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Mirroring the Echoes of the Hybrid War : Romanian Media Coverage of the Ukrainian crisis

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MIRRORING THE ECHOES OF THE HYBRID WAR – ROMANIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

Summary:
Since the beginning, informational conflict was an intrinsic component of the hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine, serving a number of well-defined goals. Although the main narrative pole was directed against the pro-Western Ukrainians, there are constant references to the EU and NATO member states, including Romania and Poland. Using discourse analysis, cognitive-emotional maps and scenario method, applied to content selected from the Romanian media from August 2014 to September 2015, we aimed to identify the main narrative threads about the two countries. The goal is to identify potential risks and threats addressed to the two U.S. strategic partners that are hosting on their territory elements of the U.S. missile shield.

Key words:
hybrid warfare, propaganda, psychosphere, cognitive-affective maps, Ukraine.

About geographical representations and frontier's geography on the South East border of NATO

Twenty years from the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian Federation seems determined to make use of its "rimland" advantages, since it didn't benefit from them in the Cold War. An explanation for this comes from George Friedman, who says that the Russian Federation can't tolerate `narrow borders` because they don't allow an `in-depth` defence strategy to be applied, as in the cases against Napoleon and Hitler.

Because of that, the Russian Federation wants to be surrounded by `buffer zones` like Kaliningrad, Belarus, Ukraine, Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which it can influence and which give it access to the Baltic Sea, Black Sea and Caspian Sea, a "perforation" of the "rimland", made of states like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic or Georgia, situated in the

"close neighbourhood" of the Russian "heartland"[1]. This is the reason why NATO's extension and the Russian Federation's intention to protect the "close neighbourhood" in Europe represent a 'zero sum game', inside which the Ponto-Baltic "rimland" represents a "buffer geopolitical region"[2].

It is to be mentioned that as far back as March 1992, Paul Wolfowitz pointed out to the necessity of counteracting the creation of a thalassocratic power in the Eurasian region that is capable of opposing the United States, in his vision, the Ponto-Baltic isthmus being a "buffer zone" of a strategical importance[3].

Moreover, the Russian Federation doesn't want the Black, Baltic and Caspian Seas coastal countries that were part of the communist bloc, to be transformed into "buffer-states" by NATO, which enables the latter to control the European "rimland" of the Russian Federation[4].

It is also to be mentioned that the project of creating a Ponto-Baltic isthmus has appeared several times, under different names. Poland launched, in the interwar period, the idea of creating a federation in the Central and Eastern Europe, under the name of "Intermarium", which would have extended from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, as a counterbalance for the Russian and German imperialism[5].

From a historical perspective, the explicit interest of the Russian Federation for the two seas is illustrated by Simion Mehedinți, who was talking about the "Russian colossus" which needed the Baltic Sea and Prut river in order to "breathe freely to the ocean"[6].

Today, the geopolitical area between the Baltic and Black Sea is made of Poland, Romania, Serbia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the Baltic States, Ukraine – which have reasons to be worried by the Russian Federation's intention to re-establish its influence from the Cold War[7].

Especially since the Russian Federation's geostrategical objective on the European continent is to block the operationalizing of the Euroatlantic "rimland" in the Ponto-Baltic region – which is contrary to the Eurasian geopolitics, the setup of anti-missile shield elements in Poland and Romania being considered a manner in which the thalassocratic power is trying to enforce the isthmus' efficiency and to protect the states on this axis against influence actions of the Russian Federation.

The Baltic Sea, as a potential Russian influence zone, is tied to the Kaliningrad enclave, situated between Poland and Lithuania and an exit to the Bal-

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[1] G. Friedman, *The next 100 years. A forecast for the 21st century,* New York 2009.

[2] I. Bădescu, *Tratat de geopolitică,* București 2004.

[3] A. Dughin, *Bazele geopoliticii si viitorul geopolitic al Rusiei*, București 2011.

[4] C. Gușă, *Imperialism în postcomunism. Geopolitica dezordinii în fostul lagăr socialist*, București 2011.

[5] G. Calopăreanu, *Regionalizarea securității în Europa Centrală*, București 2011.

[6] I. Bădescu, *op. cit.*

[7] A. Dughin, *op. cit.*

tic Sea. Over the time, Kaliningrad represented a strategically important region, the Russian fleet being stationed there, a place from which an attack could be launched against the West[8].

It is to be pointed out that Kaliningrad enclave is the only European maritime gate of the Russian Federation that doesn't freeze in the winter, allowing the state to preserve the borders impenetrable against Germany or Poland. After Poland's announcement about the anti-missile shield elements being installed near Kaliningrad, the Russian Federation started equip its fleet in the Baltic Sea with high precision missiles and modern submarines, capable of launching them[9].

As for the role that the Black Sea has in the Ponto-Baltic equation, this geopolitical space was described as a "buffer-zone that is looking forward to be taken into consideration" by the big powers[10], namely a "strategical synapse", notion that suggest the fact that the importance of the Black Sea is determined by the big powers' interests in this "security complex".

Objectives

Taking into consideration the proximity of the conflict to Romania, the security and economic consequences, Romanian, European and Euro-Atlantic interests in Black Sea region, we considered opportune to analyse the manner in which the crisis was reflected inside Romanian media. On the one hand, we are interested in analysing the cognitively-emotionally content of the information on the subject, the picture that is presented to the public and the manner in which European reflection themes about the crisis in Ukraine are reflected in the national media. In this regard, we want to identify the main discussion themes, the aimed audience, newspapers' methods and the potential impact on the audience.

Data and method

The research protocol consisted of monitoring the Romanian press between August 2014 and August 2015 (the period in which the armed conflict became more ferocious), emphasizing on identifying that media pieces (news, reportages, editorials published online in Romanian, English and French) referring to the Ukrainian crisis, and also the official and public statements of the authorities or political figures in Romania. This data served as a foundation for the creation of a mind map about the way in which the conflict was represented in

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[8] A. Diener, J. Hagen, *Geopolitics of the Kaliningrad exclave and enclave. Russian and EU perspective,* "Eurasian Geography and Economics'" 2011, vol. 52, no. 4.
[9] R. Hâldan, *Flota Rusă din Marea Baltică-Element cheie al politicii militare şi navale a Rusiei*, "GeoPolitica" 2011, no. 41.
[10] G. Văduva, *Pivot sau margine?*, "GeoPolitica" 2005, no. 14-15.

