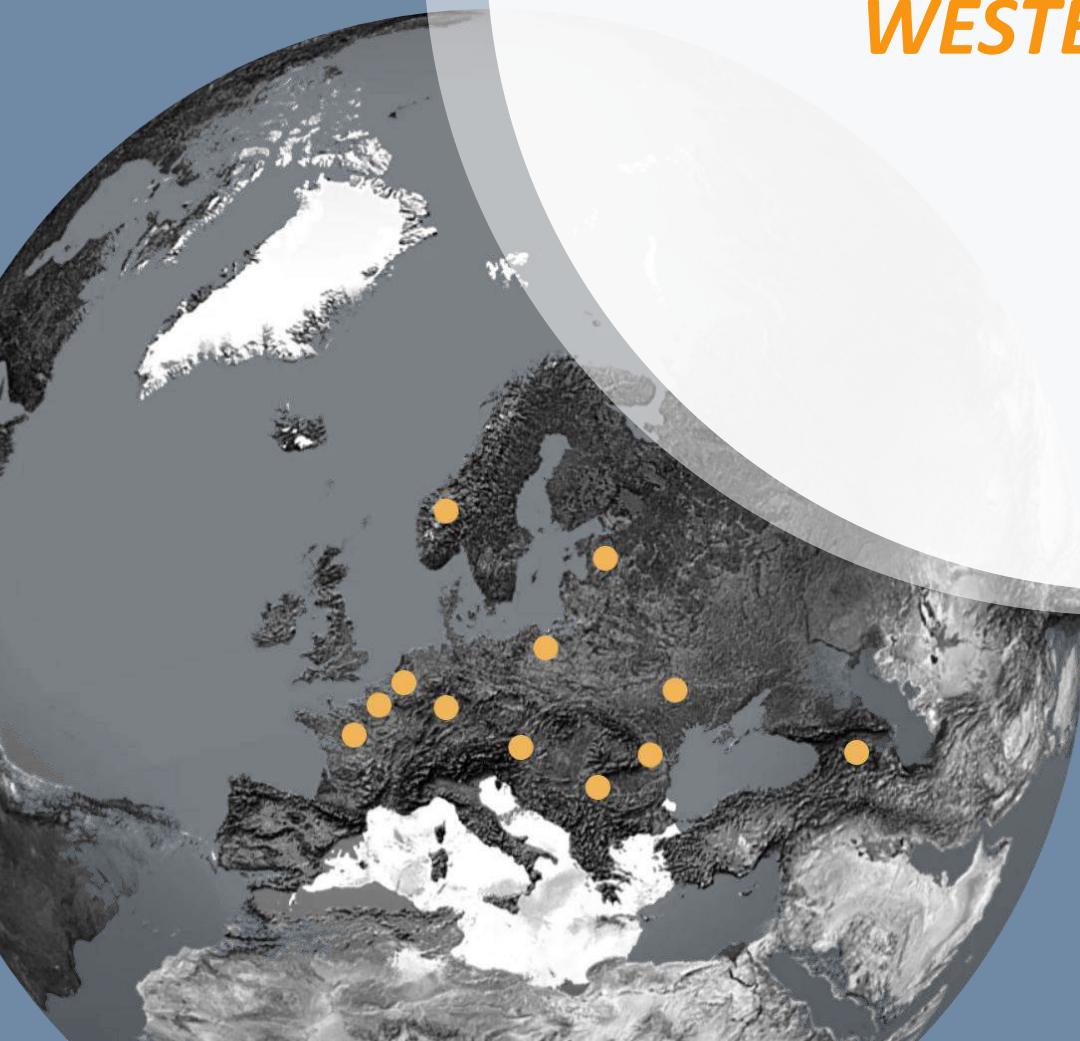




***MILITARY THREAT
ASSESSMENT IN EASTERN
NEIGHBOURHOOD &
WESTERN BALKAN
COUNTRIES***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Working Paper, the first deliverable of REUNIR work package 3, aims to understand the nature of the military threats facing the nine candidate countries of the Western Balkans and Eastern Neighbourhood.

We identify six military instruments that might be employed by third states against the candidate countries and from which threats — defined as functions of capabilities and intent to exploit vulnerabilities — may emerge. The six instruments are armed attack; armed presence; sub-threshold attack; military training; arms transfers; and defence cooperation. We assess, on a low-medium-high scale, the likelihood that each of these instruments will be employed against each of the candidate countries in the 2025-2030 timeframe; and, also on a low-medium-high scale, the impact on the candidate countries should these threats emerge. These assessments—essentially expert judgements by the research team—were supported by reference to sets of likelihood and impact indicators developed for this project and informed by a review of the primary and secondary literature dealing with the security environment of the candidate countries and a small number of expert interviews. The resulting threat scans, included as an Annex to this working paper, summarise the military threats to each candidate country.

We conclude that in the Western Balkans, Russia will continue a pattern of behaviour that has seen it act as a spoiler power, using defence cooperation, military training, and arms transfers to sow instability. Its opportunities for doing so, however, have been reduced since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russia may also, as it has before, directly attack Western Balkans countries in the cyber domain. Those countries that are not members of NATO (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia) are more likely to be vulnerable to Russia's hostile actions. China, meanwhile, has sought to expand its presence in the regional arms market and will continue to do so, with consequences that may be destabilising. The presence of Chinese weapons systems in the armed forces of countries in the region may be an obstacle to their integration into European security arrangements. Türkiye will also continue to be a presence in the military domain through arms sales and defence cooperation. Türkiye's agenda for the region is benign, but its promotion of parallel, possibly replacement regional arrangements centred around its own leadership may stand in the way of EU integration. Within the region, Serbia has directly employed military instruments against Kosovo, whose independence it does not recognise. It will likely—albeit at a reduced level—continue to pose threats to other Western Balkans countries, and, through a relationship with Russia that stands in the way of EU integration, to itself.

The situation in the Eastern Neighbourhood is more serious. Russia is, and will continue to be, the predominant third state actor posing military threats in this region. Its occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and its support for Transnistria raise the likelihood of it employing (or continuing to employ) military instruments against Georgia and Moldova in the future. Russia will also continue to present the most serious of military threats to Ukraine. Its war there has dragged in other countries — including Belarus, China, North Korea, and Iran — that have become, and will remain, states that pose threats to Ukraine.

In later work, we will evaluate the ability of the candidate countries, with EU support, to cope with these military threats and identify new or improved instruments in the EU toolbox to assist in countering them.

1. INTRODUCTION

REUNIR Work Package 3 (military threats, aggression and defence resilience) aims to:

- identify and categorise threats posed by third state actors using military instruments against the nine candidate countries (CC) of the Western Balkans (WB) and the Eastern Neighbourhood (EN) in the timeframe 2025 - 2030;
- identify and evaluate the capabilities of the CC to respond to military threats and of the EU's CFSP, CSDP, neighbourhood, and enlargement toolboxes to assist the CC in their responses; and
- identify what is missing from the CC and/or EU toolbox to allow an effective response to military threats and thus identify and evaluate options for building a more resilient and stronger EU foreign, security and defence toolbox to counter military threats on the European continent.

This Working Paper concerns the first step in this process. It aims to understand the nature of the military threats facing the nine CC.

1.1. Scope and Definitions

1.1.1 Military Power and Third States

In the course of its work, REUNIR will, in line with the Horizon call for proposals, analyse and forecast possible scenarios regarding Russia, China and other countries' geopolitical ambitions towards the CC and provide policy recommendations to strengthen the EU's resilience and diplomatic arsenal in a potential new era of military intervention on the continent (European Union, European Commission, 2022). As a first step, this Working Paper focuses on the military threats created by the employment of military power against the CC by third state actors. Military power most obviously encompasses armed forces, whose definition can be problematic as national arrangements vary somewhat (Lunn, 2002, p. 83). Here we define armed forces broadly as central state structures under the jurisdiction and/or control of ministries of defence or other state institutions whose function is the 'ordered application of force in the resolution of a social or political problem' (Hackett, 1983, p. 9). Social or political problems are not defined according to some universal standard but are those perceived by the state having jurisdiction over the armed force in question. Armed forces may include armies, navies, air forces, special forces, offensive cyber units, military police and other paramilitary forces (including certain law enforcement bodies), voluntary military organisations, military intelligence organisations, private military companies and other military contractors.

Third states may also employ indirect forms of military power against the CCs, for example through arms transfers to other states or structures such as unofficial paramilitary groups that may have malign intentions towards the CCs or may be ready to act as proxies. Similarly, they may use their armed forces indirectly to provide training to such groups or to conduct defence cooperation, for example in the form of defence cooperation agreements or liaison arrangements, that may be against the interests of CCs.

The notion of the use of military power 'against' the CCs deserves further attention. In this work, we consider state actors to pose threats to the CCs if their actions are intended to delay or derail the integration of the CCs into the EU, or if they are at least ambivalent about such an outcome. Intent is not always evident and

may require a judgement to be made based on a state's postures and actions in international affairs more broadly (see chapter 2 for a discussion of third states' motivations for their involvement in the WB and EN regions). It is not difficult, for example, to characterise Russia, a state that has waged wars of aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, in part in response to their ambitions for EU membership, as a threatening state actor in the military sphere. The case of China is less obvious. Even if it shares with Russia a desire to erode what it sees as western dominance of the current world order (Stent, 2020, p.3) it does not, for example, overtly act as a 'spoiler' power in the WB as Russia does. Its main involvement in the military realm here is in the form of arms sales, which are primarily economically motivated. Nonetheless, the outcome of these sales — the presence of Chinese weapons in some of the region's armed forces and the CC's logistical dependence on and financial obligations towards China — make the integration of these CCs into western security structures more problematic: China thus poses a threat in the region.

States whose actions in the military sphere may have unintended adverse consequences (for example, if an arms transfer intended to promote stability in fact resulted in arms race dynamics) are not considered threatening. This is the case, for example, for US military cooperation with WB and EN countries. Even if this may produce unintended (and unforeseeable) second order effects at some point in the future, they are not motivated by a wish to stall European integration; indeed, in many cases, they are intended to promote NATO integration.

More broadly, as the most powerful state of the western world the US can, through actions or neglect, greatly impact the security of the CCs of the WB and EN. At the time of writing, the largely unpredictable foreign policy actions of the new Trump Administration may have serious adverse consequences, above all for Ukraine, but also, if Russia is emboldened to take aggressive military actions elsewhere, for other states in the WB and EN. These concerns, however, are excluded from our analysis as they are most unlikely to involve the US itself employing military instruments as we define them below that threaten the CCs, either directly or indirectly.

1.1.2 Non-state Actors

While military instruments remain largely within the purview of states, military and military-like capabilities are also employed by non-state actors, for example terrorist groups. The possible presence of armed terrorist groups inside WB CCs complicates the region's security landscape. There have been fears, for example, that Albanian citizens who have returned home, trained and indoctrinated after participating in conflicts in Syria and Iraq, may radicalise others, be coordinated by terrorist groups, or act as lone actors to commit terrorist offences (Byman and Shapiro, 2014, pp. 6-7). North Macedonia's strategic defence review, meanwhile, states that 'non-state actors ... who originate from within the region represent the most serious threat and most likely destabilising factor'. (North Macedonia, 2018, p. 12). Although official documents refer to the possible manipulation of foreign terrorist fighters by external actors (Republic of Albania, 2023, p.8), there appears to be no evidence that hostile state actors have been engaged in such activity. Indeed, no state in the region has recorded terrorist actions in recent years (Department of State (US), 2023). The possibility of radicalised domestic terrorists thus appears to be beyond the scope of our work. Measures to preventing and counter violent extremism have, in any case, been comprehensively addressed in previous Horizon projects, for example EUNPACK (Bøås and Rieker, 2019).

1.1.3 Threats

In the security studies and defence planning literature, threats are often conceived of as a combination of capability, intent, and opportunity (Riehle, 2013, pp: 96-7). In REUNIR, we have adopted a broad definition of a threat as ‘a function of capabilities and intent to exploit vulnerabilities’ (Bressan et al., 2024, p. 7). Threats as conceived here are thus predictable and foreseeable occurrences, analogous to the notion of ‘risks’ in the work of Katzenstein and Seybert, whose exploration of control and protean power informs REUNIR’s analysis of how the EU has advanced its values and interests in the CCs in security and other areas (Lawrence et al., 2024, pp. 25-26). Katzenstein and Seybert associate calculable risks (i.e., ‘threats’ as used here) with ‘control power’, which is demonstrated through relatively predictable behavioural, institutional, and structural responses to events. They contrast risk with the idea of inherently unpredictable ‘uncertainty’ which in turn they associate with the concept of ‘protean power’: ‘the results of practices of agile actors coping with uncertainty’ (Katzenstein and Seybert, 2018, p. 80). This paper deals only with plausible, foreseeable military threats (‘risks’, per Katzenstein and Seybert) to the security of the WB and EN CCs as ‘uncertainties’ are, by definition, unforeseeable. Present-day responses to such threats, for example, contingency planning and the building of military capability to deter and defend against attacks, operate in the realm of control power. In coping with actual threat episodes that materialise in the future, actors including the EU and the CC themselves may still demonstrate the agility that Katzenstein and Seybert associate with protean power.

1.2. Methodology

We used four steps to develop an understanding of the nature of the military threats facing the CCs:

- categorisation of military instruments;
- threat scans;
- assessment of likelihood;
- assessment of impact.

Data to support these steps was obtained through a combination of desk research and a small number of expert interviews.

1.2.1 Categorisation of Military Instruments

The military threats to the CCs in the WB and EN are numerous and wide-ranging. From their armed forces, third state actors may employ many different types of military unit and equipment to present threats to WB and EN countries, in particular in a hybrid, grey-zone or sub-threshold context. Any categorisation based on unit and equipment types will thus quickly become unwieldy. Instead, we propose a role-based approach, categorising according to the ways in which military power may be employed by third state actors, rather than the by type of armed force or capability itself. This approach allows a broad definition of ‘military instrument’ that includes both threatening actions posed by armed forces, for example assembling military forces at borders to coerce a target state, and indirect hostile actions that involve military power, such as arms sales intended to have destabilising regional effects. To the best of our knowledge, a categorisation of this type has not been previously reported in the literature.

