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# The perception of security threats in EU and NATO strategic documents: implications for the countries of the Eastern flank

**Percepcja zagrożeń bezpieczeństwa w dokumentach strategicznych UE i NATO: implikacje dla państw wschodniej flanki**

**Abstract:** The anticipation of security threats is one of the key elements in the determination of objectives and the main direction for the functioning of states or organizations. It constitutes a fundamental basis for building capacity, aimed at counteracting the identified threats or limiting the emergence of new ones. This is also applicable to the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which in their security documents identify threats that may have an impact on their existence and future development. The purpose of this article is to identify common threats to EU and NATO security, as well as to demonstrate their impact on the security of the countries of the Eastern flank. The analyses, comparisons and generalizations are based on strategic documents concerning the sphere of EU and NATO security (the EU security strategies and the NATO strategic concepts). The analyzed timeline covered the period from the end of the Cold War until the publication of the strategic documents in question. The perception of threats to the external security of the EU and NATO was contrasted with the results of public opinion polls from the member states of both organizations. The general result leads to the conclusion that the perception of security threats, contained in the strategic documents of the above-mentioned entities, is essentially identical; however, the priorities in the scope of reducing the risks associated with the occurrence of specific threats are perceived differently, including the Eastern flank countries.

**Keywords:** Eastern flank, European Union, NATO, security, security strategy, threats

**Streszczenie:** Antycypacja zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa jest jednym z kluczowych elementów w określaniu celów i głównych kierunków funkcjonowania państw lub organizacji. Stanowi fundamentalną podstawę do budowania ich zdolności ukierunkowanych na przeciwdziałanie zidentyfikowanym

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zagrożeniom lub ograniczanie pojawiania się nowych. Odnosi się to również do UE i NATO, które w swoich dokumentach dotyczących bezpieczeństwa identyfikują zagrożenia mogące mieć wpływ na ich egzystencję i rozwój. Celem artykułu jest zidentyfikowanie wspólnych zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa UE i NATO oraz wykazanie ich wpływu na bezpieczeństwo państw wschodniej flanki. Punkt wyjścia do przeprowadzonych analiz, porównań i uogólnień stanowią dokumenty strategiczne ze sfery bezpieczeństwa UE i NATO. Analizie poddano strategię bezpieczeństwa Unii Europejskiej oraz koncepcję strategiczną Organizacji Traktatu Północnoatlantyckiego. Za cezurę czasową przyjęto okres po zakończeniu zimnej wojny do czasu opublikowania aktualnie obowiązujących dokumentów strategicznych. Percepcję zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa zewnętrznego UE i NATO skonfrontowano z wynikami badań opinii publicznej państw członkowskich obydwu organizacji. Generalna konkluzja prowadzi do wniosku, że percepcja zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa zawarta w strategicznych dokumentach omawianych podmiotów jest tożsama, ale inaczej postrzegane są przez nie priorytety w obniżaniu ryzyka związanego z występowaniem konkretnych zagrożeń, w tym w odniesieniu do państw wschodniej flanki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** bezpieczeństwo, NATO, Unia Europejska, strategia bezpieczeństwa, wschodnia flanką, zagrożenia

## Introduction

The key contents included in the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) strategic documents (accordingly security strategies and NATO strategic concepts) refer to the anticipation of their security environment. Moreover, there is an evident correlation between these documents, particularly after the end of the Cold War. This is understandable due to the fact that the vast majority of countries are EU and NATO members at the same time. Assessments related to the recognition of threats are prepared by the expert teams, based on past and current events, mainly in the following areas: political, economic, social, and military (security). In most cases, they are reactive and anticipate future threats to global security only to a small extent. On the other hand, the catalog of security threats has definitely expanded due to new risks, but also in connection with a broader understanding of security itself, which is understood as an interdisciplinary concept further related to threats perception in the context of the Eastern flank countries. Therefore, the security threats no longer include only military elements, but they also form an entire registry of identified and anticipated risks that may lower the level of acceptable threat to the external security of entities. This evolutionary approach is also evident in the EU and NATO strategic documents in the post-Cold War period.

