**The impact of the recent political developments in Europe**

**on the resilience of SEDM Member Nations to anti-Western influence**

**Draft Concept paper**

In a political and social context overshadowed by uncertainty, the year 2025 and the near future appear to be an inevitable extension of the issues, crises, conflicts, and tensions that defined the previous year. At their core, none of these challenges have been resolved, making it highly likely that political, military, economic, ideological, and socio-cultural upheavals will continue to dominate our attention in the coming period. This will be particularly true in the expansive region stretching from Ukraine to the Middle East, and from Western Europe to Romania, Moldova, and further into Georgia.

At the same time, however, it is plausible that some of the changes we fear may not come to pass, meaning the world may not experience the radical transformation predicted by those advocating for “total resets.” Taking into account recent developments, it appears that the near future could offer, alongside the turbulence, a few constructive resolutions on global, European, regional, or national levels, where our efforts and interests might align.

Unfortunately, it is an undeniable reality that the member states of SEDM, along with other European nations and beyond, are grappling with a wide range of challenges. These include the heightened potential for conflict, with the risk of escalating existing wars and the emergence of new ones. Additionally, there is a growing erosion of trust in current political, economic, and institutional systems, which is contributing to the strengthening of revisionist movements.

Economic developments in the region are increasingly concerning, and globally, experts are expressing more cautious views regarding the economic outlook for the next 2-3 years. This outlook reflects slowing growth in key economies, compounded by an aging population in developed countries, rising public debts, and inflation. Social media has demonstrated its destructive potential, proving to be an effective tool for manipulation in the hands of those who seek to spread hate speech, revisionism, and a confrontational mindset. Artificial intelligence and the emerging technologies linked to it remain poorly regulated, generating both positive and negative consequences. Simultaneously, we are facing a profound crisis in education and a broader crisis of societal models, raising the risk of societal drift toward extremism. The instability of international relations and certain national political systems, whether democratic or not, is reshaping the interactions between major powers. The sudden changes in the international environment are directly impacting state interests and reshaping political strategies.

Amidst this backdrop of challenges, it is clear that the countries of Southeast Europe, engaged in cooperation within the framework of the regional SEDM initiative, as well as other nations in the western vicinity of the former Soviet space, are under the influence of unique pressures, interests, and strategic stakes.

At the same time, the efforts of NATO and the EU to bolster their global competitiveness and relevance are noteworthy. These institutions are focused on promoting and safeguarding democratic, Euro-Atlantic values, responding more swiftly and effectively to crises, and enhancing their overall resilience.

Democracy, by its very nature, relies on the free expression of the population's preferences, choices, and desires, founded on principles of legality, without censorship and without insisting on absolute truths. The issue arises, however, when truth becomes a casualty of manipulation, disinformation, and the overwhelming flood of information in the online space. Often, the truth is costly, complex, and frequently uncomfortable, while fictions are crafted to be appealing, captivating, and most of the time cheap (in relation to the asymmetric effects they can produce).

In a context where democracy grants equal weight to all opinions, we are observing a gradual erosion of democratic processes, accompanied by the rise of populism and the growing influence of extremism, which undermine social cohesion and the stability of democratic institutions within the region, including among the member states of SEDM.

In this way, the event is a step-in order to provide a platform for strategic discussions and facilitating the transfer of expertise between partner states, communities, civil society, academia and the military to bring together collaborators through a consortium-based approach to work together to identify, test and promote real, effective and measurable resilience solutions, either tailored to each interested SEDM member states or in a general approach to the South-Eastern Europe region.

Proposed Panels

Panel no. 1: **Cognitive security – a key factor in the resilience of societies in Southeast Europe**, panelist Ciprian PRIPOAIE, expert associate

Panel no. 2: **The role of extremism in undermining social cohesion and democratic stability in the region**, panelist Dumitrița SOLOMON, expert associate

Panel no. 3: **Education: The Key to Combatting Malign Influence,** panelist David Carstens, expert associate