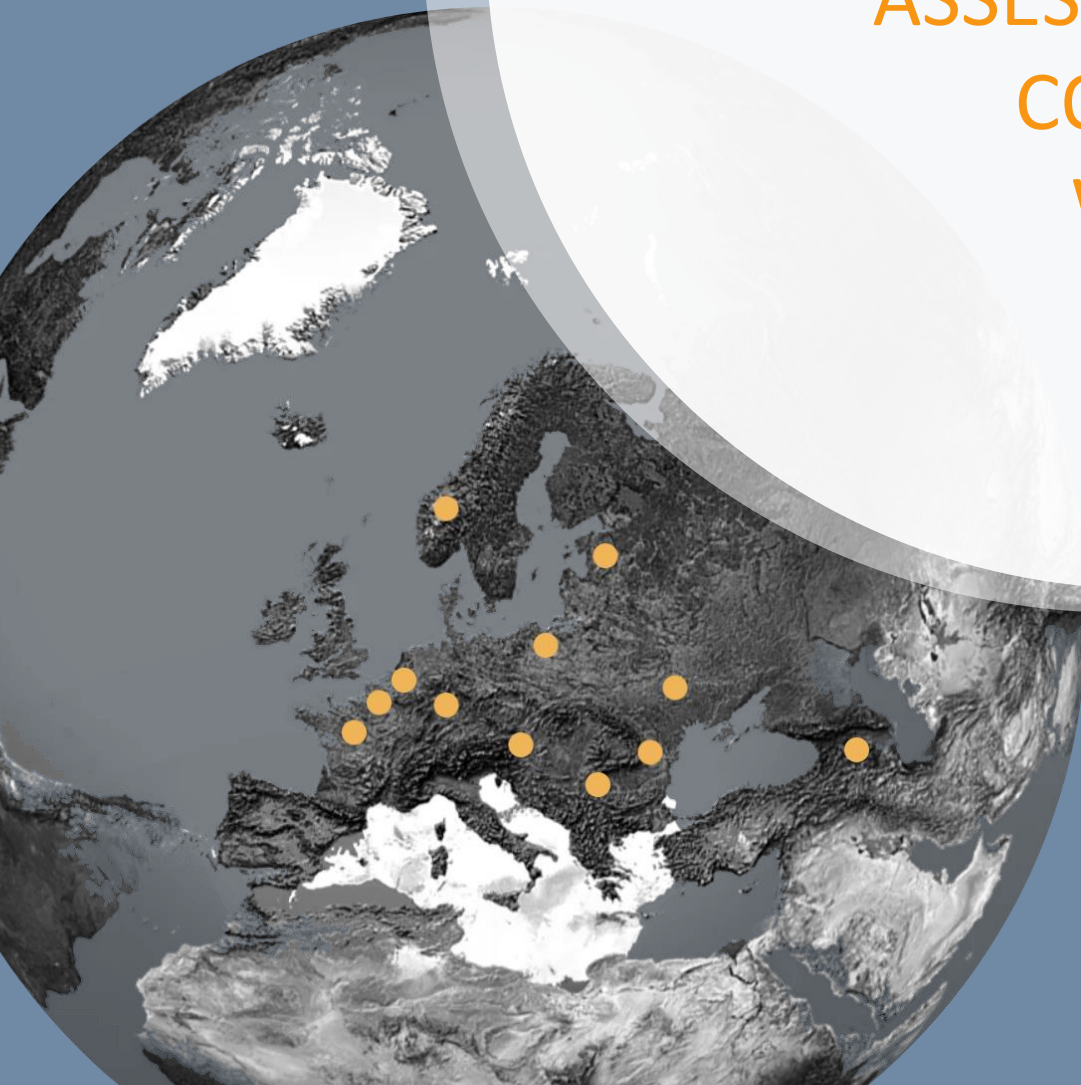# THE METHODOLOGY FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT TO BE CONDUCTED IN WP3, 4 AND 5

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REUNIR – D2.3 – WORKING PAPER ON THE METHODOLOGY FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT TO BE CONDUCTED IN WP3, 4 AND 5

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HISTORY OF CHANGES

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1.0	30.06.2024 (M6)	Final version

CONTENTS

Future Threats to EU Candidate Countries: The REUNIR Strategic Foresight Approach

1. INTRODUCTION

The EU needs foreign policy instruments that are fit for purpose to support the countries of the Western Balkans (WB6) and Eastern neighbourhood (EN3) against the geopolitical ambitions of states that seek to undermine their democratic trajectory towards EU accession. These instruments need to, by definition, be designed for a tomorrow in which military aggression, malign influence operations and shocks will likely impact the democratic resilience of the EU's neighbourhood and the effectiveness of the EU's policies in yet unknown ways. REUNIR's strategic foresight methodology is designed to (1) assess current and anticipate future threats and (2) suggest ways to make the EU's policy toolkits more robust to counter these threats, and support resilience in and EU integration of the WB6 and EN3. In this paper, we outline the methodology with which we seek to identify, assess, and prioritise threats and design policy recommendations.

