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National Security Cultures - A View From The Balkans



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Excerpt From Reviews

“...The scientific research study entitled “National Security Cultures – A View from The Balkans” authored by Svetlana Stanarević, Marina Mitrevska, Julija Brsakoska Bazerkoska and Aleksandar Spasov, offers an analysis of the phenomenon of the concept of national security cultures as a contemporary trend in security sciences. It examines the forms through which the culture of national security is constructed and manifested, while also investigating the factors that influence its perception and application with particular reference to the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia....”

...The study examines the foundations of the culture of national security, its constituent elements and the ways in which it develops in response to new threats. At the outset, the authors note that they were inspired by the publication *National Security Cultures – Patterns of Global Governance*, edited by Emil J. Kirchner & James Sperling. The central problem or question posed by the authors is whether the current culture of national security is adequate to address contemporary challenges such as terrorism, cybersecurity, and health crises. The monograph further explores the evolution from the traditional view of national security, focused on military defence to new dimensions, such as environmental and economic security....”

Prof. Nano Ružin

“...This monograph is among the first, well-constructed presentations of national security culture characteristics of two Western Balkan states – the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia, which deserve dedicated and thorough research because of their phenomenological features. Therefore, the authors of the monograph had a complex task to analyze the structure and characteristics of the national security cultures of these two states, which were phenomenologically shaped through numerous historical and political processes, that have undoubtedly left mark on their national security cultures habitus....”

...The incompleteness and imperfection of national security culture is a problem faced by all Western Balkans countries, and that is the reason for reduced resistance to various external influences, as well as for delays and lags in reforms and development. The monograph “National Security Cultures – A View from the Balkans” distinguishes itself through its analytical framework, particularly with two case studies of Western Balkan states. It highlights how dealing with crises, post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization in Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia, have played an important role in shaping their national security cultures....”

...Not only does the monograph address important issues of security culture, but it also highlights certain important elements and dimensions, which must be taken into account when seriously studying security topics. Namely, the monograph emphasizes that a systematic approach is essential for achieving national security goals and interests, while underscoring the indispensable significance of the security culture....”

Prof. Olivera Injac

The monograph *National Security Cultures – A View from the Balkans* provides a comprehensive analysis of the concept of security culture from various perspectives and through numerous examples, making it a valuable contribution to the field of security studies. The first part introduces readers to the fundamental concepts of culture and security - their etymological development, conceptual reflections, and their interconnection. The text successfully synthesizes these terms and offers clear definitions of security culture, contextualized within the research domain, while emphasizing its importance as the foundation of both national and European security policies. Particularly interesting are the reflections on the evolution of the security concept throughout history, which contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary challenges. The origins of the security culture concept are clearly presented, with reflections extending to different entities: the state, society, and the individual.

...The authors focus on specific case studies of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia. Through an examination of historical and social contexts, the development of national identity and interests, security threats, and the processes of transforming security structures and fostering regional integration, the authors provide valuable insights. Special attention is devoted to the challenges faced by Serbia and North Macedonia in the contemporary international environment, including the impact of conflicts, NATO integration, and regional politics. The analysis also highlights the factors shaping the national security culture in both countries, offering a nuanced understanding of their unique contexts...

...Overall, the monograph serves as an extensive guide to the theoretical foundations and practical examples of security culture, contributing to a better understanding of the complexity and dynamics of security systems in the modern world. Understanding national security culture is essential for developing tailored strategies of cooperation, dialogue, and conflict resolution, as it provides insights into the motivations and perceptions of various actors within society and at the international level. In summary, it provides a foundation for developing sustainable, acceptable and effective security policies that reflect a nation's identity and values, whereby one may have good strategic and tactical skills, but culture is essential. The authors effectively integrate theoretical reflections with case analyses, making this work a valuable resource for experts, researchers, and students seeking deeper insights into this important field.

Prof. Zoran Keković, PhD

List of abbreviations

CEFTA – Central European Free Trade Agreement
CSDP - Common Security and Defence Policy
COVID - Coronavirus Disease
DDoS – Distributed Denial of Service
DPMNE – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
DUI – Driving Under the Influence
EC – European Commission
EC – European Community
EUFOR – European Force
EU – European Union
FYROM - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
IPAP - Individual Partnership Action Plan (for NATO)
ICTY – International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
HELBROC – (EU Battlegroup - EU BG) an acronym of its first member States, namely HELLas, Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus
KFOR – Kosovo Force
KLA – Kosovo Liberation Army
MAP – Membership Action Plan
NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSPO - NATO Support and Procurement Organisation
NSSRS - National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia
OSCE - Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PARC - Partnership for the Assessment of Risks from Chemicals
PTEC – Partnership Training and Education Centres
SANU – Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
SDSM - Social Democratic Union of Macedonia

SEECP – South-East Europe Cooperation Process
SELEC - Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre
SFRY - Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SOFA - Status of Forces Agreement
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIFIL – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMIK – United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNPROFOR - United Nations Protection Forces
USA - United States of America
VMRO - Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation

Foreword

The Western Balkans continues to navigate a landscape defined by political transformation, shifting geopolitical influences, and profound social change. In such a context, understanding security requires more than institutional capacity and strategic planning; it demands an appreciation of the cultural values, collective memories, and societal expectations that shape how communities perceive threats and envision their future. The concept of *security culture* therefore represents a crucial lens through which to examine the region's stability, democratic resilience, and long-term development.

It was precisely this need for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the nexus between culture and security that inspired the regional conference “Culture and Security – New or Old Nexus in Security: How to Understand and Develop the Concept of Security Culture”, held in Skopje on 7 March 2025. Co-organized and supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation – Skopje Office, the event gathered academics, practitioners, and policymakers from across the region. Their discussions highlighted the importance of culture as a factor that shapes national security policy, institutional behaviour, and public trust — demonstrating that security is always embedded within broader societal and political frameworks.

The quality of the debates and the diversity of perspectives shared at the conference laid the groundwork for this monograph. As publisher, we are proud to continue supporting this effort, recognizing both its intellectual value and its political relevance for the Western Balkans today. This volume contributes to an emerging field by outlining how cultural norms, beliefs, and values influence security thinking, particularly in the cases of Serbia and North Macedonia. It shows that security culture is neither static nor neutral — it evolves alongside social change, political discourse, and transformations in identity.

This monograph also underscores the political importance of developing inclusive, transparent, and democratically grounded security cultures. At a time when the region faces both longstanding challenges and new forms

of vulnerability, strengthening the cultural foundations of security can support better decision-making, enhance institutional legitimacy, and reinforce societal cohesion. By linking theoretical frameworks to regional specificities, the authors provide insights that are relevant not only for academia but also for policymakers and practitioners working to build more resilient democratic systems.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the authors **Svetlana Stanarević, Marina Mitrevska, Julija Brsakoska Bazerkoska, and Aleksandar Spasov** whose dedication and scholarly contribution made this publication possible. We also thank all contributors, participants of the conference, and partners who enriched the debate and helped shape the intellectual foundation of this work. Their engagement reflects the region's growing commitment to understanding and strengthening security culture as an essential component of democratic development.

It is our hope that "*National Security Culture: A View from the Balkans*" will stimulate further dialogue, research, and collaboration across the region. By fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural dimensions of security, we collectively contribute to building a more stable, democratic, and forward-looking Balkans.

Nita Starova
Program Manager
Friedrich Ebert Foundation – Skopje Office

Introduction

The idea for this monograph originated after the conference “CULTURE AND SECURITY - NEW OR OLD NEXUS IN SECURITY - How to Understand and Develop the Concept of Security Culture,” held in Skopje on 7 March 2025. The event was organised with significant support from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which recognized the importance of this topic and continues to support this project by preparing and publishing the monograph. At the conference, the concept of security culture was promoted in North Macedonia through the exchange of knowledge and ideas among representatives of the academic community from the Western Balkans region (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia).

Numerous debates have been initiated over the past few decades with regard to security studies aimed at understanding the influence of culture on security. The conference provided an excellent platform where participants highlighted the creative, open, and communicative dimensions of culture, the broad scope of the security concept and various topics linking culture and security. As a result of high-quality discussions and exchange of diverse approaches and ideas regarding the concept of culture and its influence on security studies culminating in the development of the new concept of security culture the idea to prepare this monograph was conceived. Our goal is to document these insights and create space for further activities that will deepen this topic and involve more scholars and practitioners in the discourse on security culture. This is a challenging, yet inspiring field, valuable both for empirical research and for the development of theory concerning this phenomenon.

In today’s world, where the security and stability of societies increasingly rely on deep-rooted norms and values, understanding the relationship between culture and security becomes crucial for shaping effective security strategies. This monograph focuses on presenting the concept of security culture, as a complex set of values, beliefs and behaviours that shape the approach to security in the societies of Serbia and North Macedonia.

Through the analysis of theoretical frameworks and regional specificities, the goal is to shed light on the role of culture in shaping security practices and identify factors that contribute to building, maintaining and developing a national security culture.

Various concepts are being developed in theory, providing a solid foundation and recommendations for designing mechanisms and strategies to address security challenges more effectively through political and practical processes. Starting from potential assumptions about how the concept of security culture has been formed and evolved, it is essential to explore the potential this concept carries for approaching security issues differently. In this monograph, we have attempted to integrate several elements - concepts, theoretical constructs and categories from the fields of culture and security into a cohesive whole - offering a more comprehensive explanation of how the concept of security culture was created and developed.

Considering different definitions and interpretations, as well as multiple theoretical approaches, it is important to highlight that culture, in its complexity and layered nature, provides varied answers regarding its essence, conceptual development, purpose, and application within the security domain. We have established that, beyond being a condition and means of human existence, culture also plays a crucial role in cultivating and shaping human behaviour, influencing social relations and overall societal development. Today, culture has again become a focal point in the study of national security policy, where cultural factors significantly contribute to grand strategies and state behaviour, as well as to internal security architecture within different frameworks.

Various theoretical perspectives on security are well-established in the literature, each offering insights into the understanding of this concept through notions of security, certainty and the preservation of existence. The analysis of security can be approached through its evolution as a fundamental human need and as an interest rooted in cultural needs applying a cultural approach shaped by the category of national security. This section aims to articulate how culture is integrated into security concepts and how it is reflected across different levels - individual, societal, community, or state - demonstrating how culture functions as a national security interest.

Through examining the relationship between identity, culture, and security, we conclude that social changes in the process of identity formation, along with transformations from one form to another, are influenced and

reinforced by social capacities to establish elements of national culture that can be transformed into a security culture.

The development of security thought and how the concept of culture entered the field of security, are examined within this framework considering both the issue of identity (with national characteristics) and the issue of national security. Like culture, the development of the security concept had specific historical connotations in the diverse understanding of its essence. Over time, its objective and subjective understandings have been accepted, reflected in the knowledge possessed about dangers and the possibility or ability to resist them and to “manage” the situation, preserving the values that have been chosen as desirable and worthy of preservation and protection.

Security culture can be seen as a concept that faces the challenge of overcoming contradictions inherent in the development of international relations, societal progress, and statehood amid new security challenges, risks, and threats. It serves both analytical and normative purposes: exploring which factors contribute to greater security and which socio-political and economic relations are most conducive to ensuring security for individuals, groups, nations, and the international community. Developing the capacity to understand and respect the influence of culture on politics, strategy, and security is a key skill in security thinking. Cultural knowledge encompasses examination of history, values, ideology, religion, and other dimensions along with their potential impact on security policies. By presenting security culture as a factor in the development of national security, we highlight two key transfer processes: first, the transfer of national culture into a security culture; and second, the transfer of national security principles into a security culture.

The methodologies and models used for researching security culture are diverse, and in recent years, the interest of scholars and researchers has expanded to new approaches and perspectives beyond traditional security studies. There remains significant potential for improving research programs, methodologies, and models. Key areas for development include: establishing a common definition of security culture; understanding how security culture is formed, sustained and transmitted across generations; exploring its universality; and enhancing connections among different sources of security policy.

Finally, security culture can be understood within the context of regional, international, and global processes, as well as through its potential for in-

stitutional development in relation to social integration, state-building, and international relations.

In preparing this monograph, our guiding idea was to promote a concept that is still under development, applying an approach that considers security culture as a strategic framework for national security, illustrated through the cases of two countries in the Western Balkans region – Republic of Serbia and Republic of North Macedonia.

Svetlana Stanarević
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Chapter 1

Security Culture as a Concept Synthesized From the Terms Culture and Security

Svetlana Stanarević

Today's world is burdened by numerous contradictions, as inevitable consequences of complex changes in the second half of the twentieth century. Confronted with growing and evident problems that undermine and threaten the values of individuals, social groups, society as a whole, or the international community, the focus of attention for theorists and researchers increasingly involves culture and security as the main "actors" in all complex relationships among people, nations, or states.

Events, challenges, and new developmental trends, such as democratic consolidation in post-war Iraq, the conflicts in Gaza, or the war in Ukraine, have led to the necessity of innovative thinking regarding the relations between culture and security. Once considered a secondary factor, culture now occupies a central place in the development of international relations, as well as in national and international security. Its importance is not a new phenomenon, culture has always had a significant influence reflected across all spheres of society but in recent decades, its presence on the international stage has become even more evident through changes in the distribution of power, new sources of influence, and emerging forms of power.

Specifically, the new modes of expressing power in international relations are no longer limited solely to technological advancements or the educational structure of populations but also include the attractiveness of cultural goods and resources, ideologies, ways of thinking and living in other words, the overall civilizational pattern and its appeal. Conflicts such as the war in Ukraine, the struggles in Gaza, or complex challenges in Syria, along with the global fight against terrorism, have highlighted the importance of culture as both a tool and a determinant in shaping identity, legitimacy, and power on the international stage. Through these events, it becomes clear how cultural exchange, ideologies, and civilizational differences influence the course of conflicts, as well as the possibilities for peaceful resolution and building stability.

With regard to the above, security culture is a concept that is increasingly gaining importance and can be viewed in light of several transformations that have occurred in recent decades, leading to a change in the very paradigm of security. These changes have taken place in the sphere of international relations, marked by the end of the Cold War, followed by increasingly intensive research into the role that culture plays in the field of security, as well as in the realm involving the transformation of information and communication technologies.

To fully understand what security culture is and how it can be built and developed, it is necessary to examine the terms and conceptual frameworks that constitute it. Besides emerging within the context of transformations occurring externally, the concept also possesses transfer properties, so we must consider different levels and dimensions in which transfer occurs, such as: the transfer of certain functions within culture, the transfer of categories and theoretical constructs from one concept to another, the transfer of knowledge, the transfer of meanings, and the transfer of security referent objects and subjects from one field of analysis to another, as well as the transfer of threats, methodologies, and research procedures, among others (Stanarević, 2012:280-281)¹.

Accepting a simple explanation of synthesis as a process of combining separate components or elements into a whole, two elements in our case, culture and security form a relationship that possesses a special quality. This relationship is very important because synthesis presents an opportunity to create new knowledge from existing knowledge, or to combine or synthesize information from different studies into new research, thereby developing an argument or a unique perspective on the topic. Therefore, in our case, we view synthesis as the possibility of connecting the body of knowledge about culture with the body of knowledge about security into a new form of knowledge manifested through the concept of security culture.

In addition to knowledge which represents the cognitive element of both culture and security, which is linked or synthesized, we can also observe and analyse the instrumental dimension. This dimension is reflected in the

¹ It is necessary to emphasize at the beginning that in Chapter I of this monograph certain paragraphs or sections of chapters, which contain significant corrections, were taken from the doctoral dissertation of author Svetlana Stanarević. This dissertation was defended in 2012 at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Security Studies. The topic of the doctorate is *The Concept of Security Culture and the Assumptions of its Development*. The referenced parts are quoted, often paraphrased, as interpretations of earlier thinking, but most are significantly modified or supplemented with new findings and considerations that have emerged in the meantime regarding the topic of security culture. The repository of doctoral dissertations at the University of Belgrade, as well as available doctorates, can be found at: <https://fb.bg.ac.rs/download/RepozitorijumDisertacija/2012-11-09%20Stanarevic%20Svetlana/Disertacija.pdf>

means by which people solve problems, satisfy their needs, and simultaneously prepare to confront new problems and meet emerging needs. When a new problem is detected in the field of security, culture will conceive and produce an appropriate response to that problem and provide adequate instruments that security structures can use to “master” the problem.

Synthetic features imply that cultural and security factors can be treated as variables within unified analytical systems. This does not mean merely harmonizing terminology or creating new terms, nor imposing a set of categories across the entire field. It is more about integrating different types of theories and concepts so that meaningful assertions can be formulated, encompassing results isolated within separate research areas. We begin by exploring the concept of culture.

The Concept of Culture

The analysis of the concept of culture helps to clarify the symbolic meanings and positive values - both implicit and explicit - embedded in a particular way of life within a certain culture. The analysis also encompasses the examination of elements of the way of life (which, according to proponents of different definitions, do not necessarily fall within the domain of culture); the organisation of state institutions; the structure of institutions that express or govern social relations; characteristic forms of communication among members of society; traces of creative human activity in institutions and behavioural patterns - all of which can be situated within the context of a way of life in relation to security and insecurity (Stanarević, 2012).

In today’s world, culture represents an integral part of both societal and individual life. If we attempted to define it through the lens of complete scientific objectivity, it would be difficult to isolate culture as a distinct field or object of observation. Similarly, establishing an objective judgment about culture is challenging because every interpretation, even scientific, is conditioned by the context in which it arises. The characteristics of culture such as dynamism, heterogeneity, and variability place it within the fields of social, psychological, political, economic, and spiritual life, but also within the domain of security.

The renowned cultural theorist Raymond Williams emphasized in his works that culture is “ordinary”, which can mean, among other things, that it is part of the lives of all classes and social groups and encompasses a multitude of everyday practices. He also noted that, “*as a complex organism or a*

certain way of life, culture always speaks through the community and experiences of a particular social group, which is conditioned by its position within the social structure” (Stanarević, 2012 according to Williams, 2008:124).

Among the numerous approaches and interpretations of culture, two stand out: one that views culture as a completely autonomous and incomprehensible phenomenon, and another arguably closer to the true state of affairs that sees culture as relatively autonomous but still a social phenomenon characterized by certain laws in its origin and development, which are directly related to other numerous factors of overall social development and the development of social relations.

In literature, there is often a traditional understanding of culture, which is presented as a standard of aesthetic perfection or the best that has been thought and expressed in the world. In this way, culture is seen as a devoted sphere where truth is discovered, creativity is expressed, and the depth and breadth of the spirit are revealed in so-called “high culture.” This view is complemented by another, rooted in ethnology and anthropology, which refers to a particular way of life expressing certain meanings and values not only in art and knowledge but also in institutions and everyday (security-related) behaviour. Reduced to the individual level, culture can also be understood as a perspective on one’s own life, the life of the community, and a collection of tacit guidelines for acting and experiencing the world around us.

Malinowski maintains that *“culture obviously is the integral whole consisting of implements and consumers’ goods, of constitutional charters for the various social groupings, of human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs”*. Whether we look at a very simple or “primitive” culture, or a highly complex and developed one, according to Malinowski, we always deal with an enormous apparatus, part material, part human, part spiritual, thanks to which man can successfully solve specific problems he faces (Malinowski, 1970). The same author considers culture to be *“an instrumental reality, an apparatus for the satisfaction of fundamental needs, that is, organic survival, environmental adaptation, and continuity in the biological sense”* (Malinowski, 1970:32). Every culture, therefore, must first and foremost seek to satisfy the biological system of needs. However, as Malinowski adds, as soon as human anatomy is supplemented by a bludgeon or a stone, a fire or a coverlet, the use of such tools, instruments and artefacts not only satisfies bodily needs, it also introduces new, derived needs.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning Clifford Geertz, who, besides the functionalist approach to culture, calls attention to another idea of culture, according to which culture can be represented as “*a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call “programs”) – for the governing of behaviour*” (Geertz, 1973: 44–45). Regarding the development and understanding of the concept of security culture, it is very important also to stress this dimension of culture, which comprises a set of control mechanisms, since, as Geertz further states, man is an animal that depends on such extra genetic, external mechanisms and such cultural programmes that govern his behaviour. Let it be said here that culture comes close to the synthetic sense of the term management – i.e. “*achieving a goal in spite of difficulties*” – *where it is important, just like at the core of management, to do things in a way in which people would not do them on their own, without supervision*” (Bauman, 2009: 68). Such a description of the term management and its analogy with the term culture serve to indicate restriction of freedom of the object of management, which is meaningful and justified as long as it provides more security and safety (which is a major concern today in fighting terrorism). And it is this kind of change, i.e. more security or perhaps merely enough security that we should bring about by applying the concept of security culture.

In any case, we can accept the perspective that defines culture as the processes that shape, control, and manage human thinking and behaviour whether as individuals or as part of a group enabling people to more effectively solve existential problems, satisfy fundamental needs and interests, and develop new aspects of life. The ultimate goal of culture is to foster a more humane mankind and a more compassionate society. Thanks to culture, humans have gained numerous advantages; they have exercised and developed their abilities, expanded their ideas, and ennobled their emotions. In other words, they have become sensible and human beings. Indeed, as Marcuse defined culture:

“It was a process of humanization, characterised by the collective effort to protect human life, to pacify the struggle for existence or keep it within controllable bounds, to stabilise the productive organisation of society, to develop man’s intellectual faculties, to reduce and overcome aggression, violence and misery.”

(Marcuse, 1977:223).

One of the most influential and frequently cited theorists in the field of culture is Edward T. Hall. He developed the concept of “culture” as a system of meanings, symbolic behaviours, and interpretations that shape the way people understand and approach the world. We highlight this definition because it is relevant to the concept of security culture, as it emphasizes the values, norms, and behaviours that influence attitudes toward security, responsibility, and preparedness. Hall’s definition of culture is: “*culture is a set of habits, beliefs, customs, and values that shape the behaviour and way of thinking of a particular society or group*” (Hall, 1976).

From the above it follows that it is clear that key attributes of culture are fundamental to understanding the concept of security culture. Culture is a complex system that encompasses material, spiritual, and human elements, primarily serving to satisfy basic biological and existential needs. Malinowski emphasizes that culture provides instrumental tools and ideas that help humans solve problems and adapt to their environment, which also introduces new needs. Geertz highlights that culture functions as a set of control mechanisms, rules and programs that regulate behaviour, an idea highly relevant to security culture, as it involves formalized procedures and norms guiding responsible and safe conduct. Additionally, Hall describes culture as a set of habits, beliefs, customs, and values that shape behaviour and thinking within a society. Overall, culture shapes values, norms, and behaviours related to security and preparedness, acting as a system of external controls that manage human actions to ensure safety and resilience within society.

However, to better understand the concept of culture, it is important at the beginning to examine the etymology and various interpretations of the term in etymological, historical, and comprehensive (thesauri) dictionaries. This allows researchers to identify additional important dimensions or characteristics that can be significant for a deeper understanding of the concept of security culture.

Etymological and Dictionary Interpretation of the Meaning of the Term Culture

Etymologically, the term “culture” derives from the Latin words *cultus* and *colere*. The primary meaning of the first of these two words lies in the religious understanding of culture. In contrast, the word “colere”, which means “to nurture,” “to cultivate,” or “to till,” has a broader meaning that aligns

more closely with the modern conception of culture. The essential meaning of the word “culture” refers, on one hand, to the practical-material process of nurturing one’s offspring, i.e., children and youth, and on the other hand, to the cultivation of land, plants, and animals. The latter represents the root of material culture.

There is also a meaning of the word “culture” that is interpreted as a process of nurturing the soul and spirit, relating to the development of human mental and spiritual abilities and qualities. The understanding of the entire culture as spiritual culture is, in fact, its narrower meaning, which includes science, art, and philosophy.

Globally, culture is often seen as the opposite of nature, which is not the work of humans. It is the totality of human achievements and expressions, historical, individual, and collective as well as practical, aesthetic, theoretical, mythological, and religious forms of expression (Schneel, 2008). The concept, therefore, encompasses both the culture of creation (Greek *poiesis*) and the culture of action in an ethical sense (Greek *praxis*).

From ancient times to the present, numerous searches and attempts have been made to explain the concept and the essence of culture. Throughout history, there have been more separate worlds that for a long time had no knowledge of each other’s existence, and only in recent times did they find and connect with one another, primarily thanks to the development of science and technology, modern means of transportation, and communication tools. The diverse mentalities of ancient Egypt, Imperial China, Japan, pre-Columbian America, peoples of Oceania islands, Black Africa before European colonization, as well as the Arab, Turkish, or Iranian East, enriched the analysis of what constitutes culture, i.e., an essentially universal idea.

Their perspectives, ways of thinking, and interpretations are still in the shadow of the Western world, which emerged from Greek-Latin and Christian civilization, and which gradually developed the concept of modern culture as an idea that was most thoroughly contemplated within that world. To truly understand the meaning of the concept of culture, it is also necessary to consider their worldview (the perspective of the East, Far East, etc.) and their way of thinking about this phenomenon, which is often lacking in texts dealing with this topic.

American anthropologists Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, in a study *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, already in 1952, analysed and classified as many as 164 basic definitions of culture con-

tained in anthropological and sociological literature dating back to 1871 (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). It is not difficult to imagine how much this number has increased in the period from 1952 to today, especially considering the contributions of other scientific disciplines that have, in the meantime, joined the discussions on what culture is².

The concept of culture finds its place even in the earliest times. Athens and other Greek city-states did not have words that correspond to the modern concept of culture. However, some were close: “tropos” which represented a manner or method of expression; then “ethos” in the sense of “habitat, customs, breath, or spirit.” Thus, Socrates also said that “*we should call Greeks those who share our ethos rather than those who share our blood.*” The word “paideia” is also a significant ancient Greek word closest to the modern meaning of the term culture (“paideia” from which, with slight modification, the term “pedagogy” derives). Cicero found its best equivalent in the word “humanitas” (Dolo, 2000:20).

In the Roman period, there was no significant progress in deepening the meaning of the concept of culture in terms of enriching the human spirit. Culture was then reduced to the concept of education and was viewed as a need only for select individuals for the development of refined taste and privileges reserved for a small number of people. The contribution of the Romans was in deriving the word “cultura” from Latin “colere” to cultivate. As mentioned earlier, this word was understood in its material and technical sense: improving the quality of fields and land to grow cereals, plants, trees, and fruits. The concept of culture also implies a pronounced intertwining of culture and religion, especially through the meaning of the second word, cultus, which referred to the worship of gods.

The Oxford Dictionary first mentioned it in 1450, referring to culture in its figurative sense, representing a broader framework arising from the use of metaphor. Thus, culture does not only denote an object (cultivated land), but also activity (cultivating the land)³. During the 16th century, culture was understood in its figurative sense as the refinement of the spirit and behaviour, and it was introduced into scientific language. In the 17th century, the adjective “enlightened” was often used, while the noun “culture” remained

² According to one study, there are over 250 definitions of culture today. See: Patrick D. Allan, *Understanding Military Culture: A Canadian Perspective*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, Canada, 2004, p. 15.

³ Around 1450, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the noun “culture” was first used in Middle English. At this time, it referred to the tilling of the soil or a cultivated field, deriving from the Latin *cultūra* which meant “cultivation, agriculture, or tillage”. This earliest sense of the word is evident in texts like Palladius's *De Re Rustica*. See: <https://archive.org/details/cu31924012433615>

rare and mostly used with some qualifying adjuncts (artistic culture, scientific culture). It was only in 1691 that, in one work, culture was mentioned without a qualifying adjunct, in the sense of spiritual refinement.

The first modern definition of the concept of culture comes from the German Samuel von Pufendorf, who in 1686 provided one interpretation of culture stating that:

“Culture encompasses all inventions and arrangements applied in human life, i.e., clothing, language, customs, art, and primarily the entire organisation of civilized civic societies, through which mankind was introduced into the framework of a certain order. Culture enables every person to attain a truly human life thanks to competition, activities, and the discovery of other people, but also thanks to individual efforts and reflections, as well as divine inspiration”

(Pufendorf, 1686 according to Kloskovska, 2001:10).

Almost eighteen centuries have passed since this understanding of culture, because this definition of the psychological and religious essence resembles the word *paideia*, which was used among the ancient Greeks. In the 18th century, France took on the role of boldly developing the concept of culture in its figurative sense. Indeed, some authors again gained awareness of what the term “spiritual culture” signifies, which is especially revitalized by Voltaire, who advocated for expanding the concept of culture, primarily in the name of cosmopolitanism. Culture was also assigned its intellectual dimension, while the spirit lost part of its spiritual and religious meaning and acquired a rationalist, political, and social tone.

Namely, culture is understood through the corpus of human standards summarized as civilization, and here one can also add Freud’s reflection that the first condition of civilization is justice. Although it is believed that even savage tribes have their own special culture and justice, the much more sophisticated French society of the 18th century demanded a more advanced system of justice, similar to the one proposed by the eminent Italian philosopher and criminologist of the 18th century, Cesare Beccaria, in his “Treatise on Crimes and Punishments” from 1764⁴. However, the effectiveness of any justice system depends on the degree of individual and social conform-

⁴ Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments* was translated into French by the Abbe Morellet in 1766 and published with an anonymous commentary by Voltaire. See: <https://repository.rice.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/2b2f93e1-fdb5-49c3-8b9f-627282a0b4d4/content>

ity with established norms of behaviour, which differentiate between good and evil differences determined by reason and experience (Topazio, 1977).

In Germany, during the 19th century, “culture” developed as a polemical term, opposed to the French concept of “civilization.” In Napoleon’s era, civilization was associated with national ideas and a universal belief in progress, and was primarily interpreted as a system of action. Building on how Immanuel Kant and the subsequent era of idealism used the word “culture,” the German understanding of this term emphasized inner cultivation, in contrast to external cultivation, which was characteristic of civilization (Kloskovska, 2001). The further development of the concept of culture increasingly highlighted human achievements, which grew throughout history, as well as their importance for a specific social and predominantly ethnic system of connection and its ethical premises. In mediating the concept of culture, humanistic-pedagogical concepts also played an important role, limiting culture to the so-called high culture, expressed through certain forms of literature and art in general.

Around 1800, the term acquired a specific German novelty in meaning that is, it was filled with philosophical content. This narrowed the Enlightenment concept of culture, which consequently transformed culture in the narrower sense (science and art) into a medium for the ambitious concept of education. As a sort of interpretive matrix, this would significantly influence the worldview of educated citizens up to the present day (Snel, 2008). During the first three decades of the 20th century, the concept of culture reached its greatest philosophical and journalistic development in the German speaking area, both in terms of establishing theories of culture and in terms of cultural critique.

