

CORECON

The Coverage and Reception of
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



Finanțat de
Uniunea Europeană
NextGenerationEU



Planul Național
de Redresare și Reziliență



UNIVERSITATEA
LUCIAN BLAGA
— DIN SIBIU —

***FRAMING THE THREAT:
DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN THE ROMANIAN MEDIA
COVERING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT***

AUTHORS: *Assoc.Prof. Valerica SPORIȘ, PhD*, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu
Assoc.Prof. Isabela DRAGOMIR, PhD, “Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy
of Sibiu, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu

STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Romania's main security concerns in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

1.1.1. Historical fears

1.1.2. NATO and EU security guarantees

1.1.3. Regional instabilities

1.1.4. Nuclear threats

1.2. Discursive strategies used in conflict-reporting media

2. Corpus, sampling and method

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative analysis

3.2. Qualitative analysis

3.3. Framing the threat – discursive strategies

4. Discussions

CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

CORECON Project (<https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon>)

The present study is part of the project “The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training”, which aims to apply the eclectic toolkit of Critical Discourse Studies to raise public awareness of the extent, techniques, and implications of media technologies and discourses regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, through academic publications and popularization events.

INTRODUCTION

- ✓ This study aims to examine different discursive mechanisms by which the Romanian media reporting on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict **frame the threats that generate the main national security concerns.**
- ✓ It also classifies a range of media narratives into thematic domains, identifying the discursive strategies employed in reporting conflict-related news.
- ✓ It documents the manner in which the main national concerns generated by the **threat** of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict – **historical fears**, **security threats**, **regional instabilities**, **nuclear threats** –, shape public perception and how key entities such as Russia, Ukraine, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and The European Union (EU) are perceived in terms of power and influence.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Q1: How frequent is the use of the lexeme “threat” in our dataset and how can the obtained results be justified?

Q2: What are the discursive strategies employed by Romanian online media to construct and frame the “threat” within the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

H1: The lexeme “threat” (with all its paradigm) has the most entries in the dataset of the present study, since Romania’s main security concerns are generated by threats in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

H2: The Romanian online mass media uses both rhetorical and informative/factual discursive strategies as significant tools to frame **the threat**.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Romania's main security concerns in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

- 1.1.1. **Historical fears** – the geopolitical position and security of Romania in relation to its borders (Catrina, 2024)
- 1.1.2. **NATO and EU Security guarantees** – global and European unity against external threats (Golop, 2024; Thomson et.al, 2023)
- 1.1.3. **Regional instabilities** – local anxieties with respect to sovereignty and external influence (Tudorache & Constantinescu, 2024)
- 1.1.4. **Nuclear threats** – fear of a possible nuclear escalation (Marinescu, Fox, Rodideal, & Marinache, 2024)

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.2. Discursive strategies used in conflict-reporting media

RHETORICAL

Explanation - clarifying ideas, improving arguments
Exemplification - using specific examples to illustrate broader concepts and ideas
Questioning - challenging previous assumptions, encouraging interactive dialogue with the audience.
Rationale/Argumentation - using logical reasoning and structured claims to support a particular viewpoint, thesis, or conclusion
Ridiculing - using mockery to reduce the credibility of the opposite points of view or to draw attention to certain nonsense
Speculating - presenting hypothetical situations as plausible
Manipulation - using emotionally charged language, exaggeration, or biased framing to influence the audience's perception or behaviour

INFORMATIVE / FACTUAL

- **Documenting** - presenting factual, verifiable information to establish credibility and authority
- **Exposing** - revealing hidden suppressed, or underreported facts, motives, or dangers, illustrating contradictions, or identifying misinformation
- **Exploring** - investigating a topic from multiple angles without necessarily reaching a definitive conclusion
- **Covering** - reporting or summarizing events, statements, or developments in a neutral or factual tone
- **Analysing** - breaking down complex events or issues to explain causes, implications, and relationships