The classes of this categorisation are intended to be both exhaustive, i.e., they should cover every eventuality, and mutually exclusive, i.e., they should not overlap. We have proposed a categorisation of six military instruments that may be employed against the WB and EN CCs to give rise to threats. Presented in approximate order of severity from highest to lowest they are:

- A. Armed attack.** This is the classic use of military power in an offensive role. Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 are obvious examples. While the scale of an attack may vary, this instrument includes all actions that would broadly be considered acts of war. As such, it sits primarily within the purview of conventional armed forces and may involve a combination of, for example, ground invasions, naval bombardments, and airstrikes. Irregular means implemented in support of war objectives, such as Russia's deliberate destruction of dams or strikes on the civilian energy infrastructure in its war against Ukraine, may also be used alongside conventional armed forces as part of such an attack. In its most extreme form, this instrument may also include the use of (most likely tactical) nuclear weapons. While both NATO and the EU consider cyber to be a domain of warfare, alongside land, sea, air, and space (European Union, European Defence Agency, 2024), cyber-attacks have historically fallen below the threshold of this instrument. However, NATO has acknowledged that cyber-attacks could also reach a level that would trigger its collective defence mechanisms and a response under Article 5 (NATO, 2014, para. 72).
- B. Armed presence.** Armed force may also be used at large scale below the threshold of armed conflict, perhaps to intimidate or coerce. Examples include the militarisation of occupied territories and exercises in border areas. The development of long-range weapon systems allows third states to employ this instrument from afar. Again, an extreme form of this instrument could involve the use of long-range delivery systems equipped with nuclear warheads.
- C. Sub-threshold attack.** Selected military capabilities may be used at smaller scale, discretely or in combination with other military and non-military instruments, to attack a target country. Such attacks, sometimes labelled 'grey zone' or 'hybrid', are clearly hostile but are not generally considered acts of war. NATO has, however, also acknowledged that hybrid attacks could trigger a collective defence response under Article 5 (NATO, 2016, para. 72). There is a wide range of possibilities, of which offensive cyber-attacks, for example on critical infrastructure or government websites, both of which may deprive citizens of essential services, are perhaps the best known. Other examples include sabotage, small-scale raids, harassment, and unauthorised incursions into national airspace and territorial waters. We exclude cyber-warfare in the information domain, for example influence operations on social media platforms (for a discussion of these operations and their implementation in the WB and EN, see Burmester et al., 2025, 3 ff.).
- D. Military training.** A third state may threaten a target indirectly by training aimed at building capacity in states, or sub-state groups with coincident interests. This is potentially destabilising for the regional force balance and may increase opportunities for a third state to attack another through proxies. Receiving training and other military assistance may also,

perhaps unintentionally, become an obstacle to a CC's efforts to integrate with western security structures.

- E. Arms transfers.** While much of the global arms trade is commercially motivated, third state actors may also transfer or sell arms, or dual-use goods, to seek influence, create regional instability, and build capacity in states, or sub-state groups with coincident interests.
- F. Defence cooperation.** Armed forces personnel from third states may also be involved in a range of defence cooperation activities, again intended to seek influence or create instability. This instrument may include, for example, liaison arrangements or military cooperation agreements.

1.2.2 Threat Scans

We carried out threat scans for each of the WB and EN countries. This involved surveying source material — both primary sources (for example, national security strategies, national defence strategies) and secondary sources (for example, research reports, media articles) to gather data on which military instruments officials and observers have identified as threats to the CCs. Relevant statements from these sources were categorised according to the classes of military instrument they implied and assembled into a matrix for each CC. These matrices and supporting narratives are included as Annex A to this working paper.

In several cases, published primary sources were several years old. On the one hand, as they have not been withdrawn, such documents must be considered extant statements of official policy. On the other hand, their value is questionable if they fail to address the impact of recent important security events such as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Source material data was thus supplemented by data gathered in a small number of interviews. Further interviews and focus groups to be conducted during REUNIR's field study research will enrich the threat picture as the work package proceeds.

1.2.3 Likelihood Assessments

Data collected from the threat scans was also used to make an expert judgement of the likelihood of a particular military instrument being employed against each of the CCs in the timescale 2025-2030. REUNIR will later conduct structured foresight analysis to cover the period 2030-2035. For the threat scans, a simple three-point scale — low, medium, high — was used. Cases where instruments are being used at present (for example, Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine) were classified as high likelihood.

The judgment was supported by the development of a set of indicators intended to assist in assessing whether the use of an instrument was more or less likely. Many of these indicators are common to all instruments (for example, the determination of an adversary to effect changes through the hostile application of an instrument, the adversary's capability to employ an instrument) but some are applicable to certain instruments only. The list of indicators is included in Table 1.

Any judgement of likelihood will, of course, be subjective. One inherent weakness is that likelihood assessments may be coloured by past or ongoing events: if a situation has occurred before or is ongoing, assessors may judge it more likely to happen again in the future. Reference to indicators is intended, to the greatest extent possible, to minimise the impact of subjectivity on the assessments. Past and ongoing events

are accounted for as part of the evidence related to the likelihood indicators ‘adversary capability’ and ‘adversary determination to effect change’. Scoring according to a very coarse low-medium-high assessment scale is also intended to smooth out the effects of assessor bias. Overall, our approach acknowledges that likelihood predictions may be imprecise but should still be adequate to allow a broad picture of the most serious threats facing the CCs to emerge, for which a similarly broad set of responses can be developed. This broad picture will serve as a basis for the aforementioned structured foresight analysis.

Table 1 . Indicators of Likelihood.

Instrument	Examples	Indicators of Likelihood
A. Armed attack	Invasion	International environment
B. Armed presence	Border/occupied area deployment 'Peacekeeping' operation Exercises	Presence of exploitable situation (e.g. frozen conflict) Adversary determination to effect change Adversary capability Adversary opportunity Stance of CC partners and allies CC military deterrence effectiveness CC ability to detect, respond
C. Sub-threshold attack	Sabotage Cyber-attack Harassment	Adversary determination to effect change Adversary wish to avoid attribution Adversary capability Adversary opportunity Stance of CC partners and allies CC ability to detect, respond
D. Military training	Of hostile paramilitary groups Of potentially hostile proxy forces	Adversary determination to effect change Adversary wish to avoid attribution Adversary capability CC military deterrence effectiveness Stance of CC partners and allies
E. Arms transfers	Destabilising sales Donations to proxy adversaries	Adversary determination to effect change Adversary wish to avoid attribution Capability, cost of equipment on offer Stance of CC partners and allies
F. Defence cooperation	Military cooperation agreements Liaison office	Adversary determination to effect change Adversary wish to avoid attribution Adversary capability Stance of CC partners and allies

Source: the authors

1.2.4 Impact Assessments

The threat scan data was also used to make an expert judgement of the impact on the target CC of the employment of a particular military instrument. We again developed a set of indicators that could be used to inform an assessment of overall impact on a simple three-point scale — low, medium, high. These indicators, which are common to all instruments, are:

- disruption to local or state governance;
- loss of life;
- disruption to daily life;
- economic disruption;
- damage to international standing; and
- increase in likelihood of other threats materialising.

We also identified two further indicators which, if present, immediately result in a high-level impact for the employment of an instrument:

- failure of state institutions; and
- loss of territorial integrity.

2. THIRD STATE ACTORS

Several third state actors employ military instruments in the WB and EN that can pose threats to the countries of these regions. These third state actors have been identified through the process of constructing the nine threat scans that form the core of this Working Paper. We consider the actions of third state actors to be threatening if they delay or derail the integration of the CCs into the EU or have the potential to do so. According to this view, the degree of threat posed by third state actors thus varies. Russia and China pose the greatest threats to the countries of the WB and EN, but other actors, including Türkiye, the Gulf States, Iran, Belarus and North Korea, also employ military instruments that generate threats. This chapter briefly examines the motivations of third state actors.

Russia shares with China a desire to challenge the US-dominated model of global governance established after 1945 (Chivvis and Keating, 2024, p. 11). It sees the WB as a vulnerable periphery of Europe where it can build a foothold, recruit support, and maximise the influence it can use against the West (Bechev, 2019, p.6). Russia also wishes to preserve historical cultural and religious links in the WB with the Slavic populations, mainly Serbs, which it has supported over the years (Burmester et al., 2025, 10 ff.). Imperial Russia supported the pan-Slavic movement in the 19th century and supported Serbia in the First World War. When Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s, Russia sided with the Serbs in the ensuing conflicts (vetoing the recognition of the Srebrenica genocide, denouncing NATO's involvement in Kosovo, and not recognising Kosovo's declaration of independence).

Russia also values its privileged economic exchanges in the WB, particularly in the energy sector. But at the same time, it is ready to act as a spoiler power, acting to destabilise the region and to prevent the WB states

from drawing closer to the EU and NATO. Its soft power efforts are thus frequently undercut by its hard power actions (Stronski and Himes 2019, p. 2).

Russia's spoiler objectives are also present in the EN countries, but here it uses more coercive means. Russia considers the countries in the trio to be part of its 'near abroad' - an integrated economic and political space in which the influence of others is to be denied (de Waal, 2024, p. 3). This vision has led to it establishing a military presence on the territories of Moldova and Georgia (in Transnistria since 1991, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since 2008) where it also works to destabilise political and economic life (Cenusa, 2024). Ukraine is even more firmly anchored in the minds of Russia's leaders as 'part' of Russia. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and waged war in the Donbas, and in 2022 launched a full-scale invasion of the country (Plokhy, 2023).

While China is increasingly belligerent towards Taiwan and in its military activities in the South China Sea, in the WB and EN countries, it pursues its goals mainly in the geo-economic domain. The WB and EN countries were included in the 2013 Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to expand China's economic presence by developing maritime and land routes, and in the '16+1', a composite group that contains all the WB countries except Kosovo. However, there are signs that China's approach is changing, notably through the introduction of the concept of the 'three wars' (the war on public opinion (disinformation campaigns), psychological war (aggressive diplomacy), and lawfare) through which China aims to shape an environment favourable to itself (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer, 2021, p. 15). China's involvement in the war in Ukraine through its assistance to and support of Russia are also evidence of a more assertive approach (Christoffersen, 2024).

Türkiye, the Gulf states and Iran promote cultural and religious ties with the Muslim populations in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have made major economic investments in the WB that increase their own regional and geopolitical importance and provide gateways to European markets (Vascotto (2024)).

Türkiye shares this economic objective but also seeks to extend its influence in a region to which it has been historically close through the Ottoman Empire. Its position as a regional power with a claim to multiple alliances has also been seen in the EN, where it has placed itself in the position of mediator in negotiations between Russia and Ukraine (Atalan, 2024). Türkiye has denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine, continued to apply the Montreux Convention and, above all provided military aid to Ukraine (notably, drones). It also invested political capital in the Black Sea Grain Initiative of 2022-2023. But it has not applied Western sanctions against Russia, providing outlets for Russian hydrocarbons and the export of dual-use equipment.

Iran too invests in the WB, mostly in the cultural realm as a means of enhancing its soft power, but its involvement remains at a low level compared with that of the Gulf states and Türkiye (Koppa, 2021, p. 257). Iran also uses the WB and especially the EN spaces to seek to destabilise the Euro-Atlantic bloc. Its military assistance in the form of drones has been essential to Russia in its war in Ukraine (Eslami, 2022, pp. 513-515).

Two other actors share Russia's desire to destabilise the Euro-Atlantic bloc: Belarus and North Korea, which both support the Russian regime in the war it is waging in Ukraine. North Korea has provided military equipment (munitions) and has sent troops that have been employed by Russia in the Kursk region (Pietrewicz (2024)). Belarus has extensively supported Russia on the international stage, sharing its anti-western narrative, and organising joint exercises, lending its military bases, and allowing Russian troops to be stationed on its territory (Masters, 2023).

The US and the EU also employ military instruments in the WB and EN. The US conducts a range of mostly low-level defence cooperation activities, including assistance programmes and joint exercises, throughout both regions. It participates in NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) (around 600 troops of a total strength of 4 300 (NATO, 2024b)) and has been the largest state donor of military assistance to Ukraine, allocating almost EUR 60 billion worth of weapons and equipment between January 2022 and October 2024 (Trebesch et al., 2023). The EU (while not a state actor) has donated funds to the armed forces of Albania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Moldova, and — substantially — Ukraine through the European Peace Facility (European Union, European Commission, 2024) and provided training to more than 50 000 Ukrainian recruits through the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (Skrypchenko, 2024). The US and EU are not assessed to be threatening actors in any of the threat scans conducted for this working paper, i.e., their employment of military instruments in the WB and EN countries will not trigger the adverse indicators of impact we have defined to inform the threat scans.

3. FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the findings of the threat scans. It has been organised by military instrument, rather than by country, as options for building a more resilient and stronger EU foreign, security and defence toolbox to counter military threats are likely to be first designed to address the nature of the threat, and only then tailored to meet specific differences between the CCs. The principles of cyber security, for example, are broadly applicable to all states; it is logical that any EU instrument would be designed to first embody these common principles, and then tailored for specific country needs if necessary. Nonetheless, as this section demonstrates, there are important regional differences in the nature of the military threats facing the WB and EN CCs.

The full threat scans, which reference supporting sources for our assessments and include further details of some events mentioned below, are included as an Annex A to this Working Paper.

3.1 Armed Attack (Instrument A)

We assess the likelihood of a large-scale military attack on any of the WB CCs to be low. Some government security documents note that such a possibility cannot be entirely excluded (unsurprisingly, as the need to protect territorial integrity militarily, however unlikely this may be, provides the basic justification for any state's development of armed forces). Official documents in most of the countries of the region do not name a hostile state actor that might pursue such a course. The exception is Kosovo, whose national security strategy (supported by secondary sources) draws attention to the territorial claims of another CC — Serbia — and the possibility that these may result in military action, e.g., the annexation of Kosovo's northern territories. Even so, the likelihood of such action remains low, in large part due to the presence of KFOR, which is accounted for in the likelihood indicator 'stance of CC partners and allies'. The force of attraction of European integration also acts as a restraint on Serbia, although this is clearly contingent upon the EU continuing to extend credible prospects for this.

The governments of some CCs in the region express concern that while they themselves are unlikely to suffer military attack, they may be adversely affected by military conflict elsewhere. Albania, for example, notes that in the current security environment, there is a higher likelihood that its armed forces may need to respond to an attack on another NATO ally. Montenegro more obliquely refers to the dangers of conventional conflict in the region.

The situation is somewhat different in the EN. There is a clearly identified hostile state actor — Russia — that has been at war with Ukraine since 2014 and may also launch large-scale warfare against Georgia and Moldova. Russia invaded Georgia in 2008 and has since then occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Its perception of ‘unfinished business’ may lead it to renewed military aggression, particularly if its attempts to derail Georgia’s EU aspirations using non-military means — where it presently focuses its attention (Burmester et al., 2025, 4 ff.; Akhvlediani et al., 2025, pp. 26-7) — are unsuccessful (interview 1). Furthermore, Russia’s military presence in the occupied territories provides increased opportunity for military adventurism. Russia is also engaged in hybrid warfare in Moldova that may, as was the case in Ukraine, be intended to shape the battlefield in advance of a conventional military attack. Nonetheless, with Russia pre-occupied in Ukraine, militarily weakened, and preferring to pursue its objectives in these CCs through non-military means, we assess the likelihood of Russia employing this instrument against Georgia and Moldova to be low in the 2025-2030 timeframe.

Ukraine is a unique case amongst the CCs. At the time of writing, Russia is conducting a war of aggression against the country, during which it has pursued extreme forms of warfare, including the intentional targeting of civilian energy infrastructure and the targeting of infrastructure with the intent of causing environmental disasters on territory it occupies (for example, the Kakhovka and other dams).

