



# SECURITY THREATS REFLECTED IN THE STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS OF NATO'S EASTERN MEMBER COUNTRIES

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*The aim of the paper is to identify and compare the main threats to the security of NATO member states situated on its Eastern border, as they are found in the strategic documents of NATO's Eastern border member states and in document "NATO 2030: United for a New Era" at organisational level. The analysis is limited to the threats identified as such, not to the security risks or vulnerabilities.*

*Thus, it is found that some of the former communist Eastern European countries, many of them part of NATO's Eastern border, have in common the reminiscent threat related to Russia's vicinity. However, NATO's Eastern countries also have specific perceptions of security threats. For some of these countries, a threat reassessment is needed in order to include the results in their national security strategies. The same update needs to be reflected in NATO's Strategic Concept, given the new challenges and the flare up of old ones.*

**Keywords:** *NATO Eastern member states; the Russian Federation; threat; perception; Romania; security policies.*

## Introduction

Since the end of World War II, the transatlantic organization has been the cornerstone of European and Euro-Atlantic security. For more than seven decades, NATO has confronted with multiple and dynamic threats, has succeeded to adapt,

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and remains the most powerful political-military organization in the world, despite all the difficulties. Meanwhile, it has defended its members not only by military force, but also through an active contribution to improving the Euro-Atlantic and international security climate.

During the Cold War, NATO's role and purpose were clearly defined by the existence of the threat posed by the USSR. After the Warsaw Pact was abolished and the Soviet Union disintegrated, the traditional opponent of the Alliance disappeared. But the Alliance has reinvented itself. Thus, after the USSR fall in the 1990s, the Russian importance on the NATO agenda declined, and many of the Alliance's resources were redirected to other areas, such as global terrorism, Afghanistan and Iraqi conflicts, China deterrence, and the Middle East pacification.

However, when Russia restarted its military assault over the states considered to be part of its former influence area (Georgia – 2008, Ukraine – 2014, 2022), the former Soviet states in the vicinity started to feel threatened by its aggressive posture and started to ask more support from the Alliance in order to build in more security and deterrence on its Eastern Flank.

### **1. NATO's Overall Threats Evolution as Reflected in Its Policy Documents**

The main mission of NATO members, stipulated in the 1949 Washington Treaty, is to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security, this standing as the organization's constant regardless of the future historical context or geopolitical context. Inside this founding document of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, the single considered threat was a military attack as "such an act against one of its members was to be considered as an aggression against all NATO countries" (NATO 1949), in conformity with Article 5, and an response intervention to such an act is legitimated by Article 51 of the UN Charter,

The end of the Cold War changed the international relations system, as well as the nature and range of threats. With the collapse of the USSR, the 1991 Strategic Concept of NATO was presented in Article 7 that "The threat of a simultaneous, full-scale attack on all of NATO's European fronts had effectively been removed and thus no longer provided the focus for Allied strategy" (NATO 1991). In this specific Concept, as the direct military threat became defused and basically generally reiterated in Article 20.III "To deter and defend against any threat of aggression against the territory of any NATO Member State" (NATO 1991), similar to its presentation in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the risks, as significantly expressions to Member States security, have come to the forefront of the organization's political agenda as "multi-faceted in nature and multi-directional" (NATO 1991). These kind of expressions showed the need for NATO reconfiguration from its posture as entity



built to balance militarily the USSR threat to a more general approach of missions in times of peace, conflict or war. The focus was specifically shifted to the risks embodied by “ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes faced by many countries in Central and Eastern Europe”. Of course, the worrying motives were plausible, as these countries were in the reorganizational path from communism to democracy.

The *1999 NATO Strategic Concept* maintained the same line of concerned threats against the Alliance: deterrence and defence in conformity with Articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty and the unlikelihood of a large-scale conventional aggression. However, a new approach has emerged in relation to NBC weapons proliferation that could pose a direct military threat to the Member States of the transatlantic organisation’s populations, territory, and forces, as was stipulated in Articles 35 and 53h of the respective Concept (NATO 1999). Article 3 emphasized “the new complex risks to Euro-Atlantic peace and stability, including oppression, ethnic conflict, economic distress, the collapse of political order, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction” (NATO 1999). Article 12 also included the encouragement of cooperation and dialogue with other states, including Russia, as a consequence of their relations defrost on the background of the *NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security* signing in 1997.

