

Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

Doctoral School European Paradigm

Summary  
of the Habilitation Thesis  
European Security and Combating Disinformation

CANDIDATE

NATEA Mihaela Daciana, Ph.D., associate professor,

George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy,  
Sciences, and Technology of Târgu Mureş

This habilitation thesis presents the professional development in the field of International Relations and European Studies, the main professional achievements, and career development prospects. The work is structured into two sections which outline the professional training starting from the educational experience and continuing with professional and research activities. In the second section, it presents university management activities and career development prospects, and argues for the ability to coordinate projects and research teams.

## Section I. The Educational, Professional, and Scientific Experience

**The educational experience** involves multidisciplinary studies developed by postgraduate courses and scholarships won both nationally and abroad.

My professional construction in the multidisciplinary field of international relations stems from my bachelor studies, which encompass competencies in history, legal sciences, and international relations, supplemented by studies in public administration.

I completed my master's studies in Public Administration Management in 2010 at Petru Maior University on Targu Mures, Faculty of Economic, Juridical and Administrative Sciences, with a thesis on E-Administration and E-Governance.

I completed the pedagogical module, which contributed to the formation of necessary skills in the educational environment, supplemented over time with other training courses in the field of education sciences, completed at both national and international levels.

I received my PhD in International Relations and European Studies in 2011 from Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, with a doctoral thesis entitled: "Protection and Defense of Rights over Trademarks and Geographical Indications in International Relations."

I received an invitation through an international competition to be a visiting researcher in a program financed by the U.S. Department of State. The participation in the program was funded by the Department of State, with an amount exceeding \$15,000.

**Teaching and Professional Activity.** I have been a full-time lecturer in the field of International Relations and European Studies since 2010 at Petru Maior University, subsequently at UMFST. Since 2019, I have held the position of associate professor in the same field of studies.

I am active in coordinating students, student events, student scientific organizations and I have organized summer schools as a coordinator and have participated in the organizing committee of over 10 summer schools.

I developed my professional career outside the university as well. I held the position of spokesperson. In 2020, I was elected County Council Representative in the Mureş County

Council. Since 2015, I have had constant collaborations with local and regional media, hosting programs on foreign policy topics at ȘtiiTV Television, then at M9 Television, and a permanent program in my university's TV station.

**Institutional University Management Activity and International Recognition.**

Throughout my teaching career, I have held positions that involved university management activities.

In 2015, I was elected Department Director of the Department of History and International Relations, a position I held until 2020, for one term. This role involved coordinating a team that, at its peak, consisted of 20 teaching staff members. I coordinated 3 bachelor programs and 2 master's programs.

I initiated the bachelor program in Security Studies in collaboration with the Special Operations Forces Command, with a team consisting of over 10 teaching staff members.

I was elected in the Faculty Council and the University Senate. This year, I was re-elected for a 5-year term.

Since 2020, I have been serving as the Deputy Director of the Department of International Relations at UMFST, overseeing the university's bilateral and inter-university agreements.

In 2022, I began implementing (as project manager) the European research project "Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on European Security and Disinformation in Multicultural Societies" (involving 10 researchers from both domestic and international backgrounds).

In December 2023, I was selected from nearly 600 candidates by the European Commission to be part of the Science Diplomacy Working Group. Specifically, I am part of Working Group 1: Using science diplomacy strategically to tackle geopolitical challenges in a fragmented, multipolar world. Within this group, I contribute to the development of proposals regarding the strategic use of Science Diplomacy to combat disinformation.

**My research activity is coherent and aligned with the thematic areas of International Relations and European Studies.** I have addressed topics such as international and regional governance in the field of intellectual property rights, human rights, or health policies. I have analyzed how various cultural, legal, and economic aspects influence international policies. I have published substantial research that examines how states present themselves internationally, how they shape their image, and how they construct national narratives using historical, economic, social, cultural, or even legal arguments when international disputes arise. I have analyzed the struggle between international companies that influence or are influenced by state interests.

In the context of the merger with the University of Medicine, I have addressed aspects of international health policies from both a global and European governance perspective. I have observed how communication affects state policies, how states communicate, and what international impact communication may have. I have studied and published papers related to hybrid warfare, especially disinformation, and how international and European governance in this field is developing.

