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## A plea for a unified and compatible national security terminology

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### Abstract

Security terminology is a contentious and unclear topic in Romania. By analyzing the public speeches of politicians or national strategy texts, we often notice the presence of confusion regarding the correct use of the terms: security, defence, and safety. This confusion gives rise to both theoretical and practical problems, manifested in misunderstandings at the institutional level regarding their respective roles, society's misconceptions about the functions of certain organizations, and the failure to harness the collaborative potential between society and the military sector. The appropriate solution to address these issues is the cultivation of a security culture that fosters a grasp of fundamental concepts in this field. To achieve this objective, it is considered essential to have adequate knowledge and usage of the main concepts related to security terminology. This will bring order and enhance understanding of the processes involved in achieving security, defence, and safety.

### Keywords:

security; defense; safety; terminology; strategy; law; information; intelligence.

## Article objectives

This article advocates for the correct and appropriate use of terms and concepts specific to the field of national security terminology. Accurately employing, comprehending, and working with these concepts is crucial, both for practical activities in the information field and for the analysis and comprehension of the theoretical aspects of security culture within both civilian and political environments. Furthermore, considering that the field of intelligence studies is relatively young on a global scale, the Romanian academic community needs to learn how to effectively use security terminology. This is essential for both integration into the international academic sphere and for ensuring the relevance of research produced by the Romanian academic community in the context of national and international security culture.

Given its extensive scope encompassing a multitude of terms, this article will terminologically and conceptually analyze the notion of *security*, which is a complex concept often used erroneously in Romania.

### Terminology. Concept. Term – Linguistic Importance

Terminology is represented by all the specialized terms used in a discipline or a branch of activity (Dexonline 2023).

Making the transition from the general to the specific framework, it is noticed that the central element constituted by this domain is represented by the element “term”, which can be expressed through means of a word, phrase, expression, or figure of speech.

Because the linguistic field is a fluid one, it can be observed how over time certain terms have lost their original meaning. By analyzing the causes underlying the change in the meaning of certain terms, it can be seen that said change derives either from reasons of a lexical-grammatical nature (most often being the result of an academic consensus, the change appearing as a result of certain linguistic norms being introduced to the language), on the grounds of cultural and linguistic adoptions from other languages (from which a significant number of neologisms that enrich the terminological sphere derive), on the grounds of the linguistic crossbreeding of two/or more languages from distinct ethno-linguistic groups (synthesis which results in the emergence of a new language which has in its composition elements from several linguistic groups) or on political-ideological grounds (where the use of certain terms/terminology is part of a certain trend).

Changes of a terminological nature that took place through a political-ideological basis are often the most profound level of changes in the field of terminology. These changes are emotionally charged, which sometimes puts the terms into two categories: positive and negative. In this sense, terms such as freedom, equality, and democracy acquire a positive connotation, they are part of the terminology used in

the area of liberal democracy. While terminology in the negative sphere is composed of derogatory and offensive terms for certain people, these terms are negative by the nature of the historical events based on which they were formed, or the terms themselves are created with the purpose of denigrating. Also, at the terminology level from the political-ideological sphere, high volatility can be observed between the positive/negative nature, as accepted by the population, throughout history certain terms have experienced such a transition. As a suggestive example, we can use the term “nationalism”, a term that was found in both spectrums.

Referring back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Century of Nations, “nationalism” was a word that, due to the positive conceptual load that it had been attributed with, fell into the terminology of a positive and heroic nature, nationalism constituting the main method of birthing a nation and new states, being the main ideology that was constituted in the birth of new nations and the main weapon against imperialism (which at a conceptual level was beginning to acquire more and more negative connotations). Making the transition to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we notice that the term nationalism is a term from the negative sphere, being associated with terms such as racism and the far-right, with nationalists being the opponents of the current values promoted in society.

