

May 2023
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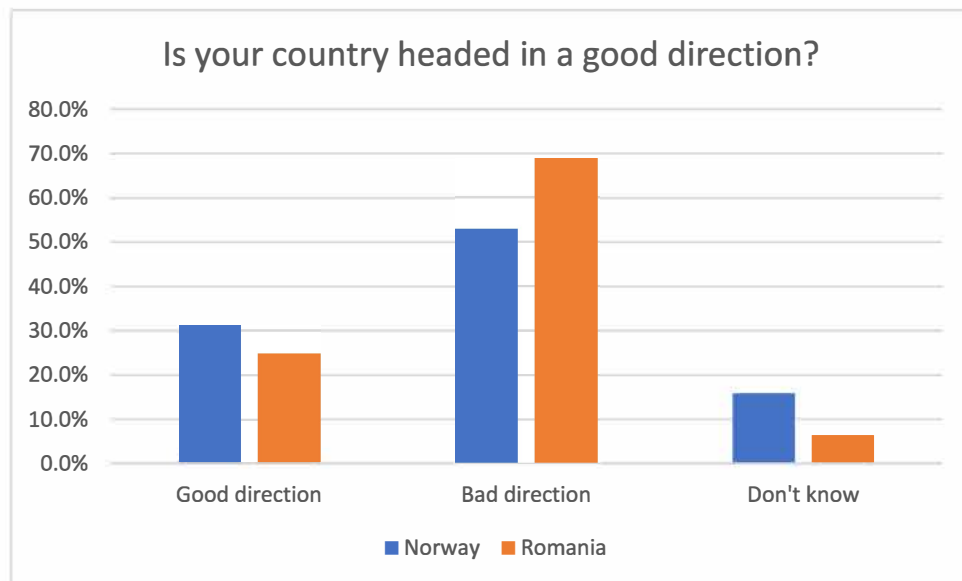
This policy brief is part of the FLANKS II – Dealing with the challenge of political warfare in the COVID-19 and Ukraine war context, financed under the Fund for Bilateral Relations 2014-2021, co-published by New Strategy Center, Romania and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

The *A year of War – National Attitudes in Romania and Norway* policy brief analyzes the results of two national surveys conducted simultaneously in Romania and Norway. New Strategy Center and NUPI worked together to design the questionnaire and adapt it to the cultural, social and political specificities of each country, while retaining a high degree of similarity, able to inform a sound subsequent analysis. The purpose of the survey was to establish national societal attitudes in the two target countries in around the 1st year mark of Russia's unprovoked aggression of Ukraine. The questions were constructed around the following themes of interest: perception of the national outlook, energy prices, sources of worry, the war in Ukraine, attachment to Euro-Atlantic institutions and media usage and trust. The two surveys collected a nationally representative sample based on age, gender, and regions in both target countries in the first half of March, with samples consisting of 1004 respondents in Norway and 1103 people in Romania.

The policy brief will contrast and compare the results of the two national surveys, interspersing collected data with social, cultural and geopolitical consideration where required for analytical clarity. In doing so, the paper will follow the outline of the surveys, separating topics into thematic clusters.

1. Social Optimism

The majority of Romanians, 68%, are pessimistic regarding the future evolution of the country, compared to 53% in Norway. In both countries, young adults were the most optimistic, with 38% of Romanians between the age of 18-29 evaluating the direction that their country is going in as “good”, compared to 49% of Norwegians respondents between 18-24.

