NATO

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

AGENDA ITEM

Strengthening Cooperation in the Eastern Europe

Under Secretary General
Ceylin Musalı

STUDY GUIDE

Overarching Diplomacy

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1. Welcome Letters

1.1. Letter from the Secretary General

Esteemed Participants,

I proudly welcome you all to the third edition of MUNAAL as the Secretary General of the conference. I am Taha Ersoy and I am an 11th-grader at the Ankara Atatürk High School. It is a great honor for me to serve as the Secretary General of such a conference with an amazing organization and academic team. It has been a period of relentless efforts and sleepless nights for our team to finalize the preparations of MUNAAL'25 and make THE conference of the year possible.

The amount of trouble I personally have been through during the preparation phases of MUNAAL is unutterable and I would not be able to overcome the tough challenges we faced if not for our executive team and specifically our Director General, Eylül Koçak. She has been my greatest supporter through my best and worst, yet I can't imagine ever making MUNAAL'25 possible without her. She has been the backbone of the MUNAAL organization and with the joint efforts of our Directory General, Eylül, and her Deputy, Ecem, we managed to arrange a conference of the highest quality. I want to also thank my Deputy-Secretary General, Abrek, for being the best Deputy I could ever wish for.

We have selected a capable academic team and prepared eye-catching committees in order to exceed the conference to its limit. I would like thank our academic team; Dervişan Mehmet Savaş, Nur Mürsel, Ekin Dal, Edanur Altun, Ceylin Musalı, İpeksu Kaya, Ahmet Ozan Yılmaz, Mirata Deva, Atakan Duman, Çınar Mehmet Erduran and our Head of Crisis Görkem Can Coşkun. We have worked relentlessly to give you the best experience possible. Sincerely,

Taha Ersoy
Secretary General of MUNAAL'25

1.2. Letter from the Under Secretary General

Distinguished participants,

I am Ceylin MUSALI, a 11th Grade student in Arı Private Anatolian High School Pre IBDP. I will be the Under Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in this year's MUNAAL. First and foremost, I would like to thank my honorable secretary general Taha Ersoy and her director general, my beloved Eylül, for giving me this opportunity. I am so grateful for meeting with her last year at an MUN. I would like to thank and appreciate my dearest friend, partner in crime, therapist and supporter Eylül Koçak. I want to share my thanks with my MUN Daughter Ecem Kalyoncu. She is always an inspiration for me to continue my Model United Nations career. With her caring and understanding personality she helps me to turn a disaster into a success.

My sincere advice for the committee members is to read this comprehensive study guide thoroughly that I prepared for all of you. Additionally, do not forget to make use of further reading and investigate this matter. Do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you have any inquiries.

Ceylin Musalı,

Under Secretary General of NATO,

email: musaliceylin@gmail.com

2. Introduction

2.1 The history and structure of North Atlantic Treaty Organization

With the end of World War II in 1945, the Western nations were far separated from the east, the conflict had caused economies to crash, resulted in the death of millions and world diplomacy to eventually crash down.

In 1945 the Iron Curtain was established as the world tension did not end with World War II. It was a concept in which the Soviet Union established a political barrier dividing Europe into two and in which later on turned into a physical barrier that operated as a block the Soviet Union used as a defense from the open world to protect its satellite states. It played a significant role further into unresolved conflicts that arose later on and a dividend between the world that on the east of the barrier the Soviet Union and the states in which it had an influence resided and on the West the unified western states and neutral states resided.

After the dissolution of the League of Nations in 1946 the World was in desperate need of alliances and new concepts to replace the damaged international affairs between all nations. The drift between the West and the East, North and the Southern nations had further resulted in the rise of nationalism or different ideologies and the major players of both the Axis and the Allies to put effort into strengthening their political claims and replacing the lost ties between relevant nations and with the existence of the political concept of the Iron Curtain.

 This resulted in countries with similar ideologies and cultures to form new alliances as now World peace had been distraught starting with the West and then the east. In 1947 the Cold War started with the Truman Doctrine. The Doctrine stated that the United States and the "free world" could no longer allow Soviet totalitarianism to spread to independent nations and that the nation would provide

political and all necessities demanded to nations in need, strengthening the support in the Western world. The doctrine claimed that within the Greek civil war the communist victory would further drift the relations of Turkey and Greece and that with Turkey's strategic position in the Middle East would be endangered with a Communist nations' presence that is supported and interfered by the Soviet Union. The Truman Doctrine eventually gathered the support of the European nations and eventually led up to the unification of the North American and European nations to unify against the Soviets.

On 17th of March 1948 the Treaty of Brussels was signed between western nations in order to solidify their front against the East and the Soviet Union, establishing the Western Union, Western European Union, and the European Coal and Steel Community. This eventually led the unification of European and North American countries to unify and counter Soviet-expansionism. Following the drift between, the President of the United States released the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to express the country's standings against the Soviet and communism.

In 4th of April 1949 The North Atlantic Treaty, popularly known as the Washington Treaty was signed by 12 founding nations; Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Washington Treaty officially declared the establishment of NATO to the world.

Since then, NATO has had an agenda of collective defense, with the article 5 of the treaty stating " that if a NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked." This movement striked the Soviet Union as now the founding members of NATO posed as a unified front against its expansionism.

The organization consists of sub-bodies to ease the governance and the proceedings. The North Atlantic Council (NAC) is the decision-making body of NATO and the highest of command-consisting of ambassadors, defense ministers or direct head states of governments, it evaluates proposals and makes decisions upon NATO's foreign and internal policies. As NATO is the body of the organization that implements the decided policies and common aims into action therefore any action is taken by NATO.

The International Military Staff (IMS) executes the militaristic actions decided by NATO's military authorities and it provides the alliance military advisory alongside with staff to execute any sort of policy and operations of the Alliance and assures that the alliance's political and militaristic actions are aligned with one another and that there is no breach of any article.

The Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) is responsible for the execution of all of the Alliance's operations and provides the necessities for the operations alongside with its sub-sub-bodies The Allied Command Operations (ACO).

2.2 Member Countries

COUNTRY	ENTRANCE DATE
Belgium	April 4, 1949
Canada	April 4, 1949
Denmark	April 4, 1949

France	**April 4, 1949**
Greece	**February 18, 1952**
İceland	**April 4, 1949**
İtaly	**April 4, 1949**
Luxembourg	**April 4, 1949**
Netherlands	**April 4, 1949**
Norway	**April 4, 1949**
Portugal	**April 4, 1949**
Turkiye	**February 18, 1952**
United Kingdom	**April 4, 1949**
United States	**April 4, 1949**
Germany	**May 9, 1955**
Spain	**May 30,1982**
Sweden	**2024**
Slovenia	**2004**
Slovakia	**2004**
Romania	**2004**

North Macedonia	2020
Montenegro	2017
Albania	2009
Bulgaria	2004
Croatia	2009
Czechia	1999
Estonia	2004
Finland	2023
Hungary	1999
Latvia	2004
Lithuania	2004
Poland	1999

2.3. NATO's Policies

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has 14 articles that bind the organization and its members. The articles set the foundation of principles and commitments of its members.

Article 1: The parties agree to settle international disputes peacefully and refrain from the threat or use of force.

Article 2: Each country will contribute to the development of peaceful and friendly international relations.

Article 3: Members commit to maintaining and developing their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

Article 4: Members can consult with each other if they believe their territorial integrity, political independence, or security is threatened.

Article 5: An armed attack against one or more members is considered an attack against all, and each member agrees to take action to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Article 6: The treaty does not affect the rights and obligations of the parties under the United Nations Charter.

Article 7: Members will assist a member who is the victim of an armed attack by taking action deemed necessary.

Article 8: Members agree to further cooperation in economic, social, and cultural areas.

Article 9: Consultations will take place whenever the security of a member is affected.

Article 10: Members may invite any European state to accede to the treaty.

Article 11: The treaty enters into force after ratification by each signatory.

Article 12: After the treaty's entry into force, members may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European state to accede.

Article 13: Any member may withdraw after twenty years of the treaty's entry into force by providing notice.

Article 14: The treaty is open for signature by the parties and will be deposited with the Government of the United States of America.