Romanian media in the selected period of time and in the analysis' data used.

We are aware of this study's limits – the narrative content was assessed (but the audio, video and graphic one not), the media coverage is not complete (social media sources weren't included – Facebook, Twitter, blogs), but the most important media sources were selected, the sample being representative from the credibility and audience perspectives. Even if different quantitative techniques and methods were used, we preferred that the final results to be interpreted in a qualitative way. Even with the limits mentioned, we consider that the objectives of the study were achieved and the results are objective and improvable.

Results obtained

In connection to the targeted audience, distribution channel, the publicist genre being used, cognitive concepts and affective valences identified (types of emotions, intensity) we identified six narrative levels, which allow designing an image over the Eastern Europe conflict that was reflected in Romanian media.

The actions to which the Russian Federation is linked, inside the Ukrainian crisis

Firstly, there's no general consensus over the direct military involvement of the Russian Federation in Ukrainian conflict, aspect proved both in narrative level and in the very low usage of Russian journalistic sources (less than 5% from all the sources mentioned). Sources from the Kremlin-controlled media conglomerate are mentioned as being anti-sources, parts of the informational conflict started against the new Ukrainian authorities and with the role of hiding the offensive military actions of the Russian Federation in Donbas area. The incredible content, able to emotionally affect the public, offensive and polarizing, the repeated use of false or anonymous sources (artillery news), as well as subjective ways of presenting the facts (ucronism use, alternative scenarios, conspiracy content, stereotype and simplified concepts use, constant repetition, semantic distortion, metonymy, self-questioning, use of jargon and slang) made the Romanian public to reject these sources. These semantic disinformation sources were opposed by the ones from the European states and the United States – multiple media sources, credible, which demonstrated and detailed the actions of Putin regime in the South-West of Ukraine and in Crimea in real time or anticipated further evolutions. We have to mention that a major role in generating Ukrainian crisis' image had the historical background, due to the short distance between Romania and Russia and also to Bessarabian issue.

The last aspect represented a challenge to Romanian public; however, over three fourth of the press material uses present as a dominant time framework, dividing the Romanian-Russian relations and avoiding the creation of groundless or wishful-thinking scenarios. Taking into consideration the complexity of

historical relations between the two countries, invocation of past events (recent or not – Romanian Revolution, Romanian-Soviet relations from the 1940s and 1950s and after 1968, the occupancy of Bessarabia, informative war of the USSR against Romania in the interwar period, etc.) would have generated an intensification of negative feelings against the Russian Federation as well as a growth in cognitive biases. In the cases where historical aspects were inevitable, an informative style was used, along with cognitive elements and tested facts. Through this, "sensitive" historical themes were kept out of the media discourse inside this analysis. A similar problem appears when prospective scenarios are brought into discussion; the style is narrative, neutral, focusing on potential political-economical and security developments for Romania and the European Union.

As presented in the mind maps (Figure 2), the discourse in Romanian media about the Ukrainian events is cognitively polarized on a tempered and balanced background. Although the majority of opinions are negative towards the Russian Federation's involvement in the crisis, the style used is informative, technical, logical, not including a negative emotional part from the start; the last aspect is unsteadily observed in our analysis. Predominantly, the arguments are juridical, military, economical, etc. and the sources are legitimate (open sources and bibliographical references, experts, statements of Romanian, European and Euro-Atlantic officials), focusing on explaining the situation in Ukraine and the impact on Romania. In this way, a balanced view over the events is created, but not the "truth"; although, it is more credible than the Russian propagandistic messages.

Population from the major EU countries have some similar views. For example, a pool realised by the Institute of World Policy presented in November 2015 and conducted in Spain, Italy, Poland, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden showed that the majority of the residents of eight member states of the EU (60%) agree that Ukraine is at an armed conflict triggered by Russia. This option has the largest support among the Poles (75%), and the lowest among the French (46%) and the British (49%). Another point of view was that Ukraine is at civil war (53%), with the Germans and the Italians showing the highest rate (61% and 59% respectively). The point that the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is triggered by the West is the least supported option with only 25%[11].

In contrast, the intense media manipulation campaign launched by the Russian Federation determined a strong cognitive and affective polarization of the public. Thus, according to a poll published in February 2015 by the Independent Centre Levada, approximately 71% of Russian citizens possess a negative

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[11] *IWP Has Presented the Survey on How EU Citizens Perceive the Ukraine-Russia Conflict. Photos,* Institute of World Policy, 04.11.2015, <http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/1792.html> (27.11.2015).

attitude towards European countries and 81% affirmed to have a bad or very bad opinion over the United States[12]. Not being a surprise, the evolution of approval rates about Putin's policy in Ukraine is partly identical to the rates about anti-West or anti-American feelings.

Perception, in Romanian media, over the negative effects inside Ukraine due to the direct or indirect involvement of the Russian Federation (particular case – informational aggression)

The military aggression of the Russian forces in Ukraine is described as credible or, at least, plausible in Romanian media, many ways of its manifestation being detailed (political, military, economical, informational) as well as its consequences (Figure 3). Mainly, it was the informational war that was detailed, a known type of confrontation, whose complexity and perfect fulfilment generated a legitimate reflection over the possibility and consequences of this type of aggression against Romania. The events during the Romanian Revolution, as well as a series of incidents in the last 25 years, proved the population vulnerability to such informational aggressions, as long as they are well planned, executed and internally-supported.

In this regard, there are enough reasons to worry, a series of vulnerabilities – which can facilitate propaganda transmission to some parts of the population – being identified. As a mainly-used method we can mention the legitimization, credibility and peddling of the information from Russian sources which can be inserted into a point of view referring to a political national context. Unfortunately, a worse impact have the kompromat type rotten-journalistic methods (targets being decision-makers from military and political fields, international corporations), which feed with plausible information taken from external sources under the influence or control of the Kremlin.

There can be identified a series of audiences vulnerable to Russian propaganda, the reasons for that being multiple and sometimes paradoxical, although only a very small number of individuals identify themselves with propaganda messages.

