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for doctoral (PhD) dissertation

An Analytical-evaluative Approach

to the Security Perceptions of the States of Central Europe

by

Ladislav PÁSZTOR

Supervisor:

Dr. Ferenc KAISER, associate professor.

Co-supervisor:

Dr. Csaba VIDA, associate professor

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1. Formulation of the scientific problem

In the introduction of my thesis, I referred to the most important sources of danger affecting the Central European region, such as irregular migration, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and the escalation of tensions in the Middle East, thereby outlining the security challenges that have surfaced. My objective was to present the general security policy situation daily affecting citizens, civil servants, soldiers or politicians interested in political, economic, social, security, military, or military science issues.

A characteristic of our time is the flow of a multitude of information, which hits like a flood (not only) those interested in security and military science. Orientation is not easy in this (over)supply of information, and the conscious selection of accompanying information, the separation of fake news, disinformation (misinformation) or even real information taken out of context from real and really important, defining information is a time-consuming procedure that exceeds basic knowledge. At the same time, the subject of security theory exceeds current events and proceedings – it strives to explain their occurrence and reveal their causes, and predict the expected consequences of the events".

Between 1816 and 1830, there were 22 sovereign countries, between 1914 and 1940 there were already 65, in the period 1970–1977 there were 140, while currently there are 193 sovereign states. As a result, the current international system consists of 193 independent and sovereign states. The increase in the number of sovereign states may also rise the uncertainty, the risk of wars, conflicts, or "just" conflicts of interest and disputes.

After the end of World War I, a few new Central European countries were created within their current borders, but the formation of several other countries can be traced back to the early 1990s – the post-bipolar period. Several small or medium-sized states were established in the Central European region, the vast majority of which belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War, and had formed a kind of buffer zone between the two superpowers of that time. During the post-bipolar period, the majority of former socialist countries became democratic states, chose democratic political system, and a rapprochement with Western Europe. The post-bipolar period between 1991 and 2000 was replaced by the (gradually emerging) multipolar world order that is still characteristic of today, in which globalization, the development of economic supply chains, and the clash of ideologies and civilizations significantly influence the overall security situation of our region.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 made China's (gradual) economic rise even more evident, and Russia's invasion launched against Ukraine in 2022 affected Moscow's great-power aspirations and regaining its great-power status. The foreign and security policy of the United States of America is still aimed at maintaining Washington's role as a world hegemon. All these processes predict the development of a multipolar world order.

However, the transformation did not take place peacefully everywhere. Several armed conflicts broke out in the Balkans and the post-Soviet region (typically in the Caucasus). The Russo-Ukrainian hybrid war began in Eastern Europe in the spring of 2014, which culminated in an open military offensive launched by Russia on 24th February 2022. The Russo-Ukrainian war, as well as other "security shocks" of the 21st century, also had precursors; signs indicated or could indicate their occurrence. Nevertheless (perhaps) the *democratic peace* that arrived after the Cold War, the excessive confidence that the world – or at least Europe – would become peaceful (despite the Yugoslav wars), as well as the turning of the Central European states towards the West, gave rise to the appearance of a peaceful life. Due to the processes after the regime change, ensuring the security of the individual (nation) states by their own efforts was moved into the background, which led to the downsizing of armies with significant numbers of personnel and combat equipment resulting in the decline of their armed forces. Allied peacekeeping tasks (NATO operations, UN and EU peacekeeping) that can be performed with small expeditionary units have come to the fore. The consequence of this process was that the countries in the Central European region had a higher level of knowledge about the security situation assessment of the states in the Middle East, North Africa, or the Caucasus region than of the security situation of their own (allied) Central European region. The about-face, the *shift in security perception* occurred in 2014, after Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territories, and after the 2015 migration crisis.

Countless scientific articles, doctoral theses, informative or historical books have been published on the security situation in Central Europe, its development process, and the development of the statehood of the current nation-states. Publications published in Hungary, the Czech Republic, or Slovakia, educational films, as well as countless projects supported by the Visegrad Fund can be listed here. In addition to studies discussing international and global security, articles on the security of the Central European region and scientific publications analysing the conceptual framework of security were published.

At the same time, the studies on the security strategy of Central European countries and the economic, energy, or other strategies aimed at the resulting defence, military, cyber security, and hybrid threats, which typically focus on one sector (dimension) – according to the constructivist view of security – e.g. cyberspace. Therefore, they do not cover all security sectors, or they analyse several security sectors at a bilateral level, they examine a certain security sector of several Central European states, or only focus on issues affecting the security and defence policy of the V4 states.

