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Article

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The EU's responsibility in the securitization of Eastern Europe – prospects for using the full potential of the CSDP in the region

Gabriela Cristina ȘPAIUC*

Abstract

The level of ambition and strategic autonomy of the European Union in the global approach of conflicts and crises was tested in the context of unsolved conflicts which characterised the security environment in the East European neighbourhood area. We set out to analyse the main strategies, security policies and tools used by the EU in relationship with the countries of the Eastern Partnership, in response to various kinds of security problems in the region. The coherence of the European policies regarding the role of securitization of countries from the Eastern border of Europe depends on the use of the whole potential of legal instruments set out in the treaties. At the same time, the Union relevance is defined by the adaptation of these policies to the security needs resulted from the political instability and the military threats to which the countries of this region are exposed.

Keywords: European Union, Eastern Partnership, security, hybrid threats, CSDP

Introduction

The European Union (EU) acts as a global strategic actor in pursuing the objectives defined by the treaties and detailed by global and sectoral strategies which show the aspirations and development perspectives of its contribution to the resolution of security issues in the whole world. The coordinates of action undertaken by the EU as an international security actor have been determined from a medium and long-term strategic perspective, by a series of conceptual and programmatic documents adopted in the European decision-making process designed to imprint the strategic direction, the orientations and general political perspectives in this field. To the primordial strategic documents which compose the general framework of external Union action, the European secondary documents which detail the main objectives and the political declarations in the context of high-level meeting were added.

The attempt at contributing to the definition of the EU role in securitization of a region involves to seek the implementation of these policies from the point of view of the method of action,

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instruments and vision used in the fulfilment of strategic objectives, including in the prospect of relations with other international actors with ambitions in the matter of preservation and counteraction of factors which threaten the international security. In this respect, a particular attention will be paid to the degree of involvement of the EU in several dimensions, among which the economic, political, cultural, military, defence influence, in response to the instability events and the military threats, respectively the real needs of countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood of Europe.

Finally, the question to which we will try to bring an answer to is if the external action promoted by the EU in the countries from the Eastern border of the EU towards which it had a particular approach by the initiative of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), highlighted the prospect of a potential strategic autonomy with a defence component which EU can claim in relationship with other actors acting in the region such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). To support this step, the answer and involvement of the EU in the political crises which the East-European countries had to face over the last years, by use of civil and military instruments specific to the European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) can contribute to the evaluation of European policies in security matters. These issues will be treated from both the point of view of the European answer to a potential crisis in front of factors such as the hybrid threat or the terrorist threat, as well as in front of events which left traces regarding the territorial integrity of the states concerned.

The proposed research topic is intended to be an analysis of the EU's external action in the Eastern Neighborhood, in light of the policies promoted to ensure security in the region, including those aimed at responding to the terrorist threat and hybrid threats. In this respect, the structure of the paper follows three main questions or research purposes.

The first chapter focuses on the analysis of the strategic objectives undertaken by the EU to respond to international security threats, with a focus on the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy adopted in June 2016. The second chapter deals with the EU's role in conflict prevention and crisis management as a security provider for Eastern Europe following the objective of promoting a comprehensive approach to the issue. Looking at the EU goal of contributing to international security, we aim to find out if the direct or secondary effects resulting from political instability and military threats to the countries of Eastern Europe are a substantial part of the EU's external action in the region or, rather, reveal a lack or a low level of strategic autonomy. Regarding the third chapter, it includes a completion of the first two chapters and the answers to the research questions, leading the way to the conclusions of the research. The section describes the use of CSDP civil and military instruments and cooperation between the EU and NATO.

1. Global security aspirations – EU's strategies on foreign and security policy and the objectives undertaken in relation to the EaP countries

The first step in the direction of the general evaluation of common threats and definition in a unique document of EU objectives and interests in security matters has led to the adoption of European Security Strategy (ESS), under the auspices of the European Council which met on December 12th, 2003 in Brussels, during the mandate of the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (HR) at that time, Javier Solana. The general objectives stated in this document for the pursuing of European strategic interests aimed at the active promotion of policies which counterbalanced the dynamics of threats to global security, the development of flexible military capabilities with a high degree of interoperability and the coordination of actions and cooperation between states (Council of the EU, 2009, p. 73). However, with reference to regional conflicts, ESS did not mention the conflicts from the East of EU, and in the section dedicated to the subject of building security in the near neighbourhood, the document only referred to the Balkans area without mentioning the ex-Soviet space expressly (Fawn, 2020, p. 12).

