

# REACTIONS OF SELECTED NATO EASTERN WING COUNTRIES TO THE CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION IN EUROPE<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In its strategic environment description, the NATO 2022 Security Concept defined the security threats directly targeting Europe, especially the eastern wing of the Alliance. Russia's build-up of its military presence in the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean region, and its military integration with Belarus challenged the Alliance's security. After their aggression against Georgia in 2008, the illegal annexation of Crimea, and unsuccessful efforts to control the eastern part of Ukraine in the spring of 2014, Russian troops invaded Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity, making the Russian Federation a significant and direct threat to NATO's security. Pervasive instability in Africa and the Middle East, and the possible disruption of the fragile balance in the Western Balkans contribute to irregular migration. The People's Republic of China also presents a challenge to our interests, security, and values, and seeks to undermine the rules-based international order. This paper aims to analyse the presence of primary security threats in the national strategic documents of the V4 countries and Romania. The synthesis of the acquired knowledge supplemented with information on the governments' attitudes after the Russian aggression against Ukraine indicates the current attitudes of the governments of the evaluated states.*

**Key words:** security threats, V4 countries, Romania, Russian aggression, irregular migration

## **Introduction**

Based on the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, this paper addresses several main security challenges, risks, and threats. The first is Russia, which poses the most significant and direct threat, followed by irregular migration, continuously representing security risks and challenges. The second is China, which employs a broad range of political, economic, and military tools to increase its global influence, making a remaining opaque security challenge. The third security challenge is Ukraine as a target of Russian aggression (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 2022). The research is based on currently valid security strategies and whether they contain these challenges, risks, and threats. Subsequently, it discusses the revision of the governments' attitude towards these security challenges and threats, as well as the support to Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression.

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All evaluated countries are located on the eastern flank of NATO and (except the Czech Republic) have direct borders with Ukraine, have a growing economy, and are member countries of NATO and the EU, as well as several Central European regional formats of cooperation. Finally, during the Cold War all the assessed states belonged to the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union and were on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain.

The national security strategies comprehensively interpret a country's defence through the individual main security sectors (military, political, economic, social, environmental, and information technology) and comprise the country's basic and guiding security document. Poland's current security strategy (*Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, hereinafter SBNRP) was approved by President Andrzej Duda on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020. The National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted the new Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic (*Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky*, hereinafter BSSR) on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021, and the Slovakian Defence Strategy (*Obranná stratégia Slovenskej republiky*, hereinafter OSSR) on the previous day. On 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020, the Hungarian government adopted Hungary's National Security Strategy (*Magyarország Nemzeti Biztonsági Stratégiája*, hereinafter MNBS). At a joint meeting, the Romanian Chamber of Deputies and the Senate on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 approved the National Defense Strategy of Romania for the period 2020-2024 (*Strategiei Naționale de Apărare a Țării*, hereinafter SNAT) (Pásztor, 2023).

Due to the peculiarities of the Czech strategic culture, the paragraph takes into account the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic (*Bezpečnostní strategie České republiky*, hereinafter BSČR), approved on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015 by the Czech government (Usnesení vlády č. 79..., 2015) also the Defence Strategy (*Obranná strategie České republiky*, hereinafter OSČR) adopted on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2017 by the Czech government (Usnesení vlády České republiky..., 2017). Because the Security and Defence strategies of the Czech Republic are significantly outdated, the paper considers the Policy Statement of the Government of the Czech Republic (*Programové prohlášení vlády České republiky*, hereinafter PPVČR) (Programové prohlášení vlády, 2022).

The author uses a three-level scale to name the security factor levels. The first is the lowest level of reflection, the “*security challenge*”, when dangerous factors can affect the power relations of a given region. The second is the medium level, the “*security risk*”, when national interests may be harmed, causing some losses. The third is the highest level, the “*security threat*”, when national interests may be harmed and indirectly affect the preservation of national values. In this case, the possibility of coercion or violent solutions also exists to achieve an external interest (Resperger, 2013).

