



## FEAR AND INDIVIDUAL OR SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

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*How strange that man often fears what he hopes.* (Gustave Flaubert)

**Abstract:** Human behavior largely depends on individual peculiarities of personality, but also on environmental aspects, the novelty or the spontaneity of the situation. In extreme situations, everyone reacts differently. One of the factors that generate specific behavioral reactions in such situations is fear – an emotion characteristic of danger or the perception of danger. The discrepancy between our own resources and the surrounding world's imbalance requires forced autonomy on the part of the individual and decision-making for his own safety and rescue.

Fear expressed in society is conditioned by historical development of nations. Behavioral reactions of nations in situations which pose a threat to their own integrity indicate values and power of influence of states and peoples. The presence or absence of fear shows the historical evolution of the Romanian people.

**Keywords:** fear emotion; danger perception; personal safety; behavior; social fear; the fear for Romanians.

### Introduction

Human nature has evolved over the centuries, being constantly dominated by basic needs, such as food and survival, which generated primary instincts of self-defense and acquiring resources. Although progress and development of civilization have resulted in the emergence of superior needs on a cognitive and spiritual scale, to the need for self-realization (and I am compelled to insist that it is present only in a small number of people), the range of vital needs has widened too. The quality of a man's life depends not only on education, skills, material wealth, but it often relies on other factors such as the presence or absence of water and food, the air temperature, sun radiation and wind power. The quality of human life largely depends on the environmental conditions where man is born, grows and lives. The most important thing is how people perceive their current state and how well they are prepared to overcome the hardships of life, especially unexpected and uncomfortable situations, and how much strength and skill they are able to muster in those moments.

### The crisis situation and fear

Sometimes life puts us in front of unexpected situations that we have to go through. Such situations are called, depending on the viewpoint approached, tightrope situations, emergency situations and crisis situations. In the context of individual and group security, I will now refer to crisis situations. What constitutes a crisis situation? It is an unexpected moment which we cannot predict and which may suddenly spin out of control. In general, crises take us by surprise, and our reaction must be prompt, genuine and consistent with the conditions created and adapted to the changes that occur along the way. Not many know how to get out of such situations, because by being caught by surprise and off guard, the vast majority does not know how to react, especially if faced with such an event for the first time in their lives, for we are all different from each other and react differently to crisis situations. It all depends very much on how emotionally balanced we are and, moreover, what knowledge and training we have.

The crisis at the individual level is when man faces a corruption of internal or external conditions which is a major obstacle that limits his possibilities and cuts off his life goals (Caplan, 1961). This situation cannot be overcome with their own

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resources and with the usual methods. A stage of disarray sets in at first, followed by depression, then the individual tries implementing various methods to solve the problem. If a crisis is successfully dealt with, the individual learns to react appropriately to such situations, acquiring effective behavioral patterns. Otherwise he will be overcome by fear and panic, not to mention behavioral and psychiatric disorders.

According to Charles Darwin's theory, existing species survived only because they had been able to evolve and adapt to changes in their environment. In other words, to ensure our durability, we need a natural mechanism to go through almost any dangerous situation effectively. Crises are a mandatory part of our life, which is often unpredictable, and the most important thing to understand is that no one is safe from evil. Experience shows that every person, organization, state or civilization will face critical moments sooner or later. Modern dictionaries of terms and concepts define crisis as a difficult, almost impossible situation to predict, a critical lack of something, a painful period of transition, a sudden, sharp change.

In the case of security crisis, when physical, psychological or socio-economic safety is jeopardized, man is involuntarily taken out of his comfort zone thus running the risk of losing stability, his structure order, his own existence or integrity. This frightens him, uncertainty and anxiety arise, together with helplessness and discouragement, loss of control, lack of confidence in the present and in the future and a *feeling of fear* occurs as a universal consequence of the state of imbalance. Fear may occur as a consequence of threat not only on one's own human conditions, but also on another person or very close group of people, on private property or living and working conditions. In such a context, man feels unsheltered, exposed, miserable, powerless and overwhelmed. Man realizes through fear that his existence may be destroyed due to the loss of stability in the world or due to perceived aggressions around him.