The analysis is based on strategic documents of the EU (security strategies) and NATO (strategic concepts), understood as official documents that outline the organization and nature, as well as both entities' fundamental security tasks. The strategic documents also identify the central features of the new security environment, specify the elements of the EU and NATO approach to security, and provide guidelines for their adaptation to many areas. These documents create a framework for policy aimed at ensuring the inviolability of the vital interests of the members as well as outlining the directions of constant and successful development.

## 1. Identification of security threats in the EU security strategies

Strategically, three key stages can be distinguished in the EU's approach to security, including defense. As indicated by Stanisław Koziej, they are the following<sup>1</sup>: 1 pre-strategic, declarative, and initiative strategies. The first stage covered the period up to 2003 when the EU did not have a security (defense) strategy and tasks related to security and defense were implemented by the Western European Union. During this period, the collapse of the bipolar international order, after the end of the Cold War, led to the release of national interests and as a result new forms of conflicts and threats emerged.

The second stage covered the period from 2003 when the EU adopted its first European Security Strategy (ESS) entitled A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy.<sup>2</sup> The ESS identified many security threats and challenges. One of the threats referred to in the ESS is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which at that time was treated as potentially the greatest danger to EU security, particularly in relation to non-state actors. Equally critical threats indicated in the ESS are terrorism and organized crime.<sup>3</sup> What is im-

1 S. Koziej, 'Ewolucja i scenariusze kształtowania się środowiska bezpieczeństwa europejskiego', in: *Bezpieczeństwo Europy w globalnym świecie. Szanse i zagrożenia przyszłości w warunkach przesileń cywilizacyjnych*, eds. J. Kleer, K. Prandecki, Warszawa: Polska Akademia Nauk, 2018, pp. 280-309.

2 Council of the European Union, 'European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World', consilium.europa.eu, December 2003, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf>, pp. 29-33 [2020-02-28].

3 Ibidem.

portant to note is that the ESS was adopted only two years after the terrorist attacks in the United States. The coalition military operation in Afghanistan was ongoing while the military operation in Iraq had just begun. Thus, the threat of terrorist activities, which are also associated with organized crime, is emphasized in this document.<sup>4</sup> The authors of the ESS also point to security threats in cyberspace, while warning against possible attacks on the critical infrastructure of EU member states. The problem of internet crime is also highlighted, including private or governmental IT systems in the EU member states. The ESS also pays great attention to energy security; threats associated with becoming dependent on the supply of energy resources from third parties are a real threat to energy security. The problem of progressive climate change and its impact on EU security was treated as a challenge in the ESS. The authors of the ESS also point to the danger of the emergence of regional conflicts, including dormant ones. Kashmir, the African Great Lakes region, and the Korean Peninsula were recognized as the main areas of the emergence of regional conflicts.<sup>5</sup>

The ESS has been deprived of any tools that would allow for real execution of the determined strategic objectives: addressing the threats, building security in the neighborhood, strengthening an international order based on effective multilateralism. In the context of identified threats, pointing only to the political will of the EU member states turned out to be far from sufficient. The weaknesses also include the lack of references to the direct defense of the territory of EU countries and the categorical statement about the low probability of large-scale aggression against any EU country. Analysis of the contents of this document also leads to the conclusion that the ESS is similar to the American strategy in force at the time.<sup>6</sup> As indicated by Stanisław Koziej,

among others, this is expressed in emphasising the need for preventive actions, which can prevent more serious problems in the future. Although EU experts are trying to demonstrate differences between the American strategy and the EU strategy, among others by refusing to use the term 'pre-emptive

