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An increasing cooperation between Vilnius and Bucharest: the reflection of Lithuania in Romanian media

The purpose of this article is to analyse how the most read Romanian media outlets (Libertatea, Digi24, Știrile Pro TV, Adevărul, Click!) were reporting news about Lithuania in the period between 24 February 2022 and 15 April 2024, with two aims being elaborated in the research. The first goal is to focus on the reflection of Lithuanian and Romanian bilateral relations; the second goal is to assess the Romanian media coverage on the news related to Lithuanian national security. The research suggests that the Romanian media is extensively reporting news from Lithuania. These news items can be grouped into three categories: the first category is the security news; the second category is the other news containing anything directly related to Lithuania excluding security questions; the third category is the contextual news, with only contextual references to Lithuania among other things. Meanwhile, the security category can be grouped into three subcategories, those being: the news from Lithuania; the news covering Lithuanian and Romanian bilateral relations; the contextual news. The analysis confirms the intensively developing bilateral relations as well as wide coverage of Lithuanian security questions in Romanian media. The study aims to expand the perceptions of the geographical dimension of the Lithuanian network of bilateral relations, and representation of Vilnius' security perceptions in NATO allies.

Keywords:

Lithuania, Romania, media, bilateral relations, Vilnius, Bucharest

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Introduction

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania, among other things, contains references to the United States of America, Germany, the UK and other partners by indicating that one of the Lithuanian strategic goals is achieving a permanent presence of troops of these states in the region. Further in the document there is another reference to specific states, namely Poland, Latvia and Estonia, by expressing Lithuania's will to cooperate and continue synchronisation and coordination of military compatibility with them (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2021). Another document, 'Lithuanian Military Strategy', contains references to several states as well in Paragraph 14.3, declaring the aim to ensure regional and international security. It indicates an aim to develop bilateral and multilateral military cooperation with the United States of America, Baltic and Nordic states, Poland, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and other NATO allies. This is in an attempt to develop joint military power, and raise the interoperability of Lithuanian armed forces with the armed forces of allies (Lietuvos Respublikos karinė strategija, 2016). These references to certain states in the strategic documents of Lithuania can be explained by the character of NATO with its 32 member states each having their own national security concerns, where the network of bilateral cooperation and geographical proximity plays an important role in ensuring security.

Yet, there are still plenty of NATO member states not included in the strategic Lithuanian documents, particularly those in NATO's Eastern Flank, sharing similar security concerns. In this context, Romania's role in ensuring the region's security is critically important for at least four reasons. Firstly, although both Lithuania and Romania share similar security concerns and are currently intensively developing bilateral relations between the states, this question still lacks discussion in both Lithuanian and Romanian academia. Secondly, Romania, located in the NATO's Eastern Flank, is a strategically important state in Southeastern Europe with strong military forces and increasing investment in its military strength (Gardocki, 2023, p. 213–214). Thirdly, the recently found Romania's natural gas resources and planned heavy investment into extraction can transform the Southeastern Europe's energy security in the near future (Apostol, 2024). Fourthly, Romania is not only a consistent supporter of Ukraine, but is also strong supporter of Moldova European policy and security, with the question being an important factor for Bucharest's foreign policy and national security. To

conclude all these factors, it can be stated that Romania is a strategically important like-minded NATO ally of Lithuania, with whom diplomatic relations have recently been developing intensively.

The previously prepared works on the topic should be divided into three categories. (1) The topic of bilateral Lithuanian and Romanian relations in the twenty-first century, which has not been covered in academia with no works having been prepared. However, both the topics of (2) Romanian foreign policy aspects and (3) the coverage in Romanian media of various questions have been discussed extensively, particularly taking together the growing amount of reports and policy papers. However, it should also be noted that the topic of Romanian foreign policy aspects analysis should be divided into the works prepared before the start of Russian invasion of Ukraine and afterwards. While the works prepared before 2022 are multiple (yet not used in this work since they do not provide any explanation for the most recent developments), the number of the works prepared after 2022 is still low. An example of such work could be the insights on Romanian support to Ukraine prepared by Katja Cristina Plate and Mihai March (2023). Meanwhile, there are multiple works on Romanian media analysis covering various aspects, such as:

- the media coverage of the Romanian Revolution (Maiorean & Raluca, 2006);
- the role of the Internet in changing the news industry in Romania (Vasilendiuc & Gross, 2012);
- the coverage in Romanian media of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis (Barna & Dugan, 2016);
- the analysis of Poland's EU presidency reflection in Romanian media (Marinescu & Balasescu, 2013);
- the report on the Romanian media in general (Comanescu, 2010).

The aim of this article is to analyse how the most visited Romanian media outlets described Lithuania in the period between 24 February 2022 and 15 April 2024. The aim contains two goals: on one hand, it focuses on the reflection of Lithuanian and Romanian bilateral relations in the period; on the other hand, it provides an analysis of how Lithuania is described in Romanian media in the light of recent security developments, and what message about Lithuania is spread to the Romanian-speaking population. To achieve the aim of the work, the article contains several tasks. Firstly, the role of media and

its relations with the diplomatic practices are discussed; secondly, the collected empirical data is evaluated and grouped into categories and subcategories; thirdly, the empirical data in the security subcategory is assessed. The categories based on the content of the news were introduced by the author. The research was conducted by applying discourse analysis with some elements of content analysis.

The author aims to contribute to the discussion on Lithuanian relations with the Southeastern European states and particularly Romania, considering the lack of literature on the topic and expressing the will to expand the geography of the perception of Lithuanian relations with like-minded NATO allies.

1. The media and diplomacy

When considering what information the media analysis can provide about the diplomatic relations between states, two aspects should be taken into consideration: firstly, the media's role to spread information and construct perceptions of reality and secondly, the media's connections to diplomacy.

