

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2022-2-7>

PECULIARITIES OF THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT FOR THE BUCHAREST NINE COUNTRIES IN TERMS OF THE RUSSIAN THREAT

Oleksandra Davymuka,

Postgraduate Student of the National Institute for Strategic Studies (Kyiv, Ukraine)

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2185-0210

davymuka@gmail.com

Abstract. The article considers the peculiarities of the current security environment for the countries of the Bucharest Nine (B-9) in the context of the long-term Russian threat in the region. The study is based on using such research methods as a systematic approach for making a comprehensive analysis of the region of Central and Eastern Europe as a separate strategic space; a comparative method for identifying similar and different patterns in the assessments of current security challenges and threats by the Bucharest Nine states; and a content analysis of strategic documents, declarations and statements based on the results of meetings and summits of the B-9 countries and NATO member states. Within the framework of the article, the general role and significance of the Bucharest Nine format for regional security is characterized; the peculiarities and key aspects of the security threat from the Russian Federation for the B-9 countries are defined; the positions of the Bucharest Nine states on ensuring security in the region are determined depending on the internal and external contexts. In addition, the article considers the new realities of regional security for the B-9 countries with the beginning of a full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, as well as new approaches to responding to the threat from regional security actors (in particular, the North Atlantic Alliance).

Key words: the Bucharest Nine, Central and Eastern Europe, the North Atlantic Alliance, NATO's eastern flank, regional security, the Russian threat, aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Introduction. The beginning of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2014 put the issue of reassessment of threats to regional security on the agenda of Central and Eastern Europe countries. Since then, relations between the countries of the region have been marked by a number of new formats of political and security cooperation, one of which is the Bucharest Nine, founded to harmonize the regional policy of joint containment of the Russian Federation revisionism. The issue of the functioning of the Bucharest Nine as a regional form of security cooperation between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe remains the subject of study for a number of individual researchers (Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek, Tomasz Pawłuszko), as well as different state and non-governmental think-tanks, such as the Polish Institute of International Affairs in Poland (Marcin Terlikowski, Veronika Józwiak, Łukasz Ogrodnik, Jakub Pieńkowski, and Kinga Raś) or the Foreign Policy Council «Ukrainian Prism» in Ukraine (Sergiy Gerasymchuk), etc.

The format of cooperation within the B-9 was especially updated with the conduct of full-scale military operations of Russia on the territory of Ukraine since February 24, 2022, requiring from the countries of the region not just a reassessment of the regional security environment, but an urgent response to an immediate physical threat from the eastern borders. In this context, the purpose of this article is to analyze the peculiarities of the current security environment for the countries of the Bucharest Nine in the context of a long-term Russian threat in the region.

Main part. Achieving the purpose involves the implementation of a number of tasks in the framework of this study. First, it is supposed to characterize the general role and significance of the Bucharest Nine format for regional security. The second task is to define the peculiarities and key aspects of the security threat from the Russian Federation for the Bucharest Nine countries. The third task involves determining the positions of the B-9 states on ensuring security in the region, depending on the internal and external contexts. The fourth task includes an analysis of the new realities of regional security for the B-9 countries with the start of a full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, as well as new approaches to a comprehensive response to the threat from regional security actors (in particular, the North Atlantic Alliance). The achieving abovementioned purpose involved using such research methods as a systematic approach for making a comprehensive analysis of the region of Central and Eastern Europe as a separate strategic space; a comparative method for identifying similar and different patterns in the assessments of current security challenges and threats by the Bucharest Nine states; and a content analysis of strategic documents, declarations and statements based on the results of meetings and summits of the B-9 countries and NATO member states.

Results and discussion. The first task in the framework of the study is to consider the general role and significance of the Bucharest Nine format for regional security. The B-9 serves as a format for military-political consultations for nine NATO's member states in the Baltic and Black Sea region. It was launched by Poland and Romania, the states which, first, claim the status of regional leaders in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in the Black Sea region, and, second, directly face the threats originating from Russia (for Poland, above all, these are the risks associated with neighboring Kaliningrad Region, while Romania is concerned about Ukraine's Crimean peninsula occupied by Russia and the militarization of the Black Sea region provoked by Russia); and, third, they seek to improve the security situation in the region both through regional cooperation and by engaging global leaders, first of all, the United States in the region's security agenda (Gerasymchuk, 2019).