In Russia, the word “culture” was first recorded in N. Kirilov’s Pocket Dictionary of Foreign Words in 1845-1846, where it was described as directed activity aimed at awakening dormant forces within an object, and as a certain level of development of that activity⁵. At the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, the word “culture” had not yet been found in the theory of philosophy and literature in Russia. The current content of this term was conveyed at the time with words like “education” and “enlightenment.” In A. S. Pushkin, who did not use the term “culture” but certainly knew of it, one could read: “Respect for the past that is the trait that distinguishes education

⁵ Карманный словарь иностранных слов, вошедших в состав русского языка, издаваемый Н. Кириловым : Вып. 1. - Санкт-Петербург : тип. Губ. правл., 1845-1846. - 14. See: <http://rarebook.onu.edu.ua:8081/handle/store/2370>

from barbarism” (Соколов, 1976). The same author also notes that later, in the Encyclopaedic Dictionary of All Sciences, published in 1878, culture was referred to as the spiritual and material development of the land, and the concepts of “culture” and “civilization” were considered synonyms.

The indeterminacy of the term “culture” led to sceptical attitudes towards it among some theorists in the first half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the term was accepted in scientific literature in most countries, including in Dutch, Scandinavian, and Slavic languages, and it became fully established in Spain, Italy, and America, while in France and England it encountered some resistance. According to some interpretations, the language of science in these two countries was already sufficiently developed at the time of the emergence of the science of culture, and for this reason, there was less need for foreign borrowings, especially German ones.

Thus, by the end of the 20th century, culture was no longer understood in a certain overly intellectual and literary manner; its domain expanded to include other values, which inevitably opened up new debates supporting or opposing such interpretations. During the 1990s, the concept of culture underwent further differentiation whenever some form of cultural expression gained a cult status and was connected with ritual forms of self-incensing. Culture then also began to be perceived as part of the so-called event.

It is not only the interpretation of the term “culture” that has evolved over time, but also the efforts to understand the very essence of culture by various interpreters, theorists, and researchers who sought to systematically and cohesively present their understanding of culture, methods of its scientific investigation, and to derive a definition of culture as an object of scientific research and science as an instrument for exploring culture. In this way, they aimed to establish a maximally consistent and coherent scheme, connected by a logical structure unique to itself, of all key factors and their mutual relations involved in the dynamics of the origin and development of culture and cultural phenomena.

In addition to terminological presentations and dilemmas regarding the meaning of culture, there are also specific theories and theoretical approaches that take culture as their subject of study, applying different criteria conditioned by research needs and the ideas we aim to develop. For example, these can be two dichotomous principles guiding this work: rational and irrational, which also determine two general orientations of cultural theory, tentatively divided into: a) rationalist theories and b) metaphysical-irrationalist theories. Methodologically, rationalist theories approach “culture” em-

pirically, meaning they understand culture as a historical, objective, factual reality. Conversely, irrationalist theories believe that behind the apparent manifestation of “culture” there is a metaphysical foundation, which can be uncovered by examining its deeper structures, primarily emotional and collective-soul carriers and motivators.

In presenting theories of culture, sometimes this dichotomous principle can be followed, while at other times, emphasis is placed on how certain elements of culture such as tradition, change/progress, and identity are interpreted, or which are given priority or importance in understanding and explaining the very concept of culture. Among these are: ethnological and anthropological theories, theory of cultural evolution, ecological approaches, functionalism, structuralism, constructivism, cultural studies, and many others. In her doctoral thesis, Svetlana Stanarević presented these theoretical approaches and identified the key determinants of culture that are significant for establishing with security, as well as for a better understanding within the framework of security culture (Stanarević, 2012: 40-79). The essential insights we can highlight, at least from these approaches, are summarized in the following points:

- Culture is both a condition, a means, and the essence of human existence. It has the potential to determine ways of directing and investing in prolonging life and providing its meaning.
- Cultivation or processing represents a fundamental connection between human groups and the natural environment from which they derive means of life. Thus, culture reflects the basic ways in which different societies perceive their relationship with nature not only as a source of food and energy but also as a source of experience that helps them cope with mortality, dangers, and risks, as well as marking significant milestones in the cycle of human life.
- Culture is a significant factor in shaping human behaviour, and these are not merely “natural instincts,” a topic often discussed in debates about community evolution from tribes to empires to modern states. In some cases, communities are modelled under environmental influence, such as climate or the presence of competing groups; in others, by shared ideas about identity and common goals that unite them.
- Culture must be recognized as a crucial factor influencing overall social development - political, economic, technological as well as in the fields of security and security phenomena.

- To effectively adopt the concept of culture as a basis for reflection in security studies, it is necessary to reconcile subjective ideas with objective, empirical reality.
- At its core, culture is a valuable tool an instrument through which humans are better equipped to address specific, concrete problems encountered in their environment, especially in satisfying their needs.
- Culture can also be understood as an interconnected system of signs (symbols) subject to interpretation. However, it is not a source of power itself; rather, it provides a context within which social events, behaviours, institutions, and processes can be meaningfully and thoroughly understood.
- Culture is both a theoretical and practical domain that is continually evolving, acquiring new meanings and interpretations. It is increasingly linked to concepts that serve as important analytical tools for understanding the numerous changes occurring in contemporary societies.

The process of content production focused on culture, of course, is not yet finished, and it is expected that future reflections and ideas that shape culture will also be fruitful and constructive.

Culture and Reflection on Security

The idea that culture can define strategic outcomes was first observed among classical theorists Thucydides, Sun Tzu Wu, and later Clausewitz. Early research attempted to explain how “national character” could influence or lead to different ways of conducting war. Based on these assumptions, connections were made between culture and security policy, focusing on “national character” as a product of language, religion, customs, socialization, and the interpretation of shared historical experiences (Lantis&Howlett, 2007:84).

It has long been recognized that cultural knowledge and warfare are inseparably linked. Herodotus also emphasized cultural knowledge as a means of enhancing military strength, highlighting the importance of understanding the “enemy’s” character during the Persian Wars (490–479 B.C.E.). Many generals and soldiers throughout different historical epochs memorized Sun Tzu Wu’s verse: *“If I know the enemy and know myself, I need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”* Additionally, many contemporary mil-

itary theorists and commanders emphasize that despite memorizing great thoughts expressed in *The Art of War*, especially “know your enemy,” as one of the fundamental principles of warfare numerous military operations and decisions crucial to national security have failed precisely due to a lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and societies, and an ignorance of the cultural context within which everyday life takes place.⁶

Culture has also found its place in other social activities, so political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba sparked interest in political culture, which they defined as a “subset” of society’s beliefs and values that rely on the political system (Almond&Verba, 1963). For them, political culture encompasses the obligation to respect values such as democratic principles and institutions, ideas related to morality and the use of force, the rights of individuals and communities, as well as predispositions regarding the role and position of a particular country in the world.

Sociologist Ann Swidler proposed a more comprehensive model of the connection between culture and state behaviour by emphasizing the intermediary role of what she calls cultural “strategic action.” Swidler defines culture in a very broad sense and states that it consists of symbolic carriers of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, artistic forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural habits such as language, gossip, stories, and daily rituals. Based on the arguments of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, she argues that strategies driven by interest are a very important intermediary structure when it comes to behaviour of the state (Swidler, 1986).

In the mid-1970s, Jack Snyder introduced culture into modern security research by developing the theory of strategic culture to interpret the Soviet nuclear doctrine. He considers that a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavioural patterns taking into account nuclear strategy achieved a state of semi-permanence, which he situates at a “cultural” level rather than solely within policy itself. Snyder applied a strategic-cultural framework to interpret the development of nuclear doctrines in the Soviet Union and the United States as a function of various organisational, historical, and political factors, as well as technological limitations. He concluded that the So-

⁶ For example, the American experience of warfare illustrates this thesis very well, with numerous examples from wars fought in the 20th and early 21st centuries: the Vietnam War, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These various “small” wars have alerted politicians, strategists, and military leaders to the importance of culture at the tactical and operational levels. Considerations of how culture influences political and strategic actions, as well as the behavior of others, have become vital strategic tasks. The ability to understand and appreciate the role and influence of culture in politics and strategy is increasingly regarded as a critical skill in strategic thinking. Cultural knowledge at the level of politics and strategic action involves the capacity to consider history, values, ideology, religion, and other cultural dimensions, and to assess their impact on potential policies, especially within the security sphere.

viet military showed a preference for preventive, offensive use of force, and the origins of this could be found in Russian history marked by insecurity and authoritative control (Snyder, 1977).

Colin Gray also noted that different national styles, deeply rooted in the “individual course of historical experience,” characterize the strategic development of countries such as the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Based on this, nuclear strategy can be linked to historical political orientations. Gray defined strategic culture as “a regime of thinking and action, taking into account the forces stemming from perceptions of a nation’s historical experience, from the aspiration for responsible behaviour at the state level,” and even from “civilian culture and way of life” (Gray, 1981). Accordingly, strategic culture “provides the environment within which strategy is debated” and serves as a decisive independent factor in strategic political patterns. Like Snyder, Gray believed that strategic culture could have a conditionally lasting influence on security policy.

How culture shapes national security is best seen through the behaviour of the state in international relations and, accordingly, through the achievement of a position from which it can significantly influence other states on the international stage or endure their influences. In this context, culture is also difficult to define, but scholars agree that it is, in any case, an important concept in international relations. When observing and analysing this sphere of cultural activity, three areas are often identified where culture frequently finds application in the consideration of international relations: as already mentioned, in the connected fields of political, strategic, and organisational culture.

To analyse the structure of the relationship between culture and security, both concepts must be placed on a level that provides stability and a solid foundation for theoretical reflection. This can, therefore, be at the level of national security, where concepts such as: national culture, national and/or cultural identity, and national interests intersect. Since the emergence of modern nation-states, it has become clear that cultures can be constructed through deliberate policies and frameworks, but they can also serve as instruments through which we can shape people, their thinking, prejudices, emotions, behavioural patterns, and political preferences.

Culture plays a crucial role in national security through its various functions. The survival function ensures humanity’s continued existence and motivates efforts to protect not only our species but also the planet. The communication function facilitates contact, information exchange, coop-

eration, and mutual trust, giving meaning to relationships. The normative function helps establish rules and norms that guide useful behaviour while preventing harmful activities. The security and protection function involves planning and measures to distinguish good from evil, ensuring survival, order, and peace. Lastly, the cumulative function allows for the storage of human achievements material, spiritual, and knowledge whose potential is vital for developing a security culture. This accumulated cultural wealth fosters creativity, innovation, and the protection of vital values, forming the core of modern national security (Stanarević & Gačić, 2014).

It is well known that national security refers to the activity of the state by which it, in accordance with its social capabilities in the present and resources it builds for the future, protects its own identity, survival, and interests. Moreover, social capabilities, in the broadest sense, are conditioned by cultural features such as tradition, values, beliefs, institutions, as well as ways of life. When discussing security, this social dimension is particularly emphasized because, to be secure, it is not enough to simply lack some threat or danger; one must live in a society that is abundant in justice, morality, and culture a society that continuously improves its values.

The theorist Peter J. Katzenstein emphasized sociological institutional perspectives on the politics of national security and considered two determinants of security policy - the cultural-institutional context and the imagined or constructed identities of states, governments, and other actors. He also notes at least three effects that a cultural environment can have on a state's identity, and thus on its interests and security policy. First, it can influence the likelihood that the state will survive as an entity. Second, the environment can change the system of forms of statehood over time. Today, in contrast to the late 19th century, it would be almost unthinkable for a state to casually declare itself a colony. Accordingly, until the 19th century, armed conflict was viewed as a moral exercise of state power; whereas today, states still organised for war are changing international norms and are not immune to internal factors that "weaken" aggressive impulses in many nations. This is especially noticeable in the West, creating a sentiment that war is regarded as a necessary evil. Finally, as a third effect, the cultural environment can induce changes in the characteristics of statehood within the given international system. An example is how, as a consequence of World War II, changes in identity politics occurred in Germany and Japan, leading to the formation of new identities of trading nations (Katzenstein, 1996:33-75).

Following this thought, and unlike the dimensions of political, strategic, and organisational culture, we believe it is appropriate to introduce a new use of the term culture within the concept of security culture. This should enable us to identify certain behaviours related to security within the system as a whole, its individual parts within specific groups (subcultures), as well as at key points of security initiative and decision-making primarily at the level of the state, but also involving other entities (organisations, groups, individuals). Culture and behavioural rules in security change, develop, and become more complex in accordance with the changing role of the state and the transformation of the security environment within or outside the state's territory, including changes in the character of security threats and risks.

These changes also trigger the emergence of new actors and the altered roles of existing actors in security, whose security interests are aligned with cultural factors. The cultures they possess and exhibit internally and towards one another can influence how they define and achieve their goals. Even in stable circumstances, culture determines and sustains a whole repertoire of attitudes and responses based on beliefs and habits that prevail within the state or are established among states in their mutual relations. The extent to which norms and ideas can be used to explain certain outcomes remains open for future reflection and the crossing of different viewpoints on this issue. However, through various illustrations in this work, we will demonstrate the complexity of these possibilities that are available to analysts and researchers.

The Concept of Security

The conceptualization of security is also undergoing profound changes, rooted in a new way of thinking about and practicing security. This new approach aims to enable a safer, more just, and better-organised society and state. In the new millennium, under the conditions of emerging security challenges, risks, and threats, these changes are significantly more difficult but also more demanding in terms of new approaches and forms of resistance, especially evident in preventive strategies, concepts, and specific measures. Like culture, security is complex; it has both a theoretical and a practical dimension and establishes connections with other dimensions as well as with numerous other concepts. The term “security” is also an “essentially contentious concept,” particularly when it becomes a field of political conflicts.

Security has a multi-layered definition, with different interpretations depending on the theoretical framework that studies it. The understanding of the concept has also evolved from what it meant in traditional international relations, where the focus was on the security of the state against external aggression, more specifically military security to what it signifies today, when the concept has expanded in scope and structure. This expansion of security's scope was discussed by Barry Buzan, who explains that the concept of security is linked to survival, and for an issue to be considered a security concern, threat whether military or non-military must be an *“existential threat to the referent object posed by a securitizing actor, which thereby generates support for urgent measures outside the rules that would otherwise be binding”* (Buzan, 1997:13).

A Historical Perspective on the Development of the Practice and Idea of Security

Security itself has a relatively obscure history, certainly shorter than that of culture. The concept of security from more recent history belongs to the field of international relations and is a part of a broader political science discipline, with its own specific historical roots and culturally determined evolution. Before the mid-20th century, the term “security” was never used in relation to issues of international relations or, more generally, in the domain of politics. The end of World War II marked a period when this term began to be used, almost hesitantly, but it did not yet have the dominant role it plays today.

In ancient times, the concept of security was primarily associated with the spirit and spirituality and was the essence of a theological idea. Security was understood as a disposition, a worldview, and a spiritual state, both psychologically and morally. The Greek word “ataraxia” (meaning a state of mind or peace) was used to describe a state of security (Burgess, 2008). During the transition to the Middle Ages, “ataraxia” was translated into Latin as “securitas”. In the moral logic of medieval Christianity, “securitas” acquired a negative connotation. Security was seen as an evident subjective characteristic, indicating a lack of emotional and spiritual problems, which was interpreted as a lack of engagement with them. Security was a personal matter, not connected to the state, society, or any other group, and largely remained morally and psychologically based. According to Burgess, if someone is secure, they are also without interest and reflection, and thus without self-awareness, likely on the path to danger especially concerning “heavenly

forces". Therefore, if a person finds themselves in a secure state, according to this interpretation, they are free from trouble, sorrow, and reflection in other words, free from worry, self-awareness, alertness, and respect for oneself and others.

With the shift in meaning from "ataraxia" to "securitas", the connotations moved closer to how we understand security today as stability and strength. The Roman version of security had a more objective character (Ricci, 2018). Many individuals could share concerns and considerations about security, creating the foundations for collective understanding, collective approach, and collective action.

During the Middle Ages, the terms "certitudo" and "securitas" took different paths. The idea of "certitudo" (today in English the word "certain" meaning certainty or safety) allowed for a conceptual distinction from the branch of security more oriented toward knowledge thus, in relation to thinking separating it from the concept of "securitas." "Certitudo" means security in knowledge, thought, conviction, certainty, and this term retained the idea of security as an individual matter. This connection also enabled the development of the modern concept of security (Burgess, 2008).

Security, represented by the term "securitas," was more of an objective thought considering danger in the external world rather than internally. It was freed from the subjective aspects of threat, danger, and risk, as well as from the moral dimension of security linked to God, the cosmos, and other individuals. In other words, it was fully objectivized. The feudal period led to a discourse of security as transformed into an economic system of goods and services. Security could be bought and sold. The function of the feudal lord was, in a sense, to offer security to those who could pay for it. This is when the word "safe" (or "secure") began to find its modern usage in the 14th century, especially as the protection of roads for traders and pilgrims became a major concern. In this context, agreements were signed between emperors, princes, and dukes (such as the Dukes of Austria and Bavaria in 1375) to protect and secure all important routes (Pasic, 1998).

On the other hand, there is also a hypothesis that the word "security" has roots in the Greek term "asphaleia" [ασφαλεια], meaning avoiding error, cause of ruin, defeat, which in a transferred sense implies managing a situation, preventing disaster, ensuring victory, prudence, luck, and similar concepts (Dillon, 2003). Which interpretation we lean toward depends both on

the etymological analysis and critical approach to the meaning of the concept of security, as well as on how certain languages have developed and for what needs these and similar concepts have been established within a linguistic complex.

When President Truman signed the National Security Act in the United States in 1947, certain things suddenly changed (Rearden, 1984). The concept of security was replaced by a higher level, represented in the form of national security. As a result of the strong influence of Cold War ideology, the term inexorably and uncritically entered circulation worldwide over the next 40 years. The term “national security” was completely unknown before World War II. The perception of real and imaginary threats against the nation-state during the Cold War contributed to the renaissance of the concept of security.

Security, as a state devoid of threats, general protection against potential danger, stood in opposition to the concept of classical defence, which represented a strategy with a clear objective of potential attack. The concept was further crystallized and institutionalized through the formalization of security and strategic research. When nuclear threats were incorporated into the security equation, security studies strengthened as both a subject and a tool of strategic analysis (Walt, 1991). Regardless of whether we view security from a broader or narrower perspective, it represents a certain arrangement of danger, threat, refuge, well-being, and similar notions. Structured connections develop between refuge and the threatened place, framing the relationship between well-being and jeopardy, danger, or threat.

Additionally, independent of the interpretations encountered in security literature, security is not merely a state of affairs or situation. Through a kind of dialectical logic, security is the absence of insecurity, and it is only truly possible with a consciousness of insecurity through preparation not for what has not yet happened, but for what could happen. Security has far less to do with what is known than with what is unknown. Thus, security is also understood and experienced as a “way of dealing with the unknown, a means of taking action in the face of unknown danger, in the face of the unknown as danger itself, sometimes even as danger as the unknown.” In this sense, security can be interpreted as a kind of epistemology, a system for managing knowledge or ignorance, which is incomplete or inadequate knowledge about danger (Burgess, 2008).

Conceptual Reflections on Security

The concept of security has entered the realm of consideration in numerous scientific disciplines, some before, and others after the need arose to develop specialized security studies that focus precisely on this phenomenon. As a result, sociological, legal, political science, anthropological, and many other perspectives on security can be examined. For this reason, it is important for disciplines to communicate with each other, and the relative disciplinary isolation of security experts and theorists shifts the debates and discussions about security toward multidisciplinary security studies.

Traditionally, security has been regarded within the fields of strategy and power. After World War II, under the guise of strategic studies focused on defending the state's territory through military and material strength, it appeared difficult to think about security in any other terms within security studies. The traditional approach to security today can be characterized as a narrow or limited understanding, privileging a specific interpretation of security. Such an approach has its limitations or consequences, which can be described as an attempt to make the concept precise and suitable, but at the expense of context; to represent a predominantly linear, unidirectional relationship between the subject and object of security; and to hinder discussion about the limited role of the state and its capacity to create security (Hoogensen, 2012:6). It was precisely this decontextualized negative perception of security that dominated throughout the 20th century, especially during the Cold War.

However, in the last two decades of the 20th century, there emerged significant challenges to a new vision of security and safety analysis. Besides the recognized need to expand the analytical and methodological scope of security studies, the domain of analysis also broadened to include questions of identity, human security, environmental security, and a range of other issues, creating a diverse and resonant field of intellectual and political debate. Contemporary theoretical approaches indicate that security is not solely required due to fear (the desire to attain freedom from fear) or the use of force against impending threats. Instead, approaches emphasizing positive security interpret security using an epistemology of enabling creating secure spaces, building capacities and capabilities, and enabling or "producing" security through trust.

The end of the Cold War also led to an evolution in security relations, as theorists and analysts developed a more constructivist approach that would

transcend narrow rationalist and materialist understandings. They point to the need for developing sophisticated sociological theories of security that place questions of culture and identity at the centre of their analyses. Social constructivist theories and analyses began to occupy a significant place in contemporary security studies.⁷ For a moment, concepts of power and strategy became less prominent in security analyses and assessments, and they diminished in constructivist security studies. This, in a way, had notable implications for the more recent history of security relations and their future developmental trajectory. Alongside national security and the integrity of the state, there are security demands related to the identities and cultures of specific societies, and even local communities or particular regions. These demands are much more about threats.

Furthermore, representatives of liberal institutionalism pointed to a comprehensive reflection on security, emphasizing the importance of societal security, as well as the significance of ethnoreligious self-identity within that framework. The Copenhagen School contributed to a new direction of security studies by introducing the theory of securitization, the concept of security sectors, and the theory of regional security complexes (Buzan et al., 1998). The idea of security sectors represented an expansion of the concept of security from military to political, economic, social, and ecological dimensions.

The social sector and social security constitute the segment that has been most widely debated and continues to provoke the most polemics and conflicting opinions. Social security can be understood as a society's capacity to preserve its essential characteristics amidst changing circumstances and despite possible or actual threats. This security is threatened when a community perceives a threat as something that endangers its identity, and it is already known that identity is defined as a set of ideas and practices that identify certain individuals as members of a particular social group.

National identity emerges as the most significant referent object of social security, encompassing a sense of political community, shared institutions, and certain rights and obligations for all members of the community. It also includes a defined social space and a delineated territory with which community members identify and for which they feel a sense of belonging.

⁷ Social reality is not viewed as solely material but as socially constructed. What is important to emphasize is that social constructivism in the science of international relations was introduced by Alexander Wendt, while security studies have been enriched by this approach through the work of Peter Katzenstein, Emanuel Adler, and Michael Barnett.

Articulation of Culture in Security Concepts

According to Desh, from the beginning of World War II to the present day, theorists have observed three waves in which culture has emerged as an important factor increasingly discussed in security studies (Desh, 1998). The first wave is associated with World War II and the dilemma of how to deal with the Axis Powers, which cultural theorists in the USA faced. Specifically, at the Ministry of War Information, there was the Foreign Morale Analysis Division of the Office of War Information, which employed a large number of leading cultural anthropologists of the time, including Geoffrey Bateson, Ruth Benedict, Geoffrey Gorer, Clyde Kluckhohn, Alexander Leighton, and Margaret Mead. Their primary activity was based on producing studies of the “national character” of the Axis Powers, especially Japan and Germany. It was argued that their influence on the actual course of the war was questionable, but it was also clear that the “national character” played a significant role in the public discourse about the nature of the enemy during World War II (Dover, 1986)⁸.

Soon after the war ended, the first wave of cultural theories lost prominence, partly as a consequence of the nuclear revolution. Nuclear weapons proved so destructive that, in comparison, cultural differences became, to put it mildly, irrelevant. General theories of strategic behaviour, such as deterrence theory, came to the forefront. The Soviet Union’s reluctance to stop once nuclear parity was reached, along with the defeat of the USA in the Vietnam War, diminished the importance of general theories based on intimidation and coercion.

The continuous nuclear arms build-up by the Soviet Union beyond the “acceptable” threshold led to guaranteed destruction. This prompted many scholars to examine the rational effects of the assumptions underlying most general theories and the influence of nuclear weapons on the skill of state leadership. The US failure to prevent the collapse of the non-communist regime in South Vietnam also contributed to the diminished impor-

⁸ John Dover, a professor of Japanese studies, attempted in his work *War Without Mercy* to explain the power and influence of racism in the Pacific, an important theater of World War II. Dover argues that the war in the Pacific was significantly more savage and brutal for both sides—in America and Japan—than European theaters, because, simultaneously, racism in American and Japanese cultures left no room for mercy. Drawings in numerous unconventional sources of propaganda, such as political cartoons, documentary films, various animations, lyrics of popular songs, and similar materials, convincingly demonstrate to Dover that both warring cultures were permeated with ethnocentric feelings of superiority. While this does not justify the “barbaric” behavior during the war, it led to overconfidence and effective military operations across the Pacific. Ultimately, Dover concluded that race was not the cause of the war; rather, imperial rivalries across the Pacific, alliances in Europe, and Japanese aggression led to the American fight in the Pacific. However, unlike the war in Europe, the war between Japan and the U.S. was a “war without mercy,” because, as mentioned, racial prejudices dehumanized both opponents. See: John Dover, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

tance of general theories of political and economic development and called into question the rational efficacy of limited war theory (Grey, 1971). General strategy theories, which ignore differences in “local context,” caused dissatisfaction among security analysts and led to a search for alternative theories of strategic behaviour. Cultural theories emerged as the only apparent choice, thereby rekindling support among security studies scholars and sparking a second wave of influence of cultural factors.

The second wave particularly demonstrated its strength during intensified Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Numerous security experts argued that the US, due to its cultural incapacity to think and act strategically, was at a decisively disadvantageous position relative to the Soviet Union. Consequently, two perspectives from culturally oriented security specialists appeared. Some focused on studying the differences in organisational cultures of the American and Soviet military forces. According to them, current American strategic theory was born out of a marriage between scientists and accountants, with the professional soldier being lost.

In contrast, the Soviet military was viewed as Clausewitzian and operationally oriented. They believed that these differences in American and Soviet military organisational cultures placed the US in an extremely unfavourable position in conducting the Cold War. A second significant strand of strategic-cultural theorizing during the Cold War focused on American and Soviet political cultures. Some saw democratic US as weak and indecisive because of its limited tradition of prolonged warfare or subtle statesmanship. Since the US could also be seen as a consumer society, they considered it incapable of successfully playing the “high politics” game.

Conversely, the Soviet Union was seen as a unified and authoritarian state, with a long tradition of conducting wars and great skill in high diplomacy. In the segments of social structure where the USA was characterized by the middle class and consumer society, the Soviet Union was viewed as a peasant society, with vastly different attitudes regarding conflicts and national relations. Critics were confident that these differences would give the Soviet Union an advantage in the Cold War. However, the USA emerged as the victor from the Cold War, and it seems that the arguments of culturalists about that period were mistaken. Thus, despite the predictions of cultural scholars at the time about the collapse of democratic, commercial,

and “non-Clausewitzian” USA, they evidently won the “war,” with nearly the same strategic and political culture that “lost” the Vietnam War.⁹

The failure of the second wave of cultural factors, which dominated throughout the Cold War, despite everything, revived the search for cultural explanations of state behaviour in the international system. One of the prominent theorists in this regard is Peter Katzenstein, who begins his introduction to the return of culture in security studies by asserting that “it is hard to deny that existing theories in international relations have lamentably failed in their attempt to explain the important revolution in world politics” (Katzenstein, 1996).

Many scholars believed that the Cold War ended due to internal changes within the Soviet Union, such as economic collapse and democratization. Others argued that it was caused by “new thinking,” which, again, was the result of the spread of a new global culture transmitted through the peace movement, the concerns of naturalist scientists, or other scientific associations. In any case, what all these explanations share is the rejection of a realist view of international politics, which frames states as inevitably engaged in a power and security competition.

The post-Cold War renaissance of interest in culture within security studies actually reflected a broader return to focus on these variables. The renewed legitimacy of cultural variables also nicely aligns with scientific interests in ideas and internal politics, but also with a renewed scepticism toward general theories. Culture is considered an ideational variable, and ideas are, among other things, situated in the realm of nationalism and often emphasize uniqueness among cases. Finally, the return of culture in security studies (the third wave) is of particular interest to some scholars because it is less tied to positivism “view that all knowledge is scientific” than other approaches in national security studies.

As earlier cultural research in political science and the most recent wave of cultural theories in security studies have shown, one criticism is that they have failed to formulate a clear and widely accepted definition of culture. In fact, there are some other potential obstacles in evaluating the third wave of cultural theories in security studies. One of these is that cultural varia-

⁹ The U.S. defeat in Vietnam became a source of concern regarding the lack of American strategic culture. If culture was such a critically discussed explanation for the outcome of the Vietnam War, then how can one explain the significant differences in the fighting capabilities of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces compared to the South Vietnamese army (supported by Americans)? All of these groups were products of similar strategic and political cultures. A few years later, the Soviet Union, with its presumably more effective strategic and political culture, did not fare any better in a similar war in Afghanistan.

bles are complex to explain and apply. Furthermore, some theorists believe that cultural variables turn each case into a sui generis entity, making their theories neither broadly applicable nor testable across multiple cases. Culture, as a central variable, was a focus of interest in anthropology and psychology during the 1930s and 1940s, but by the mid-1970s, it had lost its conceptual clarity and significance in social sciences, primarily due to broad and imprecise definitions. This led to a certain marginalization of culture, as theories addressing its influence often proved difficult to apply and predict.

Another challenge in cultural theories is their focus on individual cases rather than common factors, which complicates the formulation of general theories. This is especially evident in security studies, where some culturalists abandon external rationalism and systematic variables, which are necessary for prediction and analytical application. Clifford Geertz points out that variation in cultural forms is a major source of both insight and theoretical difficulty because it is hard to reconcile this variation with human biological equality.¹⁰

This raises questions about the possibility of developing scientific theories about culture. Some scholars, including Samuel P. Huntington, admit that explanations based on culture are often imprecise or tautological, while modernists in security studies support the use of cultural variables in specific contexts, and anti-modernists emphasize that the world cannot be reduced to discrete variables. Nonetheless, progress in cultural theories is possible, but they will most likely pertain to the behaviour of certain states or regions during specific periods, with the potential for analysis at different levels (states, groups, individuals). Addressing numerous intercultural challenges in the contemporary world such as understanding the motivations of people who commit terrorist acts with religious elements, or managing a team from different continents on a project requires having the courage to speak about cultural differences and to acknowledge them (Roth, 2015). This also involves the ability to analyse the impact of these differences at strategic, operational, and tactical levels, so that certain behaviours can be controlled and predicted, especially in multicultural environments.