Thus, we can observe that terms can undergo certain changes over time in terms of the connotations that are attributed to them, based on grounds of emotional, social, and political nature, being able to become either positive or negative terms, the connotations being decided by social norms, culture, and customs.

### ***“Our everyday security”*** (Leahu 2021, 123)

Based on the above example, the following questions arise: “What is the moment when the terminology begins to take on nuances opposite to the connotation with which it had been assigned?”, “How slowly or fast is this change occurring?” and “How consistent is this change at a societal level?”

For these questions, we can identify an answer that implies both a general applicability (being, for example, the same for states with a similar political and social system) and a differentiated applicability, being determined by the cultural and historical specifics of each society/region/country.

Thus, to all of the above questions, the answer is constituted by *variation*, the change, the modification of the terminological connotation being determined by factors such as the emotion caused by the use of the term (spoken or written), the connotation that the term has had over time, the major events with which that term, consciously or unconsciously, was and is associated, and the opacity and conservatism of the society in question towards the cultural changes that took place within it.

While most of the time, connotative changes occur gradually over generations, resulting in something that appears somewhat natural, there are certain sensitive

areas, such as security, where the change should be accelerated.

In this sense, the most notable example regarding security is the case of Romania and its security culture. Paradoxically, although the term “security” is often associated with a state of safety, trust, or caution, within Romanian society, it carries a pejorative connotation, provoking emotions and feelings of fear, anxiety, or even unease.

### **Why is the term security a pejorative term in Romanian society?**

The negative connotations associated with the word *security* have deep roots in Romania’s history, originating in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the communist regime.

“The Security” (“Securitatea”, the usual name of the Department of State Security) was the Romanian intelligence service under the communist regime. Officially founded by the no. 221 decree of the Great National Assembly of August 28, 1948, the Security had the role of the political police, being a tool used by the single party in power. Unofficially, the Security began to operate on the Romanian territory after the coup d’état of August 23, 1944, it being created after the NKVD model by SMERȘ (Leahu 2021, 125).

As such, the Security operated on the Romanian territory for more than 40 years, it being abolished following the Revolution of 1989, following the decision of the National Salvation Front on December 30, 1989.

Having the role of political police, the Security during the communist regime was tasked with removing and arresting critics and dissidents who were against the regime. The methods used in the exercise of its powers were different, ranging from interrogations to the physical elimination of people deemed not to be compliant with the social, ethical, and moral norms imposed by the party. Thus, through the techniques and methods used, it managed to penetrate deeply into the collective mind of the population, with the belief that the Security is omnipresent and omnipotent, any citizen possibly being a collaborator of the Security or even a member within it.

That is why, for a period spanning over 40 years, Romanian society lived with the deep fear and belief that it was under constant surveillance, with any deviation from social norms equating to interrogation, searches, or even physical harm, with Security being the primary factor associated with these consequences. Therefore, the dominant emotion and connotation assigned to it during the communist regime was fear, firmly placing it within the realm of words with negative connotations in everyday language. Consequently, it can be observed that in the sphere of emotional connotation related to the assignment of terms, cognitive dissonance can sometimes emerge. Paradoxically, terms like “security,” despite their inherent association with safety and trust (originally intended to convey these concepts), end up evoking feelings of anxiety and fear due to

their connection with negative events from the past.

Thus, at the level of Romanian society, the term “security” still carries a negative connotation, resulting in a terminological framework with negative connotations at the social level as well.

### **What are the factors that have contributed to the transformation of the term security into a term with negative connotations?**

As previously mentioned, the Security, as a *sui generis* institution, has been active for a long time on Romanian territory, its actions having very negative consequences on the collective mind.

And yet, more than 30 years have passed since the Security as an institution was abolished. Why does the term security continue to be a pejorative one?

Here it can be said that the answers are based on a triple causality.

