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NATO's Eastern Flank: Security Issues in the Baltics, Ukraine and Turkey

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of its authors and should not be associated with the official position
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Executive summary

1. The present Policy Papers outline the main developments within the Baltics' defense systems following Russia's military operations in Ukraine in 2014. First, the publication gives a structured explanation on how the defenses of the Baltic countries were formed and argues that Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was shocking for the defense establishments of the three Baltic states. Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania built their armies and defense systems gradually adjusting to the existing international environment and relying on the norms of international law and practice of the post-Cold-War period. Before Russia's actions in Ukraine, the Baltic countries primarily focused on various international operations and on assisting international forces in their peacekeeping missions in "hotspots" around the globe. The most significant engagements by the Baltic countries were provided in the US-led Operation Iraqi Freedom and NATO's operations in Afghanistan (ISAF). What happened

in 2014 forced the Baltics to rebuild their defense forces completely, this time focusing on their self-defense capacity.

2. Second, the Policy Papers answer the question concerning the main components of these developments and tangible changes emerging from these. The publication also provides a brief case study of each of the Baltic countries. Two dimensions of these changes ought to be highlighted – the national level and policies which are to enhance self-defense capabilities, and efforts undertaken by the Baltics with the aim of vitalizing a response of the NATO collective defense system towards defending the states.

3. Within the national domain, when we walk through the updated defense policies of the Baltic countries following Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the most vivid change for Latvia and Lithuania comes with different approaches towards the engagement of the whole society within the national defense. For Latvia, it is the comprehensive defense approach, which was introduced instead of the reinstatement of the conscription service. Lithuania, on the other hand, chose to restore the conscription in 2015. Estonia placed its emphasis on the "porcupine strategy" for a "worst case" scenario. All three countries pursue higher defense spending, reaching 2% of their GDP for defense expenditures and undertaking major investments in the armament and mobility of their defense forces.

4. As far as the collective defense is concerned, the Baltic countries acted to promote a much more articulated presence of allied troops in the region. This resulted in the NATO

Summit of 2016 decision concerning the deployment of the Enhanced Forward Presence battalions to each Baltic country, led by Great Britain, Canada and Germany, also composed of troops from other NATO allies such as Poland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and others.

5. Finally, the Policy Papers argue that there prevail few existing challenges to the Baltic states' defenses which are related to the necessity to achieve a much stronger defense and security synchronization and cooperation among the Baltic countries themselves and the closest regional partners in order to consolidate air defense and maritime security capabilities and make improvements within their military training and education systems, as well as update personnel and higher command policies.

6. For decades, NATO has been adjusting to new challenges and threats of security-related nature. The adaptation has also proved necessary since Russia's neo-imperial policy towards Ukraine "woke the dragon" in 2014 and NATO began to adjust to the new security reality in East-Central Europe by boosting defense expenditures, modernizing the military and command structures, and relocating troops, etc. Since 2014, an armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in Donbas (along with operations connected with the annexation of Crimea) has been ongoing. It resulted in the change of security perception concerning Eastern Europe, and Europe in general.

7. The Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict has implications for the countries of NATO's eastern flank. The following ques-

tions emerge: Are NATO members responding adequately to the threat emerging from the armed conflict in Ukraine? Will Russia's revisionist politics revitalize the North Atlantic Treaty Organization? Do valid premises concerning the change of security condition in Eastern Europe exist?

8. The crisis of relations between the Republic of Turkey and the USA and other NATO allies is rooted in the transformation of Turkey's political system. According to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rhetoric, the concentration of power in presidential hands which occurred in 2016 was to result in the consolidation of the country's position in international relations. However, the plan backfired and the relations with NATO, the USA, EU and European countries deteriorated. On the other hand, as a consequence, a rapprochement between Turkey and Russia emerged.

9. Due to American withdrawal from the Middle East, the Russian Federation became the most vital actor exerting an impact upon the conflict in Syria. In order to achieve the primary objective of its policy towards Syria, i.e. the elimination of the YPG (forces of Syrian Kurds), Ankara was compelled to establish close cooperation with Moscow. As a consequence, in order to maintain its military and political presence in Syria, Turkey became dependent upon the decisions of the Kremlin.

Introduction

The present IES Policy Papers highlight the security of NATO's eastern flank. In 2019, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of NATO's establishment and the 20th anniversary of the organization's enlargement encompassing Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. For decades, NATO has been adjusting to new challenges and threats of security-related nature. The adaptation has also proved necessary since Russia's neo-imperial policy towards Ukraine "woke the dragon" in 2014 and NATO began to adjust to the new security reality in East-Central Europe by boosting defense expenditures, modernizing the military and command structures, and relocating troops, etc. Since 2014, we have been dealing with an armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in Donbas which, along with the annexation of Crimea, resulted in the change of security perception concerning Eastern Europe, and Europe in general. One can even go as far as arguing that the Ukraine conflict constitutes a symbolic end of the post-Cold-War international order. Apart from Russia's neo-imperial policy, NATO has been facing threats emerg-

ing from the unstable Middle East which materialized in the expansion of the so-called Islamic State. Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, argues that the joint management of threats such as Russia's revisionist politics as well as terrorism are vital for the transatlantic unity. In addition, it is critical for NATO to halt Turkey's withdrawal from the organization and to prevent the country's close (military) cooperation with Russia. Moreover, the organization ought to respond adequately to President Trump's valid frustration resulting from the fact that the majority of NATO members fail to meet the 2% GDP expenditure on the enhancement of defense capacity.

The IES Policy Papers analyze the situation of countries representing NATO's eastern flank: the Baltic states, Central and Eastern Europe (especially the armed conflict in Ukraine), and Turkey's changing role in the region and in NATO itself. The chief problems in the surveyed region were outlined in the work and the complex international context was discussed. The volume of the present publication does not offer scope for the subject to be exhausted. However, the work may constitute a departure point for future studies and research.

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The Role of NATO and Military Security Viewed from the Baltics Point of View

1. Introduction

While defense systems of the three Baltic countries have experienced a number of positive trends, they still face numerous challenges after Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2014. Indeed, the defense sector of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania has changed since 2014. When the Baltic states began their reform of the defense sector in order to qualify for NATO membership in 2004, these countries had to rebuild and restructure military sectors in accordance with NATO standards. When they reached full NATO membership in 2004, surprisingly, the Baltic countries, Latvia in particular, had a well-functioning military system and military forces deployed in international armed conflicts[1].

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[1] E. Bartl, "Latvia's Integration in NATO", *Latvian Institute of International Affairs*, 06.11.2013, http://www.lai.lv/viedokli/latvias-integration-into-nato-262 [04.10.2019].

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and restoration of their statehood, the Baltics carefully followed the optimistic structuralist advice, believing in the power of internationalized economic, political and military mechanisms. The paradox of the moment came with the fact that, at the time when the 3Bs joined the Transatlantic community, NATO did not perceive Russia as a threat. The USA was among the strongest advocates of the Baltics' membership in NATO, and the Baltic states "fully paid the bill" by sending their troops to the ISAF and OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom) missions. After the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, Barack Obama, U.S. President, declared a "reset" with Russia and the consolidation of Russia-NATO partnerships. Only in the course of its blatant actions in Ukraine, Russia instigated a dramatic confusion and mistrust among its former friends in NATO. In face of "Russia's threat", certain actions were undertaken to assure NATO's eastern members of their security within the Treaty[2].

I would argue that after the restoration of independence, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania went through three major phases of formation of their defense and security. It can be argued that the phases have lasted until the present day. Just after the restoration of independence, political and economic integration with the Western political and economic space performed as the main driver of the Baltics' domestic and foreign policy. Somehow, the countries formed an official ideology promising long awaited democracy, uncompro-

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[2]   My analysis on the Baltic and Latvian defense issues a year after the Crimean cirisis was mentioned by L. Jegelevicius in the *Baltic Times*, 18.11.2015, https://www.baltictimes. com/___vulnerability_of_the_baltics_is_much_higher____than_elsewhere__says_expert/ [22.11.2019].

mised peace, higher standards of living and nearly guarantied autonomy. At the same time, military development was somewhat neglected– more or less capable units were sustained only for the purpose of participating in international military/peace keeping operations. Within this phase, "Russia's threat" remained relatively low. All Baltic defenses reflected this situation. As a consequence, merely symbolic military installations were maintained[3].

The second phase within the process of developing the Baltics' defense and security came with certain prospects of NATO membership in the early 2000s. NATO Membership Action Plan demanded of the Baltics' defenses particular changes in command and control structures. In addition, military staff was completely reformed and reorganized in accordance with NATO standards. During this period, conscription service was abolished in Latvia and Lithuania. However, military focus was not directed to countering the possible enemy on the eastern flank but to succeed as a support element for NATO's military operations abroad. Only Estonia did not abolish its conscription service throughout the entire period after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After 2014, the security and defense priorities of the Baltic states changed dramatically. With Russia's aggression in Ukraine, when the question of the security of the Baltic states itself was raised, it became evident that the development of self-defense capabilities was not sufficient and, starting with 2016, the return to the doctrine of total

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[3]   Ibidem. This categorization maintains its current validity as the Baltics are continuing to consolidate their self-defense capabilities due to Russia's threat.

protection was announced in Latvia[4]. Similarly, Lithuania restored its conscription service in 2015[5].

At the same time, certain vulnerabilities were discovered in NATO's collective capability to protect the Baltic states in accordance with Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. These relate to: (1) the presence of Russian military forces in the region (Kaliningrad), vulnerability of the Suwalki gap, (2) massive Russian military forces against the numerically smaller Baltic armies acting as the armies of the militarily stronger NATO countries, and (3) the fact that NATO capabilities are still distant from the potential defensive positions of the Baltic states[6].

Russian invasion of Georgia (2008) and the atmosphere of fear among the Baltics and Eastern European countries led to the third phase, which was further motivated by Russia's alarming invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula (2014). From then on, not only Eastern newcomers to NATO began to calculate their military capabilities differently, engaged into much closer cooperation

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[4] O. Nikers, O. Tabuns, "Sub-regional defense synchronization – what the Baltics can offer for a stronger Alliance?", *Security Forum, University of Dąbrowa Górnicza*, vol. 3, 2019, no. 1, p. 8, also see interview with Latvian MoD Parliamentary Secretary Mr. A. Panteļejevs, *Latvijas Avīze*, 27.04.2017, http://www.la.lv/atzist-kludu-lidzsineja-aizsardzibas-koncepcija-lai-to-labotu-bus-jamaina-domasana/ [22.11.2019], also see MoD State Secretary Mr. Jānis Garisons quote on October 29, 2016 from the Riga Conference 2016, http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/632112-am_valsts_sekretars_jaatgriezas_pie_totalas_aizsardzibas_koncepta [22.11.2019].

[5] "Lithuania to reinstate compulsory military service amid Ukraine tensions", *Associated Press in Vilnius*, 24.02.2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/24/lithuania-reinstate-compulsory-military-service [24.02.2015].

[6] Ibidem, p. 5, also see a Rand Corporation study: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/nato-russia-baltic-states-overrun-in-hours-rand-corporation-report-a7384381.html [22.11.2019], also see L. Jegelevicius, "Baltics still an easy prey for Russia as 'porcupine strategy' may work best to last longer", 04.11.2015, http://news.err.ee/117119/baltics-still-an-easy-prey-for-russia-as-porcupine-strategy-may-work-best-to-last-longer [22.11.2019].

with NATO, and devoted much more commitment towards the region as a whole. The NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016, as expected by the Baltic Allies, discarded its policy of "trust" in favor of the policy of "deterrence"[7].

Since then, the Baltic states have been focusing on (1) integrating into a collective security system (2) building self-defense capacity (3) focusing upon compatibility with NATO forces and self-defense capabilities (including the provision of host nation support).

Seriously concerned with Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the three Baltic nations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania called for international battalions – up to a thousand soldiers each – to be located in the territory of every Baltic country.

2. Latvian case

Reaction to these developments on the part of Latvian defense establishment came slowly but steadily. In early 2018, the Ministry of Defense of Latvia (MoD) reported plans to expand the National Guard (Zemessardzes) force to 12,000 by 2027. The largest component of the National Armed Forces and the basis of Latvia's territorial defense, the National Guard is currently made up of nearly 8,000 volunteers (Latvian Professional Army Units number around 6,000 personnel). This National Guard expansion scheme fits well within the broader concept of a "comprehensive defense," which

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[7] O. Nikers, "Inside Latvia's New State Defense Concept: Riga Declares Its Military Ambitions Ahead of NATO Summit", *The Jamestown Foundation*, 28.05.2016, https://jamestown.org/program/inside-latvias-new-state-defense-concept-riga-declares-its-military-ambitions-ahead-of-nato-summit [04.10.2019].

Latvia chose to pursue instead of immediately pursuing the reinstatement of the conscription service[8].