¹⁰ Despite superficial differences, human beings share some fundamental similarities, based on which it should be possible to formulate theories that address human behaviour at a general level. However, many new culturalists in security studies have not adequately addressed the question of the extent of "shared" human psychology, physiology, and physics that produce similar patterns of behaviour. This entire debate is further complicated by the introduction of questions regarding the possibility of a "science" of culture. Some scientists believe that culture is subject to systematic learning, while others, like Geertz, are skeptical. Specifically, Geertz argues that cultural theories are unable to provide two defining features of culture: accumulation and predictability (Geertz, 1973). See: <https://cdn.angkor database.asia/libs/docs/clifford-geertz-the-interpretation-of-cultures.pdf>

The Concept of Security Culture

Understanding the concept of security culture in a general sense would involve security activities and behaviours that stem from the responsibility and readiness for action of all members of a society, in accordance with their acquired knowledge and skills as well as the accepted values and value orientations, beliefs and attitudes rooted in a given culture and cultural heritage. It is reflected in the way we understand the environment in broadest terms, perceive the dynamics of social relations (both at an individual and general level), recognise the importance of absolute control over one's own goods (principle of sovereignty), as well as in the way we identify and define dangers/threats, determine interests and choose means or instruments of action in order to protect values and interests (Stanarević, 2012).

Security culture can also be viewed in terms of its internal and external manifestations. The internal refer to subjective contemplation of security or the development of the idea of security, whereas the external refer to behaviour in the security sphere, as well as the attitude or approach to security which mainly concerns readiness and ability to respond to challenges and threats, be it in a material or spiritual sense. There is a great deal of common ground between security culture and many similar concepts such as strategic culture, political culture, culture of peace, organisational/corporate culture, safety culture¹¹ and several others which might be interesting for analysis, particularly in terms of theoretical sources common to all these concepts. Thus, for example, in relation to strategic culture, security culture is seen as a related concept or a subcategory (if viewed in the context of international relations), but it can also be presented as a broader or more

¹¹ It is interesting to highlight the connection between the concepts of safety culture and security culture. The relationship between safety (preventing accidental harm) and security (protecting against intentional threats) cultures is complex and is often emphasized as a key factor in risk management across various systems, especially in industry, energy, and nuclear sectors. Safety culture represents a set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices within an organisation that promote preventive behaviour and focus on minimizing unintentional errors, accidents, and incidents. Its goal is to ensure that all employees recognize and understand the importance of safety procedures, respond appropriately in crisis situations, and continuously work on improving safety standards. It involves responsibility, education, a culture of openness and transparency, and proactive identification of hazards. Security culture, on the other hand, pertains to the set of values and practices adopted by an organisation or society to protect against deliberate threats such as terrorism, sabotage, theft, or technological abuse. It focuses on safeguarding against human factors, sabotage, terrorist attacks, and preserving infrastructure from malicious actions. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986 is often cited as a key example for understanding the relationship between safety and security cultures. A lack of safety culture was one of the primary causes of the catastrophe. During the design and operation of the reactor, systemic non-compliance with safety procedures, a lack of transparency, and cultural resistance to reporting problems were evident. Inadequate safety culture led to ignoring warnings and underestimating risks, ultimately resulting in catastrophic explosions and the release of radioactive materials. The security aspect was also neglected, as the system was vulnerable to human errors and sabotage, and there were no adequate mechanisms in place to protect against deliberate malicious actions or terrorist threats. Today, when it comes to nuclear reactors and everything related to nuclear energy, equal importance is given to both safety culture and security culture. Recognizing and integrating both is essential for comprehensive risk management and the prevention of future disasters (Jore, 2020.; Glesner, et al. 2020, Gandhi, et al, 2013).

encompassing concept above all because it has the potential to be developed and applied in more dimensions and aspects, has more instruments at its disposal and incorporates a wider range of issues and actors. Namely, in keeping with the new, modified concept of security, which includes numerous actors and is not limited to military threats and military instruments as responses to these threats, conditions are being created that transcend the possibilities, designs and ideas of strategic culture mostly due to the change in the social meaning of security.

Furthermore, according to Mary Kaldor, security culture can be presented through four ideal types as analytical instruments used to describe boundaries between cultures: geopolitics, new wars, liberal peace and war on terrorism, which also indicates, as has been mentioned, its relationships to other concepts within other theoretical frameworks in sociology, political sciences and technical sciences (Kaldor, 2016).

The development and theoretical foundations of the term security culture can be analysed and studied from several aspects and dimensions. In fact, one of the criteria for analysis is the expansion of security's scope of research, which has a horizontal and a vertical dimension. This means that in the horizontal sense, it involves the expansion of the concept of security from military to political, economic, societal and environmental security, whereas in the vertical sense, the concept is expanded towards international and/or global security, on the one hand, and by separating state (national) security from the security of the society and the individual, on the other.

Several definitions of security culture which can be analysed contain key elements such as knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, values, norms, rules, etc. (Roer, 2015; Malcolmson, 2009; Burgess, 2008;). Although it is complicated to define these elements in terms of priority (i.e. what is more important to us – our knowledge about security and the dangers that might compromise or threaten it as well as some of our attitudes towards it, or how we behave and react in a dangerous situation), they can vary from one situation to another. As shown by the relevant literature, they are most commonly related to the historical experience in the field of security, particularly the most dramatic attitudes towards certain national and international practices, norms and values. In that regard Harald Müller defines security culture as a “*set of values, rules, norms and practices with regard to security that gives thinking and acting in security field of a specific state a particular, sometimes singular pattern*” (Müller, 2002:381). Of course, they can be represented differently, depending on whose security culture we are talking about – that of a state,

social group, organisation, individual etc. With regard to the development and application of the concept of security culture, as well as its institutional implementation in certain frames of reference, we can speak of three domains.

The first domain is the already mentioned purview of the state and the security policy it implements in practice, especially bearing in mind the national and international context. It is the state which develops this policy on identifying (external and internal) threats and predicting responses to these threats using different tools, measures and activities (Kirchner and Sperling, 2010).

Moreover, the state is obliged to translate this policy into national legislation and regulations, appointing personnel and determining supervisory authorities in terms of security, determining financial resources and similar aspects. Adopting the view of security as a social and political construct opens up the possibility of formulating issues dealing specifically with the processes of change, including how enemies transform their relationship into a friendly one, how threats are defined and how the use of force is constituted; thus, the constructivists focus most of their attention on social structure at international system level and on the role of norms in international security. According to Alexander Wendt, the constructivist approach includes states' identities and interests as being "socially constructed based on previous knowledge" (Wendt, 1995).

"National security culture provides the lens through which national authorities refract the structural position of the state in the international system; it explains the subjective understanding of objective threats to national security, the instruments relied upon to meet those threats, and the preference for unilateral or multilateral action."

(Kirchner, Sperling, 2010: 11)

In that respect, according to Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling, we can identify elements that define the framework of national security culture and provide the basis for its analysis. In fact, the authors arrived at these elements based on conceptualisations of security culture such as can be found in: Berger, (2003); Banchoff (1999); Duffield (1998); or: Katzenstein (1996). In terms of national level, that is, national security and security policies implemented within a state, these authors identify the following elements of security culture: view of the international environment, national

identity, instrumental preferences (as to usefulness), and interaction preferences (Kirchner, Sperling, 2010:11).

A useful way to understand the concept of security culture within organisations or corporations is to consider established definitions, such as that proposed by Malcolmson. National security encompasses nearly all aspects of social life, and its institutional framework is also articulated through the activities of organisations in economic and other systems. Therefore, **the second sphere** of developing and implementing security culture can be examined through its organisational dimension, where each organisation, relying on state policies, forms an organisational and/or corporate culture rooted in elements of national and security culture. During this process, it develops and implements its own security culture, thereby contributing to the broader goal of building and strengthening national security although this may not be directly applicable to large multinational corporations, which are often less connected to national security interests.

Taking into account precisely that organisational approach, for example, Malcolmson defines security culture as:

“The assumptions, values, attitudes, and beliefs held by members of an organisation, and the behaviours they perform, which could potentially impact the security of that organisation, and that may, or may not, have an explicit, known, link to that impact.”

(Malcolmson, 2009: 361)

The third sphere pertains to the perspectives adopted by individuals at all levels regarding the implementation of policies that promote security culture within their living and working environments, as well as their efforts to incorporate these principles into their daily activities. From a sociological standpoint, this also involves analysing how different social groups develop and sustain their own distinct security cultures, recognizing that societies except for primitive communities are significantly differentiated and stratified.

For these groups, security culture can be described as a set of shared norms, beliefs, and practices related to safety and security that are rooted in their specific structural positions, cultural backgrounds, and social roles. For example, the security concerns and practices of a corporate security team differ markedly from those of a local community or an ethnic minority group. While some elements of security are universal such as the need for protec-

tion from violence or crime, others are highly specific, shaped by particular social, economic, or political contexts.

From a sociological perspective, various societal structures have their own perceptions of security, which are embedded in their lifestyles, existence, and everyday activities. These perceptions serve as mechanisms for their progress and development, influencing how different groups interpret threats and respond to them. At the same time, security possesses an ambivalent nature; it can sometimes pose challenges for analysts and policy-makers alike (Bigo, 2010; Clements, 1990).

In the case of individuals, security culture may be defined as: *“the set of assumptions, attitudes, systems of rules, and behaviours that an individual adopts concerning their personal safety and security, which influence how they perceive, respond to, and manage security threats in their daily life.”* (Svetlana Stanarević, personal interpretation). This includes personal practices, beliefs, and perceptions that are shaped by individual experiences, social environment, and cultural background.

Security Culture as the Foundation of National and European Security: Development, Application, and Challenges

When we talk about the national security culture, we are actually starting from presenting the security culture as a factor in the development of national security. Security culture as a factor in the development of national security is a key aspect in shaping the stability of a state. It is formed from national culture and identity through strengthening national will, patriotic awareness, and citizens' readiness to protect their vital values. This culture is directed towards achieving lasting national goals, which implies reliance on one's own resources and capacities across various spheres of society. The transfer of national culture into security culture involves incorporating values such as unity, integrity, and a shared identity, which are fundamental for maintaining the stability and resilience of the state in the face of contemporary challenges.

National culture and mentality shape responses to global and transnational changes and organise collective thinking about security and identity. Although the importance of unity is emphasized in theory, it is often recognized that maintaining unity is difficult due to society's diversity and complexity. Therefore, it is crucial to develop mechanisms for managing plurality and to strengthen a culture of tolerance, respect, and shared identity to prevent

threats of division and conflict. In this context, unifying principles such as civic national consciousness and a common ethos can contribute to building stronger bonds within society. We can add another thought that the analysis of security culture has shown that it changes, but also that it can change, when cultural elements are used for a planned purpose. Because, according to its properties, culture has a symbolic value for security, which is reflected in at least three dimensions: culture as a strategic resource, as an instrument, and as a system (Injac, 2016).

Before adopting certain concepts of unity, it is necessary to transfer knowledge, experience, and values from national culture into security culture, which will serve as the “guardian” of national security. This requires active engagement of various actors and the use of appropriate means in the process of building a resilient and stable security structure. Only through this approach can a security culture effectively contribute to strengthening national stability and sustainability in the face of contemporary challenges.

Conversely, we can talk about the transfer of national security into security culture. As previously discussed, national security represents a higher form of developing security interests transferred to human structures and entities, serving as the foundational basis for the conceptualization of culture, security, and ultimately, security culture itself. To effectively transfer national security into security culture, it is essential to support the active, constitutive role of the nation within the security political community. This involves building national awareness among members of the political community through established state and social institutions, fostering behaviours based on moral and ethical principles, respecting norms, and emphasizing core values cultivated through education, culture, and economic mechanisms (Figure 1).

National security, regardless of its interpretation or application, is rooted in diverse cultural and historical traditions, carrying normative and value potential that can be shaped and framed within security culture. Successful transfer requires harmonizing factors that, on one hand, contribute to various aspects of national life, and on the other, threaten the forms and methods of their realization. Maintaining and safeguarding national security is a significant challenge, especially when faced with threats that undermine national identity or arise from supranational structures. Through this transfer, security culture provides the necessary stability grounded in cultural components that influence the reactions and behaviours of the state, its institutions, social groups, and individuals in response to security threats.

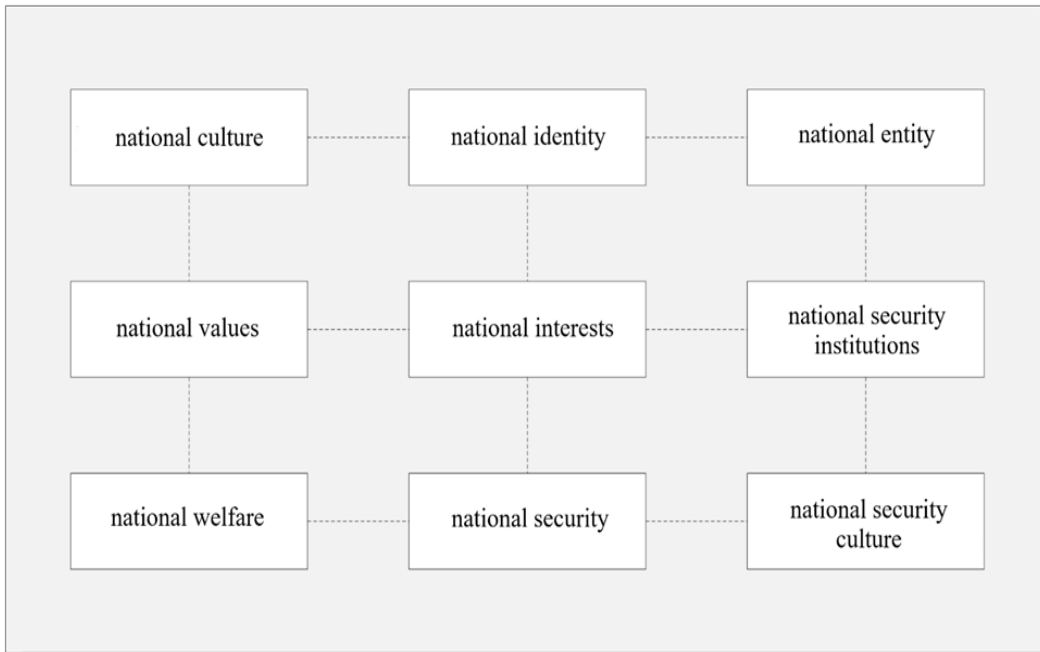


Figure 1. Conceptual analysis of security culture
(Stanarević, 2012:309)

The state remains the primary and most significant organisational form for developing security culture, as it possesses the legitimacy to govern and manage citizens. It acts as a regulator in key areas such as the economy, politics, security, culture, and education, facilitating the realization of collective and individual interests. Historically, the state has been viewed as the main “educator,” aiming to create a new level of civilization, influencing economic potential and development, as well as the “superstructure” factors like law and order. The state’s role involves planning, incentivizing, guiding, and, when necessary, punishing behaviour to maintain social order, with an emphasis on moral sanctions rather than mere condemnation.

Beyond state institutions, social institutions – such as the family, education, labour markets, governance, and cultural or religious organisations – play a critical role in shaping security culture. These institutions are not just physical objects, but structures of relationships, roles, and norms that reflect shared values and collective identities. For instance, families play a vital role in socialization and transmission of social status, while educational institutions foster knowledge and skills necessary for societal stability. In the broadest sense, the purpose of a security culture lies in the prevention of various security threats, as well as in achieving and improving the safe-

ty of each entity. One of the ways to first develop a security culture and then raise the level of security is through education and the introduction of this topic into the educational system (Ćurčić, 2021; Stanarević, 2021). Social institutions evolve over time through processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization, adapting to societal changes. Recognizing these transformations is vital, as the development of security culture depends on how well these institutions can adapt and reinforce shared values, especially in a dynamic social environment. The most important thing to observe is that all spheres and dimensions of security culture must communicate and cooperate with each other, and be oriented towards each other, united and agreed on the minimum of their shared needs and interests, for only then will the application of this concept as well as the resulting positive practices make sense.

Certainly, in addition to the national, one can also talk about the supranational and look for the first institutional practices that use the elements of security culture, as we understand and present them today, and whose first outlines can be found in the distant or recent past. For example, although traces of security culture can be found in ancient history¹², when we consider its institutional reflection primarily associated with the state we can refer to the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815). The statesmen present did not only redraw the map of Europe and discuss peace terms, but negotiations also aimed to preserve wartime alliances and establish security arrangements for peacetime. In this way, the Congress marked the beginning of the institutionalization of European cooperation in the field of security. This historical moment served as the starting point for an international academic conference on the Congress of Vienna, organised two hundred years later in 2014 by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences/The Young Academy, Utrecht University, and The National Archives. Indeed, through several key presentations, the conference participants examined, from various perspectives, the foundations of the European security architecture established following the Congress in Vienna in 1815.

This very conference, “Vienna 1815: The Making of a European Security Culture”, highlights the significance of the Congress of Vienna in shaping

¹² Let's remember Sun Tzu Wu and the well-known thought “know the enemy” or the period of World War II and the attempts of some anthropologists to get to the essential features of the actors on the war scene (the Pacific, for example) through the research of the concept of “national character”, in order to understand and then perhaps predict some moves of the opposite enemy side. Which means that cultural knowledge about the enemy can contribute to the outcome of warfare. Anthropological approaches from the recent past contribute to the development of the modern concept of security culture, because they emphasize the importance of understanding cultural factors in security analyzes and assessments, as well as strategic projections and policies.

the foundations of European security. Beyond redrawing territorial boundaries, the negotiations aimed to establish lasting peace and stability by formalizing alliances and security arrangements. Reflecting on this historical moment helps us understand how ideas about collective security and diplomacy evolved, influencing the development of modern European security culture. The event underscores the enduring importance of diplomacy and strategic cooperation in maintaining peace across nations.

The role of culture in fostering resilience, peace, and security has gained significant attention on both domestic and international agendas, notably promoted by the European Union. Recognizing the shared dimensions and mutual understanding of cultural and security aspects is seen as a vital element of European integration. Within the EU framework, two key components of security culture are distinguished: the national security culture of individual member states and the overarching common security culture.

The concept of a common security culture involves, at minimum, the gradual development of a shared “mentality across all Union member states” (Howorth, 2002:88). This perspective is echoed by Nicole Gnesotto, the first director of the European Union Institute for Security Studies, who described it as “the purpose and the means to activate a common thinking, compatible reactions, and coherent analysis - in short, an increasingly European strategic culture that transcends different national cultures and security interests” (Howorth, 2002). This shared understanding is reflected in the progress made toward establishing a cohesive European Foreign and Security Policy.

An insightful approach to the EU’s common security culture is offered by Monica Gariup, who suggests that:

“The culture of the European Union can be considered the result of the accumulation of all national strategic cultures. This involves convergence and/or unification: conflicting elements must be harmonized to identify a common strategy. Conversely, the security culture of the EU can be viewed as the product of multiplication, where the combined position, policy, and culture create a unique, shared framework.”

(Gariup, 2009: 9)¹³

¹³ Organised around themes of cultural realism and social constructivism, Monica Gariup develops a theoretical framework to enhance our understanding of security culture at the European Union level. The book’s innovative approach examines the implications of discourse and practice in the European Security and Defence Policy. See: Gariup, Monica. 2009. *European Security Culture: Language, Theory, Policy*. Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Various member states articulate their definitions of security culture through official documents and scholarly research. For example, Romania's National Defence Strategy for 2015-2019 and 2020-2024 defines security culture as "the totality of values, norms, attitudes, or actions that shape society's understanding and internalization of the concept of security and its derivatives (national security, international security, collective security, insecurity, security policy, etc.). It is a concept related to the need to generate security both as a citizen or community and as a state therefore a matter of civilization, humanity, and social normality" (National Defence Strategy Guide, 2015).

Finally, the conference in North Macedonia (Skopje) in March 2025 underscored the importance of recognizing the role of security culture within the Western Balkans region. It highlighted its significance in national frameworks, security policies, and strategies (Mitrevska, Stanarević, 2023). This publication represents the first substantial step toward understanding and accepting this concept as a new security paradigm, one that, by acknowledging the complexity of relationships and communication among countries in the region, provides a solid foundation for restructuring and transforming security approaches in a positive direction.

Key Findings of Chapter I

In conclusion, the exploration of the concepts of culture, security, and security culture reveals their intricate interconnections and the vital role they play in shaping both individual and collective responses to security challenges, risks and threats. The reflection on these themes underscores the importance of understanding security not only as a set of protective measures but also as a cultural phenomenon embedded within societal norms, values, and practices.

The need for developing the concept of security culture arises from the comprehensive integration of security and the rapid increase in the complexity of security challenges. Totalization of security means that security-related issues, problems, and aspects become more interconnected and visible in all spheres of life. The concept of security culture has both analytical and normative dimensions: it explores the factors that contribute to enhancing security and identifies socio-political and economic relations that are most likely to generate maximum security for individuals, groups, nation-states, and the entire world. The key challenge is developing the ability to un-

derstand and respect the role and influence of culture in shaping policies, strategies, and security approaches, which is a fundamental skill in modern security thinking.

Cultural knowledge involves considering history, values, ideologies, religions, cultural and other dimensions, as well as assessing their potential impact on security policy. It is important to emphasize that, beyond knowledge of security and security phenomena (as stated in some definitions), cultural knowledge – even if only as the context in which security phenomena occur - plays a significant role in the development of new perspectives and theories of security culture. There is an increasingly strong interest among national security actors and other participants in social life in the culture as an important factor in systemic commitments and solutions for the development of institutions. This will, among other things, be a prerequisite for successful monitoring of security risks, conflict resolution, or becoming an indispensable part of the security infrastructure.

Representing security culture as a factor in the development of national security, we pointed out two key processes: first, the transfer of national culture into security culture, and second, the transfer of national security into security culture. Security culture can also be viewed in the context of regional, international, and global processes worldwide, as well as through the possibility of institutional development in relation to social integrations, attitudes towards the state, and within international relations. For the concept to evolve and be applied effectively, there are also multiple solutions and recommended models; although we did not discuss them here, they include education, obligation, control, and the implementation of standards (Stanarević, 2012).

Finally, we can assess that security culture determines the steps and approach to security and insecurity, but also defines values as guiding principles of humanity that will be fulfilled in the pursuit of national security, reflected at the levels of the nation, society, and individuals. Security culture can be presented as one of the most important categories of the modern security concept, based on the materialization of security ideas. Since its full affirmation is still forthcoming, it is essential to develop and support research in this area. Like other concepts, it can be seen as a bridge between the mind and the world so vital that it demands from us to change how we perceive the mind and the world, and its openness will help people learn new competencies.

This monograph raises important questions and points to some dimensions and elements that must be taken into account when addressing security prob-

lems and issues more seriously. It means that we need a systemic approach correctly distinguishing between what is important for achieving goals (greater security, development, the well-being of the community and society, and so on) and what is not. A systemic approach requires thorough philosophical and logical knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge. This observation also points to the fact that it is obvious that security culture originates from general culture, but also that its essential properties draw from national culture. From a methodological perspective, it is necessary to carefully consider whether the power of reason and science is sufficient to understand and control the uncertainty of natural and social phenomena, or whether, and to what extent, value ideas and norms by which humans are guided should be included, regardless of the fact that many experts do not trust them.

The next important point to emphasize is the role of security culture in developing cooperation skills, particularly the need for a general and natural effort toward collaboration in the domain of security. New forms of cooperation should fundamentally break with old practices and impose an obligation on all actors ranging from the state and social spheres, including public agencies, to business organisations and individuals to work together in order to improve security rules and regulations. They should promote interactive actions rather than merely prescribing compliance with rules and demands set by the state. The ability to reach consensus and achieve coordination are crucial conditions for effective cooperation. Like cooperation, consensus is not only a matter of ethical intention; it also requires a professional approach, expertise, and skills. Both must be learned. In this sense, the role of the national education system, the social elite, and strategic commitments in determining methods and means for implementing national security policy is of paramount importance.

Furthermore, the discussion on security culture as the foundation of national, regional or global security highlights its significance in fostering resilience, cooperation, and effective policy implementation. Despite the progress made, numerous challenges remain in developing and sustaining security cultures that are adaptable to evolving threats and diverse societal contexts. These insights emphasize the need for continued research and dialogue to address the complexities of security in a rapidly changing world.

In addition, it is important to emphasize that research indicates that every other aspect of security culture, cyber, corporate, political culture, carries its own elements and characteristics and is part of an increasingly widespread research practice and theoretical thinking, especially in the last decade. We

have already indicated and presented some, but it is worth highlighting the most significant among them. Therefore, as previously stated in one paper by authors Mitrevska and Stanarević, it is important to emphasize that in the conditions of a globalized and interdependent society, the complexity of the concept of security culture is reflected in several important conceptual frameworks:

- *“the versatility/multifaceted concept of culture, but also of security;*
- *demarcation of safety culture and security culture;*
- *reflection of key cultural elements (policies, technology, and people) in the security culture;*
- *the relationships between national culture, corporate culture, and security culture;*
- *hard and soft security culture;*
- *vertical/hierarchical levels and horizontal/sectoral layers of security culture;*
- *national traditions/styles of security culture (in diplomacy, in management);*
- *security culture in different phases of response to dangers/threats: prevention, monitoring, control, remediation;*
- *what is the “hard core” of a security culture and what are derived concepts;*
- *entities and institutions which are crucial in building a security culture;*
- *ways of development of security culture (standards, control, education, commitment.”*

(Mitrevska, Stanarević, 2023)

In the following chapter, as previously indicated/mentioned, we will present the example of two countries of the Western Balkans - how all our findings on culture, security and security culture are projected onto institutional practices, strategies and policies and define democratic values that are vital for the functioning of institutions in a healthy and stable society.

Analysis of Elements for Comparison

The inspiration for the monograph, which is presented to readers and jointly developed by the authors using the example of Serbia and North Macedonia, is the publication: National Security Cultures – Patterns of Global Governance, edited by Emil J. Kirchner & James Sperling. In the introductory

part of the book, the authors explore the concept of security culture and its role in shaping national and international security. James Sperling emphasizes that the security cultures of each country are shaped by historical, social, and political contexts, as well as by the technical capabilities available to states. He discusses how different nations approach security challenges and threats, and how their specific cultural characteristics influence the ways they develop their security strategies and policies. Sperling also examines the role of technology in the delivery of public goods and security, as well as how technological innovations alter security paradigms. His analysis covers the interaction between national security and technologies, and how individual countries utilize technological resources to achieve their security objectives.

Therefore, taking into account the introductory part of this monograph, our goal of presenting the national security cultures of individual countries (Serbia, North Macedonia) can serve as a foundation for further analysis of national security cultures. Additionally, illustrating how these cultures develop within a regional (rather than global) context provides future readers with insight into the complexity and interconnection between culture, politics, security, identity, national interests, and technology within the field of national security.

In the mentioned publication, elements for the analysis of 11 countries are provided, including the EU as a special entity. In the monograph we prepared, we adopted some of these elements, with the intention to continue exploring the remaining ones in a future publication, where we will expand and include other countries from the Western Balkans region.

Here we will list four elements of national security culture, according to Sperling, as he defined them:

- 1. **Worldview of the external environment:**** This refers to how a nation perceives and interprets the world beyond its borders. It includes perceptions of the nature of threats whether threats are seen as primarily military, economic, ideological, or something else. Does the world appear as a competitive or cooperative environment? It speaks to the potential for cooperation or conflict, meaning how likely other nations are to collaborate or clash. Is there an assumption of hostility or peace? What are the roles of other states, and how does the nation perceive the roles and behaviours of other countries in international relations? Does it lean towards opposition, neutrality, or cooperation? Finally, what is the global distribution of power: How

does the nation see itself within the (regional or global) order, and how much influence does it believe it has within it? Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of Serbia, are found in Chapter 2 and subchapter: “National Interests in Different Analytical Units; Security Threats, Strategies, and Means for Preserving Serbia’s Security”. Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of North Macedonia, are found in Chapter 3 and subchapter: “Contextualizing Macedonian national Security at its very Beginnings – the Role of International Positioning”.

- 2. Identity:** This pertains to the nation’s perception of itself, its values, historical experiences, and roles in the world. Key elements include national values: What does the nation consider its fundamental values (democracy, freedom, nationalism, etc.), and how do these values influence its relationships with other nations? What are its historically traumatic experiences? How do past experiences (wars, colonization, revolutions) shape the nation’s perception of itself and the world? Its perception of strengths and weaknesses: How does the nation view its capabilities and limitations in the field of security? National interests: What are the priority national interests, how are they defined, and how closely are they connected to the security culture? Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of Serbia, are found in Chapter 2 and subchapter: “Contextualizing Serbian National Security and Security Culture”; “The Construction of Serbian National Identity Through the Centuries”; “Defining National Interests”; “Serbia’s National Interests – Strategic Approach”. Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of North Macedonia, are found in Chapter 3 and subchapter: “The Internal Struggle – Security Implications of the 2001 Conflict”.
- 3. Instrumental preferences:** This refers to the choice of strategies and methods used to protect national security. This includes the selection of weapons and military strategies, does it emphasize a preventive or defensive approach? What types of weapons and technologies are considered important? Negotiation and cooperation methods: Is there an emphasis on diplomatic channels and international cooperation, or solely on military intervention? What is the attitude towards economic sanctions, obligations, and trade: How are these tools used to achieve security objectives? Readiness to use force: What are

the thresholds and conditions for the use of force in foreign policy? Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of Serbia, are found in Chapter 2 and subchapter: “Transformation of Security Structures and the Beginning of the Process of International and Regional Integration”. Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of North Macedonia, are found in Chapter 3 and subchapters: “Changed Aspects of Military Defence after NATO Membership” and “The Importance of Cyber Security”.

- 4. Interaction preferences:** This refers to the behaviour and expectations of a nation in its interactions with other nations. It includes the communication style: Is the communication direct, indirect, formal, or informal? It also encompasses relations with allies and enemies: What methods are used to create and maintain alliances, and how does the nation behave towards enemies? Reactions to crises and potential conflicts: How does the nation behave in situations of crisis and conflict? The attitude towards international organisations: How does the nation cooperate with international institutions, and does it trust them? Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of Serbia, are found in Chapter 2 and subchapter: “Civil War and NATO Aggression”; “Transformation of Security Structures and the Beginning of the Process of International and Regional Integration”. Elements of the answers to these questions, when using the example of North Macedonia, are found in Chapter 3 and subchapters: “Redefining the National Security Culture in a Crowded Region”; “The Contemporary National Security Culture in a Challenging International Environment”, and “The Challenges of the Soft Power Projections in the Republic of North Macedonia”.

