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ESSAY

30-20-15 AND THE CHANGING WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The last three decades we have discussed comprehensively on the new world order[2] and consequently the challenges stemming from the new realities. Having said that, 2019 is a special year to think back as it commemorates many anniversaries. The symbolic numerology of the „30-20-15" reflects the cornerstones and of course the many headaches in Central Europe. For us Central Europeans the real question related to the new world order has been our ability to adapt to these new realities.

Keywords: US foreign policy, transatlantic relations, Central Europe, Visegrad cooperation, international relations

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[2] Péter Rada, "Átalakuló biztonsági kihívások, a biztonság dimenziói," in *Új világrend? Nemzetközi kapcsolatok a hidegháború utáni világban*, ed. Péter Rada, Grotius Könyvtár, I (Budapest: Corvinus Külügyi és Kulturális Egyesület; Ifjú Közgazdászok Közhasznú Egyesülete, 2007), 53–72, http://real.mtak.hu/80396/1/Grotius_konyvtar_1_szam_Uj_vilagrend.pdf; Péter Rada, "Rebuilding of Failed States," 2007, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c158/2b186e63610f9f2b9d5fa5f6be8896fdf582.pdf; Péter Rada, "Új típusú biztonsági kihívások," in *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák: Háttéranyagok korunk legfontosabb biztonságpolitikai problémáinak megértéséhez*, ed. Csaba Rada (Budapest: Corvinus Külügyi és Kulturális Egyesület, 2008), 7–19.

As mentioned above 2019 was a symbolic historic benchmark when our region's countries celebrated and commemorated leaving the Soviet sphere of influence 30 years ago; the 20th anniversary of the NATO membership for Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic; the 15th anniversary of the EU membership and for many the NATO membership; and not least the 70th anniversary of the Washington Treaty. During this long transition process the Central European countries have had and caused many headaches during the parallel political, economic, and societal changes which ended in the full Euro-Atlantic integration. It has been a long and exhausting road but today Central Europeans are more pro-NATO and have better views on the United States than most of the citizens of older allies despite some up and downs in the alliance and some inconsistent American policies towards the region. It has been often mentioned in the last years that Atlanticism is waning in Europe but actual opinion polls from Central Europe cannot back these fears.[3] This is partly the consequence of the successful Euroatlantic integration of Central Europe. And also it is true that the NATO regained some momentum after the Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

Even though 2019 is a symbolic year but we also know that the new world order have brought new threats and new challenges. The Euroatlantic integration's importance lied in this very characteristic of the international system and politics that it has changes many times and very quickly. The last decades were more than unpredictable therefore being the member of a stable political, military and economic alliance has been a guarantee for our region's countries.

At the end of the first decade of the new century many publications tried to analyze the changes in international relations and they tried to predict the

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[3] "NATO- és USA-pártiak a közép-európaiak, de többet várnak Trumptól," Nézőpont Intézet, accessed March 3, 2019, http://nezopontintezet.hu/analysis/trump/.

possible ways how our world would develop.[4] This is still a valid questions today[5] and it is very important because in case we understand our world better we can adapt to it easier. It is even more important if we think about how volatile the events were in the last decade. The 2010s began very pessimistically and continued even worse. We could witness significant changes, which made us rethink what the new world order really is, the conclusions from 10 years before became outdated and the impetus of new analysis became stronger. The present collection of publication is a good example for that and it intends to reflect on the symbolic 2019 year while also evaluates today's realities. It is also worth to note that the Antall József Center of Exellence's recent book also had this goal.[6]

During the last three decades there were real changes and we could witness events which were not or should have not been a surprise but the common characteristics were that these events changed how we understand the security challenges. Of course the most significant were the series of system changes in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. 2001 and the simultaneous terrorist attacks in the United States woke up the world's military superpower from its strategic slumber and the global war on terror emerged as the most important priority of the Western alliance (even though it created serious friction especially due to the invasion of Iraq in 2003). The number of conflicts within the NATO have increased even more after the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 most importantly because the allies ran out of money and the United States realized that it could not bear the burdens alone. Washington decided to pull back, to moderate the American presence and to lessen the costs of the overstretched foreign policy. 2014 is the next turning

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[4] Rada, "Átalakuló biztonsági kihívások"; Rada, "Rebuilding of Failed States"; Rada, "Új típusú biztonsági kihívások."

[5] Péter Marton, István Balogh, and Péter Rada, *Biztonsági tanulmányok: Új fogalmi keretek, és tanulságok a visegrádi országok számára* (Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2015); Péter Rada, "Megváltozó világunk és a biztonsági kihívások átalakulása," in *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák*, ed. Kinga Szálkai, Tamás Péter Baranyi, and Luca Szarka E., vol. I (Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2019), 15–23.

[6] Kinga Szálkai, Tamás Péter Baranyi, and Luca Szarka E., eds., *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák*, vol. I–II (Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2019).

point because – despite the fact that the allies still struggle with economic problems – the Russian invasion of Ukraine called the attention to the original goal of the NATO and that territorial defense is still valid. Simultaneously in 2015 the ongoing identity crisis of the EU manifested in the counterproductive political statements and dangerous steps trying to manage the illegal migration crisis. The crisis is still one of the most serious challenge but after 4 years there is still no common ground and no solution at sight even according to the most optimistic commentary. However, it is obvious that we need to rethink the basis of our security also within the EU.

Our region, the EU, the NATO has faced parallel challenges and threats since, too; traditional ones such as the Russian aggression, the growing appetite and presence of China in the world, the failed Iran nuclear deal, or North Korea; and also non-traditional ones such as state failure in Africa and the Middle East (largely contributing the new waves of migration), the appearance of the Islamic State and international terrorism in general and the ever growing threat within Europe, still present financial and economic problems in the developed world. It is clear that our existing institutions have not been able effectively control the events. This leads to serious criticism towards the security architecture and the questioning of it is relevance. Consequently the international players have been forced to find alternative solution even if it sometimes drew serious criticism from the allies, see the Hungarian policies to stop illegal migration as an example. It sounds pessimistic but a better and more secure Europe and World is still a distant goal therefore regional cooperation such as the Visegrad Cooperation will have an important role in the coming years.

As mentioned above 2019 is a special year for commemoration. In 1989 Hungary not only chose a new political path but this year let Hungary rejoin the West after that in Yalta took this opportunity for 40 years. It is true that the last decades were not easy and the road of the political, economic, societal, even cultural transition was bumpy, however, Hungary today is the full and

equal member of the transatlantic alliance and the Western value community despite the fact that unsubstantiated criticism and double standards are still common towards the "new" members. The "new" ones still feel often that it is still worth bearing criticism because the membership gave back opportunities and possibilities, which were lost after the Second World War and with the Soviet "alliance". Our region regained the momentum to be able to develop along those values and more importantly interests which we share with our Western partners. The Euro-Atlantic integration has had no alternative. Nevertheless, there will be conflicts, frictions and debates. However, a healthy dialogue rather strengthens the alliance than questions its effectiveness, especially if the "new" ones are equal not only on paper.

Central European have felt some kind of alienation within the club and they also have had the valid feeling that despite the full membership the "new" members are rather second class ones. The feeling of neglect has come back time to time and it is still tangible in many decision processes today, therefore sticking together for instance in the frames of the Visegrad Cooperation is very important. In the 1990s the most important foreign policy priority was alinement to the NATO and the EU which resulted in the acceptance of the rules without much criticism and also the adaptation of the Western institutions according to the Western interests. This resulted in on one hand that the Western allies are not used to strong Central European voice and on the other hand that events and processes in our region have been less important in Brussels and we could not react in time, either. The energy security and the 2006 and 2009 gas crises are good examples. The energy security and a common position in the EU was not a priority earlier. Probably it is even better example how surprised certain Western members and Brussels were that a "new" member can be so vocal on the illegal migration crisis.

Hungary's core interest – similarly to the other V4 countries – to be member of the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Nonetheless, the last 15 and 20 years also proved that the alliance and these institutions can only function effectively if

the members are able to present their interests, make their vice heard and equally participate in finding the solutions. Honest dialogue is also in the "old" member's interest. The Central European feeling of being neglected will definitely not help the smooth development. This is not only true in the EU and NATO but in the bilateral relations with the United States. Due to the serious effects of the global financial crisis the United States decided to turn away from our region and the "pivot to Asia" had clear economic reasons. With the pivot new reflexes were born: since the beginning of the 2010s it became more and more common that Washington openly criticized the allies' domestic policies and also openly tried to influence them. [7] From the American point of view we could even justify this change but it is beyond question that the new tone in the American foreign policy could not help deepen the cooperation within the alliance.

It has become obvious the last years that those liberal political and economic institutions which were created after the Second World War and intended to help avoid a new great war are not able to handle the new problems and provide effective and sustainable solutions. Thus the ideological debate about the existing institutions is not a simple European problem, but it is also present in the international politics. On the other hand, the debate is rather a Western "extravagancy" because many regional powers and international players already abandoned the dysfunctional international frames and suggested new forms of cooperation, think about Russia, or China. The gravest Western dilemma is how long the liberal world order is still able to manage the challenges and despite the problems to maintain the credibility of the institutions. The liberal label gained negative connotation whilst the debate should focus on the reform of the international institutions and not about how the "new" members such as Hungary should change their domestic institutions to fit the best in the clashing institutional frames. Without the "new" members

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[7] "Victoria Nuland az európai és eurázsiai térség ügyeiért felelős külügyi államtitkár beszéde az Egyesült Államok–Közép-Európa Stratégiai Fórumon," October 3, 2014, http://ircblog.usembassy.hu/2014/10/03/victoria-nuland-az-europai-es-eurazsiai-terseg-ugyeiert-felelos-kulugyi-allamtitkar-beszede-az-egyesult-allamok-kozep-europa-strategiai-forumon/.

the reform of these institutions is not possible and their voice is really important. Without the development of the reformed structure it is difficult to imagine that the institutions will be able to survive under the growing pressure and facing simultaneous challenges. This ability of reform needs political will but the future of our region, the EU and the Western alliance is at stake.

Since 1989 the Central European needed to adapt quickly to the changes in international politics and because of the forced openness they were very vulnerable at the same time, especially economically. Nonetheless, the "canaries" [8] were not listened to in the West, the geopolitics stroke back (Kaplan 2013) and the West could not understand the different needs and interests for instance being too close to the civil war in Yugoslavia, and definitely the unavoidable influence of Russia in the neighborhood. The EU and NATO expected and even demanded full and quick integration and adaptation of all the Western institutions in exchanges letting in the new members. The serious conditionality let not much room for the Central Europeans than follow the instruction without questioning them. However, the last decade Europe faced significant changes which hopefully make the Western Europeans realize that a functioning EU needs all the members. These hopes are still vague seeing that some politicians blocked the process of the formation of the new European Commission only on selfish and domestic political basis not considering the destroying effects of lengthening the process and deepening the rift between East and West.

Besides the argument for reforming the liberal institutions it is even clearer that the international security architecture is outdated and is not able to answer the new challenges. Not surprisingly it created lot of tension within the transatlantic alliance. The Cold War ended without forcing the West and the United States to seriously think about the reform of for instance the NATO. Of course it is true that the NATO looked for new tasks proving that there were

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[8] See Wess Mitchell, *The Ties That Bind: U.S.–Central European Relations 25 Years after the Transition* (Washington: CEPA, 2013), 9.

still need for the formal alliance. In the 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and more importantly due to the Yugoslav War, the civil wars in Africa it seemed that the West will not face a serious military challenger but the small conflicts create regional security vacuum which was not in the Western interest. The NATO tried to be prepared to go beyond territorial defense and answer the "new security threats". The paradox of the 21st century lies in this very process: the outdated institutions tried to find new impetus whilst the 20th century's traditional military threats never disappeared, think only on Ukraine. It became clear that the institutions are not anymore able to manage the traditional threats, either.

Before the Russian aggression in 2014 – despite the fact the 2008 Georgian War was a very serious proof – it seemed that Fukuyama was right and the history in Europe indeed ended and the West can forget the traditional military conflicts. The EU and the Western powers not surprisingly were shocked, surprised and were not able to find adequate answer for the Russian aggression. The unanimously accepted – but many times criticized – sanctions against Russia rather hurt the European economy and has not proved effective. The parallel other challenges such as the global financial crisis, the illegal migration crisis, or UK's decision to leave even more complicated the otherwise serious situation. Obviously, the EU was too occupied finding the (new) identity and solve the domestic, institutional problems, strengthen the Euro, regain trust and bridge the divide between North and South and East and West.

In 1991 it seemed that Russia intended to return as a full member of the Western institutional system and will accept the rules of liberal international relations. The (European) peace of the 1990s – despite the Yugoslav War – made the West comfortable and probably a bit negligent. It was expected that the hard security challenges were part of the past and the future is to manage

the new security threats[9] and rather to focus on "soft" power.[10] Accordingly the EU and member states paid more attention to use the "peace dividend" rather than accepting the realities and being able to reform the security architecture in Europe. In 2019 – or since Donald Trump became president – it is more and more clear that the United States is fed up paying for European security alone. The Russian invasion of Ukraine did not bring back the traditional military threats rather it clearly proved that they never disappeared.

The emerging regional military powers are testing the existing international system and world order.[11] Russia cannot be outmaneuvered in Europe, in the Russian near abroad or now in Syria, and obviously has intentions to be more active in other continents such as Venezuela in Latin America. China today seems to be a peaceful superpower without any violent intentions, however, for the neighbors it is already more serious and the Chinese provocation is the South China See are part of everyday life and China made it clear that it intends to strengthen its influence in the region. Furthermore, in the Middle East the proxy wars – such as in Yemen – hinder any regional political solution. The Iran deal in 2015 held the hope for a short period that the nuclear threat at least was managed. In 2018 the United States unilaterally left the deal which shows that the deal was not that stable after all.