In summary, studies discussing the security of the Central European region are widely available, but it is difficult to navigate in the multitude of information and – in accordance with the saying “You can't see the forest for the trees” – one can easily lose sight of the overall picture and context concerning the security of our region. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that it is necessary to prepare a scientific study that delimits the Central European region from security point of view, performs an analysis and evaluation of the security strategies based on national security perception of the delimited countries, and identifies areas of potential cooperation based on the conclusions (topics), as well as highlights the contradictions.

I consider the constructivist security theory supplemented with my own methodology development to be the most suitable for researching the outlined scientific problems. Accordingly, scientific research is conducted with the use of mixed and comparative research methods.

2. Research goals, questions, hypotheses

The aim of the dissertation is to develop a document based on scientific methods, which provides information on the security environment of our Central European region to the political and military leaders of the Euro-Atlantic region, especially the V4. At the same time, my work can be of use for researchers and experts interested in the topic, and can become a teaching material in military higher education (especially Hungarian, Slovak and Czech) institutions in the region. In accordance with the formulation of the three research problems (security, Central Europe and cooperation), I identified the following research goals, questions, and hypotheses:

Research objectives:

1. To present and based on the constructivist security theory to analyse-evaluate the effective security strategies of the examined Central European countries, as well as to identify the danger factors determined by national security perceptions, and to determine their order of importance.
2. To compare the identified and prioritized risk factors of the examined countries, to reveal the parallels and contradictions between the countries.
3. To present the military-political affiliation of the examined countries, to identify the strategic partners designated by the effective security strategies of the countries, as well as to disclose the current regional, Central Europe-related potential shifts in the centre of gravity in relation to the international security framework.
4. To present the defence expenditures of the examined countries, the national armed forces, and their foreign peacekeeping and crisis management missions.

Research questions:

1. Are the Central European countries coherent in determining the order of importance of the identified risk factors? Which are the risk factors on which there is agreement among the Central European countries, and which ones show a significant difference?
2. What are the characteristics of the security cooperation of Central European countries? Is there regional, multilateral or bilateral cooperation between the examined countries, or are they also looking for strategic partners outside the region (outside the EU and NATO)?
3. According to the effective security strategies of the examined countries, geographically, where do the danger factors threatening Central Europe originate, and what are the most prominent tension points?
4. Do foreign peacekeeping and crisis management missions, as well as strategic partners, contribute to the protection or deterrence of the danger factors arising from their geographical location defined in the strategies of the examined countries?

Research hypotheses:

1. Based on the methodology developed by me, a more realistic order of emphasis can be established in relation to the order of importance of the risk factors defined in the strategies, which also takes into account the principle of securitisation.
2. There are more parallels than contradictions between the order of emphasis of the danger factors defined in the security strategies of the examined countries, which provides an opportunity for cooperation.
3. In order to protect national interests, the examined countries give preference to geographically distant strategic partners over neighbouring countries in their security strategies.
4. The examined countries favour their own national interests over community interests or compromising solutions in terms of preventive protection and deterrence against threats and danger factors.

3. Research methods

In accordance with the requirements of the Doctoral School of Military Sciences, I began the preparation of my research by compiling my study and research plan, which I updated at regular intervals as the research progressed during the training. The interdisciplinary nature of my research topic also determined the extent of applied research methods and scientific trends. In accordance with this – thanks to my advanced knowledge of English, Czech, Hungarian, Russian, and Slovak as my mother tongue, as well as my basic and intermediate proficiency in several Slavic languages – I studied the printed and electronic literature in the above mentioned languages, legislation, as well as other publicly accessible sources of information. During my studies, I strove to form and formulate conclusions based on analyses and syntheses, as well as to support the theoretical results with examples from real life and real politics.

In order to delve deeper into the theme, I participated in several conferences in Hungary and abroad, where – taking advantage of the given opportunity – I tried to build professional relationships during the break of conferences, during lunches, and at receptions following the conferences in order to discuss the research problem in a broad way. The organization of presence conferences was interrupted for more than two years by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the conference organizers relatively quickly solved the problem and online conferences, round table

discussions, courses and other professional events appeared. All of this – in addition to the existing network of contacts acquired during my career – made it possible to learn about the topic from multiple perspectives and from several national perceptions. After the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, attendance conferences came to the fore again, which once again enabled the possibility of personal professional exchange of ideas. In summary, personal contacts and the online space, as well as the extensive literature available on the Internet, enabled the collection of information on the research topic. Accordingly, I mainly used primary sources in the thesis.

In accordance with what was described, among the qualitative methods, I mainly used document analysis and context analysis. In the analysis of security strategies and other relevant documents, manuals, analyses, reports and studies related to the topic, I considered the original language version to be decisive. I used the English, Czech, Slovak or Hungarian translations as additions.

