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NATO's Defense and Deterrence Policy on its Eastern Flank in the
Wake of Ukraine Crisis

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Abstract

The European security has been considerably challenged by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its continuing intervention in Eastern Ukraine. Russian aggression towards Ukraine especially strengthened fears and concerns among NATO's Eastern Allies, namely, the Baltic States and Poland about Vladimir Putin's future intentions due to the following factors: geographical proximity, long-term historical relationships, tensed by the Soviet invasion and domination during the Communist era, relatively low military capabilities, energy dependence on Russia and having a large amount of Russian minorities. Conventional as well as non-conventional threats posed by Russia made the Baltic States and Poland prompt calls for strengthened NATO presence on their territory. Considering the concerns of the Eastern Allies, NATO, to some extent, strengthened its defense and deterrence posture on its Eastern flank. But the Allies do not have common approach to what extent the Eastern Allies are vulnerable to the Russian threat, to what degree NATO should strengthen its defense and deterrence on its Eastern flank and what kind of relations should be pursued with Russia. The Ukraine Crisis turned out to be a crucial point and kind of litmus test for transatlantic relations as it revealed deep divisions among Allies which, consequently, hampered their efforts to elaborate coherent defense and deterrence policy on NATO's Eastern border.

Accordingly, the thesis aims to explore the reasons for NATO's inability to pursue coherent defense and deterrence policy on the Alliance's Eastern flank in the wake of Ukraine Crisis. Main finding of the research is that the Allies' different perceptions of security threats and their divergent views regarding the formation of policy towards Russia restrained NATO from elaborating coherent defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank.

International institutions are crucial actors in International Relations. In order these institutions to fulfil their functions effectively, cohesion among member states is of high significance. North Atlantic Treaty Organization is one of the major players in international politics. By showing that Allies' different threat perceptions and their divergent national interests do impact on NATO's coherence while elaborating its defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern border, the thesis represents an attempt to enrich existing literature devoted to revealing the challenges for Alliance cohesion.

The thesis relies on qualitative research methods. Namely, based on single case study research design, the thesis uses theory testing process tracing and qualitative content analysis. As for the theoretical approach, the assumptions made by the following neorealist authors, Stephen Walt and Kenneth Waltz, turned out to be relevant to the main findings of the research.

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1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War resulted in bringing about a difficult but manageable world in which Russia, the US and European states cooperated with the aim of managing common problems. Despite this, some historical facts, such as the NATO intervention in Kosovo, Russia's illegal military intervention in 2008 in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 revealed that cooperation between old foes, which framed the end of the Cold War, turned out to be difficult to achieve (Balfour, 2014).

As a consequence of the political upheavals in Ukraine in 2013, also known as "Euromaidan", against the pro-Russian regime of Viktor Yanukovich who refused to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (Salushev, 2014), the Russian Federation illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula, the part of Ukrainian sovereign territory since 1991 (Sigurosson, 2015). Russian occupation and annexation of this territory formed a crisis in Ukraine that resulted in pro-Russian rising and Russian illegal intervention in the Eastern regions of Ukraine with the aim of protecting the rights of Russian minorities living there (Sigurosson, 2015). These developments of 2014 marked a shift in the relationship between NATO and Russia due to the fact that since then, the relation has been dominated by mistrust and fear between the two (Overbo, 2017).

In the changing security environment, throughout the last decades, NATO has demonstrated some resilience and ability to transform. Since the end of the Cold War, the role of collective defence, which has always been the main purpose of NATO since its creation, has been supplemented by the functions such as cooperative security and crisis management (Fassi, Lucarelli & Marrone, 2015). The Russian occupation of Crimea and the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine have taken NATO aback once again by considering the facts that the premise about the impossibility of military inter-state conflict in Europe turned out to be wrong (Fassi, Lucarelli & Marrone, 2015) and the agreement between NATO and Russia under the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 - the framework of NATO-Russia Partnership - about not to redraw the map of Europe has never been so apparently ignored as it is nowadays (Balfour, 2014).

Russia's continuing intervention in Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea presents unambiguous challenge to the European security as a whole. By pursuing aggressive foreign policy, Russia not only rejected the Euro-Atlantic integration, but also shattered the vision of a

stable, secure and economically healthy Europe (Oliker, McNerney & Davis, p. 1). It is worth noting that in the wake of Ukraine Crisis, Russian threat perceptions have been particularly strengthened among NATO Allies on its Eastern Flank which made them permanently call for increased NATO presence on their territory (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, p. 24). Russian aggression and animosity towards Ukraine especially strengthened fears and sharpened concerns within the Baltic States and Poland about Vladimir Putin's future intentions due to the following factors related to Russia: geographical proximity, long-term historical relationships which was tensed by the Soviet invasion and domination during the Communist era, relatively low military capabilities, energy dependence on Russia and having a large amount of Russian minorities (Belkin, Mix & Woehrel, 2014).

There are several common factors why Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania predominantly matter for Russia: Poland and the Baltic states serve as a buffer zone for Russia between its territories and those of Western Europe (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, p. 24); secondly, similar to the Crimea, which is the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet and pathway to the Mediterranean, Poland and the Baltic states own ice-free ports and are seen by Moscow as a window to the West; thirdly, Baltic states have a large amount of Russian minorities which serve as an incentive for Moscow to support potential separatists and protect 'compatriots' in this region (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, p. 24). It is noteworthy that considerable amount of scholars claim that Russian military deployments near the borders of Baltic States and Poland as well as conducting information operations in Baltics under its 'hybrid warfare' tactic, give NATO a strong incentive to strengthen its defense and deterrence on the Eastern Flank in order to effectively deal with conventional as well as non-conventional threats posed by Russia (Kristek, 2017).

Considering the concerns of the Eastern Allies, following the crisis in Ukraine, NATO Foreign Ministers agreed to strengthen the collective defence of the alliance's territory, to signal solidarity with NATO's Eastern European allies, to suspend military and civilian cooperation with Russia and to increase its military presence, particularly in Poland and the Baltic States with the purpose of improving the defence capacities of the Eastern member states (Bagbaslioglu, 2016). NATO has taken most conspicuous and demonstrable steps to adapt its defence and deterrence posture since 2014 in the Alliance's eastern European territories and established Enhanced

Forward Presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (DAY, 2018). Increased Allied presence in the form of deployed rotating forces, equipment stockpiles as well as exercises aims: to change the balance of conventional and nuclear forces along with missile defence and arms control initiatives; to signal the credibility of the Alliance's post-2014 defence and deterrence posture; to reinforce the Alliance cohesion and capability in the face of an evolving Russian threat to the Alliance's population and territory and, thus, effectively deter a resurgent and revisionist Russia (DAY, 2018).

Despite the fact that there is a broad agreement with the help of which NATO seeks to make Russia pay for its aggressive actions, deter plausible Russian coercion and threats, reassure NATO member states and support the security of non-NATO states, particularly of Ukraine, NATO as an alliance does not have a comprehensive strategy for accomplishing these goals (Oliker, McNerney & Davis, p. 1). Even though, NATO has taken steps to reassure its most vulnerable Eastern Allies by raising its non-permanent military posture in Poland and the Baltic states and by increasing its ability to deploy troops to deal with emergencies along its borders (Alcaro, 2015), current configuration of conventional forces in the NATO's eastern territories remains insufficient (DAY, 2018). Russia demonstrates its advantages of efficient internal communication channels and a restructured brigade-focused army - equipped with near-peer capabilities in firepower and mobility along with its modernized air defence systems capable of rapid deployment (DAY, 2018). In fact, Russia's anti-access/area-denial capabilities could easily prevent NATO from quick deployment of its troops in a conflicting situation (Buras & Balcer, 2016). There is a lack of a sufficient number of European member states high-readiness rapid reaction forces currently available for deployment in case the crisis takes place (DAY, 2018). The main problem is that the Allies do not have common approach which would reveal to what extent the Eastern Allies are vulnerable to the Russian threat and to what degree NATO should strengthen its defense and deterrence on its Eastern flank (Gotkowska, 2016).

Accordingly, the thesis aims to explore the reasons for NATO's inability to pursue coherent defense and deterrence policy on the Alliance's Eastern flank. In order to achieve this goal, the thesis also necessitates to incorporate the analysis of security threats NATO's Eastern Allies – Baltic States and Poland – face from Russia in the wake of Ukraine Crisis, which made them call for strengthened NATO presence on their territory. Therefore, the **research question** of the thesis

is formulated in the following way: *Why could NATO not elaborate coherent defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank in the wake of Ukraine Crisis?* Accordingly, the following **hypothesis** will be tested in the thesis: *Allies' different perceptions of security threats and their divergent views regarding the formation of policy towards Russia restrained NATO from elaborating coherent defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank.*

As it is well-known, during the Cold War, NATO allies were very clear and coherent in their perception of threat coming from the Soviet Union (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014). Now, in the post-Cold War era, many scholars started talking about the crisis of this coherence within the Alliance and shift from deterrence to 'détente' in NATO's relations with Russia (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014). It is worth noting that so far, some scholars have already analyzed NATO's defense and deterrence posture on its eastern flank since 2014 Ukraine Crisis, claiming that the Allies' positions differ when it comes to directing the resources to reinforce the security of the Eastern Allies as a response to their demand. The thesis aims to enrich the existing literature that explore the factors standing behind NATO's disunity and incoherence in post-Cold War era, especially, since the Russian annexation of Crimea. The Ukraine Crisis turned out to be a crucial point and kind of litmus test for transatlantic relations as it exposed deep divisions among the Allies which, consequently hampered their efforts to elaborate coherent and strengthened defense and deterrence policy on NATO's Eastern border (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014).

The thesis starts with reviewing the existing literature on this subject in order to show what has already been said regarding the research topic. Next, there is discussed what was NATO's role in Cold War period and how its functions changed in post-Cold War era. Next section is devoted to overview of the Russian annexation of Crimea and its illegal actions in Eastern Ukraine in order to get deeper understanding of the events that led to the emergence of crisis. Next two chapters are devoted to the security threats Poland and Baltic States are facing from Russia. Then, it is reviewed what NATO has done with the aim of strengthening its Eastern flank. And then, the thesis analyzes the reasons that explain the inability of NATO to elaborate common defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern border in order to effectively deal with Russian provocative steps.

1.1 Methodology

Methodology is of crucial importance while conducting the research (Sprinz & Wolisnky, 2002). Therefore, in order to successfully fulfill any research project, it is essential to use correctly chosen methodology.

In order to fulfil the research based on the following research question - *why could NATO not elaborate coherent defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank in the wake of Ukraine Crisis?* - thesis uses qualitative research methods. The main reason for using qualitative research methods in the thesis is that answering the research question necessitates in-depth examination and analysis in order to provide deep explanatory insight about the factors that caused lack of cohesion and unity within NATO in elaborating common defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank.

Concretely, the thesis employs case study method. To start with its definition, the case study method “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth collection involving multiple sources of information” (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 2). In general, case studies are analysis of groups, events, decisions, periods, institutions, policies or other systems (pressacademia, 2018). The thesis relies on single case study. The Ukraine Crisis that started in 2014 represents the case and with the aim of testing the theory about the main reasons for NATO’s incoherence in elaborating coherent defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank in the wake of Ukraine Crisis, the thesis uses process tracing method, which has been widely used in social sciences for theory-testing purposes (Beach, 2017) and best allows to study causal mechanisms (Beach & Pedersen, 2017). The research relies on theory testing process tracing, which is used for deducing a theory from the existing literature on the research topic and then to test whether there is evidence that a hypothesized causal mechanism is actually presented in a given case (Beach & Pedersen, 2017). Therefore, the process tracing method turned out to be one of the relevant methods to be chosen for fulfilling the research in order to see how Allies’ different threat perceptions and their divergent views about relations with Russia restrained NATO’s coherence when elaborating its defense and deterrence policy on Eastern flank in the wake of Ukraine Crisis.

Additionally, in order to fulfil the aim of the research, the thesis uses qualitative content analysis, which provides detailed, systematic examination of the contents of particular material for identifying patterns of themes (Perumal, 2014). One of the advantages of this method is that it helps to reduce the amount of material and focus on selected aspects of meaning, namely those

aspects that are related to the research question (Flick, 2014). Qualitative content analysis is suitable for a wide range of materials, verbal or visual or sampled from available sources, including, websites, magazines, newspapers, letters (Flick, 2014), journals, books, etc. (Perumal, 2014).

In order to respond to the research question, the thesis uses primary as well as secondary sources, such as “official” reports made by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, documents about national security strategies of NATO’s eastern allies, publications, research reports that have been constructed as a representation of important events by others regarding the research topic (Flick, 2014), academic articles, books as well as online sources such as online magazines and official web-pages. Additionally, with the aim of strengthening the reliability of the research, the thesis uses transcripts of speeches of official leaders as well as transcripts of interviews with official representatives of states and institutions.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

To start with general understanding how alliance cohesion is viewed by the IR scholars, there is a wide agreement that one of the prerequisites for alliance cohesion is existence of common threat - change in the level of external threat and whether or not allies are equally threatened affects cohesion (Quirk, 2014). Thus, the alliance cohesion is strengthened if all alliance partners perceive the threat to the same extent and weakens when some allies’ perception of threat is lower than that of others (Quirk, 2014). Additionally, when deciding how much resources to be directed against which threat, core motivating factor for allies’ while making such decisions is advancing their national interests (Quirk, 2014).

