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RATIU FORUM

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The Ratiu Democracy Centre
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THE RATIU DIALOGUES ON DEMOCRACY 2026

European Security in Challenging Times





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He contributed to the research, writing, and preparation of the 2026 Rațiu Dialogues on Democracy report.

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The Ratiu Forum is a joint initiative by the Ratiu Family Charitable Foundation, the Ratiu Democracy Centre and the London School of Economics IDEAS Think Tank.

Romania and the Balkan region are priority areas of interest for the Ratiu Forum.

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

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We are grateful for their support and contribution to the success of this year's Dialogues.

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Introduction

What does European security mean today? And more importantly, to what extent is Europe prepared to define and defend its own interests in a world that appears increasingly prone to profound change?

Since their establishment, the Rațiu Dialogues on Democracy have provided a space for open and informed discussion on the challenges facing democratic societies. Bringing together perspectives from academia, politics, journalism, civil society, and other fields, the Dialogues seek to encourage exchange across disciplines and to connect broader European debates with the particular experiences of Central and Eastern Europe.

Leading thinkers, policymakers, and experts took part in the 2026 edition of The Ratiu Dialogues on Democracy, held between September 4–6, at the Rațiu Democracy Center in Turda, Transylvania. The conference is part of the annual Ratiu Dialogues on Democracy series, a forum for discussion and reflection on some of the most important questions shaping the present and future of democracy and security in Central and Southeastern Europe, as well as Europe's relationship with the transatlantic region as a whole.

This year's theme, "European Security in Challenging Times" brought to the forefront not only the military and geopolitical challenges facing Europe, but also broader questions about its ability to act, adapt, and defend its values. Against a backdrop marked by the war in Ukraine, rapid technological change, and increasingly complex tensions within the international order, the discussions sought to examine and frame European security beyond its traditional boundaries—from defense and the transatlantic relationship to democracy, artificial intelligence, the rise of populism and the future of Europe. Taken together, these themes have painted a picture of European security as a phenomenon far broader than border defense—one that is equally about technology, institutions, society, and the ability to act together.

The interdisciplinary nature of the event was underscored by the broad participation of experts from key fields, ranging from foreign policy, defense, and international relations to journalism, technology, and the study of democracy. Keynote speakers included Clara Volintiru, State Secretary at the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Professor Slobodan Markovich of the University of Belgrade; Sir Philip Barton, former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; Robin Brooks of Pomona College; and Professor Alexander Evans of the London School of Economics.

Through the complexity of its themes and the diversity of perspectives brought together, the Rațiu Dialogues on Democracy 2026 provided a rigorous framework for analyzing the intersection of security, democracy, technology, and international cooperation. For Romania and the Central and Eastern European region, these dimensions hold particular strategic relevance, stemming from the region's position within the new European security architecture and from the reconfigurations dictated by the current geopolitical context. The 2026 edition brought together over 90 guests throughout the three-day event.

This report brings together the main themes and discussions that emerged during the event.

SPEAKERS



Rațiu, Nicolae
British-Romanian businessman, philanthropist and Chairman of the Rațiu Family Foundation. He is actively involved in supporting education, culture, democracy and civil society in Romania and internationally. Through the Rațiu Family Foundation, he supports a range of educational and cultural initiatives, including the Ion Rațiu Chair of Romanian Studies at Georgetown University, the Ion Rațiu Democracy Award and Fellowship, and the Ion Rațiu Award for Investigative Journalism. He is a trustee of several charitable organisations in Romania and the UK and is closely involved in the work of the Rațiu Democracy Centre in Turda and The Ratiu Forum.



Evans, Alexander
Professor in Practice in Public Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where he teaches on international affairs, national security and technology. He has previously served as an adviser to the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, Strategy Director in the Cabinet Office and Director Cyber at the Foreign Office. He led the UN Security Council expert mission on Daesh, Al-Qaida and the Taliban, served as British Deputy and Acting High Commissioner to India and briefly to Pakistan, and was a senior adviser to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke in the U.S. government. He was previously a Senior Fellow at Yale, a Gwilym Gibbon Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford, and Henry Kissinger Chair at the Library of Congress.



