



REALITIES OF THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD MILLENIUM

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The changes that took place at the end of the 20th century in the international relations system led to changes at the global level, but especially at the regional level, in terms of the prospect of understanding how security was achieved. In this respect, the continued struggle of actors to reconfigure power centers, the increased development of existing threats and the emergence of new ones, have led to the reshaping of the regional and global security environment. Thus, in this article we aim to capture some of the realities that govern the European security environment at the beginning of the 21st century.

Keywords: European Union; threats; security; security environment; security actor.

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century lead to the writing of a new chapter in the evolution of the international security environment, the fall of the main bastions of communism, the evolution towards multipolarity, the growing trend towards the expansion of globalization, as well as the emergence of new types of risks, threats and extrapolation of existing ones, requiring rethinking the approach to the security environment.

The need to maintain and even expand its sphere of influence in an environment characterised by increasing unpredictability, fluidity and complexity also compels a number of prominent actors to adapt their security policies and strategies, both regionally and globally. In this respect, the great powers of the world understand that they cannot fight alone the rapidity with which the current threats propagate, their increased capacity for adaptation and transformation, the optimal solution being the development of credible, transparent forms of cooperation in which dialogue, sharing of experience and addressing the interests of all members constitute steadfast pillars.

At the same time, at the beginning of the millennium, the achievement of security in the context of the international perceived as "the ability of States and societies to preserve the autonomy of their functional identity and integrity"¹ can no longer be understood only through the prism of the old realistic approach which is centred on the

application of military power and the superiority of the balance of forces, and need a new understanding through a combination of neorealist, neoliberal and socio-constructivist approaches with postmodernist accents in which non-military forms and instruments occupy the decisive place in resolving divergences in international relations. Moreover, through the voices of the most significant representatives of the Copenhagen School – Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde and Ole Waever – a new vision of the approach to security is offered, one that combines both traditionalist and idealistic principles, resulting in a multisectoral approach to security², which considers that, together with the military factor, the political, economic, societal and environmental factor must be analysed.

Also, the subject of security reference is reconsidered, the emphasis being increasingly placed on the security of the human individual, as an essential element of any form of social organization, the security of the whole community being deeply influenced by human security and the system of relations between people. However, internationally the state continues to be the main exponent of security, this state being increasingly built on the inter-market between countries, power blocs and international organisations.

Moreover, the responsibility of ensuring security attributed in the last century to the great powers is redivided at the beginning of the millennium, between them, the forms of regional cooperation and international and non-governmental organisations that tend to take an increasingly significant role in ensuring stability and prosperity at regional and even global level.

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However, a series of actions, carried out both in plain sight and by using hybrid techniques and tactics aimed at masking the perpetrator's footprints, are directed towards destabilizing the existing balance of power and creating a new one in which spheres of influence are redistributed. Thus, this continuous struggle for power creates new hotbeds of instability and premises for the substantive increase of threats, often the collateral damage being significant at the societal level.

This more complex approach to security is also reflected in the analysis of the security environment, in the opinion of the researchers the phrase "a relational concept, which implies a permanent adaptation and adjustment of a set of internal parameters (economic-social, political, military, legal, cultural and moral) to the conditions of the international environment, a process with a fluid dynamics, oriented towards the preservation of space, common ideals and values and at the same time putting these elements in a stable balance, unaffected by risk factors or threats"³.

Therefore, taking into account the above international context, through the use of quantitative analysis, the study of bibliographic resources and content analysis, the article aims to identify the main trends that are manifested in the system of international relations outlined in the European space and to draw a series of conclusions on the perspective of European security at the beginning of the third millennium.

Determinations and trends that manifest in the European space in the 21st century

The end of the Cold War led to the elimination of the international order system characterized by the control of the two superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union, over the states, producing multiple effects on the system of international relations, both regionally and globally. In this respect, there is a growing trend towards reconfiguring forms of international cooperation, with major powers and a number of emerging countries trying to polarise around them as many supporters of their own values and interests as possible in an attempt to maintain/secure a dominant place in the new world hierarchy that is increasingly projected through a reorganisation of power centres.

In this context, at the level of the European

security area, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, followed a year later on 3 October by the reunification of Germany, is one of the defining stages of Post-1945 European history. Although after 30 years, according to opinion⁴ polls, about a third of Germany's population still considers reunification incomplete, this act represented a strong push for Europe towards democratisation, inoculating in the souls of Europeans hope and determination in rebuilding the old continent.

The European security environment of the post-Cold War period is also shaped by the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, causing the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union) in December 1991 and the later split of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In the space under review, this leads to the emergence of new independent states, in this way, fundamentally changing the security imperatives. Moreover, newly created states are taking important steps towards democratisation, with the full support of Western democratic countries. However, many of the countries on the path of democratisation are not legislatively and institutionally prepared, thus generating new vulnerabilities to European security. There are therefore difficulties in putting democratic principles into operation due to the resistance to change of the main institutions of the States concerned, which leads to an even greater deepening of the gaps between states.