2. CORPUS, SAMPLING AND METHOD

- ✓ **Top three most read online newspapers in Romania:**
Libertatea.ro, Adevarul.ro, and Stiripesurse.ro
- ✓ **Citizen trust between 49% and 51%** (*Digital News Report, 2024: 101*)
- ✓ **CORECON Project corpus** - selected according to:
 - **keyword Ukraine (RO)**
 - **relevance of the news**
 - **period February 24, 2022** (the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict) – **February 28, 2024** (date of completion of the compilation of the RO corpus within this project)

2. CORPUS, SAMPLING AND METHOD

CAUSES

(regional) instability
generated by the
Russian-Ukrainian
Conflict

THREAT

CONSEQUENCES

fear
worry/concern

2. CORPUS, SAMPLING AND METHOD

- **“amenințare”/“threat”** = manifesting the intention to cause harm to someone, in order to intimidate them or to obtain something from them;
- **“îngrijorare”/“worry”+“concern”** = both “worry” and “concern” involve a state of unease about potential problems, which differ in intensity and focus. “Worry” is often characterized by anxious, repetitive thoughts about negative outcomes, sometimes leading to feelings of fear or panic, especially when the situation is beyond one’s control. “Concern”, on the other hand, is a more measured and proactive state of mind, involving a focus on a problem with the intention of taking constructive action or making preparations;
- **“frică”+“teamă”/“fear”** = state of being troubled, generated by a real or imaginary threat, a danger that is predicted and likely to happen;
- **“instabilitate”/“instability”** = lack of stability/balance, which has been combined with the concept of **“destabilizare”/“destabilization”** hinting at the effects of the conflict.

2. CORPUS, SAMPLING AND METHOD

Quantitative analysis - LancsBox

- ✓ Filtered subcorpus grammar tokens (Ro language dataset – 1,298,671)
- ✓ Filtered subcorpus texts (Ro language dataset 1,994)
- ✓ Filtered subcorpus grammar tokens (sample dataset – 578,994)
- ✓ Filtered subcorpus texts (sample dataset - 851)
- ✓ KWIC – all occurrences of the selected lexemes – concordance lines (10 tokens to the left/right)