Starting with the assessment of the media's role in spreading information and constructing perceptions of reality, it should be noted that since the twentieth century (in some cases even earlier) in democratic societies the media has gained a critically important role in the construction of reality perception (also in political, both internal and external, processes). This is due to two reasons:

- On one hand, in democratic societies it is important what the ordinary people think with the success of democratic governments being dependant on public opinion.
- On the other hand, the media has changed perceptions of reality across the globe for the ability to rapidly spread news and react to topics, being the main source of information for most of the people. It consistently attracts their attention to specific topics, particularly considering the recent rise of the online platforms of social media.

Back in 1972, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw observed that more than ever before the information in the mass media became the only contact many have with politics and the candidates. It was used as an instrument to build images, set an agenda for each political campaign and influence the salience of attitudes towards the political

issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176–177). Afterwards, in the 1980s, the media influence reached a new level with the cable news network (CNN) expanding its broadcast around the clock across the globe and producing a new communication approach. This was even coined the CNN effect (particularly in light of the Gulf conflict in 1990) altering not only the practice of international relations, but also having a wide-reaching psychological influence on the masses (Gilboa, 2005, p. 325–327). An even greater change took place with the expansion of the Internet, which played a crucial role in levelling the playing field across the globe. It enabled anyone, anywhere, to have access to the same information, to connect and do business directly with others (Westcott, 2008, p. 3), thus allowing the involvement of more and more people into the circulation of information. The numbers prove how the Internet changed the way people acquire and share information – for example, while in 2000 25% of the world’s stored information was in digital form, in 2014 the figure had increased to around 98% with the number being even higher today (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 16).

As can be seen, the media is not only a channel for transmitting information; it has also become a tool to form reality perception. In the case of this research, it can become a basis for political leaders’ decisions and practice for a foreign policy by shaping public opinion with the way the facts are covered (Papadopoulos, 2009, p. 45). It can also put pressure on politicians (Archetti, 2012, p. 181–183) if considering internal policy aspects. The specific ability to influence the salience of various topics among the public has come to be called the agenda-setting of the news media. This theory foresees that the prominence of elements in the news influences the prominence of those elements among the public (Carrol & McCombs, 2003, p. 36–37) with both internal and external circumstances being important contributing factors (Yanovitzky, 2002, p. 422–423). Agenda-setting outlines the impact of mass media on the public and its ability to shape policy by calling the public’s attention to certain issues. In this context, the visibility based on the total amount of media coverage that a certain aspect receives from the media based on news frequency is identified as first-level agenda-setting (Zhang & Meadows, 2012, p. 80–82). Such visibility can be observed in multiple domains. In this research, this approach is applied to diplomacy and state, for which the brand or reputation, based on the media coverage, are critical to progress and prosperity (Anholt, 2008, p. 31–32), particularly when it is reflected in a positive way (Semetko & Weaver, 1992, p. 34). Additionally, the concept of soft power, briefly speaking, assists in explaining how

persuading for specific goals and needs, bringing emotion based on the things that make people love a country (Gosling, 2021, p. 4–6). This attempts to attract others and marks the efforts by which an actor seeks to spread ideas through influencing foreign political discourses via direct contact and actions (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 4–5). This mechanism is instrumentalised by framing that can be described as the selection of some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text for the promotion of particular problem definition. Frames help organise facts that take on meaning by being embedded in some larger system of meaning, or frame to provide references for the public about what is important. Framing is also concerned with the way that interests, communications, sources and culture combine to yield coherent ways of understanding the world. These are developed using all the available verbal and visual symbolic resources and – what is crucially important – are subject to repetition. This creates meanings that are resistant to change and in this case an individual is likely to treat that framed referent of reality as reality itself. Media plays a critical role in this process (Carter, 2013, p. 3–5).

Another aspect to consider in the context of this research is the media's impact on the practice of diplomacy. In 1974, Phillips Davison observed how significant media is for diplomacy by writing (as quoted by Cristina Archetti) that:

The press serves as the eyes and ears of diplomacy. Diplomatic reporting and national intelligence services play a significant supporting role, but most of the information reaching governments about developments throughout the world comes from the wire services, newspapers, news magazines, radio and television. Furthermore, mass media reports come in first; supplementary information via diplomatic or intelligence channels arrives hours, days or even weeks later. And it is often maintained that much of the information flowing through official channels is originally culled from the press in any case (Archetti, 2012, p. 181–182).

Afterwards, more contributions to the topic followed. In 1982, Patricia Karl observed that governments talk not so much to each other as at each other through media (Karl, 1982, p. 149–150). The transmission of non-secret messages between leaders (and, of course, to the public) through the media had become a frequent phenomenon by 1991 (Papadopoulos, 2009, p. 50). The situation changed further with the development of digital technologies (particularly social media) that challenged the conventional diplomatic practices and boosted digital diplomacy (Duncombe, 2019, p. 103). Diplomacy was now occurring

within a highly mediatised environment as both the domestic and foreign public could easily discuss policy decision-making because of the speed and diversity of social media (Duncombe, 2019, p. 111). Therefore, it can be claimed that the news media is a diplomatic device as powerful as formal policy statements in terms of a nation's visibility based on trigger events. This results in the appearance of a state in the media spotlight, which is able to influence the public's perception of a country (Zhang & Meadows, 2012, p. 89).

