

ROMANIAN STRATEGIC CREDIBILITY – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: *Born at the border between social sciences and military sciences, the concept of strategic credibility reclaims an increasingly solid position in the area of political sciences. The need to ensure strategic credibility for Romania was confirmed by the policy makers who included this concept in the Romanian National Defense Strategy. While strategic credibility is a national value that must be nurtured, promoted and protected by every citizen, we intend to highlight in this paper, using the interview technique, the awareness of this issue by young politicians and the elements that, in their view, would lead to the deterioration of this volatile but very important resource. Results will allow us to highlight the level of their knowledge of strategic credibility, as well as the gaps in their knowledge, which can be overcome through appropriate corrective measures.*

Keywords: *strategy; credibility; strategic credibility*

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary international security environment is characterized by increased complexity, as security is more and more understood as an ensemble of dimensions which no longer include only traditional elements, such as military elements, but also societal, economic, political or environmental elements (Buzan *et al.*, 2011). In the age of permanent international interactions, partnerships are an important ingredient of international relations and, therefore, the confidence instilled by a state is often more important than its natural or economic resources.

In this article, we set out to investigate whether young Romanian politicians know the concept of strategic credibility and the extent to which they are aware of the importance and role it holds for our country.

2. DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF 'STRATEGIC CREDIBILITY'

The interest referring to the notion of credibility dates since classical antiquity, when, in his *Rhetoric* treatise, Aristotle, in 380 BC, referred to the ingredients “which inspire confidence in the orator's own character . that induce us to believe a thing apart from any proof of it: good sense, good moral character, and goodwill” (Gass & Steiter,

2004).’Ever since then, confidence was believed to be an essential element for gaining credibility and it is found in most references to individual or group credibility throughout time.

The most detailed studies referring to credibility are incorporated in those referring to persuasion. This field of research was dominated for a long time by psychosociologist Carl Hovland (Hovland *et al.*, 1953), who theorized the model of Source Variables, Message Variables, Channel Variables, as well as Receiver Variables. In Hovland’s opinion, people are more easily convinced when the source of information is credible. Another perspective on the notion of credibility is provided by the definition given by O’Keefe (1990:130-131) which moves the emphasis from the information source to the manner in which the source is assessed by the receiver: “judgments made by perceivers regarding the believability of communicators”. Therefore, the same communicator may instill a certain level of credibility in relation to a certain receiver and a different level of credibility in relation to another receiver. Being included in the paradigm of social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966), the assessment of credibility becomes highly dependent on the characteristics of the corresponding communication process.

The common denominator of all definitions referring to credibility is that credibility cannot be

created outside a social context; it can only exist in relation to others. We may talk about the credibility of a person, a website, an institution, a company, a government or a state. Given the fact that life can no longer be separated from others and that the perceived message is more referenced than the transmitted message, credibility gains valorizing new features.

When the credibility of an individual is assessed, their reputation and the image created through their personal actions are taken into account, while, when the credibility of an organization is analyzed, it is equally determined by its collective actions and the actions of its members. Despite the fact that the image of the institution is global, its reputation lies in the hands of the people comprising the institution. A similar situation occurs concerning states – their credibility is the credibility of their leaders and citizens. There may be cases when a state is credible from the point of view of another state, but not from the point of view of a third state. The association of the psychosociological notion of credibility with that of strategy led to the emergence of the concept of strategic credibility (Higgins, 2002). From a military standpoint, *strategy* is the preparation and planning of warfare and military operations (von Clausewitz, 1982), while, from an economic standpoint, *strategy* means setting objectives and planning the course of action (Chandler, 1962). Joining the two terms by creating the phrase *strategic credibility* is liable to bring the notion of credibility into the military and economic fields, with tangible, determined emphasis.

