

TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY INITIATIVE

THE VOICES OF CENTRAL AND
EASTERN EUROPE



IRI INTERNATIONAL
REPUBLICAN
INSTITUTE
Advancing Democracy Worldwide

Transatlantic Security Initiative – The Voices of Central and Eastern Europe

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Attn: Department of External Affairs

International Republican Institute

1225 Eye Street NW, Suite 800

Washington, DC 20005

info@iri.org

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TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY INITIATIVE – THE VOICES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

In order to ensure a strong Transatlantic Alliance, the International Republican Institute (IRI) gathered participants from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia to form the inaugural class of Transatlanticists dedicated to preserving and strengthening the Transatlantic Alliance and the democratic values it stands for.

The program included work visits and expert discussions. Throughout the year, participants not only discussed the security challenges to Transatlantic cooperation and values, but they also gained first-hand experience in emerging threats to Atlanticism and to democratic institutions by travelling to “hot spots,” visiting some of the region’s capitals, and making study visits to NATO’s forward areas of operation. These visits included excursions to Estonia, along the border of Russia’s Western Military District, and a visit to the Georgian–South Ossetian Administrative Boundary Line. In both countries, participants were briefed by decision-makers, military and defense experts, and elected officials on the emerging threats facing their countries. Participants were also able to attend a series of workshops in the Visegrád 4 region. Through these study visits and a series of workshops around the region, participants discussed the emerging threats Europe’s democracies and the Transatlantic relationship face, using the widest possible perspectives and with the region’s decision-makers and best analysts.

The contents of this paper are the result of a collaborative effort to share the main lessons learned by program participants from September 2020 until December 2021. It also aims to provide the perspective of each participant’s respective country on the security issues facing both their country and the Transatlantic Alliance at large. Our goal in publishing these insights is to give a platform to the new generation of Atlanticists; a place for them to share their train of thought and get involved.

It is important to note that this collection of essays was written in late 2021, months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Transatlantic Security Initiative strongly condemns Russia’s military assault and stands with the people of the free democratic Ukraine. Though this report does not directly address the new challenges presented by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, we would like to acknowledge the drastic impact the invasion has had and will continue to have on the European security space. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Europe has been thrust into a new security architecture. Participants of the Transatlantic Security Initiative are dedicated to confronting and tackling the challenges presented as a result of the invasion and will continue to support the growth and preservation of free democracy on the European continent.

NATO STRATEGIC CONCEPT 2022: TOWARDS A MORE RESILIENT ALLIANCE

Matej Kandrik

With thirty member states on two continents, NATO forms a broad and diverse community. While discussing specifics related to building capabilities, budgetary needs for military planning, deterrence, or the role of new technologies, we tend to forget that NATO is first and foremost a security organization, which could not be effective without a strong political underpinning. A mixture of interests and values always drives politics, they are the lifeblood of any political community. If they are not shared, every action can be undermined by tension, mistrust, and reluctance. Framing the discussion this way, it is clear how severe and potentially crippling a deterioration of unity for NATO can be. Therefore, the renewal of shared values and interests is the key to solving the challenges posed by disunity and low cohesion. Countries sought and continue to seek NATO membership first and foremost because of the promise of collective defense. This is the *raison d'être* of the Alliance.¹

As the recent weaponization of migration by Belarus's Lukashenka regime against Poland and Lithuania shows, the distinction between threats specific to the eastern flank versus threats specific to NATO's southern flank is artificial. The countries of the V4 (or the Visegrád Group, consisting of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) need to learn this lesson especially. They are in a region of Europe where finding a common interest and shared threat perception is a persistent problem. If the security of member states is indivisible, then the shared interest of collective security must serve as an anchor in political consultations between allies. There is no other way to reach a clear consensus with thirty member states except to engage in extensive and often lengthy discussions. This is the price for the Alliance, but one well worth paying.

Therefore, it is important to consider structuring and focusing the consultations between allies in a way that increases their added value and effectiveness. The "regionalization" of internal discussions can help to produce better threat perception analysis and strategic prioritization. Setting up, for example, regional advisory working groups under the North Atlantic Council (NAC) may serve as diversification platforms, may help to specify various, multiple challenges simultaneously, and produce regular reports for the NAC.

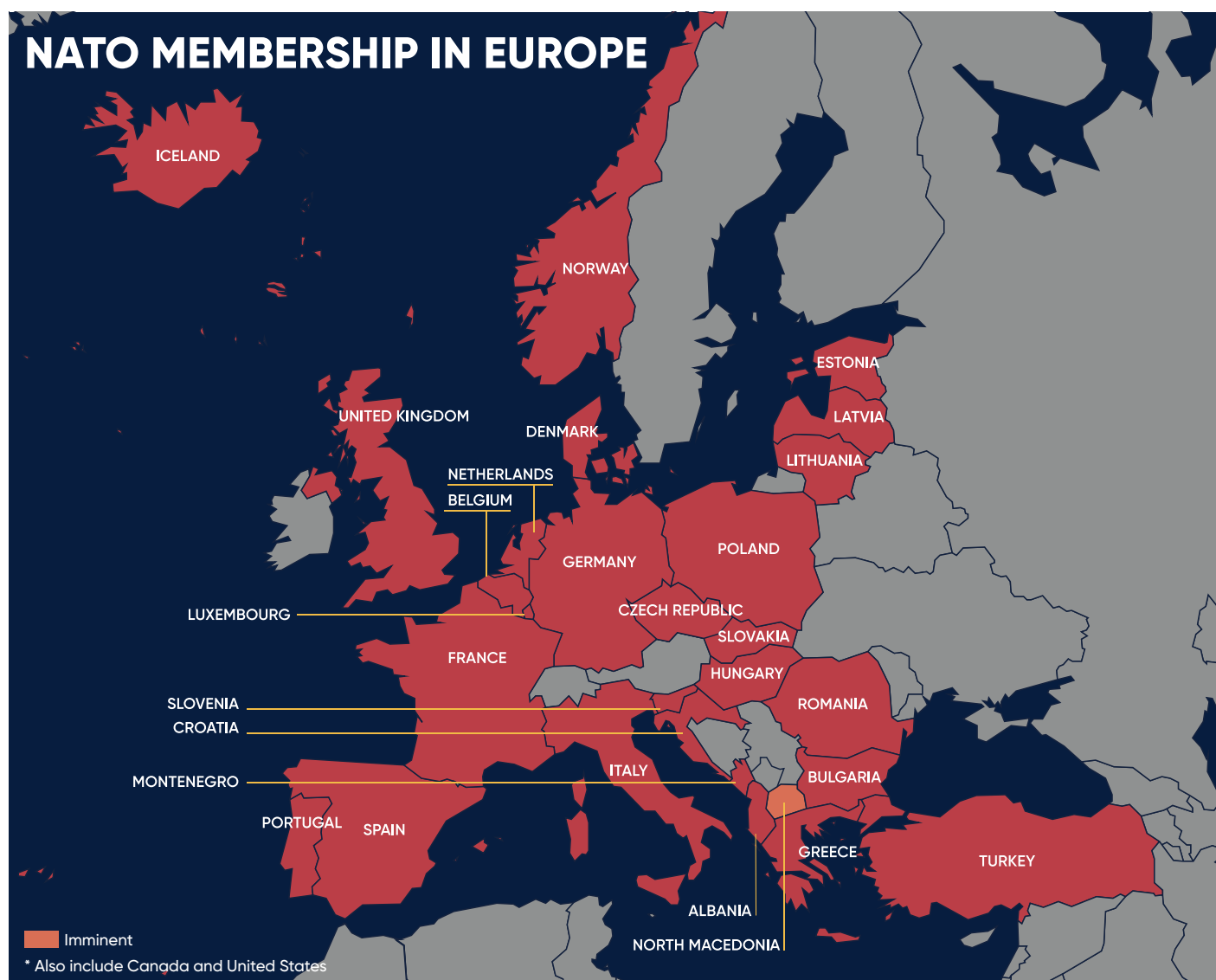
Multi-layered resilience and a comprehensive defense offer the best guidance to prepare for a highly dynamic, uncertain, complex, and volatile security environment. In synergy, these create a unique quality of resilience. If we cannot be sure what lies ahead, our best option is to be flexible, ready to adapt, and to build smart capabilities.

The applicability of resilience as a guiding concept is surprisingly broad. It includes civil preparedness, crisis response and management, critical infrastructure (both real-world and digital/cyber), traditional deterrence and institutions, as well as political processes. Resilience is a key part of the answer to most emerging security challenges, and it offers an essential element for dealing with conventional military threats. It can be helpful for the impacts of climate change, of man-made, as well as natural disasters, of vulnerabilities to hybrid and cyber threats, and to challenges created by emerging, disruptive technologies.

¹ This, of course, does not mean a depreciation of NATO's other functions and dimensions, such as, for example, crisis management or collaborative security dimensions. These too are vital and necessary for the success of the organization.

To master resilience, we must build it on firm conceptual foundations, on comprehensive understanding, and on an appreciation of its holistic nature. For effective application of the concept of resilience, it must be included in the mindset of political decision-makers, military planners, and strategists. Therefore, it is vital for NATO's new Strategic Concept to include a chapter dedicated to the challenge of building resilience.

A separate chapter on resilience could act as a cornerstone, offering a firm understanding and direction on how the Alliance aims to use its understanding of resilience as a backbone of its security and defense policies. NATO's new Strategic Concept is a great opportunity to provide a comprehensive definition of, as well as the basic requirements for, resilience, beyond the currently expressed seven requirements for civil preparedness. For this, a team of experts and of a group of institutions should be dedicated to exploring the concept of resilience, to exchange insight and best practices and to conduct further research. Setting up a central hub dedicated to resilience, a new Center of Excellence in Resilience (CER), is worth considering. Both the network of experts and institutions and the CER need to be placed in a whole-of-the-society approach to bring together public, private, and civil sectors. The involvement of NATO's partners and, especially, the European Union offers great potential for exploring further steps and synergies in promoting and strengthening the resilience of member states and of NATO as the organizer of its members' collective security.



CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND THE REALITY OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Pavel Havlíček

Central and Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) and the EU's Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) are currently going through a period of turbulent challenges. The West (the EU and NATO) has not yet found the political will for an adequate response to these challenges. Belarus's official suspension of participation in Eastern Partnership projects and activities provides a recent example of this.²

The most prominent trends in the region (prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine):

- ♦ A rapidly deepening diversification of regional attitudes towards the West and different political models (i.e., transitional electoral democracy vs. consolidated authoritarian regimes),³
- ♦ The increasing role of societal polarization and domestic political turbulence,
- ♦ Rising instability provoked by Russia's aggressive security policy and its support for anti-democratic and anti-Western political forces,
- ♦ The growing prominence and engagement of China and Turkey in the region.