Since NATO's establishment the member states have gathered under one common goal and name which is in accordance with the North Atlantic Treaty, the main purpose of NATO's establishment has always been to counter the Soviet Union and against communism in which it was seen as a threat at the time with the Truman Doctrine, therefore NATO's common agenda is collective deterrence, defense, stability.

2.4. Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe is a subregion of the European continent. Having a very ambiguous nature, it is loaded with diverse geopolitical, geographical, ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic connotations. Its eastern margin is set by the Ural Mountains, whereas its western margin is defined in different ways. All definitions broadly cover Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, Moldova and Romania countries, but more inclusive definitions may also cover the Balkans, Baltic states, Caucasus and Visegrád group.

The area is also an important element of European way of life; the classical socio-cultural features of Eastern Europe have been long attributed to the culture of the East Slavs and the culture of the Greeks and also to the transmission of the Eastern Christian thought, which came to be through the Eastern Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

A second definition defined the Cold War, when Europe was politically divided by the Iron Curtain forming the "Eastern Europe" shifting of the states dominating the Eastern Bloc, states controlled by the Soviet Union.

The EU multilingual classification thesaurus EuroVoc, which is maintained by the Publications Office of the European Union, labels Bulgaria and Croatia and the Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia as Central and Eastern European and also Albania and North Macedonia and Serbia as Central and Eastern European.

2.4.1. Baltic states

UNESCO, EuroVoc, National Geographic Society, Committee for International Cooperation in National Research in Demography, and STW Thesaurus for Economics categorize the Baltic states as Northern Europe, while the CIA World Factbook enroots the region in Eastern Europe with its typical high level of Northern European assimilation. They are both part of the Nordic-Baltic Eight regional cooperation mechanism while Central European countries are members of the Visegrád Group, each on its own. The Northern Future Forum, the Nordic Investment Bank, the Nordic Battlegroup, the Nordic-Baltic Eight and the New Hanseatic League are some other examples of Northern European intergovernmental cooperation encompassing the three countries as a group—the Baltic state countries.

- Estonia
- Latvia
- Lithuania

2.4.2. Caucasus states

The South Caucasus nations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are included in definitions or histories of Eastern Europe. They are found at the edge of the transition zone between Eastern Europe and Western Asia. They are involved in the European Union's Eastern Partnership, the Euronest Assembly of Parliament, and the Council Of Europe, which stipulates that their links to Europe are political and cultural. In January 2002, the European Parliament went on record as noting that Armenia and Georgia may one day become members of the EU. Georgia and Armenia are applying for EU membership and also for NATO membership in conjunction with

- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Georgia

Two de facto republics with de facto state recognition in the South Caucasus come under the control of the Russian military. Both states are members of the Community for Democracy and Rights of Nations:.

- Abkhazia
- South Ossetia

Former republics with limited recognition: Former republics with limited recognition:

Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (1991–2000) existed in former Soviet territory until it was driven into exile during the Second Chechen War.

Republic of Artsakh (1991–2023) breakaway state from Azerbaijan that ceased to exist by 1 January 2024

2.4.3. Post-Soviet states

Some European republics of the former Soviet Union are considered a part of Eastern Europe:

● Belarus

● Moldova (sometimes included in the Balkans or Southeast Europe)

● Russia

● Ukraine
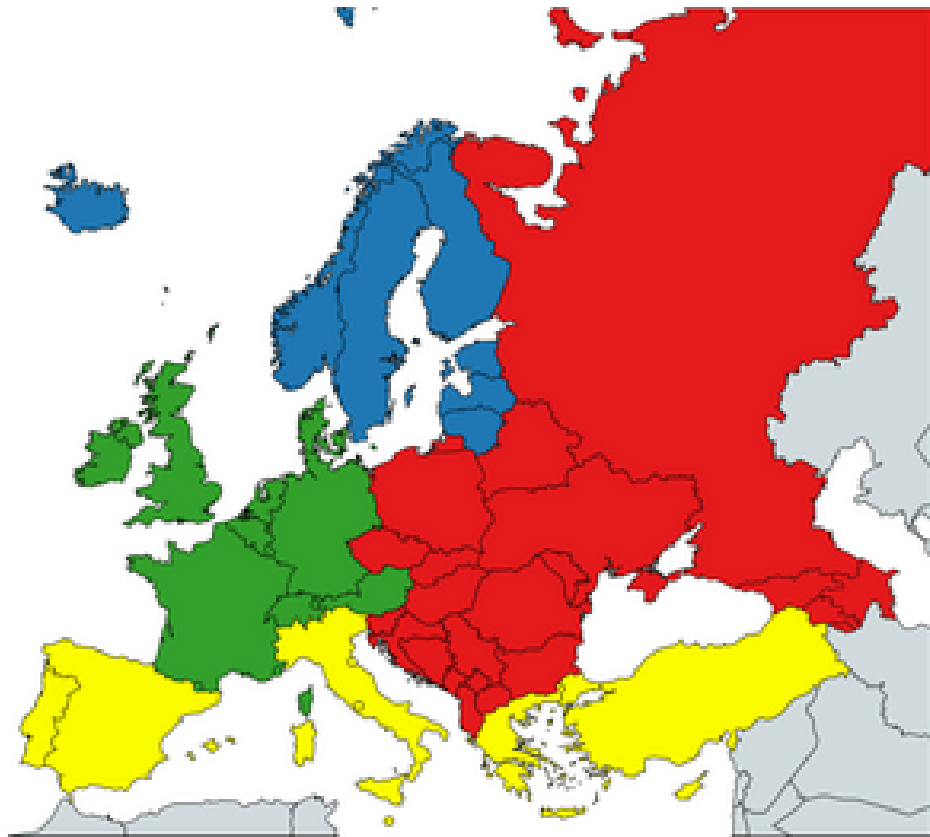
According to this map by EuroVoc countries that are stated with red are Central and Eastern Europe, greens being Western, blues being Northern and yellows being Southern Europe.

Eastern Europe's security is still one of the highest impacted threats from affirmative Russia exterior methods. Russia has shown time and again that it can wield regional dominance through dozens of military incursions and many more proxy conflicts, energy leverage, and hybrid warfare forces equipped with weapons. Gas pipelines such as Nord Stream 2 have been built that increase

European reliance on Russian energy and give Moscow much economic and political leverage. Russia also used cyber-attacks, propaganda, and other covert operations to weaken NATO's cohesion and undermine the sovereignty of Eastern European nations.

3. Geopolitical Context and Security Challenges

3.1. Russo-Ukrainian War

Russia launched missiles, airstrikes, and a large ground invasion along multiple fronts. Zelenskyy declared martial law and mobilized all male Ukrainian citizens between 18 and 60. The Ukrainian forces launched counter offensives in the south and northeast, and Russia annexed four oblasts of Ukraine. The invasion was internationally condemned as a war of aggression, with a United Nations General Assembly resolution demanding a full withdrawal of Russian forces, the International Court of Justice ordering Russia to suspend military operations, and the Council of Europe expelled Russia. Many countries imposed new sanctions, affecting Russia and the world's economies, and provided humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine.

In September 2023, CNN reported that Ukrainian Special Operations Forces were likely involved in drone strikes and ground operations against the Wagner-backed RSF near Khartoum. Ukraine's Chief of the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, Kyrylo Budanov, could neither deny nor confirm the involvement of Ukraine in the conflict in Sudan, but said that Ukraine would punish Russian war criminals anywhere in the world. In September and October 2023, fragments were reported in Romania, a NATO member state, which were suspected to be the remains of a Russian drone attack near the Romanian border with Ukraine.

Gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine have been ongoing since 2014. Russia's Nord Stream pipeline bypassed Ukraine, causing gas transit volumes to decrease. The Russo-Ukrainian War in 2014 and the suspension of a project to develop Ukraine's own shale gas reserves at the Yuzivska gas field

led to the EU commissioner for energy being called in to broker a deal securing supplies to Ukraine and transit to the EU. In May 2021, the Biden administration waived Trump's CAATSA sanctions on the company behind Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany.