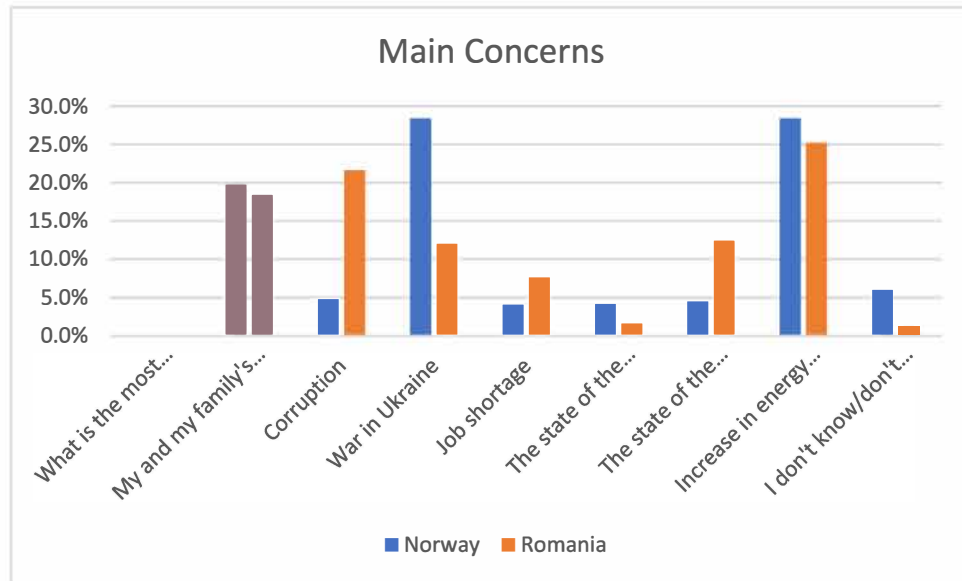


2. Sources of concern

The main source of concern for Romanians respondents is the economy: 25% the increase in energy prices (electricity and natural gas) followed by corruption (22%) and their own and their family's health (18%). One year after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the degree of anxiety regarding the conflict is on par with concerns about the state of the education system (12% compared to 12%), showing a real decrease in the intensity of fears related to a possible Russian military aggression against Romania, or to the involvement of Romania in the conflict. However, the increase in prices and the cost of living, in general, is correlated with the war in Ukraine being perceived as a source of considerable fear for 44.3% of Romanians, followed by the possibility of Russia attacking one or more NATO and/ or EU member states (27%) and the increase in the number of refugees, at 11%.

The three main issues that the Norwegian respondents were most concerned with were, perhaps unsurprisingly, the increased energy prices (28%), the war in Ukraine (28%) and their and their family's health (18%). We find that the level of concern with the war in Ukraine is steadily increasing with age. 18% of respondents in the age group 18-24, 26% in the age group 45-54 and 51% in the age group 75-80 chose the option “war in Ukraine” as their main concern.

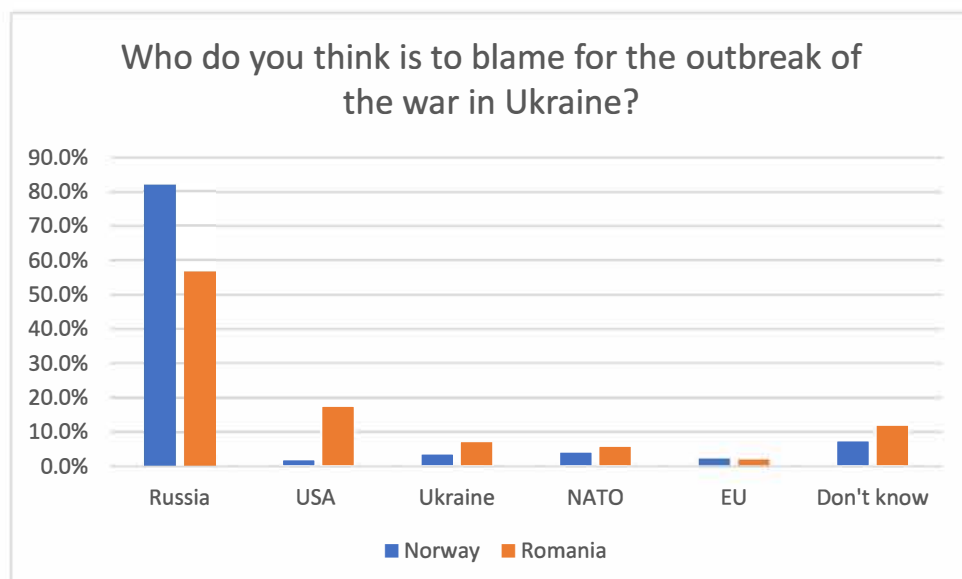
In both countries, there was no clear correlation between proximity to Russia or Ukraine and increased anxiety towards the conflict.



3. The War in Ukraine - Blame vs. Winner

In both countries, the results of the surveys indicate an obvious positioning of the population towards identifying Russia as the main culprit for starting the war.