Qualitative analysis - Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

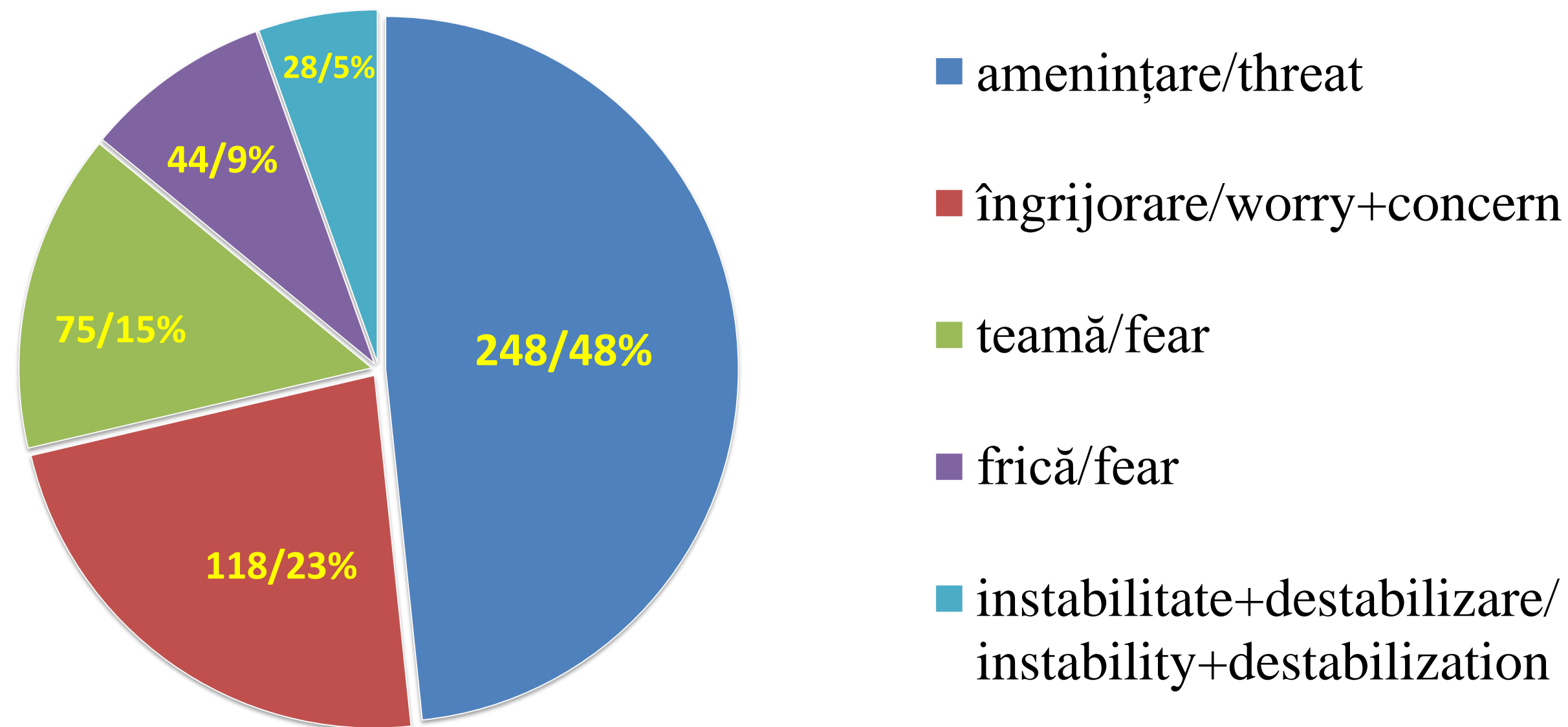
3. RESULTS

3.1. Quantitative analysis

No.	Basic Lexeme (noun)	Filtred subcorpus frequency (no. of occ.)	Filtred subcorpus range (no. of texts)	Adevărul (no. of occ.)	Libertatea (no. of occ.)	Știripesurse (no. of occ.)
1.	amenințare/threat	248	140	123	61	64
2.	îngrijorare/ worry+concern	118	91	48	38	32
3.	teamă/fear	75	57	28	31	16
4.	frică/fear	44	35	21	19	4
5.	instabilitate+destabilizare/ instability+destabilization	28	22	14	7	7
TOTAL		513	345	234	156	123

3. RESULTS

3.1. Quantitative analysis



3. RESULTS

3.2. Qualitative analysis

1. “amenințare”/”threat”

HISTORICAL FEARS	NATO AND EU SECURITY GUARANTEES	REGIONAL INSTABILITIES	NUCLEAR THREATS
“Ukronazismul reprezintă nu mai puțin, ci o amenințare mai mare pentru lume și Rusia decât <i>nazismul german</i> al versiunii hitleriste (...)”/“The Ukronazism represents no less, but a greater threat to the world and Russia than <i>German Nazism</i> of the Hitlerite version.” (<i>Adevărul</i>)	“Pentru că Rusia amenință toată lumea civilizată – lupta se duce acum la granița <i>NATO</i> .”/“Because Russia threatens the entire civilized world – the fight is now going to <i>NATO</i> ’s border.” (<i>Libertatea</i>)	“Deși amenințarea rămâne relativ îndepărtată, <i>țările care se învecinează cu Rusia</i> au început totuși să-și ridice nivelul de pregătire.”/“Although the threat remains relatively remote, <i>countries bordering Russia</i> have nevertheless begun to raise their level of preparedness.” (<i>stiripesurse.ro</i>)	“ Amenințarea lui Putin de a recurge la <i>armamentul nuclear</i> „este un lucru pe care ar trebui să-l luăm foarte în serios, (...)”/“Putin’s threat to resort to <i>nuclear weapons</i> “is something we should take very seriously, (...)” (<i>Adevărul</i>)

3. RESULTS

3.2. Qualitative analysis

2. “îngrijorare”/“worry”+“concern”

