
SOLIDARY INDEPENDENCE AS A STRATEGIC PARADIGM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ROMANIA’S NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY 2025–2030

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Abstract: *The National Defense Strategy of Romania for 2025–2030 reflects a significant recalibration of national security thinking in response to a rapidly deteriorating European security environment. This article provides a critical analysis of the strategy, focusing on its conceptual foundations, strategic coherence, and implementation constraints. Particular attention is given to the notion of solidary independence, introduced as the central organizing principle of Romania’s strategic vision, which seeks to reconcile national autonomy with deep reliance on NATO, the European Union, and the transatlantic partnership. Using qualitative document analysis and process-oriented strategic assessment, the study examines how threats, risks, and vulnerabilities are diagnosed, how national interests and objectives are articulated, and how strategic ambitions are translated into policy directions. The findings suggest that while the strategy offers a comprehensive and realistic diagnosis of the security environment - especially regarding hybrid threats, regional instability, and institutional vulnerabilities - fit also exhibits structural weaknesses. These include an expansive securitization of public policy domains, limited prioritization among objectives, and ambiguities in the operationalization of solidary independence. The article argues that the effectiveness of the strategy will depend less on its conceptual coherence and more on Romania’s institutional capacity to implement reforms, mobilize societal support, and align strategic ambitions with available resources. By situating Romania’s approach within broader debates on strategic autonomy, resilience, and alliance politics, the study contributes to the literature on national security strategies of medium-sized states operating under conditions of structural interdependence.*

Keywords: *National Security Strategy; Romania; Solidary Independence; NATO and EU security; Hybrid Threats.*

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1. Introduction

The transformations that have occurred in the international security environment after 2022 have fundamentally altered the premises on which European states build their defense strategies. The return of conventional warfare to the continent, the intensification of competition among major powers, and the normalization of the use of hybrid instruments have called into question the adequacy of previous strategic frameworks and have accentuated the need for documents capable of providing not only political guidance but also genuine instruments for security governance. This paradigm shift is also reflected in recent Euro-Atlantic strategic language, which places increased emphasis on deterrence, resilience, and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches (NATO, 2022; Council of the European Union, 2022).

In this context, national defense strategies tend to become less programmatic exercises and more tests of states' institutional and strategic maturity. They are expected to manage simultaneously heightened external pressures, persistent internal constraints, and growing societal expectations regarding state performance in the field of security. For Romania, these developments have particular relevance. Positioned on NATO's Eastern Flank, in direct proximity to the war in Ukraine and at the center of increasingly complex security dynamics in the Black Sea region, Romania faces a specific combination of military, hybrid, economic, and informational risks.

The adoption of the National Defense Strategy for the 2025–2030 period must be understood within this framework, as an explicit attempt to respond to a dual challenge: adaptation to a profoundly deteriorated security environment and the assumption of a more articulated role within the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. The strategy thus reflects not only a reaction to an adverse geopolitical context but also the ambition to reposition Romania as a more active and predictable regional actor, capable of contributing to collective security.

A distinctive element of the 2025–2030 Strategy is the introduction of the concept of solidary independence, formulated as a central principle of Romania's strategic vision. This concept expresses the ambition to move beyond an exclusively reactive or dependent approach, without calling into question the fundamental commitments to NATO, the European Union, and the strategic partnership with the United States. In essence, the strategy seeks to articulate a form of national autonomy compatible with allied solidarity, within an international context characterized by structural interdependencies as well as internal vulnerabilities that may become critical risk factors. From this perspective, the concept of solidary independence can be placed in dialogue with contemporary debates on strategic autonomy, limited sovereignty within alliances, and the role of medium-sized states in collective security architectures (Zandee, Deen & Kruijver, 2020; Howorth, 2019).

At the same time, the document adopts a broad definition of national security, integrating economic, technological, social, informational, and governance dimensions alongside military and diplomatic ones. The citizen is explicitly placed at the center of the security architecture, and societal resilience is presented as an essential condition for the state's capacity to cope with contemporary threats. This conceptual expansion reflects widely recognized trends in EU and NATO policies, but it also raises legitimate questions regarding the degree of prioritization, the clarity of objectives, and the institutional capacity to translate a comprehensive vision into a coherent set of public policies (Council of the European Union, 2022; NATO, 2022).

Building on these observations, the present article aims to provide a critical analysis of Romania's National Defense Strategy for the 2025–2030 period, with a focus on the document's internal coherence and on the relationship between declared strategic ambition and the proposed

implementation mechanisms. The central question guiding the analysis is the following: to what extent does the 2025–2030 Strategy succeed in offering a coherent, realistic, and operational framework for managing the security risks and threats Romania faces in the current geopolitical context?