Despite multiple ceasefires and peace agreements, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine continues. The war has had a humanitarian impact, with many people in the region living in dire conditions and an extreme and unpredicted amount of refugees and asylum seekers migrating to other countries. It has also strained Ukraine's relations with Russia and has alerted Western Countries. With the possibility of having closer borders with Russia, NATO and the EU applied strict precautions against the Russian threat, Finland and Sweden joined NATO in order to be protected from Russian aggression. Right now, Ukraine till this day receives financial and logistics support from its supporters such as the United States of America and multiple international organizations.

Eastern Europe is beset by a number of geopolitical tensions in addition to the current Russian-Ukrainian war. These problems are all the results of historical disputes, ethnic and cultural conflicts, economic difficulties and the strategic significance of the region as a meeting point of Europe and Asia. Below are some key geopolitical tensions in the region:

3.2. Ethnic and Territorial Disputes

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (Armenia-Azerbaijan): Even if from a strictly geographical point of view, the South Caucasus area, its repercussions extend across to Eastern Europe. This centuries-old territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan has resulted in military confrontations, forced displacements, and regional instability.

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020) was a military operation that occurred in the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent territories that are under occupation. It was a significant

step-up in a very tense, unsolved conflict on the territory between Azerbaijan, Armenia and the self-declared Armenian breakaway republic of Artsakh. The war lasted for 44 days and resulted in Azerbaijani victory, with the defeat igniting anti-government protests in Armenia. Post-war battles continued in the area, including large scale battles and 2022.

Hostilities started in the morning of 27 September when an offensive by Azerbaijan occurred along the Line of Contact created as the result of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-1994). Clashes were particularly intense in the less mountainous districts of southern Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkiye provided military support to Azerbaijan.

The Nagorno-Karabakh War could be recognised by the use of rotary-wing drones, sensors, heavy long-range artillery and missile attacks, and by state-sponsored propaganda and the conduct of official social media accounts to support war time information warfare. Drone attacks in Azerbaijan, its role in setting the battle course, was considered key to the conflict's resolution. Many member states and the United Nations highly criticized the fighting and urged both sides to minimize the escalations of the fighting and resume earnest negotiations. Three ceasefires by Russia, France, and the United States failed to stop the conflict.
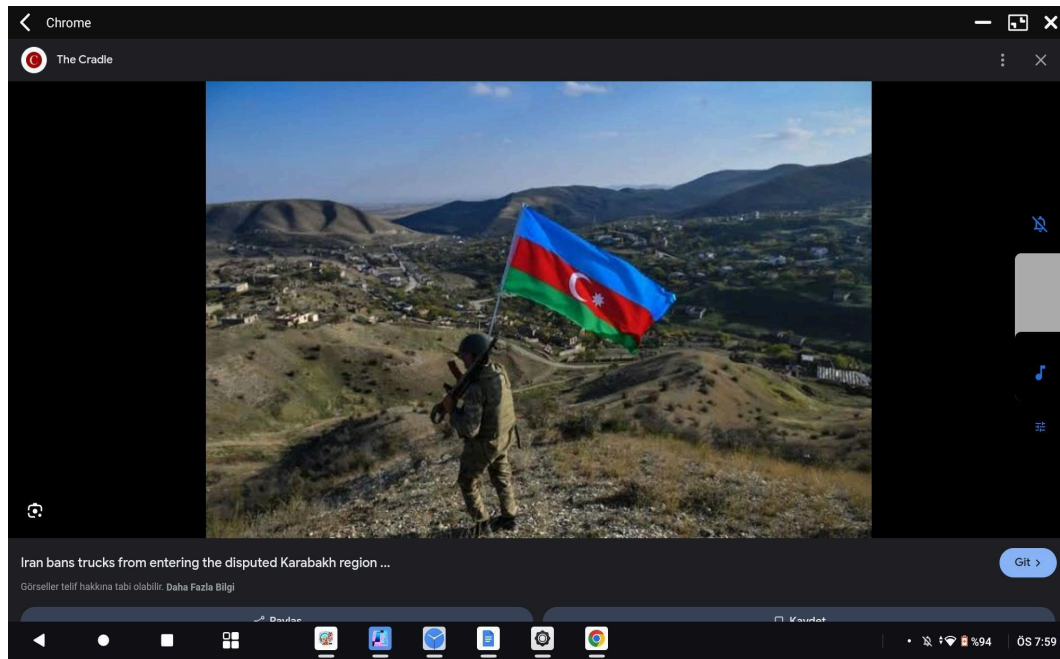
After the occupation of Shusha, the second largest city in Nagorno-Karabakh, a cessation of hostilities agreement was reached, stopping all fighting in the region from 10 November 2020. That agreement brought about a fundamental change in the status of control of the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions. About 2,000 Russian soldiers were stationed there as a peacekeeping unit along the Lachin corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, with a commitment of no less than five years.

Azerbaijan's attack in late 2023 will result in the whole contested area coming under the control of Azerbaijan.

3.3. Belarusian Political Crisis

The 2020 Belarusian presidential decision started far reaching dissents and universal condemnation of Alexander Lukashenko's government. His near joins to Russia and a detailed human rights infringement have driven to a breach with the territorial European nations and individuals of the North Atlantic Settlement Organization (NATO).

The 2020–2021 Belarusian dissents were a continuous stream of mass political exhibits and dissent against the Belarusian administration and the president, Alexander Lukashenko. The greatest anti-government challenges ever organized in Belarus, the challenges took place within the run-up to and within the course of the 2020 presidential race amid which Lukashenko pointed for his 6th continuous term within the office. Taking after the challenges, a number of little pro-government shows took place. Protests expanded over the nation after the statement of triumph by Lukashenko within the constituent results released on the night of 9 Eminent when Lukashenko was announced the victor. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the most rival of Lukashenko, rejected the claims as distorted and claimed instep to have gotten 60–70% of the votes. On 14 Admirable, she declared the creation of the Coordination Board, with participation applications open to all Belarusians who concurred that the official race had been adulterated.

On 23 September, Belarusian state media detailed that the introduction of Lukashenko for an assisted 5-year order had taken place in a closed ceremony. The other day, the EU issued a press discharge censuring the legitimacy of the decision, contended for a new race, and upbraided the mistreatment and viciousness against nonconformists.

The nonconformists confronted rough mistreatment by the specialists. Agreeing to an explanation by the United Together Countries Human Rights Office on 1 September (see Extra record 1), there's

proof of more than 450 cases of torment and ill-treatment of prisoners as well as sexual mishandle and assault. At the end of 2020, the Viasna Human Rights Middle archived 1,000 declarations of torment casualties. Alexander Lukashenko has been the head of state of Belarus since 1994, and did not have a serious challenger within the past five races, coming about in being referred to as "Europe's final tyrant" by media outlets. With the government's press running the show, it has turned to the rehashed concealment of oppositional sees.

Lukashenko had to fight with more open feedback with respect to the widespread Coronavirus Infection 2019 (COVID-19) whose reality Lukashenko had made light of. Of the 5 decisions that won for Lukashenko, as it were the 1994 race which was unquestionably portrayed as free and fair.

Tikhanovsky was arrested in late May 2020 Belarusian authorities and was ultimately charged as a foreign agent. Street demonstrations against Lukashenko occurred in June 2020. A number of opposition candidates were listed for the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, but to unseat Lukashenko many of them were imprisoned.

During an interview, Lukashenko claimed that the opposition protests were a part of a plot orchestrated by foreigners, whom he suggested might be Americans, NATO members, Russians, or even Ukrainians. On 19 June Lukashenko declared that he had "prevented a coup", leading to the detention of the main opposition opponent Viktar Babaryka. According to CNN, Babaryka stated that the charges of bribery and corruption were falsified and the arrest was politically motivated to stop him from winning the presidential election.

After Babaryka was arrested, people began to walk through the streets to protest. Arrests in connection with the crackdown took place against opposition activists, demonstrators, journalists and bloggers. The human rights group Viasna estimated that around 1,300 people had been detained for protesting between early May and early August.

Tikhanovsky's spouse Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya applied as a candidate to the election after Babaryka's detention. Lukashenko claimed the country was not yet ready for a woman to become president. Somat confirmed that the wife of the unregistered candidate, Veronika Tsepkalo, and head of Baby's presidential campaign Maria Kalesnikava agreed to support their candidacy by joining Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's campaign.