Belarus, allied with Russia through the Union State of Russia and Belarus, permitted Russia to launch part of its military invasion of Ukraine from its territory. It too poses a threat of conventional attack to Ukraine in the 2025-2030 timeframe. Although it is almost inconceivable that Belarus would act alone against Ukraine, we assess there to be a medium-level likelihood that it would do so alongside Russia, including in the context of the current war. In such circumstances, the impact would be medium. Belarus’s military capability is very small compared to Russia’s thus the military impact of its participation would not be game-changing.

In ordinary circumstances, the possibility of North Korea posing any threat of military attack to Ukraine would be immeasurably small. However, North Korea became a co-belligerent in Russia’s war in Ukraine in late 2024, posing a threat of high (ongoing) likelihood. Like Belarus, the impact of its participation, while serious is not game-changing. We assess this to be medium.

Naturally, for all other CCs, the impact of any military attack (i.e., war on their territories) would be high.

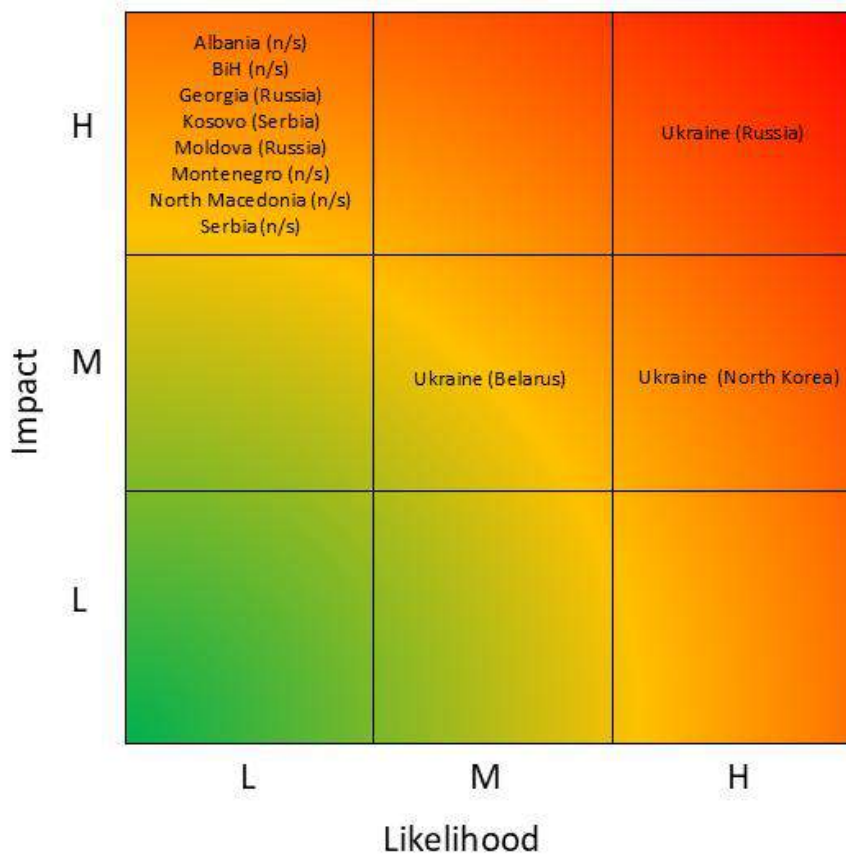


Figure 1 Instrument A Summary. Source: the authors.
n/s = not specified; L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

3.2 Armed Presence (Instrument B)

We assess the likelihood that armed forces might be used in a coercive role against the WB CCs to be mostly negligible. Kosovo, however, is also an exception with regard to the employment of this instrument. Serbia has, on more than one recent occasion deployed armed forces in sizeable numbers close to Kosovo's borders, for example in 2022, following a dispute about the issue of Kosovar vehicle license plates and in 2023 following a recommendation from the Council of Europe that Kosovo should become a member of the organisation. We assess the likelihood of a similar demonstrative use of force to be medium. While the risk of escalation to armed conflict is limited, largely due to the constraining presence of partners and allies, such intimidation creates tensions in the region. We assess the impact of such an episode to be medium.

The situation in the EN CCs is once again more serious and once again dominated by the threat from Russia. Georgia and Moldova's security situations are presently negatively impacted by Russia's use of military forces at scale in a destabilising or coercive role. In Georgia, the Russia military is pursuing a policy of 'borderisation' at the margins of the territories it occupies (the erection of physical barriers and monitoring infrastructure to create de facto borders) and upgrading the Ochamchire naval base in Abkhazia. In Moldova, the Operational Group of Russian Forces, purportedly a peacekeeping mission, is illegally present in the

Transnistrian region. Transnistria itself, while not a recognised state, uses the security forces it controls to provoke incidents at the administrative line between Moldova and the Transnistrian region. We assess the likelihood of the employment of this instrument by Russia to be high (ongoing) for both Georgia and Moldova, with high impact in both cases. For Transnistria, we assess the likelihood again to be high (ongoing) and the impact of the presence of these lower capability forces to be medium.

Russia’s regular nuclear posturing not only threatens Ukraine with nuclear strike or contamination but also intimidates Ukraine's supporters into reducing their military assistance to Kyiv. While support has continued throughout the war, it has been cautious, hence these threats are high (ongoing) likelihood with medium impact. Meanwhile, the intimidatory presence and exercising of large numbers of Belarusian troops close to Ukraine’s borders forces Ukraine to maintain its own military presence in the locality and away from the front line with Russia. The likelihood is high (ongoing) and the impact is medium — this reflects relative severity when compared to the impact of the ongoing full-scale war; Belarusian military presence on the borders would likely present a lower impact threat in peacetime. For Ukraine, there is also a low likelihood threat that Türkiye may no longer prevent and police the transit of military vessels and cargoes through the Bosphorus Strait with a medium impact on Ukraine’s ability to defend itself.

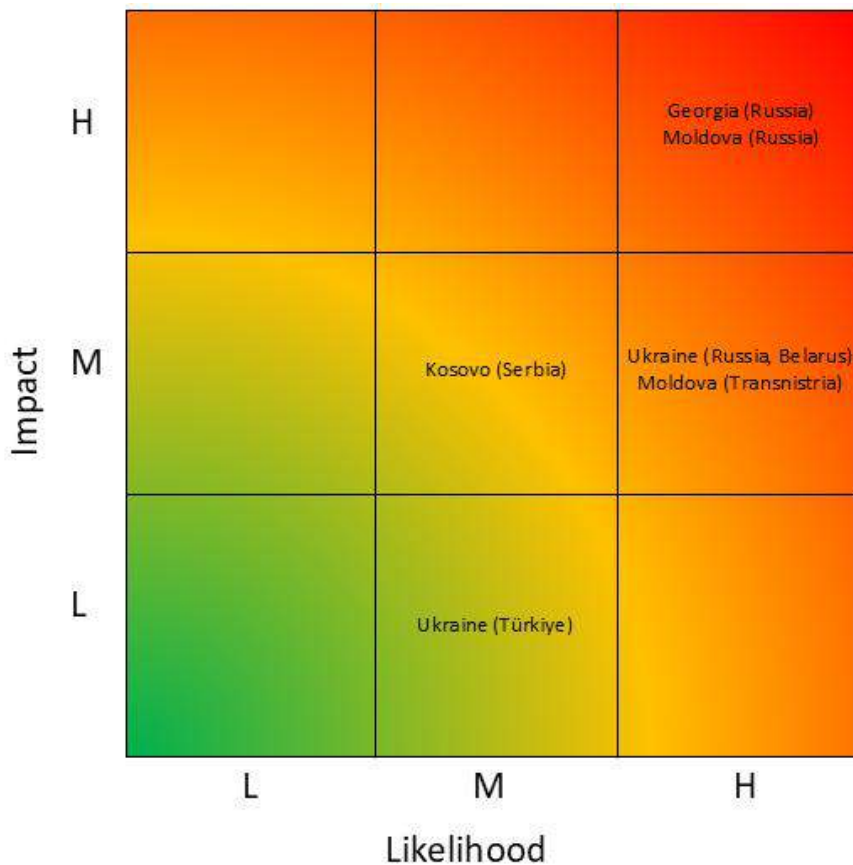


Figure 2 Instrument B Summary. Source: the authors.
n/s = not specified; L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

3.3 Sub-threshold Attack (Instrument C)

Hybrid warfare is a growing feature of the threat landscape in the WB, notably involving political interference and disinformation operations. The use of military or quasi-military assets as a component of hybrid warfare is, however, less prominent. The most conspicuous threat is in the cyber domain, to which, in accordance with global practice, the WB CCs are paying increasing attention. Even here, however, the threat picture is dominated by cybercrime, rather than the hostile actions of third states (PwC and ISAC, 2022, p.11).

National security documents are often vague about the exact nature of the threat posed in cyberspace. The term ‘cyberattack’ may be used without further description or explanation of severity and impact. Public attribution of cyberattacks is uncommon, and government communications rarely name cyber domain adversaries. Albania, however, has named Iran as being responsible for an attack in response to its hosting of the controversial Iranian opposition group, Mujahedin-e Khalq, while Kosovo and Montenegro have accused Russia or hacker groups aligned with Russia of attacks in 2024, and in 2016 and 2022 respectively. These, however, appear to be opportunistic attacks associated with particular events (Mujahedin-e Khalq in Albania, Kosovo’s support for Ukraine, Montenegro’s NATO accession and the fall of the Abazovic government) rather than symptoms of sustained campaigns.

Beyond the cyber domain, (quasi-)military assets have occasionally been used in sub-threshold actions against the WB CCs, including contacts between Republika Srpska entity and the private military company Wagner (Bosnia) and hostile foreign intelligence operations (North Macedonia). More seriously, Kosovo has experienced armed attacks by non-identifiable forces (the Banjska incident) and sabotage (Iber Lepenc/Ibar Lepenac canal). Kosovo has blamed both attacks on Serbia—this attribution is widely accepted in the case of Banjska, while internationally supported investigations into the canal incident are ongoing at the time of writing.

Broadly, states of the WB region recognise an increased likelihood in the current security environment that hostile hybrid activities will be directed at them, even if they are unable or unwilling to pinpoint the nature of such attacks or identify their source. These hybrid attacks will not necessarily include military components — indeed, we assess the likelihood of military assets being used by hostile states in sub-threshold attacks against most of the WB CCs as low. The impact would be medium, reflecting the potentially serious consequences of such attacks. Kosovo is once again an exception — Serbia’s territorial claims and previous recourse to military actions raise our estimate of the likelihood to medium.

We assess the likelihood of military assets being used against the EN CCs to be high (ongoing) for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The impact is medium in all three cases. Cyber threats feature heavily in the threat scans for the EN CCs with Russia identified as the sole culprit. Cyberattacks in Georgia and Moldova have increased since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including attacks on election servers, while in Ukraine they are a continuous (if not always successful) feature of Russia’s war of aggression. More broadly, Belarus poses a low-likelihood, medium-impact threat to Ukraine related to the potential disruption of water sources that flow through its territory before entering Ukraine.

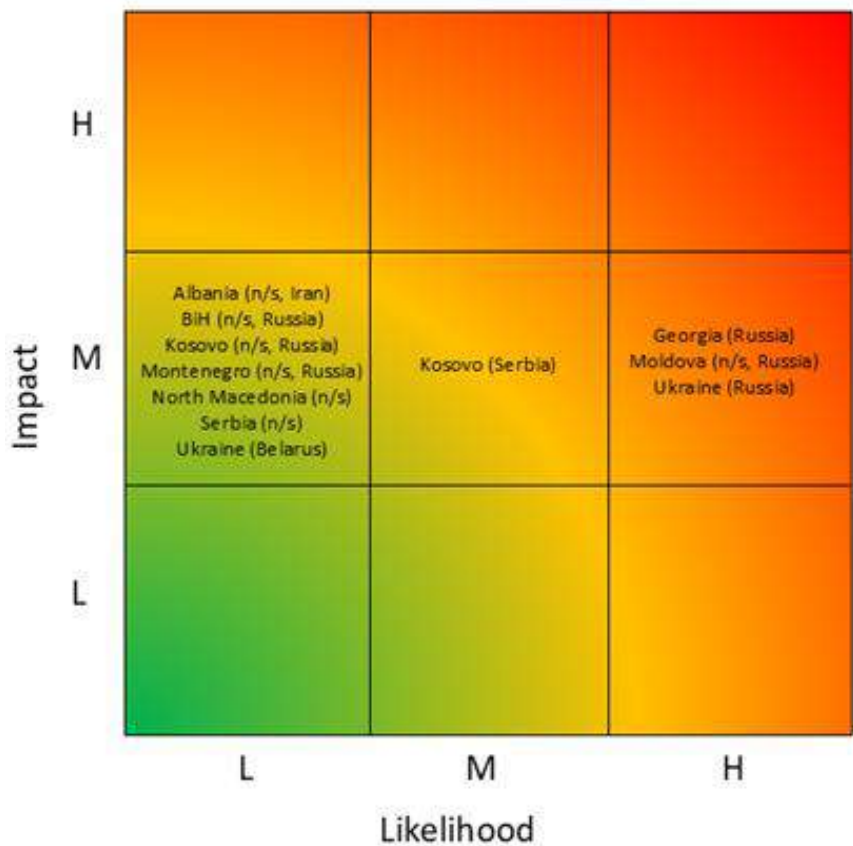


Figure 3 Instrument C Summary. Source: the authors.
 n/s = not specified; L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

3.4 Military Training (Instrument D)

For the WB CCs, there is some variation in our assessments of likelihood and impact for the threats posed by third states that train other forces in the region. For NATO members Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, this threat is negligible. For Kosovo, Serbia’s military cooperation with Russia, which has historically included Serbian participation in CSTO exercises and the ‘Slavic Brotherhood’ exercise, is a concern, although cooperation between Serbia and Russia has reduced significantly since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine; indeed, Serbia has suspended all activities related to the planning, preparation and conduct of military exercises with foreign partners. Even if cooperation resumes, the impact would be relatively small: it is unlikely that Serbia’s participation in Russian-sponsored exercises would result in a substantial increase in military capability that might be employed against Kosovo. Our assessment of this threat is thus low likelihood and low impact.

There is also a low likelihood that Russian training activities will pose a threat to Bosnia, although in this case, the concern is related to the renewal of previous Russian efforts to assist in the build-up and potential militarisation of the Republika Srpska (RS) police. Although RS officials have denied Russian involvement in training, experts claim that former Russian intelligence officers regularly deliver lectures at the RS police

academy. In addition, the purchases of equipment and weapons from Serbia and Russia by the RS Ministry of Interior raises concerns that it could be positioning itself for potential conflicts. We thus assess the impact in this case to be medium.

For Serbia itself, we consider military cooperation with Russia to be malign — even if it is not seen so by Belgrade — as it diverts Serbia from Euro-Atlantic integration. The likelihood of a threat materialising in the 2025-2030 timeframe is low as this cooperation has reduced substantially since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but the political-strategic consequences are potentially severe, hence we assess the impact as medium.

