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THE EFFECTS OF THE CURRENT SECURITY SYSTEM'S TRANSFORMATION ON THE SECURITY OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN NATION STATES

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ABSTRACT: The end of the bipolar world order at the end of the 20th century, which has had a strong impact on the global security system and particularly affected the Central European states to this day, gave rise to an analytical-evaluative approach to the security threats in the region. The topic of this doctoral research ('An Analysis- and Evaluation-based Approach to the Security Threats in Central Europe') is primarily the analysis and evaluation of the risk factors to the V-4 states, especially Slovakia and Hungary. The article analyses the external security challenges, risks, and threats identified on the basis author's objective perception and can be primarily classified as ones within political and military dimensions. Of course, this does not dismiss the possibility that the threats not discussed in this study are non-existent. With the use of National Security and Defence Strategies and annual Security Assessment Reports the article presents the risk factors identified by Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

KEYWORDS: Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Russia, Ukraine, ISIL, security challenges, hybrid war, cyberspace

INTRODUCTION

In the states of the Central European region, the end of the bipolar world order was accompanied by a political regime change. The transition from a socialist type of government and planned economy to a market economy was not smooth. This process affected not only the Central European states (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland), but also other countries of the Soviet Bloc and some successor states of the former superpower. The unification of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, or the “bloody” disintegration of Yugoslavia, also significantly contributed to the transformation of the security environment in Central Europe. The independence of the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) and Ukraine, which broke away from the former Soviet Union, further complicated the European security environment. In 2014, the “reunification” of the Crimean Peninsula to Russia and the proclamation of the breakaway Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics by the local Russian population and Russian “volunteers” led to a civil war that continues to this day, making relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation extremely tense. The conflict takes place on the territory of a country neighbouring Hungary,

Slovakia, Poland and Romania; therefore it has a significant – negative – impact on the immediate security environment of Central Europe.

In the Arab World, bordering Europe, civil wars, violent changes of government and weak states emerged as a result of the 2011 “Arab Spring”¹. Poverty, unemployment, and poor living conditions, culminating in hopelessness, had led to a power vacuum in many countries, and generated a trend of the strengthening of various radical groups. The so-called “Islamic State”², which is essentially the successor to the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization,³ was established in Iraq and Syria. As a consequence of the “Arab Spring” and the overpopulation of so-called Sub-Saharan Africa, migration to Western Europe intensified. This trend should clearly be considered a threat as one of the migration routes to the west goes through the Balkans and through Central Europe.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

On 4th October 2017, at its 72nd meeting of the year, the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted the new Security Strategy, which would have replaced the Security Strategy in force since 2005. However, the new document has not yet come into force, due to certain political reasons,⁴ it has not been submitted to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Nevertheless, the strategy indicates very well how Slovakia’s then political leadership⁵ approached the current security environment and the relating security risks. To maintain objectivity, government approved Security Reports of Slovak Republic for 2017⁶ 2018⁷ and 2019⁸ were analysed in this article. After the establishment of the new government of the Slovak Republic the document approved by the previous government but not submitted to the National Council of the Slovak Republic was revised. The revision is executed by the interministerial committee set up by the experts of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry

¹ Arab Spring, a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa from in 2010 and 2011. See: “Arab Spring”. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 23 August 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring>, Accessed on 13 December 2020.

² ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

³ “Counter Terrorism guide: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)”. National Counterterrorism Center. <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/isil.html>, Accessed on 7 December 2020.

⁴ “Otvorený list premiérovi a poslancom: Výzva na podporu Bezpečnostnej a Obrannej stratégie SR”. O mediach. com. 5 December 2018. <https://www.omeiach.com/tlacove-spravy/14489-otvoreny-list-premierovi-a-poslancom-vyzva-na-podporu-bezpecnostnej-a-obrannej-strategie-sr>, Accessed on 7 December 2020.

⁵ On 29th February 2020 parliamentary elections were held in Slovakia. Subsequently, on 21st March 2020 a new government was set up with opposition party representatives, replacing the previous cabinet led by DIRECTION – Social Democracy (Slovakian: “SMER – sociálna demokracia”) party. The new government consists of the Slovak National Party (Slovakian: Slovenská Národná strana), inter-ethnic political party MOST-HÍD (Slovakian: MOST-HÍD) and until 10th September 2016 #NETWORK (Slovakian: #SIEŤ).

⁶ “Správa o bezpečnosti Slovenskej republiky za rok 2017”. [Report on the Security of the Slovak Republic for 2017] Slov-lex. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/-/SK/dokumenty/LP-2018-556>, Accessed on 7 December 2020. (hereafter SOB SVK 2017)

⁷ “Správa o bezpečnosti Slovenskej republiky za rok 2018”. [Report on the Security of the Slovak Republic for 2018] Úrad Vlády Slovenskej Republiky. 3 September 2019. <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24131/1>, Accessed on 7 December 2020. (hereafter SOB SVK 2018)

⁸ “Správa o bezpečnosti Slovenskej republiky za rok 2019”. [Report on the Security of the Slovak Republic for 2019] Slov-lex. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/-/SK/dokumenty/LP-2020-202>, Accessed on 7 December 2020. (Hereafter SOB SVK 2019.)

of Foreign and European Affairs.⁹ The new Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic and the final version of the new Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic were completed on 8th December 2020.¹⁰ After their approval by the government the documents will be submitted to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in early 2021.

