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DOCTORAL STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL STUDIES

DOCTORAL THESIS

PUBLIC POLICIES AIMED AT CROSS-BORDER SECURITY
CASE STUDY: PREVENTING AND COMBATING
CROSS-BORDER ORGANIZED CRIME

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SUMMARY

Cross-border security represents one of the most complex and challenging dimensions of national and international security, especially in the context of globalization and the intensification of cross-border flows of goods, people, and information. Within this framework, transnational organized crime (TOC) has become an increasingly sophisticated phenomenon that affects not only state security, but also the stability of democratic institutions, the global economy, and social cohesion. The present paper aims to analyze the public policies developed to prevent and combat transnational organized crime, with a focus on the European Union (EU) and Romania.

As a result of increasing economic and political interdependencies between states, cross-border security has gained particular relevance in recent decades. Trade liberalization, regional integration, technological advancement, and increased mobility have facilitated connections between states, but have also created vulnerabilities exploited by organized crime networks. From the perspective of the European Union, the Schengen area and the free movement of goods and people, although they have brought significant economic and social benefits, have generated major challenges regarding cross-border security.

Romania, as an EU member state located on the Union's eastern border, plays a strategic role in this context. Its geographical position places it near major routes for trafficking in persons, drugs, and weapons, making it both a transit country and a destination for various illegal activities. Thus, addressing transnational organized crime requires effective public policies that respond to the dynamics of this phenomenon.

TOC is an advanced form of criminality involving illegal activities carried out by well-organized groups operating across national borders. Human trafficking, smuggling, drug trafficking, cybercrime, and money laundering are just a few of the activities associated with this phenomenon. Beyond the economic impact—significant losses for national budgets and private companies—organized crime puts pressure on state institutions, generates social insecurity, and can undermine citizens' trust in authorities.

At the EU level, estimates indicate that economic losses caused by the illicit activities of TOC groups exceed billions of euros annually. In Romania, issues related to corruption and insufficient resources allocated to combating this phenomenon increase the difficulties encountered in managing cross-border challenges.

Public policies in the field of cross-border security are essential for creating an integrated framework for preventing and combating organized crime. These policies not only regulate border control activities and international cooperation but also establish mechanisms for information sharing, the use of modern technologies, and the mobilization of resources to limit the impact of criminal networks. An important example is the European Union Security Strategy, which emphasizes the need for coordination among member states to effectively address common threats. At the national level, Romania has implemented strategies and programs aimed at modernizing border security infrastructure, as well as collaborating with European agencies such as Europol and Frontex.

This paper aims to explore public policies in the field of cross-border security, focusing on the prevention and combating of transnational organized crime. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Analyze the phenomenon of transnational organized crime;
- Identify risks and threats to cross-border security;
- Analyze the existing normative and institutional framework at EU and Romanian levels;
- Identify the challenges and limitations of current public policies;
- Evaluate the impact of cooperation;
- Propose solutions and recommendations for improving public policies in this field.

Through this research project, I will attempt to provide clarifying answers to the following questions:

- What is organized crime and what are its main implications for security?
- What are the main forms of manifestation of transnational organized crime?
- What risks, threats, and vulnerabilities to state security are generated by organized crime?
- How do the new trends in transnational organized criminal activity affect national and European security?
- What public policies exist for the prevention and combating of transnational organized crime?
- Which institutions implement these mechanisms for preventing and combating transnational organized crime?
- What improvement solutions are available to states and institutions in the fight against transnational organized crime?

The study employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from political science, law, sociology, and economics. The research is based on documentary analysis of national and European legislation, official reports, case studies, interviews/discussions with experts in cross-border security, and questionnaires addressed to the general public. In addition, quantitative methods such as statistical analysis of organized crime data will be used, along with qualitative methods including comparative analysis of public policies.

The paper is structured into several chapters intended to provide an overview of cross-border security issues.

In the first chapter, I will address the concept of security (definition, evolution, characteristics, major schools of thought), then continue with elements related to national, European, and cross-border security, and conclude with aspects related to insecurity, including existing risks, vulnerabilities, and threats to security.

