

Summary of the thesis with the title: Intelligence transparency. Challenges, opportunities and good practices in Romania

Everything is interconnected. This is the conclusion we reached in the doctoral thesis and we chose to start the work this way because the interconnection is representative for the current social context, in which we framed our theme: intelligence transparency. The context is that of democratic societies marked by national and international influences and developments, by technological transformations, which sit above traditional mentalities and by a state-citizen relationship in a constant process of redefinition. The interconnection of the modern world led to the writing of this thesis, through a multidisciplinary approach. This is useful in helping us to understand and be able to evaluate that the phenomena unfolding in a complex society cannot be understood in a linear, uni-dimensional or mono-disciplinary way, transparency not being an exception.

Is intelligence transparency really a paradox in the era of openness and digitalization? The premise from which we started this paper is that intelligence on sight is starting to be a comfortable concept for all stakeholders in the field, therefore it requires attention in terms of planning, implementation and monitoring.

The work we propose represents an initiative aimed at contributing to reducing and perhaps even eliminating the paradox from the expression "intelligence transparency" or "intelligence in plain sight" and normalizing the association of the two concepts at the level of the specialized, educated public and even the general public. In this thesis, we set out to identify and analyze the place of transparency within different sciences, such as communication sciences, government sciences and intelligence studies. We also paid attention to the correlation between relevant concepts in these fields, such as good governance - transparency in governance, secrecy and transparency in public communication of intelligence services, government transparency and intelligence in the context of digitalization.

The research problem refers to the phenomenon and paradigm of intelligence transparency in Romania. The associated objectives that we have proposed are: the characterization of the model of transparency and public communication used by the representative actors of the National Intelligence Community in Romania through social networks, respectively the determination of the opinions and perceptions of experts regarding the intelligence transparency - from the strategic and tactical perspective.

The need to carry out research on the topic of the paper, which may seem paradoxical at first sight, was highlighted in the framework of the reform process of the intelligence field, initiated following the terrorist attack in the United States of America on September 11, 2001. The events underlined the obsolescence of absolute secrecy, the closure of intelligence services and the need to switch from a system marked by strict secrecy to a system based on collaboration, openness and information sharing with all categories of actors who can contribute or are interested in the field.

The research design we used consisted of two congruent methods, one quantitative and one qualitative. The quantitative analysis was carried out through the content analysis in social media, at the level of 2022, of an actor from the National Information Community in Romania, the Romanian Information Service, and led us to define the characteristics of the communication model through the platforms Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The qualitative method was implemented by conducting 20 interviews with experts, coded with the E series and numbered from 1 to 20, relevant to the field of intelligence and national security, which led to the identification of their opinions regarding the phenomenon of intelligence on sight in Romania today, as well as regarding the optimal model for the future.

Regarding the structure of the thesis, it has two components: theoretical and research. The theoretical component is contained in the first four chapters, built on the basis of academic literature. The research component is represented by the fifth chapter which is dedicated to the research design, the obtained results and their integrated analysis. In the review of the academic literature, we included works and information from the area of academic research, from the area of practitioners and strategists, and conclusions presented by national and international organizations relevant from a governmental point of view, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Union, the Office of the Director for US Homeland Security. In addition, the documentation also included official government information, made available to the public by authorities from Romania or other states, including actors from the National Intelligence Community. We chose this approach because among the goals of this work is the exposure for members of society and stakeholders of the intelligence field in Romania and other countries of academic knowledge and the results of our research, resulting from the integration of theoretical and practical aspects. The results can be concretely used by integration into future policies and strategies regarding voluntary institutional transparency, public communication and security and intelligence culture.