The security policy of the Slovak Republic is determined by the Security Strategy. For the security of the state and its population, it is the Slovak Republic itself that is primarily responsible. At the same time, global competition, the technological and information revolution, and changes in the security environment necessitate the addressing of security challenges, risks, and threats in the context of international cooperation. This is the reason why the Security Strategy emphasizes the importance of the active membership of the Slovak Republic in international organizations, in particular the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which are the cornerstones of security and those of the implementation of security policy.¹¹

The security strategy of the Slovak Republic is in line with the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EU Global Strategy¹²) and the Strategic Concept of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO Strategic Concept¹³).

The security environment in which the Slovak Republic pursues its security interests has significantly deteriorated. As a consequence of the impact of internal and external factors, which are closely intertwined with their borderlines becoming increasingly blurred, the security environment is changing rapidly, often in an unpredictable way. Crises can surface without any warning, and the reaction of the international community is not necessarily immediate.¹⁴

The Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic Identifies, Inter Alia, the Following Security Threats:

In the International Security System:

The crisis and conflict prevention capabilities of the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have weakened and are unlikely to

⁹ “Rezorty obrany a diplomacie už začali s prípravou nových strategických dokumentov, na rokovanie vlády ich chcú predložiť do konca tohto roka”. Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej Republiky. 8 July 2020. <https://www.mosr.sk/47390-sk/rezorty-obrany-a-diplomacie-uz-zacali-s-pripravou-novych-strategickych-dokumentov-na-rokovanie-vlady-ich-chcu-predlozit-do-konca-tohto-roka/>, Accessed on 7 December 2020.

¹⁰ “Ivan Korčok a Jaroslav Naď predstavili nové strategické dokumenty”. [Ivan Korčok and Jaroslav Naď presented a new strategic documents] DennikN.sk. 8 December 2020. <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2177892/?ref=list>, Accessed on 12 December 2020.

¹¹ “Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky 2017”. [The Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic – 2017]. Úrad Vlády Slovenskej Republiky. 2 October 2017. <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/22364/1>, Accessed on 7 December 2020. (hereafter BS SVK 2017)

¹² For further details see: “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy”. European Union. June 2016. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf, Accessed on 12 December 2020.

¹³ For further details see: “Strategic Concept 2010”. North Atlantic Treaty Organization. 3 February 2012. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.html, Accessed on 12 December 2020.

¹⁴ BS SVK 2017: 5., article 7.

strengthen in the near future. New zones of tension and long-term conflicts are emerging, as well as failed states that do not guarantee the security and stability of their own citizens.¹⁵

From the aspect of protection of the security interests of the Slovak Republic it is of particular concern and is regarded as a violation of international rules and principles that in 2014 a part of Ukraine came under the rule of the Russian Federation under an illegal and unlawful referendum, presumably with the support of the Russian armed forces. The Slovak Republic considers this event as a serious violation of international law. In the neighbourhood of the Slovak Republic an armed conflict broke out and has been in progress to this day, affecting the security and stability of the entire region.¹⁶

Following these events, the relations of the EU and NATO member states with the Russian Federation deteriorated significantly, reciprocal sanctions were introduced, and the strength, capabilities, and activities of Moscow's armed forces increased in the vicinity of the EU and NATO member states, necessitating the military reinforcement of the eastern wing of NATO. At the same time, ongoing efforts are being made in order to deepen the dialogue with Russia, primarily on security issues. These talks are conducted in the framework of the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE.¹⁷

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery poses a security threat, including the existence of dysfunctional states that are not always able to ensure effective control and disarmament of such weapons systems. Hazardous materials, including chemical, biological, radioactive, or nuclear materials, may fall into the hands of state and non-state actors, including terrorist groups, thus presenting a threat to the territory and population of the Slovak Republic and its allies. The deterioration of the security situation was also reflected by the negative developments in the situation of the international arms control system. A fundamental challenge is posed by the scientific and technological progress and the rapid proliferation of technologies across various disciplines, allowing non-state actors and terrorist organizations to evade existing control mechanisms.¹⁸

In the Euro-Atlantic Area:

The trust and confidence of the population of the EU and NATO member states in these organizations is dwindling. The spread of negative tendencies and political processes, coupled with negative sentiments towards the existence and values of the EU and NATO, may potentially weaken or even deteriorate the functioning of these organizations, have an influence on integration processes, and thus damage the security interests of the Slovak Republic. An important factor in this regard is the propaganda, information, and disinformation activities of external and internal actors.¹⁹

The Euro-Atlantic area has been hit by a number of terrorist attacks, which have essentially grown into a permanent threat. These terrorist attacks may present indirect threat to democratic society through urging the state administration to introduce extreme measures or special legal order. Such restrictive regulations may decrease the trust of population in the organs of state administration.²⁰

¹⁵ BS SVK 2017: 6., article 9.

¹⁶ BS SVK 2017: 6., article 10.

¹⁷ BS SVK 2017: 6., article 11.

¹⁸ BS SVK 2017: 6., article 12.

¹⁹ BS SVK 2017: 7., articles 13-14.

²⁰ BS SVK 2017: 7., article 15.