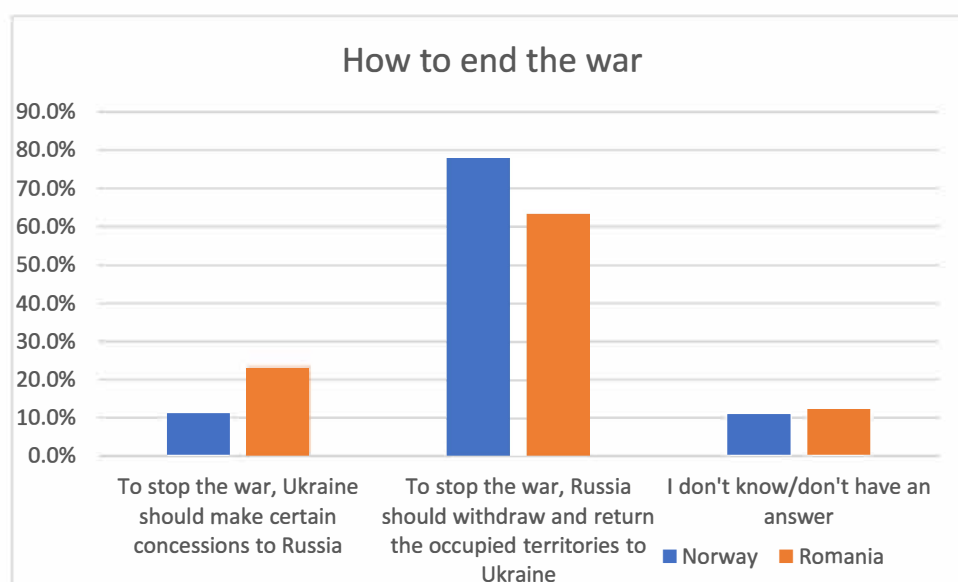
In spite of the overall majority, there were significant differences between the two countries, with only 57% of Romanian respondents blaming Russia, compared to 82% in Norway. The anti-Western and anti-American narratives, present especially in social media, circulated to dilute Russia's responsibility and blame the USA for starting the war, made 17% of Romanians consider that the latter is the main culprit for starting the war, followed by Ukraine. The people who consider the USA and Ukraine guilty for this war fall into the same profile as those who have as their political option the party on the Romanian political scene that promotes a populist and Eurosceptic platform. In contrast, the data from Norway indicates a lesser presence of anti-American and anti-Western narratives in society, which is an effect of Norway's firm position as a Western state with strong ties to the USA.



4. The vision of how to end the war

In March 2023, 38% of Romanians believed that Ukraine would win this war. In contrast, 28% believed that the winner would be Russia. In Norway, 52% thought Ukraine will win the war, with only 13% believing that Russia is capable of doing so. 35% had no answer to this question, highlighting an overall larger degree of belief in Ukraine's ability to win the war among Norwegian respondents.

Regarding the perception of the way to end the war, the majority of the respondents in Romania consider the statement that *Russia should withdraw and return the occupied territories to Ukraine* to be correct (63.3%). Only 24% of respondents favor *certain territorial concessions* towards Russia to stop the conflict. Respondents in Norway were of the same opinion, albeit with a more pronounced majority in favor of the return of all occupied territories (78%), compared to only 11% who believed that Ukraine should make territorial concessions.



