

# SOCIETAL SECURITY IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

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Starting from the idea that modern security is no longer strictly a matter of state and military threats, the Copenhagen School has developed an extended security concept based on security sectors and securitization theory. In this context, it has developed a special security sector, called societal security, to address the conservation capacity of a society by preserving its identity, spiritual values and perennial character. From this perspective, contemporary societal security is the subject of a variety of risks and threats, among which those due to the process of regionalization and European integration occupy a central place. This article is focused on introducing the societal security concept and analyzing its mining in the current European geopolitical context.

**Keywords:** societal security; identity; security sectors.

## Introduction

Societal security is a concept developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies which focuses on the ability of a society to preserve itself by preserving its essential character. The concept emerged in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War and was developed in the context of the integration of states into the European Union. This paradigm minimizes the role of state power in guaranteeing security by confronting threats, in order to bring to the fore issues regarding the identity of communities and societal dynamics. Taking into account these aspects, this article presents the concept of societal security and analyzes its significance in the current geopolitical context.

## What is societal security?

The end of the Cold War, which culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new states, followed by sustained efforts for continued integration into the European Union, has prompted specialists and policy makers to rethink the paradigm of independent state and military security.<sup>1</sup> The new world order required a re-conceptualization of Europe and European security, which could no longer be based on the old understanding of security, as an arrangement

between states. For this reason, security concerns were closely marked by questions about social identity, national values, free movement of persons or cross-border crime. The concept of societal security, developed by the specialists of the Copenhagen School, is in the context of these concerns.<sup>2</sup> The security of the company refers to: "the ability of a company to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or real threats"<sup>3</sup>.

In Ole Waever's view, the concept of social security represents, "the ability of a society to survive in its essential characteristics under fluctuating circumstances and in the face of possible or present threats"<sup>4</sup>. If until now the state was the object of the military, political, economic and environmental dimensions of security, in the case of societal security, the object of study is the society whose essential characteristic is that of national identity.

## Characteristics of societal security

In his book *Security: a new framework for analysis*, Barry Buzan et al. formalizes the broader understanding of security by introducing five sectors, each governed by distinctive characteristics and dynamics and conceptualized around reference objects and actors (ie, military, environmental, economic, societal and political). The security of the society represents the survival of a community as a cohesive unit; its reference object is the large-scale collective identity that can function

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independently of the state<sup>5</sup>.

Societal insecurity arises when a society fears that it will not be able to live on its own and comes from: migration (influx of people will overcome or dilute the identity of a group, for example the need to define Britishness), vertical competition (integration of a group into within the framework of a larger organization, for example Euroscepticism regarding the future of the EU), nationalist-separatist claims and horizontal competition (the community is obliged to integrate more influential identities in their own groups, for example the French cultural exceptionalism that is defended by American influences).

The security of the society is not related to a territory, as is the security of the state, for example in the territory inhabited by Kurds, the security problems of the state and the society are largely divergent and conflict.<sup>6</sup>

From a sociological perspective, the concept of societal security embodies a certain vision of security that considers security as an independent phenomenon. Thus, the security of the society is not a threat, nor an opportunity but is both a center and a base, on the basis of which the reliability and certainty of the collective life could be built. This means that security is considered to be based on collective life – the lives of ordinary people – instead of looking at differences and insisting on disagreement between groups and states, which is a key factor in determining threats and identifying friends or foes. Security as a social phenomenon does not need military solutions or even soft solutions. In other words, the security of society cannot be assimilated with power, on the contrary, it must be seen as a mechanism for transforming social ties. Finally, societal threats and opportunities can only be considered as deterrence or impetus. In other words, the ultimate goal of societal security is the comfort and understanding of the beauty of collective life - not an interest for the government, not the elimination of enemies, not facing the perceived threats to the nation.<sup>7</sup>

