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***The Euro-atlantic security Dillema from the perspective  
of Central and Eastern Europe***



The Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is becoming the centre of a new hybrid Cold War between Russia and the West<sup>1</sup>. Recently there have appeared two important approaches to this problem. The first one is a book entitled *2017: War with Russia*<sup>2</sup> by British General Richard Shirreff, a former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. This is a tough approach of a military man to the potential occurrence and halting of Russian threats on the NATO's Eastern flank. The other one is an idea conceived by a well-known American analyst M. O'Hanlon to create a strategic buffer between Russia and the West in this very region<sup>3</sup>, already hailed by some Yalta II. This is, on the other hand, a way of thinking of a cool diplomat: you can never gain something if you do not sacrifice something.

What role in the hybrid Cold War will therefore play the Central and Eastern Europe region? Will it be as hard as a cork of a gin bottle holding the new Cold War risks and threats posed by Russia? Or will it be an open arena of the new Cold War games between the West and Russia?

In order to answer these questions, let us begin with analysing the interests, missions and strategic objectives

of the main actors influencing the CEE region, followed by examination of basic interactions between them contributing to the security environment as well as its evolution in the context of security in the region. These actors undoubtedly include the USA – as a global security actor whose interests are also located in the CEE region and mainly implemented through NATO (but not only); Russia – as the main source of concerns, challenges and threats for the region, and finally – Europe in a broad sense, with its unique organisation, the EU, delicate and politically fragile, but offering great opportunities.

### *Interests, missions and strategic objectives*

In the most general terms, it can be said that national interests of the United States and Russia and the missions of NATO and the EU are fairly clear. They can be briefly summarized as follows:

- the United States – intends to maintain global hegemony;
- Russia – has ambitions to become one of the global decision-makers<sup>4</sup>,
- the mission of NATO is to ensure permanent stability of the Euro-Atlantic space and security of its members, and of the EU to ensure the secure conditions for the effective delivery of socio-economic development of its member states.

The short-term strategic/political objectives leading to the implementation of these interests and mission are still largely unknown.

The United States – as the main world actor – plays a key role, not only in the context of the Central and East

ern Europe, but also as regards general security in the Euro-Atlantic space. Throughout the 20th century, this superpower determined the fate of Europe, successfully extinguishing the fires of both world wars and winning the Cold War<sup>5</sup>. Thus, when today the U.S. President at some point started to question the transatlantic relations, Europe had been given cause for concern. It is worthwhile, however, to point out the evolution of these causes for concern: from very strong concerns during the period of the election campaign and the first days of the presidency to the period during which the American strategy to maintain its presence in Europe was gradually developed.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the world is still not fully clear about the interpretation of some statements made by President D. Trump. Some light on the issue of U.S. international intentions is cast by the new<sup>6</sup> National Security Strategy published in late 2017. Among other things, it is clearly visible that the President's slogan "America First" will not, after all, mean taking direction towards isolationism in the matters of security, which some feared. The United States intends to remain an active, even expansive, player in the pursuit of its interests. This also means that it will be actively involved in the Euro-Atlantic security. In accordance with the new security strategy, the United States still finds Europe important and confirms its obligations within NATO, which remains an essential instrument of American policy. This is conditional, however, on meeting by the European allies of the requirements, mainly in respect of an increase in defence spending.

At the same time, it has been long apparent from the American perspective that the Euro-Atlantic area is only

one of the wings in the U.S. security system. The Asia-Pacific wing, where the birth of a new rebellious nuclear player in the form of North Korea adds to its complexity<sup>7</sup>, has been growing in importance<sup>8</sup>. The problems experienced by the United States with North Korea are also one of more difficult issues for Europe, including the Central and Eastern Europe. The risk of conflict, including a nuclear war, must also for example affect NATO, along with the possibility of NATO being directly involved in it, which would undoubtedly happen if the territory of the United States was attacked. All in all, the problem of how to optimally balance the two wings – the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific – constitutes, in my opinion, the main dilemma of the U.S. strategic objectives of the current decades, which has not been resolved yet.

From the point of view of security of the Central and Eastern Europe, this is of key importance, as only the presence of the United States can effectively balance the Russian pressure on the region.

Russia is the factor of the highest gravity from the perspective of security in the Central and Eastern Europe. Its policy determines the behaviour of two other basic actors, namely: the United States and Europe. Russia, on the other hand, has already decidedly taken the direction of revising the post-Cold War international order, seeking for itself the role of one of the global players<sup>9</sup>.

