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ARTICLE TITLE:

NATO enlargement to the east: Bucharest nine as a game-changer within the Alliance

ABSTRACT:

NATO progressive expansion to the east has generated prolific academic literature. However, only a few works have investigated how these enlargements affect the internal dynamics of the Alliance. This article thus seeks to analyse changes at work within NATO by focusing on informal groupings created by central and eastern European countries to influence its decision-making processes. Based on extensive fieldwork within the organisation, this paper will mostly focus on Bucharest nine, which seems to be the preferred extra and intra-alliance format. It will first analyse the custom of informal groupings within NATO and its main features. Then, this article will trace the emergence of Bucharest nine and its claims, to end with an assessment of its homogeneity.

KEY WORDS:

NATO, Bucharest nine, minilateralism, transatlantic relations, European defense

MAIN TEXT:

Introduction

On 25 December 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In his farewell speech, he recognised the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the 'old system' in favour of a new world order.¹ Soon after, the NATO enlargement debate emerged on both shores of the Atlantic, lukewarmly welcomed by most allies and strongly condemned by Russia. The reflection on a possible enlargement was publicly pushed early on by the Visegrad group formed in 1991 by Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.² It then grew increasingly evident during the following NATO summits. Indeed, while the Rome Communiqué cautiously offered former USSR countries the Alliance's assistance to democratise their institutions through partnerships,³ the Madrid Communiqué officially invited the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to begin the accession process eight years after the fall of the Berlin wall.⁴ The entrance of the three countries in the Alliance in 1999 became the first step of a still ongoing post-Cold War enlargement process welcoming within NATO the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania in March 2004, Albania and Croatia in April 2009 and Montenegro in June 2017.

This progressive expansion to the east has generated prolific academic literature on the matter, mainly focused on changes happening outside the Alliance's organisational structure. It is thus possible to observe a first ensemble of works focusing on the effect of NATO

¹ 'Gorbachev Speech Dissolving the Soviet Union (USSR): Christmas 1991,' *The Public Purpose*, accessed 3 December 2019, <http://www.publicpurpose.com/lib-gorb911225.htm>.

² Christopher S. Chivvis, Raphael S. Cohen, Bryan Frederick, Daniel S. Hamilton, F. Stephen Larrabee, Bonny Lin, *NATO's Northeastern Flank. Emerging Opportunities for Engagement* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017) 17.

³ 'Rome Declaration on Peace and Cooperation,' *North Atlantic Treaty Organization On-line library*, last updated October 27, 2000, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c911108a.htm>.

⁴ 'Madrid Declaration on Euro-Atlantic Security and Cooperation Issued by the Heads of State and Government,' *North Atlantic Treaty Organization Press Releases*, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1997/p97-081e.htm>.

enlargement on the organisation's or the allies' relations with Russia fuelled in recent years by the declassification of governmental archives.⁵ This literature approaches the heated talks on the so-called promise made by the US and German administrations to M. Gorbachev during the negotiations of the reunification of Germany, and the resulting Russian reaction to the incorporation of former Soviet Union countries in the Alliance.⁶ A second set of academic works on NATO enlargement addresses for its part the transformation of the institutions of eastern European countries with a focus on democratisation. The question raised within this literature is generally that of the opening – or not – of these state's public and private institutions to a western model of governance.⁷ It is finally possible to note a third kind of literature devoted to an inter-organisational analysis of both NATO and EU enlargements. It generally compares the opening of the two organisations to new members and analyses their interactions during the process.⁸ This rich academic literature has succeeded in portraying a more nuanced reality than that described by famous political discourses on successive NATO enlargements and their domestic and international consequences. However, only a few academic works have

⁵ Mary Elise Sarotte, 'How to Enlarge NATO: The Debate inside the Clinton Administration, 1993-95,' *International Security*, vol. 44 (2019): 7-41.

⁶ See Leonid A. Karabeshkin, Dina R. Spechler, 'EU and NATO Enlargement: Russia's Expectations, Responses and Options for the Future,' *European Security*, vol. 16 (2007): 307-328; Mary Elise Sarotte, 'Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990,' *Diplomatic History*, vol. 34 (2010): 119-140; Mark Kramer, 'The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,' *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 32 (2009): 39-61; Michael Ruhle, 'NATO Enlargement and Russia: Discerning Fact from Fiction, American Foreign Policy Interests,' vol. 36 (2014): 234-239; Andrew Kydd, 'Trust building, trust-breaking: the dilemma of NATO enlargement,' *International Organization*, vol. 55 (2001): 801-828; Kristina Spohr, 'Precluded or Precedent-Setting? The 'NATO Enlargement Question' in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990-1991,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 14 (2012): 4-54; Thomas Lane, 'The Baltic States, the enlargement of NATO and Russia,' *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 28 (1997): 295-308; Alton Frye, 'The new NATO and relations with Russia,' *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 23 (2000): 92-110; Christopher Layne, 'US hegemony and the perpetuation of NATO,' *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 23 (2000): 59-91; Kimberly Marten, 'Reconsidering NATO expansion: a counterfactual analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s,' *European Journal of International Security*, vol. 3 (2018): 135-161.

⁷ See Dan Reiter, 'Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy,' *International Security*, vol. 25 (2001): 41-67; Rachel Epstein, 'NATO Enlargement and the Spread of Democracy: Evidence and Expectations,' *Security Studies*, 14 (2005): 63-105.

⁸ See: K.M. Fierke, Antje Wiener, 'Constructing institutional interests: EU and NATO enlargement,' *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 6 (1999): 721-742; Petr Kratochvíl, Matuš Mišík, 'Newcomer, Normal Player or Regional Leader? Perceptions of Poland in the EU,' *Politics in Central Europe*, vol. 11 (2015): 11-29; Christopher Browning, Pertti Joenniemi, P. 'The Challenges of EU and NATO Enlargement,' *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 39, (2004): 227-231. John Leech, *Whole and free: NATO, EU enlargement and transatlantic relations* (London, England: Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2002) 216.

investigated how these enlargements have affected the internal dynamics of NATO. In that regard, the research work of Dr Amélie Zima is noteworthy in its meticulous account of the 'institutional tinkering' of the Atlantic bureaucracy during the post-Cold War accession process of new member states within the Alliance thus showing the plasticity of the organisation.⁹

For its part, this article seeks to analyse changes at work within NATO by focusing on the way eastern European countries organise themselves individually and collectively to influence the evolution of the Alliance since their accession. Informal groupings seem to have become the rule between states to influence formal negotiations within NATO and to foster agenda setting on specific topics. If it is not the only tool used by member states to achieve their goals, it represents a significant part of the life of the organisation. Just like the historical members of the Alliance, central and eastern European countries gather in different kinds of informal groupings that may vary depending on the subject. Still, this practice is overlooked by the literature on minilateralism, which considers the formation of informal groupings either by the international bureaucracy itself to foster initiatives or more generally outside multilateral organisations to overcome their shortcomings.¹⁰ Thanks to five months of participant observation within NATO headquarter, archives consultations and the conduction of a hundred interviews with civilian and military officials, the author was able to identify and describe in

⁹ Amélie Zima, 'La fabrique des négociations d'adhésion. Le cas de l'élargissement de l'OTAN en 1999,' *Les Champs de Mars*, vol. 2 (2018): 31-57. See also: Amélie Zima, *D'ennemi à allié: L'adhésion de la Hongrie, de la Pologne et de la République Tchèque à l'Alliance Atlantique 1989-1999* (Brussels, Belgium: Peter Lang, 2019) 422.