In 2006, in the *Comprehensive Political Guidance*, issued after the September 11, 2001 acts, the perception of threat suffered a real change as terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction were seen to be the main threats to the Alliance’s territory over the next 10 to 15 years. The risks were reflected in Article 2 of this Guidance to be emanating from instability due to “failed or failing states, regional crises and conflicts, and their causes and effects; the growing availability of sophisticated conventional weaponry; the misuse of emerging technologies; and the disruption of the flow of vital resources” (NATO 2006) exacerbated by potential access of terrorism to WMDs. In the same Guidance, asymmetric threats and risks are seen to damage the security environment in the next decade (NATO 2006).

In the *Declaration on Alliance Security* issued on April 2009, in the context of the NATO Summit, on the anniversary of 60 years of the organization, the aim of cooperating with Russia on common challenges was re-iterated, despite the Russian military intervention in Georgia (2008). As global threats were seen “terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery and cyber-attacks” (NATO 2009). It was stressed out that Alliance’s security is strongly connected to other regions security.

In the 2010 NATO Concept “Active Engagement, Modern Defence”, the Alliance came up with an updated understanding of the new geopolitical context that reinterpreted its 1949 Treaty. Article 5 remained the stronghold of the document, but



in addition deterrence of both nuclear and conventional capabilities were considered threats against Alliance's security. A wide range of threats returned on NATO's political agenda, thus, the focus of the document has shifted from many risks to many threats, and this reveals the unpredictable dynamic changes intervened in the security environment. Also, with regard to the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory, from "highly unlikely" in the 1999 Concept, in 2010 became "low" and "cannot be ignored" (NATO 2010), according to Articles 7 and 8. The proliferation of ballistic missiles is seen as "real and growing threat", particularly from the part of "world's most volatile regions" (NATO 2010). Terrorism also remained on the list of direct threats, with its high potential to "acquire nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological capabilities", as well as "instability or conflict beyond NATO borders", potentially fuelled by transnational criminal activities (NATO 2010). Cyberattacks are seen as a growing threat to Euro-Atlantic critical infrastructures providing vital services (NATO 2010). Concept also stresses that "NATO poses no threat to Russia", and NATO-Russia cooperation is needed, and in this regard, in Articles 33 and 34, some areas of shared interests are listed "missile defence, counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, counter-piracy and the promotion of wider international security" (NATO 2010).

Since 2014, in response to Russian military intervention in Ukraine, NATO-Russia practical cooperation has been suspended. Some political documents were issued calling on the Russia's unlawful behaviour: Joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission – December 2014, Warsaw Summit Communiqué – 2016, and the Brussels Summit Declaration – 2018. Moreover, in 2018, after some Russian actions (the use of Novichok<sup>1</sup> chemical agent, the development and launching of the 9M729 missile system – action infringing the Treaty on intermediary range nuclear and conventional forces<sup>2</sup> – and the deployment of military forces in the Ukraine vicinity near the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait), NATO statements became sharper and some were followed by actions. Thus, it was decided "the expulsion of over 140 Russian officials by over 25 NATO Allies and partners" and the reduction of "the maximum size of the Russian Mission to NATO by ten people" (NATO 2018).

At the end of 2020, NATO 2030: United for a New Era, document resulted from the work of the Reflection Group assigned by NATO Secretary General, presents that "NATO's external security environment has changed dramatically since the 2010 Strategic Concept was published", therefore "the starting point must be to update

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<sup>1</sup> In March 2018, former Russian spy Sergei Skripal, his daughter Yulia, and police officer Nick Bailey were poisoned with Novichok in Salisbury in March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, signed in 1987, also known as the INF, required the USA and the USSR to phase out and permanently abandon their nuclear and conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, all with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers.



the 2010 Strategic Concept” (NATO 2020, 16, 12). Threats are better described than in the previous documents, and, this time, real solutions are set for them (Table no. 1).