In the EN, while Russia’s armed forces are heavily pre-occupied in Ukraine, they still, from time to time, carry out joint exercises with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In the context of Russia’s claims for the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we consider the likelihood of a threat emerging to be high (ongoing) and the impact to be medium. For Moldova, the de facto Transnistrian authorities regularly exercise paramilitary forces, for example the ‘peacekeeping contingent of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic’. We assess the likelihood of a threat arising to be to be high (ongoing), but the impact of the employment of these small, light forces to be low.

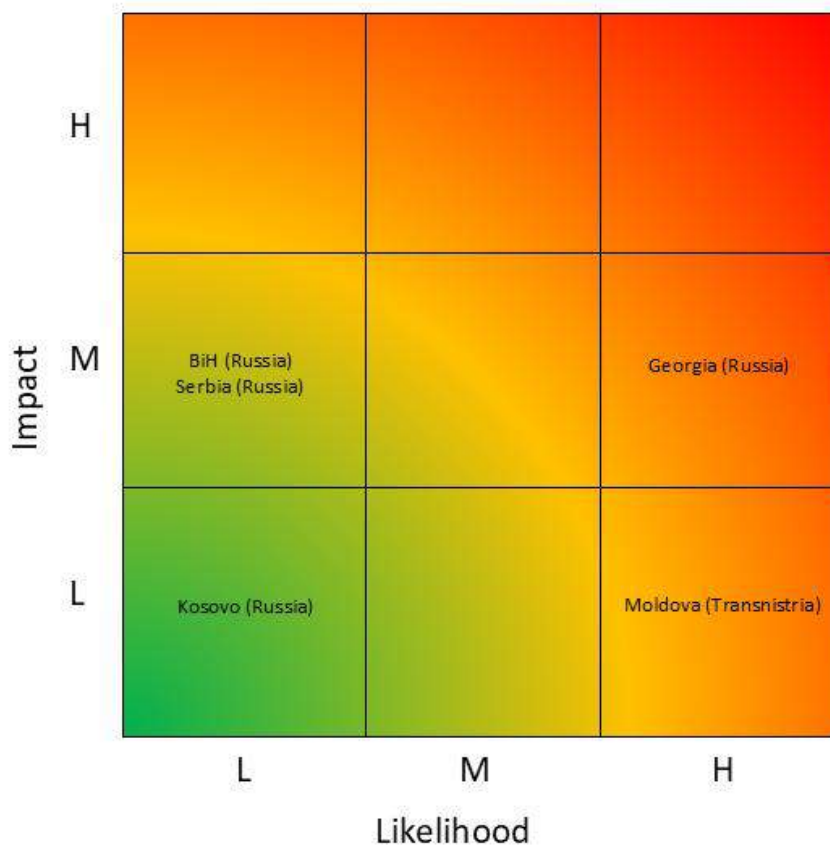


Figure 4 Instrument D Summary. Source: the authors.
n/s = not specified; L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

3.5 Arms Transfers (Instrument E)

Third state actors may produce destabilising effects through arms transfers, possibly unintentionally. For Bosnia, the main threat is again linked to the militarisation of the Republika Srpska police, who have in the past been supplied with weapons by Serbia. We assess there to be a low likelihood and medium impact of this threat re-emerging. Meanwhile, the supply of weapons to Serbia by both Russia and China presents Kosovo with a high (ongoing) likelihood threat with medium impact. In 2023, China was the largest military donor to Serbia. Russia is also a major supplier and in return for this trade, Serbia has exported sanctioned dual-use goods to Russia. As well as creating threats for Kosovo, these arms transfers pose a high (ongoing) likelihood threat with medium impact for Serbia. As with training, we consider military cooperation (with Russia especially) to be malign as it diverts Serbia from Euro-Atlantic integration. Serbia has also received fighter jets from Belarus. There is a medium likelihood that it will receive further weapons from Belarus, with medium impact for similar reasons.

NATO members Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, as well as Bosnia, have imported arms and military equipment from Türkiye. While Türkiye's agenda is largely benign, it has an interest in promoting alternatives (or at best, complements) to European integration centred around its own leadership. We thus assess the threat this poses to be high (ongoing) but with low impact.

In the EN, Russia supplies weapons to the de facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, posing a high (ongoing) likelihood threat to Georgia with medium impact. As regards Ukraine, several third states including Iran and North Korea, are supplying Russia with weapons. These are important, although not game-changing contributions to Russia's war effort, creating a high (ongoing) likelihood threat with medium impact. China's ongoing supply of dual-use goods to Russia is essential for Russia's war efforts and thus has a high impact.

Entities in several third states (including India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates) have also been sanctioned for supplying Russia with dual-use goods that support its war effort. The extent of state involvement in these entities is not clear, but their sanctioning indicates a high (ongoing) likelihood, medium impact threat to Ukraine that these and other third countries will (continue to) supply such goods to Russia.

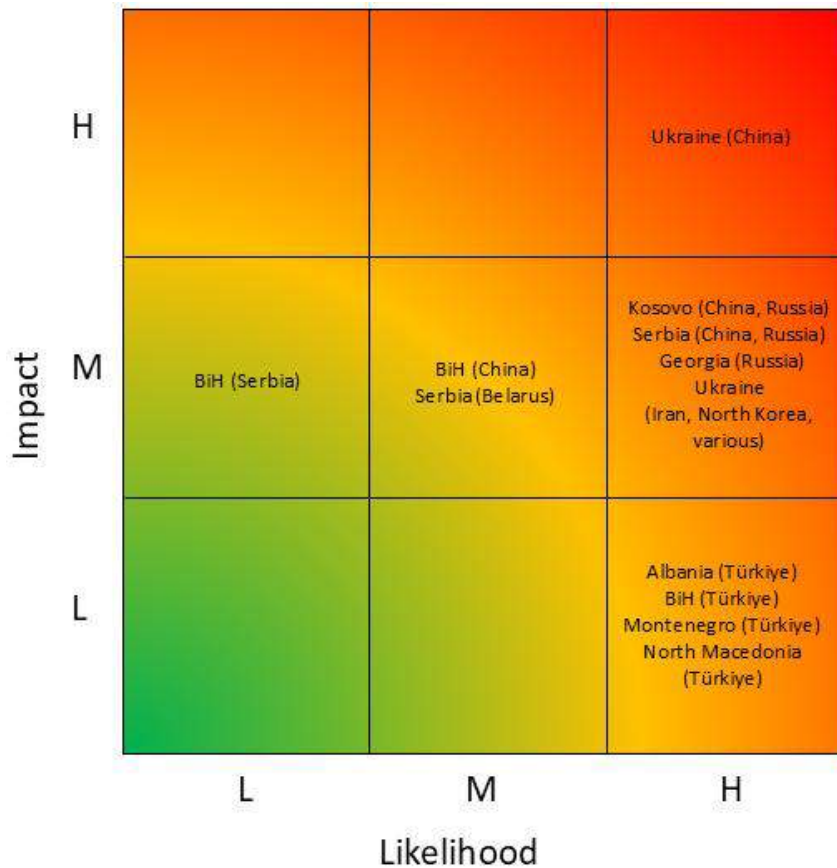


Figure 5 Instrument E Summary. Source: the authors.
n/s = not specified; L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

3.6 Defence Cooperation (Instrument F)

Cooperation agreements with third states are generally low impact threats. In the WB the presence of a Russian MoD office in Serbia poses a high (ongoing) likelihood threat with low impact to both Kosovo and to Serbia itself. Serbia also retains observer status in the CSTO, but in practice contacts are presently limited and the US and NATO are closer security partners (Serbia has suspended its 2022 foreign exercise moratorium only once, for exercise 'Platinum Wolf 2023' co-organised with US European Command).

For Moldova, Russia's ties with the de facto authorities in Transnistria, including in the security field, create a high (ongoing) likelihood threat with low impact. For Georgia, Russia military agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia are more serious matters as they cement Russian presence in the occupied territories and support Russia's military expansionism, for example through the construction of the Ochamchire naval base. We assess this to be a high (ongoing) likelihood threat with medium impact.

Russia's bilateral military cooperation agreements with countries such as Iran and North Korea pose a high (ongoing) likelihood and medium impact threat to Ukraine in the context of practical and political support to Russia's war of aggression.

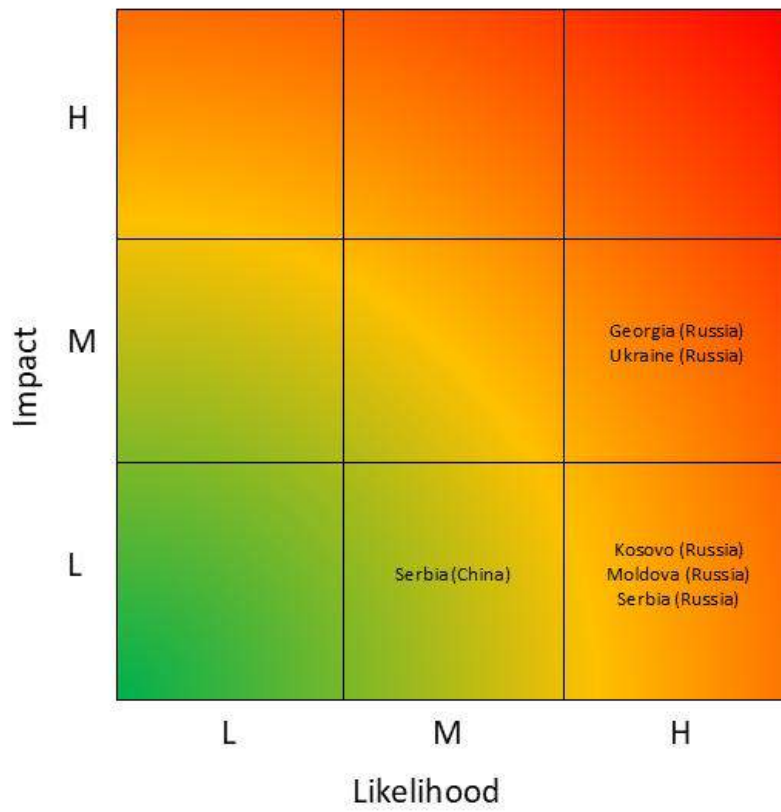


Figure 6 Instrument F Summary. Source: the authors.
n/s = not specified; L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

4. CONCLUSIONS

Threat scans conducted for each of the CCs of the WB and EN demonstrate that in the 2025-2030 timeframe, military instruments may be employed against these countries by third state actors, posing threats that may delay or derail their integration with the EU. These instruments range in severity from full-scale invasion to defence cooperation actions. While the range of instruments is common to both regions, there are clear differences between the two in the likelihood and impact of their employment and in the third state actors involved.

The third state actors likely to pose the greatest threats to the WB countries in the military domain are Russia and China. Russia will most likely continue to act as a spoiler power in the region, sowing instability through defence cooperation, training and arms transfers, in particular with Serbia, albeit to a much lesser extent than before its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russia has also, on occasion, directly attacked WB countries in the cyber domain (Kosovo, Montenegro) and may do so again. Judging from historical patterns, the countries of the region that are not members of NATO (Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia) are more likely to be vulnerable to Russia's hostile actions.

China's motivations for its actions in the WB region have been largely geoeconomic. In the military domain, it has sought to expand its presence in the regional arms market and will likely continue to do so, with consequences that may be destabilising. More directly, the presence of Chinese weapons systems in the armed forces of WB countries and the financial and logistic obligations that this entails may be an obstacle to the WB countries' integration into European security arrangements.

Türkiye's continuing presence, in the form of arms sales and defence cooperation with Albania and Kosovo and Montenegro, will also pose a (low impact) threat to WB countries. Türkiye's agenda for the region is benign, but its promotion of parallel, possibly replacement regional arrangements centred around its own leadership may stand in the way of EU integration. Some states in the WB have also been threatened in the military domain by other states in their own region, notably Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina whose fragile relations with Serbia (complicated by Serbia's own relationships with Russia and China) have been a source of instability. Most seriously, Serbia has directly employed military instruments against Kosovo, whose independence it does not recognise. Serbia will likely continue to pose threats to WB countries including, through a relationship with Russia that stands in the way of EU integration, to itself. These threats will be mitigated by Serbia's declining relationship with Russia in the wake of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine.

The situation in the EN countries is somewhat bleaker. Russia has, for some years, been the predominant state actor posing military threats to security here and will continue to be so. Its occupation of territory in Georgia and support for the breakaway region of Transnistria in Moldova are important factors that raise the likelihood of it employing (or continuing to employ) military instruments against these countries in the future.

Russia, obviously, presents and will continue to present the most serious of military threats to Ukraine. Its motivations for its ongoing war of aggression have shown no sign of diminishing and its objectives remain unchanged. Its overestimation of its capabilities to prosecute the war has ensured that other countries — including Belarus, China, North Korea, and Iran — have also become, and will remain, states hostile to Ukraine.

Neither the EU, nor the CCs themselves are powerless in the face of these threats. Later in this work package, we will evaluate the ability of the CCs, with EU support, to cope with military threats and identify new or improved instruments in the EU toolbox to assist in countering them. In the terminology of Katzenstein and Seybert, designing responses to foreseeable situations such as the threats we identify here, will increase the EU's ability to exercise control power. We have previously observed that the upgrading of the EU's civilian and military crisis management capabilities and capacity-building initiatives from the late 1990s onwards provided a springboard for the transformation of the EU and thus a demonstration of its protean power (Lawrence et al., 2024, p. 26). Control and protean power responses reinforce each other: typical defence planning processes aimed at countering foreseeable threats may still contribute to producing agile organisations better adapted to uncertain environments.

ANNEX A . COUNTRY SUMMARIES

A.1. Albania

A large proportion (80 %) of the Albanian population considers that Serbia is a security threat to Albania (the nature of the threat is not specified) while a smaller but significant part of the population (18 %) believes the same of NATO Ally Greece (Dyrmishi, Hallunaj, and Strati, 2024, p. 34).

Albania's national security strategy, however, identifies only one state actor that poses a direct threat to its national security — Iran — which it has [accused of conducting cyber-attacks](#) against the state. These appear to have been opportunistic attacks in response to Albania's [hosting](#) of the controversial Iranian opposition group Mujahedin-e Khalq, rather than a sustained campaign. China is mentioned only in passing with reference to its political support for Russia's war. Russia itself is referenced only in the context of its war of aggression against Ukraine, which is argued to reduce regional stability and raise the prospect of a Russia-NATO conflict that would draw in Albania through its Article 5 obligations. The likelihood of a large-scale military attack on Albania (instrument A) is nonetheless considered low.

The most prominent threat to Albania's security is thus in the hybrid domain, including cyber (instrument C). Official documents note growing activity in this domain, characterising it as 'one of the greatest challenges to our security' and noting, in the context of the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines, the strategic importance of the TAP pipeline. In the cyber domain, Albania's cybersecurity capacity is somewhat weak ('top 36th in Europe', according to its national cyber security strategy (Republic of Albania, 2021, p. 1486)).