First of all, it can be assumed that a significant fault lies with the media which constantly propagates news about the old institution of Security and constantly associates it with the Romanian Intelligence Service (an institution that has no continuity and connection with the old Department of State Security), inducing thus the idea that the SRI would actually be its *de facto* heir and that the same people who were active in the old Security are active in the SRI.

Another factor that has substantially contributed to the distortion of the concept is represented by the political class, which constantly accuses each other of links with the former Security, either at the level of collaboration or integration within the structures, or through the so-called interventions of the SRI in politics, a fact that again associates SRI to a politicized institution (like the old Security) and not an institution dealing with intelligence.

Last but not least, another factor that has a significant weight in creating this confusion is constituted by poor communication, since unfortunately there are still no campaigns carried out in this sense, that would exemplify and create the association of security to a process and not an institution.

### **What are the main consequences of not understanding the connotation of the concept of security?**

According to the 51/1991 Law on the National Security of Romania, the national security of Romania represents the state of legality, balance, and social, economic and political stability, and the development of the Romanian national state as a sovereign, unitary, independent and indivisible state, the maintenance of the rule

of law, as well as the climate of unrestricted exercise of the rights, freedoms and fundamental duties of citizens, according to the democratic principles and norms established by the Constitution ([Parlamentul României 1991](#)).

Thus, we can observe that security is currently a process of ensuring and strengthening the life and fundamental freedom of citizens, and by no means a limitation of it.

However, the continuous and constant association of the concept of security in the form of a pejorative term has negative effects on this field, the effects being of a professional, administrative and academic nature.

At the professional level, the first consequence of the term security being associated with negative connotations is represented by the mistrust it generates among the population regarding intelligence institutions. Thus, many citizens will feel fearful and suspicious about the potential actions of the SRI, sometimes exhibiting a certain reluctance to report certain dangers that could have negative repercussions on national security, and being hesitant to engage in potential collaboration with the relevant authorities in this domain.

Also, another consequence resulting from the inadequate use of the term *security* is the fact that the concrete field of activity of the SRI is not known to the general public and is not understood. This can also be seen from the name of the service, which is considered to be one based on *information*, and not on security. This marks a serious deficiency in terms of the security culture of the Romanian society, since the field of information is only one of the SRI's branches of activity, its activities being much more numerous and complex in the pursuit of achieving internal security. Reading Law no. 14 from February 24, 1992 ([Parlamentul României 1992](#)) on the organization and operation of the Romanian Intelligence Service, it is clear that the SRI is one of the institutions of the country's defense system, its attributions being much broader than the simple collection of information, including the implementation of counter-terrorism operations, counter-espionage, analysis, the purpose of the operations being the implementation of security.

Also, intelligence services at the global level are security services, the SRI association having a slightly atypical name for the terminology in this field.

At the administrative level, the problems end up becoming more and more numerous, knowing different effects and forms. In this sense, we can note that, first of all, Romania is one of the few member states of NATO and the EU that does not have a clear delimitation of the notions of security, safety and defense at the administrative level. This is worrying, as the notions and concepts listed above, even if they are part of the specific security terminology, cannot be a substitute for each other, as they are specific terms, which have a very well-regulated field of activity.

Thus, in the case of Romania, while there is a strategy in the field of defense, through the document National Defense Strategy 2020-2024, Romania does not currently

possess a National Security Strategy that contains a strategy for each field, which represents a security factor, it currently only having a Strategy for Cyber Security ([Parlamentul României 2022](#)). This is worrying, since the last strategy that addressed security at the level of all its branches of interest was Romania's National Security Strategy from 2006 ([AFAS 2016](#)).

Currently, within the institutional planning framework of Romania, the terms 'defense' and 'security' are still used in a symmetrical and congruent relationship. As such, the simultaneous use of these two concepts and their constant association can be found in multiple bills, laws, and strategies intended to ensure security and defense. Illustrative in this regard is the 203/2015 Law regarding defense planning, which, according to Article 1, Paragraph 1, mentions that "Defense planning, an attribute and essential component of the defense policy, represents a complex of activities and measures aimed at protecting and promoting national interests, *defining and achieving Romania's national security objectives* in the defense domain." This demonstrates that the realms of security and defense continue to be approached in a deeply congruent relationship by Romanian state institutions ([Parlamentul României 2015](#)).