As for the theoretical approach, the thesis uses one of the mainstream IR theories – neorealism. To start with core assumptions of the theory: states, considered to be rational goal-oriented actors, are central to world politics (Webber, 2009); they seek power and rationally seek to advance their interests; structure of international system, particularly, distribution of capabilities among states make a considerable impact on state action (Keohane, 1988); cooperation is difficult to achieve but not ruled out while Alliances are considered as key medium in this regard (Webber, 2009); alliances arise and are sustained as a response to a common threat but should that threat disappear or diminish, this does not mean that the alliance will suddenly dissolve, rather, “alliances will become more fragile and less coherent and will devote less effort and attention to matters of

common defence” (Webber, 2009, p. 12); finally, neorealist view assume that alliance health is reflected in a convergence of threat perceptions and the effective operation of integrated military capabilities – accordingly, unravelling of these conditions marks out decline of alliance cohesion (Webber, 2009). It is also noteworthy that when emphasizing NATO’s declining cohesion, neorealists argue that the main point to be considered as a basis for the Alliance’s incoherence is that threat perceptions of NATO Allies are divergent which impacts on the development of NATO in recent years (Webber, 2009).

Specifically, the assumptions made by two neorealist authors, Stephen Walt and Kenneth Waltz, turned out to be particularly relevant for the thesis. Firstly, according to Stephen Walt’s Balance of Threat theory, which represents an important contribution to neorealist thought (Dwivedi, 2012), it is of high significance how non-structural factors such as threat perception influence alliance patterns (Hellmann & Wolf, 1993). According to Walt, the level of threat state poses to others is defined by the following factors: function of its power, geographical proximity (closer is more threatening), offensive military capabilities (more is more threatening) and lastly, perceived aggressiveness (states with offensive intentions are more threatening) (Dwivedi, 2012). States are more likely to make their alliance choices in response to nearby powers rather than in response to those powers that are distant; states with large offensive capabilities are more likely to provoke an alliance than those that are incapable of attacking, therefore, intention, not just power is crucial (Dwivedi, 2012). The arguments suggested by Stephen Walt complies with the theoretical assumption of the thesis. Specifically, different threat perceptions among NATO Allies have an impact on the Alliance’s decision to what extent NATO’s Eastern flank needs defense and deterrence to be strengthened since 2014 Ukraine Crisis. In fact, geographical proximity with Russia and its relatively high offensive military capabilities made Eastern Allies feel threatened which made them demand for increased military footprint of the Alliance on their territory. On the other hand, the same factors - geographical proximity and large capabilities – impacted on NATO’s Southern flank, such as Italy and the other big European Allies when they began to actively call for directing more resources to deal with threats coming from the south, namely, terrorism and migration that are the consequences of instability in the Middle East and North Africa. The Southern allies consider that threats coming from the South are of greater significance rather than threats coming from Russia which is not perceived as a threat or an enemy by some Allies at all.

According to Kenneth Waltz, institutions are hard to create but once they are created, member states begin to act with a measure of autonomy and become less dependent on the wills of the other members (Waltz, 2000). Waltz shares the view of the other realist authors that international institutions are shaped and limited by the states that found and sustain them, accordingly, have restrained independent effect (Waltz, 2000). He emphasizes that international institutions primarily serve national, rather than international interests (Waltz, 2000). Thus, whether institutions have strong or weak effects depends on what states intend (Waltz, 2000). Waltz argues that NATO apparently validates these thoughts (Waltz, 2000). Recent history of the Alliance illustrates subordination of international institutions to national purposes (Waltz, 2000). One of the evidences of this argument is the decision of major European Allies of NATO about unilateral large reductions in their force levels shortly after disappearance of the Soviet threat (Waltz, 2000). The Ukraine Crisis turned out to be a crucial historical event as it exposed divisions of interests and views of NATO Allies regarding the formation of relations with Russia, which impacted on NATO's defense and deterrence posture on its Eastern flank. Because of their close bilateral ties with Russia, big Western European Allies, such as Germany and France clearly oppose more robust NATO presence on Eastern flank claiming that it will provoke Russia. They argue that Russia is a close partner for them, therefore, they do their best to avoid tensed relations with Russia. Thus, national interests of several NATO Allies tend to be of high leverage when NATO makes decision to what extent its Eastern flank should be strengthened. It is a very fact that the Alliance remains faithful to the commitments established under the NATO-Russia Founding Act, as part of its confidence-building measures towards Russia and attempts to assure Moscow of NATO's defensive but not offensive intentions (Overbo, 2017).

2. Literature Review

The research, conducted by Belkin, Mix and Woehrel clarifies that Russia's actions in Ukraine prepared the ground for emergence of security concerns within NATO, especially among its Eastern Allies (Belkin, Mix and Woehrel, 2014). Because of geographical proximity and long-standing tensed historical relations with Russia, including the experience of the Soviet invasion and domination until the end of Cold War, the Russian threat perceptions have largely strengthened on NATO's Eastern Flank (Belkin, Mix and Woehrel, 2014). The authors emphasize that Poland, which is the largest economy and the most significant military actor of Visegrad Four, has the most difficult relationship with Russia among V4 (Belkin, Mix and Woehrel, 2014). Russian Annexation of Crimea and deployment of Russian military forces in Russian Exclave Kaliningrad - bordering Poland and Baltic region - including the Baltic Sea Fleet and two airbases, enhanced perception of Russia as a threat and made Poland call for NATO's increased focus on strengthening its territorial defense (Belkin, Mix and Woehrel, 2014). Additionally, the authors claim that as in case of Poland, after the Ukraine Crisis, perceptions of Russian threat strengthened among Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well. Size, geographical proximity and energy dependence on Russia make the Baltic states especially vulnerable to Russia. Moreover, Baltic countries have a large portion of Russian minorities living throughout the region that give them another incentive for enhanced sense of threat coming from Russia given the fact that claims of persecution against Russian minorities have been used as an argument for Moscow to justify its illegal interventions in both Ukraine and Georgia (Belkin, Mix and Woehrel, 2014).

Gotkowska and Szymanski also emphasize that Russian annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in eastern Ukraine have once more confirmed that Russia is a challenge to the Western security architecture. Russia emerged as a revisionist power with the aim of weakening the West, restore its domination over the post-Soviet area and change the order of post-Cold War era (Gotkowska and Szymanski, 2017). The authors claim that Baltic Sea region represents a convenient test bed for Russia in trying to achieve this goal as all three Baltic states share a significant amount of Russian-speaking population and have a small military potential (Gotkowska and Szymanski, 2017). The recent deployment of new types of air and missile defence, coastal defence and ballistic missile systems in the Kaliningrad Oblast, bordering the Baltic region, have largely expanded the capabilities of Russian military troops which, consequently, resulted in the Baltic states' increased focus on territorial defense (Gotkowska and

Szymanski, 2017). In addition to demonstrating its military power in the region, under ‘Hybrid Warfare’, Russia has been trying to undermine local trust towards NATO’s collective defence, to destabilize internal politics of Baltic states and make those countries not to confront the Russian national interests (Gotkowska and Szymanski, 2017). Also, the authors share the view that the Russian threat perception has strengthened in Poland to a considerable extent, which is the biggest country on NATO’s eastern flank and borders the Kaliningrad Oblast in the north (Gotkowska and Szymanski, 2017).

A considerable amount of scholars argue about ‘division’ within the West how to respond to Russia’s aggression in Europe and how to pursue relations with Russia after the Ukraine Crisis. For instance, Wayne Merry suggests that with regard to punishing Russia, Washington has taken the lead in the West as the US pressed its European partners to adopt extensive sanctions against Russia in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and its illegal support for Eastern Ukrainian separatism (Merry, 2015). But, in spite of the transatlantic cohesion on sanctions maintained, there are some differences with Europe that are likely to increase. For example, overall burden from sanctions is modest for the US economy, because of its no energy relationship with Russia while the links exist between Europe and Russia in this field (Merry, 2015). Europe has extensive commercial ties with Russia as it is a large consumer of Russian energy. Moreover, some political leaders comparing with others value ties with Russia more highly and are willing to accommodate Moscow in its “near abroad” (Merry, 2015). Therefore, self-interest restrict European leaders from pursuing a very punitive sanctions against Russia even if some are willing to do so. Thus, problem of achieving consensus in Brussels on any sanctions regime directly leads to sanctions that are weaker in enforcement than those of the United States (Merry, 2015). The author also adds that different threat perceptions of the Allies matter. For some member states of the Alliance, threat does not come from Russia, but from the tense situation in the Middle East and this enhances division in the West to what extent strengthen the Eastern Allies’ defense and how to pursue relations with Russia in response to the latter’s continuing violation of European security architecture (Merry, 2015).

When talking about dealing with Russia, Sten Rynning discusses the cases of Germany and France, as examples of NATO member states, that focus more on ‘political NATO’ and support more engagement with Russia, more dialogue with Moscow on unresolved issues (Rynning, 2017).

Additionally, the author emphasizes that while the Crimea's annexation strengthened the NATO's Eastern members' perceptions of threat coming from Russia, the Western members, such as France and Germany see the unstable situation in the South and Middle East but not Russia as a serious security challenge to be addressed in the nearest future (Rynning, 2017). Therefore, while deciding on what kind of relation to pursue with Russia, they choose 'détente' and 'pragmatism' rather than make relations harsher.

Emil Jorgensen Overbo very clearly underlines that the Alliance has significantly restrained its deterrence policy on the Eastern flank by exercising military restraints in its deterrence posture and, consequently, showed its adherence to the NATO-Russia Founding Act (Overbo, 2017). Specifically, despite the fact that NATO's eastern allies have persistently called for an increased permanent military presence in NATO's eastern periphery, Germany and other, more cautious allies argued in favour of the rotational multinational battalions in Poland and Baltic states with the aim of showing the modest character of the NATO presence in eastern Europe and securing adherence to the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997(Overbo, 2017). Eventually, in spite of admitting Russia's violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the Alliance remains faithful to the commitments established under the Act as part of its confidence-building measure towards Russia and attempts to assure Moscow of NATO's defensive but not offensive intentions (Overbo, 2017).

Additionally, Bagbaslioglu underlines that Russia's aggression in Ukraine led debates on NATO's re-emphasis on its core purpose of collective defence (Bagbaslioglu, 2016). The author analyses the influence of the Ukraine crisis on NATO's unstable relationship with Russia and solidarity crisis among NATO member countries. It is worth noting that different interests of NATO countries along with their different attitudes towards Russia result in lack of cohesion when it comes to dealing with Russia (Bagbaslioglu, 2016). Specifically, not all NATO countries perceive the threat from Russia to the same degree whereas Poland and the Baltic states, sharing common borders with Russia, are much more concerned than the other member states (Bagbaslioglu, 2016). The Wales Summit was a test for NATO's solidarity while defining policy towards Russia. Despite the fact that, at the Summit, NATO leaders reaffirmed the commitment of two percent of GDP defence spending on paper, putting this commitment into a practice turned out to be a delaying process. The author names that diverging threat perceptions among NATO

members is the main reason for inability of putting the above-mentioned commitment into a practice as some of Allies do not share the view that persistently rising defence spending in Poland and the Baltic states is a convenient option (Bagbaslioglu, 2016)

Mattia Bieri's work also focuses on disunity that was seen in the refusal of NATO to deploy permanent Western European and US forces in the Baltics. Instead, rotation-based troops and joint exercises as agreed at the summit is a demonstration of NATO's effort not to provoke Russia and remain faithful to the NATO-Russia Founding Act (Bieri, 2014). The author also points out that another demonstration of disagreements within the Alliance is different perception of the identified Russian threat. In addition, the author also shares the view of the above-mentioned scholars about the lack of cohesion in facing with the commitment of sharing defence expenditures to two percent of GDP (Bieri, 2014).

Wojciech Lorenz notes in his work that the NATO stance on the Eastern flank has been shaped by the reluctance of the old members and especially, Western European states to strengthen the territorial defence of the new allies with the aim of not provoking Russia (Lorenz, 2014). Moreover, the biggest European NATO member countries, such as Germany and Russia, have invested in Russian military modernisation programmes while Berlin, at the same time, made the strategic decisions in the energy sector which increased the dependency of Germany on Russian gas and offered new possibilities to Russia of strengthening pressure on its neighbours (Lorenz, 2014). Besides this, the author underlines that the decision to remaining faithful to the NATO-Russia Founding Act and not basing NATO permanent forces in Poland and the Baltics gives Russia the incentive to further undermine the credibility of NATO (Lorenz, 2014). Finally, the author shares the view that divisions and lack of political will in face of a threat, displayed during the Wales Summit and principal opposition of some allies to a permanent NATO presence on its eastern flank suggest that the level of the Alliance's credibility is low (Lorenz, 2014).

Despite the broad agreement that NATO seek to make Russia pay for its aggression on the territory of Europe - violation of sovereign territory of Ukraine – in order to deter plausible future Russian coercion and threat, reassure NATO member countries and support the security of non-member states, in particular, Ukraine, neither NATO as an alliance nor its individual member states have a comprehensive strategy for accomplishing these goals (Oliker, McNerney & Davis, 2015). Oliker, McNerney and Davis name competing political and economic interests and pressures related

to Russia as main drivers for absence of the comprehensive strategy (Oliker, McNerney & Davis, 2015). Specifically, the differences among NATO member states exist on how much support is needed for Ukraine, how much support is needed for NATO's eastern flank as part of its deterrence policy, to what degree NATO should support harsher sanctions against Russia in response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, etc. (Oliker, McNerney & Davis, 2015).