In the realm of arms transfers and defence cooperation (instruments E and F), NATO Ally Türkiye is the only third state that might be considered a threatening actor as we have defined it. Türkiye has a fairly active presence in the Western Balkans, including in Albania to which it has supplied weaponry including Bayraktar TB2 drones.

In the broader security domain, official and secondary sources place heavy stress on the threat of terrorism and radicalised extremism (Republic of Albania, 2023, pp. 3-10, Byman and Shapiro, 2014, pp. 6-7), suggesting that Albanians who have fought as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq may have been sufficiently radicalised as to engage in acts of terrorism back home. Official sources, however, note that the threat is low and that no incidents of this type of terrorism have been recorded. There also appears to be no evidence to link returned fighters to malign third state actors. A counter-narrative thus suggests that Albania's eagerness to join NATO and the EU have led it to emphasise threats that it believes the international community wishes it to deal with (organised crime, corruption, radical terrorism) rather than any actual threats that the country may face and at the expense of human security and development (Jano, 2022, p. 57).

Table 2 Threat Matrix, Albania

Albania						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Unspecified		The risk of a military aggression against the territory of Albania is considered low, but the current international security situation on the borders of the Atlantic Alliance has increased the possibility of a military attack against one of the allied countries of NATO or against the territory of Albania itself, as well as the obligations arising from the implementation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. (Republic of Albania, 2023, p. 12).	L		H
B	-	-	-	-	-	-
C	Unspecified	De-stabilisation, disruption of services, espionage.	<p>The exponential emphasis of some sophisticated threats specifically, such as cyberattacks in the past year against our online systems ... the threat to the security of the computer systems and networks of the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces is real. (Republic of Albania, 2023, p. 2, 9, 20);</p> <p>The sabotage of Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines in the international waters of the Baltic Sea has made NATO and its member countries pay increased attention to the protection of critical energy and underwater infrastructure in the territory of allied countries. The passage of the TAP gas pipeline through the territory of our country and in the Adriatic Sea acquires increased strategic importance in the current context. (Republic of Albania, 2023, p. 6);</p>	L		M

			Hybrid activities pose one of the greatest challenges to our security and the integrity of our democratic institutions. Hybrid techniques can affect both the military and civilian spheres, harming our interests and threatening our cohesion. (Republic of Albania, 2023, p. 18).			
	Iran		Large-scale cyberattacks on critical and important information infrastructure by state sponsored malicious cyber actors, such as the one last year originating from Iran, prove that cyber security must be prioritised ... remain under threat of cyber-attacks by state and non-state actors on their behalf, who not only have the objectives but also the capabilities to carry them out. (Republic of Albania, 2023, p.9).	-		-
D	-	-	-	-	-	-
E	Türkiye	Influence	USD 76 000 worth of arms and ammunition in 2023, including Bayraktar TB2 drones. (Emin and Ekinci, 2024).	H		L
F	Türkiye	Influence	Military Framework Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Government of the Republic of Türkiye (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (2024).	H		L

A.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

The principal state actors that may employ military instruments to the detriment of the security of Bosnia and Herzegovina are Russia and Serbia. While China has donated military equipment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's armed forces, its influence within the country's defence sector remains limited ('The Authoritarian Nexus', 2024, p. 58). Türkiye is another actor with notable impact. The threats from these states may emerge from the combination of military, political, and economic instruments, but this threat scan focuses specifically on military instruments.

Bosnia's National Security Strategy was adopted in 2006, while the Defence Strategy was adopted in 2008. They have not been updated since: Bosnia's strategic documents are outdated and not adapted to the current global and regional security environment. For example, the 2006 National Security Strategy identifies terrorism as the greatest threat to the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina, explaining that there are increasing tendencies among certain terrorist groups to expand their activities to countries where such actions have not occurred previously (Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2006, pp. 5-6).

Political and social animosities caused by the war from the 1990s, nationalist extremism, incomplete implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, and problems related to political transition, are also defined as main threats. Bosnia and Herzegovina is still dealing with the consequences of past conflicts and unresolved issues, particularly the ethnic and political divisions that could destabilise the region.

According to its strategic documents, however, the possibility of armed aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina is non-existent. Bosnia and Herzegovina has no territorial claims involving neighbouring and other states, nor does it perceive neighbouring states as hostile and a possible threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty (Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2006, pp. 2). Nevertheless, the relations between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are especially delicate and could pose a threat to regional stability and Bosnia and Herzegovina's security. Serbia tries to position itself as a protector of its ethnic compatriots in neighbouring countries, in this case in Bosnian entity Republika Srpska (RS).

Although Serbia's official policy supports Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity, [political actors in Serbia](#) have promoted ideas like the 'Serbian world', which envisions closer ties and even unification of all Serbs across the Balkans. Such rhetoric, while largely symbolic, could threaten Bosnia and Herzegovina's internal cohesion and fuel ethnic tensions, especially considering [frequent secessionist statements](#) from Milorad Dodik, the President of Bosnian Serb-dominated RS. For this reason, analysts highlight the regional security dilemma — more specifically, Serbia's accelerated armament as a military challenge to Bosnia and Herzegovina's security. While Serbia's arms purchases could be interpreted as efforts to ensure domestic security, they are also often perceived as laying the groundwork for potential territorial ambitions in the future. (Interview 2).

Furthermore, there is a possibility that RS will sell its military industry to Serbia. Although not confirmed, in February 2024, RS's Prime Minister [stated](#) that the military companies in RS 'cannot do business without relying on Serbia' in the future, because they are heavily indebted. Most of these companies were focused on repair and maintenance, and only one is engaged in production. It should be noted that the sole client for these companies has been the Serbian Ministry of Defence, because most of the equipment used by the

Serbian Armed Forces and MoD dates back to the Yugoslav era. These companies are the only ones still capable of repairing equipment from that time. Most recently, an intergovernmental commission has been established to determine the best approach for this process. Options being considered include selling the industry to a Serbian state-owned weapons manufacturer or directly to the Serbian MoD or simply transferring ownership to one of these two entities in Serbia without an actual sale. A final decision is still to be made (Interview 5).

Russia has very strong ties to RS where it supports political leaders opposed to Bosnia and Herzegovina's integration into NATO and the EU. Although there has been no official strategic agreement between Russia and Bosnia and Herzegovina related to defence, certain levels of cooperation have been established. Over the years, the RS Ministry of Interior has significantly increased police armament, with weapons from Serbia and Russia. For example, it procured three helicopters from Russia as well as firearms, including long-barrel rifles, from Serbia. This type of weapon is not typical for standard law enforcement, which is why it is often claimed that the militarisation of the RS police is gradually taking place and that it is preparing for potential armed conflict amid political crises in Bosnia and Herzegovina ('The Authoritarian Nexus', 2024, p. 65).

Russian involvement extends to police training as well. In 2015, the RS Ministry of Interior and Moscow's Main Directorate of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs signed a Memorandum of Understanding for joint training. Although RS officials have denied Russian training involvement, experts claim that former Russian intelligence officers frequently lecture at the RS police academy ('The Authoritarian Nexus', 2024, p. 65). In 2018, Serbia's then Minister of Interior, as well as representatives of the Russian Ministry of Interior, [attended](#) the opening of the RS Police Training Centre near Banja Luka. Additionally, at the opening of the centre, some of the 2 500 rifles procured by the RS Ministry of Interior from Serbia were also displayed, a purchase that sparked significant controversy.

Despite the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina was granted the [status of candidate country](#) to the EU in December 2022, Milorad Dodik maintains ties with Moscow. This is evident from the four meetings he has had with Putin since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. During the visits, Dodik and Putin showed each other support — Dodik by [claiming](#) that Russia was forced to military intervene in Ukraine, that Bosnia and Herzegovina will not introduce sanctions on Russia, and that it will not join NATO. Putin openly supported Dodik upon his election, awarding him for his contribution to the development of cooperation between Russia and RS.

China's influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in much of the region, is largely economic. While it does not pose an immediate military threat, its growing economic presence, particularly through investments in infrastructure projects, but also [donations in arms and equipment](#), raises concerns about future leverage that could impact Bosnia and Herzegovina's strategic choices.

Türkiye has also been investing in Bosnia and Herzegovina's armed forces. Turkish military engagement is focused on donating military equipment, developing capacities of the armed forces, education etc. Considering that Türkiye is a NATO member, these relations do not cause any concern from a military point of view. However, from a political perspective, the potential risks lie in a fact that Turkish influence does not target the state as a whole, but rather specific groups within the country. For example, Turkish influence is absent in regions within RS where Serbs are the majority or in areas dominated by Croats, but it is present in

regions with a Bosniak majority (Interview 5). In a complex system such as Bosnian, this type of ethnic division could cause instabilities in the country.

Table 3 Threat Matrix, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Unspecified	-	<p>BiH does not perceive neighbouring and other states as hostile or as a potential threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty (Bosna i Hercegovina Predsjedništvo [Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2006, p. 2).</p> <p>The possibility that Bosnia and Herzegovina will face external aggression in the near future practically does not exist (Bosna i Hercegovina Predsjedništvo [Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2006, p. 4).</p>	L		H
B	-	-	-	-	-	-

C	Unspecified	-	<p>Cyber-attack on the BiH Parliamentary Assembly in 2022 (OSCE, 2022).</p> <p>Cyber threats (Strategija vanjske politike Bosne i Hercegovine, 2018, p. 13).</p>	L	<p>BiH does not even have a comprehensive, state-level cyber security strategy.</p> <p>(Stojanovic et al. 2021)</p> <p>It is recognised in the more recent official documents that fight against modern and unconventional security threats and cyber defence is necessary and that BiH will cooperate in that field with NATO.</p> <p>(Strategija vanjske politike Bosne i Hercegovine, 2018, p. 11).</p>	M
	Russia	Influence, de-stabilisation	<p>Relations between Russian private military company Wagner and RS: according to BiH Minister of Defence, members of the Russian mercenary Wagner group attended the celebration of the RS's Day on January 9 ('Na Dan RS', 2023).</p>	L	<p>BiH Minister of Defence sent a letter to the commander of EUFOR in BiH, warning of security threats related to the celebration of RS Day, which is declared unconstitutional by Bosnian state courts ('Na Dan RS', 2023).</p>	M
D	Russia	Potential militarisation of RS police	<p>Transfer of Russian equipment to the RS police and alleged Russian training of RS police is beyond symbolic - it is part of an effort by the RS to prepare itself for possible armed conflict around a political crisis internal to BiH ('The Authoritarian Nexus', 2024, p. 65 (Bechev, 2022).</p>	L	<p>A threat by Dodik to turn his armed police into a revived Bosnian Serb army risked the prospect of a return to war.</p> <p>(Bowen, 2022).</p>	M

E	Türkiye	Military-financial cooperation, modernisation of BiH's Armed Forces	In 2021, BiH Minister of Defence signed an Agreement on Military-Financial Cooperation between the Council of Ministers of BiH and the Government of the Republic of Türkiye. Additionally, he signed an Implementation Protocol on Financial Assistance, securing 200 million Turkish liras for the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces of BiH (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2014; 'Turska i BiH,' 2021).	H	Implementation of these agreements will last for five years from the year they were made ('Turska i BiH,' 2021).	L
	Serbia	Potential militarisation of RS police	RS bought at least 2,500 automatic rifles from Serbia in 2018 ('2.500 automatskih puški,' 2018).	M		M
	China	Influence	China has donated equipment to the Engineering Corps of the BiH Army on three occasions ('Increased activity by sanctioned Chinese defence companies', 2021).	M	BiH and Chinese defence ministries signed an aid agreement in 2013 and another in 2017, under which Beijing donated 15 pieces of equipment to BiH's armed forces four years later (Cvjetičanin, 2022).	M
F	-	-	-	-	-	-

A.3. Kosovo

Three main state actors may employ military instruments to the detriment of the security of Kosovo: Serbia, Russia, and China.

Serbia does not recognise Kosovo's independence and claims it as an autonomous province. Furthermore, it has some interests that coincide with those of Russia — a state that makes efforts to weaken the regional security order — and mutually beneficial security cooperation arrangements. Kosovo claims that 'the increasing militarization of Serbia, whose intent is to become the regional hegemon, directly raises the security dilemma and remains an identified source of threat to both Kosovo and the countries in the region' (Office of the Prime Minister (Kosovo), 2022, p.7). Nonetheless, the likelihood of large-scale armed conflict (instrument A) is low, in large part due to the restraining presence of the NATO Kosovo Force (Kruijver and Xhambazi, 2020, pp. 3-4).

However, Serbia has on occasion deployed military forces close to Kosovo's borders, for example in November 2022 when forces in a 'full state of combat readiness' [were deployed](#) in a period of high tension following the issue of Kosovar license plates. It has also [conducted exercises](#) in border regions. There is a possibility that Serbia will make further attempts to establish a hostile armed force presence (instrument B) to intimidate or coerce Kosovo even if the impact of such an attempt will be limited, again largely due to the presence of KFOR preventing any kind of escalation.

Serbia is also widely alleged to have used armed force in hybrid attacks (instrument C): in September 2023, 'ethnic Serb gunmen' [stormed the village of Banjska](#) in northern Kosovo, an attack claimed by Kosovo to be as reminiscent "of the hybrid techniques used in the early stages of Russian occupation in Crimea" in 2014, whose aim may have been to provoke Kosovo into a heavy-handed response. In 2024, Kosovo [accused Serbia](#) of sabotaging the Iber Lepenc/Ibar Lepenac canal, a source of drinking water and power plant cooling water, although this attribution had not, at the time of writing, been confirmed by other actors. Kosovo's cyber security strategy also recognises the threat of (unspecified) state-sponsored cyber-attacks that aim to breach national security (instrument C).

For Russia, the Western Balkans has been, since at least 2014, an arena where it can provoke crises both to pressure the West and distract from its war in Ukraine. While it has acted directly against Kosovo, for example through [cyber-attacks](#) (instrument C), it has more commonly sought to sow instability by acting through its principal ally in the region, Serbia. Its security cooperation with Serbia has included joint training (instrument D), arms sales (instrument E) and defence cooperation actions such as the opening of a ministry of defence office in Belgrade (instrument F). These activities are very likely to continue, although their impact is somewhat limited. Arms transfers, assessed to have medium-level impact, are probably the most worrisome.

China mainly operates in the economic realm in the WB, but has supplied Serbia with military equipment (instrument E), including armed drones and surface-to-air missile systems, in what has been described as a '[growing defence relationship](#)'.