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) from the prospect of success of actions subject to the model of provider of stability and security in relationship with the partners from East and South, made the object of several evaluations. An analysis of the Council of EU, which had as subject the evaluation of implementation of ESS in the first 5 years from the adoption of the reference document, highlighted that the EU got involved from operational point of view s (instruments specific to CSDP) by carrying out a number of 20 missions in response to crises. Among these, in the near neighbourhood the involvement of EU in the conflict of Georgia is notable and it escalated in a direct confrontation with Russia in August 2008. In this case, the EU has played a central role in the answer of international community to crisis and in mediation of negotiations and *six-point ceasefire agreement* by mediation between the Parties, humanitarian assistance, financial support and a civil mission of post-conflict monitoring (EUMM) established in September 2008, whose mandate was successively extended from that moment on, and the last extension was authorised by the Council of the EU until December 14th, 2022 (Council of the EU, 2020, 3 December). The involvement in a conflict from the Eastern Neighbourhood represented an affirmation of security principles set out in the UN Charter, showing to what extent and by what type of instruments EU can act to sanction the use of armed force against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia.

With a particular importance in the pursuit of foreign and security policy objectives of the European Union, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) adopted in 2016 frames and recognizes as threat

the violation of European order in security matters in the East and in the South Caucasian, marking the passage from the claims of regional actor to the mission of global actor (Fawn, 2020, pp. 6-10). The document sets out five priorities of external action of the EU, which were correlated with the strategic interests and common European principles and with the norms consecrated by the international treaties in this matter. The first priority refers to the internal dimension of security, which it recognizes to an equal extent the importance of efforts related to external policies and intrinsic connection of internal dimension with the disturbing events manifested at global level, by which it proclaims the attainment of an “appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy” in the service of the goal to promote peace and security inside and outside the EU (European External Action Service/EEAS, 2016, p. 9).

The second priority proclaims the promotion of policies for increasing the “resiliency of states and societies” from the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, mentioning the ENP as distinctive objective in this priority, with emphasis on good governance, economic and societal issues, migration policies. The third priority undertaken by the Union, with applicability in the conflict areas, treats the issue of “comprehensive approach of conflicts and crises”, in which a contribution of Union is set out in all the stages of a conflict – prevention, response to crises, stabilization and forestalling. The fourth priority direction was formulated around the regional dynamics of the role and importance of “cooperative regional orders” based on governance formulas with beneficial effects on multiple levels (security, culture, identity values, influence on international environment etc.). The last priority states the respect of international law norms in the twenty-first century (EEAS, 2016, pp. 9-10).

The Global Strategy for the Foreign and Security policy of the European Union presented in the European Council of 28th June 2016 presents the EU as a provider of security both in the near neighbourhood and in farther regions. The first strategic priority frames the line of action entitled *security and defence*, which proposes actions for the European involvement in the defence component specific to external crises, as part of collective efforts (e.g., actions in cooperation with NATO) and by autonomous actions carried out by the Union with the purpose of developing the European defence. Along with the tasks in the matter of management of external crises, the Union has assimilated the complementary role to contribute to the development of capacities of external partners in matters of security and defence (EEAS, 2016, pp. 19-20). The challenges to security with an external dimension such as the hybrid threats and terrorism, were identified as major concerns for the European security.

The most important part of EUGS from the perspective of relationships with the neighbourhood – resiliency of states from East and South of the Union – defines the meaning and policies related to the objective to consolidate the capacity of countries to manage the internal and external crisis

situations (EEAS, 2016, p. 24). ENP is distinctly treated by the extension policy, being based on concepts such as the attraction power of the EU, the Association Agreements, and agreements regarding the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA). EUGS reiterates the commitment to the EaP and the determination to deepen the partnership relations with emphasis on the realization of economic progress and connections at society level (cultural and educational exchanges, cooperation in research matters etc.).

