

RUSSIA'S COGNITIVE WARFARE AGAINST ROMANIA:

THE INCIDENTS IN GALAȚI AND CONSTANȚA



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Context

This analysis aims to identify and explain, considering the events that took place in Romania in May-June 2026, the impact of the interconnections between kinetic developments stemming from the prolonged conflict in Ukraine and the errors in the strategic communication of Romanian government institutions, with direct and measurable effects on the increase or decrease of societal resilience. The central objective is to assess the effects of this hybrid warfare in the online public space, specifically in the context of the drone incidents in Galați, a Danube city close to the border with Ukraine, and Constanța, Romania's main Black Sea port.

The effects of these hybrid operations are visible in vulnerabilities resulting from distorted messages affecting both the reactions of institutional political actors and the positions of opinion vectors in the media. Although these vulnerabilities are constant and are often mentioned in official documents as threats to state security, as well as in public speeches, at key moments of response and deterrence they take atypical forms of public communication. These distortions facilitate, to varying degrees, the dissemination and the consolidation of adverse narrative structures that were already latent in public opinion, allowing them to reactivate and undermine the validity of official positions.

The Drones in Galați and Constanța: More Than Simple Incidents

Chronology and Anatomy of the Incidents:

A. The Galați Incident (29 May):

On 29 May, at 01:52, a Russian Geran-2 drone was detected in Ukrainian airspace, but radar contact was lost after two minutes. At 02:00, the device struck the 10th floor of an apartment block in the Mazepa district of Galați municipality, injuring four people and

forcing the evacuation of 70 residents.

- Identified vulnerability: an eight-minute 'window of opacity' between detection and impact, followed by a 48-hour delay in the publication of the official technical report by the Ministry of National Defence (MAPN).



Map of the flight path of the Geran-2 drone, initially launched as part of a Russian attack on the Ukrainian port of Reni. Source: New Strategy Center

In this context, the incident during the night of 28-29 May 2026 was not merely a quantitative intensification of previous airspace intrusions, but a major rupture in the pattern of evolving threats to national security. Since 2022, the handling of dozens of cases in which fragments of Russian drones fell in Tulcea and Galați counties had relied on a linear communication protocol focused on technical confirmation, the exclusion of intent behind a deliberate attack, and the rapid restoration of normality.¹ This repetitive interpretive framework directly generated a public perception of controlled risk; however, this conceptual construction proved fragile and collapsed the moment a combat device directly struck inhabited urban residential infrastructure.

The chronological analysis of the Galați event highlights how limitations in detection and response generate major vulnerabilities in terms of social stability. The initial detection of the target in Ukrainian airspace at 01:52,

followed by the loss of radar contact after only two minutes and the final impact at 02:00 on the 10th floor of an apartment block in the Mazepa district, left an eight-minute operational window entirely uncovered by interception measures. As a result, the explosion and fire that followed, which injured four people and forced the evacuation of 70 residents, triggered immediate public pressure on military structures, generating a trust deficit that opened space for narratives of institutional delegitimization.²

This succession of tactical dysfunctions and the absence of a rapid official response created the enabling infrastructure for the proliferation of disinformation, a phenomenon explained through the concept of narrative engineering for deception defined by researcher Henry W. Prunckun. Within this mechanism, the interval between the occurrence of a critical incident and its official technical validation is the only territory in which hostile actors can operate successfully, because a false narrative does not require truthfulness, but only a minimal degree of plausibility under conditions of informational vacuum.³ In Galați, the almost 48-hour delay in the publication of the technical report by the Ministry of National Defence directly caused the emergence and consolidation of an adverse narrative ecosystem that rapidly expanded across digital platforms.⁴

During the 01:52-02:00 interval on the night of 28-29 May 2026, technical detection limitations generated immediate operational consequences, creating an insufficient response window for defense forces. The initial detection of the target 19 kilometers from the border and the loss of radar contact after only two minutes made it technically impossible to engage defensive systems; the armed forces were unable to authorize an interception in such a short time, despite the

despite the activation of NATO notification protocols. This deficit of positioning and capability density caused, at 02:00, the drone's impact on an apartment block in Galați, generating an explosion and a fire that produced structural damage and civilian evacuations.⁵