HISTORICAL FEARS	NATO AND EU SECURITY GUARANTEES	REGIONAL INSTABILITIES	NUCLEAR THREATS
<p>“(…) o importanță similară, pentru poporul rus, nostalgic al vremurilor imperialiste. Îngrijorător este faptul că pe canalele media oficiale ruse a început (...)” / “(...) of similar importance for the Russian people, nostalgic for imperialist times. What is worrying is that a campaign has already begun on official Russian media channels (...)” (stiripesurse.ro)</p>	<p>“Papa Francisc (...) menționând o conversație pe care a avut-o cu un șef de stat, căruia nu l-a numit, dar care și-ar fi exprimat îngrijorarea că <i>NATO</i> “latră la porțile Rusiei” într-un mod care ar putea duce la război.”/“Pope Francis (...) citing a conversation he had with an unnamed head of state who reportedly expressed concern that <i>NATO</i> was “barking at Russia’s gates” in a way that could lead to war.” (Adevărul)</p>	<p>“De altfel, o analiză a Centrului Euro-Atlantic pentru Reziliență (E-ARC) arată că apropierea Rusiei de România ar trebui să ne îngrijoreze din cel puțin patru motive (...)” / “In fact, an analysis by the Euro-Atlantic Resilience Center (E-ARC) shows that Russia’s rapprochement with Romania should concern us for at least four reasons (...)” (Adevărul)</p>	<p>“Amenințările pe care le face Putin cu <i>bomba nucleară</i> îngrijorează lumea cel mai mult”, este de părere cercetătorul George Epurescu, (...)” / “Putin’s threats with the <i>nuclear bomb</i> worry the world the most” says researcher George Epurescu. (Libertatea)</p>

3. RESULTS

3.2. Qualitative analysis

3. “teamă”/“fear”

HISTORICAL FEARS	NATO AND EU SECURITY GUARANTEES	REGIONAL INSTABILITIES	NUCLEAR THREATS
<p>“Mă tem de apropierea zilei de 9 mai, data la care se sărbătorește <i>Ziua Victoriei în Rusia</i>, un moment care i-ar crea lui Putin oportunitatea perfectă pentru lansarea unei astfel de mișcări decisive, care ar decide soarta războiului.”/“I fear the approach of May 9, the date on which <i>Victory Day is celebrated in Russia</i>, a moment that would create the perfect opportunity for Putin to launch such a decisive move, which would decide the fate of the war. (stiripesurse.ro)</p>	<p>“Se teme Vladimir Putin de un război direct cu <i>NATO</i> sau el caută acest război? (...) Dacă <i>NATO</i> intră în război, vorbim despre un război mondial.”/“(15) “Does Vladimir Putin fear of a direct war with <i>NATO</i> or is he looking for this war? (...) If <i>NATO</i> enters the war, we are talking about a world war.” (Libertatea)</p>	<p>“Mă tem de apropierea zilei de 9 mai, data la care se sărbătorește <i>Ziua Victoriei în Rusia</i>, (...) Ce va face <i>România</i> pentru a-și apăra <i>integritatea teritorială</i> într-un posibil scenariu al redesenării granițelor în zonă?”/“I fear the approach of May 9, the date on which <i>Victory Day is celebrated in Russia</i> (...) What will <i>Romania</i> do to defend its <i>territorial integrity</i> in a possible scenario of redrawing the borders in the area?” (stiripesurse.ro)</p>	<p>“România face cercetări de fizică atomică lângă Moscova, împreună cu rușii. (...) La Dubna profilul este de <i>cercetări nucleare</i> și de aici vine o teamă mai mare dacă să fie continuate colaborările.”/“Romania is conducting atomic physics research near Moscow, together with the Russians. (...) At Dubna, the profile is <i>nuclear research</i> and hence comes a greater fear of continuing the collaborations.” (Libertatea)</p>

3. RESULTS

3.2. Qualitative analysis

4. “frică”/“fear”

HISTORICAL FEARS	NATO AND EU SECURITY GUARANTEES	REGIONAL INSTABILITIES	NUCLEAR THREATS
<p>“Frica de ruși este de înțeles poate din <i>motive istorice</i> dar azi nu se justifică.”/“The fear of Russians is understandable perhaps for <i>historical reasons</i>, but today it is not justified.” (<i>Adevărul</i>)</p>			