The significant increase in illegal, uncontrolled migration from the Middle East, Asia and Africa into Europe has a significant impact on the security of the Euro-Atlantic region. The risk of further illegal and uncontrolled migration is aggravated by the poor social and economic conditions, population growth, ongoing conflicts, instability, and climate change affecting those regions. In this context, illegal, uncontrolled migration is not only a serious humanitarian challenge, but it also presents a serious security threat to the Slovak Republic, to the cohesion and stability of the European Union, and to the functioning of the Schengen border control system. Illegal migration promotes the activation of domestic extremist groups, increases populism and intolerance, facilitates political communication of extremist movements, increases the profits of organized criminal groups involved in human trafficking. Moreover, it generates contradictions among the EU Member States and jeopardizes the functioning of the Schengen system.²¹

In the Context of Europe:

In many regions of the world, the security situation, the failure of certain states, rapid demographic growth, and the effects of global problems, such as poverty, epidemics and climate change, destruction of the natural environment, shortages of food and drinking water contribute to crises and conflicts, which ultimately lead to migration to the regions of the more developed world. Such processes are accelerated by the emergence of modern technologies that easily overcome both physical and psychological barriers. Failed states are the sources of instability, conflicts, and forced migration, moreover, they even provide safe haven for terrorists.²²

The security situation in the eastern regions of Ukraine indicates the emergence of a long-lasting conflict that will create potential sources of tension and affect the security situation throughout Ukraine, the Black Sea region and Central and Eastern Europe. Ukraine's instability, in parallel with a possible escalation of tensions, poses a security threat to the Slovak Republic.²³

The Middle East remains a source of instability. The major destabilizing factors are: armed military conflicts, regional powers and radical religious factions, territorial disputes, the popularity of ideologies that promote terrorism, religious extremism, social and economic stagnation and even decline, migration, energy shortages, water scarcity and related food shortages, population growth and the proliferation of conventional and non-conventional weapons. The international cooperation and effective actions against the Islamic State in Libya, Iraq and Syria have induced asymmetric threats from the Islamic State, which launched attacks on European targets.

In its partial summary the new Security Strategy²⁴ states that in the changed security environment an armed attack poses a serious and potential security threat to Slovakia. This threat cannot be completely ruled out due to the deepening instability and the escalation of current conflicts in regions neighbouring NATO and EU Member States. At the same time, the document warns that the present security situation in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine could lead to an armed conflict in Europe not only as a direct military conflict of states, but it may also take the form of multi-spectrum hybrid warfare. Security is not just a dimension

²¹ BS SVK 2017: 7., articles 16-17.

²² BS SVK 2017: 8., article 22.

²³ BS SVK 2017: 8., article 23.

²⁴ BS SVK 2017: 8., article 24.

of the physical world – the unprecedented development in information and communication technologies offer a range of possibilities, and new vulnerabilities as well. State and non-state actors have the potential to make cyber-attacks more complex, sophisticated, and dynamic.²⁵

The security threats posed by the activities of foreign intelligence services are high in the long run, and the growing IT capabilities have been contributing to their further increase. In addition to inciting extremists and foreign secret services, one of their main activities is the criticism of state institutions and international organizations of which the Slovak Republic is a regular member. In this regard the spread of propaganda against the interests of the Slovak Republic and its allies within the Euro-Atlantic structures plays an important role.²⁶

Terrorist threat is presented first and foremost by the violent activities of radicalized individuals or minor cells inspired or directed by globally operating jihadist terrorist organizations. A new security threat is posed by foreign (terrorist) fighters, i.e. citizens of EU Member States (including those of the Slovak Republic) who have fought abroad and then return to their home country or third countries. The latter threats are fuelling an increase in organized crime, which poses a security threat to the Slovak Republic.²⁷

The threats identified above by the Security Strategy were fully confirmed and detailed by the 2017, 2018, and 2019 Security Reports of the Slovak Republic, which identified the following security threats, risks and challenges:

The security environment of the Slovak Republic continued to be significantly affected between 2017 and 2019 by the security situation in the regions on the eastern and southern flanks of the EU and NATO. Armed conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen and the activities of terrorist groups in these countries, as well as in many countries in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, were identified as significant factors in the security environment. All this is a support for extremist groups opposing the Slovak Republic's EU and NATO membership. The situation in the Western Balkans, in particular the deteriorating relations between Pristina and Belgrade, continues to have a significant impact on the security environment in the Slovak Republic. The European security situation is determined by the tense relationships of NATO and the EU to the Russian Federation due to the continuous support to the East-Ukrainian separatists and the illegal actions against Ukraine of Moscow.²⁸

At the same time, positive changes also took place in the Balkans: what needs mentioning is the agreement to adopt the name “North Macedonia”, which settled the relations between the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Greece, or the invitation of North Macedonia to join NATO.²⁹

The Russian Federation further increased its military capabilities and preparedness near NATO's borders (e.g., Kaliningrad, Crimean Peninsula), where it conducted significant military exercises, including practicing conflicts with NATO member states. Targeted operations against individual EU and NATO member states continued, seeking to influence domestic politics and election processes and to increase the internal instability of the target country. In the case of Slovakia, these activities were mainly manifested in the well-targeted dissemination of propaganda and disinformation aimed at the values and democracy of the Slovak Republic.³⁰

²⁵ BS SVK 2017: 9-10., articles 26-28.

²⁶ BS SVK 2017: 10., articles 29-34.

²⁷ BS SVK 2017: 10-11., articles 35-37.

²⁸ SOB SVK 2017: 5.

²⁹ SOB SVK 2018: 5.

³⁰ SOB SVK 2018: 4-5.