2. APPLYING FUTURES THINKING TO ANALYSIS AND POLICY DESIGN

Policy recommendations need to be designed for the future. This requires an idea – implicit or explicit - of what this future will look like. From social psychology, we know that thinking about the future on autopilot is suboptimal and involves a range of cognitive, social, and institutional biases (see Kahneman 2011; Oeberst et al. 2023). For example, humans tend to extrapolate the course of events based on the past, rate recent events more likely to reoccur than others – even if they are statistically no more likely – and underestimate the extent of fundamental change in the future. The political reality of frequent surprises in international politics illustrates this (see, e.g., Dahl 2013; Meyer, Guttmann, and Ikani 2022). Yet, political science and international relations scholars rarely make assessments and predictions of the future explicit. Future studies and forecasting are both rather small subfields of the discipline (see Gleditsch 2022). Similarly, foreign policy making – for example in the EU – has only in recent years started to embrace methods to structure futures thinking, to arrive at better assessments of what the future could be (see Bressan 2024; Noonan 2020). This stands in contrast to, for example, fields like business, environmental and climate policy, technology policy, or defence planning, in which foresight methods have been in use for a longer time (see Dreyer and Stang 2013; Petropoulos et al. 2022; Prítyi, Docherty, and Lavery 2021).

Foresight is a broad category of approaches to better understand what is to come, i.e. the future, or a range of possible futures. It is an umbrella term for a variety of future-oriented analyses that often involve more than mere prediction of a single future (Bressan and Rotmann 2019; Hines 2020; Scoblic 2021). Our understanding of foresight assumes the pluralist epistemological position that there is no single, knowable, predictable, or static future since events and actions keep making the future (Gabriel 2014; see Gidley 2017). It is impossible to predict most social phenomena – the result of complex and independent interactions – with sufficient certainty and precision to be useful. This is why our approach instead works with multiple alternative scenarios. This helps to avoid a misleading expectation of *the* future as merely a predictable continuation or extrapolation of the past.

Scenarios are the main foresight tool we use for REUNIR. They are 'descriptions of possible situations and chains of events with explicit reference to the future' (Bressan et al. 2019a: 12-13; based on Gabriel 2013; Neuhaus 2003). Participatory, narrative scenarios are 'the result of a conscious and deliberate group process of construction without any claim to be predictive. They must therefore always be thought of in the plural — meaning that there are, by definition, multitudes of scenarios for the topic in question' (Bressan et al. 2019a: 13; based on Gabriel 2013; Neuhaus 2003). These kinds of scenarios highlight the fact that *the* (singular) future is inherently unknowable. Instead, the scenarios are methodologically disciplined thought experiments to help us map the range of plausible possibilities. Narrative scenarios consist of an *image of the future* (e.g. what a plausible threat landscape could look like for a particular region in the 2030-35 timeframe) and a *history of the future* (what plausible path could lead from today to that future). In addition to *qualitative* analysis, scenarios can also be built on pluralist *quantitative* analysis – by modelling or simulating different projections of quantitative indicators and assumptions, for example (see Lustick and Tetlock 2021; Rotmann et al. 2021, 27–40).

Figure 1: Futures cone, depicting the range of imagined futures based on a pluralist foresight approach
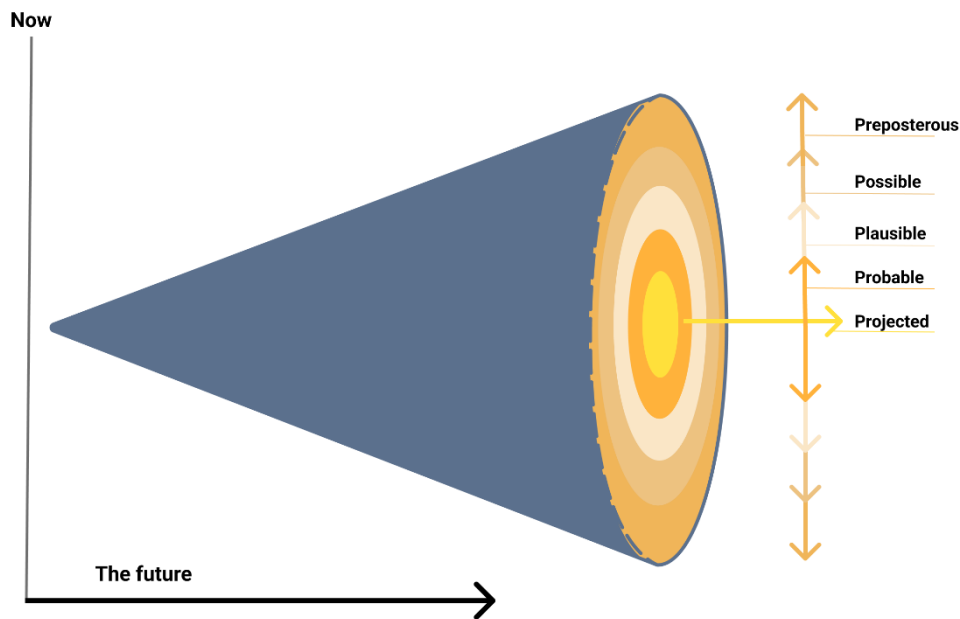
Based on Baxter (2020); Voros (2003, 2017)

Forecasting or prediction approaches usually take a different epistemological starting point than our pluralist understanding: they seek to provide accurate predictions by approximating the most likely outcome of a (singular) future, reducing uncertainty as much as possible. This means the closer the forecast is to the future reality, the better (in terms of accuracy and precision). Prediction is 'the assignment of a probability distribution to an outcome based on model estimates but may be applied to realised as well as unrealised outcomes. Put in less formal language; forecasts are predictions about tomorrow given information we have about what has happened in the past and up until today'(Nygård et al. 2020: 8). They are 'predictions about unrealised outcomes given model estimates from realized data' (Hegre et al. 2017: 114). Forecasts tend to be more useful for the near future, when high quality data is available, and theoretical assumptions about relationships between phenomena in a prediction model are available (see Bressan 2024). Such forecasts can be useful parts of bigger scenarios, or indicators for how close events are moving toward certain scenarios – which is how we will use them in REUNIR.