Strategic credibility became more and more relevant in the field of international relations. Dumitru Borțun (2014) claimed that “Strategic credibility is a strategic reserve for image crises”. From this standpoint, strategic credibility is viewed as a resource which may be used in critical situations, as it provides means of overcoming the obstacle.” Being aware of the effects of a high or low reserve of strategic credibility, the President of Romania included this concept in Romania’s National Defense Strategy, referring to the “consolidation of democracy and the rule of law” on one hand, as well as to the “predictability and continuity . . . of the external security and defense policies.” In the aforementioned sense, strategic credibility is the result of strategic communication, which has the objective of strengthening the state and democracy in a planned and continuous manner. All external policy elements must be circumscribed to the promotion and maintenance of national interests, assumed as defining elements.

Without credibility, a state loses its right to be equal in any negotiation. In the 21st century, states cannot remain outside Alliances, Unions, Organizations or Partnerships, and their position in all of these types of associations is directly related to the confidence they enjoy internationally. In this context, credibility may be defined as a national virtue which must be nurtured, promoted and protected. Attacks to the credibility of a state may have unsuspected future effects, all the more severe as they cannot be quantified in relation to the initial moment, but will depend on future circumstances, factors and interests.

Of course, the political field has the most visible contributions to building strategic credibility, as the decisions of the political class create economic, military and legal paradigms and credible behaviors. There is an extremely close and directly proportional relationship between politicians and the strategic credibility of the state. On the other hand, the image capital of the political environment is directly related to the level of citizen confidence in the political act. Considering the temporary nature of strategic credibility and the time required to build it, stability is necessary from a political point of view. Quality and reliability can be demonstrated only in the context of continuity. Discontinuity engenders distrust, fear, instability and has the effect of losing image capital, which generates the restart of the process of building credibility.

We must state that it is not enough for the political class to adopt decisions and promote national policies. The continuous communication of the political environment with the external and internal audiences is required. In an international context marked by profound changes, in a world in which disinformation plays an important part, appropriate communication in relation to the circumstances is crucial for maintaining the strategic credibility of the state.

Therefore, from an external perspective, strategic credibility brings diplomacy to the forefront as a way of consolidating in a planned manner the national image in relation to the other actors on the international stage. The reputation of a certain state is built according to the manner of negotiating, of mediating tense situations and according to the light in which the acts of a state and its entities are presented, with direct effects on the way in which the state will instill confidence in the other states. Observing the assumed commitments, supporting the positions generated by the alliances concluded and the coherence of external policies are essential to strategic credibility.

3. THE CULTURAL FACE OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

This paper sets out to reveal the most important dimensions of the concept of strategic credibility, as well as to investigate the extent to which this concept is familiar to young persons interested in a political career, future actors involved in the process of consolidating/undermining strategic credibility. To identify the extent to which strategic credibility, as an objective of the National Security Strategy, is known and assumed by young politicians (party members, affiliates of the youth organizations), we chose to carry out a sociological investigation based on interviews. Eight young persons were interviewed – three men and five women, all higher education alumni with ages between 20 and 30 years old.

An interview guide focused on matters of interest was applied to the subjects. The form of individual, structured interviews was chosen and we selected strictly the subjects to be discussed, so as to be able to clarify certain positions or to explore themes mentioned by the subjects. This method allows for a more relaxed approach of the subjects, the activity being perceived as normal and integrated in daily activities (Iluț, 1997), but also entails obstacles such as the difficulty of accessing subjects and persuading them to answer questions over a relatively long period of time, and suspicions concerning the assurance of anonymity (Bailey, 1978/1982:183, *apud* Chelcea, 2004:301).

3.1 Processing information – data analysis and explaining the researched processes and phenomena. Asked if they understood the concept of strategic credibility, most young persons admitted ignorance (five subjects) and tried to approximate the meaning of the concept:

S1: ... I believe it refers to the armed power of a country, its history within state alliances, as well as the financial power of the country and its ability to support certain projects.