This format is a stable platform to «compare notes», primarily in the field of defense and security for its participants. Consultations between countries are held at different levels through regular meetings between the heads of defense or foreign affairs governmental institutions, as well as the heads of countries participating in the format (the Bucharest Nine summits). According to the geopolitical view, the focus is on such direct contacts rather than on tedious discussions of lower-level politicians within the frame-work of permanent international organizations (Pawłuszko, 2021: 17). The countries of the region have different national interests, but all of them are united by the collective defense of NATO, political solidarity, democratic values, and since 2014 – by a common threat, that is Russian aggressive policy in the region. For some actors this threat is more perceived (the Baltic states or Poland), for others – it is less obvious (Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria). Bringing together the states of NATO's eastern flank in a single solidarity initiative, developing common crisis response mechanisms, and possibly even common approaches to warfare remains a long-term plan for the B-9.

The format of military-political consultations of the Bucharest Nine countries is important in the context of its significance for regional security. All nine countries geographically belong to Central and Eastern Europe, located between the Baltic and Black Seas and represent the eastern flank of NATO. A review of the strategic environment demonstrates that the security challenges in this region are not a new phenomenon due to the long-term geopolitical confrontation between large states for control of the respective territories in the past. Today, the region between the Baltic and Black Seas, due to its historical development and geographical location, continues to play a special role for the military-strategic dimension of security for all regional actors (both on the mainland and in the water area). Also, the political support of the United States has critical importance for the B-9, as the American administration is interested in the structured cooperation on the eastern flank of the Alliance and the solidity of the positions of the member states. In the face of growing military threat in the region, NATO, with the leading role of Americans, is considered by the Bucharest Nine states as the main guarantor of security for the Euro-Atlantic community (Orzelska-Stączek, 2020: 85).

The second task within the framework of the article is to define the peculiarities and key aspects of the security threat from the Russian Federation for the Bucharest Nine countries. It should be noted here that the region of Central and Eastern Europe is fairly significant for Russia from a geostrategic point of view. The Baltic and Black Seas are adjacent waters for the Russian Federation, providing access to the Atlantic Ocean. The countries participating in the B-9 in this region previously belonged to «socialist camp», then acting more like objects of influence for the «great powers», and today they are full-fledged international actors with membership in NATO and the EU. In view of the systemic policy of the Russian Federation, aimed at undermining the system of European and transatlantic unity, the Bucharest Nine countries are among the first to experience the destructive influence of Moscow. Russia uses the internal agenda of the B-9 countries, which allows diversifying its instruments of hybrid war (financial, energy, information, political and diplomatic, etc.). In this context, Russia can build political alliances with ideologically «friendly» political groups promoting the Kremlin's ideas inside the B-9 country. In some countries, this happens primarily with the involvement of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minorities and with the spread of pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives among them. At the same time, the hybrid influence of the Russian Federation in this region is not homogeneous and differs in intensity and messages used in a particular country.

At the political and diplomatic level, the Bucharest Nine countries can face the hybrid influence of the Russian Federation due to the presence of a (pro-)Russian agent network. The relevant agents are present, in particular, among the employees of Russian embassies, as well as certain radical parties (which may not be mass, but are quite well-known in the information space due to their odious rhetoric and behavior). The socio-political imbalance in the states is achieved by the Russian Federation through work with different target audiences and the most sensitive issues: these are Russian-speaking minorities with problems of social integration and «nostalgia for the past» in Latvia and Estonia; raising the issue of dependence on Russian energy resources and investments, as well as the threat of the so-called «blurring» of national identity from rapprochement with the United States and NATO in Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia; the use of issues of historical memory and sensitive pages in the history of relations with neighboring states (primarily Ukraine) to carry out provocations in the public space in Poland and Hungary. At the same time, the main goals achieved by the Russian Federation by hybrid influencing the states of the region are to divide the European and Euro-Atlantic allies, to undermine their unity and, thereby, to obtain beneficial political and economic decisions (for example, blocking the processes of strengthening sanctions against Russia in connection with the military aggression against Ukraine).

