

THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM – NECESSITY, LIMITS AND THE WAY FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract

In the academic literature, the transformation of the institutions, roles, and processes related to national security, addressed at a sub-state level of analysis, has traditionally been a less prominent area of study, especially if compared to the weight of international security and the external behaviour of states. However, the need to understand the security-related issues from the internal environment of states has led, especially in the last three decades, to the emergence of several concepts and approaches that have also addressed additional levels of analysis and topics such as human security or the transformation of the security field in states in transition. The concept of security sector reform, which refers to this last topic, developed during the 1990s. Despite its already long history, the concept is still prone to shortcomings and may be subject to further development. The aim of this paper is to briefly analyse its meaning, as well as its limits and prospects for development, in order to provide an additional contribution to a better understanding of the underdeveloped area of security studies addressed through it. The study relies upon examples from the recent past of the Romanian security sector.

Keywords: 1990s; Romania; security sector reform; theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of security sector reform (SSR) occurred in the academic literature during the 1980s but it was developed and became more visible only in the next decade. With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of non-traditional security challenges, hardly framed by the previous paradigm of inter-state competition, the international community has been pushed to turn attention to sub-state violence, internal clashes or to the fragile institutional design of the states in transition. At the same time, the research agenda concerning security also expanded, surpassing the borders of the military security and linking the concept to economics or society and translating its levels of analysis from an international and state-centric perspective, to individuals, communities or institutions.

The emergence of the concept of security sector reform (SSR) resulted, on one hand, from the new security challenges in the 1990s and, on the other, from the shift in the theoretical views on security. SSR embedded, from the beginning, a wide acceptance for security, both horizontally, in terms of sectors – encompassing both a political, an economic and a social dimension –, and vertically, in terms of actors and levels of analysis.

Due to the ingrowing international concern for the relation between a reliable security sector and a successful reconstruction and reform in the Balkans, in Latin America, in the Middle East or in Africa, SSR evolved, during the 1990s and after 2000, as one of the key concepts associated to the international aid, post-conflict reconstruction, state-building and democratization and it was included in the papers released by the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Development and Assistance Committee within OECD even drafted a blueprint for the security sector reform (2005) and a handbook aimed at helping the practitioners to implement it (Sedra 2010, 3). Within the academic community, SSR also became a gripping concept and gained visibility, due to the work of research centers and think tanks such as Berghof Foundation and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

However, despite of its relatively solid intellectual history, the concept is still prone to shortcomings and may be subject to further development. While an extensive attention has been paid not necessarily to the design and the intrinsic premises of SSR, but to its practical results and the way for further improving its implementation, the underlying theoretical foundations of the concept continue to be one of its most sensitive – and unexplored – dimensions. The low effort to get into the essence of SSR and to inquire about its basis may lead, in research, to limited or distorted results, while, in the international practice, may be a fertile ground for failure in implementing the security sector reform.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute in overcoming those risks, by questioning the content, the limits and the way for further improving the concept. Starting from a brief presentation of the landmarks of SSR, the paper assumes a meta-theoretical role, seeking to advance a possible answer to questions such as: ‘What are the intrinsic gaps of this concept?’, ‘What are its limitations?’, respectively ‘How can one minimize, in research, the possible shortcomings associated to the use of SSR?’. The aim of this endeavor is to expand the understanding of the security sector reform and to provide a useful starting point and a possible notice to scholars who choose to use the concept in their analyses. The study highlights that (1) security sector reform may be a slippery, misleading or incomplete concept, but also that (2) the concept is still relevant for studying security, while its pitfalls and blind spots can be surpassed. In order to highlight the benefits and the weak points of SSR, the study relies upon sporadic examples from Romania's post-authoritarian experience in transforming its security.

Except for the introductory part and the conclusions, the paper consists of three sections: an overview of the concept of security sector reform, a brief outline of some of its most relevant limitations and shortcomings, as well as a short list of possible strategies to overcome, in research, the inconveniences in working with this concept.

2. THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM – WHAT DOES IT COVER?

The concept of security sector reform usually refers to the coherent transformation of policies, institutions, relationships and roles related to security management, insurance and monitoring, which are aimed at improving state's performance in providing security for its citizens (Gindarsah 2015, 5). The concept is associated, as it was already mentioned, to the agenda of the international programs for democracy promotion, assistance for development and cooperation in the field of security (Egnell & Haldén 2009, 27). Occasionally, the references to the concept of security sector vary – the research in this area covers both wider approaches, which add some supplementary dimensions to the initial concept and operate to a review terminology (for instance, that of 'security sector reform and governance' or 'justice and security sector reform'), or, on the contrary, less ambitious views (which have criticized, for instance, the reform idea encompassed by SSR, replacing it with terms such as 'transformation').

Beyond the terminological diversity, SSR usually addresses to three general types of situations: post-conflict reconstruction, developmental contexts, respectively the transition to democracy of post-authoritarian states. Depending on which of these components is particularly targeted, security sector reform is shaped by different general processes and security challenges. Thus, if, in the case of post-conflict reconstruction, the key process concerns transition from violence to a stable and peaceful internal situation, in the post-authoritarian cases, the transition envisages the parcourse to a democratic political regime, and, in the developmental contexts, a robust and prosperous economy (Hänggi 2004, 10). The content of the reform is also, in its turn, distinct. Thus, if the transition to democracy of a former communist state challenges aspects such as the oversized and overmilitarized security sectors, the need to optimize the expenses for defense or to update the normative framework, in the case of post-conflict reconstruction, the reform of the security sector covers, for instance, topics related to the privatization of security or the consolidation of the network

of institutions in charge to security (Hänggi 2004, 10). Due to its polymorphic character, SSR has been used, over time, for a wide array of case studies, such as fostering democracy in the former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, stabilizing and consolidating the Balkan states, supporting the post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq or restoring peace and strengthening state capacity in Libya, Mali or Somalia.

Besides these areas of applicability, which form the core research of security sector reform, the concept has also been used, albeit in a narrower way, also for reflecting on the processes such as the transformation, under budgetary constraints, of the security sectors located in mature and stable democracies or for a better understanding of the institutional effects of the emergence of new types of security threats.

The core idea behind SSR is that the transformation of the security sector is a key factor in solving the intricate puzzle of democratization and development - the reform in this area is regarded both as a part of and as precondition for the successful change in other areas of activity. The corollary of this idea is that a poor management of the security sector and a low performance in reforming it is understood a possible hindering factor for the fragile processes of democratization, reconstruction or development (Egnell & Haldén 2009, 30). This core substance of the concept led, for some researchers, to include in the very definition of security sector reform its link to democracy. Nicole Ball describes, for instance, a reformed security sector as one which is 'governed according to democratic principles' and which is also 'subject to the same principles of public sector management as other government sectors' (Ball 2000, 14). At the same time, within the academic community, SSR is also widely defined as incorporating 'the values of the liberal democracy' (Ejdus 2012, 63). Some international organizations, such as OECD, explicitly define the security sector reform in relation to democracy: 'Security sector reform means transforming the security sector/system, which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions, so that they work together to manage and operate the system in a manner that is more consistent with democratic norms' (OECD 2005, 20).

The implicit relation to democracy shapes the entire content of SSR. The reform is thus understood as an expression of the 'democratization' of the security sector – therefore, it does not address, in general, the mutations in this area –, with the clear scope of improving the relation to the citizens, the performance of the institutional establishment etc. Derived from this fact, the concept of security sector reform comprises a multidimensional set of activities and concrete aspects, such as enhancing transparency in the activities related to security, the primacy of the rule of law and of the respect for the human rights, the engagement of the civil society in security debates and public policies, the political neutrality of the institutional establishment responsible to security, its civilian leadership, the accountable character of the security institutions etc. The concept simultaneously reaches to the structure, resources, relationships and processes related to security, offering a comprehensive and integrated approach in this area.

The outline of such a package of activities was the result of both the experience of international interaction, even before the 1990s, with post-conflict and democratization contexts, as well as of the theoretical explorations of the idea of security.