In writing this dissertation, I basically acted according to the basic principles of the intelligence cycle. Consequently, the first step of the cycle is the definition of goals and tasks based on the available information and data. In doctoral training, this consists of defining research goals, questions and hypotheses. After the primary analysis and evaluation, the acquisition of the missing data, knowledge, and information from different sources and the acquisition of knowledge followed, which also required planning. Within the framework of research work and doctoral training, this step consists of the preparation and approval of various research plans, as well as study (semesters 1–4) and research activities (semesters 5–8, and the period determined after the complex exam). The third step is making the information and data interpretable, which is followed by professional translation, statistical statements, and the structuring of interpretable information. I identify this part of the cycle with the preparation of the draft of the doctoral dissertation (preliminary defence). The fourth part of the cycle includes the analysis and evaluation of the obtained and summarized information. It is important to highlight that during the fourth step, the need and necessity of supplementing information often arises in order to achieve the specified objective. It was no different when holding the workshop discussion of the thesis. The fifth step is the presentation of a useful report from reliable and credible sources that is accurate – if possible – comprehensive and timely, which I identify with the preparation of my thesis. In the framework of the doctoral training, this part of the cycle constitutes the defence of the dissertation and, by definition, does not mean the but the continuation end of the research. The latter appears in the

conclusion of the dissertation, namely in the utilisation of the research results, recommendations, and the identification of areas requiring further research.

The customer's interaction and active cooperation play an important role in the intelligence-gathering cycle, which means restarting the cycle, regardless of the current phase of the intelligence-gathering cycle. It is important to emphasize that, just as the intelligence cycle is a never-ending process, the scientific research work in the field of military science and security and defence policy cannot be considered completed either. The process of life and real politics always carries new danger factors and opportunities at the same time.

I finalised my research on 21st August 2024, so the subsequent changes and new statistical data are not included in the thesis. Due to the amount of statistical data processed and the time-limited access to the databases by the Ludovika University of Public Service, the data from the databases of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reflect the status valid on 13th April 2024.

In conclusion, I used a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research methods in the preparation of the present dissertation, including case studies, observations, textual analyses, statistical analyses, comparative analyses, and historical analyses. I also used the results of published surveys, questionnaires, and sociometric research published by other analysts and researchers. In the course of my work, I developed and applied a self-developed methodology based on keywords.

4. Presentation of the self-developed methodology

The self-developed methodology presented in the dissertation is based on the analysis and evaluation of national security strategies and is used to analyse factors that threaten national interests. These are usually identified on the basis of an assessment of the security environment and security situation. Strategy-makers and decision-makers primarily consider their own national values, interests and goals, and then consider international and global values, interests and goals as well.

By analysing and evaluating the strategic documents, the political and security guidelines of each country, their commitment to the Alliance, their attitude to international and regional cooperation, their relationship with neighbouring countries and their strategic partners can be established. Through the targeted quantitative analysis of the documents and the application of

context and text analysis, the parallels, common values and interests among the examined countries, disagreements and their causes can be revealed.

The dissertation discusses the factors threatening national interests according to the basic principles of the extended constructivist security theory – broken down into security sectors – and determines the significance of the risk factors termed in the strategies by applying a self-developed methodology. The applied methodology presents the national security emphases independently of the expectations of the national security policy and the internal political conditions of each country – based on scientific quantitative methods, context and text analysis.

In connection with the self-developed methodology, I start from the fact that if a country's strategy makers classify a phenomenon as a danger factor, on the one hand, it represents a direct challenge, risk or threat to the country's own national security, and on the other hand, the related keyword (e.g. migration, cyber security, armed attack, organized crime, etc.) occurs more frequently in the overall text of the strategy. This appears not only in the assessment of the security environment or the security situation, but also in the definition of objectives (political intent), tasks and tools (providing resources to meet security expectations) and, if it is a truly important priority risk factor, they are also present in the preamble and in introductory or closing summaries.

In other words, according to the methodology, the definition of the danger factor itself in the strategy is not enough, because it must and can be determined on the basis of the assessment of the security environment (situation), and it can also damage national interests and values. If a factor endangers national interests and values, then it must be fought against, and by definition the keyword characterizing the danger factor must also appear among the tools guaranteeing and promoting security, as well as among the guidelines of the national security policy. In short, the keyword characterizing a particular risk factor must be not only named as a risk factor, but must appear at least twice, and the more times it appears in the text of the strategy, the more important the given risk factor is for the country under scrutiny.