Considering that the Bucharest Nine countries represent the eastern flank of NATO, the hybrid actions of the Russian Federation in this region are complemented by direct military actions in the region of the Baltic and Black Seas. At least since 2014 Russia has been increasing its capabilities in the Western Military District, militarizing the Kaliningrad region, conducting military exercises near the borders of NATO member states. Russia continues aggressive air and maritime domain behavior against Allies and Partners and has threatened Denmark and Sweden with nuclear attack, rehearsing such a scenario against Sweden on more than one occasion (CEPA, 2020). In the case of the Black Sea, which is of strategic importance for Russia, the Kremlin illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula, has started a war firstly in the east of Ukraine, and then throughout the country. Today, the Russian Federation uses the militarized territory of Crimea for shelling on the territory of Ukraine; and blocks the Black Sea ports. Moscow continues to keep «frozen» the conflicts in the unrecognized Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, without withdrawing Russian military contingents from there.

This situation has created new realities of security for states of the B-9 format. The aggression by Russia against Ukraine, its increasingly provocative narrative about relations with the West, and alarming developments in its force posture at or near its borders with NATO have suddenly made these countries the focal point of some of the most dangerous

scenarios of a potential military standoff between Russia and NATO (Terlikowski et al., 2018). The physical proximity of Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine forces the B-9 states to jointly and quickly respond to ensuring their own security, in particular, within the framework of the North Atlantic alliance.

For a more complete understanding of how such a respond occurs, it is necessary to pay attention to the positions of the B-9 states on ensuring security in the region, depending on the internal and external contexts. As is known, the format of the Bucharest Nine is not a homogeneous formation; it is not institutionalized and is fragmented according to the composition of participants into three conditional groups – the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the countries of the Visegrad group (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic) and the Black Sea region countries (Bulgaria, Romania). The B-9 states have different national interests and differences in the perception of security issues; they represent themselves in the region diversely. Each state has its own security context with its own peculiarities.

Poland is one of the founders of the B-9 initiative and acts as a regional leader. The state lobbies the interests of Ukraine in Europe actively and advocates the strict NATO's approach to the Russian Federation. Romania, the second founding state of the B-9, in turn, is also an applicant for regional leadership, actively supporting initiatives to deploy NATO forces on the eastern flank and realizing the threat of the Russian military presence in the Black Sea region. The Baltic states also have their own peculiarities on the security issues. Lithuania, like Poland, feels a direct physical threat from Belarus and the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. Estonia and Latvia are subject to serious hybrid influences of the Russian Federation, in particular due to the vulnerability of a large number of the Russian-speaking population of the countries to them. In Czech Republic, a reassessment of approaches to security took place recently, when the issue of the threat posed by the Russian Federation to the national interests of the state with its renewed parliament and government finally became clear. Slovakia and Bulgaria remain states with significant Russian influence in the economic (dependence on energy) and public (at the level of information campaigns) spaces, as well as with a cautious attitude towards NATO's presence in the region. Current positioning of Hungary in the region can be called unique in a certain way; the actions and rhetoric of its leadership have recently led to criticism and a certain diplomatic isolation of the state both in Europe in general and among its closest allies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Despite the mentioned differences and peculiarities, all the states of the Bucharest Nine are united by an important factor – belonging to the North Atlantic Alliance and its system of collective defense, as well as awareness of the vulnerability of the states to security threats. Despite the possible rhetoric, contradictory statements and situational decisions of individual political figures, since 2014 all the B-9 states have realized and reviewed the threat from the Russian Federation, which is directly or indirectly stated in updated strategic documents (national security concepts and strategies of countries). At the same time, those countries that have a common land or sea border with the Russian Federation and have suffered the most from its destructive actions in the past place the greatest emphasis on this threat. The threat from the Russian Federation remains relevant in the long term for the Baltic countries, which focus on increasing Russia's military activity and presence, in particular in the Baltic Sea region and on their borders, primarily in the Kaliningrad region (National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia 2017, National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia 2019, National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania 2017).