Finally, **strategic foresight** takes the analysis of one or many future(s) a step further to develop and/or analyse ideas for strategic action in the present (see Bressan and Rotmann 2019; Kuosa 2016). It involves activities to explore, make sense of and act upon future visions. For strategic foresight, both positivist forecasting and pluralist future-oriented analyses can be useful: the former to predict aspects of the future as accurately as possible, and the latter to stay open to and deliberately identify futures considered less likely from today's standpoint. This can help to avoid blind spots and cover areas that cannot be predicted. Strategic foresight methods can be used to both identify what needs to be done to prepare for or forecast a particular scenario, and how a given tool or policy might fare if faced with a certain scenario.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREATS, UNCERTAINTY AND PROTEAN POWER

To study threats to EU candidate countries and the EU's responses, the REUNIR project adopts Katzenstein and Seybert's (2018) protean power framework. Traditionally in the study of power in politics, including the EU's power as an international actor, most scholars have focused on capabilities and the ability to exercise control in the face of calculable future risks (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018 80). According to Katzenstein and Seybert (2018, 80 f.) this capability-focused view neglects the fact that political actors mostly operate under radical uncertainty, in which case control power fails because this involves responding to calculable risks with established tools and standard operating procedures.

The authors propose a framework that adds the concept of *protean power* to the traditional conception of *control power*. While the terms 'risk' and 'uncertainty' are often used interchangeably, Katzenstein and Seybert (2018) use the terminology of calculable versus incalculable to capture the distinction between the domain of risk and the domain of uncertainty, which has an unmeasurable quality to it (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018, p. 85; cf. Knight 1921, 20).

Under conditions of risks, policy makers and relevant stakeholders operate in the domain of the expected and predictable. They are aware of the consequences of certain occurrences and can attach probabilities to different eventualities. In such situations, they find themselves in an environment where they have adequate information that can help them estimate the risks and plan accordingly the resources at their disposal. In complex but predictable environments, policy makers act with the intention of exerting control over future outcomes, i.e. they exercise what Katzenstein and Seybert (2018) refer to as control power.

Under conditions of uncertainty, policy makers must be creative and utilise the tools that they have at their disposal in innovative ways to manage unpredictable scenarios. The concept of protean power helps understand how individuals, organisations, and states navigate such dynamic and uncertain environments. *Protean power* is the effect emerging from 'practices of agile actors coping with uncertainty' (Katzenstein & Seybert 2018, p. 80), which enables thinking 'about power less in terms of police controlling an unruly world and more in terms of innovators creating new options and firefighters containing disasters' (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018, p. 90) offering 'improved vision and more resilience in the face of the unpredicted and unpredictable' (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018, p. 90). Protean power stems from the ability of actors to shape their environments by leveraging a combination of resources, strategies, and networks, and by innovating and improvising in situations of unexpected developments. This involves flexibility, adaptability, resilience, and transformation in the face of sudden shocks to the status quo. Power in such contexts is generated through the surprising actions and self-transformation of agile actors who try to steer the course of uncertainty.

The concept of protean power shares similarities with the EU's understanding of resilience. The European Commission's 2020 Strategic Foresight Report defines resilience as 'the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges but also to undergo transitions in a sustainable, fair, and democratic manner' (European

Commission 2020, 6)[1]. Joseph and Juncos (2024) identify two different understandings of resilience. The first is descriptive and understands resilience as system stability, i.e. strength in continuity and a focus on resilience building of external actors; the second understands resilience as a boundary object with a focus on adaption and transformation through internal (self- or community-) resilience strengthening. The EU unites both approaches in a third way: while the definition clearly stresses the importance of adaptability in the face of shocks and changes (resilience as boundary object), its work in the European neighbourhood is often an example of external resilience building (resilience as system stability) (Joseph & Juncos 2024).

In REUNIR, we will identify and analyse threats resulting from both calculable risks and radical uncertainties. Traditionally, security threats were defined on the basis of knowledge about the military capabilities and intent of adversaries (Daase 2010, 147). With the growth in interdependencies between states came the recognition that threats do not necessarily emanate from military capabilities. This led to an increasing focus on non-military vulnerabilities that can be exploited by adversaries (Daase 2010, 147). This understanding of threats is reflected in the EU's definition of hybrid threats with an 'emphasis on exploiting the vulnerabilities of the target' (European Commission 2016). In REUNIR, we also adopt a broad definition of threats as a function of capabilities and intent to exploit vulnerabilities. At the same time, we recognise that threat perception and the social construction of threats among threatened actors and those identifying threats also play important roles (see Cohen 1978; Daase 2010).

We identify and assess threats emanating from both risks and uncertainties with the appropriate foresight tools for each: (1.) Forecasts and probabilistic thinking for threats emerging from calculable risks – for which we have data and causal frameworks to predict – and (2.) scenarios and possibilistic thinking to anticipate critical plausible threats emerging from radical uncertainties when 'predictive accuracy is unobtainable' (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018, 90; see Katzenstein & Seybert 2018, 87). In practice, however, we expect situations in which the EU has operated in and will operate in the future with regards to candidate countries and the international environment to rarely fall completely into one of two ideal types of calculable risks versus fundamental uncertainty. Rather, we expect a combination of both to be present regarding different policy areas at any given point in time.