Many politicians' expectation was not met in 2016 and many were surprised by the political changes in the United States and the earlier unbelievable electoral win of Donald Trump. At the same time similar political processes are ongoing in Europe, too, which could not be seen. The politics and the politicians have got in distance from the electorate and the voters' real everyday problems. The elite politics is not in the interests of the voters who demand significant changes – such as "drain the swamp" in Washington. These changes are

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[9] Rada, "Átalakuló biztonsági kihívások"; Rada, "Új típusú biztonsági kihívások"; Rada, "Megváltozó világunk és a biztonsági kihívások átalakulása."

[10] Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005).

[11] Jakub J. Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerable Allies, and the Crisis of American Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

necessary and instead of each other's criticism the EU needs reforms which pays attention to the special problems of each citizen and not only on the vague liberal "Europe visions" of the Western political elite.

We cannot state that the validity of the Western and European political value system has gone but the recent changes question how universal this Western value system is. The Fund for Peace think tank has published a yearly publication on the functioning of the states since 2005. The failed states index or the fragile states index shows yearly how well the countries performed each year. Of course the criteria system is Western and consequently the list shows how close these countries are to the liberal Western values. The last decade the number of underperforming states and state failure steadily grew, which poses the question whether the world became worse or the Western evaluation criteria is outdated and we should reform it, too, according to the realities. The most recent map[12] shows that only the United States and Europe (and in general the Western world) was able to fulfil the expectations and fit to the Western criteria. This could be flattering but it should rather call for caution. Today we tend to engage in philosophical debates on the real meaning of words such as liberal, democratic etc., but we need to accept that it does not matter at the end whether our system is liberal, or something else if it is not able to manage the new security threats and seizes to exist.

It has been a decade long question whether the United States is still able and willing to fulfill its role as the protector of the Western world and the values. The role Washington accepted after the end of the Cold War. The "America first" slogan and program did not appear only with Donald Trump. There was already strong need to pull back during Barack Obama's presidency and demand more activity and share of the burdens form the allies. Few would argue that this is the beginning of a new multipolar world. This is for sure not true on the global scale but valid in different regions locally. China is a clear challenger but not strong enough militarily yet, Russia is on the other hand a

[12] J. J. Messner et al., "Fragile States Index 2019," Fund for Peace, April 24, 2018, https://fundforpeace.org/2018/04/24/fragile-states-index-2018-annual-report/.

real military power but the economy is weak and small, today and the next few years hold the last opportunity for Russia to participate in shaping the World. Thus, the United States is clearly the most important and still the only real superpower even if it is more reluctant and more critical.

Donald Trump is often criticized that his foreign policy is unpredictable but it is not true. We can conclude that Washington is tired to be policeman of the World and is fed up with paying the protection of the Western world alone while maintaining the liberal institutions is rather a burden on the American foreign policy. It is understandable that Trump is not sure why the United States should bear the costs of fighting international terrorism and defeating the Islamic State alone whilst the European allies are engaged in shoreless debates about the identity and they are not able to come to a common agreement how to stop the immense flow of illegal migrants. Furthermore, it seems that Trump is also less patient asking the allies in vain to significantly increase their defense budget. There are positive developments in this sense but the road is still long.

Considering these developments we could witness new trends in international politics. The United States intends to decrease the number of all those activities which are costly and have become more and more reluctant to engage in solving new challenges alone. The American foreign policy clearly overstretched in the 2000s and became tired. Especially, after the 2003 invasion of Iraq Washington gained more criticism than approval. It could not be continued and already George W. Bush tried to find a way out; Obama's main goal was to engage the partners and leave the two battlefronts in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Trump has also looked for new solutions for the dilemma: how to remain in a world leadership position and decrease the burdens and costs on the United States at the same time. In this sense Trump did not begin a new politics rather the foreign policy reflects the American public opinion.

All the arguments above are valid despite the fact that still around 200 thousand American soldiers serve abroad and the United States is still present in all continents. It is also true even though the American troops did not leave Syria after defeating the (formal) Islamic State and killing the leader of the terrorist group. Dealing with the regional challengers Trump decided to engage them and have more intense conversation with them trying to solve bilateral conflicts with them, such as the trade balance and trade questions with China. Trump is not idealist and intending to have better relations with them serves pure American interests.

As it was mentioned earlier the trend reemerged in the 2010s that the international politics became remilitarized and the traditional power politics is a reality again. This also brought as a consequence that generals are again active participants of international diplomacy. Think only on the White House and how many generals served in different positions very close to the president. It is not necessary brand new because after 2001 the American presidents have followed the tendency and the generals were dominant in the foreign policy decision making process. The military solutions are on the table and diplomacy, international law, or political solutions lost some importance. At the same time the conflicts are also changed;[13] the number of armed groups increased and the violent conflicts within the states are also more common.

Consequently because the international community was not able to manage the new threats created even more problems. It was not a secret earlier wither that the EU is an attractive goal for those who would like to have a better and richer life, however, 2015 meant a significantly new problem especially because of the scale of the migration. It is even sadder that the EU could not find a solution still.

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[13] Rada, "Új típusú biztonsági kihívások."

In 2009 the official American foreign policy position changed and Washington announced that the era of democracy promotion is over[14] and the states are responsible for maintaining stabile political system and control the monopoly of use of force within their borders. However, the so-called Arab spring overwrote the screenplay and plans accepted and agreed earlier in Washington and made it almost impossible for the United States to leave the region. On the other hand even hearing the plans of an American pull out made the regional competitors more confident and encouraged them to test the American red lines.[15]

Parallel to the decreasing American possibilities and capabilities Barack Obama forced the allies to bear the costs of maintaining the international (liberal) order. The Obama era not surprisingly completed remarkable international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement or the Iran nuclear deal, even though the United States left them since. Trump believes in bilateral agreements and even tries to convince the adversaries such as Kim Jong-un, and even more so with Vladimir Putin. The withdrawal from multilateral institutions shows the lack of trust in the international institutions and international law in general. Nikki Haley was a strong UN Ambassador between 2017-2018 and after she left and published her memoire it even more obvious that the UN and the multilateral for a is not a first priority for the United States. Most probably we can expect more unilateral foreign policy decisions and steps from Washington.

The EU struggles with the domestic problems and the dysfunctional institutions and the transatlantic community is in general in an identity crisis. Having said that it is even more understandable the "American first" slogan, and that the United States relies more on the realist self-help. Economic trends shows that in the future the economic investments main target countries will be the United States and China and the EU's share will decrease steadily. If

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[14] Péter Rada, "A demokratikus fejlődés Rubik kockája," *Sereg Szemle* 9, no. 2 (April 2007): 155–63.
[15] Grygiel and Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier*.

the EU will not able to reform itself and get over the shoreless debates on the members domestic politics and party politics motivated criticism the future is rather dim. In the meantime China's economy is still growing faster. China can only profit from a longer crisis period in the EU, let alone the fact that Russia always intended to create tension, the crisis of the Western world is also a comfortable development for Russia. The trends in world politics and the events and processes which govern the international politics are unpredictable and besides the challenges in this dimension we should not forget that there are regionally conflicts which directly does not affect the future of the World, but they still mean a heavy burden for the international community.

The conflict of the two Koreas is typically such a problem. Even though there were some positive developments such as the meeting of the two leaders and also Donald Trump – as the first American president – also personally met Kim Jong Un, the nuclear threat has not been solved yet and thus the fears of an unpredictable war and steady provocation is still a possibility.

The general developments in the Middle East are not positive either and we cannot have too high hopes for an easy and quick settlement of the hostilities and wars. Leaving the Iran deal will not help in stabilizing the situation either, and also the American decision to move the Embassy to Jerusalem means that the Americans are openly left the position of supporting the two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Saud-Arabia is a regional power fighting for dominance with Iran which is materialized in the proxy war in Yemen. The Turkish invasion of Northern Syria, Assad's new momentum of maintaining the power, Russia's strong presence and the American contradicting moves will not help find a quick solution.

The Middle East is a typical and general example of the international diplomacy's failure and the individual particular and short term interests of the states in the region. The Israeli-Palestinian relations is not better and the two state solution is out of sight. A devastating war is still ongoing since 2011 which draw in all the regional players, international actors, the United States,

Russia, Turkey and many foreign fighters. There has been no peace in Iraq since the end of the Cold War, the country is not stable and probably the only stability comes from the Kurds who are the enemy of Turkey, Iran and Assad in Syria. The Shia-Sunni conflict horizontally makes the problems even more complex. In Yemen, even though Iran and Saudi Arabia's proxy war is not on the front page of the international Western media, more than 8 million people are on the verge of famine, there is no health care, no central authority.

Afghanistan is still not a solved problem after 18 years, the state-building exercise failed.[16] The international community cannot leave the country even though there were many plans and agreements that by the mid-2010s there will be a final solution and the international community will finally leave. The Taliban is still, or again strong, it is very difficult to imagine that without them there can be any kind of political solution. On the other hand letting them into politics questions the whole rational of the war since 2001. The Islamic State's presence in the Asian country made the Taliban seem to be a moderate force and probably the only organized group which would be able to fight against the extremist Jihadism.

It is also not completely surprising that many other "smaller" conflicts cannot reach the threshold of attention in many cases. The Western countries as it is the general reaction usually condemns the human rights violations on paper or in a statement but nothing really happens later. The ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, the devastating decades long civil wars in Africa, the ungoverned territories of the Sahel where terrorist groups and organized crime groups found home seem to be second class problems. Regionally probably there are solutions but if we think about Nigeria the strongest military power in Africa and it cannot defeat the Boko Haram.

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[16] Rada, "A demokratikus fejlődés Rubik kockája."

After the end of the Cold War it became a common sense that civil wars are not European problems and violent military conflicts are characteristics for Africa. However, since 2014 more than 10 thousand people died in Ukraine and it does not seem that the conflict will be ended soon.

The present collection of publications intends to commemorate our regions' transition in the last 30 years and the fact that in 2019 all the V4 countries are full and equal members of the transatlantic community. Being member of the West means that the changes of the world and international politics have also effects on our regions and the V4 countries need to accept the role of being responsible allies. On the other hand the double standards need to be ended and the voice of the "new" members needs to be heard by the "old" members. Honest dialogue will help our community develop, the lack of trust definitely will lead to a dim future

ESSAY

ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: 30 YEARS AFTER THE END OF COMMUNISM. THE CASE OF POLAND[1]

Alicja Curanović, PhD

ABSTRACT

The goal of the paper is to establish whether the profound multilevel changes of the last three decades have influenced the historical modes of self-identification of Central European nations. Using Poland as the case study, I analyzed the social reception of the recent Three Seas Initiative which targets Central Europe. The analysis of the content of the discussions which take place on the Polish expert and newspaper on-line domains allows for a reconstruction of the contemporary Polish social geopolitical imaginary. The findings show that despite all the changes of the last thirty yeas the cognitive and discursive practices shaped over a hundred years ago are still relevant for the Polish geopolitical thinking.

Keywords: geopolitics, foreign policy of Poland, Central Europe

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[1] Some thesis of this paper were presented during the seminar "A Hundred Years of Polish East European Policy" at the University of Warsaw, 26 October 2018.

Introduction

30 years after the fall of communism many things look different in Central Europe.[2] The former members of the Warsaw Pact have regained full independence and joined first NATO, then EU. They all have introduced market economy. Political pluralism, free mass media and civil societies, despite some recent negative tendencies, make a firm part of the social reality in the whole region. The change of geopolitical circumstances, to name just the reunification of Germany, the collapse of the USSR and the dusk of the unipolar order, required from Central European countries to re-think their foreign policy and their role in European affairs. The popular in academia mode of the analysis concentrates on the evolution of foreign policy, usually with the NATO and EU accessions as the turning point. Researchers tend to focus on interests, goals and instruments.

For me, taking a look at foreign policy is an "excuse" to tackle the identity issue. In this paper I use foreign policy analysis to get a glimpse into the self-identification process of the nations. Following David Campbell's advice I approach foreign policy as a tool to diagnose identity. My goal is to find out whether all the changes which have taking place during last 30 years have influenced the modes of self-understanding of Central European states. Considering the pace and the depth of the changes, one aspect interests me in particular, namely the ontological dimension

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[2] In this paper the notion of Central Europe refers to the former members of the Warsaw Pact with the exception of post-Soviet republics. Hence the region of Central Europe includes Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria.

of security. The ontological security is provided by the sense of historical continuity. The multilevel changes which have taken place during the last 30 years could cause a sense of an interruption or a distortion of a vision of the linear gradual historic development. It is intriguing to see how Central European countries deal with this specific challenge.

Due to the limitations of the paper, I decided to focus on one particular case study. I have analyzed the most recent concept introduced by the Polish diplomacy which targets Central Europe - the Three Seas Initiative (TSI). My interest is not as much in the concept itself as in its social perception. In order to reconstruct it, I have analyzed the debates which take place on the Polish expert and newspaper on-line domains. It's here where the political ideas usually gain most attention. Using the name of the concept as the key-word (in Polish – *Trójmorze*) I have selected 200 texts within the time frame 2015-2018. The material allowed to reconstruct the Polish social geopolitical imaginary, especially when it comes to Central Europe. The findings show that despite all the profound changes of the last three decades the cognitive and discursive practices shaped over a hundred years ago are still relevant for the Polish geopolitical thinking. It seems that after having achieved two main goals, i.e. joining the EU and NATO, there has been a certain confusion about Poland's identity. The uncertainty about the new roles lowered ontological security which was further weakened by the on-going debates about the judgment over the former communist regime. Dealing with ontological anxiety requires a coherent autobiography, i.e. a story a country (i.e.

foremost its elite) tells to itself about its past, presence and future.[3] The absence of such a story has triggered in the case of Poland the revival of the old discursive routines rooted in a distant past. Paradoxically, Poland can build own sense of ontological security by 'othering' Germany and Russia and presenting both neighbours as a source of a potential threat. A state of a permanent threat as a mechanism of soothing ontological anxiety - sounds like a promising academic problem.

