

ZPŮSOBY STRATEGICKÉ ADAPTACE: NATO a EU pod tlakem revizionismu

MODES OF STRATEGIC ADAPTATION: NATO and the EU under Revisionist Pressure

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Abstrakt

Jak lze posuzovat strategické přizpůsobení mezinárodních organizací? Článek kombinuje současné poznatky z oblasti ‚grand strategy‘ a analýzy institucionální adaptace s cílem vysvětlit reakce NATO a Evropské unie na současný ruský revizionismus. Na příkladech aliančního *Very High Readiness Joint Task Force* (VJTF) a unijního *East StratCom Task Force* analyzuje inovativnost, rozsah a soudržnost těchto institucionálních opatření v kontextu širší strategické reakce obou organizací. Závěry analýzy staví proti sobě postupnou, ale robustnější strategickou renovaci NATO a radikálnější, nicméně limitovanější a potenciálně nejistý strategický průlom na půdě Evropské unie.

Abstract

How to assess the strategic adjustment of international organisations? The article combines recent advances in the study of grand strategy and studies in institutional adaptation to explain NATO's and European Union's responses to current Russian revisionism. Selecting specific cases of NATO's *Very High Readiness Joint Task Force* (VJTF) and EU's *East StratCom Task Force*, it analyses the innovativeness, scope and cohesiveness of these measures in the context of broader strategic readjustments. The conclusions pit the Alliance's gradual but more robust strategic renovation against the Union's more radical but limited and possibly fractious strategic breakthrough.

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Klíčová slova

East StratCom Task Force; Evropská unie; NATO; revizionismus; Rusko; strategická adaptace; VJTF.

Keywords

East StratCom Task Force; European Union; NATO; revisionism; Russia; strategic adaptation; VJTF.

INTRODUCTION: FAST FORWARD INTO THE PAST?

Developments in Europe over the past decade have largely destabilized and undermined the sense of stability that marked the period since the end of Cold War. While tested by eruptions of ethnic warfare, broader regional conflagrations or activities of globalised terrorist networks, the foundations of the European security order after 1989 looked firm for a relatively long time. Boosted by gradual eastward expansion of both NATO and the European Union, not to mention other regional organisations, all challenges above seemed rather like scratches on the surface of otherwise solid construction.

The feeling of general strategic calm was rather abruptly ended by the Russian occupation of Crimea and the subsequent intervention in east Ukraine. The openness and apparent brazenness of Russia actions rattled the nerves of Euro-Atlantic elites and contributed to the feeling that a potential end of history, albeit in a limited European fashion of an ever-progressive integration process and cooperative mode of international relations, would not materialise. After all, Putin's regime had just deliberately defied key norms of non-aggression and territorial integrity and signalled willingness towards further violations. With Russian disinformation campaign and attempts to influence elections in the Euro-Atlantic region, this possibility quickly turned real.

European and transatlantic actors thus had to rediscover and relearn how to cope with a hostile regional power in the near neighbourhood. Intriguingly, the threat came from an entity that had provoked the establishment of the European security architecture in the first place. Strategic competition with the Soviet Union, as contemporary Russia's Cold War predecessor, was deeply imprinted in the organisations' historical foundations. However, the post-Cold War developments all but erased the confrontational features from NATO's and European Union's visions and activities. While previous events, such as the 2008 armed conflict between Russia and Georgia, had provided warnings about the shape of Russian actions to come, it was not until 2014 that Russia managed to completely undermine the certainty about the post-Cold War historical trend. Since then, NATO and the EU have been confronted with a novel situation which asks them to revive previous modes of strategic thinking and practical operation while at the same time adapting them to a unique contemporary political and security setting.

The goal of this article is to analyse strategic adaptation of NATO and the European Union to Russian revisionism after 2014. In doing so, it will focus on two 'front line' cases of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the EU's East StratCom Task Force (ESCTF). Both have been publicly heralded as a response to the new situation in the relations between Russia and the West. Unlike other accounts of NATO's or EU's reaction to the new challenge, this analysis is not concerned with the mechanisms of institutional adaptation per se but asks if, how and to what extent these institutions express a change in strategic narrative and behaviour of the organisations. The methodology of the article does not rest on a rigorous comparative approach and can be characterized as a parallel case study. Given the conceptual novelty (attempting to analyse changes in strategic posture through a focus on selected institutional innovations), the empirical cases serve a predominantly exploratory purpose. The analysis itself rests on the interpretation of primary documents through the lenses of hereinafter established conceptual framework, while, naturally, relying on academic

sources focusing on NATO and EU policies and institutional structures in general, and specifically in relation to Russia. Interviews with officials in relevant NATO and EU bodies played a major role in clarifying the underlying empirical realities and testing the relevance of the conceptual matrix.