The applied methodology is fundamentally based on the sequence of security challenges, risks and threats that endanger national interests named in the security strategies. According to what has been described, the methodology uses two quantitative parameters, the emphasis value and the number of keywords, the sum of which creates an emphasis order.

The first component of the order of emphasis is the emphasis value, which is the number assigned to the given hazard factor. The greater the emphasis value the higher the risk factor is

listed in the order defined in the strategy, and those ranked further down have a smaller and smaller value, until the last one, which has a value of one.

For example, if Hungary's National Security Strategy [*Magyarország Nemzeti Biztonsági Stratégiája*, MNBS] ranks the "mass arrival of illegal migrants on the Western Balkans or other routes affecting our country, foreign population Hungary places the hazard factor named" as the first of the 17 priority security risks and the "regular occurrence of periods of permanent water shortage due to global warming, the gradual drying and erosion of the soil, and the destruction of vegetation in some highly vulnerable domestic areas" is the last *risk factor* named, then the first ranked factor is listed with an accent value 17, and the last one has an accent value of 1.

Staying with the MNBS example, according to my evaluation the danger factor in the first place contains the defining and essential keywords (search terms) of *irregular* migration and *foreign* population. *Global warming* is the last of the most important risk factors. Other word elements included in the description of the danger factor – in line with my semantic interpretation – serve just for a deeper understanding of the danger factor and the exploration of the consequences, so I do not classify them as keywords.

By adding the *frequency number* (value) of the keyword to the *emphasis value*, we get a *ranking number* that enables the ranking of *national risk factors* and the exploration of parallels with other countries. This methodology helps identify which risk factors are the most important for a given country and how they compare to the priorities of other countries.

In order to avoid distortions, I always subtract one from the frequency of the keywords, because the danger factor containing the keyword already has an *emphasis value* in itself. For example, if the Security Strategy of Slovakia [*Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky*, BSSR] considers *irredentism* [*iredentizmus*], *separatism* [*separatizmus*] and *maintenance of historical claims* [*živenie historizujúcich nárokov*] as a *combined security threat*, then I subtract one from the frequency of Slovak equivalents of *irredentism*, *separatism* and *historical claims*. Since all three keywords appear only once in the strategy – among the factors that threaten national interests – the number of keywords is therefore equal to zero, but the emphasis value of the combined danger factor is five, because the strategic order ranks it in the tenth place out of 14 danger factors. In order to avoid distortions, I do not take the headings into account and do not count them among the keywords. For example, in Romania's National Defence Strategy [*Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării pentru 2020-2024*, SNAT], keywords are also included in the table

of contents, chapter titles, or names of institutions. If the keyword searched for appears here, I consider it irrelevant.

The previous example in BSSR pointed out the *combined danger factors* that can be classified into a specific security sector, in this case the political sector. However, there are combined danger factors in the strategies that cannot necessarily be classified into a single security sector, or that may affect several countries or regions. If, in accordance with the applied working definitions, the danger factors can be classified in one security sector, are related, or the strategy makers "strengthen" the danger factor by using synonyms, but in the end they do not lead to distortions, then I list them as a single danger factor, such as *irredentism, separatism and the maintenance of historical claims*, or the *(international) financial and economic crisis* mentioned in the Austrian strategy.

If the danger factor coming from two different countries (for example, Russia and China in the case of the Czech Republic) can be classified in one security sector, I separate the danger factor following the classification of the strategy and the established order, while I complete the number of the classification, in alphabetical order, in lower case and, following the strategy makers' logic, I add the emphasis value of the separate danger factor to both. I apply the same procedure when the combined danger factor can be classified into two different security sectors, e.g. in the case of the priority security risk identified by the Hungarian strategy: "efforts to violate national sovereignty, to overtly or covertly deprive national decision-making powers, and to significantly worsen or make impossible the situation of Hungarian communities beyond the borders, which may result in mass displacement from their homeland". In this case, we are faced with classification into two different security sectors. With the political sector, which I identify with the keywords *national sovereignty* and *decision-making* authority, and with the social sector, which I connect with the keywords *Hungarian communities* across the border and *leaving the homeland*. Accordingly, I separate the combined danger factor by definition and classify it into two different sectors.