These elements are interconnected and shape decision-making in foreign policy and the behaviour of a nation on both regional and global stages. Analysing these elements can provide insights into the differences in security cultures of various nations and their influence on international and regional relations. Therefore, we believe that it is important to consider the shared past as well, and the authors of our monograph, in their introductory sections, have called attention to the period of coexistence within SFRY, as well as the period before unification into a common state, with the greatest emphasis on the period after the dissolution of the shared state. All of this contributes to the contextual (historical) part of both chapters.

For our analysis of the national security culture of Balkans countries, some segments of the four elements proposed by James Sperling will be used. Additionally, we will operate under the assumption that these elements can be categorized into cognitive and behavioural ones, where Sperling's elements "view of the external environment" and "identity" fall under the cognitive category, while "instrumental preferences" and "preferences for interaction" are behavioural. If we attempt to present the degree of development of national security culture, we would need to consider who are the most representative carriers of security culture at the national level (certainly those who manage security), how they represent it, or how they care for security, how they portray security as a value, continuously improve it, and bear responsibility for establishing a security regime that maintains a structure resistant to risks and threats, and enables external and internal risk management.

As James Sperling further states, national security cultures have two primary objectives. The first is to understand the influence of national security cultures regarding four categories of policies for managing national security: assurance (post-conflict interventions), prevention (pre-conflict interventions), protection (internal security), and coercion (military intervention). The second is to assess the obstacles and opportunities for collective action among major powers in ensuring global, or in our case, regional security management.

When establishing these, Sperling starts from two assumptions: first, that states can no longer be treated as homogeneous actors; and second, that regional and global security management is (not purely) a collective good. The first assumption highlights the problem of aligning state structures and the actions of national elites in defining and implementing security policies, especially within a comparative framework. The second recognizes that security management represents a set of policies that can individually or collectively worsen or mitigate the problem of collective action.

Guided by these statements as well, in this monograph we have aimed to address some additional questions: does the coexistence of states, from Westphalian to post-Westphalian, necessarily complicate global or regional security cooperation? What implications does this coexistence have on the process of securitization at regional or global levels? Do national security cultures shape the choices of national security policies, and is the technology of public goods provision relevant for understanding the challenges of effective security management in the modern international system?

However, as previously noted/, certain limitations in the preparation of the monograph influenced our final selection of only a few elements from the analysis of national security culture proposed by James Sperling. We posed multiple questions and provided a broad platform for possible research, including an introductory part where we introduced basic concepts, but it was impossible to answer every question. Especially since, in the meantime, while the material for the monograph was being prepared, new questions and dilemmas emerged.

Regarding the methodological part and the approach to research, it primarily relies on a qualitative research approach, with the main method being content analysis of expert and academic literature, as well as official strategic and policy documents. Additionally, analysis was conducted on international reports, expert studies, and certain media content.

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Chapter 2

Case Of The Republic Of Serbia

Svetlana Stanarević

Introduction

This chapter will present a case study on the construction of the national security culture in the Republic of Serbia, as a key factor influencing the formation of the country's strategic preferences. It will analyse Serbia's worldview regarding the external environment and how these perceptions relate to security threats and cooperation potentials. Additionally, the chapter will examine Serbia's national interests and their connection to the global and regional international context, as well as the role of international organisations in the process of building its national security culture.

A special focus will be put on the challenges and threats that have shaped Serbia's security paradigm during the process of establishing independence and its international position following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In this context, the analysis will explore how internal and external factors influenced the definition of security interests and which instruments Serbia considered most effective in addressing these threats. The chapter will also examine how the national security culture aligns with the process of European integration, as well as with aspirations or resistance toward NATO membership and other international institutions, which are key pillars of Serbia's security strategy.

After presenting the introductory geographical and demographic characteristics of Serbia in the part "Contextualization of Serbian National Security and Security Culture", the socio-political and security framework of Serbia since the early 1990s will be briefly outlined, including the challenges arising from conflicts, sanctions, internal social divisions, and regional instability. The chapter will examine how these factors influenced the shaping of national identity and perceptions of security threats, as well as the selection of strategies and policies that Serbia has developed over time. Special

emphasis will be placed on the role of international actors, such as the EU, NATO, and other regional and global players, in shaping Serbia's security perceptions and strategy.

In the part, "Building the National Identity of Serbia Through the Centuries" and "Defining National Interests", the development of Serbia's identity and interests from historical beginnings to the present day will be discussed. Particular attention will be given to strategic approaches to national interests, their analysis within various analytical units, and their connection to the global and regional environment. This will include an examination of the challenges and threats that have shaped Serbia's security paradigm, as well as the instruments and strategies the country has employed to address them.

The part, "Transformation of Security Structures and the Beginning of the International and Regional Integration Process", will focus on changes in Serbia's security architecture since the early 2000s, including challenges related to internal dialogue and conflicts, particularly concerning Kosovo. The chapter will analyse the process of rapprochement with the European Union, as well as attempts to define a new security culture in light of European integration, regional challenges, and cooperation with NATO.

In the final section, we examine the contemporary challenges facing Serbia in the context of evolving geopolitical and regional dynamics, focusing on defence and security issues, as well as the prospects for developing a coherent security culture. Special attention will be paid to understanding the impact of international factors and how they shape Serbia's current and future security paradigm, including the roles played by global and regional actors. In this section, we also synthesize key findings from a case study on the ongoing process of building a national security culture in Serbia, highlighting its importance as a fundamental factor influencing the country's strategic preferences and perceptions. We present Serbia's worldview in relation to its external environment, analysing how such perceptions influence its assessment of security threats and opportunities for cooperation. In addition, the section discusses the role of international organisations and their contribution to the development and strengthening of Serbia's security culture, highlighting how external influences and internal perceptions intertwine to shape the country's security policy and strategic potential.

Geographical And Demographic

Characteristics Of Serbia

The Republic of Serbia is a democratic country composed of all its citizens residing within its territory. Its rich history and achievements are integral parts of modern civilization and the international community.

Serbia is a landlocked country situated in the northern and eastern hemispheres of the Earth, located in south-eastern Europe within the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. Geographically, it lies approximately between latitudes 41°53' and 46°11' North, and longitudes 18°49' and 23° East.

Situated in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, Serbia occupies a strategic position along key routes connecting Europe and Asia. Covering an area of 88,361 square kilometres, Serbia shares borders with Hungary to the north, Romania to the northeast, Bulgaria to the east, North Macedonia to the south, Albania (through Kosovo, which declares independence but is partially recognized), Montenegro to the southwest, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the west, and Croatia to the northwest. The total length of Serbia's borders is approximately 2,361.7 kilometres, of this, 1,567.3 kilometres are land, 751.1 kilometres are rivers and 43.3 kilometres are lakes (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). Serbia's borders are based on three principles: natural-geographic, historical and ethnic. It still has problematic borders with the former Yugoslav republics, which are still undefined, disputed, in crisis and burdened by war legacy, and yet for the geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic interests of Serbia - very important (Croatia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Proroković, 2018).

Situated at the crossroads of Europe, Serbia holds significant geopolitical importance. Its international roads and railways, which follow the valleys of its rivers, constitute the shortest routes between Western and Central Europe on one side, and the Middle East, Asia, and Africa on the other. These routes generally follow the flow of the Morava River, which divides near Nish into two branches: one following the South Morava and Vardar valleys toward Thessaloniki, and the other along the Nishka River toward Sofia and Istanbul.

Serbia operates on Central European Time (CET), which is one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+1). The country has a moderate continental climate, characterized by gradual transitions among the four seasons.

The official language is Serbian, and the Cyrillic script is used officially, although Latin script is also widely employed. National minorities have

the legal right to use their languages and scripts in official communication within their communities.

Administratively, Serbia is divided into two autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija (subject to ongoing political dispute) as well as 29 administrative districts, 174 municipalities, 6,169 settlements, including 207 urban settlements and 5,962 rural settlements. The City of Belgrade and the City of Nish are designated as separate territorial units. The capital city of Serbia is Belgrade, with a population of approximately 1,673,851 inhabitants, making it the administrative, economic, and cultural centre of the country.

The ethnic composition of Serbia is highly diverse, reflecting a complex historical development. The majority of the population are ethnic Serbs, but the country is also home to 37 recognized national minorities. All citizens enjoy equal rights and responsibilities and are guaranteed full national equality.

Demographics (according to the 2022 Census): Total population: approximately 6,567,783 inhabitants Ethnic composition: Serbs: about 80.64%, Hungarians: 2.77%, Bosniaks: 2, 31%, Roma: 1.98%, Albanians: 0.93%, Others (including Croats, Slovaks, Romanians, Vlachs, and more): the remaining percentage (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2023). Everyone in Serbia is entitled to equal rights and freedoms, regardless of ethnicity, language, or religion, ensuring a unified and inclusive society.

Contextualizing Serbian National Security And Security Culture

Serbia has a rich and complex history that spans centuries and is particularly significant within the context of European and Balkan¹⁴ events. In the 19th century, Serbia underwent key phases of independence and nation-

¹⁴ The Balkans serve as a vital transcontinental bridge connecting Europe with the Near and Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. Its unique position has historically made it a zone of cultural interpenetration and geopolitical rivalry, embodying a crossroads of civilizations and civilizational clashes an axis of transgression and regression driven by diverse powers seeking influence through projects like the Berlin-Baghdad railway. This region's strategic importance is further emphasized by its role as a geopolitical node, where interests of Russia, Britain, Germany, the Islamic world, and the Vatican intersect and compete along multiple axes. This complex geopolitical landscape has also established the Balkans as a historical borderland initially a civilizational divide, later a military frontier, and a zone of territorial and religious contestation. From the civilizational conflicts of 1054 to the territorial ambitions of empires like Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, outside influences have fueled centuries of instability. The region's persistent volatility underscores its significance as a focal point of international power struggles, shaped by external forces that have long defined its turbulent history (Деспотовић & Глишин, 2023).

al revival. After centuries under Ottoman rule, the first major step toward independence occurred in 1804 during the First Serbian Uprising, which marked the beginning of the struggle for liberation. This uprising was part of a broader process of liberation from Ottoman dominance. Subsequently, the Second Serbian Uprising in 1815 led to Serbian autonomy within the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Principality of Serbia, which had its own assembly, constitution, and ruling dynasty.¹⁵

In the following decades, Serbia gradually gained broader autonomy, especially after the Berlin Congress of 1878, when it was formally recognized as an independent state. What we should emphasize here is that the beginning of the struggle for freedom from the Ottoman Empire was not the beginning of the conquest of internal freedom. As Professor Jovanović notes, the conquest of freedom “from” did not mean the conquest of freedom “for,” because from the very inception of the state’s formation, a prevailing populist (democratic) principle of governance was dominant, which largely derives from an authoritarian-patriarchal cultural pattern (Jovanović, 2012).¹⁶

Additionally, regarding Serbia’s modernization and the establishment of a rule-based order, which at that time lacked broader support, there is another idea namely, national unification as a powerful ideology that, with some interruptions, continues to live today. Concerning liberal political ideas in the 19th century, they gradually began to gain political space, but not as an expression of Serbia’s own political culture, rather as ideas brought by Serbs educated abroad or, on rare occasions, by European travellers. Serbia of that period was socially highly divided, with a social structure largely based on peasantry and a modest cultural-political elite.¹⁷ Vladimir Jovanović, one of the first Serbian liberals, noted that:

¹⁵ After the First and Second Uprisings, Serbia experienced profound changes in its political system, as well as changes in the way of life and economic activity. Serbia gained freedom under peasant dynasties, which was another factor influencing the fact that the internal profile of Serbian society changed very little and very slowly. Therefore, there was no rapid or fundamental change in the foundations of cultural life in Serbian society, which remained shaped for a long time by patriarchal and traditional patterns (Jovanović, 2012).

¹⁶ After 200 years of modern Serbian history, Serbia still seems to be trapped in the same cultural pattern, which is reflected across all spheres of Serbian society’s functioning, and in a special way through the security sphere.

¹⁷ In Serbia, an educated elite was just beginning to emerge, thanks to Western universities (within the Habsburg Monarchy, Germany, Central Europe, and to a lesser extent Russian, French, and British universities). However, there was no urban environment as a dominant setting where this education could be applied. The modernization of society was progressing slowly, and the connection between the advanced intelligentsia and the peasantry was very weak. What is emphasized in the description of that period is the fact that Serbia did not pass through the European feudal development phase, where aristocracy would be the more important carrier of cultural development, but rather through the Ottoman system, which had little in common with European feudalism. All of this reflected on the romantic phase of Serbian society from that period, which created a simplified romantic image of the Serbian “people” (Jovanović, 2012: 252-253).

“Serbian domestic trouble is reduced to those layers of society that do not touch the healthy seed of virtues that the people carry in their hearts and souls. These layers are: unscrupulous bureaucracy, demoralized intelligentsia, heartless clergy, aristocratic nobility, foolish ‘civilizers’, and ostentatious nudity.”

(Jovanović, 1868).

In the 20th century, Serbia was part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) from its founding in 1918. The specifics of the formation of this state entity are reflected in how internal political balance was sought, which almost always manifested through the application of the “national key” principle. *“This mainly emphasized differences, while little was contributed to the creation of an integrated political-institutional system”* (Proroković, 2018: 296). After nearly a decade of unsuccessful attempts to establish a functional state, Alexander I Karadjordjević introduced the so-called ‘February 6th dictatorship’ in 1929. Two years later, the famous Vidovdan Constitution was adopted, which primarily contributed to territorial reorganisation and the formation of banovinas. Following the tragic death of Alexander I Karadjordjević (assassination in Marseille in 1934), Yugoslavia continued to exist as a community, but more out of necessity internally unstable and with increasing aspirations and ambitions from external actors concerning its territory.¹⁸

During World War II, the territory of Yugoslavia was a site of conflict and occupation, which left deep impacts on Yugoslav society, albeit with certain specificities in each region. Serbia was an occupied territory that was the first to resist occupation, which is said to have had the strongest resistance in Europe at that time, alongside Poland. Two resistance movements operated: the Chetniks and the Partisans, each leaving a distinct mark and embodying two different visions of the direction in which Serbia should develop.¹⁹

¹⁸ As Josip Broz Tito wrote in one journal, “Monarchist Yugoslavia was like few other countries, full of internal contradictions. From the very beginning, a constant struggle was waged between the exploited working class and the young bourgeoisie eager for rapid wealth, between nationally oppressed peoples and anti-national regimes. It was torn apart by contradictions that also stemmed from capitalist exploitation of the countryside, from feudal remnants, from struggles among church hierarchies, and so on. All these contradictions were intensified and deepened due to the struggle of imperialist countries to create spheres of influence and secure positions in our country for the brutal exploitation of our wealth and the working masses.” (Proroković, 2018: 299).

¹⁹ The Yugoslav Royal Army in the homeland, the so-called Chetniks, under the leadership of General Dragoljub Mihailović, declared their war goal as the “biological survival of the Serbian people.” The Chetnik vision of “Serbian territory” is actually the work of Stevan Moljević, Homogeneous Serbia. See more broadly: Proroković, 2018: 315-316 and Jovanović, 2012: 240-241. On the other hand, the communist movement fostered the idea of Yugoslavism, which aimed to disregard the national question and claimed that all issues could be resolved through the elimination of class antagonisms. National questions in Yugoslavia were addressed only when it served the goals of the Communist Party and to the extent that it was in the interest of the new state leadership. The internal organisation of SFRY, which was federally structured, followed ethnic and national lines. In the Yugoslav communist system, the process of “liberation of nations” meant the formation of six separate federal units: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia.

After the war, Serbia became one of the republics of socialist Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito, while Yugoslavia as a whole remained a unified federation until its disintegration in the early 1990s.²⁰ The breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars of that period posed significant challenges for Serbia, which experienced a period of international sanctions, political instability, and economic turbulence. The context of the 1990s has several key aspects, such as political and social instability, reflected in deep political conflicts, authoritarian tendencies, and clashes within the joint state (SFRY), creating fertile ground for authoritarian regimes and abuse of state institutions (Gordy, 1999).

Markers of that period include extremism and nationalism, which manifested through intense nationalist movements and rhetoric, often linked to war crimes and ethnic cleansing, and contributed to creating an atmosphere in which the government used or tolerated violence as a political tool (Gordy, 1999). Widespread corruption and institutional weakness were also prominent. This was a time when large-scale corruption scandals, the fragility of the rule of law, and inefficient institutions emerged, enabling the authorities to use state power for personal interests and to suppress opposition activities. Finally, there was significant control over media and information. The monopoly over the media and censorship contributed to the creation of a propaganda machinery that legitimized authoritarian and violent methods.

During the 2000s, Serbia went through processes of democratization, reforms, and European integration. A key event in recent Serbian history was in 2006, when Montenegro unilaterally declared independence, resulting in Serbia becoming an independent state. This event marked the end of the state union between Serbia and Montenegro and the establishment of an independent Serbia, representing an important turning point in its national and international position. The process of disintegration did not stop there; in 2008, local Albanian authorities in Kosovo and Metohija (a southern province of Serbia) declared independence from Serbia, which was recognized by a number of countries worldwide.²¹ Serbia itself did not recognize this declaration of independence, nor did several other countries,

²⁰ Three decades after the end of World War II, which left the SFRY in complex external and internal circumstances, a new framework was created (the Constitution of 1974) that made an already complicated situation even more complex. Namely, nationalism began to spread even in environments where it otherwise did not have strong support, and the nations that made up Yugoslavia, each writing their own national programs, increasingly distanced themselves from each other and entered into mutual misunderstandings, finding fewer and fewer elements of commonality.

²¹ As of March 26, 2025, Kosovo has been recognized as an independent state by 105 out of 193 United Nations (UN) member states (54.4%), 22 out of 27 European Union (EU) member states (81.5%), 28 out of 32 NATO member states (87.5%), 4 out of 10 ASEAN member states (40%), and 34 out of 57 Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states (59.6%).

and all governments of the Republic of Serbia continue to regard Kosovo and Metohija as a province of Serbia.²² As stated in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia:

“Based on the state tradition of the Serbian people and the equality of all citizens and ethnic communities in Serbia, and taking into account that Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of Serbian territory, that it has the status of substantive autonomy within the sovereign state of Serbia, and that from this status follow the constitutional obligations of all state authorities to represent and protect the interests of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija in all internal and external political relations, the citizens of Serbia adopt this Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.”²³

Today, Serbia is a candidate country for membership in the European Union, actively working on economic, political, and social reforms, and striving to preserve its identity and stability within a complex regional context. It can be said that the process has been ongoing for a long time, considering that the EU stabilization and association process for the Western Balkans began as early as 1999 (when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was not yet included). However, after democratic changes in Serbia, on 5 October 2000, the process continued its course, with the first positive results seen through the signing of the Visa Facilitation Agreement and the Readmission Agreement in 2007, followed by the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Serbia and the EU in 2009. In 2011, the European Commission recommended granting Serbia candidate status, and in 2013, the European Council officially decided to grant Serbia candidate status for EU membership. In January 2014, the first intergovernmental conference between Serbia and the EU was held in Brussels, marking the beginning of accession

²² The Government of the Republic of Serbia does not recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state, although it does not exercise any form of sovereignty over the territory of Kosovo and is working towards the normalization of relations with the Kosovo government in accordance with the Brussels Agreement. The two sides began normalizing relations in 2013 in accordance with the agreement, but the process stalled in November 2018 after Kosovo imposed a 100% tariff on imports from Serbia. Kosovo withdrew this tariff on April 1, 2020, to allow the process to continue. In September 2020, according to the agreements in Washington mediated by the United States, Serbia and Kosovo agreed on the normalization of economic relations.

²³ Many professors of constitutional law have expressed their opinions on this matter, emphasizing the fact that Kosovo and Metohija must be removed from the Constitution when establishing borders with Serbia, and that delimitation, in terms of recognizing Kosovo's independence, could not be carried out without changing the Constitution. First, the part of the Constitution that states that the Republic of Serbia has two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija, would need to be amended. Additionally, the preamble of the Constitution would also have to undergo changes, as it creates certain obligations for state authorities regarding Kosovo and Metohija. Specifically, in the Serbian Constitution adopted in 2006, Kosovo is explicitly mentioned three times. First, in the Preamble, then in the articles on territorial organisation, where the status of autonomous provinces is defined. As is well known, the Preamble, which mentions Kosovo, is not a binding part of the Constitution.

negotiations at the political level.²⁴ In the meantime, 18 out of 35 chapters have been opened, and there was also a change in the form of a revised accession methodology in 2021, when Cluster 1 was opened, followed by Cluster 4, and since then, negotiations have been at a standstill.

In the last decade, the Republic of Serbia has entered a period characterized, in principle, by a unified stance that it is moving towards European integration. However, this stance is gradually being reshaped into increasing denial and rejection of pro-Western orientation, leading to a gradual return to authoritarian patterns of behaviour (Biber, 2020).

The Construction of Serbian National Identity Through the Centuries

The construction of national identity among Serbs has lasted for centuries. Today's identity of Serbia, although oriented towards modernity, still seeks its roots in the past, relying on a "traditional authentic political identity", namely medieval Serbian heritage, Orthodoxy, Byzantine legacy, folklore in culture, and more and more anti-Western sentiments. Numerous carriers of contemporary Serbian culture attempt to exclude a part of the 20th century from their experience and memory, even willing to relinquish their greatest achievements. The clash between patriarchal and modern civilization currently leans more towards re-patriarchalization of society, with strong resistance to the principles of a modern state rule of law, human rights, pluralism, and tolerance. The dominant nationalist elite advocates for a "holy Serbian identity" as the foundation upon which all victories are based and hope for the recovery and construction of a stable and independent Serbian state.

Let us recall the basic principles regarding national identity, the relationship between identity and culture, and the peculiarities of the national and cultural identity of Serbs. National identity (especially during certain historical periods) is one of the most important but also most controversial expressions of identity. In its distinctive way, national identity conditions the development and expression of other forms of identity. It can be presented as awareness of the whole "self", belonging to a particular national and cultural group. It is linked to the formation of nation-states, respecting the Westphalian order and the territorial basis of identity. It is woven from numerous other identities, with religious identity often prevailing among them,

²⁴ For a broader overview of all these topics, see the "Guide to the Negotiations between Serbia and the European Union." Available at: <https://www.mei.gov.rs/sr/obuka/e-obuke/vodic-kroz-pregovore-srbije-i-evropske-unije/>

which has frequently been distinguished from others. In states, alongside language, customs, and territory, it has been taken as a differentiating factor in the constitution of the nation.

The relationship between identity and the concept of culture develops in a variable, fluid, and pulsating manner. Identities can be created, changed, transitioned from one form to another, and disappear through the cultures and subcultures to which people belong or participate in. There are also views emphasizing that identity is based on culture but is not simply its product. Thus, Stephen Frosh presents this relationship as follows:

“Recent sociological and psychological theories have emphasized that a person’s ‘identity’ is actually something multiple and potentially fluid, emerging from experience and linguistically encoded. In developing their identity, people draw from culturally available resources within their immediate social networks and society as a whole. Therefore, the process of building identity is deeply influenced by contradictions and opportunities within the socio-cultural environment surrounding them.”

(Frosh, 1991)

The very definition of cultural identity should also encompass the existence of shared cultural features that symbolically delineate the social in this case, the national group through national culture and national identity. These cultural features, as previously mentioned, include numerous elements, from language and national symbols to cultural traditions and national art. As is well known, cultural identity includes: place, gender, origin/race, history, nationality, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and ethnicity. The concept of national cultural identity implies a self-understanding of a particular national community as a response to the question of what makes it a unique whole, what forms the basis of its historical experience, and what gives meaning to its historical existence.

Thus, it can be said that Serbian national identity is deeply rooted in cultural and religious assumptions established as early as the Middle Ages, linked to the figure of Saint Sava and the Kosovo Battle, and their symbolic-mythic transformation into the Kosovo Covenant. It is believed that Saint Sava laid the foundations of Serbian identity based on a set of ideas and values that serve as moral and spiritual guides for the Serbian people. According to this ideological matrix, every ruler must maintain a balance between political idealism and political realism. Political idealism here implies firmly ad-

vocating certain values and principles, even at the cost of personal sacrifice and taking responsibility for the suffering of the entire nation. These values in medieval Serbia primarily included the principles of Orthodox Christianity and the preservation of spiritual independence both from Byzantium (autocephaly) and from Catholic Western Europe, and later from Islam.

Therefore, a ruler, even before preserving political independence, had to be a guardian of spiritual independence, specifically the purity of the Orthodox faith. This was demonstrated through the Nemanjic dynasty's founding activity, as they built an exceptionally large number of monasteries and churches, many of which still exist today and preserve the continuity not only of culture but also of church life.

Political realism in the Serbian context involves a pragmatic assessment of the nation's position, initially situated at the crossroads between Christian East and West, and later between the Christian and Islamic worlds. This approach also emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance of power among great powers and safeguarding internal unity. It entailed establishing clear priorities distinguishing what could be temporarily or even permanently sacrificed under enemy pressure from what was non-negotiable. The Serbian awareness of the transient nature of worldly things underscored that the only absolute criterion guiding political realism was the preservation of spiritual independence and the integrity of faith. All forms of cooperation and cultural influence were considered permissible and even desirable, provided they did not threaten the purity of that spiritual essence. It was Saint Sava who established an open cultural matrix a culture of openness to different cultural influences and pagan past, because the primary goal was to preserve the core, the eternal and unchangeable essence of the Serbian spiritual identity.

The idea of supremacy of the spiritual over the worldly is reflected in the Kosovo Battle, where it receives its concrete confirmation. In the battle, both Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanovic and Ottoman Sultan Murad perished, and in church and popular consciousness, this event is remembered and perhaps consciously conceptualized as a sacrifice and a commitment to the Heavenly Kingdom rather than the earthly empire. The idea of the primacy of the spiritual over the worldly here was given a tangible affirmation. Faced with the possible loss of both political and spiritual independence, which would entail the preservation of life and privileges for the elite, Serbian Prince Lazar chose suffering.

Following the Battle of Kosovo, Serbia sacrificed its political independence but retained its spiritual sovereignty. The Kosovo Covenant embodied unwavering loyalty to the purity of faith and spiritual independence, even in the absence of a state, institutions, or rulers essentially, in the absence of political sovereignty. This steadfast stance was rooted in the Covenant's emphasis on enduring spiritual values over transient worldly affairs. It became the guiding mission of the entire nation, not just its elite, which had already been diminished through centuries of Ottoman rule.

The revival of the Serbian state in the 19th century, after liberation from the Turks, was fundamentally anchored in the legacy of Saint Sava and the Kosovo Covenant. These symbols reaffirmed the Serbian people's commitment to preserving their spiritual continuity and safeguarding their faith and independence. History has shown that when worldly interests take precedence over spiritual ones, Serbs have often suffered. Their relentless pursuit of independence sometimes bordered on self-sacrifice, and while they may not be deeply devout in liturgical practice, Serbs are willing to endure suffering for their faith an enduring testament to their spiritual resilience. Despite modern challenges and crises, the core Serbian ideology continues to be rooted in Saint Sava and the Kosovo Covenant.

In the 19th century, Serbia's political history began to take clearer shape, marked by a turbulent struggle for national emancipation and the creation of a modern state. Despite nearly six centuries of interrupted statehood, Serbia gradually aligned with European trends of national consolidation. Confronted with the legacies of Ottoman domination and pre-modern traditions, Serbia faced the painful process of modernization striving to forge a new identity while overcoming historical challenges (Despotović, 2008:29).

The final formation and constitution of the Serbian national identity unfolded over more than two centuries. A process marked by ups and downs and strong anti-modernization shocks, it consisted of phases of great national ascents and development, followed by declines, setbacks, doubts, and wandering. Just as the very historical matrix of its development was shaped, burdened by powerful and intertwined factors - cultural, political, religious, economic, geopolitical, gender-political, demographic, security-related, and others - so too is the complex reality of its evolution. Historian Ljubodrag Dimić highlights some of the most important of these, along with an awareness of their complexity and interdependence, clearly demonstrating not only the extent of their interconnectedness but also the

brutality and destruction they inflicted on the national fabric of the Serbian people.

“The theme we are discussing encompasses two centuries of Serbian history. The scale of these centuries is reflected in: twelve wars which produce demographic exhaustion, provoke existential minimums, stimulate biological and spiritual indifference, and destroy the future; multiple genocides foreshadowed by sultanic firmans and fatwas of the Reīs-ul-Ulema (1804), which recurred in all subsequent wars, especially those that marked the 20th century; numerous uprisings and rebellions against injustice, foreign conquerors and occupiers, fascist threats; several civil wars; multiple occupations; more liberation epics; four economic blockades (1906-1908, 1948-1955, 1992-1995, 1998-2000) which deprived the Serbian people of accelerated development, hampered modernization, and consumed twenty years (a fifth of a century); fifteen major diplomatic crises that provoked all forms of external pressures and internal tensions; the expenditure of enormous generational energies on building and preserving the state (the Serbian people created and lost the state five times), on rebuilding a war-ravaged country, modernizing society, establishing institutions, and aligning with Europe’s civilizational ‘model’; multiple revolutions and dictatorships, with only two-thirds of the twentieth century under their influence; numerous migrations and thinning of the national fabric; many exoduses and ‘shrinking into the motherland.’”

(Dimić, 2005:15)

It is important to recognize that for Serbia, as well as for other socio-political spaces that emerged after the breakup/dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia, this represented an extreme case of epochal disintegration of the old order and the search for a new identity, as well as for “a balanced trajectory of a society that is yet to be shaped in the process of transforming the community into a modern society” (Teniès, 1969).

The changes occurring in these regions can be characterized as a controversial strategy of intertwining re-traditionalization with trends of political modernization, whose outcomes are a kind of hybrid between community and society, with unfinished (semi-)state structures. As author Jovan Komšić notes, the first phase of this “backward-forward” trajectory, initiated in the late 1980s, was marked by a populist, ethno-nationalist “return to roots” (“clan,” “blood,” “holy land”). This, widely accepted ideology across all

Yugoslav nations, held the power to be a decisive factor in the destruction of the old socialist order of “brotherhood and unity of equal nations and nationalities” (Komšić, 2016:16).

After the turbulent decade of the 1990s and the fall of Slobodan Milošević’s regime in 2000, Serbia entered a period of relative stability, characterized on one hand by the beginning of democratization and, on the other, by the development of increasingly profound divisions within its society. Some sociological research on the consciousness of Serbian citizens (excluding Kosovo and Metohija) has shown that the transition process after 2000, which by definition also involves changes in cultural patterns, is accompanied by cultural-value divides along the following dimensions: a) traditionalism – modernism; b) liberalism – conservatism; c) pro-reform – anti-reform orientation; d) authoritarianism – non-authoritarianism; and so on (Pantić, 2003:95-129). As Jovan Komšić states in his research, “*the divisions are clearly expressed in relation to key issues concerning the democratic definition of national identity, as well as the character of the state and political order*” (Komšić, 2016:11).