¹⁰ 'minilateralism' and 'informal groupings' are used alternatively by the author who considers that they both refer to the same phenomenon. See Alice Pannier, 'Le "minilatéralisme" : Une nouvelle forme de coopération de défense,' *Politique étrangère*, vol. 1 (2015): 37-48; Niklas Helwig, 'Germany in European Diplomacy: Minilateralism as a Tool for Leadership,' *German Politics*, vol. 28 (2019): 1-17; Joel Wuthnow, 'US 'Minilateralism' in Asia and China's Responses: A New Security Dilemma?,' *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 28 (2019): 133-150; Robyn Eckersley, 'Moving Forward in the Climate Negotiations: Multilateralism or Minilateralism?,' *Global Environmental Politics*, vol. 12 (2012): 24-42; Moisés Naím, 'Minilateralism,' *Foreign Policy*, n. 173 (2009): 136-135; Michael Mastanduno, 'US foreign policy and the pragmatic use of international institutions,' *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 59 (2005): 317-333; Fulvio Attinà, Daniela Irrera, *Multilateral Security and ESDP Operations* (London, England: Routledge, 2010) 254; Fulvio Attina, 'Multilateralism and the Emergence of Minilateralism in EU Peace Operations,' *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, vol. 8 (2008): 5-24; Pia Riggiozzi, Christopher Wylde, *Handbook of South American Governance* (London, England: Routledge, 2017) 508.

her ethnographic notebook this trend of informal groupings which may be invisible for external observers.¹¹ Regarding central and eastern countries, Bucharest nine seems to be the preferred extra and intra-alliance format which regularly brings them together at different levels. This article will therefore focus on Bucharest nine by first analysing the custom of informal groupings within NATO. It will then trace the emergence of Bucharest nine and its agenda-setting of the reinforced protection of its member's territories, to end with an assessment of its homogeneity.

The custom of informal groupings within NATO

Consensus decision-making and minilateralism

Consensus decision-making is accused by most academic works of either preventing states to reach an agreement or of creating *a minima* decisions.¹² In that, it would encourage the practice of parallel or *ex-post* minilateral meetings, especially for environmental and financial decisions, but also regarding security and defence issues, crisis management, and military operations.

When it comes to NATO, informal groupings are rather meant to facilitate negotiations at almost thirty than to overcome the shortcomings of the institution. This *ex-ante* strategy builds upon the gathering of like-minded allies around common topics to exchange information and harmonise positions before formal negotiations in working groups and committees

¹¹ The interviews have been conducted under Chatham house rules. To anonymise the interviewees while attesting their diversity, this paper relies on the method developed by Olivier Schmitt consisting in creating a three letters and one number's code for each interview. The first letter designates the institutional position of the interviewee (capital, embassy, ACO, ACT, NATO headquarter in Brussels), the second one designates his status (military officer, diplomat, civilian), and the third one designates his nationality. The number is used to differentiate two or more individuals having the same characteristics. For more information on the method: Olivier Schmitt, 'L'accès aux données confidentielles en milieu militaire : problèmes méthodologiques et éthiques d'un 'positionnement intermédiaire', Les Champs de Mars, no. 27 (2015/2): 50-58.

¹² Moisés Nafm, 'Minilateralism.'; Niklas Helwig, 'Germany in European Diplomacy: Minilateralism as a Tool for Leadership,' 1 ; Alice Pannier, 'Le « minilatéralisme » : Une nouvelle forme de coopération de défense,' 46-47; Joel Wuthnow, 'US 'Minilateralism' in Asia and China's Responses: A New Security Dilemma?,' 133.

meetings.¹³ It is considered by both the allies and the international staff as the best way to 'find common grounds' between countries and as favouring efficiency in decision-making by avoiding disputes as much as possible during formal negotiations.¹⁴ Moreover, it is fostered by the specificities of NATO facilities. As a military alliance, it welcomes national diplomatic and military delegations within its headquarter for security reasons. Thus, regular informal contacts are favoured by the co-location of all actors:

The great advantage of NATO, it is a specificity compared to other multilateral organisations we are part of, is that everything is in the same place: both the headquarter and the delegations. You can accomplish many things just by going to see each other.¹⁵

Informal groupings within NATO share many similarities with those described by the academic literature while keeping specificities. It is therefore possible to establish a typology of the characteristics of these groups.

Moisés Naím, a Venezuelan columnist, considers that minilateral meetings should bring a 'magic number' of countries around the table to produce positive outcomes, that is approximately twenty.¹⁶ In the case of NATO, this number must be lowered given the already exclusive character of the Alliance. These much smaller formats generally bring between three and nine countries together, according to the author's observations within NATO headquarter.¹⁷ Bilateral meetings are therefore not considered in this article as being part of minilateral initiatives because of their own particularities and dynamics.¹⁸

¹³ Interviews with 2019-UZP, 2018-AQX.

¹⁴ Interviews with 2019-UDE, 2019-UZS.

¹⁵ Interview with 2019-AZX.

¹⁶ Moisés Naím, 'Minilateralism.' 135.

¹⁷ These observations have been recorded in the author's ethnographic notebook.

¹⁸ Contrary to the conclusions of Dr. Alice Pannier, 'Le « minilatéralisme » : Une nouvelle forme de coopération de défense,' 38.

According to the academic literature, informal groupings also gather geographically and strategically close states, which share the same values and interests.¹⁹ This phenomenon is observable within NATO where eastern allies have formed groups like 'Visegrad four' or 'Bucharest nine,' while southern allies sometimes gather to discuss terrorism and immigration issues. However, NATO members also participate in informal groupings according to the topic, as exemplified by the '*francophonie* group' created by a French initiative and heterogenous in its composition.²⁰ This observation is particularly true for operations, which have engendered several informal groupings within the Alliance since its first military intervention.

Likewise, minilateral initiatives are marked by informality because of the absence of a treaty defining their jurisdiction and the lack of a permanent location or bureaucracy attached to them. Consequently, the flexibility offered by informal formats allows for direct discussion on various subjects between governmental officials.²¹ NATO allies either meet within their delegations or in capitals to discuss informally. In both cases, it generally tends to happen discreetly behind closed doors unless a statement is publicly issued at the end of the meeting.²² With regards to their agenda, if most regional groupings talks revolve around common geopolitical issues, the topics addressed during minilateral meetings may also vary depending on NATO current activities and the international context.

These activities tend to engender *ad hoc* formats or 'circumstantial alliances,'²³ which disappear once a decision is made. This statement is also true within NATO. However, several informal groupings initially formed to address a specific topic have survived it like the Quint,

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

²⁰ See Belgium Ambassador Pascal Heyman's tweet : Pascal Heyman (@PascalHeyman), 'merci à ma collègue Hélène Duchêne d'avoir organisé un déjeuner consacré à la promotion de la langue française au sein de l'Alliance,' Twitter, June 14, 2019, 5 :36 pm.