By examining the concept of solidary independence, the manner in which threats and vulnerabilities are assessed, and the correlation between national interests, security objectives, and courses of action, the article seeks to contribute to the literature on security governance in NATO Eastern Flank states. At the same time, the analysis aims to highlight both the elements of strategic maturation reflected in the document and the structural vulnerabilities that may limit its practical effectiveness, offering a critical assessment relevant from both an academic and a public policy perspective.

2. Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The analysis of a national defense strategy cannot be reduced to the inventory of threats or the description of declared objectives. Such a document represents, in essence, a concentrated expression of how the state understands its position within the international system, its own vulnerabilities and limits of action, as well as the relationship between strategic ambition and institutional capacity for implementation. From this perspective, security strategies can be approached not only as normative texts, but also as instruments of security governance, designed to coordinate actors, resources, and decision-making processes at both the state and societal levels (Krahmann, 2003; Buzan & Hansen, 2012).

Romania's National Defense Strategy for the 2025–2030 period fits into a broader trend visible in the Euro-Atlantic space, namely the expansion of the concept of security beyond its traditional military dimension. Security is approached as the outcome of the interaction among military, economic, technological, informational, social, and institutional factors, reflecting an integrated vision of contemporary risks. This approach is consistent with recent developments within NATO and the European Union, where concepts such as whole-of-government and whole-of-society have become central reference points for strategic planning, particularly in the context of hybrid threats and systemic crises (NATO, 2022; Council of the European Union, 2022).

A key concept for understanding the internal logic of the strategy is that of resilience. In the analyzed document, resilience is not treated exclusively as a technical or operational capability, but as a systemic characteristic of both the state and society. It is associated not only with the effective functioning of public institutions, but also with levels of social cohesion, security culture, and citizens' trust in public authorities. This approach reflects a significant shift in emphasis, from a form of security predominantly centered on the state apparatus to a distributed security model, in which society becomes simultaneously part of the solution and a potential multiplier of vulnerability. In the specialized literature, resilience is increasingly conceptualized as a principle of governance, linking institutional performance, political adaptability, and society's capacity to absorb shocks without compromising its essential functions (Boin, Ekengren, & Rhinard, 2021).

Within this conceptual framework also falls the notion of solidary independence, introduced by the strategy as a key principle of its strategic vision. The concept expresses an attempt to articulate a balance between the assertion of national interest and the structural interdependence generated by Romania's membership in NATO and the European Union. The analysis of this concept is conducted in relation to existing debates on strategic autonomy, the limits of sovereignty within alliances, and the inherent tensions between national capacity for action and allied solidarity (Howorth, 2019; Zandee, Deen & Kruijver, 2020). Without pursuing an exhaustive theoretical

discussion, the conceptual framework allows for an assessment of the extent to which solitary independence functions as an operational principle capable of structuring priorities and decisions, or remains primarily a normative formulation with a legitimizing role.

From a methodological perspective, the article employs qualitative document analysis (QDA), a well-established method in the study of public policies and security strategies, which treats official documents both as sources of content and as expressions of institutional processes and power relations (Bowen, 2009). The National Defense Strategy 2025–2030 is analyzed as a public policy document with strategic vocation rather than as an operational plan, which justifies the emphasis placed on interpreting its internal logic, coherence, and proposed governance mechanisms.

The analysis examines the relationship between threat assessment, the definition of national interests, the formulation of security objectives, and the proposed courses of action, with the aim of identifying both logical continuities and potential disjunctions between diagnosis and proposed solutions. The evaluation does not seek to measure the actual impact of the strategy—an undertaking that would be impossible in the absence of implementation—but rather to analyze its degree of potential operationalization.

In this regard, the analysis employs criteria frequently used in the evaluation of national security strategies, such as the clarity of objectives, the level of prioritization, institutional feasibility, the existence of coordination and monitoring mechanisms, and the relationship between strategic ambition and available administrative capacities. Through this analytical lens, the article moves beyond a purely descriptive reading of the document and offers an argued critical assessment, relevant both for academic debate and for reflection on public security policies.

3. Strategic Diagnosis: Assessment of Threats and the Security Environment

The strategic diagnosis represents the analytical core of Romania’s National Defense Strategy for the 2025–2030 period, as the manner in which threats, risks, and vulnerabilities are identified and interpreted determines both the strategic options and the courses of action subsequently proposed. In the security literature, the assessment of the strategic environment is not a neutral exercise, but a process of selection and prioritization that reflects not only objective realities, but also political, institutional, and discursive constraints. From this perspective, the diagnosis functions not merely as a description of risks, but as a mechanism for orienting security governance.

