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RUSSIA AS A CHALLENGE TO EUROPEAN SECURITY – A ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVE

Abstract: *The year 2022 was characterised by a major conflict in Europe and numerous crises worldwide. The conflict started in February 2022 with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, being considered the most demanding and strange conventional war since the Second World War. Even though it was described by Kremlin as a ‘special military operation’, the duration, political objectives, participants and ways of conduct made it a real conventional war that takes place at the Eastern European flank, with major implications for the European current order and the international security environment. The two nations involved in the conflict – Russia and Ukraine – are not NATO members, but they have a special status of partnership with the Alliance. This is why, the NATO decision-makers could not directly military interfere in the conflict, but political-diplomatic and STRATCOM only. The NATO Secretary General encouraged Member States and the EU to take all necessary measures to support Ukraine and sanction Russia, including arms sales to Ukraine and soft military participation for counselling and advice. The conflict itself deepened the international consequences of almost two years of the Coronavirus pandemic that led to not only an international sanitary crisis but also economic, financial and social ones. It amplified the disastrous security situation not only in Europe but worldwide, by creating additional crises for energy (gas) and food (grains). In its turn, the food crisis was and continues to be highly influenced by some climate change consequences, including draught and the great hit wave in Europe, North America and Africa during this Summer. Even if we are not at the end of the war in Ukraine and no participant can consider itself as being victorious so far or achieving its political objectives, there are some lessons identified for the military field that should be considered for the future security of Europe and the international environment,*

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as well. These lessons have and will continue to present geopolitical implications for Europe, having also some national implications, as well.

Keywords: *Ukrainian war, special military operation, European security, lessons identified, energy crisis, food crisis, Extended/Wider Black Sea Area, geopolitical implications, the Minsk Agreement, the Montreux Convention*

Introduction

In the last ten years or so, the Geostrategic situation in Europe was not easy or relaxed. Moreover, we can affirm that it was very complicated and sensitive, with a lot of unpredicted violent actions, crises and even conflicts taking place inside. It is worth mentioning here the 2014 Ukrainian crisis (the Russian new type of Hybrid Warfare), the ‘Wave of Terror in Europe’ between 2015 and 2018, the illegal migration between 2016 and 2020, as well as the BREXIT and the EU internal crisis of ‘one Europe with two speeds’ and the NATO internal crisis with Türkiye. More recently, there was Catalonia’s drive for independence in 2019 that plunged Spain into its biggest political crisis for 40 years, as well as the Armenia-Azerbaijan war of 2020 or the continued Greece-Türkiye crisis in the Eastern Aegean Sea. All this volatile security situation was exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic and the counter-Covid 19 measures undertaken by all European states to escape from the fifth and sixth waves of the disease.

We all know what happened in 2014 and how Moscow conducted a new type of ‘Hybrid Warfare’ to destabilise Ukraine and not let it become a democracy. Kremlin aimed to keep Ukraine under its control. To stop this ‘Hybrid War’, Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists agreed on a 12-point ceasefire deal in Minsk, in September 2014 (Minsk I). Followed quickly by violations from both sides, representatives of Russia, Ukraine, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the leaders of two pro-Russian separatist regions signed a 13-point agreement in February 2015. This new agreement called ‘Minsk II’, was supported by France and Germany. It set out military and political steps that remain unimplemented. A major blockage has been Russia’s insistence that it is not a party to the conflict and therefore is not bound by its terms.

Another bold move of the Kremlin was to start building impenetrable lines of defence against the West at its buffer zones, including the terrestrial and maritime borders. Throughout history, there are a lot of examples when big powers have built castles, trenches, walls (e.g. Great Wall of China), defence lines (e.g. Maginot Line) and now Anti-Access and Aerial Denial (A2/AD) capabilities to undermine the freedom of movement and operational access of

foes. This is why, considering that the US became the most powerful nation with immense military power, from 2014 until now, Russia was building A2/AD systems in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Ocean². The aim is to deny the US and NATO free access in the respective areas, being under strategic interest for Kremlin.

Moreover, in 2021 Russia started to change its military posture alongside the Ukrainian borders, using some joint strategic–operational exercises with Belarus (Zapad-2021), including testing of its nuclear missiles to increase its nuclear deterrence (Grom-2022). It also launched a hitherto unprecedented political rhetoric, drawing a ‘red line’ on Ukraine and Georgia's joining NATO and increasing the presence of Allied forces in Eastern Europe. These events have convinced Western political and military decision-makers that such major military action in the area is imminent. Actions were even expected to begin during the Chinese Winter Olympics. So, using the operational-strategic exercise ‘Zapad-2021’ in Western Russia and Southern Belarus, the posture of Russian military forces on the border with Ukraine has changed, by bringing about 20.000-30.000 soldiers and military equipment from other districts and relocating them to training areas near the western border³. Meanwhile, Kremlin has decided to create 20 new large units in the Western Military District, to discourage the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance to the east.

