The strategy of "mılıtary non-alıgnment" and NATO

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Abstract

The war in Ukraine in 2014 brought a concept of "military non-alignment" to the fore in the countries, which are namely influenced by both the West and Russia. The war proved that national security strategy was lacking. The paper examines the ways how neutral states cope with their security in a globalized world. It covers the brief history of neutrality, its evolution process through the centuries. The terms of "neutrality" or "non-alignment" have been delineated in order to distinguish between different strategies adopted by particular countries. The focus of the paper is on the countries located in Europe. The authors attempted to discuss the strategic consequences of the policy of "military non-alignment" in the context of cooperation with NATO. At the same time, they endeavored to justify the close cooperation of neutral countries with NATO, the strongest military-political Alliance of the world.

Key words: NATO, cooperation, challenge, rhetoric, prospect.

Introduction

Approximately three decades after the end of the Cold War, NATO and Russia – strange bedfellows have again become potential adversaries. The exacerbation in relations has stretched to the Middle East as well. While the West blames Russia for meddling in neighboring democracies, Moscow accuses the West of so-called "broken promises" by the West to Russia not to expand NATO eastwards. The countries squeezed between these two parties watch closely and attentively the on-going rivalry between Russia and the West reflecting on the strategy of "military neutrality".

Even though bipolar world order came to an end, an issue of "neutrality" has been consistently discussed in the world politics since the collapse of the soviet regime. Some countries have already left their state of neutrality as a national identity. For instance, the identity of "neutrality" does not ideally suit the states, i.e. Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Ireland, which are represented in EU now. However, to some extent, they still maintain their status of neutrality as a key factor in their national strategies. Then, how to describe this kind of strategy? Therefore, the term "non-alignment" has been widely used to characterize the strategy of these countries. The terms 'neutrality' and 'non-alignment' are used in the same meaning in the military context. We focused primarily on this point while developing the paper.

There are many different approaches and theoretical lenses with which to study international relations and to make sense of events, trends and processes. Although such established theoretical lenses as realism, constructivism, Marxism, liberalism/idealism and others exist, neoclassical realism has been chosen as the means to make sense of this case study. Neoclassical realism primarily aims at explaining the foreign policies of states by referring to both international and national (domestic) levels. By doing so, the supporters of neoclassical realism claim that this theory is able to fill in the gaps found in other versions of realism, especially with respect to previous failures in explaining and predicting foreign

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policy choices. More recently, neoclassical realism has evolved toward becoming both a "theory of foreign policy" and a "theory of international politics". While a theory of foreign policy focuses on the explanation of behaviors of states in the international arena, a theory of international politics discusses the main trends in the international system, such as the supposed systemic tendency toward the formation of balances of power and the durability/stability of bipolar systems (Layla Ibrahim, Abdallah Dawood). The main objective of this article is to explain the grand strategies of individual states, which have proclaimed "military neutrality" their political identity. In the weighing of pros and cons, considerations such as the specifics of the case, i.e. the study of the influence of international institutions on international security politics and relations, provides the tools with which to delve into the roles played by NATO versus other actors (i.e. Russia) in those countries.

The question in the paper is formulated in the following way: Is the concept of military neutrality a productive political tool to maintain the national security of the states and to what extend this strategy enables them to cooperate with NATO against the backdrop of the confrontation between the West and Russia?

Results and discussion

Having scrutinized the historical experiences of different countries we may better explain various types of neutrality. The internationally accepted definition of neutrality is non-participation in a war between other states, maintenance of an impartial attitude towards the belligerents, and in peacetime not doing anything that would make neutrality impossible during wartime (The meaning of Irish neutrality).

The concept of neutrality can be traced back to the beginning of the development of the system of states in the 16th and 17th centuries and has since been embedded in the international law. The term stems from Latin "ne uter", which means "neither of the two" (Sophia Barolo, 2016). At the end of the 16th century and in the early 17th century, neutral countries were allowed to be friendly towards the side considered to be fighting for a "just cause". This implied two important elements: the neutral country had to allow the crossing of foreign forces over its territory and it had the right to mobilize its people in order to stop the conflict (Security sector reform, 2014).