Shah, Rebecca
Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy in Romania since July 2023. She joined the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office in 2010 and has held diplomatic postings in the Philippines and Cyprus, as well as roles covering the Western Balkans and post-conflict issues. In the Philippines, she served as Political Counsellor, leading teams working on foreign and multilateral policy, prosperity, science, environment, communications and public diplomacy. In Cyprus, she worked closely with the UN peace process and the Turkish Cypriot community. Before joining the FCDO, she worked in academia, lecturing, researching and publishing in ethics, development and human rights. She holds a PhD in global health inequality, justice and public health ethics.



Hofmann, Stefan
Head of the Romania Project of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), based in Bucharest, since October 2025. He joined KAS in 2002 and has held a number of positions within the organisation, including assignments in Mexico City and Guatemala and leadership roles in Germany. From 2011 to 2025, he served as KAS Regional Representative for Baden-Württemberg and Head of its Political Education Forum in Stuttgart. He studied political science and sociology in Heidelberg and Hamburg and conducted research at the University of Salamanca. He received his doctorate from the University of Hamburg in 1998. Before joining KAS, he worked as a journalist and editor for newspapers in Germany and Spain.



Volintiru, Clara
Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, where she oversees inter institutional relations, development cooperation and human rights. Prior to joining the government, she served as Regional Director for the Black Sea at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, where she worked on regional security, democratic resilience, good governance and transatlantic cooperation. She previously led the New Economy and Society Programme at the Aspen Institute Romania and has worked as a consultant for the World Bank and other international organisations. She is also Associate Professor of International Political Economy at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science.



Markovich, Slobodan
Full Professor at the School of Political Science of the University of Belgrade. He teaches Political Anthropology, Political History of South-East Europe and Image of European Other. He is also Full Professor at the Institute for European Studies in Belgrade and has been a Research Associate at LSEE/LSE since 2012 and at LSE IDEAS since 2018. Since 2017, he has headed the Centre for British Studies at the School of Political Science in Belgrade. His research interests include the construction of ethnic, national and religious identities in the Balkans, British-Balkan relations, psychoanalytic anthropology and the history of European pessimism. He has authored and edited numerous books and academic publications, including works on Freud, British-Serbian relations and the political and cultural history of the Balkans.



Sir Barton, Philip
Senior Adviser at SC Strategy and Visiting Professor in Practice at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is also on the Advisory Council of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, chairs Strategy International's Advisory Board and is a trustee of the Heywood Foundation. He served as Head of the UK Diplomatic Service and led the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office through the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. He previously served as British High Commissioner to India and Pakistan and as Deputy Ambassador in Washington. With nearly 40 years of experience in diplomacy, national security and organisational leadership, his focus is on helping leaders and institutions navigate global complexity and volatility.



Brooks, Robin
Visiting Fellow in Global Policy and Governance at Pomona College. She previously served as Special Advisor to Vice President Kamala Harris on Europe, Eurasia, Multilateral Affairs and Democracy and, before that, as Director for Central Europe and the Balkans at the U.S. National Security Council. She spent 21 years as a Foreign Service Officer at the U.S. Department of State, including overseas assignments at U.S. Embassies in Moscow, Belgrade, Sofia and Ankara and at the U.S. Mission to the OSCE. She also held senior positions in Washington working on Afghanistan and the United Nations.



Barbu, Mircea
War correspondent and BBC News producer with more than 15 years of experience covering armed conflicts, war crimes, organised crime and international security. He has reported extensively from Syria, Iraq, Gaza, Crimea and Ukraine, where he has documented Russia's war against Ukraine since 2014. He has investigated human trafficking, disinformation and transnational criminal networks, bringing extensive experience from conflict zones and complex security environments. He also teaches War Correspondent at the University of Bucharest's Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies and is the founder of SAFE. ro, an initiative dedicated to resilience, crisis preparedness and civil defence education.