In the first chapter, we approached the way of defining the concept of transparency in the academic literature, its integration in inter-disciplinary topics, with a nucleus in the area of

communication sciences and the relationship between transparency and public communication of the institutions of a democratic state. Another topic that we presented is the psychology of transparency, which was approached by analyzing and exposing the role that the construction and characteristics of perception play in the processes of public uptake, acceptance and evaluation of public communication and transparency measures. A review of the literature and case studies on transparency revealed an adaptable, flexible concept. It is not specific to a single field, it is not subsumed exclusively to communication sciences and it can be extended in several specialized areas. We believe that for a thorough understanding of the concept and practices of transparency, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive approach, with the inclusion of fundamental and complementary elements. In the same chapter we also established that the voluntary dimension of transparency is the one that interests us, represented by the pro-active measures taken by an actor in this direction. This is dissociated from the dimension of transparency that materializes as a result of legal obligations, most often representative of access to information of public interest, the application of specific measures for the control system of the activity of public authorities and intelligence services or decisional transparency.

In the second chapter we approached the concept of government transparency, a concept that has already proven to be naturalized, being agreed and promoted by most of the relevant researchers and practitioners. The review and analysis of academic literature helped us to understand the place and role of transparency in the context of strategies, needs and specific requirements at the level of government institutions in a democratic state. We discussed the emergence and definition of the concept, the effects that government transparency can mediate in shaping the public's perception of public administration. The need for a multidisciplinary perspective was highlighted because we identified scientific approaches to government transparency from multiple fields, especially from communication sciences, administrative sciences, legal sciences, political sciences, psychology and behavioral sciences. Regarding the emergence and evolution of the concept, we have identified in different geographical areas a multitude of initiatives and policies on government transparency, translated at the initial stage into laws on free access to information and later into recommendations, standards and documents that define a conceptual ideal. They describe transparency as part of good governance from all perspectives, good practice and a tool to combat institutional dysfunctions such as corruption. At the opposite end, views were also identified that too much government transparency leads to negative smokescreen valences or loss of interest and attention of target groups. The literature in all the mentioned fields focuses on transparency from the perspective

of the observed effects or the potential effects generated by the lack of governmental transparency.

In the third chapter we discussed intelligence transparency, that represent the transparency associated with the activity of intelligence services and agencies. We chose to focus on the identification of those conceptual elements regarding transparency that we can consider constant, recurrent in the national and international academic literature, with the aim of identifying the types of criteria that influence the practice of this complex, multi-faceted process. Thus, the need to measure the perception of relevant experts outside of a national intelligence community regarding intelligence transparency was generated. The results are opinions with a high degree of objectivity, based on a foundation of knowledge and previous experience relevant to the field. We obtained points of view and opinions regarding the current situation, as well as the optimal perspectives for the future, starting from the evolution of the presence of intelligence in the democratic public space, with an emphasis on the professional aspects specific to the strategic and tactical area.

When we approach the subject of transparency in the field of intelligence, in the academic literature we identify frequent correlations with the area of control of intelligence services, but it is not as rich in terms of voluntary transparency. One of the causes we presume is the very organizational micro-culture of the intelligence services, marked by secrecy and opacity. However, two concepts have been identified that encourage increased transparency: security culture and open secrets. Consolidating the security culture creates premises for supporting some societal objectives, and the use of open secrets in transparency processes can support objectives that are part of operational strategies. In addition, in the case of Romania, the lack of in-depth academic research and knowledge regarding intelligence transparency must be interpreted through the prism of the national profile characterized by a democracy in the process of consolidation and a historical memory still in the shadow of the Security. However, the topic is relevant in the contemporary social context, since the intelligence services are present in the public space, they are formally recognized as part of the society that carries out its activity in the service of the citizens.

