

How to cite this paper:

Cucută, R.-A.; Stănciugelu, Ș.; Ungureanu, R.S. (2024). The Missing Issue in the Romanian Security Policy. Discourses and Practices of Environmental Protection. *Perspective Politice*. Vol. XVII, no. 1-2. Pages 203-217. <https://doi.org/10.25019/perspol/24.17.15>

Received: June 2024

Accepted: September 2024

Published: December 2024

Copyright: © 2024 by the author(s). Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

Article

The Missing Issue in the Romanian Security Policy. Discourses and Practices of Environmental Policy

Abstract: *The paper proposes an analysis of Romania's security policy from the perspective of the relation between the different Romanian authorities in the specific field of environmental policy. The paper tries to offer an explanation for the reaction of the Romanian authorities to Ukraine's decision to dredge and deepen the Bystroye Canal, a navigation route through the Danube Delta, partially on the border between Romania and Ukraine, which connects the Danube and the Black Sea. The response of the Romanian state is considered a sub-optimal consequence of the interaction between two different sets of logics: the tension between a conventional state-centred view on security and the imperatives of environmental protection, on the one hand, and the difficult cooperation between the Political and the Institutional Power on the other hand. The authors resort to two types of content analysis, a qualitative one of the defence and military strategies of Romania and a quantitative one of the Romanian public authorities' communication, based on results generated by the ZeList Monitor software. The paper thus highlights the extent to which the results of public policies are significantly influenced by the interaction of distinct views on politics and international relations.*

Radu-Alexandru CUCUȚĂ

Department of International Relations and European Integration, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania; ORCID: 0009-0000-4599-7527; radu.cucuta@dri.snsa.ro

Ștefan STĂNCIUGELU

Faculty of Political Science, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania; ORCID: 0009-0002-1439-2765; stanciugelustefan@yahoo.com

Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU

Department of International Relations and European Integration, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania; ORCID: 0009-0001-7345-4295; rsungureanu@dri.snsa.ro

Keywords: *Bystroye Canal; defence policy; environmental security; institutional power; political power.*

1. Introduction

The research is placed in the international context of the war started by Russia in Ukraine and focuses on Romania's security policy in the field of environmental protection. The case study underscores the be-

havior of the Romanian authorities in the case of a border incident on the 15th of February 2023. Political decision-makers from the top of the Romanian state denounced that the Bystroye Canal maintenance works were, in fact, illicit canal deepening works, which could affect the ecological balance on the Romanian side of the Danube Delta. This framing of the situation was interpreted by the Romanian media and public opinion as a failure of Romania's environmental protection strategy.

The navigational status of the Bystroye Canal has been the focal point of a lengthy dispute between the two countries. The central hypothesis of the paper is that the dithering and apparently hesitant and confusing reaction of the Romanian authorities in the above-mentioned situation is the result of the contradictions between different types of political logics espoused by the Romanian authorities.

There are two assumptions about the nature of domestic and international politics on which the study is based on. Firstly, the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of environmental issues as security issues are fundamentally different to those underlining the conventional view on security. The tension between these views is one of the factors accounting for the sub-optimal responses of the Romanian authorities to the Bystroye issue. Moreover, the Bystroye issue lies at the intersection between sovereignty (the border between the two countries) and environmental issues (the safeguarding of the Danube Delta biosphere).

The second assumption is that there is a tension between the institutional and the political logic. In the context of a crisis related to environmental protection, whether internal or international, we advance the distinction between Political Power and Institutional Power, each of them advancing distinct claims. While the Political Power is supposed to establish goals for policies, their enactment rests with the Institutional Power, legitimized by expertise and scientific knowledge, in this case embodied by the Ministry of the Environment, Waters and Forests (hereinafter MEWF). The nature of the issue, however, highlights the difficulty of reconciling the two logics. Consequently, the hypothesis of the article is that the tension between the two conceptions on security, as well as the tension between the political and the institutional logic, can account for the (sometimes) suboptimal environmental public policies of Romania.

The next section of the article discusses the methods employed for testing the main hypothesis. Subsequently, the paper dwells on the theoretical underpinnings concerning environmental issues in international relations and the environmental dimension as presented in the strategic documents of Romania. The relation between the Institutional and the Political Power is followed by an analysis of the media and communication dynamics surrounding the Bystroye issue.

2. Methodology

The research methodology operates within a general framework concerning the presentation of the dynamics of environmental issues and security as it appears in international documents, agreements and treaties in the last decades. The methodology is supported by an institutional analysis of Romanian legal documents related to environmental protection based on two types of content analysis: a) a qualitative analysis of the defence and military strategies of Romania; b) a quantitative analysis of the Romanian public authorities' public communication on the topic of the Ukrainian deepening and dredging works on the Bystroye Canal. The time intervals considered by the study are February-March 2023 and May-June 2023.

The study focuses on the peculiar dynamics of the Romanian political space and tries to identify the factors which motivated a political appropriation of the Bystroye issue. Both the incentives and the consequences of the political exploitation of the issue and their eventual institutional management are investigated, through a social and online media visibility analysis, compiled with the ZeList Monitor software, during the time interval mentioned above.

The first research question regards the relations between the Political Power (political parties in government and in opposition) and the Institutional Power (the Government of Romania, MEWF, other relevant central and local authorities) with respect to environmental protection. This question is considered in a wider context where traditional, online and social media took part intensively.

The second research question of the study concerns the interaction between the logic underpinning environmental security issues and those underscoring conventional threats. How do the logics interact and what is their impact on the coherence and cohesion of Romanian strategic documents, which form the outline for state policies in these fields?

