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THE SECURITY OF NATO'S EASTERN FLANK FOLLOWING DECISIONS MADE AT THE ALLIED SUMMIT IN VILNIUS

IS IT A SHORT-TERM OR LONG-TERM SOLUTION?

ABSTRACT

The unfolding events since 2014, particularly regarding the aggressive foreign policy and military activities of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, have led to a deterioration in the state of international security. Consequently, the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) found itself in a new situation that required a response and decisive action. The recent NATO summits have played a crucial role in shaping security policy and guiding strategic decisions for member states, notably in enhancing the security of NATO's eastern flank. The primary research question addressed in this article is the extent to which the 2023 summit in Vilnius will genuinely contribute to improving security on NATO's eastern flank. The significant military commitments made during the summit also carried a symbolic dimension. The article aims to analyse and evaluate the decisions taken by NATO at the Vilnius summit, utilising research techniques and methods such as interviews, the Delphi method and scenario analysis. The central thesis posited in the article is that NATO's reaction, a consequence of decisions made during the Vilnius summit, will be crucial for strengthening the security of NATO's eastern flank and the development of the Alliance's military capabilities. To achieve this objective, the article will present selected scenarios for the development of the situation based on insights obtained from experts

during interviews. Undoubtedly, the findings of this article will be an invaluable resource for the academic community, professionals, individuals in the security sector and policymakers in the political sphere.

Keywords: NATO, security, eastern flank, Allied Summit in Vilnius

INTRODUCTION

Among the nine NATO summits held since 2014, including the virtual session on 25 February 2023, each has been significant for the security of allied nations, particularly in enhancing security along NATO's eastern flank. This role was further highlighted at the most recent Alliance Summit in Vilnius on 11-12 July 2023. Besides crucial military commitments, the event also held symbolic importance.

The Vilnius Summit marks a crucial moment in NATO's efforts to address security challenges in the region. It is essential to assess different security scenarios for the eastern flank and NATO as a whole following the outcomes of the Vilnius Allied Summit. This involves analysing the strategic implications of the decisions made at the summit and their potential long-term effects on regional stability and NATO's standing as a security provider.

This article uses various research methods such as interviews, the Delphi method and scenario analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding. The aim is to illuminate the complex dynamics at play and offer insights into the effectiveness of the measures endorsed at the summit in addressing security challenges in the eastern flank.

Recent changes in the security landscape surrounding NATO's eastern flank have prompted the Alliance to reconsider its strategic position in the area. This reassessment materialised at the Allied Summit in Vilnius, where key stakeholders gathered to tackle emerging threats and strengthen collective defence measures. Therefore, the main argument of this article is that NATO's response, based on resolutions from the Vilnius summit, is crucial in enhancing the security of NATO's eastern flank and boosting the Alliance's military capabilities. It delves into the implications of these decisions on the security dynamics of NATO's eastern flank, examining whether the strategies offer immediate solutions or lay the groundwork for lasting outcomes.

THE ESSENCE OF THE EASTERN FLANK IN ENSURING NATO'S SECURITY AND FACILITATING ITS EVOLUTION

Since its establishment in 1949, safeguarding security on NATO's eastern flank has consistently been a focal point and a challenge. This was evident during the Cold War era, when the Alliance's frontier delineated the boundary between two conflicting systems and military blocs: NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The two primary frontline

countries along this boundary were Germany and Denmark, which directly neighboured Warsaw Pact nations and were thereby vulnerable to potential initial attacks. The defence of the Alliance against aggression from the East relied heavily on these nations, as part of the adopted strategy known as 'Forward Defence'.¹

After the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Cold War era, NATO experienced a structured evolution, moving away from its original role as a purely collective defence Alliance outlined in the Washington Treaty to becoming a more adaptable security organisation. In the context of this particular international and geopolitical evolution, the development of NATO's eastern flank emerged as a strategic response to the pressing need to strengthen the Alliance's new eastern borders against potential threats from Russia and other adversarial actors, spanning from the Baltic States in the north to the Black Sea in the south.²