The security report of 2018 mentions the state of war in Ukraine as a specific security risk; however, this state of war did not affect or have any influence on the security of Slovakia.³¹ The state of war was declared after the military incident between Russia and Ukraine at the Kerch Strait on 25th November 2018.³²

However, the protracted armed conflict along the eastern border of Ukraine, the activities of radical nationalists, the proliferation of small arms among the Ukrainian population raise national security concerns, since these may spill over into Slovakian territory through increased migration and growing crime rate.³³

The security risks arising from illegal immigration were also present in 2017, despite the fact that the intensity of migration decreased compared to 2016. Illegal immigration continues to divide the EU Member States, in particular the debates on forms of solidarity called for by the countries most affected by illegal migration.³⁴ In 2018, illegal migration comprised mainly illegal border crossing and illegal stay in the country. Permanent efforts were detected when persons from high-risk countries requested temporary permission to stay in order to conduct economic activities. Such persons would have used their residence permit provided in Slovakia, for free travel all over the European Union.³⁵ 2019 saw the appearance of a brand new security risk: the return of European-born, often radicalized terrorist and jihadist fighters and their relatives to their European home countries.³⁶

2017 was characterized by an increase in threats in cyberspace aimed at private and state actors in Slovakia, and at the infrastructure – similarly to allied and neighbouring countries (Ukraine). Hostile activities of state and non-state actors in cyberspace, in particular economic espionage, continued to present a significant threat.³⁷ Fast, exponential technological development (Artificial Intelligence, 5G network) brought along the increase and extension of cyberspace security risks aimed at gaining strategic advantage or interference with existing infrastructure in the field of critical digital and telecommunication infrastructures. Competition and confrontation engulfed not only cyberspace but airspace, outer space, and international waters as well.³⁸

In line with this, the UN and OSCE capabilities were significantly weakened in the field of crisis- and conflict-prevention. The weakening of the UN and OSCE capabilities is the consequence of the stormy process on the global scene, characterised by the establishment and rivalry of new power centres, parallel with economic protectionism, unilateralism, and the weakening of international institutions.³⁹

In 2019, simultaneously with the weakening of the UN and OSCE capabilities the member states of NATO and the EU were faced with security challenges from all strategic directions, which included the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, growing increasingly assertive, Islamic terrorism, and hybrid warfare.⁴⁰

³¹ SOB SVK 2018: 4.

³² “Указ Президента України Про введення воєнного стану в Україні”. [Decree of the President of Ukraine on the imposition of martial law in Ukraine] Верховна Рада України. [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine] 26 November 2018. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/393/2018#Text>, Accessed on 7 December 2020.

³³ SOB SVK 2019: 4.

³⁴ SOB SVK 2017: 6.

³⁵ SOB SVK 2018: 5-6.

³⁶ SOB SVK 2019: 5.

³⁷ SOB SVK 2017: 6.

³⁸ SOB SVK 2019: 4.

³⁹ SOB SVK 2018: 4.

⁴⁰ SOB SVK 2019: 4.

The Security Report of 2019 states that the erosion of the arms control system continued. The most significant element of this process was the violation and then termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) between the United States and the Soviet Union on the elimination of ground-based intermediate-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles with conventional and nuclear warheads. There is lasting uncertainty about the future of the USA-Russia Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (STARTIII) as well. The increasing tensions between Russia and the USA generate further concerns, encouraging the monitoring of compliance with the provisions of the international Treaty on Open Skies.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the USA officially withdrew from the Treaty on 22nd November 2020.⁴²

On the basis of the analysis of the security environment, the author identified the security challenges, risks, and threats from the military perspective of the security strategy of Slovakia, adopted by the government, in parallel with the annual Security Reports, from the aspect of Slovakia:

- The weakening of the UN and OSCE capabilities in crisis and conflict prevention as well as their subsequent stabilization, is a matter of concern.
- The “reunification” of a part of Ukraine with the Russian Federation is a violation of the principles and norms of international law, which affects the security and stability of the entire region.
- As a consequence, the relations of the EU and NATO countries with the Russian Federation deteriorated significantly, mutual sanctions were imposed, and the Russian Federation’s military strength and presence/activities in regions close to the EU and NATO member states increased, which led to the military reinforcement of the eastern flank of NATO. At the same time, the dialogue with Russia on security issues continues, in particular in the framework of the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE.
- Gradual deterioration of bilateral political and military-political relations between the USA and Russia.
- The proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, especially in the case of “failing states”, which may be unable to ensure the control and destruction of their weapons.
- Terrorist attacks in the Euro-Atlantic region, which became a constant threat and significantly reduced the citizens’ sense of security.
- The sudden increase in illegal, uncontrolled migration from the Middle East, Asia and Africa to Europe, which presents not only a serious humanitarian challenge but also a threat to the security of the Slovak Republic, the cohesion and stability of the European Union, and the functioning of the Schengen border control system. It activates domestic extremist groups, increases populism and intolerance. It promotes human trafficking, supports organized crime, induces contradictions between EU Member States, and jeopardizes the functioning of the Schengen system.
- State and non-state actors are able to carry out cyber-attacks in a more complex, sophisticated and dynamic way not only against Slovakia but also against the allied nations and neighbouring countries (Ukraine). Such cyberattacks against the neighbouring countries and NATO allies may present indirect threat to the Slovak

⁴¹ SOB SVK 2019: 5.