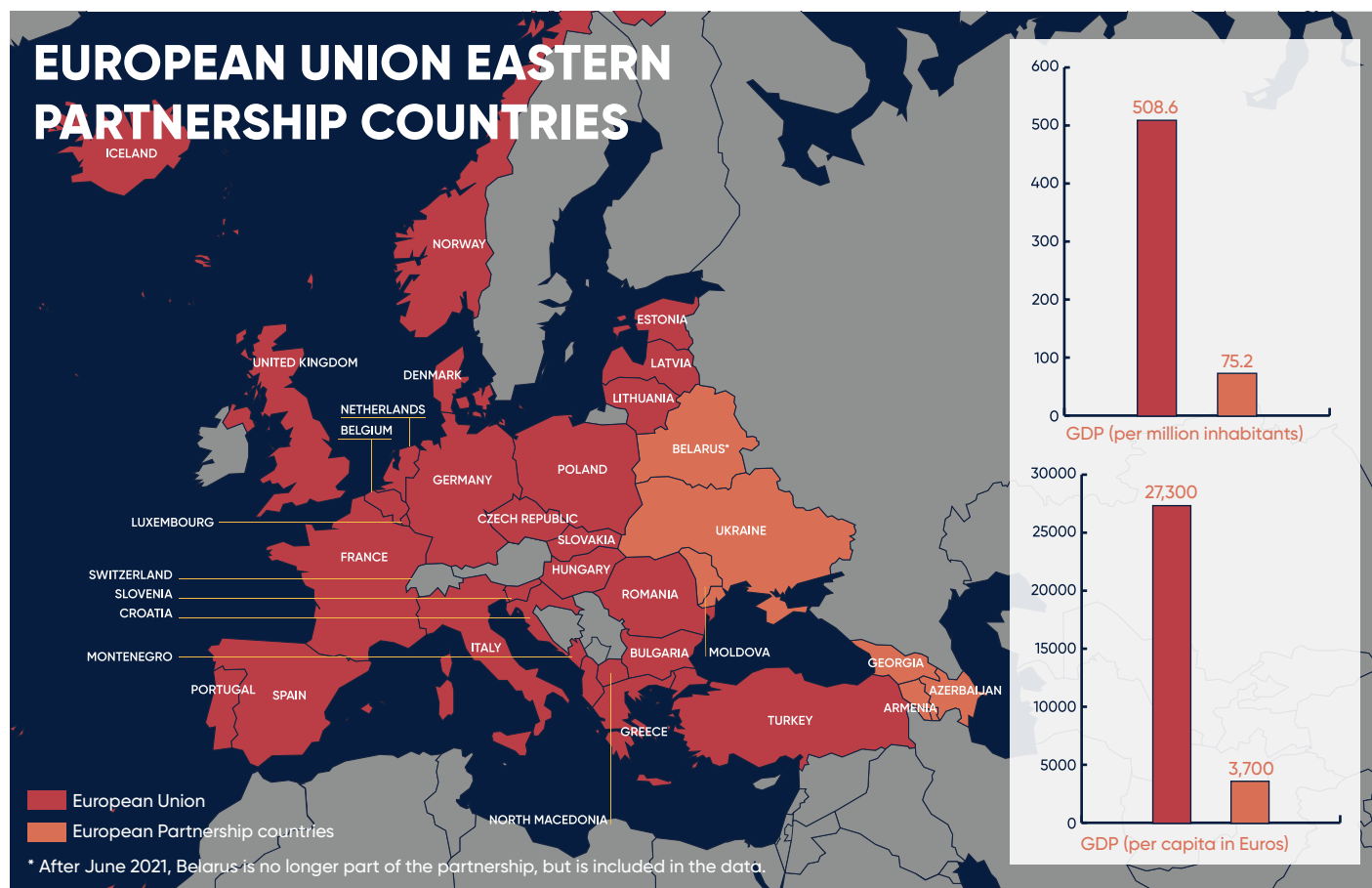
Over the last 30 years, Central and Eastern Europe has gone through complex changes and transformation, resulting in a much closer and more open relationship with the EU and increased exposure to the influences of Western liberal democracy and the free market. This has been the main goal of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP), which has made the most progress in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, but has largely failed in Azerbaijan and Belarus.

Three out of the six EaP countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) now have visa-free relationships with the EU, which allows for more frequent visits and deeper and more efficient people-to-people ties, including labor migration. Other countries, including Azerbaijan and Armenia, have visa-facilitation agreements that provide better access to the EU. Belarus has been deprived of this right by the regime of President Alexander Lukashenko.

The EaP countries are now much better integrated with the EU's single market. Three of the six countries have Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with the EU. The EU is the most significant trading partner and investor for four of the six countries, excluding Belarus and Armenia, where the EU is second on the list. This is, to some degree, also true for energy. Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia have invested in and promoted closer cooperation with the EU under the Energy Community Treaty. Because of this integration with the EU, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have become more democratic than they were 30 years ago.

2 On 28 June 2021, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it is withdrawing from the Eastern Partnership. See Brzozowski, Alexandra. "EU reproves Belarus' walkout from the Eastern Partnership." Euractiv, June 29, 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/eu-reproves-belarus-walkout-from-the-eastern-partnership/>. This, however, does not mean that Belarus' citizens would not benefit from the partnership. See: Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, "EaP CSF Steering Committee statement on the decision made by Belarusian authorities to suspend Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership and the Readmission agreement," Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, <https://eap-csf.eu/project/sc-statement-on-the-suspension-of-belarus-participation-in-the-eap/>.

3 Zselyke Csaky, "The Anti-Democratic Turn," *Freedom House*, [The Antidemocratic Turn | Freedom House](https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/2021/anti-democratic-turn).



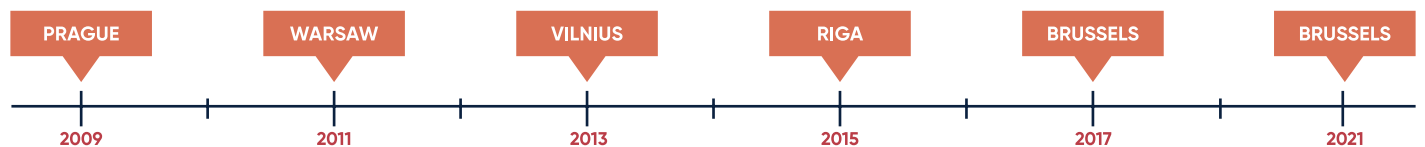
However, the Eastern Partnership faces several challenges to its goal of bringing the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus closer to Europe, and to help them to strengthen their sovereignty and territorial integrity, which the Russian Federation has long challenged. The region remains a point of contest between the EU and Russia and is struggling with many serious social, economic, and political problems. For instance, Azerbaijan and Belarus have experienced dramatic authoritarian backsliding in recent years. Excluding Georgia, corruption is rampant in the region. Domestic crises in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and Georgia, and its pressure against other countries in the region will not just go away by itself. That should, however, not distract the EU from building its cooperation with the willing in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

The EU's eastern neighborhood has recently been shaken by several developments⁴ and has been, to a large degree, overwhelmed by problems and conflicts, including the newly revived war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, repression in and international isolation of Belarus, which suspended its membership in the EaP in June 2021, as well as an increasingly aggressive Russia. Consequently, the Associated Trio of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova gained additional prominence after finally being formalized in May 2021. These are countries with a clear ambition for closer integration with the EU and, in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, also with NATO.

⁴ Namely, the Russian invasion of February 24 and the ongoing war in Ukraine.



Timeline of Eastern Partnership Summits



The EU's Position

The sixth EU Summit of the Eastern Partnership was held on December 15 and 16, 2021. The previous EU summit at the level of European leaders took place four years earlier. This shows that the Eastern Partnership has lost its importance within the EU in recent years since previously summits were held every two years. Evidence of the EU's lack of interest in the region arises from the fact that, apart from the summit in Brussels (2017), all summits have been held in Central and Eastern European countries (Warsaw, Prague, Vilnius, and Riga) and no meeting has been hosted by a capital on the Western side of the EU.

Moreover, the EU has found neither the right tools nor the political will to respond to the new reality in Eastern Europe, where Russia is playing a destructive role and where other players, including Turkey and China, have also become decisive actors in security, social, and economic spheres. In the case of Turkey, this may be largely related to the reluctance of the EU to offer a credible prospect of EU membership.

Cooperation and investment in the post-COVID-19 recovery have dominated the discussion about common European values and security regarding European interaction with the Eastern Partnership. In addition, the EU has largely avoided a more supportive approach toward Euro-Atlantic integration of individual EaP countries.

Nevertheless, certain individual EU members, including Poland and the Czech Republic, have increased their engagement in the EaP region. Several other EU members, however, including from western and southern Europe, have paid little attention and continue to focus on other regions, particularly on the southern region of the European Neighborhood Policy.

Russia, China, and Other Third Parties

Moscow perceives Eastern Europe as its backyard where it can exercise power over this sphere of influence, often playing a zero-sum game with the West. Russia has become decisively more aggressive in Eastern Europe over recent years. Examples can be seen in its aggression against Georgia in 2008, the war against Ukraine in 2014, an increase of “Zapad 2021” drills,⁵ and a concentration of Russian troops at the Ukrainian border in 2021. There have also been attempts to expand its territorial and political control over the region. Examples of this can be seen in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with the annexation of Crimea, in the separatist’s peoples’ republics of Donbas, the ongoing integration of Belarus with Russia and an increasing control over Armenia since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. However, Russia’s economic, social, political, and cultural influence has in the past decades decreased dramatically in most of the region (particularly in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan).

Therefore, Russian assets in the region are based more and more on hard power, including energy, and its readiness to use military force and blackmail Eastern European countries to overtake them is on the rise. This corresponds with Russia’s main goal to regain and maintain its sphere of influence and push out Western alliances, preventing any further integration of Ukraine with the West.⁶

China and Turkey are the two key countries which have benefitted from Russian weakness and have increased their leverage in the region in recent years. The city of Ankara, focused especially on the Black Sea, gained status as Georgia’s and Azerbaijan’s most important economic partner, decisively surpassing Russia. Turkey has also established close cultural, social, and military ties, particularly with Baku. Turkey’s support contributed considerably to Azerbaijan’s victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020. Moreover, Turkey expanded its cooperation with Moldova and Ukraine as it did with Azerbaijan and Georgia, though to a lesser degree with the latter. Nevertheless, Turkey is one of the key economic partners of Kyiv and Chisinau. Turkish-Ukrainian relations in the security sphere have gained a new dimension in recent years, thanks to a new format for bilateral foreign and security cooperation called Quatringa, which may to some degree also compensate for Russian aggression against Ukraine.

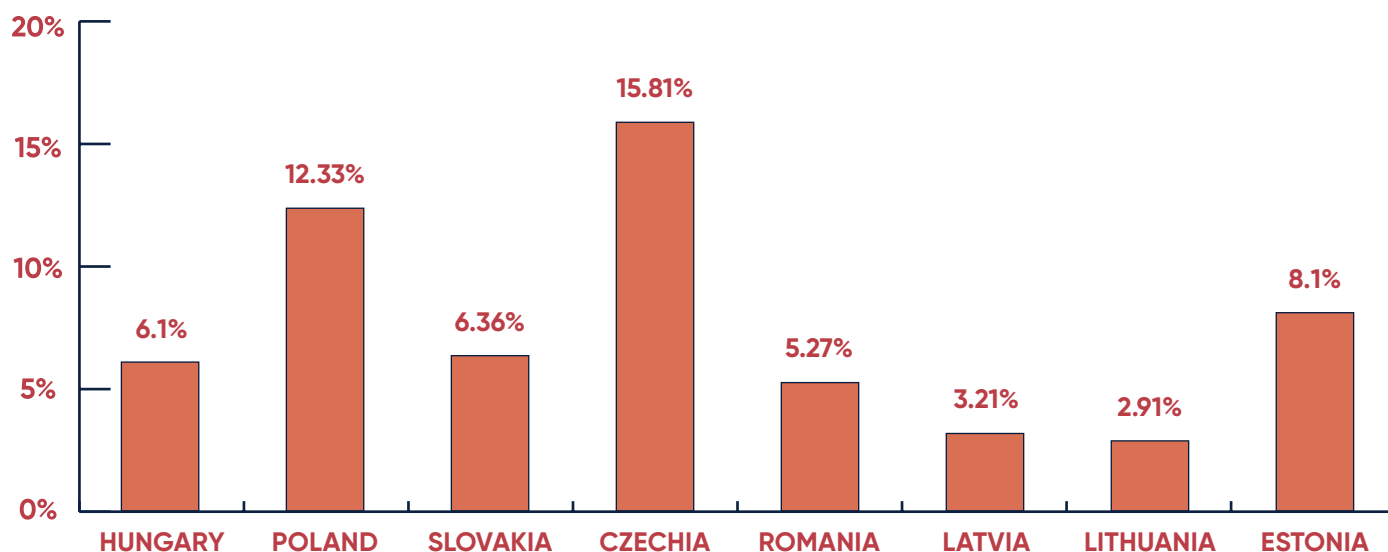
Turkey, as an autonomous and important regional power, pursues its own agenda in Eastern Europe. It tends to favor Ukraine over Russia in accordance with NATO, of which it is a member. Turkey’s economy has a lot of regional influence, even as it copes with serious challenges such as inflation. These challenges may affect the region, destabilizing certain countries or at least having a negative impact on the economic performance of others. But the cooperation between Turkey and the EU in Eastern Europe may improve in upcoming years if regime change occurs.

