



DEFENCE SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT IN A 'FROZEN CONFLICT' CONDITION: CASE STUDY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Safeguarding the security of the state and society is the meaning and reason for the national security system's existence and its functioning. How security will be achieved depends on the organisation of the state security system, which is determined by the level of vulnerability of proclaimed national values. Since the 'frozen conflict' represents a latent and permanent threat to the security of state and the identity of society, the national security system adapts to the dynamics of the security environment by revising its defence capabilities. Reconsideration of the readiness for defence is most often manifested through an increase in military potential, which can generate a security dilemma problem and threaten regional stability.

Due to the escalation of violence on the Eurasian continent and the security situation in the Western Balkans region, this study critically examines the need for the development of a defence system in the case of the Republic of Serbia. The purpose of the research paper is to encourage reflection on the implications of the independent state's concept for international peace and security. Is the solution that brought peace to Europe nearly four centuries ago a source of nowadays conflicts?

Keywords: *national security; defence system; frozen conflict; security dilemma; Serbia.*

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Introduction

Security is the foundation of the state community's existence and represents its inseparable attribute. Although the nature of security risks and threats at the beginning of the 21st century has changed, the standard unit for international relations and security remains the sovereign state (Keković and Dimitrijević 2017).

The optimal condition of security represents the state's minimum right. Since in the absence of security the state as a sovereign entity does not exist, the state security function is the guarantor of the endurance of the state and, thus, the respective society. The security function is often identified with the protective function, that is the function through which security is provided to society within the state (Grčić 2000). The realisation of the security function in terms of safeguarding the values of the state and society is defined as national security (Sretović, Talijan and Beriša 2016). National security is a condition in which the state and society are not threatened by a military attack, political pressure, or economic threat from outside, as well as an extremely political, economic, ideological, religious, or cultural attack from inside (Stajić 2015, 33). Therefore, from the aspect of security sciences, security as a nation's function implies activity and action aimed at achieving an optimal state of security for the state and society.

1. The Security System Organisation

As a polyvalent element, the state executes the security function by systematising security affairs into a normatively, structurally, and functionally ordered entirety. Organising security affairs into a systemic entirety, the security system as the bearer of the security function of the state is established. Accordingly, the national security system represents the doctrinally regulated entirety of a series of human activities and specialised bodies directed by state policy toward achieving a specific security goal (Savić 2007, 61).

The security system organisation rests on legal rules and documents and depends on the totality of connections and relationships between system elements, as well as connections and relationships that the security system achieves in interaction with other social (sub)systems. According to the system general theory, the security system organisation depends on the complexity and size of the security and socio-political systems, as well as the system's stability and tasks, operating services, end users, security competition etc. (Pejanović, Vejnović and Rakić 2017). In other words, the organisation of the security system is carried out in a manner and in a scope that corresponds to the character, needs, and state capabilities. As the scope and importance of a state protection are different, the organisation of the national security system differs and depends on the level of development of the society and its social relations (Kršljanin and Karović 2015).



The security system is determined by the principles of the socio-political system and legal order. The scope and structure of the national security system are shaped by various factors, such as internal and foreign policy; the strategic-doctrinal sight of national security; international relations; the political and economic stability; as well as social, demographic, geographical, and other elements (Ratković and Petrović 1981). The security system is determined by the established state order, i.e., the form of government, the type of political regime, and the power of state authorities (Mitrović 2019, 60). The socio-political system affects the security system by shaping its conceptual framework, organisation and structure, content, and method of the implementation of security activities, as well as the management and position of entities within the national security system (Gaćinović 2020; Rakić 2020). National security policy as a state-systematic approach to the problem of (in) security unites the organisational factors of security. According to the national security policy viewpoint, different democratic arrangements influence an organisation, management, supervision, and state control over the security system, as well as its ability to confront security challenges, risks, and threats (Mitrović 2019). The organisation of the national security system is carried out following the adopted security policy, which determines the method of performing the security function, the purpose of the security system, and the manner of organising security forces and means (Debeljak and Zekić 2016). Therefore, a properly measured and targeted strategic approach to security is a condition for achieving national security.

