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20 years of ensuring security of the European Union in the context of a ‘perfect storm’

SUMMARY One of the key priorities of every society, country or multinational organization is ensuring its internal and external security. In this connection, the paper – in the context of the events that hit the European continent in the past two decades of the third millennium and which can be described as part of the ‘perfect storm’ concept – deals with security threats and challenges that the European Union faced, or it is currently facing and which it must deal with in order to ensure its security, prosperity and sustainable development. In this context, the author of the article, using relevant scientific methods and approaches, explains the concept of the ‘perfect storm’, analyses selected events that have had a dramatic impact on European society, and at the same time points to the urgency of adopting effective and efficient measures aimed at solving the security issues of the EU.

KEYWORDS The European Union, the perfect storm, security, threats, and challenges

Introduction

The European Union (hereinafter referred to as “EU” or “Union”) represents a unique economic and political integration grouping of currently 27 European countries, based on common values and goals, which after a relatively long period of peace must today face new challenges and increasing security threats. Especially during the first two decades of the third millennium, EU security has become much more complex, less predictable and much more vulnerable. Deepening globalization

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processes and technological progress are gradually blurring the boundaries between internal and external security and increasing mutual interdependence and dependence to such an extent that individual EU member states are no longer able to individually face a wide range of military and non-military threats and are more than ever before dependent on mutual cooperation. This is also why solving security issues is currently one of the central topics of the European agenda (Ivančík & Rožňák, 2021; Ivančík, 2021; 2022). Since one of the main driving forces of European integration was the creation of a single market enabling the free movement of goods, services, capital and people in order to support economic development, gradually balance the economic and social imbalance between individual European states and regions, and improve the living and working conditions of all citizens of the Union (Brhlíková, 2012; 2013), security issues were initially not the focus of either politicians or ordinary citizens (Brhlíková, 2014; Nečas & Kollár, 2018). The issue of security began to come to the fore only after the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Majchút & Vaššová, 2020), which demonstrated the inability of the EU to respond adequately to ongoing or emerging conflicts and crises (Kazanský, 2013; Koudelka, 2016). and also pointed to the acute absence of mechanisms and tools for a coordinated common approach to security threats and challenges. Currently, in the first half of the third decade of the third millennium – following the continuous deterioration of the global and regional security environment, the deterioration of the security situation in the immediate and distant surroundings of the EU, the growth of tension in international relations, especially between the powers, as well as in close connection with the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine – the issues of the present and the future of the security dimension of European integration have acquired significantly greater importance, gained greater importance and have become the subject of many political and professional discussions (Ivančík, 2023; 2024; Jurčák & Ivančík, 2023). Under the influence and consequences of several dramatic events that took place in the last two decades, which can be subsumed into the concept of a “perfect storm”, the EU today faces security threats that are very diverse and diverse, and some of them – especially hybrid threats – for the first time view also less visible, but all the more dangerous. This is also why individual member states of the Union are currently no longer able to face current security threats and challenges individually, but are dependent on mutual cooperation. For these reasons, ensuring the security of the EU and its citizens is currently at the forefront of the common European project. And it is also the reason why the author of the article deals with the issue in question as part of his interdisciplinary research.

Securing the EU in the context of a ‘perfect storm’

As indicated earlier in the text, the EU has faced several internal and external events in the past 20 years, which some researchers and security analysts have described as a “perfect storm”. It is a term that is relatively young, not long appearing in the scientific literature, in the case of which there is still no unified, unified and generally valid definition. However, several authors agree that in the case of a perfect storm, it is a concept that refers to a combination of events that have a surprising or dramatic impact on society (Dearing, 2012; Horwood & Reitano, 2016; Sbisá, 2017). From the point of view of ensuring the security of the EU in the previous 20 years, perhaps among the events falling under the concept of the “perfect storm”, i.e. j. among the events with serious, dramatic consequences for European society include:

- bloody terrorist attacks in several European cities (London, Paris, Madrid, Brussels, Berlin, Hamburg, Manchester, Nice, Barcelona and others) (EU, 2024a), which brought not only dozens of innocent civilian casualties, but also countless physical injuries, psychological trauma and huge material and financial damages. In this context, the EU at the transnational level and countries affected by terrorism (but also other EU countries) at the national level were forced to adopt a number of political, economic, security, legislative, organizational and other measures aimed at combating terrorism;
- the global financial and economic crisis, which broke out in 2007 in the United States of America (hereinafter referred to as “the USA”), spread throughout the world in 2008, and in 2009 its negative consequences were already felt in all countries and regions around the world. One of the negative consequences in the security sector – among a number of others – was the rapid reduction of expenditures on security and defence of states, as these expenditures became the first victims of budget cuts carried out by the governments of individual countries as part of the implementation of fiscal measures aimed at consolidating public finances (Rooney et al., 2021);
- the debt and credit crisis in the Eurozone, which broke out in the EU member states using the common European currency, the euro, and whose negative effects, similar to the case of the global financial and economic crisis, also manifested themselves in the security sector. Due to the close

connection and interconnectedness, the crisis affected all member states of the Union, including those that did not belong to the Eurozone at the time. As part of fiscal measures aimed at consolidating public finances, the EU and the governments of the member states cut back primarily from the expenses allocated to security and defence (Edmond, 2012);