4 Council of the European Union, 'European Security Strategy...'

5 Ibidem.

6 S. Koziej, 'Ewolucja strategii bezpieczeństwa Unii Europejskiej', *Mysł Ekonomiczna i Polityczna*, no. 2, 2018, pp. 195-227, DOI: 10.26399/meip.2(61).2018.23/s.koziej.

actions', this clearly noticeable real conceptual convergence may indicate that the international community is gradually developing a common approach to security matters in the current environment.<sup>7</sup>

The ESS was the first document containing the word “strategy” in connection with security issues, and therefore determining the direction for the EU’s functioning in a global security environment. In the last dozen or so years, this environment has turned out to be much more complex and dynamic, which is why the analysis included in the ESS of 2003 has become inadequate due to the political, social, and economic changes occurring.<sup>8</sup> The redefinition of threats was mainly caused by the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, the economic crisis in the years 2007–2009 with its long-term security consequences (e.g. reduction in defense spending), the negative effects of the Arab Spring (civil war in Syria, Libya, Yemen) and, above all, Russia’s neo-imperial policy, which manifested itself in the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine. These factors have become the reason for commencing work on a new security strategy, which opens a third stage – a strategy that initiates the implementation of practical solutions in the sphere of EU security.

Content analysis of the new EU strategy in the scope of security (Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy), often referred to as the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS),<sup>9</sup> leads to the conclusion that the perception of threats to the European security environment, compared to those included in the previous document, has not changed significantly.<sup>10</sup> Despite the above-mentioned factors, which determined the development of a new EU security strategy, the threats mainly associated with transnational terrorism, organized crime, and

7 S. Koziej, 'Ewolucja strategii bezpieczeństwa...'

8 M. Terlikowski, 'Navigating Through Threat Perceptions in Europe', ethz.ch, 16 December 2015, <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/195270/pdf> [2020-02-25].

9 European External Action Service, 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy', eeas.europa.eu, June 2016, [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf) [2020-02-28].

10 K. Archick, 'The European Union: Ongoing Challenges and Future Prospects'. Report R44249. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, fas.org, December 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44249.pdf> [2020-02-28].

the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are still at the forefront.<sup>11</sup> These threats are still valid today, as evidenced by unpredicted nuclear tests performed by North Korea, Iran's nuclear program, terrorist attacks in European cities: Madrid (2004), London (2005), Paris (2015). It also continues (which is justified) to indicate threats associated with economic instability, assurance of energy, and cyber-security, as well as climate change, which may become the cause for the emergence of risks associated with, among others, migration. Newly identified threats include hybrid threats as a result of actions undertaken by Russia.<sup>12</sup> In the EUGS, Russia is indicated as a state that "violated international law and caused destabilization of Ukraine". Also, it has been clearly emphasized that the EU "will not recognize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, nor accept the destabilization of eastern Ukraine."<sup>13</sup>

Within the EU, there is a widespread consensus regarding the growing threats to its security in the past decade. In surveys carried out by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the respondents from EU member states clearly stated that threats to their countries in the years 2008–2018 have significantly intensified, and, in their opinion, these will increase during the next decade.<sup>14</sup> According to the respondents, the current top five threats to EU security include (in descending order): cyber-attacks, failure of states and civil wars in the immediate vicinity of the EU, interference of external entities in the internal policy of the EU member states, uncontrolled migration to EU member states and deterioration of international and institutional order. Further, the following were determined as significant threats: terrorist attacks, interstate conflict, the disintegration of the EU, the lack of resilience of the state apparatus and social instability, financial instability, disruptions in the energy supply, climate change, and nuclear attacks on the state or its allies. The respondents indicated that the identified threats to EU security will be largely the same

11 European External Action Service, 'Shared Vision...'

12 B. Piskorska, 'Globalna strategia a redefinicja polityki Unii Europejskiej w jej sąsiedztwie', *Roczniki Nauk Społecznych*, no. 1, 2018, pp. 67-91, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rns.2018.46.1-4>.