The media also enacts public diplomacy, whose focus is the analysis of how the use of global communication technologies can contribute to improved communication across borders. The media outlets form a communication network influencing policy from within the state, as well as the party system, interest groups or the socio-economic stratification of society, named public diplomacy (Naveh, 2002, p. 3). It is also a channel of contact for clarifying positions, probing for information and convincing states and other actors to support one's position (Gilboa, 2001, p. 1–3). Public diplomacy is foremost about building and managing relationships as a tool of foreign policy, and it is also centred on diplomatic engagement with other parties. It is an important aspect of the development of a state's international reputation used to persuade and influence the foreign public according to the particular agenda of that state. Its power lies in how the transmission of ideas, values and interests underpinning state identity are communicated (Duncombe, 2019, p. 105–106). A similar phenomenon is media diplomacy, addressing how the media connect policymakers to foreign governments and people, including the media as a channel for transmitting the diplomatic narrative from one state actor to another and for audiences to achieve particular goals. Media diplomacy and public diplomacy have often been confused as the same, as public diplomacy carried through media. The main difference can be described in the following way: public diplomacy is strategic communication where the media is used to communicate targeting relations, while in media diplomacy, state official actors use media to send messages to state officials (Ramaprasad, 1983, p. 69–70).

Considering all these factors, it can be stated that media, today based on the Internet platforms, plays a significant role in various processes. These include both international relations and diplomacy by not only transmitting information, but also serving as a tool for reality perceptions shaping through various instruments. Media is a network of communication channels in which the international actor,

mainly nation-states, exists and acts (Naveh, 2002, p. 4). Consequently, media is a tool to collect the factual information about the bilateral relations; however, it is also a platform used for framing the image or reputation of a certain state.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted by analysing the five most visited Romanian news websites (ro. *știri generale*). Based on the information provided by the Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Audit (ro. *Biroul Roman de Audit Transmedia*), as of March 2024, the most visited Romanian news websites by unique visitors per month (Rezultate trafic, 2024) were:

- *libertatea.ro*, owned by Ringier Axel Springer Media AG with 9,729,728 (1);
- *digi24.ro*, owned by Digi Communications – also known as RCS & RDS – founded by Zoltán Teszári, who is still the major shareholder with 8,439,365 (3);
- *stirileprotv.ro*, owned by CME (Central European Media Enterprises) in turn owned by PPF Group with 7,282,263 (4);
- *adevarul.ro*, owned by Adevărul Holding with 6,301,536 (6);
- *click.ro* also owned by Adevărul Holding with 5,806,150 (7).

Considering the fact that on 1 January 2024 there were over 21 million residents living in Romania (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2024), it can be claimed that the number of unique visitors taken together from all five websites reflects a significant part of the Romanian population, thus creating the assumption that the news being released on these websites are likely to spread widely across the Romanian-speaking population.

The research was conducted in three stages. In the beginning, the keyword *Lituania* was entered to each website's search bar for finding the news with references to Lithuania in any context. Afterwards, all the news containing the word *Lituania* was grouped into three categories by the content provided in each text. The first category titled *security* contains anything that is related to the security related issues including such keywords as NATO, war in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus. The second category titled *other* contains any text that is directly covering news from Lithuania that cannot be considered as the subject of the *security* category with sport events, tourism news or reports on specific topics

serving as the best examples. The third category titled *context* refers to the articles covering certain topics where Lithuania is mentioned in the broader context in the news. For example, discussing the statistical data of European states, the *Eurovision* song contest, the other news where Lithuania is mentioned as a bordering state of another without providing any deeper insights on Lithuania and without referring to security questions. Finally, the news in the *security* category was further divided into three subcategories. The first subcategory titled *Lithuanian news* refers to the news where Lithuania is the main object in the text. The second subcategory titled *Lithuanian–Romanian relations* refers to the news covering the bilateral relations between the states. The third subcategory titled *context* refers to the news with contextual references to Lithuania with different topics of the articles. It should be stated that since grouping was made based on the author's analysis and interpretation of the articles' content, there could be some minor differences in grouping, in case some other scholars conducted the research with the same data.

The research was conducted by analysing articles in the period between 24 February 2022 and 15 April 2024. The starting date was chosen as symbolically marking the new period for European security after the outbreak of Russia's war against Ukraine, while the ending date was based on the deadline to submit the article to the journal's editors.

3. The assessment of the data collected in the empirical research

The empirical research started with counting all the news items with references to *Lithuania* in any way in the period from 24 February 2022 to 15 April 2024 in the five most visited Romanian news websites. This part of the research revealed that there were 90 references to Lithuania found in *Libertatea*; 820 references found in *Digi24*; 560 references found in *Știrileprotv*; 174 references found in *Adevărul*; and 3 references found in *Click!*. All these numbers indicate references to Lithuania found within the texts, while Lithuania's appearance in the titles of the texts is less numerous with the numbers being as follows: 40 articles in *Libertatea*; 78 articles in *Digi24*; 43 articles in *Știrileprotv*; 77 articles in *Adevărul*; 2 articles in *Click!*. It should be mentioned that on some occasions in the titles, although not exceeding the use of the

name *Lithuania* in number, there were also references to Vilnius as well as Baltic states (ro. *statele baltice* or *țările baltice*) indicated when discussing topicalities of Lithuania.

Some additional comments are necessary relating to the dynamics of the media coverage about Lithuania during the time in Romanian media outlets analysed in the research, starting with 2020. The aim of providing such information was based on the hypothesis that, comparing the periods before and after 24 February 2022, there would be an increase of news coverage about Lithuania following the Russian attack against Ukraine, since both Romania and Lithuania share similar security perceptions. The research confirmed the hypothesis with the increased number of news items about Lithuania in Romanian media compared to 2020 and 2021, although 2023 marks a slight decrease in the amount of news (Figure 1).