The internal condition of Russia defies unambiguous assessment. In the political and social dimension, Russia is under the authoritarian management of President V. Putin, which is a 'soft' version of the former tsarist despotism. It suits the Russians, they fully accept such political system, because a tsar-like President is the only reliable reference point in their uncertain lives. At the same

time, such character of the potential of the authority also becomes, however, the main source of risk posed thereto. Should it demonstrate any weaknesses, helplessness or hesitation – it will immediately lose confidence and support. The Russians will desperately look out for another strong man in the Kremlin.

An important instrument of the strength of the Kremlin is of course its military potential<sup>10</sup>. In this respect, Russia is undoubtedly a superpower, especially a nuclear one<sup>11</sup>. The restoration and development of this potential that has been taking place over the last decade is really impressive, but also very expensive. A slowdown in military spending is already apparent and it will decrease the pace of its development as compared to the other countries. Thus, if the past military spending was to be used for political purposes, the armed forces would have to be used now, because later they will become relatively weaker.

The military spending is undoubtedly a heavy burden on the Russian economy. In the economic dimension, Russia dwarfs in comparison with the other superpowers. It is largely, unilaterally and fundamentally, dependent on the export of energy resources, which means that its economic destiny is not in its control. Economic forecasts for Russia are rather pessimistic.

At the same time, used to hardships, the Russian society is also more poverty-resistant than any other. It can withstand any hardship in the name of Russian pride. This gives the political power more freedom and, larger than in other countries, margin of acceptable risk. This margin is not unlimited, though. It is true that in the short-term, Russia is not threatened with an internal collapse, but in the long-term such risk exists, similarly as in case of the collapse of the USSR. Strategists in the Kremlin must

be aware of it, thus they may attempt to gain whatever is possible in a short-term (safer for Russia) perspective, in order to freely implement the unavoidable and difficult internal changes in the long-term perspective.

It can therefore be assumed that Russia has already probably realised that it has run into excessive costs associated with the development of its military potential and extensive military involvement in Ukraine and Syria<sup>12</sup>. It seems that as an afterthought it has started to seek for a strategy to rationalise its international activity without losing face in the international arena, without jeopardising its social support or causing any turbulence inside the country. How to maintain control of the post-Soviet space and continue to weaken the West, with a view to improving its global role against such background, in a manner that does not entail excessive costs, in particular in economic terms – this is a major dilemma of the new Cold War launched by Russia against the West.

On the whole, Russia is under severe pressure of internal factors – the fact that the long-term internal changes are inevitable intensifies pressure on external activity in the short-term perspective. This is dangerous for the Central and Eastern Europe, as it may become the main target of such Russian pressure and strategic expansion.

The collective actors of Euro-Atlantic security, i.e. NATO and the EU, are also facing dilemmas, which have not yet been resolved or clearly defined.

The North Atlantic Alliance made a U-turn at the most recent summits in Newport and Warsaw, departing from its expeditionary priorities in favour of direct security of its territories. In its mission and tasks, it returned to its 'roots', the basic statutory function – protection of member states' territories. The most important change

took place in relation to Russia. However, NATO has not decided yet whether this is enough or whether it will be necessary to move more strongly towards the new Cold War security mechanisms, including the adoption of adequate rules of defence against the Russian threats<sup>13</sup>. There is a growing awareness that the alliance needs a new strategic concept corresponding to the conditions of the new Cold War with Russia. Thus, the relevant work may be commenced at the 2018 summit.

As for the EU, it has been undergoing a serious crisis. It is true that, unlike NATO, it has its new security strategy<sup>14</sup>, but its practical implementation still remains an open question<sup>15</sup>. In the first place, a pressing challenge becomes the following: how to balance the required unity of action with the necessary move forward. Is it better to expand the European pack in order to smooth the zig zag path of uncertainty and crisis or is it better to stick together to help the stragglers? The final choice has yet to be made, although the lead of the European pack has already started to form around Germany and France.

All in all, it seems that there is a growing conviction in Europe that the only solution can be what not so long ago was regarded as the worst possibility – namely, a flexible multi-speed Europe. A solution for Western Europe and, at the same time, a serious risk for Central and Eastern Europe. Some of its countries, for example Poland, largely at their own request, may become a peripheral and weakened link in Europe.