²¹ Alice Pannier, 'Le « minilatéralisme » : Une nouvelle forme de coopération de défense,' 43; Orfeo Fioretos, 'Minilateralism and informality in international monetary cooperation,' *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 26, (2019): 1137.

²² Interview with 2018-AQX. This observation has also been recorded in the author's ethnographic notebook.

²³ interview with 2018-ADX2.

which was created during the Bosnian war but now gathers regularly at the military representatives level with a broader agenda.²⁴

The creation or survival of these informal groupings also depend on good interpersonal relationships, though it is rarely a decisive factor. According to Orfeo Fioretos, associate professor at Temple University, it '[greases] the wheels of international cooperation.'²⁵ During the Iraq war, France, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom ceased to gather informally for a year because of the US-French diplomatic dispute. It was also partly explained at that time by the animosity between the American and the French ambassadors.²⁶ However, lack of trust or liking between the actors do not prevent them from gathering in informal formats, as observed by the author during her fieldwork. Therefore, it is only an intervening variable, especially when the actors are part of a heavy bureaucracy constraining their room for manoeuvre.²⁷

Finally, minilateralism is marked by exclusivity.²⁸ The actors openly assume this club diplomacy: 'There is a moment when you are too many, and it does not work anymore. You need to keep some form of trust.'²⁹ Nevertheless, these informal groupings are not fixed and can occasionally welcome external participants. By way of example, Turkey gains access to several groupings thanks to its rigid stance on several issues making it a key player in negotiations: 'You have to invite people who disagree to know how to find a solution, [...] to sense out what is feasible.'³⁰

²⁴ This observation has been recorded in the author's ethnographic notebook.

²⁵ Orfeo Fioretos, 'Minilateralism and informality in international monetary cooperation,' 1141.

²⁶ Interview with 2018-AZX3.

²⁷ This observation has been recorded in the author's ethnographic notebook.

²⁸ Robyn Eckersley, 'Moving Forward in the Climate Negotiations: Multilateralism or Minilateralism?,' 21; Moisés Naím, 'Minilateralism.' 135.

²⁹ Interview with 2019-UZX.

³⁰ Interview with 2019-UZH.

A practice dating back to the origins of the Alliance

As underlined by Jenny Raflik-Grenouilleau, professor of contemporary history at the University of Nantes, France, The United States, and the United Kingdom used to share their views on NATO through diplomatic memoranda during the 1950s. They also gathered several times at the ministers level to determine the evolutions of the organisation and the sending of American troops in Europe.³¹ Despite strong divergences on nuclear weapons and the rearmament of Germany, this practice continued and created an informal tripartite governance of NATO pushed by General De Gaulle.³²

It eventually included the Federal Republic of Germany thus creating the Quad.³³ If the origins of the Quad remain blurry, one interviewee who took part in some of its meetings considers that the quadripartite occupation of Berlin encouraged ministers to gather regularly in New-York in parallel of General Assembly meetings. It then declined at the political counsellors level to ultimately take place within NATO between ambassadors on a weekly basis.³⁴ Because of its composition and its exclusivity, the Quad is an open secret which can provoke envy or resentment from other allies. Its evocation during interviews elicited two types of reactions: some actors feigned ignorance, while others talked openly either to justify the format or to criticise it. Still, the Quad is considered by most allies as the most influential grouping within NATO since its positions are rarely contradicted during formal meetings because of the privileged status and the prestige of its members: 'When we agree on something, it is very hard for other nations to question us.'³⁵ If the United States tried to open this format to other allies during the Bush and the Obama presidencies, these attempts rapidly faded in light

³¹ Jenny Raflik-Grenouilleau, *La Quatrième République et l'Alliance Atlantique: Influence et dépendance, 1945-1958* (Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013) 130-131.

³² Maurice Vaïsse, Clémence Sebag, 'France and NATO: An History,' *Politique étrangère*, vol. 5 (2009): 140-141.

³³ Interview with 2018-AZX3.

³⁴ Interview with 2018-AZX3.

³⁵ Interview with 2019-UZM.

of the French reluctance to include new members and considering the practicality of such format. According to an interviewee whose country is not part of the Quad: 'they are the most important shareholders of the organisation. If they can unblock things between them, it is beneficial for everyone.'³⁶ Having understood this dynamic, the international staff has progressively established links with the Quad, as shown by the Secretary General dinner with Quad ambassadors before ministerial meetings.³⁷ Hence, its activities and perception can be summarised by the following quote from an interview:

The Quad is a convenient format for ambassadors, directors, or deputy directors. It is not systematic, at least for NATO, at the Heads of State and Ministers' levels. Like all restricted formats, it excludes. Those who are not part of it do not like it, especially when the format takes place in a larger organisation. The main objective of the Quad is to exchange on respective positions so that we have an optimal level of information. As far as possible, it can lead to defusing differences. There may be strong ones on some subjects. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not work. It can also help to create leverage or mobilisation on topics where the four countries share the same position and want to push it.³⁸

If it is emblematic of NATO and its informal functioning, the Quad is not the only format created by allies. During the Balkan war, another informal grouping emerged: The Quint. Bringing together the main contributors to Operation Allied Forces, it continues to exist at the diplomatic level to discuss Balkan issues and at the military level to address a broader range of topics.³⁹ Likewise, the Afghan war spawned its minilateral format, the framework

³⁶ Interview with 2019-UZB. The Quad was cited as the most influential informal grouping in most interviews: 2019-UZG, 2019-UZE, 2019-UQJ, 2019-UZJ, 2019-UZV, 2019-UZH, 2019-UZY, 2019-UDS, 2019-UQW, 2019-UZB, 2019-UZM, 2019-UZR, 2019-UZX, 2018-AQX4.

³⁷ Interviews with 2019-UZX, 2019-UDE, 2019-KZX.

³⁸ Interview with 2018-AZX2.

³⁹ Interview with 2018-AZX2, 2019-UZX, 2019-UQJ, 2019-UQJ2, 2019-UZO.

nations group, which is becoming increasingly exclusive as allies withdraw their troops from the country.⁴⁰ This trend of informal groupings for NATO operations or military activities continues nowadays, as shown by the strikers group created during Operation Unified Protector in 2011.⁴¹

Allies also tend to participate in minilateral meetings to address thematical and regional issues. The list of circumstantial groupings created to address one specific topic grows and fluctuates as NATO activities evolve. By way of example, two groups generally face each other during the negotiation of Summits Communiqués: the P3 gathering nuclear powers on one side, and the disarmers (Netherlands, Belgium, Norway and Germany) on the other side.⁴² Regarding the 2010 reform of the civilian and military structures, a reformers group composed of Spain, Germany, France, Canada, Denmark and the United Kingdom advocated itself for a rationalisation of the organisation.⁴³

Finally, geographical proximity drive countries sharing same threat perceptions to gather informally: 'On Mediterranean issues, France regularly talk to Spain, Italy and Portugal.'⁴⁴ Indeed, these countries have created a group called the Southern Quartet, which regularly gathers at the ministers level to tackle terrorist and illegal immigration issues.⁴⁵ In the following part, this article will discuss the formation of another paradigmatic regional group, Bucharest nine.