## 1 Attitudes towards the Russian Federation

In its SBNRP, Poland states that Russia's neo-imperial policy is the most serious threat. The aggression against Georgia, the illegal annexation of Crimea, and activities in eastern Ukraine violated the basic principles of international law, and undermined the pillars of the European security system. The Russian Federation is intensively developing its offensive military capabilities by extending its military presence in the Baltic Sea region, in the Kaliningrad Oblast, conducting large-scale military exercises based on scenarios assuming a conflict with the NATO member states, rapid deployment of large military formations, and even the use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the Russian Federation performs comprehensive actions below the threshold of war activities (hybrid warfare) and other non-military activities (including cyber-attacks and disinformation) to rebuild its power and spheres of influence (SBNRP, 2020, p. 6.).

According to the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic, the Russian Federation's aggressive behaviour provoked the conflict in Georgia and eastern Ukraine and the illegal occupation of Crimea, which grossly violates international law and political obligations (BSSR, 2021, paragraph 26). The deterioration of the European security environment due to the breach of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine by Russia is stated in Slovakian Defence Strategy (OSSR, 2021, paragraph 10e). Slovakia is interested in developing good mutual relations with Russia in an open critical dialogue on issues where values and interests diverge. Therefore, in necessary cases, it will also support the application of restrictive measures. At the same time, the Russian Federation is an important participant and partner in managing international threats and challenges. At the same time, with its aggressive approach in the military, security and political fields, it represents the main challenge to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area (BSSR, 2021, paragraph 81). Even if the document does not state it directly, it is clear that Russia dominates the supply of energy carriers to Slovakia. Consequently, the purposeful interruption of supplies of energy carriers and transport interconnections would endanger Slovakian critical infrastructure (BSSR, 2021, paragraphs 33, 34). The same applies to cyber-attacks and hybrid threats (BSSR, 2021, paragraphs 32, 35).

The Czech Republic does not directly mention Russia as a security challenge in its strategy. Still, from the point of view of energy security and the related threat to critical infrastructure due to the interruption of supplies of strategic raw materials or energy, it is clear that the threat is posed primarily by Russia (BSČR, 2015, paragraphs 21, 75–77). The same is true of the threat posed by unilateral attempts by “*some states*” to build spheres of influence through a combination of political, economic and military pressure and intelligence activities (BSČR, 2015, paragraph 19). The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic directly names the Russian Federation, which openly pursues its power

ambitions in Eastern Europe, including through military force (OSČR, 2017, paragraph 4). **Petr Fiala's** government policy undertook to review the relationship with Russia and update strategic documents by 2023 (PPVČR, 2022, pp. 25, 29).

Hungary's National Security Strategy states that the Russian Federation is one of the key actors in the international system, essential in managing several global and regional security issues. However, significant tensions have developed recently in the relations between NATO and Russia and between the EU and Russia. Hungary regards the maintenance of the cohesion of NATO and of the EU as one of its priorities. At the same time, it is interested in the pragmatic development of Hungarian-Russian relations and economic cooperation (MNBS, 2020, paragraph 118).

The National Defence Strategy of Romania notes the aggressive behaviour of the Russian Federation in the form of militarisation of the Black Sea region (including strengthening its offensive military capabilities) and hybrid actions carried out to maintain a tense atmosphere of insecurity near Romania (SNAT, 2020, paragraphs 6, 109). The Militarisation of Crimea and the Black Sea basin by the Russian Federation generates significant challenges to the national strategic interests aimed at securing EU and NATO borders, ensuring energy security and stability in the Black Sea Region (SNAT, 2020, paragraph 119). The attitude and activities of the Russian Federation carried out in violation of international law led to continued and extended divergences with many Western and NATO states and represented a serious obstacle to identifying viable solutions for stability and predictability of the security environment (SNAT, 2020, paragraph 66). The Russian Federation harms the security environment in the eastern neighbourhood of Romania, especially the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. The Russian Federation's arsenal stationed in Transnistria tends to extend the security crisis in eastern Ukraine, triggered in the context of the illegal annexation of Crimea (SNAT, 2020, paragraphs 108, 155).