A similar assessment of the actions of the Russian Federation is provided by the National Security Strategy of Poland, which mentions Russia's development of its offensive military potential, including in the western strategic direction (National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2019). The strategic documents of Romania (National Defense Strategy of the Republic of Romania 2020) and Slovakia (Milo, 2020) do not ignore the issue of Moscow's violation of international law and its attempts to undermine transatlantic unity. Other B-9 countries, in particular Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria, despite avoiding direct references to the Russian Federation in their national security strategies, indicate the threat from its side indirectly – through the mention of the aggressive policy of some actors in the international arena (Security Strategy of the Czech Republic 2015); «big power ambitions» that led to the forceful annexation of the territories of neighboring countries (Stepper, 2020); violation of the geostrategic and military balance in the Black Sea region (Актуализирана стратегия за национална сигурност на Република България 2018).

On the practical level, all this time the B-9 countries have been demonstrating an agreed vision of needs in terms of regional security (specifically within the framework of membership in the Alliance). In this case, the common and agreed interests of the B-9 states are generally reduced to the need to strengthen NATO's forward presence and defense on its eastern flank; compliance with the Alliance's strategic approaches to modern security realities and to the security context for each member state; strengthening the national resilience of member states; increasing interoperability and mobility among states both in the B-9 and within NATO in general.

These interests were only actualized within the new realities of regional security for the B-9 countries with the beginning of the full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which led to the development of new approaches to comprehensive response to the threat from regional security actors. After that, a new stage in the assessment of the regional security environment by the B-9 states has begun. In 2022, political consultations within the framework of the B-9 significantly intensified at various levels. The first summit at the level of presidents and heads of government of the Bucharest Nine countries was held the day after February 24, 2022. Then the parties expressed unequivocal support for the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, condemning the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation and discussing new security realities for Central and Eastern Europe. The meeting was held in Poland, where Andrzej Duda in his opening speech emphasized that the time has come «for fundamental military change on NATO eastern flank», and that the military adaptation of the region «can no longer be seen as a long-term goal» – it is needed «here and now» (Bucharest Nine summit in Warsaw, 2022). This demand was soon satisfied – during

the extraordinary summit of the North Atlantic Alliance on March 24, 2022, NATO member states decided to activate defense plans, and to deploy four additional multinational battlegroups in a number of the B-9 states (Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria). The military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine had a significant impact on the reassessment of security issues even among those states of the eastern flank, where the deployment of allied forces has previously been controversial (for example, there was no socio-political consensus on the issue of the deployment of NATO's forces in Slovakia until February 24).

Consultations among countries continued at other levels all this time before the summit of the Bucharest Nine in June 2022. On March 31, 2022, a meeting between the ministers of foreign affairs took place in Bratislava, Slovakia (Bucharest Nine meeting in Bratislava, 2022). During it, the issues of military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the future of the Alliance, including the new Strategic Concept of NATO, as well as the need to strengthen defense and deterrence (in particular, the forward presence of the Alliance in the region) were discussed again. The next meeting at the level of defense ministers of the Bucharest Nine states was held just before the summit – on June 6, 2022, in Romania. In a joint statement based on the results of the meeting, the defense ministers called for maintaining unity in strengthening political and practical assistance to Ukraine, expressing full support for the Alliance's measures to strengthen the deterrence and defense potential in response to the actions of the Russian Federation and its military presence in the region (Joint Statement by the Defense Ministers of the Bucharest 9, 2022). At the same time, the defense ministers came to an agreement on the development of specific measures during the future NATO's summit in Madrid to increase the forward presence of NATO forces in the B-9 states. Accordingly, all intermediate stages of consultations before the B-9 summit in June have already confirmed the clear focus of the states on awareness of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, protection of security interests within the North Atlantic Alliance.