The paper starts with the introduction of the concepts relevant for the analysis, i.e. identity, ontological security and their connection to foreign policy. Next I present the Three Seas Initiative and its social reception. The final part of the paper highlights to what extend the old cognitive routines guide today the geopolitical imaginary of the Polish experts.

Identity, ontological security and foreign policy: how does it all add?

Constructivists were the ones who in IR have turned the spotlight on the role of identity in explaining states' behaviour.[4]

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[3] Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25.

[4] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas Onuf, *Making Sense, Making Worlds: Constructivism in Social Theory and International Relations* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012); Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge, UK ; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Carmen Wunderlich, *Rogue States as Norm Entrepreneurs: Black Sheep or Sheep in Wolves' Clothing?* ([s.l.]: Springer International Publishing, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27990-5.

They questioned the position of realists who disregarded the identity of individual agents as an object worth a deeper analysis. Realists believed that the structure, i.e. the material division of power, was the single most important factor determining states' actions. The realm of ideas, including ideas about Self were of secondary importance. Under the circumstance of the international anarchy states could survive by maximising their power.

Constructivist, however, made a point that although states do strive for increasing their power, they can understand differently what power is. States, like all social communities, exist in a social reality of socially constructed meanings. This, so called, social stock of knowledge keeps being constructed and reproduced by agents and at the same time it constitutes these very agents. In order to understand agents' actions, we should learn about their identities. The ways a state understands Self precedes and influences how this state understands own interests and what kind of goals it wants to achieve in the international arena. In other words, identity should be viewed as a source of a state's foreign policy.

According to Dirk Nabers, identity „supplies an actor with an angle through which to interpret his or her social situation and the expectations of appropriate behaviour that come with it".[5] Or, as Ted Hopf put it, identity is „how one understands oneself in

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[5] Dirk Nabers, "Identity and Role Change in International Politics," in *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hans W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 83, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818756-13.

relationship to another".[6] Hopf' emphasises the dynamic and relational nature of identity which is shaped by the mechanism of '*othering*', i.e. learning by the agent about self by determining the difference between Self and the "Other". In Jean-Frederic Morin and Jonathan Paquin's words: "Identity is formed by transforming differences into otherness".[7] The figure of the "Other" plays hence a crucial role in the self-identification process. However, adherents of constructivism differ in opinions about the nature of the Other. Bahar Rumelili is convinced that the "Other" must be external to the agent. It means that identity of a state is always shaped in the process of contacts with the international environment. Ted Hopf presents a different view. He argues that self-understanding of a state might be formed in relation to inner "Other", for instance an image of own past (historical "Other") or a minority which lives within the state, e.g. ethnic, religious or class minority (domestic "Other").[8]

The focus on identity has raised constructivists' interest in another issue, namely ontological security. Following the findings of R.D. Laing (1960) and Anthony Giddens (1984)[9] researchers like Jeniffer Mitzen, Brend J. Steel or Ayşe Zarakol argue that states, like all social collectives, draw own sense of security not only from

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[6] Ted Hopf, "Making Identity Count," in *Making Identity Count: Constructivism, Identity, and IR Theory*, ed. Ted Hopf and Allan Bentley B. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5, https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190255473.001.0001/acprof-9780190255473-chapter-1.

[7] Bahar Rumelili, "Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU's Mode of Differentiation," *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 27–47.

[8] Hopf, "Making Identity Count."

[9] Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security and Conflict : The Dynamics of Crisis and the Constitution of Community," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018): 825–35, http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0161-1.

the physical survival but also from stable identity.[10] Hence there are two dimensions of security: security as survival and security as being-in-time.[11] As Aliaxei Kazharski wrote, ontological security is about "depending on preservation of the integrity of the self despite ruptures in established routines, and being able to feel the effect of self-identity and continuity of the biographical narrative".[12]

In order to be able to act a state must assume the invariability of its existence, the invariability of perceptions about itself, about what it is and what roles it plays among other countries. Brent J. Steel notes that the main source of the sense of ontological security is a stable narrative about the continuity of the state – an autobiographical narrative[13]. In other words, ontological security comes from a stable narrative about a state's identity. It's important to remember that since identity is a dynamic phenomenon, "stable", in this context, does not mean rigid. "Stable" refers to a coherent autobiographical narrative which a state (its elites) can tell to itself about its past, present and the coming future. What's more, in order to enhance the sense of ontological

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[10] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 341–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346; Ayşe Zarakol, "States and Ontological Security: A Historical Rethinking," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 48–68, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653158; Ayşe Zarakol, "Ontological (In)Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan," *International Relations* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 3–23, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117809359040; Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008).

[11] Brent J. Steele, "Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War," *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 526.

[12] Aliaksei Kazharski, "Civilizations as Ontological Security?," *Problems of Post-Communism*, May 1, 2019, 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1591925.

[13] Steele, "Power of Self-Identity," 519–40.

security, this autobiographical narrative should be accepted also by external "Others".[14] The lack of the external recognition eventually lowers the ontological aspect of security, hence causes ontological anxiety.[15]

According to Jennifer Mitzen, the need for ontological security can be so strong that in a situation of conflict between a behaviour ensuring physical or ontological security, the state can choose the latter.[16] This helps to explain the perseverance of the state in conflict roles, even if they harm its physical security. If a conflict with another state has become a part of the identity of a particular state, that state is attached to this role. A change of its role would not only require settling the conflict, but also (perhaps above all) redefining the identity of the state. It is not the type of relationship with the external world (conflicting / peaceful), but the stability of this relationship that gives the state a sense of ontological security. The state experiences its continuity, is convinced of its authenticity, because its habits of perception and understanding of itself and the international environment remain unchanged.

German political scientist Sebastian Harnisch stressed that ontological security of a state might be challenged not only by other actors of international relations but also by the absence of a coherent narrative about own past which be broadly accepted by

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[14] Jelena Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," Foreign Policy Analysis 12, no. 4 (October 2016): 612, https://doi.org/10.1111/fpa.12089.
15 Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity," Cooperation and Conflict 52, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 31–47, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653161.
16 Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 342.

the domestic audience.[17] In order to achieve a sense of ontological security the state must form a strong relation to own historical Self. Achieving this goal usually helps a commemoration of a historical victory. However, it may also happen that a state shapes its relation to own historical Self by commemorating defeats. Sebastian Harnisch warns that the latter case is burdened with the risk of „role-taking trapped in history".[18]

Identity is a crucial aspect of ontological security. And how does foreign policy correspond to these two phenomena? In regard to this issue there are two "camps" among constructivists. The "positivists" focus on seeking causal relations between identity and a state's actions in the international arena. The "post-positivist" take a step further. For them identity is not a cause but a reason for a state's behaviour. They are not interested in tracing simple causal dependencies. For them state is not a social fact but it is always in the process of becoming.[19] A state exists as long as it is able to sustain and reproduce the coherent autobiographical narrative. From this perspective, foreign policy is not a set of ideas and actions undertaken by a state in the international area but one of many means to reproducing national identity, providing sense of community and historical continuity. Such understating of foreign

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17 Sebastian Harnisch, "Role Theory and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy: Background and Rationale of the Political Economy of Business Journalism," in China's International Roles (New York: Routledge, 2015), 11, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818756.
18 Ibid., 12.
19 Sebastian Harnisch, "Role Theory: Operationalization of Key Concepts," in Role Theory in International Relations, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hans W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 7, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818756.

policy was proposed by David Campbell.[20] According to British scholar, foreign policy does not serve sustaining relations with other countries but its primal purpose is to provide a sense of identity by drawing the dividing line between the national community and the "Other".[21] The crucial role in this process plays discourse about national security. By presenting international environment as a dangerous space foreign policy allows to achieve two goals. Firstly, it "glues" together a several million group into a nation. Secondly, it minimize the significance of possible domestic rifts and raptures in face of a greater external threat.[22]

Campbell's perspective highlights the role of foreign policy in the self-identification process. By analysing foreign policy and its social reception we can get an insight into the dynamics of national identity. In the case of Central Europe it enables us to find out how these states, after three decades of so many changes, understand today their role in the region. Saying goodbye to the socialistic past did not happen in a day. The number of necessary changes undertaken by these societies in a relative short period of time brings into the picture the question of ontological security.

Considering the turbulent history of the region the sense of existential continuity seems like a rare commodity. All Central European countries at a certain point lost their sovereignty to their more powerful neighbours (Russia, Prussia, the Habsburg Monarchy or the Ottoman Empire). This loss should be considered

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20 David Campbell, Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
21 Ibid., 9.
22 Ibid., 44.

the "formative experience" for shaping the sense of common historical fate among Central European nations. It's neither the language nor ethnicity and not religion but the loss of sovereignty which allows for drawing the boundaries of the region of Central Europe. Milan Kundera was right when he defined Central Europe as a region of mostly small states which were an object of a political rivalry and all had experienced the loss of sovereignty.[23] Losing sovereignty and statehood is a fatal blow to sense of historic continuity. That's a reason why ontological security of Central European nations have shaky foundations. Recalling Filip Ejdus' work, we could say that these countries make a good case of "mortal nations", i.e. less confident than other states in the eternity of sovereignty.[24] According to Ejdus, such nations "usually incorporate fatalistic future self-projections into the narrative of the Self and use it as a source of ontological security. While anxiety of death is an inescapable feature of the human condition, these 'mortal nations' are less capable of coping with it. In these polities, anxiety about political finitude always lurks".[25]

Poland lost its sovereignty as the last in the region and hence for the shortest period of time – "only" 123 years. What's more, in the case of Poland the loss was not sudden. It was not a result of a military defeat (unlike Czechia, Hungary or Serbia) but happened gradually - 23 years passed between the first and the final partition. Until the first national uprising in 1830-1831 (the so

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23 Milan Kundera, "Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy Środkowej," Zeszyty Literackie, no. 5 (1984).
24 Filip Ejdus, "Critical Situations, Fundamental Questions and Ontological Insecurity in World Politics," Journal of International Relations and Development 21, no. 4 (March 9, 2017): 883–908, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0083-3.
25 Ibid., 889.

called November Uprising), many though that it was only a temporary crisis and that the regaining of sovereignty was just a matter of time. Only the defeat of the military struggle sowed the seeds of doubt in Polish people's minds. Eventually, Poland re-emerged together with other countries after the I World War. It was a multiethnic and multireligious state with a significant territory. It was also a weak state with a deep sense of existential threat. The unstable geopolitical circumstances required from Poland confirming constantly its borders, legality of territory - its very existence. By showing agency Warsaw had to prove that the Second Polish Republic was not a temporary phenomenon. The "come-back" on the political map of Europe after 123 years of absence demanded from the Polish elites establishing an autobiographical narrative which would add meaning to the disrupted past and provide a sense of community to society whose members had been socialised in three different political entities. Foreign policy played a part in achieving these goals.[26] II World War followed by the Cold War and its abrupt end forced the societies of Central Europe to redefine again their identities and adapt their autobiographical narratives. After 1989 joining the UE and NATO was a common goal for the most former members of the Warsaw Pact. Once these goals have been achieved, new discussions started within Central European countries about their

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[26] Bartosz Światłowski, "Prometejska racja stanu. Źródła i dzieje ruchu prometejskiego w II Rzeczpospolitej," *Poliarchia* 2, no. 1 (2014): 153, https://doi.org/0.12797/Poliarchia.02.2014.02.08; Jacek Borkowicz, "W poszukiwaniu gwarancji. Prometejski nurt polskiej myśli wschodniej," in *Okręt Koszykowa*, ed. Jacek Borkowicz, Jacek Cichocki, and Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz (Warsaw: PWN, 2007); Marek Kornat, "Ruch prometejski –ważne doświadczenie polityki zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej," *Nowa Europa Wschodnia*, no. 2 (2018): 76–86.

roles, future perspective but also about their past. Appeals for a critical evaluation not only of the communistic regime but also of the transformation process have become a part of the agenda of the right wing parties which in the case of Hungary and Poland have gained power.[27] Hence after three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall many (if not all) Central European societies have found themselves in a position with no clear ideas about their new roles in the European affairs or even an accepted by the majority judgment over the most recent past. And although one can hardly consider these circumstances a "critical situation"[28], nevertheless, problems with articulating a coherent autobiographical narrative at home, has provided a fertile ground for raising ontological anxiety in Central European nations. Problems with shaping a consistent autobiographical narrative should have consequences for their ontological security.[29]

It's impossible to cover in one paper all Central European countries. Therefore, I have chosen as the case study Poland and its Three Seas Initiative (TSI). One of the goals of this initiative was to find a "niche", a new role for Poland in the European affairs. By analysing the social reception of the TSI, I aim to reconstruct

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27 Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga, "Introduction: Toward a New Illiberal Conservatism in Russia and East Central Europe," in New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe, ed. Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 1–22, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351020305-1.

28 Students of ontological security emphasise the role of "critical situations" which undermine the sense of being-in-time and trigger ontological security seeking behaviour. "Critical situations are generated by radical (real or perceived) ruptures in established routines of international society". Ejdus, "Critical Situations."