A potential collapse of the EU is particularly risky for the CEE countries. This would lead to the emergence in this region of the so called 'gray-zone' of security, where the interests of Russia and the West would intersect.

### *Strategic environment*

From examining the condition of individual elements of the 'Euro-Atlantic' triad (the United States with NATO, Russia and the EU), let us proceed to the assessment of the relations between them, decidedly shaping the character of the security environment of the countries from the CEE region.

Before commencing the analysis, it is worthwhile to present a few more general theses on the current security environment of the West-Russia:

- in the period strategically preceding the current state of international relations, i.e. during the 20th century Cold War confrontation, the most important threat was a global nuclear war,
- the post-Cold War period – is mainly characterised by attempts of the West to build in Europe, together with Russia, a cooperative security system,
- the Russian annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine defined the end of the post-Cold War era in the Russia's security relations with the West,
- the expansive policy conducted by Russia, also outside the so called post-Soviet space, practically expressed in its military intervention in Syria, marked the beginning of the new hybrid Cold War<sup>16</sup> – that is another political confrontation between Russia and the West with the threat of armed violence (including nuclear weapons) in the background, but this time with more diverse and limited forms of these threats.

Moving on to more detailed analyses, let us begin with the relations of the U.S. and NATO with Russia, which



are of key importance for the security of Central and Eastern Europe. The idea of 'new reset' in these relations originated at the time of D. Trump's triumph in the presidential election. Today, it seems that this option practically died before it had actually been born. The Russian-U.S. relations are acquiring the new Cold War character<sup>17</sup>. The clash of personality of D. Trump with that of V. Putin may even result in the sharpening of these relations to the state known from the times of R. Reagan. For Central and Eastern Europe this means that it may become a more important than previously area of U.S. interests, and at the same time, an area of clash with the Russian interests pursued here for centuries. What will this clash look like – remains an open and optional issue.

One thing is certain, though. In the east of the Euro-Atlantic area, the post-Cold War period ended a few years ago and *the new hybrid Cold War between Russia and the West is in progress*. As regards the methods, it slightly differs from the first, classical war of the 20th century, but as to its essence, it is quite similar. Both in the first Cold War and in this new one, the most important thing is political confrontation with the use of coercive measures, including the armed forces. There is a difference, however, in the character and content of the classical Cold War confrontation and the current new Cold War<sup>18</sup>.

In the global Cold War of the 20th century, the opposing blocks threatened, blackmailed and mutually deterred themselves with their military potentials, but refrained from direct use against each other of any armed forces. They were only indirectly involved in an armed conflict, through intermediaries in the so called third world (commonly named proxy wars). Things are not look different in the new Cold War.

Now, apart from deterrence and proxy wars (e.g. in Syria), the direct use of armed forces against each other is becoming more and more real, or has already become, even if only in cyberspace. Of course this is not about an overt, open use of the army 'with flags unfurled', but covert, secret, camouflaged operations, below the threshold of overt regular aggression, which is often, not very precisely, referred to as hybrid aggression/intervention<sup>19</sup>.

The information struggles, including in particular operations in cyberspace, play an increasingly important role in the new Cold War.

Russia includes within the arsenal of the new Cold War blackmail also *tactical nuclear weapon, with a doctrine of so called 'nuclear de-escalation'*. It assumes that should the conventional conflict develop in a manner posing any risk to Russia, it may use tactical nuclear weapon, not against specific facilities of its opponents, but rather in an operationally neutral manner, in the air, at sea, in order to show the other party that we are on the verge of a full nuclear war, thus let us contain the conflict, de-escalate it and negotiate the end of the war. What we have obtained as a result of the aggression though, is ours.

At the same time, Russia is strengthening its military potential in the western part of the country<sup>20</sup> and – *inter alia*, through such projects as the ZAPAD exercise – is building a *conventional 'kulak'*, whose purpose is to deter and secure a potential hybrid intervention in one of the Baltic countries. The possibility of carrying out such a successful intervention is tempting as an option of strategic discrediting of NATO, and thus the West as a whole. This would be a success of Russia in its new Cold War with the West. With this in mind, it has been building its capacities, developing doctrines, plans and putting them

to practical tests e.g. in such projects as ZAPAD manoeuvres<sup>21</sup>.