The evolving political landscape in these regions reflects a complex interplay between re-traditionalization and modernization, resulting in a hybrid societal model characterized by semi-formed state structures and a blend of community and societal elements. Following the upheavals of the 1990s and the fall of Milošević, Serbia has experienced a period of relative stability marked by democratization, yet deep societal divisions persist along lines of traditionalism versus modernism, liberalism versus conservatism, and reformist versus conservative orientations. These internal divides reveal that national identity and the character of the state remain contested terrains, shaped by a lingering tension between the desire for rooted cultural values and the pressures of political change. Ultimately, this ongoing process underscores the fragility and complexity of Serbia’s journey toward a cohesive national identity, highlighting the enduring influence of historical narratives and societal cleavages in shaping its future trajectory.

Defining National Interests

National interests can generally be viewed as values and goals oriented towards the development of the national community and are closely related to national security (Stanarević, 2018). In this context, national interests represent the clearly defined intentions of the state, based on which the

objectives and methods for developing the national community are determined, while national security constitutes the organised approach of the state aimed at their protection, or a mechanism for their realization. As Samuel Huntington says:

“A national interest is a public good that concerns everyone, or most citizens; a vital national interest is that interest for which they are willing to shed their blood and spend their wealth to defend it. National interests usually combine security with material concerns, on the one hand, and moral and ethical concerns, on the other”.

(Huntington, 1997)

Such a definition of national interests indicates that they have both an internal and external dimension, allowing them to be observed from two perspectives. If the internal dimension is considered, then it pertains to public interests, which should be distinguished to some extent from national interests, strictly in a narrower sense. Public interest represents the interest of all citizens. In the literature, the term public interest is most often referred to as “general interest,” which encompasses those interests that are most closely related to the well-being of the community. Therefore, public interests are related to the internal well-being of states, while in the narrower sense, national interests are directed outward and are defined as visible needs and aspirations of a state in relation to other sovereign states that constitute its international environment. Additionally, national and public interests can also be understood as something that has a national and representative role in discovering, creating, researching, studying, presenting, disseminating, and preserving national cultural values.

The orientation of foreign policy is rooted in the concept of national interest, which serves as the fundamental guiding principle for all a state’s external actions. Interests are typically categorized into three groups: first, those related to core values such as territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty, and other principles that are non-negotiable; second, interests that can be negotiated even if they are significant, such as arms control or disarmament agreements, provided that the essential balance is maintained;

and third, interests that are often subject to negotiation, like navigation rights on the Danube and other shared resources.²⁵

We must understand that the national interest is an unclear and ambiguous term, which carries a meaning depending on the context in which it is used. This context encompasses factors from both the external and internal environments, including political, economic, and military aspects, as well as cultural, historical, and other factors that decisively influence the possibilities of realizing the national interest. These factors must be above the minimal requirements (mere physical survival) (Lipovac, Dimitrijević, 2015).

When it comes to the national interests of Serbia, throughout the twentieth century, they primarily related to the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty. During the First and Second World Wars, Serbia suffered significant losses and territorial changes. After World War II, within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia held the status of a republic but continued to strive to preserve its statehood and territory. In this sense, the 1974 Constitution, the last Constitution of SFRY, is significant. Besides further developing self-management and introducing a delegate system, it brought innovations in the organisation of the federation changes that stemmed from constitutional amendments in 1971. These amendments granted far greater authority to the republics and autonomous provinces, aiming at significant decentralization; some even spoke of confederalization of Yugoslavia and Serbia. Although this legal act had many issues, in collective memory, only one dimension remained: the 1974 Constitution divided the Serbian people. On one side, we have the reflections of Professor Mihailo Đurić, who, in his famous essay “Deliberate Confusion” in the Annals of the Faculty of Law, concluded with the following words:

“In order to survive all the current challenges, to remain amidst the flood into which it has been pushed, the Serbian people must turn inward, must begin to think about their survival, and must start fighting for their dangerously threatened national identity and integrity”.

(Đurić, 1971)

²⁵ The renowned German scholar Hans J. Morgenthau distinguished between two levels of national interests: vital and secondary. Vital interests pertain to the very survival of the state; when these interests are threatened, there is no room for compromise or hesitation, and war may be unavoidable. These vital interests are relatively straightforward to define: they include the security of a free and independent nation, as well as the protection of its institutions, people, and fundamental values. Secondary interests, on the other hand, are those over which compromise can often be sought and are more difficult to precisely define. They are less critical and do not directly threaten sovereignty. However, they can potentially evolve in the minds of policymakers into vital interests over time. When interests are secondary, mutually beneficial agreements are generally possible, provided that the other side is not pursuing expansionist policies (Morgenthau, 1949).

Vojin Dimitrijević, through his reflections on the controversy surrounding the 1971 Constitutional Amendments, expresses deep concern and criticism regarding the changes and the rhetoric that dominated society at that time. He emphasizes that it is surprisingly easy, even for those previously considered rational and progressive, to shift to irrational language and arguments. His commentary reflects a worry about the loss of critical thinking and ideological manipulation within society, especially during periods of political change and conflict.

“The only thing that is strange and I believe there is an explanation for this as well is how easily many among those who until recently considered themselves carriers of rationality and “scientific”, “avant-garde” ideas have shifted to irrational language. In other words, how surprisingly easily children who were strongly breastfed on the principles of unitarism (in fact, the absence of democracy) are accepting leadership of something that supposedly opposes it. It is sad how much the new, nationalist impulses are already being justified through well-known pseudo-arguments, using “socialist” and “worker” phrases”.

(Dimitrijević, 1971)

The justification of his thinking can be seen in the reactions that followed after some time. Meanwhile, the constitutional debate was conducted on multiple levels, and among other actors, the Serbian Orthodox Church²⁶ participated with the document “Appeal for the Protection of the Serbian Population and Its Sanctities in Kosovo and Metohija” (1982), as well as the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts with the famous Memorandum²⁷, which was prepared in 1986 by a commission of 23 of the most influential academicians.

²⁶ The beginning of the awakening of the Serbian Orthodox Church marked a period during which it became increasingly active and visible in the public sphere in the subsequent years. As Srđan Barišić emphasized in one of his texts, as an integral part of social changes in post-socialist societies, the revitalization of religion primarily occurred through the politicization of religion namely, in the context of a collapsing socialist identity framework by reaffirming old ethnic and confessional patterns with the aim of homogenizing identities within national frameworks. The sacralization of national identity strengthened the power of political elites and allowed religious elites to finally re-enter the public sphere, restoring at least some of their lost privileges (Barišić, 2016).

²⁷ Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (abbreviated SANU Memorandum) is a document drawn up by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) between 1985 and 1986, as a strategic program of the Serbian intelligentsia. The memorandum immediately caused stormy reactions in SFRY, due to its views on the state of the nation and demands for a thorough reorganisation of the state. His basic claim is that decentralization leads to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and that Serbs are discriminated against by the Yugoslav constitution of 1974. The memorandum especially insists on the “integrity” of the Serbian people: “*The question of the integrity of the Serbian people and their culture throughout Yugoslavia is raised as an essential question for the survival and development of that people*”. See: <https://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/doc/memorandum%20sanu.pdf>

On the other hand, there is a perspective that the beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia is directly linked to 1974 and that this date is used to portray the wars of the 1990s as inevitable. By selectively extracting negative continuity from the past, the complexity of historical processes is ignored, and history is reduced to a single, almost deterministic course that led the country to disintegration and war. As historian Dubravka Stojanović points out in her critique of the 1974 Constitution, several key elements of modern Serbian nationalism emerged, which aim to create a state where, as Miloshevic demagogically said, “the entire Serbian nation will live”, and which would encompass not only the entire or parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro but also significant parts of Croatia. Thus, this narrative has not changed much over time; there has been no re-evaluation or distancing, but as historian Dubravka Stojanović states:

“Through the critique of that Constitution, a self-victimizing narrative about the Serbs is continuously renewed and reinforced; it repeatedly constructs a negative image of the former Yugoslav peoples. It is always there to remind us that the shared state was a mistake, an error that still needs to be corrected. These are precisely the triggers of strong political emotions through which almost forty years of governance in Serbia have been maintained emotions that are always present to prevent any fundamental questions from being posed. Because, according to this narrative, everything would be better only if the problems arising from that Constitution were resolved, if today’s interstate borders, made more rigid by it, were abolished, and if that space were reorganised according to ethnic belonging.”

(Stojanović, 2024)

During the 1990s, amid the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Serbia insisted on preserving its territory, especially in the context of conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. The wars of the 1990s culminated in conflicts where Serbia insisted on protecting the Serbian people and territory, which led to international sanctions and conflict. Kosovo and Metohija remain a constant national interest of Serbia. Since the 13th century, Kosovo has been a Serbian ecclesiastical and cultural centre, with numerous medieval monasteries and monuments, forming the foundation of Serbian identity. After 2008, as already mentioned, Kosovo declared independence, which has been recognized by more than 100 countries, but not by Serbia, leaving the question of its status a key issue for national interests.

It must also be added that in the Balkans, powerful geopolitical and national interests of the USA, NATO, the EU, as well as the Russian Federation, Turkey, China, and Arab countries intersect. Internally, in the Balkans, there are national motives for the “Greater Albania” project, which aims to unite Kosovo, Albania, and parts of North Macedonia. Croatian interests are also present, with their most pronounced stance toward Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Turkish interests in BiH, Kosovo, and North Macedonia (Subotić, 2021).

If we follow the extensive literature on this topic, it can be said that most peoples in Europe have had ideas and projects for their own “great states”: Greater Germany, Greater Bulgaria, Greater Croatia, Greater Albania, and even Greater Serbia.²⁸ How justified and well-founded these ideas are is a separate question altogether. It is also a fact that, as stated by Jovo Bakić in his research on the destruction of Yugoslavia, nationalism can also sharpen the awareness for noticing true injustices against the nation, which someone from the outside, perhaps, has a harder time noticing since (although he is not a directly interested party) he may indirectly have certain conflicting interests or stereotypes (Bakić, 2011). For a long time, the articulated question has been what are the national interests or state reasons of Serbia and the so-called “Serbian national interests.” The strategies of national security (from 2009 and 2019) have, for the first time, articulated the most important national interests of the Republic of Serbia at the level of strategic documents.

Serbia’s National Interests – Strategic Approach

According to the National Security Strategy, national interests are defined as “a lasting need and aspiration of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens,” and “are based on universal and national values that stem from the Constitution and the heritage of the Serbian people and all citizens living in the Republic of Serbia” (NSS, 2019: 10). The fundamental national values recognized by this document are: “freedom, independence, peace, security, democracy, rule of law, social justice, human and minority rights and freedoms, equality and

²⁸ When Serbia, after a period of lethargy in its national politics, intensified its religious-educational activities in Ottoman-controlled European territories during the last decade of the 19th century accompanied by the opening of a network of consulates and the establishment of bishoprics in Prizren (1896) and Skopje (1897, finally in 1902) Vienna diplomacy interpreted its efforts to protect compatriots as an unequivocal expression of “Greater Serbian propaganda.” The Habsburg monarchy was known as the main accuser of Serbia, alleging that it was pursuing a “Greater Serbian policy” throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Scholar and historian Čedomir Popov, in his book *Great Serbia: Reality or Myth*, attempted to explain that this accusation was unfounded or at least misinterpreted.

parity among citizens, tolerance, transparency, solidarity, patriotism, and a healthy environment” (NSS, 2019:10). By pursuing national interests, as unambiguously articulated in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, “*the core national values are protected*” (NSS, 2019: 12).

According to the National Security Strategy, the national interests of the Republic of Serbia are: preservation of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity; preservation of internal stability and security; preservation and protection of the Serbian people wherever they live, as well as national minorities and their cultural, religious, and historical identity; maintenance of peace and stability in the region and the world; European integration and membership in the European Union;²⁹ economic development and overall prosperity; and the preservation of the environment and resources of the Republic of Serbia (NSS, 2019). Within the section “policy of national security,” these national interests are further operationalized, with a clear emphasis on their causal-effect relationship and interconnectedness, mutuality, indicating that the realization of any of these interests entails the advancement of each of them.

The strategic view of national interests entails the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty. In this regard, although Kosovo declared independence, Serbia considers Kosovo to be an integral part of its territory and insists on political and legal sovereignty over the entire area. International agreements, such as the Brussels Agreement (2013), aim to normalize relations, but the status of Kosovo remains unresolved. Protecting cultural and religious heritage includes safeguarding and promoting monuments, churches, and monasteries, including those in Kosovo, such as the Decani Monastery and Gračanica, which are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Preserving the identity of Serbs in Kosovo is of vital importance given the political and security challenges.³⁰

Membership in the EU and international organisations: Serbia has been a candidate country since 2012, and accession negotiations are ongoing with the goal of integration into European structures. The objectives include

²⁹ European integration and EU membership imply: – shaping a modern and developed society based on common European values that are part of Serbian national identity and historical heritage; – achieving internal readiness for EU membership; – improving national security and defence through the process of European integration.

³⁰ In the section of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (National Security Policy, 4.1.), which corresponds with increasingly prominent trends in international politics and relates to the achievement of an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina on the sustainable status of the southern Serbian province, it is emphasized that “the Republic of Serbia will not recognize the unilateral declaration of independence of its southern province, but in the interest of regional stability and the best possible Serbian-Albanian relations, it will continue dialogue with the provisional self-governing institutions in Pristina under the mediation of the European Union, until a long-term sustainable and mutually acceptable agreement is reached” (NSS 2019, 13).

aligning legislation, achieving economic stability, resolving Kosovo issues, and regional cooperation. Economic development and stability are also among the key national interests. Priorities include infrastructure development, digitalization, reducing unemployment (below 10%)³¹, and attracting foreign investments. Serbia maintained steady growth of about 3-4% annually before the pandemic, with the aim of increasing competitiveness and reducing poverty.³²

Finally, security and regional cooperation are also important national interests. Serbia strives for peaceful cooperation with neighbours, including regional projects like CEFTA, and membership in regional initiatives such as the OSCE, as well as cooperation with NATO, which is of particular interest. Maintaining internal stability and combating organised crime and corruption are crucial for national security.

However, it is important to note that the strategy itself does not clearly indicate the order of priority or importance of individual national interests, nor of risks and threats. There is no ranking that would indicate which interests, challenges or threats are the most important, but some of them are additionally highlighted in other legal acts or strategic documents. In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the most important interests, such as the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty, certainly occupy a leading place, while membership in the European Union, according to the EU Accession Strategy from 2005, is declared as a strategic goal.

Conversely, economic development is often highlighted in other strategic documents, which further indicates that certain interests receive more attention, but without a clear hierarchical order within the National Security Strategy. Such ambiguity makes it difficult to precisely focus and allocate resources in accordance with real priorities, which can affect the effectiveness of overall security and development policies.

³¹ According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the unemployment rate fell below 10% from the fourth quarter of 2021. In the first quarter of 2022, it rose back above 10%, specifically to 10.9%, and it has only been at 10% in the third quarter of 2023, where it has remained until today. For the current year, it can be said that in the second quarter of 2025, the unemployment rate will be 8.1%. See: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-latn/vesti/statisticalrelease/?p=17102&a=24&s=2400?s=2400>

³² Economic growth in the Western Balkans significantly slowed down in the first quarter of 2025. The real GDP growth of the region decreased to 2.3% in the first quarter, from 3.3% in the previous quarter. All countries recorded lower growth than in the previous three months, with Serbia, the largest economy in the region, experiencing the most significant slowdown, from 3.3% to 2%. North Macedonia and Albania maintained growth rates above 3%. This is shown in the European Commission's quarterly report on the economies of candidate and potential candidate countries for EU membership. The report adds that the economic growth was driven by domestic demand. The entire region continued to experience high wage growth. See: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-candidate-countries-potential-candidates-economic-quarterly-cceq-2nd-quarter-2025_en

National Interests in Different Analytical Units

In the previous section, we presented the national interests as they are depicted in the strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia. However, national interests can also be presented as an analytical concept or tool, which essentially tests their cognitive potential. Some theorists have proposed a matrix or classification method for national interests (Joseph Frankel, Donald E. Nuechterlein), which others (domestic researchers) have attempted to apply in practice (Dimitrijević, Lipovac, Krstić, Jović).

Since they decided to analyse the national interests of the Republic of Serbia, a small country, Ivan Dimitrijević and Milan Lipovac chose the Non-Linear Matrix, which allows for the ranking of national interests, i.e., assessing the importance that decision-makers and security policy creators attach to specific interests by categorizing them as: existential (critical), vital (dangerous), important (serious), and marginal (disturbing) (Dimitrijević&Lipovac, 2017:91).

As authors Dimitrijević and Lipovac note, there are several reasons supporting the decision to use the Prime Minister's exposé as content for analysing national interests: 1) exposés provide more material for analysis, 2) they cover a broader time frame, 3) they include more political actors, i.e., decision-makers who operationalize the policy/policies of national security, and may also contain comments on policies of previous governments, 4) they are more sensitive to political changes and the balance of power within the country than strategic documents, and 5) they offer insight into specific regional and global issues at a given time (Dimitrijević&Lipovac, 2017:78). In their work, they analysed the exposés of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia (2007, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017).

The most important national interest of the Republic of Serbia since 2007, at least according to the analysis of the Prime Minister's exposé, is related to the physical survival of the state, namely the protection of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia. Almost all prime ministers since 2007 have linked the most significant (national) interest to Kosovo and Metohija and, depending on specific circumstances, personal affinities, and assessments of what is feasible under current conditions, have formulated certain policies or measures to achieve that national interest. The published exposés also demonstrate a consensus on the importance of fighting organised crime and corruption as one of the main national priorities. In economic areas, Serbia strives to join the EU and improve its economy, which consti-

tute minimal conditions for national interests. Integration into international organisations was not considered a “rigid core” of national interests.

At the same time, Serbia’s regional interests are weakly emphasized and often general, indicating their low priority. The analysis shows that prime ministers most often express willingness to protect the interests of the Serbian population in the region, but their positions are subjective and selective, depending on specific interests and political circumstances. For example, some have expressed readiness to cooperate with certain regional countries and states, but at the same time have excluded the possibility of cooperation with other countries in the region, such as Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, depending on their status within the EU or NATO.

However, authors Milan Krstić and Nikola Jović include other analytical units besides the analysis of strategic documents and the Prime Ministers’ exposés (political elite). They incorporate public opinion (citizens’ perceptions of national interests) and experts (specialists’ attitudes towards national interests) into their analysis. Thus, in addition to the already analysed exposés used by Dimitrijević and Lipovac, they added the exposé of Ana Brnabić from 2022 and the exposé of Miloć Vučević from 2024. Their programs most often mention national, state, and civil interests. The most prominent interests highlighted are accession to the EU and the protection of Serbia’s territorial integrity.

Although economic development is not explicitly listed as a national interest, it is emphasized as a key element in several parts of the documents. Additionally, important interests include maintaining Serbia’s independence in decision-making, preserving political stability, economic empowerment of Serbs in Kosovo (including property rights and refugees), as well as respecting the rights, language, identity, religion, and cultural heritage of Serbs in the region. Vučević emphasized in his program that the entire foreign policy is based on national interests, with the most important being the defence of territorial integrity and the preservation of developmental potentials. EU accession is marked as a strategic goal, but it is considered a lower priority than economic development. Furthermore, maintaining peace in the region and the world is deemed important for economic progress (Krstić & Jović, 2024).

Regarding public opinion, the findings of the mentioned authors show that citizens consider the seven national interests listed in the Strategy (completely or mostly) to be important. However, EU membership is perceived as

important only by a relative majority (49.3%), making it the lowest-ranked interest. The highest ranking was given to the preservation of internal security, which was rated as “completely important” by more than two-thirds of respondents (72.2%), alongside 21% who perceive it as “mostly important.” The other interests received positive ratings from over 80% of respondents (“completely” and “mostly important” combined between 86.3% and 89.4%). Considering the minimal differences, it is difficult to hierarchize the interests between second and sixth place. A second important question related to ranking national interests, which were grouped by similarity into five categories.

Level	Interest
Existential	Preservation of internal stability and security Economic development and overall prosperity
Vital	Preservation of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity Preservation of the peace and stability in the region and the world
Important	Preserving the existence and protection of the Serbian people (...) Preservation of the environment and resources of the Republic of Serbia
Marginal	European integration and membership in the European Union

Table 1. Classification of Citizens' Preferences Using the Nuechterlein's Scale (Krstić&Jović, 2024)

Combining the findings from both questions, the authors concluded that, besides maintaining internal stability and security, economic development and overall prosperity can be classified among the most important (“existential”) interests according to citizens. The next level (“vital”) includes “political” interests: preserving sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, as well as maintaining peace and stability in the region and the world. Slightly lower (but still “important”) are identity interests (the preservation of the existence and protection of the Serbian people wherever they live, as well as national minorities and their cultural, religious, and historical identity) and ecological interests (preserving the environment and resources of the Republic of Serbia). The last position (“marginal”) in citizens’ views is reserved for European integration and membership in the European Union, as previously mentioned (Krstić& Jović, 2024:506).

Finally, the results obtained from the expert survey confirm the dominance of preserving internal stability and security (18 experts believe it is “of key importance,” while 13 consider it “very important”). Behind them are the preservation of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, as well as economic development and overall prosperity. Similar to the public opinion, EU membership is at the bottom of the hierarchy. However, this does not mean that experts consider this interest marginal, since a clear majority of 20 experts state that this interest is either very important (13) or of key importance (7), while an additional ten experts believe it is at least partially important (Krstić& Jović, 2024:507).

Civil War and NATO Aggression

The civil wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s represent one of the most difficult periods in recent European history. After decades of shared life, the country experienced deep ethnic and political divisions that led to armed conflicts and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991, which triggered wars in those states. The Croatian War of Independence lasted from 1991 to 1995, involving ethnic cleansing, mass civilian casualties, and international mediation, while the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995 is considered the bloodiest conflict in Europe after World War II. During this period, mass crimes, the genocide in Srebrenica, and ethnic cleansing were carried out by various actors, leaving deep scars in the region.³³

A particular challenge was the conflict in Kosovo, which was a key moment in the development of conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. As early as the 1980s, Kosovo Albanians demanded greater rights and autonomy, and in 1981 they organised mass demonstrations that led to clashes with authorities and repressive measures. In the subsequent period, Kosovo experienced the abolition of its autonomy, and tensions and violence between Serbs and Albanians escalated. During the 1990s, Kosovo Albanians demanded independence, with some advocating unification with Albania.

³³ Much has been written about the disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia, but despite the obvious facts, there is still doubt regarding the reliability of the available knowledge about the true causes, essence, dynamics, and consequences of the violent breakup of SFR Yugoslavia. As Miroslav Hadžić notes, there is a lack of a quality and objective debate on that war, and instead, a political and ideological debate about World War II is constantly conducted, which nearly forcibly revises that historical period (Hadžić, 2004). In line with this, it can be said that the 1990s shaped the foundations of authoritarianism, lack of transparency, and abuse of power, which are reflected in modern Serbian society.

At the same time, an armed group called the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was formed, which carried out attacks on Serbian forces, further worsening the situation. The conflict escalated to the point where NATO intervened with airstrikes in 1999, after which Serbian forces were forced to withdraw from Kosovo. The international community established UN administration (UNMIK) under UN Security Council Resolution 1244, creating a provisional government in Kosovo, but the issue of its status remained unresolved.

NATO's bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia³⁴ lasted from March 24 to June 10, 1999, in response to the escalation of the conflict and accusations of ethnic cleansing and crimes against Albanian civilians. The objectives were military and political, but there were significant civilian casualties and infrastructure destruction in Serbia and Montenegro. After the airstrikes, the Kumanovo Agreement was signed, leading to the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo, and the international community took over the administration of the territory. This conflict resulted in deep divisions and lasting consequences, and the process of resolving Kosovo's status continues. In 2008, Kosovo declared independence, recognized by most Western countries, but not by Serbia or other states.

After the NATO aggression on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, official Belgrade began the process of institutionalizing its relations with this organisation, initially out of necessity (signing of the Kumanovo Agreement),³⁵ and then increasingly, often making decisions that, from a geopolitical perspective, are indefensible (Proroković, 2018). In the following years, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia signed the Transit Agreement for NATO troops through Yugoslavia in 2005, followed by a bilateral agreement on the protection of American troops with the United States - A status of forces agreement (SOFA agreement) in 2006, which was signed by an independent Serbia, and later that year, Serbia was admitted into the Partner-

³⁴ It is a well-known fact that there was no approval from the UN Security Council for NATO's bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), in which the USA and other North Atlantic Alliance members participated.

³⁵ The military-technical agreement between the International Security Forces ("KFOR") and the governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia was signed in Kumanovo on 9 June 1999. It was signed by Michael Jackson, a British general and then commander of KFOR, or the international forces in Kosovo and Metohija, until October 1999, on behalf of NATO, and by Yugoslav Army generals Svetozar Marjanovic and Obrad Stevanovic, as representatives of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The agreement established a deadline of 11 days for the withdrawal of Yugoslav Army and Serbian Police forces from Kosovo and Metohija. Instead, KFOR units, mostly from NATO member countries, were deployed in the southern Serbian province. The very next day, NATO's aggression against Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was halted by an order from NATO Secretary General Javier Solana. The agreement also stipulated the creation of a so-called Security Zone along the administrative boundary with Kosovo and Metohija, within central Serbia and Montenegro. The airspace depth of the Security Zone was set at 25 kilometers; a land depth of five kilometers was planned; KFOR committed to disarm the terrorist so-called KLA; the international forces were "authorized to take all necessary measures to establish and maintain a secure environment for all citizens"; and technical details of the implementation of the agreement were specified. On the same day, 10 June 1999, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 was adopted. The text of the agreement can be viewed at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/kosovo-metohija/?id=19947>.

ship for Peace program. Ten years later, relations with NATO elevated to a higher level, but more on that in the subsequent chapter.

It is also important to mention that after the conclusion of the conflict (NATO aggression), marking the end of the 20th century, the so-called “October 5 Revolution” took place in 2000, leading to the overthrow of Slobodan Miloshevic and the beginning of democratic changes in Serbia. Miloshevic was charged with crimes committed during the war, and in 2001, he was arrested and extradited to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Other high-ranking war leaders, such as Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, were also convicted, with sentences for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.³⁶ This period was characterized by Serbia’s pursuit of stability and integration into European and international structures, but open questions and challenges remain in confronting the period of conflict and crimes.

Further analysis aims to emphasize the socio-political and security issues, as well as the framework in which the Republic of Serbia has existed over the past decades, from the disintegration of SFRY, through the transition phase, to full independence and the building of an independent national security system as much as possible for a small country. This system has been shaped by national culture and numerous security factors, providing a solid basis for analysis from the perspective of security culture as well.

Transformation of Security Structures and the Beginning of the Process of International and Regional Integration

Serbia’s position after the breakup of the former SFRY was quite challenging and went through various phases. At times, it seemed that Serbia was “catching up” with modern states, but then NATO’s aggression on FRY halted that process. Only after the events of 5 October 2000, which marked the end of Slobodan Milošević’s rule and the start of democratization in Serbia, did hope emerge that reforms were moving in a positive direction. One of the key policies that gained momentum was the transformation and

³⁶ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has today convicted Radovan Karadžić, the former president of Republika Srpska (RS) and its Supreme Commander of armed forces, for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws or customs of war committed by Serbian forces during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) from 1992 to 1995. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison. See: <https://www.icty.org/bcs/press/medjunarodni-sud-osudilo-radovana-karadzica-za-zlocine-u-bosni-i-hercegovini> Ratko Mladić the former Commander of the Army of Republika Srpska was convicted on appeal of life imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws or customs of war during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. See: <https://www.icty.org/bcs/case/mladic#tjug>.

modernization of the country's security system. Over the previous decades, Serbian security structures faced numerous challenges, including armed conflicts in the region, internal political tensions, and issues related to confronting the past and war crimes. After the change of government, focus shifted toward aligning security structures with European and international standards, as well as establishing stability and trust within the country and in the regional environment.

However, the fall of the old regime of Slobodan Milošević, which marked the 1990s, was not entirely dismantled after his overthrow. Reforms in the security sector were initiated but, after some time, were postponed; the normalization of society was hindered, and new security challenges, risks, and threats emerged to the safety of citizens, society, and the state. The authorities that ousted Slobodan Milošević did not acquire enough power to reform and modernize the Republic of Serbia. Efforts to highlight the economic, political, and destructive power of wartime and criminal structures in Serbia were avoided, and as a result, there was no radical political and value-based break with its wartime and authoritarian legacy. Very quickly, from the beginning of reforms, it became evident that there was no sincere determination among the ruling elites to transform Serbia and reform the security sector, especially the armed forces shaped by war, the police, and intelligence services.

The transformation process involved reforming the Ministry of Defence and security forces³⁷, strengthening civilian oversight over the military and police, and adopting new legal frameworks aligned with European standards. Particular attention was also given to issues of national security within the context of regional stability, as well as cooperation with international organisations. During this period, Serbia gradually accepted obligations related to accession to the European Union and other international integration processes, marking the beginning of its path toward EU membership and potentially NATO, although these processes remained full of challenges and often complex.

³⁷ Within the context of changes in military culture, transformations, and reforms being implemented in the Serbian Armed Forces, it is of great importance to highlight issues related to the broader national security culture. Specifically, the role of gender equality and the rights of the LGBT community in this context should be considered. Research and available data indicate that, although women and members of the LGBT population have gained certain rights and opportunities within military structures, their participation remains marginalized. Therefore, within the framework of reforms and modernization of the military and national security culture in Serbia, it is crucial to work on overcoming these prejudices and building a society that values diversity as an integral part of the national security strategy. This involves not only changes in legal and institutional frameworks but also a broader shift in social attitudes, which is essential for creating a more resilient, inclusive, and secure Serbia (Rokvić & Stanarević, 2016).

The beginning of the European integration process also marked the intensification of bilateral and multilateral relations with countries in the region, as well as the strengthening of regional cooperation within initiatives such as the South-East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECF). The goal was to establish a more stable, secure, and economically developed regional environment, which would contribute to the stability of the entire region and improve relations with neighbouring countries. In this context, Serbia actively worked on resolving open issues, including the legacy of conflicts, security cooperation, and the fight against organised crime, which represented an important part of the integration and stabilization process.