One of the most important segments is represented by the Christian-Orthodox channel, which appeals to Christian fraternity, Orthodox values and a common history being invoked as well as similar identity related reactions (similar traditions, nationalism, isolationism, protection against immigrants from Syria and Maghreb). The unity of Orthodox space (Moscow – "the third Rome") represents an old and strong instrument used by the Kremlin's propaganda, especially in the post-Soviet area after 1992, as a "Slavic unity" vector, and anti-capitalistic, anti-corporatist propaganda instrument. European liberal values and the secularism are matters of interest too, being under discussion

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[12] Международные отношения, Levada-Center, 09.02.2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/02/09/mezhdunarodnye-otnosheniya/> (27.11.2015).

inside Western Orthodoxy, the messages from the rulers of Russian Church inciting directly and indirectly to discrimination and lack of tolerance towards sexual, racial or religious minorities, a populist position which finds itself enough supporters in the Eastern Europe countries. Another point of interest for the Slavic Orthodoxy exploited in connection to propaganda is the mysticism, which finds supporters among bigoted, idealistic, utopic believers. Moreover, Vladimir Putin, as a "champion" and defender of Russian Church is the main beneficiary of the attraction power of the Slavic Orthodoxy.

Another audience segment vulnerable to the Kremlin's propaganda is represented by the anti-regime movements, usually consisting of different coagulated forms of the civil society, especially very active NGOs, both in public and in virtual space, in search of media exposure and involvement in the public agenda. Hidden under the mask of public interest matters (most often ethical), such as social development, economy, human rights, minorities rights, ecology and alternative energy, there can be found "classical" Russian propaganda messages, as part of the Soviet heritage, the most relevant ones being the ones that are oriented against the West. With a form that is more adapted to the present geopolitical realities, "Yankee go home" slogan (or better "don't come back") is revived by Putin's propaganda, the target being the United States' presence in Europe through the anti-missile shield. One of the priorities was affecting economical (corporatist) interests of the West, especially in the energy field (focusing on hydrocarbons extraction and processing, Russian specialty and part of the Kremlin's political strategy towards Europe). On the second place there is situated the rhetoric against TTIP. Many of the NGOs from Romania copied the work agenda from similar organizations from Western Europe, which - in the 1990s - were strongly infiltrated by post-USSR dissolution Marxists, which is why they show (sometimes not intentionally) some anti-regime, anti-American, neo-Marxist approaches. In the context of massive migrations determined by Syrian conflict, Russian propaganda stimulated nationalist and xenophobic agendas, under the mask of being concerned over human and minority rights, as well as over reviving some historical political nationalist trends, along with operationalizing them in today's context. Techniques used reflect the target as being young people, because of the utopic or Messianistic approaches (absolute truth and justice, religious vision, past rejection), message polarization ("the ones who aren't beside us are against us"), invoking preventive action principle (establishing a "generation" mission) – calling for involvement in major actions on the ground of untested premises, with a serious impact on today's world.

Another vulnerable category is represented by anarchist, nihilist, radical movements, often on anti-regime paths – a good segment of individuals for recruitment. Even if their number is low, the mixture of idealism, xenophobia, lack of tolerance, violence, demagogy, social and economic discrimination, political confusion and the need of challenging any authority form, offers a

fertile path for propagandistic messages. Especially the idea that any means of destabilizing the regime is morally acceptable may contribute to borrowing some subjects from the propaganda and exploiting them with a view to generating a series of protests and social confrontations.

A particular segment is represented by the nostalgic ones, ex-communists who haven't benefited from the same advantages after the fall of communism. Even if they are pensioners, they still have a certain potential inside the social segment they represent. Talking about the "glorious past", the "big achievements", the seduction of "illuminated dictator", elements that, for some people are associated with the idealistic period of youth, contribute to the present's decline perception amplification and lack of a desirable future. Even if they share some opinions of the Russian propaganda (anti-West, anti-Euroatlantism, ultra-conservationism, etc.), the nationalistic and anti-Soviet nature of the Romanian communism (in contrast to the one in the USSR members) generate an ambivalent and demobilizing feeling. Also, the poor participation of the Romanian armed forces to military applications of the Warsaw Pact meant that a very limited number of Romanian officers had direct contact with officials from the former USSR (as opposed to the former Red Army reservists that are now citizens in the ex-USSR republics – Ukraine and Moldova, for example).

Perception over potentially unfavourable consequences of Ukraine's crisis and their regional impact

The geographical proximity, Romania's interests in the area and the involvement of the Russian Federation as aggressor generated a series of legitimate questions inside Romanian society over the potential scenarios in which Romania could be involved. Consequences of these scenarios are of interest for Romanians, aspect reflected by media articles, editorials and commentaries' content. (Figures 4 and 5). At first sight we can distinguish some major scenarios – based on a comparison with the facts in the Eastern Ukraine, on similar aspects concerning conflictual situations between Romania and Russia (USSR) on other conflicts in which Russia was involved, scenarios took from the Western media and less from the Russian or pro-Russian ones as well as scenarios focused on Romania's interests in the Black Sea Region. All these scenarios have a common element – the integration in the European and Euroatlantic structures, aspect considered as being positive and security generating. Besides, Romania out of these structures is referred to as a `shadow` of today's Ukraine, a similar scenario being considered as plausible if the security guarantees weren't present. A poll by INSCOP from February 2015 supports the above mentioned vision, showing a 64.4% percentage of Romanians who considered that the situation in Ukraine is dangerous for Romania, whereas 17.9% thought

the opposite – the rest couldn't offer a clear answer[13]. In contrast, a similar study in Moldovan Republic, a neighbour and strategic point for Romania, a non-UE, non-NATO country, showed that in the case of an extension of the conflict inside the country 28% of the population wouldn't do anything, 10% would flee from the country and only 21% would fight[14]. This example proves that the lack of real security guarantees, the small country, the ex-Soviet republic, will collapse before the launch of a military offensive. The reverse of this situation is represented by Estonia and Latvia, countries strongly supported through the Ukrainian crisis by the UE and NATO countries (especially USA), which resisted in front of Russian threatening and challenges.