Botiș, Horia-Răzvan
Vice-Chairman of the NATO Industrial Advisory Group (NIAG) and Executive Director of the Romanian Defence Industry Shareholders Organization. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the NATO Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and as a member of the NATO Innovation Fund LPAC. He is a PhD candidate at the Polytechnic University of Bucharest and the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, where his research focuses on the defence industry and economic security. He previously served as Chief of Staff to Romania's Minister of Research, Innovation and Digitalization and held senior positions in technology transfer and international affairs within Romania's defence industry.



Cazalet, Piers
Director of Defence and Security Cooperation at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. He joined NATO's International Staff in 2017 and has held senior positions including Director of Defence Institution and Capacity Building and Head of the Press and Media Section and Deputy NATO Spokesperson. Before joining NATO, he served in the UK Diplomatic Service, including as Defence Counsellor at the UK Delegation to NATO and in diplomatic postings in Beirut, Jakarta, Jerusalem and Nicosia. His experience spans defence, security cooperation, international policy and NATO partnerships.



Cârstocea, Raul
Professor of History at Maynooth University and Principal Investigator of the ERC Consolidator Grant project Insurgent Temporalities: Fascism as a Global Anti-Universalist Project (2025–2030). His research focuses on antisemitism, fascism, nationalism and the Holocaust, as well as state formation and nation-building in 19th- and 20th-century Europe. He is co-editor of the Modern History of Politics and Violence book series at Bloomsbury and serves on the editorial boards of several academic journals.



Cileacu, Cristina
Foreign affairs journalist at Digi24, Romania's news channel, where she has presented Pașaport diplomatic since 2011. The programme features interviews with world leaders, diplomats and senior security officials. She has covered every NATO Summit since 2019 and has reported from major international events and conflict zones, including Israel, Turkey, Serbia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. She holds a degree in philosophy from the University of Bucharest and is an alumna of the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program.



Danylyuk, Oleksandr
Senior expert on defence, security and intelligence who has worked closely with Ukrainian government structures. He has served as Chief Adviser to the Minister of Defence of Ukraine, Special Adviser to the Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine and Assistant to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. His expertise focuses on Russian multidimensional warfare, active measures, hybrid threats and the activities of Russian and Soviet special services. He has authored numerous articles, reports and books on these subjects and has developed training programmes for senior government officials on countering hybrid threats in cooperation with King's College London.



Dijxhoorn, Ernst
Assistant Professor at Leiden University's Institute of Security and Global Affairs. His research focuses on the relationship between international law and contemporary war and warfare, with particular interest in how non-conventional and "non-obvious" forms of warfare challenge established legal categories.



Durante Mangoni, Alfredo
National Coordinator of the Central European Initiative (CEI). A career Italian diplomat, he previously served as Ambassador of Italy to Romania from 2021 to 2025. During his diplomatic career, he held senior positions dealing with European affairs, justice and home affairs, Asia, development cooperation and international anti-corruption policy. He served in diplomatic postings in Moscow, Benghazi and Tokyo and was diplomatic adviser to Italy's Ministers of Labour and Welfare and Justice. He has also chaired the G20 Anti Corruption Working Group and represented Italy in several major multilateral forums.



Fatalski, Marcin
Political scientist and historian at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, where he works at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora. His research focuses on the modern history of international relations, U.S. foreign policy and nation- and state-building. He has conducted research at institutions including the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the John F. Kennedy Institute in Berlin. His publications include research on U.S. policy towards the USSR and Iran. In 2021–22, he was a Jagiellonian University/LSE IDEAS Visiting Fellow.



Florescu, John
CEO of Centrade and an experienced media executive and producer. For 17 years, he served as President and CEO of David Paradine Television, the Los Angeles-based production company founded by Sir David Frost, producing more than 150 hours of national and international television for CBS, HBO, PBS, Discovery, Disney, A&E, The History Channel, BBC and CBC. In the early 1980s, he served as Communications Director for the Democratic National Committee in Washington, D.C. In 1997, he expanded the Centrade group in Romania, subsequently establishing businesses in advertising, television, media and digital communications. He holds a history degree, magna cum laude, from Boston College and studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford University. He speaks English, French and Romanian.