Finally, on June 10, 2022, a new summit of the Bucharest Nine was held in Bucharest, Romania, at the level of the presidents of the B-9 countries. The main purpose of the meeting was the need to discuss the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its security consequences for NATO among the member states of the Alliance's eastern flank. Despite the usual «comparing notes», the key difference from previous summits was the issue of adaptation to the presence of full-scale military operations on the European continent, the transition from potential security threats to real ones. The meeting was a preliminary event before the NATO summit at the end of June 2022 in Madrid, where it was important for the B-9 states to speak with a single consolidated voice and common positions. The outlined common security interests of the B-9 states were expressed in the adopted declaration following the results of the summit in Bucharest. The aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine was defined by the B-9 states as «the biggest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in recent decades», which the participants of the summit strongly condemned (Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting, 2022). The position of the countries of the region was expressed in support of the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, in calls to the Russian Federation to change its aggressive behavior, to withdraw its armed forces from Ukraine, etc.

In addition to the expected reaction and the obvious position of the B-9 countries regarding the support of Ukraine, the important results of the summit were the agreement of the positions on the expectations from the adaptation of NATO's policy to the new security context. Since 2014, the Alliance has responded to the aggression of the Russian Federation by intensifying defense plans, strengthening deterrence and defense positions on land, in the air and at sea, including by increasing its presence on the entire eastern flank from the Baltic to the Black Seas. In this context, the creation of four new battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, as well as the strengthening of already existing battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic states, were important for regional security. At the same time, since the beginning of the full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the B-9 states have demonstrated the need to strengthen their deterrence and defense positions along the entire eastern flank with the ability to prevail in all operational areas during the elimination of security threats. The multi-domain Allied presence, the operational interoperability in peacetime, the improvement of command mechanisms, and the strengthening of military infrastructure (anti-missile, anti-air defense, military mobility and access to fuel supply chain) are key issues for the B-9 countries.

The states of the region also noted hybrid threats in the context of the need to strengthen the resilience of allies within NATO. A key moment at the Bucharest Nine's summit was the emphasis on the importance of long-term transatlantic ties and Allied commitment to «defend every inch of NATO territory» (Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting, 2022). And the position of the B-9 countries on the eve of the adoption of new NATO's Strategic Concept was as follows: the document was supposed to reflect, among other things, the new security reality created by Russia's war against Ukraine. Due to that, the Russian Federation became the most significant and direct threat to Euro-Atlantic security, and NATO in these realities should focus on its key function – collective defense. Looking solely at defence expenditure trends and the ambitious technical modernisation and transformation plans, it might seem that the B-9 has everything it takes to strengthen its position and the role of the Eastern Flank in the ongoing NATO adaptation process and make sure the Alliance does not lose its focus on the needs of this particular region (Terlikowski et al., 2018).

The B-9 countries aim to continue to allocate at least 2% of GDP to defense until 2024, with the possibility of increasing such spending in the future. The emphasis on the need to strengthen NATO's defense capabilities on the eastern flank, as well as on the need to «return» NATO to its primary function (collective defense), indicates that the B-9 states, despite the rhetoric of certain politicians, are aware the proximity of a real physical threat to its borders from the Russian Federation at the level of strategic assessment of the security environment. This motivates them to represent a «united front» and emphasize the Alliance's guarantees of protection in the event of a possible attack or aggression.

The abovementioned demands of the B-9 countries were taken into account when the new NATO's Strategic Concept was approved on June 29, 2022. The Concept defined new priorities, tasks and approaches in the activities of the Alliance for the next decade, taking into account the current security environment (NATO's Strategic Concept 2022). The Alliance has decided on a fundamental change since the end of the Cold War in approaches to defense and deterrence to respond to new security realities. These approaches relate to the strengthening of the Alliance's forward defense borders, enhancing battlegroups in the eastern flank, transforming the NATO Response Force, increasing the total number of Allied High Readiness Forces to more than 300000 people (from 40000). Such a decision was a response to the latest requests from the Bucharest Nine countries. Also, the Alliance decided to reinforce its operational capabilities including pre-positioned equipment, and stockpiles of military supplies; forward-deployed capabilities (air defence); strengthening command and control; upgrading defence plans, etc. (Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 2022).