The protests led to questions of how long the crisis may last, and whether it would escalate into violence,possibly evolving into a full revolution, akin to how the Euromaidan protests turned into a revolution in Ukraine in 2014. A US think tank, German Marshall Fund, also stated that protests were more widespread, and more brutally suppressed than protests in Belarus before.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reported that it would not be monitoring the 2020 election as it wasn't invited to do so. This was the first time since 2001 that the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) was not involved in election observation in Belarus. The OSCE has never acknowledged any Belarusian elections as free and fair since 1995,and in the country past OSCE election monitor missions have been blocked by the government. In the sanatorium near Minsk 33 suspected mercenaries of the Russian private military company Wagner Group were detained on 29 July. Lukashenko accused Russia of lying about the

arrested "mercenaries", saying "So far there is no open warfare, no shooting, the trigger has not yet been pulled, but an attempt to organize a massacre in the center of Minsk is already obvious. The Belarusian government asserted that Tikhanovsky was in cooperation with the Russians with a view to create unrest in Belarus. Except for one, the mercenary (who was Belarusian and was still in detention) was expelled to Russia on 14 August even though Ukraine filed a request for their extradition.

On 30 July, a permitted rally of presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya took place in the Friendship of Peoples Park in Minsk. According to human rights activists, 63,000–70,000 people gathered,but a statement from the Belarusian Interior Ministry alleged that only 18,250 people had been recorded passing through the metal-detecting checkpoints set up at the event.

On 6 August an estimated 5,000 peaceful protesters took to the streets in Minsk, waving white ribbons, calling for free and fair elections. Among the sectors most impacted by the government responses to demonstrations was the Belarusian IT sector.

Multiple IT companies operating in Belarus began moving their employees and operations outside of the country due to internet shutdowns, namely in Minsk. The intermittent cut-offs, starting in August 2020, were said to have caused major difficulties in the IT industry. An IT CEO Club of Belarus survey, undertaken soon after the 2020 presidential election, in partnership with RegisConsult, interviewed 270 IT company owners and managers in Belarus. According to 38% of the participants, their companies already were looking at changing the location of their offices. 11% of participants said that their companies had already left or were in the process of transferring part of their workforce outside of the country; 3% of the surveyed stated that their companies had left Belarus completely or were in the process of relocating all employees.

World of Tanks "The global success story" moves employees from Belarus to Vilnius, Kyiv and other countries. Nevertheless, the corporation did not issue a public statement in opposition to the government's actions, probably because of fear that its staff members would be held hostage.

According to SoftSwiss, the programmer of the Soft and Swiss software in August 2020 it was unable to maintain its services in normal manner, and transferred more than 100 employees to Ukraine. The company stated they were planning a permanent move outside of Belarus by the end of 2021, stating their reasons are linked to the volatile situation in the country.

Global game developer, Gismart, was also affected. While Gismart is headquartered in the United Kingdom, it employs dozens of people in Belarus. Parallel to SoftSwiss, at the beginning of August 2020 Gismart started to transfer its Belarusian employees from the country. In response to the increasing number of requests by employees worried about the situation in Belarus, the company launched a relocation programme initiative. The firm explained that this type of work for these employees would not be feasible without a reliable internet facility. As reported by Russia's press service statement of 19 August 2020, "Russia expressed its dissatisfaction at foreign interference in the domestic affairs of the country and such interference can, in turn, exacerbate tensions. Georgy Saralidze, secretary to the director of the All-Russia State Television and Broadcasting Company on programme policy as reported in an interview with Vestnik Kavkaza, reported that leading Western countries had been trying to cut off Belarus from Russia for many years. An ultimate aim is to stop the process of enlargement of the Union State, and ideally even to destroy it. What Vladimir Putin told Merkel and Macron is highly symptomatic, as now accusations of Russian interference in Belarusâ€ affairs are at their height. In addition, no comments from Russia, besides the acceptance of the election results, are present. If you call it interference, then those who do not recognize the election also interfere in the affairs of Belarus. "

Lukashenko announced a week after the election that NATO forces were, "at the gates" and threatening the country (which was denied by NATO, prompting President Putin to offer to send in military assistance, A Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, on 19 August stated that there was no need for Russia to help Belarus militarily or otherwise at present. Belarus and Russia are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a Russia-led military alliance of six ex-Soviet republics, and also signatories to a Belarus-Russia Union State. Speaking on 19 August on the subject of the interference in Belarus, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, said, "It is imperative that both the EU and Russia stand up for democracy in Belarus. We want to avoid external interference in Belarus." He added that he had read recent statements from the Kremlin that it does not intend to interfere militarily.

On 18 September 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Belarus, accused the United Nations Human Rights Council of interference in Republic of Belarus domestic affairs due to the resolution of the UN Human Rights Council regarding close monitoring of Alleged rights violations in Belarus. The resolution came after the violent crackdown on protests of the disputed presidential election.

On 17 April 2021, the Russian FSB issued a statement that it had prevented an attempt at a coup d'état in Belarus, said to have been planned with the support of the United States, in collaboration with the Belarusian KGB. A few political pundits and the US Department of State refused to take this claim as truth.

In May 2021, a hoax by a pair of Russian pranksters convinced officers of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), including President Carl Gershman, that they were speaking remotely to Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and an aide. They claimed that the NED "helped a great number of groups, and we maintain an extremely active program all across the country" and that the NED had fueled the Belarusian protests.

3.4. Moldova and Transnistria Conflict

Transnistria, an unrecognized entity in Moldova, is a permanent frozen conflict. Backed by Russian forces, the region's status threatens Moldova's sovereignty and complicates its aspirations for closer ties with the EU and NATO.

Just before the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on 14 January 2022, Ukrainian military intelligence reported that the Russian special services were preparing to instigate "provocations" by Russian servicemen in Transnistria at that moment to initiate a bill of Russian invasion of Ukraine. On 1st of February (24 February) upon the start of the offensive, there were claims that some of the strikes that were shot down in Ukraine were launched with Transnistrian rockets (however the Defence Ministry of Moldova has refuted this before). On 4 March, the Ukrainian government blew up a rail bridge at the border between Ukraine and Transnistria to prevent the return of 1,400 Russian troops in the secessionist enclave from entering Ukraine. Then, on 6 March, the claims were brought to light that all the attacks that struck were originated from Transnistria, but they were denied by the authorities of the republic of Moldova as soon as they showed that it originated from the Black Sea from the Russian ships.

Amid rumors that Transnistria would attack Ukraine, Transnistrian President Vadim Krasnoselski declared Transnistria to be a peaceful state which never had any plans to attack its neighbors and that those who spread these allegations were people without control over the situation or provocateurs with malicious intentions. Besides, he also stated about the large ethnic Ukrainian population of Transnistria and that the Ukrainian language is taught in Transnistrian schools and is official in education of the Transnistrian republic. Yet in March a picture of Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko in front of an invasion map of the Ukraine War was leaked. This map illustrated a supposed Russian occupation from the Ukrainian port city of Odessa into the Transnistria and Republic of Moldova, showing that Transnistria would be drawn into the war.

Ukrainian military leaders already recognized the creation of a land corridor to Transnistria as one of Russia's top aims since the very beginning of the invasion. On 22 April 2022, Russia's Brigadier General Rustam Minnekayev in a ministry meeting stated that Russia is preparing to expand the Nikolaev–Odessa front in the Ukraine war across the western border to include the Transnistria on the Ukraine border with Moldova.Minnekaev stated that the Russian military conquest of Ukraine "owed to detailed plans to dominate the South (of Ukraine) and then to take control of the earth corridor from the South to Transnistria. He brought up the question of alleged evidence of "oppression" of the "Russian-speaking population" of the de facto republic of Transnistria (which, in Russia's view, is the very same one that caused the Ukrainian conflict). The Ukrainian Ministry of Defence described this desire as imperialism and stated that it ran counter to what Russian authorities have previously announced, namely their lack of territorial ambitions toward Ukraine.