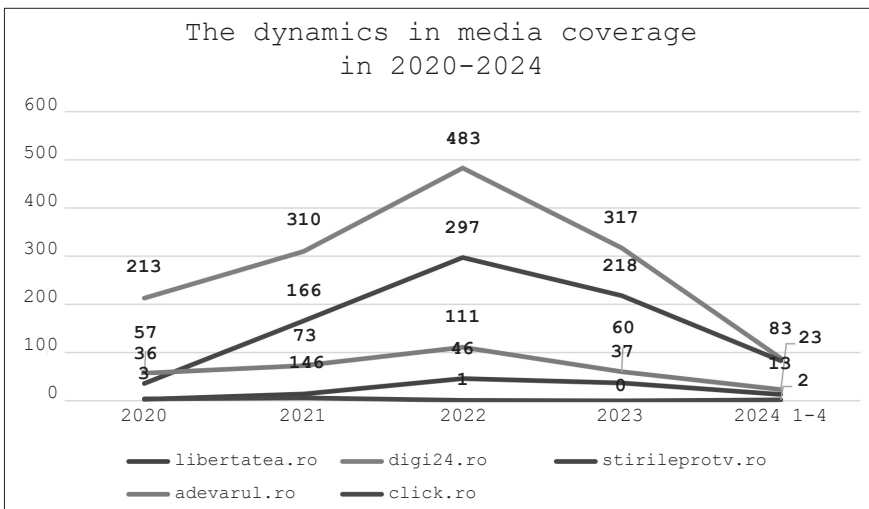


Figure 1: Media coverage dynamics 2020–2024.

The empirical research proceeded with grouping all the new items containing information about Lithuania into three categories. For research, the relevant category is the *security* news which made 86.7% of the total news in *Libertatea*; 77.4% of the news in *Digi24*; 63.4% of the news in *Știrileprotv*; 87.4% of the news in *Adevărul* and 0% of the news in *Click!*, containing the keyword *Lithuania*. This data is visualised in the following graph with precise number of the new items in each field in more detail found in each website (Figure 2).

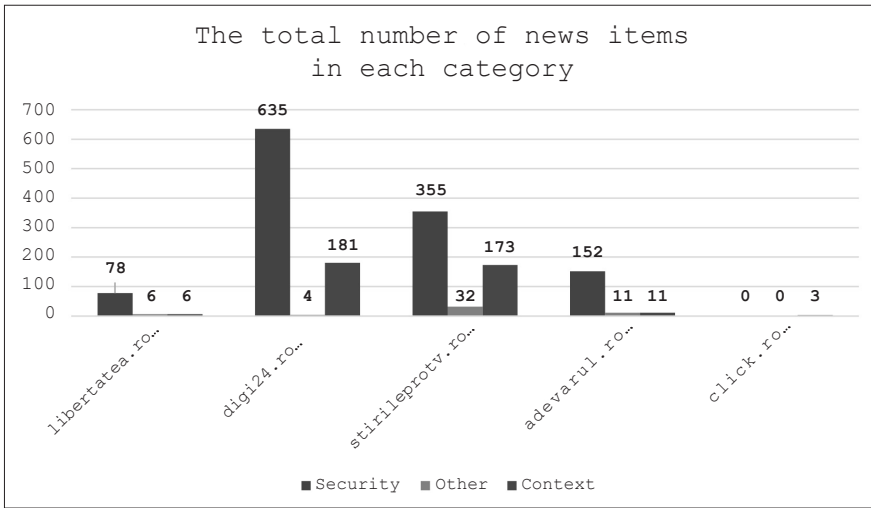


Figure 2: News items per category.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the *security* category was the majority of all the news items covering Lithuania. This category, meanwhile, can be divided into three subcategories consisting of *Lithuania-related* news, the *Lithuanian–Romanian relations* and *contextual* aspects with the latter subcategory being the most numerous. Figure 3 provides visualised information about the number of news items in each subcategory.

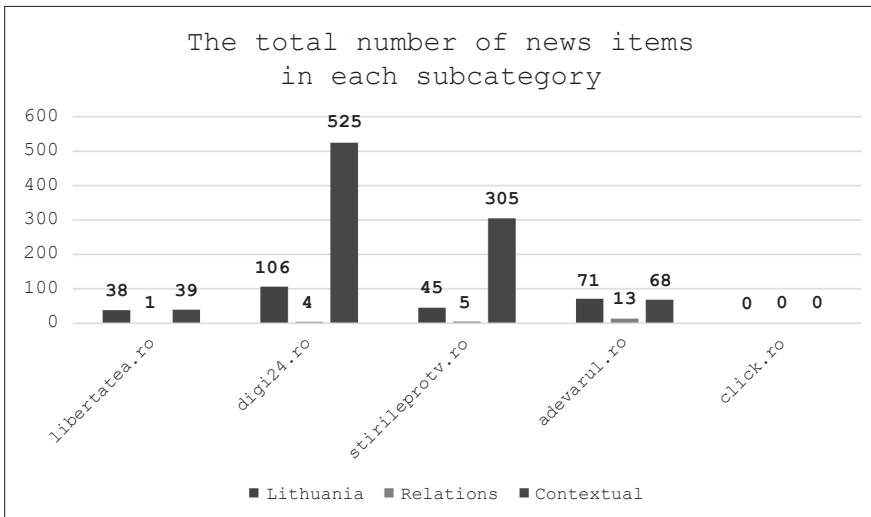


Figure 3: News items per subcategory.

In the following paragraphs, the three thematic subcategories of the *security* category reflected in the news items are elaborated and commented on in more detail.

3.1. The news from Lithuania

The first subcategory within the *security* category is the news directly covering the topicalities in Lithuania. Although this subcategory was not as extensively developed as the *contextual* information in numbers, it provided a wide panoramic view on Lithuanian topicalities that are related to the security domain. The news from Lithuania can be grouped into four topics.