Finally, Robert Kupiecki and Andrew Michta suggested work on outcomes of the 2014 Warsaw Defense Dialogue where the Group of participants presented their essays about the Ukraine Crisis and challenges for NATO how to effectively deal with Russian threat. The work underlines that the Ukraine Crisis has become a kind of litmus test for transatlantic relations (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014). The crisis clearly exposed deep divisions among the Allies which, consequently, hampered efforts among them to elaborate a common political, military and economic approach in response to Russia's aggressive foreign policy. Therefore, the group concluded that the primary strategic goal should be restoration of NATO's unity and strengthening transatlantic ties against common threat coming from Russia (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014). Additionally, the Group emphasizes that the above-mentioned divisions among the Allies in threat perceptions and relations with Russia results in lack of NATO's attention to deterrence – they argue that there is need for a stronger NATO presence on its eastern flank, including components of the non-military response as one of the demonstrations of transatlantic unity towards Russia (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014). Finally, the Group concluded that there is a real need for a more decisive, coherent, impactful and durable response to Russia's aggressive foreign policy. Therefore, the West has to accept the fact that today's Russia is much different rather than it appeared to be and this should become a strong incentive for NATO to help elaborate a coherent and comprehensive strategy to deal with the Russian threat (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014).

3. North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Definitions

Before overviewing NATO in a Cold War as well as in a post-Cold War era, it is of high importance to define “defense” and “deterrence” as they have been an inseparable part of NATO’s core tasks since its creation.

Defense

According to Webster’s definitions, defense policy means a course of action defined by executive leadership in order to influence or determine decisions, actions and other matters related to the conduct of military affairs (Tagarev, 2006). Defense policy involves the actions that are taken for defending a country against its enemies (Tagarev, 2006) from the following threats: international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery, organized crime, direct military threats and so on (Tagarev, 2006). In order to pursue an effective defense policy, it is not the forces that are the most significant, rather the capabilities – formation of armed forces, for example (Tagarev, 2006).

“Collective defence is an arrangement, usually formalized by a treaty and organization, among participant states that commit support in defence of a member state if it is attacked by another state outside the organization” (Aleksovski, Bakreski & Avramovska, 2014, p. 275). NATO is the best-known collective defence organization whose Article 5 calls on member states to support another member state in case it is attacked. NATO invoked Article 5 once in its history after 9/11 terrorist acts in the United States (Aleksovski, Bakreski & Avramovska, 2014).

Deterrence

The theory of deterrence in international politics simply means to discourage or restrain the other party from taking unwanted actions, including an armed attack (Mazarr, 2018). In deterrence, the employment of military force is considered to be an essential threat whereas the main goal is not to reach the point of actual exercising such force (Arie, 2016).

Basically, there are two fundamental approaches of deterrence: deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. The former strategy tries to deter an action by making it unlikely to succeed and consequently, deny a confidence of a potential aggressor in accomplishing its goals –

through deployment of significant military capabilities and forces to defeat an invasion, for instance. Additionally, deterrence by denial involves efforts to defend some commitment (Mazarr, 2018). The latter strategy threatens by severe means, such as nuclear escalation or economic sanctions in case of an attack takes place. Unlike the former strategy, the focus of deterrence by punishment is not the direct defense of the contested commitment but threats of wider punishment that has a considerable potential to raise the cost of an attack (Mazarr, 2018). Furthermore, in a literature on deterrence, the direct and indirect deterrence are differentiated. The direct one means convincing the potential perpetrator that any harmful act or an attack will encourage the retaliatory action. The indirect deterrence means convincing the potential perpetrator that a significant investment is required for an attack (Putten, Meijnders & Rood, 2015). Ultimately, deterrence is about influencing the would-be perpetrator's assessment – making it less attractive to perform the act with the intention of causing harm (Putten, Meijnders & Rood, 2015).

Deterrence has a long history. It became a major principle in the international security environment in the Cold War era as a response to the existence of nuclear weapons (Putten, Meijnders & Rood, 2015). That is why current thinking on deterrence is directly related to the bipolar world order in which the Soviet Union and the US maintained a peace based on mutually assured destruction – MAD (Putten, Meijnders & Rood, 2015). Accordingly, the first wave in deterrence theory which started after the Second World War demonstrated that a state could no longer protect itself on the basis of military superiority as the adversaries owned weapons of mutually assured destruction (Putten, Meijnders & Rood, 2015). Notably, during the following decades, deterrence thinking focused mainly on traditional conflict between states. But later on, after the end of the Cold War and 9/11 attacks of 2001, non-traditional threats turned out to be a primary focus of the deterrence theory (Putten, Meijnders & Rood, 2015). Since then till now, deterrence has been directed not only to the nuclear weapons and conventional war, but to broader kinds of threats, such as violent non-state actors including international terrorist groups and asymmetric warfare (Putten, Meijnders & Rood, 2015).

3.1 NATO in a Cold War Era

The legal basis for the creation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 is article 51 of the UN Charter which affirms the right of any state to both individual and collective self-defence and claims that the essence of NATO is collective defence – providing with

assistance, including, the military one in case of an attack on party or parties to the Treaty (mfa.gov.pl, 2016). The Treaty's key provision is Article V, according to which, "an armed attack against one or more [allies] shall be considered an attack against them all" (Gallis, 1997, p. 1). It is noteworthy, that NATO invoked Article V for the first time throughout its history as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States (nato.int, 2018).

Major purpose of NATO's creation was to deal with the Soviet threat. Manifestation of the Soviet threat included the Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the blockade of the West Berlin as a response to the unification of the latter with West Germany (mfa.gov.pl, 2016). Allies' perception of threat coming from the Soviet Union had been strengthened as a consequence of the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb in 1949 and outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 when North Korea, supported by the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea (nato.int, p.2). In 1957, NATO adopted the doctrine called "Massive Retaliation" as a strategy of deterrence, meaning that if the Soviet Union implemented a military attack, NATO would respond with nuclear strike on Warsaw Pact. Moreover, the doctrine meant a pre-emptive nuclear attack in case of a threat to NATO members (mfa.gov.pl, 2016). The doctrine was reflection of the imbalance of conventional forces in Europe. Considering the fact that conventional forces of the Soviet Union were much larger rather than of NATO (Overbo, 2017), the Alliance relied on its large nuclear arsenal for its deterrence. Consequently, nuclear potential of the United States became the basis for the security of NATO member states (mfa.gov.pl, 2016).

In sum, during the Cold War period, main purpose of NATO was to deal with the Soviet threat. With this aim, NATO pursued strong defense and deterrence policy in its relations with the Soviet Union (Wallander, 2000). It could be said that in a Cold War era, NATO effectively dealt with its collective action problem through extended nuclear deterrence (Lepgold, 1998).

3.2 NATO in a post-Cold War Era

In IR, it is claimed by some that when threats disappear, allies lose their *raison d'être*, there is no more a reason for cooperation and the coalition is about to break apart. In consistence with this theoretical prediction, early in the post-Cold War period, many scholars predicted the demise of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Wallander, 2000), claiming that with the disappearance of a clear adversary – the former Soviet Union – threat was no longer a rational reason for maintaining the alliance. Nevertheless, NATO continued its existence and developed a new strategic concept

(Lozancic, 2010). Moreover, NATO has significantly expanded its membership despite the break-up of the Soviet Union and dissolution of Warsaw Pact (Lozancic, 2010) – since 1949, NATO's membership has increased from 12 to 29 countries through seven rounds of enlargement (nato.int, 2018). Consequently, under NATO's defensive umbrella, Western Europe and North America achieved a considerable level of stability which the European economic cooperation and integration was based on (nato.int, p. 11).

NATO's transformation started with the London Declaration of 1990s according to which the Alliance did not consider the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact as adversaries and invited them to establish diplomatic contacts with NATO (Wallander, 2000). In November 1990, NATO and the Warsaw Pact signed the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and a joint declaration on commitment to non-aggression. Also, all members of the OSCE signed the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. As it is considered, these commitments, which were meant to establish political and cooperative basis for security in Europe, formally ended the Cold War (Wallander, 2000).

It is often said that cohesion constitutes the center for gravity of NATO (Mattelaer, 2016). To briefly assess NATO's credibility in today's world, contrary to the Cold-War period, the Alliance is facing the crisis of cohesion and unity (nato.int, 2014). Taking into consideration the fact that NATO, the world's most important military-political alliance is facing a considerable number of internal and external challenges – divergent interests of allies for defense; threats coming from Russia, especially after its illegal annexation of Crimea and support to separatism in Eastern Ukraine; terrorism threats coming from instability in North Africa and Middle East - its current military posture and political commitment turned out to be insufficient to maintain the necessary credibility, unity and cohesion to effectively deal with these challenges (nato.int, 2014). Whilst in the Cold-War period, NATO was a prime example of Allied solidarity and unity against the common threat, nowadays, there exist some doubts about common values, disagreements about burden-sharing, different perceptions of threat by the member states and divergent national interests of the Allies, which, consequently, lead to emergence of concerns about NATO's collective action problem and lack of cohesion (nato.int, 2014).

4. Ukraine Crisis

4.1 Russian Annexation of Crimea

At the end of 2013 and at the beginning of 2014, protests have taken place in Ukraine against the pro-Russian regime of Viktor Yanukovich who refused to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (Salushev, 2014). As long as NATO enlargement in post-Cold War era left Russia surrounded with united Europe from one side and the United States from the other, Moscow viewed the EU and NATO extending close to its border as a threat to its national interests (Nicoara, 2016). Therefore, Moscow set a goal to prevent Ukraine from joining the EU and leaving it as a buffer zone between Russia and NATO. With this aim, Russia pressured the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich not to join the European Union (Nicoara, 2016). Instead of signing the AA with the EU, Yanukovich accepted to sign an economic agreement with Russia (Dedova, 2016). A large part of the population in the country interpreted it as an incentive for eventual integration into the Russian economic zone, named as Customs Union (Salushev, 2014). The protests, also known as “Euromaidan” transformed into a “national movement” making pro-Russian President Yanukovich flee to Russia (Klotz, 2017). Suspending the constitution, Parliament voted to remove Yanukovich from power and hold new Presidential elections where Arseniy Yatsenyuk was designated as a Prime Minister of newly elected temporary government. Russian officials considered this as illegitimate and considered the above-mentioned events as “coup d’état” (Dedova, 2016). The unstable situation in Kiev triggered a crisis in Crimea as well, where pro-Russian demonstrations took place in Crimean cities of Sevastopol and Simferopol (Dedova, 2016). Afterwards, Viktor Yanukovich announced that he was still legitimate and rightful president of Ukraine and asked Russia for getting protection from extremists in his country (Dedova, 2016).

In response to the protestations in Ukraine, Russia started so called “hybrid warfare” uniting “military means” with the “nonmilitary ones” (Klotz, 2017, p. 264) with the aim of establishing dominance over Ukraine (through control of media, disinformation campaigns, propaganda) (Matzek, 2016). As long as Yanukovich left Ukraine, pro-Russian protests started in the capital of Crimea. On 27 February, 2014, armed masked forces seized government building in Crimea and appointed Sergey Aksyonov – then member of parliament and leader of Russian Unity Party – as Prime Minister. The following day, military forces, later admitted to be Russians,

occupied strategically significant targets of the Peninsula, such as, military facilities, media, airports, and blocked all the connections between Crimea and Ukraine (Matzek, 2016). Finally, on 18 March, 2014, President Putin signed a bill to take Crimea away from Ukraine and absorb it into the Russian Federation (Dedova, 2016). Since then, President Putin has underlined many times that Crimea has always been and remains an inseparable part of Russia (Harding & Walker, 2014). He justifies Russia's behavior by emphasizing that Russian origins come from Crimea (Klotz, 2017) and integration of Crimea was the choice of population as the decision was made based on the results of referendum in which more than 96% of the population voted in favour of reuniting with Russia (bbc, 2014).

Notably, out of 2.2 million population of Crimea, 1.5 million are Russians and 350,000 are Ukrainians who consider Russian as their native language and approximately 290,000-300,000 are Crimean Tatars who prioritize the close relations with Russia. Russians, Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and the other ethnic groups have lived side by side in Crimea so far maintaining their own identity, languages, traditions and faith (bbc, 2014). As above-mentioned, in the referendum, which was held in March 2014, the population of peninsula voted for uniting with Russia and Crimea and Sevastopol were integrated into the Russian Federation (Klotz, 2017). But the West considered this referendum as illegal and illegitimate, therefore, did not recognize its outcome at all (Harding & Walker, 2014). According to the international law, territory cannot be annexed just because its population want to secede. If that were allowed under international law, any geographically cohesive group could vote on independence (Brilmayer, 2014). If a referendum were the right way to decide the issue of Crimea, then Russia as well has to hold a referendum to determine the future of Chechnya (Brilmayer, 2014). Countries can acquire territory by discovering uninhabited land, signing a treaty as it was the case when Khrushchev transferred Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, or by occupying an area in peaceful ways for a long period of time. The legal methods for resolving questions of sovereignty have never included a simple referendum of residents of a contested territory (Brilmayer, 2014). Moreover, while the existence of a historical grievance over the territory make secessionist claim successful, no such legal claim can be made in case of Crimea (Brilmayer, 2014). President Putin was concerned not because of Russian speakers living in Crimea who might be suffered in the hands of the new government of Ukraine, but what matters is the port and its value to the Russian fleet (Brilmayer, 2014). That is why he pursued such policy in order to obtain the control over Crimean Peninsula.