From an analytical perspective, this assessment is informed by insights from the securitization literature, which emphasizes that the identification of threats is not a purely objective process, but one shaped by political, institutional, and discursive choices (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). At the same time, studies on threat inflation and comprehensive security warn against the risks associated with overly expansive threat catalogues, which may dilute strategic prioritization and strain institutional capacity (Freedman, 2013; Dunn Cavelty, 2018). This framework allows for a critical reading of the Romanian strategy that acknowledges the empirical validity of identified risks while interrogating their hierarchical structuring and operational implications.

This section examines how the 2025–2030 Strategy constructs its assessment of the security environment by integrating the international, regional, and domestic levels, proposing a comprehensive vision of the risks facing the Romanian state and citizen. The analysis addresses both the internal coherence of this diagnosis and its degree of prioritization, as well as its capacity to underpin realistic and implementable public policies. The approach is critical in the sense of maintaining analytical distance from the internal logic of the document, without contesting the empirical relevance of the identified threats.

Within this framework, the strategic diagnosis is treated not as a mere exercise in securitization, but as an indicator of the Romanian state's strategic maturity, with the potential to highlight both conceptual progress and tensions between strategic ambition and institutional response capacity.

3.1. The International and Regional Strategic Environment

The National Defense Strategy starts from the observation of a structural degradation of the international security environment, characterized by systemic instability, unpredictability, and the accelerated erosion of the rules-based international order. Romania is placed within a global context marked by the re-emergence of power politics, the intensification of strategic competition among major centers of influence, and the multiplication of regional conflicts with escalation potential (arts. 18–21).

The document emphasizes the increasingly fragmented nature of the international system, in which traditional multilateral mechanisms are losing their capacity to prevent and manage major crises, while fundamental norms of international law are openly challenged through acts of military aggression and territorial revisionism (art. 21). This assessment reflects a clear convergence with diagnoses formulated at NATO and European Union levels, suggesting Romania's conceptual alignment with the Euro-Atlantic reading of the security environment.

At the regional level, the strategy identifies the Black Sea region and the eastern neighborhood of the European Union as spaces of persistent insecurity, characterized by accelerated militarization, political instability, and intense geopolitical competition. Developments in the Western Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa are treated as indirect sources of risk through mechanisms of strategic spillover, migratory pressures, and the disruption of economic and energy flows (arts. 21, 28). This approach indicates an expansion of the analytical framework beyond the immediate neighborhood, but it also raises the issue of clearly distinguishing between direct risks and contextual risks.

A distinctive element of the assessment of the strategic environment is the integration of the technological dimension into the security analysis. The strategy acknowledges the profound impact of artificial intelligence, accelerated digitalization, and competition for critical technologies on global power relations, highlighting both the opportunities and the vulnerabilities generated by these developments (arts. 22–23). Through this integration, security is conceptualized as the result of the interaction among military, political, economic, and technological dimensions, reinforcing the comprehensive character of the diagnosis.

3.2. Priority Threats to Romania's Security

Within the diagnostic architecture of the strategy, the Russian Federation is unequivocally identified as the primary threat to Romania's national security. This assessment is grounded in Moscow's revisionist behavior, materialized through the war of aggression against Ukraine, the militarization of the Black Sea, and the consolidation of offensive military capabilities in proximity to NATO's Eastern Flank (arts. 43–44).

The strategy addresses the Russian threat in a multidimensional key, emphasizing that it goes beyond the risk of conventional military confrontation and includes the systematic use of hybrid instruments. Cyberattacks, influence operations, disinformation, and cognitive manipulation are presented as deliberate means of undermining societal cohesion, trust in democratic institutions, and strategic decision-making processes (arts. 45, 47). An important aspect of this diagnosis is the



recognition that such actions are designed to operate below the threshold of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, exploiting ambiguity and fragmentation in allied responses.

From an analytical perspective, the identification of the Russian Federation as the principal threat functions not only as an empirical assessment, but also as an organizing principle of the entire strategy. This centrality structures the hierarchy of risks, legitimizes the expansion of the security concept, and justifies the mobilization of national and allied resources. While this option is coherent with regional realities, it raises the issue of the relative visibility of other types of risks, which tend to be subsumed or evaluated primarily through the prism of the Russian threat.