Firstly, it is the statements of high-ranking Lithuanian representatives, mainly made by either the Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda or the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis, that were presented to Romanian-speaking people with few examples to mention. For example, in March 2022, *Adevărul* quoted Gitanas Nausėda addressing American Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his visit to the Baltic states as saying that if not stopped, the war against Ukraine would lead to a Third World War (Țaga, 2022). Another example is a quote by the head of the Lithuanian military intelligence service ELEGIJUS PAULAVIČIUS, who claimed that Russia has

enough resources to continue the war in Ukraine at its current intensity (Redacția Adevărul, 2023). Later that year, *Digi24* quoted Gabrielius Landsbergis as stating during the Annual Meeting of Romanian Diplomacy that Ukraine would have security and peace guarantees only by joining NATO; at the same time, he elaborated Romania's importance in Moldova's European integration, the process that was described as a security guarantee for Chișinău (Dumitru, 2023). Another statement by Gabrielius Landsbergis was quoted during the Munich Security Conference of 2024, where the Lithuanian minister spoke again about the security reality in Europe by emphasising the need to strengthen the defence capabilities and prepare for possible future war (Știrileprotv, 2024). Finally, on 31 March 2024 *Libertatea* reposted the news from *The Sunday Telegraph* that the ambassadors of the three Baltic states to the United Kingdom warned about the possibility of a Russian attack on NATO (Stăniloiu, 2024). Considering these quotes, also that several additional statements on security developments in Europe from high-ranking Lithuanian representatives were reposted as well, it can be stated that the official Lithuanian position towards European security has been reflected extensively by Romanian media outlets.

Secondly, it is the information about Lithuania's investment in its security. The topic was developed along several dimensions. The first dimension is the military acquisition that was discussed in Romanian media after each announcement of acquisition. For example, on 21 November 2022 *Știrileprotv* announced that following the missile attack in Poland, Lithuania would accelerate the acquisition of anti-aircraft defence systems (Bran, 2022) while soon afterwards, on 25 December 2022 *Știrileprotv* announced that Lithuania would buy *Switchblade* suicide drones (Manta, 2022). Finally, in the year this article was prepared, on 24 January 2024 *Știrileprotv* announced that Lithuania is planning to buy *Leopard 2* tanks (Matei, 2024). In this context, two additional aspects concerning strategical objects discussed in the media as well should be mentioned. These are the end of construction works for a border fence on the Lithuanian border with Belarus (Știrileprotv, 2022), and the plans to build a defence line along the Eastern borders of the Baltic states (Iana, 2024).

The second dimension is the cooperation of Lithuania with NATO allies. For example, on 23 May 2022 *Digi24* announced that Lithuania had entered into a cooperation agreement with the United Kingdom in the field of security (Nețoiu, 2022). Another important

act of cooperation was announced on 3 August 2023 by *Adevărul* quoting both Lithuanian and Polish Presidents, who met in the light of tensions on the border with Belarus and discussed the security issues in Suwalki corridor (Gaidău, 2023). While these examples refer to the political level of cooperation, there were also several news items from the military domain. For example, on 21 August 2022 *Știrileprotv* announced that one of the largest US warships had arrived at Klaipėda to demonstrate solidarity with Lithuania (*Știrileprotv*, 2022); on 29 September 2023 *Adevărul* announced the AWACS system deployment to Šiauliai base to monitor Russian military activities (Trufasu, 2023). Yet the most important event in the period was the decision to deploy German troops to Lithuania permanently, with quite extensive coverage on Romanian news websites. In September 2023 the plans of the deployment were discussed by emphasising the economic aspects (*Știrileprotv*, 2023). In March 2024, the deployment of German troops to Lithuania was described as a historic move representing the first permanent deployment of German troops since World War Two (Mihăilă, 2024), with several more news items on the topic being released on various websites.

The third dimension is the Lithuanian assistance to Ukraine and – partly – to Moldova, with the topic being covered extensively. As for Ukraine, which was a widely discussed topic since 24 February 2022 in general, the meetings between Lithuanian and Ukrainian representatives were described such as Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to the Baltic states in January 2024 (Smerea, 2024). Also, the information about the Lithuanian military assistance to Ukraine containing, for example, military munition and 10 armoured vehicles in summer 2022 (Ionescu-Heroiu, 2022) and several other cases were discussed as well. Apart from that, the fundraising campaigns in Lithuania also attracted the attention of the Romanian media outlets, particularly the campaign of May 2022. This is when Lithuanians collected EUR 5 million to buy and transfer the Bayraktar drone to Ukraine with additional drones being donated by the Bayraktar company itself (*Adevărul*, 2022). There was also the campaign of February 2023 when Lithuanians collected EUR 14 million to provide Ukraine with tactical surveillance radars (Costea, 2023).

As for Moldova, which is a critically important topic to Romania and its security, on 1 March 2022 *Adevărul* announced that Lithuania donated EUR 750,000 to Moldova for accommodating Ukrainian refugees (Botnarenco, 2022). The upcoming visit of Gitanas Nausėda to

Moldova on 7 May 2022 following his visit to Romania was mentioned (Botnarenco, 2022), as well as the Moldovan President Maia Sandu's visit to Lithuania on 6 July 2022 (Botnarenco, 2022). Such coverage confirmed one more time how Moldova is important to Romanian security.

Thirdly, it is the questions related to Russia and Belarus, including the security concerns, combined with the most recent security issues and the news related to war. Starting with Russia, the topic attracted much attention by Romanian media outlets in general; consequently, Lithuania appeared plenty of times on the news covering various aspects. For example, the Kaliningrad Oblast transit question in the early months of war (see for example, Dumitru, 2022) or Russian tourists' access to the territory of the EU (see, for example, Ghinea, 2022) – both questions that had also implications for the whole of the EU, were discussed. Additionally, many other details, such as the decision of the Vilnius municipality authorities to rename the street where the Russian embassy is located to 'Ukraine Heroes Street' (Mironescu, 2022) were discussed. Also discussed was the decision of the Lithuanian authorities in April 2022 to ask the Russian ambassador to leave Lithuania (Bonea, 2022). *Digi24* announced that more than 1,000 citizens of Russia or Belarus were declared to be a threat to Lithuanian national security following the analysis of the answers from the special questionnaire, banning these people from entering Lithuania, or rejecting the extension of residence permits (Bonea, 2023). The cyber attack against Lithuania in June 2022 (Știrileprotv, 2022) was announced as well. Finally, one of the most recent news items covered was the assault on Leonid Volkov, the ally of Alexei Navalny, being discussed on all but one websites (Agerpres, 2024).