Thus, according to the 203/2015 Law, the relationship of congruence between security and defense is stated most profoundly through the phrase "defining and achieving Romania's national security objectives in the defense domain", which highlights that for the field of security, it represents an essential component for the planning of national defense, having components from the security sphere included in it (such as information, as well as elements from the European Union's Security Strategy ([Legrand 2023](#))). Additionally, also based on the 203/2015 Law, the relationship of congruence between defense and security is reiterated in Article 1, Paragraph 2, letters b and c, which address the obligations that Romania must fulfill in terms of common security and defense as a member of NATO and the European Union. Therefore, based on the aforementioned law, a unified approach to the two concepts and their congruent relationship is evident. Unfortunately, however, there is no precise delimitation for separately addressing security objectives and addressing objectives in the defense domain.

As far as Romania's National Defense Strategy is concerned, it is noticeable that the main directions of action and methods for ensuring security are addressed within it, as a part of defense, and are not addressed separately. This creates inefficiency in terms of defense and security due to a lack of understanding of the concepts and specific responsibilities of each institution.

By making an external analysis, it can be seen how most NATO and EU countries update their strategies annually, and not once every 4 years, as defense and security issues are constantly changing. At the same time, analyzing the strategies of other states, we can see that the field of security and defense are approached separately,

each having a clear field of activity established, the attributions and competencies in the field of security and defense not being in a substitution type of relationship, but in a working relationship. Suggestive examples in this regard are the Defense Strategy ([US Department of Defense 2022](#)) and the Security Strategy of the United States ([National Security Strategy 2022](#)), the Defense Strategy and the Security Strategy of France, or the Defense Strategy and the Security Strategy of Germany.

Furthermore, at the level of utilizing the concepts of defense and security in an equivalent and congruent relationship, a model of theoretical and practical approaches to these two concepts can be found in the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy. Within the terminology used in the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), we notice right from the title that the two domains are addressed separately, and their relationship is subsequently presented. As such, there is no confusion in terms of terminology or attributions. The presence of the coordinating conjunction 'and' in its name indicates that there is a cooperative relationship between the notions of security and defense, while also signifying that the two domains have distinct attributes and connotations ([Legrand 2023](#)).

Continuing to analyze the specific field of international security, it is noticed that even at an academic, theoretical, and practical level, there is a substantial distinction between concepts within the realm of political/governmental intelligence and those specific to economic intelligence terminology.

In the realm of international security relations and security studies terminology, it is evident that even at the international level, the field of security is approached in a multisectoral and multilevel manner, spanning across several domains of study.

International security, understood as security between different states, first emerged as a concept in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, threats no longer solely originate from states, existing in various levels and forms. Alongside classical threats posed by hostile states, new security threats emerged, encompassing ethnic groups driven by hyper-nationalism, criminal gangs, mafia organizations, epidemics, terrorism, toxic foods, poverty and the mismanagement of their effects, overpopulation, failed states, refugee flows, pollution and its effects, and the destruction of fauna and flora, as well as new threats emerging in the cyber realm. At the international level, international security takes a multilevel approach, encompassing individual security, societal security, and global security ([Bertel and Kristensen 2019, 26](#)).

Furthermore, starting from the 1980s, a significant portion of state responsibilities has been transferred to the private sector, including the realm of security. Thus, the field of economic intelligence emerged, focusing exclusively on corporate espionage and counterespionage. Conceptually, the most relevant terms in this field are *security science* and *security governance*.

Security science represents a field that brings together several concepts and principles. It is a newly emerging domain, not a traditional branch of security,



integrating concepts from security management, security principles, information, and security risk management (Smith and Brooks 2013, 19).

