



THE MAIN RISKS AND THREATS TO NATO'S EASTERN FLANK

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Located within the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus, the North Atlantic Alliance's (NATO) Eastern border faces a number of threats, which exceed in diversity and breadth the existing challenges at other border territories of the Alliance. In addition to the historical, permanent threats generated by the geographical and geopolitical position of the Eastern flank states, there are also new threats, that occurred in a pandemic context, especially in the context of the current technological era. This article aims to identify and analyse the main risks and threats facing NATO's Eastern flank states and to argue the need for complex, multi-purpose support for the materialisation, consolidation and securitisation of the East-European North-South Corridor.

Keywords: Ponto-Baltic Isthmus; technological era; NATO; East-European North-South Corridor; Russian Federation;



INTRODUCTION

Named as such at the beginning of the 20th century by Polish historian Oskar Halecki (1891-1973), the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus was considered by some geographers as the true frontier of Europe. This strip of land is stretched between the Southern shore of the Baltic Sea and the Northern shore of the Black Sea and the Moravian Gate to the West and the Caucasus Mountains to the East (see map in *figure 1*). From a geopolitical point of view, the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus is the boundary between the power that has controlled the Eurasian pivot zone for centuries and the dominant powers of Atlantic Europe. Its geopolitical status as a “buffer” between two major global zones has sealed its destiny, the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus and its two semi-closed seas becoming the subject of domination concerns of the main active geostrategic players in its immediate vicinity.

Moreover, the predominantly plain landscape of the Isthmus also is the Western frontier of the pivot power, today called the Russian Federation. It is its most vulnerable border, because, unlike its other borderlands, which benefit from the natural protection provided by ice, dense forests or the Central Asian plateaus, in the West, the plains and the gauge of over 800 miles of the Isthmus require a huge effort for defence on the part of Russia.

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THE PONTO-BALTIC ISTHMUS – A GEOPOLITICAL COMPRESSION ZONE AND PIVOT BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Like any “buffer zone”, the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus becomes a pivot and implicitly acquires a huge geostrategic value, both for the pivot power and for the Atlantic powers. Because this territory can be transformed into either a barrier, blocking the human, military, commercial flows between the two great global spaces, or into an open gate to either of them. Therefore, the control of the Ponto-Baltic pivot becomes a strategic imperative of utmost importance, both for the Eurasian pivot power, whose internal security ring has its “gemstone”



within the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus, and for the US, the dominant power of the Atlantic zone, which is interested in preserving its presence in Eurasia in strategic areas of great importance. Geoeconomically speaking, the Isthmus represents a hub and a nexus of the transport corridors that unites Europe with Asia on the West-East axis and the Arctic Zone with the Levant and the Mediterranean on the North-South axis.

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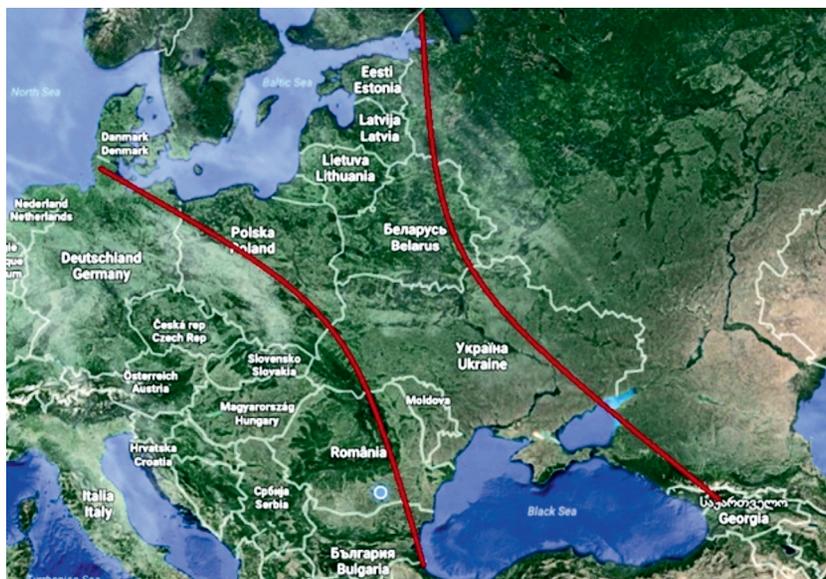