5 Zapad 2021 was Russia’s Strategic Command Staff Level Exercise conducted in its western (Zapad) military district. While military exercises are a normal part of military training and assessment, the size and nature of Russian military exercises like the joint Russian-Belarusian Zapad 2021 exercise, causes concern among some observers who fear the exercises are primarily meant as coercive signaling or as a mask for invasion activities. See Bowen, Andrew S. *Russian Military Exercises*. Congressional Research Service, October 4, 2021.

6 See Gressel, Gustav. “Russia’s military movements: What they could mean for Ukraine, Europe, and NATO.” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, November 17, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/article/russias-military-movements-what-they-could-mean-for-ukraine-europe-and-nato/>.

China is rapidly becoming an important economic partner for Eastern European countries, particularly regarding trade, loans, and infrastructure. China's share in the foreign trade of economies of the region has increased in recent years and today oscillates between 7 percent and 15 percent. For instance, China became Ukraine's most important trade partner (15 percent) and entrenched itself as a significant partner for Armenia (almost 15 percent), and Georgia (12 percent), with which it also has a free trade agreement.⁷ This trend is most probably going to continue due to the strong performance of the Chinese economy, which is more robust than either the EU's or Russia's.

Central and Eastern European countries with percent of imports from China



⁷ Source: Statistical offices of EaP countries.

MULTILATERALISM AND REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Pavel Havlíček

Since 1918, Central and Eastern Europe has depended on an efficient multilateral system and on international law to counter the influence of great power politics and rivalry in a region populated primarily by smaller and mid-sized countries squeezed together between Russia, Germany, and the wider West.

With current world crises such as COVID-19⁸ and the intensification of rivalry between major global powers such as Russia and China, which often slows the decision-making process of international organizations and subsequently their responses, regional groupings of committed members take the lead in addressing pressing issues to their countries. These small groups can be more agile and thus more efficient, which makes them even more relevant in times of crisis.

Due to the tense security situation in the region, this is particularly relevant for Ukraine and its cooperation with the West. There are multiple ways to promote multilateral cooperation and closer ties between Eastern European countries and their Western and Central European counterparts.

In this context, the EU plays an instrumental and supportive role on the bilateral, regional, and cross-border level as well as ad hoc thematic and policy-based levels. The most visible example of this multilateral effort has clearly been the EU's Eastern Partnership policy, but several others have also been instrumental in tying Eastern European countries closer to the West. At the same time, the EU and its member states have been involved in a rich network of projects, initiatives, and multi-layered forms of cooperation, which have proved to be of crucial importance. Not all EU institutions play an active role, and this is clear given the low number of initiatives driven by member states on the regional level.

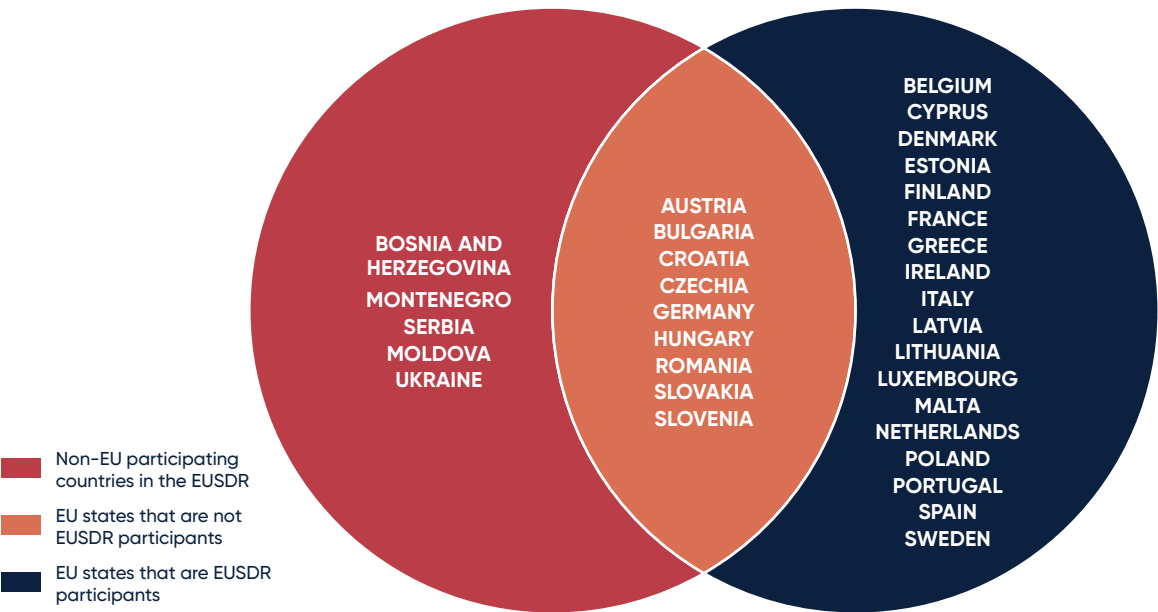
The Many Faces of Multilateral Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe

One example of enhanced cooperation with Eastern Europe is the **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)**. The EUSDR unites the 15 countries of the Danube basin, including nine EU member states. Ukraine is represented by its four bordering oblasts, which belong to the Danube region. This policy framework allows Ukraine to be involved in cross-border and regional EU programs in the areas of connectivity, environmental protection, education, culture, tourism, and security, among others.⁹ In addition, Ukraine is the first non-EU state to hold the EUSDR presidency, which started on November 1, 2021.

⁸ See Dworkin, Anthony and Richard Gowan. "Three crises and an opportunity: Europe's stake in multilateralism." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, September 5, 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/three_crisis_and_an_opportunity_europes_stake_in_multilateralism/.

⁹ EU Strategy for the Danube Region. "One Strategy – 12 Priorities." <https://danube-region.eu/about/priority-areas/>

Participating countries in the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)



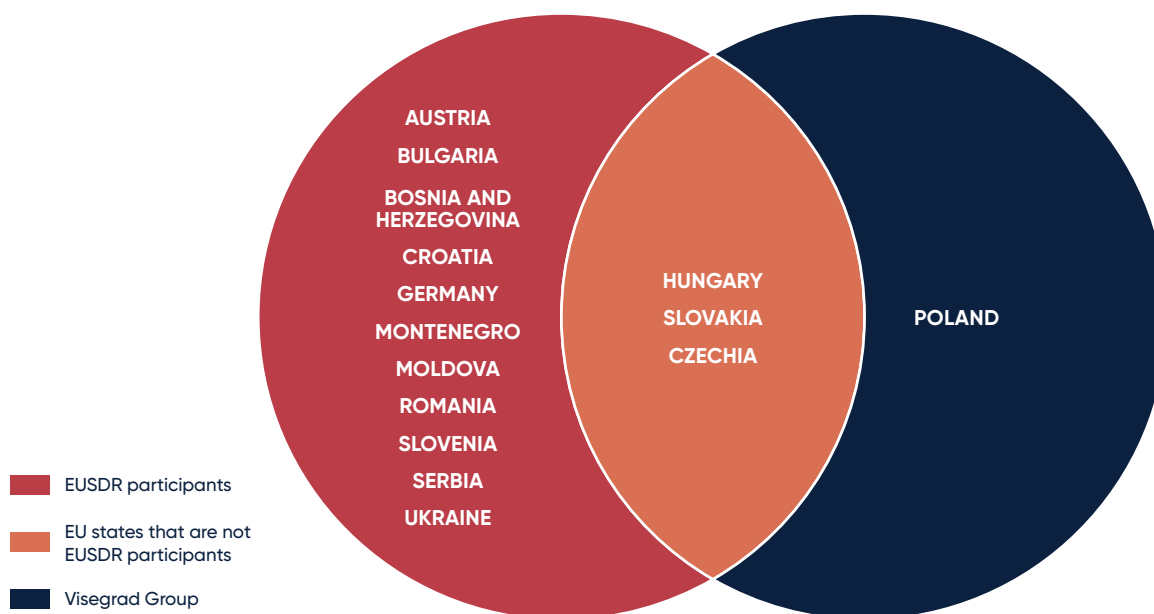
The Energy Community represents another venue for Eastern European states’ integration into European structures and the EU single market. It is an exchange between EU member states but also allows for closer cooperation with third parties, such as Ukraine and Moldova, as well as Norway, Turkey, and, most recently, Georgia. The Western Balkans are also involved in the framework as potential members. The potential of the Energy Community, which Ukraine, Moldova, and to some degree Georgia has engaged in, lies in the harmonization of accumulated energy and in the promotion of reforms. It also allows for a more efficient exchange of electricity, gas, or oil among the members, the end goal being increased energy sustainability.

| Parties | Observers | Participants |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| European Union member states Albania Bosnia and Herzegovina Kosovo North Macedonia Moldova Montenegro Serbia Ukraine Georgia | Norway Turkey Armenia | Austria Bulgaria Croatia Cyprus Czech Republic Finland France Germany Greece Hungary Italy Latvia Lithuania Netherlands Poland Romania Slovenia Slovakia Sweden |

In the absence of a comprehensive EU strategy toward the Black Sea region amid a security vacuum, Ukraine has strengthened its relations with Turkey. The “**Quadriga**” (2+2), Ukraine and Turkey, with the participation of the two countries’ foreign and defense ministers, was held in December 2020. Future meetings will be held on an annual basis in order to discuss the most pressing political and security issues, coordinate joint actions, and develop new projects in the political, security, economic, and defense industries.¹⁰ Given the destabilization of the situation in the Black Sea region and the EU’s geographical discrepancies on the threat perception, a comprehensive joint strategy for the region is of utmost importance.

Related to the Central European initiatives, the **Visegrád Group (Visegrád Four or V4)**, which consists of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, is one of the most developed groupings not only in Central Europe, but in the EU. After joining the Euro-Atlantic community, the V4 countries committed to help neighboring countries prepare to become part of the EU and NATO. The V4+EaP and V4+Ukraine groups were also created, the latter after 2014. Ukraine’s western neighbors shared their experiences and provided assistance in energy efficiency, decentralization, transregional cooperation, security, and defense, as well as in education, digitalization, and ecology.