The consequence of this legitimate concern can be found in a preventive attitude, mainly shown by the desire not to uselessly challenge the Russian Federation, not to underestimate its military power or its willingness to attack and to consolidate the defensive capacities of the Romanian army as well as to obtain additional guarantees of security from NATO (and, in particular, the USA). Therefore, more than two third of the adult population considers that additional fund allocations are necessary for defence and also that it is strongly required to accelerate the process of improving the material facilities of the army and also to professionalize the personnel in accordance with the highest standards. Nevertheless, the prolonged experience of being a direct or proximate neighbour of Russia determines the Romanians to adopt a cautious attitude, motivated by the desire not to affect more the bilateral relations and to maintain an assertive position towards the regional interests, perceived as being vital also in the case of the Republic of Moldova.

The media perception upon the Romanian interests in Ukraine is rather amorphous, being dominated by the lack of a concrete and guaranteed course of action, political, military and economic instability as well as the unpredicted behaviour of the Kremlin and sometimes Kiev. The economic and political bilateral initiatives that were launched after the dissolution of the USSR as well as a series of difficult bilateral files (Hague arbitration regarding the Snake Island, Bâstroe channel, the failure of Krivoy Rog mining plant, the treatment of the Romanian communities living in Ukraine, the position towards the Republic of Moldova, transnational organized crime, military espionage affairs) made the public opinion rather cautious and lacking major ambitions in the short run with regard to the new authorities from Kiev. Some recent strained events such as the Russian proposal to divide Ukraine (Bukovina, territory that

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[13] *Evaluarea conflictului din Ucraina. Atitudinea românilor față de alte țări,* INSCOP Research, 16.02.2015,
<http://www.inscop.ro/februarie-2015-atitudinea-romanilor-fata-de-alte-tari-evaluarea-conflictului-din-ucraina/> (27.11.2015).
[14] *Barumetrul Opiniei Publice,* Institutul de Politici Publice, 04.2014,
<http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/Brosura_BOP_04.2014_prima_parte_final-rg.pdf> (27.11.2015).

has been torn off by the USSR at the end of the Second World War, was to be given back to Romania), the "threat" that Romania is preparing to occupy Bukovina by force or the feeling that the Romanian population has been treated in a discriminatory manner during the process of military incorporation highlighted the need of restoring the bilateral relations in the new context created by the distancing from Russia.

The confrontation core – identifying the combatants, their relations and the level of implication in the context of the conflict

In almost all the cases, the Russian Federation is identified as being responsible for the aggression in Ukraine and also as being one of the confrontational poles (fig. 6). A particularity of the media reflection promoted by the press from the Russian Federation, and whose main ideas are adopted also by the Western press (including the Romanian one), is the image of the leader. This matter does not stand for something new, the idealization of the leader represents a reflex of the Russian society dating back to the imperial period. Moreover, it proves to be a necessity, during periods of crisis or quick transformation, of the sophisticated state propaganda apparatus in its mission to diversify, amplify and adapt the elements of the cult of personality to the current context. The analysis of the evolution of Putin's image as the leader of the Russian state reflects the core changes of its policy – from the national reformer of the state and its economy to an ideologue preoccupied by its place in history. The Russian propaganda made complex public documents in which President Putin is presented as a symbol of masculinity and power, archetype of the providential leader, nevertheless tangible through its "soft" image of model-citizen, "our Vova". Even though its carefully built image was reflected in the Romanian press, a sceptical attitude could be noticed, sometimes bearing shades of ridiculousness. This attitude is perhaps rooted in the experience of the cult of personality imposed during the communism age and also in the gradual desensitization of the press during the following 25 years of freedom. In fact, Putin seems to become the prisoner of his own image, so carefully created, which - according to the Western standards - is a very rigid one, almost pathological, lacking empathy and authenticity, more like a robot. Nevertheless, the Western public represents a second auditorium, the main recipient being the Russian elector (and tax payer).

The United States are perceived as representing the opposite pole, the only force capable of effectively opposing the Russian military aggression, even though the handicap of geographical distance becomes more than obvious (positive perception >90%). In fact, the image of the USA in the Romanian press is easily associated with Romanians' aspirations and desires, rather than with the reality accessible to the press (which had actually very rarely the occasion to participate in meetings gathering important top officials). The asymmetrical typology of the conflict, doubled by the lack of precise information and the

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effects of the Russian informational conflict, contributed to the USA's image of "apparent weakness" in the military field, perceived as being prisoner of bureaucratic and legislative mechanisms (in comparison with Putin's "fluid" leadership during the crisis). This expectation was compensated by the tangible guarantees of security provided to the states that are in the proximity of the Russian Federation (Estonia, Lithuania) and that are threatened by a hybrid war as well as by the NATO measures that generated an additional feeling of protection. Other NATO and EU member states, which actively participated at finding solutions to the Ukrainian problem, enjoyed a positive image in the Romanian press – Poland (positive perception of 82%), Germany (66%), France (72%), Great Britain (73%), Turkey (56%) – all being perceived as generators of security. The antimissile shield at Deveselu also enjoyed a positive image in the press (81%), even though it was explicitly mentioned by several officials of the Russian Federation – a matter which was largely debated in the Romanian press.

Some clarifications offered by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the shield represents a military facility of the USA, located on our national territory, which has an exclusive role of defence for the NATO member states. Also, the declarations of American political and military officials, sustaining the Romanians' statements, contributed to the creation of a positive perception of the shield, as it is seen as a generator of security and a catalyst of the Euro-Atlantic relations.

The Ukrainian crisis consolidated the Romanians' opinion about the importance of their integration in the EU and NATO, these entities being perceived as the main guarantors of national security as well as economic and social development. This option is constantly encountered in the opinion surveys from that period; thus, according to a survey conducted by IRES and applied in March 2014, 67% of the respondents were confident that NATO would defend Romania in the case of a Russian aggression, whereas 21% sustained the contrary[15]. According to another survey, elaborated by INSCOP in May 2015, 57% of the Romanians believe that in the context of several statements delivered by some Russian officials regarding a series of the East-European countries (including Romania), the best option of our country is to coordinate its reactions with those of NATO and EU allies, whereas 23.2% think that it would be more suitable for Romania to ignore the statements/threats and 8% believe Romania should answer Russia in the same manner. The same survey confirms the fact that in the case of an actual security threat, Romania's major ally are the USA (45.9%), whereas next ranks Germany (16.7%), France (4.9%) and the Great Britain (1.6%). Romania's neighbouring countries, even though they are NATO