Ukrainian presidential advisor Oleksiy Arestovych in an interview on 26 April indicated that while Moldova was in the Ukrainian neighbourhood, there was no indifference towards the 2 Moldova

and it was possible to "look" to Ukraine for [specific service/help]. He also claimed that Ukraine could "conclude the issue of Transnistria, as it occurred in a minute" only on condition that the Moldovan authorities would ask for their help; and that Romania could also help Moldova, "because they are in fact the same people", speaking Moldovan, as he went on and on, even if "there are many Moldovans who would disagree with me. Moldova natively refused this proposal from Ukraine and expressed willingness only for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Moldova has lost de facto control over Transnistria in 1992, after the War of Transnistria. However, the Republic of Moldova sees itself as a legitimate successor state of the Moldavian SSR (esoteric, autonomous republic under the old edition, in order to ensure the "secession privilege" of the Soviet Union, i.e. On the ground of the rule of territorial integrity, the Republic of Moldova insists that any secession from the state, without agreeing between the Government of Moldova, is not lawful. Hence the Moldavian side has come to believe that its position has international law standing. The legitimacy of Transnistrian-based PMR is in principle considered incompatible with the legitimacy of the ruling and the ruling is not the expression of the self-claimed voice of the living population, a Moldovan-pluralistic one (39.9% according to 1989). On the one hand, the Moldavian confesses that Transnistria is no state and must therefore be part of the lexicon of Moldova.

Based on information provided by the Moldovan press, in Transnistria the political environment does not allow the free choice of citizens of the territory and who support the Transnistrian cause do not have the possibility of being victims of harassment, surprise arrests and other methods of pressure exerted by the separatist authorities.

Due to the obliquity of the Transnistrian independence recognition, all the inhabitants of Transnistria are recognized as Moldovan legal citizens in line with Moldova. It is estimated, however, that a population of 60,000 to 80,000 people living in Transnistria has Russian citizenship and 20,000 Transnistrians have Ukrainian citizenship. Therefore, the authorities in Moldova have been organizing to prevent the establishment of a Russian and Ukrainian consulate in Tiraspol.

3.5. Romania-Bulgaria Black Sea Tensions

With the arrival of NATO and Russian military build up, the strategic significance of the Black sea has peaked. Romania and Bulgaria are worried about the ability to ensure security and the mobility of key maritime lanes.

Security in the Black Sea region continues to be precarious with the protracted war in Ukraine now in its third year. Acknowledging the continued imperative to enhance defence security in the region, NATO and its allies have heightened their collaborative efforts in order to increase deterrence and defend national interests. As a gateway between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, the region serves as a critical security and defense frontier. On the side of the just concluded NATO summit in Washington, D.C., Bulgaria and Romania came together and signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implement a Regional Special Operations Command, Black Sea (HQ R-SOCC). The new directive will bring together Romanian and Bulgarian special forces under a new Command and Control (C2) architecture, responsible for carrying out Alliance special operations in the area. The chief aim of this new statutory body is to defend merchant ships and carry out inspections in support of protecting NATO's strategic interests in the region.

Historically, the Black Sea has been of great geostrategic significance for centuries. The region has been an important trade zone and served as a "buffer zone" between NATO and Russia. NATO

members Bulgaria and Romania have a total length of coastline of 670 km. This strategic location is highly beneficial for Bulgarian and Romanian because of its role in trade, tourism and transport. The Black Sea is a rich source of oil and gas and houses strategic supply pipes for energy security of its littoral countries.

The littoral states of the Black Sea (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine), including those in the South Caucasus and Moldova, are caught in a complex web of escalating tensions. The intersecting conflicts in the Black Sea (the Russian war in Ukraine, the Syrian Civil War, and the Conflict in the South Caucasus) along with its links to the Middle East have deepened regional instability. The Black Sea region has again emerged as a strategic geopolitical hotspot after Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine broke out in 2022

The Black Sea has been a major export pathway for Ukraine for many years, and is severely restricted by the war now. Accordingly, the area has been subjected to a significant military expansion since 2014, when Russia garrisoned its air defence structures in Crimea and reinforced its Black Sea Fleet (Gressel, 2021). As an integral part of the response, NATO increased its posture in littoral states, upped Black Sea air policing, and deployed several exercises and missions to the area, such as Operation Atlantic Resolve.

Thus considering the changing security environment, NATO has acknowledged the need for regional security enhancement. Next, NATO has created a Regional Specialized Operations Forces Command for the Black Sea. While maritime security in the Black Sea is the responsibility of the Black Sea littoral states as per the Montreux Convention, which limits the presence of military vessels to 21 days NATO's role is to supplement and support these states within the constraints of the Convention.

The newly introduced Command and Control (C2) framework, announced at the NATO Summit in Washington, aims to improve the coordination and interoperability among NATO Special Operation Forces deployed in the region. This framework is designed to increase the Military Defence capabilities of the Alliance, to protect against threatened aggressors, and to deter attacks against the Alliance. At the core of this structure is the Regional Special Operation Command for the Black Sea (HQ R-SOCC), established through the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Ministers of Defence of Bulgaria and the Minister of National Defence of Romania. HQ R-SOCC will provide a key hub for special operations forces Alliance (SOF) operations across the area. The activities of R-SOCC will mainly center around enhancing maritime vigil, protecting civilian vessels, and carrying out checks to maintain good sea order and thereby reinforcing maritime security and contributing to regional stability.

However, SOF possesses unique advantages in countering terrorism, countering narcotics, and countering criminalities. Their ability to efficiently manage discussion and security threats lowers the possibility of escalation of conflict. The fact that NATO has set up a regional center for SOF gives it the ability to carry out certain missions and render support to its allied partners. The construction of this facility is another significant step of the project for adapting to the changing types of modern threats, such as those in the Black Sea.

The Black Sea area remains a geopolitical tension point where Russia's and the NATO members' interests in conflict clash. The creation of C2 SOF cooperation between Bulgaria and Romania is a small, but significant, step towards building up NATO's collective defence in the area. With the security environment making itself ever more dynamic, continuous flexibility and cooperation of Black Sea littoral states will be the key both to maintain stability, to contribute to the enhanced security of the region and to minimize the risks.

3.6. Hungary's Ties with Russia

Hungary's energy contract with Russia strains its relations with other member states of the European Union (EU) and contributes to cleavages within regional groups. Russia provides Hungary with a large portion of its energy, making Hungary highly reliant on Russia's energy resources. Also considering the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, Viktor Orbán, Hungary's long-serving prime leader has been branded as pro-Putin. During the Second World War, the Soviet army seized the country, and in 1948 the Soviet Union took full control of Hungary. It became part of the Warsaw Pact military alliance and the Comecon economic union. Relations between the two countries were strained in 1956 due to the Soviet military intervention in the revolution occurring in Hungary. The country expelled its communist government during the Revolutions of 1989, and diplomatic relations with Russia were reestablished after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.

3.7. Refugee and Migration Issues

Eastern Europe is a transit area for refugees and migrants coming from the Middle east, Africa and Asia . The Belarus-Poland border crisis, when Belarus was alleged to be weaponizing migrants to destabilize the EU, exemplifies the problem.

As a transit area for refugees and migrants in the long term, Eastern Europe has played an important role in the transit of people fleeing for reasons of war, unrest, and economic crises from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The dumbbell geographic location of the region—positioned as a junction of East and West—makes it at the crossroads of migration routes in the European Union. Migration, although, may bring the potential for labor and demographic rejuvenation, it also comes with high security and social integration and political instability.

The 2021-2022 Belarus-Poland border incident was one of the largest contributions towards the refugee and migration crisis in Eastern Europe. This crisis exposed how migration could be employed as a geopolitical leverage to disrupt regional stability and pressure the European Union.

During the summer and fall of 2021, the conflict-ridden border between Belarus and Poland witnessed tens of thousands of migrants, mostly from the Middle East (Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan), crowds illegally trespassing over the Belarusian-Polish border in search of shelter and wider movement. Belarusian authorities, under President Alexander Lukashenko, were accused of facilitating and even encouraging these migrants to cross the border, a move widely seen as part of a broader strategy to retaliate against EU sanctions imposed on Belarus after its controversial presidential election in 2020.