5. Euro-Atlantic Institutions

a. NATO

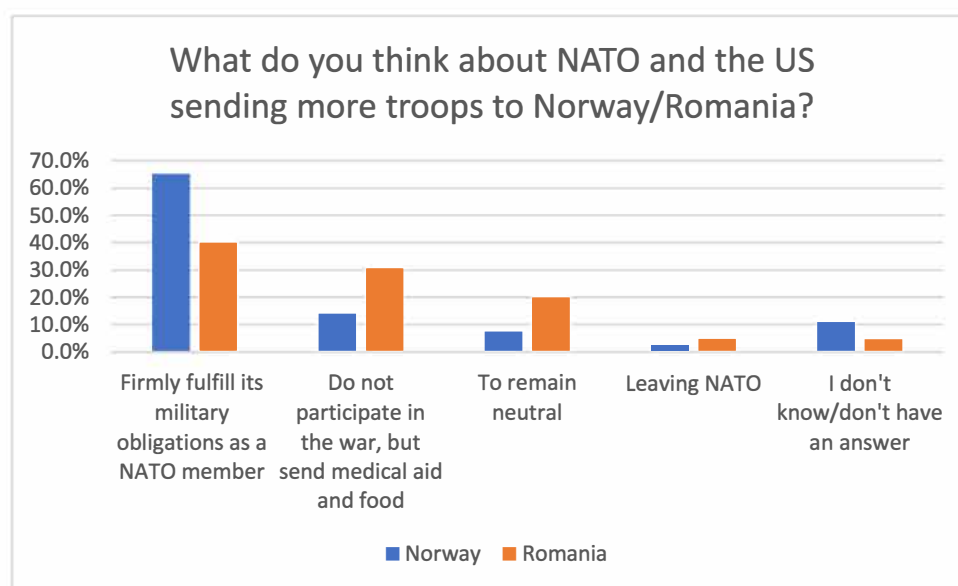
The presence of NATO troops in Romania, and recent additional deployments, are mainly perceived as an element of security for Romanian citizens, with 58% of Romanians considering that NATO troops defend the country from Russia. 33% were adherents of the narrative that the presence of NATO troops and the increase in the number of troops could upset Russia. From the socio-demographic perspective, those who perceive the presence of NATO troops as a security element are both young people (18-29 years old) and people over 60 years old, located in large urban areas and in the capital Bucharest, with above average education, plentiful income and a political orientation that does not include Eurosceptic, populist or sovereigntist discourses. The results were similar in Norway, with 57% in favor of deployment of NATO troops compared to 22% who were concerned with a potential Russian reaction.

Concomitantly, there was a sizeable discrepancy regarding the perceived necessity to fulfil all NATO obligations, with only 40% of Romanians being of the opinion that Romania should firmly fulfil its obligations as a NATO member state in case an Alliance member state is attacked, compared to 65% in Norway. When it comes to neutrality, there was a threefold difference between Romania and Norway, with only 7% of Norwegians thinking that it is both desirable and feasible, compared to 20% of questioned Romanians.

Support for NATO runs high in both countries, with only 5% of Romanians and 8% of Norwegians believing that their countries should leave the alliance. The results show a more balanced understanding of NATO in Norway, given that the strong Romanian attachment to the Alliance does not translate into a similar support for fulfilling its collective defense obligations.

When it comes to purchases of American weaponry, an almost identical share of Romanians and Norwegians consider that “US purchases of advanced weaponry help strengthen the Army” (46% vs. 47%). The share of respondents who did not know which of the two options to choose was higher in Norway, reflected in the options for the follow-up question “US purchases of advanced weaponry only help boost arms manufacturers' profits”, with which only 28% of questioned Norwegians agreed, compared to 44% of Romanian respondents.

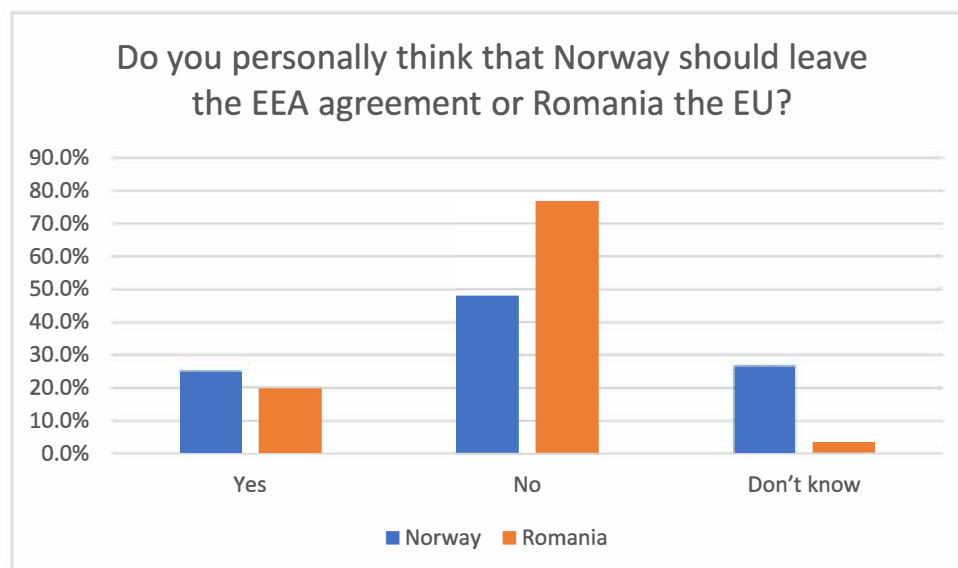
A specific question was addressed to the Romanian respondents, regarding the upcoming investment in offshore gas extraction facilities in the Black Sea. 53% believe that by exploiting the gas resources from the Black Sea, Romania will no longer depend on Russian gas, while 38% believe that the gas resources will only be sold to the West, without Romania benefitting from them. The snapshot suggests a balance between adherence to anti-Western narratives and their rejection. The situation tends towards an increase in the proportion of the population that subscribes to anti-Western narratives.



