

SECURITY ARCHITECTURE THROUGH THE LENS OF ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the structural transformations of the security paradigm at the European Union's eastern border, with a specific focus on Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Driven by the geopolitical shifts following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, this study aims to evaluate how economic security has evolved from the mere management of macroeconomic indicators to a systemic survival imperative, focusing on the core objective of identifying strategic vulnerabilities and practical pathways for resilience. Utilizing a qualitative and comparative research design grounded in statistical analysis, the methodology explains how empirical datasets are synthesized with contemporary theoretical frameworks. The article explores the instrumentalization of energy through the manipulation of the TTF (Title Transfer Facility) index, the disruption of logistical chains via the Solidarity Lanes, and the conversion of inflation into a vector of cognitive warfare. The relevance of this study lies in proposing practical pathways for resilience. The findings underscore the necessity of a paradigm shift from efficiency-based security to resilience-based security, arguing that social cohesion and Total Defense models are fundamental to the stability of frontier states.*

Keywords: economic security, resilience, hybrid warfare, critical infrastructure, instrumentalization of energy

1. Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe has entered a defining era. The ongoing war in Ukraine has shattered the post-Cold War security paradigm, giving rise to a “new security architecture” on NATO’s Eastern Flank.

This new architecture is characterized by a transition from cooperative security to active deterrence, where the boundaries between military defense and economic resilience are deeply blurred. Trade, once viewed as an instrument of peace, has been weaponized, transforming economic interdependencies into acute strategic vulnerabilities. The concept of a “new security architecture” refers precisely to the structural realignment of regional defense mechanisms, wherein economic sovereignty, critical infrastructure

protection, and energy independence are directly integrated into the national hard defense strategy, moving away from purely kinetic warfare doctrines.

The objective of this paper is to analyze how Romania and the Republic of Moldova two critical frontier states with distinct security statuses (NATO member vs. constitutionally neutral) navigate these systemic shocks. The motivation stems from the urgent need to understand how asymmetric threats, such as energy blackmail and logistical bottlenecks, impact societal stability. In the view of some experts in the field, heightened geopolitical instability entails not only direct military aggression, but also a broad spectrum of threats that translate into the economic sphere [1,p.12]. The subsequent analysis

offers an in-depth assessment of these dynamics.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, comparative, and conceptual research methodology designed to assess economic resilience in frontier states. We conduct a comparative analysis of Romania and the Republic of Moldova across two primary critical axes: energy security and food/logistics infrastructure. The empirical foundation of this study relies on secondary data compiled from official economic and statistical sources, including Eurostat and the National Institute of Statistics of Romania (INS) [4] for industrial production and regional inflation indices. The European Commission's Quarterly Reports on European Gas Markets [5] for analyzing natural gas price volatility (TTF index). Strategic policy documents regarding infrastructure investments on the Danube and the Port of Constanța. The International Energy Agency (IEA) regional reports [7] for analyzing power grid vulnerabilities.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. The Instrumentalization of Energy

This section examines how historical dependence on Russian energy sources has been weaponized, exerting a significant impact on the Republic of Moldova and triggering severe inflationary pressures in Romania. This constitutes an archetypal case study for demonstrating direct vulnerability within the realm of economic security.

While the period between 2021 and 2022 was defined by the “strategic trap” of dependence on Russian hydrocarbons, the current risk landscape has diversified [2, p. 95]. Price manipulation via the TTF (Title Transfer Facility) index, which peaked at €345/MWh in August 2022, [5,p.32] demonstrated that energy serves as a weapon designed to erode European cohesion through Russian tactical interference.

Furthermore, recent conflicts in the Gulf region have jeopardized LNG (Liquefied

Natural Gas) alternatives for Romania and the Republic of Moldova—states currently striving to decouple from Eastern sources through strategic projects such as Neptun Deep and the Iași-Ungheni-Chișinău pipeline. Any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz or the Red Sea increases maritime transit costs, precipitating a second wave of energy-driven inflation across the European Single Market. Historical dependence on Russian hydrocarbons was not merely a commercial relationship, but a “strategic trap” meticulously prepared over decades. In the contemporary context, energy has transitioned from a commodity to a political instrument aimed at fracturing European unity and destabilizing NATO's Eastern Flank.