Table 4 Threat Matrix, Kosovo

Kosovo						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Serbia	Territorial claims	<p>The core security threat derives from Serbia's territorial claims. The possibility of a conventional military attack is low, primarily due to the presence of KFOR (Office of the Prime Minister (Kosovo), 2022, p. 7)</p> <p>Kosovo is not confronted with direct and significant threats from any of the Western Balkan nations, with the notable exception of Serbia. (Myrta, 2024, p. 45).</p> <p>Serbia is not Russia, and the EU has much more leverage over its critical choices. Yet the political conflict in Kosovo is acquiring a dangerous military dimension and a return to war is no longer unthinkable (Shea, 2023).</p> <p>The threat of renewed violence has substantially receded and is also permanently monitored by</p>	L		H

			NATO's KFOR mission and EULEX. (Bargues et al., 2022, p. 9).			
B	Serbia	Intimidation, coercion	2022 deployment, Kosovar licence plates dispute ('Serbian troops on Kosovo border', 2022). 2023 exercises on border ('Serbian military drill ramps', 2024).	M	The possibility of a conventional military attack is low, primarily due to the presence of the NATO-led Kosovo force and the increase of Kosovo Security Force protection capabilities (Office of the Prime Minister (Kosovo), 2022, p. 7). Serbia moved military forces to the border. ... Even then, open armed conflict was virtually impossible (Marković and Perović, 2023, p. 3).	M
C	Unspecified	Weakening sovereignty, damaging image in the international arena.	The Republic of Kosovo is exposed to hybrid threats that include unconventional and asymmetric elements ... and cyberattacks (Office of the Prime Minister (Kosovo), 2022, p. 8, 17).	L	The National Cyber Security Unit and CERT suffer from critical staff shortages (Němec and Stojarová, 2022, p. 94). Successful cyberattacks against [critical information] infra-structure would have a significant impact on the country. Such impacts can include destabilizing the economy and damaging the reputation of businesses and individuals (National Cyber Security Strategy 2023-2027, 2023, p. 16).	M

	Serbia	Provocations and instability	Banjska incident 2023 (O`Carroll, 2023).	M	Casualties, potential for escalation.	M
	Russia	Provocations and instability, retaliation	2024 cyber-attacks (Bami, 2024)	L		M
D	Russia	Provocation, influence, de-stabilisation	Pre-2021, Serbian military regularly participated in CSTO exercises, and 'Slavic Brotherhood' exercise (Vuksanović, 2022, p. 245).	L	<p>Serbia's strengthened security cooperation with Russia seems to be of particular concern for Kosovo as it is moving increasingly towards a collision course with the EU and NATO (Němec and Stojarová, 2022, p. 94). Nonetheless, the influence of Russia and China within these policy domains should not be overestimated as the WB6 are firmly integrated into European and (to a lesser extent) Euro-Atlantic structures (Vulović, 2023, p. 4).</p> <p>Serbia holds more military drills with NATO than with Russia (Vuksanović, 2022, p. 245).</p>	L

E	Russia	De-stabilisation, provocation	Russia is [Serbia's] principal supplier of arms and military equipment. Between 2018 and 2022, Serbia imported 31 % of its arms from Russia, including anti-tank weapons, drones and other equipment (Wezeman et al., 2023, p. 6; Zweers, Drost and Henry, 2023, p. 32). In return, Serbia helps Russia skirt Western sanctions by exporting dual-use goods. It is estimated that between February 2022 and November 2023, Serbian firms exported USD 71.1 million in sanctioned goods to Russia, including electronics and communications equipment with military applications (Katic, Jevtovic and Zivanovic, 2023; Lancaster, 2024, p. 13).	H	Serbia's military buildup is supported by Russia, which has directly interfered in countries across the Balkans, especially Montenegro and North Macedonia (Global Europe Program Working Group on the Western Balkans and Subgroup on Kosovo, 2021, p. 4).	M
	China	Penetration of European defence markets	China has become Serbia's biggest source of arms and military equipment. In 2022, Serbia became the first operator of Chinese military equipment in Europe, importing Q-22 surface-to-air missiles and CH-92 UAVs (Kastner, 2023). Serbia is now the largest UAV operator in the Western Balkans, a move that has pushed other regional states to acquire UAVs (Lancaster, 2024, p. 14) Military cooperation has also increased. According to data released by the Serbian Ministry of Defence, between 2008 and 2018, China became the largest military donor to Serbia after the US (Vuksanovic 2020, p. 244). The purchase of Chinese drones CH-92A is turning Serbia into the largest drone operator in the Western Balkans, and	H	Serbia's close ties with Russia and China are a further major risk to regional peace and stability (Global Europe Program Working Group on the Western Balkans and Subgroup on Kosovo, 2021, p. 4).	M

			Chinese technology transfer is helping Belgrade to develop its own drone programme, 'Pegaz' (Pegasus) (Vuksanovic, 2023, p. 5).			
F	Russia	De-stabilisation, provocation, influence	Russian MoD office in Serbia (Vulović, 2023, p. 5). Russian Serbian military cooperation agreement 2013 (Ministry of Defence (Republic of Serbia), 2013).	H		L

A.4. Montenegro

Russia and its capacity to destabilise the Western Balkans, and therefore Montenegro, undoubtedly stand out as a key concern. Russian actions in Ukraine have demonstrated its willingness to intervene militarily, which is why Russia can be perceived as a potential direct threat. China is also viewed as a growing threat and a challenge (Interview 4). These states can combine military instruments with political or economic influence, to the detriment of the security of Montenegro.

The WB region is still burdened by past events and unresolved issues, which could cause destabilisation in certain areas. Montenegro's national security and defence strategies identify that as a result of the reduction of military forces in the region, the integration of countries into NATO and the EU, and the development of trust, cooperation, and partnership policies, the chance of a direct military threat to Montenegro is significantly reduced today, but it cannot be entirely ruled out (Ministry of Interior (Montenegro), 2018, p. 7).

Among other threats, the national security strategy defines cyber threats and the malign influence of foreign actors. Cyber threats are perceived as a major risk to Montenegro's security, especially because it has already been targeted by such activities (for example, a [cyberattack in 2022](#) for which the Montenegrin National Security Agency blamed Russia).

After gaining NATO membership on June 5, 2017, Montenegro began aligning its entire strategic and regulatory framework in the field of security and defence, while navigating its historical ties with Russia and balancing its relations with China. Since its accession to NATO, military cooperation between Montenegro and Russia has been completely absent. Montenegro has fully aligned with EU sanctions on Russia. However, it is important to highlight examples of Russia's interference aiming to prevent Montenegro from joining Euro-Atlantic structures, which obviously failed.

One of the most significant concerns for Montenegro is the potential for external actors to exploit internal political divisions and undermine the country's pro-Western trajectory. Russia in particular has been active in influencing political developments in Montenegro, especially in the context of the country's NATO membership process. [The 2016 attempted coup](#), allegedly orchestrated by Russian operatives and aimed at preventing Montenegro's NATO accession, remains a stark reminder of the extent to which external actors may go to influence the country's security policy.

While Montenegro does not face direct military threats, the presence of malign external influence, particularly from Russia, is seen as a security concern. Moscow continues to support political groups and media outlets that oppose Montenegro's NATO membership and promote closer ties with Russia. Some Montenegrin opposition politicians also maintain close ties with the Kremlin. On the other hand, Montenegro is on Russia's list of so-called [non-friendly states](#).

Montenegro's relations with China are primarily based on economic cooperation, which includes primarily investments in infrastructure projects. Considering that China is trying to break into the European defence market and to gain strategic leverage, it is possible that China's influence could have

implications for Montenegro's security. Currently, Montenegro's military engagement with China is more limited and typically revolves around military education and training programmes.

Serbia is also sometimes perceived as a threat, working to undermine Montenegro's sovereignty via pro-Serb proxies in the government. This has been particularly in focus in the previous years with the concept of the 'Serbian world'. The former Minister of Defence and former Director of the Security Intelligence Agency, Aleksandar Vulin, who imposed this topic in the public realm, defined the Serbian world as an intergenerational aspiration and a strategic direction towards the peaceful unification of all Serbs in one state (BCSP, 2023, p. 10). Political elites in Montenegro, but also throughout the region have leveraged this concept to argue that the idea of Greater Serbia has never truly faded and to shape their national policies in opposition to such aspirations. However, the most accurate interpretation of the Serbian world might be as a propaganda tool, lacking any concrete strategy, designed solely to get nationalist support both in Serbia and among Serbs in the wider region. Nevertheless, this idea can potentially bring additional instability and threaten Montenegro's security.

Table 5 Threat Matrix, Montenegro

Montenegro						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Unspecified		Armed aggression presents a real threat to national security, although the likelihood of conventional armed conflicts breaking out has been significantly reduced. The risk of military threat to Montenegro today is significantly reduced, but it must not be neglected in the future. (Ministry of Interior (Montenegro), 2018, p. 8).	L		H
B	-	-	-	-	-	-

C	Unspecified	To partially or completely disrupt functioning of transportation infrastructure, tele-communication networks, the healthcare and social system, media space, the financial system, energy and utility systems etc.	<p>Cyber threats often manifest alongside other threats (Ministry of Interior (Montenegro), 2018, p. 9, National Defence Strategy of Montenegro, 2019, p. 8).</p> <p>Hybrid threats represent a new form of modern warfare. Given that Montenegro has been targeted by such activities, and that these trends are also present in other member states of the Alliance (Ministry of Interior (Montenegro), 2018, p. 9)</p> <p>Hybrid threats, which include the synchronisation of various methods of destructive action, also pose a significant risk (National Defence Strategy of Montenegro, 2019, p. 9).</p>	<p>L</p> <p>Such a complex area requires complete synergy of all actors within the national security system and full cooperation of all system holders and service providers (Ministry of Interior (Montenegro), 2018, 2018, p. 9).</p> <p>The complex mechanisms of hybrid actions highlight the need to build and enhance capacities to counter and strengthen resilience against this security challenge (National Security Strategy of Montenegro, 2018, p. 9). Modern trends indicate an increase in the impact of cyber and hybrid challenges and threats (National Defence Strategy of Montenegro, 2019, p. 9).</p>	M
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	Russia		<p>Montenegrin authorities were struck by cyberattacks on the same day that coup attempt happened in 2016 (Stronski and Himes, 2019, p. 9).</p> <p>Montenegro's government websites and critical infrastructure systems were targeted by largescale cyber-attacks also in 2022. Although 'Cuba ransomware', a Russian-speaking gang claimed responsibility for part of the attack, the Montenegrin National Security Agency blamed the attack on Russia, stating that some organisations are a disguise to hide Russian government involvement, (Zweers, Drost and Henry, 2023, p. 37).</p>	H	<p>Energy, telecommunications, and information infrastructure are exposed daily to complex operations in virtual space, with risks of causing a wide range of implications in the real world. Cyberattacks are particularly complex, given that cyberspace knows no boundaries or state sovereignty (National Defence Strategy of Montenegro, 2019, p. 9).</p>	M
D	-	-	-	-	-	-
E	Türkiye		<p>In 2019 the Armed Forces of Montenegro was allocated a EUR 16 million budget to procure Turkish off-road vehicles. Türkiye has also donated hundreds of 7.62mm MPT-76 and 5.56mm MPT-55 assault rifles to Montenegro, among other countries. In 2023, Türkiye appears to be the greatest military donor to Montenegro, having donated three logistic vehicles worth USD 1.2 million (Mitzer and Oliemans, 2021; BCSP, 2024, p. 26).</p>	H	<p>In recent years, Türkiye has become a global player in the defence industry and an important ally of Montenegro. Montenegro's Minister of Defence has recently highlighted that a strong defence cooperation has been established between the two countries. He also underscored the importance of Türkiye's long-standing support in the form of military equipment donations to Montenegro, which have significantly contributed to</p>	L

					the modernisation of the Montenegrin Armed Forces. (Ministry of Defence (Montenegro), 2023a, Ministry of Defence (Montenegro), 2023b).	
F	-	-	-	-	-	-

A.5. North Macedonia

The principal state actors that may employ military instruments to the detriment of the security of North Macedonia are Russia and China.

Hostile foreign intelligence services and their covert operations are a serious threat to the security of the Republic of North Macedonia. Their aim is to frustrate or terminate Macedonian efforts for closer integration within the Euro-Atlantic community, especially membership of NATO and the EU. Their actions are intended to weaken the political and security commitments and the economic potential of the state (North Macedonia's National Defence Strategy, p. 6). The likelihood of a direct, armed threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of North Macedonia is, however, considered low.

A growing threat to North Macedonia's security is cyberattacks. The most recent cyberattack, carried out against the armed forces and the Ministry of Defence, was in April 2024 before the parliamentary and presidential elections. The geographical location of the attackers is still not determined, nor if this constitutes an act of hybrid warfare. There are no examples of cyberattacks on North Macedonia that have been attributed to a specific state actor, nor is official cooperation between North Macedonia and Russia on cyber-related matters identified (PwC and ISAC Fund, 2022, p. 39). North Macedonia's national cyber security strategy recognises cyber defence as an autonomous and specific branch of the broader concept of cyber security (Ministry of Information Society and Administration (North Macedonia), 2018, pp. 24-25).

Considering that on 27 March 2020, North Macedonia fulfilled its long-standing foreign policy priority — membership of NATO — Russia's direct military threat to North Macedonia is minimal. Nevertheless, Moscow is engaged in disinformation campaigns and sharing pro-Russian narratives in Macedonian media, aiming to influence the country to keep it out of the EU integration process, since its attempts to prevent it from the NATO membership failed. It is important to highlight that Russia used to support the previous government, led by Nikola Gruevski and his party VMRO-DPMNE. This party returned to power in May 2024, which could have implications on relations between Russia and North Macedonia.

Relations with China are mostly based on economic cooperation and investments in infrastructure. An interesting example of this cooperation includes Hungary in the most recent development. Hungary was acting as an intermediary for China in providing the new North Macedonia government with a EUR 500 million loan, which comes from the EUR 1 billion secured by Budapest from a consortium of Chinese banks. When VMRO came back to power, its vice president revealed that the loan would not come from China but '[would be extended by EU and NATO member country](#)'. Hungarian Prime Minister and North Macedonia's radical right-wing VMRO are allies, but the question is why the Hungarian government provided financial assistance to a foreign government at a time when it faces severe financial difficulties of its own.

China has not supplied significant military equipment to North Macedonia, but its growing presence in the region could pose an indirect threat.