Belarusian authorities were reported to have enticed migrants from the Middle East and Africa by using false tourist visa arrangements, indicating that immigration to the EU is straightforward. Once in Belarus, these migrants were reportedly transported to the border with Poland, where many attempted to cross into the EU.

The Belarus actions were generally seen as hybrid warfare—migrant crisis as a weaponizing tool to destabilise the EU and to pressure its neighbours Poland, Lithuania or Latvia, all of those are EU and NATO members. The European Union charged Belarus with "weaponizing" migration by deliberately and orchestrating the destabilising situation. The EU claimed that the Belarusian government was deliberately creating a humanitarian crisis at the border to destabilize the EU's eastern frontier and to retaliate against the bloc's support for opposition groups in Belarus.

As the crisis unfolded, the migrants found themselves stuck in a dangerous no-man's land between Belarus and Poland, often in freezing conditions, with little food, water, or shelter. A lot of immigrants died of exposure, dehydration, and other border risks when crossing the border. Cases of severe illness in children, pregnant women and other vulnerable patients were reported, adding to the humanitarian burden.

Neighboring Belarus, sharing with Poland, responded by strengthening the Polish border with a heavy security force (including military personnel and police officers) and tight border controls. Poland, in addition, erected a tall, high-tech border wall to stop migrants from crossing. Despite Poland's tough stance, many migrants continued to attempt to cross illegally, leading to violent confrontations at the border.

The European Union voiced its disapproval of the Belarusan action, put renewed sanctions, and delivered humanitarian assistance to those stranded at the border. Nevertheless, the European Union's response was complex because of the conflict between border control measures and the right to asylum as guaranteed by international law.

The crisis challenged the EU's cohesion and its capacity to cope with non-military types of aggression, indicating the difficulties of tackling non-military forms of aggression. The border crisis also strained Poland's relationship with the EU over its approach to human rights and asylum procedures. Critics of Poland's response argued that its harsh border policies violated the rights of asylum seekers, while others defended Poland's position as necessary for national security.

Although the Belarus-Poland crisis provides a particularly graphic illustration of migration being exploited for political gain, it exemplifies only a component of a wider and more nuanced migration trend covering the whole of the Eastern European region.

Eastern Europe, particularly countries like Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Bulgaria, have been receiving growing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom flee conflict, persecution, and economic instability in regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. Ongoing conflict in the Syrian Civil War, in Afghanistan, and political turmoil in Iran, Iraq, and parts of the Horn of Africa have sent millions of people fleeing to Europe.

Countries in the area, particularly those sharing a physical border with the EU external edge, e.g., Hungary and Poland, are important entry points for these migrants who are travelling westwards through Europe. However, many Eastern European countries have been resistant to accepting refugees, citing concerns over security, cultural integration, and economic burden.

The European Union sought to respond to migration by implementing different programmes, for example the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and schemes of relocation between member states to distribute asylum seekers in a more fair manner. Nevertheless, Eastern European countries have challenged those schemes, claiming that they run counter to national sovereignty and national security.

Hungary and Poland, for example, have long been vocal opponents of mandatory refugee quotas and have championed stricter border controls, claiming that uncontrolled movement poses a threat to national security and social cohesiveness. By contrast countries such as Germany and Sweden have tended to be more hospitable to refugees, illustrating the fracture within the EU on migration policy.

NATO's involvement is less direct but still significant. As a collective defence organisation, NATO has delivered assistance in border security and counter-terrorism‑related operations, especially in Turkey, which is also under tremendous pressure from migration. In other risk areas, NATO too has contributed to regional stability in conflict zones (e.g., Afghanistan) to minimize the flow of migration.

Eastern European countries have expressed worries about possible security threats from large increases in migration. There is a worry that, if uncontrolled, certain persons may represent, in particular, a national security risk by becoming potential terrorists infiltrators. This concern has been compounded by the emergence of extremist groups in the Middle East as well as the transnational nature of terrorist organizations.

Another key challenge facing Eastern Europe is the social integration of refugees and migrants. These countries are often challenged in delivering the necessary level of housing, healthcare, education and employment opportunities to newcomers, much less with the overstretched public services. There is a social and political backlash against immigrants in many countries, motivated by anxieties about cultural homogenization and the impression that immigrants would exert an unsustainable strain on local resources.

3.8. China's Influence Through the Belt and Road Initiative

China's increasing economic activity in Eastern Europe in the form of investments in and development of infrastructure and energy facilities sparks anxieties about dependence and geopolitical closeness. While a country like Hungary welcomes Chinese investment, other countries view Beijing's intentions with suspicion.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or New Silk Route is one of the largest infrastructure projects ever conceived. Launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the grand ensemble of development and investment projects was first conceived to connect East Asia and Europe by physical infrastructure. In the last decade, the initiative has reached Africa, Oceania and Latin America, and contributed to increasing China's footprint in the economies and politics of these regions to a large extent.

People who observe the work regard it as a perturbing development of China's power, because the cost of the supported projects has been through the roof, and hence support for a significant part of the work has been steadily rising in some countries. In the meantime, while the U.S. along with certain Asian countries that share the fear that the BRI is the Trojan horse to a Chinese-led regionalisation and Militarisation process, the now is a potentially destructive one. President Joe Biden perpetuated the negativity of his predecessors toward the behavior of Beijing, but it has proved to be of tenuous use to sell back to the concerned parties a different and more palatable economic paradigm.

Xi's vision included creating a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways, and streamlined border crossings, both westward—through the mountainous former Soviet republics—and southward, to Pakistan, India, and the rest of Southeast Asia. Such a network would be utilized to enhance the transborder utility of Chinese currency, the renminbi, and "escape the Asian bottleneck in connectivity", as Xi has said. (The 2018 Asian Development Bank [ADB] indicated an annual shortfall in infrastructure finance of more than USD 900 billion [ADB]. In order to generate profits and employment, besides physical infrastructure, China has mobilized hundreds of special economic zones, i.e., economic and industry districts, to play a role in expanding revenue and employment, and has promoted other economies to implement its ICT applications, e.g., 5G net, internet of things andising.

Shortly after, in 2013, Xi declared the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Indonesia. To meet the increasing shipping flow, China

will agree to port development in the Indian Ocean,Southeast Asia, East Africa, and European regions,

China's overall ambition for the BRI is staggering. At this point (on the order of 147 countries - 2/3 of the world population and 40% of global GDP) are onboard, or have indicated willingness to adopt the schemes in some form.

3.9. Non state actors

Eastern Europe is threatened by different non-state actors which destabilize regional stability, security, and governance. Such actors operate in different spheres such as cyber, terrorism, or organized efforts. Among the key non-state actors in the area are:

3.9.1. Cybercriminal Groups

Notable Groups: Conti, REvil, and DarkSide are prominent ransomware and hacking groups.

Activities: Such collectivities engage or employ cyber-attacks against governments, critical infrastructure, and business enterprises alike for financial profit or to act as tools of a state-identified agenda. Eastern Europe has frequently been the seat of such attacks, including severe interruptions of energy grids, transportation and health care systems.

3.9.2. Terrorist Networks

Actors: Extremist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda on occasion use Eastern Europe as transit or recruitment area because of its geographical location between Europe and Middle East.

Threats: Such groups have carried out isolated attacks and attempted to radicalise vulnerable groups, capitalizing on economic disenfranchisement and social unrest in infrastructure and state fragility across the region.

3.9.3. Organized Crime Syndicates

Actors: Transnational criminal organizations, such as Balkan drug cartels and human trafficking networks.

Activities: These syndicates are engaged in drug, arms and human trafficking trade. Eastern Europe's open frontiers and scarce facility for border monitoring place it at the heart of illegal activities.

3.9.4. Paramilitary Groups and Separatist Movements

Actors: Clusters such as the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic militias in East Ukraine, supported indirectly by Russia.

Threats: These cleavages have destabilized the area through armed conflict, attacks on sovereignty and instability in disputed areas such as Crimea and the Donbas.

3.9.5. Disinformation Networks

Actors: Media companies, troll farms and social media operators who are connected to foreign agents or ideologically driven organizations.