Participating countries in the EUSDR and Visegrad Group



The V4 countries have also provided strong political and financial support to Ukraine since the start of the Russian aggression in 2014 and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, V4 Foreign Ministers launched the V4 East Solidarity Programme, which gave 207,350 EUR in medical equipment to Ukrainian hospitals and medical personnel. Multilateral assistance to Ukraine has been granted through the International Visegrád Fund’s grant and scholarship programs. Projects cover areas such as democratization, social and economic transformation, modernization, European integration, regional cooperation, and the development of public administration and civil society. Ukraine is the biggest non-V4 recipient of support from the fund. Visegrád Group members have allocated assistance to Ukraine bilaterally as well.¹¹

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. “Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Defense of Ukraine and Turkey held the First Meeting in the Quadriga Format and approved a Joint Statement.” <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/ministri-zakordonnih-sprav-i-ministri-oboroni-ukrayini-ta-turechchini-proveli-pershe-zasidannya-u-formati-kvadriga>

¹¹ Office of the Government of the Czech Republic “Communiqué of Prime Ministers of the Visegrád Group after the meeting with Prime Minister of Ukraine.” <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/communique-of-prime>

The debate over the future of the EU may intensify with the formation of a new government in the Czech Republic. This is especially true as members such as Hungary and Poland have expressed anti-EU sentiment, leading to a fissure within the V4 (Czech Republic + Slovakia on one side, and Hungary + Poland on the other). At the same time, the deterioration in relations between Hungary and Ukraine over ethnic Hungarian minorities in the country may lead to greater tensions within the V4, especially considering that Hungary currently holds the presidency of the group. This might provide an additional impetus for the intensifying cooperation between Ukraine and the **Central Five** (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia) and the **Slavkov Format** (Austria, Czech Republic, and Slovakia), which was revived during the pandemic. In May 2021, Ukraine's foreign minister joined a meeting of the Central 5 foreign affairs ministers and proposed three priority areas of cooperation in addressing the pandemic: vaccinations, safe travel for citizens, and support for businesses.¹²

Another regional format which could play an important role in both supporting EU cohesion and unity towards Ukraine, and the EaP in general, is the **Weimar Triangle** (France, Germany, and Poland). In March 2014, the chairs of the Weimar Triangle parliaments' foreign affairs committees made a first-ever trip to Kyiv in order to express their support for the territorial integrity and the European integration of Ukraine. Unfortunately, this meeting was a one-off, because of the deepening political and ideological disagreements between Warsaw and the other two capitals.

Like the Weimar Triangle, the **Lublin Triangle** is designed to integrate Poland into the Western community. Established in 2020, it consists of EU and NATO members Lithuania and Poland and aspiring country Ukraine. Given the historic and cultural ties between the three countries and the vocal support from Lithuania and Poland for Ukraine, especially since 2014, the Lublin Triangle has the potential to address challenges. The three countries have outlined main areas of cooperation, including security, defense, energy, cyber threats, trade, culture, and the fight against COVID-19. During a recent meeting, foreign affairs ministers approved a plan to combat disinformation and they agreed to cooperate on parliamentary, government, expert, and youth levels. The three countries signed the memorandum of cooperation and established the Youth Lublin Triangle, which will accelerate exchange and cooperation between young people in the different countries.

Another fast-growing initiative which involves 12 Central and Eastern European EU member states is the **Three Seas Initiative (3SI)**. The unique feature of this group is that it aims to develop a north-south infrastructure axis, contrary to the traditional east-west one. The 3SI was launched by the presidents of Croatia and Poland in 2015, and since then annual summits at the presidential level have been held across participating states, accompanied by a business forum which began in 2018. The prime focus of the initiative is to improve connectivity by developing transport, energy, and digital infrastructure. All of these are of great importance to Ukraine, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky pushed to join the initiative.¹³ That being said, there was no official communication from the 3SI regarding involvement of non-EU members, so this could be an empty promise. Financial support for 3SI priority projects is split across EU funds, Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) funds, and in-country contributions. The 3SI Investment Fund, established in 2019, is expected to provide 9 percent of funding.¹⁴ In addition, the initiative enjoys strong support in the U.S., as it is perceived as an alternative to China's (16+1)

12 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. "Dmytro Kuleba named three priorities of cooperation between Ukraine and the Central Five." May 13, 2021. <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/dmitro-kuleba-nazvav-tri-prioriteti-vzayemodiyi-ukrayini-ta-centralnoyevropejskoyi-pyatirki>.

13 Ukrinform. "Zelensky, Duda discuss Ukraine's accession to Three Seas Initiative." November 12, 2020, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/3116226-zelensky-duda-discuss-ukraines-accession-to-three-seas-initiative.html>.

14 Institute of Central Europe. "The Three Seas Initiative ahead of the Riga Summit: politically inspired, commercially driven." <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/the-three-seas-initiative-ahead-of-the-riga-summit-politically-inspired-commercially-driven/>.

engagement mechanism¹⁵ and Russian influence in the region.

The Bucharest 9 (B9) is a regional group made up of NATO's eastern flank states. It was established in 2015 on the initiative of the presidents of Poland and Romania in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, including the illegal annexation and militarization of Crimea. Given the shared Russian threat and the importance of Transatlantic cooperation, the B9 platform could become a key organization assisting Ukraine's improvements in security and defense toward its fulfillment of Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

These are some concrete examples of cooperation inside the CEE region, with the support of the EU, NATO, and the United States. Even if the list is not comprehensive, it provides solid evidence of intense regional and multilateral cooperation. It is designed to counterbalance great power politics and overcome obstacles for some Eastern European countries, particularly Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova to further integrate into the West.

Energy Community Affiliation



¹⁵ "17+1" refers to the "China-Central and Eastern European" (CEEC) engagement mechanism, which brought together 17 European countries, including 12 EU members, and China to engage in cross-regional cooperation on trade and investment. The mechanism became known as "16+1" when Lithuania left the engagement mechanism in May 2021. See Garding, Sarah E., Ricardo Barrios, Derek E. Mix, and Michael D. Sutherland. *The European Union and China*. Congressional Research Service, February 14, 2022.

HOW DOES THE RISE OF CHINA IMPACT TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS?

Istvan Kiss, Jan Havlíček, Karol Przwara, and Pavel Havlíček

The Czech Republic

Czech political and economic relations with China are best described as being in a state of hibernation. For the last few years, the Czech Republic's China policy has brought no tangible benefit to the Czech economy. Meanwhile, the actions of the Chinese embassy in Prague have triggered broad criticism following its overly assertive interference in Czech internal public and political issues.¹⁶ This reached its peak during the visit of Senate President Miloš Vystrčil to Taiwan in August and September 2020.¹⁷ Afterwards, Czech–Chinese relations receded into the background of public debate, and bilateral relations have become practically frozen.

We have seen widespread disillusionment regarding the Czech Republic's economic ties with China. The Czech Republic has received a mere fraction of the originally announced investments from China. On the contrary, as of March 2019 Taiwan's direct investment in the Czech Republic's manufacturing sector was 14 times greater than China's. At the same time, security risks posed by China have increased substantially. With greater economic benefits and less security risks with increased relations with a democracy like Taiwan, it is expected that the new Czech government will continue to reassess the country's approach to China and will seek support among its Central and Eastern European partners in this respect. For the Czech Republic to commit to a renewed and productive relationship with China, would require it to stop approaching other states with the condescending attitude of a colonizer as it has in places like Montenegro, and instead to engage in constructive and respectful dialogue.

Hungary

Amongst CEE states, Hungary likely has the closest relationship with China both diplomatically and economically. This is by no means a new development, as Hungary was the first post-communist country in the region to realize the importance of rebuilding ties with China. Relations gained renewed momentum under former Hungarian Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy, who succeeded the first Orbán (Viktor Orbán, the current prime minister) government in 2002. Medgyessy's prime ministerial trip to China, after a 44-year hiatus, which Medgyessy later referred to as a "breakthrough" in bilateral relations.¹⁸ This visit established Hungary's designation as the number one regional economic cooperation partner for China and was followed by significant growth in trade. Overall trade more than doubled between 2003 and 2008.¹⁹ Since then, most political parties have generally accepted China

¹⁶ Beijing cancelled cultural exchanges and its sister-city relationship with Prague following a Prague city council decision to seek the elimination of Beijing's preferred One China policy language in the sister-city statute. The relationship was further strained when the Chinese embassy sent a letter to Czech authorities warning them that Czech visits to Taiwan would have consequences for Czech companies operating in China. See Schmitz, Rob. "Czech–Chinese Ties Strained As Prague Stands Up To Beijing." *NPR*, October 30, 2019; Muller, Robert and Ben Blanchard. "Czech prime minister says China's ambassador should be replaced." *Reuters*, March 10, 2020.

¹⁷ Herszenhorn, Miles. "China warns Czech senate president will pay 'heavy price' for Taiwan trip." *Politico*, August 31, 2020, [China warns Czech senate president will pay 'heavy price' for Taiwan trip – POLITICO](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/31/china-warns-czech-senate-president-will-pay-heavy-price-for-taiwan-trip).

¹⁸ Koleszár, Réka. "Hungary–China Relations: Is it Time for a Change?" *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE)*, October 21, 2022, <https://chinaobservers.eu/hungary-china-relations-is-it-time-for-a-change/>.

¹⁹ Szunomár, Ágnes and Tamás Peragovics. "Hungary: An Assessment of Chinese–Hungarian Economic Relations." In *Comparative Analysis of the Approach towards China: V4+ and One Belt One Road*, 2–8. Prague Security Studies Institute.

as an important economic partner and advocated for closer economic ties between the two countries. China's interest in Hungary is not only based on politics but also on good historic relations going back to the beginning of the 20th century. Also, Hungary has the largest Chinese diaspora in the region because of open visa rules in the beginning of the 1990's.

Despite Hungary's interest in China, economic reality shows that bilateral economic ties are still minimal and are well below Western European standards. Hungary's strongest economic partners are European countries. Hungary has attracted about 3.2 billion USD in Chinese investments since 2012, when the 16+1 initiative, which refers to cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries and is an initiative to promote Chinese business in the region run by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was first inaugurated. This level of investment is below most Western European countries.²⁰ Also, China's appeal is still very low in Hungary. Polls show that about 50 percent of Hungarians hold negative or very negative views about China. This means that Hungarians are more negative about China than, for instance, some EU members like Poland, Slovakia, Italy, and Spain.²¹ While Hungary would like to see itself as the primary target of Chinese investment and economic cooperation in the CEE region, it is not yet, though it has the potential to be. The reality is that Chinese investment in the region and in Hungary is still minimal.

Poland

Poland's approach to cooperation with China has fluctuated in recent years. Since the formation of the 16+1 Initiative, Poland has expressed its willingness to play a key role as a leader of the initiative. The main goal of the Polish government was to become the main beneficiary of the BRI by becoming the terminus of the northern corridor of the railway route. Poland has major economic incentives to be involved with BRI, China is the largest importer of Polish dairy products in the world²², being the terminus of BRI would allow Poland to increase its food and dairy exports to the Chinese market in the long term exponentially. The culmination of Polish-Chinese relations was the June 2016 visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Poland. The presidents of China and Poland signed a declaration on a strategic partnership and expressed a desire to strengthen political and economic ties²³.

Donald Trump's election as U.S. president led to changes in the American approach toward China. Poland was closely monitoring the new American administration's relations with its Asian partner. The debate about excluding Chinese infrastructure providers such as Huawei in the creation of 5G networks in Poland is one of the most visible examples of the new order.²⁴ Also, Poland has significantly reduced its activity in the 17 + 1 format, which is a China-led group aiming to expand cooperation between Beijing and Eastern Europe. Instead it is emphasizing its own initiatives in the region, such as the Three Seas Initiative, a group of twelve EU countries coordinating on energy, transport, and digital infrastructure.

20 Venne, François. "China in Hungary: Real Threat or False Alarm?" *Center for European Policy Analysis*, January 6, 2022, <https://cepa.org/china-in-hungary-real-threat-or-false-alarm/>.