The new Strategic Concept of the Allies reflects crucial changes in NATO member states' assessment of the strategic security environment, particularly on their eastern borders. The document emphasized Russia's violation of norms and principles that contributed to the stability of European security; and also emphasized that NATO «cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity» (NATO's Strategic Concept 2022). This point is especially important for those countries of the Bucharest Nine that feel a similar threat from the Russia at the level of national security – in particular, Poland, Lithuania or Estonia.

The Russian Federation was defined as the most significant and direct threat to the security of the member states of the Alliance, as well as peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. Its militarization, including in the regions of the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean seas, «along with military integration with Belarus» was described as a challenge to NATO's security and interests. NATO's willingness to respond to the Russian threat and hostile actions in a united and responsible manner, supporting partners in countering its possible malicious interference was a positive result of the summit for the B-9 countries.

The Strategic Concept 2022 characterizes the updated content of the Alliance's three core tasks (deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, cooperative security), which specify NATO's response as a defense bloc to strategic threats and challenges. NATO's key objective in this context is to strengthen its deterrence and defense capabilities by ensuring «a substantial and persistent presence on land, at sea, and in the air, including through strengthened integrated air and missile defence» (that is, the Alliance actually declares a return to military means of deterrence and defense).

NATO emphasizes strengthening the collective readiness, responsiveness, deployability, integration and interoperability of Allied forces and the overall defense capabilities of the Alliance, including the improvement of critical infrastructure, supply chains, etc. (which has core importance for the B-9 states). Thus, the Bucharest Nine countries satisfied their security interests and response to the Russian threat at the level of the strategic vision of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Conclusion. The results of the study allow making the following conclusions regarding the peculiarities of the current security environment for the Bucharest Nine countries in the context of the long-term Russian threat in the region:

a) The B-9 format has a unique significance for regional security due to the consolidation of the political positions of Central and Eastern Europe countries, which have a special geographical location between the Baltic and Black seas; similar common historical development; and currently represent the Eastern flank of NATO.

b) The most urgent threat to the regional security of the B-9 countries is the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation, which has various manifestations – from using a complex of hybrid instruments against the states of Central and Eastern Europe to using military and political measures, like militarization of border regions, illegal annexation of territories and beginning armed conflicts. At the same time, the main goal of the Russian Federation in the region of the B-9 countries is to divide and undermine the European and Euro-Atlantic unity.

c) The analysis of the B-9 states' positions regarding security in the region demonstrates the presence of heterogeneity and fragmentation of the national interests of the Bucharest Nine participants, depending on their internal security context. However, these differences do not override the basic unifying factor for the B-9 countries, namely membership in the North Atlantic Alliance and its collective defense system, and awareness of the vulnerability of regional security to external threats. The joint perception of security trends and the Russian threat, in particular, has been fixed since 2014 at the level of strategic documents (national security concepts and strategies) of the Bucharest Nine countries. And the agreed interests of the countries of the region as NATO member states relate, above all, to the need of strengthening the forward presence and defense of the Alliance on the eastern flank.

d) The new realities of the regional security environment, in particular the full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, led to the development of new approaches to responding to the threat from both the B-9 states and NATO in general. From February 24, 2022, the military-political consultations of the Bucharest Nine countries have intensified, the results of which have been reflected in the decisions made during the summits at the highest level. The general position of the B-9 countries regarding the renewed threat from the Russian Federation to regional security consists in expectations from NATO to strengthen the positions of deterrence and defense along the entire eastern flank; as well as emphasizing the importance of long-term transatlantic ties and the Alliance's focus on its key function – collective defense, which was taken into account in the new NATO Strategic Concept.