b. European Union and EEA

Regarding Romania's relationship with the European Union, the majority of respondents, 77%, do not consider Romania's exit from the EU bloc an option, compared to the 19.7% who agree with such a scenario. The profile of those who are against the EU is more common in the blue collar, 30-44 age group, with a self-perceived insufficient monthly income, residing in large

urban areas who work in the public sector. The same profile emerges for Romanian citizens (16%) who consider Romania's exit from NATO an option. **Nevertheless, the results indicate that 79.8% of Romanians are against the country's exit from NATO.** We observe that the two isolationist options, which feed into wider Russian strategic goals, attract a young electorate with a low level of education, located in deprived areas, who are either unemployed or underpaid.



In Norway, 25% thought that Norway should leave the EEA agreement, while 48% were against. 27% did not have any opinion on this matter, fitting into a wider trend of a higher proportion of undecided respondents compared to the survey conducted in Romania.

6. The phenomenon of disinformation

67.1% of respondents in Romania agree that there is propaganda inside the country is carried out by other states. Those in the 18-29 age bracket with higher education and above average incomes residing in large urban areas, are most adamant that concerted disinformation actions are taking place in Romania. Among the states that are considered to be carrying out disinformation activities, **Russia ranks first**, (30%), followed at a considerable distance by the USA, with 15%. The third and fourth positions are taken by Hungary (4%) and Ukraine (4%). Those who are of the opinion that the USA is behind the disinformation campaigns in Romania, are mostly blue collar workers employed in the private sector, aged between 30 and 44, with insufficient income, the same group of respondents that consistently expresses anti-EU sentiments.

In Norway 47% opted for “to a very large extent” or “to a large extent” as answer to the question “To what extent do you think that some states support propaganda, disinformation actions in Norway?” 31% chose the options “to a small extent” or “very little/not at all”.

30% of the respondents named mass media as responsible for the spread of fake news in Norway, while 22% though other countries were responsible, and another 21% named “ordinary people” as the source of fake news. There is also one ambiguous category “People posting on fake accounts” which garnered 12% of responses. People posting on fake accounts could for instance be agents of countries wishing to influence Norway or ordinary people with their own agendas. The tendency to believe that fake news is spread by other counties increased with age: 11% of the 18-25 age group, 25% of the respondents aged between 45-

54, and over a third (37%) of the respondents aged between 75-80 answered that other countries spread fake news. When it comes to the tendency to believe that ordinary people “willing to believe anything” spread fake news, the results point towards an inversed tendency: 30% in age group 18-25, 20% in 45-54 and 11% in 75-80. There is no such clear age trend among those selecting media as responsible for fake news. The data does not show major regional variations in answers to this question. For example, 27% of respondents in North-Norway, 19% in Trøndelag (middle of Norway), 22% in Vestlandet (west), 17% in Sørlandet (south), 23% in Østlandet (east), and 18% in Oslo (the capital) chose “other countries” as responsible for the spread of fake news.

Regarding the responsibility for the spread of fake news, 56% of the Romanian respondents believe that **the media is the main culprit** due to their cynical pursual of increased audience. This fact denotes a lack of trust in media institutions, which are perceived to have departed away from their public function of informing the public in a deontological manner. According to the socio-demographic analysis, the 18-29 years old bracket with higher education, inactive on the labor market and with above-average incomes are the most sensitive to these trends.

In Norway, 40% thought that they had “to a very large” or “large extent” personally been exposed to fake news in recent months. 46% indicated that they thought they had been exposed to fake news “to a small extent” or “very little/not at all”. Interestingly, 51% of the age group 18-24 opted that they had been exposed “to a large” or “very large extent”. However, this critical view of information seems to be decreasing with age with only, 38% of respondents in the age group 45-54 and 26% in the age group 65-74 claiming they had been exposed to fake news “to a large” or “to a very large extent”.