During the strategic nuclear exercise ‘Grom-2022’, President Putin ordered the launching of two nuclear ballistic missiles – one from northwestern Russia and the second aboard a submarine in the Barents Sea. In this exercise, in which the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was also invited to participate, Kalibr cruise missiles and Zircon hypersonic missiles were launched by ships of the North and Black Sea fleets, against naval and ground targets, and the planes launched Kinzhal hypersonic cruise missiles against ground targets⁴.

The Geopolitics of the Extended/Wider Black Sea Area was very complicated even without what happened in Ukraine and what Russia has done near the Ukrainian border. This is true because we can speak of the persistence of ‘frozen conflicts’ in the region, especially in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, where some actions were endangering the security of the region. For example, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, which took place between 27th September and 10th November, had and continues to

² K. Muzyka, *Russia Goes to War: Exercises, Signalling, War Scares, and Military Confrontations*, <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-goes-war-exercises-signaling-war-scares-and-military-confrontations>> (28.02.2022).

³ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁴ T. Balmforth, M. Kiselyova, *Putin leads sweeping nuclear exercises as tensions soar*, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-starts-russias-strategic-nuclear-exercises-tensions-soar-2022-02-19>> (28.02.2022).

have implications up-to-day for regional security. This conflict there involved Azerbaijan, militarily supported by Türkiye against the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh and Armenia, supported by Russia. The conflict represented a defeat of Armenia, which had to return all surrounding territories occupied since 1994, as well as a marginalization of Russia's influence over the region⁵.

Another example is Transnistria, the Moscow-backed separatists' region of Moldova, where, at the end of April this year, a governmental building was hit by rocket-propelled grenades⁶ and several shootings happened a mile away from Cobasna, the largest ammunition depot in Eastern Europe. This provocative act was seen by the Republic of Moldova's pro-EU president, Maia Sandu, who blamed the blasts on infighting between rival factions in Transnistria, prompting growing concern that the country could be dragged into the Ukraine conflict. The region still hosts 1500 Russian troops, as well as 20.000 tons of ammunition stored in Cobasna and is long used by Moscow as a bargaining chip in its efforts to influence the Republic of Moldova⁷.

Therefore, my article is aimed at analysing the very hot topic of the current security environment in Europe related to Russia and how it is perceived by Eastern European countries for the security of the region. In the end, it represents the Romanian view of the current Russia-Ukraine war, highlighting the geostrategic impact of this conflict against European and national security. For nations living at the edge of this conflict and being neighbours with Russia, the approach and effects understandings are different from the rest of Europe.

Military Aspects and Lessons Identified from the Russian-Ukrainian War

On 24th February 2022, around 05.00 a.m., Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an unprovoked war against Ukraine, called by Kremlin 'a military special operation'⁸. Previously, on 22nd February, the Russian Duma recognized the two self-declared independent states Luhansk and Donetsk and,

⁵ S. Fraser, *AP Explains: What lies behind Turkish support for Azerbaijan*, <<https://apnews.com/article/turkey-territorial-disputes-azerbaijan-ankara-armenia-9a95d9690569623adedffe8c16f3588d>> (13.05.2022).

⁶ H. Fot, *Explosions hit state security building in Transnistria*, <<https://www.ft.com/content/1e811d5d-3972-4bde-abc5-acac7dd4832b>> (30.04.2022).

⁷ O. Adey, *Moldova: shooting near Russian ammunition depot in Transnistria*, <<https://gettotext.com/moldova-shooting-near-a-russian-ammunition-depot-in-transnistria/>> (15.05.2022).

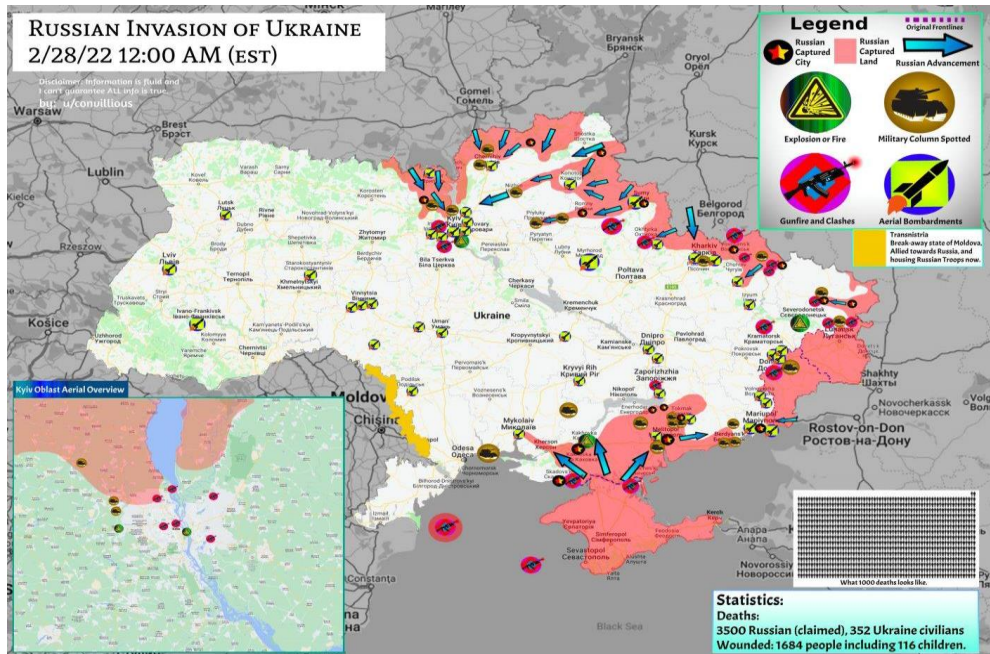
⁸ P. Kirby, *Why has Russia invaded Ukraine and what does Putin want?*, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-5672058>> (11.03.2022).