The explosive impact of the drone on the apartment building in Galați. Source: IGSU

As a direct consequence of this eight-minute breach, the public agenda was instantly distorted, focusing not on the aggressor's responsibility, but on questioning the army's institutional capacity, which facilitated the rapid vulnerability of the information space through the massive proliferation of pro-Russian comments on international platforms.⁶

Although the administrative response on the morning of 29 May 2026 complied with procedures through the activation of the Red Intervention Plan, the issuance of public alerts, and diplomatic steps to summon the ambassador of the Russian Federation, crisis management suffered from a severe deficit of early technical communication. The absence of rapid official clarifications on the nature and origin of the aerial vector directly caused the incident to be absorbed into the disinformation ecosystem. In the absence of clear technical data, the event was automatically aligned with pre-existing interpretive frames, such as narratives about false-flag operations or deliberate Ukrainian provocations.⁷

This phenomenon demonstrates that Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) operations do not improvise situational responses to crises, but immediately exploit informational vacuums by reactivating already structured and ready-to-use manipulation patterns.

The same day's decision by the Supreme Council of National Defence to expel the consul general of the Russian Federation in Constanța represented a firm diplomatic response⁸, but its temporal proximity to the incident generated an unforeseen side effect in the field of disinformation. Hostile actors used this political decision to invert the real causal relationship, promoting that same evening the idea that the drone crash had been artificially orchestrated to legitimize both diplomatic sanctions and acquisitions under the SAFE military programme. This mechanism reveals a major vulnerability in the analysis of information manipulation: any legitimate measure adopted by authorities against the backdrop of collective trauma risks being propagandistically reframed as the very cause of that trauma, fueling public distrust through the thesis of political opportunism.⁹

Romanian President Nicușor Dan's visit to Galați on 30 May 2026, intended as a sign of empathy toward citizens affected by the incident, created a new opportunity for the asymmetric exploitation of public reactions in the digital environment. Images of citizens challenging the authorities were extracted from their context and massively distributed on social media, consolidating the perception that the population rejected the official version and turning local dissatisfaction into an argument against the state.¹⁰ By contrast, strategic analyses with deeper impact, such as the assessment published by the Institute for the Study of War on the Russian Federation's deliberate acceptance of the risk

of civilian casualties in NATO states, remained isolated within niche circuits.¹¹ This visibility gap illustrates the logic of influence operations, in which emotional and conflictual content generates broad organic engagement, eclipsing the technical-strategic assessments essential for understanding the real nature of the threat.

The publication of the technical report by the Ministry of National Defence on 31 May 2026 provided a rigorous methodological confirmation that the drone was a Russian Geran-2, but this factual truth arrived at a moment when the institution's credibility had already been significantly eroded.¹² The two-day delay allowed public irony to proliferate around the video explanations previously offered by army officials regarding the impossibility of interception. From the perspective of security policy analysis, this case demonstrates that the authority of a solid technical document cannot retroactively repair the reputational damage suffered in the first hours of a crisis, because the absence of proactive initial communication partially cancels the positive impact of subsequent clarifications.¹³

The emergency session of the UN Security Council on 1 June 2026 shifted the dispute into the realm of multilateral diplomacy, with the Russian Federation contesting the Romanian technical report through erroneous technical arguments regarding the drone's explosive payload and the scale of the building damage¹⁴. The most serious strategic effect, however, was not the Russian rhetoric in New York, but the way in which this contestation was instrumentalized in Romania's domestic information space. Statements by Russian officials were immediately picked up by local propaganda channels and presented as legitimate external validation of public doubts, demonstrating how FIMI mechanisms use the adversary's arguments to deepen credibility gaps between citizens and state institutions.¹⁵



The meeting of the UN Security Council. Source: Facebook page of Oana Țoiu.