**Table no. 1:** Threats and solutions identified in “NATO 2030: United for a New Era”

No.	Threat	Solution
1.	A direct Russian military action to the Euro-Atlantic area	- Dual-track approach of deterrence and dialogue addressing gaps in deterrence and defence system on NATO Eastern flank
2.	Increasing China’s importance in the world	- Outlining a political strategy based on security interests for China
3.	Terrorism	- Enhancement of the fight against terrorism as part of the hybrid and cyber threats
4.	Pandemics	- Inclusion in NATO planning of exercises, deliberations and discussions on the resilience and management of health crisis
5.	Migration	- Boosting current partnerships in the South, namely the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)
6.	Cyber attacks	- Building a common policy framework for how NATO should assess, attribute, and respond to hybrid and cyber incidents in a crisis
7.	Climate change	- Raising awareness of the situation, early warning, and information sharing, including by considering the establishment of Centre of Excellence for Climate and Security.
8.	Hybrid attacks	- Developing political and non-political tools to counter hybrid activities, such as new approaches to attribution, deterrence in the hybrid domain, as well as tackling disinformation
9.	Emerging and disruptive technologies	- Organizing a digital summit of governments and private sector to identify gaps in collective defence cooperation in security-related AI strategies.

Later, in February 2021, on the transatlantic organizational level, in the “Food for Thought Paper: NATO 2030 – a Transatlantic Agenda for the Future”, most of these threats were reiterated. Also, in the Communiqué of the Brussels Summit in June 2021, Russia’s aggressive actions appear, together with terrorism in all its forms, state and non-state actors challenging the rule-based international order, cybercrime and China’s growing influence, as the main threats to NATO security (NATO 2021). Following the launch of Russia’s “special operation” in Ukraine, on February 28, 2022, the Heads of Defence of the 30 NATO Member States got together in an extraordinary meeting in the Military Committee of the organization, to discuss the situation created around Ukraine.



## 2. Common and Specific Threats against NATO Member-States in Eastern Europe<sup>3</sup>

As a new NATO Strategic Concept is not yet updated on the new security challenges, including the circumstances of the Russian Federation military aggression on Ukraine, we take as milestones the ones that are explicitly mentioned as such in *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* document (a direct Russian military action to the Euro-Atlantic area; China's growing importance in the world; terrorism; pandemic; migration; cyberattacks; climate change; hybrid attacks; emerging and disruptive technologies) in considering common and specific threats to NATO Eastern member countries—Bulgaria (BG), the Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HUN), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI) and Slovakia (SK).

“Common” threats are considered the ones similarly identified as such in the aforementioned document and in the NATO Eastern members’ strategic security documents. Also, by “specific” threats there are considered the ones presented in the security or defence strategies of the mentioned countries, but are not identified among the 9 threats explicitly considered in *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*.

**Bulgaria** has a security strategy issued ten years ago, but largely updated in 2018, wherein Article 9 states that “The risks and threats to the security of Republic of Bulgaria and of its citizens are largely identical or similar to what the EU or NATO member countries face”, and also that “none of the neighbouring countries consider it a potential aggressor” (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2011). In particular, the last quoted phrase, practically, expresses, that if Russia does not see it as an aggressor, thus, Bulgaria is not threatened by a Russian direct military action, but as the strategy’s time horizon was 2020, it must be updated. In the Bulgarian Security Strategy there are identified some specific asymmetric threats, such as: proliferation of WMDs, regional conflict and trans-border organized crime (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2011). Also, specific threats against international security are identified to be: failed states, unstable political and economic situation in third countries, crises related to energy security, Middle East instability (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2011). Moreover, Bulgaria’s 2018 version of the Strategy acknowledges hybrid threats, but without outlining means to counter them. Recently, since 2019, Bulgarian national security authorities have revealed information on a number of unauthorized uses of their own computer systems by Russian intelligence services (Kramer 2021) and, thus, the Bulgarian hybrid threat ranking and perception on Russia must have changed, which must be also included in a new updated security strategy.

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<sup>3</sup> These are not all geographical *stricto sensu* East European countries, some, on case by case basis, are also considered to be part of the Central Europe (Hungary and Poland, for example).