Within the strategic priorities in relation to the neighbourhood several actions were set out in tested field from the point of view of EU capacity to produce a collective change. In the security and defence field, the actions stipulated were modest, aiming at the strategic dialogue in view of initiating an increased involvement of these countries in CSDP (EEAS, 2016, pp. 21-22). According to EUGS, the main approach promoted by EU in the region for fighting against terrorism is based on the promotion of standards regarding good governance and social inclusion of minority groups, encouraging reforms in justice, security and defence sectors, and consolidation of capacities which should be achieved including in cooperation with United Nations and NATO (EEAS, 2016, p. 26). Therefore, the issue of approaching conflicts and crises did not make the object of a particular attention in the actions dedicated to Eastern Neighbourhood.

However, the applicability of these objectives is extended to the Eastern neighbourhood region in the strategy section dedicated to this specific priority. The emphasis is laid on the involvement of EU in the peace consolidation process, but the lines of action generally refer to a gradual approach and involvement in the three phases of the conflict – prevention, resolution and stabilization (EEAS, 2016, p. 28). Thus, the EU reaffirmed the decision to get involved in the resolution of long-term conflicts from the countries from the EaP by promoting a multilateral approach based on partnerships and adequate global governance for the twenty-first century (Tocci, 2017, pp. 495-496).

Also, the recognition of the contribution of regional cooperation systems in the approach of conflicts, respectively the importance of regions (subregions) in their capacity of “complex webs of power”, highlighted the reality of interference of external actions in the Eastern region, in a regional dynamic which is exposed to threats contrary to “European Security Order” and international law. In this respect, the EU blames the violation of the main elements of these norms (sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity), naming the actions of Russia in Ukraine (the illegal annexation of Crimea, destabilization of East of Ukraine) and the conflicts from the Black Sea region as vectors of EU policies towards the region (EEAS, 2016, pp. 32-33).

The legal tools for the enforcement of objectives and priorities undertaken come from the innovations introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, for the effectiveness of external action and common

security and defence policy, the forecast result being to use of maximum potential so that the Union can respond to the threats to security in the international environment. The external action of the Union is substantiated on a series of principles, among which maintenance of peace, prevention of conflicts and consolidation of international security (TEU, 2012, p. 28), achieved with the support and respect for the objectives stated in the international legal acts of reference. The legal basis regarding the competence of EU as actor on international stage is presented in article 24 of Treaty on European Union (TEU), which sets forth that the action of the Union in Common Foreign and Security Policy includes “all the fields of foreign policy and all the matters regarding the security of the Union”, and in this policy they regulated “the gradual definition of a common defence policy which can lead to common defence” (TEU, 2012, p. 30). The specificity of the process of taking commitments in this field shows the political nature and important role of states in adoption of decisions, an important characteristic being the predominance of applying the unanimity rule in decision-making regarding the involvement of the Union in specific CSDP missions (TEU, 2012, p. 39). The scopes of the rule with qualified majority cannot aim at decisions with military or defence implications (TEU, 2012, pp. 33-34).

Also, the enforcement of CSDP is mainly achieved by the civil and military means of the member states, but also by resorting to the especially financial instruments made available by the Union, with involvement of the European Commission (TEU, 2012, pp. 38-39). The main body in the European architecture acting in the external dimension of security is the Political and Security Committee (PSC). Its competences refer to the monitoring of international situation, the reporting of issues of interest and contribution to the definition of policies in CFSP field, by issuing approvals addressed to the European Council (TEU, 2012, p. 36). Thus, PSC can imprint the strategic direction of concerned policies, with the role of assuring the early identification and flexibility in the Union's reaction to the events from the international stage, following thus the mainly political nature of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The legal virtue for the gradual development of a common defence component at Union level involves the opportunity given to the European Council to decide with unanimity of votes, that the common defence policy should result in a common defence of EU and for the fulfilment of this goal, the contribution of member states is necessary (TEU, 2012, p. 38), as well as the consideration of a series of legal, constitutional and institutional implications (European Parliament, 2018, pp. 125-135). The passage from the definition of the common defence policy to the implementation of a common defence will be translated by increasing the level of military integration and defence and especially by giving strategic autonomy to the EU in defence matters.