B. The Constanța Incident (5 June 2026):

A Ukrainian naval drone (Sargan-3000), diverted by Russian electronic jamming, entered seven kilometers into the Civil Port of Constanța. It self-detonated at Berth 78, near the oil terminal and not far from a warehouse containing 900 tons of ammonium nitrate.

- Identified vulnerability: although the neutralization was an operational success, the speed of the response was used speculatively to suggest prior 'complicity' by the Romanian authorities.



The location within the Port of Constanța where the drone explosion occurred (Berth 78). Source: New Strategy Center.

The amplification of perceived vulnerabilities was reinforced exactly one week later, on 5 June 2026, by a second incident that exposed maritime-security gaps rather than clarifying the security situation. The diversion of a Ukrainian Sargan-3000 naval drone under the effect of intense Russian electronic jamming caused it to penetrate seven kilometers into the perimeter of the Civil Port of Constanța without being detected or stopped in time. The self-detonation of the device at Berth 78, in the immediate vicinity of the oil terminal and only four kilometers from a warehouse containing approximately 900 tons of ammonium nitrate, demonstrated in practical terms the high systemic risk to which national critical infrastructure is exposed.¹⁶

The dynamics of the 5 June 2026 incident in the Port of Constanța highlighted a higher level of operational efficiency through the coordination of safety structures and the neutralization of the drone without casualties, but this success was speculatively converted into a new cognitive vulnerability.¹⁷ The chronology of the Constanța Port incident began at 06:11, when the presence of the drone at Berth 78 was reported to the Naval Forces, after which the Coast Guard (06:18) and the divers' team (06:45) were alerted. At around 10:25, the self-destruction signal of the Ukrainian craft was detected, followed quickly by its explosion at 10:28 and the activation of the Red Intervention Plan at 10:29. Safety measures continued after another offshore detonation was observed at 11:05, with RO-ALERT messages issued at 11:21 and 11:29, followed by the preventive evacuation of beaches and resorts starting at 13:50; the action officially ended with the deactivation of the Red Intervention Plan at 14:35.¹⁸ Pro-Russian sources exploited the promptness of the institutional response to claim that Romanian authorities had known the Ukrainian vector's trajectory in advance, transforming an

effective preventive action into false evidence of Ukrainian complicity or hostile intent.¹⁹ Even the official clarifications from Kyiv, which explained the drone's deviation as the effect of Russian jamming, were distorted by removing the Russian disruptive factor from the equation and presenting the technical acknowledgement as an admission of a deliberate attack against Romania.²⁰ This case confirms the warnings of the international community regarding the Kremlin's strategies of instrumentalizing technical errors and deviations caused by electronic warfare in order to absolve its own aggression and fracture the cohesion of allied states.²¹

Both crises acted as a catalyst for the thesis of Romania's defensive vulnerability, validating in the public space the idea that the state lacks real-time response capabilities and displays opacity or delays in assuming institutional transparency. This convergence of effects provided the optimal structural premise onto which external information-manipulation and interference operations could graft themselves and prosper, directly exploiting the authorities' weaknesses in communication and reaction.



The drone explosion. Source: Amateur

Actors and Their Positions: The Dynamics of Institutional Reactions

The security incidents of 29 May and 5 June 2026 functioned as major diagnostic indicators for Romania's institutional resilience, highlighting how the strategic communication decisions of national and international actors directly influence the vulnerability of the information space. From a public policy analysis perspective, the relevance of the positions adopted by various actors does not lie in their isolated content, but in the measurable causal effects that information management had on society's capacity to resist external influence operations. Each communication asymmetry and each institutional delay served as a structural premise for the expansion of disinformation.