In the fourth chapter we chose to discuss the current social context, in order to be able to carry out a research anchored in the architecture and recent needs of citizens and public institutions, located in a dynamic correlated with that of the society to which it belongs. We addressed five main themes, and they are: the digital transformation of society and the impact it has at different levels; the emerging technologies that generated the emergence of social media and the phenomenon of platformization; the adoption of public communication through

social media by government institutions; the state-citizen relationship from the perspective of the impact of technological transformations; societal resilience in the digital age. A related topic that has been integrated in this chapter is the concept of narrative, approached from the perspective of the impact of narrative persuasion in the processes of public communication and transparency. We have also documented the ways in which narratives can be used in such a way as to lead to the creation of a climate of trust favorable to public institutions and those in the field of intelligence, as well as to the management of moments of crisis, by strengthening and consolidating societal resilience. At the end of the chapter we concluded, by integrating all the information presented, that there is a direct link between digitalization, the need to strengthen societal resilience in the digital age and ensuring the national security of a state through transparency measures. At the same time, I could state that the potential of using new technologies in the government area, including social media tools, presents both social and national security risks, as well as opportunities that can generate a positive impact.

In the last chapter I presented the research design. We defined the research problem as the phenomenon and paradigm of intelligence transparency in Romania, with two associated research objectives: identifying the model of transparency and public communication adopted by the actors of the National Intelligence Community through social networks and determining the opinions of relevant experts regarding intelligence transparency, from a strategic and tactical perspective.

The quantitative research method consisted in the content analysis of the relevant social media accounts, in the year 2022, of the actors who are part of the National Information Community in Romania, using two specific tools, respectively two analysis matrices in the function of the analyzed social network. The methodology used for the Facebook and Instagram accounts was that proposed by Bonsón and Ratkai (2013), while for the YouTube channel the methodology proposed by López-Navarrete, Cabrera-Méndez and Díez-so was applied(2021). Regarding the qualitative research, the method used is the semi-structured expert interview. It was made based on a guide built starting from the elements identified in the first four chapters of the thesis and based on the results obtained in the quantitative research. The creation of the profile of the interviewed experts and their selection was carried out by referring to the membership of three relevant environments: the academic environment in Romania related to national security issues, intelligence studies, strategic communication; the institutional environment of the central public administration with connections and inter-dependencies with the field of intelligence; former employees of the institutions of the National Intelligence Community of Romania.

The main conclusions resulting from the application of the mentioned research methods, together with relevant aspects from the theoretical component, are presented below.

Regarding the concept of transparency, there is a close correlation between the level of governmental transparency, the level of trust of the population in state institutions and the degree of democratization of the society in question. The concept is associated with the performance and efficiency of the governance process, in the sense that on the one hand it is a proof of good governance, and on the other hand it is a tool through which the institution in question can acquire authority and legitimacy, as well as responsibility for its own actions.

Regarding the legal framework associated with transparency, at the moment in Romania it is focused on the information component, access to information of public interest. It is predominantly perceived as relevant, the current legislation is sufficient to satisfy the information needs of citizens or third parties, achieving a balance in protecting and promoting the immediate interests of both parties – state and citizen. However, the legal framework is not enough to promote transparency, and in the context of technological developments and the evolution of the open society, which will increase more and more, a massive update or change of the current legislation will be necessary. Thus, transparency still remains a voluntary action of public institutions, including those in the field of information, as it has not been identified distinctly and comprehensively in the current regulations. However, it was deemed necessary for the creation and growth of a democratic relationship between the state and the general public and civil society. Also, the new legislation could aim at an explicit responsibility of each institution to create culture in the public space in the fields it has competence, in the case of the Romanian National Information Community, it is about security culture.

Regarding the subject of the messages, the public appreciates the promotion and association of intelligence institutions with events relevant to society, such as national or SRI holidays and awareness and information measures that support the development of security culture and even intelligence culture. The latter component was also confirmed in the interviews with experts. The opportune topics for the intelligence services in their opinion are: operational results to which the field of intelligence has contributed, the implementation of projects of national interest, the promotion of the use of new tools and technologies, legislative-normative aspects, the use of resources from the state budget, decision-making on topics of interest to a wide audience, the development of policies of national interest, the clear presentation of the mission of the institutions and the profiles of the leaders, inter-institutional cooperation relations at the national and international level, and last but not least, the results of scientific research in the field of responsibility. One of the relevant conclusions is that topics

must constantly adapt to create and satisfy the interest of the general public, in the context of the lack of an active interest on his part. It is necessary that institutions to be able to develop and actively maintain a dialogue with civil society, "to remain connected to public life" (E7), showing characteristics specific to their democratization.