A. The Republic of Moldova: A Case Study in Asymmetric Vulnerability.

The Republic of Moldova represents a textbook example of asymmetric vulnerability. Prior to its synchronous connection to the European grid and the diversification of sources via the Iași-Ungheni-Chișinău pipeline, Moscow utilized the “gas weapon” to dictate political outcomes in Chișinău. A concrete instance occurred in the autumn of 2022, when Gazprom's arbitrary reduction of supply volumes by 30% [5,p.41] forced the Moldovan government to declare a state of emergency.

Moreover, reliance on electricity produced in the separatist Transnistria region (the Cuciurgan Power Plant) which operates on free Russian gas created a vicious cycle of blackmail: electricity in exchange for political concessions. This transcends an economic crisis; it constitutes an existential threat to statehood.

B. Inflationary and Security Impacts in Romania.

Although Romania maintained a diversified energy mix and significant domestic reserves (ranking as the EU's second-largest gas producer), it was not immune to “price contagion.” Due to the integration of the European Single Market, record prices at

Viennese or Amsterdam hubs were automatically imported into the Romanian consumer's invoice. Despite maintaining a high degree of energy independence (over 70-80% for natural gas during crisis years), domestic resources failed to insulate the local market, as benchmark prices were determined by unified market mechanisms [3, p. 22].

The surge in energy prices acted as a regressive tax on the entire economy. Energy-intensive industries, such as Azomureș (fertilizers) and Alro Slatina (aluminum), were compelled to reduce or temporarily suspend production. Approximately 2,500 individuals [4, p. 112] faced the risk of job loss, including direct employees and personnel from contracting firms. In the initial phase, nearly 1,000 direct employees [4, p. 115] of Azomureș were affected, with over 600 remaining on technical unemployment [4, p. 116] (furlough) as of January 2026.

In this analysis, ALRO Slatina is classified as an energy-intensive industry whose survival is critically dependent on predictable electricity pricing. The extreme volatility, which saw price spikes exceeding 1,400% [4, p. 120] during the energy crisis, effectively "dismantled the business models" of energy-intensive firms. This volatility underscores that physical energy independence (domestic reserves) does not guarantee economic security (affordability) in the absence of market mechanisms decoupled from Russian influence.

While Romania utilized its financial reserves and domestic infrastructure to buffer consumers against the worst of the pricing contagion, the Republic of Moldova had to rely entirely on emergency loans and immediate physical gas transfers from the Romanian market via the Iași-Ungheni pipeline to ensure its structural survival [5, p. 50; 7, p. 120].

To validate the hypothesis of energy instrumentalization, it is imperative to analyze the evolution of the TTF (Title Transfer Facility) index in Amsterdam. Data

reveal a statistical anomaly that cannot be explained solely by market forces, pointing instead to strategic supply manipulation. In early 2021, the average price of natural gas ranged between €18–25/MWh, considered the equilibrium for a stable European economy. However, starting in the autumn of 2021 months before the first tanks entered Ukraine Gazprom began reducing spot market supplies and depleting the storage facilities it controlled in Germany. By December 2021, prices had already surged to approximately €100/MWh, a 400% increase [5, p. 55] over the historical average. This confirms that the "gas war" predated the kinetic conflict.

3.2. Food Security and the Displacement of Logistical Chains

Romania has transitioned from a passive neighbor to the primary exit gate for "Europe's breadbasket." However, this geopolitical success has incurred a high internal cost:

The Black Sea Blockade: The closure of Ukrainian ports necessitated the transit of over 60% of Ukrainian grain [6, p. 19] through Romania's "Solidarity Lanes."

Competition for Finite Resources: The massive influx of cargo created a "Crowding Out" effect. Freight rates on the Danube doubled or tripled, effectively pricing out Romanian farmers, who were left with harvests stranded in silos due to prohibitive logistical costs.