The works carried out by the Ukrainian authorities on the Bystroye Canal attracted significant public attention. Within this communication ecosystem, the authorities came under increased scrutiny. The third research question focuses on the factors that created an apparently disadvantageous public communication situation for the Romanian decision-makers.

3. Case study

3.1. The Bystroye Issue

On the 30th of May 2023, the Ukrainian Minister of Infrastructure, Yuri Vaskov, announced the commencement of new dredging and deepening works up to 7.2 m on the Bystroye Canal, in order to turn it into a river-borne export route for Ukraine, to the Black Sea (Lazăr, 2023). Three and a half months before, one could argue, the move would have been considered a violation of the Espoo Convention (Parliament Law no. 203/2015). On the 20th of February 2023, the same minister publicized the deepening of the Canal from 3.5 m to 6.5 m (Ilie, 2023). These works were interpreted in Romania as a decision that fundamentally affects the environmental protection of the Danube Delta, as shown by the statements of the public authorities and media interpretations of February 2023 (Preotesescu, 2023). The Romanian press of the same period of time also highlights a conflict between the Political Power in Romania (individual ministers acting foremost as politicians and political parties as well) and the Institutional Power, namely the Government of Romania, in which the MEWF is the only one possessing the expertise and responsibility of the environmental protection. The monitoring of the mass media from February 2023 also shows that the interpretations of the political parties, part of the Political Power, is in disagreement with the Institutional Power, e.g., the Presidency of Romania (Cojan, 2023).

Replacing in the public discourse the Institutional Power (MEWF), the spontaneous appropriation of the problem by the Political Power was probably at the basis of a communication crisis, eventually solved by the MEWF three weeks later. Based on the provisions of the same Espoo Convention, the Romanian and Ukrainian environmental ministries signed an Agreement in November 2022 in Bucharest (MEWF, 2022). If accused of violating the Agreement in February 2023, in March, however, Ukraine was no longer seen by the Romanian authorities as having caused a cross-border incident. According to MEWF, the biodiversity in the

Danube Delta is not affected by the Ukrainian project to deepen the Bystroye canal. The measurements proved that the water level of the Danube (seen as the first cause for the disappearance of flora and fauna from the Danube Delta biosphere) did not decrease on the territory of Romania, compared to the parameters in the last years (Pecheanu, 2023).

At the same time, it is important to note that Bystroye is a long-standing issue for the Romanian diplomacy. Ever since Ukraine has announced in 2004 its intention to resume commercial navigation on the canal, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter MFA) has questioned the legality of the Ukrainian endeavour, arguing that the environmental costs of the initiative would be detrimental for the Danube Delta (MFA, 2021). Furthermore, the discussions and negotiations in relation to navigation on the canal were part of a wider series of disputes between Romania and Ukraine, settled by an International Court of Justice decision (ICJ, 2009). Consequently, it is possible to argue that, in addition to the MEWF, there is another institutional actor, the MFA, which has considerable expertise in managing the interactions with the Ukrainian authorities. The political approach and communication management in relation to this problem relegated the MFA to the position of a second line communication actor in relation to the Political Power.

This substitution of the expertise of the administrative power by the interests of the political parties seems to have generated what could be called a suboptimal management of the then defined cross-boundary incident related to the Romanian environmental protection policy. As stated before, the reaction of the Romanian authorities was compounded by the conflicting logics of conceptualizing environmental issues as security matters.

In order to better understand the significance of this situation from a strategic perspective, it is necessary to briefly review the relevance of the environmental issues for the International Relations theories. This step is needed for approaching its significance from the Romanian view of security.

3.2. Environmental Security

Traditionally conceived in military terms, a broader conception of security was developed in the last 40 years, mainly due to the contribution of the Copenhagen School. Barry Buzan, a member of this approach, added the political, social, economic and environmental sectors to the military one. (Buzan, 1983). Environment was thus included in the understanding of security, at least for the partisans of the widening of the term.

The intellectual enlargement of the term was anticipated by a political effort in this direction. In 1972, the United Nations held the first conference on human environment. The participants adopted an action plan and established an UN program in this regard (UNGA, 1972). Even if, due to the conditions of the Cold War, the socialist East-European camp, with the notable exception of Romania, boycotted the conference, the moment marks the first step in placing the environment topic on top of the international agenda.

Both the intellectual and political understandings of the relevance of the environment got momentum in 1987, when a UN body (UN World Commission on Environment and Development), better known as the “Brundtland Commission”, issued a report entitled *Our Common Future*. Later adopted by the UN General Assembly, the report famously coined the term “sustainable development”, which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UNGA, 1987). The concept stresses the necessity to orient the economic development in an eco-friendly manner. In 1994, the United

Nations Development Program listed the environment among the components of “human security” (UNDP, 1994). This last term intends to move the emphasis from states and international security, mainly discussed in their military dimensions, to the basic human needs. This perspective is actually consistent with a whole range of efforts of framing, politically and intellectually, the relevance of the globalization processes and effects.

One should not understand that the widening of the concept of security is generally embraced. In particular, the scholars attached to the realist tradition defend a conventional perspective, which conceives the states as the only acceptable security objects of reference, the dangers that they can face coming exclusively by military means from similar polities. The main argument presented in this respect is that the expansion of the sphere of security “would destroy its intellectual coherence” (Walt, 1991, p. 213). Without intending to present here in detail this fruitful debate, the lack of common understanding of the concept stands out. This very fact involves not only that the debate on what security concerns will not end anytime soon, but it is also a matter of confusion in both the academic and political realms.