Ford, Matthew
Associate Professor in War Studies at the Swedish Defence University. His research examines military innovation and the changing nature of warfare, including the representation and conduct of war on the digital battlefields of the 21st century. He is the author of three books, including War in the Smartphone Age, and holds a PhD from King's College London's Department of War Studies. He is an Associate of the Imperial War Museum, Honorary Historical Consultant to the Royal Armouries and Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.



Goșu, Armand
Professor at the University of Bucharest's Faculty of Political Science, where he teaches Russian politics, the history of Russia and the USSR, Russian and Soviet diplomacy, and the history of Russian secret services. He holds a PhD in Russian history and has been an editor and editor-in-chief of the magazine 22. He also served as an adviser to the Romanian Foreign Minister on the former Soviet space.



Guseth, Cristina
Director of Freedom House Romania and has worked on human rights and civil society development in Romania since 1991. She previously worked with the Soros Foundation for an Open Society, where she managed programmes in media, public relations, public administration and civil society education. She helped establish the BBC Radio and TV Journalism School in Romania and has been closely involved in initiatives promoting democratic accountability and a free press.



Hlibovytskyi, Yevhen
Ukrainian public intellectual, member of the Nestor Group and founder of Pro.Mova, a think tank and strategic consultancy researching the role of cultural factors in Ukraine's development. He is a lecturer at Ukrainian Catholic University and a member of the Supervisory Board of Suspilne, Ukraine's public broadcaster.



Khan, Adnan
Professor at the School of Public Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science and Co-Director of the Executive MPA/MPP programme. His work focuses on geoeconomics, political economy, public policy and strengthening economic capabilities in governments, international institutions and businesses. He previously served for four years in the UK Government as Chief Economist and Director of Analysis at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. He has also served as Research and Policy Director at the International Growth Centre at LSE and Oxford, Academic Director of the LSE School of Public Policy and Visiting Lecturer at Harvard Kennedy School. He co chaired the LSE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development.



Lemmen, Daniel
Policy Adviser at the Warsaw Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, where he focuses on security policy and German-Polish relations. He previously worked as a research associate at the Collegium Polonicum and European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). He holds a doctorate on the geopolitical significance of German-Polish relations and is the author of Deutschland, Polen und die Geopolitik. He also co-authors DASIP, a platform covering Polish defence and security policy.



Michnik, Wojciech
Assistant Professor of International Relations and Security Studies at Jagiellonian University and Transatlantic Project Coordinator for the Central and South-East Europe Programme at LSE IDEAS at Jagiellonian University. He is also a contributing editor for New Eastern Europe. He has been a Fulbright-NATO Security Studies Fellow at the University of Arizona and an Eisenhower Defense Fellow at NATO Defense College in Rome. His research focuses on transatlantic security, NATO-Russia relations, NATO's frontline states and great-power competition.



Mîndrescu, Mircea
Brigadier General (ret.) and experienced Romanian military Officer whose professional career spans operational command, military education, defence planning, politico military diplomacy and senior positions within Romania's Ministry of National Defence. He holds a Master's degree and PhD and has worked across key areas of national and international security and defence.



Monckton, Anthony
Former UK Army Officer and diplomat with 36 years of UK Government service, specialising in national security. His diplomatic career included postings in Geneva, Zagreb, Banja Luka, Belgrade and Vienna and focused throughout on European security. In 2016, he established VE INSIGHT, a risk advisory consultancy based in London and Vienna. The firm currently works with an academic consortium on an EU Horizon project examining the prospects for EU enlargement in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership states, including European defence.