The article starts with a conceptual outline, merging the focus on institutional adaptation with recent advances in the analysis of grand strategy. In the next step, it delimitates the basic tenets of the European Union and NATO's grand strategies after 1989 and explains how recent Russian revisionism challenges their core facets. The article's centre of gravity consists in the analysis of the Alliance's and the Union's strategic adaptations, presented through the prism VJTF and ESCTF as two specific institutional adjustments.

INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENT AS AN EXPRESSION OF GRAND STRATEGIC ADAPTATION

Grand strategy connects the state's actions, primarily in the realm of security and defence, and the surrounding international order. A useful summarisation posits that grand strategy should encompass global scale of a given state's engagement with political issues, should coordinate them across specific situations and levels as well as coordinate all instruments of national power in the long term.¹

Doubts have been raised whether such a vague concept is at all useful, typically claiming that to live up to the standards of declared strategies is practically impossible.² However, positing grand strategy as an unapproachable ideal without relevance for practical policy may not be the only way of conceptualising the phenomenon. Authors in the field of organisation studies, studying grand strategy in connection to management³, propose that grand strategy is not what actors possess but what they create and practice. Nina Silove⁴ has recently presented a meticulously crafted argument in favour of distinguishing between three meanings of grand strategy: grand plans (i.e. persistent designs linking state's ends and means), grand principles (or "overarching ideas" held by individuals involved in state's decision-making) and grand behaviour (a "*long-term pattern in a state's distribution and employment of its military, diplomatic, and economic resources toward ends*"⁵). Jennifer Mitzen suggested to understand grand strategy as a publicised collective intention: "*intentions are commitments, that is, action-oriented resolutions of issues.*"⁶ In her study, Mitzen focuses on interstate frameworks, not individual states as most of the other studies of grand strategy, thus offering a crucial conceptual opening for the understanding of grand strategies in a multilateral setting.

¹ MARTEL, William C. *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 34-56.

² BETTS, Richard K. Is Strategy an Illusion? *International Security*. 2000, Vol. 25, No. 2. ISSN: 0162-2889.

³ FENTON, Christopher - Ann, LANGLEY. Strategy as Practice and the Narrative Turn. *Organization Studies*. 2011, Vol. 32, No. 9. ISSN: 0170-8406.

⁴ SILOVE, Nina. Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of "Grand Strategy". *Security Studies*. 2017, Vol. 27, No.1. ISSN: 0963-6412

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23

⁶ MITZEN, Jennifer. Illusion or Intention? Talking Grand Strategy into Existence. *Security Studies*. 2015, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 63. ISSN: 0963-6412.

How do institutions relate to grand strategies? On a general level, Colin Gray puts "organisation" in the second "cluster" of his account of strategic culture.⁷ In a more recent and more specific study, Kei Koga⁸ offers both theoretical reflection and great empirical insight into the practice of non-European organizations' adaptation. With a singular focus on NATO, Seth Johnston⁹ presents a detailed historical analysis of institutional adaptation within the transatlantic organisation. Johnston delivers a complex survey of NATO's adaptation through several case studies; he does, however, separate institutional developments and strategic adaptation as two separate, parallel paths of NATO's evolution.

Comparing the two aforementioned streams of research, it can be concluded that even innovative approaches to grand strategy rarely consider institutional developments as more than a part of the background against which strategic intentions are formulated or strategic behaviour implemented. Vice versa, institutionalist accounts tend to emphasise the internal workings through which adaptation proceeds¹⁰ while treating strategic adaptation as a separate line of historical development. To find an opening for a creative merger, this article starts from Mitzen's conclusion that publicly announced collective intentions hold sway over subsequent action. To extend that line of argumentation further, not much can be considered more binding than a publicly announced institutional change, explicitly motivated by actions of a strategic competitor or foe, given the depth of political commitment and institutional investment in them. This article thus claims that institutional changes can be understood as a direct and potent expression of grand strategic adaptation.