Each assessed country, except Hungary, sets Russia as a destabilising element of European security. From Poland and Romania's aspect, Russia represents a long-term security threat. These states have already gradually diversified their energy dependence on Russia, so becoming independent from Russian energy carriers will not be difficult. The strategic documents of Slovakia and the Czech Republic assess Russia only as a security challenge. Still, they indirectly consider it a security risk in the context of energy dependence and hybrid threats. The Czech-Russian relations reached a low point in April 2021 after revealing that the same two Russian GRU officers who poisoned Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury in 2018 were behind the explosion of the ammunition depots in Vrbětice in 2014 (Hevő – Pásztor, 2022, pp. 221-222). After the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the Czech Republic and Slovakia assess Russia as a security threat, even though they

know their energy dependence on Russian energy carriers.<sup>3</sup> The Hungarian security strategy also considers Russia a security risk. However, due to Hungary's high dependence on Russian energy carriers<sup>4</sup> and the delay in diversification processes, it wants to continue pragmatic economic cooperation, thus prioritising its national interests (Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde, 2023).

## 2 Attitudes towards irregular migration

Persistent regional and internal conflicts in the southern European neighbourhood are a security risk for Poland. Because of this, along with rapid population growth and differences in living standards, migratory pressure has increased, challenging Europe's security (SBNRP, 2020, p. 7). The SBNRP stipulates elaborating a comprehensive migration policy coordinated with the economic, social and security policy. This policy must consider the current and expected needs of the labour market and the integration of migrants into Polish society, ensuring social cohesion and counterbalancing possible threats to public order and security related to migration processes (SBNRP, 2020, p. 32).

Slovakia identifies the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa regions as a source of security threats and of challenges such as terrorism, religious extremism, and irregular migration. There is rivalry among local states for regional leadership and influence, with regard to religious, ethnic, economic and social conflicts, and not least geopolitical competition among external actors (BSSR, 2021, paragraph 28). Slovakia listed irregular migration as a direct security threat. The Western Balkan migration route passes through Slovakia so it is both a transit and destination country for (ir)regular migrants entering the Schengen area. At the same time, Slovakia considers the lack of integration of migrants, the spread of radicalism and extremism, as well as fake news and disinformation about migrants a security threat (BSSR, 2021,

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<sup>3</sup> After the “vrbětice” case, the Czech Republic excluded Russia from completing the Dukovany nuclear power plants (Hevő – Pásztor, 2022, pp. 221-222.), and since January 2023, it has no longer purchased any natural gas from Russia (Síkela, 2023). Slovak nuclear power plants - Jaslovské Bohunice and Mochovce - are built on Russian technologies and entirely dependent on Russian nuclear fuel (Funtíková, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> In 2020, Hungary had 95% dependence on Russian natural gas (Buzás, 2022), in 2022 it had only 85% (Csiki, 2022). To produce electricity sold in Hungary, power plants used 68.1% nuclear, 7.1% renewable and 24.8 fossil (of which 53.8% natural gas) energy sources (Energiamix, 2021). 75% of Hungary's electricity consumption is produced by domestic power plants, 40% of which is provided by the Paks nuclear power plant, which can obtain the necessary heating elements from several sources (Csiki, 2022). The arguments of the MOL refinery about the technological complexity of the transition to the processing of a type of oil different from the Russian URAL to a business strategy instead (with the support of the Hungarian government) because the company has been working on diversification in several stages since 2014 (Kiss, 2023).

paragraph 40). According to Slovakia's defence strategy, massive irregular migration significantly impacts ensuring defence (OSSR, 2021, paragraph 10j).

In its security strategy, the Czech Republic also includes relevant security threats that do not directly impact its security but threaten allies. The strategy mentions irregular migration several times but never once as a direct threat to the Czech Republic (BŠČR, 2015, pp. 8–12, 15, 17). The Czech defence strategy considers irregular migration “*alarming*” but does not list the Czech Republic as a target country. The EU is generally the target of irregular migration (OSČR, 2017, paragraph 4). Fiala's government policy statement promotes access to migration without mandatory quotas and prevention in the place of origin and the countries with migration routes (PPVČR, 2022, pp. 27, 29, 33).

Hungary takes the most radical approach to irregular migration of all the evaluated countries, considering it the primary security threat (although labelled differently) affecting the national interests of Hungary (MNBS, 2020, paragraph 124a).

