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Faculty of History and Philosophy
Doctoral School of International Relations and Security Studies**

HABILITATION THESIS

SUMMARY

The power of Culture and the Impact of Paradiplomacy in International Relations and Border Regions

CANDIDATE

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2026

This habilitation thesis highlights the professional trajectory of the author in the fields of international relations and European studies and aims to demonstrate the coherence of the academic path, the relevance of the scientific contributions, and the author's capacity to actively engage in contemporary research dynamics at both national and international levels.

The structure of the thesis is organized into two main sections. The first section presents the author's educational background and professional development, followed by an analysis of teaching activity and scientific contributions, with a focus on the major research directions pursued. It also highlights the theoretical and practical foundations of the studied fields, as well as their relevance in the context of contemporary transformations of the international system. The second section is dedicated to the capacity for coordinating research activities, presenting experiences in managing academic teams and projects, involvement in competitions for securing funding, and future research directions. Within this framework, the competencies acquired for coordinating projects and research teams are discussed, along with the contributions to the development of the academic and scientific environment.

Section 1. The Educational, Professional, and Scientific Experience

The educational experience reflects a coherent progression from initial training in history to interdisciplinary specialization in international relations and European studies. The methodological foundation acquired through historical studies—critical analysis of sources and understanding of political and institutional contexts—provided the basis for the subsequent focus on diplomacy and international relations, representing not a rupture but a natural continuity in the academic path.

A defining moment in this development was the international academic experience at the University of Coimbra, which contributed to the development of comparative skills and a deeper understanding of European international relations. Doctoral studies further reinforced this direction through the analysis of Romanian–Portuguese diplomatic relations during the interwar period, facilitating the understanding of classical diplomatic mechanisms and highlighting the role of culture not only as an expression of identity but also as an instrument of influence and cooperation in the international system.

Subsequent research activities, supported by participation in international conferences, research projects, and professional development programs, strengthened a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective on contemporary international relations. Overall, this educational and scientific trajectory provides the theoretical and methodological foundation for current

research focused on cultural diplomacy, paradiplomacy, and European border regions, with particular emphasis on their cultural dimensions.

The teaching and professional activity reflects a progressive and coherent academic development, characterized by the continuous integration of instruction with research in the fields of international relations and European studies. The academic trajectory, which began in 2004 and was reinforced through successive positions as teaching assistant, lecturer, and university professor, demonstrates the ongoing development of pedagogical and scholarly competencies. The portfolio of courses has expanded from foundational areas, such as the history of international relations and foreign policy, to contemporary topics, including cultural diplomacy, cultural strategies, security studies, and the analysis of European borders, with course content constantly updated and adapted to the dynamics of the international system.

A defining element of the teaching activity is the integration of theoretical and practical dimensions, through the use of interactive methods and study visits to diplomatic missions and consular offices, designed to familiarize students with the realities of the diplomatic profession. Involvement in coordinating the student scientific circle *“20th–21st Century International Relations and Diplomacy”*, as well as ongoing tutoring and mentoring activities, has contributed to fostering a rigorous academic culture and encouraging student participation in research, publications, and conferences. The organization of summer schools and academic events has further supported the development of both theoretical and practical skills.

At the institutional level, university management activities demonstrate active involvement in internationalization and academic development. Holding positions such as member of the faculty or departmental council, president of the Faculty’s International Relations Committee, departmental Erasmus coordinator, and program coordinator for RISE has contributed both to administrative and institutional consolidation and to the development of international partnerships and the integration of European educational standards. Experience in coordinating European projects, particularly within the Jean Monnet programs, as well as work as an ARACIS expert evaluator, reflects strong competencies in academic management, quality assurance, and research team coordination, contributing to institutional visibility and the advancement of the field of international relations.

The research activity in the fields of international relations, European studies, and security reflects a constant focus on understanding contemporary geopolitical transformations and their regional and global implications. The scientific approach has been interdisciplinary, integrating political, cultural, and security dimensions, highlighting the interdependencies between them and how they influence the behavior of states and non-state actors. The complex

analysis of contemporary international relations has been shaped by profound changes in the global system over recent decades, such as globalization, regionalization, the emergence of subnational actors, and shifts in the dynamics of international power. Within this context, the research activity has focused on identifying mechanisms of interaction between states and regions, as well as the role of civil society, cultural institutions, and local actors in processes of transnational cooperation.