Security governance is a relatively new field within economic intelligence, both in practice and academia, emerging around the 1980s. Security governance is presently aimed at the corporate realm, primarily focusing on the areas of business and IT.

Security governance comprises the responsibilities and practices exercised by the executive leadership to provide strategic direction, ensure objectives are met, manage risks appropriately, and ensure responsible use of enterprise resources. The research done for this paper indicates that, through their emerging capabilities in security governance and risk management, many organizations take proactive measures to ensure their security control investments directly support their business objectives. A consistent organizational-wide view of security risks, integrating both physical and IT security, is essential to this strategy. By combining superior security governance and risk management with an integrated approach to logical and physical security, organizations gain a competitive edge in the global economy with optimized IT infrastructure and enhanced protection of their digital, physical, and human assets (Fay and Patterson 2018, 56).

Unfortunately, in Romania, there is currently inadequate terminology used for the field of economic intelligence as the research in theoretical and practical subjects is in its early stages. However, considering the intense competitiveness in the economic and entrepreneurial sphere, the introduction of ideas and terminology from the field of economic intelligence will be necessary for Romanian society, this domain undoubtedly holding substantial importance in the future.

### **Why is such a precise distinction important at the strategy level?**

The answer is because, first of all, defense, security, and safety are different concepts. Previously, the concept of security with all the attributions that its realization implies was defined. In the following, a definition of the concept of defense and safety will be provided.

According to Law No. 45 of July 1, 1994, national defense includes the set of political, diplomatic, economic, military, legal, psychological measures and actions carried out by the Romanian state, to guarantee national sovereignty, independence and unity of the state, territorial integrity of the country and constitutional democracy (Parlamentul României 1994).

It can also be observed within the terminology used in the sphere of intelligence services that there is significant confusion regarding the distinction between the concepts of security and safety, with both terms often being assigned the same meaning.

According to the National Security Law no. 51/1991, national security is defined as a state of social, economic and political legality, balance and stability necessary for the development of the Romanian national state as a sovereign, unitary, independent and indivisible state, the maintenance of the rule of law, as well as of the climate and the unrestricted exercise of the rights, freedoms and fundamental duties of citizens, according to the democratic principles and norms established by the Constitution ([Parlamentul României 1991](#)).

Thus, a clear understanding of the definitions and concepts in the field of security to describe its exact field of activity is imperative for the proper realization of the security and defense of the country, to create institutions that have a well-defined role and that perfectly understand the attributions that they have within them, so that they may channel all their resources in order to fulfill them.

At an academic level, the security-specific terminology is currently studied and analyzed in Romania only at specialized institutions, within programs intended for civilians and military personnel. This paper proposes that in order to achieve a security culture at the national level, security terminology must go beyond only being studied within specialized institutions and begin to be addressed in the spectrum of political sciences, study programs in the field of international relations and European studies, in the framework of international economic relations and even in the framework of informatics and cybernetics programs, since, in a complex world, with constant changes, which produces a significant number of hybrid threats, security will be an area which will not be able to have a monopoly owned by government institutions, thus requiring the transfer of certain responsibilities to private institutions or the country's citizens, as is the case in Switzerland ([Federal Intelligence Service 2022](#)).

Therefore, at the academic level, it is necessary to also include students, who are not enrolled at studies in specialized institutions, in the study and understanding of the notions and terminology in the field of security, since the increase in the number of hybrid threats, of state and non-state origin, will require some minimal knowledge in the area of the security spectrum.

### **How can the terminology of security be better presented in the civil environment and how can citizens acquire and accurately understand the notions of this spectrum?**

As previously specified, a first measure would be to de-monopolize security notions currently being taught only in specialized or adjacent institutions. Just as a student from the Faculty of Letters must have some elementary notions of mathematics, informatics, biology, or chemistry, it is important that the university (or even the high school) environment be able to teach citizens some elementary notions in the field of security.

