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Europe's Security in the Face of Crises and Challenges. Introduction

Europe is entering the third decade of the twenty-first century amid an unprecedented accumulation of threats. Russia's war against Ukraine, the destabilization of the international order, energy and migration crises, pandemics, the rapid development of new technologies, and growing informational and hybrid pressure mean that security is no longer understood solely as a matter of national defence. Increasingly, it is viewed holistically, encompassing state structures, EU institutions, the economy, the digital domain, public health, and the everyday lives of citizens.

In the face of these challenges, it is necessary to seek adequate theoretical frameworks that will allow for a better understanding of the nature of contemporary threats and the formulation of practical responses. In doing so, we draw both on the achievements of contemporary international relations theory and on historical experiences – assuming that the past can serve as an important reference point for interpreting the present and designing the future. As A. Gałganek notes, the search for a theoretical key of explanation is burdened by ontological and epistemological uncertainty,[1] yet it possesses not only a heuristic dimension but also a practical one, underscoring the teleological character of research on security.[2]

The theoretical frameworks of contemporary analysis of international relations are shaped primarily by realism and liberalism, together with their numerous variants. From the realist perspective, conflicts arise from the anarchic structure of the international system, in which states strive for survival, focusing on the balance of power. Stability is temporary, and its breach leads to tensions and

[1] See: A. Gałganek, *Filozofia nauki o stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Kraków 2021, pp. 9-20.

[2] See: A. Dawidczyk, *Podstawy badań bezpieczeństwa,* [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria, badania, praktyka*, eds. .A. Czupryński B. Wiśniewski, J. Zboina, Józefów 2015, pp. 48-49, 55-56; A. Czupryński, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Nauki o bezpieczeństwie. Wybrane problemy badawcze*, eds.. A. Czupryński, B. Wiśniewski, J. Zboina, *Wybrane problemy badawcze*Józefów2017, pp. 5-7.

a redefinition of the status quo.[3] Liberalism, by contrast, stresses the cooperative potential of states, the role of international law and institutions, and the importance of economic interdependence as factors conducive to peace.[4]

After the collapse of the USSR and the period of unipolar dominance by the United States, the world entered a phase of intensifying U.S. – China rivalry. The disruption of the existing order created a "window of opportunity" for states seeking to maximize their gains before a new order takes shape. It is in this context that Russia's actions, including its aggression against Ukraine, should be examined. At the same time, processes challenging U.S. dominance have accelerated, visible, among other things, in the policies of President Donald Trump.

The liberal institutional order built after the Second World War is currently in crisis. Structural systemic changes have rendered many postwar arrangements inadequate in the face of contemporary challenges. Awareness of the negative consequences of globalization has grown – M. Leonard notes that interdependence may also constitute a source of conflict.[5] We are also increasingly observing revisionist actions that undermine the foundations of the existing order.

Under these conditions, the European Union – created within the logic of liberalism and defined as a "normative power" – faces the necessity of redefining its role in a dynamic and dangerous international environment. The challenges it confronts are not solely military in nature, although Russia's aggression against Ukraine has significantly undermined the regional security order and the stability that for decades facilitated the development of European states. As J. K. Ikenberry observes, the liberal institutional order is capable of absorbing crises as long as its pillars – including the United States and the EU – maintain their leadership capacity.[6] The current weakening of this order results both from the rise of authoritarian powers pursuing revisionist policies and from the erosion of Western cohesion in the face of external pressures (particularly from China) as well as internal political challenges.

The aim of this volume is to provide a multifaceted analysis of contemporary challenges and to assess Europe's capacity – understood as the European Union and the community formed by its societies – to respond to dynamic and often unpredictable crises. The collected texts present security as a complex system of interdependencies among politics, law, technology, society, and information.

[3] See: K. N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading 1979, pp. 102-129.
[4] See: R. O. Keohane, J. S. Nye Jr, *Power and Interdependence, 4th ed*., New York 2011, pp. 224-258.
[5] See: M. Leonard, *Wiek nie-pokoju. Współzależność jako źródło konfliktu*, Warszawa 2022.
[6] G. J. Ikenberry, *The end of liberal international order?*, "International Affairs" 2018, volume 94, issue 1, pp. 7-23.