21 Turcsányi, Richard Q., Matej Šimalčík, Kristína Kíronska, Renáta Sedláková, Jiří Čeněk, Andrej Findor, Ondrej Buchel, Matej Hruška, Adrian Bróna, Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Mario Esteban, Beatrice Gallelli, Jelena Gledić, Peter Gries, Sergei Ivanov, Björn Jerdén, Marc Julienne, Tamás Matura, Tim Rühlig, and Tim Summers. *European public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19: Differences and common ground across the continent*. Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2020.

22 Global Times "Exports of Polish dairy products to China rises 34% in first half of 2021: embassy" <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202112/1240865.shtml>.

23 "Poland and China sign strategic partnership declaration." President of the Republic of Poland, June 20, 2016, <https://www.president.pl/news/poland-and-china-sign-strategic-partnership-declaration,36161>.

24 Cerulus, Laurens and Laura Kayali. "Poland wants to go beyond EU on 5G security, says minister." *Politico*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-wants-to-go-beyond-5g-security-toolbox-restrictions/>.

The passive attitude of the Polish government toward Chinese pressure on Lithuania over Taiwan's recognition and the announcement made by President Andrzej Duda of his attendance at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics could mark another shift in Poland's approach to China.

Slovakia

Among the V4 countries, or the Visegrád Group, an alliance consisting of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, Slovakia has shown a rather passive approach toward China in the past. Before 2012, Slovakia was regarded as perhaps China's strongest critic. Around 2016, it did not even have an ambassador in Beijing for about a year. But in the last five years, Slovakia has taken a different approach. In April 2017, the country approved a Strategy for the Development of Economic Relations with China 2017–2020. At that time, the social-democratic government was in power, which has traditionally regarded China differently than the country's center-right parties, which form the current government.

Trade relations between Slovakia and China have suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a negative trade balance in 2021. However, trade relations might improve in the upcoming years.

Ties between China and Slovakia, however, might worsen regarding Taiwan. In 2020, China warned Slovakia that it would respond if Slovakia welcomed the Taiwanese minister for a state visit. In December 2021, a Slovak delegation of 43 government officials traveled to Taipei to meet Taiwanese officials and to sign trade and tech agreements. The Slovak visit to Taiwan may or may not end Slovak-Chinese cooperation, but it could be regarded as a sign of disillusionment from the CEE region regarding China. Furthermore, Slovakia's intelligence agency concluded in 2020 that the number of disinformation campaigns in the country has increased, especially campaigns coming from China.²⁵

Recent signals suggest that Slovakia's approach toward China is going to be more value-based. In 2020, Slovakia called on China to release the Panchen Lama and other political prisoners, supported Taiwan's accession to the World Health Organization, and criticized China's security legislation on Hong Kong. Because Slovakia is less dependent on economic ties with China, it is well-positioned to pursue these views.

Summary

In recent years the 17+1 mechanism, which was begun by China to deepen relationships with the CEE region,²⁶ has become a talking point for politicians in the U.S. and EU to demonstrate how China is buying influence in NATO and EU countries. Yet the reality of this issue is much more complex. For example, while there is much public discourse about rising Chinese influence in CEE, some of the most vocal anti-Chinese governments are also located in the region, for example Lithuania or, to some extent, the Czech Republic. Also, the economic reality is that Chinese investment and trade relations in the region are minimal, especially when compared to Western Europe. For example, out of around \$126 billion in Chinese investments in the EU (excluding the UK) between 2000–2019, less than \$10 billion were directed to the CEE region. Of that, more than half, \$5.5 billion, went to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic combined. During the same period, Germany received around \$25 billion, the UK \$57 billion

25 Hudec, Michael. "Slovakia sees increase in disinformation campaigns, especially from China." Euractiv, December 6, 2021, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/slovakia-sees-increase-in-disinformation-campaigns-especially-from-china/.

26 "17+1" refers to the "China–Central and Eastern European" (CEEC) engagement mechanism, which brought together 17 European countries, including 12 EU members, and China to engage in cross-regional cooperation on trade and investment. The mechanism became known as "16+1" when Lithuania left the engagement mechanism in May 2021. See Garding, Sarah E., Ricardo Barrios, Derek E. Mix, and Michael D. Sutherland. *The European Union and China*. Congressional Research Service, February 14, 2022.

and the U.S. \$149.9 billion in Chinese investments.²⁷ Additionally, after eight years of an “increased” Chinese presence in the CEE region, only four out of around 40 planned Chinese projects have been finished.

Value of foreign direct investment (FDI) outward flows in Europe in 2020, by country (in million U.S dollars)



It is also worth mentioning that the degree of influence China can exercise in the region depends on alternatives to Chinese investment. The U.S. does not always offer any viable alternatives to Chinese investment, especially in the technological and communications sectors. The U.S. needs to encourage more investment in the CEE region and develop competitive programs, especially in the telecommunications field.

Still, we must avoid double standards, and our region also has every right to pursue a healthy economic cooperation with China, just like Western Europe does. Of course, we should be mindful that the prospect of economic gain should not overshadow the ideological and values-based differences between our region and China. Additionally, policymakers should exercise caution regarding critical infrastructure. We should also take note of the growing prominence of issues of conflict between CEE and China, particularly regarding the treatment of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, restrictions on Hong Kong's autonomy, human rights abuses in Tibet, suppression of freedom of speech, threats to Taiwan, Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea, or the recent intimidation of Lithuania. Based on these concerns, we recommend reevaluating the benefits of cooperation with China in various areas, including national, regional, and international relations. Additionally, a comprehensive audit of the benefits of the 17+1 initiative should be undertaken, while breaches of human rights and international obligations by China should be consistently raised at all levels of mutual relations.

27 Brînză, Andreea. "Central and Eastern Europe Is Not in Bed with China." *The Diplomat*, July 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/central-and-eastern-europe-is-not-in-bed-with-china/>.

AN ASSESSMENT OF RISKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY FOR THE TRANSATLANTIC COMMUNITY

Lukasz Maślanka

Strategic autonomy for the European Union, defined as the EU's ability to respond independently to crises and threats, appeared for the first time in December 2013 in the conclusion of a European Council publication and again in the EU Global Strategy doctrine of 2016. Since the beginning of Emmanuel Macron's presidency in 2017, France has used the concept to promote the idea of the EU as a superpower, loosening Transatlantic ties. From the point of view of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, which perceive Russian imperialism as their main threat, this is highly problematic. France and some of the EU's southern member states treat the idea of EU autonomy as a means of redirecting the resources of northern EU member states to the south, to the detriment of interests in the east. When the EU's eastern member states ask for greater attention to build their resilience against Russia, the EU's western and southern countries often reply that that is NATO's responsibility. At the same time, some CEE member states view arguments for strategic autonomy as directly undermining partnerships with NATO and the U.S. These contradictory arguments from states which are the main promoters of European autonomy (especially France) is disturbing for CEE member states.

This paper proposes the following series of recommendations to bridge this gap.

EU Internal Recommendations

Central and Eastern European EU member states should show greater interest in the security challenges facing the EU's southern neighborhood and to the situation in the Mediterranean. Some of these challenges in the south are arising from mixed migration flows and recent discoveries of natural gas. However, it must be emphasized that CEE member states allocating resources for these challenges is proof of member state cooperation and solidarity, which should be reciprocated by western and southern EU states.²⁸

Defense

Work on the EU Strategic Compass²⁹ may be an opportunity for CEE EU member states to emphasize the importance of collective defense. The division of security tasks between the EU and NATO is also of key importance. The EU's priority should be to create infrastructure that facilitates the movement of allied troops to where they are needed, for which there are insufficient funds at present. The lack of interest from larger EU countries in allocating sufficient funds for increasing strategic mobility partly justifies the reluctant attitude towards the concept of strategic autonomy on the part of CEE member states. The involvement of the U.S. and Norway in the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)

²⁸ Despite increased EU engagement on the security crisis created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, agreement on a common European threat assessment will remain difficult because of different interests in each of the EU's 27 member states. Even when an objective is shared, disagreement may still emerge regarding the appropriate approach. For instance, the extent to which resources devoted to mitigating the threat are shared by the members versus the development of specialized interests, capabilities, and expenditures. (Eds.)

²⁹ You can find more on the Strategic Compass at: [A Strategic Compass for the EU – European External Action Service \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu/strategic-compass)

pact are welcome developments and should be backed up with sufficiently high funding. Strengthening European defense should focus on building new capabilities, not on multiplying structures. Most EU armies are also NATO forces. It is important to avoid building an alternative chain of command.³⁰

Nuclear

EU countries that promote the concept of strategic autonomy often argue that the U.S. is an unreliable ally or lacks credibility. The United States' 2022 Nuclear Posture Review will be of key importance for determining future reliability and credibility. Due to Russia's advantage in terms of the number of conventional forces in Europe, the U.S. should not adopt a "no first use" policy. It is also equally important for the U.S. to involve European allies in talks on new treaties on strategic weapons.³¹

Economic

Strategic autonomy is not only about defense, but also about the economic security of the EU. For most of the CEE EU members, it is crucial to maintain the freedoms of the European Single Market and to promote further cooperation with those partners who embrace the increase in prosperity, freedom, and access to goods, services, jobs, opportunities, and cultural exchange that the market provides. Hence the need to maintain close economic and political ties not just within the EU, but also with the United Kingdom, Taiwan, and other Asian democracies. The EU should also ratify the Mercosur trade agreement³² and continue negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement with the U.S. Support for EU businesses should not be as a pretext for member states to avoid the consequences of these firms' illegal (or sometimes just unethical) business practices, including culpability for tax and sanctions evasion.

U.S. Recommendations

From one U.S. presidential administration to the next since the Clinton era, there has been an overarching tendency to limit Transatlantic consultations on key issues to a select few (Western) European capitals. By alienating Central Europe, the U.S. limits its options by increasing the relative leverage of those countries that strive to weaken Transatlantic relations. U.S. concessions on Nord Stream 2 before elections in Germany were a serious and long-term blow to U.S. relations with Poland and the Baltic states, for example. Although Central Europe is now under pressure from the disturbing phenomena of populism and right-wing extremism more than in Western Europe, this situation can change at any moment. Appreciating the role of Central Europe in EU-U.S. relations will allow America to arrange its relations with the entire Transatlantic community in a more harmonious manner. Efforts to correct the current administration's policy in this area should be an important goal of the U.S. Congress.³³

30 The European Union published *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* in March 2022, several months after this piece was written. The *Strategic Compass* indeed affirms that the EU "is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members." p. 10. Additionally, *The Strategic Compass* states that the EU "will organize training and exercises within the EU framework to increase readiness and interoperability (also in line with NATO standards) of all the elements of this capacity." p. 26. Cf. Dempsey, Judy, "What Ukraine Reveals About NATO and the EU." *Carnegie Europe*, February 1, 2022. (Eds.)

31 The United States Department of Defense transmitted to Congress the classified 2022 Nuclear Posture Review on March 28, 2022. The associated public fact sheet did not announce a change to a "no first use" policy. Regarding reliability and credibility, some may read U.S. diplomatic efforts that effectively organized Transatlantic states to sanction Russia as proof of U.S. commitment to its NATO allies. Others may worry that Transatlantic solidarity is too conditional on favorable political winds in dozens of states to trade away the deterrent effect of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Some portion of that group may even argue that the United States' strategically ambiguous nuclear doctrine has prevented Putin from invading the Baltics and prevented a geographical expansion of the war in Ukraine. (Eds.)