At the same time, in order to achieve a culture of security at the public level, the main institutions that carry out this process must be more transparent towards the citizens (such as the intelligence institutions in the West) and communicate much more openly with the citizens. In this sense, it would be essential for civilians to have access to certain publications that have as their subject of interest the security culture, so that they can acquire these notions precisely from experts in the field. Also, a change or improvement in the communication made on social networks is needed, so that the constant idea of secrecy and mystery that surrounds the activity of the services may no longer seem to be related to the field of the occult and mysticism. Even if this attractiveness towards the intelligence services initially consisted precisely in the existence of the mystery factor, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the century of speed, social media, and transparency, the attractiveness for young people lies in the simplicity and transparency of the activity.

Last but not least, a public communication campaign must be undertaken in order to emphasize the fact that the field of security has no connection with the Security of the communist era, and that the institutions that carry out national security are doing it for the benefit of the citizens, not their detriment.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a correct mastery of the terminology in the field of security is essential, since the creation of a security culture at the military, political, institutional, and civil levels is vital for the challenges of the current decade.

At the same time, the existence of an active security culture among citizens also creates a strong partnership between society and the institutions engaged in the production of security, thus increasing the level of trust towards them and thus reducing the index of distance from the governance with regards to public institutions, citizens becoming aware that such institutions work for them and not against them.

A strong security culture also indicates the existence of an increased level of development and trust of citizens in the state, in countries that possess such a culture such as Israel, Switzerland, or the United States, where the standard of living is high and citizens have a high respect for defense institutions.

From a practical point of view, the current study is important because the identification and definition of the terms: security, defense, and safety, from a legislative point of view, are elementary, because starting a process of creating a security culture is founded on a legal basis. Thus, the idea of creating a strong security culture at the civil society level is feasible, benefiting from the existence of legal support.

Also, by analyzing the Defense Strategy of Romania and the Security Strategy of Romania, it was shown that there are still certain limitations regarding the correct operation of concepts from the security sphere, these limitations can go from the stage of errors of a technical nature to serious repercussions for society (which can be calculated, unfortunately, in the number of deaths).

At the same time, the study shows that Romania currently does not have a National Security Strategy, a fact that places our country among very few NATO and EU members that do not have such a strategy. In the context of the current war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, but also of the existence of more and more hybrid threats such as terrorism, cyberterrorism, hacking, climate change, and potential food crises, it is imperative for our country to have such a strategy, as such threats are found in all sectors of interest of a country (political, military, sanitary, economic, financial, cultural, energetic), surpassing the boundaries of classic threats.

Regarding the limitations of this paper, the main issue is the lack of a recently conducted study, on a sample of citizens representative of society, so that an estimate of the possible degree of trust/distrust regarding the institutions engaged in carrying out the security process or defense can be made.

Another limitation was constituted by the fact that currently, at a country level, there has not been a study made to measure the true level of security culture in Romania, lacking both quantitative and qualitative measurement data.

The study contains only information obtained from open sources, of the OSINT type, no interactions with politicians, government officials, or personnel from the sphere of military institutions were made for its inception, the opinions presented in its pages being only the opinions of the authors regarding the current security culture in the territory Romania. Therefore, it was not known if there are currently any discussions about improving security terminology in the environments listed above.

From a novelty perspective, the present study is one of the first to present the correlation between the need to improve and understand the terminology specific to the field of security and the creation of a strong security culture at the institutional and civil levels. This study demonstrates the need to remove from the pejorative sphere the concept of "security" perceived negatively in public opinion and its transformation into a positive concept, which is associated with the idea of safety, defense, and tranquility.

In conclusion, it can be said that this study brings into discussion the need to create a National Security Strategy, a step that will be necessary for the future confrontations and threats that the Romanian state will have to solve in the future.

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