on 23rd February, the Ukrainian Rada proclaimed the State of Emergency on the entire territory of the country.

The Russian land offensive simultaneously started in four directions – NORTH, from Belarus towards Kyiv, NORTH-EAST, from Russia towards Kharkiv, EAST, from Russia to support separatists in Donbas, and SOUTH, from Crimea towards Odesa and Mariupol – and was supported by heavy air and missile attacks against command and control (C2), air defence (AD) installations, airports and military bases (see fig. 1). The initial strategic objectives of the Russian Armed Forces were:

- conquest IOT control of the central and eastern parts of Ukraine, by developing the offensive in the Southern directions (Crimean Peninsula), Eastern (Donbas region) and Northeast (Kharkov) – military victory;
- conquest of the Northern part and Kyiv (later joining forces with the forces on the Dnieper River) IOT capture, remove the political leadership of Ukraine and replace it with a pro-Russian one – ensuring political victory.

Figure 1. The Start of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine



Source: corneliupivariu.com personal blog.

It was characterized by: a slow, unexpected pace; very predictable directions, manoeuvres and tactics; being delayed by an efficient Ukrainian resistance, amplified by the Western support; being sporadically and divergently supported by Air and missile; increased distance and effort for logistic supply lines⁹.

On 18th March, Russia launched the second phase of its ‘special military operation’ in the Eastern part of Ukraine, with the main effort on the integral conquering of the Donbas region and securing it (see fig. 2)¹⁰.

Figure 2. The Second Phase of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine



Source: Institute for the Study of War (21:00 GMR, 5 June)

⁹ P. Bergen, *Gen. Petraeus: Invasion reveals a host of weaknesses in Russia's military*, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/15/opinions/russia-ukraine-petraeus-bergen/index.html>> (16.03.2022).

¹⁰ As the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made it clear, the liberation of the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine is an ‘unconditional priority’ for Moscow and other territories should decide their own future.

Concurrently, an additional offensive operation was launched on a secondary line of effort towards south IOT deny Ukraine access to the Black Sea and establish a corridor from Crimea to Transnistria. To successfully implement the new phase of warfare, President Vladimir Putin nominated, on 9th April 2022, a new Theatre Commander in Ukraine – Gen. Alexander Dvornikov, known also as ‘the butcher from Syria’¹¹. By appointing him to lead the ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, it is expected to change the operational-strategic approach so far, moving to the so-called ‘scorched-earth’ strategy, in which will be conducted ‘quick battles’ in several areas at the same time.

The Ukrainian well-conducted counter-offensive and counter-attacks slowed down the Russian offensive in the central part of Donbas, stopped/pushed back Russia's advance in the Kherson and Mykolaiv area and forced Russian troops to withdraw from Kharkiv, letting Ukrainian forces regain some part of their NE border. The strong resistance of Ukrainian forces in the area of Kharkiv and Mariupol significantly delayed this offensive and caused many tactical and operational challenges to the Russian Theatre commander of the operation¹². Ukrainian commanders use the so-called ‘porcupine defence’ tactics, a concept that was described by Dr Harlan K. Ullman¹³. What characterises but also differentiates this type of defence in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is the great superiority of the Ukrainian military equipment, which is at allied standards, compared to those used by the Russian army in Ukraine (for example, Russia has removed 50-year-old T-62 tanks from storage¹⁴). This unexpected success made Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko interfere at the Belarus border with Ukraine by establishing a Military Command ‘South’ and deploying tactical Battle Groups (BGs) of Mechanised Infantry and tanks near the border¹⁵.

¹¹ In Siria, General Dvornikov used ‘scorched earth’ tactics to lead prolonged sieges of smaller cities and towns, which he bombarded at length, with much loss of life and destruction of infrastructure and residential areas, forcing the leaders of those localities to hand them over so that they are no longer bombed.

¹² R. Burns, Y. Hope, *US doubts new Russian war chief can end Moscow's floundering*, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-appoints-new-ukraine-war-commander-dvornikov-225f976f9abfb5aff6154ac3b77c21e6?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=AP&utm_campaign=SocialFlow> (11.04.2022).