Accordingly, international community does not recognize the Republic of Crimea as part of Russia (Dedova, 2016) and condemns Russia's aggressive foreign policy on the territory of European state which directly violates the principles of international law, particularly, maintaining respect towards the sovereignty of any state and pursuing non-intervention policy into the internal affairs of any country.

4.2 Russian Intervention in Eastern Ukraine

The Eastern Ukraine is considered as one more target of Russia after Crimea because of the fact that the region shares a number of features that are similar to Crimea which makes it more attractive for Russia. In some areas of Eastern Ukraine, more than 75% of the population speak Russian as their native language. Apart from a large quantity of the Russian-speaking population, similar to Crimea, the Eastern Ukraine is geographically accessible to Russia. After annexation of Crimea, the region was destabilized by pro-Russian forces through occupying government buildings in the regions and establishing control over the region (Ramicone et al., 2014).

The crisis emerged after the Russian annexation of Crimea heightened ethnic divisions in Ukraine. Consequently, two months later, pro-Russian separatists in the regions of Eastern Ukraine – Donetsk and Luhansk - held a referendum in order to declare independence from Ukraine (cfr.org, 2019). Despite the fact that Moscow denied its involvement in the region, it was reported by NATO and Ukraine itself that there was a buildup of Russian troops and military equipment close to Donetsk and Russian cross-border shelling (cfr.org, 2019). In brief, Russia has stimulated a proxy war in Eastern Ukraine by using the local pro-Russian separatists as military tools for achieving Russia's political goals (Sazonov et al., 2016).

'Information Warfare' Component in the Crisis

When discussing the Ukrainian crisis, it should be emphasized that 'information warfare' is a key term (Sazonov et al., 2016). Information warfare is about achieving military goals, such as annexation of a country, by replacing military force with spread of specifically prepared messages in order to win over the minds of the targets. However, Russia does not consider the information warfare just as an accidental choice of different instruments and weapons (Sazonov et al., 2016).

In Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Russian information activities were used at all levels from the political level directed towards the state of Ukraine, its politicians and structures, to the military level (Sazonov et al., 2016). Russia conducted cyberattacks against Crimea – shut down the telecommunications infrastructure, disabled major Ukrainian websites and mobile phones of key Ukrainian officials just before the Russian forces entered the Crimean Peninsula (Iasiello, 2017). Moreover, as part of its disinformation campaigns, Russia used television broadcasts to obtain support of population for actions in Crimea and to create an impression that Moscow’s intervention in Ukraine was essential in order to protect native Russian speakers living there (Iasiello, 2017). Also, the separatist People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk have their own channels conducting anti-Ukrainian propaganda very actively and justifying Russian policy in Ukraine (Sazonov et al., 2016). Furthermore, Russia actively carries out the pro-Russian propaganda in Donbass, historical side of Eastern Ukraine for the past several years volume of which considerably increased as Russian President Vladimir Putin took control over media and started the program of calling on ethnic Russians everywhere (Nicoara, 2016). Regarding this, in 2015, Freedom House reported that broadcasts in Ukraine very often contain false information and myths with the aim of making Ukrainian citizens sure that they are being under oppression of the Ukrainian government (Nicoara, 2016).

The annexation of Crimea brought what had been considered a thing of the past back to Europe – territorial conflict and the change of borders by using the force. As we know, Europe has a long history of great power competition. But, along with rebuilding of Western Europe after 1945 and the reunification of the continent after 1989, Europeans believed that they entered a new “postmodern” era where soft power replace hard power (Rumer, Weiss, Speck, Khatib, Perkovich & Paal, 2014). Embedded in the cooperation frameworks, such as NATO and the EU, they were convinced that international law prepared the foundation of a mutually beneficial order. But as we all have seen, all these assumptions are questioned and old-style power politics are back (Rumer, Weiss, Speck, Khatib, Perkovich & Paal, 2014).

By annexing Crimea and violating the territorial integrity of Russia, Russia not only disturbed its obligations towards Ukraine provisioned under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum about Security Assurances, but it also “undermined the credibility of the whole system of security guarantees offered in exchange for non-proliferation commitments” (Zelienkova, 2016, p. 18).

Also, what is important to note, the Crisis raised concerns among Eastern European states about Russia's intentions (cf. org, 2019) that historically have tensed relations with Russia (Dokos, 2014).

4.3 How the West responded to the Ukraine Crisis?

Western Sanctions

Russia has been the subject of sanctions regime as a reaction of the EU, the US and other Western allies (for instance, Canada, Australia, Japan) to the Russia's annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Ukraine (Smith, 2018). The sanctions targeted individuals and entities, by imposing asset freezes and travel bans, arms embargoes, restrictions on trade, including on the export to Russia of technology necessary for oil exploration and also, the restrictions on lending money to certain Russian companies and banks. Sanctions also included bans on investment in and trade with Crimea (Smith, 2018).

NATO Response

By considering the fact that Ukraine is not the member of the Alliance, article 5 would not be triggered in case of Ukraine even if NATO was willing to do so (Ramicone et al., 2014). Consequently, NATO showed no signs that it would militarily intervene in Crimea (Ramicone et al., 2014). In fact, what NATO did in response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, foreign ministers of the Alliance states suspended all kinds of military and civil cooperation between NATO and Russia below the level of NATO Council (Klein & Kaim, 2014). Also, NATO's Deputy Secretary-General Alexander Vershbow announced that NATO "now no longer saw Russia as a partner, but as more of an adversary" (Nünlist, 2014, p. 13). But not all the states in the West agreed with this view – some countries, specifically, Western states were not united and cohesive how to respond the Ukraine Crisis and how to deal with Russia (Nünlist, 2014).

5. Threats to the NATO's Eastern Flank: Baltic States and Poland

The Ukrainian Crisis is one of the most remarkable crises for NATO in the post-Cold War era which demonstrated that the resisting reaction of the Alliance to the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 did not turn out to be sufficient enough to deter Russia from pursuing its aggressive foreign policy (Otskivi, 2016). It is noteworthy that the Russian aggression and animosity towards Ukraine especially strengthened fears, among the Eastern-European states of NATO, particularly, the Baltic States and Poland. Geographical proximity, long-term historical relationships which was tensed by the Soviet invasion and domination during the Communist era, relatively low military capabilities, energy dependence on Russia and having a large amount of Russian minorities sharpened concerns in Eastern Europe and Baltics about Vladimir Putin's future intentions (Belkin, Mix & Woehrel, 2014).

5.1 Threats to the Baltic States

The Baltic Sea region has been considered by Russia as a convenient test bed in attempting to achieve its geopolitical objectives to divide the West, to undermine trust in NATO's collective defence and its credibility (Gotkowska & Szumanski, 2017), to regain political and economic dominance over its neighbours who were either in the USSR or Warsaw Pact and to maintain its conventional military advantage over the Eastern Flank countries (Piotrowski & Ras, 2017). The political-military geography of the Baltic Sea region, share of significant amount of Russian-speaking population and small military potential of Baltic states give Moscow opportunities to achieve those goals. To the West, Lithuania is surrounded by the militarized Kaliningrad. To the South, Lithuania and Latvia border Belarus with its military integration with Russia. To the East, Latvia and Estonia border Russia (Gotkowska & Szumanski, 2017).

Integrated Country Strategy of Estonia states that Russia's aggressive behavior against its neighbours, demonstrated in using its conventional as well as non-conventional capabilities, represents an ongoing threat to the European security, especially, to the security architecture of Eastern Europe (Integrated Country Strategy Estonia, 2018). National Security Strategy of Lithuania emphasizes that currently, the main threat for the security of the Republic of Lithuania is posed by aggressive steps of the Russian Federation expressed by its aggression against neighboring countries, annexation of Crimea, concentration of modernized military equipment, exercising of its large-scale offensive capabilities lacking transparency and demonstrating power

near the borders of Lithuania, especially in Kaliningrad, use of its ‘soft power’ with Russian minorities and, lastly, its readiness to use nuclear weapons even against the states that do not possess it (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017). Finally, Integrated Country Strategy of Latvia also names Russia as an adversary for the European security as a whole, especially, threatening the national interests of Latvia (Integrated Country Strategy Latvia, 2018).

5.1.1. Russian Hard Power - Military Threats

Military threats are based on the fear that another state or groups of states could use military force to conquer or subjugate the incumbent government and armed forces are considered to be the only means to counter military action (Li, 2009). It is noteworthy that threats of invasion and occupation are at the extreme end, aimed to destroy the state. Also, military threats might be indirect whereas they are not applied directly to the state itself but to its external interests, including threats to the allies or strategically placed territories (Li, 2009).

The idea that Russia might somehow invade one of the Baltic States became an accepted part of serious discussions only after Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Jakniunaite, 2016). This is a huge systemic change as it appeared that in 21st century, forcible territorial changes are possible (Jakniunaite, 2016). There are four areas of the military sector which have intensified the military threat since 2014 (Jakniunaite, 2016).

Firstly, intensified modernization of Russia’s military forces and increased defense spending has played a significant role. Moscow started hugely investing in new anti-access/area denial capabilities, new surveillance, advanced missiles and the Iskander tactical ballistic missiles. These developments at least made Europe keep a watchful eye on Russia and prepare for counterbalancing (Jakniunaite, 2016). Secondly, there were organized several military exercises in the region – two large military exercises simulating the occupation of the Baltic States twice in 2009 and 2013 which demonstrated the ability to move large number of troops beyond long distances (Jakniunaite, 2016). Thirdly, there were various provocations involving violations of sovereign territory. The Russian war planes permanently intrude into or close to the airspace of the Baltic States and violations of maritime borders have also taken place very often (Jakniunaite, 2016). For instance, in September 2014, Estonian security offices was seized on the Estonian side of the land border while doing an investigation just two days after President Obama’s visit in Tallinn where he talked about US security guarantees in Baltics (Jakniunaite, 2016). Fourth, there

is a problem of Kaliningrad - which is the Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea - and its ongoing militarization (Gotkowska & Szymanski, 2017).

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union, along with full conventional superiority over NATO, experienced a privileged position in the Baltic Sea. At the end of the World War II, Moscow annexed Kaliningrad and occupied the Baltic republics which were forcefully integrated into the USSR, while Poland and East Germany founded the Warsaw Pact in 1955. Kaliningrad Oblast has been the most militarized spot in Europe for decades (Pedro, Manoli, Sukhankin & Tsakiris, 2017). After the fall of the Soviet Union, Kaliningrad faced with a gradual remilitarization that demonstrates Moscow's growing uneasiness in a post-Cold War order throughout Europe. From 1999 till now, the Oblast hosted four strategic war games under the code name 'Zapad' – which means 'West' in Russian (Pedro, Manoli, Sukhankin & Tsakiris, 2017).

The Ukraine Crisis triggered a new wave of militarization of the entire western flank whereas the special role has been allocated to Kaliningrad Oblast. "Deployment of the most up-to-date military hardware such as the 'Iskander-M', the S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft weapon system, the Bastion-P and the 3K60 Bal coastal defence missile systems equipped with nuclear capability, and the P-800 Oniks supersonic anti-ship cruise missile led to Kaliningrad regaining its status as Russia's 'militarized fortress' and its most sophisticated Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) 'bubble' to date" (Pedro, Manoli, Sukhankin & Tsakiris, 2017, p.11). Therefore, new concerns emerged that like in case of Crimea, Baltics might also become Russia's next potential military target (Otskivi, 2016). Apart from gaining the status of a 'military fortress', Kaliningrad became so called 'ideological bastion' of Russia. Specifically, local media outlets and politicians spread disinformation and propaganda against Poland and Lithuania (bordering Kaliningrad) with the aim of underrating the level of economic development of them and obtaining influence on forming public opinion there (Pedro, Manoli, Sukhankin & Tsakiris, 2017). To sum up, all three Baltic states are sandwiched between Kaliningrad and Russia whereas some ports and airfields are critical to NATO's defenses in the Baltic region within 30 miles of the Russian border (carnegieendowment, 2017).

Additionally, when discussing Russian military threats to the Baltic states, it should be mentioned that Russian aircraft conducted frequent intrusions into the air space of NATO countries and harassed the US and NATO ships and aircraft operating in the Baltic as well as Black Sea

regions (carnegieendowment, 2017). Also, in addition to the deployment of additional missile and air defense as well as nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad Oblast, Russian forces have conducted unannounced exercises simulating the use of nuclear weapons in an invasion of the Baltic regions (carnegieendowment, 2017). Notably, Russia's recent deployment of nuclear-armed cruise missile threatens NATO forces and facilities and violates the US-Russian Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty (carnegieendowment, 2017).

Thus, the geography of the Baltic states, recent military exercises near the border of Baltics, air incidents over the Baltic Sea as well as militarization of Kaliningrad, all make both deliberate and inadvertent escalation, even the one of limited scale, possible (Kuhn, 2018). In fact, despite the fact that NATO as a whole has much greater conventional military capabilities than Russia, Moscow enjoys a significant conventional superiority in the wider Baltic region which ultimately reinforces the fear in Baltics of conventional attack from Russia (Kuhn, 2018).