Following the geopolitical transformations at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s and their repercussions on the security landscape, NATO underwent its initial two expansions – with the addition of new member countries in 1999 and 2004. During this period, the term 'NATO's eastern flank' encompassed four nations: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland. They shared a common characteristic, namely their accession to NATO post-1991 (following the collapse of the USSR) and their possession of a land border with the Russian Federation.³

The decisions made at the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016, aimed at enhancing allied security among member states, particularly those sharing borders along NATO's eastern frontier, signalled an expansion of the term 'eastern flank' to incorporate an additional country – the term 'NATO's eastern flank' refers mainly to Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania.⁴

On 8 June 2018, a meeting in the Bucharest Nine (B9) format was held in Warsaw, attended by the presidents of Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the speaker of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. The meeting resulted in the preparation of a joint declaration for the upcoming NATO summit in Brussels, titled 'Enhancing Security on NATO's Eastern Flank'. This marked a significant agreement among all Bucharest Nine countries to enhance security on the eastern flank, expanding the area by an additional four countries.

¹ S. Zarychta, *Doktryny i strategie NATO 1949-2013*, Warszawa 2014. See also: M. Wiatr, "Rozszerzenie NATO na Wschód," in M. Kulczycki, M. Musioł (eds), *Transformacja Organizacji Traktatu Północnoatlantyckiego a uwarunkowania wewnętrzne i zewnętrzne tego procesu*, Toruń 2020, pp. 24-25.

² R. Gramer, J. Detsch, "All Unquiet on NATO's Eastern Flank," *Foreign Policy*, 13 April 2023, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/13/nato-eastern-flank-battle-group-russia-poland-latvia-lithuania-estonia/>, 4 February 2024.

³ J. Bondalski, "Format bukaresztański jako strategiczny wymiar współpracy wschodniej flanki NATO," in M. Żyła, P. Krzykowski, J. Grabowski (eds), *Bezpieczeństwo północno-wschodniej flanki NATO*, Warszawa 2020, p. 32.

⁴ J. Gorkowska, "NATO's Eastern Flank – A New Paradigm," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, 13 July 2016, at <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-07-13/natos-eastern-flank-a-new-paradigm>, 3 February 2024; J. Bondalski, "Format bukaresztański...", p. 38.

In summary, *the Eastern Flank (EF) refers to a region occupied by states located at the easternmost end of the EU and NATO, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Across the border lie Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova.*⁵ On 4 April 2023, Finland officially became the 31st member of NATO, thereby enhancing the Alliance’s eastern flank. The eastern flank is not solely defined by the geographic positioning of NATO countries, but also by the conviction that a collective of these member states possesses a greater capability to articulate crucial demands and security interests compared to individual efforts (as indicated in Table 1).

Table 1. The basic military potential of the Bucharest Nine countries and Finland

States	Position in the Military Strength Ranking 2023 among 145 nations worldwide	Military spending – % of GDP in 2023	Military and security service personnel strengths in 2023 – number of active-duty personnel
Bulgaria	62	1.8%	30,000
Czechia	46	1.5%	27,000
Estonia	87	2.7%	7,000
Lithuania	88	2.5%	17,000
Latvia	99	2.3%	7,000
Poland	21	3.9 %	120,000
Romania	47	2.4%	75,000
Slovakia	69	2.0%	14,000
Hungary	54	2.4%	25,000
Finland	50	2.5%	31,000

Source: Own elaboration based on “Military Strength Ranking,” *GlobalFirePower*, at <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>; “The World Factbook,” *Central Intelligence Agency*, at <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>, 12 February 2024.

THE VILNIUS ALLIED SUMMIT: KEY FINDINGS AND PRACTICAL INSTRUMENTS

The 36th NATO Summit, held in Vilnius, was attended by a diverse array of international leaders. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine was among the participants, alongside heads of state and government members from Sweden, Moldova, Georgia and Bosnia & Herzegovina.⁶ Delegates from the European Union, including the

⁵ J. Biziewski, “Eastern Flank of EU and NATO – Challenge and Opportunity,” in J.M. Ramírez, J. Biziewski (eds), *Security and Defence in Europe*, Cham 2020, pp. 177-199.