Despite their different epistemological starting points, we do not see forecasting and foresight as incompatible alternatives – which academic silos often suggest – and will combine both approaches to provide a pragmatic basis for the formulation of policy responses (see Bressan, Nygård, and Seefeldt 2019). This involves, on the one hand, acknowledging that predictions can be used as pluralistic tools to simulate alternative outcomes under different assumptions with quantitative models and, on the other hand, introducing as much methodological rigour as possible into qualitative scenario foresight, making assumptions and causal links as explicit as possible. As Katzenstein and Seybert (2018, p. 88) suggest: 'In the future, rigorous modelling efforts may help to broaden the restricted risk-only-no-uncertainty setting in which information-based models have operated so confidently during the last two decades. To date, however, judging by the publications in leading journals of international relations, existing research has not ventured into that territory' (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018, p. 88). Considering the practice of foresight in institutions like the European External Action Service and Member States' foreign services, which have started to

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[1] The concept of resilience was presented in the EU's Global Strategy in 2016 as 'the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises' (Juncos 2017, 3; European Union 2016), as the starting point of what scholars have discussed as the 'resilience turn' in EU foreign policy (see Joseph & Juncos 2024).

integrate forecasting and pluralistic foresight for an integrated analysis of risks and uncertainties (see Bressan 2021, 2024), we also adopt a combined approach.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework for REUNIR's Threat Assessments

Nature of the environment	Calculable Risk	Fundamental Uncertainty
Approach to future	Probabilistic thinking	Possibilistic thinking
Empirical basis	Structured data and causal models available	No structured data and causal models available
Foresight / threat identification method	Prediction, forecasting	Scenario foresight
Policy responses	Traditional responses and tools can be sufficient	Innovation is required

In the following sections, we provide details on the methodology for the individual steps of the project: the historical analysis of EU responses to past risks and uncertainties, the identification of current threats and future scenarios, the development of forecasts, and the design of strategic policy options with the help of foresight methods (for an overview of REUNIR's workplan, see the Annex).

4. THREAT ASSESSMENT – FROM HINDSIGHT TO FORESIGHT

REUNIR's assessment of threats to the EU candidate countries' democratic future, which may arise from the geopolitical ambitions of foreign malign actors, will encompass the military, socio-economic and political dimensions. Our threat scanning methodology ensures that analyses of past risks and uncertainties and current threats are structured in a way that facilitates their integration into a coherent threat assessment, to anticipate future threats and derive robust policy options for the EU.

4.1. Past Risks, Uncertainties and EU Responses (1990-2024)

REUNIR will analyse (a) past external threats to the EU candidate countries and (b) the EU's responses based on the literature of geopolitical events since 1990 in the military, socio-economic and political domains.[2] Threats that have materialised in the past will be grouped into *calculable risks* and *radical uncertainties* as much as possible*,* while responses are designated as those that exert *control power* and *protean power* – at the same time recognising that these are often blurred in practice. As Katzenstein and Seybert (2018, 84) explain, 'protean power dynamics make it impossible to anticipate which choices and practices will lead to which outcomes, nor is that the objective. The fog clears only in hindsight, when we look back to identify how actors, deemed successful, have navigated the fluid environment surrounding them.' The hypothesis is that threats emerging from calculable, expected risks were and can be confronted with the conventional tools of exerting control power, while in moments of radical uncertainty and unexpected threats, the EU has and will have to resort to responses that unleash protean power (see Katzenstein & Seybert 2018).

Classifying events and situations as emerging from risks versus uncertainties is not easy. In retrospect, one can make relatively safe assumptions about political life as risky or uncertain, but one cannot be sure that policy makers at the time have experienced the environment as risky or uncertain in the same way as we describe it years later. REUNIR will therefore try to contextualise the events and occurrences in the Western Balkans and the eastern neighbourhood that have spurred the EU into action over the course of last 30 years, keeping in mind 'the fluidity of real-life situations that often oscillate between risk and uncertainty' (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018, 85) and providing an expert reading of predominant perceptions of risks and uncertainties at the time of the events. Likewise, when we distinguish between the effects of control power, linked to the domain of risk, and the effects of protean power, generated in the context of radical uncertainty (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018), we are cognisant of the interplay between the two types of power and their interdependent and even reinforcing qualities. Protean power often leans on control power capabilities, and control power resources are often necessary for generating protean effects. REUNIR's analyses are in this sense both guided by the main conceptual framework offered by Katzenstein and Seybert and sensitive to the complexity of the empirical contexts that we deal with.

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[2] REUNIR project deliverables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3.

4.2. Current Threats (2025-2030)

REUNIR will analyse current military, socio-economic, and political threats posed by malign foreign state actors to EU candidate countries. This will be based on primary and secondary literature; interviews and focus groups on the threat perceptions in candidate countries; the objectives, interests, and capabilities of threatening state actors; as well as third-party expert analysis. These elements will be integrated into a coherent overall threat assessment.

As a first step, REUNIR will undertake desk research on current threats to the WB6 and EN3 in the literature, public documents such as national security strategies and threat assessments, as well as initial interviews with experts and key stakeholders. To structure the analyses and enable integration into a coherent assessment, threats will be analysed according to (1.) whether they emerge from calculable risks or from fundamental uncertainty; (2.) which objectives, interests, capabilities, and foreign malign influence channels the threats emerge from; (3.) the expected impact of threats; (4.) how threats are prioritised by stakeholders in the EU and candidate countries; and (5.) how analyses and perceptions differ across countries and stakeholder groups, with a focus on potential blind spots.

Intermediary research results will be discussed at a threat assessment integration workshop, where the structure of the overall integrated threat assessment will be adjusted accordingly. The results will feed into a first set of threat assessments across three domains.[3] This work will also form the basis for planning additional field research, interviews and focus groups, to take place in conjunction with REUNIR's research on the resilience of the EU candidate countries.