⁴⁰ It gathers Germany, Italy, Turkey, the United States, but also the United Kingdom. France is no longer part of this informal grouping. Interviews with 2019-UZO, 2019-UZM.

⁴¹ Interview with 2019-EZM.

⁴² Interviews with 2019-UZB, 2019-AZX, 2018-AZX2.

⁴³ Interview with 2019-UQJ2.

⁴⁴ Interview with 2018-AZX2.

⁴⁵ 'Toulon, France: informal meeting of the Ministers of Defence of Italy, France, Spain and Portugal,' *Ministero della difesa*, 12 May 2016, accessed October 4, 2019, http://www.difesa.it/EN/Primo_Piano/Pagine/tou.aspx.

The emergence of the Bucharest nine format

A practice dictated by a constrained socialisation to the organisation

When it comes to influencing the decision-making process, central and eastern European countries lack instruments used by more prominent allies within NATO. One of the main constraints experienced by these allies is undoubtedly their low number of civilian and military personnel, compared to countries like Germany. It is thus usual to observe empty chairs either in working groups or even in committees.⁴⁶ This phenomenon is directly linked to human resources insufficiencies in capitals where foreign and defence ministries cannot handle all the files in progress at NATO. Contrary to countries like France, which are active on almost every topic, they must make choices and focus on subjects of vital interest.⁴⁷ It is notably reflected in the number of commentaries they produce which is much lower than for France or Turkey, strongly attached to texts content.⁴⁸ Thereby, their influence is limited or non-existent on several texts negotiated within the Alliance when the capitals do not consider them as critical topics.

The lack of representativeness of these countries in the civilian and military structures must also be underlined. Yet, according to several eastern and central European interviewees, having positions in the international staff is considered as an essential channel of influence.⁴⁹ If these nations recently succeeded in obtaining high visibility posts like the NATO spokesperson, occupied by Oana Lungescu since 2010, or more recently the deputy secretary general with the appointment of Dan Mircea Geoană in July 2019, most assistant secretary

⁴⁶ This observation has been recorded in the author's ethnographic notebook.

⁴⁷ Interview with 2019-UQJ2.

⁴⁸ Interviews with 2019-UZX2, 2019-UDS. The number of comments is only recorded by the International Military Staff at the Military Committee level and below since member states must share their comments on a platform before the meetings. No such system exists at the political level. Representatives thus give their comments during the meetings.

⁴⁹ Interviews with 2019-UZY, 2019-UZR. It is particularly useful to influence the early redaction of texts before their discussions in committees and working group's meetings.

general positions are occupied by western allies.⁵⁰ This western dominance is also reflected in lower positions within the international staff, less visible but as influential. In terms of military personnel within the command structure, the amount of national positions is determined during 'flag-to-post' conferences attributing a number of stars to every ally mainly based on GDP criteria.⁵¹ Consequently, eastern and central European countries have fewer stars than more prominent allies and have access to less general officers positions in the command structure. It is especially visible in the composition of Supreme Commanders command groups which tend to relegate central and eastern European military officers to peripheral positions.⁵² Likewise, this unequal access to military positions is striking within NATO headquarter where the Chair of the Military Committee has been occupied only once by a non-western General between 2015 and 2018.⁵³ The creation and maintenance of a network of inserted personnel to pass instructions and circulate the information is another driver of influence linked to human resources.⁵⁴ Once again, it is rendered difficult for small countries without the same assets as bigger ones like the United Kingdom regularly cited as an example during interviews.⁵⁵

Nuances are obviously to be made between each central and eastern European countries which possess different human and budgetary resource levels, as well as various objectives *vis-à-vis* NATO. As such, Poland stands out for its investment in the number and quality of the staff it sends to the civilian and military structures.⁵⁶ However, considering the general picture,

⁵⁰ Six posts out of eight are today occupied by Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and the United States.

⁵¹ Interview with 2018-AQX5. Each star commits the country to furnish a defined number of military officers to the structure.

⁵² 'Who we are,' *Allied Command Transformation*, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.act.nato.int/who-we-are> ; 'Command Group,' *Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe*, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://shape.nato.int/about/leadership-staff/command-group>.

⁵³ "General Petr Pavel ends his tenure as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 29 June 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_156414.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁵⁴ Interview with 2019-UDS.

⁵⁵ Interviews with 2018-AQX3, 2019-AQX2, 2019-UDE, 2019-TQX.

⁵⁶ Interview with 2019-UZH.

and in comparison with the 'big' allies, Bucharest nine countries remain structurally underrepresented within the Alliance.

A further observation made by the author within NATO is the invisible divide between allies not hesitating to break the silence procedure if they disagree with a decision, and the other allies reluctant to do so. Eastern and central European countries fall in the second category since the break of silence comes with a political cost that only a few allies are willing to endure.⁵⁷ This tool of last resort thus seems to be reserved for a small elite, which uses it if necessary to impose its views on a text: 'France, Turkey and the United States are the three countries that will usually break the silence.'⁵⁸

Considering these limitations, eastern and central European countries have turned to other channels of influence and have notably embraced the minilateral trend described above. If they participate in several informal groupings such as Visegrad Four, Nordic-Baltic, Baltic-German, or Baltic-Benelux groups, the most visible and currently used minilateral format is Bucharest nine.⁵⁹ This latter was created at the presidential level by a Polish-Romanian initiative in 2014 and has then been declined at the ministerial, defence counsellors, and ambassadors levels.⁶⁰ It shares many similarities with other informal groupings, but distinguishes itself in many aspects as well. Of particular note is the publicity surrounding Bucharest nine meetings taking place outside the Alliance. Contrary to Quad members who seek to preserve the secrecy of their gatherings, every high-level Bucharest nine meeting is announced and then followed by a public statement.⁶¹ This 'vocal' strategy can be understood as a way to weight on the decision-making process by drawing the international community eye

⁵⁷ Interviews with 2019-UDE, 2019-EZM, 2018-ADX, 2019-UZX.

⁵⁸ Interview with 2019-UDE. It has also been underlined by 2019-EZM.

⁵⁹ Interviews with 2019-UZB, 2019-UZJ, 2019-UZG.

⁶⁰ Interviews with 2019-UZV, 2019-UZG, 2019-UZR.

⁶¹ As exemplified by: 'Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting (Košice, February 28 2019),' *President of Romania*, February 28, 2019, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-bucharest-9-meeting-kosice-28th-of-february-2019>.

on their issues at strategic times, that is before NATO ministerials and summits. For instance, Polish President Andrzej Duda presented the Bucharest nine joint declaration published before the 2018 Brussels summit as a way to 'show [the other allies] what our expectations are, what our needs are, and allow them to think about it and discuss it.'⁶²

Another particularity is undoubtedly its size: Bucharest nine is the larger regional grouping within NATO. When considering the respective budgetary and military resources of each country, they are more valuable pooled than separated in terms of bargaining power. Central and eastern countries thus seem to offset their structural disadvantages by their number and visibility. If practical in terms of representativeness both within and outside the Alliance, such large format however comes with downsides that will be studied later.