The main research directions focus on three complementary areas.

1.Culture as an Instrument of Soft Power in the International System

Contributions to the Study of Diplomacy and International Relations (20th–21st Century)

- ✓ Culture and the Projection of Influence in International Relations
- ✓ Culture and International Security: Role, Implications, and Vulnerabilities
- ✓ Actors and Mechanisms of Cultural Diplomacy, a subchapter in which I discussed education, religion, cultural networks, and civil society

2.Paradiplomacy and the Role of Subnational Actors in International Relations

- ✓ Paradiplomacy in the Context of Globalization and Regionalization
- ✓ Subnational Actors in Contemporary Diplomacy, where I addressed current topics such as the paradiplomacy of European autonomous regions and the city as a European and global actor, with two case studies: Oradea and Sibiu

3.European Borders: Space of Interaction, Identity, and Cooperation

- ✓ The Border as a Space of Identity and Cultural Interaction
- ✓ Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue in the European Space
- ✓ Culture and Regional Development in Border Areas

The first research direction is dedicated to analyzing culture as an instrument of soft power in the international system, with a particular focus on cultural diplomacy. The approach examines how resources such as cultural heritage, education, religion, and cultural networks contribute to the exercise of influence in international relations. The research findings highlight that cultural diplomacy goes beyond the function of promoting national identity, playing a significant role in conflict prevention, the consolidation of mutual trust, and the development of international relations in a context characterized by interdependence and global competition.

The study combines theoretical analysis, aimed at clarifying the conceptual framework of diplomacy and soft power, with an applied component based on relevant case studies at both European and global levels. In this context, the difficulties of conceptualizing diplomacy in international relations are emphasized, as well as the importance of integrating the cultural dimension into mechanisms of global influence. At the same time, the contribution of both

institutional and non-state actors is underlined, with education, religion, cultural networks, and civil society collectively shaping complementary instruments that support intercultural dialogue and international cooperation.

I mention here a few relevant studies for this chapter, including my doctoral dissertation, published in 2011 - „Relații diplomatice româno-portugheze (1919–1933). Martinho de Brederode, ambasador la București”; articole publicate web of science - Alina Stoica, (2011), „The diplomat Martinho de Brederode and the Romanian – Portuguese Cultural Relations”, in *Transylvanian Review*, nr.3, p.97-109; Alina Stoica, Karla Melinda Barth (2025), „The contribution of education and cultural diplomacy to strengthening civil society in the Republic of Moldova”, *Civil Szemle, ISI Journal*, 22(1), 139-155; Alina Stoica, Karla Melinda Barth (2025), „Cultural Diplomacy and European Integration: The Role of Education and Civil Society in Romania and the Republic of Moldova”, in *Politice Vedy*, vol.28, nr.2.

The second research direction focuses on the phenomenon of paradiplomacy and the role of subnational actors—regions, cities, and other territorial entities—in international relations. The analysis highlights the impact of globalization and regionalization on the expansion of their participation in international dynamics, through the development of transnational partnerships and the promotion of their own interests, as well as their contribution to shaping regional and European cooperation.

The applied dimension is supported by involvement in relevant international projects, such as the Jean Monnet Module (2012–2015) and the ICMEEB project, funded by the European Commission, as well as by activities carried out within the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence EUROINCLUS, which facilitated the correlation between the theoretical framework and research and academic training activities.