Muñoz, Katja
Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Geopolitics, Geoeconomics and Technology at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP). Her research focuses on the intersection of artificial intelligence, democracy and security, including hybrid threats, technological dependencies and European technological sovereignty. At DGAP, she leads projects on influencers and the democratic public sphere and on emerging AI threats. She holds a PhD from the University of Hamburg and has studied international relations, peace and security policy in Rome, Copenhagen and Hamburg.



Noble, Ben
Professor of Russian Politics at University College London and an Associate Fellow at Chatham House. His research focuses on Russian domestic politics, lawmaking and political institutions. He completed his doctorate at the University of Oxford and previously worked as a Senior Researcher at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. He regularly contributes to international media on Russian politics and has published widely for both academic and general audiences.



Orlea, Martina
Leads a new Office within the national security department of the Presidential Administration of Romania focused on information resilience and strategic public communications. Previously, she spent five years working on political communication and counter disinformation campaigns across more than 20 countries. She was associated with the London-based communications consultancy Electica, where she developed the Shift Campaigns brand and led counter-disinformation initiatives for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office across Eastern Europe and South-East Asia. She has also collaborated with NATO StratCom and worked on political campaigns in the UK, Moldova and Germany. She holds a degree in International Economic Relations and a Master's degree from Sciences Po Paris.



Plate, Christoph
Director of the Media Programme South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, based in Sofia, Bulgaria. Previously, he headed KAS's Media Programme for Sub-Saharan Africa in Johannesburg. He worked for many years as an Africa correspondent for Der Spiegel, covering conflicts in Somalia, Sierra Leone and Liberia and reporting from the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. He subsequently covered the Middle East for the Neue Zürcher Zeitung and served as Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Schwäbische Zeitung.



Platias, Athanasios
Professor of Strategy and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of International and European Studies at the University of Piraeus. He has held research fellowships at Harvard University, Cornell University and MIT and previously taught at Panteion University in Athens. His research and teaching focus on strategy, international security and international relations.



Poulsen, Niels Bo
Senior Project Researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies and former Director of the Institute for Strategy and War Studies at the Royal Danish Defence College. His research focuses on military history, Russian military affairs, war and veterans, and the use of history by armed forces. He holds a PhD from the University of Copenhagen and has authored or edited numerous books and articles. His most recent English-language book is Russia at War: Intention and Military Capability after Ukraine, published in 2025.



Ries, Tomas
Associate Professor of Security and Strategy at the Swedish National Defence University in Stockholm. Although retired from his full-time position in 2022, he continues to work with the University on a part-time basis and advises government and private-sector organisations. His work focuses on security strategy, defence and international affairs.



Shekhovtsov, Anton
Political scientist and author specialising in the far right, authoritarianism and illiberal politics in Europe and the post-Soviet space. He is Chair of the Centre for Democratic Integrity and a Visiting Senior Fellow at Central European University, as well as an Associated Researcher at the University of Vienna. He holds a PhD from University College London and is the author of New Radical Right-Wing Parties in European Democracies, Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir and Russian Political Warfare.



Viehe, Ariella
Senior NATO official serving as Head of Current Operations in NATO's Operations Division at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. She has extensive experience in NATO operational policy and security affairs, including work on Afghanistan, Iraq and the Global Coalition, as well as NATO's engagement with partners in the Western Balkans. Prior to joining NATO, she was a Council on Foreign Relations Fellow at the Center for American Progress, where she worked on international security issues.



Wald, Jesse
Global Intelligence and Investigations Lead at Wiz (Google), based in London. He is also a venture partner at Expeditions and Project A, where he works across defence, dual use and deep technology and advises early-stage companies with a national security or intelligence nexus. Previously, he spent 15 years at the CIA across analytical and operational roles, most recently leading efforts on China's advanced computing and military systems. He holds an MPA from Harvard Kennedy School, a JD from the University of Michigan and a BA from Brandeis University

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Opening remarks
Mr Nicolae Rațiu, Ratiu Forum; Professor Alexander Evans, LSE; Dr Rebecca Shah, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy Romania; Dr Stefan Hofmann, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation

Morning Keynote
Dr Clara Volintiru, Secretary of State (Deputy Minister), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania
Chair: Professor Slobodan Markovich, University of Belgrade

Future of European Security
Chair: Ambassador Alfredo Durante Mangoni, Central European Initiative
Panelists: Professor Loukas Tsoukalis, Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy; Dr Robin Brooks, Pomona College; Mr Piers Cazalet, NATO; Mr Anthony Monckton, ViennEast

Prospects for Peace in Ukraine, Russia's Future
Chair: Mr. Mircea Barbu, BBC
Panelists: Mr Oleksandr Danyluk, RUSI, Professor Ben Noble, UCL, Professor Athanasios Platias, University of Piraeus, Professor Armand Goșu, University of Bucharest

European Cooperation on the Eastern Flank
Chair: John Florescu, CEO, Centrade
Panelists: Dr Stefan Hofmann, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, Mr Christoph Plate, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, Dr Yevhen Hlibovytskyi, Pro-Mova, Dr Daniel Lemmen, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation

How AI and Technology is Changing Democracy and Warfare
Chair: Professor Alexander Evans, LSE
Panelists: Dr Katja Muñoz, German Council on Foreign Relations, Dr Matthew Ford, Swedish Defence University, Ms Cristina Cileacu, Digi24, Ms Martina Orlea, Office of the Romanian President

Democracy and Delivery in an Age of Populism
Chair: Professor Adnan Khan, LSE
Panelists: Dr Anton Shekhovtsov, Centre for Democratic Integrity, Central European University, Professor Raul Cârstocea, Maynooth University, Ms Cristina Guseth, Freedom House Romania

A Changing Face of Warfare?
Chair: Dr. Ernst Dijxhoorn, Leiden University
Panelists: Dr Niels Bo Poulsen, Royal Danish Defence College, Mr Horia Botiș, NATO Industrial Advisory Group, Dr Marcin Fatalski, Jagiellonian University

Upgrading European Defense Capabilities
Chair: Ms. Ariella Viehe, NATO
Panelists: Brigadier General Mircea Mîndrescu, Dr Wojciech Michnik, Jagiellonian University, Dr Tomas Ries, Swedish National Defence University, Mr Jesse Wald, Wiz (Google)

Closing Remarks
Mr Nicolae Rațiu, Ratiu Forum & Professor Alexander Evans, LSE

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Written by LSE IDEAS

Overview

The 2026 Ratiu Dialogues on Democracy discussed the state of the transatlantic alliance, democracy, and security in an era of Russian aggression, an evolving US approach to Europe, and technological change. Common themes included the health of the transatlantic alliance and burden sharing amongst NATO and EU states, Russian intentions, and the fragility of democracy amidst growing populism and weak institutional delivery. Despite a prevailing mood of realism, speakers commented on the renewed commitment to resilience, adaptation and fresh investment in defence, and the agency available to European states in determining tech regulation and the governance of democracy.



Opening Keynote: Dr Clara Volintiru, Romania's Deputy Foreign Minister

The Dialogues opened with a Keynote address from Dr Clara Volintiru. Dr Volintiru set the scene of a Europe amid war, disinformation, and low growth.

She commented on the advantages of the moment: a time to bring new ideas. She emphasized that Europe needs to work with collective leadership and focus on service delivery. She expanded this by pointing out that in this new diplomatic era, Romania on the border of Ukraine means that it is at the forefront of war.

To move forward, there needs to be Greater stakeholder resilience, and as such, civilian resilience. In building civilian resilience, she pointed to adapting our understanding of democracy. Younger generations have a different understanding of democracy from civil rights to being heard and having the freedom to be heard. She emphasized the importance of shifting our understanding to better inspire younger people as well as to ensure that all generations can still believe in the promise of democracy.