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[15] *Agenda Publică: Raport de Centare,* Institutul Roman pentru Evaluare și Strategie, 26.03.2014, <http://www.ires.com.ro/uploads/articole/ires-agenda_publica_24-26_martie-2014.pdf> (27.11.2015).

members, are considered only by a very small number of Romanians as main allies in case of a security threat – Poland (0.6%), Hungary (0.4%) and Bulgaria (0.3%). Thus, the sole valid options remain the USA, Germany, and somehow France. According to the Program Director of INSCOP Research, Mr Darie Cristea, "The high percent of those who agree upon a coherent reaction with the Western allies indicates a strong confidence in Romania's integration in the Western security and civilization area. This is actually Romania's main guarantee of security in the eyes of public opinion"[16]. Surprisingly, a survey conducted by the American Institute Pew Research Centre in the United States of America, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Great Britain between 6th of April and 15th of May 2015, on a sample of 11,116 people, revealed the fact that a military intervention with the view of helping a NATO ally that is attacked by Russia is supported by 56% of the Americans, 53% of the Canadians, 49% of the English, 48% in Spain and Poland, 47% in France, 40% in Italy and 38% in Germany[17]. In fact, only in the cases of USA and Canada the majority agrees upon a military intervention to support a NATO ally, while at the opposite pole there is the German public. Subsequently, a complementarity can be noticed between the NATO member states willing to offer military support (transatlantic) and the Romanian public perception of the potential allies in the case of a Russian military aggression. Moreover, in the case of both above mentioned researches (media and sociological), we can observe the converged opinions regarding the view that the USA, and subsequently NATO as well, are our main allies. According to mister Remus Ștefureac, director at INSCOP "…the strategic partnership between the USA and Romania, along with its dominant military component, and also the several public signals from last year regarding the consolidation of the Romanian-American cooperation in the national security field, definitely shaped the opinions of a population that has anyhow the most consistent pro-American views in the region"[18].

Elements of Western pressure in the Ukrainian crisis – perception, value, utility

The media reflection shaped as a response of the Western societies to the Russian aggression from the East of Ukraine is dominated by the frustration generated by the slow rhythm with which the sanctions were imposed, their insufficiency and lack of real efficiency. The asymmetry of the sanctions (eco-

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[16] *Securitate Naţională Riscuri şi Ameninţări,* INSCOP Research, 11.05.2015,
<http://www.inscop.ro/mai-2015-securitate-nationala-riscuri-si-amenintari/> (27.11.2015).
[17] K. Simmons, B. Stokes, J. Poushter, *NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid,* Pew Research Center, 10.06.2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/06/Pew-Research-Center-Russia-Ukraine-Report-FINAL-June-10-2015.pdf> (27.11.2015).
[18] *Ibidem.*

nomic, financial, political), compared to the apparent efficiency of the Russian military campaign, disguised in the informational war and developed with the help of third parties (Russian-speaking fighters from Donbas region), led to a feeling of "weakness" among the main NATO allies. The effects of the Russian economic embargo, imposed also on Romania and the Republic of Moldova, amplified the perception upon the lack of efficient pressure tools, which could serve as a relevant card on the negotiations table. The modification of the export policy regarding the Russian hydrocarbons and, at a smaller level, the food embargo, generated a series of scenarios largely debated in mass media, creating a shade of additional tension. Despite all these shortcomings, the subsequent evolution of the conflict demonstrated the decisive impact of the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, as well as the determination of the international community to resist the Russian blackmail.

In the Romanian press, we can notice the predisposition towards identifying new diplomatic solutions, which should represent the basis for a new regional security arrangement. This should respect the interests of the actors involved and should permit the conducting of negotiations in the absence of other constraints. Romania preferred to approach these matters from the point of view of international law, relevant for this being the numerous attempts of our officials to get the issue on the negotiations table. The responses of the Romanian representatives to some challenging or incriminatory statements emitted by some Russian officials, demonstrated restraint and responsibility and contributed to the consolidation of our points of view within the North-Atlantic Treaty.

Conclusions

The study of the media reflection of the Ukrainian conflict is capable of offering some important elements for future crises. First of all, the possibility of an informational aggression, similar to the one from Ukraine, is improbable in the case of Romania, but not impossible in a modified approach. Romania lacks some essential elements that would allow the replication, even at a smaller scale, of the informational war conducted in Ukraine. For example, we have: the lack of an important Russian-speaking segment of population, the fact that Romania had never been a member state of the USSR or the CIS, the typology of the Romanian communism – nationalist model, which was deeply against the Soviet pattern, the economic and financial independence from Kremlin, the absence of a common border with Russia, the profound reforming of the defence and intelligence sectors and, most importantly, the integration in NATO and the EU. The Ukrainian crisis demonstrated that the effects of domination over the mental space, the "psychosphere", during times of crisis, within a weak country, which is above all penetrated by agents of influence, may have devastating consequences upon its resilience and political and economic strategy. In particular, the informational conflict deserves to be analyzed from the

standpoint of a non-lethal weapon, destined to destroy the cognitive and affective capacities of the population. Also, another subject would be the neocortical war, targeting the decision factors from the political and military areas. The objectives seem to be the destruction of the external image of the attacked state, the dissolution of its capacity to govern, the disturbance of its political scene, the instigation to social rising and the stimulation of separatism.

Undoubtedly, the role of national mass media cannot be omitted in the context of an informational conflict, as it is the spreading tool used in the psychological operations against the opponents or with a defensive aim. Additionally, the synergy between the informational and cyber conflict amplifies the effects of the psychological aggression, by demonstrating the omnipresence of the aggressor – the front line is in every individual's mind, involuntarily attracted in a rather scary reality ("You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you" Trotsky). The image of the conflict becomes an avatar that can be manipulated, amplified, exported, etc., by using the electronic infrastructure of globalization; the image prevails over a reality dominated by grey actors (whose actions and interests are difficult, even impossible, to be explained in the media); the conflict in the space of the image permits each actor to express a partisan message (of their own version) as well as the retouching of their moral profile, especially in front of their own audience, but also in front of the international public.