¹³ The name ‘porcupine defence’ was given by Dr Harlan K. Ullman, Doctor Honoris Causa at the Carol I National Defense University and represents the avoidance of decisive actions by using small, battalion-type formations and company, flexible and very well equipped, to inflict such great losses on the adversary that it abandons the offensive.

¹⁴ *Latest Developments in Ukraine: May 27*, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/latest-developments-in-ukraine-may-27/6591796.html>> (27.05.2022).

¹⁵ *Live updates. Mayor: Some 1,500 killed in Sievierodonetsk*, <<https://thepublicradio.org/article/live-updates--belarus-sending-troops-to-ukraine-border>> (30.05.2022).

While the Russian invasion of Ukraine appears to be a land war, there was a Kremlin desire for establishing a land bridge to Crimea and deny Ukraine access to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. From the beginning, Moscow was confident with its sea power in the South, by controlling and denying the command of the sea for the Black Sea through A2/AD systems deployed in the Crimean Peninsula and two Naval Groups established in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. The Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) consisted of missile corvettes and frigates, as well as some Kilo-class submarines, joined by the old Slava-class cruiser Moskva as the flagship and was reinforced just before invasion by amphibious ships from the Baltic and Northern Fleets. BSF largely bottled up the smaller Ukrainian patrol forces in port at the start of the war and established command of the sea via blockade by closing the Kerch Strait and strikes on Ukraine's ports. Being an unofficial maritime blockade, it trapped also neutral vessels and ships, using naval fire and commercial blockade to ensure that Ukraine is cut off from the economic lifelines necessary to support its war, making the country entirely reliant on direct financial support from the West, as well as eliminating the ability to resupply the Ukrainian military via the sea. At the same time, the Russian Navy has established a total maritime blockade against the grain transport from Ukraine towards the Middle East and North Africa, thus creating an international food crisis¹⁶.

The first Russian 'naval success' was the occupation of Snake Island, a very important strategic point for controlling the traffic in the North-western Black Sea and the Danube Delta. Immediate after occupying the island and following the sinking of its flagship Moskva on 14th April, by two Ukrainian missiles, Kremlin started to reconsider the protection of supply ships in the area and deployed long-range AD systems (S-400) on the island to defend their squadrons and give Russian troops the possibility to break into Transnistria¹⁷. Being forced by Ukrainian heavy artillery fire and missile strikes, Russian forces have withdrawn from Snake Island at the end of June 2022.

Moskva was not the first or last Russian warship sunken by Ukraine – the large patrol boat RFS Vasily Bykov was destroyed with MLRS fire on 7th March and the Alligator-class amphibious ship Saratov was sunken in the port of Berdyansk on 24th March. The Black Sea was also in the Media's eyes because of the 18 March NAVTEX message regarding the danger of almost 420 Ukrainian anchored mines drifting in the Black Sea. In several days, the floating mines were spotted in Romanian, Bulgarian and Türkiyesh waters.

¹⁶ K. Atwood, A. Marquardt, J. Hanster, *The US is working closely with allies to try to develop routes to get vital grain supplies out of Ukraine*, <<https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-17-22/index.html>> (18.05.2022).

¹⁷ A. Macias, *Russian forces bolster defenses on Ukraine's Snake Island in Black Sea, U.S. Defense official says*, <<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/26/russia-ukraine-live-updates.html>> (27.05.2022).

From the air power point of view, Russia was expected to achieve air superiority, but that does not seem to have happened. The AWACS and AEW&C have hardly been seen. Fighter strikes have also been limited. Air and ground-launched Cruise missiles and Ground-based Multi-Rockets have been used more. The Russian Air Forces' action was focused on close air support (CAS) rather than extended suppressed enemy's air defence (SEAD), here again, limited by a lack of multi-role platforms and operational exposure/training standards. Since the war is all in Ukraine only, there was no air defence requirement for Russia, except to destroy any aircraft that tried to engage in combat with them. As British researcher Peter Hoare has several times mentioned "Air defence integration has always been Russia's Achilles' Heel"¹⁸."

The Ukrainians have integrated a range of air and anti-air capabilities to stymie the much larger Russian air force. Starting with cheap, handheld, portable surface-to-air missiles, the Ukrainians have been able to restrict Russian airpower to a few eastern and southern areas, greatly limiting Russian freedom of manoeuvre. The addition of much more potent, and longer-range, S-300 missile systems from Slovakia makes the Russians even more vulnerable. The threat of the S-300s forces individual Russian aircraft, which generally lack refuelling, electronic warfare, and command-and-control support, to fly low to the ground to screen themselves from attack.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine can be considered a 'strange war', in which one cannot even speak of the application of General Gerasimov's doctrine of 'Active Defence', presented in 2019, or of a so-called continuation of the Hybrid Warfare started by Russia in 2014 when it took over the Crimean Peninsula 'on the edge of legality' and supported the launch of separatist actions in the Donbas region. The whole military action after February 24th brings to mind the operations of the First World War and not a conflict of the 21st Century. As per Lt. Gen (Ret) Ben Hodges, Former Commander of the United States Ground Forces in Europe (USAREUR), the main effort was to conquer the capital Kyiv and other major cities, to change the Ukrainian political leadership. Nor did the relocation of the main effort after 18th March 2022, in Eastern and Southern Ukraine help the Kremlin's strategies to achieve the effects of a 'blitzkrieg' and the 'tank-aircraft' binomial, as the Germans did in World War II, leading to a quick victory and an end to the conflict in favour of Moscow¹⁹.