The beginning of the 21st century presents a Europe in which the possibility of conflicts between states is relatively small, with conventional threats almost entirely diminished. Thus, there is an acceleration of the political and economic integration process at the level of the old continent, which aims to promote common interests and values, particularly favoured by the enlargement of NATO and the EU. In this respect, the EU expands its borders by welcoming the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary in 2004, with Romania and Bulgaria becoming members of the organisation in 2007. However, the existence in the vicinity of the European area of still conflicting areas such as those in the Middle East, the ex-Yugoslav space and the territory of the former Soviet Union is always a danger to regional security, and may lead to the emergence of new forms of conflict with various forms of manifestation and possibilities of



propagation, as well as the emergence of new risks and threats to European states. Moreover, there are still situations of instability and crisis at sub-regional level and trends of fragmentation, marginalisation or isolation of some states. Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European countries face economic, social and political difficulties associated with the transition to society based on the principles of democracy and the market economy, which can generate a number of risks to the security of states in the region⁵.

The influences of the particularly fluid strategic security environment, characterised by a high degree of unpredictability in which, together with state actors, are increasingly manifesting their interests in non-state actors, are also felt in the European area. If globally we are talking about a single superpower, the United States of America, at the regional level a number of medium powers tend to dispute their supremacy in a continuous attempt to re-divide spheres of influence. In Europe's neighbourhood, the Russian Federation seems awakened from a deep sleep and seeks to regain its influence in the old territories and become a global superpower again, while internally France and Germany are fighting for their position as a leader within the European Union, and Britain is seeking to break free from the rules imposed by the European Union and make its way to the world's high hierarchy. At the same time, China does not want to remain only a major player in international economic exchanges, but develops its military capabilities and increases its presence in UN-led security missions. Moreover, India has an important word to say in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, and Japan is building partnerships with NATO and the EU to participate in strengthening stability in Asia.

While in terms of conventional threats we can say that at European level the situation is relatively balanced, the trends are different for unconventional ones. Thus, under the umbrella of globalisation, unconventional threats such as terrorism, migration, drug trafficking, the illicit trade in strategic materials, as well as organised crime take advantage of border penetration and are proliferated not only throughout the European area, but throughout the world.

In this respect, the tragedy of 11 September 2001 finds Europe in a process of continuous change and adaptation to the complexity and dynamism of

the new security environment. Changes at NATO level also lead to changes in European area states, most of which are members of the European Union. Thus, at European level there is a broad campaign to condemn terrorism, the fight against terrorism gaining new valences. Europe is under further testing, facing an increased emergence of terrorism, with the Madrid, London and Paris attacks being the most eloquent examples. It is interesting, however, that instead of causing division and fragmentation between states, the terrorist phenomenon is leading to a coalition of European states and the development of new common strategies to combat this scourge, thus demonstrating that in borderline situations, Europeans are able to come together to combat them, with differences between states moving into a secondary plane. Moreover, the urgent need to combat terrorism made the EU develop and adopt the Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2005. In this respect, directing its effort in four directions of effort – prevention, protection, follow-up and response⁶ – the strategy sets out the EU's determination to join the global fight against this emerging threat and aims to strengthen European security. Further updates on policies and strategies in this area, an eloquent example being the revised EU Strategy to Combat Radicalisation and Recruitment for Terrorist Purposes in 2014, as well as the fight against 119 terrorist attacks and the arrest of 1004 people who committed terrorist offences in 2019⁷ on the European continental, show that European states are ready to take a greater role in ensuring security at regional level.

Often compared to the Great Depression of 1930, the 2008 global economic crisis⁸ produced multiple effects on the international security environment by affecting the economic factor in the first phase, the consequences produced in this area triggering the chain reaction and influencing, one by one, the political, military, social and even environmental fields. At the same time, the attention paid by governments around the world to finding optimal solutions for limiting/minimizing the effects of the crisis attests that for a limited period of time, the new emerging threat distracted the world from the main threat metamorphosed at the beginning of the third millennium- terrorism. In this respect, there is an accelerated increase in the public deficit at the European level, with a significant increase in public debt until the end of



2010..Thus, at EU level the public deficit increases from 2.3 of GDP to 7.5% of GDP in 2010, while public debt increases from 61.6% in 2008 to 79.6% of GDP two years later. This was basically tantamount to the annulment of progress on fiscal consolidation since the end of the Cold War. The crisis also had significant effects in the employment sector the average EU unemployment rate rising to 11% in 2010, with some Countries in the Union at more than 20%, with the consequences reflecting on the organisation's human capital⁹.