I highlight here several edited volumes and studies that reflect my interest in this topic: Alina Stoica, Ioan Horga, Mircea Brie, *Cultural Diplomacy at the Eastern and Western Borders of the European Union*, Universitatea din Oradea, 2015, ISBN 978-606-10-1570-2; Alina Stoica, Ioan Horga, Maria Manuela Tavares Ribeiro, *Culture and Paradiplomatic Identity. Instruments in Sustaining EU Policies*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, 327 p., ISBN: 978-1-4438-8734-2; Alina Stoica, Alina Oros (2014), „Social Borders at the Edge of EU. Canary Islands, Reunion, Guiana and Azores”, in *EuroTimes. The Security Dimension of European Frontiers vs, the Legitimacy of Political Priorities of EU and EU Members States National Preferences*, nr.18, Oradea University Press, pp. 69-87,; Alina Stoica, Luminita Soproni, „Paradiplomacy of City as European and Global Player” (2022), *Crisia, Actors, Mechanisms and Levels of Influence in the EU Decision-Making* (proceedings of the Jean

Monnet International Conference, May, Oradea, Romania), Alina Brihan, Gabriela Gaudenhof, Ioan Horga, Supliment nr. 1, Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor, Oradea, ISSN 1016-2798 (Erich Plus).

The third research direction focuses on the European border space, analyzed as an area of cultural, identity-based, and socio-economic interaction, including the eastern border of the European Union, both internal and external. The research addresses challenges generated by regional conflicts, such as the Russo-Ukrainian war, the brain drain from the Republic of Moldova, and its process of accession to the European Union, highlighting how cultural identity, intercultural dialogue, and cross-border cooperation contribute to strengthening relations between communities and to regional development.

Border areas are approached as social and cultural laboratories, where multiple identities are constructed and mechanisms of cooperation and integration are tested. The analysis, based on comparative studies of cultural diversity, migration, and regional policies, reveals the contribution of these processes to maintaining regional stability and cohesion, emphasizing the essential role of culture and cultural diplomacy in addressing contemporary challenges.

Some of the most relevant studies for this research direction include: Alina Stoica, "The Republic of Moldova and the European Future: The Dynamics of EU Accession Negotiations", in *Analele Universității din Oradea. Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*. Editura Universității din Oradea, Suppliment - *The Enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans*, eds. Istvan Polgar, Mircea Brie, 2025, ISSN 2067-3647; Bianca Larisa Gaidos, Alina Stoica, *Tensions and Ties: Cooperation, Diplomacy, and Conflict on the EU's Eastern Frontier*, in *Eurolimes. Cooperation, Diplomacy and War at the Eastern Border of the European Union*, edited by Alina Stoica, Jaroslav Usak, Tepercs Karoly, nr.35-36, Oradea University Press, 2024, ISSN 1841-9259; Alina Stoica, "Strengthening Social Resilience through Cultural Diplomacy at the Eastern European Union Border", in *EUROINCLUS*, nr.1, Editura Universității din Oradea, 2025, ISSN 3119-9380; Alina Stoica, Cosmin Chiriac (2025), "The Dynamics of Moldovan Citizens' Perceptions of EU Accession. A Multidimensional Approach", in *Romanian Journal of the European Affairs*, vol.25., nr.2, pp.89-110, Institutul European din Romania.

The research results are reflected in a significant number of academic publications, articles, and edited volumes indexed in prestigious databases, both nationally and internationally, as well as in presentations at national and international conferences. The scientific activity has been consistently integrated into the educational process, contributing to

the updating of curricular content and to fostering a critical perspective among students, through their involvement in projects and applied studies.

At the same time, the research has been oriented toward generating societal impact, by supporting the development of public policies and promoting strategies for regional and international cooperation. An essential component is the development and consolidation of academic networks at the European and global levels, with international collaborations facilitating the exchange of best practices, the integration of research projects into European standards, and the academic mobility of students and faculty members.

Overall, the scientific trajectory highlights a coherent integration between the theoretical and applied dimensions of research, between the analysis of the international context and educational engagement, shaping a solid academic profile focused on understanding the complexity of international relations and promoting diplomacy, transnational cooperation, and public policies at both national and global levels.

Section 2. The capacity to coordinate research projects and research teams

Coordinating research teams for me represents a process aimed at creating an academic environment that fosters the development of both students' and researchers' competencies. In the context of transformations and the internationalization of higher education, I consider students to be the most important resource, and my teaching and research activities are centered on promoting their active involvement in interdisciplinary projects and research.