As for the topic of Belarus, plenty of aspects concerning the country were covered as well. These news items varied, including:

- the announcement of Lithuania's decision to close two of the six border checkpoints with Belarus because of Wagner's presence (Bancăș, 2023);
- the Lithuanian reaction to the words of Aliaksandr Lukashenko after threatening Lithuania, and in this context discussing the Suwalki corridor one more time (Anton, 2024);
- announcing Lithuania's decision to issue temporary identity documents to Belarusian exiles on its territory following Minsk's decision that its citizens have to return to the country to renew their documents (Chirilă, 2023).

In these cases, concerning the topics of either Belarus or Russia, plenty of additional aspects on a smaller scale were repeatedly reported, yet it is important to note that in most cases, these topics contain only contextual references to Lithuania.

Fourthly, several aspects from the Lithuanian internal domain were elaborated as well. On 24 February 2022, *Adevărul* announced that Lithuania declared a state of emergency because of Russian aggression against Ukraine (Ghiorghe, 2022). Yet one of the most important aspects, which received wide coverage in Romanian media, was the visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to Lithuania in March 2023 and the plans to establish the eparchy in Lithuania (Stanciu, 2023). This was reported in every website except *Click!*, also discussing the subsequent development of events related to the establishing of a Constantinople eparchy in Lithuania. Finally, several important aspects, such as the plan to introduce the bank profits tax for funding the military expenditure with comments about the Lithuanian banking system (Kiss, 2023) or the resignation of the Lithuanian Minister of Defence Arvydas Anušauskas in March 2024 were described (Redacția *Adevărul*, 2024). Of other important aspects, another consistently covered topic was the Lithuanian energy policy. On 2 April 2022 several Romanian news websites announced that Lithuania would be the first state to reject the use of Russian gas (Nițulescu, 2022) with this motive repeatedly appearing in the news in many formats (including contextual references) afterwards. The disconnection from the Russian energy network of Lithuania and testing it by *Litgrid* was announced on 21 April 2023 by *Libertatea* (Stanciu, 2023). This was the first time in history that the Lithuanian energy system was operating completely independently in an attempt of total disconnection by Baltic states; the motive appearing several times on the news afterwards.

To sum up, it can be stated that a wide range of the news items related to Lithuania and its security was covered in the Romanian media. This allowed the Romanian-speaking population to become aware of the Lithuanian security concerns and topicalities with various aspects of it based on certain events. These included energy security, the purchase of weapons, international statements, assistance to Ukraine, which were extensively discussed in four of five media outlets researched in this work.

3.2. The Lithuanian–Romanian relations

The second subcategory is the Lithuanian and Romanian relations that were reflected in the media, with many important details being provided on the topic. Since the milestones of bilateral relations were the meetings between Lithuanian and Romanian representatives, discussed in the Romanian media outlets, the topic can be best revealed in chronological order.

The first bilateral meeting took place on 6 May 2022 when Gitanas Nausėda visited Bucharest, where he met with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and discussed many topics. Following the meeting, in the joint press conference Klaus Iohannis announced the very good state of bilateral relations between Lithuania and Romania. He expressed views that are very similar to the Lithuanian position towards the most recent security developments in Europe, such as:

- the war against Ukraine and the sanctions on Russia;
- energy security;
- the enlargement of the EU;
- the need to cooperate on the regional level and strengthen NATO's Eastern Flank;
- the need to support Moldova (Dinu, 2022a).

Both presidents commented on Romania's decision to resume participation in the NATO air policing mission in the Baltic region, and defined it as a significant contribution of Romania to strengthening the collective security and solidarity (Dinu, 2022b). Gitanas Nausėda also met with Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă and discussed the same security issues and possible cooperation in the field of nuclear energy, the fintech sector and Lithuania's experience in preparation to join the OECD (Costea, 2022).

The second meeting took place on 24 November 2022 in Vilnius between Klaus Iohannis and Gitanas Nausėda. This time, the most recent security developments were discussed again, the bilateral relations were defined as particularly solid and close, and Klaus Iohannis appreciated Lithuanian support to Romania's access to the Schengen area. It should also be noted that Klaus Iohannis was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Lithuanian Order of Merit by Gitanas Nausėda, while Gitanas Nausėda was decorated by Klaus Iohannis with the National Order Star of Romania at the Presidential Palace in Vilnius (Rubica, 2022). The following day, the Romanian

President went to Kaunas to the international symposium titled *The Idea of Europe*; after the conference, the joint declaration on the European security by the Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish and Romanian Presidents was made (Păcurar, 2022).

The third meeting was a phone call on 30 January 2023 between Gabrielius Landsbergis and Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu, covered only by *Digi24*. Such topics as the resuming of Romania's air policing mission in the Baltic states, the recent security developments and Romania's accession to Schengen area were discussed (Bonea, 2023).

The fourth meeting took place on 13–14 March 2023 when Bogdan Aurescu visited Vilnius, where he met with Gabrielius Landsbergis. They discussed many topics, mainly focusing on Romania's Schengen area accession, the war in Ukraine and its impact on the region (Rubica, 2023).