2. The (In)Security Perception in a State of ‘Frozen Conflict’

Since security is inextricably linked to the protection of national values and interests, the optimal condition of national security implies the absence of threats by mitigating their impact to vital national values and the absence of fear that threatened such values (Wolfers 1952, 485). As the protection of national values represents the general goal and meaning of the existence of a security system, this system’s architecture is conditioned by the nature of the protected values, the characteristics of challenges, risks, and threats to given values, as well as the respective means and methods used by it in their protection (Stajić 2015, 24; National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019; Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019).

The national security concept, with a focus on the state lasting as a sovereign entity, sees territorial integrity and sovereignty as a primary interest and a vital value that is protected by its realisation (Møller 2001). According to the national security concept’s perspective, the unresolved integrity and sovereignty issues over a certain part of the territory is the reason for the ‘frozen conflict’. In addition to the territorial dispute, the condition of ‘frozen conflict’ is also characterised by a certain ideological, political, national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and other pressure



suffered by the resident population within the territorial borders whose sovereignty is disputed. Consequently, alongside the threat to the state that exists as a sovereign entity, the state of 'frozen conflict' also implies the threat to the collective identity of the resident population, i.e., societal security. The threat to the collective identity of a society can be obviated by strengthening the influence of its own identity, or by transferring the issue of social (in)security to the political or military sector (Ejdus 2015). Similar to that, the 'frozen conflict' is a state of permanent and latent threat to the state security and the collective identity of the society generated by the separatist aspirations of a certain group, incited by a previous, frequently an externally supported, armed rebellion.

The primary role in protecting the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity from all forms of threats is the defence system. In consequence, national security is guaranteed by increasing the diplomatic, information, economic, as well as the military power of the security system. As a system of organised military resources, the military force provides optimal conditions for the protection of national values and interests (Rakić 2016, 238). The only, although not perfect, response to the situation of the armed rebellion outbreak, as foreseen by the highest state's strategic and legal documents, is precisely the use of military force. Although some authors point out that the military force is the only factor that ensures peace (Gashi 2016), such an attitude has deeper negative implications for regional and international security. Namely, the military force has a deterrent role in the sense of the absence of direct violence, i.e., organised and collective violence between large groups of people, such as nations and even between classes, races, and ethnic groups (Galtung 1967, 14). Military force is the factor that ensures negative peace. Nevertheless, peace, besides the absence of negative elements, also includes the presence of positive elements. As the most expressed characteristic of a frozen conflict, the absence of social justice and equality in the presence of indirect and structural violence implies the absence of positive peace. In consequence, the policy of improving defence readiness for the sovereignty and territorial integrity safeguard by increasing military potential may cause the problem of a security dilemma and disrupt stability in the region.

Since the use of force is a condition for the realisation of the state's protective function, the state must dispose of all elements of force – economic and military capacities, as well as knowledge of how to use it in the rational and appropriate way. A state can be an economic and intellectual giant, but a political dwarf if it does not have the instruments of force at its disposal (Stajić 2015, 15). However, the assessment of the elements of the potential military strength of the state – in terms of the size of the territory and population, economic and technological development, geographical location, military capabilities, etc. – is not sufficient for understanding the essence of the security dilemma, i.e., the question of why one state's actions are interpreted rather as offensive than defensive by another (Walt 1985).



The impetus for the creation of the security dilemma issue exists in the efforts of states to take care of their security needs (Herz 1959). Concern for one's safety leads to the emergence of a feeling of insecurity in others, each of whom interprets it in its own way. Considering the capacities of those who represent a potential threat, states increase their capabilities they consider necessary for their defence. In addition to seeing their activities as forced, they regard the rivals' activities as premeditated, often with malicious intentions (Ejdus 2015). The perception of (in) security formed in such manner influences states to closely monitor actions of others, first and foremost their military power. The decisive factor in determining whether the adversary's movements are offensive, or defensive is the perception of the other side's (in)security, which depends on the 'view of the world' held by its analysts and political decision-makers.