⁶ “2023 NATO Summit,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 28 June 2023, at <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/216570.htm>, 14 January 2024.

President of the Council and the President of the European Commission, were also in attendance.⁷ Finland, a recent addition to the Alliance, made its debut appearance at the summit. *This was the second time in NATO's history that the heads of state and government of the four Indo-Pacific (AP4) partners – Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea – had attended a NATO summit. The AP4 were invited not only to show their support for Ukraine and opposition to Russian aggression, but, more importantly, to emphasize cooperation on containing China's aggressive policies in the Indo-Pacific region.*⁸

With growing concerns about Russia's assertive foreign policies and military actions,⁹ particularly in Ukraine, NATO member countries recognised the need for a united approach to strengthen the Alliance's defence capabilities and resilience in the region. In this context, the Vilnius Summit was held to develop strategic guidelines and practical measures to enhance NATO's deterrence posture and collective defence mechanisms along its eastern flank.¹⁰

The Vilnius Summit 2023 concluded with the issuance of a communiqué,¹¹ yielding numerous resolutions and action plans geared towards fortifying NATO's deterrence and defence stance on the eastern flank. Key outcomes comprised:

- Strengthening the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) – NATO reaffirmed its commitment to the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) programme, which involves deploying multinational battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic States to bolster deterrence and offer assurance to neighbouring allies;
- The integration of selected command structures from NATO's eastern flank into regional defence plans includes the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE) based in Szczecin, along with two divisions: the Multinational Division North East

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ J. Gotkowska J. Graca, "NATO Summit in Vilnius: Breakthroughs and Unfulfilled Hopes," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, 13 July 2023, at <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-07-13/nato-summit-vilnius-breakthroughs-and-unfulfilled-hopes>, 18 January 2024.

⁹ "Векторы развития военной стратегии," *Центр Стратегических Оценок и Прогнозов* ["Vektory razvitiia voennoj strategii," *Centr Strategičeskikh Ocenok i Prognozov*], 7 March 2019, at <http://csef.ru/ru/oborona-i-bezopasnost/348/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii-8829>, 18 September 2024. See also: "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, 31 March 2023, at https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?TSPD_101_R0=08765fb817ab200020098e7381cf075d925d9c74afe36f27416da9ae8a521413094e4d4d687e22b90819a666421430009574d2e95cbac3c5fc1b8db66394e8f6deae06ee14321a4eb2b744c66fa078733b84f52aa389562d5d09c24fa0594328, 18 September 2024; "Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," *Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Kingdom of Thailand*, 21 April 2021, at https://thailand.mid.ru/en/o_rossii/vneshnyaya_politika/voennaya_doktrina_rf/?TSPD_101_R0=08765fb817ab200064d1b053a353bd755c14b9ce1456ccfbeat18aecd8205911587ad223d1f70bfc083cfaf329143000384a93868df619187977d60002bdb871fa723eace20b3d30d9f8291906ff79aefcaf6401c1b2d8e4cbc7acaf4e44518f, 18 September 2024.

¹⁰ S. Pifer, "For a Secure and Stable Europe, Put Ukraine on a Definitive Path to NATO," *Brookings*, 13 December 2023, at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/for-a-secure-and-stable-europe-put-ukraine-on-a-definitive-path-to-nato/>, 18 January 2024.

¹¹ "Vilnius Summit Communiqué," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 11 July 2023, at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm, 14 January 2024.