**Czech Republic's** security strategy, issued in 2015, focuses on non-military threats, while the risk of direct military attack on the country remains low. However, a military threat and hybrid war manifestations are seen as possibility for other NATO member countries stemming from some states' aspirations of power (Security Strategy of the Czech Republic 2015, 3, 5, 10). Thus, in the document common threats are mentioned—international migration, terrorism, hybrid threats, cyberattack, pandemic –, and some specific asymmetric threats are identified: interruptions in strategic supplies of raw materials, increasing global inequality, regional conflicts, extreme violence, growth of interethnic and social tensions, organised crime (“serious economic and financial crime, corruption, human being trafficking and drug-related crime”) (Security Strategy of the Czech Republic 2015).

**Estonia** in its 2017 National Security Concept sees as a main threat “Russia’s increased military activity and aggressive behaviour”. Also, there are seen global asymmetric threats as “economic instability, developments in the cyberspace, technology-related threats, radicalisation and terrorism, organised crime and corruption, migration flows” that can harm the security of the Estonian state (National Security Concept of Estonia 2017, 4, 5). Thus, there is a share of common and specific threats perceived in Estonian security document.

**Hungary**, although agrees in paragraphs 52 and 118 of its security strategy that “the forced acquisition of land with aggression has fundamentally changed our security environment”, aims in its security strategic document “a pragmatic development of Hungarian-Russian relations and economic cooperation with Russia”, while the idea that “the Alliance does not seek conflict or pose a threat to Russia” is strengthened (Hungary’s National Security Strategy 2020). Approximately the same pragmatic relational approach is also presented towards China, but with the concern that “China’s military and security policy aspirations need to be monitored in the longer term” (para 119). Migration and its collateral effects “cross-border threats ... arms, drugs, human and organ trafficking” (Hungary’s National Security Strategy 2020) are seen to be the most damaging to Hungarian internal security.

**Latvia** includes in its 2020 National Defence Concept an analysis of threats wherein Russia is seen as the source of the threat or potential threat of a traditional military attack or hybrid (“economic sanctions, suspension of energy supply, humanitarian influence, informative propaganda, and psychological influence, as well as cyberattacks ...”) (The National Security Concept 2020, 4). In fact, a wide part of the Concept relates Russia’s “doings” as an aggressor state and its possible means of aggression in the future. As regards Latvian threats other than ones included in the aforementioned *NATO 2030* document, there are identified “foreign fighter phenomenon”, and “internal threats caused by inhabitants, specifically youth, of Latvia ... participating in military training camps located in other countries” (The National Security Concept 2020, 7).



**Lithuanian** 2017 National Security Strategy sees Russia as its major threat, many reasons of this affirmation being stated in the document's paragraph 8 "Aggression against the neighbouring countries, annexation of Crimea, the concentration of modern military equipment of the Russian Federation, its large scale offensive capabilities and their exercises near the borders of the Republic of Lithuania and other states, especially in the Kaliningrad Region ..., cause international tensions and threaten world peace" as well as "Capacity of the Russian Federation to use military and economic, energy, information and other non-military measures ... the ability to exploit and create internal problems of the states located in the Eastern neighbourhood of the Republic of Lithuania, as well as preparedness of the Russian Federation to use a nuclear weapon even against the states which do not possess it" (National Security Strategy 2017). Specific threats are identified as "economic and energy dependence, economic vulnerability ... social and regional exclusion, poverty ... demographic crisis ... corruption ... organized crime ... crisis of values" (National Security Strategy 2017).

The 2020 Security Strategy of *the Republic of Poland* identifies that "The most serious threat is the neo-imperial policy of the authorities of the Russian Federation, pursued also by means of military force" (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020). Energy dependence on Russia and organized crime are also seen as threats.

**Romania** has a new and updated security strategy issued in 2020, wherein part of the main common threats considered in NATO 2030 document are present, except for the direct threat of China's emergence. There are also some elements specifically perceived as threats by Romanians, namely the "volatility of the security situation in the Western Balkans correlated with the limited prospects in resolving frozen conflicts in the region and conserving outbreaks of conflict in Southern Caucasus ...", and MENA instability (Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării pentru perioada 2020-2024 2020), which in NATO's document are identified as risks.