32 Mercosur, officially the Southern Common Market, is a South American trade bloc.

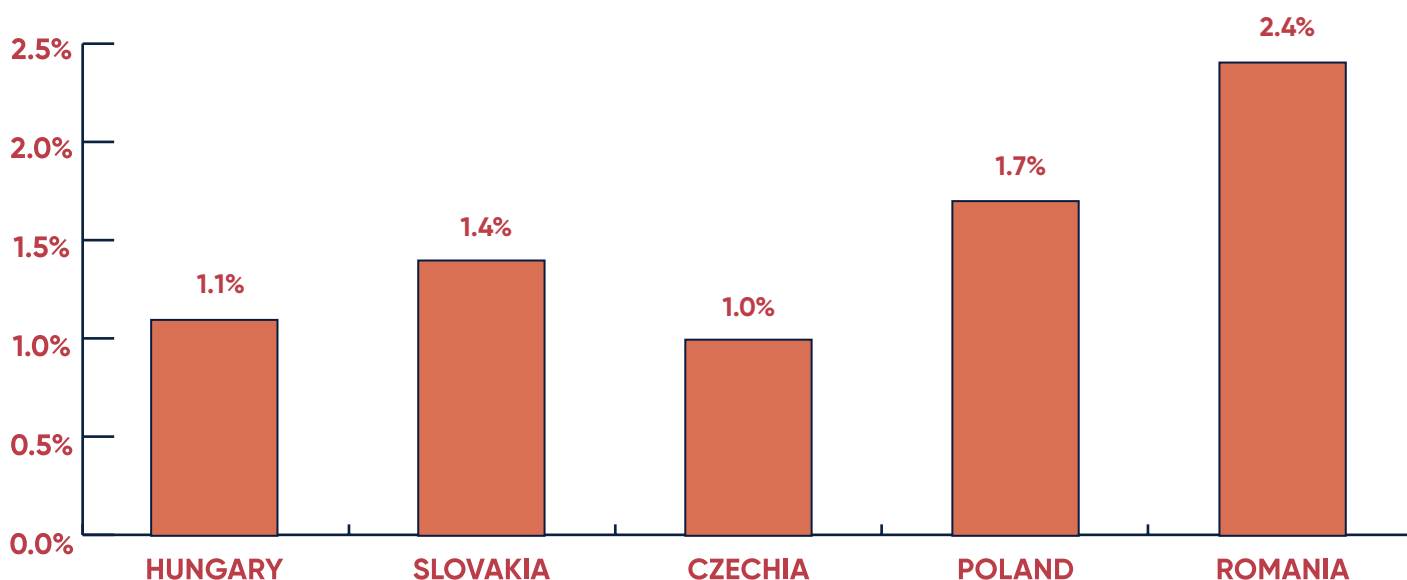
33 It is worth noting, however, that the actions of the U.S. around the tensions caused by the accumulation of troops by Russia at the border with Ukraine in the winter of 2021/2022, just prior to the invasion of Ukraine, seem to consider previous mistakes and were preceded by a wide consultation process with CEE EU member states. These dynamics should be maintained in the future.

DEFENSE SPENDING: FROM THE TWO-PERCENT DEBATE TO THE ROLE OF INNOVATION AND INTEROPERABILITY

Ina Filot, Razvan Prisca, and Bartlomiej Kot

After 2018, when the “Two Percent Debate” hit the headlines of European and American news, the commitment to increase defense spending has become the focus of discussions about the reliability of NATO. Far from being Trump-only shenanigans – as some described it first – the two percent national defense spending commitment is a long-standing US policy meant to engage Europeans in caring more about common security policy, while America is facing increasing security threats far from the European theatre. Yet, after more than 3 years, out of the V4+Romania group only Poland and Romania comply with the rule, while others still struggle to catch up.

Total general government expenditure on defense, 2020 (% of GDP)



Developments in international relations since 2018 encourage us to take a deeper view into the future of military spending that exceeds the classic debate focusing only on reaching a set cap. The medium- and long-term recommendations of this paper focus on two major needs of our future transatlantic military capabilities: on securing innovativeness and on increasing interoperability. While the former – the Holy Grail of the modern economy – may easily serve as a tool to convince governments to increase military spending despite the current economic recession, the latter is heavily harmed by European fragmentation in terms of procurement and the shape of European defense industry itself. To respond to those needs this paper recommends the following:

1. Not to use the post-COVID recession as an excuse to cut military spending, but to treat defense spending as a driving force for innovativeness that can shape the recovery of the economy

As cliché as it sounds, modern economies are fueled by innovation. And many regard innovation as one of the main responses to the economic fallout of the COVID pandemic. Consider the UK's latest Integrated Review. It states clearly that the key element for a country to build strategic advantage will be the ability of the state to construct a knowledge-based economy. However, investing in innovation is uncertain, risky, and can hardly ever be sustained by private industry alone. It therefore needs government support.

Rather than an impulse to invest in innovation, one impact of COVID may be to serve as an excuse for budget cuts in defense for those government who believe that the defense sector should not be immune to the economic consequences of the pandemic. Other nation-states demonstrate the opposite trend. As a notable example, Poland countered the economic consequences of COVID by funding a large increase in military spending via the Armed Forces Support Fund, financed by government-secured bonds.

Nevertheless, on the EU level, we have already observed the trend of cutting the funding of some key financial instruments of defense, such as that of the European Defence Fund (EDF). At the same time, it is the defense industry and its R&D capabilities that construct one of the main tools of industrial policy that a modern Western state possesses to influence the speed and vector of innovations in its economy.

But since there is a strong need to increase spending on innovation in general, we should also focus on what we spend our defense budgets on. In the past thirty years, the defense industries of CEE largely lost their potential for innovation. For example, in 2021, none of the projects created within the Polish state-run research network Łukasiewicz was strictly defense industry driven. In a broader perspective, it is however not only a CEE-specific problem. R&D expenditures make up the main part of the defense budget of but a few NATO countries. The US spends more than 40% on R&D, and the UK and France are the only other NATO countries worth noting in this respect.

2. To secure interoperability of our forces through cooperation in allocating the military spending

The fragmented European defense industry is dysfunctional. It is inefficient, provides poor returns on R&D investment, and does not secure the operability that is expected by the US or by the European allies. Any prospect of investment in the defense industry should therefore be a result of collaboration. This is the only model that answers the needs of the European market and creates a win-win option for all the parties involved, as opposed to models based on separation of competence or on national sovereignty. However, the shape of this collaboration should go far beyond the level of government-to-government relations, and it should encompass the ability to establish partnerships between state-owned companies and private ones too. In a longer-term perspective, this may become the source of the so-called spin-off effect, which increases innovativeness through, for instance, the creation of new tech start-ups.

The EU already possesses some schemes that can help respond to the insufficient level of cooperation in this field, namely the European Defence Fund and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). The European defense industry should use those opportunities to further internal consolidation, especially when it comes to cutting-edge technologies. On the other hand, any intention to treat those schemes as an instrument to shape European Strategic Autonomy as a concept in opposition to the defense industry from outside the EU, cannot be accepted. Both British and American defense companies, as a source of innovation in NATO and indispensable partners in creating interoperability

within the Alliance, should be actively engaged – at least in PESCO. At the same time, rules guaranteeing intellectual property flow between EU members and other countries should consider the need for this cooperation.

3. To counteract potential political risks to an effective military spending

One of the biggest risks to any business project, especially those based on international cooperation and trust, is the threat of mismanagement because innovation and savvy business decisions require predictability. Current developments within the CEE region, namely unreliability and instability, pose a threat to the beneficial cooperation of partners in the defense industry. Political instability resulting from even the slightest potential of withdrawing from the EU (and therefore impacting negatively on projects within PESCO and the EDF), harming intellectual property laws (such as demonstrated recently to the American investors by the current Polish government), or doubts to judicial impartiality resulting from the rule of law infringements, create a clearly negative socio-economic environment for large-scale cooperation and investment.

Threats, however, also come from those who create the new rules. As the European Commission tries to impose a taxonomy for addressing climate-related risks and other negative social impacts of some industries, the defense industry is often scapegoated for its social and environmental unsustainability. These rules hardly ever aim at creating an innovative ecosystem that promotes effective security.

Instead of narrowing the debate on defense budgets to the issue of the two-percent level, this paper offers three key recommendations for using the post-pandemic economic reconstruction to enhance security and the Alliance's resistance to external pressures: defining defense spending objectives as increasing innovation, enhancing interoperability, and mitigating political instability and unreliability.

DISINFORMATION AND DISTRUST IN SOCIETY—WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Martin Mališka and Claudia Bencescu

Disinformation may be defined as incorrect or misleading information spread deliberately and intending to deceive or influence people. It can take multiple forms, such as manipulated images and videos, deep fakes, exaggerated or omitted information, and/or information taken out of context. Even accurate information may be considered disinformation when used in a fundamentally distorted manner. Disinformation is easier to spread in the digital era when an unimaginable amount of information may be accessed through devices in our pockets. Spreading information is becoming more and more democratic. With likes, comments, and sharing one can send any information anywhere. Even though the democratization of information may be seen as positive, it also bears some risks. It makes it easier to also spread disinformation by dressing it up in sensational and exaggerated information or headlines. Moreover, social media algorithms help to drive people toward extreme positions and the algorithms help target, sometimes vulnerable, audiences. Easy access to information will not be reversed, so countries, organizations, and news outlets must find ways to make it less prevalent and less damaging.

For several years trust in both the political class as well as in media has declined around the world.³⁴ These actors and organizations (and their trustworthiness) should play a crucial role in tackling disinformation. A 1944 poll conducted in Britain asking respondents why politicians are in politics showed that 35 percent of the respondents believed that “politicians are out merely for themselves,” and 36 percent said that politicians are in politics “to do their best for their country.” In 2021, a similar poll showed 63 percent of respondents believe that politicians “are in politics for themselves,” and a mere 5 percent believe that politicians “do their best for their country.”³⁵

Building Trust

Building trust in politics requires account for the different reasons for distrust which sometimes vary from country to country. However, one common theme across many countries is, as Pew Research Center analysis shows, that citizens across Europe and North America (with certain exceptions) tend to believe that politicians do not care about them.³⁶ One way to close, or narrow, the gap between politicians and citizens would be to involve average citizens in decision-making. Citizens should have platforms to express their opinions and concerns so their voices will be heard. It is important to listen to the most diverse opinions (even if considered misguided) and establish meaningful discussion with everyone. It is crucial to provide a well-grounded explanation to the public regarding political positions taken and decisions made. Communication between decision-makers and citizens needs to be transparent.

34 Ognyanova, K., Lazer, D., Robertson, R. E., & Wilson, C. (2020). Misinformation in action: Fake news exposure is linked to lower trust in media, higher trust in government when your side is in power. Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-024>; Perry, J. (2021). Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). POLICY BRIEF NO 108. Available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/PB_108.pdf.

35 Helm, T. (2021). “Why trust politicians? How UK voters lost faith in our leaders.” The Guardian (online). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/dec/04/why-trust-politicians-how-uk-voters-lost-faith-in-our-leaders>.

36 Wike, R., Schumacher, S. (2020). “Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong”. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/27/attitudes-toward-elected-officials-voting-and-the-state/>.

Defining goals or providing context can help explain why certain measures need to be adopted. Therefore, personal meetings with citizens may play a very important role. Outreach and contact with citizens are necessary not only for politicians, but it is also an important tool for all representatives of the state, including civil servants and high-level public officials who are often regarded as part of the distrusted political class. Meetings with citizens can create opportunities for discussion about decisions. Citizens' discussions with senior public officials can provide a better understanding of complex and sensitive societal and political issues as well as insight into political decisions, thereby increasing public trust toward politicians.

Divided Societies are More Prone to Disinformation

Even for top-level opinion leaders like politicians, media representatives, and state authorities, it may be tempting to exploit divisions within society. However, this comes at a cost. Polarization makes countries more vulnerable to disinformation. The expression of diverse opinions regarding various issues are vital for a healthy democracy. However, it is necessary to approach areas that divide society in a manner that helps to reach a common position, and which does not drive people toward more extreme positions. Focusing on policies that tend to be less divisive may help to decrease polarization, especially if taken together with topics with a unifying effect on society.