The Future of European Security

The first panel looked at the future of European Security. Challenging times, as the nature of the transatlantic relationship is built on shared values (and interests) in democratic society. Moving forward, there is greater debate on burden sharing in the transatlantic order, where Europe should take greater ownership (and spend more!) and move forward without assuming U.S. leadership. There was an active discussion on the future of NATO. On the one hand, NATO is under pressure and there are debates about whether and when Russia will test Article 5. On the other hand, the NATO Summit reaffirmed Article 5 – and for now, pessimistic predictions that NATO would tear apart have not come to pass. The European security debates to watch: are we being too cautious on Russia and Ukraine – and should NATO bite-back more – and how should NATO deal with the rise of hybrid warfare and the changing nature of warfare.






Ukraine and the Future of the Region

The second panel looked at the future of Ukraine given Russia's continued war of aggression. The good news: Ukraine continues to defend its sovereignty and Russia's casualty rate exceeds the rate it can recruit new military personnel. Concerns about the costs of the conflict appear to be growing in Russia itself. The bad news: Russia is cranking up military production and striking deep into Ukraine. The prospect for a cease-fire or settlement remains low, and if anything, the concern right now is whether Putin might be tempted to escalate the conflict. Flank states in the region are particularly exposed: with Poland, Romania and Moldova facing a mix of hybrid and drone interventions. Lastly, there was discussion on the future of Russia, with some suggesting that the era of 'Putinism' may outlive Putin's own lifetime.






European Cooperation on the Eastern Flank

The Dialogues then turned to European cooperation on the Eastern Flank. Discussions on the eastern flank focused on resilience of information channels, media literacy, and communication. Russian disinformation remains a challenge. There was active discussion of whether Europe was doing enough for Ukraine (and even whether, in extremis, there might be a future Ukrainian backlash against Europe as a result). There were differing views on the likelihood (or nature) of any deal. Some argued that Ukraine would need to surrender territory; others pointed to the unreliability of Putin's Russia as a party to any deal. The backdrop of faltering EU enlargement further complicates the European operating space.



Technology, AI and Democratic Resilience

The next discussion focused on the changing dynamics of evolving technology and AI. AI makes (dis)information campaigns super-cheap at massive scale, straining the limits of democracy. This, along with the rise of GenAI capabilities, alters cyber and cognitive warfare, with major implications for democracies and resilience. Despite concerns about what this means – not least for national resilience – there was agreement that in some ways a fresh focus on the challenge would help make European states more resilient. There may be greater investment in regulatory interventions, public education on resilience, and building counter-capabilities in cognitive warfare.









Democracy, Delivery and Populism

And onto democracy and delivery in an age of populism. The key theme: what more can democracies do to deliver for their citizens in an era of low growth, growing social demand, and a general tone of 'antipolitics'. In this low-trust era, does this feed misleading political campaigning that promises short-term fixes to what are, overall, systemic and long-term problems in European economies and societies? One answer to this challenge is short-term: a sharper focus on policies that deliver growth, services, and citizen satisfaction. Another is the longer-range intervention to bolster education, public understanding of democracy, and better coalition building across mainstream politics.






Emerging Threats and the Changing Character of War

Our next discussion looked at the new (or expanding) threats to European states and the changing character of war. There was overall concern about the lack of capacity for the EU to deliver security infrastructure. This is both about capacity (defence, personnel, and industrial) but also about political will. Economic warfare is a reality that has an impact on Europe – as the energy and supply-chain cost shock of the Iran war continues to demonstrate. Even if the nature of war has not changed, its character is evolving – and this requires adaptation from NATO and European member states. This includes developing a sharper defence industrial capability to boost investment in emerging technology – and an old-fashioned ability to manufacture at scale.





European Defence Capabilities and Modern Warfare

The final panel focused on Europe's defence capabilities and modern warfare. Europe has a long history of underinvestment in its defence capability. There are conflicts in what is most important in modern warfare, whether that be overall mass, drones, and technology. The panel also discussed issues from earlier in the conference: whether the war in Ukraine is theirs or only Ukraine's. There was an overall thought that Europe faces an inherent weakness in its defence capabilities, cooperation, budget, and capability. Whatever choices this or future U.S. Administrations make about their relationship with and commitment to European security Europe must become a more active investor, leader and builder when it comes to defence. European autarchy is unlikely, but a deliberate effort is now needed to unpick the 'butter over guns' choice that Europe collectively made in the 1990s.