Here is a list of major risk factors posing a potential threat to the life and well-being of man:

- natural hazards (earthquakes, flood, storms);
- environmental disasters;
- industrial or transportation accidents;
- fires;

- shipwreck;
- events and fights which lead to greater destruction causing death or injury;
- events which cause suffering to a great number of people, the death of relatives and close friends.

In a crisis situation, the general and specific psychological aspects of people's reactions should be taken into account. Sensitivity to the effects of stress is increased for the elderly and those with psychosomatic disorders. Knowledge in the psychosocial field is necessary to prepare the population in general and the rescuers and authorities as well so that they will react promptly and effectively in extreme situations.

### **Fear from an existential viewpoint**

One must first be clear about terminology to understand what fear is from a psycho-behavioral point of view and also the possible conditional reactions to fear. Fear can be understood as the emotional response that sets in when pain and other threatening stimuli occur. Fear is actually the specific emotion which sets in because of danger or perception of danger. I shall compare the different definitions and views of some authors. I will consider the definition given in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language as a benchmark<sup>1</sup>.

From a formal genetic point of view, fear is seen as a discrepancy between the individual's own resources (courage, competence, possibilities, means) and instabilities in the surrounding world (insufficiency, insecurity, fragility). This can be explained as a "*a general spontaneous reaction of coping, which produces an attitudinal reflex (increase in muscle tone, physical and mental alarm reactions) and the search for shelter, safety and stability in the face of an abysmal threat to existence*". Although this definition is complex and comprehensive, we will also take into consideration other points of view related to the notion of *fear* which will broaden the scope of interpretations.

Fear, as a state of generalized excitation, is not only the expression of jeopardizing physical integrity but also of psychological components. The danger destabilizes existing structures that guarantee the continuity of life. Without confidence in

<sup>1</sup>DEX: FRÍCĂ, (rarely) frici, s.f. A profound state of unrest and disorder, sparked off by a real or imaginary danger; lack of courage, fear, terror. [...] – Cf. gr. Phrikē – <http://dexonline.ro/definitie/fric%C4%83>.



the security, stability and protection, existence becomes frightening. From an existential context, fear is considered a subjective parameter regarding total or partial threat to integrity and existence, to those aspects of human life that makes one feel safe.

According to the Bible<sup>2</sup> fear can also be defined as a *virtue*. So fear sets in as a prevention and protection alarm in the face of danger. On the one hand we notice man's unshakeable connection to life and fear of anything that might take it away from him or of what might harm him; hence the effort to protect himself and perpetuate his own

For Kierkegaard (1960) fear can become the cause of human failure, for Gebattel fear is a state "of becoming". When it comes to fear, man seeks to consolidate stability, to anchor his protective elements in his existential reality. Man sees his presence in the world as threatened by destruction.<sup>4</sup> Its existence is in a tension field between potential "living" and "unliving", a condition through which man discovers a basic structure of existentiality, i.e. the possibility to fall off from the "peak of existence" into "the abyss of non-existence", thus unable to be. The main signs of fear include: *muscle*

Fear dimensions		
biological-mental	socio-cultural	existential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>natural, instinctive, animal fear reaction;</li> <li>ARAS (<i>arousal reaction</i>);</li> <li>fear emotion is possible in animals too.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>comparative behavioral studies regarding the occurrence of social fear;</li> <li>endangering and threats in society (war, ecology);</li> <li>specific cultural aspects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the state of being "thrown" in the world (<i>Heidegger</i>)</li> <li>the state of being threatened</li> <li>the fact of being alone with oneself</li> <li>the possibility of failure (<i>Kierkegaard</i>)</li> <li>the becoming block (<i>Gebattel</i>)</li> <li>the lack of meaning (<i>Frankl</i>)</li> <li>the loss of stability</li> </ul>

Table no. 1 Categorical description of fear occurrence (V. Frankl, 1982, 1983)

existence and those close to him. On the other hand, we always bring up the fear of sin and, therefore, the fear of divine punishment; and on a much higher and advanced spiritual level - the fear of being separated or banished by divinity. Man's fear for his life brings forth the willingness to act on behalf of his own salvation.