The promotion form of European goals for the Eastern neighbourhood was defined to a large extent by the normative influence exerted by EU mainly by the Europeanization process which has intensified since 2009. EU positioned in this respect and regarding other kinds of European policies promoted in the ex-Soviet area, in competition on complex levels with the Russian Federation. On one hand, on security level, it highlighted the European objective to establish a stability area at its external borders, the role of mediator was often used by EU for the purpose of efficiently managing the crisis situations by specific CSDP mechanisms. On the other hand, the Russian Federation has promoted objectives by resorting to another kind of power in an attempt to remain the main provider of security in the region, thus highlighting the dilemma of means of resolution for crises between two actors who apply different principles regarding the resorting to military means. In this respect, the resorting to sanctions against the actions of violation of the international law by the Russian Federation entails the issue of their effectiveness, thus questioning the effects on the general relations with this country.

The strategic priorities and their reflection in the cooperation fields promoted by EU in the EaP, respectively the approaches towards the six partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine) in security and defence fields were reassessed on the occasion of the balance of the first decade of European policies circumscribed to this common initiative. In the reflection process on the future of EaP, initiated as a result of approving this step by the conclusions of the European Council of June 20th, 2019, the main recommendations were materialized in the following documents adopted by the European institutions: the joint communication of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of March 18th, 2020 entitled “Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020. Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all” (European Commission and EEAS, 2020) and the document which captures the Council conclusions regarding the policy on EaP after 2020, adopted on May 11th, 2020 (Council of the EU, 2020, 11 May).

In formulation of the new political bases of the long-term partnership, the starting point was the trajectory agreed previously, respectively the continuation of efforts to obtain progress in the policy fields identified in the 2017 programme of reforms entitled “20 deliverables for 2020”. Also, the measures for consolidation of resiliency were developed and framed depending on the cooperation fields concerned in relationship with partner countries. Among these, the increase of resiliency in the field of institutions, state of law and security, sets forth, apart from measures such as the judicial reform and cross-border cooperation as means of fighting against crime and “stepping up support for security dialogues and cooperation” (European Commission and EEAS, 2020, p. 10).

In the field of security, from the perspective of criminality forms, including the manifestations with terrorist specificity, and the hybrid threats, the European policies for increasing the resiliency of these countries included measures of support by “increased cooperation with EU justice and home affairs agencies, security sector reform (...); and integrated border management” and cooperation measures regarding cyber resiliency. All these measures have as main purpose to increase the capacity of these countries to respond to the crisis situations. As for the direct involvement in the unresolved conflicts in the region, the dominant mission of the Union is diplomatic. The involvement in the negotiation processes to facilitate agreements for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, completes therefore, the actions for consolidation of capacities of these partner countries, including regarding the fight against hybrid threats and cyber resiliency. Also, in order to increase the contribution of the partner countries to the European civil and military missions and operations in the region, the EU has set out to relaunch “Security dialogues and practical CSDP cooperation” (European Commission and EEAS, 2020, p. 11).

2. A global approach of conflicts and crises by the EU and the applicability of the objective in the Eastern Neighbourhood

The European Union has argued the security relations with the countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood by the common objective of establishing a stability area. From this perspective, in the theoretical debate of European integration policy they highlighted that the Europeanization policy was initiated and justified by the objective of reaching stability in the neighbourhood (Browning, 2003; Higashimo, 2004). The political and economic reforms were presented by EU as necessary elements for consolidation of resiliency of these countries as a means of guaranteeing the stability and security in the region (Simão and Dias, 2016, p. 113).

At the same time, the range of security issues was defined depending on internal frailties compared to the threats or risks identified (Ciuta, 2009, p. 317), concerning various fields such as political stability, energy security or conflict resolution. Initially, the ENP and later, the EaP have included the dimension of security in the relationship with the partner countries. The main hypothesis of this work is that the European securitization process was permanently modelled by the dynamics between the security policies promoted by the Russian Federation in this area and the strategic interests of the Union and of member states in the countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood and the special relations of the Union with the Russian Federation and of member states with the same state actor.