The concept of security has undergone significant transformation throughout history, adapting to new political, economic, and social realities. At its core, security is linked to the protection of a state, its citizens, and its territorial integrity, but the definition has expanded alongside the evolution of international relations and increasing global interdependence. Today, security refers not only to military aspects but also includes economic, political, social, environmental, and human dimensions.

National security has traditionally been defined as the protection of state sovereignty against external threats, particularly military ones. However, with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of global challenges—international terrorism, organized crime, climate change, forced migration, and cyberattacks—security approaches have diversified. Globalization has further complicated the concept by increasing economic dependencies between states and by introducing new non-state actors capable of threatening global stability.

At the European and international levels, security has become a field of intense cooperation, with the European Union (EU) and NATO being the main regional organizations seeking to ensure stability in the region. Additionally, multiple international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), play an essential role in facilitating cooperation between states for conflict prevention and peace promotion.

As security studies have developed as an academic discipline, various theories and schools of thought have emerged, attempting to explain and address these new challenges. From traditional realism, which defines security as a struggle for power between states, to critical theories that emphasize human security and social justice, the concept of security has become complex and multidimensional.

In the second chapter, I will analyze the phenomenon of organized crime, beginning with its definition and characteristics and concluding with an overview of its main forms of manifestation. This includes drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, cybercrime, economic crime, and money laundering.

Organized crime represents one of the most complex and dangerous criminal phenomena, affecting both public order and the economic and political stability of states. This complex form of criminality transcends national borders and involves well-structured networks carrying out illegal activities for significant financial gain. The phenomenon has become a global challenge, as criminal groups can operate both locally and internationally, using sophisticated techniques and adapting quickly to any change. Over time, organized crime has evolved significantly, adapting to economic and technological changes while maintaining its essential features: organization, continuity, and the goal of obtaining illegal profits. Moreover, organized crime today is increasingly a transnational issue, with criminal groups expanding their operations beyond national borders and engaging in various types of criminality, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, and political corruption.

Although organized crime has existed for centuries in various forms, globalization and technological advancement have facilitated its growth and diversification in recent decades. Today, organized crime groups operate not only regionally but globally, becoming involved in international networks and relying on technological progress such as the internet, cryptocurrencies, and artificial intelligence (AI) to conduct large-scale illegal activities. This adaptability and versatility make organized crime a significant threat to national and international security.

The next chapter will explore major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, technological advancement, and the development of new media, all of which have contributed to the transformation of the international security landscape. These phenomena do not operate in isolation; their complex interaction amplifies vulnerabilities within security systems and creates new transnational threats.

In an increasingly interconnected world, recent trends in organized crime profoundly influence global security, pushing both national governments and international organizations to continuously adapt. For example, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated weaknesses in critical infrastructures, allowing cybercrime to increase and counterfeit products to proliferate. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine has intensified illicit arms and human trafficking, generating new challenges for European and global security. Advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and social media networks have revolutionized the way criminal networks operate, complicating monitoring and regulatory efforts.

This section examines how these phenomena interact and influence national, European, and international security. The analysis highlights their implications for international stability and emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of these interactions to identify more effective measures for combating organized crime and strengthening global security.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to analyzing the results obtained through the applied research methods, with a focus on interviews with specialists in cross-border security conducted through a focus group and on a snowball-sampling-based questionnaire distributed via social media. The descriptive and exploratory aim of the research was to examine the phenomenon of organized crime in Romania, its implications for cross-border security, the risks and vulnerabilities affecting national security, and the public policies implemented to prevent and combat transnational organized crime.

The research methods revealed a series of relevant aspects that contributed to "completing the picture" regarding the objectives established at the beginning of this doctoral thesis. I can state that the descriptive and exploratory goal of the research has been achieved, with elements related to the description of organized crime in Romania, its implications for cross-border security, and the public policies implemented to prevent and combat transnational organized crime enriching the informational landscape.

The general perception regarding the intensity of organized and transnational crime, as expressed both in interviews and in the questionnaire disseminated on social media, is that the magnitude of the phenomenon is becoming increasingly evident, with irreversible effects at all levels. Organized crime represents one of the most complex and dangerous criminal phenomena, affecting national security as well as the economic, social, and political stability of states. This aspect has compelled, and will continue to compel, decision-makers to allocate special attention to the phenomenon and act accordingly. The current context of technological developments is creating and will continue to create a favorable environment for the expansion of criminal activity and for the growing complexity of transnational threats.