The Warsaw summit as the culmination point of Bucharest nine claims

Bucharest nine was strategically created before the Warsaw summit with the clear objective of monitoring the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan adopted in 2014 and of encouraging reinforced protection of the eastern flank of the Alliance: 'We will actively contribute to shaping the Allied strategic response to the long term security threats and risks we jointly face in the East.'⁶³ In the context of a resurging Russian aggressive behaviour at their doors before the summit, Bucharest nine countries benefited from an Anglo-American momentum for the strengthening of the Alliance embodied by the Obama-Cameron joint statement 'We will not be cowed by barbaric killers.'⁶⁴ Their claims also arose against the

⁶² 'Cooperation of eastern flank countries benefits the whole of NATO,' *The First News*, 8 June 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/cooperation-of-eastern-flank-countries-benefits-the-whole-of-nato---president>.

⁶³ 'Nine Heads of State Call on Alliance to "Strengthen the Eastern Flank of NATO,'" *Atlantic Council*, 4 November 2015, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/nine-heads-of-state-call-on-alliance-to-strengthen-the-eastern-flank-of-nato/>.

⁶⁴ Barack Obama, David Cameron, 'We will not be cowed by barbaric killers,' *the New-York Times*, 4 September 2014, accessed October 2, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-will-not-be-cowed-by-barbaric-killers-dhkhvgsfsxd>.

backdrop of a hardened US stance towards Russia after the bitter failure of the reset policy.⁶⁵

They thus enjoyed the support from two of the four countries considered as *prima inter pares* within NATO while showing a strong and convincing united front to the international community.

In light of these observations, it is not surprising that Russia and collective defence were the main issues put on the agenda of the summit and reflected in its Communiqué. The declaration first recognised an 'arc of insecurity' ranging from conventional to hybrid threats against both the southern and the eastern flank of the Alliance (paragraph 5).⁶⁶ It also reiterated the '360-degree approach' adopted by defence ministers in 2015. Still, measures taken for the south during the summit were mostly symbolic. In that respect, the declaration reflected NATO's will to engage in the south with a lighter footprint through partnerships and training missions (paragraphs 26, 42, 82, 83, 86, 94-96, 106, 128, 133).

As regards NATO's response to Russian aggressive behaviour, the announcements were stronger and more tangible to highlight the ongoing reinforcement of its collective defence capabilities (paragraph 4). The language of the Communiqué was however measured, and reaffirmed NATO's will to maintain the channels of communication open through NATO-Russia Council:

We remain open to a periodic, focused, and meaningful dialogue with a Russia willing to engage on the basis of reciprocity in the NRC, with a view to avoiding misunderstanding, miscalculation, and unintended escalation, and to increase transparency and predictability. We also have military lines of communication. We have agreed to continue to

⁶⁵ Mahir Khalifazadeh, "The Obama administration's Russia "reset" policy and the southern Caucasus," *Central Asia & the Caucasus*, vol. 15 (2014): 84, 86-88. See also: Mikhail Zygar, "The Russian reset that never was," *Foreign Policy*, 9 December 2016, accessed October 6, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/12/09/the-russian-reset-that-never-was-putin-obama-medvedev-libya-mikhail-zygar-all-the-kremlin-men/>.

⁶⁶ "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 9 July 2016, accessed October 10, 2019 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.

use all these channels to address the critical issues we face and call on
Russia to make good use of all lines of communication (paragraph 12).

It can be explained by a coordinated French, Belgian, Spanish, and German call to soften the language on Russia during the negotiations. These countries gathered several times informally before the summit to ensure that the double-track approach and the 1997 Founding Act would be included in the Communiqué.⁶⁷ Ultimately, the heads of state and government announced two emblematic measures for the east with carefully selected words. The first one was the functional assessment of the command structure to evaluate its adequacy *vis-à-vis* the current security environment (paragraph 46). The second one was the launching of two military activities eastward presented as being part of the Readiness Action Plan package (from paragraph 35 to 42):

We have decided to establish an enhanced forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland to unambiguously demonstrate, as part of our overall posture, Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression. [...] We will also develop tailored forward presence in the southeast part of the Alliance territory [to] contribute to the Alliance's strengthened deterrence and defence posture (paragraphs 40-41).

With these two decisions, eastern countries definitively succeeded in shedding light on their issues and orienting the decisions in their favour during the summit. During a subsequent Bucharest nine meeting, the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis even asserted that thanks to the Warsaw summit all the allies 'started to clearly perceive the threat from the east,' and the Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid underlined Bucharest nine's contribution to the Alliance

⁶⁷ Interview with 2019-UZB. Contrary to their eastern counterparts, southern European countries do not consider Russia as one of the main threats facing the Alliance.

awareness of the Russian threat.⁶⁸ This success must nonetheless be considered in light with a combination of factors discussed above and encompassing the hardening of the United States stance on Russia and a British will to reinvest NATO after the Brexit referendum.

A 'return to basics' monitored by Bucharest nine

The reinforcement of NATO Command Structure

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO command structure has undergone several reforms reducing its size in consistence with the reorientation of its activities towards out of area operations in the 1990s and early 2000s. As a matter of fact, that of 2010-2012 was intended to save costs in the context of a major financial crisis affecting the Alliance.⁶⁹ After the Warsaw summit and during the functional assessment, it was no longer a question of rationalising the military structure, but rather of bolstering it. As underlined by an eastern European interviewee: 'We reduced the NCS too much in 2010 and history proved us right. This Alliance is all about adaptation and should be fit for purpose.'⁷⁰ Most allies were either in favour of the reinforcement of the command structure or didn't openly oppose it, apart from France. The Secretary General eventually had to come and meet the French President in Paris to find a compromise on the increase of about 1,200 military personnel.⁷¹ This staffing rise announcement was accompanied by the creation of a Joint Force Command for the Atlantic in Norfolk to secure Atlantic sea lines of communication, a Joint Support and Enabling Command in Ulm to facilitate the movement of troops across Europe and a Cyber Operation Centre to bolster NATO cyberdefense activities.⁷² If they don't equal the Cold War command structure

⁶⁸ 'Cooperation of eastern flank countries benefits the whole of NATO,' *The First News*.

⁶⁹ Interview with 2018-ADX.

⁷⁰ Interview with 2019-UZR.

⁷¹ Interviews with 2019-GZX, 2019-UZY, 2019-UZS, 2019-UZG, 2019-UZR, 2019-UZH, 2019-UZP, 2019-UZB.

⁷² 'New NATO command declared operational,' *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 17 September 2019, accessed 3 October 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_168945.htm. 'JFC Norfolk formally activated by

size and capabilities, these evolutions undeniably mark a refocus of NATO on its deterrence and defence posture.

