

# Preparing for Conflict and War – The Continuing Need

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**Abstract:** The relevance of integrating preparation for conflict and war in high school and university programs is given by the geopolitical context of Romania and Moldova. This region is marked by tensions and risks generated by nearby conflicts, especially the war in Ukraine, as well as its strategic position between two great spheres of influence: the West, represented by NATO and the European Union, and the Russian Federation. These circumstances underline the importance of an educated population in the field of security and conflict management, making the research topic highly relevant. The growing tensions around Romania and the Republic of Moldova underline the imperative to equip young people with essential knowledge and skills to navigate potential conflict situations. Education systems play a critical role in fostering resilience, critical thinking and preparedness among young people. Incorporating modules that address conflict awareness and disaster response strategies is not only timely, but essential for student safety and well-being. In the research context described, it proposes to explore the importance and impact of such an educational model, highlighting ways in which it can support the development of social, cognitive and civic skills of young people.

**Keywords:** Conflict, War, Education and Training, Emotional Resilience, Crisis Management

## Introduction

The war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in February 2022 represents the most significant conflict in Europe since World War II. For Romania and Moldova, the geographical proximity of this conflict has direct implications. Romania, having an extensive border with Ukraine in the northeast, has been exposed to massive flows of refugees, to logistical and humanitarian challenges, but also to the increase in military tensions in the Black Sea region. Also, Moldova, located only a few kilometers from the epicenter of the conflict, faced socio-economic pressures and risks of internal destabilization, especially in the context of the separatist region of Transnistria, supported by Russia.

In this framework, conflict and war education becomes crucial. Understanding geopolitical mechanisms and response strategies can increase population resilience to crises, reducing social and economic vulnerabilities. The approach of geopolitical conflicts requires young people to understand the complexity of such situations, to be prepared to respond and manage them appropriately in case of need. Educational institutions have a responsibility to provide students and pupils with the necessary tools to understand and address these challenges, thereby enhancing individual and community resilience.

Romania is a key member of NATO and the EU, having an essential role in strengthening security on the Eastern Flank. International military bases, joint exercises and the presence of allied troops on its territory underline the importance of this state in the European defense architecture. However, these measures must be complemented with an appropriate education that prepares future generations to understand the complexity of international conflicts and actively contribute to the strengthening of national security. On the other hand, the energy and economic challenges generated by the conflict in Ukraine highlighted the need for well-informed policies based on a deep understanding of the geopolitical context. By integrating learning about conflicts in the educational system, young Romanians could become better prepared to endure and manage such crises.

The Republic of Moldova, although declared a neutral state by the constitution, is in an extremely vulnerable position. Pro-Russian influences, propaganda, and energy dependence

on Gazprom contribute to constant instability. In addition, the pro-European orientation of the Moldovan government faces resistance from both domestic pro-Russian forces and Moscow's external influence.

### **Research methods and tools**

The methodology used in research on the introduction of conflict and war education into high school and university education is mixed. I mainly used the following:

*The comparative study* on models from other countries: Israel and Asian states in education for conflict and war—South Korea, Singapore—on the analysis of educational programs in countries that include such modules with the identification of lessons learned that can be adapted for the context of Romania and of the Republic of Moldova and the cultural and social differences, obstacles and opportunities identified in Romania and the Republic of Moldova;

*Surveys and interviews* consisting of the opinions of students, teachers and experts in the field of education and security, resulting from a questionnaire applied both to high school and university students and to Romanian teachers.

*Documentary analysis* materialized in the study of national security strategies and relevant educational policies in Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

Subsequently, the *methods of analysis and synthesis* were used to summarize the centralized material and formulate conclusions based on them.

These methods and tools used in the scientific approach allowed me a comprehensive understanding of the transformations in the field of education, leading me to formulate relevant conclusions for the future

### **The importance of education for conflict and war**

In this context, preparing the population to understand the risks associated with conflicts, but also to respond to propaganda and political crises, becomes a priority. High school and university education can provide young Romanians and Moldovans with the necessary tools to develop national resilience, thus supporting European integration. The purpose of the proposed model is to create a link between theoretical knowledge and practical applicability, preparing young people to respond rationally to situations of uncertainty by developing the ability to make decisions under pressure, to understand global dynamics to identify useful lessons, to promote peace and cooperation through proper management of tensions and to promote negotiated solutions in various situations.

Looking at the social lessons of history and the importance of education, we determine that both Romania and Moldova share a complex history, shaped by territorial conflicts, wars and political changes dictated by the great powers. From Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian to Soviet influences, these countries witnessed episodes that deeply marked national identity and social structure. Education about conflict and war can contribute to a better understanding of these historical lessons, strengthening a culture of peace and collaboration. In addition, international examples such as Israel or the Scandinavian countries show that preparing the population for conflict management not only improves national resilience, but also promotes social cohesion.