¹⁸ *Ministerul britanic al Apărării: Apărarea antiaeriană a Ucrainei are un „succes considerabil” împotriva avioanelor rusești*, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-razboi_ucraina-25421449-ministerul-britanic-apararii-apararea-antiaeriana-ucrainei-are-succes-considerabil-impotriva-aeronavelor-rusesti.htm> (03.09.2022).

¹⁹ B. Hodges, *The War in Ukraine and its Consequences on the Easter Flank. Acting as One*, a PowerPoint presentation sustained during a public debate organized by the New

More than four months after the start of the so-called ‘special military operations’ of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, there is no possibility of a ceasefire and to start serious negotiations to sign a ceasefire agreement. Even though Moscow recently announced that there would be a possibility of a meeting between the two presidents if a substantial ceasefire document is drafted, the two states involved in the conflict accuse each other of the persistent situation. For Moscow even returning to the negotiating table will be difficult due to the intention of Washington, London and Brussels to use Ukraine to gain a strategic advantage. As a result, US President Joe Biden believes that what happens in Ukraine “...goes beyond the European continent and becomes a global problem”²⁰.

This is why, even for time being, we can consider some lessons identified at all levels of conflict, as follows:

1. At the Strategic level:

- a. the Russian strategy of blitzkrieg (fulfilling its objectives in a couple of days) did not properly work, because it represents a WWII type of strategy, its aim was the conquer of cities, including the capital, that in turn necessitates long-term siege operations and was very predictable;
- b. lesser effort to end the war and conclude negotiations from all parties involved, demonstrating no interest in negotiations and the fact that Türkiye’s implication did not help and the US and European implication did not support, as well;
- c. in the war of ‘David and Goliath’, Western support was crucial to prolong Ukrainian resilience, to demonstrate that technologically advanced weapons systems can win the war, as well as the fact that training and counselling/advising is vital;
- d. International Law and war customs were not respected or at the edge, because there was no declaration of war, the 1936 Montreux Convention was somehow illegally used by Türkiye and Russian forces used cluster ammunition, thermobaric missiles, phosphorus bombs, fléchettes and unguided missiles on residential areas;
- e. strong Ukrainian population support was crucial for resilience, which represented a direct involvement in the conflict, heavy support for Ukrainian troops and the conduct of a guerrilla-type of warfare;

Strategic Centre and CEPA on 7th April 2022, <<https://newstrategycenter.ro/the-war-in-ukraine-and-its-consequences-on-the-eastern-flank-acting-as-one/>> (30.06.2022).

²⁰ *Russia Intensifies Assault on Ukraine’s Donbas Region*, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/ukraine-calls-for-faster-weapons-deliveries/6586691.html>> (27.05.2022).

- f. STRATCOM is paramount, but in this conflict, there have been official statements regarding Media control of information warfare, with no/few official statements regarding the conflict situation, letting Media and Social Media lie and present fake news and demonstrating no STRATCOM strategy from NATO and Member States.
2. At the Operational level:
 - a. there were no Joint Operations conducted in Ukraine;
 - b. no Air Superiority was ever gained by Russia – Air Parity?
 - c. difficulties in combining Air with Land throughout the whole campaign;
 - d. Intelligence gathering and analysis – a failure for Kremlin;
 - e. no immediate Plan B in place after the failure of taking Kyiv;
 - f. no coherent effort between services and poor logistic support;
 - g. no effective Theatre and Regional C2 and lack of best practices;
 - h. manpower issues – use of mixed professionals with conscripts, as well as foreign fighters²¹;
 - i. Order of Battle (ORBAT) to fight against NATO – no flexibility in Task Organization;
 - j. Cyber Operations are not at the forefront – only an enabler role;
 - k. no Space operations.
 3. At the Tactical level:
 - a. the use of Air power was poor and demonstrated the superiority of modern AD systems against Russian air fighters;
 - b. same happened with the superiority of modern anti-tank systems against not so developed Russian tanks;
 - c. mix of Russian new and old generations of material/equipment demonstrated that the modernisation and procurement processes are not mature yet;
 - d. President Putin’s discourse radicalisation towards the collective West;
 - e. Russian troops did not fight as they were trained;
 - f. the issue of morale – Ukrainian versus Russian troops;

²¹ According to the announcement made by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, about 20.000 international volunteers from 52 countries have arrived in Ukraine to fight against the invading Russian forces. They, are part of the so-called ‘International Legion for the Territorial Defense of Ukraine’, and have joined the National Guard of Ukraine, which has 100.000 reservists reinstated since the beginning of hostilities. At the same time, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said more than 16.000 foreign volunteers, mostly from the Middle East, Libya and Syria, had joined the Russian forces in the conflict, mainly to help pro-Russian separatists. They are being recruited by the Russian Wagner Paramilitary Group.