Table 6 Threat Matrix, North Macedonia

North Macedonia						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Unspecified	-	The direct threat of military aggression to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of North Macedonia is minimal (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2020, p. 9). We do not anticipate armed aggression from a neighbouring country as a direct threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2020, p. 10). The likelihood of a direct, armed threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia is considered low. (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2020, p. 12).	L		H
B	-	-	-		-	

C	Unspecified	<p>To frustrate or terminate NM's efforts to integrate within the Euro-Atlantic community.</p> <p>Espionage, attacks on critical information infrastructure, crime and vandalism. Theft and abuse of sensitive information.</p>	<p>The most significant risks we face are from asymmetric, hybrid and cyber threats (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2020, p. 9). The operations of hostile foreign intelligence agencies will continue to pose a high threat in the short to medium terms (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2018, p. 13). Cyber-attacks are likely to pose an increasing threat, in-line with both the proliferation of technological 'know-how' and the upsurge of associated state-sponsored activities. (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2018, p. 13).</p>	L	<p>The most serious potential consequences of cyberattacks are threats to the functioning of critical infrastructure elements, including the defence and security systems of the Republic of Macedonia (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2018, p. 11). Hostile foreign intelligence agencies' actions are intended to weaken the political, economic and security commitments of the state, to erode the capacities of our defence system and to undermine public confidence in government policy (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2018, p. 11). Cyberspace has a significant impact on the security of people and states, especially given the increased vulnerability of our societies to cyber-attacks. The defence and security sector is ever more dependent and based on the functionality of ICT systems. (Ministry of Defence (North Macedonia), 2018, p.9; Ministry of Information Society and Administration (North Macedonia), 2018, p. 6).</p>	M
D	-	-	-	-	-	-

E	Türkiye	NA	Türkiye made large donations to North Macedonia - rifles, transporter of equipment and uniforms - but their value is not publicly published on the website Ministry of Defence (BCSP, 2022, p. 35).	H		L
F	-	-	-	-	-	-

A.6. Serbia

The principal state actors that may employ military instruments to the detriment of the security of Serbia are Russia and China, although they are not perceived as such by Belgrade. On the contrary, Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans that explicitly mentions Russia and China (along with the US and NATO) as partners that Serbia needs to further improve relations with, in order to maintain development and security of the region (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2021, p. 21). That is the reason why experts often point out that Serbia's internal instabilities, including polarisation of society, the nexus between organised crime and the state, but also regional relations, are the main threats to Serbian security (Interview 3).

According to the national security strategy, the key threats to the security of Serbia are separatist aspirations, ethnic and religious extremism, covert actions of foreign actors, organised crime, and illegal migration. Regarding military threats, the most notable is the problem of 'the unlawfully and unilaterally declared independence of the territory administratively covered by the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija by the provisional self-government institutions in Pristina' (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2021, p. 18).

Since Serbia does not recognise Kosovo's independence, Kosovo is not considered to pose a direct security threat. However, official documents point out that the potential transformation of the armed Kosovo Security Forces into actual armed forces is perceived as a threat to Serbia's security. It is also noted that 'the greatest threat is posed by extremist groups which operate in the area of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija', (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2021, p. 26) and that they could cause an armed rebellion. The possibility of an armed aggression against Serbia cannot be completely ruled out, but the likelihood is very low.

Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure and hybrid threats are often mentioned as a challenge that needs to be further addressed. Serbia does not have a cyber security strategy, but it recognises the importance of having an adequate system of countermeasures to cyber threats.

Russia's military cooperation with Serbia is considered malign because it diverts Serbia from Euro-Atlantic integration. Although Serbia has declared its military neutrality and does not seek NATO membership, it maintains close cooperation with the Alliance and is almost completely surrounded by NATO members. Therefore, military cooperation with Russia does not contribute to the security of either Serbia or the region.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Serbia and Russia have limited their military relations. Russia aims to maintain its cooperation with Serbia, but in 2022 Serbia cancelled its military exercises with all international partners, including Russia. But in 2023, despite the government's moratorium on military exercises, Serbia participated in one military exercise with the US, 'Platinum Wolf', indicating that the US and NATO are Serbia's predominant security and defence partners. Having this in mind and the fact that the moratorium is still valid and that the war in Ukraine is ongoing, which practically makes it close to impossible for Serbia and Russia to renew military exercises.

Also, Serbia is still waiting for Russian arms and equipment, ordered before the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine. In the past, Moscow has supplied Belgrade with air defence systems, anti-tank weapons, drones and other military hardware.

Military cooperation between Serbia and China is viewed primarily through military equipment purchases and donations from China. In 2023, Serbia [received](#) EUR 6.7 million from China based on the March 2023 agreement on Chinese free military aid. This made China the greatest military donor to Serbia in 2023, although the details are not public. Belgrade sees this as an opportunity to update its defence system and Serbian Armed Forces, but this military cooperation could also threaten Serbia's security because China is using Serbia as a [gateway country to the EU market](#), which Serbia permits. The Western powers are not willing to cooperate with China in the military area, indicating that this could jeopardise Serbia's collaboration with Western partners and generally its EU integration process. China's geographical distance means it would take far more than this donation to position itself as the primary security partner for Western Balkan countries, including Serbia. However, security cooperation with China could signal a longer-term trend for countries like Serbia, which continue to balance relationships between East and West (BCSP, 2024, p. 4).

Serbia also cooperates with China in the [broader security realm](#). Chinese technology company Huawei is thought to be the contractor chosen to provide surveillance systems for Belgrade's secretive 'safe city' project and expected, in this role, to train Serbian officials. Serbia and China also conduct joint police patrols in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Smederevo. The official reason is to deal with the many Chinese tourists that visit Serbia, but these are also locations for key Chinese investments. Such arrangements, also thought to be present in countries such as Albania and Montenegro, may cause frictions in EU accession processes.

Serbia has previously [sold weapons](#) to Saudi Arabia and UAE ('UAE-linked company in Serbia', 2024), from which it has also received investments into its defence industry from. Potentially, such deals could be contrary to EU armament policies and damaging to Serbia's EU integration prospects.

Table 7 Threat Matrix, Serbia

Serbia						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Unspecified		Armed aggression against the Republic of Serbia in the coming period is unlikely but cannot be completely ruled out. European integration processes and the improvement of cooperation between Serbia and the countries of the region will contribute to reducing the possibility of armed aggression against Serbia (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2021, pp. 19-20, 25).	L		H
B	-	-	-		-	

C	Unspecified	<p>To cause ethnic and religious tensions.</p> <p>To disrupt essential services and the society overall, undermining the country's sovereignty. Destabilisation, espionage and exploitation of data.</p>	<p>The security of the Republic of Serbia is continuously undermined by hybrid threats (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2023a, p. 18).</p> <p>Cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, high-tech crime, compromising information and communication systems, and the spread of fake news and disinformation as part of hybrid and information warfare, can negatively affect the functioning of defence system elements (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2021, p. 22). Cyber-attacks on Serbian army and state energy company (Baletic, 2024).</p>	L	<p>An increase in cyber threats, the scope of high-tech crime, and the importance of having an adequate system of countermeasures and protection in Serbia (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2021, p. 23).</p> <p>Technological and informational protection of defence system elements at all levels of organisation. Enhanced cyber security is of particular importance A network of competent entities will be established to combat cyber actions and crime (Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2021, p. 23).</p>	M
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D	Russia		<p>The Serbian military currently does not participate in military exercises with Russia, but the two countries have a history of joint exercises. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Serbia banned all international military exercises (BCSP, 2024, p. 25). This was not the first time Belgrade froze all military activities with international partners. In late 2020, Serbia cancelled all its international military exercises for 6 months when it faced pressures from the EU as a result of the political crisis in Belarus. Since 2022, there have been no official activities between Serbian Armed Forces the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, except for their official presence at events or commemorations of important dates from World War II.</p>	L	<p>In 2021 Serbia participated in four exercises with Russia, and in 2019, in five exercises with Russia. (BCSP, 2022, p. 36).</p>	M
E	Russia	<p>Provocation, destabilisation, maintaining military cooperation with Serbia</p>	<p>Serbia has received substantial donations of undisclosed value from Russia (30 T-72MS tanks, 30 BRDM-2MS armoured vehicles, 6 used MiG-29 fighter jets (BCSP 2022, p. 37)</p> <p>Since 2016, it has acquired from Russia: anti-tank system 'Kornet' (in 2021), air defence missile system 'Pantsir S-1' (in 2020), and four combat helicopters and five transport helicopters (delivered from 2016 to 2019) (Manojlovic, 2024).</p> <p>Serbia also ordered from Russia four Mi-35M helicopters, three Mi-17V-5 helicopters, two</p>	H	<p>Overall, Serbia has acquired the majority of its weapons from Western partners. However, since the Russian invasion on Ukraine, and despite the international sanctions against Russia, Serbia continued to engage in military cooperation with Russia which includes, for example, delivering of the equipment purchased by Serbia before the war. These deliveries were part of a military technical assistance agreement signed by both parties in 2016 to</p>	M

			<p>batteries of the Pantsir-S1M air defence system, electronic warfare systems, and anti-drone systems, among others. It is not publicly known how much Serbia paid Russia for these armaments which can no longer be obtained due to international sanctions and the blockade of the Russian economy. Only the Russian anti-drone system 'Repellent' has been delivered and showcased in February 2024</p> <p>(Radic, 2022).</p>		<p>support Belgrade in modernising its military.</p> <p>(Manojlovic 2024).</p>	
	Belarus		<p>Serbia received four MIG-29 fighter jets from Belarus (BCSP, 2022, p. 37).</p>	M		M
	China	<p>China is using Serbia to penetrate the European defence market and circumvent the EU's restrictions on arms trade with China.</p>	<p>Over the past years, Serbia has also purchased the Chinese medium-range air defence missile system 'FK-3'. In 2023, CH-95 drones were also delivered from China (they are more capable in terms of their tactical and technical characteristics compared to the CH-92A and 'Pegaz' models) (Topalović, 2023, Ministry of Defence (Serbia), 2024).</p> <p>In June 2020, China delivered to Serbia six CH-92A drones manufactured by the state-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC). Their acquisition made Serbia the largest drone operator in the WB. This transaction also included technology transfers that allowed Serbia to complete its drone project</p>	H	<p>Military cooperation between Serbia and China could potentially jeopardize future collaborations and military exercises between Serbia and the Western partners. Any future cooperation between Serbia and Western militaries will be complicated by concerns that the Chinese might attempt to use that weaponry to collect data for their own purposes.</p>	M

			'Pegaz' (Pegasus) (Vuksanović and Ejduš, 2023, p. 5).			
F	Russia	Influence, maintaining cooperation, obstruction of Euro-Atlantic integration	<p>Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Serbia has continued to hold observer status within the Russian-led CSTO, even if in practice contacts have been limited (Zweers, Drost and Henry, 2023).</p> <p>Former Director of the Security Information Agency of Serbia, Aleksandar Vulin, participated in an international security conference in Moscow in May 2023 ('US and Ukraine condemn', 2023).</p>	H	In terms of military cooperation, the relations between Belgrade and Moscow are not that close as before the war. The US and NATO are Serbia's dominant security partners.	L
	China	Cooperation, influence	A delegation of the University of National Defence of the People's Liberation Army of China took a multi-day visit to the University of Defence in Belgrade, also visiting the General Staff of the Serbian Army (Ministry of Defence of Serbia, 2023b).	M		L

A.7. Georgia

The principal state actor undermining the security and territorial integrity of Georgia is the Russian Federation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Georgia), 2012). Russia does not recognise Georgia's territorial integrity and [claims](#) its autonomous provinces — Abkhazia and South Ossetia — to be independent states. Additionally, Moscow has entered into strategic cooperation agreements with the separatist authorities in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, continuing an [illegal border demarcation policy, referred to as 'borderisation'](#) along Georgia's administrative boundaries with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Georgia's precarious security situation is further exacerbated by its lack of membership of any significant international military alliance and the absence of a major bilateral military pact with the US or other great powers. However, in the short term, while Russia remains heavily engaged in its aggressive war in Ukraine, it is less likely to initiate a large-scale conflict in Georgia due to its preoccupation with Ukraine. Moreover, by supporting the anti-Western agenda of the current Georgian regime, Russia prefers to entice the Georgian government into its geopolitical orbit rather than take any military action against the country (interview 1).

Despite this, Russia periodically conducts military drills in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where it has established permanent military bases. Recently, Russia announced plans [to construct new naval infrastructure at the Ochamchire port in Abkhazia to relocate part of its Black Sea fleet](#), which may become vulnerable to Ukrainian attacks. Moscow may leverage its military presence as a means of coercion to dissuade Tbilisi from pursuing its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Additionally, from Kyiv's perspective, this base could be viewed as a legitimate military target amidst the ongoing conflict, potentially embroiling Georgia directly in the war and undermining its current stance of neutrality.

More broadly, the Russian military presence poses a risk of destabilizing the entire Black Sea region, which encompasses the developing 'middle corridor' trade route from China to Europe — a significant portion of which traverses Georgia. Russia aims to obstruct Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path and closer integration with the EU, viewing such developments as contrary to its national interests. For Russia, Georgia holds a pivotal geopolitical role by:

- Controlling the north-south corridor
- Overseeing the east-west energy corridor
- Facilitating the middle corridor promoted by China
- Managing energy resources from Central Asian states
- Reducing Western influence (from the US, NATO, EU) in the region and consolidating its geopolitical presence in post-Soviet Eurasia.

Table 8 Threat Matrix, Georgia

Georgia						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Russia	Geopolitical and indirect territorial claims	<p>Key threats: Russia’s occupation of Georgian territory and terrorist acts organised by Russia from the occupied territories; risk of renewed military aggression from Russia; violation of the rights of internally displaced persons and refugees from the occupied territories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Georgia), 2012, p.7).</p> <p>Even though Russia is now preoccupied with the war in Ukraine, a conventional military attack on Georgia is still possible as Georgia is seen as the weakest opponent from the Russian perspective. Russian leadership may see this scenario as an opportunity to finish the ‘unfinished business’ of 2008. This perception of vulnerability of Georgia in Kremlin is strengthened by the fact that Georgia is not a member of NATO or the EU and is located in the grey zone of shared neighbourhood of the EU and Russia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Georgia), 2012, Avdaliani, 2023a, Khidasheli, 2023, U.S. Mission to the OSCE, 2023).</p>	L		H