Additionally, Latvian Ministry of Defense decided to form six new National Guard battalion bases by 2021 in the districts of Riga, Jelgava, Bauska, Dobele, Krustpils and Gulbene to cover the central, western and eastern parts of the country. The decision to create a professional military service battalion within the National Guard's 3rd Latgale Brigade (Eastern part of Latvia) will also significantly benefit the National Guard's overall development in the coming years[9].

While the growth of the National Guard is the main pillar of Latvia's comprehensive defense concept, Latvian MoD emphasize the role of society and every individual within the defense system. Namely, society as a whole must be involved in the protection of the state. Indeed, this sentiment is readily evident in the fourth paragraph of the preamble to the Latvian Constitution: "the people of Latvia protect their sovereignty, the independence of Latvia, the territory, its unity and the democratic state system"[10]. And yet, boosting the role of social resilience in the comprehensive defense will be challenging. A survey conducted a year ago revealed that, in the event of a military invasion, a third of respondents would leave the country, a little more than a third would join the resistance, and a similar proportion would do nothing[11].

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[8]   O. Nikers, "Latvia Pursues 'Total Defense' Concept, Rejects Conscription", *The Jamestown Foundation*, 02.05.2017, https://jamestown.org/program/latvia-pursues-total-defense-concept-rejects-conscription [04.10.2019].

[9]   Ibidem.

[10] Ministru kabinets, https://mk.gov.lv [01.02.2019].

[11] O. Nikers, "Latvia Pursues…".

In 2017, preparations continued for creating increased readiness units within the National Guard Battalions. These units will excel at various specialty tasks. Works have already begun on developing advanced mine-laying, anti-tank, military engineering, air-defense and sniper capabilities. The first certification of the high-readiness units was to take place during the Namejs 2018 military training exercise[12].

In early 2017, Latvian MoD publicly announced the country was returning to the concept of total or "comprehensive" defense, which had been abandoned after the country became a member in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The former Parliamentary Secretary of Latvian Ministry of Defense, Andrejs Panteļējevs, declared Latvia would maintain the strategy of the total defense in the long-term. He conclusively rejected the idea of returning to the conscription system[13].

The Latvian MoD declared the need to enhance direct public involvement in order to strengthen national security. However, neither of its two most important proposals in this regard recommend a return to conscription, which, according to the MoD's calculus, is not affordable for Latvia. First, the defense ministry recommended giving elementary and high school students a "mandatory choice" to sign up for basic lessons and training in state defense. Second, it calls for reforming the National Guard – Latvia's all-volunteer force, which is fully integrated with the professional military.

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[12] O. Nikers, "A Year in Review: Baltics Steadily Grow Their Armies", *The Jamestown Foundation*, 18.01.2018, https://jamestown.org/program/year-review-baltics-steadily-grow-armies [04.10.2019].

[13] O. Nikers, "Latvia Pursues…".

The concept of total defense also relies on a country's efficient economic mobilization during wartime and the involvement of domestic entrepreneurs in helping to achieve specific priorities related to national security. Currently, many Latvian entrepreneurs already support the National Guard and their employees who are members of this voluntary force. But the MoD is planning to encourage an even broader buy-in from businesses by clarifying their responsibilities pertaining to "comprehensive defense". This reflects core principles laid down in Latvia's Mobilization Law, which provides that in the State of Exception (when mobilization is activated), private business resources are redirected toward national defense.

According to Lt. Col. (Ret.) Uģis Romanovs, for many years, Russia has been positioning units and infrastructure in the immediate vicinity of the Baltic states and in Kaliningrad, purposefully shaping favorable conditions for itself in case of a military confrontation. Favorable conditions for Russia primarily mean that Allied [NATO] forces would not be able to deploy before Russia can achieve its specific objectives. Therefore, in the initial phases of the operation, the Baltic states must be prepared to fight without or with limited support from Allied forces[14].

Defense spending has drastically transformed over the past 5 years. Since 2014, Latvia's defense funding has increased as much as two and a half times, from 223 million EUR in 2014 to 576 million EUR in 2018, thereby reaching the 2% of the GDP mark.

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[14] Ibidem, LTC (Ret.) Uģis Romanovs, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Latvian armed forces and currently a lecturer at the Baltic Defense College (BDCOL), emphasizes why the concept of total defense has become increasingly important not only for Latvia, but throughout the Baltics.

According to Toms Rostoks, PhD, considerable investment was made to strengthen self-defense capabilities of the Latvian Army. For example, in 2018, as a part of the mechanization program, the supply of light armored vehicles – Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) (CVR(T)) – continued. The program enabled the purchase of a total of 123 armored units. By the end of 2017, 73 of these had been delivered, including 31 CVR(T)s. In the fall of 2017, the first self-propelled howitzers were delivered to Latvia from Austria. The supply of howitzers was completed later on[15].

Recently, significant investments were made in developing defense infrastructure for the host nation support (HNS). In order to improve the tactical mobility of the National Armed Forces (NAF), 4x4 light and medium-sized vehicles were purchased to meet the operational and technical requirements of the Latvian armed forces.

In addition, 62 military tactical vehicles will be delivered to Latvia under the U.S. government's Foreign Military Assistance program. Under this scheme, Latvia will be in possession of a total of 130 "Polaris" military tactical vehicles by the end of 2020. Owing to the NATO Support and Procurement Agency's Logistics Stock Exchange joint procurement partnership, the NAF also purchased 6x6 off-road vehicles from the Finnish "BRP", which will arrive by mid-2019. In parallel to the purchase of the vehicles, which reinforce the tactical mobility capacity of the NAF, the civilian fleet is also being upgraded[16].

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[15] T. Rostoks, "Building Deterrence Internally and Externally: Is Latvia Capable of Becoming David?", *Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook*, 2019, A. Sprūds, E. Vizgunova, S. Broka (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, pp. 109-122.

[16] Ibidem, p. 115.

Due to the fact that the consolidation of the air defense and airspace surveillance systems is among the priorities of the Latvian NAF, the country contracted "Lockheed Martin" for a multifunctional radar delivery. This mobile radar is capable of low-level flight surveillance and target identification, and is designed for ultra-low power consumption.

Simultaneously, Latvia acquired "Stinger" air defense missile systems from Denmark, as well as "Spike" antitank missile system, the purchase of which will be under finalization in several phases until 2023. Latvia will operate "RQ-20A Puma" tactical unmanned aircraft systems, supplied by the USA, whose arrival has already been scheduled. With the acceptance of the US State Department, Latvia will purchase four "Black Hawk" helicopters and associated equipment from the US[17]. First helicopters are scheduled to be delivered in 2021.

In the second year of its existence (2018), the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup was remarkably strengthened when it was reinforced by the Republic of Slovakia with 152 soldiers and the Czech Republic with 60 soldiers. Canada announced that it would renew its military presence in Latvia for another four years (until March 2023) and would increase the number of its armed forces personnel deployed to Latvia from 455 to 540. The continuous, rotating presence of the US armed forces in the framework of the operation "Atlantic Resolve" has an unwavering significance for Latvia's security as this cooperation is being implemented outside of the NATO EFP arrangement[18].

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[17]   Ibidem, p. 120.
[18]   M. Andžāns, "Latvias Defense in 2018. More Money – More Challenges and Opportunites", *Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook*, 2019, A. Sprūds, E. Vizgunova, S. Broka (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, pp. 96-108.

A significant progress has been achieved since the Crimean crisis of 2014, though there remain issues which demand political and professional solutions. For example, many high ranking civilians and military personnel in Latvia have occupied their positions since the mid-1990s, when the absence of qualified professionals allowed them to take high positions within Latvian Ministry of Defense and military – in absence of any qualified and skilled local personnel. Latvia should also consider returning to the conscription service. It would be feasible to facilitate generational change by allowing personnel with Soviet-era education or insufficient education and skills to give place to personnel with contemporary education and skills[19].

The most pressing issues of the Latvian military are still the level of development and proper use of human resources, particularly for designing and leading battle-winning structures, as well as the ability to learn and execute the operational battle[20].

3. Estonian Case

Russia's cyber-attacks in 2007, the invasion of Georgia in 2008, and the occupation of Crimea in 2014 forced Estonia to update its defense policies. Estonia was the first among the Baltic countries to fulfill NATO's requirement of 2% of the GDP being dedicated to defense spendings. Moreover,

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[19] Interview with Dr. Māris Andžāns, Reaserch Fellow at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, *Baltic armies still faced by cooperation, training and leadership challenges*, 27.06.2019, https://www.baltictimes.com/baltic_armies_still_faced_by_cooperation__training_and_leadership_challenges/ [04.10.2019].
[20] Ibidem.

Estonia has introduced massive defense readiness exercises, supported Allied troops stationed in the Baltics, as well as encouraged the establishment of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn, demonstrating its commitment towards collective defense[21]. For example, 19 countries participated in the "Siil" Exercise 2018, which allowed Estonian armed forces to be trained on the battlefield together with Allied partner troops thereby increasing cooperation and combat-readiness in case of a military crisis[22].

On the other hand, NATO CCDCOE shows the importance of cyber defense in the collective defense. Due to the fact that Estonia was the first among allied partners who experienced a massive cyber-attack in 2007 after the Bronze Soldier incident, the facility is located in Tallinn[23]. At the same time, following cyber-attacks in 2007, Estonian Defense League Cyber Unit (EDLCU) was established. The EDLCU works with the private sector to allow cyber companies to be called upon in the wake of a cyber-attack[24]. The command provides education and training and is a direct result of the findings that it was primarily private companies and not the government who were able to counter the 2007 cyber-attacks[25].

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[21] B. Cooper, "Changes in Estonian Defense Policy Following Episodes of Russian Aggression", *Inquiries*, vol. 10, 2018, no. 10, p. 1/1, http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1745/changes-in-estonian-defense-policy-following-episodes-of-russian-aggression [28.10.2019].

[22] "Exercise Siil 2018 kicks off in Estonia", North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/news_154275.htm [28.10.2019].

[23] B. Cooper, op. cit.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] T. Gjelten, *Volunteer Cyber Army Emerges in Estonia*, https://www.npr.org/2011/01/04/132634099/in-estonia-volunteer-cyber-army-defends-nation [28.10.2019].

Estonian ground forces boosted the capabilities of their light infantry brigades by acquiring howitzer guns and participating in snap exercises in order to enhance brigade combat readiness[26]. Estonia does not spend its money implementing long-term development plans, e.g. acquiring advanced weapons systems such as tanks and fighter jets. These capabilities can be provided by Allied forces, if necessary. Instead, they focus on improving the capabilities of their own army with training exercises and weapons systems which are reasonable and affordable[27].

For example, the defense sector focuses primarily on increasing Defense League training, improving communications and transportation, increasing reaction speed and command capability, and maintaining barracks and armored personnel carriers. These improvements ensure NATO's advanced weapons systems and Estonia's well-trained defense forces will complement each other in the event of a conflict[28].

Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Estonian government realized, that it was important to invest in the modern "Javelin" anti-tank weapon system. "Javelins" are capable of attacking targets at distances of up to four kilometers and are a critical weapon system due to the fact that Tallinn has no battle tanks in its armed forces[29].

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[26] *National Defence Development Plan 2018-2022*, http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/riigikaitse2022/riigikaitse-arengukava/index-en.html [28.10.2019].

[27] B. Cooper, op. cit.

[28] "Defence Budget", Republic of Estonia Ministry of Defence, http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/en/objectives-activities/defence-budget [28.10.2019].

[29] J. Palowski, "Estonia Receives Javelin Anti-Tank Missiles From the United States", https://www.defence24.com/estonia-receives-javelin-anti-tank-missiles-from-the-united-states [28.10.2019].

Apparently, Estonia learned the most important lessons from the events in Crimea in 2014, and has been developing a strong military force capable of "merging" with the population and, at the same time, fighting a guerilla war to defend their homes – which is an ultimate deterrence measure as well. In order to prepare against a possible Russian hybrid warfare invasion, the Defense League has provided significantly more weapons training to its members and has increased the number as well as the lethality of weapons provided to the volunteer citizens[30].

These weapons include 90mm anti-tank guns, Carl Gustav grenade launchers, MG-3 machine guns, and Swedish AK 4 rifles. The weaponry provides Estonian Defense Forces with the capability to support battle groups and strengthen the force which complements NATO and Estonian forces fighting a Russian invasion[31].

After the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO deployed EFP Battle groups to all three Baltic countries, demonstrating to Russia that the organization will act decisively and defend its members.

Along with boosting its self-defense capabilities, stationing the battalion size battlegroups, and establishing the cyber-defense organizations, Estonia consolidated both its defenses and collective security as a whole. At the same time, well-focused allocation of defense funds and continuation of Estonian disinformation countering efforts have been important developments for Estonian defenses.

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[30] A. E. Kramer, "Spooked by Russia, Tiny Estonia Trains a Nation of Insurgents", https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/01/world/europe/spooked-by-russia-tiny-estonia-trains-a-nation-of-insurgents.html [28.10.2019].