If a security strategy lists factors threatening national interests, such as the Austrian, Hungarian or Slovak ones, it is easy to determine the order and the *emphasis value* derived from the order. Some strategies, e.g. the Polish, the Czech, or the Ukrainian, do not list and name precisely the factors that pose a direct threat to their national interests; however, they describe the security environment surrounding the country in general, and evaluate the country's security

situation. In this case, I start from the description of the security environment in the valid strategy of the country under investigation and establish the order (*the emphasis value*) based on the denomination in the description of the security environment. On the basis of the logic derived from the strategy makers, I basically do not distinguish between factors that threaten global, international or national interests, because the strategy makers did not do this either. Following the mentioned logic, by performing context analysis, I assign the highest emphasis value to the danger factor listed at the beginning of the description of the security environment (which was mentioned first), and I classify the lowest one as the danger factor at the end of the description. After all, it is national interests the strategy makers also primarily take into account, and not global, international, community, or Alliance interests.

5. The structure of the dissertation

The introduction presents the research theme and the timeliness of its topicality, as well as formulates the scientific problem. In light of this, the research goals, questions and hypotheses are presented, as well as the methods used in scientific research. In the following, the relevant literature divided into three subsections is discussed: 1./ the literature on military science, security and defence policy; 2./ known and relevant research methodology literature related to the topic, and 3./ doctoral dissertations and other supplementary literature related to the topic. At the end of the introduction, I briefly summarize the structure of the dissertation.

The second chapter discusses the theoretical framework. It briefly presents the development process of the concept of security. It goes on to outline realist and liberal security theories, as well as a critical approach to security. I will discuss the latter in more detail, because the critical approach to security, namely the constructivist security theory, forms the guideline of the dissertation and research work. Accordingly, taking into account the theses of the security theories described in the dissertation, I determine the classification of the hazard factors into the individual sectors of the constructivist security theory.

The third chapter presents the effective security strategies of the examined countries, with emphasise on the evaluation of the security environment from a national perspective. The analysis and evaluation of the security strategies are separated into the expanded security sectors of the constructivist security theory. The order of emphasis of the risk factors mentioned in the documents is determined by applying a self-developed methodology based on the keywords used

in the strategies. The chapter's summary and sub-conclusions reveal a framework for potential cooperation, as well as the areas where this is not possible – based on the assessment of the current security situation – because the security priorities of the respective states are different.

The fourth chapter presents the security and defence policies of the evaluated countries. It briefly discusses the formation, form of government, and military-political affiliation of the examined states. Based on the evaluation of the global and international security environment included in the effective security strategies, the strategic partners named in the documents (or deducible from them) are disclosed. After that, the defence expenditures, the composition of the national armed forces, the development of its personnel going back to the last ten years since the end of the Cold War or since the founding of the given country are reviewed, and its participation in international peacekeeping and crisis management missions is analysed and evaluated. Finally, major military developments, procurement of combat equipment, as well as the state and possibilities of the domestic defence industry are discussed.

At the end of the thesis, I summarize the new scientific results of the research work and the possibilities of their use. I examine the fulfilment of the formulated hypotheses and formulate proposals for the political utilization of scientific results, as well as for further research directions.

6. Summarised conclusions

Based on the analysis of the security strategies of the examined countries, I drew the following summary regarding the geographical origin of the danger factors threatening Central Europe: Austria borders stable democratic states, but due to the security threats related to the unstable crisis regions on the periphery of Europe, it has to face several danger factors. Because a traditional military attack is not considered likely, the country places the emphasis on non-military challenges, risks and threats.

The Czech Republic primarily regards Russia as its main threat, seeking to undermine the international security system by taking advantage of the unstable security situation in the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and by supporting illiberal governments. The Czech Republic also assesses China's activities as a security risk, especially due to its activities in the Indo-Pacific region, which indirectly threaten the country's security. The international activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Iran, as well as their cooperation with Russia, are also

a cause for concern. In addition, the instability of the Western Balkans is a significant threat to the Czech Republic.

Croatia pays special attention to its south-eastern neighbourhood, which represents an unstable zone for the European Union. This instability extends from North Africa through the Middle East to the Caucasus and Central Asia. Poland considers the strategic rivalry between the United States of America, China and Russia to be a major danger factor, but it primarily considers Russia's new imperial policy as a threat. It pays special attention to the Baltic Sea and Kaliningrad region, as well as to the ongoing regional and internal conflicts in the Southern European region.

Hungary cites the competition between the great powers and the disregard of international law as security challenges, which come mainly from the east and south. The country emphasizes the fragile security situation in the Western Balkans and the mass migration related to the African and Central Asian regions. Hungary pays special attention to the Western Balkans, as well as to the conflicts emerging in Africa and the Middle East.

In addition to the rivalry between the great powers, Romania is threatened by states with regional leadership ambitions that violate or question international law. Other danger factors include social threats from the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, with a particular focus on irregular migration. At regional level, the country highlights the threats coming from the east, behind which is an aggressive and revisionist policy, already manifested in the use of military force. Romania emphasizes Russia's hostile activities in relation to Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, and considers it important to settle the security situation in the Western Balkans.