5.1.2. Russian Soft Power - Ethnic minorities in Baltic States and Russia's Information Warfare

Along with its hard power, Russia uses soft power as a mean of obtaining and maintaining influence. Joseph Nye defines soft power as the ability to attract based on a state's culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority) (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015). In case of Baltic states, Russia has used its soft power in many ways, but the most influential and notable is its advocacy for ethnic Russian minorities (Hanson, 2013). All three Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have significant minority population of ethnic Russians which has become an important element in the threat calculation of these states after the Russian annexation of Crimea and Russian support to separatism in Eastern Ukraine. Given the fact that claims of persecution and violation of rights of ethnic Russian communities turned out to be a pretext of protecting Russia's "compatriots" during its interventions in Ukraine, Baltic States' perception of Russian threat has significantly strengthened (Belkin, Mix & Woehrel, 2014).

Moscow defined the Russian diaspora and Russian speakers living in the former Soviet republics as "compatriots". Nowhere does Russia's policy of protecting its "compatriots" cause as much concern for the post-Cold War order as in the Baltic States (Grigas, 2014). Three of the

Baltic States have large and concentrated Russian population. In particular, Estonia and Latvia are populated by relatively high number of ethnic-Russian minorities, numbering about 24% and 27% of the population, respectively, while Lithuania's ethnic Russian population is represented by less than 6% of the whole population (Grigas, 2014). Moreover, all of the Baltic countries have even higher number of Russian-speakers that are resided in territories close to the Russian border – in Lithuania, Russian speakers are represented, approximately, by 15% of the entire population, in Latvia - by 34% and in Estonia - by 30% (Grigas, 2014). This has become a major source for worries among the Baltic States because of the fact that Moscow actively uses its soft power, compatriot policies, information warfare and “passportization” efforts under which Moscow offers passports and citizenship to the Russian speakers (Grigas, 2014).

As part of its information warfare, Russia intensified its informational activity in Baltic region since 2014. More finances were directed towards popularizing Russia Today and opening new Russian language TV-channels, supporting pro-Russian NGOs, paying PR firms for promoting the Russian interests and make them visible on social media (Jakniunaite, 2016). Through this information machine, Russia has maintained strong political, economic and social ties with Baltic Russian and Russian-speakers since the demise of the Soviet Union. Moscow actively tries to promote false narratives and assure the target population that Baltic States glorify Nazism, they are ‘failed states’ and they are discriminating against Russian speakers (Svensson, 2018). Russian non-conventional influence activities are addressed in the Integrated Country Strategy of Estonia according to which, Russia tries to spread disinformation about targeted oppression of Russian speakers in Estonia, lack of respect for the Russian language and that service members of NATO and the United States are oppressive occupying forces (Integrated Country Strategy Estonia, 2018). Also, considering the fact that Latvia has a significant Russian-speaking minorities, it is not surprising that dealing with the Russian information warfare remains one of the security priorities for Latvia, as it is stated in the Integrated Country Strategy (Integrated Country Strategy Latvia, 2018).

The Russian influence has also been demonstrated in the domestic politics of the Baltic States. For instance, a pro-Russian party received the majority of votes in Latvia's parliamentary elections (Grigas, 2014). Furthermore, there are numerous organizations and associations in the Baltic States that are oriented to local ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers and are funded by

Kremlin. As Vytis Jurkonis, a lecturer in international relations at Vilnius University, notes, “these organizations and their activities are constantly questioning the success of the post-communist transition, seeding mistrust in public institutions and playing with nostalgia for the Soviet past” (Grigas, 2014, p. 17). Also, Baltic Russian-speaking youth is encouraged to participate in Russian militarized camps in order to receive military trainings and psychological preparation whereas some of those students enter Russian military academies (Grigas, 2014). One of the demonstrations of Russian soft power influence on domestic politics of the Baltic region is that recent public opinion surveys show relatively low trust among Estonia’s Russian speaking population in Estonian government institutions, NATO and the EU (Integrated Country Strategy Estonia, 2018).

Under its ‘soft power’, Russia uses cyber efforts in the Baltic region (Mccord, 2018). In 2007, Estonia became the victim of first-wide-scale, state-sponsored cyber attack from Russia (Mccord, 2018). Several weeks later from this attack, communication channels across Estonia were broken, the country’s central banking systems were non-functioning and media outlets were unable to broadcast news and also, government data was attacked. But after considerable investments in cyber defensive capabilities, Estonia managed to become a global leader in cybersecurity (Mccord, 2018). In Latvia as well, with the highest percentage of ethnic Russians of the Baltic countries, Russian social-media efforts try to create divisions between the ethnically Russian as well as ethnically Latvian populations and assure the targeted population that NATO is threat to Russia. More serious attacks included to alter election data, financial institutions (Mccord, 2018). And, finally, in terms of cyber capabilities and vulnerabilities, Lithuania falls between Estonia and Latvia. As in case of Estonia and Latvia, in Lithuania as well, Russia conducts cyber attacks in order to conduct anti-propaganda of NATO. Notably, Latvia and Lithuania are particularly incapable of actively monitoring and deterring cyber intrusions because of non-existence of any central cyber organization as it is the case in Estonia (Mccord, 2018).

Despite the fact that all Baltic states successfully integrated Russian ethnic minorities, still, the concerns that Russia will employ a new doctrine of hybrid warfare in the Baltics, are real, even if sometimes exaggerated (carnegieendowment, 2017). By considering the fact that Baltic states along with other NATO member states face some gaps in their defense against these hybrid threats, it is not surprising that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania feel especially threatened in the wake of Ukraine Crisis. They are afraid that Russia, though its strong propagandist machine will provoke

destabilization on their territory by using its ‘compatriots’ as it was the case in Ukraine (carnegieendowment, 2017).

5.1.3. Energy Dependence on Russia – Vulnerability of Baltic States

During the Soviet Union, it would have been hard to use oil and gas reserves in order to maintain influence throughout the communist world as it would have destroyed not only its economy, which was based on the production of nuclear weapons, but also the Cold War security structure that was also based on the threat of nuclear weapons (Hanson, 2013). However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has become an inheritor of the natural resource wealth of it. Accordingly, the biggest reason for Russian influence in the Baltics has been a shift from the foreign policy that was based on nuclear weapons to capitalizing on its vast energy reserves (Hanson, 2013), by using the infrastructure of energy pipelines and electricity grids, inherited from the Soviet Union, connecting the Baltic states only to Russia (Hanson, 2013).

Despite the fact that Russia’s significance as a trade partner for the Baltic States – particularly for Estonia and Latvia – has been decreased, it remains as their main source of gas and oil. In fact, the Baltic States are almost 100% dependent on Russian gas and 90% dependent on Russian oil and also on the Russian pipeline system for the delivery of these resources (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). It should be noted that energy vulnerability of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania has been increased due to the fact that they are virtually isolated from the energy infrastructure of the rest of Europe (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). Therefore, they are dependent on a single and potentially hostile Russian source (Grigas, 2013), specifically, in case of gas supplies (Grigas, 2012). Unlike oil, which is traded internationally and all Baltic States have an opportunity to import non-Russian oil via their terminals on the Baltic Sea, their infrastructure for gas import is limited to the Soviet-era pipelines and entirely relied on Russia (Grigas, 2012). At the same time, it should be noted that Estonia is relatively less dependent on Russia’s oil due to the fact that it managed to develop Baltic Shale as a viable alternative for energy which is considered to be the most valuable natural resource of the country giving Estonia an opportunity to maintain leverage against Russia’s ability to exert its hard power (Hanson, 2013).

Russia uses its energy as a hard power to influence their neighbours’ domestic and economic policy (Hanson, 2013). The ways through which Moscow used the energy sector as a

source for its hard power are oil sanctions, gas isolation and superiority in nuclear power (Hanson, 2013). These countries have experienced apparent gas pricing from Gazprom (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). For instance, when Lithuania adopted a policy that could significantly reduce the Russian influence in the gas sector by requiring the sale of transfer systems in the power grid going to someone not connected to the power company, Russia has threatened Lithuania by increasing gas prices (Hanson, 2013). Even more, Estonia faced a temporary halt in supplying of oil products as a consequence of 2007 political tensions (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014).

Despite the generally successful transformation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, domestic weaknesses, such as settled energy interest groups, poor regulatory framework and weak institutions prevented energy diversification (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). It is noteworthy that their political systems are still characterized by institutional weaknesses such as fragmentation and commercialization (Grigas, 2012). Existing small, new and weak parties are more vulnerable to be influenced by third party actors, including the Russian interests (Grigas, 2012). Moreover, commercialization of politics is another enforcing factor for Russian influence, especially in Latvia and Lithuania – both local and Russian business groups involve in political lobbying and party financing to pursue the Russian interests in Baltic region. These efforts include local businesses that export goods to Russia as well as Russian oil and gas companies operating in the region (Grigas, 2012).

5.2 Threats to Poland

According to the National Security Strategy of Poland, the reassertion of Russia's position as a major power at the expense of its neighbourhood, an example of which is the Russian annexation of Crimea, has considerably negative impact on the security of Eastern Europe (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland, 2014). Since its democratic transition until today, Poland has positioned itself as a leader of the anti-Russian coalition in Eastern Europe (Vukadinovic, Begovic & Jusic, 2017). At the same time, with its largest demographic, military and economic potential of the countries on NATO's eastern flank, Poland is perceived by Russia as the main rival in the region (Buras & Balcer, 2016).

Considering the facts that Russia is permanently increasing its military spending, developing its missile and nuclear arsenal and holding military exercises in the neighbourhood of

NATO member states, concerns over Russian aggression have considerably been raised for Poland in the wake of Ukraine Crisis (Vukadinovic, Begovic & Jusic, 2017). After 2014 Russian aggression in Ukraine, approximately 80% of Poles expressed the concern that Russia was the most threatening country for them (Stoklosa, 2017). Out of nine countries surveyed in 2015 by the Pew Research Center, Poland showed the biggest concerns about Russia - 70% of surveyed people considered Russia, militarily, to be a “major threat” to its neighbours, including Poland (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). Since then, Poland believes that Russia is a threat not only for Poland’s security, but it also represents a danger for Europe (Stoklosa, 2017).

There are some critical points that demonstrate why Poland is one of the NATO’s Eastern European member states whose vulnerability to the Russian aggressive foreign policy tends to be high and why NATO should take notice when it comes to strengthening Poland’s security.

5.2.1. Military Challenges – Russian Hard Power

One of the security challenges for Poland is militarization of the region of Kaliningrad, (Vukadinovic, Begovic & Jusic, 2017) where Russia has stationed nuclear-capable missiles and conduct over-flights over Polish airspace (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). The problem emerged as a consequence of transferring the 152nd Missile Brigad to the town of Chernyakhobsk in Kaliningrad Oblast whereas the brigade is equipped with the newest Iskander missile (Vukadinovic, Begovic & Jusic, 2017) that can very easily and effectively target Poland (Vukadinovic, Begovic & Jusic, 2017). Specifically, Poland has a direct border with the Russian exclave – Kaliningrad Oblast. If the Kremlin decides a local war with NATO, the Baltic republics are to be the most obvious targets for Russian military aggression whereas in case of conflict escalation, Russia might try to neutralize Poland by occupying the Polish-Lithuanian border region – the Suwalki corridor – located between Kaliningrad and Belarus (Buras & Balcer, 2016). Along with the planned stationing of long-range nuclear-capable TU-22M3 bombers in Crimea, these moves indicate to a dangerous new element into Putin’s attempt to intimidate Poland as well as Baltics and weaken NATO’s capacity to protect its members (Larrabee, 2015).

What is also worth noting, apart from enhancing and modernizing the military capabilities in Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia took more confrontational actions that included violations of national airspace and territorial waters, as well as intimidation of planes and vessels in international airspace and waters which resulted in increase of number of military exercises based on aggressive

scenarios. One of the demonstrations of such behavior is a nuclear attack on Warsaw - Zapad 2009 (Gotkowska & Szumanski, 2017). While being interviewed on Russian threat perceptions in Poland, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski announced: “When Russian generals threaten us with nuclear weapons, what are we supposed to feel? When Russia conducts ‘Zapad’ military exercises in which Poland is the target of a nuclear strike – that’s a very good way of maintaining the phobia” (DW News, 2018, p. 4).

Additionally, tensions that have been emerged over Poland’s missile defense systems have the potential to provoke Russian military action with the final aim of destabilizing the country or neutralize its missile defense assets (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). Poland’s efforts to support missile defense systems have become the most debated and contentious issue between Poland and Russia (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). The US has approved the 10.5\$ billion sale of Patriot anti-missile system to Poland as the latter is one of those Eastern European NATO states that have been reinforcing their military capabilities in the face of perceived Russian aggression (dw.com, 2017). In spite of the United States’ claim that the system lacks capability of intercepting Russian nuclear missiles, Russia still sees it as a threat to the nuclear balance between the US and Russia (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). When agreeing on deployment of US missile defense facilities in Poland, Russia warned that Poland would become a legitimate target for a nuclear strike and threatened to deploy short-range, nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to the Kaliningrad Exclave. Therefore, the issue of missile defense could ultimately put Poland into conflicting relations with Russia (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014).

Apart from this, unlike Baltic States, Polish interlocutors downplay the risks to Poland of Hybrid Warfare Scenario and point out that the country has neither a significant Russian minority nor pro-Russian groups on its territory (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). Generally, Russian narrative does not have a tangible influence on mainstream views among Polish politicians, media and society and accordingly, Russian propagandist machine is constrained to generate positive attitudes towards domestic or foreign policies of Kremlin, specifically, of Vladimir Putin (Kacewicz & Wenerski, 2017).