Seen from another perspective, the International Federation of Red Cross Societies (IFRCS) defines disasters as any unforeseen event that leads to dysfunction in society that leads to economic, social, property and human losses up to an extreme limit, limit to that society can no longer cope with the adverse effects (IFRC, 2022). The extent, frequency and type of hazards differ by geography, ethnicity and economic capacity (Sawalha, Shamieh & Meaton, 2018).

Floods, earthquakes, heat waves and droughts are some examples of natural disasters. However, occupational hazards, infectious disease outbreaks, terrorist attacks and others are

man-made disasters. Disasters cause extremely damaging effects. First, they increase the mortality rate because they cause massive injuries, such as blunt trauma and crush injuries. In 2017, the global database recorded 335 natural disasters worldwide, affecting more than 95.6 million people. Of these, 9,697 died, of which 58% were from Asia, costing an estimated US\$335 billion in property damage. Second, they destroy property and cause disruption to economic and social infrastructure. Finally, they have a negative impact on people's physical, mental and social well-being (Centre for Research and Epidemiology Disasters, 2017).

In recent years, the influx of Ukrainian teenagers has revealed challenges in integrating refugee students into the education system, particularly in terms of language barriers and social isolation. This situation highlights the need for educational programs that address the psychosocial aspects of conflict, preparing students to support peers in conflict zones and promoting an inclusive environment.

Educational models from Israel, South Korea, and Singapore regarding conflict and war education were studied for more in-depth documentation. The conclusions are that Israel presents a realistic and practical approach that is useful in preparing students for crises, especially through simulations and extracurricular programs, South Korea has an educational system that can inspire the introduction of mandatory courses in civil defense and situation management emergency and Singapore's model of education for peace and the promotion of social cohesion is particularly relevant for regions with cultural diversity or political polarization.

The integration of elements from these models in the curricula of Romania and Moldova could significantly contribute to the preparation of young people for contemporary uncertainties and risks.

### **Introducing conflict and war preparedness into the curriculum**

In order to meet these needs, we believe that minimal components can be integrated into the high school and university curriculum can be integrated into the high school and university curriculum, so as to lead to the creation of specific skills that initiate and develop *conflict awareness and analysis* by educating pupils/students about historical contexts and geopolitics of regional conflicts in order to promote a comprehensive understanding of the field. We also believe that training for emergency or conflict response by providing *practical skills for personal safety, first aid and crisis management in conflict situations* is another area that requires the introduction of theoretical and practical subjects in the curriculum of students in our high schools and universities. We add to these, the implementation of programs that improve *emotional resilience, stress management and human support mechanisms*. Considering that the society in Romania and the Republic of Moldova went through various computer attacks in 2024, on the occasion of the presidential elections held in both countries, we believe that the development of the *ability to critically evaluate information sources in order to combat disinformation and propaganda* during conflicts is a fourth direction in which high school students and/or college students must be prepared.

We expect that the integration of these components will lead to equipping pupils and students with the necessary skills and knowledge with the skills and knowledge needed to respond effectively to conflict situations, strengthening young people's ability to cope with the stress and uncertainty associated with conflict, and promoting an inclusive school environment that supports all students, including those affected by regional conflicts.

By integrating conflict preparedness into the curriculum, universities can aim to *increase national resilience* by creating a workforce capable of responding effectively to crises, supporting lifelong learning by creating a culture of security and continuous learning and adaptability ever-changing geopolitics as well as *addressing crises by integrating various fields* - psychology, public policy, communication and technology.

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt, recover and thrive in the face of adversity, stress or trauma. It is not an innate trait, but a dynamic process that can be developed and strengthened over time. The result of this process is that resilient people maintain a positive outlook, use resources effectively, and continue to function despite challenges.

According to the definition provided by the American Psychological Association (APA), *coping mechanisms* are the cognitive, behavioral and emotional strategies that people use to manage stress and cope with difficult or threatening situations. These mechanisms are essential for maintaining psychological balance and functioning effectively under conditions of adversity. These mechanisms can be classified as adaptive (positive) consisting of healthy and constructive strategies or maladaptive (negative) that support problem solving and stress reduction, depending on their effectiveness in promoting long-term well-being. The importance of developing effective coping mechanisms derives from the social outcomes of stress management awareness and training. The main results are related to increasing psychological resilience, improving mental and physical health, and reducing the risk of burnout or other stress-related conditions. We propose here the study of coping mechanisms in the university area within the disciplines intended to strengthen social resilience.

In the context of education, fostering resilience and effective coping mechanisms among students and teachers helps improve emotional well-being, academic performance, and build a supportive school culture that thrives under stress or crisis. Incorporating these elements into the curriculum or training programs ensures that individuals are better prepared to face life's challenges with strength and adaptability.