In addition to state-based threats, the strategy identifies persistent transnational risks such as terrorism, organized crime, illegal migration, and human trafficking, which are considered additional pressure factors on the state's capacity to ensure citizens' security (arts. 50–51). The protection of critical infrastructure - particularly energy, maritime, and communications infrastructure - is also treated as a strategic priority, given its increased vulnerability to both conventional and hybrid attacks (art. 48). However, the strategy does not always clearly differentiate between existential, structural, and contingent threats, which may limit its capacity for operational prioritization.

3.3. Internal Vulnerabilities and Risk-Amplifying Factors

An element of strategic maturity in the document is the explicit recognition of internal vulnerabilities as determining factors of national security. The strategy does not treat these deficiencies as marginal administrative issues, but as risk multipliers capable of amplifying the effects of external threats.

Among the central vulnerabilities identified are limited administrative capacity, institutional fragmentation, the lack of coherent data systems to support public decision-making, and deficient interinstitutional cooperation (art. 61). These shortcomings can be interpreted as structural vulnerabilities, as they affect transversally the state's ability to respond coherently and rapidly in crisis situations.

Corruption is treated as a major systemic vulnerability, with direct effects on the rule of law, institutional effectiveness, and the national economy. The strategy highlights the relationship between corruption, economic crime, and the weakening of the state's capacity to protect its strategic interests (arts. 62–63). Within this logic, corruption can be understood as a foundational vulnerability that feeds and amplifies other dysfunctions, from reduced administrative capacity to declining public trust.

The document devotes particular attention to vulnerabilities in the societal sphere, highlighting low levels of critical thinking, media literacy, and security culture as factors that increase the receptivity of segments of the population to disinformation, extremism, and informational manipulation (arts. 72, 77). Social polarization, distrust in institutions, and deficits in civic participation are presented as latent risks to Romania's democratic resilience (arts. 76, 78). These vulnerabilities are not independent, but form a causal chain that amplifies the effectiveness of hybrid threats.

Overall, the strategic diagnosis proposed by the Strategy is coherent, extensive, and aligned with dominant trends in contemporary security analysis. Nevertheless, the extensive nature of the inventory of threats and vulnerabilities indicates a structural tension between comprehensiveness and strategic focus. Without a clearer hierarchy of risks and without an explicit distinction between structural and derivative vulnerabilities, there is a risk that public policy implementation may become fragmented. This tension will be examined in detail in the following section, dedicated to the relationship between strategic objectives and implementation mechanisms.

4. Solidary Independence as the Central Axis of the Strategy

Romania's National Defense Strategy for the 2025–2030 period is structured around the concept of solidary independence, explicitly formulated as a key principle of the strategic vision and as a unifying element of the entire document. The introduction of this concept reflects a deliberate attempt to move beyond traditional, predominantly reactive approaches to security policy and to propose a conceptual framework adapted to an international environment characterized by deep interdependencies, strategic competition, and prolonged instability (art. 2).

Analytically, the notion of solidary independence can be situated at the intersection of debates on strategic autonomy, alliance politics, and security governance. The literature emphasizes that for medium-sized states, autonomy is rarely exercised in isolation, but rather negotiated within alliance structures, where credibility, contribution, and institutional performance shape the degree of effective independence (Howorth, 2019; Zandee, Deen & Kruijver, 2020). From this perspective, solidary independence reflects an attempt to reconcile national agency with structural interdependence, rather than to oppose autonomy and alliance commitment as mutually exclusive categories.

In the strategy's understanding, independence is not associated with the idea of strategic isolation or antagonistic autonomy vis-à-vis alliances, but is implicitly defined through the Romanian state's capacity to strengthen its own political, economic, institutional, and military resources. The document emphasizes that Romania's strategic maturation is the direct result of Euro-Atlantic and European integration, which has generated both security and the premises for a more coherent articulation of the national interest. From this perspective, independence is conceived as a product of assumed interdependence, not as an alternative to it (art. 4).

The solidary dimension of the concept is explicitly anchored in Romania's membership in NATO and the European Union, as well as in the Strategic Partnership with the United States, described by the strategy as an irreplaceable pillar of national security. Solidarity is not presented as a passive commitment, but as a bidirectional relationship in which loyalty to allies is correlated with the assumption of concrete contributions to collective security. The strategy states that the consistent manifestation of solidarity has strengthened Romania's status within Euro-Atlantic structures, and that this positioning, in turn, increases the state's capacity to promote its strategic interests (art. 4, art. 5).