Take the Initiative

One of the most important countermeasures against disinformation is to start communicating before it starts to spread. It is always more challenging to counter disinformation when a recipient of the information has already been exposed to it as their first information on a certain topic. It is necessary to scrupulously identify issues that may be targeted by purveyors of disinformation. These issues inevitably vary throughout time. An interesting example is, for example, the case of military convoys moving in and across Slovakia. They did not arouse any significant interest until the 2014 crisis of Russia's annexation of Crimea in Ukraine. Since then, the Slovak Ministry of Defence has taken a proactive role in providing information on military convoys moving in and across Slovakia. It informs the public through press releases and social media, sometimes with additional information about details of where they are going and why. This proactive government approach has significantly reduced unfounded concerns and enhanced the public's trust in governmental decision-making.

DO NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SHARED VALUES MATTER IN TODAY'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT?

Lucie Voseckova and Fanni Surjanyi

What is Social Cohesion?

As defined by the Council of Europe, social cohesion is “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means.”³⁷

Does It Matter in Today's Security Environment?

The most economically disadvantaged and excluded groups have never been better off than they are now.³⁸ That applies not only to people in the Transatlantic region but generally. Yet, or precisely because of this, social cohesion has never been as important as it is today. Once people reach a certain level of satisfaction of their needs, they want to be involved in society and feel not only like they belong, but also that they have a shared responsibility to a set of generally accepted social goals and values.

The Transatlantic security architecture was built, and has relied on, cooperation between strong, cohesive, and stable sovereign member states. The well-defined borders and legal and political boundaries of each nation guarantees the sustainability of its social welfare system and a coherent, democratic polity. This is also vital for fruitful international discussions regarding regional and global challenges and the means to address them responsibly.

In the last decade, internal and external actors have criticized Transatlantic states for the division and polarization present in their societies. For example, in the Czech Republic, opinions and norms are often different for people living in Prague and in the rest of the country. This is true not only for political issues – between people who voted for the current president and those who voted for other candidates – but on most other social issues including COVID-19 vaccination. Social divisions on similar issues divide communities in Hungary and Romania as well.

However, polarization between clearly demarcated camps is often blamed on politicians and the media, which are said to simplify the description of a difficult situation. People tend not to think about things in black in white: be it social inequalities, their feelings about the COVID pandemic, or other issues.

The latest data, according to the Masaryk Democratic Academy's research, shows that people in the Czech Republic do not consider themselves to be part of one or another group, but as having individual concerns when it comes to their futures and the country's security.³⁹ The media and politicians both

37 European Committee for Social Cohesion. *A New Strategy for Social Cohesion*. The Council of Europe, March 31, 2004, 3.

38 Masarykova Demokratická Akademie. *Jedna společnost různé světy. Poznatky kvalitativní studie o fragmentarizaci české společnosti*. 6/2021. ISBN: 978-80-87748-67-1

39 Masarykova Demokratická Akademie. *Jedna společnost různé světy. Poznatky kvalitativní studie o fragmentarizaci české společnosti*. 6/2021. ISBN: 978-80-87748-67-1

play a significant role in forging public opinion and developing, or undoing, social cohesion and common solidarity. Public figures and organizations should operate with the goal of not dividing society by simplifying contentious social issues or by exaggerating existing problems. Societies need certain axioms, a set of values that all political and social groups agree upon and share, that creates a national identity. Boundaries and different identities do not necessarily lead to trouble and conflict. They also guarantee diversity, which is a fundamental value of both the European and the Transatlantic community.

CYBERSECURITY AND TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Iulian F. Popa, PhD

The EU should become a global player and gain more economic and political influence in cyberspace. Cyberspace is a strategic domain, and gaining power in cyberspace is paramount for technological, geopolitical, military, and economic dominance.

The U.S.-EU-China power triangle is rather complex. For each, cyberspace is a strategic priority, and each wants supremacy. The U.S. and China are competitors in cyberspace, while the EU's relations with each differs significantly. Both the U.S. and China take full advantage of the blurring of military-civilian lines and are recognized as very active in cyberspace. The EU must cope with the limited willingness of several of its member states which only cautiously support the idea of the Union becoming a global cyber power. The truth is that some member states still act on their own, strengthening their own cyber posture first. Thus, the EU still has limited foreign and security policy leverage with which to compete with the U.S. and/or China in cyberspace. To go against both the U.S. and China would be at the very least unfeasible for the EU, if not outright counterproductive.

Though initially reluctant to expose and counter China's malicious cyber activities, the EU seems determined to confront China in cyberspace and provide more than diplomatic responses to China's malicious cyber activities (e.g., sophisticated cyberweapons proliferation, information warfare, and intellectual property theft). To do so, the EU needs complex technological capabilities for credible deterrence and response, in addition to increased economic and political influence. There is a window of opportunity for strengthening EU-U.S. relations regarding the governance and security of cyberspace. The EU cannot be a cyberspace superpower in the short term because it is technologically far behind the U.S. and China. The only realistic option for the EU is to strengthen cooperation with the U.S. and grow into a credible competitor on the international stage, especially when pushing back against China.

Bearing in mind many diverging interests and strategies regarding the security of cyberspace, the question is to what extent the U.S. is ready to engage with the EU and increase Transatlantic cybersecurity cooperation. In the same way, for example, it is not clear to what extent Brussels' policy makers are ready to cope with the use of U.S. offensive cyber capabilities. In fact, the US's preferences to focus on military and intelligence cyber capabilities may go against the EU strategy of countering proliferation by using diplomatic instruments for conflict prevention and de-escalation.

As we have seen in the recent past, these differences translated into many silent or open divergences between the EU and the U.S. As a result, both have supported and developed their own political and technological instruments instead of a common one. Let us not forget that the U.S. only recently joined the Paris Call for Trust and Security and Cyberspace which, most likely, it previously disregarded. Moreover, the EU kept its silence while the U.S. voiced many concerns on several of China's actions in the past.

The Opportunity for a Common Agenda in Cyberspace

The good news is that there seems to be increasing agreement on both sides of the Atlantic that China is the main threat, and that any transatlantic disagreement would benefit China sooner or later. Therefore, both the U.S. and the EU should fully align their strategic goals and cooperate to slow down and push back against China in cyberspace.

Some of the pre-existing EU-U.S. disagreements could be managed through drastically cutting technological dependency on China and coordinating their digital sovereignty, or the right to self-regulate their own respective cyberspaces. Otherwise, especially in the case of the EU, there is a risk in increasing dependency on technologies under strategic Chinese control (such as AI, 5G, robotics, machine learning, energy storage, nanotech, and biotechnologies).

At the same time the EU should (1) strengthen its single market and invest more in technology and cybersecurity diplomacy (or the use of diplomacy to pursue its cybersecurity preferences), (2) secure safe and resilient supply chains, (3) increase its business convergence with U.S. tech companies, especially to avoid being reliant on Chinese vendors (e.g., 5G), and (4) engage more actively in mutual strategic investments.



Finally, the U.S. should take work to find common ground with the EU, especially regarding the coordination or even harmonization of public policies on cybersecurity and regulatory frameworks. Closer strategic cooperation and coordination with the EU to strengthen responses to malicious behaviour in cyberspace is paramount. Both the EU and U.S. should do more to build trust and increase their resilience in cyberspace. Against all odds, in Brussels there is hope that U.S. policymakers' understanding of EU policies and attitudes on digital sovereignty and cyberspace governance will gain momentum during the Biden Administration. And this should be capitalized on as soon as possible.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE UNITED STATES, AND NATO ON CYBER DEFENSE

Benita Czirk

As technology is becoming more and more pervasive in everyday life, cyber threats are becoming one of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. There are now myriad ways for actors to attack states without warning and without leaving a trace.

As states begin to adopt new platforms for e-governance, threats in the cyber realm are becoming a top priority for national security.

In 2022, with a well-targeted attack, a single hacker can destabilize an entire state or region.⁴⁰ Technology touches everything and its influence on daily life is growing. States now use cyberspace for general administration and governance, and people upload sensitive personal data to the internet via social media platforms. With this increased usage of cyberspace, a huge amount of personal data can be accessed unlawfully, and many systems critical to a state's functioning can be destroyed with malicious software.

In the face of this threat, every nation, even within the EU, has taken a different approach on how to best protect their cyber infrastructures. This level of disunity and disagreement on how to best protect the state from cyber threats has created weaknesses that are easily exploited. To counter these threats, it is necessary to increase cooperation between the EU and the U.S. to plug holes in security.

Due to the growing possibility of attacks, several partnerships have been formed between the EU and the U.S. and the EU and NATO, as well as between the U.S. and Germany. The Transatlantic Cybersecurity Partnership⁴¹ between the U.S. and Germany brings together experts to address threats posed by cyber warfare and digital propaganda. This kind of international cooperation is a great example of how the EU should prepare itself for a possible cyber-attack. Preparation for defense against a major cyber-attack is already a regular element of NATO's strategic thinking. NATO organizes annual cyber defense exercises, the latest having taken place in Estonia in 2021, which modelled cyber-attacks based on real life possibilities.

This exercise tested and trained cyber experts to hone their ability to defend NATO and national power, communications, and other networks. From defending against malware, to hybrid attacks involving social media, to hacks on mobile devices, the exercise presents a set of challenging, realistic scenarios. Last year's scenarios, for example, included cyber-attacks on gas supply pipelines, a cyber-attack disrupting the deployment of troops and logistics, and a pandemic-related ransomware attack, where vaccine data was stolen, and vaccination programs compromised.⁴²

⁴⁰ See "Significant Cyber Incidents." *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/programs/strategic-technologies-program/significant-cyber-incidents>.

⁴¹ See the AICGS project at John Hopkins University: <https://www.aicgs.org/project/transatlantic-cybersecurity-partnership/>

⁴² See NATO's flagship cyber defense exercise kicks off in Estonia, 30 Nov 2021 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_189156.htm.

21st century cyber-attacks are advancing at an alarming rate and demand a sophisticated response. Cooperation in the cyber domain is of chief importance. As Mircea Geoana states, "Our future security depends on our ability to understand, adopt, and implement emerging and disruptive technologies – at speed and at scale."⁴³

⁴³ "Deputy Secretary General discusses NATO-industry cooperation on cyber security." NATO, November 18, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_188734.htm.

TRANSATLANTICISM AND THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Aleksander Siemaszko and Lucie Voseckova

International politics have long since moved from mere questions of war and peace and added an economic dimension to the discussion of security dilemmas. A comprehensive analysis of the Transatlantic partnership for the 21st century thus requires an evaluation of the current challenges (and unfulfilled potential) to economic cooperation that forms the basis of the idea of ‘the West’.

The Role of Economic Cooperation

The Transatlantic economy represents one-third of global GDP (purchasing power parity, or PPP), accounting for 27 percent of the world’s exports and 32 percent of imports. The U.S. and the EU are also the source of 68 percent of global outward foreign direct investment.⁴⁴ Yet it is not the sheer size of the two economic powerhouses that matters, but rather the intricate web of connections that foster Euro-Atlantic ties. We argue that the reinforcement of Transatlanticism relies mainly on safeguarding economic partnerships, on managing potential trade and investment differences, and on jointly developing the ability to shape global regulatory frameworks for commercial, digital, and green policies and standards.