5.2.2. Dependence on Russian Energy – Vulnerability of Poland

Taking into consideration the fact that Russia supplies approximately 95% of its oil and 2/3 of its gas to Poland, it can be said that, similarly to the Baltic States, Poland is also highly dependent on Russian energy resources (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014). PGNiG (Polskie Górnictwo Naftowe i Gazownictwo) state-controlled natural gas company of Poland, has a long-term supply contract with Gazprom, Russia's gas monopoly, until 2022 (economist, 2014). The lack of alternative sources in the past meant that Poland paid more for Russian gas than its wealthier Western European counterparts (economist, 2014). At the same time, it should be noted that Poland do its best to reduce its reliance on Moscow, opposing Russia's energy projects and diversify its energy sources to the most possible extent (Asymmetric Operations Working Group, 2014).

In an attempt to cut its resilience on Russian natural, gas, Poland decided to build a pipeline through Baltic Sea as an alternative to Nord Stream (rt. 2018). It is also worth noting that Poland is one of the most active opponents of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project between Russia and Germany (rt. 2018) - a second pipeline under the Baltic Sea that would deliver gas directly from St. Petersburg to Germany and to other European countries bypassing Poland and the route through Ukraine (Scislowska, 2018). If the pipeline becomes operational in 2019, it could be a geopolitical game-changer in the next years, which, consequently, will increase Moscow's leverage in Eastern Europe (Buras & Balcer, 2016). Moreover, Poland's main gas company, PGNiG, signed a long-term contract to receive deliveries of liquefied natural gas from the U.S. under the efforts to reduce its energy dependence on Russia (Scislowska, 2018). Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that despite current attempts made by Poland to weaken its dependence on Russian gas and oil to a possible extent, it is a very fact that nowadays, Poland is highly dependent on Russian energy, which increases its vulnerability to the Russian threats to a considerable level.

6. NATO's Defense, Deterrence and Reassurance Measures on Eastern flank

NATO officials point to Russia's changing military doctrine and military modernization as particular drivers of the Alliance's changed defence and deterrence posture in the territories (DAY, 2018). In 2014, after a few months after its intervention in Ukraine, Russia published its new military doctrine which marked a fundamental change of direction in Russian foreign policy. Specifically, if Russia's 2010 military doctrine prioritized cooperation with NATO, four years later, the new doctrine considered the Alliance as a *de facto* competitor because of the fact that the latter's activities in Central and Eastern Europe directly threaten Russian national interests (DAY, 2018). Therefore, Moscow identified its aim to increase Russian efforts to protect Russian interests in its immediate neighbourhood starting from the Arctic down through the Eastern Europe to the Black as well as Caspian Seas (DAY, 2018). In practice, Russian military modernization and rhetoric in recent years proved this shift in Russia's strategy (DAY, 2018).

In response to the recent developments discussed above, the US and NATO have introduced several initiatives in order to improve their deterrence and defense posture in the east as well as to reassure the Baltic states and Poland of the alliance's Article 5 commitment (carnegieendowment, 2017). NATO's Newport summit in 2014 was important for the process of strengthening NATO's eastern flank. During the summit, the allies agreed on maintenance of presence and activities in the air, on the ground, and the sea, in the eastern part of the Alliance on the basis of rotating forces, including, establishment of appropriate command and control structures, the construction of infrastructure, updating of defense plans, better intelligence cooperation within the Alliance, the deployment of equipment and more frequent exercises (Zieba, 2018). The leaders also adopted a Readiness Action Plan, described by the new Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, as the "most significant strengthening of our collective defence in decades" (Holland, 2016, p. 6) and decided to strengthen the military presence on NATO's eastern flank (Zieba, 2018). Key elements of the Plan are the following: significant increase in size of the Response Force to 40,000 troops, a new very high readiness force to around 5,000 troops, four multinational battalions deployed to the Baltic and Eastern European states (Newport Summit 2014) and increase the number of joint exercises and pre-positioning of equipment and supplies with the ultimate goal of strengthening the ability of the Alliance to respond to any potential crisis that might take place (Holland, 2016). It is also important to note that the Plan set a goal to address

specific threats connected with hybrid war which is conducted with different types of military, paramilitary and civilian means (Zieba, 2018). Also, considering the Russian attacks on cybernetic systems, defense against cyber-attacks has become part of NATO's main task under its collective defense (Zieba, 2018). They also agreed on increasing military expenditures to the level of 2% of GDP within a decade and establishing a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) that can be deployed very quickly and is comprised of several thousand soldiers with capabilities to respond immediately to threats (Zieba, 2018).

Moreover, it is of high significance that during the Warsaw summit, both the US and NATO recognized that Russia represents a serious and long-term challenge to the Alliance and definitely needs strong and firm response. Therefore, the Allies agreed on transforming the nature of the US and NATO's military involvement in the region from reassurance to deterrence (Gotkowska & Szymanski, 2017). Under the umbrella of its deterrence measures in Eastern European member states, NATO leaders agreed on extension of strengthening NATO's eastern flank. Specifically, NATO allies agreed at 2016 Warsaw Summit on deployment of four multinational battalions – so-called Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) – in the three Baltic states and Poland. NATO also agreed to expand the scope of its exercises in the region in order to deter Russian aggression and assure its eastern members (Kuhn, 2018). Under EFP, all four battalion-sized battlegroups comprised of 4,500 personnel, deployed in the region, are led by a framework nation – the United Kingdom in Estonia, Germany in Lithuania and Canada in Latvia, and the United States in Poland. In addition to these nations, twelve other NATO Allies participate in the EFP (Kuhn, 2018). While perhaps insufficient as standalone forces in the event of a full-scale Russian attack in the region, the EFP serves as a tripwire for a whole-of-alliance Article 5 response in case of an aggressor's potential coercive action against any Allied territory or population with the ultimate aim of bolstering the credibility of the Alliance's deterrence posture in the Eastern region - a strategically vulnerable part of the Alliance (DAY, 2018). In addition to reinforcing the territorial defense as part of the conventional response to the Russian aggression, during the Warsaw Summit, NATO allies also agreed to strengthen their cyber defences and recognized cyber as a domain of its operations (rasmussenglobal, 2014).

Additionally, under its deterrence posture, the United States has sent additional forces and military equipment under the U.S. national program which is known as the European Deterrence

Initiative (Kuhn, 2018) under which the U.S. deployed a range of forces, including an armored brigade combat team comprised of about 3,500 personnel that gradually rotates through NATO's eastern member states. Under this deployment, combat aviation brigade has also been sent with about 2,200 personnel and also a combat sustainment support battalion of about 750 personnel has been based in Poland (Kuhn, 2018). The United States recently announced a planned allocation of USD 6.5 billion to the EDI in 2019 which is 1.7 billion increase from last year and USD 3.1 billion more than it was allocated in 2017 (DAY, 2018). Apart from this, the US initiated European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) with the aim of strengthening US military presence in the Baltic region through reinforcing measures for the region decided at the Wales summit in 2014 (Gotkowska & Szymanski, 2017). The US decided to strengthen ERI that resulted in deployment of US armoured brigade combat team (ABCT) in the region in the beginning of 2017 the main components of which are located in Poland and its units are regularly exercised in the Baltic states (Gotkowska & Szymanski, 2017). In sum, the EDI/ERI has funded a significant increase in US presence in Eastern Europe which supports more exercises, equipment prepositioning, infrastructure and partner capacity building efforts (DAY, 2018). Last point to be emphasized is that the US is also trying to strengthen the allies' national capabilities – for instance, Poland has been granted with permission by the US to buy AGM-158 joint air to surface stand-off missiles (JASSM) for its fleet of F-16 multi-role fighter aircraft which can destroy its targets at a range of up to 370 km (Lorenz, 2014).

2018 NATO Summit in Brussels did not significantly change the deterrence posture of the Alliance and kept the main focus on the conventional element, but one of the shortcomings of this posture which have been addressed after the summit was to strengthen NATO's air and naval dimensions of the deterrence posture (Spruds & Andzans, 2018). In order to improve awareness of overall maritime situation at the Baltic and Black Seas, list of maritime warfighting capabilities to exercise were formulated – anti-submarine warfare, amphibious operations, and protections of sea lines of communications (Spruds & Andzans, 2018). As for the air domain, the Alliance approved a Joint Air Policing and Ballistic Missile Defence missions (Spruds & Andzans, 2018). Having highly responsive, time-critical and persistent capability, it incorporates all measures to deter and defend against any air as well as missile threat or reduce the effectiveness of the hostile air attack (nato.int, 2018). In sum, this decision is of vital significance, in particular, for the Baltic states that lack in mid- and long-range air defence capabilities (Spruds & Andzans, 2018). With

regard to the cyber-related issues, they were also discussed at the 2018 Summit, but few actionable outcomes emanated apart from increased rhetoric from member states. While reaching a consensus on cyber issues among member states is of high significance, it does little to make a fundamental effect (Mccord, 2018).

Implications of NATO's defense and deterrence posture on Eastern flank

It is a very fact that Russia continues pursuing aggressive foreign policy and provocative actions. Having taken into consideration the increased military activeness including Russian air force near the airspace of Baltic States and Poland, also Russian military deployments and exercises neighbouring these Eastern Allies as well as recent activeness of the Russian Navy in the Baltic, it has been clarified that the level of militarization of relations in Europe has grown (Zieba, 2018). In fact, Russia has the advantage of efficient internal channels of communication and a restructured brigade-focused army which permits rapid deployment. Also, progress in modernization provide Russian forces with near-peer capabilities in firepower and mobility in air defense systems (DAY, 2018).

Eastern Europe represents the testing ground for President Putin's goal to create a new world order. Mid-level conflicts being at the center of Moscow's destabilization strategy are seen in Warsaw not just as aggressions on their own, but also the test balloons to assess the cohesion of NATO (Buras & Balcer, 2016). What is alarming for Poland is that Russia's military forces are ten times greater than the capabilities of NATO member states in Eastern region and this is a matter of notice to be taken as seriously as possible. In fact, NATO's strategic posture in the region is weak, as Russia's anti-access/area-denial capabilities could easily prevent NATO from quick deployment of its troops in a conflicting situation (Buras & Balcer, 2016). Therefore, if Russia is not sufficiently deterred, mid-level conventional conflict could very easily spread throughout NATO member states in the region. That is why Warsaw asks for real and not symbolic strengthening of defence capabilities in Eastern Europe in the nearest future (Buras & Balcer, 2016).

Despite the fact that NATO's defense and deterrence posture on its eastern flank, formulated during the above-mentioned summits, showed some level of solidarity, like for Poland, for Baltic states as well, existing posture cannot seriously be considered as provocative enough because of its insufficient military weight (Spruds & Andzans, 2018). While talking about the

possibility of Russian invasion and defending the Baltics, Estonia's Defense Minister, Juri Luik announced: "What I would say is that any Russian threat depends on what we do. Because if we are firm, if we are clear, if we are strong, then the likelihood of Russian threat goes down immediately. If we are weak, if we show hesitation, then the Russia threat goes up. So, it's very much dependent. We cannot change what Russia does. But we can be sure that what we do really corresponds to the needs of the Western alliance and to the security of the Western allies. So I think that some of the steps which have already been undertaken, like positioning NATO troops on the Baltic territory, NATO air policing – these are all extremely important. But there is a lot of stuff which still needs to be done" (Mehta, 2018, p. 7).

After taking Russia's superiority into consideration, it becomes clear that current configuration of conventional forces in the NATO's eastern territories remains insufficient (DAY, 2018). All the above-mentioned actions carried out as part of the Alliance's reaction to Russia's aggression against Ukraine constituted a significant reinforcement of its NATO's eastern flank but what is important to point out, not all its European members were equally enthusiastic in this matter (Zieba, 2018). While elaborating defense and deterrence posture on Eastern flank, the Allies exposed divergent views to what extent the security of Eastern Allies needs to be strengthened against Russia, which is not perceived as a threat by some Allies at all. Moreover, NATO member states demonstrated that they have different views regarding the formation of relations with Russia which also impacted on NATO efforts in this regard.

7. Lack of Unity and Coherence within NATO in Defense and Deterrence Policy on its Eastern Flank

The Ukraine crisis clearly disturbed solidarity and unity among NATO member states which is reflected in differences in attitudes and interests of NATO allies. Specifically, not all NATO countries perceive the same level of threat from Russia as Poland and the Baltic states that have common borders with Russia and, accordingly, are more concerned comparing the other allies (Bagbaslioglu, 2016). And not all NATO's European countries have the same interests and relations with Russia, which, ultimately, results in lack of unity and coherence within the Alliance when it comes to strengthening defense and deterrence on NATO's Eastern flank (Bagbaslioglu, 2016). In Eastern Europe, people are particularly afraid of threat coming from Russia and highlight the importance of more robust military response from NATO while Western European states, such as Germany, France and Italy express deep concerns about the terrorism threat and migration crisis coming from instability in Middle East and North Africa and at the same time, support more dialogue with Russia rather than strengthened deterrence against it (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2017). Consequently, while the eastern members of NATO strive for the permanent deployment of NATO units on their territories, the other members prioritize their close relations and interests with Russia, therefore, do not want to go beyond the stationing of a military presence consisting of forward deployed NATO forces on a rotational basis (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2017).