Closing

The 2026 Dialogues focused significantly on security – perhaps understandably given the context. But European security depends on the nature, resilience and persistence of democracy, which is why the nature of democratic politics and track-record on delivery recurred during the Dialogues. While the overall mood was realistic, it was not apocalyptic. Europe has, it seems, turned a corner. There is a collective commitment to renewed defence expenditure. Few states now don't get the importance of building resilience given the wide-ranging nature of cyber, disinformation and hybrid threats. And for all the norm-busting, aggressive actions by Putin's Russia the integrity of European collective security has, if anything, expanded. NATO has new members, Article 5 is holding, the Americans haven't abandoned the Transatlantic Alliance (though they expect Europeans to do more heavy lifting). And while Europe is not a technological superpower it can regulate and shape the way in which technology is invested in, used and misused for Europeans.





SPEAKERS STATEMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

Nicolae Ratiu
"Today we're in a very different world from where we were 20 years ago, with threats that are apparent — not only war, but threats to democracy."

Alexander Evans
"The Ratiu Dialogues this year have been a real opportunity for us to discuss not only the risks in Europe and the uncertainty around Europe's security, but also the opportunity for European states to do more with each other, to revive and renew around defence spending, around democracy, around negotiating a fresh revised relationship with the United States, and finding fresh ways to reanimate Europe as a force for good."

Clara Volintiru
"European Security in challenging times — yes. But not unprecedented challenges. What we must understand, first and foremost, is that the challenges we live through today have had different versions unravelling through the past as well, and the level of distrust, lack of optimism, in our society, has been around for quite some time."

Rebecca Shah
"I think what we get from collaborations like this with the Ratiu Forum is incredibly high-quality speakers, but also the space in which we can create room for real thought, for real discussion, to really get into ideas."

Robin Brooks
"I think it is absolutely critical that we look at democracy and security hand in hand, in the way that this conference is doing[...] I'm really grateful to the Ratiu Forum and to all the participants in this conference for making it incredibly fruitful, and I think weighty and important, as we consider the future of democracy and our security in Europe."

Stefan Hofmann
"The important thing about this meeting is that we managed to bring many people from Europe to one place, which is a secluded place, where people can talk openly about strategy, about issues, about topics to resolve, in an environment which is to create trust, and to maintain trust, and to spread some contact between people."

Sir Philip Barton
"I think we brought together here in Romania a really interesting, diverse group of people from a range of different countries — from countries here in Europe, but also from the United States [...] And that's meant we've had a really rich conversation about the challenges European security is facing in a world where we now have, obviously, war for Ukraine and big changes throughout the world."

FUNDING & COSTS

The Rațiu Dialogues on Democracy was made possible through the generous support of its sponsors and partners, whose financial and in-kind contributions supported the organisation and delivery of the event. The total costs of the event amounted to 318,569 RON (€60,680), covering the core expenses associated with bringing together international and Romanian speakers, hosting the programme, and ensuring the necessary logistical and production arrangements.

We extend our sincere thanks to our sponsors for their generous support of the Rațiu Dialogues on Democracy 2026. Their contribution made it possible to bring together a diverse range of speakers and participants and to create a space for meaningful discussion on the challenges facing Europe and democratic societies.

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CONCLUSIONS

The 2026 Rațiu Dialogues on Democracy underscored how complex European security has become, extending well beyond its traditional military and geopolitical dimensions. The discussions examined the growing links between security and democratic resilience, technological change, political transformation, and the future of transatlantic relations.

A central question remains: can Europe develop the capacity to define and defend its own interests in an increasingly uncertain international environment? For Romania and the wider Central and South-Eastern European region, this question carries particular weight. The perspectives shared during the Dialogues offer a valuable starting point for further reflection on the challenges Europe faces and on its ability to respond to them collectively.





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