The widening of the concept of security refers not only to the multiplication of the objects of reference taken into account. It also entails several different levels of analysis. The classical “security dilemma”, as expressed, for instance, by John Herz, concerns only two such planes: the national and the international ones (Herz, 1950). On the contrary, the environmental issues penetrate all the layers, from the individual to the global one. The final participant in the environment is the simple human being living in the biosphere, and the power distribution among states is an irrelevant factor in this regard. A huge variety of factors and actors, of a sub-state, interstate or trans-state nature, complicate even more the attempt to analytically discuss the problem in a comprehensive manner. Briefly put, the discussion of the environment as a security issue tends, as all issues specific to globalization, to focus more on non-state actors and several levels of analysis as compared with traditional areas. The emergence of a system of transnational governance (Stevenson, 2018) means that the states are considered more in their capacity of polities able to negotiate international regimes among them and to enforce on the national territory the rules commonly agreed, especially in the areas where globalization is significant.

The system of transnational governance points to an important difference between the environmental regimes and other international security-related agreements. The former involve a huge variety of actors, international organizations, epistemic communities, NGOs, corporations etc. (Chasek et al., 2018), which act at various levels. Unlike, for instance, military agreements, environmental ones entail a variety of processes and actors (Green, 2001). In short, compared with a military topic, the environment issue asks for the overrun of the statist perspective on security.

3.3. Environmental Security in the Romanian Military and Defence Strategies

The aforementioned considerations are not easily translated into political institutions and practices. In this regard, the Romanian situation is eloquent. For peculiar constitutional reasons, Romania does not have a national security strategy. Its role is played by a National Defence Strategy, which the President must present before the Legislature within six months of taking

office (Parliament Law no. 203/2015), pending the Legislature's approval (Constitution of Romania, 2007).

In as much as the content of the strategies and their logic are concerned, it is important to note the overall logic of the document. It can be argued that, given the formal designation, the document is concerned mainly with military defence issues, even though, within the Romanian institutional system there is a distinct National Military Strategy (hereinafter MS). Nonetheless, the state-centric logic of the document is highlighted throughout the document, which proclaims that it attempts to achieve "a balance between the state and the individual, as beneficiaries of national security" (National Defence Strategy, hereinafter NDS, 2020, p.7). Furthermore, the international environment in which Romania tries to map out solutions for its security is painted in a conventional manner, with some clear undertones taken from the International Relations tradition of realism. It emphasizes the primacy of national security imperatives, which are pursued by competitive actors, i.e. states, within an anarchic international system.

The documents discussed here contain significant and sometimes repetitive references to an international environment either based or significantly influenced by the global or regional distribution of power: "global evolutions [...] generated by the reconfiguration of balances of power" (NDS, 2020, p.6), "economic and security evolutions generated by the reconfiguration of balances of power" (NDS, 2020, p.8), "the revival power politics and the assertiveness of non-Western powers [...] will influence the global distribution of power and the configuration of balances of influence and regional balances" (NDS, 2020, p.18). Consequently, to the extent that the environment is relevant within the National Defence Strategy, it is only within a global context where power distribution is paramount and the state remains the main actor.

The environmental dimension of security seems, at first glance, to function mostly as a fashion concept (Libiseller, 2023). It thus has a nondescript or very elastic meaning, but it needs to be included in the Romanian strategic documents due to its relevance. Regardless of whether this represents an instance of subalternity (Spivak, 1988) or mimicry (Bhabha, 1994), the manner in which environmental issues are mentioned does however seem to encapsulate a peculiar logic subjacent to the state-centred perspective. It is for this reason that these documents fail to address the fact that global issues such as climate change may require collective action or represent a problem which is indifferent to the international or regional power distribution. Within the Romanian strategic documents, environmental issues have the state as an object of reference of security and elicit (almost) exclusive state action.

The way in which the environment is conceptualized has three major features. At first glance, there is an intrinsic conventional geopolitical outlook – especially the references to the Black Sea Region fall in this category: Romania must raise awareness among its allies on the importance of the region (NDS, 2020, p. 9), Romania needs a consolidated posture in response to Russia's actions (NDS, 2020, p. 8), while extant resources need to be capitalized (NDS, 2020, p. 9).

Secondly, the references to the environment seem to be consigned to somewhat fatalist-naturalist depictions. The environment is the source of unpredictable and dramatic events, difficult to foresee and only relevant under two aspects: as an obstacle to be overcome by the resilience of the state (NDS, 2020, p. 8) and as a factor directly impacting the international distribution of power. Environmental change is seen as an "unpredictable" global security evolution (NDS, 2020, p.6). The fatalist-naturalist perspective is probably at its clearest when the strategy lumps together pandemics and energy demand variation (NDS, 2020, p. 19).

Last, but not least, the environmental dimension is seen as a residual category placed in the middle of larger and sometimes puzzling lists. The document discusses the importance of ensuring “security of food and of environmental quality” (NDS, 2020, p. 15). Climate change is seen as an “emerging risk”, alongside hybrid actions, illegal migration or cybersecurity issues (NDS, 2020, p. 19). A similar position is taken also by the Military Strategy, which argues that society needs to answer the persistence of terrorism, as well as the possible occurrence of pandemics, uncontrolled migration and climate change (MS, 2021, p.7).

Briefly, the environment is placed within the Romanian strategic documents in a secondary position as compared to armed defence, just as one of the multiple dimensions of security, alongside foreign policy, intelligence, crisis management, education, culture, healthcare, economy, demography, cybersecurity, energy security etc. (NDS, 2020, p. 7). It is noteworthy that there are mentions of risks that can affect the infrastructure in the fields of “agriculture, environmental protection and forestry”, while a “critical zone for state and citizen security” is “ensuring energy and environmental security” (NDS, 2020, pp. 27-28). To the extent that the environmental dimension of security receives a distinct treatment, the strategic focus seems to be on preventing climate change, responsible use of resources, protecting safe areas and implementing EU environmental policies (NDS, 2020, p. 12).