Figure 1: Ponto-Baltic Isthmus¹

From the same geopolitical point of view, the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus is an area of compression and convergence, subjected to geopolitical pressure from the two neighbouring massive force fields. This area might become a shatter belt – a common geopolitical status with the Middle East or Transcaucasia, other inter-civilisational “buffer zones” known for active geopolitical processes that marked their development during the last century and ended up triggering wars and frozen conflicts, territorial fragmentation, state failure, crime, terrorism, poverty and underdevelopment.

Therefore, by the nature of its geographical, geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic features, the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus

¹ https://media.hotnews.ro/media_server1/image-2016-10-24-21370829-0-istmul-ponto-baltic.jpg, retrieved on 10 august 2021.

is one of the most disputed geopolitical areas in Eurasia and predisposes the states in the region to substantive, structural threats, springing from the essence of the paradigm of global domination.

From a political point of view, the Isthmus is divided between 10 sovereign states, of which:

- six are NATO (and European Union) members and form the Eastern flank of the Alliance, respectively: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria;
- one, Belarus, is in the sphere of influence of the pivot power;
- the other three, respectively Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, are in the “grey zone” between the two force fields, being subject to fragmentation and frozen conflicts orchestrated by the Russian Federation. All three unaffiliated states are riparian to the Black Sea, a matter that is turning the Pontic region into one of the most unstable areas in terms of security in Eurasia.

PERMANENT, STRUCTURAL RISKS AND THREATS

The geographical positioning of NATO's Eastern flank states within the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus entails *structural, permanent risks and threats*, generated by:

- *Russia's historical strategic imperative of domination of the region.* This imperative has been included, since the time of Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725), within the main objectives of Russia's Grand Strategy of transforming into the hegemon of Eurasia. Today, this imperative materialises through the hybrid actions of the Russian Federation in the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus region;
- the risk of transforming into a battlefield in the conditions of any change of the international *status quo* that could target the Eurasian security balance.

To which are added other risks and threats, so far structural, determined by:

- *European energy dependence on hydrocarbons from Russia;*
- *the risk of economic inability to keep up with the technological sprint in the conditions of modern war;*
- *the deficit of high-speed and/or economically efficient transport infrastructures, which should ensure the interoperability*



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The strategic imperative of domination of the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus region is currently expressed by the aggressive behaviour of the Russian Federation about the states of this area, located in its immediate vicinity. This behaviour includes a wide variety of actions, from the militarisation of the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions to the hybrid warfare waged by this state in the Pontic region.

of the armed forces of the states of the Eastern flank of the Alliance: railways, riverways, highways, express roads, airports/heliports;

- *the ageing of the population and the depopulation of the Eastern flank states.*

Hybrid actions of the Russian Federation in the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus region

The strategic imperative of domination of the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus region is currently expressed by the aggressive behaviour of the Russian Federation about the states of this area, located in its immediate vicinity. This behaviour includes a wide variety of actions, from the militarisation of the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions to the hybrid warfare waged by this state in the Pontic region.

In this regard, the *security risks* for the Alliance must be mentioned in the context of amplifying the hybrid aggression of the pivot power, which could target strategic objectives of maximum importance, such as:

- *the mouths of the Danube* – a river that connects the Western and Central Europe with the Black Sea;
- *the Dniester estuary*, which ensures river access to Northern Europe and the de-enclaving of Transnistria – the Russian bridgehead near the mouth of the Danube, located on a strategic axis with Kaliningrad, the other Russian bridgehead in the Baltic area;
- *the Snake Island*, strategically positioned in the immediate vicinity of the mouths of the Danube.