[31] B. Cooper, op. cit.

4. Lithuanian Case

The annexation of Crimea urged Lithuania to implement "practical" decisions to strengthen military capabilities of the country. Following a consensus among all political parties, for the first time after independence has been regained, the Lithuanian Parliament considerably increased the defense budget, which grew by 32 percent to 425 million EUR, or 1,11 percent of the GDP, in 2015, with the aim of reaching 2% of the GDP in 2020[32].

However, the major shift in Lithuania's defense sector came with the decision to restore the conscription service in 2015, the step encouraged by the President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė. Stimulated by the fear of the potential of Russia's military challenge, this decision "went against a well-established post-Cold War trend in Europe and drew the attention of those studying the factors behind the defense policy decision to change the format of the armed forces"[33].

According to Tomas Jermalavičius, the decision reinstating conscription, combined with the dramatic increase in defense spendings after Russia's aggression against Ukraine, served to convey the sense of a nation mobilizing itself to confront an existential threat, and thus, not being a mere security consumer within NATO. Another factor was Russia's potential ability to interfere with getting the decision

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[32] L. Kojala, V. Keršanskas, "The Impact of the Conflict in Ukraine on Lithuanian Security Development", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, vol. 3, 2014-2015, Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University, pp. 171-189.

[33] T. Jermalavičius, "Reinstating conscription in Lithuania: bringing society back into defence?", *Delfi*, 17.10.2017, https://en.delfi.lt/archive/reinstating-conscription-in-lithuania-bringing-society-back-into-defence.d?id=76078357 [29.10.2019].

to its final form and to the implementation stage. Russia's hostile propaganda and political influence-peddling campaign to discredit and possibly halt the change was almost inevitable[34].

Apart from rising defense expenditures, the return of the conscription after Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the reception of EFP Battalions, following the Warsaw Summit Declaration in 2016, Lithuania, similarly to Estonia and Latvia, invested in armor and equipment for their defenses. The 386 million EUR contract concerning the purchase of 88 armored Boxer infantry fighting vehicles was signed in August 2016. The first few machines should reach Lithuania at the end of this year, with all of the vehicles delivered by 2021[35].

NASAMS air defense systems were purchased from Norwegian Kongsberg. The value of the contract equals 110 million EUR. Lithuania expects to receive the systems by 2021. They will be stationed in Radviliskis, northern Lithuania, with the capacity of them being transferred to any part of the country.

A contract with German Daimler AG to buy trucks was signed at the end of 2015. Under the 63 million EUR deal, 340 Unimog U5000 trucks will be delivered to Lithuania by 2022. The new machines were purchased to modernize the army's truck depot. In September 2015, Lithuania's army purchased artillery pieces- self-propelled howitzers. As a part of the agreement, Lithuania will receive 21 PzH2000 howit-

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[34] Ibidem.
[35] "5 biggest Lithuanian army acquisitions after Crimea annexation", *The Baltic Times* (ed.), 30.10.2017, https://www.baltictimes.com/5_biggest_lithuanian_army_acquisitions_after_crimea_annexation/ [28.10.2019].

zers, 26 command vehicles M577 V2 and six BPZ2 evacuation tanks. The contract is estimated at 16 million EUR.

A contract for the purchase of the GROM air defense systems was signed with Poland's Mesko in September 2014. The weaponry numbers are withheld, while the value of the contract totals at 34 million EUR. GROM can take down targets at a distance of 400 km and altitude of up to 3.5 km. All of the systems should be delivered by 2021[36]. Moreover, the core of the collective security assurance was brought to Lithuania and throughout NATO's eastern flank shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea, namely through the NATO Readiness Action Plan. The plan offers a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to changes in the security environment on NATO's borders.

As agreed upon in late 2014, concrete measures will be taken by Allied partners, such as the preparation of more detailed contingency plans which would be reviewed and upgraded regularly taking into account a newly emerged security threats; establishment of permanent command-and-control assets and deployment of vehicles, weapons, and other equipment for the High Readiness Joint Task Force to Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania; creation of a "spearhead" Very High Readiness Joint Task Force of 4,000 troops, which would be combat-ready within two to five days. At the end of 2014, Lithuania was the first country among NATO members to create such forces, comprised of roughly 2500 soldiers from existing units, which will be ready to respond to a threat within 2 to 24 hours[37].

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[36] Ibidem.
[37] L. Kojala, V. Keršanskas, op. cit.

Additionally, the largest ever military exercise, "Iron Sword 2014", took place in November 2014 in Lithuania and involved 2500 troops from 9 allied countries in total[38]. In order to strengthen the capacity to resist and respond to cyber-attacks and centralize the supervision of cyberspace, a National Cyber Security Centre, which was in planning for several years, was finally initiated and created by the Ministry of National Defense of Lithuania. It was launched on 1 January 2015. According to Linas Kojala, the establishment of the National Cyber Security Centre is a first step towards a stricter control of information and cyber space. However, it is still in the development process, specifically evaluating the consequences of the decisions taken.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the "Baltic Security Strategy Report" compiled by the team and experts of the Baltic Security Foundation, it became evident that the shortcomings of the air defense and maritime security are among the major gaps within the Baltics' defenses. All three Baltic countries have a very symbolic air defense and maritime security installations which can serve only in peace-time. The countries rely fully on the collective defense capabilities in war time, which are distant and currently unavailable in the situation of a real military crisis[39].

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[38] Ibidem.
[39] O. Nikers, O. Tabuns (eds.), "Baltic Security Strategy Report", *The Jamestown Foundation*, 2019, https://jamestown.org/product/baltic-security-strategy-report/ [28.10.2019].

For example, air force is the smallest of the three branches of the Estonian Defense Forces and, lacking any offensive capabilities, acts as a support structure for NATO exercises in the region. Specifically, Ämari Airbase in Harjumaa hosts the Baltic Air Policing Units from allied European powers. Estonian naval power is comprised of four ships, including two minesweepers. The main task of these assets is to pinpoint and remove thousands of mines laid in the Baltic Sea during the two world wars[40].

Bgen. Ilmārs Atis Lejiņš, a high ranking officer of the Latvian army, pointed to existing gaps within defense cooperation among the three Baltic countries. As all three are going through an exhilarating process of spending more on defense, there seems to be no room for the pursuit of cooperation. "Everyone is still intoxicated with their own "2%" and spending of it. The military and security challenges are regionally focused, not national. Therefore, a regional approach and regional coordination is paramount. Putin doesn't care about international border lines, nor should we", says Bgen. Lejiņš[41].

In order to resolve the military and civilian leadership issues in the Baltics, independent expert Glen Grant recommends the Baltics, Latvia in particular, contribute to the US and UK staff instructors at BDCOL and engage a western commandant with deep operational experience from France, the UK or US. At the same time, he suggests all ex-

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[40] B. Cooper, op. cit.
[41] Interview with Bgen. Ilmārs A. Lejiņš, O. Nikers, "Baltic armies still faced by cooperation, training and leadership challenges", 27.06.2019, https://www.baltictimes.com/baltic_armies_still_faced_by_cooperation__training_and_leadership_challenges/ [04.10.2019].

ercises be made more demanding, and senior staff trained and tested as much or even more than ground troops[42].

In conclusion, a number of measures were taken by Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania to change and strengthen certain defense capabilities, shifting from contributor to NATO's international operations to becoming the "consumer" of the collective defense after Russia's occupation of Crimea, Ukraine. This partnership requires not only well- developed Host Nation Support capabilities, but also well-settled self-defense capabilities and updated personnel policies in the future.

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42   Ibid. Interwiew with Glen Grant, an independent expert.

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Tomasz Stępniewski

NATO's Eastern Flank in the Context of the Russo-Ukrainian Armed Conflict

1. Introduction

In 2019, we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of NATO's establishment and the 20th anniversary of the organization's enlargement encompassing Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The countries of NATO's eastern flank form the so-called "Bucharest Nine" composed of Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Czechia. For decades, NATO has been adjusting to new challenges and threats of security-related nature. The adaptation has also proved necessary since Russia's neo-imperial policy towards Ukraine "woke the dragon" in 2014 and NATO began to adjust to the new security reality in East-Central Europe by boosting defense expenditures, modernizing the military and command structures, and relocating troops, etc. Since 2014, we have been dealing with an armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in Donbas (along with the annexation of

Crimea) which resulted in the change of security perception concerning Eastern Europe, and Europe in general. One can even go as far as arguing that the Ukraine conflict constitutes a symbolic end of the post-Cold-War international order[1]. The order was based upon the peaceful coexistence of states, integrity of national borders and international legal regulations concerning the operation of states. The objective of the present paper is to examine the implications of the Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict for the countries of NATO's eastern flank. In addition, the paper attempts to offer answers to the following research questions: Are NATO members responding adequately to the threat emerging from the armed conflict in Ukraine? Will Russia's revisionist politics revitalize the North Atlantic Treaty Organization? Do valid premises concerning the change of security condition in Eastern Europe exist? Will the Russian Federation succeed in revising the USA-dominated, post-Cold-War international order in the course of e.g. armed conflict in Ukraine?[2]

The fall of the bipolar division of the world intensified the state of unpredictability and uncertainty[3]. Adam Daniel Rotfeld argues that "after the end of the Cold War, it is not international conflicts but internal, ethnicity-based hostilities and religious wars which are dominant. However,

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[1] See R. Kupiecki, "Konflikt zbrojny na Ukrainie a bezpieczeństwo europejskie", *Zeszyty Naukowe AON*, 2015, no. 3 (100), pp. 9-10.

[2] Fragmentary research results were published in the following: T. Stępniewski, "NATO, ukraiński kryzys i szara strefa bezpieczeństwa Europy Wschodniej", *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe [Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej]*, vol. 14 (2016), no. 5, pp. 183-199.

[3] One of the exceptions in the Black Sea region was Russia's war with Georgia in September 2008. See A. D. Rotfeld, "Geneza i miejsce konfliktów na przełomie XX/XXI wieku", wykład na konferencji Stowarzyszenia Willa Decjusza, Kraków, 29.09.2004, http://www.msz.gov.pl/files/file_library/29/Krakow_11400.doc [09.11.2018].

globalization results in these conflicts being detrimental to international security"[4]. In addition, due to the decline of the bipolar system, a security vacuum emerged in Eastern Europe. Sławomir Sierakowski labels the area as "the shadow zone" or "the shadow of the Kremlin". According to the author, this "shadow zone" is half-moon-shaped and extends from Helsinki to Tbilisi, and probably as far as Astana. The half-moon encompasses countries which have no intention of co-existing together- states which failed to develop a cohesive geopolitical region, but whose interests cement them more than differences divide. The geopolitical shadow zone between the West and Russia emerged in the course of neo-imperial ambitions in the Russian Federation being rekindled[5].

2. Towards NATO 4.0? Development perspectives for NATO's eastern flank

The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (July 1991) and the fall of the Soviet Union (December 1991), both NATO's enemy structures, resulted in the necessity of a next "geo-military" division of the post-WWII world. These developments not only determined the situation of post-Soviet states but forced NATO to redefine its position, utility and role in the post-Cold-War world. Jerzy M. Nowak argues that NATO "is constantly evolving in political, military and operational domains"[6]. Changes in international relations necessitate

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[4]   Ibidem.
[5]   S. Sierakowski, "Długi cień Kremla", *Polityka*, 20.07-26.07.2016, no. 30 (3069), p. 22.
[6]   J. M. Nowak, "NATO: główne dylematy i pytania o przyszłość", [in:] A. D. Rotfeld (ed.), *Dokąd zmierza świat?*, Warszawa 2008, p. 263.

NATO's adaptation to new challenges and problems in the post-Cold-War period (including asymmetric threats, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc.)[7]. This requires NATO to recognize threats emerging from the post-Soviet space both for the sake of its own security as well as the one of the whole region. Moreover, the situation of the post-Soviet space is further complicated by two processes. First of all, it is the "deontologisation" process, visible particularly in the western world, which revolves around the growth of multi-dimensional and network relations at the expense of e.g. state structures. The decision-makers' return to thinking in geopolitical terms is the second. These processes result in the emergence of the so-called "new Cold War", i.e. rivalry over aspects of vital importance for chief players[8].

Events which occurred in recent years within NATO (and the EU) as well as in their international environment, are not without influence upon the shape of politics pursued by these organizations which address their neighbors. In relation to the above, the following ought to be mentioned: the eurozone crisis, Brexit negotiations, war in Syria, migrants overflowing the Mediterranean region, the issue of the Islamic State (Daesh), Russia's neo-imperial policy (annexation of Crimea, support for separatists in southern and

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[7] M. Berdal, D. Ucko, "NATO at 60", *Survival*, vol. 51, 2009, no. 2, pp. 55-76; S. Nunn, "NATO Nuclear Policy and Euro-Atlantic Security", *Survival*, vol. 52, 2010, no. 2, pp. 13-18.