Bucharest nine countries warmly encouraged this adaptation in various official statements from 2017 to 2019, while pushing NATO to deepen its efforts. In a joint statement published in October 2017, the foreign affairs ministers declared:

We need to consolidate and build on the decisions made in Wales and Warsaw, and to ensure coherence across our implementation efforts. We also need to make sure that the next summit provides concrete objectives and solutions for the path ahead in NATO's adaptation to the new security environment. This will require inter alia an adapted NATO Command Structure, which needs to be able to effectively respond to the changed security environment.⁷³

This meeting purposely happened before the 2018 Brussels summit, thus confirming Bucharest nine influence strategy adopted at its creation and resting on calculated media coverage of their shared concerns and claims. In that respect, defence ministers met four months before the summit to repeat Bucharest nine requests and clarify its agenda: 'The working sessions of the B9 Defence Ministers Meeting brought to the attention of the delegations topics such as NATO's Command Structure adaptation.'⁷⁴ The presence of the Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning, Heinrich Brauss, during this second meeting is significant in that he was presented during the author's fieldwork as one of the main architects and proponents

NAC,' *SHAPE NATO*, July 30, 2019, accessed 3 October 2019, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2019/jfc-norfolk-formally-activated-by-nac>. 'Cyber defence,' *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, last updated 6 September 2019, accessed 3 October 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_78170.htm.

⁷³ 'Joint Statement by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bucharest 9 Format (B9),' *Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 11 October 2017, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/43579>.

⁷⁴ 'Bucharest 9 Defence Ministers' Meeting,' *Romanian Ministry of National Defence*, 13 March 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, https://english.mapn.ro/cpresa/4965_Bucharest-9-Defence-Ministers%E2%80%99-Meeting.

of the reform within the International Staff.⁷⁵ After the foreign and defence ministers, presidents finally met one month before the summit to insist one last time on the implementation of the Warsaw summit decisions, among which the adaptation of the command structure.⁷⁶

In the resulting Brussels Communiqué, two paragraphs were dedicated to the subject and announced several concrete progresses, including an agreement on an implementation plan following the completion of the functional assessment and analysis of needs phases between 2016 and 2018: 'We have agreed a new, strengthened NATO Command Structure that meets the requirements of today and tomorrow.'⁷⁷

The launching of enhanced and tailored Forward Presence

For its part, the launching of two military activities eastwards fits into the broader picture of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) adopted at the Wales Summit in 2014. This latter was created to enhance NATO's reactivity and reinforce its deterrence and defence posture with a series of assurance and adaptation measures at sea, in the air and on land.⁷⁸ Enhanced and tailored forward presence, confirmed during the October 2016 defence ministerial meeting, belong to the ground measures of the RAP.⁷⁹ The negotiations on their format revolved around

⁷⁵ As underlined during several meetings the author attended within NATO and noted in her notebook, Heinrich Brauss, then Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning, and SACEUR (Gen. Breedlove and then Gen. Scaparrotti) were presented as the main proponents of the reform among the organisation's civilian and military staff. 'President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, received the Defence Ministers, respectively the Heads of the nine member states' ministerial delegations of the Eastern Flank of the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation,' *President of Romania*, 13 March 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/president-of-romania-klaus-iohannis-received-the-defence-ministers-respectively-the-heads-of-the-nine-member-states-ministerial-delegations-of-the-eastern-flank-of-the-north-atlantic-treaty-organisation>.

⁷⁶ 'Joint Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 meeting (Warsaw, 8th June 2018),' *President of Romania*, 8 June 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/joint-declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-bucharest-9-meeting-warsaw-8-th-june-2018>.

⁷⁷ 'Brussels Summit Declaration,' *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 11 July 2018, accessed 3 October 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

⁷⁸ 'NATO's Readiness Action Plan Fact Sheet,' *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, July 2016, accessed 3 October 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-rap-en.pdf.

⁷⁹ 'Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast,' *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, last updated 21 January 2019, accessed 3 December 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/topics_136388.htm?selectedLocale=en.

several friction points caused by the reluctance of some western allies attached to the 1997 Founding Act and concerned by the Russian perception of such activities.⁸⁰ After several heated negotiations and compromises made at the military and political levels, enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) finally emerged as a voluntary, rotational, persistent, but non-permanent activity in Poland and Baltic countries led by four framework nations.⁸¹ Less ambitious than its counterpart, tailored Forward Presence (tFP) principally materialised itself through the creation of a Romanian-led brigade and additional measures to better protect Romania's and Bulgaria's maritime and airspaces in light of their recurring violation by Russia.⁸²

Initially thought of as a political tool creating a 'tripwire' effect in case of a Russian attack, eFP has engendered varied discourses from both framework and host nations, as well as contributing members. If nations like Germany, France or Belgium tend to insist on training and interoperability, Poland and the United Kingdom prefer to underline their operability and deterrence effect.⁸³ Now looking at the Bucharest nine communication on eFP and tFP, the format applauded the deployment of allied troops in eastern territories in several statements:

We are preparing for the NATO Summit. Today, the allied forward presence has been consolidated on the entire Eastern flank of the Alliance, both in the North-East, the Baltic region and in the South-East, on Romanian territory and in the Black Sea region. We continue focusing on its implementation.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Interviews with 2019-UZR, 2019-UQX, 2019-UQX2, 2019-UQJ, 2019-UZG, 2019-UDS.

⁸¹ Interview with 2019-UZV. This observation has also been recorded by the author in her notebook during her fieldwork.

⁸² Lizzie Dearden, 'Full list of incidents involving Russian military and Nato since March 2014,' *The Independent*, 10 November 2014, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/full-list-of-incidents-involving-russian-military-and-nato-since-march-2014-9851309.html>.

⁸³ Interviews with 2019-UQX, 2019-UZB.

⁸⁴ Mihai Fifor cited in 'Bucharest 9 initiative – B9,' *Tactic Magazine*, 15 March 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.tacticamagazine.com/2018/03/15/bucharest-9-initiative-b9/>. See also: 'Joint Statement by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bucharest 9 Format (B9),' *Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*; 'Joint Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 meeting (Warsaw, 8th June 2018),' *President of Romania*.

The Polish President Andrzej Duda even declared in June 2018 during a Bucharest nine meeting that the format has reached its goal with the launching of the two activities.⁸⁵ Hence, as with the NATO command structure reform, Bucharest nine countries monitored the implementation of eFP and tFP while developing a narrative highlighting its success and stressing its importance: 'We welcome and support strengthened military presence of the United States and Canada in Europe, particularly on NATO's Eastern flank. [...] In the spirit of allied unity, solidarity and fair burden sharing, we underline the importance of NATO's forward presence from the Baltic to the Black Sea.'⁸⁶

Bucharest nine as a disparate group of countries

Putting an end to the perception of a homogenous eastern bloc

A part of the literature on central and eastern Europe tends to describe it as a relatively homogeneous bloc of countries sharing a common history and culture engendering similar paths and close cooperation.⁸⁷ This misperception has been nurtured by regional initiatives like that of Visegrad four which seemed to advocate unanimously for rapid accession to NATO after the fall of the USSR.⁸⁸ Indeed, in its 1991 declaration, the Visegrad group stated that:

A favourable basis for intensive development of cooperation is ensured by the similar character of the significant changes occurring in these countries, their traditional, historically shaped system of mutual

⁸⁵ 'Cooperation of eastern flank countries benefits the whole of NATO,' *The First News*.