4.3. Scenarios (2030-2035)

Assessments on current military, socio-economic and political threats are the baseline for updating and expanding scenarios for 2030-2035. Collaborative foresight methods will be used to update and expand threat assessments in 2025 for five to 10 years ahead. Specifically, we will apply an adapted threat scanning, qualification, and monitoring (TSQM) foresight approach[4] that uses a multiple-step Delphi expert survey technique (see Häder 2002). REUNIR experts will identify, rate and prioritise factors that impact the security of EU candidate countries (see Bressan et al. 2019b). In addition to the baseline assessment of current threats, REUNIR will also use interviews and fieldwork as an opportunity for future-oriented threat assessments. Specifically, the assessment of resilience capabilities[5], local perceptions and policy preferences[6] will feed into the scenario generation process, which will take place in parallel to the development of forecasts[7] and review of existing EU instruments, policies, and strategies.

As mentioned above, scenario foresight based on possibilistic thinking can help to expand the focus on calculable risks, to include (as much as possible) blind spots and threats that can plausibly emerge from

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[3] REUNIR project deliverables 3.1, 4.1, 5.1.

[4] Piloted in the Horizon 2020 EU-LISTCO research project.

[5] REUNIR work packages 3, 4, 5.

[6] REUNIR work package 5.

[7] REUNIR work package 7.

uncertainty. Delphi survey rounds will prepare two in-person collaborative foresight and scenario building workshops. These will identify and assess such threats that stem from foreign malign geopolitical ambitions outside the realm of calculable risk (see Bishop et al. 2007; Peterson et al. 2003). An analysis of the foresight results will help examine causal mechanisms through which geopolitical ambitions turn into threats at the sub-national and transnational level. This can inform the development of policy responses to counter risks and assess their effectiveness.

By integrating multiple perspectives, alternative assumptions, and even different worldviews into the collection and qualification of threats, we can expand on existing thought experiments about the broader environment of the EU. This can help us to explore hitherto unknown and novel threats that loom on the horizon and could materialise in the mid- or long-term. Based on the integrated threat picture(s) built in 2024-25, we will draw upon the entire consortium's expertise and research for written and oral inputs to build formal scenarios that map plausible threats for the 2030-2035 window (see Bressan et al. 2019a; 2019b). With this, we lay the groundwork for identifying strategic entry points for policy solutions to counter these threats.

4.4. Forecasts (2030-2035)

In addition to the possibilistic thinking-based TSQM and scenario approach, we will also leverage forecasting methods based on probabilistic thinking to forecast threats. Following a pluralist approach to foresight, we assume that for highly complex phenomena - such as societal and geopolitical developments - it is much more useful to simulate alternative outcomes based on different assumptions than to try and forecast a single expected (i.e. most likely) future as precisely as possible (see Gidley 2017; Seefried 2014). Quantitative measures, projections, and indicators can be used to this end.

REUNIR will identify existing quantitative indicators within security, socio-economic, and political dimensions to measure not only risks and threats, but also the resilience of EU candidate countries to resist foreign malign influence (see also chapter 6 below). Eventually, REUNIR[8] will integrate these indicators of foreign influence and resilience to threat into the scenario foresight process and develop ways to simulate indicators for critical vulnerabilities and influence into the future 2030-2035 (see Lustick & Tetlock 2021). A simulation and modelling approach can help anticipate and assess the impact of future malign influence and the consequences of foreign threats. It can also identify indicators to monitor the development of threats, substantiate knowledge on emerging threats, and help guide future EU policy. Using projections and assessments of key threat channels, we will produce quantitative simulations of how risks and uncertainties may evolve into threats under a set of different assumptions. This allows us to produce forecasts of the level of impact and consequences of manifested threats to the EU candidate countries. In addition, indicators can be used to monitor the evolving situation in the coming years, to identify trends, changes, and to define warning signals that trigger action or the reconsideration of policy options.

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[8] REUNIR work package 7.

5. STRATEGIC FORESIGHT FOR POLICY DESIGN

In the project's final phase, we will leverage strategic foresight for policy design. Based on shortfall analyses conducted in REUNIR[9] and similar to the integration of threat assessments, we will use a different part of the strategic foresight toolkit to help the consortium pull together a joint shortfall analysis.

REUNIR's extensive threat scanning approach gives the project a solid analytical foundation for making policy recommendations to be implemented from about 2026 onwards, with the reasonable expectation of these being effective and robust into the 2030s, for which REUNIR builds scenarios and forecasts. The protean power framework's distinction between a) situations of risk in which old, established tools can be effective and b) situations of radical uncertainty in which they are no longer effective and need to be replaced with innovative responses that unleash protean power will guide this step (see Katzenstein and Seybert 2018).

Specifically, a method piloted in a prior Horizon project on threats to the EU's neighbourhood (EU-LISTCO), which was designed to complement the TSQM scenario foresight, will be adapted to REUNIR (see Baykal et al. 2021; Rotmann et al. 2021). The goal is to identify gaps and opportunities to strengthen policy tools of the EU, Member States and candidate countries. It builds on the identification and prioritisation of plausible future threats from geopolitical ambitions of authoritarian powers like China and Russia. The method takes prior analyses to identify the greatest resilience and policy response tool gaps, against a background of threat analyses, scenarios, and forecasts. It identifies gaps in EU instruments and policies to prevent and counter the most relevant threats, and maps gaps and opportunities for more robust policy responses. Two collaborative strategic foresight workshops for policy design will leverage expert and policy expertise to this end, feeding into the policy recommendations developed by WP8. This allows for the identification of the most important and strategic entry points for policy solutions to counter risks and threats in a robust manner.