The crisis also has significant effects in the employment sector the average EU-wide unemployment rate increasing significantly, with the consequences of turning to human capital. Furthermore, the decrease in defence budgets across all EU states leads to asymmetry in the capabilities of Member States' armies, with major implications for the interoperability and defence capacity of the old continent, as well as on the fulfilment of the obligations undertaken under partnerships and initiatives. In addition to unemployment, which leads to the deepening of the phenomenon of poverty at Union level, the crisis is causing worsening working conditions, increasingly difficult to ensure the essential services of life, a multiplication of the number of homeless people, excessive indebtedness and financial exclusion¹⁰.

Moving from economic to social, Europe is facing upward trends in the migration phenomenon. While it can be an effective approach to filling in weaknesses in the labour sector, with the migratory population generally young, active and able to work, the phenomenon is causing a number of security challenges. Thus, populations with different traditions and cultures, often opposite behaviours and ideologies are coming into contact, the challenge of the institutions of European states being to manage the situation in order to prevent the emergence of conflict situations generated on ethnic and religious grounds, and at the same time to find the most effective methods of integrating those who migrate. Other challenges relate to the adaptation of policies and strategies towards respect for human and minority rights, as well as the education and vocational training of the migratory population¹¹.

Moreover, the demographic factor and spatial distribution of the population bring challenges with an impact on the security problems of the European

space. Thus, the disproportionate evolution of the pace of population growth, the perpetuation of economic gaps between developed and developing areas, the ageing trend of the population, the vulnerability to epidemics and pandemics, labour migration and the deterioration of social conditions in crisis and conflict areas, are defining elements of the asymmetric nature of global developments. They are still added in a form of deep and widespread manifestation of the phenomenon of poverty. Thus, in the first decade around 20% of the total EU population (116.4 million people) is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and 17% live with less than 60% of the average household income in their country, with the Europe 2020 target being to reduce the number of the continent's poor population by around 20 million¹².

The events of 2014, resulting in Russia's annexation of Crimea, were an inflection point in international relations, bringing up a topic that the entire international community thought had been consumed since the end of the Cold War, namely the use of military power and the threat of its use to annex new territories. The consequences of this are all the more significant, as the effects on international relations go beyond the operational/actional framework, extrapolating conceptually/ideologically. Practically, the entire effort made by the international community to ensure a framework conducive to human development by respecting the provisions of international law, the resolution of disputes between states mainly diplomatically, is not only called into question by Russia, but provokes a real setback in the realization of peace and stability so necessary for the development of human society. Although there were different views at the level of the major actors, instead of producing a split effect between East and West, Russia's annexation of Crimea produced a diametrically opposed effect, with a union effect, with the entire international community condemning the actions of the Russian aggressor. The extension by the EU, the UN and the US, successively from 2014 to 2021, of the period of imposition of sanctions against Russia by prohibiting all Euro-Atlantic investments in Crimea and Sevastopol, the drawing up of a blacklist that currently contains individuals and companies supporting the destabilization of Ukraine and bans in certain sectors of the economy, demonstrates the determination of the international community to

end any attempt to violation of international law not only by Russia but by any state of the world.

The European security environment has as its main vector of power the European Union; by developing its partnerships, it tends to expand its borders and assert itself not only as an economic force, but also as a political and military one, the stated aim being to become a more important factor of stability and security, not only at regional level, but also at global level. For years, the world's most important economic partner, believed that the economic interdependencies between existing states at the beginning of the millennium would ensure the preservation of the balance of power. Thus, confronted at its borders with the expansionist and revisionist tendencies of the Russian Federation, the Union understands the importance of strengthening the transatlantic partnership and the need to develop the security and defence side as quickly as possible.

In this regard, through security and defence initiatives, the promotion of the Common Security and Defence Policy, the establishment of the European Defence Agency, the adaptation of their own security strategies culminating in the issuance on 28 June 2016 of the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, the creation of Permanent Structured Cooperation, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability, the establishment of the European Defence Fund, the conduct of a Coordinated Annual Defence Review Process, the development of numerous projects under PESCO and beyond, the Union becomes much more coupled with the phenomenon of international relations and takes the strategic partnership with NATO to another level, ensuring in complementarity with the Alliance, the security and stability of the transatlantic space. Competition is also growing in the economic field, with China's rise as a global economic partner, threatening to remove Europe as the world's leading economic partner.