⁸⁶ 'Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting (Košice, 28 February 2019),' *President of Romania*, 28 February 2019, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-bucharest-9-meeting-kosice-28th-of-february-2019>.

⁸⁷ See David Lane, 'Post-Communist States and the European Union,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 23 (2007): 461-477; Andrei Shleifer, Daniel Treisman, 'Normal Countries: The East 25 Years After Communism,' *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-10-20/normal-countries>.

⁸⁸ Karl-Heinz Kamp, 'The folly of rapid NATO expansion,' *Foreign Policy*, n°98 (1995): 116.

contacts, cultural and spiritual heritage and common roots of religious traditions.⁸⁹

It has been reinforced recently by Bucharest nine in its official statements. The group's narrative also rests upon a demonstration of unity and cooperation in line with the Visegrad initiative. In every joint declaration of heads of state or ministers, Bucharest nine countries thus regularly reaffirm their determination to work together:

We [...] gathered in Warsaw in the Bucharest 9, platform for consultation and dialogue, to reaffirm our commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, share views on a wide range of challenges and threats to the Euro-Atlantic area, and emphasise our resolve to address them together with our Allies and Partners.⁹⁰

Their cooperation is equally justified by a collective past marked by the experience of totalitarianism. This 'tragic' history would thus play a cemented role between former soviet republics which accessed NATO and the European Union approximately at the same time. It is particularly conspicuous in the speech made by the Polish defence minister Mariusz Błaszczak in April 2019 during a Bucharest nine meeting:

NATO's eastern flank countries have been particularly affected by history in the 20th century, we have experienced the tragedy of totalitarianism, deprivation of liberty and the ability to decide about oneself. The fact that we meet here today in such a group, shows how unifying is the historical experience [...] 70 years of the North Atlantic

⁸⁹ 'Visegrad Declaration 1991,' *Visegrad Group*, 15 February 1991, accessed 3 December 2019, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412>.

⁹⁰ 'Joint Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 meeting (Warsaw, 8th June 2018),' *President of Romania*.

Alliance, 20 and 15 years of our membership shows how important cooperation is.⁹¹

The result of such cooperation would be the formulation and achievement of four main security objectives constantly repeated by Bucharest nine representatives: the reinforcement of NATO defence and deterrence posture, the anchoring of the United States and other allies' troops in eastern Europe, the deepening of NATO-EU cooperation and the development of their own defense through regional partnerships.⁹²

During an interview conducted in June 2018, Polish President Andrzej Duda declared that Bucharest nine countries have achieved '100 percent effectiveness so far.'⁹³ Thereby he reinforces the image of a strong coalition of countries, which is characteristic of informal groupings aimed at concealing dissensions and divergences among their members to display a united front for negotiations.⁹⁴ However, it would be illusory to believe that this facade embodies the reality of their relations. Academic works like that of Dr Jana Vargovčíková have already demonstrated that Visegrad four hid national strategies and political issues that went against its stated objectives.⁹⁵ This article aims at showing that Bucharest nine also faces internal divergences, which could impede its influence in the coming years.

⁹¹ 'The eastern flank of NATO is the first line of the Alliance,' *Polish Ministry of National Defence*, 4 April 2019, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/the-eastern-flank-of-nato-is-the-first-line-of-the-alliance>.

⁹² See: 'Bucharest 9 initiative – B9,' *Tactic Magazine*; 'Joint Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 meeting (Warsaw, 8th June 2018),' *President of Romania*; 'Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting (Košice, 28 February 2019),' *President of Romania*; 'Speaker Dragnea: NATO membership, strategic partnership with US, security guarantees for Romania,' *Agerpres*, 13 March 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2018/03/13/speaker-dragnea-nato-membership-strategic-partnership-with-us-security-guarantees-for-romania--71860>.

⁹³ 'Cooperation of eastern flank countries benefits the whole of NATO,' *The First News*.

⁹⁴ Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, 'The club model of multilateral cooperation and problems of democratic legitimacy,' In Robert Keohane (dir.) *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalised World* (London: Routledge, 2002) 221.

⁹⁵ Jana Vargovčíková, 'Le Groupe de Visegrad, 20 ans après,' *Politique étrangère*, vol. 1 (2012): 149-154.

Various approaches to security

By first analysing Bucharest nine countries' defence strategies and white books, it is possible to observe divergent depictions of their security environment. In that respect, only Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Estonia explicitly address the conventional and hybrid threats posed by Russia to their territories.⁹⁶ Among them, Poland is undoubtedly the most assertive towards Russia: 'the scale of threats resulting from the Russian aggressive policy had not been adequately assessed in the past.'⁹⁷

By contrast, Slovakia adopts a more cautious approach: 'The security architecture of Europe is undergoing change and revision. This is the result of the system of international law, as applied so far, being questioned, as well as of the developments taking place in bilateral relations of the Russian Federation with Ukraine on the one hand, and with NATO and the EU on the other.'⁹⁸ In the case of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Hungary, Russia is absent of their documents. It can be explained for Hungary by the arrival in power of Viktor Orban in 2010 and its attempt at rapprochement with Russia ever since. Migration and terrorism are thus put at the front row of threats facing Hungary in its strategic document.⁹⁹

For their part, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic mention threats, which could emanate from Russia without being specific on their origins, as exemplified by the Czech 'potential threats and risks' list encompassing: 'proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems and their potential use; cybernetic attacks; disruption of critical infrastructures

⁹⁶ Polish Ministry of National Defence, *The Defence concept of the Republic of Poland* (Warsaw: Poland, Ministry of National Defence, 2017), 72; Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic, *The White Paper on Defence of the Slovak Republic* (Bratislava, Slovakia: Ministry of Defence, 2016), 118; The Presidential Administration of Romania, *National Defense Strategy 2015-2019* (Bucharest, Romania: Presidential Administration, 2015), 23; Estonian Ministry of Defence, *National Defence Strategy* (Tallinn, Estonia: Ministry of Defence, 2011), 26; Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, *White Paper on Lithuanian Defence Policy* (Vilnius, Lithuania: Ministry of National Defence, 2017), 59.

⁹⁷ Polish Ministry of National Defence, *The Defence concept of the Republic of Poland*, 6.

⁹⁸ Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic, *The White Paper on Defence of the Slovak Republic*, 33.

⁹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, *Hungary's National Security Strategy* (Budapest, Hungary: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012), 23.