⁴² “United States formally withdraws from Open Skies treaty”. 22 November 2020. Al-Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/22/united-states-formally-withdraws-from-open-skies-treaty>, Accessed on 7 December 2020.

Republic. Security risks may appear not only in cyberspace, but in airspace, outer space, and international waters as well.

- The increasingly assertive actions of the People’s Republic of China on the global scene, demonstrated by economic and R&D⁴³ espionage.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic was adopted on 4th February 2015 by the Prague government. The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic, adopted by the Czech government in March 2017, is based on this Security Strategy.⁴⁴

The fundamental security policy document of the Czech Republic is the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic, on which the rest of the lower-level strategic state concepts are built. This fundamental national security strategy follows the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the international obligations to the EU, NATO, and OSCE.⁴⁵

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic states that it is the responsibility of the Czech government and the organs of state administration to provide the security of the population, the territorial integrity of the country, and the preservation of the democratic system. Such objective may only be achieved through a nationwide unity, the proactive attitude of the entire citizenry, public administration, and government agencies, while the political and economic stability of the EU also plays an important role. The proactive policy of prevention includes the early recognition and analysis of national security risk factors, while the subsequent appropriate decision making and preventive diplomacy may be followed by defensive actions in force. The security of the Czech Republic is ensured primarily with own power, and secondarily through the active participation in the NATO alliance and EU capability development in the field of crisis management and cooperation.⁴⁶

The security interests of the Czech Republic fall into three distinct categories: vital interests, strategic interests, and further key interests.⁴⁷ From military aspects, the author regards vital interests and strategic interests as high priority, in particular:

- Ensuring the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the Czech Republic, preserving all essential elements of the democratic rule of law, including guaranteeing and protecting the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the population (vital interest).⁴⁸
- The fulfillment of strategic interests promotes the realization of vital interests. From a military point of view, the author considers it important to prevent local and regional

⁴³ Research and Development

⁴⁴ “Zpráva vlády Bohuslava Sobotky k plnění programového prohlášení 2014–2017”. [Report of the Government of Bohuslav Sobotka on the Implementation of the Program Statement 2014–2017] Vláda České republiky [The Government of the Czech Republic]. 29 September 2017. https://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/zprava-vlady-bohuslava-sobotky-k-plneni-programoveho-prohlaseni-2014_2017-160113/, Accessed on 7 December 2020

⁴⁵ *Bezpečnostní strategie České republiky 2015*. [The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic – 2015]. Praha: Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2015. 5., articles 1-2. hereafter (BS CZE 2015)

⁴⁶ BS CZE 2015: 6., articles 5-11.

⁴⁷ BS CZE 2015: 7., article 12.

⁴⁸ BS CZE 2015: 7., article 13.

conflicts, to increase the efficiency of the United Nations, to develop the role of the OSCE and, in this connection, to control conventional armaments in Europe. It is no less important to implement a NATO-EU strategic partnership while maintaining the transatlantic relations in a functional and credible manner. The Czech Republic would promote the preservation of international stability through regional and partner cooperation.⁴⁹ The government of the Czech Republic considers the countries of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans as partner countries in line with NATO and the EU's enlargement policy, as well as the countries of North Africa, the Sahel, and the Middle East.⁵⁰ In the transatlantic region, in addition to international obligations, the Czech Republic is focusing on strengthening and developing bilateral relations with the US.⁵¹

On the basis of the analysis of the security environment, the Czech Security Strategy identified security risks, threats, and challenges from a military perspective. According to the document, cooperation security mechanisms, and political and international legal obligations identified the weakening of security guarantees. Some states are making efforts to transform current international agreements and are ready to use hybrid warfare to achieve their power goals – combining traditional and non-conventional military means with non-military tools. Such arsenal includes the dissemination of propaganda through traditional and online media, spread of intelligence disinformation, cyber-attacks, political and economic pressure, and deployment of “unmarked” armed forces in foreign countries). These countries develop their military capabilities and seek to build exclusive spheres of influence by destabilizing neighbouring countries and exploiting local conflicts and disputes.

Instability and regional conflicts in and around the Euro-Atlantic region are stemming from unresolved conflicts, and their negative consequences may have a direct and indirect impact on the security of the Czech Republic. Ethnic, territorial, political, or economic disputes may generate armed conflicts.

The threat of terrorism as a way of enforcing political goals has long been high.

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery is also a threat. Certain state and non-state actors either openly or covertly seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The range of such assets makes it possible to reach the territory of the Czech Republic or its allies, which necessitates a great deal of efforts in terms of active and passive countermeasures.

The number and level of sophistication of cyber-attacks against both the public and private sectors is constantly increasing. These attacks may, in particular, disrupt communications, energy and transport networks, and maintenance processes, industrial and financial systems, ultimately inflicting significant material injury. The dependence of the state's armed forces on information and communication systems may affect the country's Defence. At the same time, political and economic intelligence is in close connection with cyber-attacks.

Negative aspects of (illegal) international migration. The number of local armed conflicts is on the rise, increasing the rate of illegal immigration, which may be a source or catalyst for a lot of security risks. At the same time, the lack of integration of legal immigrants

⁴⁹ BS CZE 2015: 7., article 14.

⁵⁰ BS CZE 2015: 15., article 51.