3. The Security System's Organisation Framework in a State of Frozen Conflict

The organisation of the security system as an instrument of national security protection rests on the strategic-legal framework, which consists of internal and international legal norms, and strategic documents. Arranged from top to bottom under hierarchy and degree of generality, the internal framework is composed of the Constitution, strategic and doctrinal documents, laws, and by-laws, while the international-legal framework is made of the UN Charter and a series of ratified multilateral and bilateral agreements.

The state's defence policy, along with the Constitution, is the starting point for the establishment of various systems aimed at protecting national values. Apart from the legal ones, the Constitution contains rules of a political and programmatic nature that express society's needs (Lilić and Bulajić 2010). By drafting strategic and doctrinal documents that align with the state's defence policy and the proclaimed society's requirements, the establishment of the strategic-legal framework as an assessment of the security conditions within the state and the region is achieved. Based on the adopted regulations, the national security system evaluates the security situation inside the state and in the region whereby directives are activated for the implementation of pre-planned procedures of the state's security structures and institutions with a noticeable division of departmental and personal tasks and responsibilities (Gaćinović 2017). By adopting state strategies, preconditions for synchronised operational-tactical actions of all elements of the national security system in peacetime, state of emergency, and wartime are created, as well as in times of 'frozen conflict', as a unique security modality. The established strategic-legal framework is regulated more closely by laws and by-laws that define the internal



organisation of various security structures, their scope of actions, as well as methods, means, and measures that these structures utilise during their activity.

The International Framework of the Security System of the Republic of Serbia

After the withdrawal of Montenegro from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006 by the adoption of the Constitution in the same year, Serbia, for the first time since its independence, has unequivocally identified priority national interests and values. The importance of national values was initially confirmed in 2009 by the adoption of strategic-doctrinal documents in the fields of security and defence, and then in the framework of new strategies – the National Security Strategy and the Defence Strategy, in 2019.

Spurred on previous emergencies (the armed conflicts in Kosovo and Metohija during 1998 and 1999; the NATO bombing, i.e. aggression on Yugoslavia without authorisation of the UN Security Council in 1999; the March Pogrom of the Serbs and other non-Albanian minorities in Kosovo and Metohija in 2004; and the unilateral and illegal declaration of Kosovo and Metohija independence in February 2008), Serbia has emphasized the preservation of territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty as one of the primary and inalienable national interests, as well as the protection of the national, cultural, religious, and historical identity of the Serbian people and identities of national minorities (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019).

Considering that the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia has been violated because of the unresolved sovereignty of Kosovo and Metohija, Serbia's security system has been operating in a state of 'frozen conflict' since 1999. As Serbia's legal regulations have been put ad acta across the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, the security issues of the Kosovo-Metohija region are regulated following ratified international documents, implemented by international security and police forces. Even though they explicitly guarantee the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, the ratified documents do not specify the competencies that the Republic of Serbia has in Kosovo and Metohija (UNSC 1999a). Although a temporary political regime functioning based on the Kosovo-Metohija self-government has been established on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, international military and civilian institutions implement arbitrary power instead of the temporary organs of the self-governing government of Kosovo and Metohija. Thus, the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia across the territory of Kosovo and Metohija are derogated, while Serbia's security system is put out of action by the provisions of the UNSC Resolution 1244 and the Kumanovo Military-Technical Agreement.

Starting in June 1999, the ratified documents limited the protective function of the security system of the Republic of Serbia, in Kosovo and Metohija by order



of arrival of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) on the Kosovo-Metohija territory after the withdrawal of Serbian security forces. The security function was further reduced by establishing two security buffer zones – the Ground Safety Zone, without the presence of the armed forces, with a width of 5 km that extends beyond the territorial borders of Kosovo and Metohija within the territory of Serbia, and the Air Safety Zone, without a flight permit, at a depth of 25 km within the airspace of the Republic of Serbia (UNSC 1999a; UNSC 1999b). A special aspect of the limitation of the Republic of Serbia's security system function in the Kosovo-Metohija area concerns the use of military force. The KFOR commander has the authority to order the use of force in cases of violation of the Military-Technical Agreement provisions (UNSC 1999b).