The relationship between independence and solidarity is explicitly formulated as one of mutual consolidation. The strategy rejects the idea of an opposition between the two dimensions and argues, on the contrary, that genuine strategic independence cannot be exercised in the absence of loyalty to allies, while the value of solidarity is amplified by the existence of credible national capabilities. This formulation has a pronounced normative character, suggesting that decision-making autonomy and allied commitments are not merely compatible, but interdependent (art. 4).

The central status of solidary independence is reaffirmed explicitly in the section dedicated to the values and principles of the strategy, where the concept is included as a fundamental principle of Romania's security policy. Here, solidary independence is defined both through a preference for action in cooperation with allies and partners and through the development of the capacity to act independently in order to protect the national interest, on the condition of maintaining transparency and mutual trust in relations with strategic partners (art. 17).

Through this dual anchoring (normative and operational) solidary independence becomes the conceptual axis around which threat assessment, the definition of national interests, and the formulation of courses of action are articulated. The concept thus functions as an interpretive framework for the entire strategy, providing internal coherence to the document and justifying

Romania's ambition to assert itself as a relevant regional actor, without calling into question its Euro-Atlantic commitments.

4.1. Solidary Independence and European Strategic Autonomy

The concept of solidary independence formulated in Romania's National Defense Strategy 2025–2030 must be analyzed in direct relation to the broader debate on European strategic autonomy, which has become one of the central themes of academic reflection and EU security policy over the past decade. The deterioration of the international security environment, the intensification of geopolitical competition, and the experience of the war in Ukraine have accelerated this debate, generating divergent interpretations of strategic autonomy—from strengthening European capabilities within NATO to more ambitious visions sometimes perceived as partial alternatives to the existing transatlantic architecture (Howorth, 2019; Zandee, Deen & Kruijver, 2020; Tocci, 2021).

In this context, solidary independence can be interpreted as a formula of moderate strategic positioning, through which Romania avoids both the discourse of a “hard” strategic autonomy with potential for transatlantic friction and the posture of an actor purely dependent on the security guarantees provided by allies. The Romanian strategy does not explicitly claim European strategic autonomy as a distinct objective, but neither does it reject it; instead, it refracts it through the logic of Euro-Atlantic solidarity and the complementarity between the national, allied, and European levels. This option is consonant with the literature that treats strategic autonomy not as an absolute condition, but as a gradual process dependent on capabilities, resources, and institutional arrangements (Sweeney, 2020).

This positioning reflects a realist reading of Romania's status in the international system. Classic studies on alliances show that medium-sized or small states exercise autonomy not through isolation, but through negotiating their position within hierarchical security structures, where credibility and contribution are essential for maintaining freedom of action (Walt, 1987; Lake, 2009). From this perspective, the Romanian strategy avoids associating independence with the idea of strategic emancipation from NATO or the European Union and instead insists on strengthening the European pillar of the North Atlantic Alliance, not on substituting it.

Solidary independence thus functions as a concept of compatibility, not of substitution. It suggests that the development of national and European defense capabilities is legitimate and necessary only insofar as these efforts strengthen allied cohesion, interoperability, and collective deterrence capacity. This interpretation converges with the European Union's official approach, reflected in the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, which defines strategic autonomy as the ability to act when necessary, preferably together with partners and allies, and not as an alternative to NATO (Council of the European Union, 2022).

At the same time, the positioning adopted by the Romanian strategy has a relevant domestic political dimension. The literature emphasizes that discourses about strategic autonomy can generate internal polarization, especially in states where security is perceived as deeply dependent on external guarantees (Ryon, 2020). By avoiding an explicit embrace of European strategic autonomy as a sovereignist project, the strategy reduces the risk of internal fractures regarding the relationship with the United States or the role of the European Union in defense. Solidary independence thus becomes a concept easier to internalize within the Romanian political and societal space, offering a narrative framework that legitimizes both the strengthening of national capabilities and the deepening of Euro-Atlantic commitments.

From a critical perspective, however, this balancing formula also has limits. The strategy does not clarify the extent to which Romania would support European strategic autonomy initiatives

in situations where these might come into tension with transatlantic priorities or with the interests of key allies. The literature shows that such dilemmas are not exceptional, but inherent to the process of consolidating the European dimension of security and defense (Schmidt, 2020). The absence of an explicit positioning suggests a preference for strategic ambiguity, which may be functional in the short term, but problematic in the medium term as the European Union expands its security and defense instruments.

Overall, solidary independence can be interpreted as a national adaptation of the European discourse on strategic autonomy, filtered through the geopolitical realities of the Eastern Flank and through structural dependence on NATO security guarantees. This formula enables Romania to participate actively in strengthening the European dimension of security without calling into question the transatlantic architecture, but it leaves open the question of its capacity to manage potential strategic divergences among the main actors of that architecture.