### **The current context of societal security**

The security of a society is endangered when a threat is perceived to it regarding its identity and its survival as a community. The overlap between the state and society has led analysts to consider societal identity as a value to be defended and thus

to promote the concept of identity security, as a basis for societal security. In the acceptance of the Copenhagen school there are two types of societies that participate in shaping the specific identity of the human being, respectively the ethno-national communities and the religious communities. In this context, the problem arises of identifying the actors who should have the competence to provide security. If, traditionally, the security provider is the state, through its political-institutional bodies, in the case of societal security, the state faces certain difficulties. Sometimes, the actions of the state can generate insecurity in the societal sector, and attempts to influence the identity are not always effective, they can have negative consequences, provoking strong manifestations against the oppressive tendencies of the state. In order to identify threats to the identity of a state, we must establish the values around which the community coagulates, in this case the nation, including objective factors such as the national language, territory and other identifying elements specific to the state concerned.

Barry Buzan identifies three major types of threats to societal security:

a) Migration – when a people receives a percentage of foreigners too high their identity can be affected by the modification of their social composition;

b) Horizontal competition – the cultural and linguistic characteristics of a society can be affected by the influence of neighboring cultures with clear effects on the identity of the respective people;

c) Vertical competition – sometimes integrationist or secessionist projects cause people to stop identifying as Z people (eg Catalonia, Kosovo etc.).

In addition to the three types of threats at present, three more threats to societal security are identified, namely:

a) Depopulation has an ambivalent character and is therefore mentioned separately. Depopulation has an ambivalent character because it does not represent a real threat to the identity of a society, but, first of all, to the individuals, who are the bearers of the identity of a nation. It becomes a threat to societal security when it threatens to destroy society;

b) Discrimination;

c) Terrorism.

In the context of integration in the European Union, the identity of the states is becoming more and more important as the borders are almost disappearing. "In a united Europe, those national societies that succeed in preserving their moral and identity bases will enjoy security."<sup>78</sup> According to the analysis provided by the Copenhagen school, it can be said that the integration into superstate structures of the European Union type can be interpreted as a renunciation of national identity and sovereignty, causing phenomena circumscribed to the vertical competition. Not only does the renunciation of the identity held in favor of a supranational identity correspond to such dynamics, but also the exacerbation of subnational identities of minorities. In this regard we refer to the multitude of speeches that have as their subject the autonomy or even secession of some regions of some European Union countries after the Brexit in the United Kingdom of 2016.

### Conclusions

Starting from the new paradigm of contemporary security, this article is nothing more than a justification for the need to place great attention on its societal dimension. According to the opinions of many specialized analysts in this sector, the biggest changes occur and, therefore, it is necessary to understand much better what are the response mechanisms of the society to security threats which are varied and especially difficult to anticipate. We consider that it is possible to speak of a dilemma of the societal security, in the sense that the effects of the threats to society's security are really difficult to stop and the effects are in the long term.

In an identity conflict the parties tend to treat the threats as aiming at their very existence and survival, and such wounds close very hard. The knowledge of this sector is not an easy one, especially given the inherent multidisciplinary, but also the need to develop the most suitable analysis tools. Although the concept of social security should have a unitary academic approach, it is nevertheless difficult to imagine a unique theory that corresponds in the same approach to all societies in the European Union.

The effort to have a unitary construction of the social security, which encompasses these specificities, is of the utmost importance to imagine

a stable European Union adapted to the current needs of its citizens. However, the dynamics specific to the societal dimension, including the risks and threats of insecurity, are constant concerns of the politico-social factors even if their approaches are not identical or related to the same societal level.

Migration, population aging, horizontal competition, vertical competition, depopulation, discrimination and terrorism have a long-term societal impact that must be integrated into the socio-economic policies of the European Union, and these, in turn, must be implemented by all Member States. It is clear that all these problems can be solved only through cooperation between the Member States and calls for serious discussions to establish clearly what is the national-European border in the fight for the defense of the traditional values specific to each state and implicitly the national identity.

### NOTES:

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2 *Ibidem*, p. 211.

3 Ole Wæver, *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, 1993, p. 23.

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5 Wæver Buzan & de Wilde, *Security a new Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p. 22.

6 *Ibidem*, p 119.

7 Manijeh Navidnia, *Societal Security*, Iran, Tehran: Research Institute of Strategic Studies (Rahbordi), 2009, pp. 69-83.

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