Table no 1. Security sector reform main domains

Domain	SSR reflection & standards
Structure	Balanced number of institutions and human resources, balanced degree of militarization, clear legal provisions concerning security
Relations	Civilian leadership, functional democratic control and oversight mechanisms, political neutrality of the security sector, low or no doubling tasks between institutions, good horizontal cooperation, accountability and transparency in relation to the citizens, civil society involved in shaping security and well developed civil – military relations
Resources	Balanced military expenditures, transparent and traceable budgeting, resource and expenditure planning systems, prioritization, responsibility in spending public money
Processes	Medium and long-term planning, consultations to the civil society, respect for the human rights in security processes, compliance with constitutional limits and legal provisions, respect for the rights of the military, predictable evolution in the military career etc.
Performance	Ability to protect citizens, to ensure peace and internal stability, effectiveness, resilience

Source: the author, relying upon the UN Secretary-General report on security sector reform (UN 2008, 6), as well as on the previous work of Iis Gindarsah (Gindarsah 2015, 9), Mark Sedra (Sedra 2010, 5)

Due to the strong applied character of the concept of security sector reform, the activities associated to it were accompanied, in the specialized literature, by plans and implementation models. For researchers like Amadou Mahamane Ousmane, the sequences of the reform processes include assessing the reform, programming its design, budgeting and financing transformation, implementing the measures and making a final evaluation of the results (Foaleng & Ousmane 2015, 2). For as Mark Sedra, security sector reform is supposed to comprise a preparatory phase, an implementation period and a reform consolidation interval (Sedra 2010, 8-9), while other scholars, such as Eboe Hutchful, identified twelve steps for an ideal type security sector reform, which included the

creation of a plan for managing risks or drafting of a financial feasibility plan (Hutchful 2009, 49-53).

The broad range of core activities and phases involved by SSR include a 'similarly broad range of actors' (Schnabel & Born 2011, 8), fully or partially responsible of ensuring security, aimed at monitoring the security sector, at reinforcing its transformation or at simply benefiting of its performance. SSR is located, both in theory and in practice, at the intersection of the internal and external environment of state, being a nexus for a plurality of actors, such as international organizations, internal institutions, departmental structures, paramilitary organizations, communities or NGOs. Each of these actors is targeted, in different proportions, by the reform processes: from an institutional point of view, the armed forces or the intelligence services are expected to be politically neutral and to possess a civilian leadership, to cooperate horizontally or to fully respect the legal provisions; regarding the political leadership, it is expected to exercise a solid democratic control or to effectively program and manage the activity of the security sector; from a societal point of view, it is assumed that the NGOs or the citizens are able and willing to be involved in shaping security policies etc.

However, not all the researchers prefer to deal with the full range of actors that can be grouped under the umbrella of the security sector. Thus, while the narrowest perspectives are addressed to just a few of them (which usually include the security forces and the institutions responsible for their control and oversight), the broader approaches encompass the civil society, the companies involved in security processes (outsourcing companies, producers of defense resources, strategic buyers etc.) or even universities and think tanks. The most relevant lines of differentiation between the various categories of actors consider their statutory character or their right to use force (Ejdus 2012, 64), while, depending on their dispersion in the research, the analysis can oscillate between a state-centric stance and a focus on individuals and communities.

SSR provides, thus, a malleable focus, with a low consensus on its meaning (Egnell & Haldén 2009, 31) and on its margins, a fact that allowed a plurality of definitions, approaches and case studies. Even there is a traceable set of common

ideas covered by SSR, the variations are so numerous that the papers and analysis dealing with this concept can be incomparable or significantly different.