It is important to note the effect of the peculiar position of environmental issues in Romanian security strategic thinking. On the one hand, in spite of claims to the contrary, environmental issues are a secondary matter of concern – the fact that the Minister of the Environment is not a permanent member of the Supreme Council for the Defence of the Country highlights this reality (Parliament Law no. 415/2002), but can only attend its meetings as a guest, is relevant in this regard. The Supreme Council represents the highest authority organizing and coordinating national security and defence policies, bringing together representatives of the Presidency, the military, the intelligence services and the ministries deemed as most relevant to security and defence issues. On the other hand, this allows for multiple sectorial views and practices to become manifest in this field. Ministries and political actors can act following their peculiar logic to solve what they perceive as environmental issues. As shown below, this can lead to a greater degree of flexibility, but it is far from forming the basis of a coherent policy.

3.4. Environmental protection – Institutional Power and Political Power in Romania

The institutional analysis correlates the two variables of Political Power and Institutional Power in the specific situation of the cross-border ecological security incident. In essence, the Political Power, in the broadest sense, is a transitory power having the popular vote as an external source of legitimacy. As for the Institutional Power, this is legitimized by knowledge, expertise and the scientific dimension of environmental protection issues (Commissions, Committees and Working Groups in which the Romanian Academy participates under the subordination or coordination of MEWF). It is a permanent power, part of the administrative structure of the Romanian state, having an explicit rational-legal legitimacy in the Romanian legal system (Weber, 2015).

The Romanian legislation specifies in various legal acts that MEWF is the central authority responsible for environmental protection strategies and policies in Romania. This central

authority operates at lower levels through 41 county agencies and an environmental agency of the municipality of Bucharest (Emergency Ordinance no. 195/2005).

The MEWF acts in 31 fields, ranging from strategic planning and sustainable development to the protection of citizens against environmental risks (Government Decision no. 43/2020). MEWF is also responsible for the elaboration and enactment of the national environmental protection policy, as well as for coordinating the other relevant authorities in this domain (Government Decision no. 43/2020).

The MEWF thus exercises a series of 8 functions: strategy, planning, control, monitoring, representation, administration, information, and state authority. It also has over 100 attributions in national and international environmental policy (Government Decision no. 43/2020), being the single competent authority in such matters (Emergency Ordinance no. 195/2005). In fulfilling its tasks, MEWF cooperates directly with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Transport. All these central authorities are legitimized in the exercise of their duties and responsibilities related to environmental protection by MEWF (Government Decision no. 43/2020). Despite their equal administrative rank of central authorities, in matters of environment protection, the MEWF is a dominant authority in relation to all other central authorities. (Parliament Law no. 137/1995).

In the case of the Bystroye Canal cross-border incident, it appears that this key authority of MEWF in environmental protection issues is questioned. The potential incident was announced by the Ministry of Transport on the 15th of February, despite the lack of any legal provisions mandating it to take the lead on debating such an issue. As remarked by the media, the positions of the ministries seemed to contradict each other, also influenced by political party considerations (Mihăiță, 2023).

Only the MEWF had the relevant expertise in relation to extant relevant legal provisions, which had previously been confirmed in several cases. For instance, two years before the crisis of February 2023, the MEWF had criticized the impact study of the deepening of Bystroye Canal sent by the Ministry of the Environment of Ukraine, emphasizing that the hypotheses of the Ukrainian researchers regarding the lack of correlation between the deepening of the Bystroye Canal on the Ukrainian territory and the damage to the Danube Delta biosphere on the Romanian territory were not validated and that the study had been carried out with an outdated technology of reading environmental data. (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, 2019). Apparently, the Ukrainian part did not respond to the Romanian notifications. (Notification for the project “Arrangement of the Deep Water navigable channel Danube river-Black Sea within the Ukrainian part of the Delta”, 2019).

In February 2023, the legitimate expertise of the Institutional Power was marginalized by the party interests. For example, in the public communication there were contradictory speeches even at the level of the leaders of the parties in the governing coalition, one of them being even ridiculed in the statements of the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, on the 22nd of February 2023 (Cojan, 2023). It is also important to note that the semi-presidential political regime grants the President significant prerogatives in the field of national security and foreign policy, especially as the head of the Supreme Council for National Defence. Moreover, such suboptimal forms of cross-border incidents management might be explained by the unease of the Romanian authorities and society in the context of the current war launched by Russia in Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. Politically, this situation could be exploited in

order to undermine Romanian public support for Ukraine, as the Romanian president promptly observed in February 2023, as quoted below.

3.5. The fracture between Political Power and Institutional Power reflected in the media

The institutional lack of coherence is accompanied by a conflict between the Institutional and the Political Power. The latter took its energy from the public debate, as reflected by the media. To this end, an analysis of online and social media communication was realized using the ZeList Monitor software, which can provide an accurate coverage of a specific topic in the Romanian online environment. Traditional media, as well as blogs, comments, forums, news aggregators, major social media networks (Twitter, TikTok, VK, Instagram and Twitter) are covered by the software, which provides numerical data values for the searched terms and phrases. We have chosen to study the online visibility of the “Bastroe OR Bistroe” term (the Romanian spelling for the Ukrainian name of the Canal; the software also accounts for the use of the “Bâstroe” or “Bîstroe” spelling variants) for three intervals: the 15th of February – the 5th of March 2023, when the issue initially surfaced in the Romanian media and political debate, the 26th of February – the 2nd of June 2023, when the issue appeared to be solved after the comments of the Romanian president, and the 15th of February – the 30th of June 2023, to provide a wider framework for the media analysis. The conclusions of the analysis highlight that the politicization of the topic did not lead to significant long-term visibility. While the initial debut of the issue highlights its importance (almost 1500 daily posts only on Facebook in February – Fig. 1), the reassertion of a balanced Institutional-Political Power balance ensured that the public communication attempts in May were far less visible.