References:

1. Bucharest Nine summit in Warsaw. The President of the Republic of Poland. 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.president.pl/news/president-calls-for-military-aid-to-ukraine,49477> [in English].
2. Declaration of the Heads of State Bucharest 9 Meeting (Bucharest, June 10, 2022). The President of Romania. 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-bucharest-9-meeting-bucharest-june-10-2022?fbclid=IwAR3o0f47F6rzmZUvBR-qmydRvL-XZWm8ML5IF-q87LJhP0BkACpzzpQtw> [in English].
3. Deputy Minister Paweł Jabłoński represents MFA at Bucharest Nine meeting in Bratislava. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/deputy-minister-pawel-jablonski-represents-mfa-at-bucharest-nine-meeting-in-bratislava> [in English].
4. Gerasymchuk, S. (2019). Bucharest Nine: Looking for Cooperation on NATO's Eastern Flank? *Foreign Policy Council Ukrainian Prism*. Retrieved from <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/15574.pdf> [in English].
5. Hodges, B., Bugajski, J., Wojcik, R., Schmiedl, C. (2020). One Flank, One Threat, One Presence. A Strategy for NATO's Eastern Flank. *Center for European Policy Analysis*. Retrieved from https://cepa.org/cepa_files/2020-CEPA-report-one_flank_one_threat_one_presence.pdf [in English].
6. Joint Statement by the Defence Ministers of the Bucharest 9. Ministry of National Defence of Romania. 2022. Retrieved from https://www.mapn.ro/cpresa/17469_joint-statement-by-the--defence-ministers-of-the-bucharest-9 [in English].
7. Milo, D. (2020). Highlights of the New Slovak Security and Defence Strategy Proposals. *GLOBSEC*. Retrieved from <https://www.globsec.org/2020/12/11/highlights-of-the-new-slovak-security-and-defence-strategy-proposals/> [in English].
8. National Defence Strategy of the Republic of Romania for 2020-2024. Romania Presidential Administration. 2020. Retrieved from https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National_Defence_Strategy_2020_2024.pdf [in English].
9. National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia. 2017. Retrieved from https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_security_concept_2017.pdf [in English].
10. National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania. 2017. Retrieved from <https://kam.lt/download/57457/2017-nacsaugstrategijaen.pdf> [in English].
11. National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland. National Security Bureau. 2020. Retrieved from <https://en.bbn.gov.pl/en/publications/publications/769,National-Security-Strategy-of-the-Republic-of-Poland.html> [in English].
12. NATO's Strategic Concept 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/> [in English].
13. On Approval of the National Security Concept. Legal Acts of the Republic of Latvia. 2019. Retrieved from <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/309647-on-approval-of-the-national-security-concept> [in English].
14. Orzelska-Stączek, A. (2020). New wave of regional cooperation in Central Europe as a response to new threats. *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, № 18 (2020), 79–97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36874/RIESW.2020.1.5>. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/44925254/Agnieszka_Orzelska_St%C4%85czek_New_wave_of_regional_cooperation_in_Central_Europe_as_a_response_to_new_threats [in English].
15. Pawłuszko, T. (2021). The Rise of Geopolitics in Poland and Eastern Europe: the Three Seas and the Bucharest Nine Initiatives. *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies*, № 1, 5–26. DOI: 10.12775/CJPS.2021.001. Retrieved from <https://apcz.umk.pl/CJPS/article/view/35818/30781> [in English].
16. Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government (2022 NATO Summit). 2022. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/uk/natohq/opinions_197288.htm?selectedLocale=en [in English].
17. Security Strategy of the Czech Republic. 2015. Retrieved from https://www.army.cz/images/id_8001_9000/8503/Security_Strategy_2015.pdf [in English].
18. Stepper, P. (2020). Sovereignty and Defence Capacities. A Brief Assessment of the New Hungarian National Security Strategy. *Antall József Knowledge Centre*. Retrieved from <https://digitalistudastar.ajtk.hu/en/research-blog/sovereignty-and-defence-capacities> [in English].
19. Terlikowski, M., Józwiak, V., Ogrodnik, Ł., Pieńkowski, J., Raś, K. (2018). The Bucharest 9: Delivering on the Promise to Become the Voice of the Eastern Flank. *Polish Institute of International Affairs. Policy Paper*, No. 4 (164). Retrieved from <https://pism.pl/upload/images/artykuly/legacy/files/24501.pdf> [in English].
20. Updated National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2018). Retrieved from https://www.mod.bg/bg/doc/cooperation/20181005_Akt_strateg_NS_RB.pdf [in Bulgarian].