**Slovenia** has as security strategic document *The Resolution on the National Security Strategy*, issued in 2019. Military threats are considered possible for the first time since the end of the Cold War (Resolution on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia 2019, 16). This resolution expresses very well the actual context NATO has to deal with: "In the East, we are facing a serious increase in military threats, while the South and South-East are facing instabilities and the possibility of threats being transformed into asymmetric threats" (Resolution on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia 2019, 8). It is also noted that "armed conflicts and low intensity conflicts in crisis areas pose a threat to international peace and security", "the proliferation of conventional weapons ... and dual-use items, is an important potential threat", "national security is threatened by serious and organized forms of crime" and "the escalation of tensions around





international trade relations, and the potential crisis of the Eurozone, pose a real threat of a new financial and economic crisis” (Resolution on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia 2019). Threats to public safety as “increased attacks on human life and property; economic crimes; corruption; financial fraud; the falsification of documents and goods; counterfeit money; cyber and environmental crimes; and mass violations of law and order” (Resolution on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia 2019, 28) are also considered.

*The Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic* is the newest security/defence strategic document among those analysed. In paragraph 10, Russia is seen as a danger from the perspective of Ukraine sovereignty violation, as an escalation of power competition between states. Specific perspectives of threat are “erosion of arms and disarmament regimes”, “spreading propaganda damaging the cohesion in NATO and the EU”, and “extremism, including its penetration into the Armed Forces” (Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2021).

In Table no. 2 is presented the summary of the main threats identified in *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* and whether they are reflected as such in the analysed security policy documents of each NATO Eastern member.

**Table no. 2:** “NATO 2030: United for a New Era” threats as reflected/non-reflected in Eastern NATO member countries security strategies

Country Threat <sup>4</sup>	BG	CZ	EE	HUN	LV	LT	PL	RO	SI	SK
No. 1	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
No. 2	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
No. 3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. 4	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. 5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>5</sup>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes <sup>6</sup>	Yes <sup>7</sup>	Yes <sup>8</sup>
No. 6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. 7	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. 8	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. 9	No	Yes <sup>9</sup>	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>10</sup>	Yes	Yes

<sup>4</sup> No. 1 – A direct Russian military action to the Euro-Atlantic area; No. 2 – Growing importance of China in the world; No. 3 – Terrorism; No. 4 – Pandemic; No. 5 – Migration; No. 6 – Cyber attacks; No. 7 – Climate change; No. 8 – Hybrid attacks; No. 9 – Emerging and disruptive technologies.

<sup>5</sup> Illegal immigration.

<sup>6</sup> Illegal migration.

<sup>7</sup> Illegal migration.

<sup>8</sup> Massive illegal migration.

<sup>9</sup> Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

<sup>10</sup> Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.



### 3. Similarities/Differences in the Threat Perception of NATO's Eastern Border Countries

The Alliance was always focused on a set of common identified threats, but geographic position created differences in threat perceptions. The member countries situated on the Alliance's Eastern border have built a geopolitical axis from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Both seas are in NATO's attention as they are situated in the buffer zone of Russian areas of influence, and they are also former communist countries.

Table no. 2 shows that, although all these countries were part of the former Soviet bloc, the Russian aggressive posture and its hybrid war worries some of these NATO countries more than the others. Thus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia do not express directly in their documents that Russia is a threat (although the hybrid threats from aggressive neighbours are highly mentioned in their documents), perception that diverges from the other Eastern Border States considering Russia as a real military and hybrid threat (the Baltic States, Poland, and Romania). Moreover, currently there is no perception consensus as regards the possibility of a military threat against them, which is reflected in their security and defence policy papers. Some countries stipulate in their strategies that Russia may be the initiator of a potential direct military threat on them (Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Lithuania), Slovenia sees possible a direct military threat on it, Hungary considers a military attack over any NATO member as possible, other countries see any military threat against them as low (Czech Republic) or this direct threat is not mentioned at all (Bulgaria, Slovakia), while Romania, in regard to paragraph 121 of its active security strategy, is more worried about "the perpetuation of imbalances on the size of the eastern flank and changes in the positions of others in relation to the Russian Federation, (that) have the potential to have negative influences on Romania's security situation" (Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării pentru perioada 2020-2024 2020).