[8] See J. Olchowski, "Interesy Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego w regionie czarnomorsko-kaspijskim", [in:] B. Bojarczyk, T. Stępniewski (eds.), *Obszar czarnomorsko-kaspijski w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Lublin 2011, p. 205; also: J. Sherr, "Security in the Black Sea Region: Back to Realpolitik?", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 8, 2008, no. 2, pp. 141-151; G. Winrow, "Geopolitics and Energy Security in the Wider Black Sea Region", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 7, 2007, no. 2, pp. 220-222; J. Sherr, "Hard Power in the Black Sea Region: A Dreaded but Crippled Instrument", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 11, 2011, no. 3, pp. 279-295.

eastern Ukraine), new cyber- and hybrid- threats, etc. These phenomena result in the division of EU member states (and de facto NATO) along the following geographic lines: 1) countries invested in the Mediterranean region (southern states and those constituting migrants' destinations: Germany, Austria, etc.), and 2) states focused upon the situation in the eastern neighborhood (Poland and Central Europe in general, the Baltics, Sweden) where the Russo-Ukrainian conflict poses a challenge for the security of these states and the whole region. It is noteworthy that Russia's aggression in Ukraine stimulated NATO's revival as an organization acting for European security. According to Camille Grand, Assistant Secretary General, Defense Investment in NATO, the defense expenditure trend among member states was reversed. Moreover, additional 100 billion USD will be invested in defensive capabilities between 2016 and 2020. The matter of dividing defense spending became significant among NATO members due to the drive to reaching 2% expenditure level by each of them (Table 1 outlines countries which have met the 2% criterion, as well as the date the remaining countries will meet the spending level). Camille Grand believes that over the course of the coming 10 years, this will considerably improve NATO's capabilities as an entity exerting the strongest impact upon security, stability and peace for close to 1 billion citizens of Europe and North America[9].

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[9] "NATO at 70: Where next? Experts weigh in on the future of the military alliance" (Camille Grand), *Politico*, 03.04.2019, https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-at-70-where-next/ [20.07.2019].

Table 1: Delivery of the 2% armament expenditure level in NATO

In 2018	In 2019	In 2024	Not delivering
Greece	Lithuania	Albania	Belgium
Estonia	Poland	Bulgaria	Canada
Latvia	Romania	Croatia	Denmark
UK		Czech Rep.	Germany
US		France*	Italy
		Hungary	Luxembourg
		Montenegro	Netherlands
		Norway	Portugal
		Slovak Rep.	Slovenia
		Turkey	Spain

In 2025

Source: D. Zandee, "The Future of NATO. Fog over the Atlantic?", [in:] T. Sweijs, D. Pronk (eds.), *Strategic Monitor 2018-2019*, The Clingendael Institute and The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, Hague, https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/strategic-monitor-2018-2019/ [20.07.2019].

Gen. James Stavridis (Ret.) observes that if NATO is viewed in terms of a computer game, then NATO 1.0 reflected the bipolar division of Europe and world during the Cold War period when each side possessed a massive military potential and closely followed actions of their opponent. NATO 2.0 was more expansive and reflected antiterrorist operations launched in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya after 11 September 2001. At the moment, we are dealing with NATO 3.0 which focuses upon Europe and Russian threat in the region of NATO's partners in Eastern Europe- Moldova, Georgia, and primarily Ukraine. The general believes that NATO 4.0 will continue to shield its European members against Russian pressure in the coming 10 years. However, the organization will be much more engaged at its frontier in the far north (the Arctic). It will also be much more effective

in cyber-security. Its offensive capabilities in cyber-space will stronger. It will also continue to deal with illegal migration and terrorist groups moving in from the south (Middle East and North Africa)[10]. Following Gen. James Stavridis' observations, it may be concluded that NATO's eastern flank states will remain at the center of the organization's attention in the coming years due to Russia's expansive and aggressive politics towards the countries of the immediate neighborhood and the Russian Federation's revisionist international objectives.

3. 80 years after the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact – modern repercussions for the countries of NATO's eastern flank and Eastern Europe

On 23 August 1939, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov (paradoxically) signed a non-aggression pact, further known as the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (or the Hitler-Stalin pact). It specified a secret protocol concerning the partition of Poland and Central Europe. For that reason, among historians and publicists, the pact is frequently referred to as the "Fourth partition of Poland". Despite the standing French and British guarantees concerning Polish security, the assistance never materialized on 1 September 1939 when WWII broke out. Soon after, on 17 September 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland. It ought to be noted that the USSR was Germany's ally when WWII started and that Stalin supported Hitler (Soviet Union supplied Nazi Germany with oil, steel, coal and food) in conquering west-

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[10]   Ibidem.

ern Europe (Belgium, Holland, France, Denmark, Norway, Yugoslavia and Greece). It ought to be noted that "the pact, which was signed 80 years ago, delineates Russia's current territorial demands. This was clearly manifested in the invasion of Ukraine and the Kremlin's justification for the fact, which was drawn straight out of Stalinist rhetoric"[11]. In the same source, the author of the text aptly observes that "what is clear in Poland, Lithuania or Finland, invaded by Russia three months after Poland, constituted self-defense according to Vladimir Putin. Today, the Kremlin's sentiment follows Stalin's observations from the 1940s: Russia attacked Central Europe along with Hitler in order to protect the oppressed brotherly nations. The rhetoric, drawn from the period of Nazi-Soviet alliance is being successfully applied by Russia to justify the invasion of Ukraine"[12]. For that reason, it does not come as a surprise that it is the states of NATO's eastern flank and Eastern Europe which, having been oppressed by German and Soviet totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, are the most sensitive to Russia's aggressive politics towards Ukraine and the whole East-Central European region. Historical factors determine the fact that Central-European states found their security politics upon cooperation with European partners but also tight relations with Americans. The presence of American forces in Poland raises objections of certain NATO member states but also Russia's. Some European NATO members observe that it drives a wedge in the organization's cohesion and de-

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[11] J. Mielnik, "Jak Stalin i Hitler rozpętali II wojnę światową", *Wprost*, 19-25.08.2019, no. 34, p. 65.
[12] Ibidem, p. 67.

grades relations with Russia. These arguments are groundless because it was Russia which annexed Crimea, and it is the Russian Federation's operations which have resulted in the security situation of East-Central Europe becoming precarious. In addition, there is strong controversy in NATO concerning Polish-American negotiations pertaining to the so-called "Fort Trump", i.e. permanent presence of American forces in Poland.

4. NATO's politics towards Ukraine and Eastern Europe: since the 1990s to the NATO Bucharest summit in 2008

In the 1990s, NATO's policies were focused upon the consolidation of relations with Russia at the expense of those with post-Soviet states. NATO's enlargement to include East-Central Europe (Poland, Czechia, Hungary) in 1999 changed the security setup in this part of the continent. Subsequently, according to Mitat Celikpala, the USA and NATO revised their strategy towards the region in the aftermath of the WTC events of 11 September 2001. The United States began to increasingly view the region as a "security vacuum", which situated the area at the center of American external security policy. As a consequence, specific assistance programs were developed for Georgia and Ukraine. The "international visibility" of the region increased and the reference point concerning security shifted as well[13]. Such developments were

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[13] M. Celikpala, "Escalating Rivalries and Diverging Interests: Prospects for Stability and Security in the Black Sea Region", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 10, 2010, no. 3, p. 289.

determined by NATO's effort regarding the consolidation of cooperation at the beginning of the 21st century and upon bringing Ukraine (since Viktor Yanukovych's rise to power) and Georgia closer to NATO standards. In addition, color revolutions in these two countries initiated a new debate concerning the consolidation of democratic reforms in the countries and security-enhancing actions in the post-Soviet space[14]. Next, NATO's enlargement of 29 March 2004 encompassing Bulgaria and Romania (as well as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia) resulted in the organization entering the post-Soviet space (especially the Black Sea region), thereby making NATO an actor exerting an impact upon the security situation of the area.

NATO Bucharest summit in 2008 was a next vital milestone in NATO's politics addressing Eastern Europe. During the summit, the USA advocated the introduction of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for eastern member states. The USA primarily pursued to intensify NATO's cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, thereby cementing relations of these countries with the Atlantic family. For that reason, in relation to Russia's negative and destabilizing actions aimed at post-Soviet states and the country's declarations concerning the so-called the privileged zone in the Commonwealth of Independent States, NATO's drive concerning the MAP being granted to Ukraine seems obvious from the point of view of the organization's interests in Eastern Europe, and the CIS more broadly. However, NATO did not decide to grant the MAP to Ukraine and Georgia. This de-

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[14] R. D. Asmus, "Europe's Eastern Promise. Rethinking NATO and EU Enlargement", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 1, pp. 95-106.

cision was determined by German and French objections. It also reflected NATO's fears related to the deterioration of relations with Russia. As already mentioned, some NATO members (including Germany and France) have been voicing opposition concerning the enhancement of cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus by arguing that NATO's enlargement ought to consolidate the Alliance instead of weakening it. Those countries believe that the enlargement encompassing Ukraine and Georgia may only cripple the organization.

The situation of Eastern European states may be defined as the "security vacuum". This stems from the location of the countries between Euro-Atlantic and European security organizations (NATO and the EU respectively) as well as the neo-imperial Russian Federation. Ukraine's geopolitical location places the country in two distinct regions, Europe and Eurasia. However, the country is peripheral in both. The situation in the post-Soviet region has been volatile, especially recently. Russia's war with Georgia in 2008[15] and subsequent events such as Russo-Ukrainian "Gas Cold War" in January 2009, Russia's intentional actions, the so-called passport policy in Crimea, or the matter of the Black Sea fleet being stationed in Sevastopol, and the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict (ongoing since 2014), result in Ukraine's domestic situation becoming severely complicated. The situation is further aggravated by Russia's hybrid warfare with the countries of Eastern Europe and the

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[15] More on the consequences of Russia's war with Georgia in: K. Zasztowt, "Zmiany w polityce regionalnej Turcji, Armenii i Azerbejdżanu po konflikcie zbrojnym w Gruzji w sierpniu 2008 roku", *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe [Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej]*, vol. 6 (2008), pp. 113-120.

West. It ought to be noted that the conflict in Donbas constitutes an opportunity for Russia to destabilize Ukraine's domestic political situation by exploiting Donetsk and Luhansk separatisms.

5. NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016

At this point, a reference to the NATO Warsaw summit and its ramifications for the countries of East-Central Europe ought to be made. The NATO Warsaw Summit (8-9 July 2016) was held in the context of qualitative changes in the international environment- both on the southern and eastern flanks of the Alliance. In addition, the year 2016 proved critical from the point of view of NATO's politics in East-Central Europe. This is associated not only with NATO members' shift of security perception but also with changes emerging in the international environment and threats for NATO members. The NATO membership of Czechia, Poland and Hungary since 1999, and Slovakia since 2004, overcame European divisions. The summit in Warsaw symbolized changes which occurred in Europe, but also confirmed Poland's position in NATO's security. It ought to be noted that the summit was symbolic because it was in Warsaw in 1955 where the Warsaw Pact was established. The pact divided East-Central Europe into two military camps. As a consequence, a bipolar division of this part of the continent emerged, which only ended with the fall of Communism in 1989.

When viewing the provisions of the NATO Warsaw Summit, it ought to be noted that their character is military (e.g. decision concerning the deployment of one battalion battlegroup in Poland and one in each of the Baltic states) but

also political (emphasis on NATO's internal cohesion, stress on boosting defense expenditures, etc.). The provisions also highlight that "the most vital task of the Alliance is the protection and defense of our territory and citizens against an attack, which stems from Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Nobody ought to doubt NATO's resolve in case any of its members comes under threat. NATO will maintain full deterring and defense measures against any security threat to our communities, wherever it may emerge."[16] In addition, the previous summit in 2014 in Newport established the boost in threat preventive measures. The following matters were decided upon during the Warsaw summit: delivery of the Readiness Action Plan (adopted in Newport), establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). It is noteworthy that the VJTF is to be deployment-ready within a few days (deployment of 5000 troops). These initiatives and enhancement of land and maritime cooperation within the organization (the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and the Mediterranean) confirmed NATO's strategic adaptation to new challenges and threats emerging from e.g. southern and eastern neighborhood. Undeniably, the matters of soft security, especially cybersecurity, are significant as well. Russia's hybrid warfare with Ukraine (de facto the West) poses new challenges for NATO member states and constitutes a challenge for NATO-Russia relations and for international security. What is more, it ought to be noted that not only conventional but also nuclear threats emerge on the part of Russia. Many analysts believe that the likelihood of Rus-

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[16]   "Report on NATO Warsaw Summit", Ministry of National Defense, Warsaw, http://www.mon.gov.pl/d/pliki/rozne/2016/08/Komunikat_ze_Szczytu_PKZPnxg.pdf [12.12.2016].

sia's attack on any NATO member is low. However, Russian politicians suggest that the Russian Federation is a nuclear power and may exploit the weapon against western states. This stems from the fact that since 2014, Russia has been perceiving NATO as the chief threat to the European continent as well as the threat to the country's interests in the post-Soviet space. Russia perceives any NATO statement concerning the deployment of forces to the countries of East-Central Europe as an "enlargement policy". However, NATO cannot agree with such an interpretation because Poland and the Baltic states are full-fledged NATO members and can independently decide upon the shape of NATO politics, including its eastern vector.