⁵¹ BS CZE 2015: 21., article 94.

can also generate social tensions and lead to undesirable radicalization of some members of the immigrant communities.⁵²

The military security threats mentioned above are closely linked to the manifestation of extremism, growing interethnic social tensions, the spread of organized crime (economic and financial, corruption, human and drug trafficking) and, last but not least, threats to critical infrastructure.⁵³

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic concludes that the security of the Czech Republic is affected by the dynamically changing environment of the country, which is difficult to predict, and asymmetric in nature. Security threats in geographically remote regions have a major impact on the security environment in the Czech Republic, as do security threats in closer regions or in country. A traditional armed attack against the Czech Republic is currently rather unlikely. The security situation and stability are deteriorating on the peripheries of Europe and in Europe's immediate neighborhood, with the consequence of a potential direct military or non-military (hybrid) threat against a NATO or EU member state. The main sources of risk factors include the threat to the values of the democratic rule of law, the denial of fundamental human rights and freedoms, as well as the efforts of great powers that disregard international law. These threats are not only presented by state actors, but also by non-state actors and various interest groups and advocates.⁵⁴

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic identifies, *inter alia*, the following security threats:

- The steady decline in political and legal commitments to European security is accompanied by unilateral attempts made by some states to build spheres of influence through a combination of political, economic, and military pressure and intelligence activities. Such pressures and activities are also applied in cyberspace.⁵⁵
- Security threats largely originate in weak or failed states whose governments are unable to provide their own defenses, the security of their citizens, and the rule of law. The potential cause of destabilization and subsequent conflicts in such failed states pose serious human rights violations from political, social, environmental, or other points of view.⁵⁶
- The deteriorating security situation in areas immediately adjacent to NATO and EU Member States and the growing severity of non-military threats necessitate the development of Europe's independent response capabilities. Such non-military security threats include, e.g. energy and raw material dependence, migration (caused by Europe's aging population, widespread poverty, and negative environmental changes, social and economic backwardness in large areas or entire regions of the Third World), cyber-attacks, financial vulnerabilities, abuse of information and communication technologies; uneven economic growth, proliferation of extremist political and religious trends. Preference for the national interest over the common, federal (NATO, EU) interest and underfunding of defense projects weaken the position of Europe and the USA in the global security environment. It is worrying that the UN's capacities to

⁵² BS CZE 2015: 11.

⁵³ BS CZE 2015: 12.

⁵⁴ BS CZE 2015: 8., articles 16-18.

⁵⁵ BS CZE 2015: 8., article 19.

⁵⁶ BS CZE 2015: 8., article 20.

prevent crises and conflicts are weakening. Consequently, non-state actors are much more flexible in responding to the control of business, transport, information and communication infrastructure.⁵⁷

The impacts of the transformation of the current security policy environment on the security of the Czech Republic are – in the author’s opinion – best summarized in the Czech Defence Strategy, which states: “In Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation openly implements its power-related ambitions, including even the use of military force, and the violations of the territorial integrity of neighbouring countries. A number of hybrid tools are used against NATO and EU member states, including targeted disinformation activities and cyber-attacks. At the southern and south-eastern borders of Europe, instability covers large areas from North Africa to Afghanistan. Weak and collapsing states cannot curb non-state actors, for example the Islamic State. This situation led to an increase in radicalization, extremism, terrorism, organized crime, and illegal migration into the EU.”⁵⁸

The assessment of the current security environment is published in broad outlines in the annual security reports of the Security Information Service (civil counterintelligence agency) “Bezpečnostní Informační Služba – BIS”. The 2017 Security Report was released in December 2018 – this security report identified the security risks, threats and challenges to the Czech Republic.

According to the report, Russian hybrid warfare activities were detected in the Czech Republic, typically in the field of operations influencing domestic politics. The ultimate goal, as interpreted by Russia, is to weaken the cohesion among the EU and NATO member states, for example, by weakening individual member states. The 2017 security report established that Russian hybrid warfare can be traced back to the period before the annexation of Crimea.⁵⁹ With regard to the Russian hybrid warfare waged against the Czech Republic, the Security Information Service concluded that due to the division between anti-migration and anti-Muslim extremist groups, the reluctance of individual activists to cooperate, and the cessation of immigration, these groups were transforming into “anti-government” movements. These anti-government movements manifested themselves in public condemnation of the NATO-and EU-membership of the Czech Republic and a positive opinion on President Putin’s policy, with an emphasis on the principles of so-called “pan-Slavism”.⁶⁰ Such anti-NATO and anti-EU, pro-Russian attitudes were present among members of extremist paramilitary, illegal “homeland defence”, and right-wing extremist groups.⁶¹ According to the Annual Security Report, in 2017 the most likely attackers of the e-mail server of the Czech Foreign Affairs Ministry were the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) and the Main (Intelligence) Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GU). These were the organizations that appear to have launched two unique attacks.⁶²

⁵⁷ BS CZE 2015: 9-10., articles 21-33.

⁵⁸ *Obranná strategie České republiky*. [The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic] Praha: Ministerstvo obrany České republiky, 2017. 7., article 4.

⁵⁹ “Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2017”. [Annual Report of the Security Information Service on 2017] Bezpečnostní Informační Služba [Security Information Service]. 3 December 2018. 6-7. <https://www.bis.cz/vyrocní-zpravy/vyrocní-zprava-bezpecnostni-informacni-sluzby-za-rok-2017-d85907e6.html>, Accessed on 8 December 2020. (hereafter: VZ BIS 2017)

⁶⁰ VZ BIS 2017: 9.

⁶¹ VZ BIS 2017: 10-11.