Table no 2. Perspectives on the actors within the security sector

Perspective	Actors					
Narrow	Security institutions (army, police, intelligence services)	Civilian management and oversight bodies				International organizations, foreign donors
Moderate	Security institutions (army, police, intelligence services)	Civilian management and oversight bodies	Judiciary & penal system			
			Civil society / NGOs			
			Paramilitary forces			
Broad	Security institutions (army, police, intelligence services)	Civilian management and oversight bodies	Judiciary & penal system	Private security networks	Universities, think tanks	
			Civil society, social groups, communities, NGOs	Economic actors, business corporations		
			Paramilitary forces			

Source: the author, relying upon the UN Secretary-General report on security sector reform (UN 2008, 5), the content of the DCAF SSR Backgrounder series (DCAF 2015, 3-9), as well as on the previous work of Mark Sedra (Sedra 2010, 4) and Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (Schnabel & Born 2011, 10)

Summarizing the key traits of the concept of security sector reform, one may note that it evolved as a heterogeneous and context-specific framework, driven by operational effectiveness, comprising a broad understanding of security and resulting from the overlap of the international support to local ownership (Sedra 2010, 5-7). An analysis of its general descriptors reveals that the concept seems to be prone to a normative and prescriptive character, derived from its intrinsic

relation to democracy, and that it comprises a solid practical and teleological component.

With these characteristics, the concept of security sector reform has been used, for more than two decades, to understand an extensive spectrum of security contexts, ranging from the democratization processes in Central and Eastern Europe, to the post-conflict reconstruction in Africa or in the Middle East or the developmental efforts in Latin America. Despite of its relative long history and widespread utilization, SSR still contains, however, weak points and shortcomings. In the next section, we will try to highlight only a few of these.

3. A QUESTIONABLE CONCEPT - SHORTCOMINGS AND PITFALLS IN DEALING WITH THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

The main pitfalls or vulnerable areas of the concept of security sector reform derive precisely from its fundamental characteristics. The normative and teleological dimension of the concept may, thus, affect its analytical value, the implicit incorporation of certain sets of values and ideas related to democracy may make the application of SSR difficult outside the European space, the vastness of possible combinations of actors and contexts may end up in vagueness and in making from SSR a panacea, while the predilect focus on democracy and on the internal processes comes together with blind spots and relevant data left aside.

Instead of providing a neutral framework of analysis, the concept of security sector reform is rather inclined to prescribe the path for transformation and it is aimed at changing, more than simply observing its objects of analysis (some researchers even drafted objectives of the security sector reform related to democratization or development, which made the concept to resemble rather to a tool for engineering the security architecture of various states, than to a framework of intellectual analysis).

Even though such a mixture between theory and practice is not unique (other approaches, such as the Paris school of security studies, are driven by an even cleared lack of distancing of their object of study and have even assumed a programmatic and militant involvement in the transformation of security), this standpoint is not without risks and disadvantages. Drafting an analytical framework that is more likely to respond to the question 'In what direction?', than to questions such as 'How?' and 'Why?', tends to provide a truncated perspective on security, where the root causes of change, the factors that shape it or the effects of the transformation are under-represented.

Even if SSR is not a mere inventory of standards to be reached, a too prominent normative and teleological character, expressed at the expense of understanding the complexity of causal factors, can leave outside analysis a plethora of relevant and useful information. The most important risk derived from this feature is thus related to the (in) sufficiently pronounced analytical character of the concept.

The risks posed by the normative character are augmented by the poorly developed methodology. Despite its widespread application, SSR mainly relies on case studies, lacking a solid, quantitative or qualitative research. Most of the literature dedicate to security sector reform is focused on the singular experiences of some actors that go through post-authoritarian or post-conflict experiences, while a well-developed comparative body of research or data-driven trans-regional studies are still rare. At the same time, case studies also lack the tools to probe the perspectives of the various actors involved in the reform. The interviews with local policymakers, the focus groups with the representatives of the armed forces or the opinion polls are resourceful and flexible tools that are still slightly accessed. Their absence makes an entire range of valuable information (such as the public perception on transformation, as a barometer of change; the possible correlation between SSR and the improvement of the perception of security; the internal perspective of the security sector on the ongoing change that is has to cope with etc.) to be left aside.

In the absence of a data-driven core structure, the concept risks, on the one hand, to be devoid of depth, and on the other, to provide a distorted perspective on its object of study.