It can be argued that July 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit satisfied the expectations of member states representing East-Central Europe because it highlighted the matters of security in the region. Even though Article 5 of the Washington Treaty seems obvious to western states, it is of critical significance for Central European countries. In addition, NATO member states have been reducing their defense spendings while Russia has been successively doing the opposite. Poland, as well as other East-Central European countries, devote much attention to security issues and NATO's deterrence policies. As a consequence, the decision concerning the establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) in the region of East-Central Europe constitutes an important element of security policies of these countries.

6. NATO Brussels Summit in July 2018 and its ramifications for the eastern flank

During the latest NATO Summit in Brussels (11-12 July 2018), 29 NATO members signed the Brussels Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity. In addition, member states approved new command structures (logistics command in Ulm, Germany was established to oversee the eastern flank, and the command for North Atlantic in Norfolk, USA was reconstructed with the objective of securing sealift of troops from the USA to Europe) and consolidated deterring and defense capabilities by executing the 4x30 initiative (30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons, 30 ships, whose combat-readiness ought to be achieved under 30 days). In addition, the situation in Ukraine (annexation of Crimea and armed conflict in Donbas) was also mentioned on 12 July 2018 by Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO, during his meeting with the presidents of Ukraine and Georgia[17]. Stoltenberg assured them of NATO's full support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and argued that the Minsk Protocol constitutes a means for stabilizing the situation and ensuring peace[18]. He also emphasized that Russia's annexation of Crimea was one of the chief reasons for NATO's modernization of armed forces. In addition, it was Russia's aggressive politics which resulted in NATO's enhanced presence in Poland, the Baltics and in the Black Sea

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[17] "Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at a press point with the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko", NATO Summit Brussels, 12.07.2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_156736.htm [14.08.2018].

[18] T. Stępniewski, "Ukraine, Russia and the Minsk *ceasefire* negotiations", [in:] E. Latoszek, M. Proczek, M. Dziembała, A. Masłoń-Oracz, A. Kłos (eds.), *European Security and Stability in a Complex Global Order – the Case of Neighbourhood Policy*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 83-97.

region. In the course of the military presence, NATO sought to convey a clear message that the organization would not put up with such actions and the situation must not repeat in the territory of any member state.

7. Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict in Donbas vs. Russia's military presence in the "grey zone of security" in Eastern Europe

Sergey Karaganov, a renowned Russian political scientist who frequently comments on international politics in western media, repeatedly argued that Russia will never be a global power unless it becomes a regional power first. As a consequence, according to many scholars, Ukraine is critical for Russia's imperial projects. Undeniably, Russia has the capacity to become a regional power (some scholars believe it has already turned into one), and prospectively play a key role in global politics. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine questions the achievement of these objectives by Russia (at least from the perspective of 2019).

I have repeatedly argued in my papers that Russia's contemporary international operations aim to achieve the status quo ante. In the 1990s, we were dealing with Russia's declining international role (as a successor of the USSR). At the beginning of the 21st century, the Russian Federation's activity began to be characterized by the growing significance of military and energy factors and the rejection of sentimental rhetoric in favor of a strictly pragmatic approach. The "economization" of politics, or "petropolitics" of Russia towards its "near abroad" is frequently mentioned. The present armed conflict in Ukraine changes Russia's percep-

tion as a neighbor, questions all integrative projects in the post-Soviet space (including Ukraine), and begs a question concerning the future of the region.

However, it ought to be noted that over the past two decades, Russia manifested strong determination concerning the reintegration of the post-Soviet space. From the Russian point of view, the achievement of hegemony in the region and denying the area to the West are to consolidate its imperialism regionally and globally, and aim to secure several, minor socio-economic objectives. In addition, in order to defend its area of influence, Russia did not hesitate to pursue confrontational politics towards the West.

The following question ought to be posed: Why Ukraine is not Russia, and why are we witnessing the paths of the two countries part? Roman Szporluk offered a compelling answer. He believes that the source of the conflict can be traced back to Ukraine's desire to join Europe, to belong among democratic, independent states under the rule of law. On the other hand, Russia does not desire to be a part of Europe. This fuels the conflict in relations with Ukraine. In other words, Ukraine is not Russia because Russia does not seek to be in Europe[19]. According to Szporluk, due to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, relations of the two reverted to the model which emerged ages before. Adam Eberhardt believes that we are dealing with the greatest blow to Russian influence in Ukraine, one which was successively developed since the Pereyaslav Treaty 360 years before[20]. On the one

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[19]   The author attended Prof. Roman Szporluk's lecture titled "Why Ukraine is not Russia", Harvard University, 15.07.2015.

[20]   A. Eberhardt, "Ukraińska wojna o niepodległość", *Nowa Europa Wschodnia*, 2015, no. 3-4, p. 49.

hand, Ukraine has begun to approach Europe, and started to mentally gravitate towards the region. On the other hand, Russia, which rejects Europe and cooperation with the West by pursuing assertive politics, the contests post-Cold-War order and pursues new rules of the game. Russia's imperial growth is facilitated by the weakness of the EU, its internal problems (Brexit) and ragged strategy towards its eastern neighbors. The lack of established eastern strategy invites all geopolitical actors – including Russia – to compete with the EU (West) over the influence in this part of the continent[21].

When examining the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, one cannot forget about the fact that in its foreign affairs, especially towards post-Soviet states, Russia follows imperial mentality. George Soroka reflects on how the USA would respond if e.g. Russian military bases were to be established in Cuba. Would we not witness a US response, an attempt at halting or preventing such a plan from materializing? The question seems rhetorical. Such a way of thinking manifested by Russian decision-makers seems to be acknowledged by Andrej Krickovic who argues that Russians "respect only superpowers such as the USA, China, Germany. People frequently fail to understand that: 'The Kremlin is speaking of sovereignty but it has no respect for it itself!'. For Russians, sovereignty does not apply to small nations. From the Russian Federation's point of view, America ought not to inter-

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21 T. Stępniewski, "Wojna Ukrainy o niepodległość, pamięć i tożsamość", *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe [Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej]*, vol. 13 (2015), no. 2, pp. 153-166.

vene in Russian or Chinese affairs, but small nations- well they are potential spoils"[22].

When viewing the map of Eastern Europe, Russia's military presence in the region ought to be noted. Eastern Europe may be labeled as the "grey zone of security". Frozen conflicts present in the region may directly or indirectly determine the stability and security of the countries of Eastern Europe and the whole EU. In addition, Russia is becoming increasingly bold and has been deploying medium-range missiles throughout the European territory of the Russian Federation. These missiles are capable of reaching virtually any European country (the map below illustrates the situation). Mariusz Kania aptly observes that "even though Washington's withdrawal from the Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) is beneficial to the USA, because the treaty bound exclusively the US and Russia, but China, their primary rival, was able to develop such weapons freely, the deployment of 60 transporter erector launchers in Russia's European territory has completely changed the optics on the European continent"[23].

As far as Russia's deployment of Iskander ballistic missiles in the Kaliningrad Oblast is concerned, it can be argued that it poses a potential threat for north-eastern Poland and the Baltic states. In addition, Russian comprehensive A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) system is worth mentioning. The

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[22] K. Wężyk, "Niedźwiedziowi wolno więcej (rozmowa z Andrejem Krickovicem)", 18.07.2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,146875,18384515,niedzwiedziowi-wolno-wiecej.html [18.07.2015].

[23] M. Kania, "Rosjanie wycelowali rakiety w Europę, ale chyba nikomu to nie przeszkadza", *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Nasza Europa*), 20.07.2019, http://wyborcza.pl/naszaeuropa/7,168189,25004915,rakiety-wycelowane-w-europe.html [18.07.2015].

A2/AD system is tasked with the detection and electronic jamming of guiding, spatial, orientation and communication systems, and consequently, eliminating aerial assets, including drones and cruise missiles. Russian Kaliningrad constitutes the northernmost threat area for NATO (anti-aircraft assets reach deep into Polish territory and may eliminate NATO reinforcements coming with the relief for the Baltics). In addition, after the annexation of Crimea, the Crimean peninsula constitutes another threat area. Russia deployed powerful A2/AD forces throughout the peninsula, thereby assuming control over virtually the whole Black Sea region (the situation is counterbalanced by Turkey and its impressive military- second largest in NATO in terms of size). Moreover, Russia has recently reinforced its A2/AD potential in Syria.

Another problem for the conventional security of the region is presented by the violations of NATO members' and non-NATO countries' (Scandinavian states) airspace. Analysts observed that "dangerous military-military and military-civilian incidents involving ships or aircrafts of Russia, NATO member states, and third parties, continue to pose a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security."[24] In particular, the period following Russia's annexation of Crimea abounded in Russia's military activity, violations of air and maritime space of NATO members, and witnessed the deterioration of NATO-Russia relations.

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[24] Ł. Kulesa, T. Frear, D. Raynova, "Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area: A New Plan of Action", *Policy Brief*, November 2016, European Leadership Network, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org [20.12.2016].

**Map 1: Distribution of Russian A2/AD assets
(valid for August 2016)**
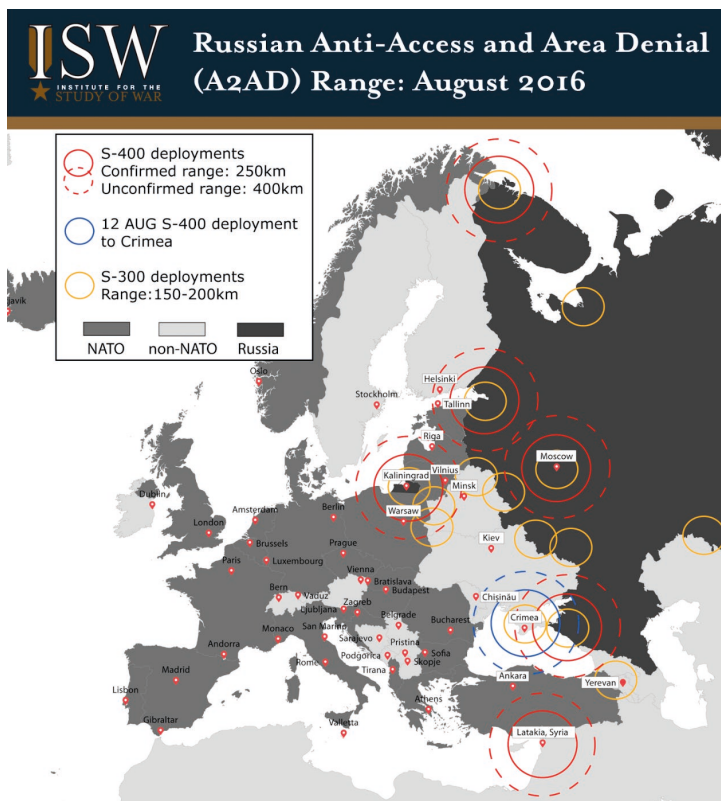
Source: K. Weinberger, "Russian Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD)", 29.08.2016, Institute for the Study of War, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/russian-anti-access-and-area-denial.html [20.10.2018].

In the context of NATO's eastern policy and potential enlargement in this direction, another vital factor ought to be mentioned, i.e. the infiltration of Ukrainian military (also other post-Soviet states) by Russian forces. The infiltration exerts a negative impact upon NATO's perception

of these countries as potential members. The level of infiltration was clearly manifested during the events in Crimea and its "hand-over" by Ukrainian forces. According to transcripts from the meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine on 28 February 2014 (published almost two years after the annexation of Crimea by Russia), it became evident that several members of Ukrainian armed forces communicated with the command of the Black Sea fleet deployed to Crimea. In addition, police officers and military personnel defected to take Russian side. The transcripts revealed that Ukraine's defense capabilities in the region were minimal. The situation was determined by Russia's continuous and long-term operations.