The Gulf Connection: Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea are forcing a reorientation of global cargo flows. This additional pressure on the Port of Constanța (which handled a record 92.5 million tons in 2023 [4, p. 142]) transforms national infrastructure into a global choke point. Any technical delay or railway incompatibility now creates a logistical bottleneck with implications across three continents.

Romania has assumed a disproportionate burden relative to its installed capacities. According to the European Commission, over 60% of Ukraine's grain exports [6, p. 20] via Solidarity Lanes transited through

Romania. An infrastructure designed to serve the national economy was suddenly forced to absorb the flows of a global agricultural power, resulting in massive opportunity costs for local actors.

A. Logistical Developments (2024–2026)

Following the historic peak of 2023, logistical trends have evolved as follows:

Grains: Although 2024 and 2025 saw a slight decline in Ukrainian volumes (due to the partial reopening of Odesa corridors and regional drought), Constanța remains the primary backup route. Logistical capacity for grain has been officially increased to 40 million tons per year [4, p. 150].

Military and Construction Freight: By 2026, grain volumes are rivaled by flows of heavy equipment and construction materials. The port now serves as a pre-positioning base for American firms contracted for the reconstruction of Southern Ukraine.

Investments: What was an "unbearable pressure" in 2023 has become a financed opportunity in 2026. Current record investments include:

Railway Modernization: Contracts exceeding €500 million [4, p. 155] are underway for the electrification and double-tracking of port rail lines to eliminate chronic bottlenecks. Piers III S and IV S: A strategic project exceeding €1.1 billion [4, p. 158] to create new deep-sea berths has been granted the status of "Objective of National Interest," allowing for the handling of high-capacity vessels.

Digitalization: Implementation of truck scheduling systems has reduced gate waiting times by over 60% [4, p. 161] compared to the chaos of 2022.

B. The Iranian Factor and the Energy Crisis

The ongoing conflict in the Gulf (as of March 2026) has shifted the tactical priorities of the Port of Constanța. The Constanța Oil Terminal is currently operating at maximum capacity to compensate for disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. Romania has emerged as a critical hub for the offloading of crude oil from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (via pipelines

and maritime vessels) to supply refineries across Central Europe.

The US and NATO military presence within the port has increased significantly. The Ministry of National Defense is implementing targeted investments in the port's "military component" to shield these vital flows from hybrid attacks. While in 2023 Romanian farmers contended that Ukrainian grain was "displacing" their position in the port, the situation is currently managed through enhanced flow segregation and optimized logistics management, such as the PRIMUS Project (facilitating 24/7 navigation on the Sulina Channel), which has alleviated pressure on the maritime port by rerouting barges toward Danubian ports (Galați, Brăila).

The Port of Constanța has evolved from a national asset into a global strategic asset. Current American and European investments (March 2026) aim to convert former "massive opportunity costs" into long-term geostrategic dividends.

C. Technical Constraints and Logistical Bottlenecks

The gauge disparity between the ex-Soviet system (1520 mm) and the European standard (1435 mm) necessitated cargo transshipment or bogie exchanges at border points (Halmeu, Dornești, Galați-Largă). This technical limitation severely reduced the rotation speed of rolling stock; rail transit times between Ukraine and Constanța, which typically spanned a few days, extended to 2–3 weeks during peak congestion. The Siret border crossing became the visual symbol of this crisis. At its height, truck queues stretched 20–30 kilometers [4, p. 170], with wait times ranging from 4 to 7 days [4, p. 172]. The immobilization of thousands of vehicles effectively removed a significant portion of the transport fleet from the market, creating an artificial capacity crisis within Romania.

3.3. Socio-Economic Impact: Winners and Losers

The impact on the private sector was asymmetrical, creating distinct winners and losers, which in turn fueled social tensions:

Opportunistic Winners: Mid-sized transport companies and port operators capitalized on the explosion of freight rates. Danube barge operators and freight forwarders in Constanța saw their turnovers double. Many SMEs demonstrated superior agility compared to state-owned giants (such as CFR Marfă) by rapidly investing in new fleets or temporary border storage.