⁶² VZ BIS 2017: 15.

In addition to intelligence activities by Russia, China also carried out both influencing and intelligence activities in the Czech Republic. These Chinese intelligence activities were classified by the BIS into three categories: 1. damaging the EU's unified policy through Czech minorities living abroad, 2. intelligence aimed at the Czech armed forces (army, police, secret services, etc.), and 3. commercial intelligence, conducted also in the fields of research and development. China's complex intelligence activities (political, intelligence, legislative and economic) present a threat to the Czech Republic in the field of economy, science, and technology. China's intelligence activities focus mainly on strategic sectors such as energy, telecommunications, finance, logistics, healthcare, and advanced technologies. All these activities serve the purpose of implementing the "Made in China 2025" program (establishment of an independent and self-sufficient People's Republic of China by 2025).⁶³

On 26th November 2019, the Czech Security Information Service released its 2018 report, which stated that the BIS conducted countermeasures mainly against intelligence activities by Russia and China. These activities of the Russian and Chinese secret services concentrated in the field of politics, diplomacy, intelligence, economy, and information. The annual report of 2018 confirmed that the biggest security threat within and against the Czech Republic is presented by Russian hybrid warfare, which is directed against NATO, therefore also against the Czech Republic.⁶⁴

Chinese intelligence activities are comparable to those conducted by the Russian intelligence services. In addition to hybrid warfare, Russian and Chinese intelligence agencies also operated in the cyber space, which manifested in an attack against the unencrypted network of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.⁶⁵ The 2018 security report already discusses Russian and Chinese intelligence activities separately.

In 2018, in addition to the FSB and GU, the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR RF) was also operating in the Czech Republic. The activities of the Russian secret services included the approaching of people close to politicians, weakening the anti-Kremlin part of the Russian diaspora, and strengthening the part that is supportive of Russia's current policy. Also in 2018, the Czech Republic was a scene of Russian-controlled subversive actions targeting Ukraine's political sovereignty and territorial integrity. Following the Russian "Novichok" attack against Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, UK, in March 2018, the Russian intelligence activities slowed down. A joint action by NATO member states resulted in the expulsion of three unrecognized Russian intelligence officers from the Czech Republic. In the framework of cooperation with a partner country's national security service the deployment of the "Information and Communications Technology (ICT)"⁶⁶ infrastructure by the FSB could be prevented. This ICT infrastructure was

⁶³ VZ BIS 2017: 8-9.

⁶⁴ "Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2018". [Annual Report of the Security Information Service on 2018] Bezpečnostní Informační Služba [Security Information Service]. 26 November 2019. 6. <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocnizpravy/2018-vz-cz.pdf>. Accessed on 9 December 2020. (hereafter: VZ BIS 2018)

⁶⁵ VZ BIS 2018: 6.

⁶⁶ ICT is an extensional term for information technology that stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications (telephone lines and wireless signals) and computers, as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage and audiovisual systems, that enable users to access, store, transmit, and manipulate information.

to operate as part of a broader system that the FSB planned to use for regional and global encrypted cyber and information operations.⁶⁷

Both the intensity and scope of intelligence activities of the People's Republic of China increased. All major Chinese National Security Services have carried out operations in the Czech Republic – Military Intelligence Department (MID),⁶⁸ International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party (IDCPC), Ministry of State Security (MSS), Ministry of Public Security (MPS). In addition to the national security services, as in the previous period, Chinese career diplomats also resorted to coercive promotion of Chinese interests. In addition to targeting the scientific community, security and armed forces, and government agencies more and more free training, conferences, and sightseeing invitations were offered to members of these groups.⁶⁹

On 10th November 2020, BIS released the 2019 Safety Report. In this report, the director of BIS stated in the preface that the Russian and Chinese national security services were the most active against the Czech Republic in the previous year. However, the counterintelligence services also dealt with the activities of the national security services of Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) conducted in the Czech Republic.⁷⁰ Attempts to circumvent international sanctions were detected by BIS, made primarily by North Korea, Syria, Iran and Pakistan.⁷¹

The intensity of China's intelligence and influence activities does not lag behind Russia's activities. The key difference, however, is that Russia seeks to destabilize and disintegrate its opponents, while China aims to build a Sinocentric⁷² global community where other nations recognize the legitimacy of Chinese interests and give China the deserved respect (as interpreted by China). In addition, actors related to Russian and Chinese state powers were active in cybersecurity intelligence as well. In this context, BIS detected additional security incidents in 2019 linked to the activities of state or state-sponsored cyber spy groups.⁷³

In principle Russian and Chinese intelligence activities did not change compared to 2018 – the national security services present in the Czech Republic remained active. The majority of Chinese activities were aimed at the scientific community, while the Russian National Security Services continued to use proven intelligence methods in cyberspace against the Czech embassies and the private antivirus company Avast.⁷⁴

Based on the analysis of the security environment, the Security Strategy, Defence Strategy adopted by the Czech government parallel with the annual Security Reports, the author identifies security challenges, risks and threats from a military perspective and with regard to the Czech Republic:

⁶⁷ VZ BIS 2018: 6-7.

⁶⁸ In the Czech Republic the Second Department and Third Department of the People's Liberation Army operated most probably.

⁶⁹ VZ BIS 2018: 7.