Overall, after 5 October 2000, Serbia embarked on a complex and long-term process of transforming its security systems and integrating into European and regional structures, with the aim of ensuring a stable and secure future for its citizens and positioning itself as a responsible and reliable member of the international community.

Serbia's active participation in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) enhances the country's position on the international stage, strengthens its standing in international organisations, and contributes to creating a safer regional and global environment. Since 2012, Serbia has established a legal framework for cooperation in the field of security, including the exchange of classified information, participation in crisis operations, and integration into European security initiatives, which supports its European integration efforts. Serbia actively participates in EU military operations, such as missions in Somalia, Central Africa, and Mali, which strengthens its operational capacity and interoperability with EU member states. Additionally, a cooperation agreement has been signed with the European Defence Agency, enabling participation in various programs and projects aimed at modernizing the armed forces, technological development, and improving defence capabilities.

Participation of Serbia in EU combat groups, especially in the HELBROC group, represents an important step in the process of integration into European security structures. According to government decisions, Serbia became a full member of this combat group in 2017, and preparations for participation include defining roles and organisational structures. In the upcoming period, priorities include continuing participation in negotiation processes, activities in crisis operations, involvement in European Defence Agency projects, as well as improving administrative capacities for cooperation within the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.

Here we must also mention the broader integration of military and police capabilities into UN peacekeeping operations. Since returning to multinational operations in 2002 and a ten-year hiatus due to war events in the former SFRY, the Yugoslav Army and the Army of Serbia and Montenegro, then the Serbian Army, have participated in several United Nations missions. Serbia's participation in international peacekeeping missions demonstrates its readiness and ability to contribute to global security, projecting a positive image as a responsible nation committed to peace. It also enhances Serbia's influence within the UN, EU, and the region, while providing valuable military experience that strengthens its defence capabilities, which is especially important in the context of Serbia's EU integration aspirations (Radojević & Blagojević, 2024).

Regarding the cooperation with NATO, we continue to present additional arrangements, which during 2014-2015 manifested through the signing of three agreements: the Serbia-NATO Agreement for procurement and logistical support (NSPO), the SOFA agreement with the entire NATO, and the so-called IPAP agreement (Individual Partnership Action Plans). The first two agreements were ratified in the National Assembly in 2016, and they entail commitments from the founding treaties of NATO member countries signed in Washington in 1949, London in 1951, and Paris in 1952 (SOFA and NSPO). The third agreement, IPAP, is implemented without ratification.³⁸

Serbia in the Process of Regional Integration

Understanding the current state of security culture in the Balkans reveals a region still grappling with the legacy of past conflicts, where multiculturalism is often seen as a source of tension rather than strength. The region is frequently described as a "powder keg," with lingering distrust among communities and challenges in implementing effective integration policies. This situation hampers efforts to build lasting peace and stability, as divisions and unresolved grievances continue to influence social and political relations.

³⁸ Regarding the IPAP agreement, an interesting aspect is the obligation undertaken by the Republic of Serbia to participate with its financial and logistical resources in further NATO propaganda activities on its own territory. This is intended to contribute, as stated in the IPAP agreement text, to "raising awareness" among Serbian citizens about the necessity of cooperation with NATO and "promoting regional stability." For more information on these and other mechanisms and cooperation programs, see the website of the Ministry of Defence: <https://www.mod.gov.rs/cir/4358/partnerstvo-za-mir-4358>

However, there are significant opportunities to improve this situation. By fostering a narrative of successful integration, promoting dialogue, tolerance, and mutual understanding, the Balkans can transform its multicultural diversity into a source of strength. Strengthening security culture through education, institutional reforms, and community engagement can help turn the region's challenges into opportunities for lasting cohesion, stability, and development (Stanarević & Gačić, 2017). With committed efforts, the Balkans can move from being a "powder keg" to becoming a model of inclusive and peaceful coexistence.

Within regional processes and activities, it is certainly worth mentioning the Open Balkan Initiative, which is one of the latest attempts at regional integration in the Western Balkans, launched in 2019 with the goal of enhancing cooperation and connectivity among the countries of the region.³⁹ This initiative has sparked numerous controversies, particularly due to challenges in achieving concrete economic progress, which has also attracted academic interest for a deeper analysis of its effects (Hrnjaz & Milošević, 2024). Although the public often focuses on political and security aspects, research is gradually shifting towards identifying factors that could contribute to achieving economic results and increasing trust among participating countries.

The key features of the initiative include facilitating cross-border trade, removing administrative barriers, and strengthening cooperation at the level of regional institutions, with the aim of creating more space for economic development and joint projects. Currently, the three Balkan countries involved are Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia. For Serbia, the Open Balkan represents an important strategic step in achieving its national interests, particularly in the domains of economic prosperity, strengthening its international position, and political leadership in the region. Serbia's political leadership sees this initiative as an integral part of its efforts to improve

³⁹ The cooperation and integration of Balkan countries is not a new initiative, which is reflected in the Open Balkan. The first ideas and concrete steps in this regard date back to the creation of independent national states in the Balkans during the 19th century and the liberation from the rule of great empires (the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires). There have also been various attempts to establish relations among Balkan countries on new foundations, aiming to enable closer cooperation and integration. Apart from primarily military alliances (at the end of the 19th century and immediately before the First Balkan War), which included certain clauses on other types of cooperation, the most significant example of the integration of Balkan peoples at the beginning of the 20th century was the formation of the State of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes on 1 December 1918, known later as Yugoslavia. This state existed under various names and with interruptions until the beginning of 1992. Between the two world wars, there were other attempts at broader Balkan cooperation and integration, among which the most interesting and significant was the Balkan Conference, which resulted in the first multilateral agreement among Balkan countries the Balkan Pact (Balkan Entente). From 1918 to 1991, in addition to the Balkan Conference and the Balkan Entente, there were also the Balkan Confederation, the Balkan Alliance, and the Conference of Foreign Ministers of Balkan countries (Lopandić, Kronja, 2010:33-53). For more details, see: https://www.emins.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/pdfslide.tips_regionalne-inicijative-i-multilateral-na-saradnja-na-pdf

economic opportunities, stimulate investments, and increase competitiveness at regional and international levels. This is also confirmed by strategic documents such as the National Security Strategy, which emphasizes that regional activities contribute to stability, trust, and joint action aimed at strengthening regional security and cooperation.

For Serbia, the Open Balkan presents an opportunity to solidify its position as a political leader and to contribute to the stability and development of the Western Balkans, paving the way for long-term economic and political prosperity. The initiative also carries a security dimension, emphasizing that regional cooperation contributes to stability, as highlighted in the Serbian National Security Strategy, despite the ongoing challenges rooted in historical conflicts and numerous unresolved issues in the Balkans and Southeast Europe. While economic and political goals are highlighted, the security aspect emphasizes the importance of cooperation for long-term peace and stability in the region. (NSS, 2019:16-18). By facilitating cross-border cooperation, information exchange, and building trust among participating countries, the initiative can help reduce regional threats such as organised crime, terrorism, or other security challenges. In this context, the Open Balkan is also viewed as a tool for enhancing regional security, creating a more stable environment for development and cooperation an issue of importance for all participants, including Serbia. Security policy, as a vital segment of this arrangement, must consider existing institutional mechanisms based on *realpolitik*, while also effectively addressing ideological and cultural factors that often prevail and undermine the potential for cooperation among those who do not always share the same values.

Serbia is part of numerous regional initiatives, such as SEEPC, the Adriatic-Ionic Initiative, the Berlin Process and the Western Balkans, SELEC (Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre), which are not all directly security-related but can certainly contribute to strengthening soft security. These initiatives often focus on areas like economic cooperation, sustainable development, and regional connectivity, thereby promoting economic well-being and prosperity. These activities, expressed through attractiveness, appeal, and shared values, can play a key role in building trust and stability in the region, thus contributing to overall peace and security.

Unfortunately, many of these initiatives often stagnate and do not produce significant results. This can be explained by numerous factors, including the unpreparedness and immaturity of societies in the Balkans. There is often a

low willingness for long-term engagement, which slows progress and hampers the full realization of the potential of these initiatives.

Security Threats, Strategies, and Means for Preserving Serbia's Security

The history of Balkan states, from the Berlin Congress to the disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia, has been marked by numerous disruptions in inter-state relations, often involving armed conflicts, with the most common cause or reason being unresolved national issues or border disputes. Security challenges, and subsequently threats, in the Balkans have always been complex and multi-layered, and the complexity of internal relations among different countries has often been exacerbated by external pressures, ambitions, and interests of great powers.

Looking at the present moment, this complexity is heightened by new security risks and threats resulting from global changes with local interactions, as well as technological development. Security threats for Serbia include various forms of danger, such as traditional military threats, terrorism, organised crime, cyberattacks, economic threats, and threats arising from political tensions and regional destabilization. Recently, the importance of threats emerging from the digital environment, like cyberattacks, as well as challenges related to migration and border protection, has increased. To be more precise and within the institutional framework, a list of contemporary security challenges, risks, and threats to the Republic of Serbia can be found in the current National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2019).

The perception of threats in Serbia is primarily focused on immediate and traditional challenges such as crime, terrorism, and regional conflicts. Modern threats like cyberattacks or climate change are less recognized or insufficiently understood as systemic challenges. Understanding and perception of these threats are shaped by historical context, media reporting, and the level of societal education, which further influence society's preparedness and resilience to these challenges.

According to a recent study conducted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy in 2022, citizens in Serbia perceive the greatest risks to national security as economic and energy crises, inflation, organised crime, and illegal drug trafficking. Residents of Southern and Eastern Serbia see the highest risks from organised crime, corruption, the COVID-19 pandemic, extremism and terrorism, inflation, and emigration. Meanwhile, inhabitants of Shu-

madija and Western Serbia identify risks related to climate change and natural disasters, fake news, cyberattacks, regional armed conflicts, and pollution of air, land, and water (Stanković, 2023).

In a more recent study involving youth, which examined multidimensional perceptions of security among students in Serbia and the role of institutional, socio-economic, and demographic determinants of sustainability, similar results were obtained. Based on young individuals' perceptions of various threats to Serbia's security at the national level, the statement "organised crime poses a serious threat to Serbia" received the highest average rating, indicating broad agreement among youth regarding the severity of this issue. Immediately following were concerns that "the spread of disinformation represents a risk to social stability" and that "energy dependence on other countries jeopardizes our security," emphasizing the importance placed on information integrity and energy independence (Cvetković et al., 2025).

From a security culture perspective, perceptions of threats in Serbia also encompass risks related to national identity, cultural heritage, and social cohesion. These threats are often linked to internal divisions, ethnic tensions, and the potential erosion of cultural values, which can undermine the societal fabric and resilience. For example, concerns about the manipulation of national identity through disinformation, the impact of external influences on cultural sovereignty, and the rise of social polarization are increasingly recognized as significant security challenges.

Moreover, threats related to identity and societal cohesion are intertwined with perceptions of foreign influence, cultural assimilation pressures, and the stigmatization of certain groups. In this context, it is important to once again highlight the significant role of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the ongoing, complex process of identity exploration, both within the international arena and within the internal social and political frameworks. This dynamic has historically contributed to, and continues to provoke, social turbulences. It has become evident that the democratization of the system has not necessarily translated into the development of the necessary civil potential, which appears to be significantly overestimated. Meanwhile, the influence of conservative patterns remains extremely strong, often underestimated making them a formidable force even for nationalist elites at certain moments.

The intense process of de-secularization, which is evident even in the symbols of the officially secular state, raises serious questions about the true

sovereignty of the state itself, as well as about its civic character - the proclaimed and constitutionally guaranteed unity and equality of all citizens. The majority of the local Orthodox Church continues to be a central, influential partner in shaping and defining state policies. While there are occasions when the interests of the state and the Church align completely, there are also times when they diverge or are not sufficiently harmonized. Nonetheless, both sides generally strive to find solutions that minimally satisfy the dual spiritual and political heads of this strong and indivisible national organism often symbolized as a double-headed eagle and to balance interests from both the Eastern and Western zones (Barišić, 2016).

From the perspective of security culture and identity protection, it is of particular importance to consider the impact of “soft power” and the attempts at destabilization coming from the environment. Russia’s “soft power” and its efforts to influence social, media, and political flows in Serbia pose a serious threat to the country’s identity and stability, especially within the context of social and political challenges. Russia’s investments in establishing numerous media outlets, portals, foundations, citizen associations, and NGOs aimed at strengthening anti-Western and pro-Russian tendencies indicate a strategic effort to shape public opinion and undermine European integration processes.

This media and informational offensive by Russian authorities is not only a reflection of the ambivalent stance of Belgrade authorities towards the West but also part of a broader strategy of destabilization and maintaining influence over social and political currents. Besides Russia, China’s “soft power” in Serbia is expanding through the establishment of Confucius Institutes and other cultural dissemination efforts, further amplifying its influence with potential implications for Serbia’s identity and security system.

These activities are not accidental but are part of a long-standing cultural and ideological matrix of anti-Western and anti-liberal discourse, which dates back to the 19th century in Serbia. This tendency involves preserving and strengthening nationalism as the dominant ideology, rejecting Western values, collectivism over individualism, authoritarianism, negation of the rule of law, and the pursuit of Serbian national unity and liberation from Western influence. All these characteristics pose risks to Serbia’s identity and stability because they foster susceptibility to external influences and undermine internal cohesion and resilience (Bešlin, 2016, according to Perović, 2015).

The ongoing conflict between supporters of Western values and advocates of Russian and Chinese influence deepens societal divisions. While the West promotes integration into European institutions and NATO, emphasizing democratic principles and liberal economic policies, the alternative camp emphasizes the preservation of traditional values, national sovereignty, and closer ties with Russia and China. These differing visions often manifest through political and economic pressures, fuelling internal discord. As a result, this ideological struggle not only amplifies internal polarization but also risks regional destabilization, posing a significant challenge to Serbia's long-term stability and security.

In light of these challenges, it is crucial to develop strategies to strengthen the national security culture and protect the identity, enabling society to resist propaganda, disinformation, and other forms of external threats, thereby safeguarding Serbia's sovereignty and internal stability. These issues can influence public attitudes, trust in institutions, and social stability, thereby affecting the broader security environment. Recognizing and understanding these identity-related threats are essential components of developing a comprehensive security culture that emphasizes societal resilience, inclusivity, and the protection of shared values.

Strategies for defence and security preservation include developing defensive capabilities, collaboration with international organisations such as NATO, the EU, and the UN, as well as enhancing internal security through intelligence and security services. Serbia also develops its military capacities, modernizes its armed forces, and cooperates with regional partners. As the youngest militarily neutral European country, Serbia constructs its own concept of national defence within the constraints imposed by broader Euro-Atlantic integration processes, regional characteristics, and the diverse nature of security challenges, risks, and threats it faces. Serbia's neutrality does not represent a policy of isolationism but, rather, a dynamic and active foreign policy emphasizing engagement in international relations based on the so-called Four Pillars (relations with Washington, Brussels, Moscow, and Beijing).

According to Branislav Milosavljević, Serbia's policy of military neutrality aims to avoid membership in collective defence systems (such as NATO), but does not exclude participation in collective security arrangements, like those of the United Nations or the European Union. The possibilities and limitations of Serbia's ongoing implementation of its military neutrality policy can be understood by considering the specificities of its experience

in relation to existing military alliances and the process of EU accession (Milosavljević, 2016). In this context, the stance of the Russian Federation is also noteworthy; Russia does not restrict Serbia's activities within the "Partnership for Peace" program nor openly blocks its aspirations for EU membership.

However, a problem arises from the establishment of the Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre on Serbian territory, which raises suspicions among other countries that it may be a military base or at least a facility that could be easily repurposed. One of the essential conditions for maintaining permanent neutrality, emphasized in the cases of five Western European neutral states, is that no foreign military bases can be established on the territory of a permanently neutral country (Milosavljević, 2016: 156-157).

Since the decision to adopt military neutrality was made in 2007, it has not been detailed in the Constitution or laws until 2019, when it was more comprehensively outlined in the National Security Strategy and the Defence Strategy (which came into effect in 2020). According to the Defence Strategy, military neutrality is considered "a defensive interest of the Republic of Serbia," indicating Serbia's commitment "not to join military-political alliances, which does not exclude cooperation in the defence sector." The 2019 National Security Strategy and Defence Strategy, which are also the latest adopted documents, envisage the introduction of the concept of total defence. Specifically, *"in this regard, the concept of total defence will be developed and implemented, and the number of citizens trained for national defence will be significantly increased"* (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2020, 36). The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Concept of Total Defence at the end of 2023. A summary of the concept was published by the Ministry of Defence in 2024.

Means of maintaining security include regulatory measures (such as policies, the constitution, laws), as well as capacity-building tools (skills for enabling, record-keeping, information management, training, force projection, military and police equipment), military and police forces, intelligence agencies, technological systems for cybersecurity, as well as various preventive and response measures. An important aspect is also civilian security, which encompasses education, public campaigns, and legal mechanisms for the protection of citizens. These are not yet fully developed, but certain activities in this area are noticeable. Overall, Serbia strives to balance between defensive capacities, international cooperation, and internal stability

in order to effectively respond to modern security challenges and to protect its interests and citizens.

In addition to the mentioned strategies, Serbia is also implementing activities aimed at preventing and early detection of security threats, including the development and application of modern technologies for surveillance and analytics, as well as enhancing cooperation with various governmental and non-governmental security actors. The focus is also on strengthening the capacities of civil society and public institutions to increase resilience against disinformation, destabilization, and other indirect threats that may undermine social stability.

The protection system includes the development of crisis centres and response plans, as well as continuous training and exercises for civil protection services, firefighters, medical services, and other relevant institutions. Furthermore, Serbia invests in improving critical infrastructure, including energy, transportation, and communication networks, to reduce vulnerability to potential challenges and attacks.

Within international cooperation, Serbia actively participates in regional initiatives and programs for information exchange and joint response to threats in cyber security. These activities are crucial for building a comprehensive and dynamic security architecture that encompasses not only military and police spheres but also civil aspects, education, and social resilience.

Instead Of A Conclusion, Or Serbia' S National Security Culture In The Current Challenging International Environment

The history of Serbia is characterized by frequent deep ruptures and turning points, which have created entirely new historical circumstances. This is the primary reason why the Serbian nation has not succeeded, neither in space nor in time, in achieving a harmonious structure of its own national identity.

In Serbia, and arguably in almost the entire Western Balkans when considering only the turbulent history of the last 200 years, certain cultural models have remained unchanged. Parochial culture persistently endures, reacting suspiciously whenever it perceives anything that deviates from its rigid established norms. This period has been burdened with wars, internal

conflicts, revolutionary aspirations, encounters with other cultures, and major cultural and historical events.⁴⁰ Many Serbian intellectuals believe that this thread of petty, provincial, yet highly influential cultural constructs has changed very little.

The outcome of World War I was the creation of Yugoslavia, in which the Serbian people, for the first time in their history, lived within a single state. In the early 21st century, Serbs live on its ruins, having been pushed back an entire century. The most crucial question is: how did this happen? The answer cannot be given without understanding the historical facts, with the First World War occupying a central place in this process both due to the immense sacrifices and demographic collapse, whose consequences are very clearly visible in the modern era, and due to the political processes that completely overturned Serbian history. The influence of ideologies on the formation and development of the Serbian national identity in the 20th century is also the most significant phenomenon, as pointed out by numerous historians (Nikolić, 2024, Bodrožić, 2015).

Serbia will modernize and will be able to boast a developed security culture at all levels and within all structures when it pays serious attention to internal agents of modernization and development. These agents will elevate security policy to a higher level. There has been a mixing of interests stemming from provincial understandings of tradition on one side, and practitioners of cultural and political “national” ideology on the other, which support each other, but often lead to misunderstandings with the broader European environment.

The culture of national security in Serbia today is shaped within a complex and challenging international environment characterized by numerous global and regional challenges. In the modern world, where threats and risks evolve rapidly and the boundaries between internal and external security are becoming increasingly blurred, Serbia faces challenges that require adaptation and the development of specific strategies and attitudes by its security institutions and society as a whole.

The fundamental principles of Serbia’s national security culture include safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity, protecting state interests,

⁴⁰ It is considered that the entire Balkans Peninsula, with the Western Balkans in particular, can be regarded as a cultural-civilizational zone. In this region, different national communities come into contact, intertwine, and conflict; their languages and scripts, religious affiliations, artistic and scientific achievements, architectural heritage, ethnopsychological structures, and perceptions of life and human existence intersect. Although these contacts are multidimensional, the decisive criterion for differentiating cultural-civilizational circles remains religion, despite attempts to artificially ignore or transcend this fact (Proković, 2018:440, according to Stepić, 2004:151).

and maintaining internal stability. At the same time, through long-standing experience and historical heritage, there is an awareness of the importance of regional cooperation and peace, which is crucial for preserving security in a complex geopolitical landscape. Serbia, as a country aspiring to European integration, simultaneously balances its strategic interests within Europe with specific regional challenges, such as unresolved relations with neighbours, the Kosovo issue, and challenges related to security from organised crime and terrorism.

In the current international environment, characterized by increased competition among great powers, changes in security paradigms, and new threats such as cyber threats, hybrid wars, and disinformation, Serbia is developing its strategy based on the principles of multilateralism, dialogue, and a military-neutral policy. The security culture in Serbia promotes responsible and comprehensive understanding of the state's role in safeguarding peace, security, and stability, with an emphasis on the international legal framework and cooperation with organisations such as the UN, NATO, the EU, and other regional initiatives. The commitment of Serbia to participating in multinational peacekeeping operations reflects a key element of its national security culture, emphasizing responsibility, stability, and the pursuit of peaceful coexistence. By actively engaging in international missions, Serbia not only contributes to global peace and security but also reinforces its foreign policy objectives and enhances its international reputation, demonstrating a strategic approach rooted in its security values and identity.

Despite the challenges, Serbia strives to build a resilient and adaptable security culture that enables effective response to modern threats while preserving its interests and contributing to regional stability. This culture encompasses not only technical and strategic aspects but also raising societal awareness about the importance of national security, education, and continuous adaptation to dynamic global changes.

Therefore, what we need to reiterate or extract as a fundamentally important segment of this monograph can be summarized in the following few sentences. The national security system has been largely shaped by the influence of national culture and security culture, as they define the values, identity, perceptions, and priorities that the state and its actors hold in the process of preserving and enhancing security. The national culture, which includes general social norms, customs, historical experiences, and identity elements, influences how threats are defined, how responses are shaped, and how security strategies and policies are formulated.

Conversely, security culture represents a set of shared beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and practices that shape the behaviour of actors within the security system, including military, civil, and international factors. It reflects specific values and traditions present in society and influences how security is approached, from decision-making to policy implementation. Thus, national security has been built and adapted over time to cultural specificities, and its development is deeply rooted in the identity and values of a people, resulting in the formation of a unique security culture that reflects these cultural norms and attitudes.

However, although this model of national security culture is present in most cases within society, the opportunities for its improvement still remain limited. The path toward building a stable and effective national security culture is still fraught with many challenges. It is necessary to invest in education, training, and the promotion of values that foster unity, responsibility, and professionalism within the security system. Additionally, strengthening institutional capacities and developing a culture of dialogue and trust among various actors in the security systems are also crucial. Equally important is the need to reconcile the historical circumstances in which national identity was shaped and to address the challenges of the modern global environment. Only through continuous effort and dedication can more significant results be achieved in creating a stable and sustainable security culture that will contribute to lasting security and stability of the state.

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Chapter 3

Case Study: The Republic Of North Macedonia

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Introduction

This chapter will offer a case study of the construction of the national security culture in the Republic of North Macedonia as a key determinant in shaping the country's strategic preferences. It will analyse the worldview of the country's external environment and how it is perceived in terms of security threats and potentials for cooperation. Furthermore, it will elaborate on the Republic of North Macedonia's national interests and how they are connected with the global and regional international environment and the importance of the international organisations in the process of building its national security culture.

The chapter will examine how the country's independence from the former Yugoslav federation and its international positioning, followed by the internal conflict in 2001 defined the security threats and the preferred available instruments relied upon to address them. It will offer an insight into how national security culture accounts for the securitization of threats. It will elaborate on how the vulnerability of the country in the process of gaining independence has influenced the defining of the national interests and how they are rooted in the country's national security culture. Since the national security threats were coming from both the outside – mainly from the expansionist aspirations of some neighbouring countries to create greater nation-states by seizing pieces of Macedonian territory, and from the inside – the ethnic tensions, the first formative years were the most important in shaping the national security culture of the newly independent state and defining its reliance on international cooperation. The country identified the European Union and NATO integration as one of the main foreign policy priorities that will contribute towards the security consolidation.

The analysis will be structured in four parts. The first part provides an overview of the first decade of the country's independence, which is crucial for a country's positioning in a newly established international system. Being part of a large federal state in a Cold War era is completely opposite of being an independent small landlocked country in the turbulent environment of the Balkans. The first part will provide a comprehensive picture of the real sources of threats to the national security, the identification of the national interests, the definition of policies and the build-up of a national security system of the country. The second part will focus on the internal ethnic conflict of 2001 and its security implications for the country. It will also elaborate on the EU's involvement in the peaceful solution of the conflict and the post-conflict management, which greatly coincided with the EU's internal development of crisis management institutions and capacity. The third part continues with the redefinition of the country's security culture after the Bucharest NATO Summit and the disappointment from not becoming a NATO member. This part will focus on the vacuum that was left with the Republic of North Macedonia not becoming a NATO member and the fact that the EU integration process has been stalled. These developments led the country to easily become target of the rising influence of different actors whose presence was becoming increasingly dominant in the region. The fourth part will focus on how the new geopolitical and regional context has urged the country to slowly redefine its national security culture and move forward in solving the name issue with neighbouring Greece in order to become NATO member. It will further elaborate on the modern security threats in the country and the challenges in the military defence as a NATO member.

Contextualizing Macedonian National Security in its very Beginnings: The Role of International Positioning

After the collapse of the Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), alongside other changes on the political map of the region, following a successful referendum on independence that took place on 8 September 1991, conditions emerged for the Republic of Macedonia⁴¹ to become an

⁴¹ For historic relevance the first two parts of this chapter will use the name of the country as it was provided in the Constitution of 1991 – the Republic of Macedonia or Macedonia. With the "Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as Described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the Termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the Establishment of the Strategic Partnership Between the Parties", known as "Prespa Agreement", the official name of the country was changed to the Republic of North Macedonia or North Macedonia and it will be used accordingly in the third and fourth part of this chapter.

independent state. After Slovenia and Croatia, Macedonia was the third Yugoslav republic to declare independence. The independence referendum and the subsequent independence from the SFRY was peaceful, following the negotiations concerning the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army (JNA) from the territory of Macedonia, which took place between the newly elected Macedonian president Kiro Gligorov and the JNA leadership.⁴²

The 1991 referendum on the independence and the withdrawal of the JNA from its territory, marked the beginning of a new phase in the development of the country's national security system. The Republic of Macedonia, almost completely disarmed, was burdened with issues with all of its four neighbours - Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and SR Yugoslavia. At its very beginnings, the country has found itself in an extremely vulnerable security position. Bearing in mind that Macedonia was the only republic of the former Yugoslavia that gained independence by peaceful means, the issue of security was placed high on the agenda of the political leadership. The issue of security was especially important since Macedonia was one of the smallest countries in the region with limited resources. The newly independent country has a territory that corresponds to the territory of the Macedonian federal unit in the SFRY, comprising of 25,813 km². Even before the independence, the Republic of Macedonia's borders were largely international, including borders with Albania, Bulgaria and Greece. Only the administrative border to Serbia (including Kosovo) became an international border with its independence (and was finally demarcated in 2009, upon Macedonia's recognition of Kosovo). The total population in the country according to the Statistical Office of Macedonia's data of 1991 was about 2 million, out of which 65 per cent were ethnically Macedonian, 21 per cent Albanian, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and others. The newly independent country had modest economic and security resources and, therefore, it mostly relied on a generous foreign aid, primarily from the USA. At this point in time, for the United States, Macedonia represented the pillar of US politics on the Balkans (Gligorov, 2000; Maleski, 2012).

Given the nature of the agreement reached with the Yugoslav Army, in the beginning of 1992 Macedonia was left without any military or defence capabilities. Moreover, the main transportation and communication corridor to

⁴² For a comprehensive historical analysis on the issue see more in: A. Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A History* (2008) Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford; K. Gligorov, *Makedonija e se sto imame* (2000) Tri, Skopje; D. Maleski, *Bebeto od katran* (2012) Kultura, Skopje; C. Koneska, *Policy Consensus During Institutional Change: Macedonian Foreign Policy Since Independence*, in S. Keil, B. Stahl, (eds) 'The Foreign Policies of Post-Yugoslav States - New Perspectives on South-East Europe' (2014) Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 97-121.

south and north was blocked with two embargos. Besides that, a potential for interethnic conflict with large Albanian community existed in the country. Consequently, it was the strong belief of the Macedonian leadership that the country should be secured within a regional security framework.

The concept for promoting Macedonia as part of a regional security framework was developed in November 1992 when the authorities demanded preventive deployment of UN forces on its borders to Albania and SR Yugoslavia which was approved by the UN Security Council (UN Security Council Resolution 795). It should be underlined that the initiative was accepted by the UN regardless of the fact that Macedonia was not a member of the organisation.⁴³ The UN organised peacekeeping forces within UNPROFOR to prevent an outside aggression and an internal ethnic strife between the Macedonians and the Albanians in the country. The United Nations presence on Macedonia's borders with Albania and SR Yugoslavia was essentially precautionary, to monitor and report any developments in the border areas which could undermine confidence and stability in Macedonia and threaten its territory. The Secretary General recommended that the enlargement of UNPROFOR comprise an estimated battalion of up to 700 all ranks, 35 military observers, 26 civilian police monitors, 10 civil affairs staff, 45 administrative staff and local interpreters. This contingent would operate under UNPROFOR's "Macedonia Command" with headquarters in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia.⁴⁴ As part of the long-term commitment to Macedonia's security in 1993 additional 300 US peacekeeping forces were sent to Macedonia with the sole purpose of containing the Bosnia war. In that direction, US Secretary of State Christopher Warren depicted the troops as a "deterrent force" that would have "both symbolic and tangible" value and emphasized that "U.S. is not likely to leave its troops in Macedonia undefended".⁴⁵ Although Macedonia was not officially recognized by Washington, the symbolic deployment of US forces on Macedonian borders represented a strong commitment to the security of the new state. Identification of Macedonia as the key area for the Balkan security, and dispatching American soldiers to this country, has provided this state with peace in a precarious environment (Tatalovič, 1998).

43 In 1995 the UNPROFOR mission was replaced with a separate mission for Macedonia – UNPREDEP (UN Security Council Resolution 983 (1995)). The foreign military presence in Macedonia lasted until 28 February 1999.