At the same time, the concept of security sector reform embeds, as we have mentioned before, 'a set of values, norms and behavioral standards' (Krempel 2014, 55), related to liberal democracy, which are presumed to be universally applicable (Egnell & Haldén 2009, 27). This relation and the intrinsic axiology behind the concept are putting at risk its applicability, especially outside Europe. The Western model of civilian-military relations or of civil society involvement in shaping security policies, which is used as a reference framework for SSR, starts from two implicit assumptions: that there is a finite model of reform that can be exported, respectively that the specifications of that model are generally applicable. However, the current European understanding of a reformed security sector is, most probably, a stage (and not a final product) of the Western evolution in this area, with new accumulations and new directions of development still under way, while the universality of the norms is slippery and contested. For instance, the values of the liberal democracy have little in common, in their historical evolution and content, with the way of life and the traditional political organization of the communities in Africa or in the Middle East. Trying to approach those areas through the lens of a Western concept, such as SSR, which is not necessarily compatible with the local contexts, may conduct, in research, to distorted views and to a conceptual-contextual divide (Scheye & Peake 2005, 295). This risk was approached, in practice, by the attempt to involve local factors in the reform processes and reshape the directions of change according to the contextual factors. The UN, which operates with the concept of security sector reform, thus underlines the need for SSR to be locally owned. However, it emphasizes, at the same time, that the aim of reform is at 'restoring the social contract on which stability depends' (UN 2020), omitting that in some cases there is nothing to restore, but to build, and that the social contract is, by itself, a foreign concept in some parts of the world.

In these circumstances, in specific cases, the use of SSR may be disjointed from local realities, both in theory and in practice.

The main risk deriving from the fact that SSR is backed by intrinsic sets of norms and values is to provide a narrow, inflexible and hardly applicable perspective on security. Preaching reform without paying enough attention to additional values and norms may relate to missing valuable complementary models of

transformation and to facing local resistance in understanding and implementing SSR in non-Western contexts - therefore, precisely in the spaces who are in need to perform transformative processes. Quoting the title of a paper released by Lauren Hutton, for the countries that are barely improving their statehood or who are struggling with poverty and crime, SSR may simply be 'a bridge too far' (Hutton 2009, 1) and an model that is difficult to be replicated in order to enhance their security situation.

Another provocative trait of security sector reform emerges from its focus. While security is a contested concept (Baldwin 1997, 10), so are the ideas of security sector and security sector reform, whose meaning is not necessarily agreed, but rather vague. As we have pointed out before, there are numerous and heterogeneous views both on the meaning of the reform and on the actors targeted by it. This diversity makes SSR a concept which is easy to use in some of the most different contexts. However, this does not necessarily mean flexibility or coherence. Just as Michael Brzoska pointed out, it may be 'deceptively facile' to work with the idea of security sector reform (Brzoska 2000, 11) or to selectively pick sequences of this concept in order to apply them under extremely different conditions.

SSR has been used to analyze both small-scale mutations and structural changes, internal contexts with a relative degree of democratization or areas in the process of stabilization, groups of actors limited to some security institutions and their oversight bodies or who included citizens, private security companies, economic actors interested in security or non-governmental organizations. The concept is thus at risk of lacking internal coherence and consistency.

For instance, the post-communist experience of Romania was barely similar even with the one of other actors in the region, who passed through transformation in the same historical interval, as the Balkan states. Thus, if, in one case, the reform of the security sector comprises gradual changes, initiated from the first days after the withdrawal of the communist regime, which evolved peacefully and gradually and which were augmented and subsequently improved by the interaction with international organizations, for Serbia, Bosnia or Croatia, the security sector transformation includes previous processes of stabilization. Such dissimilitude may become even more acute in the case of

actors who are not located in the same region or who benefit from different historical experiences. Despite this fact, the concept of security sector reform has still been used both to analyze the transition of post-communist Romania and the progress of some Latin American or African states.

The most prominent risk in broadening a concept so it can cover a plurality of contexts is to dilute its content and to make it become vague and lacking in depth - being largely applied may both equate to the fact that SSR simultaneously refers to everything and to nothing at all and that, despite of becoming more visible, the concept 'has not grown in depth, in coherence and in clarity' (Egnell & Haldén 2009, 31).