⁷⁰ "Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2019". [Annual Report of the Security Information Service on 2019] Bezpečnostní Informační Služba [Security Information Service]. 10 November 2020. 3. <https://www.bis.cz/vyrocní-zpravy/vyrocní-zprava-bezpecnostni-informacni-sluzby-za-rok-2019-c665e2a7.html>, Accessed on 10 December 2020. (hereafter: VZ BIS 2019)

⁷¹ VZ BIS 2019: 8.

⁷² Sinocentrism is an ideology centred around the idea that China is the cultural, political, or economic centre of the world.

⁷³ VZ BIS 2019: 8-9.

⁷⁴ VZ BIS 2019: 9-11.

- The capabilities of the UN and the OSCE are insufficient to prevent regional conflicts, and the mechanisms of conventional arms control need to be developed.
- The NATO-EU Strategic Partnership is not powerful enough to effectively prevent Russia from building exclusive spheres of influence for destabilising the neighbouring countries, while the efforts of the People's Republic of China are focused on building a Sinocentric global community. To achieve all of these goals, these powers apply intelligence activities in the fields of politics, diplomacy, intelligence, economics, and information.
- Terrorist threats, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and illegal migration originate from weak or failed states, as a consequence of serious, multiple violations of human rights, and the inability of their governments to provide security guarantees for their own citizens.
- The resilience of state and non-state actors to cyber-attacks and control of critical infrastructures that have due to the reduced defence spending and the preference of allied (NATO, EU) national interests over Alliance interests.
- Extremism is an increasingly powerful manifestation of interethnic social tensions and organised crime.

CONCLUSION

The probability of a traditional, state-level military attack against the Slovak Republic or the Czech Republic is low. However, the risk of a military attack against another NATO member state cannot be ruled out. The changing security environment makes it necessary to address security challenges, risks and threats in the framework of international cooperation. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of the UN and the OSCE has declined recently. There is a threat of terrorism, although it does not directly affect the Slovak Republic or the Czech Republic.

The continuing deterioration of NATO/EU relations with the Russian Federation, which led to bilateral economic sanctions and a diplomatic crisis, has worsened the security situation. This is the consequence not only of Russia's military presence near the borders of NATO member states, but also of the stepped-up Russian intelligence activities in NATO member states, including the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic.

The author considers it necessary to note that Russia's activities are based on the current national security strategy of the Russian Federation [Указ Президента РФ от 31 декабря 2015 г. N 683 "О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации"] and obviously correspond to the Russian interpretation. This National Security Strategy states that NATO's global power projection is in violation of international law, while activating the Alliance's military activities, further expanding the Alliance near Russia's borders and establishing a missile defence system will jeopardize Russia's national security.⁷⁵

Both countries consider the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery as a threat. Both illegal and legal migrations pose a security risk for both countries, even if they are not directly affected for the time being. The increase in cyber-attacks that has become a part of hybrid warfare presents a security threat. All these risk

⁷⁵ "Указ Президента РФ от 31 декабря 2015 г. N 683 'О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации'". [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2015 N 683 "On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation"] 31 December 2015. Articles 15. and 106. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201512310038>, Accessed on 12 December 2020.

factors affect the two assessed states not only from Russia, as a similar and growing trend could be detected from the People's Republic of China in the past 2-3 years.

These hazards occur on the peripheries of Europe and in geographically more remote regions, and present indirect threats to both – the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. The current security challenges are rather complex and extremely difficult to foresee. They are often mixed up not only due to geographic factors but also because cross-border security threats mix up with national and Schengen-zone developments within the EU. All this is known to hostile state and non-state actors and they also use these opportunities to achieve their goals.

The statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Ivan Korčok, at a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers on 1st December 2020 fully and complexly expresses the “top player” of the current order of external security threats: “it is the Russian Federation, which poses a complex security challenge not only to the Slovak Republic but also to NATO as a whole. NATO must respond adequately to this complex security challenge – through the use of collective defence and dialogue with the Russian Federation. Such a dialogue requires both sides, and officials from the Russian Federation must show an interest in the dialogue.”⁷⁶

On the basis of the National Security Strategies and the annual Security Reports of the assessed countries, it is clear that most of the complex threats come from Russia. The next complex threats, no less important though, are the weak or failed states in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, which are mainly manifested by illegal migration. These risk factors are followed by the efforts of the People's Republic of China to build a global, Sinocentric community and carry out economic, and research and development espionage. Last but not least, activities that present a threat to the national security of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic may originate in Iran, Syria, Pakistan and North Korea. Due to the minimum language barriers, the possible legal migration from Ukraine to the two assessed countries could turn into a serious security challenge in the future.

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⁷⁶ “Minister Korčok na rokovaní NATO: Rusko je bezpečnostnou výzvou pre Alianciu a Slovensko ako jej súčasť. Zároveň chceme dialóg, na ten však potrebujeme aj záujem Moskvy”. [Minister Korčok at the NATO meeting: Russia is a security challenge for the Alliance and Slovakia as part of it. At the same time, we want dialogue, but we also need that the Moscow's interest in it] mzv.sk. 1 December 2020. https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/Iw1ppvnScIPx/content/minister-korcok-na-rokovani-nato-rusko-je-bezpecnostnou-vyzvou-pre-alianciu-a-slovensko-ako-jej-sucast-zaroven-chceme-dialog-na-ten-vsak-potrebujeme-a?p_p_auth=VsIN-qKIL&_101_INSTANCE_Iw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fsk, Accessed on 2 December 2020.

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