13 European External Action Service, 'Shared Vision...'

14 S. Dennison, U.E Franke, P. Zerka, 'The nightmare of the dark. The security fears that keep Europeans awake at night', *ecfr.eu*, July 2018, [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/SECURITY\\_SCORECARD\\_267.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/SECURITY_SCORECARD_267.pdf), pp. 2-11 [2020-02-28].

during the next decade.<sup>15</sup> The researchers who conducted the survey assessed that gradation of recognized threats to the security of EU member states in 2018 is slightly different than the one assessed in 2008 when the following were recognized as the most important threats (in descending order): economic instability and terrorist attacks, instability in the immediate vicinity of the EU, disruptions in the energy supply, and cyber-attacks. In other words, the identification of security threats is closely associated with the events before and during the performance of the research. In 2008, these included the beginning of the economic crisis, and in 2007 the cyber-attacks aimed at government institutions in Estonia.<sup>16</sup> Some threats can be considered to be universal, e.g. terrorist attacks, which are also reflected in the contents of the EU strategic documents. In the context of the international situation, the respondents indicated that jihadists and associated terrorist attacks are still one of the main threats to EU security, however, they also pointed to the real threat from Russia and North Korea. The respondents acknowledged that these threats might continue for another decade until 2028.<sup>17</sup> The gradation of threats to EU security is different in individual member states.<sup>18</sup> There is a widespread conviction about the division of security issues into the East, where the main threat is associated with Russia's aggressive policy, and the South, where terrorism is considered to be the main threat.

## **2. Identification of threats to security in NATO strategic concepts**

When the 1991 strategic concept was adopted (the first one after the Cold War) at the NATO Summit in November of the same year, Germany was unified, the Warsaw Pact had disbanded a couple of months earlier, and the days of the Soviet Union were numbered. The 1991 strategic concept reflected the uncertainties of the times. It highlighted a mix of threats and opportunities, capturing NATO's uncertainty

15 S. Dennison, U.E Franke, P. Zerka, 'The nightmare of the dark...'

16 Ibidem.

17 Ibidem.

18 R. Krumm, A. Dienes, S. Weiß et al., 'Wake-up call for Europe!', fes.de, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/wien/15176-20190412.pdf> [2020-02-22].

over what the future might bring. It also implicitly tried to answer the question: “Why NATO?” In the context of potential threats, NATO’s military authorities would continue to plan the worst-case scenarios involving Soviet major attacks using the full range of conventional and nuclear weapons. NATO had to maintain the strategic balance in Europe, while the Soviets were still being kept out. In this respect, the 1991 strategic concept did not appear much different from previous NATO strategic concepts: Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of any aggression incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential in preserving the peace. NATO did not give up its potential first-use philosophy.<sup>19</sup> The 1991 strategic concept stated that Eastern Europe faced major economic, social, and political problems, among them the potential territorial disputes fueled partially by ethnic tensions. These problems could erupt into crises of wars that could directly affect the security of NATO’s members.<sup>20</sup>

The 1991 strategic concept was very prophetic with respect to the risk of war in Eastern Europe as well as to the benefits of friendship and cooperation. The evolution of the 1991 strategic concept ideas of crisis management and cooperation were easily discernable during the 1990s in NATO’s Balkan operations and Partnership for Peace. The Balkan wars, in which NATO military forces had, for the first time, engaged in combat, had perhaps the most significant impact on NATO during that decade and the next strategic concept of 1999. Whereas the 1991 strategic concept mentioned NATO’s need to maintain the strategic balance in Europe, the 1999 version stated: “The Alliance does not consider itself to be any country’s adversary.”<sup>21</sup> There was no longer any country or group of countries to counterbalance. The Soviet Union’s successor, the Russian Federation, was no longer considered an adversary. In addition, NATO added organized crime and mass migrations to the litany of terrorism, sabotage, and disruption of the flow of vital resources, as examples of other risks of wider

19 B.J. Collins, *NATO: A guide to the issues*, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011, p. 90.

20 NATO, ‘The Alliance’s New Strategic Concept agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council’, nato.int, 7-8 November 1991, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm?selectedLocale=en) [2020-09-11].