8. Conclusions

The objective of the present paper was to conduct a general review of the security condition of East-Central European states- especially with regard to the countries of NATO's eastern flank and Eastern Europe in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict in Donbas. While NATO members have been reducing their defense expenditures (merely a few NATO members, e.g. Poland, have increased these recently), the Russian Federation has been continuously reinforcing and modernizing its military forces (including conventional ones). It ought to be noted that in the course of the armed conflict with Ukraine, Russia has been testing new strategies, tactics and capabilities. In addition, Russia's operations in Ukraine are not merely tactical in character but are determined by long-term objectives. NATO is mistaken in viewing Russia's actions exclusively in light of the

Ukrainian conflict (the conflict as a local, internal affair). NATO members ought to revise their approach to conventional threats in Europe. The situation on NATO's eastern flank offers a perfect example. From the point of view of conventional threats, it is Russia and its neo-imperial policy which currently constitute the most critical threat to the European continent. The lack of reflection upon the revision of security condition in Eastern Europe may entail far-reaching ramifications for NATO as an organization as well as for its individual member states. Both Heinrich Brauss, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) and Joachim Krause, the head of the Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel, believe that "when our attention is drawn to climate change, migration crisis, the EU crisis and several other problems requiring cooperation-based solutions, completely unprovoked, Putin's Russia has been preparing for regional wars in Europe which may be won by means of nuclear threats"[25]. They also argue that "the deployment of Russia's new middle-range weapons ought not to be viewed in isolation, but should be analyzed in the context of Russia's comprehensive strategy for the times of peace, crisis and war"[26].

The security system of Eastern Europe (the post-Soviet space and the Black Sea region in general) is severely complicated and complex due to its multi-facetedness (military, energy, ethnic, political aspects)[27]. In connection with the

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[25] T. Jungholt, "Rosja przygotowuje się do wojen regionalnych w Europie", *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Nasza Europa*), 20.07.2019, http://wyborcza.pl/naszaeuropa/7,168189,24996087,rosja-przygotowuje-sie-do-wojen-regionalnych-w-europie.html [20.07.2019].

[26] Ibidem.

[27] More on the "security paradoxes" of the Black Sea region in: D. Triantaphyllou, "The 'Security Paradoxes' of the Black Sea Region", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 9, 2009, no. 3, pp. 225-236.

growth of the region's geostrategic significance, further problems complicating the troublesome situation emerge[28]. The lack of a cohesive NATO strategy addressing the post-Soviet space clearly does not contribute to the stabilization of the situation and to the provision of security in this part of the globe in general. As mentioned before, NATO's interests in the region revolve around 1) the provision of the feeling of security (destabilization of the region results in the destabilization of the organization); 2) the provision of energy and resources infrastructure security; 3) balancing Russia's influence by consolidating the statehood of regional actors and engaging these states in the cooperative security system.

Heinrich Brauss' statement offers a perfect conclusion for the paper. Brauss believes NATO members must improve their "capacity to respond and consolidate the most endangered region of the organization, i.e. the Baltic Sea region and Poland, by the consistent application of provisions of Warsaw and Brussels NATO summits". Brauss also believes that German armed forces (Bundeswehr), due to the country's geographical position in Central Europe, ought to "reach full operational readiness and meet NATO's additional, demanding military objectives as soon as possible"[29]. If NATO member states fail to recognize threats emerging from their immediate neighborhood, they may lose precious time necessary to compensate for the delay. Security situation in Central and Eastern Europe is undergoing rapid changes regardless of whether NATO undertakes adaptive

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[28] J. Solak, "Bezpieczeństwo regionu Morza Czarnego w aspekcie stosunków transatlantyckich", [in:] J. Gryz (ed.), *Bezpieczeństwo w stosunkach transatlantyckich*, Toruń 2008, p. 386.
[29] After T. Jungholt, op. cit.

measures. The world around us is changing without waiting for Europe to catch up.

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Konrad Zasztowt

Turkey's Eurasian Policy Shift: Towards Strategic Sovereignty or Client State?

1. Introduction

Tensions between Turkey and NATO allies and EU partners characterized their mutual relations since 2002 throughout the term of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). However, beginning with the middle of 2016, the deterioration of Ankara's Euro-Atlantic relations and improvement of those with Russia became a prevalent trend. Turkey ceased to be perceived as a fully credible ally in NATO. Several causes of such state of affairs can be enumerated. Even though these are interconnected, they are not equally important. The friction between Turkey and its Western allies and partners is worth examining as a spectrum of problems- beginning with the fundamental ones, and finishing with those which may seem as separate factors, but are in fact a consequence of the former ones.

All tensions have emerged due to domestic policy changes in Turkey, i.e. the consolidation of power in the hands of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is criticized by NATO member states, Western NGOs and international institutions. This constitutional consolidation of presidential powers in 2018 was declared to contribute to the enhancement of Turkey's strategic sovereignty, understood as independence in decision-making, including the freedom from any pressure of NATO allies.

The argument that tensions between Turkey and NATO members and EU partners stem partly from an objective clash of interests can be accepted as a fact. However, the tensions are largely due to Erdoğan's calculations concerning Turkey's domestic politics. Three issues pertain to the conflicting objectives of foreign affairs pursued by Turkey and its Euro-Atlantic allies and European partners. The following constitute the most pressing elements of the dispute: (1) the issue of Turkey's / Western countries' politics towards the Kurdish YPG in Syria; (2) Turkey-Russia military cooperation, which currently manifests in Ankara's purchase of Russian S-400 anti-aircraft weapon systems, and (3) Cyprus conflict, which has entered a new phase due to Turkey's pursuit concerning the exploitation of offshore gas deposits around this EU island.

The matter which exacerbates the conflict between Turkish government and the USA and European allies is the country's attitude towards Hizmet, an Islamic movement of preacher Fethullah Gülen[1]. The problem revolves around

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[1]   After emigrating from Turkey in 1999, Fethullah Gülen has been residing in Pennsylvania, USA. The official reason for Gülen's departure was hospitalization in America. It is

American and European criticism concerning de-democratization of Turkey's political system. Ankara considers neutrality towards Gülen as the lack of solidarity of NATO allies, and even as silent support for this anti-government organization.

In the past, the stagnation in the integration of the country with the EU was another chief problem in Turkey's relations with Western partners. Even though, at present, Ankara is still formally pursuing EU membership, association negotiations have been at a stand-still for years. Turkish political elites do not perceive EU membership as a vital objective of foreign affairs (regardless of the fact that such a perspective for the country has been doubtful and distant due to objections voiced by French, German and Austrian political elites).

Even though the objective character of the conflict of interests in the foreign affairs of Turkey, the USA and EU can be acknowledged, it ought to be noted that international matters remain a secondary issue for Turkish president, who is much more focused upon the achievement of his objectives in domestic politics. As a consequence, Erdoğan has been painting European countries and the USA as adversaries, and even enemies of the country. This enables him to consolidate the electorate around nationalist ideas. Such domestic politics has already been successfully applied, e.g.

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likely he left Turkey and has been residing in the USA due to the threat of imprisonment in connection with a sentence of 2000 concerning the propagation of the concept of "Islamic state". Gülen was acquitted in 2008. Both the sentencing and acquittal of the Hizmet leader were motivated politically. In 2000, both the judicial authorities and executive government were dominated by secular, Kemalist elites who were reluctant towards Islamists. On the other hand, Gülen's movement remained in an informal alliance with the ruling Islamist Justice and Development Party.

a few years before the constitutional referendum in 2017, parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018, and local elections in 2019. Military operations in Syria, where Turkish army clashed primarily with Kurdish forces, served to spur nationalist sentiment in the society, as well as public support for Ankara's government.

2. Transformation of Turkey's political system as a root cause of the country's Eurasian policy shift: from Ergenekon trials to a "judicial coup"

The intensifying conflict between the government in Ankara and the West, as well as the rapprochement with Russia, are strictly related with political changes in Turkey. In its initial term, the Justice and Development Party, at the helm since 2002, represented an amalgamate of Islamist ideology with the postulates of democratic reforms convergent with EU requirements. In practice, it boiled down to the reduction of significance of secular, Kemalist, republican elites, which were still dominant among the Turkish public despite several periods of rule of conservative and Islamic parties in the 1990s. Even though the AKP, which descends from the Islamic Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*), continued with the devotion to conservatist and Islamic values, it also emphasized the democratization of the state. The process was to be facilitated by the integration with the EU, i.e. the conformity with the so-called Copenhagen criteria, which were labeled by the contemporary AKP Prime Minister Erdoğan as the Ankara criteria.

Political changes which served to prepare to and open association negotiations were beneficial for the Islamist

rule[2]. In the course of reforms introduced by Turkey (pressed by the EU), civilian control over military was implemented. This denied the secular elites, commonly represented in the army, any opportunity for a non-democratic intervention in the political life. In the period preceding association negotiations between Ankara and the EU, secular opposition and media sympathetic to this group highlighted the fact that the convergence of AKP and EU objectives is merely situational and is likely to change when actions facilitating democratization cease to benefit Islamist groups. Indeed, shortly after the significance of the military in the political life diminished, Erdoğan's party not only dominated the Turkish political scene, but purged secular, Kemalist opponents and accused them of planning a coup attempt in the so-called Ergenekon trials[3].

Several supporters of an alliance with Russia, advocates of Eurasian ideology, as well as staunch opponents of the USA and the West were among the accused of the coup's organisation. Among the arrested was e.g. Doğu Perinçek, former Maoist, and the recent leader of Turkish Eurasians represented in the Workers' Party (*tur. İşçi Partisi*). Aleksandr Dugin, the chief ideologist of the Eurasian movement in Russia, condemned the arrest of the politician. In 2013, Perinçek was sentenced to 117 years in prison. The Ergenekon trials also sentenced Turkish generals who were expressing anti-West and pro-Russian opinions. For example, Mehmet

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[2] M. Cebeci, "De-Europeanisation or Counter-Conduct? Turkey's Democratisation and the EU", *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 21, 2016, no. 1, p. 126.

[3] See e.g. G. H. Jenkins, "Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation", *Silk Road Paper*, August 2009, https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2009_08_SRP_Jenkins_Turkey-Ergenekon.pdf [20.10.2019].

Şener Eruygur was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2008, and Tuncer Kılınç to 13 years in prison in 2009.

In December 2013, a crisis and conflict between two allies, Gülen's movement and PM Erdoğan, emerged in the ruling Islamist camp. The prosecutor's office charged people tied with the PM with corruption. Charges were presented to the sons of three members of the government (Zafer Çağlayan, the Minister of Economic Affairs, Muammer Güller, the Minister of the Interior, Erdoğan Bayraktar, the Minister of Environment and Urban Planning). Prosecutors were also planning to present charges to the PM's son, Bilal[4]. Charges pertained to the participation in a corruption scheme to avoid American sanctions against Iran. The ministers resigned. However, neither them, nor their sons were held criminally liable.

The corruption scandal did not lead to the fall of the government because Erdoğan and the AKP argued that the accusations of the prosecutors were an anti-government conspiracy organized by Gülen's supporters employed in justice authorities. Even though, it is likely that people with ties to Gülen were behind the investigation against the politicians of Erdoğan's party, the corruption itself was not a hoax.

Prosecutors in charge of the case were made redundant. In the official government discourse, the Hizmet movement began to be labeled as the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization, (tur. *Fethullahçı Terrör Örgütü*, FETÖ). In the AKP narration, the events of December 2013 are referred to as

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[4]   "Erdoğan oğlunu koruyor: Soruşturma savcıdan alındı!", *SoL*, 23.12.2013, https://haber. sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/erdogan-oglunu-koruyor-sorusturma-savcidan-alin-di-haberi-84919 [26.10.2019].

the "judicial coup"[5]. The political crisis and the rift among Islamists soon began to determine Turkey's foreign affairs, including relations with the West and Russia.

3. The impact of the AKP government after the 15 July 2016 coup upon the exacerbation of crisis in Turkey-NATO relations

The next stage of Turkey's domestic political transformation commenced with Ahmet Davutoğu retirement from the position of the PM. He was the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and the architect of the country's foreign politics in the past decade. On 22 May 2016, he was replaced by Binali Yıldırım, a long-term Minister of Transport for the AKP. This change was motivated by the consolidation of power by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The new PM was to secure the reconstruction of Turkey's political system from the cabinet-parliamentary into the presidential system. Contrary to his predecessor, Yıldırım was not in charge of foreign policy but merely executed presidential orders[6].

Davutoğu's removal was associated with the projected change of the foreign affairs' vector towards Russia and other non-Western partners, along with relations with the USA and EU becoming crippled. The politician envisaged improvement of Ankara's relations with the countries of the region. He was known as the author of the so-called strategic depth doctrine, which also referred to Russia, a country

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[5]   M. Övür, "The realities behind the Hakan Atilla case", *Daily Sabah*, 30.07.2019, https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/mahmut_ovur/2019/07/30/the-realities-behind-the-hakan-atilla-case [20.10.2019].

[6]   A. Balcı, *Türkiye Dış Politikası. İlkeler, Aktörler ve Uygulamalar*, İstanbul 2017, p. 349.

of the Black Sea region. However, Davutoğu did not deny the necessity of the integration with the EU and cooperation within NATO. In addition, the former prime minister ought to be credited with succeeding to negotiate an agreement concerning the solution of the migration crisis jointly with the EU[7]. The March 2016 agreement was beneficial for Turkey. The EU declared to grant three billon EUR in order to provide care for migrants in the Turkish territory. In exchange for Turkey's engagement in the agreement, the association process was to be restarted and visa requirements lifted for Turkish citizens travelling to the Schengen Area.