At the Vienna Congress in 1815 the concept of "a permanent neutral power" was adopted. Namely, at the Congress, all European states recognized the status of a permanently neutral power to Switzerland (Jan Litavski). Thus, in the 19th century neutrality changed its meaning and implied absolute impartiality and, for the first time, standardization of provisions for the neutral status of a country to be recognized in international relations commenced (Security sector reform).

Subsequently, The Hague Convention V was enacted in The Hague in 1907. This document regulates military neutrality, determines its basic characteristics, which imply that neutral states must not support the belligerents in conflict nor interfere in the conflict. Moreover, this document grants certain rights of neutral states, such as inviolability of their territories, prohibition of using their territories for the transport of military troops etc (Jan Litavski).

During the 20th century, the concept of neutrality went through changing practices and perceptions. Firstly, the idea of collective security was born and was consolidated in the framework of the League of Nations (1919) and after World War II in the United Nations Organisation. In this picture of a supranational community, neutrality seemed to have become redundant. Any attack would have been seen as an attack on the whole international community, not only on the attacked state. This belief, however, changed quite rapidly after the formation of the blocs in the cold war and the foundation of NATO (Sophia Barolo). In the 1950s, as the tensions between East and West

became stronger, neutrality reached new legitimacy. Those states, that wanted to remain on the sidelines of the war, established their roles as observers, mediators or "peacekeepers" (Sophia Barolo).

It's also important to note that, military neutrality becomes relevant only when other states recognize that neutrality. There is a perfect example from the history. There was a country named Melos during the Peloponnesian War. Melos was small, neutral island. Athens viewed Melos as strategically important and wanted it join the Athenian allies. When Melos refused to cooperate, Athens attacked, killed all men, took women and children as slaves and gained control over Melos (Athens and Melos, 2020). Because of the creation of transnational organizations and institutions, as well as the influence of globalization and increasing interdependence between countries, today the concept of neutrality is much harder to sustain (Dajana Ostojic, 2018). Zurab Davitashvili claims that, a country should meet several criteria when making a declaration of neutrality in order to make sure that other countries recognise its neutral status. In particular, according to his assessment, first of all a country which aspires to have neutrality should not be in the geopolitical interest of a big power, should not belong to the sphere of influence of any country and should not have problems of territorial integrity or separatism. In addition, a country with guaranteed neutrality should be economically strong to provide for itself and maintain a strong and well-equipped army (Initiative of the Alliance, 2019).

The contemporary concept of military neutrality, or non-participation in wars and military alliances, is as old as the concept of soverignity. Over the centuries, military neutrality has been a strategy followed by many small states that have wanted to preserve their soverignity in the face of a balance of power among the great powers of the day. The concept lost much of its clarity with the end of the Cold War, especially in the European context. For example, three neutral states, Austria, Sweden and Finland, joined the EU in 1995. Their neutrality policy officially remained in place (as was the case with Ireland, Cyprus and Malta), but the concept itself lost its erstwhile precise meaning in the process of adaptation to the post-Cold War era and Europe's collective security needs (Filip Ejdus,2014). According to Heinz Gärtner, the concept of neutrality has proven time and again that it can adapt to new situations. The notion that the concept of neutrality is a phenomenon and a part of the Cold War is false. He justifies it in some ways. First, the history of neutrality is much older; the Swiss idea of neutrality dates back to the fifteenth and sixteenth century, however received its legal basis at the Hague convention of 1907. Second, neutrality was not constitutive of the Cold War but was its anomaly. The Cold War in Europe was about building blocs; neutrality was about staying out of them. Whereas the Cold War was the normal, neutrality was the exception (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

We may group the countries in Europe, which are not in any military bloc under five categories:

1. So-called "permanent neutrals": Sweden, Finland, Austria, Ireland and Switzerland;

2. New models, which adopted the strategy of "military neutrality": Azerbaijan and Serbia.

3. Potential candidates, which may adopt concept of "military neutrality": Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

4. Potential countries for NATO membership: North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

5. The countries with the highest level of safety: Andorra, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Malta, Vatican City.

We will not touch upon the fourth category since the objective of the paper is to lay out the "military neutrality". The last category is not the subject of the paper, if we take into account that these countries are not concerned with their security as serious as other countries.