29 A reverse phenomenon in regard to Central / Eastern Europe could be observed recently within the EU. As Maria Mälksoo argues that the region has return as an ontological insecurity trope in the discourse of the old EU members. Maria Mälksoo, "The Normative Threat of Subtle Subversion: The Return of 'Eastern Europe' as an Ontological Insecurity Trope," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 365–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1590314.

the contemporary Polish geopolitical imaginary and see whether it differs from the cognitive patterns established over a hundred years ago, when Poland regained its sovereignty.

The Three Seas Initiative: the historical geopolitical imaginary and the contemporary official agenda of the Polish government

Since we are to tackle the issue of ontological security, we should refer to the past. The geopolitical imaginary shaped by the historical experience is an important source of ontological security and hence provides foundations and a framework also for contemporary foreign policy. At this point there is no need for a detailed description of Poland's history. I will present a panoramic overview of the main features of the tradition of the Polish political thinking, which should help to contextualise the today's findings about the geopolitical vision.

Some constructivist, e.g. Iver Neumann and Vincenc Poulliot, argue that histories of particular nations are marked by the so called "formative experience".[30] The notion of "formative experience" refers to a period of time or experience that has an important and lasting influence on ideas and attitudes. In the case of Poland, as formative we could consider the first two decades of the freshly regained independence, hence the period 1918-1939. It was during these years that the Polish elites, for the first time in the modern history, could not only debate and wonder about

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30 Iver B. Neumann and Vincent Pouliot, "Untimely Russia: Hysteresis in Russian–Western Relations over the Past Millennium," Security Studies 20, no. 1 (March 21, 2011): 105–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.549021.

Poland's policy but also could put these ideas to the test, since they finally disposed over institutions of a sovereign state. The geopolitical imaginary of the elites of the Second Polish Republic was marked by the strong sense of an acute insecurity and a conviction about fragility of the geopolitical situation. Another loss of precious independence was feared the most. The elites were in one mind about the hostile environment in which Poland was forced to survive. They differed, however, in judging which of the neighbours presented a greater threat. Two leaders of the political debate took different perspectives. Jozef Pilsudski thought it was Germany – advanced, modern, strong militarily and economically. Roman Dmowski, in turn, pointed to Russia which, in his opinion, represented barbarian imperialism. Both politicians feared the deadly alliance of Germany and Bolshevik Russia which would inevitably bring Poland's existence to an end. It is worth to note that the roots of this particular fear go way back to the November Uprising.[31]

Eventually, it was Pilsudski's vision which prevailed. Looking for a way to minimize Russia's threat resulted in many initiatives. One of them was the so called *Intermarium* – an idea developed in the 30s by the minister of foreign affairs Jozef Beck. He proposed to create a federation of nations situated between Germany and Bolshevik Russia, stretching from the Baltic Sea to Black Sea - the "Third Europe".[32] The goal behind this idea was to

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31 Borkowicz, "W poszukiwaniu gwarancji.," 47–48.
32 Jakub Lubelski, "Związek Bałtycki i Trzecia Europa. Koncepcje reorganizacji Europy Środkowej w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczpospolitej," Nowa Europa 9, no. 1 (2010): 183–217; Piotr Cieplucha, "Prometeizm i koncepcja Międzymorza w praktyce polityczno-prawnej oraz dyplomacji II RP," Studia Prawno-Ekonomiczne 93 (2014): 39–55.

strengthen the region and its agency. Integrated Central Europe was to become an independent agent in the European affairs. It was thought as an alliance against Germany and Russia. But also, it was to strengthen the status of Poland. The *Intermarium* was to fulfil a function of a springboard to re-establish the lost once greatness. Finally, the initiative conveyed a message about Poland's "natural" leadership in Central Europe. Despite the ambitious plans, the *Intermarium* did not bring any notable effects. The II World War broke out and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact made the Polish elites' worse nightmare come true. The end of war was followed by the imposed alliance with the USSR and another loss of the political independence.

The analysis of the most persistent cognitive and discursive patterns in the traditional Polish geopolitical imaginary reveals a certain paradox. The sensation of the threat coming simultaneously from the West and the East is so deeply rooted in the Polish perception of international dynamics that it has become a stable cognitive routine which might function as a source of ontological security. The situation of the threat and the prospect of a devious alliance between Germany and Russia is "familiar" to Polish self-understanding. In plain words, when Germany and Russia are considered a threat, defining Poland's role in Europe comes almost without an effort. For it's not the type but the stability of roles that strengthens ontological security. As paradoxically as it may sound, stirring fears in connection to Germany and Russia might work as a reliable means to sooth ontological anxiety in the case of Poland. A true change of Warsaw's relations with any of these two neighbors requires changing first

Polish's self-identification patterns. It's a challenge for Poland and, perhaps, also for other former socialistic countries. All of them have not yet come to terms with their recent past. Just to name the ongoing debates about the necessity of lustration, de-communisation, restoring sense of justice etc.[33] What's more, the problem of constructing a consistent autobiographical narrative about own past goes often beyond the issue of the Cold War years. One look at the history texts books in Polish schools allows to notice that the sense of historic continuity is provided through the narrative about the series of the failed uprisings with the Warsaw Uprising (1944) as the most recent and the most important one. Striving to construct a coherent vision of own past by turning failed national insurrections into the central points of the story locks the Polish geopolitical imaginary in a trap of a history, which Harnisch warns about. I will illustrate these arguments by presenting my findings from the analysis of the social reception of the Three Seas Initiative,

In September 2015 the representatives of Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Hungary attended a meeting of a format labelled as "Adriatic-Baltic and Black Sea" which took place during the session of UN General Assembly. The talks concerned the prospect of a cooperation in the area of energy, transport and telecommunication. A year later, due to the common initiative of Poland and Croatia, the format of such meetings was labelled as

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33 Jo Harper, ed., Poland's Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2018), www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctvbd8m13.

"Three Seas".[34] Its first session was held the same year at the end of August in Dubrovnik. The next meeting, co-hosted by Poland and Croatia, took place a year later in Warsaw,. The third round was organized in Bucharest in September 2018. Within the framework of the new initiative 157 projects have been prepared of a value of 45 million EUR[35] and with one general purpose: to make Central Europe more competitive in comparison to other regions within the EU.

According to the Polish government, the Three Seas Initiative aims to unlock the dormant potential of Central Europe – an area that makes 28% of the whole EU and 22% in terms of the population. On many occasions the Polish officials made it clear that the initiative was not driven by any geopolitical concerns.[36] On the contrary, Krzysztof Szczerski, State Secretary in the president administration, explained that it's a pragmatic project which is to modernize the region.[37] The special priority is the development of transport infrastructure and energy. It should help to attract more foreign investments. Szczerski said: "As far as the Three Seas Initiative is concerned, it's a notion which is to replace the previous

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34 Agnieszka Bieńczyk-Missala, "Od Międzymorza do Trójmorza – meandry polityki zagranicznej Polski w Europie Środkowej," Stosunki Międzynarodowe 54, no. 1 (2018): 95–115.

35 The most notable result of the TSI are the bilateral agreements which were signed by Poland and Croatia in July 2017. "Jest porozumienie Gaz-System-Plinacro. Współpraca Polski i Chorwacji w gazie," Biznes Alert, July 7, 2017, https://biznesalert.pl/porozumienie-gaz-system-plinacro-wspolpraca-polski-chorwacji-gazie/. About the prospect of investments see Martin Sienkiewicz, "Koncepcja Trójmorza w polityce zagranicznej Polski po 2015 r.," Dyplomacja i Bezpieczeństwo 4, no. 1 (2016): 139–51.

36 Sienkiewicz, "Koncepcja Trójmorza."

37 "Min. Szczerski: Trójmorze nie jest alternatywą dla Unii Europejskiej," Prezydent.pl, September 7, 2016, https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/aktywnosc-ministrow/art,424,min-szczerski-trojmorze-nie-jest-alternatywa-dla-unii-europejskiej.html.

name (i.e. Adriatic-Baltic and Black Sea), since the three seas have different names in different languages. The label "*Intermarum*", on the other hand, has a strong geopolitical and historical connotation. We want to tighten the regional cooperation, when it comes to economy, infrastructure, but also security".[38] It's important to note that the initiative is addressed exclusively to the members of the EU. Ukraine was not invited. This fact was emphasized as a proof that the Polish government had no intentions to resurrect old geopolitical ideas but was dedicated to pragmatic modernization.

If taking the declarations of the Polish government at face value, we could say that the project indeed seems pragmatic. There is no geopolitical motivation, no ill ambition on Warsaw's side to become the regional leader. On the contrary, there is a conscious rejection of the old ideas in order to create a new quality in the region. However, the social perception of the initiative among the Polish experts and commentators is much different and reveals the persistence of cognitive-discursive routines formed way back in the beginning of the 20th century, or earlier.

Come what may, fear the neighbors! The Reactions of Polish experts to the Three Seas Initiative

In order to learn how the Polish experts perceive the Three Seas Initiative, I analyzed the texts which concern this topic and

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38 Ibid.; "Minister Witold Waszczykowski w rozmowie z Radiem dla Ciebie," Rzeczpospolita Polska, Ministerstwo Spaw Zagranicznych, accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/msz_w_mediach/minister_witold_waszczykowski _w_rozmowie_z__radiem_dla_ciebie;jsessionid=FCBCEA3E296D89C64727F69873BE0AA0. cmsap1p.

were published on the Polish websites. I started my research not from selecting particular websites but from searching for all the sites which mention the key-word "Trójmorze". This approach allowed to select a broad spectrum of portals, including online editions of well-established news magazines („Rzeczpospolita", „Gazeta Wyborcza", „Polityka", „Teologia Polityczna", „Myśl Polska", „Polska. The Times"), expert discussion fora (np. Puls Biznesu, biznesalert.pl), papers made availabe by think-tanks (np. Fundacji Batorego, Fundacji Kazimierza Pułaskiego), websites of the Polish community abroad, conservative and right-wing groups (e.g. Jagiellonia.org, Kresy24.pl, PCh24.pl, niezalezna.pl, konserwatyzm.pl, prawicarzeczpospolitej.org, fronda.pl), as well as blogs (Salon24.pl). One glance at the mentioned websites shows that Three Seas Initiative was not debated much by leftists.

I have decided to base my research on the materials from the Internet because I wanted to see not only the opinions of experts (it happens so that the experts are the social group which is the most engaged in commenting political initiatives) but I also hoped to gain access to representative of the broader society by analyzing the comments posted under the articles. All in all, I analyzed over 200 texts, which allowed to identify the main features of the Polish international imaginary. Below I have described my main findings.

Among the online expert community the only ones who shared the understating of the initiative as presented by the government were the commentators from the websites of a business-economic profile. They see TSI mostly as a project aimed at modernization of

the region[39]. The absolute majority of the commentators, however, perceive it as a geopolitical project which continues the tradition of the *Intermarium*. Most of the authors stressed that the project should be pragmatic. The voices who favored the "messianic" edge were marginal.[40]

The commentators differ in how they evaluate the current situation in Central Europe. Those who think of TSI as a modernization project, emphasize the significant dormant potential of the region which with some help could become an important local center of development.[41] For people who view TSI as a step towards a geopolitical reconstruction, Central Europe is struggling with the semi-peripheral status imposed partly by "German colonisation".[42] This very group is also concerned with the "geopolitical fatum" which historically overshadows Central Europe. Last but not least they perceive Russian imperialism as a realistic threat. The anonymous blogger from Salon24 writes: "We have found ourselves in unenviable economic situation. From both

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39 See Michał Kleiber's comment at the Baltic Bussines Forum: "Koncepcja Trójmorza: Polska może zyskać gospodarczo i naukowo," wGospodarce.pl, August 26, 2016, http://wgospodarce.pl/informacje/28851-koncepcja-trojmorza-polska-moze-zyskac-gospodarczo-i-naukowo.

[40] Jan Malicki, the head of the Eastern Europe College at the University of Warsaw expressed a conviction that Poland should not resign from attempts to formulate initiatives which would be more about politics and ideas and less technocratic. He admitted that he personally considers the *Intermarum* a dream which could still come true. "Eastbook: 'Musimy ograniczać rolę Polski w Trójmorzu' – rozmowa z Janem Malickim," January 24, 2018, https://studium.uw.edu.pl/eastbook-musimy-ograniczac-role-polski-w-trojmorzu-rozmowa-z-janem-malickim/.

41 Michał Kobosko, "Michał Kobosko: Koncepcja Trójmorza ma sens," Rzeczpospolita, December 16, 2016, https://www.rp.pl/Publicystyka/312159879-Michal-Kobosko-Koncepcja-Trojmorza-ma-sens.html.

42 "Koncepcja Trójmorza. Czy to ma sens?," Bumerang Polski, June 23, 2017, https://www.bumerangmedia.com/2017/06/koncepcja-trojmorza-czy-to-ma-sens.html.

sides, West and East, we face powers which, for some time already, strive to achieve a 'natural' goal, i.e. shape an alliance".[43]

The internet-users who consider TSI a geopolitical project are divided about the main source of the threat in Central Europe. In other words, they agree that the initiative is aimed against other states, but they differ in naming these states. The analysis of the posts reveals five possible interpretations. Hence, Three Seas is against (1) Germany (which is often identified with the whole EU), (2) against Russia, (3) against Germany and Russia, (4) against Germany and Russia with the US as Poland's patron. The interpretations number 3 and 4 are founded on the assumption that there is a secretive traditional anti-Polish Berlin-Moscow alliance.[44] The last, fifth interpretation has an anti-Semitic connotation. It assumes that the initiative is American-Jewish intrigue which aims to create American-Jewish protectorate in this part of Europe. It's worth to stress that this particular comment was found on a portal called Christian Poland (Polska Chrześcijańska).[45]

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43 "Trump, jego rewolucja a wschodnioeuropejskie Trójmorze.," Salon24.pl, July 5, 2017, http://paxpolonica.salon24.pl/791125,trump-jego-rewolucja-a-wschodnioeuropejskie-trojmorze.