On the restricted level of approach towards crisis situations and conflicts, the applicability of the European action in the region was especially tested in the context of increasing tensions in the conflicts in the region. Such moments showed the European preference for the close pursuing of strategic objectives for resolution of crises by peaceful means and valorisation of the stabilization component specific to the crisis management mechanisms against the background of missions and operations carried out by the EU. Another fundamental factor of EU limits in the region is the individual positioning of European MS, materialized in some cases by disagreements and preferences of certain states to act in the name of national capacities they have (e.g., France and Germany) (Deen *et al.*, 2021, p. 15). The lack of harmony is not just reflected in the choice to adhere to positions and European common actions or to act as statal actors, but can also be observed in the debates on the involvement of the EU in the management of security deficit from the countries of EaP, where France has a position characterised by scepticism regarding the development of security and defence dimension in relationship with partner countries (Deen *et al.*, 2021, p. 14).

Also, considering the breadth and meanings resulting from the military component of these conflicts and the inherent role of member states in the foreign policy decisions, EU has the capacity to agree on a common response to crises, which exceeds the prevention framework, facilitates the establishment of a peace agreement, rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction. Thus, considering the primordial need of security of these states and the effects that the lack of EU involvement in the resolution of these problems can entail on the success of the other European objectives in the region, the matter of adopting sanctions against the Russian Federation has incited an increased interest inside the Union and in the partner countries.

EUGS claimed in relationship with the countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood the objective for integrated and comprehensive management of conflicts and crises, based on the use of civil instruments for the management of crises by the Union. Moreover, this objective was emphasized by a type of approach on several levels (the local and regional dimension of conflicts) and a multilateral approach which involves partnerships with relevant actors for the given conflict context. More specifically, EUGS notes the decision of EU to get involved in security problems derived from the conflicts from the Eastern Neighbourhood by referring to the events in Ukraine which were precursory to the adoption of strategy. The categorical declarative position regarding the actions of Russia in Crimea and destabilization of East of Ukraine (EEAS, 2016, p. 29), in consideration of the EU claims of actor acting for the approach of conflicts at global level, cannot be reduced from the perspective of objectives undertaken just at vehement position takings in these actions which violate the European and international principles and values.

The inclusion of security problems on the agenda of the EaP was requested by the partner countries – the deeper sectoral integration in the field of cooperation on security matters, along with the proclamation of the objective of stability, security and prosperity in the whole East Europe region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2019). However, the language used in the recommendations of the European Commission for the future of the EaP post-2020 bring close-up the term of *resiliency*, but also support for the *dialogues and cooperation in security matters*. Therefore, in relation to the political and strategic approach reflected in the official European documents, this is the vision which the European Party proposes to cover the security problems in the region, both regarding the unsolved conflicts and before hybrid threats, serious crimes (terrorism) and cooperation in security and defence matters.

On the other hand, the text of regional political commitments in security matters reflects the reserved treatment by EU of this dimension in relationship with the Eastern partners, while the discourse specific to the global security strategy presents a Union characterised by the ambition to become a more strategically autonomous actor. The European Union has a series of instruments to approach the ongoing conflicts on the territory of five of its Eastern partners. In this respect, EU supports the conflict resolution efforts and contributes to the mitigation of their negative effects by missions in CSDP such as EUMM (Georgia), EUAM (Ukraine) and EUBAM (Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). EU also promotes political dialogue in security matters and the European political objectives regarding the multilateral vision based on partnerships, with the aid of *EUSR for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia*. The EUSR mandate includes, among other things, the objective to contribute to prevention of conflicts in the region, to their peaceful resolution (including the crisis of Georgia and the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh) according to the international law principles and to support the future cooperation between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and as applicable, their neighbours. At the same time, the multilateral approach allows EU to contribute to the resolution of conflicts in other formats, the EU has the opportunity to get involved in the various processes facilitated by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in the region (Deen *et al.*, 2021, p. 16).

As for the hybrid threats (European Commission, 2016), against the background of their emanation from the Russian Federation to the partner countries (Klijn and Yüksel, 2019), this security problem was included on the agenda of strategic priorities of the Union for the EaP. In this sector, the recommendations of COM and HR reiterated the actions of EU for support and assistance for the cyber resiliency of the partner countries by contribution to the development of robust legal, political and operational frameworks of cyber security (EEAS, 2016, p. 15). Considering the potential effects

of hybrid threats on European reform policies in the region such as their undermining by disinformation campaigns, the potential and interest in EU involvement for fighting against this kind of threat has increased compared to other security fields.