Figure 2: Strategic Foresight for Robust Policy Design
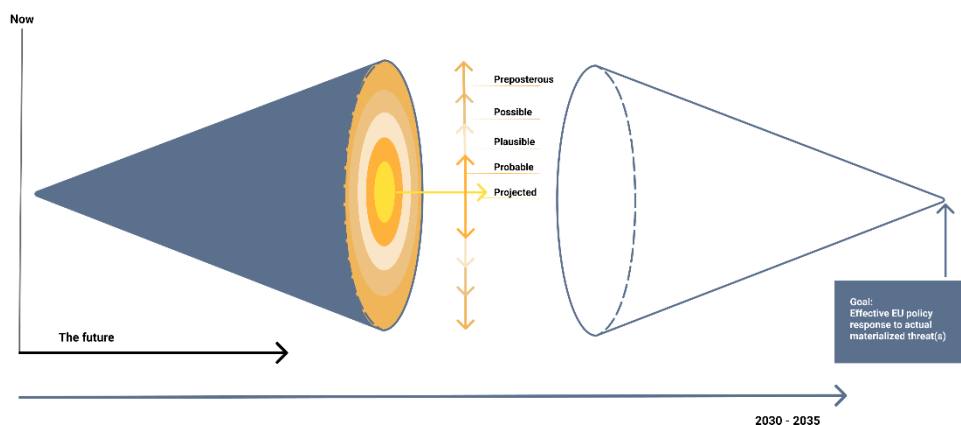
Based on Baxter (2020); Voros (2003, 2017)

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9 REUNIR work packages 3/4/5.

The policy design method rests on the idea of iterative design. It uses foresight techniques with the goal of reducing psychological biases, and improving analytical judgement to arrive at better policy options that are anticipatory and preventive (see Baykal et al. 2021). It also addresses key gaps in the EU's and Member States' preparedness and strategic goals. The process combines elements of design thinking and pre-mortem analysis, in which analysts consider potential reasons why policy options could have succeeded or failed from the ex-post perspective of future historians, and it uses these insights to improve or rebuild policy options (Baykal et al. 2021). In the past, this has made resulting policy options more robust against adverse political dynamics and pitfalls in implementation and has 'helped participating experts to expand their anticipatory thinking beyond the scope of current expectations and existing instruments, thereby limiting the effects of institutional path dependencies and key cognitive and social biases' (Baykal et al. 2021, 49; see Baykal et al. 2021, 8).

Figure 3: Foresight for Strategic Policy Design – Steps according to Baykal et al. (2021)

1. **Setting the scope**: How to delineate the regional and thematic threat to be addressed?

2. **Objectives**: What strategic objectives need to be secured or promoted? How are different objectives related?

3. **Scenarios**: How could the threat play out in plausible futures, in ways sufficiently distinct from the past and present to complement traditional policy formulation?

4. **Fields of action**: What are the thematic areas that are the most important to prevent the threat, and the ones where existing policy approaches fall shortest?

5. **Initial policy options**: What new or different approaches might help prevent the threat?

6. **Robust policy options**: Challenging the assumptions and logic behind initial policy options. How would each option, were it implemented in real life, succeed or fail? What lessons to draw from such thought experiments?

7. **From policy options to policy choices**: Reinsert strategic policy options into the relevant policy process for decision-making by legitimate policymakers.

6. MEASURING FOREIGN INFLUENCING

In developing indicators and forecasting threats to EU candidate countries from the geopolitical ambitions of state actors, REUNIR can build on quantitative and qualitative measures of foreign influence developed in the past years. While the EU addresses foreign influencing and takes measures to counter it, there is no official definition of foreign influencing or foreign malign influencing (FMI) by the EU (Bauer et al. 2021; Bentzen 2018; Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2022). The EEAS has defined the narrower concept of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) as 'a pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes. Such activity is manipulative in character, conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner. Actors of such activity can be state or non-state actors, including their proxies inside and outside of their own territory' (EEAS Strategic Communications 2021: para. 2).

Beyond the EU, the United States has established a foreign malign influencing centre (FMIC), which seeks to mitigate foreign threats to US national security (e.g. election safety) by integrating the work of the intelligence community. The FMIC defines FMI as '(...) subversive, undeclared, coercive, or criminal activities by foreign governments, non-state actors, or their proxies to affect another nation's popular or political attitudes, perceptions, or behaviours to advance their interests' (ODNI 2024). US Congress, which issued the bill enabling the establishment of the FMIC, originally used an even narrower definition of FMI. This regarded any type of Chinese, Russian, Iranian, and North Korean attempts at exerting any kind of influence on US political, military, or economic activity and the responsible agencies thereof, or US elections and public opinion within the US, as FMI. These attempts can occur covertly or overtly (US Congress 2019).

Apart from the varying definitions of FMI by different US agencies and officials (see US Congress 2022, ODNI 2024, CSIS 2020, CISA 2024, Mansted 2021), there is little academic work to define the term. Szicherle defines FMI as covert attempts at influencing (Szicherle 2022). The term 'malign' is often used as a normative adjective to describe anti-democratic attempts at influencing rather than attempting to conceptualise FMI. The Australian government uses the term foreign influencing with a normative connotation but without the 'malign' label, defined as activities 'carried out by, or on behalf of, a foreign power, (that) is coercive, corrupting, deceptive or clandestine, and contrary to Australia's sovereignty, values and national interests' (Department of Home Affairs 2024).