44 "Dr Targalski: Trójmorze bez Ukrainy, a z Austrią, to ukłon w stronę Rosji," July 7, 2017, https://telewizjarepublika.pl/dr-targalski-trojmorze-bez-ukrainy-a-z-austria-to-uklon-w-strone-rosji,51004.html.

45 "Donald Trump zdecydowanie poprze zainicjowaną przez Polskę koncepcję Trójmorza," PCh24.pl, May 20, 2018, https://www.pch24.pl/donald-trump-zdecydowanie-poprze-zainicjowana-przez-polske-koncepcje-trojmorza,60382,i.html#ixzz5RMCxTvny. About TSI as a tool of building US hegemony but with no anti-Semitic connotations writes also Juliusz Krzysztoforski, "Po jasną cholerę to międzymorze?," mPolska24, September 21, 2017, https://www.mpolska24.pl/post/15239/po-jasna-cholere-to-miedzymorze.

Most of the internet users perceive Three Seas as a means to oppose foreign influence. Hence, they are convinced that it's a counter-hegemonic project. Many texts argue that the initiative is in fact Poland's response to the Nord Stream II[46]; it's a reaction to the attempt to create the multi-speed EU[47] or to the devious process of German economical colonization of the region.[48] The popular perception of the Three Seas as a counter-hegemonic project indicates that Polish internet users view the whole region as a space under pressure of the external powers.

The prominent plot in the narrative about TSI concerns security of Poland and Central Europe. Fear appears as an important premise of a regional cooperation[49]. One of the acknowledged political commentators, Eugeniusz Smolar, quoted the following statement of the Polish ambassador to Kiev, Jan Piekło. The diplomat called Three Seas "an initiative of Central Eastern Europe which fear Russia".[50] Andrzej Zyberowicz is convinced that we are already witnessing a "hybrid war against Poland".[51] Włodzimierz Iszczuk from the journal „Głos Polski"

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46 "Donald Trump."
47 Even Szczerski admitted it. "Min. Szczerski."
48 "Wielomski: Zwrot geopolityczny? O Trójmorzu," Konserwatyzm.pl, July 29, 2017, https://konserwatyzm.pl/wielomski-zwrot-geopolityczny-o-trojmorzu/.
49 Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski, "Trójmorze – kontekst europejski i atlantycki (1)," Niezależna, July 9, 2017, http://niezalezna.pl/101954-trojmorze-kontekst-europejski-i-atlantycki-1.
50 Eugeniusz Smolar, "Polska nie jest liderem," Liberté!, July 8, 2017, https://liberte.pl/polska-nie-jest-liderem/.
51 Agaton Koziński, "Andrzej Zybertowicz: Trójmorze to nie projekt antyunijny. Przeciwnie, ma wzmocnić UE," Polska+, July 7, 2017, https://plus.polskatimes.pl/andrzej-zybertowicz-trojmorze-to-nie-projekt-antyunijny-przeciwnie-ma-wzmocnic-ue/ar/12246763.

sends a serious warning: "the most probable arena for a military operation in the coming world war is Central Eastern Europe".[52]

The analysis of the discourse shows that most users paint a grim picture of the most powerful neighbors of Poland. Germany is called a hegemony and a colonial power whose goal is to carry out own project of *Mitteleuropa*. An anonymous blogger argues that Germany's policy aims to "de-industrialize and depopulate our country by creating a mass unemployment which forces people to leave Poland".[53] What's more, the image of Germany is strongly connected to the image of EU which by many commentators is considered to be right now "under German diktat". The EU itself is often presented as plunged into crisis and moral downfall. Dominik Szczęsny-Kostanecki refers to the EU in a following manner: "Confused, suffocated by numerous regulations, less and less democratic, and hence less and less recognized as legitimate by own population; larded with Muslims immune to acculturation; possessed with own ideology which was meant as a weapon against conservative (traditionalist) thinking but has become a grenade dropped among own troops…. The EU, shocked constantly by terrorist attacks surpassing 100-200 thousands death toll, lives in a state of a permanent fear".[54] It is impossible to miss the contrast in the image of the EU and Russia. The former is referred to by one of the internet users as "dying old prostitute"[55], while the latter is

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52 Włodzimierz Iszczuk, "Tarcza Europy," Portal Spoleczno-Polityczny Jagellonia.org, November 28, 2014, https://jagiellonia.org/tarcza-europy/.
53 "Trump, jego rewolucja."
54 Dominik Szczęsny-Kostanecki, "Projekt Intermarium a klęska europejskiej federacji," Portal Spoleczno-Polityczny Jagellonia.org, September 6, 2016, https://jagiellonia.org/projekt-intermarium-kleska-europejskiej-federacji/.
55 Krzysztoforski, "Po jasną cholerę to międzymorze?"

presented most of the times as a fearful and powerful actor. Russia's actions are perceived as aggressive, expansionistic and imperialistic. Włodzimierz Iszczuk calls Russia "an aggressive empire of evil" and argues: "after losing the cold war Russia was forced to retreat from Central Eastern Europe. It does not mean, however, that she was ready to accept own defeat. For the last 25 years, she has been preparing to take revenge".[56] A noticeable group of the internet users perceives Russia not only as a military but foremost a civilizational threat.[57]

The US comes as the only country which by internet users, especially those from the right wing-conservative milieu, is referred to as a partner and guarantee of security in Central Eastern Europe (the only exception is the anti-Semitic comment). For political scientist Adam Wielomski, Donald Trump is the harbinger of the long awaited "cultural counterrevolution against the unbridled liberalism".[58] Remarkably enough, despite the "global village" phenomenon the geopolitical imaginary of the internet users comes down to three actors, i.e. Germany, the EU and Russia. China appears incidentally as a potential partner but also a certain risk.[59]

The internet users are split about the role Poland should play in its immediate neighborhood. Most believe that apart from the

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56 Iszczuk, "Tarcza Europy."
57 Ibid.
58 "Wielomski: Zwrot geopolityczny?"
59 Michał Specjalski, "Specjalski: Branding Trójmorza [Analiza Szczytu Trójmorza i Global Forum 6-7.07.2017]," LinkedIn (blog), July 11, 2017, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/specjalski-branding-tr%C3%B3jmorza-analiza-szczytu-i-forum-specjalski.

considerable territory Poland does not have necessary resources to become the regional leader.[60] Especially, that the countries participating in the Three Seas Initiative show certain mistrust towards Warsaw's ambitions.[61] Any attempt to speak in the name of the whole region will undermine Poland's diplomatic initiatives. Merely as a far echo of the historical past appears an opinion of some commentators that by strengthening the regional cooperation Poland would enhance own status within the EU.[62] Krzysztof Szczerski argued: „having own vision […] enables us to bring an original idea to the debate about the post-Brexit future of the EU. It's obvious that Germany has taken over the political initiative, with the personal engagement of Angela Merkel. But there is still no new vision. A fresh vision, a new concept will provide Poland with a leverage within the EU".[63]

The most surprising, at least to the author of this article, was to discover the "civilizational" plot in references to the Three Seas Initiative.[64] According to some commentators, in face of Western

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60 Smolar, "Polska nie jest liderem."

61 Some examples of the external reactions: Croatia, "Miloszević: Trójmorze to koncepcja o wymiarze transatlantyckim (ROZMOWA)," Biznes Alert, September 6, 2017, https://biznesalert.pl/miloszevic-trojmorze-koncepcja-o-wymiarze-transatlantyckim-rozmowa/. Austria, Aureliusz M. Pędziwol, "Austriacki dyplomata: Trójmorze to inicjatywa infrastrukturalna, nie polityczna," Deutsche Welle, July 11, 2017, https://www.dw.com/pl/austriacki-dyplomata-tr%C3%B3jmorze-to-inicjatywa-infrastrukturalna-nie-polityczna/a-39630402.

62 Adam Leszczyński, "Szczerski: 'Trójmorze to napęd Europy'. Wraca idea Trójmorza i Międzymorza, fantazja o polskim mocarstwie," OKO.press, June 20, 2017, https://oko.press/szczerski-trojmorze-naped-europy-wraca-idea-trojmorza-miedzymorza-fantazja-o-polskim-mocarstwie/.

63 "Min. Szczerski."

64 About the „civilizational" dimension of the TSI writes also Adam Balcer. Adam Balcer, "Trójmorze – myślenie życzeniowe czy Realpolitik?," Forum Dialogu, October 14, 2017, https://forumdialogu.eu/2017/10/14/trimarium/.

Europe's decay and aggressive, barbarian Russia, Poland (together with the region) is predestined to become the defender of true European values and the whole Latin civilization. Like the Biblical Ark of the Covenant Poland should preserve the true identity of Europe. Nothing more, nothing less. It's remarkable that in this context there are comparisons of the EU to the old Roman Empire. Poland together with Central Eastern nations is depicted as Byzantium which survived the "barbarian flood" and manage to preserve the civilizational heritage. In Andrzej Zybertowicz's opinion, "the countries of Central Europe are now the guardians of Latin civilization".[65] According to a blogger of the portal Salon24, "The cooperation in the area of economy, infrastructure, energy, and last but not least, political-military is the key to create Three Seas. The initiative is about forming a North-South alliance in the Central Eastern Europe which shares the values of the western civilization".[66]

Another variation of the "civilizational" plot is the conviction that Poland and the region must take upon the role of *Antmurale Christianitatis* and protect Europe from the aggressive Russia. Poland should again become "the shield". Iszczuk argues: „The Three Seas Initiative should become a reliable shield of European civilization and the whole free world".[67] It is worth to note that among the studied materials I have found just one which though of Central Europe's location between two civilization (West-Russia)

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[65] Koziński, "Andrzej Zybertowicz."
[66] "Trump, jego rewolucja."
[67] Iszczuk, "Tarcza Europy."

as a disadvantage. The author argued that because of the two different influences the region can't truly unite.[68]

The "civilizational" plot includes also references to Poland's moral superiority in comparison to both, Germany and Russia. Dominik Szczesny-Kostanecki while writing about TSI, argues that Poland "will never strive for an unconditional hegemony, because… it is neither characteristic for Polish people's nature nor a part of the Polish political tradition – even the one symbolized by Pilsudski. Poland aspires only to the role of *primus inter pares*".[69]

The analysis of the material allows to reconstruct also the specific understanding of the Polish history. According to internet users, Poland's history is characterized by the unstoppable cycle of crises. The repetitive nature of catastrophes in a twisted way adds to the existence of the Polish state an "ahistorical" dimension. This specific vision of the past influences the idea of the future. Most internet users are pessimistic. They foresee new crises and find the collapse of the EU quite possible. Some even go that far to call to prepare for the third world war.[70] It seems impossible for Central Europe to escape the *Fatum* of geopolitics.

30 years later: everything has changed, nothing has changed?

In the begging of the 21st century Russian intellectuals were still occupied with finding a remedy to national identity crises. They looked jealously to Central European countries which after

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[68] "Nasz Dziennik – Dr Kawęcki: Nowy Ład Europejski," *Prawica Rzeczypospolitej*, July 7, 2017, http://prawicarzeczypospolitej.org/aktualnosci,pokaz,1835.
[69] Szczęsny-Kostanecki, "Projekt Intermarium."
[70] Iszczuk, "Tarcza Europy."

1989 were free of the dilemma of self-identification. Most of the former members of the Warsaw Pact could form their new identity in contrast to the recent history (interpreted as the Soviet diktat) and with the notion of "return to Europe".[71] While these words are being written, Poland is a member of the EU and NATO. In both institutions Warsaw cooperates with Germany – the country which until the end of the communistic regime was considered a deadly enemy. In the North and East Poland borders with Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine – three countries, which according to Pilsudski's vision were to play the role of a buffer protecting Poland from Russia. A hundred years have passed since Poland regained independence, and thirty since re-establishing its full sovereignty. Many things have changed. It's enough to mention the fall of the USRR, the end of the Cold War, the enlargement of EU and NATO, the growth of China. The volume and significance of these changes stand in striking contrast with the durability and immutability of the geopolitical imaginary of the Polish experts in regard to its neighbors. Constructivists would explain it by pointing to the importance of identity, especially social actors' attachment to cognitive and discursive routines.

The conducted analysis allows to observe three differences in Poland's perception of Central Europe. Firstly, unlike after 1918, it is hard to find prominent intellectuals who while perceiving Germany as the main threat would at the same time call for a

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[71] Tanya Narozhna, "State–Society Complexes in Ontological Security-Seeking in IR," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, October 23, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0164-y.

rapprochement with Russia.[72] To a certain extent, this absence of the pro-Russia party in Warsaw is a result of the still unsettled issue of the plane crash which happened in Smolensk in 2010.[73] The second change is connected to the perception of Poland's role in the region. The number of commentators who doubt their homeland's capacity to become the local leader and a mentor is increasing. However, the dream of reviving the glorious past of the European power is not completely absent either. The third differences is connected to the role of the guardian. Traditionally it was reserved for France which was now replaced by the US.

The most important neighbors, i.e. Russia and Germany, are cast in their traditional roles. Although it was the government of Angela Merkel which insisted on sustaining sanctions against Russia after 2014, many Polish internet users believe in the existence of the traditional anti-Polish alliance of Germany and Russia. The membership in NATO of both Warsaw and Berlin does not preclude thinking of Germany as striving to fulfil own hegemonic project and turn Poland into its vassal. This image of Germany resurfaced in some comments especially after Berlin had declared interest in joining the Three Seas Initiative in August 2018. The MP and the member of the ruling party, Prawo and Sprawiedliwość, Beata Pawłowicz, in the interview for the portal niezalezna.pl said: "I think that each situation, each initiative, which Germany wants to join, turns automatically into a situation

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[72] The exception refers to the text written by Bohdan Piętka for „Myśl Polska", B. Piętka, op. cit.