21 NATO, ‘The Alliance’s Strategic Concept Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C.’, nato.int, 24 April 1999, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_27433.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm?selectedLocale=en) [2020-09-11].

nature affecting the security of the Alliance. In fact, the 1999 strategic concept stated that the Alliance's forces and infrastructure must be protected against terrorist attacks. The 1999 strategic concept incorporated many of the lessons of its peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, while NATO embarked on its first peacemaking operation in Kosovo, again with partner support. NATO found that it needed its conventional forces to become more responsive and that it also needed more command and control as well as transport capabilities to support operations. Although the 1999 strategic concept had a large focus on crisis response operations, NATO stood by its requirements to maintain both strategic and sub-strategic nuclear forces considering conventional war and threats related mainly to terrorism.

While analyzing the contents of NATO's latest strategic concept in 2010 – Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon – in the context of identified threats, those associated with the proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction, the means of their transportation, and terrorism, are the most significant ones. Therefore, the NATO strategic concept of 2010 does not take due account of the conventional threats associated with the possibility of the occurrence of high-intensity armed conflict in the Euro-Atlantic area. The NATO concept of 2010 specifies unconventional threats, such as terrorism and the possibility of the occurrence of cyber-attacks, which are able to destabilize the functioning of individual countries.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, there is an indication of the possibility of regional conflicts based on various causes, in the immediate vicinity of the NATO member states and beyond their borders, which may, directly and indirectly, affect their security. Moreover, NATO took into account the threats resulting from limitations in the natural environment and resources. Scenarios in the future concerning conflicts over water or energy resources are realistic.

22 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon', nato.int, 19 November 2010, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_68580.htm? \[2020-02-20\]](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm? [2020-02-20]).

The assessment of threats included in the Strategic Concept of 2010 was prepared based on the events occurring in the international security environment at that time. Currently, the perception of threats is changing and it is a derivative of several events taking place in the global security environment. The first of these is Russia's unlawful annexation of Crimea (2014) and its participation in the destabilization of the eastern part of Ukraine. The second is the changing optics of the United States' perception of NATO's role, which is represented by President Donald Trump. The third is the United Kingdom's exit from the EU and associated concerns regarding the deterioration of the security status of European NATO countries. Fourth is the constant threat of terrorism, which is mainly associated with Western European countries. The last is the migration crisis and the potential role of NATO in this area. In the context of assessing threats to international security, it is necessary to note the provisions included in the declarations from NATO summits, adopted by the heads of states and governments participating in the meetings of the North Atlantic Council, including in particular the Wales summit (5 September 2014) and the Warsaw summit (8-9 September 2016).

The Wales Summit Declaration includes strongly emphasized threats associated with Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine. It was highlighted that Russia "continues to intervene militarily, arm separatists, and foment instability in Ukraine."<sup>23</sup> Representatives of the NATO member states treat this threat very seriously, although the perception varies in individual NATO countries. Moreover, it was pointed out that Russia has a dismissive approach to the international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as well as refrains from the implementation of the provisions of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (ultimately, Russia unilaterally terminated the CFE agreement in March 2015). It was also noted that this country uses military means in order to exert pressure on its neighbors. Such a situation can have a significant impact on the security of the Black Sea region, which is a critical element of Euro-Atlantic security. In the

23 'Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales', nato.int, 5 September 2014, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm) [2020-02-26].

context of actions of the Russian separatists in Ukraine, as well as the annexation of Crimea, hybrid threats were identified, which include a wide range of explicit and covert military, paramilitary and civilian actions, implemented in an integrated manner. This threat is indicated as very realistic in the case of Russia's possible future involvement in events similar to those in Ukraine.<sup>24</sup>