From an analytical viewpoint, my research activity can be categorized as follows:

1. Contributions to the Study of International Security, Regional Security, and the Role of Intellectual Property in the International System:
  - a. Intellectual Property in International Relations
  - b. EU Political Projects in Eastern Europe: Impact on Intellectual Property
  - c. Intellectual Property and Power Relations in the International System
  - d. Intellectual Property and Medical Tourism in an International Context
  - e. Brand and Managerial Innovation in International Relations
2. Contributions to the Study of Strategic Communication and International Security
  - a. Brand and National Identity in International Relations
  - b. Branding, Communication, Disinformation
  - c. Stratcom and Fake News from the Perspective of International Relations
  - d. Digital Diplomacy
  - e. The Impact of Communication from the Perspective of International Relations
  - f. European Security and Governance in Health
  - g. Medical Tourism from a New Perspective in International Relations
3. Contributions to the Study of European Security in the Context of Hybrid Warfare, Combating Disinformation, and Education for Resilience
  - a. Education and Research for Resilience and Combating Disinformation
  - b. Multilayered Disinformation Concerning the War in Ukraine
  - c. Security and Reconstruction in Europe
  - d. From Hybrid Warfare to Fake News in the Context of the War in Ukraine

Regarding my professional activity several distinguished national and international professors praised the quality and relevance of my scientific research.

Concerning the book *Trademarks and Geographical Indication in the International Relations System*, professor Cornel Sigmirean, PhD noted: "In this context, the book 'Trademarks and Geographical Indications in the International Relations System' stands out for: the novelty of the research, with a unique approach from a triple perspective: legal, historical,

and international law; the timeliness of the subject, especially for Eastern states undergoing restructuring, whose references are not yet clearly defined. Even in Romania, the institutions and organizations meant to manage the issues of registered trademarks and geographical indications are not always prepared to face the challenges or capture trends in the field; the work can serve as a major reference guide, combining aspects related to economics, marketing, and international law; the author's research capacity, utilizing websites and specialized literature, acquainting us with new research and documentation methods as alternatives to traditional sources of information."

Associate Professor Dr. Habil. Simion Costea, in analyzing the volume, notes: "In her book, 'Trademarks and Geographical Indications in the International Relations System,' the author Mihaela Natea presents the development of the international system in the field of intellectual property. The book analyzes the behavior of international actors such as states, the construction of an international system of laws and international organizations, and the economic focus of companies worldwide in this domain. The approach is made from various angles of international relations, European studies, law, economics, providing a unique perspective on the subject." In the expert's opinion, "the book offers a rare perspective of international relations in a domain primarily studied from a legal or economic standpoint, adding valuable research to academic literature."

The scientific paper "The Ana Aslan Case: Intellectual Property as a Driver for Sustainable Medical Tourism," received the **Best Paper Award** at an international Conference in Sweden. The article discusses how the patenting of new treatment techniques and the interaction of certain substances, such as procaine, with the human body had a significant effect on generating a brand for Romanian medicine through Dr. Ana Aslan. The institute bearing her name, along with innovative techniques, created a true brand for Romanian medicine and the country as a whole.

The paper, cited as a reference article in specialized literature, including "The United Nations Encyclopedia on Sustainable Development Goals, Health and Well-being", discusses medical tourism and merits the distinction of being the first in the literature to link intellectual property to a phenomenon of medical tourism, thus opening up development opportunities for those wishing to transform certain areas into medical tourism destinations.

Regarding the scientific value and novelty of the volume "Redefining European Security in a Post COVID-19 World. Education and Research for Resilience and Combating Disinformation," published at L'Harmattan, Paris, France I will present the passages from the appreciation report of the volume found in the preface written by the prestigious historian Hedi

Saidi, agrégé d'Histoire, Honorary President of the journal "L'Europe Unie," Knight of the Legion of Honor, Knight of Academic Palms, who provides a description of the volume, a contextualization in the literature, and, last but not least, highlights the innovative elements that this volume brings to the study of European security, the concept of resilience, and how these can be developed through research and education.

"The historian is like a miner from depth. It extracts the data from the depth of the ground and brings it to the surface for another specialist, economist, climatologist, sociologist, to exploit." - E. Leroy-Ladurie

It is a great privilege for me, but also a great responsibility, to present this excellent and captivating volume dedicated to Europe, brilliantly written by Mihaela Daciana Natea.

With this beautiful volume (writes Hedi Saidi), the author promotes a grandiose vision with common sense and pragmatism. Here she develops intelligent, innovative, and precise ideas about the great subjects of our time. Mihaela is convinced that Europe is the future, its security is an evidence, and an absolute necessity.

This volume, written with passion and reason, aims to contribute to the formation of citizens to understand issues of European and international security, capable of using fundamental and operational knowledge in this new field of action of the European Union and capable of developing expertise for practitioners, as well as analysts.

The technical skills targeted in this book are mainly precise and updated knowledge about the functioning of the EU, its interaction with other international actors, its common foreign and security policy, and European cooperation in internal security, especially in the face of terrorist threats. Mihaela demonstrates with clarity that she has a very solid knowledge of the professions and the institutional environment of the EU, including the international framework in which its common foreign and security policy operates.

An expert, she understands the challenges of internal security and the external action of the EU, with a focus on its external and security policy. She has deep professional expertise and attitude.