The main source of information regarding the war in Ukraine in Romania indicated by survey respondents is **television (58%)**, followed at a considerable distance by social media platforms, with 14%. The percentage of those who state that they get information from international sources (websites) and national publications is relatively similar, respectively 7% and 6% (for Romanian newspapers and websites). A percentage that attracts attention is that of people who are no longer very interested in the subject of the war in Ukraine: 13%, mainly found in the 18-44 age bracket, with higher education and an above average income, working in the public sector.

In Norway, 38% of the respondents claimed that they get their information about the war in Ukraine from TV, 33% from Norwegian newspapers and websites, 11% via social networks and 11% consulted international newspapers and websites. Norway is known for its high



newspaper readership compared to other countries and this explains the high percentage of respondents who opted for newspapers as their main source of information. As expected, the age group 18-24 used social networks for information the most (28%), while those between 65 and 80 mostly relied on television for their daily information (over 60%). In contrast 0% of respondents older than 65 used social networks for information while less than 26% of respondents aged 44 and below got information about the war in Ukraine from TV.

However, in Romania, TV-news trigger a high degree of distrust: 67% of the sample trust them *very little* and *little* compared to only 30% (*very much* and *a lot*). Websites and internet pages dedicated to news garner the small degree of trust 15% compared to 37% and 39%, respectively, who declare a total or partial lack of trust. Similar situations are also registered for other sources of information: social media, WhatsApp groups and other private messaging applications. Information from the online environment is characterized by a high degree of caution and suspicion, without the adoption of individual measures to combat disinformation.

In Norway, the results point to a completely opposite situation, with 72% of the respondents chose “a lot” and “much” as indicators of their trust in TV news, the percentage being above 64% for all age groups. Others have found that Norwegians generally score high on the levels of institutional trust and trust in the news, and our findings are in line with these observations.

Only 16% of respondents in Romania stated that they consulted the official websites of the EU or NATO to fact-check dubious news appearing online. We note that young people between **18-29 years old, with higher education and medium incomes residing in the Bucharest capital area are most likely to verify the information through official channels**. The results were similar in Norway, with 74% of the respondents said that they did not use official websites created by NATO and the EU aimed at debunking false information circulating online, while 17% claimed to use such websites. The use of these websites was most prominent among those aged 18-24 (34%) and decreased with age.

Regarding the quality of the news circulating in the Romanian public space about Ukraine, the ratio between the respondents' perception according to which the information about the war in Ukraine is correct or incorrect is relatively equal. 33% rate the information as generally correct, while 40.6% state the opposite. **20% of respondents declare that they do not follow the topic of the war in Ukraine**. The discrepancy between those believing the information to be correct and those who believed it to be incorrect was larger in Norway: 58% believed that information circulating in Norway about the war in Ukraine is generally correct, while 11% judged it to be incorrect, 6% were not interested in the topic and 24% did not have any answer to this question. 27% of those aged 18-24, 15% aged 45-54 and 0% aged 75-80 evaluated the information as incorrect. Broken down to regions, 48% of the respondents in Oslo answered that the information in Norway about the war in Ukraine is generally correct, in the rest of the regions between 58% and 62% chose this answer. Of the 118 Norwegian respondents who thought the information about the war in Ukraine was incorrect, 61% opted that it favors Ukraine, while 22% claimed that it favors Russia. In contrast, in Romania, out of the 447 respondents who thought that the information was incorrect, 41% thought it favors Ukraine, while 43% were of the opinion that it favors Russia.

45% of Romanians are of the opinion that state institutions should protect citizens from the spread of fake news, disinformation campaigns and propaganda, while 11% believe that an independent body should be specifically created with this purpose. Those who support this idea are people over 60 years old, retired, with below average education, employed in production residing in rural areas and others whose incomes are insufficient. In contrast to them, **29% of the respondents, mostly young people (18-29 years old), with higher education, with above-average incomes, active on the labor market, from the urban environment**, consider that the responsibility should rest on the individuals. This illustrates a degree of confidence in one's own **self-protection capabilities in the face of fake news and a civic responsibility assumed in this regard**. At the same time, 14% of respondents believe that these

citizen protection activities should be the responsibility of media institutions and journalists. These figures suggest a majority attitude characterized by non-involvement, a questionable self-critical apparatus and a preference for a patriarchal or even authoritarian state, at the expense of free choice and individual responsibility for consuming and processing information. The perceptions are markedly different in Norway, with 25% of the respondents answering that media and journalists should protect people from the influence of fake news, misinformation, propaganda. 22% opted that people should be protected by an independent body specially created for this purpose. 23% indicated that the people should protect themselves against fake information and 20% placed this responsibility with state institutions.