Fig. 1. Online media and social media on the issue, 15th of February – 5th of March 2023 (ZeList Monitor data)

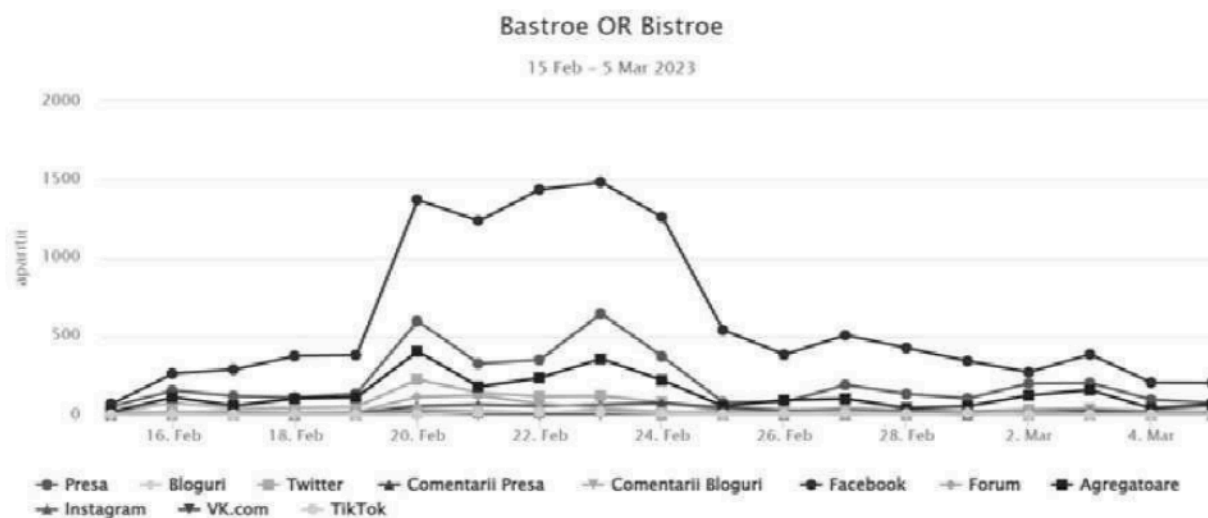


Figure 2 highlights that, somehow ironically for the Romanian online environment, VK was the most prominent forum of debate – the Russian social media network has a marginal following in Romania and the figures were far smaller as compared to the February Facebook data (less than 75 posts).

Fig. 2. Online media and social media on the issue, 26th of May – 2nd of June 2023 (ZeList Monitor data)

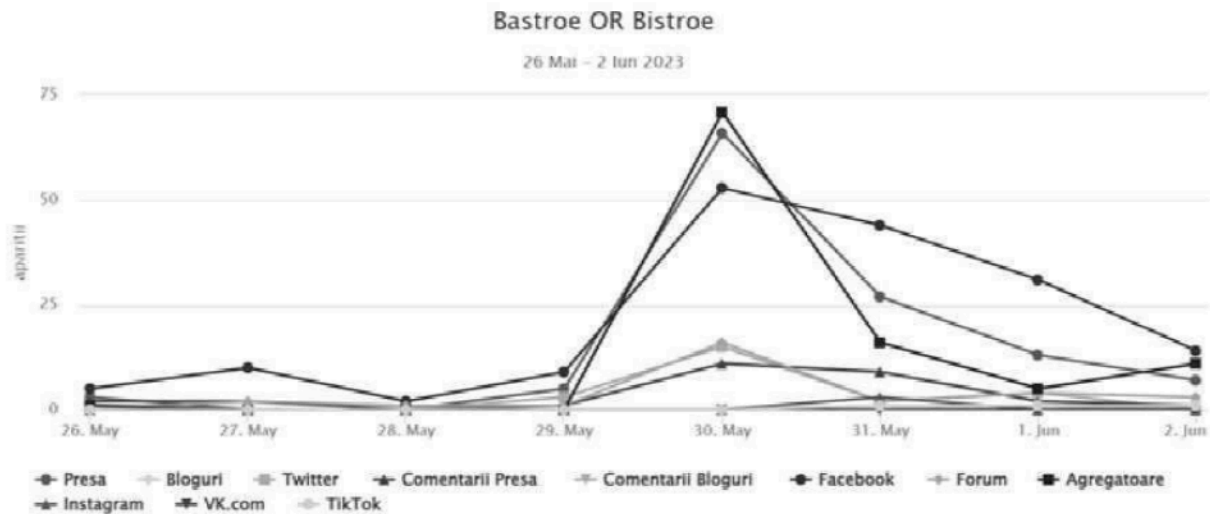
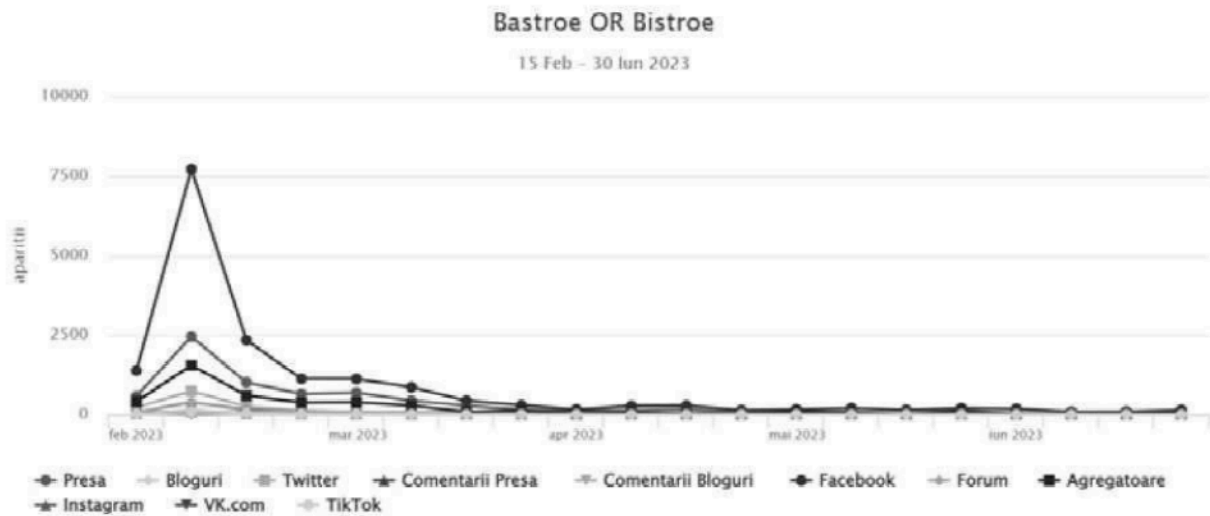