Romania links irregular migration to other threats, such as organised crime, terrorism, and international trafficking of high-risk illegal drugs (SNAT, 2020, paragraphs 61, 82, 130, 150). It identifies the starting point of the migration wave (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) which flows through Romania as a secondary transit route to the West (SNAT, 2020, paragraph 70).

It can be stated that irregular migration is a security threat to Slovakia and Hungary. Czechia and Poland had treated irregular migration as a security challenge before they confronted the migration wave directly at their borders.<sup>5</sup> We can state that these two countries have re-evaluated their attitude towards irregular migration and consider it at least a security threat. Romania continues considering irregular migration a security challenge.

### **3 Attitudes towards the People's Republic of China**

Poland ranks China among the strategic rivals of the USA and Russia. Because the USA is a critical strategic partner for Poland and Russia has generated several security threats at both global and regional levels, it is clearly stated that China also poses a security risk for Poland (SBNRP, 2020, pp. 6–7).

The Slovak security strategy assesses China as an essential participant and partner in meeting global challenges. However, it is also an economic and technological competitor and systemic rival of the EU. China significantly

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<sup>5</sup> For more than ten months, Poland was affected by irregular migration from August 2021. In response to EU sanctions against Belarus, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko encouraged migrants from the Middle East and elsewhere to enter the European Union illegally through Lithuania and Latvia, and later primarily through Poland (Bielecka, 2022). Since the number of irregular migrants in the Czech Republic increased, the Czech government introduced temporary border controls with Slovakia on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022 (Čtvrtletní zpráva o migraci za 3. čtvrtletí, 2022, p. 6).

increases its power potential and political influence based on rapidly growing military capabilities, which it assertively uses in combination with economic power and strategic investments to advance its interests (BSSR, 2021, paragraph 82). Behind the threat of military use of modern technologies, without directly naming an actor the Slovakian security strategy suggests that it is China.

The Czech defence strategy does not directly name China but indirectly considers it an ambitious economic actor (OSČR, 2015, paragraph 19). The Czech government policy statement confirmed its earlier decisions to exclude Chinese and Russian companies from its nuclear program (PVVČR, 2022, p. 10).

Hungary considers China the world's second largest national economy and centre of civilisation. It was interested in the pragmatic maintenance and strengthening of Hungarian-Chinese economic relations, primarily through mutually beneficial involvement in the “*Modern Silk Road*” (»*Belt and Road Initiative*«) program aimed at strengthening trade relations connecting the European, African and Asian continents. At the same time, in the case of Chinese investments in critical infrastructure – in the most advanced information and communication technologies – China's activities are classified as a security risk (MNBS, 2020, paragraph 119).

The Romanian defence strategy does not mention China as an emerging global power at all. As China's international (emerging) power objectives and aspirations encourage the United States to respond accordingly (SNAT, 2020, paragraph 83) the Romanian assessment of China reflects the American attitude, which makes it clear that Romania will accept the US position regarding China as a security risk.

Based on the security documents of the evaluated countries, China poses a security risk to each of them. By excluding China from its peaceful nuclear program, the Czech Republic moved it into the security threat. For other countries, except Hungary, a cautious approach to China can be assumed. Hungary continues to develop its strategic economic partnership with China (FM: Hungary's economy..., 2023); and through mitigating the regional security risks Budapest draws attention to in its own security strategy.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4 Attitudes towards Ukraine**

Strengthening the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine (as well as of Georgia and Moldova) are essential elements of the international security system. Therefore, Poland supports the Euro-Atlantic accession aspirations of these countries (SBNRP, 2020, p. 25).

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<sup>6</sup> According to MNBS: “*While capitalising on economic cooperation, we must also take into account the factors resulting from the vulnerability that may stem from investment in critical infrastructure by an emerging China, its appearance as a possible supplier of state-of-the-art info-communications technology, and in general by an increase in its regional influence.*” (MNBS, paragraph 119).