(MND NE) from Elbląg and the Multinational Division North (MND N) from Ādaži, Latvia;

- Enhancing the interoperability and standardisation of armaments and military equipment within NATO, including the development and approval of Defence Production Action Plans;
- Modernisation and revision of nuclear strategies – these challenges are fuelled by the upgrading of Russian nuclear forces, including plans to station tactical nuclear weapons within Belarusian territory. This could potentially pave the way for dialogue regarding the potential inclusion of Poland in such initiatives, possibly involving the certification of F-35 aircraft for nuclear missions;
- Prospects for Ukraine’s Membership in the Future – this discussion likely involved assessing Ukraine’s progress towards meeting NATO membership criteria, evaluating its strategic importance for NATO’s eastern flank and considering the geopolitical dynamics in the region;
- Enhancing Military Preparedness and Rapid Reaction – member nations pledged to boost military preparedness and the ability to respond swiftly, emphasising increased defence spending, joint training manoeuvres and projects to enhance interoperability;¹²
- Strengthening Cybersecurity and Robustness – NATO reiterated its commitment to enhancing cybersecurity and resilience against cyber threats, highlighting increased sharing of information, efforts to build capacity and closer cooperation with partner countries and international organisations;
- Improvement of Strategic Messaging and Disinformation Countermeasures – NATO enacted steps to strengthen strategic messaging and counter-disinformation efforts, such as creating specialised communication channels, launching public diplomacy initiatives and instituting programmes to enhance media literacy;
- Focus on Partner Involvement – the importance of engaging partners to promote security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, especially by enhancing collaboration with countries in Eastern Europe, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea region, the Mediterranean Sea and other regions.

The Vilnius Summit marked a pivotal moment in NATO’s efforts to address the security challenges on its eastern flank. It not only focused on military aspects, but also highlighted several key non-military issues, including cybersecurity and technology cooperation, climate security and sustainability, economic security and supply chains, political and diplomatic engagement, humanitarian aid and support for refugees, as well as global health security.¹³

¹² I. Karpavičiūtė, “Main Takeaways from NATO Summit in Vilnius,” *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2023), p. 215-217.

¹³ C. Grand, “A Summit of Substance: How NATO Can Prove Itself in Vilnius,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 6 July 2023, at <https://ecfr.eu/article/a-summit-of-substance-how-nato-can-prove-itself-in-vilnius/>, 14 February 2024. See also: “2023 NATO...”; S. Monaghan, S. Martinez, O. Svendsen, C. García Encina, M. Droin, “What Happened at NATO’s Vilnius Summit?,” *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 14 July 2023, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what>

ASSESSMENT AND PROSPECTIVE SCENARIOS FOR THE SECURITY OF THE EASTERN FLANK AND NATO: INSIGHTS FROM THE VILNIUS ALLIED SUMMIT 2023

Two out of the three main topics discussed during the Vilnius summit directly related to the security of NATO's eastern flank.¹⁴ It is worth noting that expectations among Alliance members regarding the outcomes of the Vilnius summit varied significantly. Specifically, countries on the northeastern flank anticipated concrete decisions to enhance their security in response to the unfolding developments in Ukraine.

In terms of bolstering allied defence capabilities, the primary focus for the countries on NATO's eastern flank has been the first area. This includes considerations related to the need to strengthen defence and deterrence in the face of the deteriorating security situation in Europe and increased military activities by the Russian Federation.

To fully understand the significance of the NATO summit held in Vilnius in strengthening security along the eastern flank, it is important to consider the event in relation to the preceding summit in Madrid in 2022. The decisions made during the Madrid summit acted as a catalyst for further strengthening NATO's eastern defensive perimeter. NATO members began the deployment of forward presence in four additional countries: Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. Furthermore, existing battle groups in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were scheduled for reinforcement. The provisions outlined in the new strategic document represented a shift in approach towards Russia, opening up opportunities to enhance the Alliance's military capabilities. As a result, NATO found it challenging to fully comply with the obligations set out in the 1997 agreement with Russia, which Russia had long used to restrict NATO's presence in countries along the eastern flank.