- g. NCOs are not the backbone of the Russian Armed Forces;
- h. WWII tactics versus modern warfare;
- i. little use of Cyber-attacks and Electromagnetic Warfare actions.

Many military specialists around the world considered the Russian “special military operation” not only a strange war but the largest conventional war in Europe since the Second World War that has marked a major escalation of the conflict between the two countries since 2014, shattering the peace in Europe and endangering the entire European security environment. The consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are not only politico-military for the region but encompass energetic, food and financial crises with international repercussions.

Geopolitical Implications for Europe

The escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict towards the East and South of Ukraine and the possibility of its long duration with numerous human victims and collateral damages has transformed it into a real conventional war that had and continues to have many implications for the Geopolitics of Europe. These implications refer to the volatile security situation in Eastern Europe, being characterised by the migration crisis, as well as energy, economic, financial and grain transportation crises, which, in turn, could change the current European order.

In response to Russia’s actions and because of the special status of the two countries involved in the conflict, NATO’s response was and continues to be just politically, involving numerous Secretary General statements, statements from Alliance’s Heads of state and Government during the Extraordinary NATO Summit in Brussels, on 24th March 2022 and Madrid Summit of 28-30 June 2022, as well as the diplomatic pressure on Russia. At the same time, the North Atlantic Council decided to provide political and practical support, but not military, to Ukraine, in the format of assistance in cybersecurity, protection against CBRN and extensive humanitarian support. Internally, NATO decided to activate its defence plans, deploy elements of the NATO Response Force, and place 40.000 troops on the Eastern flank, along with significant air and naval assets, under direct NATO command supported by Allies’ national deployments. It also established four additional multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. NATO took and continues to take all measures and decisions to ensure the security and defence of all Allies

across all domains and with a 360-degree approach. Its measures remain preventive, proportionate, and non-escalators²².

The Heads of State and Government decided at the Extraordinary NATO Summit in Brussels, on 24th March 2022, to accelerate NATO's transformation for a more dangerous strategic reality, including through the adoption of the next Strategic Concept in Madrid. In light of the gravest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades, they also significantly strengthened NATO's longer-term deterrence and defence posture and further developed the full range of ready forces and capabilities necessary to maintain credible deterrence and defence. These steps are to be supported by enhanced exercises with an increased focus on collective defence and interoperability.

At the Madrid NATO Summit on 28-30 June 2022, Heads of State and Government nominated Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area²³” and highlighted the need to include energy security inside the resilience. Even it is considered a national responsibility under Art. 3 from the 1949 Washington Treaty, the current energetic crisis in Europe and how Russia uses it as a weapon against European countries forced Allies to consider energy security as a collective commitment to ensure reliable energy supplies to NATO military forces.

Moreover, the Secretary-General encouraged Member States to support Ukraine with modern military equipment at NATO standards, sending also military advisers to train the Ukrainian Armed Forces to know how to use this equipment and host millions of refugees on their territories. Nevertheless, one of the positive implications of this conflict was the national decision of Finland and Sweden to stop their neutrality and join NATO. Even with Türkiye's objections from the beginning, their requests have been approved and the two countries were invited to become Allies at the Madrid Summit. The Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden were signed by Allies at Brussels, on 5th July 2022 and are now to the Member States for ratification, according to their national procedures²⁴.

On the other hand, the EU from the beginning strongly condemned Putin's decision to recognise the non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk and Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. It also condemns Belarus' involvement in Russia's military

²² *Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government, NATO Press Release (2022) 061*, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_193719.htm?selectedLocale=en> (02.08.2022).

²³ *Madrid Summit Declaration, NATO Press Release (2022) 095*, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm> (02.08.2022).

²⁴ *Finland and Sweden complete NATO accession talks, NATO Press Release (2022) 108*, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_197737.htm> (02.08.2022).

aggression. In response to the military aggression, the EU has acted both politically and economically, through the European Council and the Council of the EU statements, as well as massively expanded sanctions against Russia, by adding a significant number of persons and entities to the sanctions list, and by adopting unprecedented measures. In this respect, the EU has adopted six packages of sanctions designed to weaken Russia's economic base, depriving it of critical technologies and markets, and significantly curtailing its ability to wage war, including here: individual sanctions against Russian and Belarussian VIPs; restrictions on economic relations with Donbas Region; suspension of visa for diplomats, officials and businesspeople; closure of EU airspace and EU ports; SWIFT ban for Russian banks; suspension of broadcasting for Russia Today and Sputnik; and the prohibition on imports and exports, including energy²⁵.