The structural changes underway in the system of international relations, rooted in the power games between the main actors, have been strongly felt during the COVID-19 crisis and the complex dynamics it has generated. These structural changes have been identified when states began to define their security in a more realistic and neo-realist approach, as each country had to face the challenges of the pandemic. The European Union has identified several guidelines that required additional solutions, as asymmetrical dependencies were identified that affected not only one or more member states of the EU but also threatened European security.

The philosophy of EU funds has been adapted as states needed concrete solutions to strengthen their resilience and pave the way for rapid recovery.

Overlaying the health crisis, the invasion of Ukraine has generated other levels of threats and risks to European security, confronting states with unprecedented decisions. Hybrid threats have been amplified by military threats. Disinformation has become an information war and it has been proved that critical infrastructures are vulnerable to a wide range of warfare tools.

In this context, the European Union had to react and reassess its security policy in the east. The enlargement process took a different turn, offering the Eastern member states of the Eastern Partnership the opportunity to develop their own European perspective. Thus, Ukraine and Moldova became candidate countries.

The pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are disruptive elements in the multidimensional approach to European security. While measures are being taken, there are still significant aspects that need to be covered. In this context, we must emphasize that the concept of resilience is increasingly used in security issues. The use of the concept, sometimes excessive, aims to define the response of the entire society to threats and its ability to recover afterwards. Although we recognize the progress made, we need to ask ourselves if the right tools are being used and what could be done more.

This book explores four directions. The first one refers to how resilience is used and how it has grown in European security policies. This aspect is followed in connection with the use of the resilience concept in relation to disinformation, education, or research. The second one follows the construction of disinformation campaigns by Russia. This chapter argues that the current campaign has its roots in communist rhetoric, concepts, and methods of propagation, the only difference being the targeted audience, as online platforms offered new ways of propagation. At the end of the chapter, a case study is presented showing how Russia's propaganda can reach countries in Eastern and Central Europe, thus exposing security risks. The third chapter argues that it is necessary to reassess education and to reflect more deeply on what education should mean today, especially considering the online environment and hybrid threats. We argue that there is a need for a new concept: education for resilience, and this concept should cover knowledge that is not included in the formal education system. The last chapter examines how resilience as a scientific subject is addressed in the European Union's research policy. The study also tracks the impact of research policy reform in the Eastern Partnership countries.

At the end of each chapter, solutions and conclusions for future research are included. This book presents several remarkable aspects (writes Professor Hedi Saidi): it links current disinformation campaigns in Eastern Europe to communist propaganda; identifies the means used to spread disinformation; identifies gaps in the education system exploited by disinformation campaigns, and identifies areas in which Horizon Europe should further develop.

The book has a remarkable number of sources used to document research issues and uses scientific and applied expertise, as well as security policies and reforms. Mihaela, cultivated, open, and determined supporter.”

## **Section II: Ability to Coordinate Research Projects and Research Teams**

As the head of the department, I have overseen the institutional activities of education and research at the Department of History and Political Science (2015-2020), which, at its peak, comprised 20 teaching staff. I coordinated research topics, projects, and the research strategy of the department, contributing to the development of the research strategy of the Faculty of Sciences and Letters. In this regard, I correlated historical research with international relations and political sciences, emphasizing interdisciplinarity and European trends in the field.

With the establishment of the Security Studies specialization in 2016, I coordinated educational and research activities in correlation with the concerns of our partners within the Special Operations Command. Thus, we expanded our research area to include resilience, hybrid warfare, European security, NATO, EU-NATO cooperation, educational policies to combat disinformation, and other topics of common interest.

As Deputy Director of the Department of International Relations at UMFST, I participate in developing the university's internationalization strategy by initiating and developing bilateral agreements that concern not only the educational component but also research. In this regard, my activities actively aim to increase the university's participation in international projects, including within the Horizon Europe program.

I actively collaborate in coordinating scientific journals, serving on the editorial board as managing editor, secretary, member, or associate editor of journals. From 2009 to 2011, I was the secretary and a member of the editorial board of the *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior, Series Historia* journal. During my tenure, in addition to the natural activities related to the life of the journal, I managed to index it in databases such as EBSCO, DOAJ, CEEOL, and Index Copernicus. Since 2017, I have been a member of the editorial team of the *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior, Series Oeconomica* journal.



I am honored to contribute decisively to the success of the French journal L'Europe Unie, known in academic circles as an academic project of high quality, transnational, multidisciplinary, bringing together universities, established authors, and bright young people from numerous countries. The journal has published over 20 issues since 2007 and has built serious prospects for the future.