[73] While still in office, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Witold Waszczykowski, said: „…the keys to improve Polish-Russian relations are in Moscow. The wrack of the plane is one of such keys". "Minister Witold Waszczykowski."

which should be very carefully observed in regard to Poland's national interest. Never does Germany do anything selflessly. Never does Germany get involved in projects which don's suit its interests. And it happens so that Germany's interest was always about weakening Poland and any powerful subject which could emerge between Germany and Russia. These are Germany's eternal political interests. Today's initiative to join the Three Seas - personally, I would approach it very warily. I could support some form of a cooperation with Germany but only to extend it serves Poland's interest. Maybe some technical issues or *know-how* in the sphere of labor organization. However, never should Germany have any decision-making capacity or any impact on political arrangements within the Three Seas' states. Let's not forget that Germany is the eternal 'murderer' of Central European countries".[74]

It's important to notice the difference in the kinds of threat which the Polish commentators attribute to Germany and Russia. The former is thought to have an ambition to create own colonial system based on the economical exploitation of Central Europe. Russia, we could say traditionally, presents foremost a physical threat to the existence of Poland and the Latin civilization which Poland is to guard. Within this narrative framework Germany is

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[74] Luiza Dołęgowska, "Czym grozi udział Niemiec w projekcie Trójmorza? 'To powinno zapalić u nas wszystkie czerwone światełka,'" *Niezalezna*, August 31, 2018, https://niezalezna.pl/234649-czym-grozi-udzial-niemiec-w-projekcie-trojmorza-to-powinno-zapalic-u-nas-wszystkie-czerwone-swiatelka; Piotr Lewandowski, "Trójmorze na niemieckiej smyczy," *Ilustrowany Tygodnik Polski²*, October 2018, https://ilustrowanytygodnikpolski2.blogspot.com/2018/10/trojmorze-na-niemieckiej-smyczy.html; Zygmunt Korus, "Trójmorze – Polacy wpuszczają dobermana," *Nasze Blogi* (blog), August 29, 2018, https://naszeblogi.pl/51307-trojmorze-polacy-wpuszczaja-dobermana.

depicted as a superior, technologically more advanced power which, nevertheless, belongs to the same Western civilization. Russia, on the other hand, is the embodiment of an alien barbarous culture. Russia is Poland's significant "Other" which keeps being orientalized. These practices of "othering" and orientalization help to legitimate Poland's own civilizational belonging to Europe, or the West. In the case of Poland, the security discourse which plays such an important role in reproducing identity through foreign policy, is strongly connected to Germany and Russia.

The analysis of the gathered material shows that in the beginning of 21st century Germany and Russia are attributed with the same roles as hundred years ago. Ontological Security Theory helps to explain this considerable stickiness of historical images. After the successful 'return to Europe', i.e. joining NATO and EU, Poland faced a new challenge – to determine own identity within the European Union. The lack of consensus among the Polish political elites about the mid- and long-term strategy in foreign affairs resulted in lowering the sense of ontological security. This situation, in turn, made old cognitive and discursive routines characteristic for Poland's self-identification process again attractive. Reproducing stable, autobiographical narrative in the case of Poland feeds on "othering" and fearing both Germany and Russia. Paradoxically, the situation of a threat from both sides might be the most familiar to Poland's identity. And it's not the type of roles but their stability which brings sense of ontological security. Fearing German colonization and Russian aggression is the most familiar "environment". Seeking ontological comfort in well rooted images of external threats is stimulated also by the lack

of a coherent vision of own past. After 30 years since the Round Table Talks the Polish society is divided in its judgment about the communistic regime and the mode of transformation. The ongoing debates whether the Round Table was a "rotten compromise" or the "wisest thing the Polish elites ever done"[75] shows the depth and complexity of the dispute. The call for restoring justice is one of the main motives of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. Let's recall again Harnisch's remark that the lack of a stable relation with the historic Self favours reviving historical images. In the case of Poland, it locks its geopolitical thinking in a historical trap.

The references to the decaying Europe and the clash of civilization in which Poland plays the role of *Antemurale* has also its roots in the past. Remarkably enough, the critic of 'old Europe' as demoralized and Godless, compared to the ancient Rome, makes the narrative of Polish commentators resemble the Russian conservative turn.[76] Poland is to be the shield which protects the Latin civilization from Russia, while the latter is the shield which protects the whole exploited world from the Western hegemony. Both countries emphasize own moral superiority. Poland sees itself as the messenger of the free world. Freedom is also the motive of the discourse which serves "othering" Russia and draws the

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[75] Ewa Dąbrowska, "New Conservatism in Poland: The Discourse Coalition around Law and Justice," in *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*, ed. Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 92–112, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351020305-1.

[76] Alicja Curanović, "The Guardians of Traditional Values: Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Quest for Status," *2014-15 Series*, Transatlantic Academy Paper Series, no. 1 (February 2015), http://www.gmfus.org/file/5315/download; Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, "A New Russian Conservatism: Domestic Roots and Repercussions for Europe," *Notes Internacionals, CIDOB*, no. 93 (June 2014), https://www.cidob.org/en/content/download/56914/1464415/version/2/file/NOTES%2093_MAKARYCHEV_ANG1.pdf.

dividing line between free Europe and Poland as its guardian and Russia – non European autocracy. This image of Poland as a fighter for freedom and democracy is strictly connected to Russia. It's enough to mention that US's imperialistic policy never seriously bothered Poland and China's autocratic practices never stop Warsaw from developing bilateral economic cooperation. The relations with Russia, to be more precise, not any relations but tense and fueled with conflict, are a part of Poland's self-understanding; a part of its ontological security. Paradoxically as it may sound, Poland loads its ontological 'battery' in an efficient way, when it fears Russia and Germany. Under these circumstances Poland's Self is the easiest to determine. This observation welcomes a question whether Poland can be "true Self" without fearing its neighbors. This question may sound naïve after the annexation of Crimea and Russia's military involvement in Eastern Ukraine. However, it's important to point out that during 13 years which preceded these events there had never been in Poland a serious initiative to create a mode of cooperation for Warsaw, Berlin and Moscow, or a regional initiative which would include Russia. Such an initiative, should it ever appear, would present a challenge to the cognitive and discursive mechanisms well rooted in Poland's self-identification process. They would undermine mechanisms of viewing Germany as a 'devious colonizer' and Russia as a 'barbarous aggressor'.

There are many factors which influence today the Polish geopolitical thinking. Including identity and ontological security in the analysis of this state's behavior reveals the significance of the cognitive and discursive practices shaped, in some cases, over a

hundred years ago. A consensus within the elites is needed to overcome the historical entrapment of the geopolitical imaginary. Also a pinch of political courage is required to dare to let go the traditional security discourse. Working out a consistent vision of the most recent past would be the first step in the right direction. By 'working out' I don't mean a top-bottom initiative decreed by the government and announced to the people of Poland but rather a constructive debate motivated by the sense of common interest. Having presented the Polish dynamics, it would be interesting to see how other Central European countries have dealt with ontological anxiety during the last three decades. Have the access to the EU and NATO resulted in their case also in relying on the narratives rooted in history? This question, I believe, presents a new promising area of research for IR students.

Small and medium – sized states as an integral part of North Atlantic Treaty Organization and their importance for NATO

Dominika Trubenová – Jaroslav Ušiak[1]

Abstract

The article is dealing with the importance of small and medium – sized states for North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO as a security complex created by 29 European and north American states incorporates also small states which are, naturally, not as strong (military wise, economic power wise, etc.) as bigger states. So the question to ask is what is their importance in such a big alliance? How do they manage to complete the tasks given to them by the alliance itself? Therefore the aim of this study is to point out the importance of small and medium-sized states to North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The following study tends to analyze the acquisition of small and medium-sized states to NATO by using Visegrad countries and other small states as an example using domestic and foreign literature including monographs and studies.

Key words: *V4 countries, NATO partnership, NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, security, opportunities and challenges, small states, medium sized states*

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Introduction

The current forms of the world can look for challenges both in other countries and in international communities that combine their goals. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization /Alliance as a (mainly) military-political group of 29 countries all-around of Europe and of course, engaging the US with Canada. Looking at people who are not able to miss their diverse possibilities, other benefits may also be used. There is no question in this case - is there a "small" decision by states? If you want to learn more about safety and complex functioning, then can a large scale be achieved? Is it not for their incorporation into this state? The question of the current membership of small and medium-sized countries in the North Atlantic Alliance is highly advantageous and has many dimensions.

The presented study aims to briefly explain the importance of the Alliance and, consequently, the importance of individual - small and medium - sized states, which are an indivisible and necessary part of the Community of both regional and global importance, using a few examples of such states as NATO members. Subsequently, authors focus on the V4 countries as small and medium-sized states and the potential threats to them from NATO membership. The conclusion of the study deals with the case of the Slovak Republic as a small state successfully incorporated into the North Atlantic Alliance and the challenges / opportunities arising for Slovakia.

Many domestic and foreign authors deal with the security sector and security structures, as well as the issue of small states in international structures. Scientific works of authors such as Amadeo, Krejčí, Eichler, Grizold and many others have been very beneficial in this study by multiple points of view on this agenda. By analyzing the set issues present in both domestic and foreign works, it is possible to

deduce the state of the issue and thus create a profile of the position and participation of the small and medium sized states within the North Atlantic Alliance. At the same time, by deducing it is possible to set out the challenges for small and medium-sized Member States that arise for them from membership in an international organization such as the North Atlantic Alliance.

Historical context of NATO formation and connotations for today

The world destroyed in World War II immediately after its end worked in a kind of security vacuum and without any guarantees. The peace and individual demands of the countries or the recovery steps have yet to be formed, but Western Europe has begun to feel the need for security guarantees. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) also considered steps for the future on security and defense issues. As Holubová states in her book, *"the post-war period was characterized by profound structural changes also in the balance of power between traditional Western democracies and the emergence of a socialist system".*[2] The dynamics of the development of relations and individual attitudes of the winning countries in this period showed quite quickly the future direction of the international environment. As was clearly clear, the peace talks in Yalta and Potsdam did not prevent the alliance from being split and previous allies became two antagonist blocs. This incompatible spectrum of views ultimately led to the division of Europe by the so-called Iron Curtain (after 1948). However, if we look at the previous events, between 1945 and 1948, the action of the United States and the United Kingdom was inherently uniform, or the individual steps were mutually respected.

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[2] Mária Holubová, *Dejiny veľmocí v rokoch 1914–1945* (Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov, 2012), 114.

However, the USSR, on the other hand, at the time led by Stalin, was increasingly showing signs of deviating from common declarations and objectives. There was a split between capitalism and communism, which was also declared in individual speeches of statesmen "*If Stalin, in his February speech, indirectly identified capitalism with war, Churchill made a reference to appeasement in March that Western powers should not give way to him as they once did in the case of Hitler.*"[3] It was this fact that underlined the whole situation at the time and the need for a security guarantee. It was the ambition of the US and other countries to associate under NATO's leadership that appeared to be the most rational step to protect against undesirable influences, at that time the openly labeled USSR influence. However, an important fact was that the Alliance enrolled members in its ranks regardless of their "war" past, meaning that "*NATO as an institutional community brought together winners and losers from World War II*".[4]

Based on the mutual consensus of the Western Bloc countries, the founding treaty of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was signed on April 4, 1949 with the aim of associating countries based on democratic foundations and at the same time as protection against the influence of the USSR and the ideology of communism.

Anglo-Saxon Approach

Since the end of World War II, the Western European states, led by the United States of America, have had a firm idea of the functioning of the world and the organization of international order in

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[3] Pavol Petruf, "Atlantická poistka" (Bratislava: Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky, 2000), 13.
[4] Jan Eichler, *Mezinárodní bezpečnost v době globalizace* (Prague: Portál, 2009), 59.

the name of peaceful development and cooperation of states and post-war reconstruction. America, in particular, focused on this goal, as "*US foreign policy adhered to the principles of the Atlantic Charter and counted on the post-war cooperation of the winners on the basis of mutual trust*".[5] As the development of events later showed, the USSR decided to pave the way for post-war functioning, so "*the US must take the lead in the" free world "to stop the spread of communist power*".[6]

Thus, all the attention of the Western world has been on the one hand on the US leadership and on the other hand on effective assistance to states while balancing or detaining communism. This primary goal of the Alliance is also supported by Amadeo in his article, claiming that the main task was to protect member countries from USSR troops.[7] Within the range of measures, the Truman´s and Monroe´s doctrines were among the most important,[8] that were closely related to the above objectives. The next and very important step, which showed the attitude of the Western countries, and at the same time definitively confirmed the intention to associate countries in order to achieve and maintain collective security, "*in the second half of 1948 the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany and the establishment of a permanent military union in the Western world. In July 1948, negotiations began between the US, Canada and the states*

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[5] Petruf, "Atlantická poistka," 9.

[6] Peter Terem, *Vplyv EÚ a NATO na európsku a globálnu stabilitu a ich význam pre bezpečnosť SR* (Banská Bystrica: UMB, Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov, 2016), 71.

[7] „*NATO's primary purpose was to defend member nations against troops in pro-communist countries*" (Amadeo, 2018).

[8] Truman's Doctrine - March 12, 1947 - the doctrine of detention of communism; Monroe's Doctrine - June 5, 1947 - Economic Assistance to European Countries for Post-War Reconstruction - Countries of the (later) Eastern Bloc refused to force the program, which was a definite sign of the USSR's impact and the division of Europe (Terem et al., 2016).

of the Brussels Treaty".[9] These continual actions by Western countries led to the signing of the Washington Treaty on April 4, 1949, and thus to the emergence of NATO as a collective security organization.