Based on this presumption, VJTF and ESCTF will be analysed as key components of NATO's and European Union's adaptation to contemporary Russian revisionism. As explained above, the focus on these two new arrangements stems from a combined focus on grand strategy and institutional adjustment. They are thus not presented as the only (or not necessarily even the most important) components of the EU's and NATO's reaction to Russia's assertive policies, but as institutional test cases in strategic adjustment. In their nature, scope and focus, VJTF and ESCTF represent radically different organisational settings. Their relevance is thus not inferred from their position within the respective institutional structure but is directly related to and derived from the basic tenets of NATO's and EU's grand strategies, as presented below. The goal is to determine whether they can be regarded as sufficiently innovative, robust and durable reactions to the challenge. In the course of the analysis, following aspects will be taken into account: innovativeness of the proposed instrument, the scope of the institutional adjustment, and, finally, cohesiveness understood as the robustness of the consensus among the organisations' members on the purpose and utilisation of the new institutional instrument.

⁷ GRAY, Colin S. Strategic culture as context: the first generation of theory strikes back. *Review of International Studies*. 1999, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 53. ISSN 0260-2105.

⁸ KOGA, Key. *Reinventing Regional Security Institutions in Asia and Africa*. London and New York NY: Routledge, 2017. ISBN 13 978-1138365957.

⁹ JOHNSTON, Seth. *How NATO Adapts? Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance since 1950*. Baltimore MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2017. ISBN-13 978-1421421988.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30

THE CHALLENGE: RUSSIAN REVISIONISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO'S AND EU'S GRAND STRATEGIES

The grand strategies established within both NATO and the European Union after 1989 were formulated as a specific reaction to a radically new international environment. NATO, after initial hesitation, reacted resolutely at several levels: Firstly, it adopted a new, publicly oriented strategic vision, presented not only through thus formally named strategic concepts (The Alliance's New Strategic Concept 1991; NATO Strategic Concept 1991, Strategic Concept 2010), but also spelled out in other documents, such as the ground-breaking 1990 London Declaration or the 2002 Prague Summit Declaration. Secondly, the Alliance initiated the process of a dedicated institutional transformation, including *"the downsizing of the integrated military structure and development of more flexible and expeditionary military arrangements such as the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)"*¹¹ or, in reaction to 9/11, the NATO Response Force. Thirdly, NATO opened its gates to new member states from amongst former adversaries from Central and Eastern Europe. On top of that, it established a broader web of less formalised ties to non-member states through arrangements like Partnership for Peace (PfP) or the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). Finally, it tested the new strategic principles through peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations from the Balkans through Afghanistan to North Africa.

Despite inevitable policy variations, NATO's post-Cold War grand strategy can be defined as defending member states, securing Europe and providing ad hoc support to tackling global security threats. Defence of the member states' territories and sovereignty, primarily through deterrence of would-be aggressors, has undeniably represented NATO's core mission since the organisation's inception in 1949 - defined, indeed, already in the North Atlantic Treaty as the organisation's founding document. While the salience of the issue diminished after 1989, it has never been questioned, as all the subsequently adopted strategic concepts (1991, 1999, 2010) testify. Responsibility for regional security and stability has thus been taken over by the Alliance not instead, but rather on top of the original task. It was the attention paid in the previous decades to the core mission that made it possible for NATO to utilize its formidable set of military but also diplomatic assets to export stability to the Balkans (through crisis diplomacy, preventive deployments but especially the use of military instruments in conflict management) and Central and Eastern Europe (particularly through the processes of enlargement and association, including cooperative arrangements like NATO-Russia Council). In a clear path-dependency fashion, NATO's proven prowess in out-of-area operations in the Balkans made it an organization of choice to support international action against systemic threats beyond Europe's confines, be it counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, battling piracy off the Horn of Africa, or dealing with the violent aftermath of the Arab Spring in Libya.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., p. 119

¹² For contemporary reflection of NATO's expanding scope of ambition and tasks, see e.g. ALEXANDER, Yonah - Richard, POSEN (eds.). *NATO: From Regional to Global Security Provider*. Lanham - Boulder - New York - London: Lexington Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4985-0368-6; KITCHEN, Veronica M. *The Globalization of NATO: Intervention, Security and Identity*. London and

The resurgence of Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Putin challenged NATO in all the three dimensions of its grand strategy.¹³ Starting from its ‘outside’ layers, Russian strategic assertiveness highlighted and deepened a sense of malaise, stemming from protracted requirements of ‘nation-building’ in the Balkans and especially in Afghanistan. Secondly, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, combined with other activities (notably large-scale military exercises and aggressive discourse based on the idea of Russia’s ‘vocation’ to protect ethnic Russians in its ‘near abroad’) disrupted the strategic stability established in Central and Eastern Europe after NATO’s enlargement and establishment of cooperative ties to non-member, post-Soviet countries (including, but not limited to, Ukraine). Finally, through a combination of a military build-up (including both conventional and nuclear armaments), increasingly offensive rhetoric and revival of Cold War military practices (such as the transatlantic sorties by Russian strategic bombers), Russia undermined the sense of security amongst NATO members. Military confrontation (typically imagined as a result of aggressive Russian action against the Baltic countries) has forcibly been revived as a regular component of NATO’s discourse, strategy and planning.