From "neutrality" to "non-alignment". Lessons learned

According to Wilson Center, countries that are neutral and those that are non-aligned share an obligation to remain outside the bloc structure. Although the similarities between neutrality and non-alignment are clear and obvious, the differences are harder to

distinguish (Between the blocs, 1989). If at the time nonalignment was initiated, the leaders of neutral countries did not want to be confused with non-aligned group, later, as more countries opted for non-alignment and neutral countries began to participate as guests at non-aligned conferences, attitudes began to change – even to the extent of statements that, "there is no objective difference between neutrality and non-alignment". From a historical perspective, neutrality is obviously the far older concept. In contrast, non-alignment developed after World War II as a result of extensive socio-political and economic changes in the international system. Unlike the countries that adopted neutrality in war, the non-aligned countries committed themselves to peacetime activity consistent with their national interest and wished to preserve their neutral position (Between the blocs, 1989).

In this paragraph we will try to elaborate on each and every country, which adopted "military neutrality" as a foreign policy strategy. Because we may not lump all neutral countries together in order to come up with more reliable conclusions.

Sweden. Sweden's success of not being involved in any war since 1809 is often attributed to Sweden's policy of neutrality, which can be traced back to the early 19th century and the reign of Jean Baptiste Bernadotte. The basic principles of neutrality were laid down in the 1907 Hague Convention, which prescribes the rights and duties, which every neutral state has to adhere to. The precept is the neutral state's duty to refrain from war or side with either party in a conflict. Sweden has taken an obligation of maintaining national defence system seriously by upholding a strong independent defence capacity. As a direct result of its neutrality policy Sweden managed to stay out of World War I and II and was not forced to take side with either of the superpowers during the Cold War (Annika Bergman, 2014).

One of the most serious concerns of Sweden today is Russia's open demonstration of its military resources and conduct of complex operations in its neighborhood without any warning. The Crimean crisis accelerated a debate on the capabilities of the Swedish armed forces and the military presence on Gotland – a strategically important Baltic island. After this crisis, from a Swedish point of view, the Baltic Sea region is the area most exposed to increased Russian military activity (Jannicke Fiskvik, 2016). There are some other indicators that are the telltale signs of deteriorating security environment, such as a suggestion to "neutralize" Gotland in order to "ease tensions" around the Baltic Sea and an outright Russian warnings against Sweden's NATO aspiration. As ambassador Viktor Tatarintsev declared "no way to guarantee that Russia has no plans to attack Sweden" (Barbara Kunz, 2015). He claims that, "if Sweden membership is realized, there will be countermeasure. Russia will be forced to adopt countermeasures at the military level and reorient our forces and missiles. Any country joining NATO must be aware of the risks it is exposing itself to" (Barbara Kunz, 2015).

However, Sweden's partnership with NATO is consistent, comprehensive and well-developed. Sweden has participated in the NATO Response Force (NRF) since 2013. Apart from it, Sweden signed an agreement with NATO regarding host nation support in 2014. Sweden intends to increase its participation in NATO's most advanced and complex exercises, primarily within the NRF framework, as well as in NATO's large-scale exercises. Therefore, the participation in the exercises taking place in the vicinity of Sweden is of utmost importance (Jannicke Fiskvik, 2016). Nevertheless, the agreement does not confer any right on NATO to operate on or from Swedish territory without Stockholm's formal invitation (Barbara Kunz, 2015).

From the Swedish perspective, peacekeeping was a traditional Swedish forte and its participation in peacekeeping operations is a self-evident Swedish contribution to international peace and security. The specific relevance of military non-alignment as a limiting factor for Swedish international cooperation in this situation became a non-issue – at least as long as there was some form of UN mandate or consent (Anders Bjurner, 2003). Apart from it,

the polls are conducted from time to time among Swedish population regarding its NATO membership. The results show that, even though there are strong voices in favour of dropping the neutrality, the vast majority of the people in Sweden prefer to stick to the concept of neutrality. According to the polls conducted in 2014, the figures tend to show some 50% against, some 31% in favour and the rest undecided (Peter Giraudo, 2014). It should be noted that, back in 2000 the poll resulted in 29% for NATO-membership and 48% against (Barbara Kunz, 2015). The results of these two polls prove the striking similarity in the tendency of public opinion in Sweden.