At the same time, propaganda also represents a communication field (cognitive and affective biased, which can be decoded by all the involved parties), whose study represent a useful measure towards understanding the intentions and desires of the opponents. This matter highlights the need for the development of some automatic analysis tools capable to analyse in real time the whole variety of data delivered by a target (mass media, official media, social media), with the focus being on the affective side of the communication (affective computing). We highlight here the importance of identifying the most efficient indicators (online and offline) that would allow a complex and quick evaluation of the emotional condition of a population undergoing informational, prolonged and concerted, stress. The identification of those elements showing individual and societal vulnerability in the case of the informational war (the profile for the groups of risk) and the neuropsychological mechanisms responsible for induced unfortunate and devious behaviours (radicalization, the amplification of sociopathic tendencies, suicide, dependency for psychotropic substances) or those of coping (which offer resistance) represent a preventive and defensive measure. We believe that a special attention should be offered to the study of the neuropsychological effects (types, intensity and duration) induced by the informational aggression, such as the possibilities of evolution towards future generations of this form of conflict (variants, necessary capacities, ending, spin-offs), its role and applicability within NATO, the identification of the prevention and counteraction methods, as well as obtaining the advantage in the cyber-informational field. Recent events proved that even though at the begin-

ning it was considered a minor equivalence of the military conflict, the informational aggression ought to be included within the military strategies and security policies.

Another important matter is that of the image of the actors involved in this conflict and the manner in which the perception upon the events and prospective scenarios is affected. For the Romanians, this crisis emphasized the need to increase the national defence capacity, but also the practical implications of their integration in the Euro-Atlantic security structure. In particular, the perception that the United States represent Romania's main guarantor of security, especially during the crisis times generated by the Russian Federation. Moreover, a strong necessity for coordination among the security agendas of Romania and Poland was identified (as Poland is considered to be our main and most important ally from the former communist countries), both countries hosting on their national territories elements of the anti-missile shield. The prolonged reaction time, the shallow treatment applied to some of the actions of the Russian Federation, as well as the inconsistent, sometimes ambivalent positions of some countries (Germany, France) in the initial phases of this crisis, consolidated Romanians' scepticism regarding the guarantees of security that can be offered by the European Union, especially to the countries that accessed to the EU after the end of the bipolar period. This scepticism was supplied by the positions adopted by some of the European countries in the context of the Russian military intervention in Syria and, especially, during the refugees' crisis. Despite the unpredictability and lack of consensus that were noticed in periods of major crisis of the European institutions, Romania still considers the European environment as being the main engine of economic stability and societal development.

The media reflection of Ukraine remains very complex and controversial for the Romanians, as it continues to be associated with the winding evolutions of the bilateral relations. 25 years ago, the border of Ukraine represented for Romania a source for worries, as the country was part of the USSR and potential space for the launch of an aggression (similar?). It's perceived image of satellite-state of the Russian Federation within CIS and a long series of difficult files that had to be managed following Ukraine's independence proclamation, made the emotional reaction of the Romanian public to be dimmed; in fact, an expectation to restart the bilateral relations seemed to be more legitimate. For the national audience the crisis from Ukraine was perceived through the perspective of the alternative scenario, in which USSR would not have disappeared and a common border would have continued to exist, most probably within the "socialist camp". The Ukrainian crisis became therefore a true "ghost-model" of a similar scenario that would have implied Romania, as the traces of similar plans, fortunately unfinished. The resemblance of the Kiev's Maidan square with the Romanian revolution negatively struck another chord with the Romanians, both by the number of deaths and the fact that it represented the begin-

ning of a long and difficult road to "transition", which is to have a strong impact upon the quality of life and the organization of the society. Nevertheless, at the end of this complicated transition process, Romania managed to integrate in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures and can be found today in the role of the "European neighbour" of two former Soviet countries, Moldova and Ukraine[19]. This perception of the abyss that exists between the East that was reformed and adapted to the globalization trends and the other East that is still under the post-Soviet mirage is frequently emphasized in the mass-media and represents a reason for reflection for both the parts of the borders.

We consider that as former countries of the communist camp, current member states of NATO and the EU and countries hosting elements of the anti-missile shield, that keep identifying Russian neo-imperialist actions as being the main military threat towards national security, Romania and Poland have the obligation to participate at the transformation of the European security environment in the sense of identifying the best policies aiming at deterring the destabilization initiatives launched by the Russian Federation.

Annex 1

Romanian media sources: Agerpress (http://www.agerpres.ro/), Adevarul (http://adevarul.ro), Cotidianul (http://www.cotidianul.ro), Evenimentul Zilei (http://www.evz.ro), Gandul (http://www.gandul.info), Jurnalul national (http://jurnalul.ro/), Romania libera (http://www.romanialibera.ro).

After selecting the materials, the key-concepts were identified using meta-search engines and cluster (Carrot2[20], Yippy[21], iBoogie[22] - internet) and the soft-

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[19] As mentioned by Prof. Dan Dungaciu "Both Ukraine and Moldova played the NATO and CSI game and today they suffer the consequences. They have no security solution, there is no one to defend them and have no way to formally request defense from NATO because they are not members, and the Russians have broken with their boots over them". See: C. Zamfir, *De ce vrea Rusia sa bage pumnul in Gurile Dunarii? Despre pericolul militarizarii fluviului si destabilizarea Ucrainei, cu profesorii Dungaciu, Cioroianu si Naumescu,* HotNews.ro,
06.05.2014, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-17172634-vrea-rusia-bage-pumnul-gurile-dunarii-despre-pericolul-militarizarii-fluviului-destabilizarea-ucrainei-profesorii-dungaciu-cioroianu-naumescu.htm> (27.11.2015).
[20] Carrot 2 - is an open source search results clustering engine, that can automatically cluster small collections of documents and can offer ready-to-use components for fetching search results from various sources including GoogleAPI, Bing API,eTools Meta Search, Lucene, SOLR, and more. See: *carrot²,* <http://project.carrot2.org/> (27.11.2015).
[21] Yippy - (formerly Clusty) is a metasearch engine developed by Vivísimo which offers clusters of results. See: <http://yippy.com/> (27.11.2015).
[22] iBoogie - a clustering engine developed by CyberTavern that combines metasearch and clustering to deliver and organize search results from multiple sources into structured content. See: *iBoogie^tm,* <http://iboogie.com/> (27.11.2015).