They also emphasize that geopolitical processes directly affect the everyday experiences of Europe's inhabitants – from energy infrastructure and borders to public services and social relations.

The common denominator of all the articles is the conviction that Europe now stands at the intersection of growing uncertainty and the need for strategic adaptation. Security is becoming a process that requires cooperation, institutional resilience, responsible regulation, innovative solutions, and an aware and engaged society.[7]

The methodological foundation of this volume is grounded in the paradigm of Critical Security Studies (CSS), which – consistent with its core assumptions – rejects the reduction of security to the military protection of the state in favor of a reflective, pluralistic, and theoretically informed approach. CSS conceptualizes security not as an objective condition but as a product of social practices, discourses, and power relations in which the meanings of threats are constructed, negotiated, and politically instrumentalized.[8]

One of the key methodological assumptions of this volume is the adoption of the principles of broadening and deepening/extending the security studies agenda.[9] Peoples and Vaughan-Williams note that with the decline of Cold War realist hegemony, the field of security has expanded to encompass environmental, migratory, health-related, economic, and technological issues that extend beyond traditional military frameworks.[10] At the same time, the referent object of security has been redefined – from the state toward individuals, communities, social groups, and non-state bodies.[11] This volume aligns consistently with both directions, examining security in its political, social, humanitarian, infrastructural, and informational dimensions.

CSS place particular emphasis on the concept of emancipation as a criterion for the purpose of security studies. As Ken Booth argues, security and emancipation are "two sides of the same coin," because genuine security entails not only survival but "life" free from constraints such as war, poverty, oppression, or disease.[12] According to this approach, security should be analyzed with reference to the actual well-being of people and the conditions enabling their agency,

[7] A. Czupryński, *Wstęp*, op. cit., pp. 5-7; A. Dawidczyk, *Podstawy badań …,* op. cit., pp. 48-49, 55-56.

[8] C. Peoples, N. Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, *3rd edition,* London–New York 2021, p. 7; A. Czupryński, *Naukowe aspekty bezpieczeństwa,* [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria…,* , op. cit., pp. 35–38.

[9] M. Cieślarczyk, *Metody i techniki badawcze stosowane w badaniach problemów bezpieczeństwa,* [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria …*, op. cit., pp. 60-61, 65-67.

[10] C. Peoples, N. Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security …*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

[11] Ibidem, p. 49.

[12] K. Booth, *Security and Emancipation*, "Review of International Studies" 1991, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 313-326.

rather than merely the survival of the state as a political structure.[13] Adopting this orientation in the present volume means treating security as a normative category – one directed toward identifying and critically examining the structures that limit human freedom and the capacity for action.

A significant component of the volume's methodological framework is the critical analysis of narratives of "turning points" and "epochs of crisis." Peoples and Vaughan-Williams note that security studies often rely on strong temporal narratives – such as the end of the Cold War or the events of 11 September – treated as moments of radical rupture.[14] CSS, however, call for caution toward such simplifications, emphasizing that they may obscure continuities within processes and selectively exclude alternative perspectives.[15] In this volume, "crisis" is therefore treated not only as an empirical phenomenon but also as a political construct that shapes the ways in which security practices are legitimized.

Another methodological pillar is the turn toward "everyday life" as a space in which (in)security is experienced. As Peoples and Vaughan-Williams observe, traditional research – even critical research – has remained dominated by the perspectives of elites and institutions.[16] CSS advocate incorporating the viewpoints of non-elite actors and analyzing the "lived" experiences of threats, while simultaneously noting the methodological challenges of studying everyday life, including the risk of excluding voices from outside the Global North.[17] This volume incorporates such reflexivity, emphasizing the need to analyze security as a phenomenon negotiated through social practices and experienced at the level of individuals and communities.[18]

Finally, the volume draws on the critical-theoretical principle of immanent critique, according to which research should expose the contradictions inherent in existing security systems and reinterpret their potential in the direction of progressive change.[19] The study of security here does not consist in reproducing dominant categories but in challenging their taken-for-granted status and questioning hierarchies of knowledge and voice.