The final chapter will analyze public policies in the field of cross-border security, highlighting the legislative and operational foundations that support efforts to combat TOC, both in Romania and at the EU level. The chapter will conclude with a guide to best practices in cross-border security.

Cross-border security represents a fundamental pillar of international stability, closely linked to the ability of states to protect their borders against criminal threats. In this context, transnational organized crime stands out as a complex challenge that transcends traditional boundaries of state sovereignty. The relationship between these two dimensions - cross-border security and organized crime - is essentially one of interdependence, as vulnerabilities in border management enable illicit activities to grow and persist on a global scale.

Transnational organized crime exploits the lack of effective coordination between states, relying on complex, well-funded networks to carry out illegal activities such as human trafficking, smuggling, money laundering, and drug and arms trafficking. In this regard, the European Union represents a relevant example of a region where permeable internal borders and insufficient collaboration between member states can be transformed into opportunities for criminal networks. Although Schengen facilitates freedom of movement, the system is often exploited by criminal groups that take advantage of legislative diversity and differences in law-enforcement capacity among member states.

Romania's particular strategic position within this landscape of cross-border security is influenced by multiple factors, including its geographical location, socio-economic characteristics, and the external pressures generated by its proximity to unstable regions.

Over the years, Romania has become a transit point and operational base for organized crime networks that exploit its borders with non-EU states. For example, human trafficking - one of the most profitable activities of transnational criminal groups - is a particularly acute problem. Recent data indicate that Romania is both a country of origin and transit for human trafficking victims, with routes extending into Western Europe and beyond.

At the same time, Romania's eastern border, especially with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, is used by criminal groups for smuggling excisable goods such as cigarettes. This activity not only harms the state budget but also undermines efforts to strengthen cross-border security, demonstrating the sophisticated coordination among involved groups. Additionally, Romania's proximity to the Black Sea makes it vulnerable to drug trafficking, with the Port of Constanța frequently used as an entry point for illegal substances originating from Asia and South America.

European political and legislative approaches aim to harmonize member states' responses, but their effectiveness depends on each state's level of involvement and adaptation to the local context. For Romania, this means not only strengthening internal capacities but also enhancing cooperation with European partners.

In conclusion, the link between cross-border security and organized crime reflects a complex and dynamic relationship that requires solutions tailored to the local context but integrated within the broader European framework.

Regarding the proposed guide, it aims to provide a set of best practices applicable to cross-border security, adapted to both national and European contexts. It is intended for public authorities, international organizations, and private actors involved in border security management. The guide pursues the following main objectives:

1. Creating an integrated strategic framework for preventing and combating cross-border threats.
2. Promoting international collaboration and information sharing between states.
3. Integrating emerging technologies into public policies to increase operational efficiency.
4. Developing a harmonized legislative framework that eliminates gaps and facilitates transnational cooperation.
5. Ensuring continuous training of border management personnel and educating the public on the importance of cross-border security.

The paper concludes with general findings accompanied by several recommendations. In this regard, Romania is in a unique position to become a regional leader in the field of cross-border security. This, however, requires a long-term strategic vision that integrates infrastructure modernization, continuous staff training, and the strengthening of national resilience. Furthermore, it is essential for Romanian institutions to continue strengthening international partnerships, promoting transparency, and combating corruption, which remains one of the greatest obstacles to institutional effectiveness.

Cross-border security is more than a technical dimension of international stability; it is a test of states' ability to cooperate, innovate, and collectively respond to global challenges. Romania has the opportunity to turn these challenges into development opportunities and contribute decisively to building a safe and prosperous European space. With a well-defined strategy and ongoing commitment, cross-border security can become not just a protective tool but also a model of successful international cooperation.

Finally, I wish to emphasize that the examination of public policies in the field of cross-border security is particularly relevant in the current context marked by geopolitical instability and hybrid threats. This paper contributes to understanding the dynamics between organized crime and state security, while also offering practical recommendations for decision-makers.

In conclusion, the paper aims to make a significant contribution to the field of political science and security studies by addressing one of the most pressing issues facing modern states: the fight against transnational organized crime.