In the same general objective of consolidating the resiliency in the region there is the national security sector of partner countries. In this respect, EU has promoted reforms in judicial and police sector, in order to contribute to the consolidation of capacities of these countries to manage and efficiently fight against threats. The EU action did not concern issues with weight in security field, such as the sector of intelligence services, military or defence where in order to obtain assistance, the Eastern countries could resort more easily to NATO, USA and the European states (Deen *et al.*, 2021, p. 18). In this field, EU relevance as security partner has recorded a loss, considering the primordial importance given to security and defence by the partner countries.

Even if lately a consensus was outlined among the European officials according to which EU has to adopt a dominant position on the stage of international relations (Gressel and Popescu, 2020, p. 1), which is characterised including by strategic autonomy, so far, no consistent security strategy was developed in relationship with Eastern partners, and the global power ambitions of the Union were only partly achieved in this region of strategic importance for Europe. The declarative assumption regarding support for security by intensification of dialogues and cooperation in security matters is not doubled by adequate and directed policies, which should materialize, for example, in granting assistance in the relevant sectors. In this respect, the global EU objectives in security matters are not now fully adapted to the specificity and needs of countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood, being mainly focused on the promotion of reforms in the spirit of resiliency especially in the institutional policy and judicial sectors and in civil security field, in the field of cooperation with the EU agencies and integrated border management.

3. Use of civil and military instruments of CSDP and enhanced cooperation between the EU and NATO

The comprehensive approach proclaimed by the EU policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood did not achieve the rough security component. The EaP was not thought out as a geopolitical competition, but over time, it started to be perceived thus by the EU and the Russian Federation (Pop, 2016). The main obstacle in alignment of European policies with the stronger and stronger perception of direct Russian threat to national security of the states from East of Europe and European security was the idea that a substantial political commitment at security level will affect the cooperation between EU

and the Russian Federation. At the same time, it was obvious that the lack of a firm answer to the use of military force or hybrid and cyber-attacks cannot just be compensated by actions from the economic and civilian sphere. In fields such as the intelligence sector, defence or military sector, EU does not have self-sufficient capacity, which prevents a practical cooperation and the supply of financial assistance, with effects on the political influence and even the diplomatic importance of the Union in the region.

In this context, a gradual approach of policies and strategies promoted by NATO and EU for the Eastern Neighbourhood appeared more often in the political dialogues and the relations between the two actors. The Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation of July 8th, 2016 treats the cooperation between the two actors on various levels specific to security and defence and regulates the joint commitment for the support of efforts for consolidation of capacity of partners from the Eastern Neighbourhood and their resiliency. For the enforcement of the Joint Declaration a set of 74 proposals was adopted, and its progress in implementation was regularly assessed. The last presentation of the results achieved in each cooperation field highlights that the joint efforts continue to assure the coherence of results between the planification processes of EU and NATO defence, where the requirements overlap, recognizing at the same time the different nature of the two organizations and related responsibilities. The role of coordination, command and control in defence sector played by NATO is in contrast with the European programmes and policies, which attracted the need of coherence between the activities and projects in security/defence field.

The reference document emphasizes the contribution of EU to the NATO projects in the region from the Eastern border of Europe. Among these, during the period June 2019 - June 2020, the following activities took place: in the good governance filed in defence and security sector based on a cooperation agreement signed in 2018, by which the European Commission became a financial contributor to the NATO Building Integrity programme (BI) – UE offered financial support to facilitate the participation of Armenian, Georgian, Moldavian and Ukrainian representatives in many NATO activities for capacity building; the European experts from EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) from Ukraine and the EU representatives participated in evaluation events in the NATO BI programme; the NATO representative office in Ukraine, EUAM and the EU delegation in Kiev continued to closely coordinate the support given to Ukraine, including regarding the enforcement of the Law on national security. The relationship between NATO and EU continues to rely on the complementarity of efforts and avoidance of duplication, according to the *principle of a unique set of forces*, with the specification that the capabilities developed by the two actors remain in principle

available for the operations of NATO and EU, under the reserve of national political decisions (EU and NATO, 2020, 16 June).