Thus, the hybrid actions of the Russian Federation at the Eastern border of the Alliance cover multiple forms of manifestation of unlimited war, namely:

- the **military invasion** of Georgia in August 2008 (Dickinson, 2021) or direct military involvement in armed confrontations in Eastern Ukraine by bombing Ukrainian army positions, supplying weapons to rebels through “*humanitarian convoys*” and significant mobilisation of Russian ground and air forces on the border with Ukraine (*Conflict in Ukraine*);
- **insurgency-type operations followed by the delegation of power and intervention** during the annexation of Crimea,



in February-March 2014. The annexation process began by “organising the Russian-speaking population” to ignite civic unrest and insurgency. Then “the little green men”, soldiers without national insignia, came up and started the military conflict. And, finally, the operation ended with the annexation of the peninsula by Russia (Reuters, 2014);

- **diversionary operations (manipulation/negotiation) and “false flag” operations** meant to limit the reaction capacity of political/geopolitical competitors, as is happening in the current migration crisis on the Poland-Belarus border (Al Jazeera, 2021);
- **subversion operations** meant to alter/cripple the political response of the targeted decision-makers involved in counteracting Russia’s strategic plans, which can be punctually identified in:
 - *financial support to Europhobic and anti-Occidental political parties* gathered in the non-governmental organisation known as the *Eurasian Observatory for Democracy and Elections (Brussels-Paris-Moscow-Sochi-Kishinev)*;
 - *financial and logistical support given to mass media vectors, think-tanks and academics*, such as in the Republic of Moldova, where, in 2014, two of the TV stations with a pro-Western orientation, EURO TV and Alt TV, had been bought by the tycoon Ilan Shor, known for his connections with Kremlin²;
- **the geopolitical instrumentalisation of the energy dependence** of European states on Russian gas in January 2009 (BBC News, 2009), in June 2014 (BBC NEWS EUROPE, 2014), September 2014 (Macalister, 2014) and, most recently, in October 2021 (Vasilyeva, Hugler, 2021);
- **psychological warfare** meant to intimidate opponents, such as the “parade” of the defeated, organised by pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk on the national day of Ukraine, a parade reminding the endless ranks of German prisoners in World War II (Toea, 2014);

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² At <http://www.rbnpress.info/wp/o-alta-mana-a-moscovei-in-spatiu-informatiional-al-r-moldova-cine-sunt-pionii/>, *O altă mână a Moscovei în spațiul informațional al Republicii Moldova. Cine sunt pionii?* (4 June 2014), retrieved on 4 October 2021.



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- **blackmail, misinformation and media propaganda**, as it was stated in the report named *“Outlook 2020: Bulgaria and NATO in European Defence (Defence Ministry)*, published by the Bulgarian Ministry of Defence. This report states that *“Bulgaria is one of the areas with the highest concentration of risk and threats in the Euro-Atlantic community”* because it is subject to the Russian informational war and propaganda, carried out with the help of local media representatives, politicians and economic factors (Popescu, 2014);
- **espionage actions**, such as:
 - the case of Jobbik member of the European Parliament, Bela Kovacs, accused of spying for Russia (Jurnalul.ro, 2014);
 - the case of Herman Simm, former head of the security department of the Estonian Ministry of Defence, convicted of espionage in favour of Russia (*Baltic Monitor*, 2019);
 - the expulsion by NATO of eight Russian *“undeclared intelligence officers”* in response to crimes and acts of espionage that took place in the Czech Republic during 2014 (Heynes, 2021);

cyber espionage actions and acts of cyber warfare, such as:

- the cyber attack codenamed *Epic Turla*, from August 2014, generated by Russian speakers, which targeted classified documents in the field of transatlantic security as well as European energy policy (Palade, 2014);
- the cyber attack called *Dragonfly/Energetic Bear*, from 2011, which targeted information in the field of aviation and defence in the USA and Canada (*Dragonfly*, 2017);
- the cyberattack during 2013, called *Energetic Bear*, which targeted targets in the field of energy production and supply in the USA, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Turkey, Romania and other countries (Paganini, 2014);
- the cyber espionage campaign entitled *Sandworm*, which peaked in 2014 and targeted servers belonging to NATO, Western European government agencies, Polish companies involved in the energy business, telecommunications

companies in France, the government of Ukraine (Washington Post, 2014);

- the cyber attack of October 2014 on the White House, the headquarters of the US presidential administration (Nakashima, 2014);
- the crippling cyberattack NotPetya, from June 2017, which targeted government and business information systems in Ukraine. The attack spread to computer systems around the world and caused billions of dollars in damage (*Conflict in Ukraine, Ibid.*) etc;
- **organised crime networks** such as the *Russian Laundromat* – the money laundering network controlled by Igor Putin, the cousin of the current president of the Russian Federation (OCCRP, 2014). Between 2010 and 2014, the Laundromat “bleached” 20 billion USD. The criminal network included politicians, offshore companies, banks from Russia, Moldova, Latvia, 90 Russian companies connected to FSB officers³, undercover leaders and judges from the Republic of Moldova.

The risk of turning into a space for armed confrontation

As for the changes in the international *status quo* that could target the Eurasian security equation, they turn into threats to the security of the states of this region, the first targeted by Russian expansionism and possible power games of other geostrategic players active in space. the immediate vicinity of the Isthmus. The history of the last three centuries (from Tzar Peter the Great till present) has shown that the great hegemonic confrontations ended up turning the states of the Isthmus into theatres of operations and “*currencies*” during the peace negotiations between the great victorious powers or between the victors and the vanquished⁴. Therefore, for the Isthmus states, the exit from the grey area of the buffer space status and the affiliation in military structures of collective security such as the NATO Alliance represent vital



For the Isthmus states, the exit from the grey area of the buffer space status and the affiliation in military structures of collective security such as the NATO Alliance represent vital strategic imperatives. Therefore, a threat with structural connotations to the eastern flank states of the Alliance is any action aimed at dividing the Euro-Atlantic unity and minimising the security role of the Alliance and the strategic partnerships with the USA in the region.

³ FSB - ФСБ – Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации; transliterated Federal'naia Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatii – the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.

⁴ See the Russian-Turkish wars, the Russian-Swedish wars, the two world wars of the 20th century.



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Europeans' dependence on Russian hydrocarbons

In this context, it becomes clear that Europe's current energy dependence on hydrocarbons from Russia poses a major threat to Alliance states. A threat and a vulnerability alike. Threat because, in the conditions of a conflict with Russia, the European dependence on Russian gas turns into a military instrument in the hands of Moscow, with dramatic consequences on societal resilience. And a major vulnerability, known since the 2000s, when the European Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFR-1) released a report entitled *Power Audit on Bilateral EU-Russia Relations* (ECFR-2) stated that, although Europe is much stronger than Russia both economically (15 times) and demographically (3 times) and in terms of defence spending (7 times), Russia is the one that sets the agenda in bilateral relations and, in who does, goes beyond the rules of the game. In this sense, an important role was played by the dependence of Europeans on Russian hydrocarbons and Russia's energy policy in United Europe, a policy dependent on the ancient strategy of divide and rule. Aspects also supported by Valerij Panyshkin and Mikhail Zygar, authors of the reference volume *Gazprom: The New Russian Weapon* (Panyushkin, Zygar, 2008, p. 247). A vulnerability born of addiction, which can turn into a threat at any time, especially since decisions on Article 5 within the Alliance are taken unanimously and Russia's separatist game can affect the unity of the Alliance.

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The challenges generated by the contemporary technological sprint

As for the economic inability of the eastern flank states to keep up with the technological sprint in the conditions of modern warfare, this is an extremely serious threat in the years to come.