The fifth meeting took place on 6 March 2024 in Brussels, in the context of the Congress of the European People's Party. Klaus Iohannis met with Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and had a short bilateral discussion about the recent security developments, also meeting with other high-ranking European officials at the same event (Morozanu, 2024).

Apart from that, the Romanian (along with Portugal) air policing mission in the NATO airbase in Šiauliai, lasting from April 2023 to August 2023, should be mentioned as well; it was extensively covered in Romania media. As mentioned, on 6 May 2022 the Romanian President declared that the air policing mission would be carried out by Romania in Lithuania. On 27 November 2022, *Digi24* shared information provided by the Romanian Ministry of Defence. Between April and July the following year, the Romanian Air Force would carry out the enhanced air policing service in Šiauliai, with a detachment of around 100 soldiers and four F-16 Fighting Falcons that had already been training for the mission (Dutu, 2022). The deployment took place in several stages and on 25 March 2023, the final members of the detachment and aircraft arrived at Šiauliai under the command of Vlad Cosmin (Bolocan, 2023). During the mission, which ended in August, a total of 25 interception missions took place with several cases of interceptions being covered in the media. (Bolocan, 2023).

In addition, the topic of diplomatic representation should be mentioned. On 25 September 2023, *Adevărul* announced that the following day Klaus Iohannis would receive letters of accreditation

from several ambassadors, with Lithuanian ambassador Artūras Žurauskas being one of them. Although this fact was not announced separately in a news item, it is still an important aspect concerning the bilateral relations (Cristescu, 2023). Meanwhile, the former Romanian ambassador to Lithuania Ovidiu Raetchi's appointment to Japan was announced with Lithuania appearing contextually as the diplomat's former place of service (Bonea, 2024).

To sum up, it can be stated that Romanian media outlets covered the bilateral meetings between Lithuanian and Romanian representatives extensively, allowing the reader to follow the developments in bilateral relations between the states following the meetings of the states' representatives.

3.3. The contextual information

The third subcategory is contextual information containing news based on contextual references to Lithuania where the subject is not Lithuania, yet Lithuania is somehow connected to the event or phenomenon being elaborated in the text. All these news items can be divided into three thematic blocks.

Firstly, the most characteristic example belonging to this subcategory is the Vilnius NATO Summit 2023, highlighting both Lithuania and its capital Vilnius in the titles of the news multiple times in many news websites in a flow of several days. However, in such cases Lithuania was mentioned solely as a host place without any additional remark about Lithuania. In some cases in this context there was additional information provided about Lithuania that should be highlighted: the security measures taken by sending soldiers and advanced air defence systems to Lithuania by NATO allies, or providing logistical details about Vilnius security situation in general (Stanciu, 2023). Also, *Digi24* announced that on the eve of the NATO Summit 2023, Lithuania faced a cyber attack targeting several institutions (Chirilă, 2023).

Another contextual example of a host event that took place in Vilnius was the Three Seas Summit Vilnius on 11 April 2024, although this event was covered less than the NATO Summit Vilnius 2023.

Secondly, in some texts *Lituania* appears purely contextually without any further detail that would directly cover any event or phenomenon in Lithuania. An example of this could be the news quoting the statement by Dmitri Medvedev about Finland and

Sweden's accession to NATO, where Lithuania was mentioned as a bordering state to the Russian Federation, without providing any further detail about Lithuania (Andronie, 2022). Many more similar cases appeared on the news websites.

Thirdly, in some other cases the contextual information with references to Lithuania, although not focusing on Lithuania directly, provides some details about Lithuania. An example of such a case is the news items that were released on 23 January 2024 when *Ştirileprotv* announced that NATO is arming itself. The states entered into contracts for arms purchases for EUR 1.1 billion, and among the buyers were Lithuania, Spain and Belgium (Toader, 2024). A similar example would be the news of October 2022 when it was announced that 14 NATO states, including Lithuania, were planning the joint acquisition of Arrow 3 and Patriot air defence systems, and signed the European Skyshield Initiative in Brussels (Păcurar, 2022). It is also important to emphasise that the contextual news also provides information about the general security situation in Europe. While the latter topic has been discussed extensively in general, the references to Germany's role in European security architecture, where the Lithuanian factor is also mentioned, should be assessed. On 6 July 2023, *Ştirileprotv* announced Germany's decision not to send troops to Romania permanently since Berlin decided to send troops to Lithuania (Agerpres, 2023). On 17 February 2024, amid discussions about probable *Rheinmetall's* investment in Romania, Lithuania was mentioned as a state of NATO's Eastern Flank along with Hungary, where the company had already invested (Matei, 2024). Apart from that, some news items refer to certain acts of cooperation between different European states – for example, the participation of the Lithuanian military alongside Romanian officials on 14 July 2022 during the military parade in Paris (Ştirileprotv, 2022).

To sum up, there were many contextual references to Lithuania in Romanian media, being the most numerous subcategory compared to the news from Lithuania and the bilateral Lithuanian and Romanian relations. Yet these news items require additional comments since they do not reveal as much information about Lithuania as the former two subcategories. However, it should be noted that the numerous contextual references to Lithuania allows the information about Lithuanian security concerns to be spread repeatedly, mentioning Lithuania's name in the news, thus raising the visibility of Vilnius in Romanian media.

Conclusions

The research revealed that media is an important tool for spreading information, particularly considering the current development of digital instruments. However, media is a much more complex phenomenon than a tool for spreading information, being a crucial part of the foreign policy decision-making environment. It also helps in shaping the opinion of masses by raising the visibility of certain aspects related to specific phenomena or an object being described in the media.

After the empirical research, it can be stated that in the period between 24 February 2022 and 15 April 2024 the Lithuanian topicalities were reflected and developed extensively in the most read Romanian media outlets, reaching a wide audience in Romania. All the news related to Lithuania can be divided into three categories:

- the domain of security, covering anything that is related to security issues;
- the second being other aspects, covering anything that is related to Lithuania excluding security issues;
- the third being contextual information, where Lithuania is not the subject in the news and appears only contextually.