As a member of the Faculty Council of History, International Relations, Political Science, and Communication Studies, as well as of the Departmental Council of International Relations and European Studies, I supported research coordination and interdisciplinary collaboration among departments. Later, as President of the Faculty's International Relations Committee and Erasmus Coordinator, I facilitated the internationalization of the faculty, promoting Erasmus K131 and K171 mobilities for academic staff, administrative personnel, and students, covering both teaching and research components, with the aim of expanding the university's participation in international projects.

Within the Jean Monnet Module – *Cultural Diplomacy at the Eastern and Western Borders of the European Union* (2012–2015), I coordinated a team of four professors from Romania and Portugal throughout the project, organizing two international conferences that brought specialists to Oradea from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Moldova, Ukraine, and France.

As a result of my previous experience, I initiated applications for three additional Jean Monnet Modules, all of which were successfully funded, in which I was an active member. The first is Jean Monnet Module 575549-EPP-1-2016-1 RO-EPPJMO-MODULE, “One Europe – Unified Labor Market Through Career”, implemented within the Department of Psychology at the University of Oradea. The second is Jean Monnet Module 620113-EPP-1-2020-1-BO-EPPJMO-MODULE, “EU Cultural Diplomacy in the Andean Community”, carried out at the Universidad Mayor de San Simón, Cochabamba, Bolivia. The third is “Democracy for YOU in the EU”, implemented at the University of Coimbra, Portugal. All these modules operate in related areas, addressing themes such as cultural diplomacy, paradiplomacy, and/or borders.

Currently, I am a member of two projects funded by the European Commission: the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence (EUROINCLUS) – Identity, Security and Inclusivity in Border Areas of South East Europe, implemented at the University of Oradea, and the Jean Monnet Network ENLARGE, a project initiated by the University of Bologna, Italy, joined by 27 other universities worldwide, including the University of Oradea. In this context, I represent the Department of International Relations and European Studies. This project is dedicated to teaching and research activities, significantly contributing to the development of academic cooperation and to strengthening expertise in the field of international relations and European studies.

In my teaching activity, I apply the principles of student-centered learning, encouraging active student engagement in the process of knowledge acquisition. The curriculum is continuously developed through the introduction of new courses at both undergraduate and master’s levels, as well as through the annual updating and revision of course syllabi, in order to maintain the relevance and quality of the educational process.

Students with research potential are supported through the framework provided by the student scientific circle “International Relations and Diplomacy (20th–21st Century)” and through their involvement in conferences, both in organizational roles and as presenters, thus facilitating the development of critical thinking and communication skills. For students enrolled in the Master’s program in Regional Development and Institutional Communication, coordinated together with my colleague Luminița Șoproni, the focus is placed on research orientation and preparation for doctoral studies.

The objectives of my teaching activity include the continuous adaptation of courses to socio-economic dynamics, the development of educational infrastructure, the organization of internships, and the enhancement of student mobility, with the aim of training competent

researchers and involving them in national and international projects. The pedagogical strategy aims to strengthen the teacher–student partnership through collaboration and trust, to expand tutoring activities, and to organize an annual student conference in the fields of International Relations, European Studies, and Security Studies.

My editorial activity includes coordinating and participating in the editorial boards of scientific journals, as executive editor or board member, including the department's publications RISE – Annals of the University of Oradea, Series International Relations and European Studies, Eurolimes, and Inclusivity, all indexed in international databases such as ERIH Plus. My involvement has focused on developing editorial policies, managing relations with authors and reviewers, and coordinating special issues, including *The Cultural Frontiers of Europe* (2010), *Cross-border Governance and the Evolution of Borders* (2013), and *Cooperation, Diplomacy and War at the Eastern Border of the European Union* (2024) for the journal *Eurolimes* of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, Institute for Euroregional Studies Oradea–Debrecen.

My activity will continue through involvement in evaluation processes as an ARACIS expert, further strengthening my contribution to the development of academic standards and to the international visibility of research and education in the field of international relations.