Figure 3 also shows that on the long run, the initial setback in institutional interaction and public communication was successfully overcome.

Fig. 3. Online media and social media analysis on the issue, 15th of February – 30th of June 2023 (ZeList Monitor data)



As the Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis suggested, “(...) it is very good that our politicians, before giving inflammatory speeches, let the experts see what is really happening there. (...) If they exaggerate too much with such matters, which lead to a certain tension in bilateral relations, then you can find both here and in Ukraine, some people who will be satisfied and other dissatisfied, but I can tell you for sure that there will be some who rejoice, and those are to be found in Moscow” (Cojan, 2023). It is noteworthy to mention that the president also concluded the debate, in late June, arguing, in a manner bringing together both the political and institutional legitimacy, that there had never been a Bystroye issue, given that no deepening operations had taken place (Iohannis, 2023).

The media debate triggered by the political appropriation of the public message regarding the cross-border incident (by parties in government and opposition parties altogether) made it impossible to use and prioritize the institutionally legitimate discourse in managing the problem, that of the MEWF. In the terms suggested here, we are initially dealing with an exemplary model of the lack of cooperation between Institutional Power and Political Power, the latter replacing the former. The intervention of Sorin Grindeanu, the minister of Transport, who criticized the Ukrainian deepening works on the Canal, while acknowledging his own lack of an institutional position to back up his intervention, as well as the subsequent intervention of the MFA, opened up the way for the political appropriation of the topic (Hotnews, 2023).

It is necessary to consider the extant institutional and political conditions in Romania. From an institutional perspective, Romania is a semi-presidential republic, the head of state being the main actor responsible for the foreign and security policies, while the prime minister has authority over all other issues. A coalition government ruled Romania at the time. The then prime minister (Mr. Ciucă) was the leader of the Liberal party, an organization led previously by President Iohannis, whereas, Mr. Grindeanu, the minister for Transport, is a prominent Social-Democrat figure (and a former PM), while the minister of EWF, Mr. Barna, is one of the leaders of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania.

In this context, it is reasonable to assume that various political actors tried to capitalize on the situation, in what can be considered a securitization attempt. In the conceptual apparatus of the Copenhagen School, to which Buzan, the reference author already mentioned, belongs, securitization is a speech act. For these scholars, securitization is a "more extreme version of politicization", that "takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics" (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998, p. 23). A securitization process asks for exceptional measures, outside the institutional framework, in order to manage a perceived existential threat to the security of its object of reference, i.e. the state, society or, in this case, the environment. Even if securitization did not actually take place, the high politicization of the crisis demonstrated a lack of coordination between the Political and the Institutional Power.

The Institutional Power slowly regained the control. The MEWF changed its attitude, when, following the hydrological measurements, informed the public that the decrease in the water level in the Danube Delta was not confirmed by the measurements made (Pecheanu, 2023). In the end, the whole dispute was finally solved in December 2023, through negotiations based on the provisions of the Espoo Convention (Dădăcu?, 2023).

All these blocking factors in the public communication of the state authorities in February 2023 also seem to be the result of a lack of experience in managing cross-border disputes in the field of environmental protection. However, this negative experience became a kind of lesson learned for the Romanian Executive in the following stages: (a) in March 2023 MEWF was the main authority that communicated about the hydrological level on the territory of Romania not being affected by the deepening of the Bystroye Canal on the territory of Ukraine – the mass media and the opposition parties did not challenge this legitimate authority; (b) the above media monitoring charts show that on the 30th of May 2023 there was an increased interest in the Ukrainian authorities' declaration of deepening the Bystroye Canal to 7.2 m, but this interest suddenly disappeared the following two days, according to Fig 2. The case is even more relevant, by comparison with the period from the 15th of February until the 5th of March 2023, when the same threat to the flora and fauna of the Danube Delta biosphere was a fa-

vorite topic in the mass media, with a high impact on social networks, according to Fig. 1. The most likely explanation for this case seems to be the lack of coordination between the Political and the Institutional Power.