As regards the relevant authorities, crisis management revealed a critical gap between the technical rigor of assessments and the promptness with which messages were transmitted to the public. The Ministry of National Defence's publication of the technical report 48 hours after the impact in Galați offered an indisputable methodological clarification regarding the Russian origin of the Geran-2 drone²², but this timing left the information space unprotected during the critical phase of the event. As a secondary consequence, MApN's attempted to justify the impossibility of interception on social media through a video explanation with a message that contained unfinished arguments and empty promises of answering questions deepened the problem. This weak message only amplified the public perception of incompetence and provided for the emotionally mobilized audiences an additional source for hostile narratives²³. Moreover, the honest acknowledgement by interim Defence Minister Radu Miruță of the deficit in low-altitude air-defense capabilities, although necessary for democratic transparency, was immediately instrumentalized

by disinformation networks as an official argument in support of the thesis of the Romanian state's total vulnerability.²⁴

At the level of political leadership, Romania's firm diplomatic measures, including the expulsion of the Russian consul general and the closure of the Consulate in Constanța, aimed to send a political signal to Moscow and deter hybrid aggression²⁵, but generated an unforeseen side effect in the field of propaganda. The speed of executive decisions was speculatively reframed by malicious actors through a mechanism that inverted the causal relationship, constructing the narrative that the drone incident had been deliberately orchestrated to legitimize diplomatic sanctions and accelerate military acquisitions under the SAFE programme.²⁶ This type of response illustrates a pattern specific to foreign interference: any firm institutional action taken immediately after a crisis event can be presented to the public not as a consequence of the trauma, but as its true cause.

The positioning of the international community and Euro-Atlantic partners reconfirmed strategic support for Romania, but the impact of these messages was neutralized by an informational asymmetry in the digital environment. Both the warnings of the Institute for the Study of War regarding the Kremlin's increased tolerance for the risk of causing civilian casualties in NATO states²⁷ and the condemnation resolution signed by 56 states during the emergency session of the UN Security Council circulated extremely little among Romania's wider public.²⁹ Analytically, this phenomenon demonstrates that complex strategic documents and foreign-policy arguments cannot compete effectively, in terms of organic propagation algorithms, with simplified media products with strong emotional impact, leaving mass audiences exposed to local manipulation.

This dynamic was actively exploited by the Russian Federation through a dual strategy of factual denial and propagandistic reframing of the incidents. Moscow's representative contested the Romanian technical report from the UN rostrum through the false argument that a Geran-2 drone would have entirely collapsed the apartment block in Galați; this was designed as an informational export vector and was quickly picked up by pro-Russian media channels in Romania as external validation of conspiracy theories.²⁹ Similarly, the incident in the Port of Constanța, where a Ukrainian drone was diverted by Russian jamming, was used by the Kremlin to transfer responsibility for the aggression onto Ukraine, turning an operational prevention success by Romanian security forces into a false argument about the hostile intentions of the neighboring state.³⁰

On the domestic political level, fragmentation of public discourse and the use of calculated omission acted as indirect amplifiers of disinformation. The initial refusal of George Simion, leader of AUR, the main sovereigntist opposition party, to explicitly name the aggressor in his statements - namely Russia - created an attribution vacuum that allowed the public to internalize preferred interpretive frames, while social-media interventions by pro-Russian influencers or politicians directly attacked the credibility of the official version, labelling the crisis as a pretext for arms procurement³¹. The systemic effect of these narratives was not necessarily the ideological conversion of the population, but the creation of a diffuse state of uncertainty in which factual truth and speculation were placed on the same level of plausibility, enabling the automatic recycling of older themes about false-flag operations or forced involvement in the war.

In this polarized environment, even approaches that were correct from the perspective of public policy debate suffered

major distortions once inserted into the general information circuit. The legitimate question raised by some pro-Western politicians about the technical reasons why the army was unable to intercept the drone in Galați³² was extracted from its administrative-analysis context and transformed by the FIMI ecosystem into an additional argument for delegitimizing the country's defensive capacity. This case confirms that, in the absence of rigorous crisis-communication management by the state, disinformation mechanisms have the ability to absorb valid democratic questions and convert them into instruments for undermining trust in national-security institutions.

Analysis of the Digital Environment: Patterns, Accounts and Amplification

The empirical analysis of behavior recorded in the Romanian digital environment after the incidents of 29 May and 5 June 2026 reveals the structural characteristics of a hybrid information-manipulation operation. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the sample of 2,231 comments collected through the Apify toolkit indicates that the domestic digital space did not witness a simple spontaneous effervescence of organic opinions, but rather the coordinated activation of disinformation vectors that directly distorted public perception.