4.2. Solidary Independence as a Narrative of Domestic Legitimacy and the State–Citizen Contract

Beyond its external dimension, the concept of solidary independence performs an essential function of domestic legitimization for the security strategy. Romania’s National Defense Strategy 2025–2030 is not addressed exclusively to state institutions or the strategic community, but explicitly constructs a discourse directed toward society, presenting national security as the result of a collective effort and of a renewed contract between the state and citizens. In this logic, independence is not reduced to external action capacity, but is correlated with the internal functionality of the state and the level of public trust in its institutions.

The specialized literature emphasizes that legitimacy is an essential component of security governance, especially in contexts marked by hybrid threats, prolonged crises, and strategic uncertainty. States that fail to maintain a minimum level of internal legitimacy and societal consensus become more vulnerable to external pressure, disinformation, and contestation of state authority (Boin, Ekengren, & Rhinard, 2021; Dunn Cavelty, 2018). In this sense, solidary independence can be interpreted as a concept linking external security to the performance of internal governance.

The strategy places the citizen at the center of the security architecture, explicitly stating that the defense of the country and the increase of Romania’s international relevance are conditioned by national unity, social cohesion, and trust in state institutions. This approach is consonant with the literature on whole-of-society security, which highlights that resilience is not exclusively the result of military or institutional capabilities, but also of society’s capacity to absorb shocks, maintain cohesion, and support the strategic decisions of authorities (Boin et al., 2021).

Within this framework, the strategy operates with an implicit redefinition of sovereignty. Sovereignty is not treated as a formal or symbolic prerogative, but as an outcome of institutional performance. A state characterized by corruption, administrative inefficiency, and decisional fragmentation is presented as structurally dependent and therefore limited in its capacity to exercise genuine independence. This perspective is supported by the literature arguing that a state’s internal weaknesses constitute strategic vulnerabilities comparable to external threats (Dunn Cavelty, 2018).

The strategy explicitly recognizes the erosion of domestic legitimacy generated by persistent dysfunctions and treats the fight against corruption as a precondition of national security. This formulation is significant because it moves corruption from an exclusively moral or legal sphere into



a strategic one, in line with research highlighting the direct impact of corruption on state resilience, crisis response capacity, and international credibility (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008).

Another central element of this narrative is the role assigned to the citizen as an active security actor. The strategy goes beyond the paradigm of the citizen as a passive beneficiary of security and promotes a participatory vision in which societal resilience, security culture, media literacy, and critical thinking are considered essential components of national defense. This approach is consonant with the literature on societal security and democratic resilience, which underlines the importance of civic participation and social capital in countering disinformation and radicalization (Boin et al., 2021; Dunn Cavelty, 2018).

From a critical perspective, however, this expansion of the concept also generates tensions. Although the strategy formulates high expectations regarding the involvement of citizens and civil society, the concrete instruments through which such engagement could be sustainably supported remain insufficiently developed. The literature warns that calls for societal resilience can become purely normative if they are not supported by coherent public policies aimed at reducing inequalities, strengthening institutional trust, and creating real mechanisms for participation (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008).

Overall, solidary independence functions as a narrative of state re-legitimization, seeking to reconnect external security with internal governance and with the state–citizen relationship. Through this approach, the strategy suggests that Romania’s security cannot be built exclusively through military deterrence or allied membership, but requires a state capable of mobilizing society, correcting internal vulnerabilities, and generating trust. The effectiveness of this narrative, however, will depend on the authorities’ capacity to transform the invoked solidarity into a coherent set of public policies that produce tangible and sustainable outcomes for citizens.

4.3. Ambiguities and Operational Limits of Solidary Independence

Although the concept of solidary independence provides a coherent narrative framework adapted to Romania’s strategic positioning, its use as the central axis of the strategy raises a series of conceptual ambiguities and operational limits that merit critical analysis. These limits do not invalidate the concept itself, but indicate areas in which the strategy privileges discursive flexibility at the expense of operational clarity.

A first ambiguity derives from the polysemic character of the notion of independence. The strategy employs the term without establishing a clear operational delimitation between strategic autonomy, decision-making sovereignty, and independent action capacity. Independence is invoked simultaneously as a strategic objective, as a normative principle, and as an outcome of allied solidarity, which creates a risk of functional ambiguity in the implementation process. The literature on national security strategies emphasizes that the lack of clear operational definitions reduces the capacity of strategic documents to guide concrete decisions and to prioritize available resources (Howorth, 2019; Zandee, Deen & Kruijver, 2020).