3. RESULTS

3.2. Qualitative analysis

6. “instabilitate”/“instability” + “destabilizare”/“destabilization”

HISTORICAL FEARS	NATO AND EU SECURITY GUARANTEES	REGIONAL INSTABILITIES	NUCLEAR THREATS
	<p>“Orice teritoriu iremediabil pierdut în favoarea agresorului denunță slăbiciunea structurală a Occidentului, stabilește potențiala „pace” în condiții nedrepte și îi oferă Kremlinului deopotrivă răgazul de a-și reface arsenalul și perspectiva de a gândi, impenitent, diverse alte scenarii menite să destabilizeze flancul estic al NATO.” / “Any irretrievably lost territory to the aggressor exposes the structural weakness of the West, establishes potential “peace” on unfair terms, and offers the Kremlin both time to rebuild its arsenal and the prospect of unrepentantly considering various other scenarios designed to destabilize NATO’s eastern flank.” (<i>Libertatea</i>)</p>		<p>“Acestor tipuri de amenințări li se adaugă și instabilitatea creată în jurul <i>centralei nucleare</i> electrice de la Zaporojie, Ucraina, cea mai mare instalație de acest fel din Europa și care, încă din primele zile ale invaziei, este sub controlul Rusiei, însă este operată de personalul ucrainean.” / “ These types of threats are compounded by the instability created around the <i>Zaporozhye nuclear power plant</i>, Ukraine, the largest facility of its kind in Europe and which, since the first days of the invasion, has been under Russian control, but is operated by Ukrainian personnel.” (<i>Adevărul</i>)</p>

3. RESULTS

3.3. Framing the THREAT – Discursive strategies



4. DISCUSSIONS – identified discursive strategies

QUESTIONING

- induces uncertainty or suspicion without making direct accusations
- provokes thought

SPECULATING

- fills informational gaps with possibility rather than fact
- presents situations as hypothetical but plausible

MANIPULATION

- deliberate use of language, imagery to influence public perception
- provokes emotional responses
- legitimates aggression and defence