Based on the decision of the Secretary-General of NATO, in May 2001, the Ground Safety Zone was abolished, which led to the military and security consolidation of the southern part of the territory of Serbia (NATO 2001). Also, the return of up to one thousand members of the Serbian Armed Forces to the administrative line of Kosovo and Metohija, which was originally foreseen by the UNSC Resolution 1244, became possible (UNSC 1999a). At the end of 2015, the flight-banning policy in the Air Safety Zone for all types of Serbian aircraft, without the prior consent of the KFOR commander, was abolished. By the decision of the Secretary-General of NATO, the 'upper airspace' above the Kosovo and Metohija territory is open for civil air traffic.

4. The Republic of Serbia's Defence Policy in a 'Frozen Conflict' Condition

As stated by the Law on Amendment of the Law on Defence (2015), the defence system is the warrantor of Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity from all forms of threats. Thus, when analysing Serbia's strategic-doctrinal documents, it is evident that in assessing the level of national security, Serbia takes an almost Hobbesian 'view of the world', according to which military power is the only guarantee of its existence (Ejdus 2015; Stojanović and Bardžić 2017). Considering the traditional understanding of security, which is based on military security, i.e. the balance of military power and arms control, the framework of Serbia's strategic documents is dominated by a military-centric approach to security (Mikić, Stojanović, Despotović and Ranđelović 2016). Following the geopolitical and security situation in the Western Balkans region, by adopting strategic documents in the field of security and defence in 2019, Serbia revised the previous approach to the protection of national security. However, instead of affirming the concept of human security in the National Security Strategy, Serbia has kept state-centric stress in its approach to national security (Mijalković and Popović-Mančević 2020, 357). The National Security Strategy did recognize the human security problems but gave them secondary



importance concerning the traditional national value of territorial integrity (Popović and Cvetković 2013, 170).

Intending to satisfy the need for safeguarding territorial integrity and independence, the Republic of Serbia advocates a national security and defence policy based on the traditional comprehension of security issues (Milošević and Stojadinović 2013, 132). Serbia's defence policy is entrenched in the total defence concept. The concept of total defence aims to preserve the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence of the Republic of Serbia, and the internal stability and the security of its citizens (Total Defence Concept - Summary 2024, 6). By emphasizing the Kosovo-Metohija problem, Serbia is rather oriented toward the traditional understanding of the security concept, which represents the predominant factor in shaping its current security and defence policy (Rizmal 2012). Therefore, the 2019 National Security Strategy of Serbia remains a national security strategy in its original meaning, with a focus on the state's foreign policy interests (Stanković 2021, 106).

A significant change in terms of the security approach – compared to the previous view formulated by the 2007 Resolution of the National Assembly on the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and constitutional order of the Republic of Serbia – is represented by an expanded display of the military neutrality concept. As a militarily neutral state, Serbia will not join military alliances, while the protection of national values will be based on its own potential and defence forces (Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019). Formulated in such a manner, the military neutrality concept requires an appropriate economic power so that the modernisation and equipping of the armed forces with modern combat systems become possible (Rančić, Zarić and Beriša 2019). Thereby, the concept of neutrality requires the allocation of greater financial resources to gain the full provision of national security.

Financing the national defence directly depends on the economic owner and available Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Since the budget is the main factor in the development of the defence system, its form, and the scope of engagement, Serbia strives for economic development, intending to ensure greater financial investments in defence industry development and the modernisation of the military and other defence forces (Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019). The development of the defence system is based on Serbia's needs and possibilities, followed by the strengthening of economic and demographic potential (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2019). In this regard, an analysis of the funds allocated from the defence budget for military financing purposes between 2011 and 2021 was carried out.