The actual rapprochement between Turkey and the EU never emerged. Despite the crisis associated with a Turkish fighter aircraft engaging and shooting down a Russian Su-24 which violated Turkish airspace during a bombing campaign against anti-Assad opposition in Syria's border region, relations between Turkey and Russia rapidly improved during Yıldırım's term. After ten months of tensions, the countries reconciled within a month when Turkish president sent a letter of apology for the Su-24 incident[8]. Subse-

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[7] The EU and government in Ankara developed a mechanism for the re-accommodation of migrants who came to Greece from Turkey. In exchange for the re-accommodation, the EU was to accommodate the same number of migrants from Turkish refugee camps who had not attempted to enter the EU illegally. In total, up to 72 thousand migrants were projected to be accommodated by EU member states.

[8] The text of the "apology" was ambiguous. The Russian version of the text can be interpreted strictly as an apology. However, the Turkish text can be interpreted as regret/condolences expressed in relation to the incident. Undeniably, several interest groups in Turkey, Russia and Kazakhstan contributed to a swift resolution of the conflict associated with the shot-down of Su-24. Among the people who played a significant part in the events were Gen. Hulusi Akar (Chief of Turkish General Staff, manifesting "Eurasian" inclinations), Nursultan Nazarbayev (the President of Kazakhstan), as well as Russian influential politicians, including Ramazan Abdulatipov (Head of the Republic of Dagestan). See e.g. M. Yetkin, "Türk-Rus krizini bitiren sözler: Bence uygun", *Hürriyet*, 09.08.2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turk-rus-krizini-bitirensozler-bence-uygun-40185923 [28.10.2019].

quently, Turkey-Russia relations consolidated in the fallout of the 15 July 2016 coup.

The coup itself came as a complete surprise to Turkey's Western partners and allies. Even though, in the post-war history of the nation, there were four military coups (1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997), between 2003-2008, when civilian control over the military was introduced in accordance with EU guidelines, the military ceased to play a political role. Moreover, Turkish presidents' arguments blaming the religious Hizmet movement headed by Fethullah Gülen for the coup did not sound convincing to European and American politicians. The organization, whose leader has resided in the USA since 2013, was in close relations with Erdoğan. The split between the two leaders emerged only when prosecutors associated with Gülen accused members of the AKP government of corruption in December 2013. Historically, Erdoğan and Gülen are rooted in different traditions. However, they represent the same trend in Turkish politics, i.e. Islamism combined with nationalism. The friction ongoing since 2013 between two wings of the Islamic movement in Turkey remained a mystery to the majority of Western followers of the situation.

In addition, details concerning the perpetrators and objectives of the coup were also unclear. This fact determined the lukewarm and ambiguous response of European and American politicians to the events. The government in Ankara interpreted the response as the support for the instigators of the coup[9]. Well before 15 July 2016, Erdoğan was

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[9] I. Lesser, "Turkey and the West after the Failed Coup: Beyond Suspicion?", *Insight Turkey*, vol. 18, Summer 2016, no. 3, pp. 45-46.

criticized for authoritarian practices of the government. After the coup, in the state of emergency, thousands of alleged members of Gülen's movement were arrested and sentenced. Politicians representing the opposition were accused of cooperating with terrorists. The arrested and imprisoned included e.g. the leaders of the People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*, HDP) and representatives of Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP). In addition, over 200 journalists were imprisoned. The majority of them were sentenced to imprisonment.

The context of the events determined the opinion of Western followers of the political situation in Turkey, including several influential politicians. Theories which blamed Erdoğan himself for the coup emerged[10]. Michael Rubin, a former Pentagon official, an analyst of American Enterprise Institute, compared the events of 15 July to the Reichstag fire, and suggested that Turkish president himself staged the coup against his own administration[11]. In March 2017, Bruno Kahl, the President of the Federal Intelligence Service in Germany, observed that there was no convincing evidence suggesting it was Gülen's supporters who were behind the coup of 15 July. He believes that it was the initiative of certain Turkish officers who feared they would fall victim to the projected purge in the military[12].

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[10]   "State of emergency in Turkey extended for sixth time", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 18.01.2018, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/state-of-emergency-in-turkey-extended-for-sixth-time-125972 [28.10.2019].

[11]   M. Rubin, "Turkey's Reichstag Fire. Explaining Erdogan's long game", *Commentary Magazine*, 01.09.2016, http://www.aei.org/publication/turkeys-reichstag-fire/ [28.10.2019].

[12]   "German spy agency chief says does not believe Gulen behind Turkey coup attempt", *Reuters*, 18.03.2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-germany/german-spy-agency-chief-says-does-not-believe-gulen-behind-turkey-coup-attempt-idUSKBN16P0LQ [21.10.2019].

The issue of alleged support for the instigators of the coup constituted a significant problem in relations between Turkey and its Western partners, including the USA and Germany. It is indeed true that German government granted asylum to officers and diplomats accused of membership in Gülen's movement. The USA denied Turkish demands concerning the extradition of Gülen to Turkey[13].

The issue of corruption and breach of American sanctions against Iran was directly connected with Erdoğan's conflict with Gülen's movement because it was prosecutors belonging to the organization who sought to bring these illegal actions to light. The problem also pertained to the vital interests of the USA. It was not long before American tribunal brought charges against people associated with Erdoğan concerning trade with Iran via the government controlled Türkiye Halk Bankası A.Ş. bank. Initially, it was Reza Zarrab, an Iranian businessman (with Turkish citizenship) cooperating with the bank, who became the main defendant. However, he decided to become the crown witness. He testified he delivered bribes to Çağlayan, the contemporary Minister of Economic Affairs[14]. In January 2018, a New York

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[13] In response to Turkish government's demands concerning Gülen's extradition, John Kerry, the Secretary of State, argued it would only be possible after Turkey presents evidence against Gülen which would be subsequently recognized by an American court. However, Turkey filed an official motion for extradition six weeks after the coup. Turkish charges against Gülen did not encompass his role in the coup itself but pertained to his previous criminal activity. "Turkey pushes for extradition of U.S.-based cleric who they say directed failed coup", *Los Angeles Times*, 14.10.2016, http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-us-turkey-coup-extradition-snap-story.html [12.10.2019].

[14] "New York Times: Zarrab, Çağlayan'a verdiği rüşvetleri anlatırken sakindi", *BBC News Türkçe*, 30.11.2017, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-42176735 [12.10.2019].

court sentenced Mehmet Hakan Atilla, the president of Türkiye Halk Bankası A.Ş.[15].

In response to the actions taken by American judicial authorities, Erdoğan accused American government of having a "hidden agenda". Abdulhamit Gül, Turkish Minister of Justice, referred to accusations against Çağlayan as scandalous and putting shame on American judicial authorities. He also highlighted that the accusations were fabricated by FETÖ members and subsequently pursued by American prosecutors[16]. A more radical version of this opinion also emerged. It was popular among anti-American circles in Turkey, both Islamist and secular Kemalist. The opinion argued that Gülen's movement constitutes a secret instrument of American policy towards Turkey.

Between October 2016 and October 2018, Pastor Andrew Brunson, an American citizen, was being imprisoned by Turkish authorities. He was accused of espionage for the USA, cooperation with Gülen and illegal Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK). According to the witnesses of the prosecution, the American was allegedly attempting to convert Kurds to Christianity[17]. According to media information, Erdoğan's administration was attempting to negotiate Brunson's exchange for the accused in the Türkiye Halk Bankası A.Ş. case. This never materialized

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[15]   "Turkish banker guilty of helping Iran evade US sanctions", *Deutsche Welle English*, 03.01.2018, https://www.dw.com/en/turkish-banker-guilty-of-helping-iran-evade-us-sanctions/a-42019926 [28.10.2019].

[16]   "Adalet Bakanı'ndan ABD'ye Çağlayan tepkisi: Büyük bir skandal", *ArtıGerçek*, 08.09.2017, https://www.artigercek.com/adalet-bakani-ndan-abd-ye-caglayan-tepkisi-buyuk-bir-skandal [17.10.2019].

[17]   "U.S. preacher on trial in Turkey wanted Christian Kurdish state – anonymous witness", *Ahvalnews*, 08.05.2018, https://ahvalnews.com/andrew-brunson/us-preacher-trial-turkey-wanted-christian-kurdish-state-anonymous-witness [10.11.2019].

because Turkish demands were too steep. They not only demanded the release of Atilla, but a complete halt of the investigation[18].

President Donald Trump himself became engaged in the release of the pastor and threatened Turkey with sanctions. Indeed, in August 2018, the United States Department of the Treasury introduced sanctions against two AKP politicians responsible for Brunson's imprisonment, Abdulhamit Gül, the Minister of Justice, and Süleyman Söylü, the Minister of the Interior. In addition, the government in Ankara came under pressure due to the increase of American tariffs levied on steel and aluminum imported from Turkey. As a consequence, Brunson was released. However, this did not solve chief problems which emerged in Turkey-USA relations after the coup of 15 July 2016.

A further crisis in the relations pertained to the purchase of Russian S-400 anti-aircraft weapon system by Turkish government. In summer 2019, the tension peaked. Despite American threats of sanctions against Turkey[19] and the suspension of F-35 fighters sale to the country, as well as the exclusion of Turkish partners from the aircrafts' development program, the supply of S-400 elements from Russia commenced in July. Washington strived to discourage Ankara from the purchase of the system of strategic importance from the Federation and offered the Patriot weapon system instead. However, Turkey argued that the American offer

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[18] "Turkey's diplomatic crisis is hastening an economic one", *The Economist*, 09.08.2018, https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/08/11/turkeys-diplomatic-crisis-is-hastening-an-economic-one [11.10.2019].

[19] Sanctions are to be enforced pursuant to the *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act* (CAATSA) passed by the Congress in 2017.

was not beneficial due to the missing technology transfer component.

Even though Turkish government expressed interest in the purchase of S-400 in 2009, it seems that the initial aim was to use the interest in order to negotiate more favorable terms of the Patriot deal with the USA. It was only after the coup of 15 July 2016 when Ankara began to seriously consider the purchase of the Russian system. The Turkey-Russia contract was signed at the end of 2017. In December 2017, Sergey Chemezov, CEO of Rostech Corp., confirmed that Turkey was to purchase four squadrons of the S-400 Triumf system for 2.5 billion USD.

Vladimir Putin, Russian president, was one of the first leaders who explicitly condemned the coup and expressed solidarity with Erdoğan. Russia declared support for Ankara in the fight against Gülen's movement before the coup. Aleksandr Dugin, a Russian ideologist of Eurasianism, referred to the movement as an organization controlled by American intelligence whose aim was to offer means for American intervention in Turkish domestic and foreign affairs. Such a narration was well within the theory of "American conspiracy" in Turkey.

Relations between Turkey and Russia also improved in the course of an exchange of public servants representing state administration. Officials and military personnel who were dismissed during the anti-Gülen purge were replaced by the formerly repressed supporters of Eurasianism, including the members of the pro-Russian, nationalist party of Doğu Perinçek, which was renamed from the Workers' Party into the Patriotic Party (*Vatan Partisi*) in 2015. Until the middle of 2016, the Syrian conflict remained the most

troublesome issue in relations between Ankara and Moscow. Paradoxically, along with the development of the so-called Astana format and its ratification by Russia and Turkey, Iran, the Syrian problem became a catalyst for the consolidation of Turkey-Russia relations.

4. Syrian conflict as a factor cementing Turkey-Russia relations

The resolution of the conflict caused by the shot-down of Su-24, as well as Putin's support for Erdoğan offered after the coup, did not automatically translate into the resolution of Turkey-Russia conflict concerning Syria. Ankara continued to support the Free Syrian Army fighting against the regime, and Russia backed Assad's government. However, both sides managed to develop a model of cooperation concerning the Syrian issue. The first result of this compromise was Operation "Euphrates Shield" launched by Turkey in August 2016. At the same time, there were ongoing negotiations between Turkey, Russia and Iran pertaining to the resolution of the Syrian conflict. In December 2016, a meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of Turkey, Russia and Iran, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Sergey Lavrov and Mohammad Javad Zarif, took place in Moscow. The meeting resulted in a joint action plan to ensure a cease-fire in Syria, which was announced by Putin. The plan projected a truce between Assad's forces and Sunni rebels backed by Ankara, as well as further peace-talks of the representatives of the regime and opposition to be moderated by Russia and Turkey.