The EU has shown unity and strength and has provided Ukraine with coordinated humanitarian, political, financial and material support – €243 million in humanitarian aid for Ukraine and Moldova, material assistance to Ukraine and its neighbouring countries through the EU civil protection mechanism, €1,2 billion in macro-financial assistance to foster stability and €2 billion to support the Ukrainian armed forces under the European Peace Facility mechanism. Therefore, since the Russian aggression started, the EU has committed to mobilising around €5,4 billion to support Ukraine's overall economic, social and financial resilience in the form of macro-financial assistance, budget support, emergency assistance, crisis response and humanitarian aid. In addition, military assistance measures have been provided under the European Peace Facility, amounting to €2,5 billion, which will be used to reimburse Member States for their in-kind military support to Ukraine²⁶.

The EU is committed to continuing to show solidarity and provide support to the refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine and the countries hosting them – reception of refugees through the temporary protection mechanism and €17 billion to support member states hosting refugees. It is also coordinating with partners and allies, within the UN, OSCE, NATO and the G7. Moreover, it encouraged Ukraine's accession to the EU, a joint venture started on 28th February 2022, when President Volodymyr Zelenskyy requested his country's immediate admission to the EU. On 17th June 2022, the European Commission presented its Opinions on this application, considering also other applications

²⁵ *EU sanctions against Russia explained, European Council/Council of the European Union*, <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/sanctions-against-russia-explained/>> (02.08.2022).

²⁶ *EU assistance to Ukraine, European Commission*, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-assistance-ukraine_en> (02.08.2022).

sent by Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Based on these opinions, the EU leaders gave a European perspective and granted candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova at the EU Summit on 23-24 June 2022, by unanimous agreement between all 27 EU Member States²⁷.

The most spectacular change after the start of hostilities in Ukraine was in Germany, where Chancellor Olaf Scholz planned 100 billion euros for weaponising Germany, sending weapons and military equipment to Kyiv (including 100 Armoured Personnel Carriers) and giving up a dependence on Russian gas. Considered by Chancellor Scholz a ‘Zeitenwende’ (epochal change), the new German foreign policy exceeds the 2% of GDP approved annually for the defence ministry (€70 billion, more than France, which spends €41 billion annually on the military) and encounters great resistance among the German population and businessmen regarding the post-war national identity of a peaceful nation with an export-based business policy, which made it the most developed European country²⁸. The return to the concept of ‘power politics’ in Europe is about to change the European political and security order, and Germany wants to play a more active role.

Another country that wants to play an active role in the Russian-Ukrainian war is Türkiye, because of its Geostrategic position in the region and its national interests. From the beginning of the conflict, the Black Sea security situation represented for Ankara both a challenge to take heavy decisions in keeping a balanced relationship with the two countries involved in the conflict and an opportunity to diminish and even solve the differences between the US and NATO. Therefore, the strategy followed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was focusing on supporting Ukraine as an Ally, being, at the same time, reluctant to jeopardise the close bilateral relations he has with Russian President Vladimir Putin. As a result, he believes that Ankara would only suffer in the case of direct action against Moscow because a confident or desperate Russia would produce a series of vulnerabilities in the Eurasian security of which Türkiye considers itself a part²⁹.

After the Türkiyesh Foreign Affairs minister qualified Russia's intervention as “unacceptable” and “a serious violation of international laws”, declaring it as “an act of war” – this declaration gave Ankara the possibility to close the straits and prohibit the access of warships of the belligerents through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, according to Art. 19 of the 1936 Montreux

²⁷ *European Council, 23-24 June 2022, European Council/Council of the European Union*, <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2022/06/23-24/>> (02.08.2022).

²⁸ *Ukraine war pushes Germans to change. They are wavering*, <<https://indianexpress.com/article/world/ukraine-war-pushes-germans-to-change-they-are-wavering-7869097/>> (15.04.2022).

²⁹ J. Mankoff, *Turkey's Balancing Act on Ukraine Is Becoming More Precarious*, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/10/turkey-ukraine-russia-war-nato-erdogan/>> (13.05.2022).

Convention³⁰, President Erdogan's main effort was to ensure a major role of negotiator to support the cessation of hostilities and the bringing to the negotiating table of the high representatives of the two countries at war.

The existing tensions in South-eastern Europe and its neighbourhood constituted and continue to represent a real threat to European security and, above all, to the cohesion of NATO. To defuse the existing situation in the region after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the US, NATO and the EU put great pressure on the Turkish and Greek governments to improve their diplomatic ties, especially by resuming discussions on the settlement of maritime disputes in the eastern Mediterranean.

Some National Considerations for the Regional Security

The Extended/Wider Black Sea Region is of strategic interest to Romania because it represents the region where we live. The situation here is very challenging as there are numerous tensions, crises and even conflicts in the area. It is worth mentioning here the current Russia – Ukraine war, the 'frozen conflicts' in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, as well as the Turkish dual position. To make the situation even worse, there are unfinished conflicts in the neighbourhood, including the Syrian insurgency, as well as the Libyan Civil War, which presented additional risks and threats for the region, like international terrorism, mass migration and illegal trafficking.