Nevertheless, even though the margins of the concept are very lax and SSR addresses a wide array of issues and case studies, the concept still comprises blind spots or underdeveloped areas. The predilect connection of SSR with the processes of development or democratization makes it intrinsic idea of reform to cover only these contexts, omitting the transformative processes and the reforms that are not related to those issues.

Going beyond this observation and supposing that the link between SSR and democratization is essential to the way the concept is now conceived, it still appears that, even in the usual contexts of SSR implementation, there are neglected or unexplored transformative processes. These include mutations in the activity of the security sector that exceed the involvement of international donors and which relate rather to the internal impulse of democratization, the importance of the successful regional models of reform and of the cross-influence between actors in the same geographical area or the fact that the transformations of the internal security sector come together with the mutations in the external behavior of states. In other words, SSR does not cover the entire range of security mutations pursued by the states in transition, whether they face post-authoritarian, developmental or post-conflict challenges.

For example, the security sector reform was initiated, in the post-communist Romania, a couple of years before international actors such as NATO or the European Union began to exert their transformative influence on the internal establishment responsible of security. The first changes in the activity of the security sector appeared in the first days after the communist regime was

abolished, while relations with NATO were only opened in the summer of 1990 and a consistent dialogue occurred after 1992-1993. A brief analysis of the Romanian security during the 1990s also reveals mutations not only on the internal dimension of security (new institutions in charge of security, a reset in the legislation, the emergence of democratic mechanisms to control the army and the intelligence services, a process of downsizing the number of people working within the security sector, improving its resources etc.), but also a comprehensive mutation in the external behavior of the country. Romania moved from international isolation, fragile relations to the states in the region and a troubled international image to becoming a NATO member, improving the relations to its neighbors and profiling as one of the most stable and reliable partners in the region. Despite their appearance, the internal and external processes were not disjoint but, on the contrary, were driven by the same factor and evolved together. Bucharest's interest in joining NATO and EU equated with efforts to assume the norms imposed by the two organizations. In international relations, a consequence was the improvement in the relations with neighboring states, while internally, efforts were visible in the modernization of the security sector, in strengthening the democratic control and oversight mechanisms or in preparing the armed forces to be interoperable with NATO. At the same time, the improvement in the relations with the neighboring states allowed connections between their security sectors and stimulated the exchange of good practices (for instance, through common military exercises, seminars, cultural events or even through the emergence of common military battalions). The cross-regional cooperation and the mutations in the external behavior supported the internal transformation in a way that is usually poorly understood by the means of SSR. At the same time, while donors play a central role in the reform, a low attention is paid to the way they are modeled and influenced, in return, through their interactions to the recipient states. For instance, NATO developed the *Partnership for Peace* program also due to the pressure of the former communist states, in the early 1990s, to join the organization, in a moment when they did not meet the requirements to become full-fledged members and there was no external consensus for such a decision.

Such developments are not approachable through SSR, as it is nowadays. The main risk in not mapping the blind spots and in not addressing them is to omit relevant variables, to provide an oversimplified image of the security sector reform and to skip some of the key factors for change, providing only a truncated view on security.

4. UNDERSTANDING THE LIMITS, FILLING THE GAPS OR FURTHER IMPROVING

Given its normative dimension, its blurred definitions and its other shortcomings and limitations, the necessity and the validity of the concept of security sector reform may seem questionable. In other words, if the challenges are so numerous, can the concept of security sector reform still be used? A possible answer may be: 'Yes, but it depends.'. The concept of security sector reform is an excellent vehicle for studying the non-traditional, sub-state dynamics of security. It also proved to be a reliable tool in the practice of international relations and in certain transitional and developmental contexts.

However, given both the pitfalls and the benefits in using it, the concept may be approached by choosing one of the three following possible strategies: (i) using SSR as it is, but by carefully understanding its inherent limitations; (ii) using the concept together with a supplementary, additional approach, aimed at diminishing some of the ill-covered areas; (iii) deepening and widening the concept, by extending its limits, provoking its borders and adjusting it for new areas of research.