S2: Strategic credibility is found in all actions carried out by a state, through which it can provide international safety. The concept of strategic credibility is most often encountered concerning the future plans of a state.

S3: I did not encounter this concept before, but I believe it refers to the way you are viewed by other states in terms of security, defense and related strategies. I think that a strong state, with a good infrastructure, a powerful army and a well-developed security strategy is credible from a strategic point of view.

S4: I do not know the concept of strategic credibility. I think it refers to the credibility of a country and both its geostrategic position and its position within alliances; a country's efficiency in settling conflicts, interests or promoting certain principles or values in various spheres of interest.

Particularly, the alumni of specialized studies in humanities are aware of its meaning, but they are quite few:

S5: ...as I am a Security Studies alumnus, I encountered this concept in the university courses. It represents the way a country is perceived by its strategic partners and the other global participants, and the manner in which it fulfills its internal and international commitments.

S6: ...it refers to the ability of a state to instill confidence by consistent policies which lead to a stable, predictable climate.

After assessing the knowledge level of the strategic credibility concept, the meaning of the concept was explained to the subjects. The interview continued with asking the respondents to characterize Romania's level of strategic credibility. When questioned concerning the reasons which, from their point of view, led to the decrease of Romania's level of strategic credibility, the subjects provided various answers, some relatively ill-defined. This type of answer reveals the shallowness of knowledge on this subject and the appeal to response elements from the common subjects on the public agenda:

S2: "...corruption in Romania, problems with the healthcare system, problems with the education system"
S6: "the inability to attract European funds and investments, the lack of coherence on the political path."

S1: "we don't have armed forces, and the external representatives of the country... president, ambassadors, prime minister, ministers... there is no umbrella term to cover all of them. Apart from all of these, there is the pollution created by the Romanian press, the way in which it hyperbolizes different interest topics, some of which are 100% artificial... and the news reach the national press and take revenge against the credibility of the country."

S3: "there are many reasons for discrediting Romania. The exposure of several covered officers, over time, has seriously affected the credibility of the Romanian intelligence system. Corruption, the legislative system and its serious legal errors made over time... the economic issues we have faced and the damage to several economic levels, especially that of light industry... the inability to attract European funds."

S5: "The large legislative volume, with many laws and, sometimes, contradictory laws, affects us... on the one hand, there are some Romanians who behave in a reprehensible manner outside the borders or who protest all the time, and, on the other hand, their leaders who are permanently accused of corruption."

The same respondents believe that there is also a set of actions which have strengthened the strategic credibility of our country. Thus, there are certain recurrent elements, such as:

"strengthening the partnership with the USA, excluding the visas for Canada" (S1, S5),
"The actions within the European Union, the actions within NATO, building the missile defense system at Deveselu" (S2, S5),
"The declared, official affirmation, for the states which have faced tragedies, criminal attacks, terrorist attacks... Favorable approval for receiving refugees" (S3).

Other respondents talk less about international activities, and they believe that strategic credibility is a consequence of certain internal measures in the economic field:

"The increase of foreign investments, the increase of the number of jobs, the increase of the minimum wage, the decrease of unemployment rate, and the increase of the budgets for the key-institutions in the state" (S8).

In order to particularize the understanding of the way in which Romania's strategic credibility is assessed, the subjects were questioned regarding the relation perceived between our country and several state categories. The opinions of the subjects regarding the confidence of the Western countries in Romania are equally divided, the subjects perceiving the existence as well of the lack of confidence in our country:

S2: Viewing the fact that Romania is member of the European Union and of NATO, this ensures a good collaboration with the Western countries. Some of the Western countries have made investments through the private companies in Romania, which gives a bit of confidence in the Romanian state.

S5: Yes, because it had honored its commitments, not because of the way in which it treated Romanians outside the borders

S8: I believe so, because it is a country which is not quite ready militarily and economically speaking, and its interest is to be loyal to the powers with which it is allied.