Thus, in the course of conceptual, doctrinal, organisational, modernisation and training work, Russia has prepared a relevant 'new Cold War strategic triad' for the purposes of confrontation with the West:

- *the concept of hybrid/subliminal aggression/intervention* in the soft NATO region, such as the Baltic countries, aimed at pulling any of them out of the NATO/EU structures, in order to undermine the credibility of the West as regards defence,
- *the quickly mobilised 'conventional kulak'* at the NATO borders to contain/prevent a potential armed response of the alliance to the subliminal aggression through the high risk of transferring it into an open armed conflict which, given the initial operational advantage of Russia, would have been already defeated at its preliminary phase,
- *tactical nuclear weapon with the so called nuclear de-escalation doctrine* – as an ultimate fuse against transformation of the local/regional armed conflict into a full-scale war with the West, which Russia would eventually have to lose.

Overall, in the east, there is the whole range of new Cold War risks and threats:

- from the current political and strategic pressure along with cyberspace operations,
- through a threat of subliminal/hybrid intervention under cover of the conventional kulak and a limited conventional armed conflict under the umbrella of tactical nuclear weapon,

– to the risk of a massive full-scale war, which is, nevertheless, mitigated and controlled – similarly as at the period of the ‘big Cold War’ of the 20th century – under the Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) rule, which is still in force.

Such new Cold War confrontation is particularly dangerous for the CEE region, as it is first and foremost currently subjected to Russian pressure<sup>22</sup>, and exposed to the risks and military threats occurring in the Russian relations with the West<sup>23</sup>.

The relations between the EU and Russia are also complicated, similarly as its political and military relations with the U.S or NATO. There is an unsolvable dispute over the legal dimension of the annexation of Crimea and the related economic sanctions. Another important context in this respect are the European suspicions and concerns about the Russia’s information interference in the political and, among others, election processes in the European countries. Russia is lying in waiting for the breakdown of the EU unity, for its collapse into multi-speed groups within the Community. Of particular importance for Russia would be the weakening of bonds between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the main countries in Western Europe, which would make it possible to include them within the gray zone of security.

It should be also noted that the EU itself has been struggling with other internal challenges, intensified by the impact of conflicts on the southern flank (in the Middle East and Africa), affected by the intra-Islamic crisis which generates threats for Europe, mainly in such areas as migration and terrorism.

Even if the Islamic State ultimately collapses, which is rather a foregone conclusion, the fighters diaspora threatens to intensify the spread of terrorist threats to Europe as well and to create here a kind of a large scale ‘underground’ terrorist movement (the ‘underground Islamic State’). Terrorist threats associated with the inspirations of Islamic fundamentalism in Europe are part of a much larger problem of a strategic character. Europe faces a huge challenge of how to solve the problem of coexistence of the Western and Islamic civilisations within the European continent without causing any civilisational disaster<sup>24</sup>.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the EU is now experiencing an enormous internal crisis. Edgy because of the financial crisis, undermined by the migration crisis<sup>25</sup>, weakened by liberal democracy crisis, struggling with intra-European terrorism, shaken by internal processes of nationalist populism, embarrassed by Brexit, and finally –worried about Russian information diversification, Europe is becoming weaker and weaker, also as a security actor.

Of course, the European Union is looking for a way out of the crisis. Last year, it adopted its new global strategy. It is at a high level of generality, a kind of ‘big strategy’, and now the need arises to specify its provisions within the framework of implementation plans and programs. The EU has been intently working on the implementation of this strategy in the three areas: political, economic and international. One of the important steps in the improvement of European security is the establishment and launch in 2017 of the PESCO program (Permanent Structured Cooperation)<sup>26</sup>.

Will these works lead to an unequivocal empowerment of the EU in the field of security? The European Commission assumes three scenarios for building within a decade

the foundations for the creation of the European Security and Defence Union<sup>27</sup>. Depending on the political will of member states, these can be:

- *Security and Defence Cooperation* – continuation option, voluntary cooperation between member states in line with the *ad hoc* principle, depending on the actual needs and the situation, with the EU structures playing a minor role,
- *Shared Security and Defence* – increased financial and operational responsibility for mutual security, partial delegation by member states of some competences to the EU structures, in particular as regards non-military threats (terrorism, cyberthreats...), more regular, planned in advance, and not only *ad hoc*, cooperation between member states, especially in the sector of defence industries,
- *Common Defence and Security* – deeper cooperation and integration, synchronisation of defence planning, solidarity and mutual support on a standard basis within the Community, expanded scope of joint armament programs, particularly in the most technologically demanding fields, establishment of operationally-ready common military formations, complementing NATO in the performance of defence tasks<sup>28</sup>.