In this regard, he advocates the evolution of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in the autumn of 2020, which proved that:

- the fifth generation war is as current as possible;

- *“conventional armament is vulnerable and totally inefficient in front of the last generation. Consequently, the maintenance/acquisition of outdated weapons systems is counterproductive and budgetary;*
- *the need for an integrated air defence system (IADS) to counter modern air threats. That is, to fight the air cloud. Such a configuration, with different layers of modern capabilities (long, medium, short and very short range) and well connected in the network, would allow better management of the plethora of challenges, from traditional aircraft and radars to swarms of UAVs;*
- *the fundamental role of electronic warfare in modern warfare;*
- *certification of the radical transformation of the battlefield, in which unmanned systems and electronic “witchcraft” already operate;*
- *the fundamental role of the human factor, responsible for the strategic planning of defence, and of the capacity of a state to economically ensure its defence in a present dominated by an extremely rapid technological advance. Aspects that entail the need for a flexible military education system, based on creativity, analytical thinking and strategic thinking, adapted to the new realities of war;*
- *the overwhelming importance of alliances/coalitions, without which no state will be able to resist in the conditions of the current and future technological “sprint” (Popescu, 2021).*

In this context, the fundamental role of scientific research in the military and civilian fields has become obvious, which in the future will make the difference between survival and annihilation! But technological scientific research presupposes the existence of scientific research platforms and research funds provided by strong industrialised economies. Unfortunately, the economic restructuring, independent of NATO, of the states of the eastern flank of the Alliance brought with it the deindustrialization of these states, lower economic performances and an increased risk of technological backwardness compared to the other members of the Alliance. A risk that could be amplified shortly by the economic consequences of the SARS-VOC II pandemic crisis.



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The materialisation of the construction projects of energy, road, railway, river, air and data transport infrastructures that are the object of the Three Seas Initiative acquires a primarily strategic character for the Alliance. And, Romania and Poland must be involved in the master plans aimed at developing these infrastructures, given that they are pillar states of the eastern flank of the Alliance.

A risk that could turn into a major vulnerability in the conditions of massive disruptive attacks, specific to the technological era, capable of paralyzing the response of the target state.

The deficit of high-speed transport infrastructure

The deficit of high-speed and/or economically efficient transport infrastructure that unites the eastern and central European states and ensures the interoperability of their armed forces (railways, riverways, highways, expressways, airports, heliports) is a vulnerability, which in the context of a regional conflict becomes a threat through the possibility of land, communication, isolation of eastern states. In this sense, the materialisation of the construction projects of energy, road, railway, river, air and data transport infrastructures that are the object of the Three Seas Initiative⁵ acquires a primarily strategic character for the Alliance. And, Romania and Poland must be involved in the master plans aimed at developing these infrastructures, given that they are pillar states of the eastern flank of the Alliance.

Therefore, the states of the eastern flank, by the nature of their geostrategic position and the complexity of the threats they face, should benefit from ultra-modern weapons systems, to be able to withstand a symmetrical attack from strategic competitors and to discourage success their possible offensive intentions in the region. Weapons systems to ensure their interoperability with the allied armed forces, in parallel with strengthening the institutional capacity to counter hybrid actions.

Ageing population and depopulation of the Eastern flank states

As mentioned in the *National Defence Strategy* drafted by the Romanian presidency, “in the social field, the security environment is influenced by asymmetric demographic evolution, rapid urbanization, the polarization of societies, accentuation of the ageing population, increasing individualism and isolation in space. virtually, the vulnerability of online social media to information warfare and the phenomenon of migration. Also, the intensification of the urbanisation process makes cities vulnerable, especially to climate change

⁵ ***, *Three Seas Initiative*, available at <https://3seas.eu/>, retrieved on 30 October 2021.

and ensuring minimum living conditions” (Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării, 2020). All these dysfunctions, among which the demographic asymmetry by ageing and depopulation, are, at the same time, punctual vulnerabilities of the member states and threats to the security of the Alliance – through the cumulative effect of the economic and military consequences generated by the increased percentages of ageing population, given that demographic power is fundamental in the equation of state or supranational power.