B	Russia	Intimidation, coercion; exerting geopolitical influence; exercise Russia's hegemonic influence in the CIS area.	<p>Ongoing permanent borderisation process of Russia-occupied Georgian territories; frequent kidnapping and occasional killings of Georgian citizens by Russian forces and de facto authorities; potential buildup of Ochamchire naval base in Abkhazia (National Defence Academy of Georgia, 2020; Rzeszutko, 2022; Seskuria, 2021).</p> <p>The main function of the Russian 7th Military Base placed in Abkhazia is to ensure Abkhazia's security and uphold Russian interests in South Caucasus. The military base is part of Russia's Southern Military District and holds an important role in ensuring Russia's military-political influence in Caucasus (GFSIS, 2024).</p>	H	<p>Even though GD-led government engages Russia in so-called pragmatic politics, accommodating the Kremlin's geopolitical interests, Russia is still unsatisfied with the existing pro-Western sentiments in Georgian society and sees Georgia as an indispensable part of its own Eurasian geopolitical project. This may lead to more political meddling and military provocations, especially in the occupied territories (Górecki, 2023; de Waal, 2024).</p> <p>Despite normalisation of relations by the Georgian government, Russia is still trying to strengthen its military and naval presence in Georgia. Although the Russian military has long occupied and based troops in Abkhazia, it has never so directly implicated Georgia and its occupied territories in the ongoing invasion of Ukraine (European Commission, 2023; Kakchia and Minesashvili, 2024; Demytrie, Brown and Cheetham, 2024; Desurmont, 2024; Jones, 2024).</p>	H
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C	Russia	Weakening the country's sovereignty, violating its integrity, damaging the image of Georgia in the international arena.	Amid rapid technological advances and an increasingly complex security situation, hybrid threats continue to dominate. From a wide array of hybrid means, the cyber component is actively used for sabotage, espionage and psychological operations. The agenda includes the need for consistent development of cyber security capabilities of the Ministry of Defence, which requires complex planning and proper execution (Cyber Security Strategy of Georgia, 2021-2024 p. 2; Kornely, Lebanidze and Kandelaki, 2023, p. 14).	H	There are sector-specific strategic documents that provide risk assessments in specific policy areas. These include cyber security risks – such as cyber war, cyber espionage, information war, state-led cyberattacks, and cybercrime, organised and transnational crime and CBRN risks (Kornely, Lebanidze and Kandelaki, 2023, p.13).	M
D	Russia	Provocation, influence, de-stabilisation	Due to Russia's ongoing invasion in Ukraine, Russia is unable to hold large-scale military exercises. However, from time to time, it still conducts joint drills with Abkhazia and South Ossetia ('Russia Holds Military Drills', 2022; Chedia, 2023).	H	Russia strengthened security cooperation with Iran and China seems to be of particular concern for Georgian society unlike the Georgian government (Benson, 2024; Foy, 2023; Avdaliani, 2023b).	M
E	Russia	De-stabilisation, provocation,	Russia is a permanent supplier of arms to the de-facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There is a high representation of Russian military personnel in the security and power institutions of separatist entities. Putin has ordered his government to undertake the modernisation of the armed forces of the breakaway Georgian territory of Abkhazia and to equip its military with additional weapons (Menabde, 2019).	H		M
F	Russia	De-stabilisation, provocation, influence	Russia's permanent military presence in the occupied territories of Georgia (Embassy of Georgia to the USA, 2023; Government of Georgia, 2019; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Georgia), 2012; Government of Georgia, 2018).	H		M

			Russia's military agreement with South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Nelson, 2023).			
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A.8. Moldova

In December 2023, the Moldovan authorities approved a new national security strategy (President of Moldova, 2023). This document identifies Russia and its proxies as the most dangerous and persistent source of threat for Moldova, manifested through illegal military presence, hybrid operations, corruption and kleptocratic practices. It also points out Russia's ambition to militarily establish a land corridor towards Moldova and the persistent threat posed by a conventional military attack, aimed at changing the constitutional order in Moldova.

Since February 2022, Russia has intensified its hybrid war operations targeting Moldova. Its *modus operandi* relies on active cooperation with Moldovan fugitive kleptocrats, such as Ilan Shor, sentenced for 15 years for money laundering and bank fraud and currently based in Russia, but also political parties, cultural, media and religious entities. By using these channels, Russia has attempted to destabilise Moldova's internal order through violent protests and security provocations. These attempts were successfully tackled by the Moldovan authorities.

These actions have been accompanied by other hybrid activities including vote buying and electoral corruption in the context of local and presidential elections, as well as the EU accession referendum. Recent data provided by the Moldovan police show that only in September 2024, more than USD 15 million has been transferred by the criminal network led by Ilan Shor to over 130 000 Moldovan citizens (5 % of the resident population). These funds are intended to jeopardise the electoral process and increase the number of votes for Russia's supported parties and politicians. Representatives of the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is under the patronage of the Moscow Patriarchate, are also involved in bribery schemes and malign electoral actions.

Other significant resources are currently directed by Russia for backing disinformation campaigns and spread of fake news, especially through social media and Telegram channels. While dozens of Russian TV stations and websites, most of them being affiliated to news agencies, were restricted at the request of the Moldovan Security and Information Service, social networks continue to provide fertile ground for information warfare and corruption schemes.

The Transnistrian settlement process and the presence of around 7 000 Russian and Transnistrian paramilitary troops in the region remains a concern. While they have been rather silent over the last two years, they continue to pose a threat to Ukraine's defence and Moldova's internal stability. Tiraspol's provocative actions, such as military exercises, installation of the control points across the Security Zone or regular requests of assistance to Russia, aim to inflame the status-quo.

In order to overcome the current challenges, the Moldovan government has set a number of priorities for enhancing national security and defence in the new national security strategy. These include:

(1) long-term investment in equipping and modernising the army's supply, logistics and material base, equivalent to 1 % of GDP over the course of the next decade;

(2) diplomatic action to end the illegal military presence of the Russian Federation on the sovereign territory of Moldova and to deploy an international civilian mission along the administrative line with the Transnistrian region; and

(3) harmonisation of national legislation with European regulations in the fight against financial crime, organised crime and corruption.

Table 9 Threat Matrix, Moldova

Moldova						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Russia	Territorial claims	Russia has sought, by use of force, to carve out a land corridor to the Republic of Moldova (President of Moldova, 2023, p. 3). The Kremlin is conducting information operations against Moldova very similar to those that the Kremlin used before its invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, likely to set conditions to justify possible future Russian escalation against Moldova (Evans et al., 2024). Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Mikhail Galuzin, has warned Moldova of 'a military scenario' if it attempts to resolve the problem of the breakaway Transnistrian region by force (Necsutu, 2024).	L		H
B	Russia	Security incidents produced by the 'peacekeeping' operation and	At a meeting held on 18 January 2024, the Moldovan delegation to the Joint Control Commission (JCC) demanded an investigation into Russian military exercises held on 22	H	Threats to the national security of Moldova include the illegal military presence of the Russian Federation in the Transnistrian region	H

		Operational Group of Russian Forces in Transnistria.	December near the administrative border between the right and left banks of the Dniester ('Moldova demands explanations', 2024). The Operational Group of Russian Forces held firefighting training drills at its shooting range in Transnistria against 'targets simulating an advancing infantry and enemy military equipment' ('Russia Stages Drills', 2022).		and its control over the separatist structures (President of Moldova, 2023, p. 13).	
	Transnistria	Provocations and security incidents at the administrative line between Moldova and Transnistria.	As of 31 October 2023, there were 51 control posts and other types of barriers introduced by the de facto administration with the establishment of the terrorist alert code in April 2022 (Promo-LEX Association, 2023).	H	Ban on access to the Transnistrian region for civilians, public authorities and international monitoring staff, potential illegal detentions and security incidents.	M
C	Russia	Provocation and interference.	Hybrid operations conducted by the Russian Federation against the Republic of Moldova in the political, economic, energy, social, informational, cyber areas, etc., aiming to undermine the constitutional order, derail the European course of the country and/or disintegrate the state (President of Moldova, 2023, p. 12).	H	Moldova's national intelligence agency warned of hybrid attacks against the country during elections that would include a referendum on joining the European Union. Parliamentary email servers were hit by a cyberattack. (Antoniuk, 2024).	M

	Unspecified	Provocation and interference.	Cyberattacks launched by foreign state actors on the national and regional critical infrastructure. (President of Moldova, 2023, p. 13).	H	In November 2022, Moldovan officials said Russian state-linked hackers were behind a website called 'Moldova Leaks', which published Telegram conversations of Sergiu Litvinenco, Moldova's Minister of Justice, and Dorin Recean, the Defence and National Security Advisor to the President. Moldova's pro-Russian opposition spread allegations based on the leaks, arguing that the messages proved corruption and vote rigging ('Russian hack-and-leak operation', 2022).	M
D	Transnistria	Provocation and destabilisation.	Regular military exercise held by the Transnistrian paramilitary troops (Eruygur 2023).	H	Military provocations in the Security Zone across the Transnistrian region.	L
E	-	-	-	-	-	-
F	Russia	Provocation and destabilisation.	Strong 'diplomatic' ties between Transnistria and Russia.	H	On 28th of February 2024, officials in Moldova's Russia-backed breakaway region of Transnistria appealed to Moscow for protection, as tensions escalate with the pro-Western government (McGrath and Obreja, 2022). Moldova has expelled a Russian diplomat over the opening of polling stations for Russia's presidential election in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria ('Moldova expels Russian diplomat', 2024).	L

A.9. Ukraine

Ukraine's primary threat of a conventional attack stems from Russia, which initially invaded the country in 2014 (annexation and occupation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions) and escalated to a full-scale war in 2022. In its military aggression, Russia heavily relies on its ally Belarus, which served as a launch point for Russian troops during the 2022 offensive on Kyiv.

As of today, Russian troops continue to advance on Ukraine (instrument A) without any hint of intentions to stop, exerting a substantial negative impact on the existence of Ukraine as an independent state. Besides the military impact, Russia's conduct raises the potential for large-scale ecological disaster in the occupied territories of Ukraine, such as the effects of its detonation of the [Kakhovka Dam](#). There is also a risk of ecosystem contamination from rivers flowing from Russia and Belarus into Ukraine. For example, [Russia is suspected of poisoning water by putting waste in the Seym River in August/September 2024](#), which subsequently affected the Desna and Dnipro rivers and harmed vast ecosystems (instrument C).

After the failed offensive on Ukraine's capital from Belarusian territory, Russia has still not succeeded in persuading Minsk to openly deploy Belarusian troops for its war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, Belarus, as part of the 'Union State of Russia and Belarus,' keeps troops stationed at its border with Ukraine, tying down part of the Ukrainian defence forces (Instrument B) that could otherwise be engaged in battles with Russian forces. The impact of such actions by Belarus is currently medium as they are not a game-changing addition to Russia's war effort.

Russia has also consistently resorted to nuclear threats throughout the full-scale invasion and engages in provocations by threatening a nuclear disaster at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which it occupies. These Russian actions (instrument B) pose not only the direct threat of a nuclear strike or contamination but also aim to intimidate Ukraine's partners into reducing their support for Kyiv. While support has continued, it has been cautious, hence these threats have had a medium impact. Belarus also occasionally threatens to use tactical nuclear weapons, which were transferred to it by Russia in 2023, against Ukraine. However, it is [almost inconceivable](#) that it could take such action independently of Russia.

Russia has utilised cyberattacks to disrupt Ukrainian infrastructure, steal sensitive data, and spread disinformation, aiming to undermine public confidence and create chaos (Instrument C). These cyber-operations often target government websites, energy systems, and financial institutions etc. Russia's disinformation campaigns aim to tarnish Ukraine's image globally, portraying it as corrupt, unstable, non-democratic, and fragmented.

In addition to Russia and Belarus, Ukraine faces threats from countries like North Korea and Iran, which supply Russia with weapons, including missiles, shells, and drones (Instrument E). China, the countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and some other countries maintain close political, economic, and military ties with Russia, supplying it with dual-use goods that are utilised in the war against Ukraine. Ukraine is also potentially threatened by China's penetration of Ukrainian and European defence markets. For example, a critical number of components for Ukrainian and Ukrainian

allies' drones are supplied by China. If China were to hinder its export of such components, it could weaken Ukraine's capacity for defence.

Türkiye has been asserting its geopolitical role as a regional leader since the onset of the full-scale war and the rising tensions and conflicts in the Middle East. The key concern for Ukraine is Türkiye's control over access to the Black Sea through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. This gives it the potential to delay or block the passage of goods critical for Ukraine's defence, and to allow the passage of Russian warships to assist in its ongoing aggression.

Finally, Russia is able to exploit and leverage Ukraine's dependence on Russian nuclear fuel for its nuclear power plants. Due to their technological design, Rosatom (Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation) is still a major supplier of nuclear fuel. While some measures designed to lessen this dependency have been implemented over the past few decades, many security considerations remain. The full-scale invasion, along with the growing share of nuclear energy in Ukrainian energy production, increases the threat/risk.

Table 10 Threat Matrix, Ukraine

Ukraine						
Instr.	Actor	Why?	Likelihood		Impact	
			Evidence	Assessment	Evidence	Assessment
A	Russia	Territorial claims, world power ambitions, denial of Ukraine's subjectivity (belief that Ukraine is an integral and necessary part of Russia, that and it should be under its control.	Full-scale invasion in Ukraine since February 2022, Warfare in Ukraine and annexation of Ukrainian territory since 2014.	H		H
	Belarus	As Russia's ally and part of 'The Union State of Russia and Belarus'.	In theory, Russian troops could attack Western Ukraine from Belarus with a view to cutting off supplies of Western weapons and ammunition (Glod, 2022).	M		M
	North Korea	As Russia's ally, economic benefit in return.	North Korean soldiers in Kursk region (NATO, 2024a; Bertrand, 2024).	H	Limited impact of North Korean troops on the course of the war (AFP, 2024).	M
B	Russia	Intimidation of Ukraine and its supporters.	Nuclear threats (Williams et al., 2025).	H		M

	Belarus	Intimidation, and to keep part of Ukrainian military forces near UA-BY border and away from the front with Russia.	Exercises on border; Belarusian military forces close to Ukrainian border ('Nearly a third of Belarus army', 2024).	H		M
	Türkiye		Removal of policing of military vessels and cargoes through the Bosphorus Strait.	L		M
C	Russia	Weakening the country's sovereignty, violating its integrity, damaging the image of the country in the international arena.	Hybrid threats that include unconventional and asymmetric elements and cyberattacks. (Kong and Marler, 2022).	H		M
	Belarus	Intimidation, de-stabilisation, damage of environment and water resources; panic and provocation.	Access to natural river flow that allows the interference with them - on Belarusian territory (Tatsiana and Sniazhana, 2018).	L		M
D	-	-	-	-	-	-
E	Iran	To support Russia as its ally to get arms, technologies, to destabilise the current world-order, and to increase its geopolitical importance.	Missile deliveries (Hinz, 2024).	H	Russia can continue its attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, among other, in the long term.	M
	North Korea	To support Russia as its ally to get arms, technologies, to de-stabilise the current world-order, and to increase its geopolitical importance.	Military equipment provision (Murphy, 2023).	H		M
	China	To establish itself as a major geopolitical power.	Supplying Russia with dual-use components, including drone components ('China: Supplying Components', 2024; Zubkova, 2022).	H	Russia can continue its attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, among other, in the long term.	H

	China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Türkiye, UAE	Maintaining ties with Russia, De-stabilisation.	Supplying Russia with dual-use components; helping Russia to circumvent sanctions (Department of State (US), 2024).	H		M
F	Russia	De-stabilisation, provocation, influence.	Bilateral military cooperation agreements with e.g., Iran, North Korea (Galeeva, 2024, 'Russia ratifies North Korea pact', 2024).	H		M

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ANNEX C. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

1. Giorgi Shaishmelashvili, former defence civil servant, Georgia, 14 January 2025.
2. Benjamin Plevljak, Secretary General of the Centre for Security Studies, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10 January 2025.
3. Aleksandar Radić, Analyst and Editor of the Balkan Security Network, Serbia, 24 December 2024.
4. Official, Montenegro, 4 December 2024.
5. Expert, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 23 December 2024.





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