

EDITORIAL LETTER

The Romanian Journal of Society and Politics' special issue of 2022 is centred on the Eastern and South-Eastern European (ESEE) Fanel Network's international academic conference - "The Other Europe? Resilience and Assertiveness in our region" which took place on the 14th- 15th of January. The conference provided a much-needed forum for female International Relations and related subject specialists to discuss important sociological and political issues affecting the Eastern, South-Eastern, Black Sea Region, and Central Europe sub-regions.

The knowledge of women working in International Relations, Economics, or Social Sciences is typically ignored in debates, even though the complex terrain of vulnerabilities and threats necessitates an integrated response from policymakers and intellectuals. Even when considering specific solutions, masculine worldviews frequently dominate the assessments and discussions. Women are usually asked to uphold strict gender norms. Through the conference, the Network sought to support and elevate women's voices in the region, address important issues, examine common regional concerns, share expertise, and come up with solutions as a group.

During the past decade, we have witnessed a progressive shift in the international world order, with the re-emergence of the military sector of security at the forefront of the global competition for power. The 2008 war in Georgia, followed by the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, escalated to a full-fledged illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 have signalled a growing offensive posture of the Russian Federation, incompatible with the rules-based international order. These evolutions were coupled with intensified hybrid warfare, growing vulnerabilities and threats associated with the rule of law, corruption, weak institutions, the role of minorities, unstable political environments etc., which need to be further analysed to truly understand the regional dynamics.

The promotion of alternative international frameworks of cooperation, the growth of vocal opponents of the West, the use of covert tactics to further the illiberal agenda, and the introduction of funding schemes with no apparent conditionalities attached have all blossomed over the past ten years. The Covid-19 pandemic, environmental concerns, illiberal inclinations, and digital developments are today's problems for those advocating to defend democracy and the rights of all people. As a macro-region made up of the Central and Eastern European member states of the European Union, the Western Balkans candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as the wider Black Sea Region, all these dynamics significantly impact the Eastern and South-Eastern European countries.

Given the historical legacies of these sub-regions, it was important to have meaningful and inclusive debates to discuss different issues of common interest therefore, the conference included three FANELS: (I) *Regional inequalities and their socio-economic consequences*, (II) *Established and new regional cooperation formats and initiatives inside and outside the EU*, (III) *International games in the region. Competing interests in ESEE and their consequences*.

For the special issue, we chose an article representative for each FANEL. The first one tackles the issue of the political and economic repercussions of Russia's and China's actions in relation to the process of enhancing EU strategic autonomy, taking into consideration the complementarity between the security and economic dimensions. The second one refers to the EU's role and perception as a resilience promoter and whether and how Georgia's case exemplifies resilience in the face of external "shocks", contending that the Georgian government's attitude and political narrative are influenced by immediate security threats and the vulnerability of state institutions. The third article aims to discover the migration phenomenon and motivations to return and to highlight best practices from the private sector that can be implemented by the government and to develop a brain gain model to attract talent back into the country.

Prof. LILIANA POPESCU, Ph.D.
Founding editor of the Romanian Journal of Society and Politics
President of the ESEE Fanel Network Board