An exceedingly significant development of the Vilnius summit concerning the security of allied nations was the approval of new regional defence plans. These plans serve as the cornerstone for safeguarding the North Atlantic Alliance against large-scale Russian aggression. This decision holds paramount importance as earlier plans, formulated at the Newport summit in 2014, featured considerably smaller forces, especially those designated for defending NATO's eastern flank. Presently, three compatible operational plans have been formulated – the execution of which falls under the purview of three operational commands:

- The Allied Joint Force Command in Norfolk (JFC Norfolk), responsible for the North Atlantic and Northern Europe;
- The Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum (JFC Brunssum), responsible for the area of Central Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and the Alps;

happened-natos-vilnius-summit, 16 January 2024; "NATO's Role in Defence Industry Production," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 15 July 2024, at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_222589.htm, 16 September 2024.

¹⁴ "Vilnius Summit..."

- The Allied Joint Force Command in Naples (JFC Naples), responsible for the area of Southern Europe.¹⁵

For each of the areas of responsibility overseen by the aforementioned commands, two categories of threats have been delineated: the Russian Federation, which could potentially reconstitute its military capabilities to pre-invasion levels seen in Ukraine, and terrorist organisations.

In this strategy, according to the assumptions outlined in the plan of the Allied Command of the NATO Joint Forces in Brunssum, the focus for the eastern flank primarily entails bolstering NATO forces in the Baltic region. These plans include specific actions to be undertaken across various defence scenarios in preparation for a potential attack, encompassing considerations such as supply routes, chains of command and so forth.¹⁶

As evident, NATO is partially reverting to the defence planning processes and structures reminiscent of the Cold War era, which were abandoned in the 1990s. The endorsement of the three regional defence plans marks a structural shift in the allies' approach to collective defence, requiring implementation and financing in the coming years.

Unfortunately, not all issues have been fully addressed in line with the expectations and outcomes of the Vilnius Summit, nor with the decisions taken there. The first challenge pertains to the practical implementation of new regional defence plans, which will depend on several factors, primarily the political will of member states. Contrary to widespread expectations, no decision was made to alter the current concept of stationing allied forces on NATO's eastern flank, with the rotational presence of battle groups remaining in place. In this regard, only Lithuania and Latvia are set to receive reinforcements with larger components from individual Alliance member states. A critical issue that remains unresolved is the need to establish a comprehensive allied initiative for air and missile defence, which would consolidate the majority of capabilities under a unified framework. This issue, crucial for the NATO eastern flank allies, was also not resolved at the Vilnius Summit.¹⁷

Given the military significance of the 'eastern flank of NATO' and the deterioration of the international security environment, alongside the increasingly assertive stance of the Russian Federation, various scenarios regarding the evolution of the situation along this particular eastern border of NATO are conceivable.¹⁸ The scenarios were formulated based on expert and analytical sources¹⁹ and extensive interviews conducted with

¹⁵ J. Gotkowska, J. Graca, "NATO Summit in Vilnius..."

¹⁶ P. Niec, B. Jensen, "The Future of NATO's Eastern Flank," *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 10 July 2024, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/future-natos-eastern-flank>, 18 September 2024.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ S. Koziej, "Nowa zimna wojna na wschodniej flance – scenariusze dla rozwoju środowiska bezpieczeństwa państw Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej," *Pułaski Policy Papers*, vol. 3 (2019), at https://pulaski.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Pulaski_Policy_Paper_Nr_3_19.pdf, 22 January 2024.

¹⁹ We are talking about the following sources: The Institute for the Study of War, The Royal United Services Institute, Center of Eastern Studies and B. Hodges, J. Bugajski, R. Wojcik, C. Schmiedl, "NATO Needs a Coherent Approach to Defending Its Eastern Flank," *War on the Rocks*, 12 June

experts specialising in the aforementioned matters, encompassing both academic and practical spheres. These experts included individuals with military backgrounds who have served in various institutions, including those beyond our national borders. In this context, within a time frame of up to three years, three scenarios can be discerned:

- **in a positive scenario**, Russia exerts influence on the countries of NATO's eastern flank primarily through political and economic means. The first facet may involve Russian diplomatic efforts aimed at further discrediting the nations of NATO's eastern flank. In the second aspect, Russia may leverage energy resources for economic warfare, with a particular focus on the Baltic states situated on NATO's eastern flank. Indeed, in this scenario, the Russian Federation may intensify intelligence activities in the specified region of Europe and orchestrate provocations, particularly in those countries of NATO's eastern flank where a significant percentage of the population identifies itself or holds Russian citizenship. Regarding the military dimension, such actions could involve demonstrations of force in Russia and Belarus along the border regions with the countries of NATO's eastern flank or the execution of unannounced military exercises by the mentioned countries. The aforementioned activities are likely to be conducted amidst ongoing military coercion and disinformation campaigns orchestrated by the Russian Federation. Such a scenario could materialise following the cessation of Russia's military operations in Ukraine and subsequent concessions from NATO to the Kremlin;
- **in a moderate scenario**, there is a heightened confrontation between NATO and Russia, accompanied by ongoing destabilisation of member states on the eastern flank. Russia's actions may manifest in diverse forms of military and non-military activities. Militarily, this could involve border incidents, military provocations and the relocation of large combat groups from the interior of Russia to the border zone. Additionally, there may be an escalation in the militarisation of the Kaliningrad Oblast, including the deployment of cutting-edge combat technology. In this scenario, Russia contemplates deploying additional forces in Belarus, potentially in areas adjacent to the borders with NATO, on a permanent basis, even if on a rotational basis, along with an intensification of joint military exercises conducted by the Russian Federation and Belarus. These conventional military manoeuvres are likely to be accompanied by hybrid actions from the Russian and Belarusian sides, aimed at creating crisis situations in the countries of NATO's eastern flank. This scenario could unfold against the backdrop of a protracted conflict in Ukraine or if Russia attempts military operations in another country perceived by the Kremlin as within its 'sphere of influence';

2020, at <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/nato-needs-a-coherent-approach-to-defending-its-eastern-flank/>, 18 September 2024; "Experts React: How a Year of War in Europe Remade NATO, and What Comes Next," *Atlantic Council*, 24 February 2023, at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react-how-a-year-of-war-in-europe-remade-nato-and-what-comes-next/>, 18 September 2024; "Rosyjskie czołgi wkroczą do Polski i Litwy: generalowie NATO opisali scenariusz agresji," *Jagiellonia*, 24 January 2024, at <https://jagiellonia.org/rosyjskie-czolgi-wkrocza-do-polski-i-litwy-generalowie-nato-opisali-scenariusz-agresji-na-sojusz>, 18 September 2024.

- **in a negative scenario**, Russian armed aggression targets one or more countries on NATO's eastern flank. Regardless of the specific member state involved, the North Atlantic Alliance would be compelled to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Consequently, this would lead to an open armed conflict between NATO and the Russian Federation. It is assumed that the Russian Federation will continue to develop its Anti-Access/Area Denial concept, enhancing its capacity to impede NATO forces from transferring support to the countries on the eastern flank of the Alliance. Such a situation could severely restrict the freedom of movement of allied forces.²⁰ Such a scenario could be preceded by Russian efforts to bolster the Kaliningrad Oblast. This might be undertaken under the guise of periodically conducted military exercises, such as those under the codename 'West' held on the territory of the Russian Federation and Belarus.²¹

Although the last scenario presented is relatively improbable, it should be acknowledged as a possibility. In the event of an armed conflict between NATO and the Russian Federation erupting in this part of Europe, its repercussions could exacerbate the destabilisation of the security environment in other regions across the globe.

CONCLUSION

By examining pivotal topics and advancements covered in this piece, such as the importance of the eastern flank, conclusions drawn from the Vilnius Summit and potential security scenarios for the region, numerous significant observations have surfaced. Through thorough dialogues and strategic exchanges, the summit produced significant resolutions and operational strategies aimed at fortifying NATO's deterrence stance, military preparedness, cybersecurity capacities and collaboration with partners in the area. Peering into the future, the security landscape of NATO's eastern flank continues to be influenced by changing geopolitical circumstances and strategic ambiguities.