OR

S3: I believe they do not have confidence, because, I repeat, we have an extremely bad reputation at

international level; over time, our leaders have shown weakness, unlike their international partners. Also, I don't think they trust us for armed alliances either, and history has proven that we are not exactly the most loyal when it comes to our partners. (see the turning of weapons)

S4: I don't think Romania enjoys too much confidence from the Western countries. Romania is a developing country, and this may give the impression of instability in all fields.

S6: The migration wave which began in the early 2000s, the cheap labor force provided by Romania received a negative brand in the international press, which also contributes to this lack of confidence.

Similarly, the confidence of the former Soviet countries in our country is assessed differently, in the sense that our common history is used as a reference point for confidence, while other respondents believe that this history itself and Romania's sinusoidal mode of action regarding its alliances are reasons of distrust.

S4: I believe that the countries in the former Soviet space have confidence in Romania, because they have the possibility to refer to the "common" history and to the idea of mutual help.

S5: Taking into consideration the fact that Romania has also been under communist regime, this certainly brings together the countries in the former Soviet space, both those seeing democracy as an ideal forum, and those that remained included in this segment.

AND

S2: Accession to NATO and the approach to the United States of America have weakened the relations between Romania and the former Soviet countries. Among the decisions which have led to the weakening of the relations between Romania and the former Soviet countries we can also mention the missile defense system built at Deveselu.

S3: In my opinion, these countries would not trust Romania, because there were questions regarding the Soviet occupation of Romania. Romania was occupied by the Red Army, during the offense in 1944, being allied with the Nazi Germany. The rest of the country was occupied after Romania changes sides to the Allies. I believe that this change in strategy at that moment would cause mistrust among these countries.

S6: No. Especially if we talk about the relation with Russia, taking into consideration the accession of Romania to NATO and the weakening of the relations between the two countries in recent years.

S8: I think not, due to the ending of the communist era in Romania (the people shot their leader).

There are some interesting answers provided for the way in which the subjects believe that the Asian countries see Romania, answers which are

unanimously positive, presuming their confidence in our country. We can provide an explanation in the terms of the lack of recent information regarding some of these bilateral relations cumulated with the sociological effect of the “past remembered through rose-colored glasses” the subjects often talk about.

S3: I believe so, because we currently have strong partnerships with important countries from Asia, see China, which we had as reference point during the communist era. Romania and China have always had a strong collaboration and cooperation relation in certain fields and this is why I believe that we are trustworthy to them.

S5: Historical tradition urges me to say yes, viewing the very good relations during the communist era.

Also, most respondents believe that Romania is trusted by the Arabic countries, a proof for this fact being the lack of terrorist events against the Romanian people and the existence of certain historical trade relations.

S2: Romania has not had any direct conflicts with the Arabic countries, because this can be noticed by the fact that our country has not experienced terrorist attacks, unlike the rest of the European countries. The citizens of the Arabic countries have confidence in Romania, because they migrated from their countries for a new life in Romania.

S4: The Arabic countries may be cautious regarding the confidence they have in Romania. Nevertheless, the Arabic countries were able to enjoy good reception and relations with the Romanian space. And this is what wins the trust of the Arabs.

S5: Romania, taking into consideration that it is located on the Black Sea shore, has constantly unfolded trade relations with the Arabic Countries and Turkey, and thus bilateral relations can exist without problems.

S6: Romania's relations with the Arabic countries are fairly strong, especially regarding trade and education, but I cannot claim that this necessarily means confidence... I don't know how confidence between countries is measured. In my opinion, it is a matter of perception.

Viewing the fact that the interviewed population consists of young people who are preparing for a political carrier, we considered it to be interesting to talk to them about the main ways they consider to be suitable for enhancing the strategic credibility of our country. Their answers have reached several important reference points, such as the need to strengthen certain strategic fields, and the need to have capable state people who lead the country.

S1: In order to create a good image, people representing it should be well prepared and invest more in the army.