As a result, the adopted methodological framework treats security as a contested, processual, and political category.[20] In the spirit of CSS, the volume "travels

[13] C. Peoples, N. Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security...* op. cit., pp. 49-50, 54.
[14] Ibidem, p. 18.
[15] Ibidem, p. 6.
[16] Ibidem, p. 217.
[17] Ibidem, p. 239.
[18] P. Sowizdraniuk, *Wybrane metody oraz techniki i narzędzia jakościowe w badaniach bezpieczeństwa,* [in:] *Nauki o bezpieczeństwie...,* op. cit., pp. 79-83.
[19] C. Peoples, N. Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security...,* op. cit., pp. 51.
[20] A. Czupryński, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Nauki o bezpieczeństwie...,* op. cit., pp. 5-7; A. Czupryński, J. Zboina, *Wstęp,* [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria...,* op. cit., pp. 5-8.

without maps" – as Peoples and Vaughan-Williams describe it – rejecting rigid definitions in favor of reflexivity, pluralism, and openness to alternative ways of understanding.[21]

The volume opens with analyses devoted to strategic transformations in the security environment: the erosion of the existing order, the evolution of the European Union's defence policy, and the growing importance of regions such as Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states.

The volume opens with a contribution by Marco Marsili, who analyses the European Union's adaptive mechanisms in the face of hybrid conflicts. The author argues that the war in Ukraine has acted as a catalyst for accelerated reforms in crisis management, cyber defence, energy resilience, and counter-disinformation efforts. Marsili also highlights the role of external actors – including Russia, the United States, and China – in shaping the European security environment, interpreting the EU's actions through the lens of institutional and networked resilience as well as the gradual shift toward greater strategic autonomy.

The analysis by Radoslava Brhlíková and Radoslav Ivančík develops this issue at the EU level, focusing on the challenges facing the Common Security and Defence Policy after 2022. The authors argue that the fundamental shift in the security environment caused by the war in Ukraine has necessitated a redefinition of the EU's defence ambitions, including the implementation of the Strategic Compass, the strengthening of defence capabilities, and the pursuit of technological autonomy. At the same time, the researchers emphasize that the effectiveness of these efforts remains constrained by political fragmentation and difficulties in implementing coordinated initiatives at the level of the member states, raising questions about the real prospects for the Union's operational autonomy.

The theme of regional threats is further developed in Zdzisław Śliwa's study, which examines the significance of the Kaliningrad Oblast for Poland's security. The author argues that the Russian exclave functions both as a tool of pressure in peacetime and as a potential vector of escalation in a crisis situation. The increasing militarization of the region and its use in hybrid activities lead Śliwa to conclude that Poland should enhance its own defence capabilities while simultaneously strengthening cooperation with NATO in order to counter the growing risks.

An important complement to the discussion on security is Anna Zaccaro's article, which examines the role of the Baltic states in shaping the European Union's energy strategy. The author presents Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as

[21] C. Peoples, N. Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security...,* op. cit., p. 3.

active initiators of efforts to diversify energy sources, develop LNG infrastructure, and synchronize their energy grids with the EU system. Zaccaro's findings indicate that the small states of the region – due to their specific security conditions – have become a laboratory for solutions that enhance the EU's overall energy resilience, which has direct implications for limiting the influence of the Russian Federation.

In his contribution, Albin Skwarek addresses the impact of the transformation of the international order on the security of Poland and Europe. The author argues that the current security environment is marked by profound instability stemming from intensified great-power rivalry, the weakening of multilateral mechanisms, and the consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. In this context, Skwarek advances the thesis that a revision of existing security policy assumptions is necessary, particularly with regard to strengthening the resilience of European Union member states and developing new forms of cooperation in the event of a potential weakening of transatlantic ties.

The first part of the volume concludes with Radoslava Brhlíková's text on the concept of Central and Eastern European integration inspired by the ideas of Milan Hodža, which opens a reflection on the potential of regional cooperation formats as complements to existing security structures. The author considers the possibility of building stronger regional agency – from Poland to the Balkans – as an additional pillar of European stability, noting that the future security architecture may require greater utilization of the resources and capabilities of the states in this area.

The subsequent contributions address the problem of new forms of confrontation – hybrid warfare, cognitive operations, disinformation, and terrorism – which are redefining the nature of conflicts and undermining the stability of democratic institutions.