Activities: These networks spread fake news, manipulate public opinion, and disrupt democratic processes. Eastern Europe has in particular served as a focal point for such operations, typically aimed at NATO, the EU, or particular ethnic groups to sow discord.

3.9.6. The Wagner Group

The Wagner Group is a large, but non-state actor whom Eastern Europe should beware of. Although it functions closely in tandem with the Russian government, it is technically defined as a private military company (PMC), thus can be considered as a non-state actor. Its activities and geopolitical impact in geopolitically tense areas represent direct and indirect security and stability threats to the security and stability of Eastern Europe.

The Wagner Group is a Russian Private Military and Security Contractor. Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) are private companies that provide a wide range of military and security services. These services can range from military training and advisory roles to direct combat roles. There is no official definition of PMSC's being separated from mercenaries. PMSCs often operate outside of their home nation, often operating in conflict zones where their services are in high demand. The potential for misuse, lack of accountability, and their role in perpetuating conflicts is the main issue concerning PMSCs. Its founder is believed to be Dmitry Utkin, a former lieutenant colonel in the Russian Special Forces. The group has been linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, which has led to suggestions that the Wagner Group operates with the unofficial blessing of the Russian government.

The Wagner Group first emerged in 2014, the forces that invaded and annexed Crimea were believed to be Wagner Group forces, the Wagner Group is one of the main reasons why Russia had been under the radar for a long time concerning what is happening in Ukraine.

The Wagner Group has been involved in several conflicts around the world, often on the side of governments fighting against insurgencies or civil wars. They have been involved in conflicts in Syria,

Libya, the Central African Republic, and Sudan, among others. Their actions have been controversial and have often drawn international criticism, particularly due to allegations of human rights abuses and war crimes that are assumed to be linked with the Wagner Group doing Russia's bidding.

In Ukraine, the Wagner Group operated in the conflict in the country's eastern region, particularly in the Donbass and Luhansk regions. They have been accused of aiding Russian forces in fighting against the Ukrainian government, which has led to an escalation of the conflict. Their involvement in Ukraine has been a source of tension between Russia and the West, with the latter accusing Russia of using the Wagner Group as a proxy to wage war and destabilize Ukraine. Wagner Group is a dangerous organization as it's ties with its home nations' government is strong, they have unofficial and unknown access to Russian logistics to do risky acts that a government cannot participate in.

53-year-old Dmitry Utkin's plane crashed while he was traveling between St Petersburg and Moscow. Rumors and reports suggested that he may have been assassinated. Due to the unclear and secretive nature of the Wagner Group's operations and the lack of transparency in its structure, an official verification was never made.

The Wagner Group has participated in military activity and clandestine activity in several countries, such as Ukraine, where it has provided military support to separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk. These exercises go directly against the sovereignty of Eastern European countries and fuel the conflicts.

Wagner functions as a digital weapon for Russian foreign affairs, enabling Moscow to participate in conflicts without being directly identified as such. Its proximity to disputed regions allows for protracted application of hybrid warfare operations, readily mixing state and non-state activity.

Eastern European neighbours of Wagner activity such as Poland, Baltic states, and Romania are at risk of involvement in, or threats of the broader operations of, Wagner because of potential links to Wagner in clandestine business such as the gathering and/or dissemination of intelligence, the execution of sabotage, or military/paramilitary activities.

Wagner has historically exploited and supported authoritarian states and natural resources in order to provide military support. Its operations in Eastern Europe might deepen and amplify political as well as territorial fault lines or attack essential infrastructure, thereby exacerbating the regional crisis.

In addition to classic military activities, Wagner has reportedly been implicated in cyber and disinformation activities. These methods are consistent with Moscow's wider goal of undermining NATO and EU authority in East Europe.

While its activity has been more visible in Africa and the Middle East, Wagner's operation in Ukraine attests to the possibility of extending operations to other regions of Eastern Europe, in particular countries with an influx of Russian-speakers or disputed territories.

4. Cybersecurity and Countering Hybrid Threats

4.1. Identifying Cybersecurity Risks in Eastern Europe

The Russian hacker collective "Wizard Spider" created and initially utilized the Conti virus in December 2019. Since then, it has developed into a complete ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) operation that is utilized by many threat actor organizations to carry out ransomware operations. Once

installed on a victim device, the Conti malware not only encrypts data on the device but also propagates to other devices on the network, conceals its existence, and gives a remote attacker command over the target's actions.It is known that all Microsoft Windows versions are impacted.In early May 2022, the U.S. government announced a reward of up to $10 million for information about the gang.

The private ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) company REvil (Ransomware Evil; also called Sodinokibi) was based in Russia or spoke Russia. Following an attack, if the ransom wasn't paid, REvil would threaten to post the information on their page Happy Blog. In a well-known instance, REvil targeted a supplier of the computer behemoth Apple and took proprietary schematics of their next-generation goods. The Russian Federal Security Service said in January 2022 that it had disbanded REvil and charged a number of its members.

The criminal cybergang is well-known for stealing almost one terabyte of data from Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks, a law practice, and demanding a ransom to prevent its publication. The organization had also tried to extort other public people and businesses. They made a $42 million demand of US President Donald Trump in May 2020.According to the group, they accomplished this by cracking the elliptic-curve cryptography the company employed to safeguard its data. They discovered a buyer for Trump information, according to an alleged member's interview, albeit this cannot be verified. The member asserted in the same interview that they will demand $100 million in ransoms by 2020. The group published legal filings totaling on May 16, 2020.

Five people linked to Sodinokibi/REvil and two suspects linked to the GandCrab ransomware were taken into custody by law enforcement as part of Operation GoldDust, which involved 17 nations, Europol, Eurojust, and INTERPOL. They allegedly collected half a million euros in

ransomware payments and caused 5000 infections. Indictments against Russian national Yevgeniy Polyanin and Ukrainian national Yaroslav Vasinskyi were unsealed by the US Department of Justice on November 8, 2021. Vasinskyi was detained in Poland on October 8 after being accused of carrying out ransomware attacks against several victims, including Kaseya. Polyanin was accused of carrying out ransomware operations against a number of targets, including government and commercial organizations in Texas. The Department reported the seizure of $6.1 million linked to ransomware and collaborated with the National Police of Ukraine on the accusations.

DarkSide is thought to originate in Eastern Europe, probably in Russia, but in contrast to other hacking teams to blame for major cyberattacks on the internet it never appears to have been directly financed by a state (i.e., run by the Russian intelligence services). DarkSide does not bomb targets in some geographical areas as a result of interrogating the system language settings of such targets. Apart from the languages of the present/past/founding 12 CIS countries on the exclusion list, Syrian Arabic is included. The group is described as "one of many, privately owned, ransomware syndicates that have arisen and flourished in Russia with, at least, the tacit approval of the Russian state tolerating the operations to continue in the hopes that they assault foreign systems. The language validation function can be turned off when an instance of ransomware is created. One such version was observed in May 2021. [10] Moreover, DarkSide does not set its sights on hospitals, schools, and nongovernmental organizations.

The ransomware program of DarkSide is similar to the ransomware program of REvil, another hacking group; REvil's program code is not open source, which means that DarkSide must be a descendant or partner of REvil. DarkSide and REvil use similarly structured ransom notes and the

same code to check that the victim is not located in a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) country.

According to Trend Micro Research information, the United States is DarkSide's most attacked country with more than 500 detection events in total, Norway, France, Belgium and Canada. Among 25 countries surveyed by McAfee, those most jeopardized by DarkSide attacks (the respective number of devices affected per 1 million devices) are Israel (1573.28), Malaysia (130.99), Belgium (106.93), Chile (103.97), Italy (95.91), Turkey (66.82), Austria (61.19), Ukraine (56.09), Peru (26.94), the United States of America, respectively. (24.67).

Based on June 2021, DarkSide has published data only from a single company although the amount of data published is more than 200 GB.

4.2. Past Actions

1. NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE):

In 2008, Estonia became the site of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (CCDCOE). The CCDCOE is the center of knowledge for cyber defense within NATO. To improve the member nations' cyber defense capacities, it conducts research, offers training, and hosts exercises. Through its knowledge-sharing efforts and team projects, the CCDCOE actively helps to the fight against cybercrime and illegal online activity.