A second limitation concerns the latent tension between allied solidarity and freedom of strategic choice. Although the strategy asserts full complementarity between independence and solidarity, it avoids specifying scenarios in which national interests might diverge from the priorities of certain allies or from the decision-making dynamics within NATO and the European Union. This omission reflects a form of deliberate strategic ambiguity, frequently used by medium-sized states to avoid premature constraints in volatile security environments. However, the literature shows that, in the absence of clear mechanisms for managing divergences, ambiguity can become a vulnerability in crisis situations, when rapid and politically assumed decisions are required (Howorth, 2019).



At the institutional level, solidary independence presupposes high administrative and decisional capacity, capable of transforming allied solidarity into concrete benefits for national security. The strategy itself acknowledges persistent vulnerabilities—institutional fragmentation, deficient interinstitutional cooperation, and deficits of expertise in critical domains—that may limit this capacity. The literature on security governance indicates that such internal deficiencies tend to erode the effectiveness of strategies with comprehensive ambitions, generating a structural gap between declared objectives and actual outcomes (Boin, Ekengren, & Rhinard, 2021).

Another relevant limitation concerns the societal dimension of solidary independence. Although the strategy assigns a central role to the citizen and civil society, it does not sufficiently clarify how a high level of internal solidarity can be maintained in a context marked by political polarization, low institutional trust, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Research on democratic resilience warns that appeals to solidarity and resilience can become purely normative if they are not supported by coherent public policies of social inclusion, inequality reduction, and credible counter-disinformation measures (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008; Dunn Cavelty, 2018).

In addition, solidary independence raises the issue of strategic sustainability. Strengthening national defense capabilities, assuming extended allied commitments, and active participation in regional and European initiatives require significant financial, human, and political resources. The strategy affirms this ambition, but it does not explicitly clarify mechanisms of prioritization under conditions of budgetary constraints or competition between security objectives and social objectives. The literature on strategic planning warns that strategies characterized by the overextension of objectives risk becoming vulnerable to economic or political shocks and losing credibility in the implementation phase (Zandee, Deen & Kruijver, 2020).

Overall, solidary independence functions as a balancing concept, appropriate to Romania's positioning in a volatile and interdependent security environment, yet marked by an inevitable degree of ambiguity. This ambiguity can be interpreted either as strategic flexibility or as a lack of operational clarity, depending on the state's institutional capacity to manage it. From an analytical perspective, the value of the concept will be confirmed or disconfirmed not so much through its discursive coherence, but through Romania's capacity to transform allied solidarity into effective, measurable, and sustainable independence capable of withstanding political, institutional, and budgetary pressures in the medium and long term.

5. From Objectives to Implementation: Coherence and Limits

An essential criterion for evaluating any national security strategy is its capacity to translate diagnosis and normative principles into coherent objectives and, above all, into credible implementation mechanisms. Romania's National Defense Strategy for the 2025–2030 period proposes a broad set of objectives and courses of action that cover the entire spectrum of contemporary security - from military defense and cybersecurity to governance, the economy, education, and societal cohesion. This approach reflects a mature understanding of the multidimensional character of security, but it also raises questions regarding internal coherence and the feasibility of implementation.

At the declarative level, there is a clear alignment between the assessment of threats, national interests, and security objectives. The strategy succeeds in maintaining logical continuity between the identification of a deteriorated security environment, the formulation of the concept of solidary independence, and the assumption of ambitious objectives domestically and internationally. In particular, the emphasis on strengthening national defense capabilities, reinforcing NATO's posture



on the Eastern Flank, and developing societal resilience indicates a strong correlation between the strategic and operational levels.

Nevertheless, the density and extensiveness of objectives generate a first structural limitation. The strategy includes a very large number of courses of action, often formulated at a high level of generality, which risks diluting the real priorities of security policy. In the absence of an explicit hierarchy and of clear prioritization criteria, there is a risk that implementation will become fragmented and that resources (financial, administrative, and political) will be dispersed inefficiently.

A second major limitation concerns institutional implementation capacity. Although the strategy explicitly acknowledges vulnerabilities such as administrative fragmentation, deficient interinstitutional cooperation, and the lack of a data-driven decision-making culture, the proposed solutions remain largely normative. Institutional reforms, administrative digitalization, and the strengthening of coordination mechanisms are presented as necessary objectives, but they are not accompanied by a clear timeline, well-defined institutional responsibilities, or performance indicators that would allow progress to be evaluated.