Serbia considers the long-term and destructive ethnic and religious conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa as a source of danger. According to the country, the South-East European region is an area of regional and great power influence, as well as an important transit route for energy carriers, which increases the region's geostrategic importance. However, stabilization processes are hindered by ethnic and religious antagonisms, historical antagonisms, and claims to historical territories, especially Kosovo's aspirations for independence. In addition, Serbia also pays attention to the danger factors arising in the Middle East and North and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Slovakia highlights the continuous weakening of multilateralism and the unilateral violation of international treaties by certain states, which led, for example, to the Russo-Ukrainian war. It also emphasizes the challenges posed by the unstable eastern and southern neighbourhood. He identifies the eastern challenges with Russia's actions against Ukraine and Georgia, while he links

the southern challenges to the unstable Western Balkans. For Slovakia, the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel region and the eastern tip of Africa represent the focal points of the sources of danger.

In accordance with Slovenia's security strategy, due to its geographical location the country is the subject of various political and military assessments and plans. It considers threats from the east and south as the most important. Ukraine's national security strategy is even more general, putting global security challenges first, followed by Russia's military activity against Ukraine, and unnamed migration hotspots. The strategy focuses primarily on internal security problems, and its structure shows that Russia's hostile activities appear as a secondary problem.

In summary, it can be stated that the most prominent threat is Russia's hostile activity against the international system, which led to the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war. This is followed by non-military threats coming from the south, while the instability of the Western Balkans begins to recede into the background compared to other danger factors arising outside of Europe.

I came to the conclusion that military risk factors, although they are often emphasized today, do not represent a primary threat to the countries under scrutiny. Countries are primarily concerned about danger factors belonging to economic, social, and political security sectors. These are followed by threats falling in the environmental and IT categories. Based on the summarized data presented in the dissertation, it can be concluded that it is Austria, Romania and Slovakia which are most anxious about economic threats, followed by the Czech Republic and Ukraine. Romania, Croatia and Serbia perceive the risks arising from social risk factors as the most serious ones. Concerning the factors classified in the political sector, Ukraine (7) and the Czech Republic (6) have the most danger factors. Regarding the Czech Republic, it can be noted that although it is geographically further away from military threats from the east and borders allied countries, it still mentions the most factors (7) classified in the military sector in its security strategy. This situation can be attributed to a series of Czech-Russian events, such as the 2014 explosion of ammunition depots in Vrbětice. In the second place is Serbia, where Kosovo's declaration of independence plays a decisive role.

With regard to military threats, it is important to emphasize that Ukraine, which adopted its security strategy in 2020, prioritizes the fight against international terrorism in its strategic order, despite the ongoing fighting in the Crimean Peninsula and in the eastern counties under Russian occupation. However, by applying the methodology I developed, it can be seen that, based on the

order of emphasis, the military threat factor ranked eleventh in the strategic order is ranked first, which gives a more realistic picture of the situation. In the case of the Czech Republic, which mentions seven military-sector risk factors in its security strategy, it can be concluded that "open war on the territory of Europe", ranked first in the strategic ranking, moved to the tenth place in the order of emphasis while "the use of military force" has moved from the fourth place to the eleventh. Regarding the Czech Republic, it can also be detected that the country has the largest number of identified combined danger factors, as well as a detailed list of factors that could be covered by a collective term. For example, the possibility of using "nuclear weapons" and "chemical weapons" could also be labelled with a collective term "weapons of mass destruction". In my opinion, this indicates the practical application of securitization, which can be seen, e.g. in the case of Slovenia in the sector of military security. In Slovenia's security strategy, the keyword "military" appears a total of 53 times, which puts the factor "military threats" on the first place in the order of emphasis. Combining terrorism and violent extremism as a single risk factor would also increase the weight of these factors in the strategic document if I had not listed them separately in my analysis. If we rely not only on the danger factors labelled in the security strategies, but also examine Slovenia's defence and security policy, we come to the conclusion that the fear of military threats may be well-founded, although not due to a direct threat, but due to force limitations resulting from the country's small size.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, there are several examples similar to the military security sector.

At the same time, the examined security documents lack the consistent application of the principle of *securitisation*. This happens when the strategy makers address certain security challenges, risks and threats as a priority factor, but the keyword characterizing and describing the factor is not found in the text of the document.

In the *military security sector*, this can be observed in the case of the Czech Republic and Serbia. In the case of the Czech Republic, the strategy makers address paramilitary and private security organizations, as well as the use of chemical weapons, as a priority risk factor. In the case of Serbia, armed rebellions are classified as factors threatening national interests.