A first indicator of this deliberate distortion is the profile of hyperactive users in the first hours after impact, with a critical density of accounts lacking visual identity and using generic, often alphanumeric, names. This phenomenon describes an astroturfing tactic whose effect is to create a false impression of popular consensus or generalized indignation on the part of civil society. These accounts act as resonance multipliers by injecting the same

message cores rewritten with minor lexical changes. This semi-automated replication technique indicates the existence of narrative playbooks distributed in a coordinated manner in order to saturate recommendation algorithms through massive volume rather than ideological diversity.³³

The chronology of comment emergence shows an extremely high reaction speed, with the first alternative narratives being disseminated within the first 120 minutes after the Galați incident. This dynamic directly exploited a structural vulnerability of state institutions: the 48-hour information vacuum created by the Ministry of National Defence's delay in publishing the 31 May technical report. In the absence of a rapid official version, troll networks and social bots occupied users' cognitive foreground first, fixing conspiratorial interpretive frames before the public had access to verified factual data.

Qualitatively, the JAQing technique ('Just Asking Questions') plays a central role in disguising propaganda. Accounts do not necessarily issue explicit Russian claims, but frame apparently innocent or skeptical questions (for example, 'How do you know it is Russian?' - a comment that gathered 451 likes in the network - or 'Isn't this the little remote-controlled boat?'). This approach gives the disinformation actor plausible deniability, eroding factual truth not through counterarguments, but through systemic relativization and artificially induced doubt³⁴. Moreover, the comparative study of platforms reveals a clear division of informational labor. While Facebook functioned as a vector for a more mature audience, hosting more politically structured and cynical narratives focused on financial theories (the SAFE programme conspiracy, the claim that the incident was orchestrated to justify massive arms acquisitions), TikTok operated as a purely emotional accelerator, targeting younger

demographic segments. On TikTok, the algorithmic logic based on ultra-short content allowed extremely aggressive messages to go viral. A single Russian-language comment parodying NATO's reaction ('НАТО уже глубоко обеспокоены?' - 'Is NATO already deeply concerned?') gathered 2,066 likes, becoming the most influential item in the dataset. Also on TikTok, a significant 10.8% share of comments validated the creator, indicating that the audience operates in isolated echo chambers where disinformation is pre-accepted as 'sound thinking'.

The empirical data indicate the existence of a long-term cognitive war in which the 2026 incidents did not create entirely new currents of opinion, but provided the optimal pretext for triggering preinstalled information mechanisms. These structures were activated to amplify Romanian citizens' distrust of state institutions and NATO, generate panic, and weaken the nation's overall resilience.

FIMI Taxonomy: The Narrative Matrix of the Operation

For a deeper understanding of the anatomy of the FIMI operation and its narrative mechanisms, it is essential to use the conceptual framework developed by the European External Action Service (EEAS). Unlike classical disinformation, FIMI actions constitute intentional, coordinated and asymmetric behavior used by external state or non-state actors to manipulate decision-making processes and deliberately weaken the social cohesion of a target state.³⁵

In the case of the Galați and Constanța drones, the FIMI architecture fitted perfectly onto the firehose of falsehood propaganda model. This model is characterized by four pillars: high volume and multiple channels, speed and repetition, lack of commitment to objective reality, and lack of internal consistency. The ultimate goal is not to convince the public of an alternative logical version of the facts, but to cognitively exhaust citizens, leading them to believe that 'nothing is certain and everyone lies'. Incidents involving civilian risks or structural damage, such as the explosion of a Russian drone in Galați, represent ideal windows of opportunity for FIMI because fear and emotional response inhibit the rational decoding of reality.³⁶

The granular analysis of the dataset made it possible to isolate five major narratives that operated in an integrated manner:

Narrative Code	Core Narrative	Psychological Mechanism / Tactic	Illustration from the Dataset / Effect
N1	Reversal of kinetic roles (false-flag operations)	Exploitation of regional geopolitical resentments to present Ukraine as a provocative aggressor.	'Ukrainian drone like all the previous ones, false-flag attacks to drag Romania and NATO into war' (170 likes).
N2	Financial-military opportunism (SAFE contracts theory)	Translation of an acute national-security problem into the paradigm of endemic domestic corruption.	Arguments launched by public influencers (e.g. Robert Turcescu) and taken up by users in the form: 'we give them money to buy drones with which they hit us'.
N3	Escalation anxiety (forced mobilization / general panic)	Decision-making paralysis through the induction of fear of war. Use of LLM-based agents to simulate panic.	Repetitive messages such as: 'They are trying to drag us into war', 'Everything is a diversion, they are preparing the ground'.
N4	Delegitimization of defensive capacity (discrediting the Army)	Diverting a legitimate democratic debate on military procurement into a campaign of demoralization and subversion.	Transformation of technical vulnerabilities acknowledged by the ministry into accusations of 'high treason' (comment with 487 likes).
N5	Personalization of the conspiracy (attack on political leadership)	Portraying the head of state as a docile executor of external orders.	Asymmetric editing of images from Galați on TikTok to simulate a complete rejection of the pro-Western line by the population.

N1. 'The Drone Was Ukrainian' / The False-Flag Operation

This narrative represents the hard core of the effort to launder the image of the Russian Federation and reverse the roles of aggressor and victim. Even during live broadcasts and on official pages where MApN provided incontestable technical evidence (Cyrillic inscriptions, the Geran-2 model), the comment flow was flooded with stereotypical messages: 'UKRAINIAN DRONE LIKE ALL THE PREVIOUS ONES, FALSE-FLAG ATTACKS TO DRAG ROMANIA AND NATO INTO WAR' (170 likes). The psychological mechanism exploited here is regional geopolitical resentment, with disinformation actors attempting to prove that Ukraine is deliberately provoking NATO member states in order to force the application of Article 5.

N2. 'Right on Time / Perfectly Timed' - The Military Contracts Conspiracy Theory

This line of attack seeks to undermine strategic resilience by translating a national security problem into the paradigm of domestic corruption. Public conspiracy actors, such as former journalist Robert Turcescu, speculated that the Galați drone was intentionally allowed to fall in order to legitimize the accelerated signing and financing of contracts under the SAFE military programme, whose symbolic deadline coincided with the period of the incidents. The collected data show how users quickly adopted this idea (comments such as 'for SAFE 2' or 'we give them money to buy drones with which they hit us'), turning a real technical vulnerability in air defense into an illegal deal orchestrated by the 'smart guys'.

N3. 'Romania Is at War / General Panic'

Designed exclusively to paralyse decision-making through fear, this narrative used apocalyptic messages referring to imminent forced conscription or the transformation of Romania into a theatre of war. Messages such as 'They are trying to drag us into war' or 'Everything is a diversion, they are preparing the ground' circulated widely. The systemic danger in 2026 lies in the fact that the entire interaction activity - from generating nuanced comments adapted to the local context to distributing likes and shares - can be fully automated through AI agents based on large language models (LLMs), perfectly mimicking human behavior. This makes panic appear generalized and unstoppable.

N4. Discrediting the Romanian Army

This narrative exploits an entirely legitimate civic dilemma, raised even by moderate political leaders or analysts: 'Why could they not stop it in time?' However, within the FIMI operation, this question was diverted away from a democratic debate about procurement and institutional effectiveness and toward a campaign of demoralization. Interim Minister Radu Miruță's honest statement regarding the technical limits of Romania's current systems in intercepting low-altitude targets was transformed by trolls and bots into 'high treason'. High-impact comments such as 'I believe all state structures should be arrested. High treason' (487 likes) or 'the Romanian state is complicit in the destruction of Romania' (77 likes) demonstrate how a technical military deficit is computationally converted into a crisis of legitimacy for the state as guarantor of its citizens' safety.