A review of the literature on measuring foreign influence shows that few models to measure individual aspects of foreign influence exist, and that they usually do not cover the EU's Eastern neighbourhood and candidate countries. Although foreign influencing operations date back far longer, the literature shows that the 2016 US presidential elections mark a turning point in their reception and study. Following Russian interference in the US presidential elections, there has been growing interest in foreign influence within English-language research, and greater attention paid in the US and Europe. However, methodologies and data sources are not always transparent. A foresight or monitoring approach like the one we develop in REUNIR requires a clear definition of data sources, indicators and methods.

Among publications that offer methodologies for measuring foreign influence are Sin et al.'s (2022) Influence-to-Action Model (I-AM). This assesses the efficacy of disinformation campaigns by *evaluating their reception in the target population.* The methodology takes account of individual level factors such as feelings of victimisation and perceived threats to the recipient's identity, societal level factors such as in- and out-group

definition, and delivery components such as the intensity and duration of the disinformation campaign. The researchers eventually find that individuals are most likely to act once disinformation campaigns affirm their identity and portray persistent and increasing threats, while painting a clear alternative future.

The Formal Bilateral Influence Capacity Index (Moyer et al. 2021) measures influence in economic, political, and security aspects between state dyads by looking at the volume of interactions between them (*bandwidth*) and their level of reliance (*dependence*). The higher the bandwidth and dependence, the higher the level of influence one country has on the other.

The Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund's Political Access and Influence Framework (Fleming, Christie, and Viner 2020) model was developed for the British government to *measure the level of political access* the CSSF has on core individuals with decision-making power in target governments abroad. It focuses on individual commitments to British foreign policy objectives, and the importance of measuring and assessing the success thereof by including variables such as *expressed commitment* to a policy, *attitudinal* and *behavioural changes*, and eventually *institutional change*.

The Index of Economic Independence (Helmy 2017) takes the opposite approach to measuring influence, by assessing how *economically independent and likely to survive unilaterally a country is* (thus indirectly measuring the level of influence other actors have on it). It includes factors such as resource reliance, the ability to withstand sanctions, and level of self-governance. The model finds that nations with a high level of natural resources are especially resilient towards economic influencing and coercion from abroad. Similarly, the Baqahee-Farhee Model can be used to assess the impact of shocks to supply and demand on a nation's economy as measured through the Gross National Expenditure (Baqaee & Farhi, 2022). Although not explicitly designed to measure foreign influencing, Baqaee et al. (2024) use it to measure the impact of decoupling from China on Germany's economy. The result of such applications naturally lends itself to assessing economic dependency, and thus the impact one state has on another.

Vézina and Sacko (2023) propose measuring the *quantity and content* of foreign influencing operations by analysing mentions in news text. Their findings correspond to existing US data on US-targeted foreign influencing operations. Essentially however, their model only measures the news coverage of foreign influencing operations rather than the operations themselves.

Several studies which claim to have measured a certain aspect of foreign influence (e.g. Bertelsmann Stiftung and wiiw (2023)) have only published abridged methodologies. These do not allow for immediate replicability in other cases of foreign influence measuring. Except for the Formal Bilateral Influence Capacity Index, the identified models relate to specific subsets of foreign influence (e.g. economic dependencies, disinformation), rather than attempt to quantify foreign influence in its entirety (i.e. integrating issue areas like economic dependencies, political access, and influence reception).

