Dr Tudor Andreea Loredana, Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History and Dunarea de Jos Univeristy, Security Hedging in a Fragmented Order: How Small Democracies Navigate Between Alliances, Coalitions, and Informal Security Regimes.

The fragmentation of the international order has moved from theoretical debate to observable strategic reality, particularly for small democratic states. These states now operate in a geopolitical context increasingly shaped by great power rivalry, the erosion of multilateral institutions, and the diffusion of grey-zone threats. Traditional security architectures are proving insufficiently responsive to the volatility of the current environment. While alliances such as NATO and institutions like the EU and UN continue to serve as essential pillars of collective security, their internal coherence and reliability are being questioned more frequently. In response, many small democracies are adopting security hedging strategies—an approach that neither fully replaces nor contradicts traditional alignment, but supplements it with diversified, overlapping security practices. Hedging, in this context, refers to the deliberate layering of various forms of security cooperation: formal alliances, informal and issue-specific coalitions, regional defence mechanisms, intelligence-sharing networks, and ad-hoc operational partnerships. This multi-vector strategy enables states to preserve strategic flexibility while mitigating exposure to abrupt geopolitical shifts. This paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding hedging in the context of small democracies and tests its relevance through scenario-based modelling. Empirical illustrations are drawn from selected European cases, where the interplay between agility and coherence, and between national interests and alliance solidarity, becomes particularly visible. Ultimately, the paper argues that security hedging should not be interpreted as indecision or strategic drift. Rather, it constitutes an adaptive logic responding to a fragmented and fluid international system. For multilateral organizations, engaging effectively with these evolving practices will be central to maintaining their relevance and legitimacy in the years ahead.