Safeguarding the Partnership

Trade and security reinforce each other.⁴⁵ 16 million jobs depend on trade across the Atlantic. The EU and the U.S. are each other’s largest trading and investment partner. Though the peace-making role of commerce has been subject to much debate, the Transatlantic partnership provides stark evidence that it works. The economic support offered by the U.S. after World War II, under the umbrella of the Marshall Plan, contributed to the unification of Western Europe and the creation of the European Economic Community. This then facilitated the creation of a prosperous Western Europe, which has proven to be a cornerstone of NATO, a long-held, strong, and continuously important part of the system of multilateral, regional alliances established by the U.S. during the Cold War.⁴⁶

The ill-fated Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) was meant to realize two major goals: to spur GDP growth, which faltered after the 2008 Great Recession, and to reinforce economic ties between the two sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, policies that strengthen the Transatlantic partnership in building transparent, competitive economic and trade relations stand in contrast to the corrupt and shady business practices of undemocratic regimes. In this way transparent business economics helps align Western *values* with *interests*.

However, the failure of TTIP and the slow pace of the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between the U.S. and the U.K. point to the limits of commerce as a tool of fostering partnerships. The issue of mutual protectionism -- in any sector from agriculture to public transportation -- would put any trade negotiation at risk. Failure to reach a settlement on a business or economic issue risks creating a negative spill-over effect for the entire relationship. At this point a simple focus on tariff liberalization

44 Hamilton, Daniel S. and Joseph P. Quinlan. *The Transatlantic Economy 2020: Annual Survey of Jobs, Trade and Investment between the United States and Europe*. Washington, DC: Foreign Policy Institute and Johns Hopkins University SAIS, 2020, 6.

45 See Gowa, Joanne. *Allies, Adversaries, and International Trade*, Princeton, 1994.

46 Lundestad, Geir. *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*, Oxford, 2004.

may prove insufficient, so procedures for managing differences and a stronger regulatory dialogue are a key prerequisite for launching trade negotiations.

Managing Differences

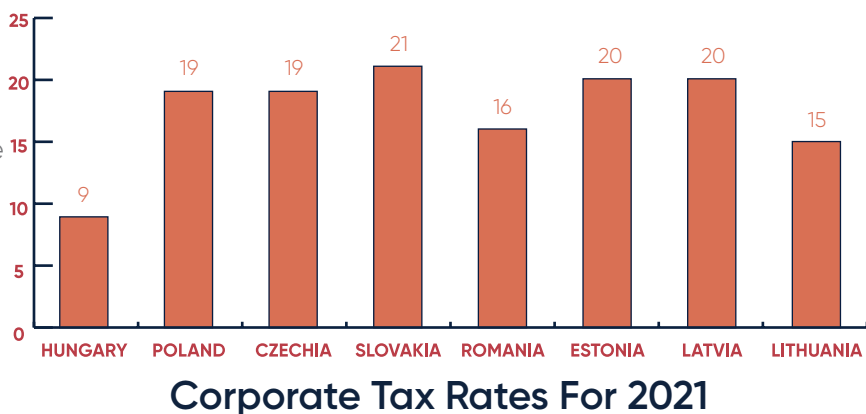
The need for proper Transatlantic consultations on the economy has been underscored for several years, especially after periods of wider Transatlantic rifts, whether in the 1980s and 1990s (with famous “Banana Wars” between the U.S. and the European Commission) or in the 2000s, culminating in the creation of the Transatlantic Economic Council in 2007. Though the body created then proved to be ultimately ineffective, the institutionalization of the Transatlantic partnership in the economy has not been forsaken. The newly created Trade and Technology Council (TTC) announced in 2021 has an ambitious agenda with the clear intention of preventing the return of the trade and tariff conflicts of the Trump presidency and of previous instances.

Fostering a Transatlantic dialogue on the economy could lead not only to the marginalization of contentious issues (such as new disputes around the regulation and taxation of technology companies) but could also facilitate wider cooperation between democratic nations, as illustrated by the close collaboration between the U.S., the EU, and Japan in the World Trade Organization. Moreover, a robust network of contacts could also lead to a better understanding of emerging concepts like European strategic autonomy, which still seems to be controversial with some American observers, or allow for better communication around certain U.S. initiatives such as AUKUS, a trilateral security pact between Australia, the U.K., and the U.S.

Shaping the Global Regulatory Framework

The TTC aims for more than just the prevention and resolution of disputes. Its agenda includes collaboration on critical raw materials, global value chains, emerging technologies (including AI), labor standards, challenges from non-market economies and, pending further consultations, trade, and environment issues.⁴⁷ Its aim is to counter the rise of systemic rivals to liberal, free-market and democratic governments in the Transatlantic region. Making sure that emerging technologies are placed within a national, regulatory framework that can be democratically controlled and is consistent with individual liberties, human rights, and that reinforces WTO rules is vital. This will avoid exploitation by unscrupulous actors and reduce dependencies in strategic sectors, which are key to safeguarding the long-term future of the Transatlantic community and its values. Without the firepower of the economy, neither military security nor the liberal order can be maintained.

An efficient Transatlantic partnership can also have a global impact, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s work on digital taxation and minimum corporate tax systems has demonstrated. Robust protections against intellectual property theft and forced labor could also come from reigniting TTIP-related talks between the U.S. and the EU. Reinvigorating Western multilateralism and ensuring fairer trade could also provide countermeasures to emerging populism and societal divisions.



⁴⁷ EU – U.S. Trade and Technology Council Inaugural Joint Statement, Brussels, September 29, 2021.

TRANSATLANTICISM—THE FUTURE OF NATO ENLARGEMENT

András Braun

NATO integration became a security priority in the early 1990s for the Central and Eastern European countries and a political reality at the end of the decade. By 2019, NATO integrated 14 countries from the wider CEE and Southeast Europe in five enlargement rounds. The accession of these countries was not only important from a national security point of view but also to underscore the Western orientation of these formerly communist countries.

After the lengthy accession process of the Republic of North Macedonia, future enlargement is not on NATO's agenda. However, it is important to highlight that there are still countries in the Western Balkans and in the Eastern Partnership area that are seeking membership. Currently, NATO recognizes three aspiring member countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine. Although each of these countries is situated in a different geographical region in Europe, it is important to note that all of them look at NATO membership as a source of internal stability and guarantor of national sovereignty.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, it first seemed that Russia would not represent a major security threat to the region. While this quickly proved to be wrong, starting in the 2000s, Moscow's most recent activities have clearly revealed even to the non-expert community that current Russian leadership is interested in maintaining and/or creating frozen conflicts to exercise its influence. Paradoxically, this can have a negative impact on the future of NATO enlargement, especially in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, where Russia is the main threat to sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the other hand, in Bosnia, due to the complex domestic political challenges in the country, NATO integration enjoys the support of the Bosniak and Croat populations, while the Bosnian Serbs remain divided over the question.

NATO Membership in Southeastern Europe



Based on these findings, this chapter is intended to assess the future of NATO enlargement from two angles.

NATO as a Security Provider

Due to their historical experience, the countries of the Visegrád (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and the Vilnius Groups (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) consider NATO not only as an important pillar of Euro-Atlantic integration but also as a guarantee of national security, sovereignty, and independence. From a narrower point of view, NATO membership for some Eastern European members also means protection from Russian influence or even occupation. This remains true even in the face of a more prominent and more malign China. While the Western part of the Transatlantic community has started to see China as its biggest geopolitical challenge, study visits organized as part of the Transatlantic Security Initiative program show that in the post-Soviet space (in Estonia and Georgia), Russia's presence and geopolitical aspirations remain a serious threat. But there are differences. Until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Visegrád countries, for example, have built their respective relationships with Moscow on more of a bilateral rather than a regional basis, while a regional approach is much stronger in the case of the Baltic States

Due to Moscow's geopolitical proximity, the integrated border defense, and the military security aspect of the defense relationship between Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia is very strong. NATO membership generated closer cooperation between these states. The fact that these countries are part of NATO is why Russia does not have as much leverage in the Baltics as it has on Ukraine, Georgia, and in some cases, in the Balkans. In those countries, even if it is not present militarily, Russia remains an important security challenge and the main source of disinformation campaigns. Russia can still create and disseminate a narrative that succeeds in dominating public discourse, as demonstrated by narratives on the migration situation at the border between Belarus, Lithuania, and Poland.

In some Baltic nations, the effort to counteract these disinformation campaigns is exemplary. Their increased resilience corresponds to increased investment. In addition, NATO membership helped them develop a comprehensive defense strategy based on lessons learned from the war in Georgia the annexation of Crimea, and the war in Ukraine. These efforts continued in the post-annexation period too. The development of self-defense capabilities, support for NATO's presence in the region, and the reinforcement of its role are part of all the Baltic countries' regional security mindset.⁴⁸

NATO enlargement was not only successful in the Baltics and Central and Eastern Europe (the Visegrád Group, Romania, Bulgaria), but also in the Balkans, where NATO, together with the European Union, managed to stabilize regional security, albeit long after the armed conflicts were over in the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, integrating Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania into NATO made regional security much more stable.

48 During our study trip to Estonia, we learned about its defense and security priorities. More information can be found in the documents published by the Estonian Ministry of Defence, the Estonian Defence Forces, and the Parliament of Estonia: [National Security Concept of Estonia \(2017\)](#), the [Estonian Military Defence 2026](#), and the [National Defence Strategy of Estonia](#).

NATO as an Engine for Turning New Members into New Security Providers

The benefit of NATO membership in our region is twofold. First, membership allows countries to enjoy collective defense. Second, it allows NATO to stabilize new democracies by integrating them into Western security structures. Most recently, President Joe Biden reminded American allies that collective defense and Article 5 will remain the cornerstones of EU-U.S. relations. These countries have developed strong ties in terms of defining regional and cross-regional defense priorities, thanks to their NATO membership.⁴⁹

But these countries are not only looking for protection: as full-fledged NATO member states, they can become security providers themselves, by contributing to various NATO missions. NATO membership brought these nations closer to each other and facilitated their military cooperation. It made them committed to reforming their armed forces based on common standards and priorities (such as interoperability).

Thanks to enlargement from the Baltics to the Mediterranean, NATO allies can express their defense and security priorities in the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and, partially, in the Black Sea. The fact that enlargement remains incomplete in the Black Sea region shows the limits and the vulnerabilities of the Alliance. The future of NATO enlargement, therefore, remains not only a value-based decision but also an important geostrategic question. The Alliance must continue to calculate the potential internal and external challenges posed by NATO's future enlargement.

Current and Future Challenges

NATO does not suffer from "enlargement fatigue" (unlike the EU on integration), significant internal political, economic, and other challenges are putting immense pressure on the Alliance. NATO members are often divided over China and Russia; however, this approach seems to be changing after the invasion of Ukraine. For a very long period of time, Moscow clearly opposed the enlargement of NATO, and it seemed that the dynamics of Russian-Transatlantic relations would certainly act against NATO enlargement. However, the war in Ukraine has changed this approach, therefore the enlargement of NATO may become a reality in the near future (for example, the potential NATO accession of Sweden and Finland.)

However, as we could witness, Moscow's strategy of maintaining, supporting and recreating regional conflicts will most certainly represent a significant security challenge on NATO's eastern flank. Despite NATO's popularity, and support for integration in these countries, the accession of Georgia and Ukraine depends on the will of the citizens and, on Moscow's attitude. Russia is interested in maintaining the current status quo in the Balkans (Kosovo, Bosnia) and in building up a buffer zone in its direct neighborhood (in the Caucasus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus). In the future, NATO must be prepared to ensure collective defense and to remain a credible and desirable security alternative for future member states.

49 A good example of this is the Baltic Defense College which has its headquarters in Tartu, Estonia.

International Republican Institute

IRI.org

@IRIglobal

P: (202) 408-9450

E: info@iri.org