The European Union is evidently a very different strategic actor than NATO, most importantly in the complexity of its goals and resulting policies.¹⁴ In this respect, the EU is closer to a ‘standard’, multi-vectoral actorness of a state than to NATO’s relatively clear-cut mission. At the same time, the intergovernmental form of governance in EU security and defence policies makes the decision-making mechanisms of both organisations comparable and, indeed, similar. The EU started its security-related strategic debates much later than NATO and, until the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy in 1999, they only played a limited role. This is, however, only true in the context of debates focusing on the use of force, since the EU dominated in other areas, especially concerning the securing of economic prosperity and providing normative underpinnings for the enlargement of ‘the West’ into post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. Since 1999, the idea of EU as a strictly ‘civilian power’ ultimately

New York: Routledge, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0-415-57017-6; SMITH, Martin A. (ed.). *Where Is NATO Going?* London and New York: Routledge, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0-415-46363-8; WILLIAMS, M. J. *NATO, Security and Risk Management: From Kosovo to Kandahar*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. ISBN-13 978-0-415-59248-2.

¹³ For a reflection of the scope of conceptual reactions to the current Russian challenge, the exchange in *New Perspectives* is illustrative. See KÜHN, Ulrich. Deter and Engage: Making the Case for Harmel 2.0 as NATO’s New Strategy. *New Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations*. Vol. 23, No. 1/2015, pp. 127-157, Institute of International Relations Prague. ISSN: 2336-825x (print), and Responses to Ulrich Kuhn’s ‘Deter and Engage: Making the Case for Harmel 2.0 as NATO’s New Strategy’. *New Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations*. Institute of International Relations Prague, Vol. 23, No. 2/2015, pp. 123-142.

¹⁴ Stimulating (and mutually varied) interpretations of the EU’s strategic ‘nature’ can be found in ENGELBREKT, Kjell - Jan, HALLENBERG (eds.). *The European Union and Strategy. An Emerging Actor*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. ISBN-13 978-0-415-45060-7; MEYER, Christoph O. *The Quest for a European Strategic Culture: Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. ISBN 978-1-4039-9280-2; TOJE, Asle. *The European Union as a Small Power: After the Post-Cold War*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 978-0-230-24396-5.

subsidized and gave way to a decisive, if limited, development of military capabilities.¹⁵ In 2003, the EU sealed its new strategic vision with the European Security Strategy (A Secure Europe in a Better World 2003), followed in 2008 by the report on its implementation (Providing Security in a Changing World 2008), and in 2016 a new document called EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (Shared Visions, Common Action 2016). In the meantime, the EU established a new crop of institutions (the High Representative for CFSP, Political and Security Committee, Military Committee, Military Staff, European Defence Agency, European External Action Service, EU Rapid Reaction Force, EU battlegroups etc.) that took over various administrative functions within the new policy while simultaneously serving as a visible commitment to its implementation. The effort at transforming the EU into a more 'standard' (i.e. capable of using military power) actor was sealed with a successful launch of out-of-area military, police and civilian operations since 2003.

The grand strategy of the European Union could be characterized as limited global ambitions, supported by regional discursive dominance.¹⁶ Starting from the outer layer, the security strategies (akin, in fact, more to grand strategic proclamations) from 2003 and 2016 declared the ambition of the EU to be perceived as a player with a global reach. The material extent of this ambition, however, has been limited. Both in geographic scope (vast majority of EU's operations have taken place in the Balkans and Sub-Saharan Africa) and in deployed manpower (only exceptionally have they reached single thousands, as in Bosnia, the DRC or Chad, nowhere near the tens or even hundreds of thousands of soldiers NATO deployed in the Balkans or later in Afghanistan). What matters for the EU, however, is arguably rather the meaning (or, in other words, narrative usage) of these missions than, necessarily, their effect on the ground. In all its strategic documents, as well as its diplomatic practice, the EU has been highlighting a unique approach (different, in its understanding, from other actors, typically the United States) based on multidimensional and multilateral take on conflict management. In fact, the main grand strategic intention of the European Union could be interpreted as an effort of wider replication of its own experience of a multi-layered, multinational, cooperative and highly institutionalized policy, as already declared in the European Security Strategy 2003. What the EU truly wants to achieve is a sort of discursive dominance in which these characteristics (resting on normative bedrock of democracy, human rights and rule of law) become universally accepted, thus opening the way for increasing Europe's influence as their originator.