The Agricultural Crisis: Beyond the congestion, the most severe impact was a "hidden" economic one, devastating for Romanian agriculture. Since port storage and transport capacity (barges, railcars, trucks) are finite in the short term, the influx of Ukrainian goods created fierce competition for these resources. International traders, pressured to export Ukrainian stock, offered premium logistics prices. Consequently, the Romanian farmer operating on thin profit margins faced market exclusion. Harvests remained in silos not for lack of buyers, but due to prohibitive transport costs that rendered sales unprofitable.

3.4. Social Polarization and the Fracturing of the Middle Class

Persistent inflation is eroding the middle class, the cornerstone of stability in any democracy. While those with access to assets (real estate, hard currency) can hedge against inflation, salaried employees face a sharp decline in real income. An increasing Gini coefficient (measuring inequality) during a security crisis is perilous; it validates the populist narrative of "elites thriving at the expense of the people" a cornerstone of Russian disinformation.

Poverty diminishes the citizen's capacity for critical thinking. An individual preoccupied with immediate survival is more susceptible to radical solutions or fabricated culpability. Eurobarometer surveys (2022–2023) indicated a direct correlation between

declining purchasing power and waning support for anti-Russian sanctions. Russian propaganda skillfully exploited the "Cost of Living Crisis" narrative. The subtle message was not "Love Russia," but rather "Hate the West for bringing you poverty." This represents a form of political warfare intended to install transactional governments willing to trade security for cheap energy.

This confirms the end of the "Illusion of Eternal Peace" and a return to rigorous Realpolitik:

Erosion of International Order: The shift from the "rule of law" to the "rule of force" has birthed the "Geopolitical Jungle" (a term popularized by Josep Borrell).

Weaponized Interdependence: Trade no longer guarantees peace; instead, it creates strategic vulnerabilities (gas dependence).

Optional International Law: The invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that a permanent member of the UN Security Council can violate the UN Charter without direct military repercussions from the organization.

A. Regional Implications: The Security Vacuum

The invalidation of security guarantees specifically the Budapest Memorandum has had profound consequences. In 1994, Ukraine surrendered the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal in exchange for "paper" security guarantees from Russia, the US, and the UK.

The current lesson for regional states is that "paper does not stop tanks." This has triggered an arms race on the Eastern Flank, with Romania increasing its defense budget to 2.5% of GDP [4, p. 190] and Poland targeting 4% [4, p. 192].

For a constitutionally neutral state like the Republic of Moldova, the invalidation of international law is catastrophic. Neutrality only functions if respected by neighbors. In the "Geopolitical Jungle," neutrality without a robust military is an invitation to invasion. Furthermore, the precedent of revisionism—the idea that borders can be redrawn by force—nullifies the post-1945 and post-

1991 settlements, reactivating fears regarding Transnistria and ethnic frictions elsewhere in the Balkans.

Conclusions

The energy crisis serves as a permanent "memento" of a period when energy was weaponized for budgetary destruction.

The TTF index remains the "thermometer" of geopolitical fever, proving that energy is no longer a mere commodity but a central element of global hybrid conflict.

While prices remain volatile due to the Iranian conflict, the Republic of Moldova has moved from a "month-to-month survival" logic to one of assisted stability and gradual independence.

The "Solidarity Lanes" were a geostrategic success for the EU (preventing the suffocation of the Ukrainian economy) but represented a local planning failure. The cost was externalized to Romania's infrastructure and agricultural sector.

Romanian farmers faced a "scissors effect": skyrocketing input costs (fuel, fertilizers) coupled with a local market saturated by cheap Ukrainian grain that, while intended for transit, often remained domestic due to bottlenecks. This transformed a logistics issue into a domestic public order issue (e.g., the 2023–2024 protests).

Societal security is priority zero. In a prolonged hybrid war, protecting the population's purchasing power is not merely social welfare it is a hard national security measure.

The Euro-Atlantic Anchor is Existential: In the "Geopolitical Jungle," isolated states are inevitable victims. For Romania, NATO and EU membership acted as a vital shield against kinetic shocks, though the economic fallout must be managed internally. For Moldova, accelerated European integration is the only path out of the "gray zone" of insecurity.

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