7.1 Threat Perceptions within NATO – Eastern Flank vs. Southern Flank

To start with defining the term “threat perception”, it is a “process of appraisal” and judgement of security status or condition (Li, 2009). As J. David Sanger defines, threat perception is a “function of both estimated capability and estimated intent” (Perez, 2016, p. 22). According to Raymond Cohen, the perception of threat should be understood as anticipation on the part of an observer-the decision maker- of impending military, strategic or economic harm to the state (Li, 2009). Additionally, as Klaus Knorr says, threats may be either “actual”, emerged from more or less definite intent or signal, or “potential”, inferred from some state or the mere capability of an opponent (Li, 2009).

Allies have a fragile consensus on Russia's intentions. Member states have different views to what extent Russia is a threat to its neighbours, how much defense is enough for NATO's

Eastern flank and whether or not too much defence and deterrence result in provoking Russia and spooking into aggression (Dempsey, 2017).

A stronger NATO presence, both in a military as well as in a cyber domains, on the Eastern Flank is an absolute must and should incorporate as many Allies as possible in order to show Moscow the strengthened transatlantic unity (Kupiecki & Michta, 2014). But, it should be admitted that defense and deterrence on eastern flank is not the main concern for all European countries while focusing on non-eastern flank contingencies (Simon, 2014). While countries closer to Russia tend to be more concerned about a threat and are in favour of more assertive policy, countries farther away from Russia tend to play down the risk of future aggression and at the same time, express deep concerns about the threats coming from the Middle East and North Africa (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017).

In fact, the credibility of NATO's deterrence strategy has already been challenged by some statements made by the representatives of NATO member states. For instance, prior to the Warsaw Summit, Germany's foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier criticized large-scale military exercises on NATO's eastern flank based on the collective defence scenario (Gotkowska, 2016). Also, during the Warsaw Summit, Francois Hollande, President of France stated that France considered Russia as a partner, not as a threat, which is contradictory to the rhetoric of the Warsaw Summit Communique (Gotkowska, 2016). What matters is that NATO member states, such as Germany, France and Italy, are not sure that Russia would attack Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania as they argue that NATO's Article 5 would definitely discourage Moscow from doing so (Dempsey, 2017). Therefore, despite the fact that Eastern Allies demanded permanent NATO presence on their territory, some NATO member states, basically, the Western European countries opposed such move from the Alliance and agreed on force deployment on a rotational basis (Dempsey, 2017). It is noteworthy that one of the main reasons of the above-mentioned division within NATO is different perceptions of Russian threat among the Allies. Specifically, the countries whose populations do not perceive Russia as a threat to its neighbours, basically, tend to be the South European Countries, such as Italy, that have other strategic concerns rather than Russia, or countries with pacifist views on Russia, such as Germany (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). Even more, these countries are also least likely to blame Russia for the violence in eastern Ukraine – only 29% in Italy and Germany consider Russia as being “most to blame” (Pezard,

Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). Moreover, just 38% in Germany and 44% in Italy consider Russia to be a major military threat to its neighbouring countries (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). And even if a NATO ally is attacked by Russia, in Germany the willingness to use a military force is limited (38% supported) (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). Having considered such perceptions of the Russian threat, it is not surprising that a significant portion of the population in Germany sees the use of military force to achieve political objectives and deployment of increased armed forces by NATO to deal with a military threat in the Eastern Europe as inappropriate and not necessary (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017).

There is no dispute within the Alliance that NATO has to deal with two major threats at the same time. But as we have seen, when it comes to allocating money and resources needed for operations or commands, the needs of the South and the East often compete. If for the US and the UK, the threats come from both the East and the South on an equal level and Eastern allies consider Russia as a major threat, Southern countries, such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, because of their geographical location are willing the Alliance to play a more active role in North Africa and in the Middle East, as terrorism and migration, rather than Russia, increase vulnerability of them (Dempsey, 2017).

The Libya, Syria and Iraq wars have created an ungoverned and conventional space for the unprecedented rise in extremist groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) which led to a significant rise in terrorism threat in the West (Holmboe, 2017). Naturally, the terrorist threat emanating from the Middle East, North Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan does not stop at the Mediterranean Sea as Paris, Brussels, Berlin and Barcelona among other European capitals faced with terrorist attacks for several times so far (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2017). Considering the threats coming from the South, French officials interviewed named ISIL and counterterrorism in general, as well as Iran, Libya, Mali and the migrant crisis as higher strategic priorities than Russia (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017).

The ability of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa to stay in power, limited reforms and encircling of the regions by conflicts, instability, slow economic growth, social stagnation and political radicalization resulted in more than a million asylum seekers crossing into Europe from the region either affected by war or unable to be provided with livelihood in the countries of Middle East and North Africa (Holmboe, 2017). For instance, Italy, located on

Southern flank best knows how destabilized and war-torn countries, such as Syria, generate migration and refugee flows to Europe which creates refugee crisis in Europe (rasmussenglobal, 2014). That's why the Southern flank of NATO considers that NATO has already done its best to strengthen the defense on the Eastern flank and now it is time to focus more on the South (Dempsey, 2017) and increase military contributions in order to strengthen security and stability in the above-mentioned regions under its counterterrorism efforts (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2017).

The diverging opinions recently expressed by two former SACEURs represent a good example of debates on NATO's new focus on territorial defense and the Eastern flank rather than on out-of-area operations and the Southern flank. In the article published in the journal "Foreign Affairs" written by General Philip Breedlove, it is emphasized that the major threat to the Euro-Atlantic region comes from the Russian aggressiveness. According to him, international terrorism is definitely a security issue but should not be a strategic priority for NATO (Borsani, 2016). In contradiction with Breedlove, Admiral James Stavridis focused on impelling priorities on the Southern flank and underlined that NATO should be involved at the forefront in those operations that aim fighting against international terrorism in the greater Middle East (Borsani, 2016).

Additionally, diverging threat perceptions between NATO's Eastern and Southern flanks are also connected to different level of efforts of the Allies to increase defense spending and achieve an equal 'burden sharing' among Allies. Notably, "burden sharing" within the Alliance has become a hot topic especially since 2014. Even though the overall defense spending increased significantly so far, spending enough and making the right military contributions have been the subjects that are actively debated within the Alliance (Cook & Burns, 2018). As a consequence of the Ukraine Crisis and NATO's decisions made in 2014-2016 to strengthen its eastern flank, military expenditures in Europe amounted to 334 billion USD in 2016, 20% of world military expenditures. In 2016, this growth in Western Europe amounted to 2.6% while in Eastern Europe – to 3.5% (Zieba, 2018). The largest military expenditures in 2015 occurred in countries bordering Russia and Ukraine – Poland (22%), Lithuania (33%), Latvia (14%), Estonia (6.6%), Slovakia (17%) and Romania (11%). This trend continued in 2016 as well and the largest percent of military expenditures had Latvia (44%) and Lithuania (35%) (Zieba, 2018). Disagreement on "burden sharing" has also been demonstrated between President Donald Trump and European

representatives while he complained that the U.S. carries too much of the organizations' mutual defense burden (Nelson, 2017). "We are still waiting for 20 member-states to meet their NATO commitments and spend at least 2 percent on defense. And 2 percent is a very low number" (Nelson, 2017, p. 8), Trump said during the NATO Summit in Brussels. In brief, as it has been revealed, geopolitics matter. Military expenditures have been increased by those NATO Allies that border Russia, as their perceptions of Russian threat have been strengthened in the wake of Ukraine Crisis. Simultaneously, the distance separated leading countries of Western Europe from the conflict in Ukraine which impacted on their decision not to change military expenditures substantially so far (Zieba, 2018).

Final point to note when analyzing NATO's defense spending is that NATO's European Allies should take into consideration that the credibility of the security guarantees could have been affected by the US disappointment with the European Allies because of their reluctance to spend at least 2% of their GDP on defence as approved by NATO (Lorenz, 2014). It was Barack Obama, the former U.S. president who had no reservations about the U.S. commitment to NATO's European allies and pushed hard for more robust NATO presence on Eastern flank (Dempsey, 2017). Donald Trump's view on defense and deterrence issue is quite different as he claims that it is time for the European allies to pay their dues for maintaining the United States' security guarantee (Dempsey, 2017). During the NATO Summit in Brussels, President Donald Trump accused Germany of spending "a little bit over 1%" of its economic output on defence compared to the 4.2% spent by the US "in actual numbers" and criticized Europe for not meeting their commitment whereas the US pays too much for Europe's protection (bbc, 2018). With the aim of confirming Trump's comments, White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said: "President Trump wants to see our allies share more of the burden and at a very minimum meet their already stated obligations" (bbc, 2018, p. 8). It is a very fact that out of NATO's 29 members, just five – the US, the UK, Greece, Estonia and Latvia - meet the goal of spending at least 2% of their annual output on defence while Poland and France are close to the mark (bbc, 2018).

To conclude, it is clear that different threat perceptions among NATO allies caused that Eastern Allies demand more robust NATO's defense and deterrence on their territory while the Allies from the Southern flank claim that Russia does not represent the threat at all and insist on directing the resources of the Alliance against the threats coming from instability in the Middle

East and North Africa. Also, the Eastern Allies, which are more vulnerable to the Russian threat spend more on defense and strive for ‘burden sharing’, whereas the others maintain passivity in this regard, which ultimately resulted in disappointment of the United States - NATO’s major Ally and security guarantor for Europe.

7.2 Allies’ different interests in relations with Russia

In practice, dealing with the Alliance’s Eastern flank is about NATO’s realizing that Russia’s attitude toward it is not going to soften as it continues using conventional as well as unconventional tools to weaken the countries of Eastern Europe (Dempsey, 2017). What matters is that different countries’ view about Moscow is considerably different (Dempsey, 2017). One of the impeding factors for NATO to maintain unity on how to deter threats coming from Russia is divergent interests of Allies in relations with Russia. Some of the Allies, basically, big Western European states, claim that more robust defense and deterrence on NATO’s eastern flank, be it permanent NATO presence or the other measures, will provoke Russia, which will ultimately threaten their bilateral interests with Moscow (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017).

Specifically, as many Alliance members become seriously concerned because of Russia’s incursions and provocative actions into neighbouring territories and demand harsher tone with Moscow as well as more robust presence on NATO’s eastern flank, powerful voices, for instance, in Berlin, push in the opposite direction (Kartnitschnig, 2017). Germany has been particularly supportive of maintaining a dialogue with Russia and claims that NATO should leave open the possibility of reestablishing a positive, cooperative relationship with Moscow in the nearest future. While Western sanctions and efforts to bolster NATO presence in the Baltics and Poland get a considerable support across European allies, in Germany the measures are subject of permanent criticism at the highest level of government (Kartnitschnig, 2017). German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced that “What we shouldn’t do now is inflame the situation further with loud saber-rattling and warmongering” (Kartnitschnig, 2017, p. 4).

Germany is not the only country traditionally having strong relations with Moscow. For instance, Italy, France, Greece or Belgium do not see Moscow through the lenses of adversary. At the informal meeting of Foreign Ministers, organized by the Greek Presidency of the EU, preference for keeping an open dialogue with Moscow was clearly demonstrated (Balfour, 2014). In France, there is deeply rooted idea that dialogue with Russia is of vital significance in order to

solve the Ukraine issue as isolated Russia would be more dangerous for Europe (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017). France, along with Germany and southern members of the Alliance, argues that the scope of dialogue with Russia should be broadened and the Alliance should even consider to expand the forms of cooperation with Russia (Dyner, Kacprzuk, Lorenz & Terlikowski, 2018). Since 2014, none of the current major political forces in France appeared to be in favour of firm policy towards Russia demanding the latter to change its aggressive foreign policy. It was demonstrated at NATO's Summit in 2016, when President Hollande stated that Russia was neither 'an adversary' nor 'a threat', therefore, France did not intend to support heavier deterrent measures to the East (Rynning, 2017). The attempt of Western European states to maintain dialogue with Russia reflects a general concern for them that stronger and more extended military response to Russia might be considered as provocative and can lead to an escalation of the conflict from Moscow (Pezard, Radin, Szauna & Larrabee, 2017).

One of the arguments for Western European states' contradiction to strengthening NATO presence on its Eastern flank was the original spirit of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act according to which, NATO will carry out its collective defense as well as other missions "by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" in former Warsaw Pact countries (Dempsey, 2017, p. 6). As a consequence of such attitudes, the NATO stance on the Eastern flank has been shaped by the reluctance of NATO's old Western Allies to strengthen the territorial defence of the new Eastern Allies by deploying permanent forces on their territory (Lorenz, 2014), which, ultimately, has been characterized as limited in size and capability (Dempsey, 2017). It is often forgotten that the Act also obliges Russia to "exercise similar restraint in its conventional force deployments in Europe" (Deni, 2017, p. 3). Despite the facts that geostrategic environment, in which the Founding Act was agreed upon, has radically changed and Russia many times violated the Act so far, NATO Allies remain faithful and do not express the willing to review the Act (Dempsey, 2017). Germany is one of the good examples of big Western European countries remaining faithful to the spirit of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act (Dempsey, 2017), which is trying to satisfy the legitimate security concerns of the Alliance's most vulnerable members by supporting continuous rotational battalion-sized deployments on Baltic states and Poland while maintaining its commitment to the Act (Deni, 2017). In sum, the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding

Act is one of the restraining factors for NATO to be more robust in its defense and deterrence posture on Eastern flank.