In 2011, the total defence expenditures of the Republic of Serbia was amounted to about 1.8% of the GDP (Stoilkov and Ivanova 2017, 122). However, the allocated financial resources did not create the conditions needed for optimal development of

the defence system and the operational capabilities of the Serbian Armed Forces. In this respect, for the functioning and development of the defence system, it was necessary to provide at least 2% of GDP (White Paper on Defence of the Republic of Serbia 2010, 128). Apart from the fact that military expenditures did not reach the projected 2% of GDP, they were reduced to 1.4% of GDP in 2016 (Stoilkov and Ivanova 2017, 122; Kostić, Knežević and Lepojević 2018, 177). Starting with 2018, the defence budget gradually increased, reaching a record of 2.4% of GDP in 2021 (Ignjatijević, Bjeloš and Šterić 2022, 14). Since 2021, the defence budget has been increasing steadily, according to the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. The structure of military spending - shown in Figure no. 1 - has also changed (Kostić, Knežević and Lepojević 2018, 178; Ignjatijević, Bjeloš and Šterić 2022, 14). Between 2011 and 2016, the distribution of military expenditures per year was approximately the same, whereas in 2017, it changed significantly. Although the continuity of the growth of personnel expenses and investments in the defence system in recent years has been evident, the largest part of the 2021 military budget was spent on the procurement of new weapon systems and equipment.

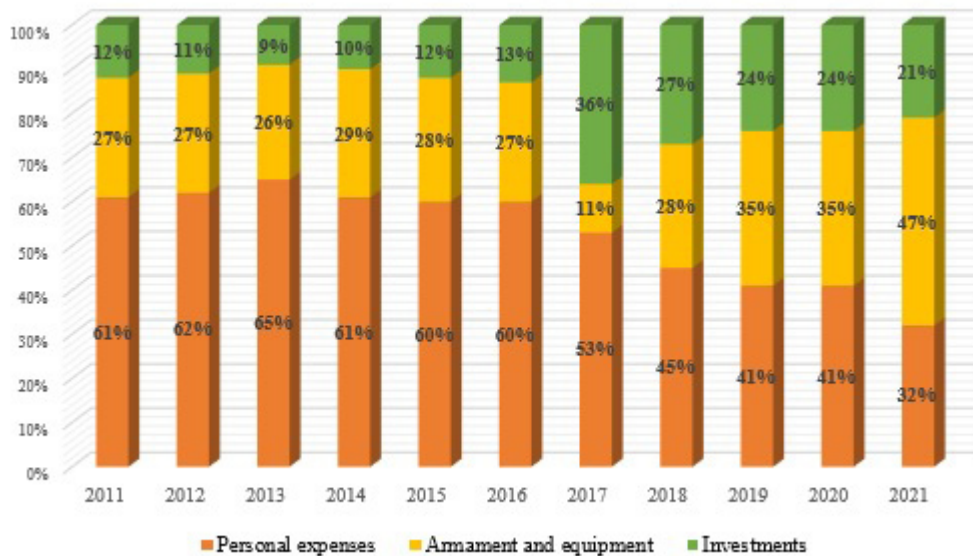


Figure no. 1: A graphic presentation of the defence budget structure of the Republic of Serbia

Under the established defence policy, the organisational structure of Serbia's defence system and the numerous size of its Armed Forces are determined by the types and characteristics of challenges, risks and threats to national security, defined defence interests, the operational capabilities of the Serbian Armed Forces,



available defence resources, and the level of Serbia's integration into global security processes (Strategic Defence Review of the Republic of Serbia 2011, 47). Since the organisational structure of the defence system should be able to establish personnel and materially harmonious relationships among the state requirements and possibilities in the specific socio-historical condition, the Republic of Serbia is intensively working to improve its defence potential.

The process of the reorganisation of the Armed Forces involves organisational, personnel, and technical-technological aspects. The activities carried out in this regard are aimed at the development of enough military capabilities through the acquisition and integration of modernised weapons systems. The second part of the reorganisation activity concerns increasing the personnel potential power (number size, expertise, etc.) of the Armed Forces in peacetime, times of emergency, and times of war – according to an adequate recruitment model. The proportions and total defence expenditures of the Armed Forces' reorganisation are determined by the nature of risks and threats to state security, national interests, and defence policy (Kovač 2013, 104). As the defence activities are directly dependent on the current security situation, the question arises as to what security challenges, risks and threats Serbia is facing or will face, and whether the implementation of the aforementioned activities is necessary to improve the current level of national security.