The interference of the Russian Federation in Ukraine has drastically changed the security situation at the Eastern borders of Europe. Actions such as the illegitimate occupation of Crimea and the military intervention in East of Ukraine have affected the stability and security at the Eastern border of NATO, respectively in the near neighbourhood of EU, violating the principles of international law regarding the sovereignty of states and also affecting the credibility of borders internationally recognized in this region (Freire, 2017). The military component and subsequent territorial issues of conflict increased the difficulty of EU to act decisively, EU was not directly involved in the conflict resolution negotiations (Freire and Simão, 2020, p. 46). While the destabilizing behaviour of Russia in Ukraine was perpetuated, the answer of EU was characterised by the adoption of political and economic sanctions against Russia, which aimed, among other things, at limitation of access to capital markets for the Russian financial state institutions, restriction of trade in armament, establishing export restrictions for products with double use and final destinations with military purpose (Drent *et al.*, 2015, p. 43). Also, EU instated a civil counselling mission in Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), on July 22nd, 2014 with the main purpose to support Ukraine in development of civil security services, in close cooperation with the law enforcement authorities and the judicial sector. The mission is ongoing, its mandate was extended until May 31st, 2024 (Council of the EU, 2021).

The North-Atlantic Alliance showed that it supported the decision of EU to impose sanctions and decided to suspend any civil and military practical cooperation with Russia, with the preservation of political channels of communication. Also, these events from the Eastern flank modelled the European and Euro-Atlantic strategies and positions. The NATO Summit of 11th-12th, July 2018 tackled the issue of Euro-Atlantic security from the perspective of threats from the aggressive actions of Russia, including the threat and use of force to achieve political objectives, reiterating the commitment for the strengthening of the defence and security capacities of the countries from the Eastern border of Europe. Under the circumstances characterised by the fundamental test for the relevance of the Union as actor in the regional security problems from the events in Ukraine, EU has adopted the new global security strategy. From the analysis of strategy objectives, EU is determined to establish a higher degree of regional strategic autonomy which would allow the initiation of missions of fight forces for the management of crises.

The mission of promoting cooperation in security matters with Eastern partners¹ benefits from the instrument of CSDP missions, but because the decision-making mechanism in this field imposes the need to align the positions of all MS, EU can encounter difficulties in resorting to these kinds of missions. According to TEU, the qualified majority rule can be applied in case of decisions regarding the European Defence Agency and the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) (TUE, 2012, pp. 40-41). The involvement of EU in the Eastern Neighbourhood could increase with the use of permanent structured cooperation formulas, which would leave behind the problem of internal divisions of EU regarding the positioning of MS towards Russia and would consolidate the response to conflicts and external crises.

Conclusions

The EU promise for the Eastern Neighbourhood wanted to answer the desire formulated by the partner countries, to assure stability, security and prosperity in the face of the security deficit felt by these countries especially as a result of the relationship with the Russian Federation. Also, the inclusion of the security dimension on the agenda of the EaP allowed EU to connect the finality of Europeanization process with the role of security provider for these countries, thus assuring the success of the other European objectives in this region. At declarative level, the content of political security commitments dedicated to the countries from the EaP shows a less ambitious character and the limits of EU in this sector in relation to the wider framework of objectives proclaimed in the EU global security Strategy. The treatment of security problems in the region was thought around the concept of *resiliency* and concerns soft fields of security. From a practical perspective, the EU policies and instruments approached security fields such as the unsolved conflicts, the hybrid threats, good governance issues and treatment of vulnerabilities in the institutions acting on national security level. In this respect, the European efforts focused on the development of robust legal, political and operational frameworks, especially in the hybrid threats sector. As for the sector of unsolved conflicts in the Eastern Neighbourhood, EU used the CSDP tools for crisis management, the conflict resolution efforts and the monitoring of implementation of peace agreements gave a certain degree of coherence to the European security policies. However, the security challenges from the Eastern border of Europe did not fully receive the necessary attention by objectives and European consolidated security policies, adapted to the specificity and individual needs of these countries. The result of current

¹ For an argumentation of the need for a Security Pact with the countries of the EaP, please see the work of Gressel and Popescu (2020).

debates on the consolidation of security policies and instruments and operational capacities promoted by EU in the Eastern region can open new perspectives in the relevance of EU as global security actor.

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