S3: First of all, I consider that it should pay more attention to diplomatic, international relations, it should have a more though and radical position towards the injustice addressed to Romanians, in order to earn the respect. Likewise, I consider that it should be more open, it should have more projects at European level, increase the absorption of European funds, increase Romanians' living standard, everything in order to strengthen itself. I do not think that an internally weak state could ever be a powerful state in the eyes of others. Furthermore, it must consolidate its army and police. A powerful state, worth to be taken seriously and prepared for any discussion, is a powerfully armed state, both in terms of people and the munition itself.

S4: In order to improve its relations with other countries, Romania should enhance effectiveness of communication with the other states. Another possibility would be the creation of partnerships and the existence of a desire to create relations with certain alliances, unions, organizations and the development of directions on which it bases its external policy.

S5: First of all, we must have a constant and solid legislative framework, focus on favorable interest and development fields, and establish strategic partnerships meant to generate strategic credibility and to increase Romania's power as an access area to the Black Sea and the border with Russia.

S8: Investing much more in promotion, in army, in education. Another factor that could contribute to the improvement of Romania's relations with other states could be its representation by very well prepared people who are able to conclude effective partnerships favorable for Romania.

During the next five years, the subjects consider that the most important measures to be taken for the increase of the strategic credibility are:

S2: A Romanian army development strategy, especially in terms of fighting equipment..., the reduction of the corruption level ..., a total transparency as regards the decisions made in Romania.

S3: increasing the budget granted to the army, purchasing munition, tanks, fighter aircrafts etc, reintroducing the compulsory military service, executing a powerful strategy in this field, reintroducing a system similar to the five year plans from the communist period, in order to insure a continuity of application of these measures. In the field of diplomatic relations it is necessary to ensure the strategic dialogue to the other member states of EU, NATO and others, to execute more strategic partnerships and to consolidate the existing ones, to

support public diplomacy actions, in order to properly promote the security measures.

S5: it is necessary to approve a legal strategy to ensure more coherence, to encourage the local environment to get involved in the economic growth and to insure the political stability and the institutional and interinstitutional transparency.

Despite the reduced degree of knowledge regarding the topic, the respondents offer a series of valid solutions which could generate the increase of Romania's strategic credibility.

The identification of the most important such measures, the construction of a coherent plan, its popularization and implementation could represent an important first step in this direction, given an Indian saying that goes like "Chance favors the prepared mind".

4. CONCLUSIONS

Considering the prerequisite observation that one of the most important objectives aimed by the most recent Romania's security strategy is the increase of its strategic credibility, we considered it was necessary to assess to what extent this goal was internalized at the level of our country's population. Therefore, beyond the conceptual clarifications, in this paper we interviewed a group of young politicians. The main limit of this study derives from the unrepresentativeness of the used group. However, the obtained answers allow us to find some answers which should constitute the basis of future developments.

As a general conclusion, the obtained answers are characterized by the lack of homogeneity, our interpretation being that the subjects have been exposed to unsystematised random information. The correlation of the identification data with the obtained answers allows us to conclude that, by attending political science or security education, young politicians acquire a more thorough understanding of this field. In comparison with the rest of the group, they have more knowledge about the strategic credibility. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt measures addressed to the entire political class which should aim at increasing the level of knowledge of Romania's strategic objectives, since they can be achieved only if they are known. Elaborating a clear action plan in the short and medium run which should aim at increasing the strategic credibility and popularizing it amongst the politicians (even amongst the ones at the beginning of their career as is this case) is of crucial importance. Therefore,

Romania would have consolidated its strategic credibility, being recognized for its predictability and continuity both in the external, security and defense policy, and in the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law. A strong Romania enjoys not only the partners' complete trust but it is also a supplier of confidence, a source of stability in a complicated region and of profound attachment to democratic values and principles. (http://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Strategia_Nationala_de_Aparare_a_Tarii_1.pdf, p.3

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