In terms of acquiring new weapons systems, it does not necessarily mean that new and/or significant security challenges, risks, and threats have been recognised. The modernisation of the defence system is also justified by the flow of time because the existing combat systems are of an older technological generation and at the exploitation limit (Rančić, Zarić and Beriša 2019, 17). Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of the security threats included in the strategic documents in the field of security and defence from 2019, concerning those from 2009, reveals differences in terms of changing the character of security threats that are important for the modernisation of the defence system. Analysing the priority security issue of the unilaterally and illegally declared independence of Kosovo and Metohija, the 2019 Defence Strategy, unlike the one from 2009, indicates the spectrum of threats that are or can be, caused by the Kosovo-Metohija issue. With the statement that the security situation in Kosovo and Metohija has worsened, the 2019 Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia sees the ongoing transformation of the so-called 'Kosovo Security Forces' into Armed Forces as one of the main security threats.

In this respect, in 2018, by the decision of the temporary local government authorities in Kosovo and Metohija, the transformation of the 'Kosovo Security Forces' into a professional army was started with the support of some Western allies. Although NATO does not formally support the professional transformation of the 'Kosovo Security Forces', individual NATO members organise joint exercises, donated weapons, and carried out combat training of the 'Kosovo Security Forces'



members. Regardless of whether the transformation of the ‘Kosovo Security Forces’ leads to the creation of the Armed Forces or the so-called ‘territorial defence forces’ – estimates indicate a significant increase in the military costs of the ‘Kosovo Security Forces’. Following the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, military expenditures for the ‘Kosovo Security Forces’ in 2023 were higher by 0.5% of GDP compared to 0.8% of GDP in 2018 and are still rising. In 2023, Serbia’s military expenditures stood at 2.9% of GDP, contrary to 1.6% in 2018, as stated by the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. At the end of 2022, the Republic of Serbia sent a request to the Office of the NATO Mission in Kosovo and Metohija for the return of up to 1,000 members of the military and police force to Kosovo and Metohija. The reason for such request was the reduced levels of societal safety and security of the Serb minority. According to the Knoema Global Peace Index Database, the level index of societal safety and security in Kosovo and Metohija in 2022 was 2.27. Although, according to the UNSC Resolution 1244, this office does not have the authority or the right to refuse the request, KFOR believed that there was no need for the return of the Serbian security forces to Kosovo and Metohija territory. Paradoxical, less than a year after Serbia’s request, NATO has sent additional troops to Kosovo and Metohija (NATO 2023). The level of societal security in Kosovo and Metohija in 2023 was 2.28, as stated by the Knoema Global Peace Index Database. For comparison, the state with the best societal safety and security levels in the world in 2022 and 2023 was Iceland, with a score of 1.24 in 2022, i.e., and 1.28 in 2023.

From the security dilemma viewpoint, the development of the ‘Kosovo Security Forces’ is of special importance and influence in organising Serbia’s defence system in a time of ‘frozen conflict’. In other words, the formation of the ‘Kosovo Armed Forces’, which is contrary to the UNSC Resolution 1244, along with the possible withdrawal of KFOR forces from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija at the end of its mandate, represents a direct threat to the national and defence interests of Serbia. The nature of recognised risks and threats requires additional defence measures and increasing military resources (Stojković and Radović 2017, 11; Rančić, Zarić and Beriša 2019, 17). In response to the identified risks and threats, Serbia strives for defence system modernisation through the procurement of new defence systems, following both operational needs and financial possibilities (Doktrina Vojske Srbije 2010; White Paper on Defence of the Republic of Serbia 2023).

The second part of strengthening the defence potential involves the change of approaching the manning policy in the defence system. A significant factor of the Armed Forces reorganisation is the possible mobilisation effort of the total population, i.e., the ratio of the peacetime and wartime composition of the Armed Forces, which depends on the state’s doctrinal commitment. According to the standards, the mobilisation effort in peacetime extends from 0.5 to 1% of the total population number, while during wartime the mobilisation effort ranges from 5% to



10%. States that advocate the deterrence doctrine have a smaller difference between the wartime and peacetime compositions, contrary to the states that are determined for the defence doctrine. Most states base the peacetime establishment of their Armed Forces at 0.5% of the total population and the wartime establishment at 5% of it. The same standards have been implemented by Serbia (Mišović 2015, 227).