In order to substantiate the proposal to introduce conflict and war education into the school and university curriculum, a questionnaire was drawn up with the question "*How important do you think it is to learn about security, defense and global and regional conflicts in high school or university education?*" and applied to a number of 95 high school students and students of the legal and economic fields. Analyzing the answers to the question regarding the importance of studying security, defense and conflicts in high school and university education, we observe the following distribution: very important – 48 respondents, important – 34 respondents and sufficiently important – 13 respondents. The interpretation of these results leads to the following conclusions:

1. *There is a high share of favorable answers* - 82 out of 95 respondents (approx. 86%) consider these disciplines to be "very important" or "important". This suggests an increased interest in integrating these subjects into the curriculum. A small number of people (13) consider these topics "important enough", which indicates a generally positive perception of the need for education in this area. This suggests a real awareness of global issues and a desire to better understand these critical themes;
2. *A high trend towards a recognition of the relevance of the field*: the majority of respondents (48) place the importance of these disciplines at the highest level ("very important"), which may suggest an increased awareness of the relevance of security and defense in the current global context and regional. A percentage of 20% of students consider the subject "important", which indicates that part of the respondents recognize an acute need for education in this field, perhaps because of the current international context or personal interests towards global policies;
3. *Possible Implications for Educational Curriculum*: These results support the case for introducing or strengthening security and defense subjects in high school and university education. The acceptance of such an initiative seems to be quite high, which could facilitate the integration of these subjects without significant resistance from pupils/students.

The results indicate a clear support for the inclusion of Security and conflict topics in high school and university education. The data suggest a perceived need to deepen these subjects, which may justify the initiation of curricular changes in this direction.

At the same time, a questionnaire was built with the question, "Do you consider that education for defense, conflict and war can contribute to the prevention of extremism and radicalization among young people?" This question was answered by 75 teaching staff from high schools and universities. The analysis of the responses revealed the following distribution: 69 respondents answered "yes," while 6 respondents answered "no." The interpretation of the answers brings the following conclusions:

1. *There is a majority agreement on the positive impact of education* - 69 out of 75 teachers (92%) believe that education on these topics can have a preventive role in combating extremism and radicalization. This high percentage indicates a strong belief in the potential of education to form critical thinking and reduce the vulnerability of young people to extremist ideologies;
2. *Skeptical minority* - only 6 teachers (8%) do not believe that these subjects can have a significant impact on the prevention of extremism. This may reflect either a perception that radicalization is influenced more by social and economic factors than education, or a doubt about the effectiveness of implementing such courses;
3. *Implications for the educational system* - the majority acceptance of this idea can constitute a strong argument for the introduction of subjects or modules on security, conflict and defense in the curriculum. If teachers believe that such courses can contribute to reducing extremism, they may be better integrated and supported at the institutional level.

For a clearer picture, we also add a graphical representation of the percentage results for both questions. On the left, the graph shows the students' perception of the importance of education about security and conflicts, and on the right, the teachers' opinion about the role of education in preventing extremism.

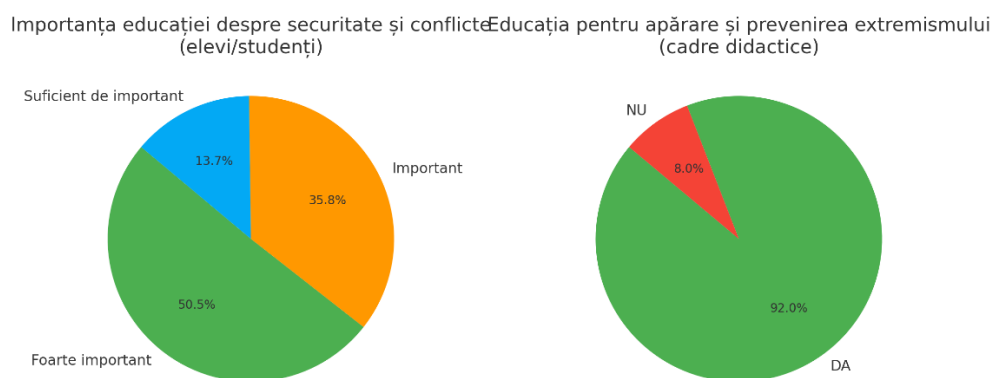


Figure 1. The importance of education about security and conflicts / The role of education in preventing extremism

In conclusion, we can consider that the answers indicate a clear perception of the role of education in preventing extremism and radicalization. Teaching staff, being essential factors in the implementation of such disciplines, show a favorable attitude, which suggests that a curricular initiative in this field could have support and a positive impact on the training of young people.

## Conclusions

We believe that integrating conflict and war training into high school education programs is a proactive measure that addresses the current security challenges facing Romania and the Republic

of Moldova. Drawing on international research and best practices, this initiative aims to equip students with the skills and knowledge to navigate and respond to potential conflicts effectively.

The increasing frequency of geopolitical crises, natural disasters and conflicts calls for the development of well-informed and prepared citizens. While basic training in conflict and war awareness and response as well as emergency response can be introduced in high school, universities have a unique role in deepening these skills. By integrating specialist disciplines into higher education, we ensure that future professionals and leaders are equipped with the advanced knowledge and practical skills needed to manage complex geopolitical crises and contribute to national economic and social resilience.

The models from Israel, South Korea and Singapore offer valuable lessons that can be adapted for the context of Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

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