Russia's perspective – response on NATO initiative

Russia has long since aspired to be a strong country, a regional power and a player of global importance. Such a position also includes the expansion of the territory, culture and other attributes, including strengthening the position of the military and armed forces.[10] At the end of World War II, the Russian Empire joined the victorious powers and thus participated in meetings and negotiations on the further direction of the world and political organization. Although the negotiations were in the spirit of a peaceful order, there was a conflict with the Western world, whose countries were subsequently concentrated under NATO's heading after 1949. This step has raised conflicting views and worries in the eyes of Russia. They began to feel the need to focus on building their own sphere of security as a response to the creation of the North Atlantic Alliance.

In 1955 the Warsaw Pact organization was established, bringing together the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under the leadership of the Soviet Union[11][12]. *"It was formally a reaction to the establishment of the Western European Union and the Paris*

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[9] States of the Brussels Treaty - United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Terem, *Vplyv EÚ a NATO na európsku a globálnu stabilitu*, 72.

[10] *"In February 1946, J.V. Stalin's speech spoke about the need to build an armed industry and the necessity of a conflict between capitalism and socialism. He stressed the need for a rapid economic recovery of the country to prepare for this conflict*." Ibid., 70. Even at that time, even this manifestation showed a split opinion on the future of the world, which was subsequently reflected in the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain.

[11] In abbreviation – „USSR"

[12] Specifically, these included Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Democratic Republic of Germany, Poland and Romania.

Agreement allowing the Federal Republic of Germany to join NATO. In fact, however, the aim was to consolidate the USSR's control over the Eastern bloc."[13] Thus, although the primary aim of this grouping was to synchronize the policies of the countries and thus create a functional system of collective security in the eastern part of the world, this union was often attributed with "*aggressive, expansive character based on aggressive communist ideology*".[14]

On the other hand, before the signing of the treaty in April 1949, however, the USSR addressed a memorandum to the Western governments in which they openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the Alliance and at the same time that the establishment of NATO severely violated signed treaties with Russia (USSR). In general, therefore, we can say that through the eyes of Russia - it was "provoked" by the West to take individual steps and thus to the subsequent creation of the Warsaw Pact. Also, "*the present theoretical work classifies the emergence of the Warsaw Pact and thus the institutionalization of bipolar antagonism rather than a crisis, emergency solution, a way out of the imbalance*".[15] Although the creation of the Warsaw Pact[16] as a step towards addressing the emerging imbalance situation, it was able to maintain its existence throughout the Cold War. Although it was a uniting element in the given period, it did not avoid problems and inconveniences[17] that later led to the disintegration of the WP, were not avoided. After the fall of

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[13] Dagmar Hoscheková, *Bezpečnostné komplexy: bezpečnosť na európskom kontinente* (Banská Bystrica: Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov, 2011), 31.
[14] Jana Lasicová and Jaroslav Ušiak, *Bezpečnosť ako kategória* (Bratislava: Veda, 2012), 202.
[15] Ibid.
[16] In abbreviation – „WP"
[17] This includes, for example, interventions in Hungary, the CSSR, and the coup in Poland, as well as social and economic problems and the backwardness of countries compared to the West.

the Berlin Wall in 1989, there is also a break-up of WP and subsequently the end of the existence of the USSR itself.

Relations between Russia and the North Atlantic Alliance itself have undergone evolution and various changes over the years, whether there were negative or positive situations that shaped this relationship. Nowadays, the international community is experiencing tensions between the two actors, stemming mainly from NATO's further eastward expansion, while "*Russia has criticized NATO as a remnant of the Cold War and continues to ask who this alliance is aimed at*".[18] However, the fact remains that NATO, as a security grouping of European countries along with the Atlantic countries, remains a "thorn in the eye", while "*the current National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020 points to the unfounded existing global and regional architecture NATO-oriented Euro-Atlantic area*"[19]

Thus, as in the past, Russia still longs to hold a firm position in the international sphere, while at the same time participating and actively forming part of the European Security Agenda. It is the creation of the Alliance that raises skepticism and fears of further expanding the membership on the Russian side, leading to various political steps, as we can see today. Pressure is increasing and further attention will need to be paid to individual factors and events that result in the formation and change of the relationship between an important contemporary international player such as NATO and the Russian Federation, which in the eyes of ordinary people remains the successor of the extinct USSR.

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[18] Alena Budveselová, "Historické postavenie Ruska v systéme európskej bezpečnosti," in *Bezpečnostné fórum 2014*, ed. Jaroslav Ušiak, Jana Lasicová, and Dávid Kollár (Banská Bystrica: Belianum, 2014), 432.

[19] Ibid., 433.

The importance of the Alliance for member countries and its basic functions

Although there was no counterpart as the Warsaw Pact Organization in the post-Cold War era, the justification for maintaining the Alliance's existence is still visible today and is still seen as a very important component of the global political and security sphere. It continues to prove its important position in deploying forces in peacekeeping operations in many regions of the world, as well as a subsidiary for other organizations. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the group of States is, by its common strength, a greater competitor than each individual State would be.

In essence, the North Atlantic Alliance is an organization that forms the essential part of a stable security environment in Europe and the entire transatlantic environment based on developing democratic institutions and a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. It also relies on the United Nations Charter for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and Article 1 of the founding Washington Treaty which states that any international dispute must be resolved by actors "*so as not to jeopardize international peace, security and justice and refrain from threats in their international relations. force or use of force in any way incompatible with the objectives of the United Nations*".[20]

At the same time, in accordance with Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Alliance serves as a transatlantic forum for consultation between Allies on any issues affecting the vital interests

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[20] *Príručka NATO* (Brussels: Office of information and press, 2001), 563.

of its members, including the development of an international environment that may ultimately jeopardize their security interest.

In addition to its primary objective - to secure and maintain peace and peaceful functioning in the world - the Alliance's activities are committed to many other goals, namely:

- providing deterrence and defense against any form of aggression against the territory of any NATO member state - this function or capability is also referred to Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, while Member States will maintain and develop both individual and collective capability to resist armed attack;[21]

- maintaining a strategic balance in Europe - Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty - actively engaging in the creation of a stable and peaceful functioning of the world together with the development of democratic structures and institutions, while promoting cooperation for the development of countries;

- maintaining sufficient military force to prevent wars and maintain effective defense - building up the armed forces of each Member State that are interoperable and compatible with each other and capable of deploying operations in the event of peace threats or the need to restore them;

- creating the ability to deal with crises affecting the security of its members - partly linked to the aforementioned Article 3 of the Treaty but also to the following Article 4 - this provides for joint consultations in case of threats to Member States;

- supporting in an active way for dialogue with other nations and a cooperative approach to European security issues - we see this

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[21] Jiří Fidler and Petr Mareš, *Dějiny NATO* (Prague: Pasenka, 1997).

goal as a priority in functional partnership programs with many countries around the world, p.ex. the Mediterranean Dialogue, the NATO-Russia Council or the creation of many specifically oriented and assembled groups; this can also be supported by measures aimed at making progress on arms control and disarmament.

Based on the Alliance's primary objectives and activities mentioned above, we can define its core functions:

- protective and defensive function - the primary function on which the whole existence of the Alliance is based, and that NATO is working to create a collective security system that works on peaceful and democratic principles with the active participation of all its members in order to prevent conflicts while protecting the territory of the Alliance from attacks by third countries;

- developing function - each member country has the right to development, while the Alliance promotes cooperation between countries, while at the same time demands a degree of development for successful functionality through active member contributions.

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The importance of small and medium-sized states for NATO

Although it may seem that membership of small[22] and medium-sized states in an organization as NATO is just a continuation of policy

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[22] When it comes to small states, it should be remembered that "*a small state cannot ensure security on its own resources and that it must rely quite fundamentally on the assistance of other states or institutions.*" Dalibor Vlček, "Postavenie malých štátov v svetovom politickom systéme – ich niektoré špecifiká," in *Bezpečnostné fórum 2014: zborník vedeckých prác*, ed. Jaroslav Ušiak et al. (Banská Bystrica: Vydavateľstvo Univerzity Mateja Bela; Belianum, 2014), 338. At the same time, Krejčí claims that small states are those "*whose lack of power does not allow them to*

without pursuing a larger goal, the opposite is true. Although it is known that contributions to the functioning of the Alliance and hence the development is not identical in all countries, all countries are still partners that make up the organization as a functioning and important whole in the current international environment. However, it is necessary to realize that "*the issue of small states, their usually limited power potential, as well as the ability to realize their foreign policy goals, has its specifics, resulting not only from their economic capabilities but also other determinants of international relations / political, military, security, demographic, geographic, and more/. These are the determinants that determine their position in the world political system*".[23] So looking at the function of these states in the organization, based on historical development, we can define a number of reasons.

The first and perhaps the most important and often mentioned reason is an ideological factor. The Alliance is united under democracy and peace, led by the United States (which "pushes" democracy policy through NATO law) and its main feature is to operate on the basis of the democratic values of society and the state. In the past, the priority was to suppress communist ideology. The ideological background of democracy in the world is the largest compared to the past, and part of democracy is also the association and cooperation of states, which goes hand in hand with security.

Another, no less important factor is the geographical importance of expanding NATO membership. As Article 10 of the Washington

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participate in creating a European balance" (Krejčí, 2009, p.319) and also that "*small states are successful in world politics only when they become proclaimers of the interests of the great powers*". Oskar Krejčí, *Geopolitika středoevropského prostoru. Pohled z Prahy a Bratislavy* (Prague: Pofessional Publishing, 2009), 319; 323.

[23] Vlček, "Postavenie malých štátov v svetovom politickom systéme," 337.

Treaty foresees, the Alliance continues to pursue an open door policy and embraces all countries that can contribute to the development and maintenance of collective security. At the same time, the impact of the Alliance is important in this factor. The Alliance includes Western European and Central European countries, with the gradual inclusion of the Balkan countries. Geographically, almost all of Europe is covered, from its northern parts to the southernmost, from terrestrial to coastal states. It is this factor that is important for both operational and new partnerships - NATO is able to function thanks to small / medium-sized states[24] in a large number of types of environments which makes it (NATO) more important.

If we look at the potential of these states, it is clear that these states are often constrained by their own power of the economy, by the amount of GDP, or by many other factors. But "*especially small states are usually less of a threat to their neighbors and often have a greater degree of loyalty from their own citizen*s" and at the same time, "*small states can prosper economically better*".[25]

But what undoubtedly remains an advantage and a pulling power of individual states is specialization. In his paper, Vlček described this ability of small states as "*The role of an expert: as it is difficult to influence a wide range of problems, they try to focus on a specific area and become excellent experts in it*".[26] Although small states (quite naturally and logically) cannot meet every single requirement,[27] there

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[24] On the other hand, small states will be able to prevent and face possible threats, in particular on the basis of international cooperation and thus NATO membership. Krejčí, *Geopolitika středoevropského prostoru*.

[25] Vlček, "Postavenie malých štátov v svetovom politickom systéme," 339.

[26] Ibid., 340.

[27] This fact is also confirmed by Krejčí when he specifically says that "*The Czech Republic and Slovakia have little power potential. Although it is comparable to each other and also to Austria and Hungary, but it is negligible when compared with Germany, Russia, but also with Ukrain*." Krejčí, *Geopolitika středoevropského prostoru*, 338.

will always be experts and specialists who ultimately excel in a number of other nations, so that countries can stack together the full spectrum of specialists and expert groups needed for the Alliance to operate under any conditions and successfully meet its goals and requirements of the international environment. We see this advantage most in the armed forces and military groups operating under the flag of NATO. Small and medium-sized states are not able to typologically cover all military units, but specialize in specific capabilities and knowledge, which in turn contribute greatly to peacekeeping in the world.

If we look at the specific cases of small NATO member states and their significance - besides Slovakia, it is possible to find them. Burden in his work, he analyzes Albania (also marginally mentioning Croatia, as it joined the same year) as a case study, which itself became a member in 2009.[28] This example shows the contribution of small states to the Alliance, the fulfillment of commitments and active participation in the tasks. We can also mention the example of Slovenia in an article by A. Grizold, who argues that "*by working together, by pooling resources, by specializing, even the smallest countries can contribute to the military capabilities of NATO – and Slovenia will not be an exception*".[29] Urbelis points to the example of Lithuania, Denmark and, indeed, the Baltic States, on which he builds its study of how small states are successful in NATO structures - on the example of Denmark, specifically as one of the most successful

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[28] Brandon Burden, "NATO's Small States: Albania as a Case Study," Naval Postgradual School, 2016,
https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/51657/16Dec_Burden_Brandon.pdf?seque
nce=1&isAllowed=y.
[29] Anton Grizold, "NATO and the Contribution of Small States," *Politico*, November 20, 2002,
https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-and-the-contribution-of-small-states/.

states in operations of International Crisis Management.[30] These are some of the many examples of small European states that have successfully integrated and perform tasks alongside larger and stronger European states.

Potential threats and opportunities to the V4 countries arising from NATO membership

As the V4 countries are relatively small states and do not have a directly named enemy, the threats to these countries stem primarily from changes in the international environment. The current change in the security situation is mainly due to Russia's position and change in the nature of its external behavior, developments in the Balkans, and the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East.