Given the diverse array of security threats present on the eastern flank, it is imperative to adopt an all-encompassing and synchronised strategy that includes diplomatic initiatives, military deterrence measures, economic robustness and societal unity. By harnessing the advantages of collective defence and collaborative partnerships, NATO can adeptly tackle the intricate security challenges encountered on its eastern flank while maintaining its fundamental values of unity and solidarity.

Moving on to delineate the key conclusions regarding the summary of the significant and widely covered meeting of the leaders of NATO member states and invited guests, held in Vilnius on 11-12 July 2023, the following points should be emphasised:

²⁰ A. Radomyski, "Anti-Access/Area Denial jako integralny element strategii odstraszenia Federacji Rosyjskiej," in J.J. Piątek, R. Podgórzńska, S. Stempiński (eds), *Bezpieczeństwo w badaniach i w praktyce*, Toruń 2020, p. 258.

²¹ M. Bruszewski, "Wojna Rosja-NATO w 2025 roku? Wyciek z tajnych analiz Bundeswehry," *Defence24*, 15 January 2024, at <https://defence24.pl/polityka-obronna/wojna-rosja-nato-w-2025-roku-wyciek-z-tajnych-analiz-bundeswehry>, 22 January 2024.

- the summit convened at a challenging juncture not only for NATO, but also for European security as a whole. In Vilnius, the Alliance grappled with the imperative to make additional significant decisions. These decisions were twofold: firstly, aimed at enhancing the security of member states, including the bolstering of deterrence and defence capabilities, and secondly, centred on ensuring enduring support for Ukraine from the Alliance amidst the armed conflict with Russia;
- one of the focal points of the Vilnius summit, centred on bolstering allied defence and deterrence, provided an excellent opportunity to deliberate on security guarantees for the countries comprising NATO's eastern flank;
- the course of action initiated in Newport and continued in Warsaw and Brussels has spurred renewed efforts aimed at augmenting NATO's presence on the eastern flank;
- the NATO summit took place in the capital of a country where concerns regarding a direct threat from the Russian Federation are acutely felt, situated less than 30 kilometres from the border with Belarus, a staunch ally of Russia involved in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

The recent meeting in Vilnius, where the top representatives of NATO countries gathered, *...emphasised the crucial role of allied security cooperation in promoting political and economic stability. It highlighted the need for increased military involvement and outlined key priorities for transatlantic security and NATO's strategic concept.*²² The decisions made at the Vilnius summit further reaffirmed the member states' conviction – particularly those on the eastern flank – regarding the restoration of the Alliance's fundamental function and its recommitment to its core mission.

The summit in Vilnius confirmed the recognition that NATO must adjust to changing security landscapes and threats. It stressed the importance of the Alliance being alert, adaptable and proactive in addressing new challenges. Additionally, it reiterated NATO's dedication to protecting the security and prosperity of its members and partners throughout the Euro-Atlantic region.

In addressing the question of whether the decisions made at the Allied Summit in Vilnius will affect the security of NATO's eastern flank in the short or long term, it is important to recognise that some decisions will have a prolonged impact on the organisation's activities, while others represent temporary measures designed to respond to immediate threats. The first category of decisions encompasses the approval of new regional defence plans, particularly the plan focused on the Baltic Sea and Central European region. This plan is intended to serve as the foundation for the development of forces, capabilities and military exercises along NATO's eastern flank, as well as for the enhancement of regional command structures. Conversely, the short-term measures include, among other initiatives, the reinforcement of the rotational deployment of Allied troops across all countries within NATO's eastern flank, along with the revision of decisions regarding the modernisation of the Alliance's nuclear capabilities in this region.²³

²² "118th Congress 1st Session S. RES. 251," *Govinfo*, at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-118sres251is/pdf/BILLS-118sres251is.pdf>, 4 February 2024.

²³ J. Gotkowska, J. Graca, "NATO Summit in Vilnius..."

In conclusion, the security of NATO's eastern flank is not solely a local concern; it is a fundamental aspect of Euro-Atlantic security. This requires continuous cooperation and efforts to uphold the values of peace, stability and collective defence on which the Alliance was established.

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