The increased development of technologies leads to an excessive digitisation of the entire area of state, private, financial institutions, etc. Thus, with the regional and global increase and spread of this phenomenon, the European area faces exponentially greater risks of identity theft, cyber attacks on bank accounts, theft of classified data and alterations of critical infrastructure all with

hard-to-remedy effects on individual, state and even regional security. In this respect, the cyber dimension of the conflict tends to spiral out of control, being one of the main threats of the last decade. Viruses, which in the last century were considered of little importance, turn into threats with particularly complex structures, an element of novelty being the use of computers formed in groups to execute cyber attacks "which generate the refusal to provide the requested services (DDOS)"¹³. Moreover, the events in Estonia in 2007 show the emergence of this threat on the European continental and the major risk of being used in increasingly complex actions. According to statistical studies in the field, in 2018, the number of cyber attacks has doubled compared to 2017, with the rate of production showing an upward trend. The ways in which attacks are carried out also denote an increasingly diabolical inventiveness and malice of cyber criminals. According to the same statistics, the damage caused by cybercrime in 2020 should be worth about five billion dollars¹⁴.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic globally to date, by infecting tens of millions of the planet's inhabitants and the deaths of some 2 million of them, the numerous crises generated at the global health system, the effects it is printing on the area of factors that determine the security phenomenon of international relations, are right to say that its management and the consequences it will cause represents one of the major challenges 21st century.

Thus, at the level of the European area, there are multiple concerns to put an end to the spread of this virus which, through its aggressiveness and speed of spread, makes mankind remember the sad memories of the effects of the Spanish gipa at the beginning of the last century. In this respect, an eclosure example is the EU Coronavirus Vaccine Strategy, presented in June 2020, by which the organisation aims to ensure that the population of Member States is urgently and fairly access to vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 virus. Although it is widely known that the period of development of a vaccine is between 5 and 10 years, the Union's efforts are conjugated to obtain a vaccine within 18 months, ensuring its quality, safety and efficacy standards. Europe's determination to combat this threat is also revealed by the speech o the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen: "this is an important moment for science and



solidarity. Nothing is certain, but I am convinced that we can mobilize the resources needed to find a vaccine that will defeat this virus once and for all. We must be ready to produce and make this vaccine available to the population throughout Europe and throughout the world. This vaccine will be a major step forward in the fight against the coronavirus and a testimony to what we, as partners, can achieve when we put our ideas, research and resources together. The European Union will do everything possible to ensure that all citizens, whereon they live, have access to a vaccine¹⁵.

Internationally, the activities carried out by the EU become significant, the organisation being the main emissary of cooperation and unity so necessary to survive this crisis, but especially the consequences arising from the metamorphosis of the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, the Union as a PARTNER of the US regrets the cumulation of less responsible US actions to withdraw funding for WHO and the withdrawal from other international treaties whose common purpose is to safeguard the rules-based world order: "EU regrets the decline in US global involvement and the US government's decision to withdraw Funding from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty, as well as the general tendency of the current US administration to make a discordant note in several multilateral organisations that have been created to establish a rules-based liberal world order or to undermine them (as happened in the case of the International Criminal Court)"¹⁶. Europe through the EU also takes note and formally condemns the destabilising actions of China and Russia on the pandemic. Thus, the European Commission report identifies threats in the area of misinformation and the dissemination of false information, with Russia and China being presented as clearly identified dangers in this regard: "foreign actors and certain third countries, in particular Russia and China, have engaged in targeted influence operations and disinformation campaigns about COVID-19, in the EU, in its neighbourhood and globally, aiming to undermine democratic debate and exacerbate social polarisation, to improve its own image in the context of COVID-19"¹⁷.

Conclusions

The beginning of the millennium presents a European space, faced with new challenges,

uncertainty and expansionary trends at its borders, at the heart of which the main exponent of stability and security, the European Union, is becoming increasingly vocal to violations of international law, more persevering in the development of civil and especially military capabilities, representing a pillar of openness to communication, integration, regional stability, with global security vector aspirations.

At European level, developments in science and technology will generate new threats and risks with the benefits to humanity, further widening the gaps between developed and underdeveloped countries. Thus, important scientific advances will occur frequently if two or more disciplines converge, especially in rapidly evolving fields such as biology, robotics and autonomy, information technology, nanotechnology, and energy¹⁸.

Moreover, in a perfectly connected world, a general trend is that of constantly updating partnerships. In this respect, the EU, as an exponent of European power, will seek not only to strengthen its partnerships through open dialogue, transparency and consideration of the interests of all participating States, but also to make small concessions in order to preserve its allies.

The EU will continue to develop both civilian and military crisis management capabilities, with the strategic partnership with NATO the foundation on which it will strengthen its security and defence dimension. Efforts to eradicate poverty, as well as the development goals of the 2030 Agenda, will also be continued.

In a world of global geopolitical competition, the mad rush to secure endangered energy resources is putting indescribable pressure on the EU as it is launching to develop new technologies and create tools and means to ensure its superiority in international relations. European states' concerns are also directed towards the effective exploitation of opportunities and the finding of optimal solutions to protect their vulnerabilities in the future architecture of international relations. In this respect, we appreciate Europe's role in the power equation of the future will be determined by its ability to continuously steer its partnerships towards new horizons and strengthen those already achieved.

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