Moreover, Austrian psychotherapist Alfried Langle (1992), successor of Viktor E. Frankl, a Viennese psychiatrist and "father" of logotherapy, defines fear in terms of existential analysis, extrapolating its mental and physical size. The author considers fear from a neurophysiologic point of view as "a state of generalized excitation, which manifests itself psychologically, accompanied by a feeling of endangerment, to which man is existentially exposed and which leads to the perception of the (partial) unsheltered exposure of life".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Frica, între virtute și patimă*. Consemnat Pr. Marius Corlean. Posted on February 1, 2013, 08:02. Available on <http://luminaortodoxiei.com/ro/articole/articole/item/1387-frica,-%C3%AEntre-virtute-%C5%9Fi-patim%C4%83>

<sup>3</sup> Längle Alfried. *Omul în căutarea stabilității. Analiza existentială a fricii* [Orig.: *Der Mensch auf der Suchenach Halt. Existenzanalyse der Angst.* / *Existenzanalyse* 2, 4-13, 1996] În: *Analiză Existențială*, nr. 4,1, 2005, pp. 55-64.

*tension (especially facial tensions); palpitations; rapid shallow breathing; reduced control over one's behavior.*

Reactions of acute shock were described by K. Kleist (1917) and called "psychosis of terror" (*Schrackpsychose*). In specialized literature there are also definitions such as emotional *shock*, *crisis reaction*, *acute affecting reaction*, *extreme situations*. In all these cases we are talking about a transient disorder of great severity, with upward endocrine and vasomotor changes in individuals without mental pathology, under extreme conditions.

According to Frankl's theory and his followers, fear comes from three genetic domains in evolutionary terms. It can be described as a result of physical and mental, socio-cultural and existential states of man's life in the world (table 1).

In the event of a security crisis, multiple systems are usually unbalanced and functional structures are shattered. Then, an array of factors come to condition fear: self-preservation reaction, fear of the unknown, difficulties in adapting to new conditions, lack of meaning, loss of stability etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.



### The evolution of fear

Like other human emotions and feelings, fear is learned from prior experiences or induced thoughts, learned values and beliefs. Thus, if someone is bitten by a dog, one will avoid it forever, someone who suffered a serious road accident will hardly go behind the wheel, someone who got lost in the woods will not walk alone in the bushes, someone who survived an earthquake will refuse to enter the partially demolished apartment etc. The reason for all this is fear. Out of panic, terror, desire to flee, escape attempt, numbness or, conversely, out of agitation or aggressive behavior. At the same time self-control is weak or even extremely low, people are not fully aware of what they are doing and what is happening around them.

Triggering factors of fear:

- *External stimuli perceived as dangerous* – wild animals, insects, airplane flight, elevators, and heights.
- *An unsafe future* (personal – financial crisis, failure, loneliness, old age, disease, death; of large groups of people – terrorism, wars, accidents; of the planet – natural and environmental hazards, the apocalypse)
- *The anticipated perception of potential failure* – social rejection, public speaking.

It bears repeating that the first natural reaction someone has is fear in a dangerous situation. This is a natural emotional reaction to an imminent danger specific to any normal person and may be accompanied by physical sensations such as tremors, rapid breathing, and palpitations. Psychomotor reactions can be so intense that a sudden and very strong fear could bring about death, hence the idiom "*dead scared*" in reference to a big scare. The main task of the person in an emergency situation is to survive. The word survival is always used in reference to very serious conditions and is equivalent to "*protect oneself from death.*" Survival means active, reasonable measures to preserve living, health, work and independent living conditions.