The second area of threats, determined as multidimensional, was indicated in connection with the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. NATO emphasizes that peace and stability in these regions are essential. In this context, the greatest threats are generated by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the crisis in Syria that was ongoing at that time. Currently, the ISIL threats are minimal, while the situation in Syria, after the withdrawal of US troops, has reached the status quo. In general, the Wales Summit Declaration indicates old and known threats to the security of NATO countries. The member states issued a strong position regarding Russia's actions and the threats generated by it. In the context of threat assessment, the Warsaw Summit in 2016 confirmed the possibility of the occurrence of threats identified in earlier NATO documents. At the same time, more attention was paid to threats resulting from NATO's Southern flank, associated with the migration crisis that was caused by the situation in Syria. In the context of the security of the Eastern flank countries, the most important decisions taken at the NATO summit in Warsaw concerned the strengthening of NATO's deterrence and defense policy, as well as the shaping of a stable NATO environment.<sup>25</sup>

### **3. Implications for the countries of the Eastern flank**

From a geostrategic viewpoint, the Eastern flank of the European continent constitutes the key to ensuring the external security of EU

<sup>24</sup> 'Wales Summit Declaration Issued by...'

<sup>25</sup> P. Soloch, P. Pietrzak, 'Szczyt NATO w Warszawie: uwarunkowania, rezultaty, wnioski dla Polski', *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe*, no. I-IV, 2016, pp. 16-19; 'Warsaw Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016', nato.int, 9 July 2016, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm) [2020-02-29].

and NATO member states, and more broadly all of Europe. The Baltic countries are directly exposed to the impact of the land and air power of Russia, whose units, theoretically, could easily move to Estonia by land or sea, and to Latvia both by land and air. In turn, the Russian enclave in Kaliningrad borders between Lithuania and Poland may be used to surround the Baltic states geographically.<sup>26</sup> From a military aspect, the Russian-Belarusian alliance constitutes a significant threat to Poland, which must be taken into account during the preparation of defense scenarios. The threat from Russia is permanent and strategic in the context of the functioning of the Eastern flank countries. This comes down to a revisionist approach to the entire political and legal order, which was implemented after the Cold War in Europe. Russia is ready to use military means, particularly against the countries of the Eastern flank, where it can operate with the use of huge military potential and apply anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) tactics.<sup>27</sup> The idea of the A2/AD is to prevent the opponent from entering the theatre of operation (anti-access) by long-range means of destruction and to deprive them of the freedom to act in this theatre (area denial) by shorter range means.

The rivalry between economic and military global powers directly affects the EU, while the threats associated with international terrorism and cyber-attacks, as well as climate change, raise further concerns in the EU member states.<sup>28</sup> This is evident in the contents of the EUGS, which identifies threats in the East and South of the continent, indicating uncertainty concerning the ally in the West – the United States. Indication of threats to European security in the EUGS is a consensus between individual member states. In fact, there are evident differences in the perception of threats to the EU's external security. For example, the EU member states that are located in Russia's neighbor-

26 M. Svárovský, 'The NATO Eastern Flank and the US Military Presence in the Region. Report 2019', *europeanvalues.net*, <https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-NATO-Eastern-Flank-and-the-US-Military-Presence-In-The-Region.pdf>, pp. 7-8 [2020-03-04].

27 'NATO and the Future of Peace in Europe: Towards a Tailored Approach', ed. M. Terlikowski, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, *pism.pl*, <https://www.pism.pl/file/3c058bdf-39af-49d6-8700-390b8e9a13ad>, p. 9 [2020-02-26].