44 UNPROFOR, UN Department of public information, available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unprof_b.htm.

45 U.S. Says it Will Send 300 Troops to Balkan Republic to Limit Strife, The New York Times, 6 November 1993.

Regarding its national security system build-up, the integration into the international security organisations and international organisations in general, was seen as a *conditio sine qua non* for the international recognition of the newly independent country, but also for building its national security system. The international recognition of the country was the primary goal in order to establish the country in the international arena, but also to give the country an international standing that will help in addressing the issues with its neighbours, which all had at one time or another denied the existence of a Macedonian people and its right to an independent state. All of the neighbours viewed the small, independent republic as a threat to their past gains or future aspirations there and rejected it as an artificial creation (Rossos, 2008). Therefore, the quick recognition by other powers, particularly by the European Community and the United States, was critical.

After the new Constitution was adopted on 29 November 1991, Macedonia joined Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina seeking recognition from the European Community (EC). The Badinter Commission, which was established by the EC as an organ of the Conference on Yugoslavia in the context of its intervention in the process of the disintegration of the former SFRY, ruled that only Slovenia and Macedonia met the minimum requirements. However, to Macedonians' surprise and disappointment, by April 1992 the European Community had recognized the other three applicants but not Macedonia. Greece's determined opposition to the recognition of the country and its claims that the new republic represented a security threat convinced both the European Community and the USA to withhold recognition until settlement of the Greek-Macedonian dispute.

On 15 January 1992, Bulgaria became the first country to recognize the new state, even though it continued to deny the existence of the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian language, a possible source of conflict between these two countries. The unwillingness of Bulgaria to recognize the nation and the language of the newly established country was twofold. Primarily, Bulgaria wanted to prove that in the part of its territory called Pirin Macedonia there are no Macedonians. Moreover, it wanted to express that in the Republic of Macedonia there are no Macedonians, but only Bulgarians. Therefore, the recognition that came from Bulgaria meant that the Republic of Macedonia is just another Bulgarian state.

By the middle of 1992, only six other countries recognized the Republic of Macedonia: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Turkey and the Philippines. Russia also extended recognition but decided not to exchange

ambassadors until the European Community formalized relations. At that point of time, the most convenient solution for the Greeks was to have Macedonia to join Serbia's reduced Yugoslavia, because of the security threat that Greece – one of the region's larger states, a member of the European Community and of NATO and a modern military power, was perceiving from this newly established country. Hundreds of thousands of Greeks demonstrated in Thessaloniki and in Athens, while the Greek military executed manoeuvres on Macedonia's border and repeatedly violated its airspace. Moreover, Greece interfered with shipments, including foreign aid passing through the port of Thessaloniki, and imposed an economic embargo towards the Republic of Macedonia, which threatened to destabilize the country (Rossos, 2008).

In the relations between the Republic of Macedonia and Albania, the bone of contention was the position of the large number of Albanians who lived in the western and north-western part of the Republic of Macedonia. These internal ethnic issues greatly affected Macedonian relations with Albania, which in 1993 recognized the newly formed country, with special emphasis that it considered it to be a state that did not belong exclusively to the Macedonian people.

This international environment in which the new state emerged, required strong security guarantees that could only come through its international recognition. The process began with its admission to the United Nations on 8 April 1993 as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). By the end of 1993, most European countries, including Britain, France, and Germany, as well as Japan, recognized the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The United States became the first major Western power to recognize the country on 8 November 2004, under its constitutional name, the Republic of Macedonia.

The admission of Macedonia to UN membership did not resolve the outstanding issues that existed with Greece. From the very beginning of Macedonia's recognition process, Greece has stressed that the issue of recognition of Macedonia is strongly connected to the regional security and emphasized that the admission of the state under the denomination used in its UN membership application would further destabilize southern Balkan in the short and long term.⁴⁶ Thanks to the USA intensive diplomatic efforts, the

⁴⁶ Memorandum Concerning the application of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for admission to the United Nations, reflecting the View and Position of the Government of Greece in a letter dated 25.01.1993 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece to the UN Secretary General, available at: <https://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/OfficialDocuments/MEMORAND.html>.

trade embargo was lifted in September 1995 after the signing of the Interim Accord between Athens and Skopje.⁴⁷ The signing of the agreement was described by the US President Clinton as an “extremely important step that will support current efforts to bring peace and stability to the Balkans”.⁴⁸ The relations between the two countries were normalized and at the same time, both parties agreed to continue negotiations in order to reach agreement over the difference concerning the name.

Greek-Macedonian relations improved under the Interim Accord of September 1995, prompting the trade to increase. That same year, the Republic of Macedonia was contributing towards the building of its national security system by joining the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program.

The important search for recognition by its neighbours ended in early 1996, with the opening of diplomatic relations with the new federal Yugoslavia - Serbia and Montenegro. Although the Republic of Macedonia cultivated good relations with SR Yugoslavia, particularly in the economic sphere, this country presented the biggest security threat (Tatalovič, 1998). From the very beginning of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia was wary about SR Yugoslavia and its geopolitical and military strategic concerns, which were not indifferent whether Macedonia was an independent state. Furthermore, there were concerns that the ethnic violence between Serbs and Albanians, and especially the hostilities in Kosovo, might spread relatively fast into the Republic of Macedonia.

During the first years of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia accomplished a lot, but was still faced with an array of problems, caused by the potential of an internal ethnic strife and the volatility of its environment – especially the conflict in Kosovo. The country was still in a very vulnerable security situation, since if an armed conflict aroused, in a state of economic underdevelopment and military might, there was a small chance for the country to successfully defend itself.

The first decade of its independence served as a period for gaining a comprehensive picture of the real sources of threats to national security, the identification of national interests, the definition of policies and the build-up of a national security system. Since the national security threats were

⁴⁷ Interim Accord between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, available at: <http://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201891/v1891.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Weekly Compilation of US Presidential Documents, Vol. 31 Issue 36, p1491, available at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbnmn-nibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/WCPD-1995-09-11/pdf/WCPD-1995-09-11.pdf>.

coming from both the outside – the potential of the escalation of the conflict in Kosovo in late 1990s, as well as the expansionist aspirations of some neighbouring countries to create greater nation-states by seizing pieces of Macedonian territory, and inside – the ethnic tensions, the country identified the European Union and NATO integration as one of the main foreign policy priorities that will contribute towards the security consolidation. Therefore, after this first period of security consolidation, the Republic of Macedonia needed to move forward in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, a process that was seen as a contribution towards the country's security consolidation.

The Internal Struggle – Security Implications of the 2001 Conflict

The most pressing internal security task for the newly independent and democratic Republic of Macedonia, was to win the loyalty of the various non-Macedonian ethnicities, to have their support and allegiance, and to maintain the interethnic peace. Ethnic tensions between the Albanian community and the majority of the Macedonian population have sporadically surfaced over the past two decades and in 2001 led to a short but violent conflict between Macedonian security forces and ethnic Albanian paramilitaries (Mitrevska, 2013). For a decade, the Republic of Macedonia presented itself as a successful model of conflict prevention in the centre of an extremely turbulent region, burdened by wars, ethnic cleansing, and refugees. The country was often referred to as an “oasis of peace”, as a synonym for a multi-ethnic model of coexistence and unique UN preventative mission. The Kosovo crisis in 1999 had a huge influence on the region and on the Republic of Macedonia as well. The crisis gave rise to an enormous influx of ethnic Albanian refugees, which threatened the fragile ethnic balance of Macedonia (Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2016). There were 379 523 refugees seeking shelter on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia.⁴⁹ In total, 287 423 refugees stayed in Macedonia for the entire duration of the crisis, while 92 100 refugees were transported by third countries via air bridge. As a consequence, the overall population of the Republic of Macedonia increased for 14,77% (Grizold, Mitrevska, Anthony, Bučkovski, Trša, 2012).

⁴⁹ The numbers are cited according to the research done by one of the coauthors of this chapter and published in A. Grizold, M. Mitrevska, W-St.J. Anthony, V. Bučkovski, I. Tršar, *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in the New Security Context: The Case of the FYRM* (2012) University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, pp. 66-67.

The following table gives an overview of what 14,77% population increase meant for the Republic of Macedonia back in 1999, but it also aims to present what type of disturbance does the 14,77% population increase mean for a particular country, by approximating the increase of the population in a certain country with the population of another country. As an example, for the USA, back in 1999, a population increase of 14,77% would mean to add the Canadian population to the country. The table is aimed at visualizing the importance of this type of demographic disturbance for the national security of the country.

COUNTRY	POPULATION IN 1999	THE POPULATION INCREASE OF 14,77%	THE POPULATION INCREASE APPROXIMATELY IN COMPARISON TO THE OTHER COUNTRY'S POPULATION IN 1999
Macedonia	1 945 932	287 423	Iceland
USA	253 250 000	37 406 175	Canada
Germany	81 591 000	12 051 361	Belgium
France	57 981 000	8 564 057	Guinea

Table 2. Comparison of the importance of demographic disturbance on national security

The data from 15 July 1999 presents the following demographic layout in the Republic of Macedonia: Albanians – 728 527 (or 32,62%), Macedonians – 1 295 964 (or 58,03%), Turks 78 019 (or 3,49%), Roma – 43 707 (or 1,96%), Serbs – 40 228 (or 1,80%). This change of the demographic layout was a huge burden for the social and the economic structure of the country (Mitrevska, Grizold, Bučkovski, Anthony, 2009). It changed the ethnic structure of the country, damaged the economy and weakened the government. Eventually, supported by the international community, a great number of refugees have returned to their countries of origin, but large number of them stayed in the country for good – and their exact number is very hard to determine (Ibid).

As the last domino of the violent Yugoslav disintegration, in the critical year of 2001, the country lived through a deep multi-ethnic crisis. It was at the beginning of 2001, when the call of the Albanian minority for greater

representation in the state system triggered the conflict in Macedonia that brought the country to the brink of civil war. There were numerous factors that influenced the Republic of Macedonia's exposure to risk and later contributed to the escalation of the conflict. The internal economic struggle and the economic hardship of the country, combined with the huge rate of unemployment, together with the low quality of governmental reforms, just added up to the call for greater Albanian representation in the state system. Moreover, it was the regional security dynamics and the effect from the Kosovo crisis, that had vast impact on the development and triggering of the conflict.

The conflict was limited to the north-western part of the country and led to signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which prevented the conflict from spreading and improved the protection of the rights of the non-majority communities in Macedonia. The Agreement aimed at providing a framework for terminating the armed conflict, but it also presented an opportunity for future cessation of the hostilities (Grizold, Mitrevska, Anthony, Bučkovski, Trša, 2012). The Ohrid Framework Agreement was built around the most important issue that appeared after the conflict - the unitary character of the country needs to be preserved, with emphasis of the multi-ethnic aspect of the society (Ružin, 2010). The Agreement envisaged a redefinition of the Macedonian political model in order to meet the multicultural and multi-ethnic needs of the Macedonian society. The basic principles on which the Agreement is founded, are as the following: (i) absolute rejection and prohibition of the use of violence in pursuit of political aims - only peaceful political solutions can assure a stable and democratic future for Macedonia; (ii) the Republic of Macedonia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the unitary character of the country are inviolable and must be preserved, meaning that no territorial solutions to ethnic issues exist; (iii) the multi-ethnic character of Macedonia's society must be preserved and reflected in public life; (iv) a modern democratic state in its natural course of development and maturation must continually ensure that its Constitution fully meets the needs of all its citizens and complies with the highest international standards; and (v) the development of local self-government is essential for encouraging the participation of citizens in democratic life, and for promoting respect for the identity of communities (Ohrid Framework Agreement, 2001).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ohrid Framework Agreement, 13 August 2001, available in English at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnbbpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/8/100622.pdf>.

In addition to the guiding principles, the Ohrid Framework Agreement provided for a comprehensive framework for development of a decentralized government, non-discrimination and equitable representation, special parliamentary procedures, education and use of the other languages in the country. The Agreement led to the changes in the Macedonian Constitution, where the proclamation that only the Macedonian people formed a constitutive nationality, while all other nationalities were defined as minorities, was changed. Republic of Macedonia was re-defined as a state comprised of Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Serbs, Romani, Bosniak and others.⁵¹

The implementation of the provisions of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, was determined as a strategic priority for the country. It was also seen as a security priority in terms of the internal struggles and problems the country was facing. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted a Plan for the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, laying out the following measures for the promotion of the inter-ethnic confidence and security of the persons and property: the strengthening of safety and security in the territories affected by the conflict in 2001, through reconstruction and rebuilding of the destroyed and damaged facilities of the police stations (Matejce, Tearce, Zherovjane and Radusha) and the creation of conditions for their normal functioning, as well as construction of new police stations in areas where a need for enhanced security is acknowledged (Aračinovo); enhanced presence of police services with mixed ethnic composition; continuation of activities aimed at building mutual trust between the police, the local population, and the local government in the populated areas. In order to address the major economic hardships of the conflict zones, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted a Programme of Activities for Economic Revitalization of the Former Crisis Regions. After the reconstruction of damaged houses within the conflict zones, efforts were to be intensified towards economic revitalization, with special focus on: agriculture, public works and business. Furthermore, the results from the activities and concrete measures of affirmative action undertaken in the sphere of employment were evident in less than four years.

During the period of implementation, the level of equitable representation of less represented communities in state institutions and public administra-

⁵¹ For a comprehensive analysis of the Ohrid Framework Agreement see more in: A. Grizold, M. Mitrevska, W-St.J. Anthony, V. Bučkovski, I. Tršar, *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in the New Security Context: The Case of the FYRM* (2012) University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; M. Mitrevska, *Conflict in Macedonia: A Challenge For New Reform Policy* (2013) Međunarodne studije, XIII (3/4), pp. 81-98.

tion increased. In the period from 2006 to 2010, the number of Albanians employed in state institutions and public administration was continually increasing. In this context it is also important to note that before the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the representation of ethnic minorities within security forces (that is the uniformed structures of the army and police) was relatively small. In 2001, the percentage of Albanian civil servants in police services was 2.5 per cent. However, in 2003 this percentage increased to 10.5 per cent and by 2006 rose to 16.5 per cent. Representation of the ethnic communities in the army, especially in the uniformed and civilian structure, was significantly improved (Mitrevska, 2013).

The Ohrid Framework Agreement was seen as tool that would contribute to evading the re-emergence of the conflict. Thus, conflict prevention cannot be presented as a formula that will mend the problems on the surface, essentially leaving open deep political (ethno-political mobilization, corruption, crime), economic (independence, unemployment, lack of investments, illegal trade), social (poverty, low standard) and security (illegal possession and trafficking in arms, illegal trafficking in people) reasons for conflict. The intersection of events in Macedonia before and after the conflict is an obvious example of that, because the Macedonian conflict ended with a political solution and full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, representing political capital with special political and legal influence, which opened up new horizons for a new reform policy (Ibid).

International Support and the Aftermath of the 2001 Conflict

The involvement of the US and the EU in the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement represented a strong commitment to Macedonia's security and territorial integrity. Each brought key assets to the negotiations: the EU in the prospect of membership in the Union, particularly important to ethnic Macedonian elites; the US in the promise of NATO support for any agreement, especially important to the ethnic Albanians, who feared retribution and tended to view NATO as their ally (Chivvis, 2008).

The conflict took the EU by surprise and the Swedish Presidency at the time decided to use the closer relationship with the EU as an alternative to war (Giandomenico, 2009). In the Macedonian case, the EU used the so-called European perspective as a conflict management tool. One of the reasons this conflict management tool was effective was that this approach was accepted by the Macedonian government (Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2016).

The Agreement provided for constitutional reforms to enable greater access to political power for the members of the Albanian community. The constitutional reforms aimed at expansion of civil rights for minority groups, including greater representation in the civil service, the police, and the army; official use of the Albanian language in the municipalities that had Albanian majority; and stronger local self-government. Moreover, the Ohrid Agreement provided for deployment of 3,500 NATO troops to disarm the rebels from the National Liberation Army who instigated the conflict.⁵²

In 2001 the Republic of Macedonia was the first country to conclude the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union. By the 2005, it was the third republic of the former SFRY to achieve candidate status.⁵³ Therefore, the post conflict stability and security of the Republic of Macedonia, together with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, became an important task for the EU (Reka, 2023). According to Michael Sahlin (Sahlin, 2007), the former EU Special Representative to the Republic of Macedonia:

“[T]he political stability, inter-ethnic harmony, progress and ultimately EU accession of Macedonia has become a prestige matter for the EU... Macedonia’s crisis and post-crisis experience as well as her initial accession experience... coincides generically and in time with important steps in the evolution of the EU’s policies of enlargement and of crisis management institutional and capacity enhancement.”

From that point on, besides the essential Copenhagen criteria, the Ohrid Framework Agreement became another tool of measuring the progress that the country would make towards fulfilling the conditions for EU membership, and it was a very important one. For the EU, it was important to achieve success in the Balkans, where it had historically been mainly passive. Therefore, in 2005, despite the fact that Macedonia did not reach the required quality of state administration, elections and other important issues, the EU Member States had little option but to grant candidate status because of the progress regarding the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Even today, the Ohrid Framework Agreement remains an

⁵² For a comprehensive analysis on this issue see more in: A. Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A History* (2008) Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford; C. Koneska, *Policy Consensus During Institutional Change: Macedonian Foreign Policy Since Independence*, in S. Keil, B. Stahl, (eds) 'The Foreign Policies of Post-Yugoslav States - New Perspectives on South-East Europe' (2014) Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 97-121; K. Brown, P. Farisides, S. Ordanoski and A. Fetahu, *Ohrid and Beyond: A Cross-ethnic Investigation into the Macedonian Crisis* (2002) Institute for War and Peace Reporting, London, UK.

⁵³ Slovenia was first and became a Member State in 2004. Croatia was second and would become member on 1 July 2013.

essential element for democracy and rule of law assessment in the country (Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2016).

According to Sahlin (Sahlin, 2007), the EU actions in Macedonia were a very special case of what can be seen as comparatively successful conflict prevention and crisis management. This was a huge investment for the EU. Moreover, the European action in Macedonia was closely connected to protecting the Ohrid Framework Agreement as a symbol for the successful conflict management carried out by the EU.

In 2004, the society was once again on the brink of another crisis as a referendum was called to put a stop to the process of redistributing the powers from central government to the newly established local authorities, as part of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The Commission Delegation in Skopje was very active in supporting this process and, using its conditionality policy and the 'carrot' of the candidate status, the EU managed to pressure the government to proceed with what was seen as a painful process of decentralization.⁵⁴ Although the granting of candidate status to the Republic of Macedonia in 2005 was seen as recognition of important progress, particularly regarding the inter-ethnic situation, the absence of membership negotiations until this day reflects some serious weaknesses (Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2016). An additional condition to begin the negotiations was imposed on the Republic of Macedonia: a resolution of the name issue with neighbouring Greece. Once again, the EU Member States' inability to reach a consensus on the name issue between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece prolonged the integration process of this small country in the Balkans. The lack of European perspective has opened the way for authoritarianism in Macedonia and contributed towards building the phenomenon of a captured state.⁵⁵

Security Implications from the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008

Macedonian leadership had a strong belief that the country should be secured within a regional security framework, and as a result of that, in the last 20 years Macedonia had been working hard to become a part of NATO. The Republic of Macedonia was part of the NATO Partnership for Peace program since November 1995. In April 1999, at the NATO Washington

⁵⁴ The proposed law was designed partly to give communes with an Albanian majority the right of self-governance.

⁵⁵ This is a description of the country which is given in the Progress Report by the European Commission. It is supposed to designate a state where there is a long-lasting bifurcation of state and the party.

Summit, the country was formally accepted into the Alliance's newly designed Membership Action Plan envisaged to annually evaluate the applications of the formal candidates (Pendarovski, 2023). In the period 1995-2008 Macedonia has carried out a number of security sector reforms as well as participated in several missions abroad. In 2003, under strong US support, the Adriatic Charter was established in order to assist the three Balkan countries in meeting NATO membership criteria. The three countries have successfully implemented several Membership action plans (MAP) and continuously supported US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, at the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, where a decision on enlargement with Republic of Macedonia was to be made, the Greek officials vetoed the Macedonian membership. NATO enlargement with Albania, Croatia and Macedonia was strongly supported by the US and was placed very high on President Bush agenda. At the Bucharest summit, NATO members acknowledged the hard work and the commitment demonstrated by Republic of Macedonia to values and operations of the Alliance. However, NATO member countries emphasized that "an invitation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached".⁵⁶

The prolonged Macedonian membership in NATO, as well as the prolonged beginning of the EU accession negotiations, had major impact on the national security culture, which was strongly dependent on the country's integration in both NATO and EU. While the EU's membership was seen as an important step towards providing economic growth and stability, the NATO's membership was seen as a strong security guarantor of the peace and stability of the country from both internal and external threats. In this period of time, since the beginning of the new millennium until the Bucharest Summit of 2008, the country was troubled by the same security issues like in the decade before, while on the world stage, both US and NATO had friendly relations with Russia. With the changes on the international stage, the security situation and security challenges for the country have changed. The vacuum that was left in the Republic of Macedonia with the prolonged NATO and EU membership, was slowly being abused by Russia and other international and regional actors.

The next part of this chapter will elaborate on the most serious political crisis in the country and the new challenges to its national security. While

⁵⁶ NATO Bucharest Summit Declaration, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

the national security culture of the Republic of Macedonia from its beginnings as a newly independent country was built around its international promotion and recognition, and its voice in the international society was strongly dependent to its membership in plethora of different international organisations, after 2008, the national security culture of the country was connected to its identity and history. Instead of learning the lesson, that: “alliances, including NATO and the EU, are created to defend the interests of their own members and not to distribute justice” (Maleski, 2010), the country’s leadership blamed the whole international security for its failures and turned towards authoritarianism.

Redefining the National Security Culture in a Crowded Region

Both international and regional context in the Balkans changed over the past years, and consequently, during the 2010s, there were numerous factors of possible destabilisation. One important factor of destabilisation was the migrant crisis, which highly affected the Republic of Macedonia as part of the Western Balkan route. The route became a popular passageway into the EU in 2012 when Schengen visa restrictions were relaxed for five Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the Republic of Macedonia. It was during the 2015 when the record number of migrants arriving in Greece had a direct, knock-on effect on the Western Balkan route. The migrants who entered the EU via Greece were trying to make their way through to Macedonia and Serbia, on to Hungary and then further on mainly to Austria, Germany, and Sweden.⁵⁷ Large number of migrants and refugees that were crossing the Western Balkan route were using illegal border crossings and these irregular movements which were very often connected with trafficking in persons and human smuggling, were additional concerns for the states on the migration route. The transnational crime connected with the illegal crossing of migrants during the 2015 crisis has put additional strain on the country’s weak institutional systems, posing a great security threat, and negatively affecting access to protection for those in need of it (Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2022).

Another security threat in the Western Balkans in general and in Republic of Macedonia in particular, was the violent extremism which was devel-

⁵⁷ During all of 2015, the region recorded 764,000 detections of illegal border crossings by migrants, a 16-fold rise from 2014. The top-ranking nationality was Syrian, followed by Iraqis and Afghans. The numbers presented are according a Frontex estimate. The CoE numbers are 100,000 higher than Frontex’s estimate for the same period of time.

oping and spreading in the region due to the ongoing war in Syria. Regardless sources that encourage it, violent extremism goes beyond national and regional borders and gets global tendencies. Waves of violent religious extremism, have gained more importance with the spread of terrorism, especially because of the prominent impact on the global security. The terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization were all present in national security policies, as major challenges for security which need to be more efficiently opposed. Reflection of the global challenges of spreading violent extremism and radicalization as an incitement for terrorism was quite present in the Western Balkans region, especially during the most dangerous phase of conflicts in Syria and Iraq 2012-2017. This was mainly due to the participation of Balkan fighters in the Syrian battlefields. In the Republic of Macedonia, 154 people - 140 men and 14 women, for the period 2012-2017 participated at the battlefields of Syria and Iraq. This country's specificity, compared to others, is that the problem of ethnic tensions contributes to reducing efficiency in addressing challenges of extremism and radicalization. The reality of this problem in Macedonia depended on several factors, among which the influence of the Islamic population is being carried out through online radicalization or directly in religious facilities, and the rapid expansion is favourable for the existence of interethnic tensions between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians (Injac, 2018).

Together with the migrant crisis and the risks of extremism, the growing Russian influence in the region was considered to be another important factor in the region and in the Republic of Macedonia as well. Since the vacuum was left with the Republic of Macedonia not becoming a NATO member and the EU integration process stalled, the country easily became target of the Russian rising influence in the region. The Russian influence was mainly directed to oppose the West, trying to demonstrate that Russia can oppose their policies further than the former Soviet Union borders. This process intensified especially since the Crimean annexation in 2014, when the Western Balkan countries, including the Republic of Macedonia, became part of the Russian sphere of interest (Brsakoska Bazerkoska and Spasov, 2019).

Alongside with the strengthened Russian presence, the country became a place where the influence of the other international actors present in the region also started to become evident. The Chinese new Belt and Road initiative, saw the Western Balkans as one of the key strategic regions for investment for China and had it impact in the Republic of Macedonia as

well. The region is important as a focal point in China's logistical and economic access to the EU. Even though, China's Foreign Direct Investment remaining fairly low in the region - approximately only 3% - their economic presence is strong due to loans, not investments (Zeneli, 2020). The Western Balkans importance for China has become evident with the purchase of the Greek port of Piraeus transforming it into the second largest port of the Mediterranean. With this purchase, China brought into life its plans to improve infrastructure in the Western Balkans which would further contribute to transport of goods being shipped from Piraeus through the Western Balkans and into EU's common market. Very often, China's investments in the Western Balkans are seen as a way to gain economic positions in the countries which may impact their potential accession in the EU (Doehler, 2019). In the Republic of Macedonia, China was embroiled in a corruption scandal. The leaked wiretaps during the political crisis in the country elaborated below, suggested collusion between local politicians and Chinese state-owned companies and massive inflation of highway construction costs in North Macedonia (Fahey and Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2022). Sinohydro, a Chinese state-owned firm was contracted to build two highways in the country and the wiretaps in 2015 have unveiled that the former Prime Minister and Transport Minister were going to award the contract to Sinohydro at least in part because Sinohydro was willing to pay a bribe of around 25 million euro (Doehler, 2019). Therefore, the Chinese involvement throughout the BRI in the Republic of Macedonia caused major concerns over corruption risks and the respect of the basic principles of the rule of law.

Furthermore, at the beginning of 2010s, Turkey's increasing cultural, political and religious influence was projected in the region. Turkey is mainly focusing on the soft power approach epitomised by an excessive use of religion and nationalism and investments, as well as through personal links between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and various Balkan leaders (Alpan and Öztürk, 2022). Mostly due to Turkey's deEuropeanisation in domestic governance, Turkey's soft power took on a particular form in the 2010s, highly endowed with religious, nationalist, economic and neopatrimonialist elements (Ibid). In the Republic of Macedonia, Turkish influence can be witnessed mainly throughout the use of the religion, which is strongly connected with the promotion of the Turkish nationalism, together with the economic investments into various state-owned and private companies. The educational sector in the Republic of Macedonia became an area of great interest for Turkey, where numerous investments at different levels of education have emerged and are continuing to grow even today.

Finally, the region became a very important crossroad where different other influences could be felt – mainly from the Middle East – like Qatar and Saudi Arabia. These countries have been influential in the Republic of Macedonia as well, mostly throughout the religion and on the part of the population that is Muslim. Conversely, the Russian influence was based on the renewal of the sense for belonging to the same Slavic and Orthodox community, which represents the traditional milestones in the Russian “identity politics”. In the changed landscape of foreign influences and pressures in the region and especially in the Republic of Macedonia, the Russian influence was the most dominant and mainly projected throughout means of the oil and gas industry, and furthermore through the penetration in the banking sector. Russia was especially vocal during the political crisis which started in the Republic of Macedonia in 2015, changing the landscape of the international security threats to the the Republic of Macedonia and redefining the national security culture.

The Macedonian Political Crisis and the Rising Russian Influence

During 2015 and 2016, the country lived through one of the most dramatic and serious political crises since its independence. Once a hopeful front-runner in the EU accession process, during the 2015-2016 crisis Macedonia’s score was nearing the low point of 2001, when violent ethnic conflict erupted in the country (Bandović and Dimitrov, 2017). The crisis, triggered by the wiretapping scandal⁵⁸ revealed by the leader of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), Zoran Zaev, exposed the involvement of the then-Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski, and his closest allies from the then-ruling VMRO - DPMNE in massive scale electoral fraud, corruption, abuse of power and a score of other economic and violent offences. The dire conversations also confirmed the worries highlighted in the EU Commission’s Progress Reports: the deep partisanship of state institutions and the judiciary, and the suppression of freedom of expression, which led the EU to define the situation in the country as “state capture”⁵⁹. The revelation of the wiretapped conversations actually started by an emergency press-conference during the weekend on 31 January 2015, by the then PM Gruevski, declaring that an attempted coup had been prevented, which was directly organised by the leader of the SDSM, the largest opposition party,

⁵⁸ BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31332530>.

⁵⁹ EU press release: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-3405_en.htm.

as well as foreign secret services.⁶⁰ This declaration of the Prime Minister of the country was interestingly, in line with what the Russian Foreign Ministry stated in the evening of that same day, that the wiretapping scandal was part of a bigger Western conspiracy.⁶¹

This political crisis, was a very prominent case in which the Russian strengthened influence in the country can be witnessed. The Russian involvement to oppose the US and the EU in times of political crisis changed the security narrative of the country. In the initial phase of the crisis, when the protestors poured onto the streets in Skopje in April 2015, calling for the resignation of Gruevski's government, Russian media accused the West of pushing for another revolution, while the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov clearly suggested that the crisis is orchestrated by the external factors – US and EU.⁶² After the armed clashes between security forces and Albanian terrorist group mostly infiltrated from Kosovo, in the city of Kumanovo on 9 and 10 May 2015, Russian Foreign Ministry pointed at the danger of creating “Greater Albania” and assessed the situation as notorious “colour revolution” scenario, which is fraught with grave consequences.⁶³

After an extensive international effort, mainly expressed through a partnership between US and EU representatives and diplomats, the so-called Przi-no agreement⁶⁴ was reached in June-July 2015. The four main political parties in the country agreed to negotiate and reach an agreement on the key structural reforms that should lead towards fair and democratic elections to put an end to the deep political crisis and start the process of rebuilding the Macedonian democracy. On the basis of this agreement, the Special Public Prosecutor's office was established with a sole purpose of independently investigating and potentially indicting key political figures for the allegations of criminal offences revealed in the wiretaps (Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2015).