Since January 2017, the talks between Assad's regime and Syrian opposition were held in Astana, the capital of

Kazakhstan[20]. In the course of several rounds of negotiations, the representatives of Moscow, Ankara and Teheran signed a memorandum concerning the establishment of the so-called de-escalation zones in Syria. In September 2017, Russia, Turkey and Iran established such a zone in Idlib province, one of the last controlled by the anti-Assad opposition. By the participation in the Astana negotiations, Turkish government gained influence on the development of the situation in Syria. However, the price to pay for cooperation with Russia and Iran was Turkish discontinuation of the policy concerning the change of Syrian regime.

Operation "Euphrates Shield" was launched after the unofficial consent of Russian authorities. Initially, the objective of the operation was to combat the Islamic State. Having eliminated the threat from the bordering region, Ankara increasingly emphasized the necessity of a fight against the forces of Syrian Kurds- the People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG). At that time, Kurds were being successful in fighting Jihadists and managed to establish three independent Kurdish "cantons" – Jazira and Kobanî in the north-east of the country and Afrin in the north-west.

American government, which previously along with Turkey supported the Free Syrian Army (FSA), established cooperation with the YPG as a new ally. The USA recognized the FSA's ineffectiveness in 2015-2016. On the other hand, Kurds proved a valuable partner for Americans and international coalition in the fight against the Islamic State.

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[20]   Several meetings in the framework of the Astana format were held in Sochi and Tabriz instead of Astana.

In order to legitimize Syrian Kurds and their military forces in north-east Syria as those representing not only Kurdish population but Arabs and other ethnic minorities, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), multi-national units, were established. However, the YPG still possessed the dominant military and political potential. Once Operation "Euphrates Shield" was launched, Turkey was reluctant to tolerate the YPG in the region but occasionally cooperated with the units[21].

Since 2016, Ankara has been declaring that from the Turkish point of view, Syrian Kurds' autonomy constitutes the greatest threat associated with the conflict in Syria. Kurdish "cantons" were labeled as the "terror belt" (*terör kuşaği*) in the rhetoric of Turkish authorities[22]. Turkey considers the YPG as a terrorist organization, a branch of the PKK operating in Turkey. The PKK is considered as a terrorist group not only by Ankara but also by the USA and the EU.

In January 2018, Turkey launched Operation "Olive Branch" in Syria and invaded Kurdish Afrin canton. The occupation of the region by Turkey and anti-Assad Free Syrian Army was criticized by public opinion both in the USA and Europe. The decision of Turkish government to pursue a fight with Kurds in Syria automatically placed Ankara in opposition to the USA and pushed the country towards cooperation with Russia.

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[21] "YPG: Şah Fırat Operasyonu'na destek verdik", *Hürriyet*, 23.02.2015, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/ypg-sah-fırat-operasyonuna-destek-verdik-28271808 [15.10.2019].

[22] See e.g. Can Acun, "PKK'nın Suriye'deki rüyası kabusa dönmek üzere", *Sabah*, 15.12.2018, https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/perspektif/canacun/2018/12/15/pkknin-suriyedeki-ruyasi-kabusa-donmek-uzere [08.11.2019].

Turkish perception of the YPG, as a chief opponent among the actors involved in the Syrian civil war, was determined by several factors. One cannot disregard the traditional opinion dominating Turkish military circles concerning the necessity to combat the PKK and similar organizations posing the most eminent threat to the national security of the country.

However, it seems that the most significant reason behind Ankara's perception of Syrian Kurds was the change of the domestic political situation after the coup of 15 July 2016. The break of the Turkish-Kurdish peace process in June 2015 and the nationalist shift in the policy of the ruling AKP accelerated in 2016-2019 and culminated in Turkish military operations against Syrian Kurds.

Between 2013 and 2015, the PKK participated in the so-called Kurdish-Turkish peace process (*çözüm süreci*), a peace dialogue with the government in Ankara. The negotiations involved political and cultural postulates of Turkish Kurds. Even though the PKK does not have total support of Kurds in Turkey, it constitutes the mainstream of Kurdish nationalism. Despite the talks being discontinued by Turkish authorities in 2015, the organization still remains the principal political interlocutor capable of resolving the conflict.

The abandonment of irenic policy towards the PKK and Kurds offered tangible benefits to the ruling AKP. The government in Ankara decided to adopt an anti-West, nationalist rhetoric. This was accompanied by the establishment of an informal alliance with far-right Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP). The AKP's turn towards anti-Kurdish neo-imperial slogans was well-received among the nationalist electorate in the period from the autumn elections of 2015, via the constitutional referendum

of 2017, parliamentary and presidential elections of 2018, up to local elections in March 2019.

Operation "Peace Spring" was launched in October 2019, after President Trump decided to withdraw American forces from a significant section of the Kurdish territory in Syria. Initially, the "buffer zone" between Turkish forces and the YPG was to be established in cooperation with Americans. The lack of cooperation between Turkey and the USA was directly motivated by Ankara's excessive demands which pertained to the access to a 30 kilometers' zone along the border. The YPG and SDF leadership were unable to meet Turkish demands because it would mean abandonment of the majority of cities in the Kurdish enclave, and de facto capitulation. As a consequence of Donald Trump's decision, the USA resigned from its role as a mediator between Turkish government and Syrian Kurds. American forces withdrew from the region, giving the green light to the Turkish army's operation. However, American concessions did not results in the rapprochement with Turkey.

Ultimately, Turkish occupation did not reach the projected 30-km belt along the border because the progress of Turkish army and its Arab allies was halted by the appearance of Russian forces and Assad's army supporting the YPG. Turkish authorities were forced to negotiate with Russia. The meeting between Erdoğan and Putin in Sochi on 22 October resulted in the agreement introducing joint patrols in 10-km zone along the border, and the YPG's withdrawal to maintain a 30 km separation from the Turkish territory.

Turkish forces remained in the conquered Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, as well as in certain adjacent areas[23].

To summarize the results of Operation "Peace Spring" from the perspective of Turkish military objectives, these may have been achieved in cooperation with the USA, instead of one with Russia. However, it seems that, again, domestic politics determined decisions of Turkish authorities. Ankara's cooperation with Washington concerning the Syrian issue would lead to a possible improvement of relations between the countries. A concrete resolution of tensions in relations with the USA would benefit neither Erdoğan nor military elites associated with the president, among whom gen. Hulusi Akar plays the first fiddle. From their point of view, cooperation with Russia entails further Eurasianism in foreign affairs, which is perceived as a positive trend.

Turkish supporters of Eurasianism believe that the purchase of Russian S-400 anti-aircraft weapon systems, which is the cause of the conflict with the allies, constitutes a way for becoming independent from American weapons' supply and reducing dependence of Turkey's security upon NATO. For the military, traditionally expressing "hawkish" opinions on Turkish policy towards Kurds, the change of the partner in Syria from the USA to Russia is obviously beneficial. Even though Turkish army did not destroy the YPG/SDF in Operation "Peace Spring", the appearance of Russian and Iranian forces in north-east Syria will undeniably limit, if not eliminate, the hitherto autonomy of Syrian Kurds. Should

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[23]   A. Mardasov, "Where the Russia-Turkey deal leaves players on the ground", 05.11.2019, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/11/russia-syria-turkey-us.html#ix-zz64gxZW5PE [18.11.2019].

American forces, even if limited in numbers, remain in the territory, this would enable the YPG/SDF to maintain their autonomous political structures.

From the point of view of the Kremlin, the consolidation of cooperation with Turkey in the Syrian conflict enables several objectives to be achieved. First of all, it will lead to a further decline of the cohesion of NATO, including the exacerbation of the crisis in Turkey-USA relations. As far as Syria is concerned, this is visible not only in Ankara's abandonment of cooperation with Americans. Following the recommendation of Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia[24], Turkish government rejected the offer of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, German Minister of Defense, concerning the establishment of a safe zone in north-east Syria which would be monitored by international observers under the UN auspices[25].

5. Conclusions

Turkish presence in NATO since 1952 has been closely associated with the organization's policy concerning the deterrence of the Soviet Union and blocking its expansion in the Black Sea region and in the Middle East. In the post-Cold-War period, Turkey's role in NATO changed considerably.

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[24] "Almanya'dan güvenli bölge önerisi", *CNN Turk*, 24.10.2019, https://www.cnnturk.com/video/dunya/almanyadan-guvenli-bolge-onerisi [18.11.2019].

[25] Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer offered the concept of establishing the UN-controlled safe zone in north-east Syria during a meeting of NATO ministers of defense on 24 October. The project was not only met with reserve by several members of the organization, but was criticized by Heiko Maas, Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs. "Germany's Foreign Minister Maas faces criticism after ignoring Defence Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer", *European Views*, 30.10.2019, https://www.european-views.com/2019/10/maas-faces-criticism-after-ignoring-kramp-karrenbauer/ [01.11.2019].

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Western allies perceived Turkey as a country which may offer a model for the coexistence of Islam, democracy and free-market economy not only for the post-Soviet Azerbaijan and republics of Central Asia, but for the countries of the Middle East as well. Davutoğlu's doctrine of the "strategic depth" seemed to confirm the hopes for the positive influence of Ankara upon the Middle East region by focusing upon the development of economic and cultural ties.

Changes in Turkish domestic and foreign policies emerging after 2016 indicate that the country is focusing upon the instruments of hard security in relations with the Middle East. This argument can be acknowledged by three Turkish military operations launched in Syria in 2016-2019. On the other hand, authoritarian tendencies in Ankara's domestic politics prove that Turkey cannot offer a democratic model for Muslim and Turkic post-Soviet states and for the Arab world as well.

The Eurasian policy change in foreign affairs has led to Ankara becoming further dependent upon Moscow, also with regard to other matters not associated directly with the Syrian issue. Except for the sphere of shared values, which is undeniably critical for the continued cooperation of Turkey with its Western partners and, in general, further existence of NATO, Ankara's role as an ally keeping Russia's neo-imperial pursuit in check is becoming problematic. Not only did Turkey revert to a cautious approach towards Russia, but decided to pursue close cooperation with the Kremlin in Syria, and also partnership in terms of the purchase (and potential joint production) of strategic weapons systems. Ankara has been increasingly perceived, especially by the

USA and countries of NATO's eastern flank, as a Russian Trojan horse in the organization.

It is noteworthy that at the beginning of 2016, during the Balkan Security Conference in Istanbul, President Erdoğan warned that the Black Sea had virtually become a "Russian lake". He called on NATO partners to take decisive action during the NATO Warsaw Summit on 8-9 July 2016[26]. However, during the summit itself, Turkish position concerning the militarization of the Black Sea region and the reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank was much more subdued. At present, Turkish support for such initiatives is highly unlikely.

On the other hand, Ankara's attitude towards the annexation of Crimea becoming softer cannot be excluded. So far, Turkey has been in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity and Ukrainian possession of the peninsula. However, the evidence of Turkish attitude becoming softer may be seen in Erdoğan hosting the official Russian delegation whose delegates included the representatives of illegal Crimean authorities, Prosecutor Natalia Poklonskaya, and Ruslan Balbek, the former Deputy PM of the annexed Crimea[27].

However, for Ankara, it is not the Black Sea region, but the Middle East, especially the Syrian conflict and security issues associated with it (activity of the YPG, Jihadist terrorism, migrants flowing into Turkey), which will remain a priority in Turkish foreign affairs. Ankara will only be able

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[26] İnsan Haber, "Erdoğan: Karadeniz Rusya'nın gölü haline dönüştü", 11.05.2016, http://www.insanhaber.com/politika/erdogan-karadeniz-rusyanin-golu-haline-donustu-h59713.html [27.10.2019].

[27] "Outrage as Crimean collaborators included in Russian delegation to Turkey", *Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group*, 14.10.2019, http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1571011436 [09.11.2019].

to manage and prevent all these threats when cooperating with Russia, which remains the strongest player in Syria after the US withdrawal from the north-east of the country. Moscow will probably be willing to support Turkey, but on the condition the country is ready to make decisions benefiting the Federation, e.g. in matters concerning energy and military cooperation, the reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank. In such a context, Turkey is increasingly becoming Russia's client state.

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POLICY PAPERS

1/2019

POLICY
PAPERS

The present IES Policy Papers highlight
the security of NATO's eastern flank.
In 2019, we celebrated the 70th anni-
versary of NATO's establishment and the
20th anniversary of the organization's
enlargement encompassing Poland, the
Czech Republic and Hungary. For dec-
ades, NATO has been adjusting to new
challenges and threats of security-re-
lated nature. The adaptation has also
proved necessary since Russia's neo-im-
perial policy towards Ukraine "woke
the dragon" in 2014 and NATO began
to adjust to the new security reality in
East-Central Europe by boosting defense
expenditures, modernizing the military
and command structures, relocating
troops, etc. Since 2014, we have been
dealing with an armed conflict between
Russia and Ukraine in Donbas which,
along with the annexation of Crimea,
resulted in the change of security per-
ception concerning Eastern Europe, and
Europe in general. One can even go as
far as arguing that the Ukraine conflict
constitutes a symbolic end of the post-
-Cold-War international order.