Accordingly, the Republic of Serbia is considering the reactivation of the conscripts' service, which was suspended in 2011, when the professionalization process of its Armed Forces began. The reorganisation of the Serbian forces required a brand-new filling model of forces, modifying its composition and structure, establishing a functional and spatial organisation, and a system of command and logistical support (Rakić 2016, 239). Since 2010, the Republic of Serbia has opted for a three-service composition of its Armed Forces as the basic military force that defends Serbia against military threats. The filling policy of defence subjects ranges from the recruitment level to the purely professional level, which depends on the political and security situation, economic opportunities, and the achieved degree of technological development of the state. Consequently, the issue of (re)activation of military obligation is particularly highlighted.

Regardless of the implemented model of Armed Forces recruitment /general or selective, the level of perceived endangerment caused by external security threats and the strengthening of civil-military relations stand out as the most relevant factors of recruitment in the military (Nikolić 2021, 4). Analysing the defence policies of states that reintroduced the obligation of military service, it can be concluded that they decided to take such a step after assessing that they were facing certain external security threats.

After the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the armed conflict in Ukraine in 2014 – the so-called Donbas war –, there was a change in the perception of security risks and threats on the European continent, whereby some European states began to review their security and defence policies. These movements led to discussions about regular military service in many states in Europe. This issue became especially emphasised after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Since the Russian invasion of the Crimean Peninsula, Ukraine (in 2014), Lithuania (in 2015) and militarily neutral Sweden (in 2017) have reactivated military service, while Sweden and Ukraine have started with the consideration of NATO membership. The decisions were directly related to the assessment of the external security threats – the proximity of militarily superior Russia and the deteriorating overall security situation in Eastern Europe (Vaicekauskaitė 2017; Nikolić 2021). Apart from introducing the military conscription, Lithuania initiated the process of harmonising its security policy with Latvia and Estonia, intending to simultaneously increase the defence capacities of all three Baltic States through regional cooperation in the field of defence. Since 2014, the defence policies of the Baltic States have



allocated larger budgets for the defence to modernise and increase the size of their Armed Forces (Szymański 2015). Additionally, since January 2024, Latvia has introduced mandatory military service. The Russian act of aggression on Ukraine in February 2022, which contributed to the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian War, influenced the change in Sweden's and Finland's perception of security, which shortly thereafter submitted a request for membership in NATO. This procedure ended a decades-long era of military neutrality for these two states. There is no dilemma that the neutralism concept in international relations has changed distinctly. Even the most typical examples of militarily neutral states, Austria and Switzerland, express attitudes that are not aligned with the traditional comprehension of neutralism (Gashi 2016). Although they are militarily neutral and have a stable security environment in terms of a low possibility of an armed conflict, Switzerland and Austria carry out general military conscription. Despite pronounced sociological changes in the perception of military service in Swiss society, refusal to serve in the military results in the payment of financial compensation or a prison sentence (Szvircsev 2011). On the other hand, Austria has never suspended compulsory military service, not even after positive changes in its security discourse after the end of the Cold War.