Strategic documents of NATO Member States on its Eastern border show that they face high uncertainties resulting from the frozen conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, open conflicts<sup>11</sup>, but also the systemic crises in the Middle East and North Africa generating illegal migration, cross-border crime, extremist tendencies and terrorism. These concerns are mainly expressed in the security strategies of Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia.

*Similarities.* As a hard-line similarity identified in almost all analysed security strategies, it is shown that internal and external security threats blend and transit one each over, therefore their differentiations are blurred. Phenomena such as terrorism,

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<sup>11</sup> Obviously, given that the security and/or defence strategies of the states are renewed in a few years, the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war have not yet been integrated into them.



migration, organized crime, cyber-attacks, and hybrid attacks are perceived as internationalized and transnational. Also, some of the Eastern NATO countries have similar threat perceptions on different areas, for example, both Bulgaria and the Czech Republic believe that emerging asymmetric threats can be imported in their territories from relatively distant regional conflicts.

Similarity also exist between some countries threat perception related to the proliferation of WMDs, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, or Romania. For some states (Estonia, Lithuania, and Slovenia) corruption is considered a threat. Thus, as for the mentioned states these are sets of similarities, compared to other countries they constitute commonly or specifically perceived differences.

Regarding migration, in their strategic documents, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia share the same opinion that illegal migration is a threat, not all migration, while Poland is the only country not counting migration as a threat, but rather as a risk.

*Particular differences* of threat perception are found in each national strategy and are reflected in the specific national perception over an express phenomenon seen as threat in that presented form only by a single country:

- for Bulgaria, “piracy and abduction of commercial fleet crews around Africa and South Asia” (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2011), stated in Article 38 of its Strategy to be an important threat;

- for the Czech Republic, interruptions of strategic raw material supplies is a real threat;

- for Hungary, the threat of an armed attack “covered by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty” (Hungary’s National Security Strategy 2020), is presented as a possibility in its Strategy, in paragraph 51, without naming a possible aggressor;

- for Estonia, economic instability is a threat;

- for Latvia, internal threats caused by its inhabitants, participating in military training camps located in other countries are identified;

- for Lithuania, “the development of unsafe nuclear energy projects nearby the borders of the Republic of Lithuania” (National Security Strategy 2017) is seen as threat in paragraph 14 of its Strategy;

- for Poland, energy dependence on Russia is seen as threat against its national security;

- for Romania, the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is seen in its Defence Strategy as a severe threat;

- for Slovakia “extremism, including its entry into the Armed Forces” (Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2021) is an actual threat expressed in its Strategy, in paragraph 10;

- for Slovenia, threats to public safety are urgent.



## Conclusions

The main threats identified in the security program documents of NATO border member countries are residual, arising from the legacy left by the Cold War termination, as these states were within the sphere of influence of the USSR. Russia, even before the recent events in Ukraine, was perceived as a threat both in terms of military tensions that were seen as having the potential to generate violent conflicts in the region, including the direct military threat of some NATO Member States, and from the perspective of its hybrid warfare manifestations.

Although all these states fear Russia, which is seen in the way they have designed their security strategies, not all expressly show this in writing. For example, Hungary has expressed its wish for cooperation with Russia and China as emerging powers on the international stage, Bulgaria states that is not threatened by a Russian direct military action because it does not consider Russia as an aggressor, Latvia openly expresses that Russia is the source of the threat or potential threat of a traditional military or hybrid attack.

Currently, the security strategies of NATO's Eastern border countries show that they face growing uncertainties, mainly from the frozen conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine (thawed in 2022), but also from the open conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, generating another set of perceived threats, such as: illegal migration, cross-border crime, extremist trends and terrorism.

Some NATO Member States in Eastern Europe have obsolete security strategies to varying degrees because they do not reflect important events that have taken place, or are taking place, in the international arena: Russian military aggression on Ukraine since 2014 and 2022, the migration and refugee crisis of 2015-2016, the emergence of Islamic terrorism with the terrorist attacks taking place in Europe and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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