N5. 'Nicușor Was Waiting for the Signal' - The Attack on the President

The final narrative line personalises the conspiracy and focuses directly on President Nicușor Dan. The FIMI campaign portrayed the head of state not as an elected leader defending national interests within CSAT, but as a docile executor of external orders from Washington or Brussels, who was 'waiting for the signal' to drag the country into conflict. Images from his visit to Galați, where he was booed by some local residents, were cut, edited and looped on TikTok as 'proof' that the Romanian people totally rejected his pro-Western line.

Conclusions and Recommendations: What the Drone Incidents in Galați and Constanța Reveal About Information Vulnerabilities

The incidents of May-June 2026 demonstrate that modern hybrid aggression uses kinetic impact merely as a detonator for a broader attack on the collective psyche, exploiting pre-existing fractures within society. They brought together, in a toxic synergy, all the ingredients needed for a perfect information storm: civilian victims and a violent emotional impact (the image of the destroyed apartment on the 10th floor), a military institution pushed onto the defensive by the acknowledgement of its own technical limits, a polarized domestic political context, and a pre-existing domestic amplification network (populist politicians, Eurosceptic influencers, and troll and bot accounts) ready to absorb and naturalize Moscow's messages.

The saturation of messages on TikTok and Facebook showed that the Romanian public is vulnerable not to direct Russian propaganda, but to the instrumentalization of its own fears and traumas: the fear of becoming a theatre of war, chronic distrust in state institutions, and the native suspicion surrounding the integrity of public procurement.

To move from vulnerability to cognitive resilience, a profound effort and far better cooperation between government institutions and the media are required. The Romanian state must understand that in information warfare, speed beats perfection. The 48-hour communication vacuum in the Galați case was manoeuvre space handed as a gift to disinformation networks. Crisis communication by ministries and the Government must respect the crisis communication principles of timely updates on the progress even though providing preliminary accurate data might require additional time. Connecting with the public, showing up with willingness to share information in the first hours after an impact is essential in order to block the installation of alternative narratives. At the societal level, broad categories of the public need digital and communication hygiene adapted to the year 2026. In a digital ecosystem in which interactions, likes and comments can be fully simulated through artificial intelligence, initiatives should be consolidated systemically, both publicly and institutionally, so that citizens understand that an incendiary comment section is not the 'voice of the people', but most often an algorithm designed to manipulate their anger and destabilize their democracy.

To achieve the transition from systemic vulnerability to cognitive resilience, measures are required across three strategic levels:

1. Debureaucratizing crisis communication (governmental level):

In information warfare, speed outranks technical perfection. The state must deliver updates on how the preliminary data report is progressing. Indeed, the crisis communication principles require communicating only the factual and accurate data. This though, does not mean that the communication space shouldn't be filled with messages from the organization. 48-hour vacuum means any actor can gain credibility only because they said it first - which reflects the Galați case, where this latency gave troll networks free rein.

The good practices for a crisis response in the absence of a fully approved technical report recommends offering existing data (e.g. "first responders team collected debree material for analysis") together with details about what are the next steps and instructions for getting more details (e.g. "all updates will be first communicated on the official website and television through the institution's spokesperson") and offering the autoprotection information necessary for a timely response. All of these details must make use of idle communication (e.g. "these are the details we can communicate by this time and details are subject to change according to the developments of our investigation")

2. Implementing prebunking techniques (media level):

Professional journalism must be supported and used as one of the major communication levers in crisis situations because, in addition to the systematic effort to provide information based on prebunking techniques, it has a decisive role in explaining and contextualizing the image games of opportunistic political actors or DIMI (Democratic Information Manipulation and Interference). Journalists and media institutions need training and logistical support in proactively dismantling manipulation patterns before they reach the virilization threshold, strictly contextualizing populist discourses and helping occupy the public space with adequate, professional and up-to-date information.

3. Consolidating systemic digital hygiene (societal level):

It is imperative to implement national digital-education programmes adapted to the technological realities of 2026. In an environment in which digital interactions can be fully simulated through artificial intelligence (LLMs), citizens must understand that comment sections no longer reflect the organic will of the population, but algorithms optimized for democratic destabilization.

End notes

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