4. Conclusions

This paper has aimed to interrogate the discourses and practices in environmental matters in the Romanian case. Even if taken into consideration by various documents dedicated to the major lines of national security, their analysis revealed that such topics hold an unclear position, subordinated to a state-centred view of international relations and domestic politics altogether. Using as a case-study the Bystroye Canal related events in February 2023, between Romania and Ukraine, we identified the relevance of a two-axes contradictory logic in the approach to the environmental security topics in Romania.

The first axis refers to the security/defence policy and the environmental protection policy. The environmental issues as security issues are fundamentally different to those underlining the conventional view on security. In borderline situations such as that discussed, it became apparent that the national environmental protection policy is effective only if it is actually based on a multi-level conceptualization and practice.

The second axis of this contradictory logic concerning the environmental security refers to the relation between Political and Institutional Power in the management of cross-border situations, as it is the case with the Bystroye Canal issue. The management of the environmental issues as national security problems can generate fractures between the Political Power and the Institutional Power, which holds the ultimate expertise and responsibility in the field. As in other cases, the permanent quest for electoral legitimacy makes the Political Power constantly attempt to become a front-line actor. Our research highlighted that this enticement of the Political Power to replace Institutional Power in environmental security matters can generate contexts for the delegitimization and discrediting of state authorities at the level of public perception.

The threats to the security of the environment in Romania have dissipated at the level of public perception, as it can be seen from the analysis of the issue in the mass and social media. Eventually, the Ministry of the Environment (MMWF) became the main communicator with the mass media and public opinion on the Bystroye Canal problem, a position supported by the Romanian president, the leader ultimately responsible for the national security.

In the current fluid context of international security and environmental security issues, we consider that Romania's defence and military strategies should include the answer to at least three specific questions such as: a) Which are the limits of the defence/security concept? b) To what extent does the expansion of the content of this concept create a problem of differentiation between what is/is not a security problem? c) Is there a need for a differentiation between a national security strategy and a national defence strategy in relation to environmental protection?

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the authors

Radu-Alexandru CUCUȚĂ (b. 1985) is a lecturer with the Department of International Relations and European Integration, of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, teaching the Strategic Studies, African Studies and Political Philosophy of International Relations classes. His research interests are theories of revolution and theories of international relations. E-mail: radu.cucuta@dri.snsa.ro

Ștefan STĂNCIUGELU is a researcher and he has published numerous books and studies in different sub-fields of political sciences. His research activity between 1994-2025 is organized within a paradigm of interdisciplinarity which is built on two main lines of research. The first line of research refers to the field of political thought and behaviour, history and analysis of political ideas. The second line of research is related to the analysis of political communication and behaviour from the perspective of social manipulation theories.

Radu-Sebastian UNGUREANU was born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1972. He is currently Associate Professor of International Relations Theory and Security Studies at the Department of International Relation and European Integration, within the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest. His main research interests concern the international order and its management, the meanings of sovereignty, the role of morality in the legitimation of the use of international violence, and the influence of identity in defining security issues. E-mail: rsungureanu@dri.snsa.ro

References

- Bhabha H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Buzan B. (1983) *People, States, and Fear. The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf.
- Buzan B., Ole W., de Wilde J. (1997) *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner.
- Chasek P. S., David L. Downie, J., Welsh B. (2018). *Global Environmental Politics*, 7th Edition. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cojan L. (2023). Iohannis, despre scandalul Bîstroe: Înainte să țină discursuri inflamate, politicienii români să lase expertii să vadă ce este acolo. Digi24 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/iohannis-despre-scandalul-bastroe-inainte-sa-tina-discursuri-inflamate-politicienii-romani-sa-lase-expertii-sa-vada-ce-este-acolo-2260841>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Constitution of Romania (2007) (in Romanian). [On line] Available at: https://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site2015.page?den=act2_1&par1=3#t3c2s0sba92, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Dădăcuș M. Ucraina și România au rezolvat disputa de 20 de ani privind canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră (ministrul ucrainean al Mediului). RFI, [Online]. Available at: <https://www.rfi.ro/politica-162506-ucraina-si-romania-au-rezolvat-disputa-de-20-de-ani-privind-canalul-dunare-marea>, accessed on January 6th 2024.
- Emergency Ordinance no. 195/2005 on environmental protection, published in the Romanian Official Monitor no. 1196 from 30th of December, 2005.
- G4Media (2023). Iohannis: Totul a fost un mit, nu s-au făcut lucrări de adâncire pe canalul Bâstroe, ci de întreținere. G4Media. [Online] Available at: <https://www.g4media.ro/iohannis-totul-a-fost-un-mit-nu-s-au-facut-lucrari-de-adancire-pe-canalul-bastroe-ci-de-intretinere.html>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Government Decision no. 43/2020 regarding the organization and operation of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests published in the Romanian Official Monitor, no. 55 from 28th of January, 2020.