In the *political sector*, Slovakia emphasizes irredentism, separatism and the maintenance of historical claims, while Ukraine emphasizes the rivalry between the great powers as a prominent danger factor. In the case of the latter, the increasing competition between the United States of

America and the People's Republic of China for global hegemony, as well as globalization, appear in the strategy, despite the lack of the appropriate keywords.

In the *economic sector*, Austria mentions piracy attacks and threats to trade routes, as well as the international financial and economic crisis, without the inclusion of the corresponding keywords in the text of its security strategy.

The *social sector* has the most "zero keyword risk factors". Austria, for example, mentions drug trafficking and pandemics while the Czech Republic uses the term "infectious diseases", in its strategy. In the case of Ukraine the same can be seen in connection with the growth of multilevel inequality. However, there are no such risk factors in the *environment and IT sector*. It is worth mentioning that the Czech strategy uses synonyms in connection with the danger factor of outer space and universe [*vesmír a kosmos*], classified in the environmental sector, in order to emphasize the importance of the factor, but this did not have a significant effect.

In the dissertation, I specified that I identify the "signs" of probable danger factors in this strategy-making process. Based on an in-depth analysis of these factors, I came to the conclusion that the Czech strategy makers used real experience with regard to the deployment of paramilitary and private security organizations, and the use of chemical weapons, and in the event of a military attack, they do not rule out such a possibility. For example, armed rebellions mentioned by Serbia often occur in the territory of Kosovo.

The irredentism, separatism and maintenance of historical claims mentioned by Slovakia from Slovakia's point of view may appear as a real threat; therefore, all diplomatic means will be used to prevent them, as it has already happened several times in real politics. The Ukrainian strategists consider the increasing competition between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, which is taking place for the global hegemony, as a major danger factor for Ukraine's national security. In the assessment, I touched on the fact that without the versatile help of the United States of America, Ukraine would face fundamental difficulties in its self-defence against Russian aggression. The Ukrainian strategy makers therefore predicted the potential problem in a broader context.

In the economic sector, in its strategy adopted in 2013, Austria predicted pirate attacks, threats to trade routes, as well as the international financial and economic crisis, as evidenced by the pirate attacks in the Red Sea, experienced nowadays. These attacks had already existed before 2013, but out of the focus of attention of security policy experts. Furthermore, it is likely that the

use of longer routes, which increases the price of products arriving in Europe from the Asia-Pacific region, may lead to another economic crisis.

Social threats, such as pandemics or drug trafficking cannot be solved by any single country on its own; therefore they require global and international cooperation. To this end, in my opinion, the strategy makers included these threats in the basic security documents. It is likely that the policies will discuss these social problems in more detail, similar to the growth of multilevel inequality named by Ukraine.

7. New scientific results

1. My dissertation discussing the analytical-evaluative approach to the security perceptions of Central European states contains the following new scientific results:
2. I developed a comprehensive methodology of analysis based on the current security strategies of the countries in and on the periphery the Central European region, as well as the data characterizing the security and defence policy, which I successfully applied. The self-developed, keyword-based methodology presented and applied in the dissertation enables a more realistic compilation of the order of importance of the risk factors defined in the strategies, taking into account the principle of securitization, as well as provides an opportunity for a deeper analysis and evaluation of the security strategy of the examined countries.
3. Using my own methodology, I pointed out the differences between the *strategic order* and the *order of emphasis* of the danger factors, thus confirming the correctness of the applied methodology. Through this, I introduced the concept of "*order of emphasis*" for the evaluation of danger factors. The essence of the my methodology is that it measures the importance of a danger factor in a country's security strategy by its frequency (number of keywords) and emphasis value, i.e. the more often and further a given keyword appears in the text of the strategy, the more prominent the threat is for the given country. The methodology uses two quantitative parameters – the emphasis value and the number of keywords – on the basis of which it establishes an order of emphasis on the factors threatening national interests.
4. In the course of the research, conducted on the basis of a uniform system of assessment criteria I created a risk factor database structured on an order of emphasis. This database can serve as a basis for further research and provide useful assistance to other researchers in their scientific

work. The database contains a total of 200 danger factors, of which 31 belong to the military, 41 to the political, 44 to the economic and another 44 to social sectors, while 23 belong to the environmental and 17 to the IT sector.