RISKS AND SHORT-TERM THREATS

Another category of risks and threats to the eastern flank states are represented by conjunctural threats, which develop depending on the geopolitical context.

This category includes:

- the emergence of new geostrategic players active in the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus region, which could complicate the regional geopolitical game;
- triggering regional conflicts/wars, which could cause destabilising migration waves on the flank states;
- amplifying the activity of organised crime and terrorism networks;
- medical crises caused by pandemics or other natural cataclysms.

The emergence of new geostrategic players active in the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus region, which could complicate the regional geopolitical game

These players can be states, international organizations or military alliances. In this regard, we must mention the emergence of China, a state that has developed the *16+1 Format* in the region (European Parliament, 2011) (the former *17+1 Format*, before Lithuania withdrew from it, see the map in *Figure no. 2*) overlapping the North-South Corridor/Three Seas Initiative, which includes states in the Balkan Peninsula, known as belonging to the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation (Popescu, 2020, p. 253).

Also, the regional economic presence has turned China into the main economic partner of some Isthmus states. For example, in 2020 China was Georgia's main export partner (Agenda.ge), Ukraine's main



In 2020 China was Georgia's main export partner, Ukraine's main state trading partner, Bulgaria's strategic partner and an important trading partner of Latvia, Moldova, Belarus. Of course, China's mere economic presence cannot pose a threat to NATO. It can, however, turn into a threat if China's emergence in the region is the result of a geopolitical game in which Russia is involved.



Figure 2: 17+1 Format⁶

state trading partner (Tass, 2021), Bulgaria's strategic partner (Xinhuanet, 2019) and an important trading partner of Latvia, Moldova, Belarus. Of course, China's mere economic presence cannot pose a threat to NATO. It can, however, turn into a threat if China's emergence in the region is the result of a geopolitical game in which Russia is involved. Because such a game would bring together the military power of Russia and the economic power of China, two great powers massively engaged in the current technological sprint. A true scenario if we remember that the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus and the Balkan Peninsula are extremely valuable geopolitical areas for Russia's security interests. Therefore, the emergence of China in these spaces could not be achieved without the consent of Russia, not coincidentally the 16+1 Format being completely relieved of the energy dimension, so sensitive to pivot power.

Of course, the situation may be complicated if, in the future, the Russian-Chinese geopolitical bloc is formed, most likely on the structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization⁷. This could lead

⁶ From <https://i1.wp.com/www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CEEC.jpg?quality=90&strip=all&ssl=1> retrieved on 1 November 2021.

⁷ ***, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, <http://eng.sectsc.org/>, retrieved on 1 May 2021.

to China's accession to the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the establishment of a Russian-Chinese military bloc on the eastern border of the Alliance! A military bloc that would bring together the status of geopolitical centrality in Eurasia, resources, Russia's military and technological power with resources, direct access to the warm seas, China's demographic, military, economic and technological power. A military bloc that would lead to the appearance of a new "iron curtain" on the eastern border of the Alliance. This geopolitical dynamic depends exclusively on Russia's geopolitical calculation and its position in the context of the power competition between the other two ruling powers of the international system, the USA and China.



The outbreak of regional conflicts/wars that could lead to destabilising migration waves on the flank states

Given the geopolitical status of the region and the interests of geostrategic players active in the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus area, this scenario could materialize. The pan-ideas that dominated the geopolitical thinking of the early twentieth century could bring back today the same security risks as in the period preceding the hegemonic conflagrations. Russian expansionism in the Black Sea region could result in an open war with Ukraine, especially if Russia is given the challenge it needs to justify its invasion. In such a situation, the eastern flank states will face waves of refugees from their immediate vicinity. Over which could overlap the waves of migrants from South Asia who reach the Alliance's border and the Russian chain, as it can be seen today at the Polish border with Belarus. Migration waves bring with them a procession of risks and threats to the security of the eastern flank states, which cover all dimensions of national security. Risks amplified against the background of the current pandemic and the need for sanitary security of the national territory.