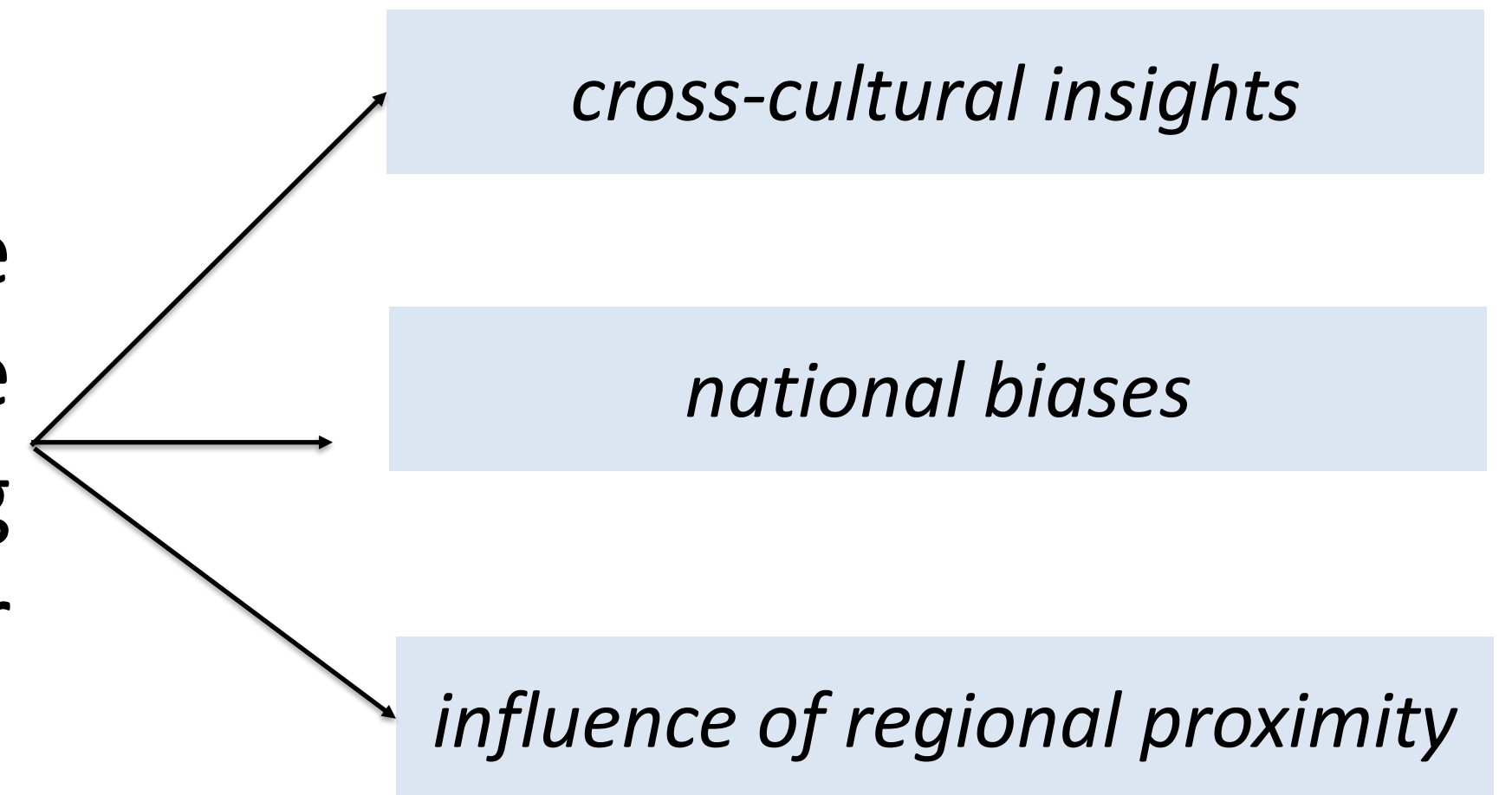
DOCUMENTING

- lends objectivity
- legitimizes narratives
- shapes collective memory

CONCLUSIONS

- ❑ Romanian media does not merely reflect the threat – it constructs and amplifies it through narrative framing and selective emphasis.
- ❑ The results of our analysis answer the research question by validating the hypothesis and identifying which **rhetorical and informative/factual discursive strategies** are used to frame “the threat” within the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

New avenues for research could be explored by conducting a comparative study between the different framing strategies employed by Polish and/or English mass media.



SELECTED REFERENCES

- Afzal, N. (2019). *Discursive Strategies and Media Representation of Conflicts*. In *International Journal of English Linguistics*; 9(2), 1-14.
- Catrina, C. S. (2024). *The Influence of the Ukrainian Conflict on Romanian, Polish and Bulgarian Security and Defence Policies*. In *Perspective Politice*, 17(1-2), 29-48.
- Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, L. (ed). (2023) *Dicționar de pragmatică și de analiză a discursului (DPAD) / Dictionary of pragmatics and discourse analysis*, Iași, Institutul European.
- Golop, V. C. (2024, June). *Dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian war. An analysis of the impact on future security and defence policy*. In *International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI –The complex and dynamic nature of the security environment*. Volume I (pp. 5-14). Carol I National Defence University Publishing House.
- Marinescu, V., Fox, B., Rodideal, A. A., & Marinache, R. (2024). *Media representations of nuclear threats during the Russian invasion of Ukraine*. In *Horyzonty Polityki*, 15(51), 61-80.
- Tudorache, P. and Constantinescu M. (2024). *Enhancing Decision-Making Resilience through Mission Command. The particular case of Ukraine*. In *Czech Military Review* 4(33), 20-36.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2015). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. In D. Tannen, H.E. Hamilton, & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, John Wiley & Sons, 466-485.
- Wornyo, A. A. (2022). *Rhetorical strategy preferences in newspaper editorials*. In *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 9, 1-16.
- (2024) *Digital News Report*, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Contact

 grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon

 grant.corecon@ulbsibiu.ro

Find us on our **social media!**