28 S. Koziej, 'Strategia globalna UE: szanse i dalsze wyzwania wdrożeniowe', *pulaski.pl*, 7 February 2017, [https://pulaski.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Pulaski\\_Policy\\_Papers\\_Nr\\_3\\_17.pdf](https://pulaski.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Pulaski_Policy_Papers_Nr_3_17.pdf) [2020-03-01].

hood (Baltic states and Poland) but also other countries on the Eastern flank (Romania, Hungary) perceive this country as a real threat to their security, including the possibility of violating their territorial integrity.<sup>29</sup> In turn, Southern Europe perceives uncontrolled migration from Middle East countries as a greater threat, hence the cooperation of these countries with the increasingly autocratic regime in Ankara. Moreover, the uncertainty is also associated with the unpredictable behavior of the president of the United States, who demonstrates a disregard for international agreements and norms, which are indisputable for Europeans. The unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the nuclear agreement with Iran, and earlier from the climate agreement, as well as the trade wars with China and Iran, are just some examples which force the Europeans to rethink their security issues. These voices are also heard in the contents of the EUGS, however, the Europeans' threat perception regarding EU security is divided. The political crisis associated with uncontrolled migration in 2015 revealed fundamental divisions, which are related to the manner in which the member states perceive their security. As indicated by Ivan Krastev, "the refugee crisis exposed the futility of the post-Cold War paradigm, and especially the incapacity of Cold War institutions and rules to deal with the problems of the contemporary world."<sup>30</sup>

It seems that the perception of threats to the EU's external security environment was treated too superficially in the EUGS. From the perspective of the countries of the Eastern flank, Russia's confrontational policy, including its actions undertaken in the military sphere, should be treated by the authors of the EUGS in a more concrete manner.<sup>31</sup> In the EUGS, the threats associated with the Southern flank (equally significant), i.e. threats associated with the uncontrolled migration and its potential negative consequences such as an increase in terrorism and crime, are much more emphasized. Moreover, the NATO strategic concept of 2010 also does not take into account the current

29 M. Buzanski, 'Threat Perceptions and Scenarios for EU Security and Defense. Outcomes Report of the Mercator European Dialogue Workshop Brussels – 9 July 2018', mercatoreuropeandialogue.org, 9 July 2018, <https://www.mercatoreuropeandialogue.org/download-file/726/>, pp. 4-6 [2020-02-28].

30 I. Krastev, *After Europe*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, p. 25.

31 S. Koziej, 'Strategia globalna UE...'

concerns of the countries of the Eastern flank, associated with threats in this part of Europe.

Despite a series of negative occurrences that have taken place since 2014, such as Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, NATO has not decided to introduce changes to its 2010 strategic concept. In turn, the basic document defining NATO's attitude as defensive and deterrent – Deterrence and Défense Posture Review – was prepared in 2012, and its contents are inadequate regarding the changes that have taken place in the international security environment, including the security of the Eastern flank countries. For example, the document states that tactical nuclear weapons are covered by a disarmament policy, which is currently in contradiction to Russia's strategy concerning tactical nuclear weapons. In the strategy, Russia reserves the right to respond, including the application of nuclear weapons, even in the event of a conventional attack targeting the Russian infrastructure necessary for the state's activities, including military activities. Moreover, the document states that no country is considered to be an opponent and NATO is seeking "cooperation in the scope of missile defense with Russia."<sup>32</sup>

In the context of security of the Eastern flank countries, the decisions taken at the last three NATO summits in Wales (2014), Warsaw (2016) and Brussels (2018) turn out to be essential because they demonstrated NATO's adaptive capabilities in regard to changes in the security environment. Allied structures are constantly working on adapting the activities to threats in the context of deterrence, command, readiness, and advanced presence in the region. Nevertheless, there are still certain weaknesses in NATO: firstly, fragile political coherence resulting from divergent threat assessments; secondly, insufficient European level of ambition within NATO relating to military engagement and the development of defense capabilities, and, thirdly, the rate of NATO's adaptation to changes in the security environment.

32 'Deterrence and Defence Posture Review', nato.int, 20 May 2012, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_87597.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm) [2020-03-03].