The attitudes of Western European citizens about NATO's use of its military force to defend Allies from Russian threat is also critical - according to a wide-ranging opinion poll conducted by Pew Global Attitudes Project, they are extremely wary of it (Birnbaum, 2015). It is noteworthy that fewer than half of surveyed citizens in Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Spain supported using military force to defend NATO allies only in case Russia started a serious military conflict with one of them (Birnbaum, 2015). Notably, out of the eight NATO nations surveyed, the United States turned out to be the most open (56% were in favour) to backing its allies with military force if the one was attacked while in Germany, which has taken the lead European role in negotiations with Russia, was the most skeptical and cautious of a military response only with 38% support (Birnbaum, 2015).

While discussing big Western European Allies' special interests with Russia, the issue of energy dependency on Russia is important to note. Russia is a key energy supplier for NATO countries. European countries are depended on Russian gas supplies for 30% which leaves them especially vulnerable in this area (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2017). Germany is one of the biggest consumers of Russian energy. In 2015, the most recent year for which data is available, 35% of its imports of natural gas came from Russia (Kottasova, 2018). Moreover, Germany has taken strategic steps in the energy sector by making the decision to build the Nord Stream 2 pipeline connecting Russia with Germany through the Baltic Sea bypassing Ukraine, which, on the one hand, increased German dependency on Russian gas and on the other hand, provided Moscow with new chances of exerting pressure on its neighbours (Lorenz, 2014). The political rational for Berlin behind such decisions is that increased interdependence between Russia and Germany will help lessen the Russian threat (Kartnitschnig, 2017). Such thinking which is quite widespread in Berlin's foreign policy establishment, is the legacy of *Ostpolitik*, the policy of *détente* that characterized West Germany's approach towards the Soviet Union in the beginning of 1970s (Gurzu, 2018). It is noteworthy that at NATO's Summit in Brussels in July 2018, the U.S. President, Donald Trump expressed its concern about Germany's captivity to Russia as it's getting so much of its energy from Moscow and told Angela Merkel: "We have to talk about the billions and billions of dollars that's being paid to the country we're supposed to be protecting

you against” (Davis, 2018, p. 3). The project was also criticized by NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, who assessed it as a geopolitical error (rasmussenglobal, 2014).

France is another example of the Western European Ally of NATO having close trade relations with Moscow. In 2017, trade between France and Russia increased by 26%, including the French import of Russian energy (diplomatie). Moreover, along with Germany, France is one of the leading foreign direct investors in Russia which demonstrates that the level of bilateral partnership between France and Russia is also considerably high (diplomatie). Considering the above-mentioned, it is not surprising that official representatives of France and Germany name Russia as their partner, not an adversary and try to avoid confrontations with Moscow. When delivering a speech to the Centre for American Studies in Rome about the challenges to the transatlantic unity in NATO’s dealings with Russia, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg expressed concerns about how easily European allies could seek to put their narrow commercial interests with Russia before a much broader point: that unprovoked aggression is going to come with high costs (rasmussenglobal, 2014). Reluctance of Western allies to review the NATO-Russia Founding Act and to be more assertive with Russia demonstrates how they prioritize cooperation rather than confrontation with Russia.

It can be concluded that for Western European states, more robust deterrence on NATO’s eastern flank and harsher tone with Russia is perceived as provocative step, which, ultimately, will threaten their close bilateral interests with Russia. Therefore, they try to maintain status quo and support more dialogue with Moscow under NATO’s so called dual-track approach towards Russia.

8. Conclusion

It has been revealed in the thesis that in the wake of Ukraine Crisis, Russian threat perceptions have been particularly strengthened among NATO Allies on its Eastern Flank - the Baltic states and Poland. Specifically, Russia considerably increased its military activities in the Baltic Sea region; Putin permanently insists on protecting Russian “compatriots” and minorities abroad, including in the Baltic States with a large amount of Russian minorities living there; additionally, Baltic States are highly depended on Russian energy which increases their vulnerability. As for Poland, in spite of not having a considerable amount of Russian minorities on which Russia can rely as a proxy force, existing tensions over Poland’s missile defense systems have the potential to provoke Russian military action in order to destabilize Poland or neutralize its missile defense assets; additionally, the recent deployment of new types of air missile defence, coastal defence and ballistic missile systems in the Kaliningrad Oblast – a Russian Baltic Sea Exclave bordering Poland and Baltic states – has significantly strengthened the capabilities of Russian troops which, consequently, enhanced perception of existing Russian threat both in Poland and Baltic region; lastly, similar to the Baltic states, Poland is also depended on Russian energy which increases its vulnerability towards Russia. These are the reasons why the fear of Russian attack has been strengthened among Baltic States and Poland, which made them prompt calls for NATO to increase its defensive and deterrent presence in Eastern Europe in order their security to be enhanced to a considerable level.

As a response to these threats, NATO, to some extent, increased its presence on Eastern flank but the research has shown that NATO member states differently view where the threats come from, how much support is needed for NATO's eastern flank and to what degree NATO should support harsher tone towards Russia. Firstly, different threat perceptions within NATO is one of the restraining factors for the Alliance’s coherence. While the Eastern Allies of NATO express deep concerns about the threat Russia poses to the Eastern flank, the Western and Southern Allies do not perceive Russia as a threat, rather, call for more engagement from NATO to the threats coming from terrorism and generally unstable situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Additionally, the research has shown that some NATO Allies’ specific interests with Russia restrained NATO’s coherence when elaborating defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank. Despite the fact that NATO’s eastern allies have persistently called for an increased permanent military presence on NATO’s eastern periphery, Germany and other, more cautious

allies, such as France, having close relations with Russia, argued in favour of the rotational multinational battalions in Poland and Baltic states with the aim of showing the modest character of the NATO presence in eastern Europe and securing adherence to the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, according to which, the Alliance can ensure its defence needs through reinforcement rather than permanent stationing on the territory of its new members (Larrabee, 2015). In spite of admitting Russia's violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the Alliance remains faithful to the commitments established under the Act as part of its confidence-building measure towards Russia and attempts to assure Moscow of NATO's defensive but not offensive intentions (Overbo, 2017). Consequently, divisions and lack of political will, demonstrated in principal opposition of some allies to more robust NATO presence on its eastern flank and their contradiction to pursuing more assertive tone with Russia resulted in incoherent defense and deterrence policy pursued by NATO on its Eastern border.

As for the theoretical approach, one of the mainstream IR theories, Neorealism turned out to be relevant to the research findings. Stephen Walt suggests that threat perceptions matter when Allies make decisions. As it has been demonstrated, different threat perceptions among NATO Allies have an impact on the Alliance's cohesion to what extent defense and deterrence of NATO's Eastern flank need to be strengthened since 2014 Ukraine Crisis. In accordance with Walt's assumptions, geographical proximity and offensive military capabilities impacted on NATO Allies while defining where the threats come from and how much support is needed to deter these threats. Additionally, Kenneth Waltz's assumptions that international institutions primarily serve national, rather than international interests and whether institutions have strong or weak effects depends on what states intend, have been also reflected in the research. Ukraine Crisis turned out to be a crucial event as it exposed divisions of interests and views of NATO Allies regarding the relations with Russia which have influenced NATO's defense and deterrence posture on its Eastern flank.

As it is well known, international institutions are crucial actors in International Relations. In order these institutions to fulfil their functions effectively, cohesion among member states is of decisive significance. The thesis represents an attempt to contribute to enriching IR literature devoted to revealing main reasons which restrain international institutions to elaborate and pursue coherent policy. North Atlantic Treaty Organization is one of the major players in international politics. In the wake of Ukraine Crisis, which strengthened fears of Russia among Eastern Allies,

NATO activated its defense and deterrence efforts on its Eastern flank but as it has been found out, there are some reasons that constrain NATO from being coherent while dealing with Russia. The thesis aims to contribute to existing literature devoted to exposing challenges for Alliance cohesion, by showing that Allies' different threat perceptions and their divergent national interests do impact on NATO's coherence while elaborating its defense and deterrence policy on its Eastern border.

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ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის
სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

ნანა სადუნიშვილი

ნატოს თავდაცვის და შეკავების პოლიტიკა აღმოსავლეთ
ფლანკზე უკრაინის კრიზისის შემდეგ

ევრაზიის და კავკასიის კვლევები

სამაგისტრო ნაშრომი შესრულებულია სოციალურ მეცნიერებებში
მაგისტრის აკადემიური ხარისხის მოსაპოვებლად

ხელმძღვანელი: ასოცირებული პროფესორი, ფიქრია ასანიშვილი

თბილისი 2019

ანოტაცია

რუსეთის მიერ ყირიმის ანექსია 2014 წელს და უკანონო ინტერვენცია აღმოსავლეთ უკრაინაში მნიშვნელოვან გამოწვევას წარმოადგენს ევროპის უსაფრთხოებისთვის. უკრაინის მიმართ გამოვლენილმა რუსულმა აგრესიამ განსაკუთრებული შიში და შეშფოთება გამოიწვია ნატოს აღმოსავლეთ ფლანკზე, კონკრეტულად, ბალტიისპირეთის ქვეყნებსა და პოლონეთში, ვლადიმერ პუტინის შემდგომ მიზნებთან დაკავშირებით, რასაც წინ უძღოდა შემდეგი ფაქტორები: რუსეთთან გეოგრაფიული სიახლოვე, ისტორიულად მწვავე ურთიერთობები, შედარებით სუსტი სამხედრო შესაძლებლობები, რუსეთზე ენერგოდამოკიდებულება და ეთნიკურად რუსი მოსახლეობის საკმაოდ დიდი რაოდენობა. ტრადიციულმა, ისევე როგორც არატრადიციულმა რუსულმა საფრთხეებმა ბალტიისპირეთის ქვეყნებს და პოლონეთს უბიძგა, ნატოსთვის ეთხოვათ თავდაცვის გაძლიერება თავიანთ ტერიტორიაზე. აღმოსავლელ მოკავშირეებში რუსული საფრთხის აღქმების გათვალისწინებით, ნატომ, გარკვეულ დონეზე, გააძლიერა თავდაცვის და შეკავების პოლიტიკა აღნიშნული ქვეყნების ტერიტორიაზე. თუმცა, მოკავშირეებმა ამ დრომდე ვერ შეძლეს ერთიანი მიდგომის ჩამოყალიბება იმასთან დაკავშირებით, თუ რამდენად მოწყვლადნი არიან ნატოს აღმოსავლეთით მდებარე მოკავშირეები რუსული საფრთხის მიმართ, რა დონეზე უნდა გააძლიეროს ნატომ თავდაცვა და შეკავება აღმოსავლეთ ფლანკზე და რა სახის ურთიერთობა უნდა აწარმოოს რუსეთთან. უკრაინის კრიზისი ე.წ. „ლავკუსის ტესტი“ აღმოჩნდა ტრანსატლანტიკური ურთიერთობებისთვის იმის გათვალისწინებით, რომ კრიზისმა მოკავშირეებს შორის გარკვეული უთანხმოებები და აზრთა სხვადასხვაობა გამოავლინა, რამაც, საბოლოოდ, ხელი შეუშალა ერთიანი თავდაცვის და შეკავების პოლიტიკის შემუშავებას ნატოს აღმოსავლეთ ფლანკზე.

შესაბამისად, სამაგისტრო ნაშრომის მიზანია, გამოიკვლიოს ის მიზეზები, რამაც ხელი შეუშალა ნატოს მიერ ერთიანი თავდაცვის და შეკავების პოლიტიკის გატარებას ალიანსის აღმოსავლეთ ფლანკზე, უკრაინის კრიზისის შემდეგ. კვლევის შემდეგად გამოვლინდა, რომ მოკავშირეების განსხვავებულმა საფრთხის აღქმებმა და განსხვავებულმა ხედვამ რუსეთთან პოლიტიკის წარმოებასთან დაკავშირებით ხელი შეუშალა ნატოს მიერ აღმოსავლეთით მდებარე მოკავშირეების ტერიტორიაზე ერთიანი თავდაცვის და შეკავების პოლიტიკის შემუშავებას.

საერთაშორისო ინსტიტუტები მნიშვნელოვან აქტორებს წარმოადგენენ საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობებში. იმისათვის, რომ ინსტიტუტებმა საკუთარი ფუნქციები ეფექტურად შეასრულონ, მნიშვნელოვანია წევრ ქვეყნებს შორის ერთიანობა. ჩრდილოატლანტიკური ხელშეკრულების ორგანიზაცია ერთ-ერთი მთავარი მოთამაშეა საერთაშორისო პოლიტიკაში. იმის მტკიცებით, რომ მოკავშირეების მიერ საფრთხის განსხვავებულად აღქმა და განსხვავებული ეროვნული ინტერესები

გავლენას ახდენს ნატოს ერთიანობაზე თავდაცვის და შეკავების პოლიტიკის შემუშავებისას აღმოსავლეთ საზღვარზე, ნაშრომი მიზნად ისახავს, გაამდიდროს უკვე არსებული ლიტერატურა, რომელიც აქამდე მიემდვნა ალიანსის ერთიანობის წინაშე არსებული გამოწვევების გამოვლენას.

ნაშრომი ეყრდნობა თვისებრივი კვლევის მეთოდებს, კონკრეტულად, “case study“-ს, პროცესის მიყოლას და თვისებრივი კონტენტ ანალიზის მეთოდებს. თეორიულ მიდგომად კი გამოყენებულია ნეორეალისტი ავტორების, სტივენტ უოლტის და ქენეთ უოლცის დაშვებები.