A new threat occurs in July 2022 in Western Balkans, when new tensions arise in North Kosovo after Pristina announced new border rules (regarding temporary IDs and vehicle registration plates) that will impact ethnic Serbs living there³¹. Immediately, Kremlin announced its support to Serbia and Kosovo Serbs, including military ones if necessary. In turn, the European Council started to reconsider the integration of six Western Balkans countries (Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Kosovo) into the EU by 2033, as a political solution to contribute to regional stability and counter growing Russian and Chinese influence in the area. This solution was discussed during the EU – Western Balkans Summit held on 23rd June 2022, in Brussels, as well as the next day, in the plenary of the EU Summit.

Romania, as a NATO and EU Member State and neighbour with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia, is directly interested and involved in how the situation evolves and how and when it is possible to be solved. Through the

³⁰ M. Colla, *Turkey plays the dance of the go-betweens in Ukraine war*, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/turkey-plays-dance-go-betweens-ukraine-war>> (2.08.2022).

³¹ *Kosovo delays planned Serbian border rules after tensions rise*, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/1/kosovo-delays-planned-serbian-border-rules-after-tensions-rise>> (3.08.2022).

Black Sea, Romania is also a neighbour of Russia and Türkiye, two major powers in the region with common interests in controlling the area, having, sometimes, antagonistic and competitive approaches. For Romania, Türkiye is a friendly country and an Ally, through which, together with Bulgaria, we want to counterbalance the military power of the Russian Federation at the Black Sea. But the fact that Türkiye has control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas through the 1936 Montreux Convention, as well as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's intention to become a caliph of the Arab world, make the Türkiyesh Geostrategy on the Extended/Wider Black Sea Area to not correspond to the Romanian one, especially in the relationship with Moscow, but also in the Ankara position towards the 'frozen conflicts' of the area that are not conditioned by the religious differences between Christians and Muslims.

Therefore, for the national security of Romania, the difficult situation in the Extended/Wider Black Sea Area, including the Russia-Ukraine war, had and continues to have both positive effects and negative aspects. One positive effect is represented by the fact that the Romanian President proposed the increase of the defence budget from 2% to 2,5%, starting with 2023. At the same time, we benefit from the enhanced NATO and the US Forward Presence on the Romanian territory, which represents a guarantee of our security at the Eastern European border, just near the conflict.

As the European Air Space Agency approved, after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, we took over serious international air transport activities. Also, at NATO and Ukraine's request, we started to provide maintenance services for Ukrainian aircraft (Su 27 and MIG 29) and helicopters (H225). From 2023, Romania will host a Regional Agrometeorological Centre for Europe, which has been approved by the World Meteorological Organization. It will play an important role in supporting adaptation to climate change.

Unfortunately for Romania, the Russian 'special military operation' demonstrated that a former threat became a real danger to our security. This fact was exacerbated by the multitude of President Putin's threatening and warning statements regarding Romania, as well as the Russian military presence near the Danube Delta.

Since the beginning of the war, more than 1.000.000 refugees have crossed the Ukrainian-Romanian border, and the humanitarian support offered by Romania has been very consistent. A humanitarian hub for the collection and distribution of international humanitarian aid is functioning since March near the Romanian-Ukrainian border.

Romania contributes with a significant number of medical facilities (field hospitals) and medicines, as well as personal protective equipment (vests and helmets), but also with ammunition items, with an estimated value of 3 million euros.

It also do multidimensional efforts in support of Ukraine, aimed at the one hand at supporting the Ukrainian economy and, on the other hand, at limiting the effects of the global food crisis, by facilitating transport on Romanian territory for carriers from Ukraine and by offering alternative routes for grain exports from this country, including through the Black Sea port of Constanta and Romanian ports on the Danube. In this respect, Romania is one of the best-placed countries to act as a transit and export hub for grain from Ukraine and pointed out that since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, more than 240.000 tonnes of grain from Ukraine have been exported through the port of Constanta, the largest port on the Black Sea.

Instead of conclusions, it is worth mentioning here what President Joe Biden told to the Naval Academy graduates on Friday, 27th May 2022, that they will be “representatives and defenders of our democracy”, as free societies are under threat from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to China’s maritime expansion: „The Western response to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s ‘brutal’ war in Ukraine shows the world is aligning not on geography, but in terms of values. The invasion represents a direct assault on the fundamental tenets of rules-based international order. The actions taken by Putin were an attempt to Finland-ize all of Europe, to make it all neutral. Instead, he NATO-ized all of Europe³².”

Therefore, Romania, as well as NATO and the EU, are very much interested in solving the conflict situation in Ukraine as soon as possible, to mitigate or diminish the effects of the ongoing crises in Europe and all around the world, including the energetic, economic, financial, humanitarian and food ones. NATO’s new Strategic Concept ensures the collective defence based on a 360-degree approach and describes the three core tasks – deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security – together with its enhanced Forward Presence and newly enhanced posture of deterrence and forward defence, represent a firm engagement of the Alliance on the European Eastern flank to protect populations and defend every inch of Allied territory at all times.

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