Any forced autonomy will force the person who denies it to make a decision based on his/her own safety and salvation<sup>5</sup>. The actions which are going to be carried out shall be focused on:

<sup>5</sup> M. Bebchuk, I. Kuznetsova. Acordarea primului ajutor în reacții acute la stres. [Orig.: Оказание первой помощи при острых реакциях на стресс], disponibilă la: <http://www.familyland.ru/students/educationmaterials/3k/stress/>.

- surpassing fear and finding ways to resist stress;
- assistance and self-help in case of trauma and injury;
- getting one's bearing to find the rescuers' track and to find a way out;
- communicating and presenting warning signals to other people;
- saving, protection, water and food supply;
- building temporary shelters.

Fear is a state known to everybody; it becomes individual based on particular internal factors but also on objective characteristics of external threats; it manifests frequently and with varying degrees of intensity, some feel it more often or even permanently, others less. In everyday life, in extreme conditions, any person repeatedly gets over the dangers that threaten his/her existence and cause fright (fear) – an affective state that persists on short or long term, an emotional process generated by a real or an imaginary danger. Fear has various degrees such as fright, horror, dismay, panic, anxiety, anguish, despair, which can occur with varying intensity and often in crescendo.

Fear forms:

- *Alarm, precaution* – the emotion of fear is combined with thoughts related to possible discomfort; the emotional intensity is reduced, but prolonged in time;
- *Anxiety, worry* – when dangerous stimuli are not present, but mentally anticipated and nevertheless perceived as if already occurring; the chance that the situations imagined appear in real life is considered very likely;
- *Panic* – fear from possible threatening situations, very intense;
- *Paranoia* – fear of somebody else's judgment; perceiving others as threatening.
- *Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)* – occurs after a traumatic event, such as after an accident or an assault; the severe anxiety that arises quickly triggers stimuli similar to those of the incident, even if not involving the same level of threat.

Human behavioral reactions which occur suddenly and are caused by the emotion of fear - apparently inadequate reactions - can be considered normal physiological reactions because they contribute to the urgent mobilization of the necessary physical and mental states in order to self-preserve and survive. Once the first phase of fear and hard-



ship has been surpassed, the goal in actions appears and the motivation to get over the sense of inability, the control over one's behavior gets more established and logical saving decisions intervene. Otherwise various temporary mental disorders (reactive psychosis, hysterical psychosis, emotional reactions of shock) are formed, not to mention that a state of panic sets in. In the case of natural hazards, reactive mass psychosis and generalized panic is often observed.

If one knows how to act, the fear of exacerbating reaction activates the mind. Cognition mobilizes the system resources, seeking effective opportunities for defense and reduction of losses. This does not mean the situation will be surpassed unless there are possibilities available. If one is more sensitive to physical or mental pain, then fear can lead to stress. Stress is a state of imbalance and confusion that causes high tensions, and blockages, thoughts are stopped as well as the desire for action. Can one withdraw oneself from this state, just depending on the capacity and willingness to choose between different ways and means to act? Sometimes yes, other times one needs the help of a third party fulfilling the role of savior or middleman.

Septimius Chelcea, a renowned Romanian sociologist, mentions in a study that fear *"means precaution rather than cowardice and the opposite of fear is not courage, but rational calculation, lucid thinking. It came into this world together with man, in the mists of time. It is a negative emotion experienced with varying degrees of intensity, generated by danger, by an imminent threat, real or fictitious, which is intended to be avoided."*<sup>6</sup>The sociologist also points out the distinction made by Michel de Montaigne, the French writer, between polar manifestations of fear: *"It sometimes gives us wings to fly and other times it nails us down"*.

Fear produces certain undesirable behavioral reactions that can be absolutely opposed: one might paralyze or mobilize. These two ways of reaction can be differentiated at an individual level, but also at a group or social level. Passive reaction to fear is manifested by trying to escape, by blocking response reactions, stillness, inactivity, retreat and taking cover into unconsciousness. Active reaction leads to the mobilization of internal and external resource to overcome the terrifying situation, the counterattack or fleeing from danger.

<sup>6</sup> Chelcea, Septimiu, *Frica în România de ieri și azi*, CURS Poll, in Jurnalul Național, on 06.10.2009.