Russian revisionism stands at odds with practically every aforementioned facet of the EU grand strategy.¹⁷ It rests on a narrow (ethnic) interpretation of nationalism

¹⁵ HAALAND MATLARY, Janne. *European Union Security Dynamics: In the New National Interest*. 2009, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 40-67. ISBN 978-0-230-00216-6.

¹⁶ One of the most comprehensive and condensed discussions on the nature of the EU's strategic interaction with the outside world can be found in Engelbrekt's and Hallenberg's edited volume (ref. 14).

¹⁷ BECHEV, Dimitar. Understanding the Contest Between the EU and Russia in Their Shared Neighbourhood. *Problems of Post-Communism*. 2015, Vol. 62, pp. 340-349. ISSN: 1075-8216. For a critique of the normative focus in interpreting EU-Russia relations, see CASIER, Tom. The EU-Russia Strategic Partnership: Challenging the Normative Argument. *Europe-Asia Studies*. 2013, Vol. 65, No. 7, pp. 1377-1395. ISSN: 0966-8136.

and open defence of its benefits, despises liberal-oriented, institutionalist governmentality as ineffective or even degenerate, its actions are resoundingly unilateralist and rest on a clearly hierarchical understanding of the international order, essentially divided between great powers and the (insignificant) rest. Moreover, byways of discourse and action, Putin has relied on the use of (military) force in bringing Russia back to the centre of global politics, putting his country directly at odds with the EU's civilian/multidimensional power pedigree. Most importantly, by intervening in Ukraine in relation to its negotiations with the European Union over an association treaty, Russia openly challenged the EU's pretence at discursive hegemony in the European continent. Even worse, through a combination of its policies and domestic developments of some of the member states, Russia has been able to undermine such a consensus within the Union itself. The Russian revisionist challenge thus concerns not only specific EU policies but essentially its whole strategic purpose, aimed at maintaining a particular model of integration at home and exporting it to the outside world, primarily in its neighbourhood.

THE RESPONSE: MODERATE RENOVATION AND ISOLATED STRATEGIC BREAKTHROUGH AS MODES OF STRATEGIC ADAPTATION

NATO confronted the new strategic predicament, established by Russia through the intervention in Ukraine, at its summit in Wales in September 2014. In its second sentence, the summit declaration explicitly referred to "*Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine*".¹⁸ As a result of this assessment, the gathered heads of state and government decided to enhance the NATO Response Force (NRF), founded in reaction to 9/11, to include a new "spearhead group" called Very High Readiness Force of up to 20000 soldiers.¹⁹ VJTF was designed as a multinational brigade conceived as rotational and persistent (though not permanently based), with up to 5 battalions, able to "move immediately."²⁰ The reimagined NRF would thus be composed of VJTF, the Initial Follow On Forces Group (IFFG) - two additional high-readiness multinational brigades - and the Response Forces Pool (RFP). Altogether, the refashioned NATO Response Force would include around 40000 soldiers.

The 'spearhead' metaphor is useful not only explaining for VJTF's military role within NRF, but also for understanding its position amongst a broader set of institutional amendments. The overall cover was provided by the Readiness Action Plan which highlighted the assurance of Allies through increased presence. Upgraded intelligence capabilities to quickly detect and respond to ambiguous, hybrid threats; organized pre-positioning of military equipment and supplies; improved preparation of eastern Allies' national infrastructure; increased amount of military exercises; and intended to raise the readiness, capabilities and role of the Headquarters Multinational Corps North-East

¹⁸ *Wales Summit Declaration*. NATO Headquarters [online] 5. 9. 2014 [cit. 2018-07-19]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2iFP36g>

¹⁹ *NATO Response Force*. NATO Headquarters [online] 16. 1. 2017 [cit. 2018-07-19]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2NTVHIs>