Conclusion

The war in Ukraine continues to represent a major concern among both Romanian and Norwegian citizens on two obvious dimensions: 1. *economic* – concern about the increase in prices (energy and fuels) and about the decrease in the quality of life (concern manifested in Romania especially at the level of employees in the blue-collar area, whose incomes are insufficient for daily expenses); 2. *socio-political* – strengthening trust in defense institutions (NATO) and European institutions (EU, EEA) as elements of security assurance. In this context, we note the manifestation of a *war fatigue* type process (the decrease in intensity of concern about the war in Ukraine, as well as the increase of opinions expressed in favor of a *softer* positioning of Romania in relation to the conflict. However, this trend is less visible in Norway where support for Ukraine is still very high. At the same time, the increase in the percentage of people who are no longer interested in information regarding the situation and the evolution of Russia's war against Ukraine is highlighted in the case of Romania. Although Russia is indicated as the country responsible for triggering the war by the majority of Romanians and Norwegians or as a country that generates false information, there is a segment of 17% in Romania that argues that the USA is to blame for the war, and 14% of those who believe that this country is involved in disinformation activities. In both situations, the people in question are part of those who are inclined to vote for the party that promotes a populist and Eurosceptic platform on the Romanian political scene. The share of those blaming Ukraine or the USA for the outbreak of war is much lower in Norway, a perception reflected in the share of those who argue that the USA is involved in disinformation, which is much lower in Norway than in Romania. This can be seen as an expression of Norway's identity as a firm and strategic ally to the USA and NATO.

NATO and the EU continue to be invested with a high degree of confidence, and Romania's exit from the two organizations is rejected by a consistent majority. The same is the case in Norway where support for NATO membership remains high while support for cooperation within the EEA framework is also substantial but lower than support for the Romanian membership in the EU.

Fulfilling the obligations of a member state of the North Atlantic Alliance remains a majority opinion, with 40%, but the option for a non-military involvement (31%) and towards neutrality (20%) is increasing in parallel, attitudes that contradict the main role of NATO, namely collective defense. The Romanian authorities need to do more to maintain not only a high level of public acceptance of NATO membership, but also the need to fulfil the obligations of NATO membership.

Regarding the process of disinformation, it is clear that this phenomenon is recognized at the general level of public opinion and identified as real in both Romania and Norway. Russia is indicated as the main state that promotes such actions, but the USA is also mentioned in this context relatively often in the case of Romania and much less in the case of Norway. Taking into account the fact that 2024 will be an electoral year in Romania, with a series of four

elections (Euro-parliamentary, local, parliamentary and presidential), the phenomenon of polarization in the public space will be recorded more and more frequently, and in this context, those who have a Euro-sceptic, nationalist, populist political option will increasingly vocal in the public space. In this sense, we note television as the main means of information regarding the war in Ukraine in both countries, implicitly bearing a great responsibility for the potential spread of disinformation. The informational symbiosis between social networks and television stations has become a chronic phenomenon during the pandemic: narratives that go viral online end up putting pressure on the political mainstream by being picked up by news channels. Such narratives, most recently observed in the case of Romania's accession to the Schengen area, will determine the growth of Euro-sceptic political options, but also of war *fatigue* sentiment, which erodes public support for Ukraine, dilutes the blame for the war and, implicitly, serves Russia's objective to diminish the trust of the citizens of democratic states in their own institutions, but also in Euro-Atlantic ones.

Norway will have local elections in 2023 where questions related to foreign and security policy will not receive much less attention, however one can expect that the issue of high energy prices can be an important topic. As far as exposure to disinformation and fake news it seems that the Norwegian society is better prepared to deal with this challenge due to the higher level of trust to state institutions and information provided in the public space, and less trust in information coming from social networks. The results also suggest that Norwegians in general are more used to approach information circulating in the public space in a more critical manner, which may play a part when dealing with malign activities in the information space supported by Russia or other actors.