Frankly speaking, the above options are in fact subsequent steps of a single program within which all member states intend to establish the European Security and Defence Union. They indeed make up a single desirable and advantageous mega-scenario.

However, one should also take into account a possibility of another, disadvantageous and undesirable mega-scenario, when the consent of all to an action plan cannot

be obtained and the EU will be divided into various integration circles (with varied integration rates) in the field of security: an integrated centre with loosely connected peripheries. How would such EU function in the area of security? At least two options can be differentiated as part of such negative scenario.

The EU of multiple speeds in the field of security would be a difficult to imagine 'political and strategic hybrid'. It can be assumed, however, that even under such conditions, when various circles (the EU sub-actors) are completely autonomous, with separate and even conflicting procedures, the EU would manage to develop certain mechanisms of cooperation, ensuring a minimum level of joint actions for security.

Such security structure would be slightly similar to an atom model: the hard core and free electrons kept in the EU orbit by the attractiveness of the core, but drawn away from it by the strength of independence. We would then deal with the scenario of *unbalanced (integrated and disintegrated) security and defence of the EU*.

It seems, however, that such EU would not last long, sooner or later it would fall apart into separate international entities. This is a scenario of *collapse of the European security*.

Unfortunately, some CEE countries, regrettably, including Poland, seem to be, probably involuntarily, working towards this scenario. An expression of this is presenting alternatives to the European integration in the form of absolute political and strategic mirages, for example the so called Intermarium or the Three Seas. A risk in the form of accelerated break-up of the EU is posed by counting on a potential strong support for such political and strategic mirage on the part of the U.S., allegedly looking for a counterbalance for Western Europe.

On the other hand, it seems that one can look with certain optimism at the relations inside the Western world, in this case between the U.S and Europe, with NATO as the keystone. It is within its framework that the necessary combining of efforts exerted by the U.S. and Europe can take place. There is only one condition: the U.S. must see a real increase in the Europe's contribution to NATO, an increase in defence spending in the European countries. This is, one may suppose, a critical condition set by D. Trump, which he will not give up on. If the Europeans manage to convince him in this respect, we should not worry about the transatlantic bond. If not – the black scenario is to be expected. Due to the fact that even today the European countries commonly declare the will to increase defence spending, one can be cautiously optimistic about the future of NATO.

The most important challenge is, however, still open. It consists in finding an effective response to the strategic objective set by Russia, i.e. in my opinion, winning the new Cold War by destroying the credibility of NATO in consequence of pulling out of its structures one of its member states by means of a hybrid intervention/aggression. Another essential task faced by NATO is stricter cooperation with the EU that ensures the strengthening of the transatlantic bond which is of particular importance for security. The establishment of systemic cooperation between NATO and the EU could lead to the creation of a kind of *Euro-Atlantic Security Tandem* based on the strategic division of roles and tasks. Some progress has been noted in this field, although these are still only fragmentary actions. In order to give this cooperation a more strategic character, it would be worthwhile, perhaps, to establish the *Euro-Atlantic Security Council*, as a joint



forum of the North Atlantic Council and the European Council. Ideally, these issues should be included in the new strategic concept of the alliance and work on it should commence at the next NATO summit in Brussels.

From the Central and Eastern Europe's perspective, the fact that the U.S. has mobilised the European countries to intensify their defence efforts is positive. It would be risky, however, if these countries were unwilling to do so and the U.S. would loosen its ties with Europe, weakening especially NATO, an institution of primary importance for the security of the region.

Analysis of the modern Euro-Atlantic security environment can be summarised in the following five items:

- it should be strongly emphasised that, as history shows, also today war is not simply to be fought. A war (or a threat of war!) can also be and is used as an instrument of a cold war confrontation: it can be applied in order to threaten/deter, blackmail/de-blackmail,
- the new hybrid Cold War in the relations between Russia and the West is more than the 20th-century one characterised by diverse war threats,
- the new Cold War pressure has been primarily supplemented with actions in cyberspace,
- particularly dangerous under the conditions of the hybrid Cold War is the threat of covert (subliminal) aggression, which creates situations where reaching by NATO/the EU a consensus is difficult (it is hard to reach a consensus regarding uniform assessment of the situation, and thus to decide on an appropriate response) and limited aggression, under the umbrella of a Russian doctrine of the so called 'nuclear de-escalation' with the use of tactical nuclear weapon,

- finding answers to these threats in particular is a condition of NATO/EU effectiveness and stable security relations between Russia and the West, which is of key importance for the security of the countries from the CEE region.