²⁰ *NATO Response Force/Very High Readiness Joint Task Force*. SHAPE NATO [online] 2016 [cit. 2018-07-19]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2AelMct>

in Szczecin.²¹ These core arrangements, aimed at reviving NATO's collective defence capabilities and, indeed, commitment, were accompanied by a yet wider set additional measures. These were deployment of four multinational battalion-size battlegroups to the Baltic states and Poland; enhancement of the Romanian-led multinational brigade (land forces) in Craiova; individual contributions to NATO airspace protection by Romania and Bulgaria; formation of NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) as "small command and control nodes enabling deployment and sustainment activity"²², located initially in the Baltics, Bulgaria and Poland; as well as additional NATO assurance measures such as land, sea and air activities on and around the territory of Central and Eastern European member states, patrolling of fighter jets over the Baltic countries and their deployment to Poland and Romania, AWACS and naval monitoring missions concerning eastern member countries, Standing NATO Mine Counter-Measures Group patrolling the Baltic Sea (alongside Eastern Mediterranean), and an enlarged Standing NATO Maritime Group conducting maritime assurance measures in addition to counter-terrorism patrols.²³ All these were (re)imagined as a part of a 'tripwire' through which NATO "ensures that forward presence forces will be reinforced by NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, the broader NATO Response Force, Allies' additional high readiness forces and NATO's heavier follow-on forces, if necessary."²⁴

On the part of the European Union, the immediate reaction to the occupation of Crimea and subsequent Russian incursions into Ukrainian territory was formulated through the European Council conclusions from 20/21 March 2014.²⁵ As Dimitar Bechev noted in his insightful article, due to existing structural impediments, it would have been quixotic to expect that the EU would adopt military measures in vis-a-vis Russia.²⁶ It is thus not surprising that, completely in line with the logic of "*the clash of narratives*"²⁷, the EU laid emphasis on the domain of strategic communication.²⁸ Experiencing confrontation with Moscow in an immaterial but very direct manner through Russia's disinformation campaign, the European Council in March 2015 ordered the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to prepare by June an action plan on strategic communication.²⁹ The plan was duly presented, with three main goals: effective communication and promotion of EU policies towards the Eastern Neighborhood; strengthening the overall media environment in the Eastern

²¹ *Readiness Action Plan*. NATO Headquarters [online] 21. 9. 2017 [cit. 2018-07-19]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2lVPkDT>

²² NRF/VJTF, ref. 14

²³ *NATO Assurance Measures*. SHAPE NATO [online] 2018 [cit. 2018-04-01]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2EIZbbR>

²⁴ *Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast*. NATO Headquarters [online] 2. 3. 2018 [cit. 2018-07-23]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2nrN7jR>

²⁵ *European Council Conclusions*. General Secretariat of the Council, European Union [online] 20/21. 3. 2014 [cit. 2018-09-20]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2Mzk9KF>

²⁶ BECHEV, ref. 17

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 345

²⁸ MISSIROLI, Antonio - ANDERSSON, Jan Joel - GAUB, Florence - POPESCU, Nicu - John-Joseph et al., WILKINS. *Strategic Communications: East and South*. European Union Institute for Security Studies, Report No. 30, July 2016. ISBN 978-92-9198-497-8.

²⁹ *European Council Conclusions*. General Secretariat of the Council, European Union [online] 19/20. 3. 2015 [cit. 2018-09-21], art. 13. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2V5sB91>

Neighborhood and in EU Member States, including support for media freedom and strengthening independent media; improved EU capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by external actors.³⁰ While the first and second goals do have links to the new strategic challenge represented by Russia, only the third can be understood as a direct reaction thereto.

The East StratCom Task Force that was subsequently established³¹ was tasked with several objectives and only dedicated a relatively small proportion of its capacity to countering of the Russian disinformation campaign. In fact, ESCTF started with less than ten members of its team and just one of them (a former Czech journalist) was working fulltime on countering Russian disinformation.³² And only since 2018 has the team been funded through a dedicated line in the EU budget, “rather than relying on contributions from EU member states or squeezing other budget lines.”³³ Despite the limitations, the anti-disinformation component of ESCTF was able to start publishing a regular Disinformation Review, attempting to disprove the most influential fake news spread by Russian or pro-Russian media (<https://euvsdisinfo.eu>) and, for that purpose, establish a wide network of contributors, including NGOs, across member countries. Tellingly, to the question whether the team engages in counterpropaganda, ESCTF’s official Q&A posits that “*the team’s main task is to explain and promote the European Union’s policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood. It also identifies and corrects disinformation.*”³⁴

In assessing the institutional adaptation of NATO and the EU as a component of their grand strategic adjustment, the aspects of innovativeness, scope and cohesiveness will be applied. While assessing the innovativeness of the arrangements, there is an obvious difference between the novelty of the EU East StratCom Task Force and NATO’s reshuffling of its toolbox, leading to the formation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. The former conforms to the idea of a strategic breakthrough, a never-before-tried approach to tackling a newly emergent threat, or rather an actor that was deliberately not conceptualised as a challenge or threat before. While the overall EU reaction to Russia’s revisionist policies has been relatively measured (the initial reaction of the European Council from March 2014 does not in fact mention the word “aggression”, unlike the final statement of NATO’s Wales Summit), the very fact that a state has been openly labelled as a threat went directly against the non-confrontational DNA of the Union. The anti-disinformation element within ESCTF has subsequently made it perfectly clear that Russia needs to be considered an entity hostile to the European Union, its policies and values it represents. Despite the fact that the EU as an organisation at least formally shuns the term ‘counterpropaganda’,