Using the concept of security sector reform as it is may be the most facile and, at the same time, the most slippery approach. In order to minimize risks, the use of the concept should be accompanied by an understanding of its limitations (including the areas left beyond explanation), a warning concerning the shortcomings and an assessment of their impact on the research. At the same time, it may be useful not necessarily to carefully select the case studies, but to understand that SSR is not equally applicable from one context to another. For

instance, in the specific case of the post-communist Romania, the link between democracy and the reform of the security sector, which is automatically induced by the concept, has a low potential to distort the results of a research, given that the country was striving for democratization, that there was already a previous (fragile) experience with such a political regime and that there was an increased permeability for adopting Western European norms and models. However, this may not be the case in a non-European context, where challenges are rather linked to building and consolidating statehood or where the adherence to a Western perspective on reform and modernization is lower.

At the same time, due to the diversity of the concept of security sector reform, researches should include clarifications on their views (for instance, a definition of the reform and the delineation of the precise set of actors involved in the transformative processes). Chronological delimitations may also be useful. For instance, the post-communist transformation of the Romanian security sector is not comparable to the transformation pursued by the same country, but across another historical period. The mutations that followed to the end of the Second World War, which also implied the massive reconfiguration of the Romanian security sector (but aimed, at that time, at adjusting it to the totalitarian political landscape) are hardly approachable in the same manner as the mutations during the 1990s. The idea of transformation cannot therefore be used outside a clear problematization on the contextual factors.

However, despite of mentioning the limits of SSR, of operating with tailored and context-related perspectives and of clearly delimitating the margins of research, some of the intrinsic challenges and blind spots will continue to exist.

Completing the concept with other theoretical contributions may prove to be an eventual solution for the ill-covered areas or for the unanswered research questions. It is, at the same time, a balanced approach between simply accepting the limits of the concept and radically adjusting it for the scope of the research. The main risk in combining concepts arises, however, from their compatibility and from the integrated final analysis. For instance, a view exclusively relying upon an international level of analysis (such as neorealism) is hardly compatible with the research agenda of the security sector reform. Other concepts and approaches are, nevertheless, more permeable to a joint applicability. The

international assistance and capacity-building sequences associated to the concept of responsibility to protect may complement – from case to case - a broader analysis of the post-conflict security mutations, covering at least some of the issues left aside by the concept of security sector reform. At the same time, the norm diffusion theory, as promoted by constructivism, may also offer some adjacent hints and answers. Scholars such as Martha Finnemore or Amitav Acharya explored, for instance, the spreading mechanisms of foreign norms or the overlapping relation between the local and foreign factors who are part of the transformative processes. The work in this area covers subjects related to the taxonomy of norms and behavioral standards promoted by the international donors, the local conditions that make the external transformation models more acceptable or even the effect of the reforms based on the adoption of foreign norms in the political legitimization of the local leaders. Those topics are little apprehended through the lens of SSR. Other researchers, such as Alexandra Gheciu, approached the internal transformation in terms of security as a case of international socialization, showing that organizations such as NATO, EU and other foreign donors seem to play the role of ‘teachers’ for the countries in transition, by providing models of reform and guiding change (Ghecium 2005, 982).

Returning to the example of post-communist Romania, the combined application of the norm diffusion theory and of the concept of security sector reform may equvalate to understanding the background of the security norms and standards of behavior promoted by NATO and EU (their occurrence and their means of popularization), the internal preconditions that have favored their acceptability (such as the existence of a prior interest in democratization, the openness to Western values or the impulse given by the interest to join NATO) or even the solidity of the reform processes. Amitav Acharya points out, for example, in his works, different stages in adopting foreign norms, from the public claim for change, to the internalization of mutations (Acharya 2004, 251), which can be also applied in understanding the transformation of security. Instead of a simple radiography of the areas of change, provided by SSR, the joint use of the concept with the norm diffusion theory, the theory of international socialization, as advanced by Alexandra Gheciu, or with other

perspectives may enhance the comprehension on the transformation of security. However, such an approach risks to be patchy and eclectic.