The Slovak Republic rejects any attempts to question the Euro-Atlantic ambitions and aspirations of partners such as Ukraine, Georgia, or the countries of the Western Balkans (BSSR, 2021, paragraph 72). The end of the armed conflict in Ukraine and restoring its sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the return of illegally occupied Crimea, is essential for Slovakia. Therefore, it will try to support a political solution to Ukraine's conflict and contribute to the fulfilment of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic ambitions (BSSR, 2021, paragraph 78). Slovakia will continue to promote the maintenance of natural gas transportation through the territory of Ukraine (BSSR, 2021, paragraph 89).

Ukraine is not explicitly mentioned in any of the evaluated documents of the Czech Republic. We can indirectly identify it as part of the “*Eastern Partnership of EU*” support in the security strategy (BSČR, 2015, paragraph 51). The Czech defence strategy points to the realisation of Russia's power ambitions through military force in Eastern Europe (OSČR, 2017, paragraph 4), and in the Program Statement we can identify Ukraine as part of the “*Eastern Partnership*” (PPVČR, 2022, p. 27).

Hungary is interested in a strong, democratic, stable, economically developing Ukraine and balanced bilateral relations. At the same time, legitimate efforts to strengthen Ukrainian national consciousness must not lead to the impairment of the acquired rights of the Transcarpathian Hungarian community<sup>7</sup> (MNBS, 2020, paragraph 88).

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<sup>7</sup> Hungarian-Ukrainian relations regarding the protection of national minorities have been deteriorating since 2011 when the Hungarian-Ukrainian Joint Commission for National Minorities last met. This session ended without signing the minutes for two reasons. The first was the non-recognition of Hungary's demand for creating a separate electoral district in the Zakarpattia region with a predominance of the Hungarian national minority and the creation of an individual “*Tisza-melléki*” district in which the Hungarian minority would prevail. The second was the rejection of Ukraine's request to cancel the simplified issuance of Schengen visas by Hungary only for members of the Hungarian national minority, which was provided by confirming the provision of financial coverage for the stay in Hungary (Fedinec, 2022). Further deterioration of bilateral relations occurred after 2017, when Ukraine, in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, limited the right to education in the language of national minorities. The new legislation introduces compulsory teaching of all subjects in the Ukrainian language from the fifth year of primary school (Školský zákon..., 2017). In December 2022, the National Council of Ukraine adopted the Ukrainian Law on National Minorities. It is a crucial requirement for the country's EU accession. The law mentioned protecting the rights of minorities, including the right to self-identification, the use of the languages of national minorities, education, and participation in political, economic, social, and cultural life. However, according to Budapest's position, the law further narrows the rights of national minorities living on the territory of Ukraine, including Hungarians (Kreft-Horváth, 2022). The Ukrainian Education Act and the Act on National Minorities directly contradict the policy of protection of the Hungarian national minority living beyond the borders of Hungary, which remained living in the territory of the successor states after the collapse of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Hungarian national minority living abroad is an inseparable part of the country; therefore, Hungary feels responsible for their safety, exercising the rights of the minority abroad and improving their living conditions.



The Romanian defence strategy does not take a clear position towards Ukraine. It mentions the country only twice, without evaluation, in connection with the deterioration of regional cooperation due to Russia's actions, which is the influence of the security crisis in eastern Ukraine, primarily on the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia (SNAT, 2020, paragraph 108) of and Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea (SNAT, 2020, paragraph 155). In this context, Russia's actions contributed to the deterioration of the regional security situation, significantly affecting Romania's eastern neighbourhood.

The evaluated countries want a potent, democratic, stable, and economically developing Ukraine. When Russia launched its unprovoked full-scale aggression against Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, millions of Ukrainians (primarily women with children) sought safety abroad. The V4 countries and Romania were the first to lend them a helping hand and provide temporary refuge or passage to other EU countries. Nearly 1.6 million reside in Poland, just shy of 491 thousand in the Czech Republic, around 110 thousand in Romania and Slovakia and slightly more than 34 thousand in Hungary. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovakian borders have been crossed by some 9.8 million, nearly 2.3 million, almost 2 million, and just shy of 2.2 million refugees respectively (Ukraine Refugee Situation, 2023). Financial support was also provided: Poland – 3.559 billion Euros (military commitment: 2.428 billion Euros), the Czech Republic – 0.57 billion Euros (military commitment: 0.464 billion Euros), Slovakia – 0.224 billion Euros (military commitment: 0.215 billion Euros), Hungary – 0.047 billion Euros, no military assistance<sup>8</sup> and Romania – 0.011 billion Euros (Military commitment: 0.003 billion Euros) (Ukraine Tracker..., 2023).