³⁰ *Action Plan on Strategic Communication*. European Union [online] 22. 6. 2015 [cit. 2018-09-21]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2BzLkRa>

³¹ *Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force*. European External Action Service, European Union [online] 8. 11. 2017 [cit. 2018-09-20]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2GT4XoN>

³² McDONALD-GIBSON, Charlotte. The E.U. Agency Fighting Russia’s Wildfire of Fake News with a Hosepipe. *Time* [online] 11. 11. 2017 [cit. 2018-09-15]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2xZM9zO>

³³ RANKIN, Jennifer: EU anti-propaganda unit gets €1m a year to counter Russian fake news. *The Guardian* [online] 25. 11. 2017 [cit. 2018-09-16]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2i2TEmA>

³⁴ *Q&A about ESCTF*, ref. 25

in a personal interview a protagonist of ESCTF confirmed to the author that Russia is indeed treated as an enemy waging an information war against the Union.³⁵

NATO's reaction, on the other hand, has relied on existing tools, processes and constructs, specifically those formed during the Cold War and then the post-9/11 period. Cold War allusions have been evident in turn towards territoriality that largely replaced the previous "out-of-area or out-of-business" mantra. In relation to VJTF, interviewed officials at NATO headquarters in Brussels repeatedly referred to the former Multinational Division - Central (MND(C)) as a late-Cold War example of a highly mobile formation meant as a dedicated reinforcement of the main allied forces facing the potential Soviet attack.³⁶ Nevertheless, the practical core of the institutional adaptation, VJTF included, rested firmly on NATO's transformation arrangements following the 2001 terrorist attacks, most importantly the founding of the NATO Response Force by the 2002 Prague Summit. At a conceptual level, the combination of highly mobile elements (VJTF, NRF) and more permanent arrangements (NFIUs, NATO assurance measures, air and naval patrolling) represents a nuanced integration of the old (Cold War) and the recent (post-9/11) toolboxes.

Assessing the scope of NATO's shift towards a reinvigoration of collective defence is complicated. On the one hand, the declared doubling of NRF to 40000 soldiers, with half of them comprising VJTF, represents a substantial increase of NATO's mobile multinational military capability (even if, as the author was reminded in one of his interviews, the deployment of the force is more politically restricted than was the case of the aforementioned MND(C)).³⁷ This is further underlined by the vigour of the related, territoriality-affirming measures. On the other hand, the purpose of the institutional adaptation is questionable. In interviews, even NATO's representatives admitted that the new forces would not matter much, in military terms, against a potential Russian attack.³⁸ Deterrence 'by denial' does not seem to be at hand, which leaves deterrence 'by punishment' as a remaining option. That would, however, potentially bring into play NATO's nuclear forces, thus rendering the institutional innovation started at the summit in Wales to either an empty exercise or a mere trigger of the envisioned 'tripwire' mechanism. That being said, the possibility of an open military confrontation between NATO and Russia, though impossible to calculate, probably remains low, since both sides are well aware of the cost they would pay for such an outcome. Somewhat paradoxically, the measured scope of NATO's new military measures suggests that its main audience does not necessarily sit in Moscow, but rather in Warsaw or the Baltic states.

Even if limited, the scope of NATO's adaptation post-2014 has still been considerable. To the contrary, the European Union's East StratCom Task Force's scope has been minuscule - and its anti-disinformation component even more so. 'One man's war' is not

³⁵ Interview with a representative of the East StratCom Task Force, conducted by the author in Brussels on 25 October 2016

³⁶ Interviews No. 1, 2 and 3 with representatives at NATO HQ in Brussels, conducted by the author on 24 October 2016

³⁷ Interview No. 1 with a representative at NATO HQ in Brussels, conducted by the author on 24 October 2016

³⁸ Interviews No. 2 and 3 with representatives at NATO HQ in Brussels, conducted by the author on 24 October 2016

a phrase often connected to the functioning of the European Union, but in relation to ESCTF fight against disinformation, it is a precise description of the first years of its functioning.³⁹ Combined with haphazard funding procedures and especially when confronted with the scope of the challenge, it seems almost surreal that the EU left the burden of countering a coordinated campaign by the Russian adversary to a single former journalist.