If security sector reform remains a useful starting point for the research but, despite of complementing it with a supplementary approach, is still insufficient or vague, a third possible strategy is innovation. Broadening the concept and questioning its limits involve both a concrete contribution to a better understanding of security, which paves the way for other scholars and explores new theoretical directions, and a chance to bring the theoretical framework closer to the needs of the research. The mutations caused within the security sector by the disruptive international events or by the emergence of new types of threats are still poorly theorized. There pre- and post-reform status of a security sector, the cross-regional influence of the actors simultaneously pursuing reform process or the conditions for a possible reversible character of the reform, as well as the variances in the pace of the reform pursued by institutions within the same state are minimally approached.

Although SSR pays attention to individuals and society and integrates topics ranging from human security to gender issues, such subjects are also less visible in research, in contrast to the attention paid to the transformation of the military institutions or to the legislative framework.

There is also room for improving methodology, given that there is still a small amount of research that relies upon quantitative or qualitative data, while most of the contributions related to SSR are based on case studies and in-depth observations. Conducting interviews with decision-makers or organizing focus groups or surveys with citizens or individuals within the security sector may represent a powerful source of information, even if such research is difficult to accomplish and it involves a great deal of resource consumption. Relying upon data could be the key point in moving from a concept of security sector reform that mostly answers to the question: 'In which direction?' to one that provides a comprehensive view on the causes, patterns and effects of change and a solid and documented understanding of security.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concept of security sector reform emerged in the late 1980s and during the 1990s in response to the imperative to address the post-Cold War security challenges in Europe and across the world. The dawns of the transition to democracy of states in Central and Eastern Europe, the need to rebuild the security institutions in the Balkan states in the aftermath of their conflictual experiences, or the necessity to cope with the ongoing security processes in Africa or in the Middle East led to the emergence – firstly, in practice, and only then in theory – of the concept of security sector reform. SSR offered, for this heterogeneous range of contexts – be they post-authoritarian, post-conflict or developmental – a framework for mapping the transformation of a key area for the peaceful internal climate and for the development of states and societies, which is security.

The usefulness of such a concept is, thus, self-evident. Even so – and despite of more than two decades of utilization –, the concept of security sector reform is not, however, safe from gaps and shortcomings. Its prominent normative and teleological dimension are prone to impact upon its explanatory potential, as it was pointed out in the previous sections. The concept provides a perspective of what a reformed security sector should look alike, rather than approaching the resorts of its transformation (the causes, the path for change or the patterns of the mutations). The idea of reform may be misleading, while, at the same time, many sources of change are left aside. Topics such as the link between the transformation of the security sector and the mutations in the external behavior of states, the cross-regional effects of the reform or the reversible character of transformation are, also, poorly addressed. Lastly, the concept is rather Eurocentric, embedding a Western axiology and providing only a limited permeability for incorporating ideas inspired from other systems of norms and values, despite of a proclaimed local ownership of the reform.

The concept of security sector reform is not, therefore, perfect, but perfectible. In order to avoid challenges and benefit from the valuable insights of working with this concept, the possible ways to follow include at least three possible options: using SSR as it is, but by acknowledging its limits and by using the concept in

the most appropriate contexts and on the most appropriate case studies; applying the concept together with other approaches, which, depending on the needs of each research, may cover some of the questions left unanswered by SSR; challenging the limits of the concept and developing it into new and innovative directions, both in theory and in method. None of these strategies is without disadvantages, which range from the risk of eclecticism, to expanding the concept in directions that are no further coherent with its initial nucleus and scope.

Managing limitations, minimizing challenges and finding the most appropriate ways to further improve the concept depend on the needs and on the creativity of each researcher. The morphology of the possible solutions related to the improvement of SSR may, thus, come in various shapes and combinations. The purpose of this paper was to briefly explore the content, the shortcomings and the possible ways to improve SSR, as a first step for its better exploration and for enhancing its utilization, leaving the door open for broadening and further improving the concept.

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