From the above numbers it is possible to conclude that no country denied humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees. The refugees decided to settle in countries that are linguistically close to them. There is a clear continuity with security strategies regarding military assistance to Ukraine.

## Conclusion

The table below contains synthesized analytical outputs on the reactions of the governments of the evaluated countries to the change in the security environment compared to the valid strategic documents.

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Therefore, denying previously granted privileges based on the European and Euro-Atlantic value systems is unacceptable for Budapest (Pásztor, 2020).

Ukraine indirectly admitted its tough stance on the use of the language of national minorities during peace talks with Russia in March 2022 (Орлова, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> As early as the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022 Hungary declared that it would not give weapons to Ukraine and would not permit to transport them through Hungary. Hungary justified its position with the safety of the Hungarian national minority living in Ukraine and supporting peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine.

1. Table: Analysis-evaluation matrix of the security factor levels

security factor / country	Russia	irregular migration	China	Ukraine	security assessment
<b>Poland</b>	threat	challenge	risk	support	strategy
	threat	threat	risk	support	February 2023
<b>Slovakia</b>	risk	threat	risk	support	strategies
	threat	threat	risk	support	February 2023
<b>Czechia</b>	risk	challenge	challenge	support	strategies
	threat	threat	threat	support	February 2023
<b>Hungary</b>	risk	threat	risk	support but set conditions	strategy
	risk	threat	risk	support but set conditions	February 2023
<b>Romania</b>	threat	challenge	risk	support	strategy

Source: author based on this paper

Poland and Romania continuously consider Russia a security threat. After the change in the security environment, Slovakia and the Czech Republic shifted their perception of Russia from a security risk to a security threat. Hungary maintains its attitude towards Russia at the same level (a security risk), also maintaining its economic relations with Russia (Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde, 2023). Regarding irregular migration, Slovakia, Hungary (a security threat), and Romania (a security challenge) did not change their position. The Czech Republic and Poland, after the direct experience with irregular migration, consider it a security threat. A qualitative jump is evident in the Czech Republic, which has reclassified irregular migration from the lowest to the highest security factor levels. Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania's attitudes toward China have not changed – they consider it a security risk country. The Czech Republic has had a significant shift, similar to the case of illegal migration, from security challenge to security risk. The attitude of all the evaluated states towards Ukraine is the same. They are interested in a sovereign, economically strong and prosperous Ukraine; support restoring its territorial integrity and its efforts to defend itself against Russian aggression. Regarding Hungary and Romania, direct military support is zero or minimal, but it is necessary to clarify that both countries contribute to the European Peace Facility (EPF).<sup>9</sup> Hungary also links Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration efforts to restoring the previously recognized rights of the Hungarian national minority.

In summary, the conclusion is that Poland and Romania's security strategies reflect Russia's security threat. After Russia started its "special military operation" in Ukraine in February 2022, the Czech Republic and Slovakia revised

<sup>9</sup> With the EPF, the EU funds the common costs of military Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, including military support for Ukraine (European Peace Facility, 2023).

their assessment from risk to threat. All the mentioned countries are gradually becoming independent of Russian energy carriers, except Hungary, which, although considering Russia a security risk, maintains business relations with Russia to preserve its competitive advantage, especially in importing energy carriers. The issue of illegal migration had been evaluated by the governments as less critical before they confronted with that security threat. Technologically advanced China is considered a security risk, except by the Czech Republic, which nevertheless excluded it from its nuclear power plant program. Hungary, on the contrary, is interested in developing and deepening trade relations with China (to preserve its competitive advantage). Each evaluated country is interested in a stable and economically strong Ukraine. Otherwise, if Ukraine were a collapsing or unstable state, it would pose a security challenge to every neighbouring country.

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