Concerning cohesiveness, the evaluation of VJTF's and ESCTF's sustainability reveals a common underlying phenomenon which is, in fact, essential for both NATO's and the EU's grand strategic posturing - the rift between their 'eastward' and 'southward' orientation. Both institutional innovations have been justified not only by their utility in confronting the Russian challenge but also in tackling contingencies stemming from the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Even if the European Union's Action Plan on Strategic Communication focuses solely on Russia, other documents and commentaries also mention other contingencies, typically ISIS.⁴⁰ Likewise, the creation of VJTF is presented as a combined effort "to adapt and respond to emerging security challenges posed by Russia, as well as the risks emanating from the Middle East and North Africa."⁴¹ In other words, the institutional adaptation of the European Union and, albeit to a lesser degree, also NATO rests on a delicate balancing act among the organisations' members whose southern wing has not at all accepted the need for a full strategic reorientation. Nevertheless, NATO's arrangements, especially the mobile elements like VJTF, arguably do have a potential to serve in both strategic directions. Unlike it, dealing with Russian (or Russia-backed and pro-Russian) propaganda and disinformation is a highly specialised activity whose lessons learned and best practices are only transferable in a limited way. As the account of ESCTF's first years of functioning suggests, underlying tensions and competing preferences of EU member states have complicated its operation since the inception.⁴²

In sum, NATO's strategic adaptation to Russian revisionist challenge has creatively combined previous experiences and tools, linking a Cold War ethos of territorial defence with highly mobile multinational military forces created after 9/11. Due to the partially limited scope and implicit tensions influencing its sustainability, NATO's development seems to warrant a designation of *moderate renovation*. Through the East StratCom Task Force, the EU has established a new element of its (grand) strategic behaviour - but did it in a way that largely questions the sincerity and rigour of such a strategic intention, thus warranting a designation of *the isolated strategic breakthrough*.

CONCLUSION: EURO-ATLANTIC COMMUNITY BETWEEN LIMITED ROBUSTNESS AND MASKED FEEBLENESS

The article aimed at presenting an analysis of specific reactions of the European Union and NATO to Russian revisionist challenge. The main value of the approach rests in conceptualising the connection between strategic adjustment and institutional adaptation, or rather in revealing the representation of the former through the latter,

³⁹ McDONALD-GIBSON, ref. 26

⁴⁰ MISSIROLI at al., ref. 22

⁴¹ NRF/VJTF, ref. 14

⁴² McDONALD-GIBSON, ref. 26

building on Jennifer Mitzen's reflection of strategies as collectively announced strategic intentions. Research in this direction should enjoy the advantage of holding the proverbial finger on the pulse of the development of an actor, with institutional innovations serving as specific viewpoints. While the analysis attempted to anchor these developments in a broader context of institutional, doctrinal and narrative reorientations, it is clear the conclusions drawn from them can be generalised only partially. The approach is capable of aptly identifying relevant strategic tendencies, but it would be hubristic to assume it can, without adding other layers of analysis, confirm these trends as established and 'final' arrangements.

The strategic reaction of NATO and the European Union to Russian revisionism was presented on two cases - the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) in NATO and the European Union's East StratCom Task Force (ESCTF). By studying the aspects of innovativeness, scope and cohesiveness, the article came to the conclusion that NATO's case, relying on a combination of existing measures from a previously established toolbox, can be characterised as moderate renovation. The EU's effort, marked by more radical innovativeness but marred by extremely limited scope and openly evident internal fissures, hampering its cohesiveness, merits the term isolated strategic breakthrough.

Comparing the two cases, one last remark is due: While NATO's strategic adaptation can - and has been - criticized from many angles, especially concerning its partially limited scope, the fact that the organization has mustered the will and (at least partially) resources to substantially refashion its strategic outlook for the second time since the end of Cold War (the first reversal being the reaction to 9/11), warrants at least limited optimism concerning its future reaction. Of course, transatlantic fissures since Donald Trump's elections have added to the uncertainty, but ongoing steadiness in the political and bureaucratic determination is hard to miss. On the other hand, the European Union has been under Russian disinformation onslaught for years, with the obvious goal of the discourse spread by the adversary to completely undermine the normative underpinnings of the EU as an international entity. Despite that, the reaction, besides its innovativeness, has been feeble. It is hard to escape a notion that European integration has got caught in yet another capabilities-expectations gap, only this time in a confrontation with a determined adversary bent on using it for its own purposes.