Fear is wrongly considered irrational behavior. On the contrary, it brings forth protection, preservation and survival reactions.

### **Social behavioral reactions caused by fear**

Living and working conditions generate different human emotions, such as joy or sadness dignity or guilt, confidence or discouragement, courage or fear. In similar conditions, people from the same community display similar emotions. Emotional experiences extend from the individual to the group, then to larger groups, to masses of people reaching the nation or the population of a state. As I have mentioned above, positive or negative experiences in dealing with situations which upset the existential balance condition the acquisition of specific behavioral skills, and ultimately, reinforce success or failure in life. Corey Robin, professor of Political Science at Brooklyn College in New York, asserted in a paper published in 2004 at the prestigious Oxford University Press and recently translated into Romanian that *"if we want to measure fear in the American style, we must begin by looking at jobs, because this has always been a sensitive area for the population, which is in the grip of fear and coercion"*.

Biological mechanisms of fear essentially differ from the social ones. Mostly negative emotions, fear shared by a large number of people (groups, social classes, nations). At a social level, fear is conditioned by social, real or fictional imminent dangers. Turning fear from individual biological reactions, manifested at a physiological, behavioral, psychological level into social reaction occurs through interpersonal communication and mass media. The danger may arise from a political regime, a social and administrative institution, organizations or individuals with economic/political power, cultural constraints and or religious prohibitions, ecological or environmental factors. In this case the social nature of fear is important, but no more than that negative emotion transmitted from one individual to another, gradually including a significant number of people - from groups, local communities, professional collectives, social categories and classes, peoples and nations.

When addressing issues of human behavior in crisis situations, particular attention is paid to the state of fear. Human behavior suddenly developed in an extreme situation is largely determined by



fear, which to some extent can be considered a normal physiological response for it contributes to the physical and mental mobilizing in emergency conditions, a state which is necessary for developing self-defense and preservation mechanisms. Fear is an alarm, not only anxiety, but a call to action, a call for man's probable protective measures. Fear makes people feel discomfort – this is its negative effect; at the same time fear is the order of individual or collective defense as the main purpose of man is to stay alive, to prolong his existence - this is unquestionably its positive effect.

The same happens with nations fearful of threats from other countries. If there are effective tools to counter the threats, the peoples can display their independent defense strategy. Actually, disputes arise between big and small countries, strong and weak, central and peripheral from a geostrategic point of view. When there is an obvious gap between offensive and defensive effectiveness of the countries concerned, as between geographic, economic or political size etc. and the balance leans towards the "aggressor", vulnerable countries turn to neighbors and allies for support.

We must keep in mind that the history of a people and its relationship with other nations strengthen the nation traits and cultivate national virtues. These include inseparable cultural values such as courage and fortitude or cowardice and humiliation before the powerful. Those peoples which over centuries have fought for independence and resisted in front of other invading peoples, who unified territories and strengthened their borders and nation values, will resist more easily to contemporary geopolitical interference. On the other hand, peoples who have accepted under different historical periods to be led by others, to conform to the will of the strongest, will barely be able to maintain national dignity and impose national policy on the geopolitical stage.

### **Fear in Romanian history**

It is interesting to notice how Romania evolved from a historical perspective and if the feeling of fear conditioned or not its historic turning points, and if this feeling led to specific learned behavior patterns and national values.

Over the centuries, Romanians went through numerous attempts of conquest, assimilation, disunion, division, unification and territorial reunification. The Roman expansion, the Ottoman Empire invasion, military alliances with Russia or

the Austrian Empire – all the interference with other nations have taken their toll on the Romanians' nation consciousness. The choices made by the people and its leaders at a certain point in time led to the appropriation of certain behavioral characteristics. How did the feeling of fear influence Romanians, descendant of the Geto-Dacians, which lasted from the time of Burebista and Decebalus under the leadership of other nations, either as Roman province or later as an Ottoman province?