For the REUNIR project, we will develop indicators and forecasts, building on the analyses of past and future threats to the EU candidate countries, and depending on the results of the integration and prioritisation exercise in the threat scanning integration step of the project.
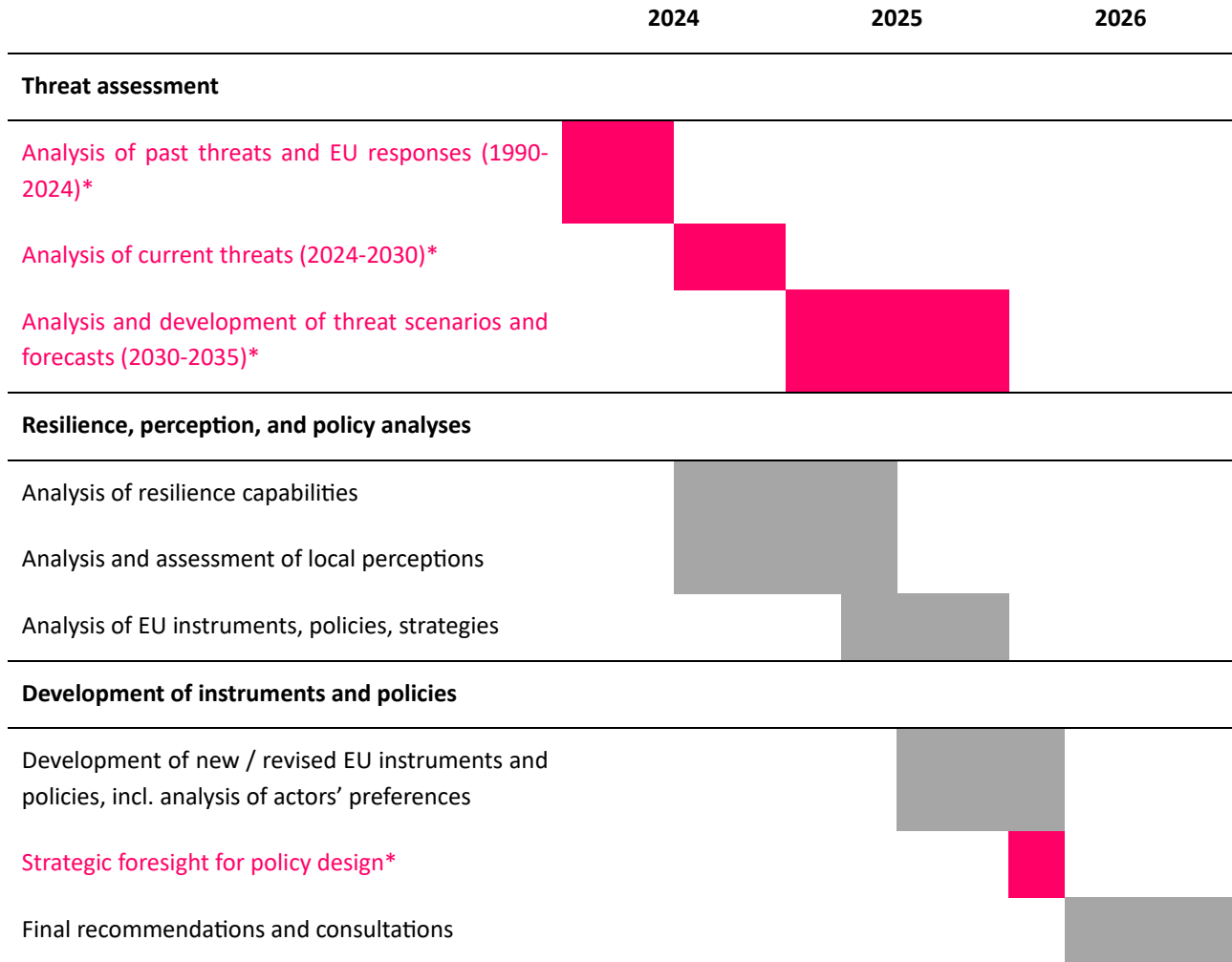
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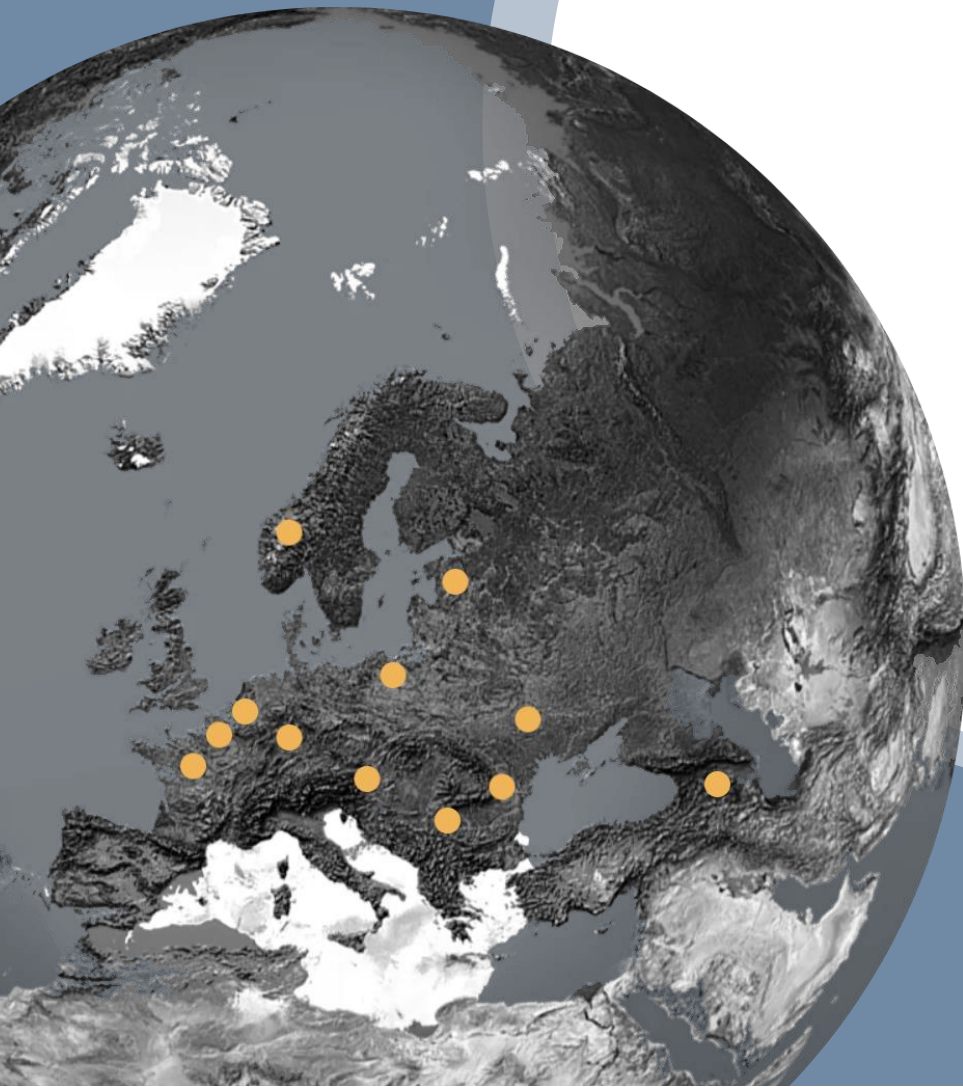
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ANNEX: REUNIR WORKPLAN

	2024	2025	2026
Threat assessment			
Analysis of past threats and EU responses (1990-2024)*			
Analysis of current threats (2024-2030)*			
Analysis and development of threat scenarios and forecasts (2030-2035)*			
Resilience, perception, and policy analyses			
Analysis of resilience capabilities			
Analysis and assessment of local perceptions			
Analysis of EU instruments, policies, strategies			
Development of instruments and policies			
Development of new / revised EU instruments and policies, incl. analysis of actors' preferences			
Strategic foresight for policy design*			
Final recommendations and consultations			

Threat scanning and strategic foresight steps covered in this deliverable