The issue of redefining the nature of contemporary armed conflicts is taken up in Sanshiro Hosaka's analysis, which focuses on the role of actors described as "quasi-non-state actors" in the context of the Russian Federation's activities toward Ukraine prior to 2022. The author argues that classical criteria for conflict typology – based on the formal participation of states – prove insufficient in situations where responsibility is deliberately obscured through mechanisms of disinformation and so-called plausible deniability. Hosaka therefore proposes an analysis of the political agency of structures presented as non-state actors, highlighting the need to examine their origins, organizational linkages, and actual subordination to political elites. This, in turn, leads to a broader reflection on the instrumentalization of "separatism" as a tool of state policy.

Arkadiusz Machniak, in turn, contributes to the debate on internal security threats by examining the development of left-wing terrorism in Europe. The author outlines both the historical foundations of this phenomenon – including revolutionary, anarchist, and Marxist movements – and its contemporary manifestations, noting the continuity of certain ideological patterns alongside evolving organizational forms. Machniak emphasizes that despite the reduced visibility of such actors compared to the late twentieth century, their activity continues to influence the security of European states, particularly in the context of radicalization and the potential use of political violence by groups rooted in this ideological milieu.

The theme of information threats is further developed in Marco Marsili's article on the European Union's democratic resilience in the face of disinformation. The author examines the EU's institutional responses to information crises accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic and foreign interference in electoral processes, assessing the effectiveness of instruments such as the Code of Practice on Disinformation, the Digital Services Act, and the European Digital Media Observatory. Drawing on the concept of the social amplification of risk and on resilience theory, Marsili argues that although significant regulatory progress has been achieved, the information environment remains vulnerable to manipulation, raising further questions about the EU's capacity to safeguard the integrity of democratic processes.

Complementing these considerations is Juliusz Sikorski's study, which analyzes so-called "indirect sources" as tools of Russian influence operations in Central Europe. The author reconstructs the mechanics of "information laundering," demonstrating the multi-stage process by which propagandistic content is introduced into the media ecosystem through seemingly independent channels, and presents case studies of operations such as Ghostwriter and NewsFront. Sikorski situates these activities within the broader paradigm of cognitive warfare, whose objective is to influence not only public opinion but also the mechanisms of perception and decision-making. His conclusions include proposed indicators for identifying proxies as well as institutional recommendations for prevention and for strengthening the accountability of informational intermediaries.

The next section of the volume focuses on legal and institutional responses to threats, demonstrating how security law, police cooperation, economic regulation, and emerging frameworks for artificial intelligence shape the Union's ability to protect its citizens. Special attention is also given to studies on social, health, welfare, and humanitarian security, which underscore that every threat

has a human dimension and that societal resilience has become a prerequisite for the stability of states.

The legal foundations of state security are examined in the article by Roman Martyniuk, Alex Datsiuk, and Mykola Romanov, devoted to the Law "On National Security of Ukraine" of 21 June 2018. The authors argue that this act constitutes a key component of the regulatory framework in the field of security and defence, defining the structure and competencies of the institutions responsible for state protection. At the same time, they identify several significant normative deficiencies, including terminological inconsistencies, ambiguities in the distribution of powers, and gaps concerning fundamental regulatory issues, all of which affect the effectiveness of Ukraine's security sector. Their analysis underscores the need for further systematization of security law to ensure its coherence with the constitutional framework of the state.

Within the broader issue of institutional responses to internal threats is Maria Hapunik's contribution, which focuses on the development of police cooperation in the European Union after 2022. The author argues that the intensification of threats—including organized crime, cybercrime, migration-related crises, and hybrid activities—has necessitated the strengthening of operational and legal instruments such as the expanded mandate of Europol and the EMPACT platform. Hapunik emphasizes that the effectiveness of this cooperation depends on the interoperability of information systems and the mutual trust of member states, while simultaneously maintaining high standards of fundamental rights and privacy protection.

Robert Siuciński develops the theme of the European Union's regulatory responses to threats of a global nature by analysing Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 on the prohibition of placing products made with forced labour on the EU market. The author situates this regulation within the broader context of global anti-slavery initiatives, comparing it with legal instruments adopted in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Siuciński focuses on the procedural aspects of the regulation—investigatory, decision-making, and enforcement processes—arguing that the document represents an example of so-called "third-generation" administrative procedures, characterised by complex oversight and enforcement mechanisms.