The elections were finally held in December 2016 and were seen by many as the end of the crisis and the beginning of the transformation of the soci-

60 See more in DW in Macedonian edition: <https://www.dw.com/mk/%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D0%BE-2015-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0-334-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0/a-18950467>.

61 More on this issue on the web site of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/mk/-/asset_publisher/Bx1lWHR8ws3J/content/id/917223.

62 More on this issue on the web site of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/1299386.

63 More on this issue on the web site of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/mk/-/asset_publisher/Bx1lWHR8ws3J/content/id/1257608.

64 The text of the Przi-no Agreement is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_agreement.pdf.

ety, of bringing the country back on the right track and of the restoration of democratic governance and the rule of law. VMRO–DPMNE still had a very narrow lead, but was unable to form a government because it lacked the necessary number of seats to form a majority in Parliament. Their previous partner of ten years – the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) as well as all the other parties representing the Albanian ethnic minority, refused to enter into a coalition with VMRO - DPMNE. One of the main reasons why they refused coalition was because VMRO – DPMNE wanted to abolish the Special Public Prosecutor’s office (Brsakoska Bazerkoska and Spasov, 2019).

Instead of abiding by the Constitution and handing the mandate to the Parliamentary majority formed by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) in coalition with three other Albanian bloc parties, the then President of the country, Gjorge Ivanov, refused to do this with rhetoric of protecting the country from future “Albanisation”. According to him⁶⁵, the essence of the so-called Tirana platform – declaration of the Albanian parties in Republic of Macedonia, is to change the constitutional order of the country.

It was clear that the peaceful transfer of government was not something that Gruevski was ready to do. Instead of change of government, what followed was the continuation of the crisis, finally escalating in violence. Although obstructed by their colleagues from VMRO – DPMNE, the new majority MPs, following the possibility given to them by the Parliament’s Rules of Procedure, elected the new Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Talat Djaferi, in the late afternoon on 27 April 2017. They were aware that this move might be harmful for their own security, since the VMRO – DPMNE leader has called for his membership several times to be on high alert to defend their country from the “traitors” from SDSM. The political earthquake that happened seemed to be inevitable. On the night of 27 April we witnessed the horrifying scenes⁶⁶ of dragging one of the MPs covered in blood through the hallways of the Macedonian Parliament, the horrifying scenes of violence and blood on the new majority leader Zoran Zaev, other MPs and also journalists. Only several minutes after the announcement of the election of Macedonia’s new Parliament Speaker, supporters of VMRO - Democratic

⁶⁵ More on this issue on the European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/04/07/ivanov-essence-of-tirana-platform-is-to-change-constitutional-order/>.

⁶⁶ More on this issue on the Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/04/27/macedonia-elects-parliament-speaker-amid-ongoing-tension-04-27-2017-1/>.

Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO –DPMNE) stormed into the Parliament’s building. One would believe that one of the most important institutions in the country and the people’s representatives working there would be best protected against any attack from outsiders. On the contrary, on the night of 27 April we witnessed what we thought was impossible to happen. It took more than two hours for the police to react. They eventually intervened to end the protests and to evacuate the MPs and journalists that were stuck inside the Parliament’s building, but did not manage to prevent the violence that left the bitter aftertaste and the feeling of insecurity and possibility for further escalation (Brsakoska Bazerkoska, 2017).

Although the events of 27 April are without any doubt orchestrated by the structures connected to Gruevski and his clique, the Russian Foreign Ministry, had a completely different view of the situation, presenting “parallel truth” by ignoring the facts, most of which were directly televised. In the Russian Foreign Ministry’s press release, issued the following day, the situation was summed up as the attempt of the opposition that lost the parliamentary election to seize power in the country by electing the Speaker of the Assembly by force on its own initiative and in violation of established procedures.⁶⁷ The Russians accused the “official representatives of the European Union, the ambassadors of some European countries and the ambassador of the United States for unhesitatingly praising the new “Parliament speaker” who is, incidentally, a former field commander in the so-called pro-Albanian National Liberation Army”.⁶⁸ The failure of the Ministry of Interior to react in a swiftly manner was praised as a “well-coordinated and quick response, doubtless, attests to the fact that these developments had been planned in advance, with the covert connivance of “foreign curators” of the Macedonian opposition”.⁶⁹ Finally, they concluded that the “attempts to change the country on the basis of the so-called “Tirana Platform” are fraught with even greater risk, and the situation might escalate into a conflict, including an inter-ethnic conflict”.⁷⁰

After the new Government was finally formed on 1 June 2017, the name issue negotiations were back on the agenda, followed by intensified contacts and negotiations between the parties under the auspices of the UN medi-

⁶⁷ More on this issue on the web site of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/mk/-/asset_publisher/Bx1lWHR8ws3J/content/id/2739769.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

ator Nimetz. The dispute was finally resolved after long and hard negotiations by signing the “Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as Described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the Termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the Establishment of the Strategic Partnership Between the Parties”, known as “Prespa Agreement”⁷¹ according to the geographic area of the Prespa lake, bordering region between Macedonia and Greece, on 17 June 2018. According to the Agreement, the official name of Macedonia was changed to the Republic of North Macedonia or North Macedonia, Macedonian language as official language of North Macedonia refers to the South Slavic family of languages and Macedonian history for Greece is the antique Hellenic civilization and for North Macedonia its Slavic heritage. Greece is obliged to refrain from vetoing the membership of North Macedonia in international organisation, including NATO and the EU. North Macedonia, after holding a consultative referendum and ratifying the Agreement in the Parliament, made the necessary constitutional amendments in January 2019 and Greece, after receiving a notification that Macedonia implemented the amendments, ratified the Agreement as well. The ratification cleared the path for future North Macedonia to sign the Protocol for membership in NATO and after the ratification of the Protocol by all NATO Member States to become the 30th member state of NATO (Sinisalo and Spasov, 2019).

While these developments took place in the country, the Russian reactions were mainly connected with their concerns of the “negative consequences for regional security and bilateral relations”⁷² from the future membership of the Republic of North Macedonia into NATO. It is worth noting Russia’s officially retreating from its previous position that any mutually acceptable solution to the name issue between Greece and North Macedonia is acceptable for Russia. The reason for that changing position is because Russia looked at the Prespa Agreement only through the lenses of the future NATO enlargement in the Western Balkans. This conclusion is confirmed by further Russian reactions on the referendum that was held on 30 September in North Macedonia. Contrary to its often-stressed principle of non-interference in the internal affairs, Russia extensively commented purely internal issue – such as the referendum on constitutional changes.⁷³

⁷¹ The full text of the “Prespa Agreement” available at: <https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/spogodba-en.pdf>.

⁷² More on this issue on the web site of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/mk/-/asset_publisher/Bx1IWHr8ws3J/content/id/3131596.

⁷³ More on this issue on the web site of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/mk/-/asset_publisher/Bx1IWHr8ws3J/content/id/3363368.

Moreover, the Prespa Agreement was incitement for a Greek-Russian diplomatic dispute over activities undertaken by Russian diplomats⁷⁴ and a Greek businessman with Russian origin⁷⁵, related to undermining the implementation of the Prespa Agreement.

Despite its strong opposition to Prespa Agreement, after the process was completed in both countries, Russia without any further comments, accepted the new name – Republic of North Macedonia for both bilateral and multilateral purposes.⁷⁶

After the Prespa Agreement and the NATO membership, the country had once again bid for EU membership. It was now up to the EU to act more rapidly in order to contribute towards final stabilization of the region. After the case of the Russian support of the former nationalistic government that was entangled in crime and corruption and generated the political crisis which reached dangerous conflict levels, it became more evident than ever since its independence - to have the Republic of North Macedonia in NATO and in EU will not only contribute towards this small country's stability, but also towards stability of the region as well.

In 2017, both USA and the EU were willing to help the new reform government in the Republic of North Macedonia to take the country out of the phenomenon of captured state. The help needs to be directed towards the domestic reform process of the rule of law as well as towards the faster integration of the country in EU. The membership in NATO and EU was seen as essential for North Macedonia, since it gave a boost to the new government's efforts to stabilize the country's democratic institutions. Moreover, the membership in those organisations is seen as a way of preserving the country's security.

The initial steps were taken to restore the trust in state institutions and rebuilding the checks and balances of the system. The absence of democratic institutions endangered the fragile stability not solely in North Macedonia, but also in the Balkans more generally. The stronger EU involvement and the proverbial 'carrot' of starting the negotiations, was once again used to give the EU an advantage in dealing with the vacuum of democracy, pres-

⁷⁴ The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/11/greece-to-expel-russian-diplomats-over-alleged-macedonia-interference> (last accessed on: 09.06.2019).

⁷⁵ More on this issue in Pappas post: <https://www.pappaspost.com/fyrom-officials-suspect-greek-russian-billionaire-paid-for-violent-anti-nato-protests/>.

⁷⁶ More on this issue on the web site of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: https://macedonia.mid.ru/web/macedonia_mc, <https://lider.com.mk/makedonija/dokumenti-rusija-vekje-ne-priznava-kako-severna-makedonija-ambasadorot-so-razdost-gi-odnese-notite/>.

ent in the country for quite some time. It has become evident that by leaving the country in the queue longer than it already is will only intensify the democratic deficit. This is even more important because North Macedonia has become one of the places where a tug-of-war between the West and Russia was going on.

Contemporary National Security Culture in a Challenging International Environment

The Macedonian contemporary national security culture is being redefined as an answer to the changing and challenging international environment. The NATO membership has been a tremendous success in fortifying the country's security structure. However, there are still numerous contemporary challenges that need to be addressed – ranging from health crisis, hybrid warfare, cybersecurity and the overall redefinition of the contemporary international system.

One of the challenges at the beginning of 2020s, was the unprecedented health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic was huge international challenge that prompted the countries to prioritize national responses to the pandemic, resulting in border closures, diverging national lockdowns, and competition for medical supplies. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Republic of North Macedonia to adapt, strengthen its response mechanisms, and rethink its health security, but also its response in the emergency situations.

Moreover, over the past decade, the cyber security threats became one of the biggest challenges for the national security systems throughout the world. Cyber security threats, on their own or as part of a hybrid warfare, tend to destroy economic and national security in the 21st century. Numerous factors contribute to the rise of the cyber security threats, such as the growing dependence on information technologies, interconnections of critical infrastructures and different weaknesses in different sectors - government, industry, financial system, etc. The Republic of North Macedonia was exposed to different and frequent cyber-attacks in the past five years, which pushed the country towards redefining its security culture and becoming more active in prevention and defence from the cyber security threats.

Furthermore, the contemporary international system has been drastically modified. We are witnessing the emergence of a new multipolarity wherein

China and Russia favour plurilateralism over multilateralism and prioritize dominance over hegemony. The international system was further challenged by the Russian war in Ukraine and the Israeli offensive in Gaza and Lebanon after the Hamas attacks. These conflicts have challenged the existing international legal order.

Finally, the changing role of the United States of America in the world with the second Trump administration, has dramatically changed the international order. The multilateral international order that was established after the Second World War by the USA is now challenged by its very own creator.

In this changed international context, the Republic of North Macedonia, as a small country in the Balkan region, needs to align its foreign and security policy with its NATO allies, but it also needs to be strongly committed to the EU membership. The EU integration of the country has been one of its key foreign policy priorities from the very beginnings of its independence and the EU membership of the country can only contribute towards its security consolidation. The draft negotiating framework was presented to the Republic of North Macedonia, together with Albania in July 2020, following the decision of the Council in March 2020. Also, in 2020, the new framework for accession talks was introduced in order to increase the effectiveness of EU conditionality and the credibility of the EU. The new Enlargement Methodology was adopted on the basis of the Commission's proposal entitled "Enhancing the accession process: A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans" (Commission Communication, COM 2020). This new methodology was put forward mainly for the accession process of North Macedonia and Albania, and later on, in May 2021, the Council agreed on the application of the new methodology to the already opened accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia. However, North Macedonia's membership bid has been stalled due to the ongoing bilateral dispute with another EU Member State – Bulgaria. At present, North Macedonia's government needs to muster a political will to resolve the ongoing dispute with Bulgaria and to continue the country's path towards the EU membership.

The following parts will focus on the changed aspects of the country's military defence with its NATO membership and further elaborate on the cyber security in the country. Finally, the overview of the soft power influences of different international actors will give the broader context of the changed and challenging international environment in which the Republic of North Macedonia is trying to build its national security today, and will further

reaffirm the need for stronger EU presence in the country and in the region as well.

Changed Aspects of Military Defence after NATO Membership

After the end of the Cold War, Western leaders seized a historic opportunity to open the doors of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to the post communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. NATO continued its expansion eastward - in 1999 Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined the organisation. Another expansion came in 2004, with the accession of seven Central and Eastern European countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Albania and Croatia joined on 1 April 2009, while Montenegro became member on 5 June 2017. The Republic of North Macedonia joined NATO in March 2020. In May 2022, Finland and Sweden declared their intent to join NATO, and jointly presented their official letters of application to former Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, following the Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Following the ratification of Finland's Accession Protocol by all NATO allies, the country joined the Alliance on 4 April 2023. By early 2024, Sweden's Accession Protocol had also been ratified by all allies according to their national procedures, after which the country became a full NATO member on 7 March 2024.⁷⁷

The NATO enlargement since the end of the Cold War prompted a debate on several significant issues. The NATO enlargement with the Eastern European countries generated a debate over whether it will contribute to worsening the relations between the West and Russia. Critics of NATO enlargement in the 1990s argued that admitting Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic would damage the West's relations with Russia, empower nationalist elements within the Russian political scene, undermine the integrity of the alliance, and ultimately prove irrelevant to democratization in Central and Eastern Europe (Asmus, 2008). Although it was largely debated whether it was the right move to take at the time, NATO took the lead in bringing Central and Eastern Europe into the the vision of a peaceful Europe expanding its foreign policy horizons (Ružin, 2010).

The Alliance lost precious time in integrating the Western Balkan countries in its membership. The political crisis in the Republic of North Macedonia

⁷⁷ More info on NATO enlargement process on the NATO web page - www.nato.int.

was a wakeup call for NATO to reassess and to strengthen its enlargement policy and continue expanding in the Western Balkans in order to contribute towards the regions' stability and to balance the expanding Russian influence. NATO membership changed and modernised the country's military capacities and contributed towards its military and security consolidation.

It can be observed from the very beginnings of its independence, that the Republic of North Macedonia in order to organise its military defence, established its own armed forces. The country's legislation defined the army as an armed force of all the citizens of the Republic, which is in line with the civil definition of the political system of the state. Its fundamental constitutional task consisted in diverting all potential external threats, as well as conducting armed struggle for the protection of territorial integrity and independence in case of an aggression. Exceptionally, and only by a presidential decree, the army could take part in certain actions aimed at eliminating the consequences of a state of emergency. This does not change the basic orientation of military defence because, according to the Constitution, "a state of emergency can be introduced in case of natural disasters or epidemics".⁷⁸ The peacetime composition of armed forces was designed so that it encompasses about 1% of the total population or about 20,000 soldiers and officers (9,000 are recruits doing military service) (Tatalovič, 1998). In accordance with their needs, and having in mind the existing standards in the developed democratic countries, the armed forces of the Republic of North Macedonia consisted of two parts: the operational units and the reserves. The operational units were prepared in peacetime conditions for a successful execution of their constitutional role, if a need arises. The reserve corps of the armed forces were constituted by the citizens who have served in the army, after which they were deployed in the reserve military units. The obligation for all men to serve in the army was abolished in 2006, and today the legislation provides for a voluntary army service for both men and women, which later would be part of the reserve corps of the Army.

Joining the NATO Partnership for Peace in the early stages of the independence of the country, meant more radical changes, primarily establishing schools for the existing sectors and agencies. There were constant changes and modifications in military training in order to conform to the western standards. The army has adopted a combined training system which included a contractual training of soldiers, training of recruited soldiers and units,

⁷⁸ Article 125 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, Official Gazette, available at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpcglcfindmkaj/https://www.slvesnik.com.mk/content/pdf/USTAV-eng.pdf>.

training of the reserves, and the regular in-service education of officers. The contractual training is modelled on the western systems.

In terms of Public Affairs, which in NATO are seen as a critical enabler for joint military operations, but also for a much wider spectrum of activities aimed at peace and security, the Public Affairs Regional Centre (PARC) was established in the Republic of North Macedonia as a national education and training centre in 2003. It was recognized as a regional centre in 2009, and since 2013 it has been a PTEC - Partnership Training and Education Centre, accredited by NATO. PARC is the only PTEC in the Republic of North Macedonia, and is the only one of the 35 PTECs in the world, which is exclusively specialized in Public Affairs. PARC has grown into a highly visible, renowned and unique centre, the PA hub in Europe, where NATO and partner countries and partners across the globe can meet, communicate, learn, network and succeed. From only 3 participating countries at the beginning, until today PARC has trained over 1600 personnel from 40 countries from across the world.⁷⁹

At the very beginnings of the establishment of the armed forces of the Republic of North Macedonia, they were not equipped with the sophisticated firepower technology, communication technology, state-of-the-art reconnaissance equipment, logistics, and other equipment necessary to a modern army. The army had at its disposal the equipment and the weapons that used to belong to the former territorial defence of Macedonia (Tatalović, 1998). This has changed throughout the years, due to the process of preparation for the country to become a NATO member, and even more with the NATO membership for the Republic of North Macedonia in 2020. Today, the Republic of North Macedonia has exceeded the NATO recommended threshold of investing 20% of the defence budget in equipment and modernization. The country is investing more than 30% of its defence budget to add capabilities and pursue modernization that has accelerated in the past decade. The Republic of North Macedonia has recently prioritized aerial mobility and air defence, placing orders in 2023 for AW-149 and AW-169 helicopters from Italy, along with portable Mistral surface-to air missiles from France in 2022.⁸⁰

In terms of training infrastructure, the Republic of North Macedonia stands out with its Krivolak training area, which represents one of the largest NATO

⁷⁹ More info on PARC website, available at: <https://parc.mod.gov.mk/parc-public-affairs-regional-centre/about-parc>.

⁸⁰ Think nea – New Narratives of EU Integration | ELIAMEP Thematic report no. 2/2025.

facilities in the region. Krivolak regularly hosts international military exercises, including the major Swift Response exercise in 2022, which brought together 4,600 troops from eight NATO countries.⁸¹

The appointment of the former minister of defence of the Republic of North Macedonia, Radmila Shekerinska, as a NATO Deputy Secretary General in 2024 is another recognition of the country's dedication in its path towards NATO, but also as a dedicated NATO member.

The Western Balkan countries, including the Republic of North Macedonia, despite not yet being EU Member States, have increasingly proven their value as security contributors and partners. The Republic of North Macedonia is contributing to past and ongoing CSDP missions of the European Union, and is showing its willingness and increased ability to engage in peace efforts in the international peacekeeping operations. The country, together with Serbia has contributed to military training and security sector reform in the Central African Republic. In addition, the Republic of North Macedonia, together with Albania, has demonstrated particular interest and engagement in EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of the country's commitment to strengthening security in their own region.⁸² In the context of UN peacekeeping missions, the Republic of North Macedonia through its Army has contributed to UNIFIL in Lebanon.⁸³

The Importance of Cyber Security

The importance of cyberspace for national security is fundamental, especially because the cyber security has strategic and tactical dimensions in national security, and it affects all levels of society. The cyber threats and their performance techniques are continuously evolving, and it represents threats to data security, electronic systems and personal privacy. The expectations are that danger will grow in a future and cyber-attacks will be able to destroy state infrastructure, what could directly threaten citizens and significantly bloc state system (Injac and R. Šendelj, 2017). Confronting the cyber threats require strong commitment of all actors – they need to be innovative and adopt efficient technologies that can be adequate to contribute on enhancing national security, the global economy and individual freedoms. Cyber threats and challenges can cause significant effects

⁸¹ More info available at the MoD website - <https://mil.mk/exercises/swift-response-22/?lang=en>.

⁸² More info available at the MoD website - <https://mil.mk/megjunarodni-operaciji/>.

⁸³ More info available at the MoD website - <https://mil.mk/megjunarodni-operaciji/>.

for the states, and force them to find new solutions, to develop tools and mechanisms for prevention and response, and also to adapt adequate security policy for cyber threats. States have different approaches towards cyber security policy, and they are mostly guided by security sector reform and national security policy development, institutional building and resources improvement (Ibid).

The cyber security has been a critical security issue in the Republic of North Macedonia as well. As the digital infrastructure and the internet dependence in the country grew, the frequency and the gravity of the cyber threats have increased. The threats and the attacks are aimed towards the governmental institutions, the critical infrastructure, the private businesses and the citizens. The cyber-crime including ransomware, phishing for data, or distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks are serious threats to the national security, the economic stability and the public trust. The ransomware attacks in the country have interrupted the businesses, the health services, even the work of the governmental agencies, that had lead towards delays and financial losses. Having in mind the fact that the critical infrastructure of the Republic of North Macedonia, including the energy, health and transport is relying on mutually connected systems, the ransomware represents grave security threat.

During 2020, Macedonian citizens were a target of a phishing campaign that was masked as an official update for COVID 19. These campaigns were aimed at gathering personal data and banking information, taking advantage of the grown sensitivity of the public during the pandemic.⁸⁴

In 2021, the Public Revenue Office was a target of a cyber-attack that compromised the data and disrupted the normal functioning of the institution. The attack pointed out the lack of strong security protocols in the state IT systems and amplified the need for better cyber protection. By compromising sensitive data, the incident raised the awareness of the danger presented by cyber attacks in the public sector and lead towards reforms in the area, bringing stronger measures for protection. As a result of those cyber incidents, the National Strategy for Building Resilience and Tackling Hybrid Threats was enacted in 2021.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ IETF, Phishing Campaigns Targeting North Macedonia: Analysis of COVID-19 Related Attacks, 2021, IETF Report, p. 11.

⁸⁵ The text of the National Strategy is available at: <https://mod.gov.mk/storage/2021/12/Nacionalna-Strategija-za-gradene-ot-pornost-i-spravuvane-so-hipridni-zakani-april-2021.pdf>

Moreover, in 2022 and 2023, the state institutions and numerous public schools in the country were under cyber-attacks for a longer period of time. As an example, on 21 February 2023, more than 30 locations in the capital Skopje and one in the city of Prilep were evacuated due to the false bomb threats. The threats were aiming towards a broad spectre of locations, including public schools, public institutions, TV stations, courts, malls, museums, hotels, but also the office of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia. These threats were identified as a form of a hybrid warfare and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia requested NATO support in tackling these types of attacks.⁸⁶

On 8 February 2023, a massive cyber-attack hit the Fund for Health Insurance, causing collapse of the system, meaning the people in the country could not take their prescribed medication, while the doctors and all the personnel in the health institutions could not have their salary. This attack had huge impact on the state health system, raising the awareness of the cyber security in the critical infrastructure, such as the health protection. IT experts were working on fixing the problem and renewing the system – which was finally restored twelve days later. This attack was also characterised as being part of the hybrid warfare that was going on in the region, posing great threat to the national security.⁸⁷

Factors Contributing to the Cyber Security in the Republic of North Macedonia

There are several factors that make the Republic of North Macedonia vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Primarily, the digital infrastructure of the country is not well developed. Although, the digital infrastructure in the country is spreading, it is still underdeveloped, especially in comparison to the European countries. Numerous public institutions and private organisations lack the basic protection for cyber security, such as security protocols, encryption and multi-factor authentication. Moreover, there is little awareness among the citizens and the employees in the public administration about their and their institution cyber security. The human factor is very often the weak link in building the cyber defence. Furthermore, the Republic of North Macedonia is faced with numerous cyber security challenges due to the limited

⁸⁶ See more in DW in Macedonian edition: <https://www.dw.com/mk/hibridni-zakani-cadot-od-laznite-bombi-ja-zagrozuva-bezbednost/a-63573945>.

⁸⁷ See more on the web page of Telma TV: <https://telma.com.mk/2023/02/16/it-sistemot-na-fondot-za-zdravstvo-e-osvoen-od-hakeri-koi-baraat-otkup-potvrdi-i-kovachevski/>

capacities to its state IT sector and the IT support for the private companies and organisations. The deficiency of trained IT professionals working in the public institutions, that can detect, mitigate and respond to the cyber-attacks, hinders the country's ability to protect its own digital infrastructure.

The Republic of North Macedonia has enacted the National Strategy for cyber security in 2018, covering the period 2018-2022, aiming at creating a safe online space for everyone. The country has been preparing a new National Strategy for Cyber Security for the period 2024-2028, but it has still not been enacted. The new strategy is aimed towards the important areas in the cyber security, such as the human rights protection and the preservation of the state integrity.

The recent cyber-attacks in the country that were aiming towards the national institutions, together with the network endangerment, stresses the crucial threats that we are facing in the digital sphere. These attacks show that everyone is exposed, no matter whether it is a state institution, a big corporation or an individual. The cyber disruptions are an important security risk which needs to be addressed on the state level.

One of the most important institutions in the cyber security area in Republic of North Macedonia is the Ministry of Defence. After becoming NATO member, the country signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2021 with NATO in order to encourage the cooperation in the area of cyber defence, with an emphasis on information sharing, exchange of the best practices and building the resilience.⁸⁸

International Cooperation and Capacity Building

Considering the transnational nature of the cyber threats, the Republic of North Macedonia has made an effort to strengthen its cyber security through international cooperation. The country has been cooperating with EU, NATO and other international organisations to enhance its cyber resilience.

As an EU candidate country, the Republic of North Macedonia is aligning its legislation with the EU Network and Information Security Directive⁸⁹, which

⁸⁸ See more in Slobodna Evropa: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/31111163.html>.

⁸⁹ Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 and Directive (EU) 2018/1972, and repealing Directive (EU) 2016/1148 (NIS 2 Directive) (Text with EEA relevance), available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022L2555>.

aims to enhance the cyber security capabilities, while introducing risk management measures and setting up rules for cooperation and information sharing. The country has a long way to go in the implementation of the EU rules, but they provide a comprehensive framework on how the cyber security of the country should be built.

The Republic of North Macedonia cooperates closely with NATO in the area of cyber security, from where it receives technical help and training for cyber defence. The country's NATO membership in 2020 strengthened its resolve to the collective efforts of cyber security, mainly because NATO is prioritizing the cyber security as part of its defence strategy.

Furthermore, the country has been building strong bilateral cooperation in the area with its partners. As an example, the country undersigned the United States – the Republic of North Macedonia Joint Declaration on 5G security in October 2020, emphasizing the need for a secure fifth generation wireless communications networks (5G), which will be vital to the national security.

Challenges of the Soft Power Projections in the Republic of North Macedonia

Another important aspect in building the national security culture in the Republic of North Macedonia in contemporary times is linked to the projection of the cultural diplomacy, as part of the soft power approach of different actors in the country. Apart of the EU (and EU's Member States) and USA traditional approach in promoting the culture throughout different educational programs and scholarships, such as the Erasmus+ mobility program and the Fulbright program offered by the US Embassy, the influence of different other actors, such as Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf countries in the Republic of North Macedonia had become increasingly incisive throughout soft power measures.

Russia is at the top of the list of potentially dangerous, destabilising, and malign external actors in the region. For over a decade, Russia's policy goals in the Republic of North Macedonia have been to enhance its economic, political, and cultural presence, to counterbalance the Western powers as a source of influence, to contain NATO, and ultimately to derail the EU accession prospects. Russia's most important instruments of influence in the region include energy policy, investment, political pressure, and "soft power" tools such as cultural, media, and religious campaigns (Panagiotou, 2021).

Alternatively, China has cultivated an image of itself as a benign global power and a strategic investor with no political or cultural ambitions. However, this approach has changed recently. In the region in general, and in Republic of North Macedonia in particular, China saw potential political and social benefits from its so called - mask and vaccine diplomacy, during the COVID 19 pandemic (Panagiotou,2025). Moreover, the establishment of the Confucius Institute in the country shows China's interest in a broader presence in the Republic of North Macedonia. The dangers of China's policies have increased as a result of the new geopolitical realities brought upon by the war in Ukraine and can only contribute to move away from EU standards and practices, and the necessary structural reforms.

Turkey also uses soft power instruments based on religious, cultural, and common historical heritage in areas that have a large number of Muslim and Turkish population.

In this context, the EU presence and visibility in the country through soft power instruments is more important than ever. The role of EU Houses that are opening in different Macedonian cities, with aim to promote EU values and EU culture need to be more visible and more tangible for people's everyday lives in order to spread the EU idea and to make it closer and more acceptable. Only through attaining its main foreign policy priority of becoming an EU Member State, Republic of North Macedonia can move towards consolidation of its economic development and national security.

Conclusions

The national security culture of the Republic of North Macedonia was constructed and redefined throughout the years, based on its national interests and how they were connecting with the global and regional international environment. One of the most important aspects in the process of building the country's national security culture was the international positioning and its membership in international organisations. The independence of the country from the former Yugoslav federation, its international positioning, followed by the internal conflict in 2001 defined the security treats and the preferred available instruments relied upon to meet them. At its very beginnings, the national security threats for the country were coming from both the outside – mainly from the expansionist aspirations of some neighbouring countries to create greater nation-states by seizing pieces of Macedonian territory, and from the inside – the ethnic tensions. These na-

tional security threats in the first years were crucial in the process of building the country's national security culture and for the identification of the national interests, the definition of policies and the build-up of a national security system of the country. The vulnerability of the country in the process of gaining independence have influenced the defining of the national interests and how they are rooted in the country's national security culture. The country identified the European Union and NATO integration as one of the main foreign policy priorities that will contribute towards the security consolidation.

After the primary security consolidation of the country and its membership in the UN and other international organisations, the internal ethnic conflict of 2001 and its security implications, brought broader EU's involvement in the peaceful solution of the conflict and the post-conflict management. However, the unresolved name issue with the neighbouring country – Greece, has further prolonged the country's bid for EU and NATO membership, which led to the redefinition of the country's security culture. After the Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008, the vacuum that was left with the country not becoming a NATO member and the fact that the EU integration process was stalled, made the country an easy target of the rising influence of different actors which presence was becoming more dominant in the region. Therefore, one of its national priorities was solving the name issue with neighbouring Greece in order to become NATO member. The NATO membership had reinforced the Republic of North Macedonia's security quest and redefined its military defence. However, what remains a necessary step forward in final consolidation of the national security is the country's EU membership. It is evident on both the EU side, being faced with the implications of the war in Ukraine and the present shifts in the transatlantic security relationship, and also on the side of the Republic of North Macedonia, that EU membership of the country will not only contribute towards this small country's stability, but also towards stability of the region as well.

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