- Green O., Environmental Issues, in Baylis J., Smith S. (Eds.) (2001). *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 387-414
- Herz J., Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma. *World Politics*, 2, 1950, pp. 157-180.
- Hotnews (2023). România nu este acord ca Ucraina să facă lucrări de dragare pe Canalul Bâstroe. Anunț (Ministerului de Externe). Hotnews. [Online] Available at: <https://wg4w.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-26086786-romania-nu-este-acord-ucraina-faca-lucrari-dragare-canalul-bastroe-anuntul-ministerului-externe.htm>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- ICJ (2009). Maritime Delimitation in the Black Sea (Romania v. Ukraine), International Court of Justice, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2009, 61. [Online] Available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/132/132-20090203-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Ilie L. (2023) Romania asks to check Ukrainian canal dredging in sensitive Danube Delta (in Romanian). Reuters. [Online] Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-romania-danube-idUSL8N3502B>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Iohannis, K. (2023) Declarațiile de presă susținute de Președintele României, Klaus Iohannis, în marja participării la reuniunea Consiliului European. [Online] Available at: <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/declaratii-de-presa-sustinite-de-presedintele-romaniei-klaus-iohannis-in-marja-participarii-la-reuniunea-consiliului-european1688050916>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Law no. 22/2001 on the ratification of the Convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context, adopted in Espoo on February 25, 1991, published in Romanian Official Monitor, no. 105 from 1st of March 2001.
- Lazăr, M. (2023) Ucraina anunță că va adânci și mai mult canalul Bâstroe. Digi 24. [Online] Available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/ucraina-anunta-ca-va-adanci-si-mai-mult-canalul-bastroe-2368555>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Libiseller C. 'Hybrid Warfare' as an Academic Fashion. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 46(4), 2023, pp. 858-880.
- MEWF (2022). COMUNICAT DE PRESĂ – Miniștrii mediului din România și Ucraina au semnat astăzi Acordul pentru punerea în aplicare a prevederilor Convenției Espoo, Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests. [Online] Available at: <http://www.mmediu.ro/articol/comunicat-de-presa-ministrii-mediului-din-romania-si-ucraina-au-semnat-astazi-acordul-pentru-punerea-in-aplicare-a-prevederilor-conventiei-es-poo/5745>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- MFA (2021). Canalul Bâstroe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Legal Affairs. [Online] Available at: <https://www.mae.ro/node/1520>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Mihăiță M. (2023) Bâstroe, un nou motiv de dispută. RFI Romania. [Online] Available at: <https://www.rfi.ro/politica-153249-bastroe-un-nou-motiv-de-disputa>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, Ukrainian Scientific Research Institute of Ecological Problems (USRIP) (2019). Analysis of the impact of the environment of Danube River Delta which follows from the already implemented work related to the project "Danube-Black Sea Deep-Water Navigation Channel on the Ukrainian Section of the Delta" (stage 1 and on full development) with the development of compensatory measures and measures to mitigate the likely impact based on materials of integrated environmental monitoring 2004-2017 and the results of field monitoring observations (at least in a transboundary context). Kharkiv. [Online] Available at: http://www.mmediu.ro/app/webroot/uploads/files/Annex_2_Analysis_of_the_impact_of_the_environment_which_follows_from_the_already_implemented_work_ENG_-_RO.pdf, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- MS (2021). Strategia militară a României. Capacitate defensivă credibilă, pentru o Românie sigură într-o lume marcată de noi provocări. Ministry of Defence, Bucharest. [Online] Available at: <https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/STRATEGIA-MILITARA-A-ROMANIEI-1.pdf>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- NDS (2020). Strategia Națională de Apărare a țării pentru perioada 2020-2024. Bucharest. [Online] Available at: https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Documente/Strategia_Nationala_de_Aparare_a_Tarii_2020_2024.pdf, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Notification for the project "Arrangement of the Deep Water navigable channel Danube river-Black Sea within the Ukrainian part of the Delta" and Research Report, Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests,

- Bucharest (2019) [Online] Available at: http://www.mmediu.ro/app/webroot/uploads/files/Observatii%20RO_proiect%20Bastroe%281%29.pdf, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Pecheanu G. (2023) Avem primele rezultate ale măsurătorilor din cazul Bâstroe. Ce au descoperit ministrul Mediului. Mediafax. [Online] Available at: <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/avem-primele-rezultate-ale-masuratorilor-din-cazul-bastroe-ce-au-descoperit-ministrul-mediului-21678193>, accessed on January 6th, 2024.
- Parliament Law no. 137/1995 on environmental protection, published in the Romanian Official Monitor, part I, no. 304 from 30th of December 1995.
- Parliament Law no. 415/2002 on the organization and functioning of the Supreme Council for Defence of the Country, published in the Romanian Official Monitor no.494 from 10th of July, 2002.
- Parliament Law no. 203/2015 on the planning of defence, published in the Romanian Official Monitor no. 555 from 27th of July, 2015.
- Preotesescu N. (2023) Ultimele informații despre Canalului Bâstroe! Ministerul Mediului va împiedica toate activitățile Ucrainei dăunătoare Deltei Dunării. Infofinanciar. [Online] Available at: <https://www.infofinanciar.ro/ultimele-informatii-despre-canalului-bastroe-ministerul-mediului-va-impiedica-toate-activitatile-ucrainei-daunatoare-deltei-dunarii.html>, accessed January on 6th, 2024.
- Spivak G. C. Can the Subaltern Speak? in Nelson C., Grossberg L. (Eds.) (1988). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Education, pp. 271-313
- Stevenson H. (2018) *Global Environmental Politics: Problems, Policy, and Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- UNDP (1994). *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security*, United Nations Development Programme. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- UNGA (1987). *Our Common Future, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, United Nations General Assembly, annex to UN Doc A/42/427, 1987.
- UNGA (1972). *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*, United Nations General Assembly, UN Doc A/RES/2994.
- Walt S. The Renaissance of Security Studies. *International Science Quarterly*, 35(2), 1991, pp. 211-239.
- Weber M., *Politics as Vocation* in Weber M. (2015). *Rationalism and Modern Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 129–198.