(e.g. communication, transport, energy); [...] endangering the functioning of mechanisms and institutions of cooperative security, and arising of disputes among world powers.'¹⁰⁰

Finally, Latvia stands out from its eastern allies by encouraging cooperation with Russia in its 2012 document: 'Promotion of cooperation with the Russian Federation is a security and stability strengthening aspect of the Baltic Sea region. It is within the interests of Latvia to promote the principle of openness and mutual trust in the dialogue with the Russian Federation in bilateral contacts and at the levels of the OSCE, EU and NATO.'¹⁰¹

If the mere reading of strategic documents is insufficient to draw conclusions, especially when some of them seem outdated, they nonetheless help to nuance the image of unity portrayed by governmental officials in their discourses. These dissimilarities between eastern countries have equally been highlighted by Dr Sarka Kolmasova from Metropolitan University Prague. In her article about Visegrad four recent initiatives, she considers that despite its display of cultural and geographical proximity, this informal grouping suffers from divergences among its members on threat perceptions and preferences thus hindering their cooperation at the regional level.¹⁰² As such, Czech Republic silence on Russia in its defence strategy may be explained by a lack of consensus between government officials on the attitude to adopt *vis-à-vis* Russia.¹⁰³ Furthermore, together with Slovakia, the country doesn't advocate or praise for NATO and US military presence in eastern countries because of its historical refusal of stationing foreign troops in its own territory.¹⁰⁴ They thus differ from Poland, Romania and the Baltic states which have been vocal advocates of such presence since they acceded to NATO.

¹⁰⁰ The Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, *The White Paper on Defence* (Prague: Czech Republic: Ministry of Defence, 2011), 165.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, *The State Defence Concept* (Riga, Latvia: Ministry of Defence, 2012) 16.

¹⁰² Šárka Kolmašová, 'Competing Norms and Strategic Visions: A Critical Appraisal of V4 Security Potential,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 71 (2019): 225-226.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 234-5.

¹⁰⁴ Interview conducted with Dr Amélie Zima in Paris on 28 November 2019.

With regards to NATO-EU cooperation, most Bucharest nine countries are generally in favour of a deepening of their relationship in their strategic documents. Yet, it is possible to observe the establishment of a clear hierarchy between the two organisations by Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Slovakia, which all consider NATO as the main security provider in Europe.¹⁰⁵ Among them, Poland is the most reluctant country towards the EU defence policy: 'All EU actions in the security domain should complement and enrich NATO operations in a non-competitive manner.'¹⁰⁶ Polish strong attachment to NATO is noticeable up until the architectural choices made for its delegation: A massive NATO logo faces its entrance while other delegations preferably chose to display national symbols.¹⁰⁷ For its part, Estonia develops a more balanced discourse on NATO-EU relations and positions itself as one of the main proponents of the EU defence project:

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is an essential factor alongside NATO's collective defence that contributes to Estonia's security. The CSDP will strengthen the security of Europe and the EU's capability to fulfil its role in the international security environment. More efficient cooperation between the EU and NATO, which entails support for both organisations complementing and strengthening each other, serves Estonia's interests.¹⁰⁸

This enthusiasm towards the EU reflects in its participation in both French and EU operations in Africa with Latvia and Lithuania. The involvement of Baltic countries in EU defence initiatives may seem an oxymoron considering their high dependence on NATO for

¹⁰⁵ The Presidential Administration of Romania, *National Defense Strategy 2015-2019*, 12, 18; Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria, *White Paper on Defence and the armed forces of the Republic of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Bulgaria: Ministry of Defence, 2010), 17-19; Polish Ministry of National Defence, *The Defence concept of the Republic of Poland*, 30-32; Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, *White Paper on Lithuanian Defence Policy*, 11, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Polish Ministry of National Defence, *The Defence concept of the Republic of Poland*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ This observation has been recorded in the author's ethnographic notebook during her fieldwork.

¹⁰⁸ Estonian Ministry of Defence, *National Defence Strategy*, 9.

their territorial protection and historical Atlanticism.¹⁰⁹ However, they justify their contribution to EU operations by to a broadened definition of burden-sharing: 'It is an action of solidarity and part of the burden-sharing: France sends troops to the Baltic and Eastern countries to Africa.'¹¹⁰ In that, Baltic states are developing a privileged relationship and are deepening their dialogue with their western counterparts and use EU operations to nourish it.¹¹¹ For their part, Czech Republic and Hungary justify the sending of troops to Africa by their identification of terrorism and immigration as part of the main threats facing their territories.¹¹²

If Poland and Romania also participate in EU operations, they prefer to highlight their strategic partnership with the United States in their official documents and declarations. While Polish President Duda asked for the construction of a 'Fort Trump' in 2018, the Romanian president of the Social Democrat Party, Liviu Dragnea, declared on television that Romania deserved a 'special office' at the US department of state.¹¹³ Moreover, contrary to their eastern allies, Poland and Romania wish to position themselves as regional leaders to assume a greater role in negotiations.¹¹⁴ Hence, it is not surprising to note that most regional initiatives come from the two countries which heavily influence Bucharest nine lines of action.

¹⁰⁹ Philippe Perchoc, 'Les États Baltes, Entre Défense Territoriale Et Élargissement Des Concepts De Sécurité,' *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, vol. 44 (2013): 66-67.

¹¹⁰ Interview with 2019-UZR.

¹¹¹ Interview with 2019-UZV.

¹¹² Interview with 2019-UZY.

¹¹³ 'Ruling party leader: Romania should have "special office" at US State Department,' *Romania-Insider*, 14 March 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.romania-insider.com/dragnea-romania-special-office-state-department> ; Julian Borger, 'Fort Trump': Donald Trump considers request for US military base in Poland,' *The Guardian*, 18 September 2018, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/18/fort-trump-us-military-base-poland-russia>.

¹¹⁴ Sergiy Gerasymchuk, *Bucharest Nine: Looking for Cooperation on NATO's Eastern Flank?* (Kiev, Ukraine: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2019), 4.

Conclusion

Dissensions are inherent to informal groupings. By their very nature, they cannot prevent individual strategies aimed at maximising one's gains to the detriment of the other members. Yet, Bucharest nine has gradually emerged in NATO landscape as an influential grouping whose position is now carefully considered during negotiations. Created around the common objective of strengthening NATO deterrence and defence in the east, Bucharest nine remedy the human and budgetary shortcomings of its members through an active public policy. It takes the form of high-level meetings happening before and after NATO summits to foster initiatives and monitor the implementation of decisions. Unlike other informal groupings, Bucharest nine thus distinguishes itself by the publicity surrounding each of its events to draw attention on its issues.

The clout of Bucharest nine is now acknowledged by national representatives – 'another very efficient format we are not part of is Bucharest nine'¹¹⁵ – and by NATO civilian and military staff. In February 2019, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg attended a meeting organised in Košice by the group, following the steps of its former Deputy in 2016 and of NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe in 2018.¹¹⁶ To the knowledge of the author, Bucharest nine and the Quad are the only informal groupings benefiting from such attention by the structure, thus confirming its rising status within the Alliance.

¹¹⁵ interview with 2019-UZX.

¹¹⁶ See: 'Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting (Košice, February 28 2019),' *President of Romania*; "Foreign Ministers of nine allied states of the Eastern Flank, NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller meet in Bucharest to discuss security in the region," *Nine O' Clock*, 8 November 2016, accessed 3 December 2019, <https://www.nineoclock.ro/2016/11/08/foreign-ministers-of-nine-allied-states-of-the-eastern-flank-nato-deputy-secretary-general-rose-gottemoeller-meet-in-bucharest-to-discuss-security-in-the-region/> ; 'Speaker Dragnea: NATO membership, strategic partnership with US, security guarantees for Romania,' *Agerpres*.

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