Zbigniew Czachór's article also addresses the issue of legal-institutional crises at the level of the European Union, focusing on the conditionality mechanism for the protection of the EU budget as defined in Regulation 2020/2092. The author offers a multidimensional analysis of the political and legal tensions surrounding

the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027 and the instruments of the Next Generation EU initiative. Czachór formulates a set of research assumptions concerning the relationship between the rule-of-law crisis and the Union's financial mechanisms, highlighting the growing importance of budget-protection instruments as tools of institutional policy.

The issue of citizen security is further developed in Mira Malczyńska-Biała's article, which analyzes information as a key component of consumer security in the European Union. The author demonstrates that legislative and educational efforts undertaken since the era of the European Economic Community were aimed at reducing information asymmetries between businesses and consumers, thereby enabling informed market participation. The text emphasizes that access to reliable information on contract terms, product safety, and market practices constitutes the foundation for protecting consumer interests in an increasingly complex economic environment.

Martyna Kaczmarczyk addresses security in the context of rapid technological development by analysing the new European regulations on artificial intelligence—particularly, Regulation 2024/1689 and the Council of Europe Convention of 2024. The author examines these instruments through the lens of values such as security, ethics, and morality, arguing that they establish the legal boundaries of responsibility associated with the operation of AI systems. Kaczmarczyk highlights the regulatory challenges and potential legal consequences arising from the accelerating pace of technological change, treating the issues presented as a point of departure for a broader scientific and societal debate.

The volume concludes with reflections on migration as a long-term challenge to national and regional security. These contributions emphasize that future security debates cannot be limited to border protection but must also take into account solidarity, human rights, and social cohesion.

Tomasz Marcinkowski addresses the issue of health security in the context of a transnational crisis by analysing the actions of the European Union during the implementation of the COVID-19 vaccination strategy. The author argues that the pandemic revealed both the scale of public health challenges and the necessity of strengthening supranational coordination mechanisms. Marcinkowski highlights the EU's role in ensuring access to safe and effective vaccines, supporting research and production, adapting legal frameworks, and conducting communication efforts aimed at countering disinformation. Particular importance is attributed to the European Medicines Agency, responsible for authorization and oversight procedures. In conclusion, he notes that although the vaccination strategy

contributed to enhancing citizens' sense of health security, it also exposed the EU's competency limitations in the field of public health.

At the level of social security in the context of natural disasters, Oliwia Radkiewicz's study examines the consequences of the 2024 flood in south-western Poland. Drawing on qualitative research, the author demonstrates the multidimensional nature of the catastrophe's impact—including material losses, psychological burdens, and social tensions resulting from insufficient coordination of institutional assistance. Radkiewicz confirms the existence of significant deficiencies in the flood protection system and highlights the role of social resilience and the solidarity of local communities as key factors mitigating the long-term effects of the crisis. Her recommendations encompass improvements to warning systems and support procedures, as well as the modernization of protective infrastructure.

Wiktoria Trybuł-Klein examines irregular migration as one of the key national and regional security challenges facing European Union member states in the twenty-first century. The author argues that the heightened migratory pressure after 2015 exposed the limitations of existing migration management mechanisms and the complexity of threats associated with unlawful border crossings. The analysis focuses on the legal, institutional, and operational dimensions of EU migration policy, including the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, return and readmission procedures, and the operational role of Frontex. Trybuł-Klein posits a shift in EU policy priorities toward stricter border control and cooperation with third countries at the expense of intra-EU solidarity and human rights standards, pointing to the increasing fragmentation of migration policy and the need to balance security interests with international legal obligations.

The multifaceted analysis of the multilevel crisis confronting the European Union and its member states constitutes the leading theme of this issue. The authors, representing different countries and academic disciplines, aim not only to explain crisis phenomena and processes but also to explore potential pathways out of the crisis.[22] We hope that this volume will serve not merely as a diagnosis of contemporary threats but also as an impetus for further reflection on the future architecture of European security—one that is more coherent, resilient, and rooted in the values that form the foundation of European integration.

[22] M. Gikiewicz, *Badania operacyjne bezpieczeństwa,* [in:] *Nauki o bezpieczeństwie…*, op. cit., pp. 101-103.

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