2. Cyber Defense Pledge:

The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other NATO members signed the Cyber Defense Pledge in 2014. Through this pledge, they reiterated their dedication to strengthening

cybersecurity and battling online risks, such as cybercrime. It underlined the significance of information exchange, teamwork, and resilience-building to effectively address the changing cyber world. In the case of a cyber assault, member nations agreed to support one another and strengthen their national cyber defense capabilities.

3. Enhanced Cyber Defence Policy:

In 2014, the Wales Summit saw the adoption of an enhanced cyber defense policy by NATO. This policy describes NATO's strategy for fending off cyberthreats and emphasizes the significance of a thorough and multifaceted approach to cyber security. In order to combat cybercrime and other illegal uses of the internet, it underlines the necessity for member nations to strengthen their cyber security capabilities, encourage international cooperation, and promote information exchange. The strategy also emphasizes NATO's adherence to international standards and laws in cyberspace.

4. NATO Cyber Rapid Reaction Teams (CRRT):

In order to improve its capacity for cyber defense, NATO created the Cyber Rapid Reaction Teams (CRRT) in 2016. In the event of a serious cyber incident, these teams are made up of highly qualified professionals from member nations who may be quickly deployed to support the impacted allies. The main objective of the CRRT is to offer technical support, guidance, and experience to reduce cyber dangers, including cybercrime, and aid in system recovery.

5. NATO Industry Cyber Partnership (NICP):

In 2018, NATO established the NATO Industry Cyber Partnership (NICP), recognizing the value of public-private collaboration in combating cyberthreats. The NICP strives to promote communication and cooperation between NATO and commercial groups. It encourages the sharing of cutting-edge knowledge, technical know-how, and threat intelligence to stop cybercrime and improve

cyber resilience. The NICP acts as a forum for communication and collaboration between NATO and business partners.

5. Economic Partnerships and Resilient Infrastructure

5.1. Diversifying and Securing Energy Sources

Energy security continues to be a pressing concern for Eastern Europe, a region historically dependent on Russian energy, especially for natural gas. This interdependence has, unfortunately, produced exploits, more so during periods of geopolitical instability. In order to overcome these risks, Eastern European countries are striving to improve energy mix, develop renewable energy sources, strengthen regional cooperation, and upgrade energy infrastructure. These efforts aim not only to enhance energy security but also to align with broader EU climate goals and ensure long-term sustainability.

Eastern Europe's reliance on Russian natural gas has been a long-standing concern, particularly in the wake of political crises such as the 2009 gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine, and more recently, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Eastern European countries are trying to achieve this dependence reduction through a series of methods:.

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Imports: The LNG infrastructure is being developed in, among other countries, Eastern European nations, who aim to supply their gas from a mix of international suppliers including USA, Qatar, as well as other non-russian generators. Construction of LNG terminals and infrastructure, like the Świnoujście LNG Terminal in Poland, offers increased flexibility and security for gas supply, thereby making the region better prepared to cope with interruption in Russian gas supply.

Southern Gas Corridor: This large scale infrastructure will try to bring gas from the Caspian basin (above all Azerbaijan) via the pipelines Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) and Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), served to benefit from both EU and Asian markets, and will reduce the reliance on Russian imports. The Southern Gas Corridor, linking the countries of the Caspian region to those of Europe, diminishes dependence of the region on Russian gas by making access to more varied gas sources available.

Adriatic LNG Terminal: The building of the Adriatic LNG Terminal in Italy plays a decisive role in allowing LNG imports to Italy, for allowing Eastern European countries to have access to gas coming from the global market from returning to the steam pipeline network, barring any other dependence only on Russian pipelines.

These diversification initiatives are designed to provide a greater sustained, competitive energy supply for eastern Europe, as well as reduce the vulnerabilities connected with a reliance on a single source, especially in light of the current geopolitical tension in the Ukraine.

5.2. Renewable Energy Initiatives

Eastern Europe is one of the areas making a concerted effort to significantly reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and is increasingly turning towards the use of renewables, wind, solar and hydropower. Investments in renewables do not only support energy security but also align with the ambitious climate goals of the EU, such as carbon neutrality by 2050. Key initiatives include:

Wind Energy: There are some countries (e.g., Poland, Romania, Lithuania) that are putting significant effort into wind energy, especially offshore wind farms. For example, the Baltic Sea has

transformed into a center of offshore wind power, where in the region several countries have wind power projects on sight, not too small (a few Megawatts) and many are on a large scale (several Gigawatts) (Andrusenko, 2013). These wind farms are capable of producing substantial amounts of clean energy and therefore wind power plays a crucial role in Eastern Europe's energy transition process.

Solar Power: Recently solar energy has expanded quickly in Eastern Europe, more specifically in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Poland. Although challenges exist (i.e., up-front cost of capital and limited sun availability in some locations), solar projects are becoming cheaper with the large-scale solar farms and rooftop solar installations throughout the country that help respond to the increasing demand for solar power.

Hydropower: Hydropower which is an important form of renewable energy in countries such as, Serbia, Albania and Romania, where many rivers offer the conditions for both small and large dams. It can be considered one of the most stable and continuous renewable energy resources, hydropower supplements the intermittency of wind and solar energy.

5.3. Infrastructure Development

The achievement of energy diversification and security in Eastern Europe depends more and more on regional cooperation. International collaboration is underway to achieve a more integrated and robust energy marketplace. Several regional initiatives are playing a crucial role in achieving energy security:.

The Three Seas Initiative (TSI): It is an organization for 12 countries in Central and Eastern Europe with an innovative vision of promoting best collective energy, transport, and digital

connectivity. TSI encourages projects aimed at strengthening the area's energy infrastructure, that is, gas pipelines, power grids, and LNG terminals. With respect to energy security. The TSI similarly promotes investment in renewable energy and stresses the desirability of a concerted energy security policy for the region.

The Central European Energy Union: This project is designed to bring the energy markets of countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary together to allow greater energy sharing, joint bargain, and the creation of infrastructure. Through enhancing cross-border electricity and natural gas grids, these countries may be better able secure energy supplies and lessen vulnerability to island energy markets.

Modernization and upgrading of energy infrastructure is crucial to guarantee that countries in Eastern Europe will be able to satisfy their future energy needs, be able to integrate renewables in an efficient way and that energy security will be guaranteed.

Aging infrastructure in the area is in need of substantial capital outlay to keep and extend gas pipelines and distribution networks. Attempts to revitalize and extend these loops to other Energy Suppliers (e.g., LNG terminals or the Southern Gas Corridor) will increase the flexibility of the energy supply and decrease the level of the vulnerabilities caused by disruption.

Electrical grid systems in numerous Eastern European nations have significant modernisation requirements in order to cope with a higher penetration of renewables, often with intermittencies. Smart grids, energy storage systems, and greater interconnection with neighboring countries are all vital components of this modernization process.

As renewable energy sources, such as solar energy, wind energy, etc, increase in proportion, energy storage systems (e.g., batteries, pumped hydro storage, etc) will play an increasingly important role. These technologies ensure that the variation of supply and demand is reduced providing a generation of energy despite the unreliability of renewable sources.

6. Questions to Be Addressed

1. How is the current state of Eastern Europe and what are the issues that NATO should take measures?

2. What steps can NATO take to address the ongoing security threats posed by foreign powers, particularly in Eastern Europe?

3. How can NATO enhance military collaboration and preparedness among its Eastern European members to ensure swift and effective responses to potential conflicts?

4. What measures should NATO implement to counter cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare targeting Eastern European nations?

5. How can NATO and its allies reduce Eastern Europe's dependence on foreign energy sources, particularly from Russia, to bolster energy security?

6. What role can NATO play in fostering economic development and building resilient infrastructure in Eastern Europe to promote long-term stability?

7. How can NATO strengthen diplomatic ties among member states and promote unity in addressing challenges unique to Eastern Europe?

8. What strategies can NATO employ to combat the influence of non-state actors and their role in destabilizing the region?

9. How can NATO effectively counter disinformation campaigns that target Eastern European nations and undermine democratic institutions?

10. What policies can NATO pursue to bridge economic and political gaps between Eastern and Western Europe?

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