5. On the basis of the analysis and evaluation carried out with the use of my methodology, I verified that security plays a prominent role in the development of basic strategic documents. This is not only evident for emphasized danger factors, but also for factors that have fewer or no keywords assigned to risk factors. These factors can serve as forecasts for security research experts, especially for strategy makers. The analysis of changes in the security situation and the prediction of trends, as well as the assessment of the strategies adopted by the countries in the region – especially if they are analysed and evaluated according to the methodology used in the dissertation – can provide significant help in the development of the national strategy.
6. I proved that the sectoral approach of the constructivist security theory makes the interpretation of security more transparent. The addition of a sixth – IT – sector to the five sectors defined by the Copenhagen school (military, political, economic, social, and environmental) is justified, especially in light of the extensive daily use of IT and communication tools. The inclusion of the IT sector was done by other researchers more than ten years ago, and its practical use is also appropriate. On the other hand, additional sectoral inclusions e.g. that of the financial, energetic, educational, religious, food safety, or cyber sectors are less justified because they can be included in the economic, social, or IT sectors. At the same time, the IT sector is undervalued by the assessed countries, as only 17 of the 200 identified risk factors can be classified here.

8. Recommendations

The dissertation demonstrably relies on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods analysis-evaluation matrices, which reveal the parallels and contradictions between the security perceptions of the examined Central European countries. The conclusions related to the interpretation of security can be useful both for analysts and researchers dealing with security and defence policy in Hungary and abroad, and for decision-makers.

Furthermore, the information based on reliable and multiple-checked sources, which approaches the analysis of the security situation in Central Europe in a transparent way, provides a valuable guideline for lay people interested in security and defence policy and military science

as well as those familiar with them. I consider this particularly important due to today's information (over)supply, fake news, misinformation, and the wholesale spread of information taken out of context.

9. Practical applicability of research results

The dissertation prepared in accordance with the research objectives and its results can be used in the following areas:

1. In education:
 - a. For students majoring in security and defence policy, political science, and international relations at bachelor's and master's programs in Hungarian – primarily Ludovika University – and foreign universities.
 - b. In officer and non-commissioned officer training.
 - c. For General Staff course students of the Ludovika University.
2. In applied research:
 - a. Basic database for researchers in the field of security and defence policy.
 - b. Through the applied methodology, it is a thought-provoking and complementary knowledge base for researchers interested in the Copenhagen school.
3. In practice, it can provide the strategy makers with a basis for comparison of the valid strategies of the analysed countries, their centres of gravity and the importance of the *danger factors* placed in *order of emphasis*, which can be assessed in comparison with the *order of strategies*. It can serve as a thought-provoking tool not only for strategy makers, but also for decision makers, and well-informed lay people interested in the topic.

I am convinced that the dissertation in its current form is correct and can be useful in the listed areas. The further development of the dissertation, the creation of a more comprehensive monograph discussing the formation process of the examined nation-states in more detail, including its historical background, their political systems, social composition, economic performance, as well as geographical location and topography, which is important from the point of view of defence, can increase its usefulness even more.

10. The author's publications on the subject to date

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11. Curriculum Vitae of the author

Colonel (Ret.) Ladislav Pásztor born in 1970 in the area of Bodroghöz of then Czechoslovakia. His parents are Hungarian-speaking, which is where the colonel's knowledge of the Hungarian language comes from. He started his military career at the Military Logistics Vocational High School in Zsolna [Žilina], specialising in military clothing. He continued his studies immediately after graduation from the military vocational high school, in Vyškov na Moravě, Moravia, at the Military University of the Land Forces of the then Czechoslovak Army, majoring in military logistics.

He started his troop service in 1992 as a lieutenant in Košice as deputy logistics commander at the Radio Technical Battalion there. From 1994, he held various staff positions at the General Staff of the Slovak Army. He participated in several further training courses and later held the positions in the field of international relations as head of department, deputy head of division and head of division at the Slovak Ministry of Defence.

From September 2016 to April 2020, he performed his foreign service as the Defence Attaché of the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Budapest, from where he also managed military-diplomatic affairs related to Slovenia.

Since September 2018, he has been a doctoral student at the Doctoral School of Military Sciences at the National University of Public Service, and since 2022 he has been a doctoral candidate, doing self-funded doctoral training in the field of national security. His research field is Central Europe, security and cooperation opportunities of the countries of the region.

Colonel Pásztor ended his military career in July 2020 and moved permanently to Budapest with his spouse Iveta. He currently works as an independent security analyst and military consultant. The author is a member of the Association of Hungarian Military Science, as well as a member of the Armed Forces Communications & Electronics Association International (AFCEA) and regional director of its Hungarian branch. In addition to advanced and intermediate level command of Slovak, Czech, Hungarian, Russian and English, he also understands Polish, Ukrainian, Serbian and Croatian languages. Thanks to his language skills, he gives presentations at numerous conferences in Hungary and abroad, and has published scientific publications.