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The increase in the activity of organised crime and terrorist networks

An increase in the activity of organised crime and terrorism networks could occur amid increasing outbreaks of instability in North and East Africa and the highly volatile security space of the "Eurasian Balkans" – which includes the Middle East, Transcaucasia, Central



and South Asia (see map in *Figure no. 3*). Such an increase in crime, whether or not in conjunction with hybrid actions orchestrated by the Russian Federation or other international actors, could flood migrants with the eastern border of the Alliance, force the penetration of militants of the global Islamist network and other terrorist/insurgent groups. non-Islamists, whose actions could seriously destabilise border states. Also, any criminal activity, from trafficking in dirty weapons and drugs to trafficking in human beings or counterfeit medicines, is an attack on the safety of the citizens of the Alliance’s member states and, consequently, threats to the security of the Alliance.



Figure no. 3: The extended region of the Eurasian Balkans⁸

⁸ <https://fromestopwarscampaign.wordpress.com/2014/10/18/the-reverse-brzezinski-the-ultimate-eurasian-dilemma/>, retrieved on 1 May 2021.

Medical crises caused by pandemics or other natural cataclysms

The SARS-VOC II pandemic brought to the fore the threat posed by pathogenic microorganisms and the need for a coordinated, global response to public health management. The ongoing pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities of health systems and reiterated, 100 years after the Spanish flu, the need for regional health security architectures, in parallel with a reconceptualisation of security, in which the medical-sanitary dimension has become a free-standing matter. The chaos and total unpreparedness of world governments in the first months of the pandemic have shown that, in the absence of these institutional mechanisms, collective memory does not retain in the long run the lessons of similar disasters it has gone through. Therefore, only a rethinking of medical and health security, as a separate, independent dimension of national security and Alliance security could increase the level of preparedness in such situations or in the case, much more serious, of a biological attack! A biological attack that could target people, livestock, crops, forests, causing immeasurable damage in the absence of clear protocols, equipment and infrastructure specific to this type of aggression.

Also, we must not omit other types of natural disasters that could generate humanitarian crises and that turn into regional security risks with an impact on Alliance states.

WHY DOES THE EAST-EUROPEAN NORTH-SOUTH CORRIDOR NEED TO MATERIALISE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE?

Some of the vulnerabilities, risks and structural threats facing the eastern flank states today could be mitigated by building the East-European North-South Corridor subsumed under the Big Three Initiative and the B9 Format. Thus, by building hydrocarbon transport networks, fast road and rail transport networks, data transport networks, by developing airport and port transport facilities, river transport facilities, the states of the eastern flank and implicitly the Alliance would be relieved. of energy dependence on hydrocarbons from Russia, of the deficit of high-speed transport infrastructures, increasing the interoperability of the armed forces of the states of the eastern flank of the Alliance and implicitly the mobilisation capacity.



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In addition, these infrastructure projects generate economic activity, which is extremely welcome in the context of the deindustrialisation of the flank states and the imperatives generated by the current technological sprint. On the other hand, the extra security brought by the corridor generates prosperity, which is reflected demographically by increasing the birth rate and by stopping depopulation.

A strong and secure eastern flank means a great advantage for the Alliance in the context of security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and sub-Saharan areas. A strong eastern flank is a guarantee of transatlantic unity and a factor of Russia's contention in its current sphere of influence. A strong eastern flank is, in the medium and long term, the most economically viable option for the other Alliance states, which will no longer have to intervene economically in support of their weaker eastern partners.

And, last but not least, the interoperability ensured by the existence of infrastructures is an asset in the effort to counteract the risks and threats generated by organised crime and terrorism networks, migration waves, humanitarian crises triggered by natural cataclysms and other conjunctural threats.

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