Roman civilization permeates all aspects of life in the occupied territory. Romanization leads to the substitution of the population's language with Latin. Moreover, Romanization factors were the army, the settlers, the urbanization, the government, the religion, the law and education in Latin. At that point in time we see that the Romans' expansionist behavior has positive effects on the invaded peoples. On the other hand, the locals' fear of something new and unknown turns into behavioral reactions of adaptation and modernization.

The Slavic invasion in the 7th century had negative effects for the Romans, discouraging repeated attempts of unification. In the Middle Ages, southern and western Romans were separated from the newly created states and reunification becomes virtually impossible because of Slavs, Bulgarians and Turks. In the XVIII century, the first two Romanian states, Moldova and Romanian Country, were vassals of the Ottoman Empire, but retained their internal autonomy. If we only mention the many battles waged by Stephen the Great, we will demonstrate the courage our brave soldiers have shown. Fear was overcome by confidence in the ruler and a desire to protect one's land and nation. The skill of the ruler as warrior confirms a good knowledge of the country, as well as the talent of knowing what the enemy was thinking. We find the famous tactics applied by Stephen the Great in the well-known paper "The Art of War", written by Chinese General Sun Tzu in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

At that time Transylvania was in turn part of Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, though it also had a wide autonomy. The Romanians, who were under the domination of other states, did not cower and did not abandon the idea of unification. Facing the fear of a new invasion, the two countries joined in 1859, along with Alexandru Ioan Cuza's double election as ruler.



The behavior of confronting foreign influences leads the Romanians to assimilate the territories inhabited by the same people. After the Treaty of Bucharest (1913) Southern Dobruja is obtained and after World War One Transylvania, Bucovina and Bessarabia are obtained, by applying the policy of "self-determination of nations". A part of the assimilated territories are lost over several decades (Northern Bukovina, Hertza County, Bessarabia, Southern Dobruja). Today they belong to our neighboring countries: Ukraine, Moldova and Bulgaria. It is worth noting that in spite of being overwhelmed and assimilated into Slavic and Bulgarian culture, Romanians in those territories largely preserved traditions and their native language.

The situation is different in Moldova, which is entirely a Romanian state, but was included in the Soviet Union. In order to secure the western border of the USSR, a vehement policy of denationalization of the Romanians was enforced on the left bank of the Prut. The area was heavily populated with native Russians and the local population was partially displaced in Siberia. The Moscow Central Committee annihilated Romanian by nicknaming it a "Moldavian language", by changing the Latin alphabet into the Cyrillic one, by supporting archaisms and regionalisms, by encouraging pronunciation with a Russian accent in the media etc. National identity was stifled for almost a century in many ways. Even the term "country" was avoided, opting for "republic" instead so as not to suggest the idea of reunification with Romania, the mother country.

Fear of mass persecution, of losing your job or even your life, determined the oppressed population to tacitly accept disgrace and the loss of national identity. The population's behavior adopted in response to the fear of social response was a passive one, of self-preservation and survival. A return to authentic values - a phenomenon that painstakingly continues today - began only after the implosion of the Soviet Empire. Conditioned by the frozen conflict in the Transnistrian autonomous area, officially unacknowledged, but controlled by Russians, Chisinau politicians had the courage to recognize Romanian as an official language only in 2013 and to replace the elusive collocation "mother tongue". A part of the population currently wants the union, some of them are pro-Russian, and another part is fearful or indecisive, waiting to see

"where the wind will blow".

The political, economic, social and moral education, science and culture declined during the Communist regime in Romania. The frightening social event is the totalitarian regime itself. Economic, social, cultural, religious threats and especially political ones cause fear among the population, not to mention distrust, anxiety, discouragement and helplessness. Every manifestation of discontent or rebellion was immediately countered and punished harshly. The population was downright scared, frightened, paralyzed, as in the Romanian saying "*fear entered his bones.*"

The poll conducted by CURS (2009)<sup>7</sup> highlights some features of national fear during Ceausescu's regime (1965-1989). People who lived under Ceausescu still remember how afraid they were of fellow party activists or informants, of Securitate, of Militia and of the regime in general. There was also a widespread mass fear of not becoming victims of crime, of not being humiliated, of difficult working conditions etc. The threats were particularly political, but there were fears of adverse economic events such as job loss. Given this background of socialist terror, few recall the devastation brought about by natural hazards (earthquakes, floods, droughts), particularly the 1977 earthquake which remained deeply rooted in their collective emotional memory.