Regarding the audience of intelligence transparency, different objectives were identified depending on the targeted audience category. Thus, towards the general public the main objectives are to inform, educate, cultivate trust, two-way interaction and create neutral and positive attitudes. In the case of the subcategories that are part of the general public, the young people, directly targeted by the recruitment campaigns, the residents of rural areas, characterized as an ignorant public that generates panic from ignorance, the mass media, as a potential partner and public actor who it requires constant attention and active two-way dialogue. Other categories highlighted by the experts, which may be of interest to the intelligence services, are the intellectual class, the political class, partners, former employees, depending on specific strategies and objectives. Specific public categories that must be identified at every moment of society's evolution were also highlighted, such as citizens vulnerable to radicalization actions and with an appetite for extremist discourse. Two other categories of public, which are not at first sight predilected for communication in the public space, but which, from the perspective of experts, require attention and addressing, are the internal public, employees of intelligence institutions, and institutional partners, both from the national area and international.

With regard to communication in the online environment, web pages, defined as traditional channels, are considered useful for the implementation of transparency measures in the sense of legal regulations and obligations established in this way. At the same time, experts believe that voluntary transparency can be implemented only by including in the public communication processes popular channels among the target audience, such as social networks, professional platforms, podcast libraries. The academic literature and the opinion of the interviewed experts are congruent regarding the use of social networks by government institutions in general, by those that carry out activities with a major impact on society as a whole, arguing that it represents an unwritten requirement of the historical stage in which we are, as a democracy and as a society.

Experts believe that transparency, although it is not regulated in this way, is a responsibility of the actors in the National Intelligence Community of Romania and translates into the exposure of themes in the public space aimed at increasing and educating the public's interest in the security area, especially the public young people and people with an active life

in society, with an above-average schooling level. The profile of the ideal public is defined by the presence and activity in the public space, looking for elements of predictability, concerned with resilience, safety and national stability. An intelligence service must position itself in society as a credible source of information, having the role of stability, ordering and logical placement of the narrative thread at the level of the collective mind and of prevention and resilience for crisis situations. These institutions can generate, at the public level, an awareness of the need for concrete security assessments even in contexts of normality and social stability, for an objective and credible assessment of the actual situation, which is often at a reduced level in the absence of an event with obvious disruptive potential.

Regarding the influence of the internal environment on the external one, the biggest challenge in increasing the transparency of the intelligence services it is represented by managing the tendency to hide and protect information, even through over-classification, and by creating a new tendency towards openness and transparency. That is why it was repeated, in context, the need for the communication processes to be coordinated and managed by „employees, who "took off their tie" (E16).

If the form of transparency measures can vary according to criteria such as the channel used, the moment of social evolution, the topic addressed, its background is a strategic one. Conceptualizing the use of transparency refers to the exposure of messages, of consistent and coherent narratives by each institution, which pursues a topic in a comprehensive way, so that the public understands the essence of the respective theme, goes beyond the informative-cognitive level, and contributes to the construction societal resilience. At the opposite end, there is punctual, disparate and discontinuous communication, which has the role of information, but not of shaping the collective mind, of supporting the adoption of elements of resilience and security culture. Narratives have been identified, both by experts and researchers, as one of the most effective transparency and public communication tools through which actors in the National Intelligence Community contribute to societal resilience and security culture.

Intelligence transparency in Romania is no longer a paradox or a simple wishful thinking. We believe that it has become, similar to government transparency, an unofficial mandate given to the intelligence services by citizens. It is the responsibility of the institutions of the Romanian National Information Community to formulate strategies and implement transparency practices. Equally, it is our responsibility, as researchers, to make the necessary scientific knowledge available to the institutional environment, the present thesis representing just such a contribution.