- the migration crisis, in which tens of thousands of refugees reached European shores in individual years via eastern, central or western routes, which significantly influenced and sometimes literally poisoned domestic political discussions in several European countries, as well as mutual relations within the Union. Both the EU and the member states were also forced to adopt a number of measures aimed at their elimination due to security risks, which are closely connected mainly with illegal migration (Brhlíková, 2016; EU, 2023);
- the announcement of a referendum in the United Kingdom to leave the EU in 2016 with its subsequent departure in January 2021 (known as Brexit), which represented a significant loss for the Union given the military, economic, financial and diplomatic power of the United Kingdom (EU, 2021);
- the crisis in the transatlantic relationship with the United States of America associated with the arrival of Donald Trump in the presidency, which seriously damaged several Euro-Atlantic security initiatives in which the Union invested significant political capital; as well as the collapse of multilateral trade rules associated with the Trump administration's decision to apply punitive US tariffs on European steel, steel products and some agricultural products (Dimitrova, 2020);
- the pandemic of the coronavirus causing the disease COVID-19, which was a heavy blow for Europe, as it was one of the regions that suffered the most deaths – more than two million people (WHO, 2023), and in addition caused a serious crisis for public health systems in various member states of the Union, brought serious economic recession and economic problems, increased unemployment, etc. The post-pandemic recovery did not solve the emergency, but rather worsened it, bringing the worst inflation in forty years due to rising energy prices and disruptions caused by the collapse of some supply chains (Nottes, 2020);
- the spread of disinformation on an unprecedented scale and numbers, especially via the Internet and social networks (Hajdúková et al., 2023; Dušek & Kavan, 2024), since the coronavirus pandemic is closely related to a significant increase in various disinformation campaigns, in which

the spreaders of disinformation in the form of state and non-state actors spread not only disinformation about the coronavirus, its origin, origin, spread between people and/or about vaccination against the disease and its consequences (EU, 2022), but also countless other disinformation aimed at influencing public opinion, thinking and actions of ordinary people citizens (Hajdúková & Šišulák, 2022), to disrupt the functioning of democratic societies, to undermine trust in democratic institutions and in democratically elected representatives, in their inability to solve the problems that have arisen, to increase polarization in society, support the growth of uncertainty and chaos in society (Lisoň & Fiedler, 2024), as well as the promotion of xenophobia, radicalism, extremism and political, religious and racial intolerance (Colomina et al., 2021);

- hybrid threats within the conduct of hybrid warfare by state and non-state actors – using military and non-military means, lethal and non-lethal tools, conventional and unconventional tactics, methods and methods, regular and irregular forces, criminal, terrorist, subversive and others subversive activities while simultaneously using and conducting cyber, psychological and information operations (Ivančík, 2020) – in order to achieve their predetermined political, ideological, economic and other goals (Ivančík, 2023);
- the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, when units of the Russian Armed Forces and private military companies invaded Ukraine as part of a so-called “special military operation” that was supposed to root out “fascism” that had taken over the Ukrainian political regime and defend Russian citizens in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions from “fascist aggression” (Osborne, 2024). From the point of view of the leaders of the countries that make up the EU, Russia’s aggressive war against Ukraine has not only caused a paradigm shift, but also represents an existential threat to European democracy, the social and legal state and a flagrant violation of international law and the principles of the United Nations, which has not occurred on the continent since the end of the Second World War (EEAS, 2024).