### *Scenarios*

The above strategic review allows to develop three general scenarios regarding the place and role of the CEE region in the Euro-Atlantic security. They depend on whether in the coming years the main tendency will be intensification of the new Cold War confrontation between Russia and the West, or looking for a way to mitigate it and 'defrost' the status quo.

In the first scenario that assumes a more intensified new Cold War confrontation, Central and Eastern Europe would play the role of a shield for the West, a restraint factor for the Russian pressure, the previously mentioned cork keeping the 'gin of the new Cold War threats' inside the Russian bottle. This is mainly about neutralising and reducing the pressure and threats of aggression against the Baltic countries: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This means maintaining and demonstrating allied capabilities necessary both to deter against 'non-territorial' aggression (with no intention of controlling or occupying the territory)<sup>29</sup>, below the threshold of open regular warfare, as well as a limited territorial aggression under the umbrella of blackmail threats of using tactical nuclear weapon (the nuclear de-escalation doctrine).

The role of a special restraint should be also played by the real and clearly demonstrated option of launching a retaliatory attack on the Kaliningrad Oblast, with a guarantee to maintain the so called Suwalki Gap<sup>30</sup>,

a land bridge operationally linking through Poland the Baltic states with the other NATO countries. The foot kept in the Suwalki Gap and the lasso around the neck of the Kaliningrad Oblast are essential elements of deterring Russia from aggression targeted at the Baltic countries, and at the same time, maintaining the strategic stability in Europe.

This scenario would entail the need to further strategically strengthen this region, develop defence infrastructure as well as increase and consolidate the presence of allied forces. The countries of the region themselves would naturally be subjected to increased militarisation.

The other scenario assumes complete transformation of Central and Eastern Europe into a political and strategic buffer between Russia and the West, the region where influences of both the West and Russia are intertwined. This could only happen in the event of an internal collapse of the two current structures of the Western world in their present role, i.e. NATO and the European Union. NATO could collapse for example as a result of the U.S. withdrawal from Europe, and the European Union could break down into parts of so called different speed of integration. If this the case, the CEE countries could fall into the gray zone of security with strong Russian influences. It seems that a simultaneous occurrence of both above mentioned conditions - the collapse of NATO and the European Union – is not very likely, similarly as the ‘black scenario’ for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The third scenario involves sacrificing by the West part of its interest in the CEE region on the altar of reverting the confrontation and seeking a new relaxation in the relations with Russia needed to pursue other important interests (in the Middle East or in Asia). This would be

'Yalta II', already mentioned in the introduction, a soft variant of Yalta arrangements for the division of influence zones in Europe. In particular, this could take the form of a smaller or larger 'demilitarisation' of the Eastern flank of NATO and the EU by the U.S. and the countries of Western Europe. This would also mean a silent and shameful consent to the existence within NATO of 'second category' countries, and in the EU – of 'lower speed' peripheral countries', and thus the consent to take into consideration certain Russian interests in this region.

As you can see, in all these scenarios the CEE region is highly sensitive to the shaping of relations between the West and Russia. It can be both a factor, important for the West, of stopping Russia under the conditions of the new Cold War confrontation, as well as a bargaining tool for a 'rotten compromise', not to mention the most dramatic option, i.e. becoming the main victim of the breakdown of the Euro-Atlantic structures. This calls for special requirements as regards the predictions and conduct of active policies by the countries from the region in order to minimise the bad scenario risk.

#### *Notes*

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28. Of course, there are also more radical scenarios that assume that the European Union will go in the direction of strategic autonomy, including the creation of the European army. See e.g. H.-P. Bartels, A. M. Kellner, U. Optenhogel, *Strategic autonomy and the Defence of Europe. On the Road to a European Army?*, Dietz, Bonn 2017.
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30. The Suwalki Gap – an area in the vicinity of the Polish-Lithuanian border (near Suwalki), between the Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus that links the Baltic states with the other NATO countries. In case of conflict, it is of key strategic importance for both the manoeuvres of the NATO and Russian forces.