NATO plans to adapt its strength structure in order to improve security in the Central and Eastern European theatre.<sup>33</sup> The plan includes three stages. The first two, which cover the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and the entirety of the NATO Response Force, have their implementation schedule in 2021. The third one, which involves a change in the development of forces throughout the European theatre of operations, should be ready by 2024. These activities are important in ensuring security on the Eastern flank, and they are supposed to be a counteraction to the high readiness of Russian forces, which is regularly verified during large-scale exercises in various scenarios. NATO assessments indicate that Russian troops are ready to fight within 1-2 days, within 3-4 days they are able to carry out limited military operations on the territory of the Baltic States, and within 8-10 days they can conduct major operations.<sup>34</sup> This means that the countries of the Eastern flank are realistically exposed to a conflict that can start at any moment, which, given the rate of NATO's adaptation processes, is not optimistic. In this context, the response time is a decisive factor, while the dislocation and development of appropriate forces in Poland are essential to securing the Eastern flank. The stationing of American forces in Poland ensures a shorter response time to threats on the Eastern flank compared to those deployed in the United States or Western Europe. These forces may commence the degrading of Russian anti-access capabilities in the initial stage of such a conflict.

## Conclusions

The perception of threats to EU and NATO security, or in a broader sense to global security, is presented in the strategic documents as a critical element in the scope of challenges, which determine the strategic goals of a given entity. In relation to the entities discussed, their identification is basically the same. This should not come as a surprise as most of the EU member states are also members of NATO, and,

33 'NATO: Ready For The Future. Adapting the Alliance (2018-2019)', nato.int, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2019\\_11/20191129\\_191129-adaptation\\_2018\\_2019\\_en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_11/20191129_191129-adaptation_2018_2019_en.pdf), s. 1-2 [2020-03-04].

34 M. Svárovský, 'The NATO Eastern...'

in general, all countries of both organizations (with few exceptions) share the same values: democracy, liberalism, solidarity, and law and order, among others. Differences are evident in the assessment determining which of the identified threats have a real impact on the external security of the countries of both organizations. Thus, there is a need to develop a catalogue of common security threats, which will take into account the concerns of all countries and treat them in the same way. While there is no problem with the identification of common security threats, their gradation for individual countries is currently completely different. For example, from the viewpoint of security of the eastern flank countries, the narrative associated with threats originating from the East, and above all Russia's unpredictable policy, is of key importance. Meanwhile, the EUGS evidently focuses on counteracting threats coming from the Southern strategic direction, such as terrorism and illegal migration, as well as on stabilizing the regions of the Mediterranean Sea and Africa. In turn, this is not quite compliant with the 360-degree optics adopted by NATO, i.e. the response to threats from all directions. Thus, determination of a common perception of threats, as well as shared priorities in their elimination, is necessary, and at the same time beneficial for the functioning of all member states of both organizations, since it will strengthen their resilience to threats.

Another significant aspect related to the perception of EU and NATO security threats is associated with the need to strengthen cooperation between these two organizations. The scope of this cooperation will be determined mainly by the dynamics of relations between the two organizations, but also by the scale of involvement of the United States in European security.<sup>35</sup> Given Poland's very good relations with the United States, it should play a catalyst role in increasing the scope of cooperation in the field of security for EU and NATO member states, especially on the Eastern flank.

Threats to the security of the eastern flank countries are not clearly emphasized in the EU and NATO strategic documents. While there

35 N. Helwig, 'New tasks for EU-NATO cooperation. Comment No. 4', swp-berlin.org, January 2018, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2018Co4\\_hlw.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2018Co4_hlw.pdf) [2020-03-03].

is a narrative in NATO documents pointing out the threats coming from the East (from Russia), in the scope of the EUGS, the actions undertaken by Russia are described as challenges, without a clear indication of the threats resulting from them. The lack of a catalog of threats clearly perceived by both organizations may lead to different speeds in ensuring security, as well as scenarios that will not adequately take into account the threats to the interests of the Eastern flank countries.

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