Faced with security challenges in the region, Israel practices a policy of general gender-neutral military service, regardless of the evident trend of growth in the number of individuals who are seeking exemption from mandatory military service granted on various grounds (Cohen and Cohen 2022). A similar view of (in) security has the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, which are introducing military conscription due to security threats from current conflicts in their environment. For the first time in history, Qatar initiated compulsory service in 2013, while in the UAE military obligation started in 2014. Similarly, India has never had any conscription laws, and joining the Indian Armed Forces was on a voluntary base. However, in 2022, the Indian Government announced that it would begin recruiting up to 46,000 men aged between 17 and a half and 21 years old annually to serve on 4-year contracts, under a process called 'the Agnipath Scheme'. Türkiye, Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan continue with the military obligation policy in frozen conflict. Apart from the execution of the general military obligation, until the mutual escalation of violence in 2020, Armenia and Azerbaijan have worked intensively on increasing military capacities through the acquisition and integration of new weapons systems. As in the case of Serbia's strategy, Azerbaijan's armament strategy implied greater financial investments to increase the capacity of its dedicated industry as a basis for the modernisation and equipping of the defence forces (Gurbanov 2019). Türkiye, as a reliable partner of Azerbaijan and with established outstanding relations with the biggest regional power – Russia, acts as a starting point for the capacity decrease of the dedicated industry. Nevertheless, the Azerbaijani perception of (in)security led to military capacities to increase.



Despite the differences regarding the (non)existence of security threats, due to the lack of a supreme authority that would guarantee their security and existence, states are forced to increase their defence capacities since military power is the only guarantee of their survival (Herz 1951, 14; Brauch 2005, 10). Regardless of the formal and legal state equality in the international system, states are not essentially equal because they do not have identical hard and soft power or rights, and therefore neither the possibility of exercising force (Stojanović and Đurić 2012). Consequently, states seek to increase their military strength as much as possible, according to their perceptions of (in)security (Wolfers 1962). Same as in the past times, all states behave in a similar manner nowadays.

Concluding Considerations

Frequent changes in security circumstances influence states reviewing their defence capabilities. The analysis of the security and defence strategies of the European and non-European states shows that the strengthening of the national defence potential depends directly on the state's security perception. Raising defence potentials might be in different forms, such as greater financial allocations and procurement of weapons systems, military obligation introduction, alliances with other states, or membership in existing alliances.

The 'frozen conflict', as a distinctive modality of security, illustrates a change in the security architecture of defence significance for the integrity and sovereignty of the state. The security architecture establishes the conditions for the re-definition of national security and defence policies, alongside the strengthening of state's defence readiness. Accordingly, the Republic of Serbia strives to increase its defence capacity due to the disturbing security situation in the Western Balkans region, the identification of risks and threats of greater intensity to the highest national-proclaimed values and interests, the impossibility of adequate safeguarding of national values due to reduced staff and material resources, and the obsolescence of the military equipment. Strengthening the defence potential is currently only Serbia's answer to the threat of a 'frozen conflict'. Any other solution is in contradiction with the national values defined by the Constitution and would be interpreted as an inconsistency of the national security policy.

However, the fact is that the Hobbesian's perception of security is not only characteristic of Serbia but also of those states that interpret security threats more traditionally and whose defence strategies were part of the analysis of the present study. Security practice shows that in the conditions of a 'frozen conflict' states always give priority to traditional values at the expense of the worth of contemporary history. Along with the security threat to the territorial borders, states often take the threat to the identity of domicile society as a reason and justification for improving the military potential.



An alternative to existing national defence strategies is the complete affirmation of new security concepts and values in the constitutional and legal frameworks, and state security and defence policies. Current ‘transitional’ security and defence policies are still hybrid. Although their content affirms the postulates of the human security concept, their framework is still state-centred. Another solution to the problem of national security protection in a ‘frozen conflict’ would be a defence alliance with other states that could guarantee the security of their members. However, the question arises whether the stated ‘solution’ is the one to national security safeguarding since the protection of national values and interests, in that case, is transferred to a collective or supranational level, while the instrument of deterring security threats remains the same – the military force.

Is the independent state concept, whose roots date back to the 17th century, applicable in preserving the societal values of contemporary history? It appears to be not. Instead, the concept of an independent state is rather a source of today’s conflicts than international peace. The traditional compression of national security according to which the strengthening of military potential and concluding military alliances represent the strongest guarantee of preserving the security of the state and society has been overcome. Moreover, it contributes to the arms race, strengthens mistrust between states, causes international instability and reflects the mentality of the Cold War period. To maintain peace and security, the 21st century international community requires an alternative approach that would guarantee the preservation of societal values by reconciling the right to self-determination and the right of a sovereign state to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

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