For its part, the security category, the largest category of all, can be divided into three subcategories: news from Lithuania, the bilateral Lithuanian–Romanian relations and the contextual information, which was the biggest subcategory.

Statistically, *Digi24* provided the highest number of new items while *Click!*, which is considered to be a tabloid, provided only few pieces of news and none belonging to the security category. Some commonalities were observed based on different focuses of different websites: for example, *Digi24* was focusing more on the general news providing plenty of contextual references to Lithuania, while *Adevărul* provided plenty of insights on bilateral relations. Meanwhile, *Știrileprotv* focused on security questions while *Libertatea* referred to the most important aspects that can be considered as contextual information, with little information provided about the bilateral relations. Yet taken together, all these news websites provide a broad panoramic view on security issues with informative references to Lithuania. Considering the fact that a wide scope of news items was provided about Lithuania, it can be claimed that further Lithuanian

topicalities would be described in Romanian media, likely with a similar intensity afterwards as well.

Considering the findings in the empirical research, two dimensions should be assessed. Firstly, it should be noted that the bilateral Lithuanian–Romanian relations were covered extensively. This provided essential details about all the meetings between Lithuanian and Romanian representatives with additional information about the Romanian air policing mission and ambassadors being provided, thus confirming how extensively the bilateral relations are being developed. Secondly, the news items from Lithuania were also covered extensively with plenty of topics, such as statements from state representatives, investment in security, security concerns and internal affairs, allowing the Romanian-speaking population to comprehensively learn the issues and concerns of Lithuania. Additionally, it should be noted that the biggest subcategory of all was the contextual references to Lithuania; although not focusing on Lithuanian issues directly, this massively contributed to the general discourse about Lithuania in Romanian media and raised Lithuania’s visibility. To sum up, it can be stated that Romanian media showed great interest in news from Lithuania, reflecting the actively developing bilateral relations between Vilnius and Bucharest, and confirming Romania to be a strong, like-minded NATO ally of Lithuania.

The author suggests that similar research should be carried out for analysing reflections of Lithuania and bilateral relations with the other states in Southern and Southeastern Europe.

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Notes

1 Particularly considering the fact that recently, Romania has been providing significant military assistance to Ukraine (Plate & March, 2023).

2 It should be noted that the Mihail Kogălniceanu base in Constanța on the Black Sea coast will become the largest military base in Europe by 2030, surpassing the US military base in Ramstein, Germany in size, being able to host 10,000 personnel. After relocating some logistics and human resources of the US military forces from Ramstein to Romania, it will strengthen NATO's security architecture and position in the Black Sea region (Nescutu, 2024).

3 Since February 2022, on multiple occasions various Romanian politicians and diplomats repeatedly expressed support for the unification of markets with Moldova as well as a pro-European Moldovan direction. For example, on 27 March 2024, the President of the Senate of Romania Nicolae Ciucă expressed Romanian commitment to unconditionally support the Moldovan European path (Agerpres, 2024). Apart from that, the news covering Moldova-related issues are numerous in Romanian media.

4 For these reasons, in the research discourse analysis is being applied, which is a convenient approach widely applied in both political science and international relations. It acquires plenty of forms depending on the purposes, preconditions or variables in cases of its application, aiming to find regularities, rules and some sort of order, the ways to explain and understand the discourse (Girkontaitė, 2018, p. 5). Discourse analysis is an engagement with meaning, and the linguistic and communicative processes through which social reality is constructed, therefore it can be perceived as the space where intersubjective meaning is created, yet distinguished

from language as it is inherently a social concept (Holzscheiter, 2013, p. 3), particularly in the light of *new diplomacy* that is exposed to the media and public opinion as the media's role in diplomacy increased with transformation of communication and information technologies that altered the meaning of power in contemporary world politics with mass media having become a central source of information about world affairs (Gilboa, 2001, p. 1–3).

5 Even greater changes can be observed in the sphere of social media with the rise of such user-driven platforms as Facebook, Twitter (Duncombe, 2018), also Blogger, YouTube, Wikipedia (Carpenter & Dresner, 2010), and recently, TikTok (Fjällhed et al., 2024).

6 Several concepts such as virtual diplomacy, cyber diplomacy and media diplomacy have been proposed for describing the variety and complexity of the phenomenon (Archetti, 2012, p. 181–183).

7 During the time when the research was conducted, more recent monthly data were not available.

8 The purpose of this article is not to analyse of the Romanian media and other related questions; instead, the purpose is merely understand the reflection of Lithuania in the media. For a more detailed insight into Romanian media see the works, for example, of Madalina Botan (2024) or Mihai Coman (2001).

9 The number in brackets indicates the overall position among all Romanian websites.

10 The Romanian word for *Lithuania*.

11 The different numbers with the new items referring to Lithuania can be explained by multiple reasons such as the number of reporters or the editorial philosophy of the media outlet. It also should be mentioned that *Click!* is considered to be a tabloid.

12 Mostly in the case of the NATO Summit Vilnius 2023.

13 The Suwalki corridor was mentioned several times in the news.

14 Not including the multilateral meetings with the presence of several representatives of different states at the time as, for example, happened on 22 July 2022 when Klaus Iohannis, together with the other five leaders of European states, including Gitanas Nausėda, visited the memorial dedicated to the victims of totalitarianism in Brussels, without referring to the bilateral meeting between the leaders (Dinu, 2022).

15 Klaus Iohannis also met the Speaker of Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania Viktorija Čmilytė Nielsen.

16 The second Romanian deployment, the first lasting from August to October 2007.

17 The handover ceremony took place on 2 August 2023.