ware KH Coder[23] (for selected and translated materials). The identification of existent cognitive connections between key-concepts was facilitated by the use of the software Tropes[24]. The analysis of the emotional connections and intensities within the text was made by using both specialized software (Sentiment analysis online[25], TexSIE[26]), and an empirical analysis system, based on analysing emotions using Putchik emotions' circle and a scale of intensity from 0 to 5. In some cases we have tried to take into consideration some video representations (photos, video) or audio, that came along the narratives, especially in the cases in which they represented an intrinsic component of the propagandistic message conveyed. All the above-mentioned steps have allowed us to establish a database, fundament for emotional-cognitive maps, realized with the support of Empathica[27]. Cognitive-affective mapping is a qualitative research tool to identify, visualize and analyse existing belief structures[28]. A cognitive-affective map (CAM)[29] is

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[23] KH Coder – is free software for quantitative content analysis or text mining that can be also utilized for computational linguistics. It can be used to analyze Japanese, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish text. See: *KH Coder,*
<http://khc.sourceforge.net/en/> (27.11.2015).

[24] Tropes – is a open source software for semantic classification, keyword extraction, linguistic and qualitative analysis, designed to be used for Information Science, Market Research, Sociological Analysis, Scientific and Medical studies, etc. See: *TROPES: High Performance Text Analysis for Professional Users,* <http://www.semantic-knowledge.com/tropes.htm> (27.11.2015).

[25] SentimentAnalisysOnline – online software for basic sentiment analysis. See: *Sentiment Analysis Engine,* <http://www.sentimentanalysisonline.com> (27.11.2015).

[26] TexSIE – online software for sentiment analysis. See: *TexSIE: Analyzing Sentiments in Text,* <http://tationem.com:8080/TexSIE/> (27.11.2015).

[27] EMPATHICA is a software program that uses the idea of Cognitive-Affective Maps (CAMs) developed by Paul Thagard and collaborators. These maps derive from ideas about emotional cognition described in Thagard's book Hot Thought. See: *EMPHATICA,* University of Waterloo, 05.10.2015, <http://cogsci.uwaterloo.ca/empathica.html> (27.11.2015).
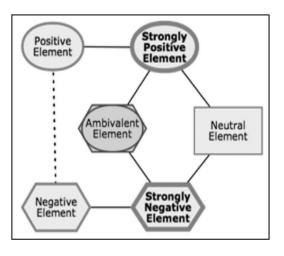
[28] M. Milkoreit, S. Mock, *The Networked Mind: Collective Identities and the Cognitive-Affective Nature of Conflict*, [in:] *Networks and network analysis for Defence and Security*, A.J. Mastis (ed.) Springer 2014, pp. 161-189.

[29] A cognitive-affective map (CAM) is a visual representation of the emotional values of a group of interconnected concepts. It employs the following conventions: 1. Ovals represent emotionally positive (pleasurable) elements. 2. Hexagons represent emotionally negative (painful) elements. 3. Rectangles represent elements that are neutral or carry both positive and negative aspects. 4. The thickness of the lines in the shape represents the relative strength of the positive or negative value associated with it. 5. Solid lines represent the relations between elements that are mutually supportive. 6. Dashed lines represent the relations between elements that are incompatible with each other. 7. The thickness of the lines in the connection represents the strength of the positive or negative relation. When color is available, CAMs conventionally represent positive elements by green ovals (go), negative ones by red hexagons (stop), and neutral ones by yellow rectangles. See: P. Thagard, *Value Maps in Applied Ethics,* "Teaching Ethics", University of Waterloo, 12.12.2013, <http://cogsci. uwaterloo.ca/Articles/ thagard.values-ethics.teach-eth.2013.pdf> (27.11.2015), pp. 2-3.

a network diagram or concept graph that "displays not only the conceptual structure of people's views, but also their emotional nature, showing the positive and negative values attached to concepts and goals"[30].

The methods used within our study are:
- discourse analysis – applied on official statements
- content analysis – in case of media materials
- analysis of emotional-cognitive maps – in case of CAM, representative for the Russian propaganda (CAMR) and comparative – between CAM and CAMR, representative for the way in which the Ukrainian conflict was illustrated by media in Ukraine, EU and USA

1. Ovals – emotionally positive (pleasurable) elements.
2. Hexagons – emotionally negative (painful) elements.
3. Rectangles – emotionally neutral/ ambivalent.
4. The thickness of the lines in the shape – the relative strength of the positive or negative value associated with it.
5. Solid lines – elements that are mutually supportive.
6. Dashed lines – elements that are incompatible.
7. The thickness of the lines in the connection – the strength of the positive or negative relation.
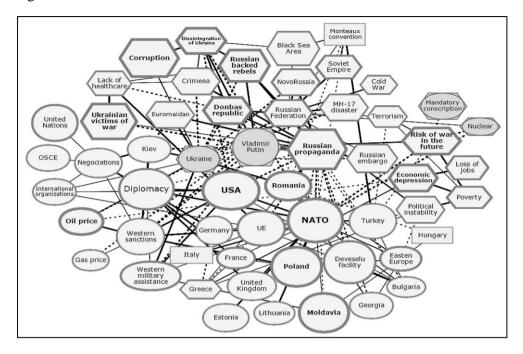
Every node of the network can be further transformed in a sub-network that allows a more detailed and targeted analysts. The main narrative domains of propaganda presented in the paper can be identified as functional networks developed around a dominant theme (cognitive coherence) pictured in a homogenous emotional background (emotional coherence). This synchronization, both cognitive and emotional is a characteristic of the top-down controlled systems (centralized), one of the most common feature of the totalitarian regimes. The near-simultaneous targeting of different objectives and the complexity of the narrative involved certify that the informational warfare was a careful staged, premeditated and malicious operation.

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[30] M. Milkoreit, *What's the Mind Got To Do With It? A Cognitive Approach to Global Climate Governance*, "Working Paper 2012-04", Stockholm Environment Institute, p. 5, 07.2012, <http://www.sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents /Publications/Climate/SEI-WP-2012-04-Cognitive-Climate.pdf> (27.11.2015).