The financial dimension represents another area of tension between ambition and realism. The commitment to increased defense spending, major investments in critical infrastructure, digitalization, education, and health requires a significant budgetary effort over the medium and long term. The strategy affirms the necessity of this effort, but it treats fiscal constraints, macroeconomic risks, and competition between security and social priorities only marginally. In the absence of explicit integration with budgetary and development policies, implementation risks becoming dependent on favorable political conjunctures rather than on robust strategic planning.

Another relevant aspect is the relationship between the national level and the allied level. The strategy relies on the complementarity between national effort and Euro-Atlantic solidarity, but it does not sufficiently clarify how Romania will calibrate its internal priorities in relation to NATO and EU initiatives, especially in the context of the multiplication of European defense and security programs. Without a clear articulation of Romania's role within these formats, there is a risk of overlapping commitments or of participation that is more reactive than strategic.

Finally, the implementation of the strategy depends decisively on the political and societal legitimacy of the proposed objectives. The strategy recognizes the importance of citizen and civil society involvement, but concrete mechanisms for participation and feedback remain insufficiently developed. In a context marked by political polarization and distrust in institutions, successful implementation will depend not only on administrative capacity but also on the state's ability to communicate coherently, transparently, and credibly the rationale of security policies.

Overall, the National Defense Strategy 2025–2030 offers a conceptually and strategically coherent framework, but it faces significant limitations at the level of operationalization. The transition from objectives to implementation remains conditioned by the clarity of priorities, the realism of resource allocation, and the institutional capacity for coordination. From this perspective, the strategy represents more a framework for strategic orientation than an exhaustive action plan, and its effectiveness will be determined by how it is translated into concrete and sustainable public policies.

Conclusions

Romania's National Defense Strategy for the 2025–2030 period reflects a stage of maturation in national strategic thinking, driven by the accelerated degradation of the European security environment and by the need for the Romanian state to adapt to a geopolitical context marked by conflict, strategic competition, and systemic uncertainty. The analysis conducted in this article has



aimed not merely to describe the strategic content of the document, but to critically assess its internal logic, central concepts, and capacity to function as an effective instrument of strategic orientation.

One of the strategy's main contributions is the formulation of the concept of *solidary independence* as the normative axis of Romania's security vision. This concept offers a balancing solution between the need to strengthen national capabilities and the reality of deeply interdependent security, anchored in membership in NATO, the European Union, and the strategic partnership with the United States. Independence is redefined not as isolated autonomy, but as the outcome of internal institutional performance and external solidarity - an approach that reflects the specific constraints and opportunities of a state located on the Alliance's Eastern Flank.

At the same time, the analysis has highlighted a number of structural and operational limitations of the strategy. The excessive expansion of the security concept, the lack of an explicit hierarchy of objectives, and ambiguities related to the operationalization of solidary independence may affect the document's capacity to guide coherent public policies. Although the strategic diagnosis is solid and well anchored in regional and international realities, the transition from risk assessment to policy implementation remains vulnerable to institutional, budgetary, and political constraints.

An important contribution of the strategy is also the explicit recognition of the internal dimension of security. Linking national security to good governance, the fight against corruption, societal resilience, and citizens' trust in state institutions indicates a comprehensive understanding of security as a public good. Nevertheless, this approach presupposes a sustained effort of administrative reform and reconstruction of the state-citizen contract, without which appeals to societal solidarity risk remaining predominantly normative.

From a public policy perspective, the findings of the analysis suggest the need for further clarification of strategic priorities and implementation mechanisms. For the strategy to achieve its objectives, it is essential that it be correlated with realistic budgetary policies, concrete institutional reforms, and transparent evaluation mechanisms. In their absence, there is a risk that the document will function more as a declaration of intent than as an instrument of strategic governance.

At the theoretical level, the article contributes to the security literature by analyzing the concept of solidary independence as a formula of strategic adaptation for medium-sized states within an international system characterized by interdependence and geopolitical competition. This concept may provide a useful analytical framework for other Central and Eastern European states facing similar dilemmas between autonomy, solidarity, and internal vulnerability.

With regard to future research directions, comparative studies are needed to analyze how different NATO and EU states articulate their security strategies in relation to concepts such as strategic autonomy, societal resilience, and comprehensive security. In addition, empirical research on the actual implementation of national security strategies could offer valuable insights into the gap between strategic discourse and institutional practice.

In conclusion, Romania's National Defense Strategy 2025–2030 is a relevant and ambitious document that responds to the challenges of a profoundly unstable security environment. Its ultimate value, however, will depend not on discursive coherence, but on the capacity of the Romanian state to transform solidary independence from a strategic principle into an institutional and societal reality.



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