Looking back at the past years and the evolution of Russia's position, we can clearly observe the increasing aggression in both speeches and proceedings. A groundbreaking, negative point in Russia's actions is in particular the events in Ukraine since 2014 and later also the gathering of force along the borders with NATO member countries. In this we see the greatest threat from Russia - its military strength and size, as well as its ability to react quickly and often inadequately. As the V4 countries are neighbors/ the nearest States to Ukraine, it is more important to closely monitor the situation and maintain stable and consistent positions with other NATO countries in the event of joint action against Russia. However, tensions do not seem to diminish so soon, as many analysts have said that the current tensions between Russia and the West have been greatest since the

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[30] Vaidotas Urbelis, "The Relevance and Influence of Small States in NATO and the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy," *Lithuanian Annaul Strategic Review* 13, no. 1 (2015): 61–78, https://doi.org/10.1515/lasr-2015-0004.

Cold War, and that is why the V4 must remain prepared for any possible evolution in this relationship as full members of the Alliance.

Development in the Balkans means, on the one hand, the integration of countries into NATO (which is, however, a positive factor) and, on the other hand, the persisting inter-ethnic conflicts. Let us mention, for example, the constant problem with the issue of Kosovo and its recognition both by Serbia and by the rest of the world. In the past, there have been many major conflicts, including the beginning of the First World War. It is not in vain that this region is called a "barrel of gunpowder" and has been perceived as a hotspot in Europe. It was created mainly by sharpening and growing nationalism among the Balkan states. Therefore, the direction of the region will be very questionable in the future, but its integration can be a stabilizing element. Bugajski speaks of the Balkan region in the eyes of America as a threat to regional stability and European integrity, identifying the Russia's presence in the region as the main reason, and stressing the need to avoid the escalation of the situation.[31] The region may be a threat to the V4 from the perspective of Article 5 of the Treaty in the case of a conflict; we can also mention the geographical proximity and the fact that there are several Visegrad communities in the region; and, last but not least, the V4 Armed Forces in missions in the region cannot be forgotten.

In today's world ranking of economic powers, the US and China are at the top two. As forecasts and analysts' statements show, China as a potential world power may overtake the US in the coming years. World media, such as The Diplomat, The National Interest and Forbes, are also expressing a change in the balance of power between

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[31] *„To prevent a dangerous spiral of escalation"* Janusz Bugajski, "Balkan Security and U.S. Strategy," CEPA, January 22, 2018, https://www.cepa.org/balkan-security-and-us-trategy.

the two countries, with the phrase "*China beats US in global leadership*" increasingly ringing. The key, in this case, is the magnitude of the force and the speed of the country's development. As we can see, the pace of economic development in China is becoming rapid and slightly unpredictable, and therefore the possible first position of the economic power in the world is increasingly closer to that country. In the case of overall power, it is also important to mention its assertiveness, which is also increasing - the more it becomes more involved in international affairs and expresses its positions, compared to its past, when it focused primarily on its internal political affairs. Although China has a fairly good relationship with the V4, also thanks to its many investments, its possible further economic and thus complex power growth may affect the power structure in the world and thus may trigger changes in NATO positions. If we look at this in a comprehensive way, in the case of a negative view of this factor, it may be essentially a cycle: China will become a world leader - a change in power structure - a change in NATO's response to China and possible negative steps against China's growing assertiveness - threatening good relations with the V4 and thus threatening the economy. So it is basically a closed circle, which may not happen, but as forecasts, as we have already mentioned, show that China's position change is highly anticipated in the coming years.

In addition to Russia, the Middle East and the possible change in China's position, the Islamic world is also of greatest concern to ordinary people, while the (violent) spread of their religion - terrorist attacks are becoming synonymous with a security threat. The threat of terrorism is now seen as a global problem, and it is „*the deliberate use of violence to create fear and to force public administrations or society to do or not to do something. The aims of terrorism are*

ideological, religious or political in nature".[32] The threat is not based on geography or the attractiveness of the environment for V4, but stems from the unpredictability of these activities, since all past attacks have occurred in several European cities and it is not possible to predict their future occurrence as well as individual time spacing between them. The fact remains that "*the European Security Strategy has made terrorism one of the key threats to Europe's security. Terrorism is a strategic threat to the whole of Europe*".[33] As Kristian also states in his article, there is no strict rule to define a country more vulnerable to the threat of terrorism.[34] Rather, it is the nature of the population - its composition, and the author of this article indirectly touches on the issue of migration and population mixing as one of the possible reasons for the terrorist threat. For example, Switzerland or Ireland are relatively safe in this perspective. From this point of view - homogeneity of the population is a factor that reduces the risk of this threat, but in the V4 countries, for example in Slovakia, anti-terrorist units are created, which should play an important role in preventing attacks in the territory.

Globalization "*is a dynamic process, removing barriers and wiping borders, linking states and continents, and creating a whole new framework for international security relations*".[35] However, if we look at globalization in the context of security, it can inherently contribute to the emergence of security risks or threats. Returning, for example,

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[32] Eichler, *Mezinárodní bezpečnost v době globalizace*, 172.

[33] Vladimír Tarasovič, Róbert Ondrejcsák, and Ľubomír Lupták, eds., *Panoráma globálneho bezpečnostného prostredia 2003–2004* (Bratislava: Inštitút bezpečnostných a obranných štúdií Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky, 2005), 293, http://www.cenaa.org/data/cms/panorama-2004-20051.pdf.

[34] Bonnie Kristian, "Many European Countries Have No Terrorism Problem. Why?," *The Week*, July 18, 2017, https://theweek.com/articles/703673/many-european-countries-have-no-terrorism-problem-why.

[35] Eichler, *Mezinárodní bezpečnost v době globalizace*, 99.

to the threat of terrorism, in today's globalized world it is much easier and faster to spread, as countries and their systems are interconnected, there is free movement (if it is an EU), and an attack in all other NATO / EU countries are hit by all others countries along with a rapid increase in threats. This can also be understood through Fukuyama's concept of globalization as the end of history – "*we are at the end of history because there is only one system that will continue to be dominant in world politics and that is the liberal system of the democratic West*".[36] With this statement, we go back to the greatest "enemy" of today's terrorist-oriented groups - Muslim – the liberal democracy and liberal rules that unite the countries of Europe, which of course include the V4 countries. Globalization and interconnection of the world is one of the reasons why several V4 security measures have been taken in the V4 territory. So, naturally, the V4 feels more vulnerable in a globalized world though, on the other hand - which is paradoxically, safer.

The impact of environmental problems on the evolution of the international environment will increase in the future as the face of the world is changing and there are increasing problems p.ex. with the availability of drinking water, the drying up of watercourses, but also the increasing incidence of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and many other environmental problems. These environmental problems, especially as regards the availability of drinking water and watercourses, often increase into conflicts over these resources. However, unfavorable living conditions may also have an impact on the growth of migration, which, in addition to natural conditions, may also be caused by the state of war in the country of origin (at present

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[36] Ibid., 101.

we mean the situation in the Middle East). We are currently watching, experiencing and trying to cope with the great refugee crisis, where millions of people are flowing into Europe with the prospect of a better life. Their goal is mostly western countries and the V4 countries are mostly transit countries only. However, it should be noted here, although the V4 is not the aim that "*uncontrollable refugee waves with the possibility of going into criminal activities in this territory pose a security risk*".[37] Migration-related criminal activities include, for example, smuggling (multiple cases recorded); theft and looting or antisocial behavior (incapacity and resulting problems). However, if we compare the impact of the migration phenomenon on selected V4 countries - for example Slovakia with the situation in Hungary, we find that the situation is diametrically different and in Hungary migration represents a far greater security threat than in Slovakia and brings problems to the internal political functioning of the state along with an increase of xenophobic tendencies.

Another potential threat is the growing disintegration tendencies in Europe, currently represented mainly by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, as well as the debated issue of Catalonia's separatism. Under the Security Agenda, we understand the greatest impact of this disintegration process on the impact on the EU's ability to generate battle groups to respond to individual crisis situations. The British Army has an estimated 150,000 active soldiers and a defense budget of around $ 55 billion.[38] But what happens when they leave the Union? The balance of power will change, the volume of possible funds will be reduced, and

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[37] Petruf, "Atlantická poistka," 65.

[38] "Najväčšie vojenské mocnosti. Pozrite si 15 najsilnejších armád sveta," *HN Slovensko*, March 7, 2017, https://hnonline.sk/svet/922401-najvacsie-vojenske-mocnosti-pozrite-si-15-najsilnejsich-armad-sveta.

therefore the requirements for individual contributions may increase, which may also have a negative impact on the V4 countries. It is therefore quite possible that in the future the mandatory obligation will grow to more than 2% of GDP and this can have a disastrous impact on the state of the economy and on the development of the V4 armed forces.

At the present time, we see a great demand within the Alliance for the ability of individual armies to cooperate together, and there are other obligations that follow. Although the variation of technology and thus the issue of commitment can be seen as a potential negative, it can also be viewed as an opportunity for the armed forces of the V4 countries. Due to changes in the international environment, it is necessary to pay increased attention to the arming and material equipment of the armed forces so that they can effectively fulfill the set tasks in the context of collective defense and in connection with changes in the security environment. In essence, we can even understand this as a kind of motivational element.

Another attribute that should be emphasized is the motivation of small states´ citizens to be responsible for the security environment of the state in order to develop national awareness in them with an emphasis on their willingness to defend their homeland. Raising this awareness could be ensured by various civil-military activities, in which the security situation and possible development scenarios, with an emphasis on civilian involvement, would be brought closer to the general population (as not everyone is interested in watching TV or news reading). It is important that the armed forces of states also have active support in the ranks of ordinary citizens who could help defend their country if necessary. Again for comparison, the example of Denmark is shown, where the emphasis is also placed on the system

of civil-military cooperation. A. Dalgaard-Nielsen in her study, she describes several aspects of the Danish environment that have triggered the need for civilian and military cooperation - for example, mentioning terrorism, natural disasters, and various other threats. It emphasizes training, education and information sharing. She refers to this cooperation as an increasingly important component of maintaining national security.[39]

The current position of the US in NATO is putting increasing emphasis on the development of the EU capabilities and capabilities. How we can see since the arrival of Donald Trump in the chair of the US President, USA is increasingly talking about reducing contributions to NATO [40] to the level of 2% of GDP, with Europe taking responsibility for its security itself. It brings more responsibility to the states of Europe, who should try to rely on themselves, their troops, skills and knowledge. Interestingly, the downward trend in US contributions is already mentioned by Hrivík in his contribution from 1997 and that "*a significant signal is also the significantly declining amounts that the US is planning to invest in NATO enlargement, including the modernization of the armed forces of new members*".[41] There is also a demand for V4 countries to increase its quality, which can contribute to increasing collective security, especially for European countries. However, this must be seen not as an obligation

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[39] Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Culture of Cooperation? Civil–Military Relations in Danish Homeland Security*, DIIS Working Paper, 2006/2 (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006), https://www.diis.dk/files/media/documents/publications/2_adn_culture_of_cooperation.pdf.

[40] Zeneli also commented on this topic in his article for The National Interest, describing why Europe can no longer rely on US funding. Valbona Zeneli, "Why NATO's European Members Can No Longer Expect America to Pick Up the Bill," *The National Interest*, November 26, 2017, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-natos-european-members-can-no-longer-expect-america-pick-23351.

[41] P. Hrivík, "Integrácia Slovenskej republiky do bezpečnostných štruktúr" (Bratislava: Stála konferencia slovenskej inteligencie Slovakia plus, 1997), 25.

but as an opportunity to improve and thus improve their position and competitiveness, so that the armed forces can increasingly and better represent V4 on international grounds and present itself as a reliable and strong partner with modern armed forces.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to demonstrate, based on the analysis, the justified need to integrate small and medium-sized states into the North Atlantic Alliance as full members. Although small states are weaker players on their own, on a world map integrated into transnational complexes such as the North Atlantic Alliance, they can perform tasks effectively and continuously and thus contribute to the maintenance of international order.

As could be seen in the study, there are several examples of states where it is possible to confirm the need to integrate such countries into the Alliance - these countries excel in their specialization and specifically targeted characteristics, which make these states irreplaceable parts of this security complex. Also thanks to such partially oriented member states, NATO is able to respond to the changes that the present world and present international environment is bringing more and more often.

We have shown in the study based on analysis that the membership of small and medium-sized states in the Alliance is a legitimate element that helps maintain the stability of the Euro-Atlantic environment. At the same time, the study revealed several challenges, but also threats to the Visegrad countries, which are examples of small and medium-sized countries.

Nowadays, it is questionable how the international community will evolve in the future in such a strongly interconnected and

globalized world, the fact remains that small and medium-sized states are and will be important partners in security structures such as NATO. However, there are many obligations for the V4 countries arising from this partnership, an important aspect is the challenges and opportunities that the rapidly changing environment brings. Among the most important challenges with regard to the security of the Alliance and the States themselves, are, for example, civil-military cooperation with an emphasis on support from the national population, as well as the importance of modernizing the V4 armed forces for their interoperability with the armed forces of other Member States in the missions of the international crisis management, which ultimately goes hand in hand with the amount of contribution to the Alliance.

However, at the same time, we shouldn´t forget about many emerging threats to which the V4 must respond flexibly, in cooperation with other partners. In the future, it appears that changing China's position, as well as the increasingly assertiveness of the Russian Federation, can bring changes in the international environment, which may affect states' security in a negative direction, whether in the military-political dimension or in the economic dimension at the same time. Terrorism and disintegration tendencies are equally important concepts that will need to be increasingly addressed and at the same time preventive plans and activities of states will be needed to maintain security.

Therefore, it can be said that the continual expansion of the Alliance to include new members - especially small and medium-sized states - is beneficial and necessary for its functioning nowadays and also in the future, as the evolution of the security environment is difficult to predict, and to meet the new challenges, it is necessary to

maintain a stable environment with the assistance of all participating states, which inherently include small and medium-sized states such as V4.

Supporters

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