Since 2018, I have been a member of the editorial board of the L'Europe Unie/United Europe Journal. The journal is indexed in several international databases, including CEEOL, Erih Plus, Ulrich, and Mirabel. Within the journal, I serve as the managing editor, where I successfully handle indexing in databases, especially Erih Plus, Ulrich, Mirabel, contribute to the development of editorial policy, and engage with authors and experts who review articles. As the editor of several issues of the journal, I actively participate in evaluating articles at the editorial board level, an activity preceding the submission of articles for review.

As the project director of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on European Security and Disinformation in Multicultural Societies since 2021, I coordinate a team of 10 researchers from Romania and abroad (Republic of Moldova, Georgia, France, Belgium) contributing to the project's implementation. Being a prestigious EU-funded project, we have managed to bring visibility to our research not only at national level, but also internationally through articles published in prestigious international publishers, journals indexed in international databases including ISI, and through educational and research activities conducted in over 4 countries.

"MY EU Future. Eu 4 Youth Opportunities" workshop has already been attended by over 500 students in the targeted countries. The conference on May 9, 2023, brought together over 50 researchers from 9 states, spanning 3 continents, in a hybrid format, both physically and online, and the summer schools included in the project gathered students and lecturers from Romania and abroad.

I have organized conferences, summer schools, book launches, workshops, and participated as an expert in several EU events.

**External academic expert for the European Commission - coordination activity in the research field.** I collaborate directly with EU institutions in Brussels as an expert and rapporteur in the research field:

- I participated in the Eastern Partnership Panel on Research & Innovation and I am a rapporteur and expert for the Working Group Meeting on Research and Innovation.

I have participated as an expert in:

- "Improving skills anticipation approaches in the age of digital data and Industry 4.0" - September 27-28, 2018, Dublin, Ireland, organized by the European Training Foundation

(ETF), European Commission, Eastern Partnership, and Department of Education and Skills, Ireland.

- Webinar on Underwater Cultural Heritage and the Exploration of Potential Sites in the Black Sea, April 13, 2021 - Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea – 2021, coordination of the Republic of Turkey, European Union, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Turkey.

- "2019 EaP Forum on work-based learning (WBL)" Lviv, Ukraine.

I have participated as a Keynote Speaker at:

- "Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Orientation Course", Timisoara 2019, conference organized by the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) Brussels, the National College of Home Affairs (CNAI) within Alexandru Ioan Cuza Police Academy, Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the West University of Timișoara (UVT).

- International event "Stronger together: Building up security through cooperation, health, research, and innovation", organized by the European Commission, The University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Targu Mureș, and "Gheorghe Șincai" Institute of the Romanian Academy, as well as an event of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

As the president of the organizing committee or as a member of the organizing committee, I have organized over 30 international and national conferences, summer schools, book launches, and other types of scientific and educational events.

I have organized events as coordinator/chair/president of the organizing committee. Among them:

- In 2019, I organized the conference "Stronger together: Building up security through cooperation, health, research, and innovation," organized by the European Commission, the University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Târgu Mureș, as well as the "Gheorghe Șincai" Institute of the Romanian Academy. The conference was an event of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The conference served as a platform for debates on university priorities, such as strengthening cooperation at the university level, developing research networks, and multinational teams of researchers intended to respond to the need for innovation, both in the health field and in other domains. Thus, we aim to discuss the role of the university in ensuring security at the national and regional levels through research development. We had guests from EU member states such as

Italy, Belgium, France, Bulgaria, Poland, and countries of the Eastern Partnership: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.

- The Jean Monnet conference "Redefining European Security in a Post COVID 19 World" on May 9, 2023, proposed a topical subject closely related to the structural transformations affecting the organization and functioning of the state, as well as the European Union in the post-COVID period. Presentations focused on various approaches regarding the role of digital transformations in today's society and the new security challenges in a complex geopolitical, media, economic, political, and administrative context. The conference brought together over 50 participants from 3 continents and 9 countries.

The **future research topics** that I intend to address together with doctoral students fall within the subjects tackled so far and align with the practical experience I have gained as an external academic expert in my activities within the European Union. There are several major research themes on which I plan to focus my attention in the future:

- Hybrid warfare, informational warfare, disinformation, informational terrorism, and fake news.
- Education for resilience and combating disinformation.
- Diplomacy and resilience through research.
- Diplomacy and science for combating disinformation.
- Strategic communication.
- International and European policies in the Eastern neighborhood.
- Populism, radicalization, and disinformation.
- Security in Eastern Europe.
- US foreign policy and combating disinformation.
- Global governance for combating disinformation.

In the future, I aim to continue collaborating with European institutions by participating in the formulation of recommendations within my area of expertise, for the development of public policies aimed at combating disinformation and hybrid warfare. Engaging with the practical aspects of policymaking and implementation will help me channel my research and that of the doctoral students I will supervise towards priority areas at the international level. This opens up the possibility of accessing European research funds. Furthermore, by promoting this engagement, research is brought closer to practice, and therefore has a real impact on society.