At present, according to the survey, social fear triggers are especially economic (crisis, economic collapse, inflation, lack of jobs), while for 14-15% of the population social phenomena such as crime, corruption, street violence are imminent dangers. A smaller part of the population is scared of getting sick and of possible natural disasters.

In 2014, during my doctoral research, I conducted a survey with reference to the perceived risks, including social concerns. Fear arises when there are actual or probable risks and danger is perceived. After analyzing the results of the questionnaire applied to a sample of 130 people, I found the following risks and threats: poor health, inefficient education, crime and corruption, lack of jobs, poor infrastructure, low salaries and pensions, undeveloped industry and agriculture, insufficient housing, inadequate functioning of public institutions, unstable mentality and values, reduced culture. The greatest fear relates to the death of closed ones (62%), economic instability

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*



in the country (42%) and the possibility of natural disasters (33%).

With reference to behaviors learned from negative experiences, almost half of respondents believe that subsequent negative events will affect them as much (44%) and only a quarter thinks it will affect them less (26%). This fearful attitude is because of not having faith in the authorities to solve issues efficiently and this is why disaster response is being rated rather poorly (57%). Nearly all respondents (96%) consider training programs for natural hazards useful and necessary and most Romanians (77%) want to be helped and guided by qualified staff if life and integrity were threatened.

In the absence of other resources, the behavior of people in emergency situations is guided by their own skills and abilities, most trying to find a solution themselves (49%) and/or to help themselves and others around (46%), only a small percentage (28%) analyzes the situation and calls for help, relatively few (9.4%) are those who admit they do not know what they should do and choose to imitate others. There is a tiny percentage of people who are ready to risk their lives to save others. Very few admit that in a tightrope situation they would be scared and would probably paralyze or panic.

A question that deserves special treatment is Romania's relation with other countries and in particular, the fear of a "hot" war escalating close to its geographic area, encompassing our country. Given the armed conflict at the border of south-eastern Ukraine, the frozen conflict in Moldova's Transnistrian separatist territory and given Russia's current expansionist and aggressive policy, it is only logical to address such questions. We cannot overlook NATO's protection and the anti-missile shield installation here, which enhances the confidence of the population that may need to be protected in the future. Observing the behavior of the Romanians at the moment and the messages in the national/international media, we can deduce that the Romanian people regard geopolitical events in the area with a certain fear, but not fright. The population does not exhibit fear behavior adaptation at the moment.

### Conclusions

Fear is a feeling with a more negative connotation, but which helps the individual to mobilize and defend in the face of danger. The same goes for social fear, at the level of peoples

or nations. We see that social fear is learned just like the biological one. Negative experiences add overvalued emotional experiences in similar situations. When danger is not well perceived, the sense of fear is present only as anxiety or worry, the individual or society rather choosing to wait. If the threat (real or probable) is perceived intensely, the physiological and social effects will be more intense, too, be them active or passive defense or general paralysis. When there are helping factors (such as a stronger person you can rely on, in case of individual fear or confidence in the authorities, leaders and the defensive power of the state in the case of social fear) adverse behavioral reactions to fear are diminished, confidence increases and conduct is guided more towards constructive measures to save oneself.

The study on the risks in Romanian society shows numerous social, economic, cultural and environmental problems. Many of them are dormant and have been happening for several years and may be gradually reduced through efficient state policies aimed at economic, societal and valuable recovery. High lighting mental and behavioral characteristics of Romanians will help to prepare the population to cope with potential disturbing social events causing mass fear. Informing the general public about events taking place in society and geopolitics, as well as cultivating proactive behavior among the population, could diminish the degree of social fear manifested in Romania in relation to the socio-political-economic phenomena in our country and beyond.

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