Conclusion

None of the above-described events and crises subsumed under the concept of the “perfect storm” posed such a security challenge to Europe and its institutions as the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. For the first time in seventy years, this war is the aggression of one state against another sovereign state, the invasion of one state into the territory of another state with the aim of eliminating the political class and integrating Ukrainian territory into the territory of the Russian Federation, with the risk that this territorial expansion could spread to other neighbouring countries, such as Moldova and Georgia and even to the Baltic countries. European political leaders and security experts consider the Russian invasion of Ukraine an existential challenge for the common European project and its institutions. Whether this event was given various descriptive labels, such as a milestone, a turning point, a turning point or a turning point, the outbreak of an aggressive war was in any case a severe blow that ended the international and European democratic liberal order and changed the geopolitics and security architecture in Europe. The first significant change in the European security architecture that arose from the Russian invasion of Ukraine was the decision of previously neutral countries such as Finland and Sweden to also become NATO members (NATO, 2022). For decades, Sweden and Finland believed that the best way to ensure their security and defence was to remain neutral during the Cold War and even after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the confrontation between East and West. However, the invasion clearly revealed Europe’s weakness and strategic shortcomings in dealing with Russia. The second important transformation of the European security scenario as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was the revitalization of the institutional relationship between the Union and the Alliance. Shortly before the invasion of Russian troops on Ukrainian territory, the European NATO member states seriously discussed the fact that they can no longer entrust their security to the USA, especially after the sharp criticism by the administration of President Trump towards the European allies and the Alliance itself and the threat that the United States may leave the organization. In November 2019, French President Macron warned Europe that NATO was suffering from “brain death” and pointed out that there was no coordination within the organization on matters of strategic decision-making between the United States and its European allies

(Macron, 2019). At the same time, Macron advocated strategic autonomy for Europe.

However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine completely changed the security scenario together with the change of president and government in the United States in January 2020. Joe Biden's accession to the presidency strengthened the institutional relationship between NATO and the EU, not only to be able to face an aggressive war together, which challenged the entire Euro-Atlantic security architecture. The idea of European strategic autonomy was relegated to the background under the pressure of the war. In January 2023, the Union and the Alliance signed a joint statement committing to strengthen and deepen cooperation in individual areas to address growing geopolitical and geostrategic competition on issues of resilience, critical infrastructure protection, new and disruptive technologies, outer space, and security implications arising from climate change, manipulation of information and external interference. The third change in the European security and defence architecture was the announcement by several EU member states that they would increase their defence spending to at least 2% of GDP, which could represent an increase of up to 200 billion euros in the defence budget. Germany alone announced in February 2022, a few weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the creation of a fund of 100 billion euros for the needs of the defence sector (Dorow, 2022). For the Germans, the invasion of Ukraine represented a real *Zeitenwende* (change of era) (Scholz, 2023), as the country was highly dependent on Russian gas for its manufacturing industry, especially the automotive industry, which also suffered from repeated shutdowns of the Chinese market due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If the decision to make a radical turn in defence spending policy is implemented, it is very likely that Germany will become a military powerhouse in Europe in the coming years. Along with increasing defence spending, several EU member state governments have decided to send weapons and military equipment to Ukraine (such as anti-tank weapons, ammunition, rifles, artillery, tanks, drones, etc.), accompanied by a series of successive packages of economic and trade sanctions against Russia. At the same time, the Union and its member states decided to reduce their dependence on Russian oil and gas to strengthen their security. Despite the fact that Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine currently represents the most serious security challenge for the EU, it can be concluded that the Union is currently facing several other security challenges in the context of events falling within the concept of the aforementioned "perfect storm", not only the one in the form of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. This is also why

the EU as a whole and, last but not least, the governments of the individual member states of the Union must learn from previous mistakes, hesitations, lack of unity, unnecessary procrastination and arguing, and instead react in a timely, unified manner and take decisive and quick measures to resolve crisis situations in the interest of ensuring an adequate level of security for its citizens.

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20 lat zapewniania bezpieczeństwa Unii Europejskiej w kontekście „perfect storm”

STRESZCZENIE Jednym z kluczowych priorytetów każdego społeczeństwa, kraju lub organizacji międzynarodowej jest zapewnienie bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego i zewnętrznego. W związku z tym artykuł – w kontekście wydarzeń, które dotknęły kontynent europejski w ciągu ostatnich dwóch dekad trzeciego tysiąclecia i które można opisać jako część koncepcji „doskonałej burzy” – zajmuje się zagrożeniami i wyzwaniem dla bezpieczeństwa, przed którymi stanęła lub stoi obecnie Unia Europejska i z którymi musi się zmierzyć, aby zapewnić sobie bezpieczeństwo, dobrobyt i zrównoważony rozwój. W tym kontekście autor artykułu, stosując odpowiednie metody, wyjaśnia koncepcję „doskonałej burzy”, analizuje wybrane wydarzenia, które miały dramatyczny wpływ na społeczeństwo europejskie, a jednocześnie wskazuje na pilną potrzebę przyjęcia skutecznych i wydajnych środków mających na celu rozwiązanie problemów bezpieczeństwa UE.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Unia Europejska, doskonała burza, bezpieczeństwo, zagrożenia, wyzwania

Date of submission of the article: 18.12.2024; date of acceptance of the article: 29.09.2025.