Future Applications for European Projects

Building on my experience in coordinating and implementing **Jean Monnet projects**, as well as managing multidisciplinary and multinational research teams, I intend to further consolidate my activity by applying for new European funding programs that support both fundamental and applied research.

My primary focus will be on participating in **Horizon Europe** calls, with an emphasis on societal security, democratic resilience, combating disinformation, and strengthening cooperation in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood. The experience gained through the **Jean Monnet Center of Excellence** and related projects provides a solid foundation for developing competitive international consortia in the field of European security.

Simultaneously, I plan to continue applying within **Erasmus+** (Jean Monnet Actions, Cooperation Partnerships, and Alliances for Innovation) to develop sustainable academic networks and innovative educational programs in international relations, security studies, and disinformation prevention. In this context, I have already submitted an application for the Jean Monnet Module “*Creating Healthy and Sustainable Communities Through Military*

Brownfields Reuse: A Special Focus on Ukraine”, in partnership with **V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University**, Ukraine, awaiting the competition results.

I also aim to engage in **COST initiatives** and projects funded through **European Structural and Investment Funds**, focusing on developing research networks, educational infrastructure, and institutional research capacity.

Moreover, I plan to leverage partnerships already established through Jean Monnet projects and collaborations with European institutions, such as the **Jean Monnet Center of Excellence (EUROINCLUS) – Identity, Security and Inclusivity in Border Areas of South East Europe**, to develop joint applications under programs dedicated to internationalization and academic cooperation, including interdisciplinary initiatives connecting research, education, and public policy development.

Through these efforts, I aim not only to attract financial resources but also to consolidate institutional standing in European research networks, enhance international visibility, and train a new generation of researchers capable of addressing contemporary challenges in international relations and European studies.

Future Research Topics

Building on previous research and aligned with the strategic priorities of the European Union, my future scientific activity will focus on thematic areas relevant to **European security, democratic resilience, and global governance**, designed to generate scientific impact and practical applicability in public policy, while facilitating access to competitive European funding.

A priority research direction is **hybrid warfare, disinformation, and information security**, with an emphasis on influence mechanisms and manipulation strategies within Europe and its Eastern Neighborhood. The research will develop analytical models and operational tools to support policies combating disinformation, in alignment with European initiatives. Closely related, studies will address **societal resilience and education for countering disinformation**, through innovative methodologies and intervention tools adapted to the European context.

Another strategic axis focuses on **cultural diplomacy, paradiplomacy, and the role of local actors in border regions**, aiming to develop cross-border cooperation models and leverage culture as a tool for integration and security. Research will also cover **strategic communication at the European level**, analyzing interactions between EU institutions, member states, and citizens to counter populism, radicalization, and Euroscepticism.

Security in Eastern Europe and **EU policies in the Eastern Neighborhood** constitute another relevant field, highlighting societal vulnerabilities in the face of recent conflicts, information flows, and geopolitical pressures. Simultaneously, transformations driven by globalization, digitalization, and transnational mobility underscore the importance of non-state actors and paradiplomacy—especially in border regions—for fostering a cohesive Europe.

In the context of the proliferation of disinformation and recent crises, there is a clear need for **integrated communication and educational strategies for resilience**, essential for strengthening citizens' trust in institutions and protecting the public sphere. The absence of such mechanisms can exacerbate populism, radicalization, and social fragmentation.

Within this framework, the proposed research addresses pressing societal needs and has the potential to contribute both to the advancement of scientific knowledge and to the formulation of effective public policies. By integrating theoretical and applied dimensions and connecting with international research networks, these thematic directions can generate significant academic, institutional, and societal impact, consolidating the role of research in understanding and managing profound transformations in the international order.

My entire research and teaching activity is oriented toward impact on the academic and socio-economic community. By involving students and doctoral candidates in projects and conferences, and through collaboration with local authorities and the business environment, I ensure knowledge transfer and facilitate graduates' integration into the labor market. Research results are integrated both methodologically and in content, contributing to the development of practical and theoretical competencies. The visibility of my work will be strengthened through continuous publication in prestigious international journals, academic volumes, and active participation in international projects and conferences, enhancing the reputation of myself, my department, and the university I represent.