- Fig. 2 The CAM from the Romanian media content related to conflict (media representation).
- Fig. 3 Perception from the Romanian media of the actions that are attributed to Russian Federation in the Eastern Ukrainian conflict.
- Fig. 4 Perception of the negative consequences in Ukraine as a result of the Russian aggression.
- Fig. 5 Media representation of possible negative scenarios in the Ukrainian crisis as a direct or indirect result of the Russian aggression.
- Fig. 6 Confrontational sides – the validation of adversaries as a result of mutual involvement in the Ukrainian crisis.
- Fig. 7 Media portrayal of the Romanian allies as a result of the implication in the Ukrainian crisis and other subjects considered to play a positive role.
- Fig. 8 Media perception of the sanctions and limitations imposed on Russia by the USA and EU that are considered to play a positive role in the Ukrainian crisis.
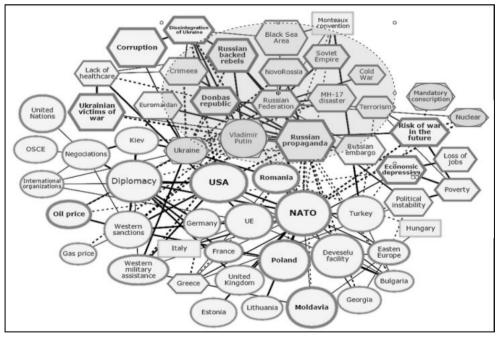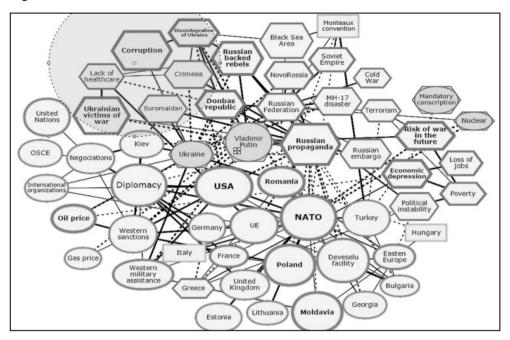
Fig. 2
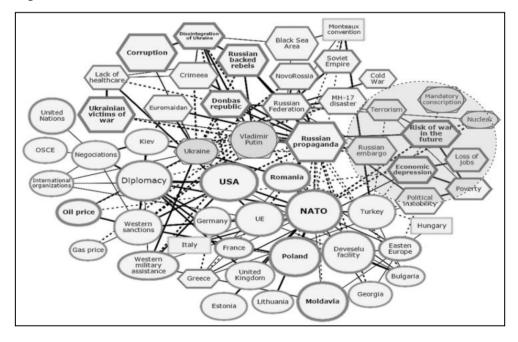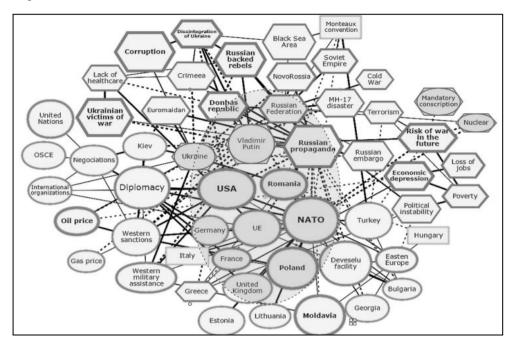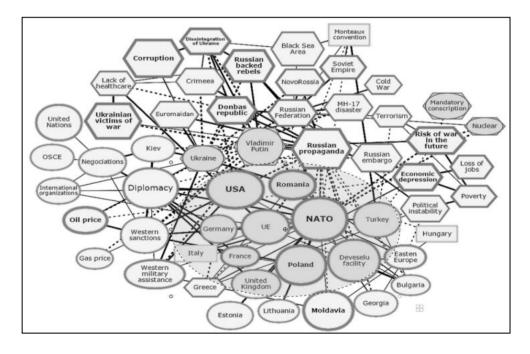

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.
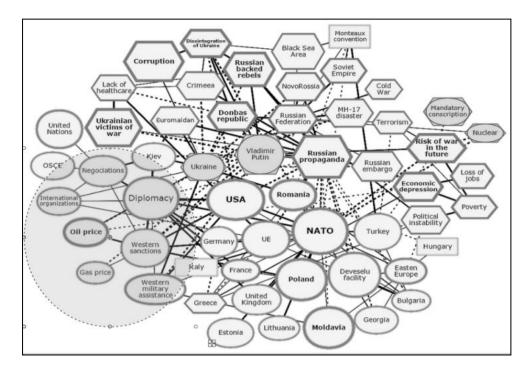
Fig. 6.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8.

Fig. 2 as shown in the CAM resulted from the analysis of the Romani a press about the events in Ukraine, the perception of the conflict is under the sign of cognitive polarization placed on an emotionally balanced and tempered background. Although most of the opinions expressed are against the Russian involvement in the crisis in Ukraine, the style remains informative, technical, logical, and it is not accompanied by a priori negative emotional key. In general legal, military, economic, etc. arguments are invoked from legitimate sources explaining the situation in Ukraine and the potential impact on Romania. While this version cannot be said to represent the "truth", it is a more balanced and credible version and it is synchronized with the points of view presented by the main EU and U.S. media channels.

Another characteristic of the conflict representation in the Romanian media was the use of present tense as the dominant time frame – the separation of the historic dossier of the Romanian-Russian relations and refrain from unfounded foresight scenarios or unilateral views (wishful-thinking). In order to avoid the cognitive-emotional sources of error (biases) that will further deepen the emotional polarization of the Romanian audiences and probably would act as a priming stimuli, when historical issues were inevitable, the style used was generally informative and the cognitive elements where predominant.

From the Romanian media we isolated five main narrative domains:
- a strong positive perception (allies – European Union, NATO, United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Moldova, etc. or subjects of positive interest – Deveselu military base);
- a negative perception related to the actions attributed to the Russian side in Ukraine (Russian-backed rebels, Donbas republic, NovoRossia plan, MH-17 disaster, etc.);
- negative consequences for the Ukrainians as a result of the conflict (deaths, humanitarian crisis, loss of Crimea, lack of healthcare). There is an important wave of solidarity and empathy for the sufferings of the Ukrainian civilians;
- risky evolutions of the crisis in Ukraine (prolonged conflict, economic depression, political instability, the risk of a regional conflict, etc.);
- a positive perception on the measures taken by the EU and NATO countries in order to contain and solve the crisis.

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