Finland. Finland is another country which has adopted "military neutrality" as a foreign policy strategy. The wars against the Soviet Union in the 20th century have left their mark on Finland's security policy. In particular, the fact that Finland's allies changed several times during the Second World War has nurtured a deep-seated belief that the country ultimately has no option but to take sole responsibility for its own security. This perception is still relevant today. This is partly due to Finland's specific geostrategic position close to the Kola Peninsula, used by Russia as a key military base (Tobias Etzold, 2015).

Uhru Kekkonen, a former Finnish president, has been closely associated with Finland's Cold War neutrality policy. For him neutrality was "the way, which could best maintain contacts with the rest of the world. But neutrality is not a goal in itself. Its purpose is to promote the country's own interests. It is a means not a goal" (Annika Bergman, 2014).

Finnish defense policy is marked by continuity. Due to geographical proximity and the long shared border, Russia is, and has long been, perceived as the main potential threat that guides Finnish strategic thinking. This latter point was reemphasized by the Finnish minister of defense following the Russian-Georgian War in 2008 (Jannicke Fiskvik, 2016). Events in Ukraine have led to concerns that Finland's defense capability will deteriorate without increased investment. The growing assertiveness of Russia has revived discussions about Finland's defense strategy, particular regarding the possibility of NATO membership. Although membership does not have majority support, there is now a greater readiness to discuss the issue. Russia's recent role has in many ways reinforced the already existing positions among the Finnish public; those in favor of joining NATO continue to argue that Finnish capabilities are insufficient, and that Russia may already consider Finland a de-facto NATO member. Opponents are still concerned that NATO membership will cause Finland to be designated as a potential enemy of Russia, and provoke retaliation from Moscow (Jannicke Fiskvik, 2016). Meanwhile, in opinion polls conducted between 1996 and 2001, 60 to 80% of the respondents in Finland opposed the idea of NATO membership (Hannu Himanen, 2003). During the Crimea crisis in 2014 a new poll was conducted and according to it, only 22% of the respondents supported NATO membership (Peter Giraudo, 2014).

Nevertheless, after Wales Summit (2014), both Finland and Sweden have been seeking closer cooperation as PfP countries to the extent that they may be regarded as informal NATO members. If the Ukraine scenario was to be repeated in the Baltics, there is a possibility that Finland and Sweden may join NATO in response to Russian threats. In this situation, the issue of NATO membership will arguably gain further incentive (Jannicke Fiskvik, 2016).

Austria. The core of Austria's neutrality depends on its military nature. The military neutrality is enshrined in the "Declaration of Neutrality": Austria may neither join any military alliances, nor can there be foreign troops stationed on its territory. The legal principle that neutral states are not allowed to participate in a war, in the sense of international law, was not regulated directly in the Declaration of Neutrality but resulted from the prevailing understanding of neutrality. Austria closely cooperates with NATO in important and necessary areas, such as crisis management, humanitarian or peacekeeping operations. Cooperative security and the concept of partners offer the possibility of co-decision for

every operation with Austrian participation (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

Austria's status of neutrality was reached when all occupying forces agreed after the Second World War that they all would withdraw their troops from the Austrian territory (Heinz Gärtner, 2018). In its neutrality law of 1955, Austria agreed not to join a military alliance and not to allow any foreign military bases to be stationed on its territory (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

However, Austria quickly adopted Western values and started a process of integration in the market economy, which eventually led to its accession to the European Union in the 1990s. This development was accepted by the Soviet Union, mainly because Austria did not become a member of NATO (Heinz Gärtner, 2018). Moreover, one could argue, that Austria's neutrality law was the beginning of the détente policy between the East and the West (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

The Neutrality Act remains in force, namely that Austria will neither join a military alliance nor permit the stationing of foreign troops on its territory. In an international context the core substance of the Neutrality Act equals the status of a non-alligned country. Therefore the Austrian Security and Defence Doctrine concludes that the international status of Austria corresponds to that of a non-alligned state, such as Finland and Sweden. However, the Doctrine states that Austria's foreign and security policy should be shaped in accordance with further development of Austria's relations with NATO within the framework of the tailored cooperation programme. The tailored cooperation programme was agreed between Austria and NATO in 2000 and it offers the possibility of an intensified exchange between Austria and NATO in the framework of a bilateral political dialogue and the PfP's military and civil cooperation (Martin Krüger, 2003).

For Austria, Finland, and Sweden, neutrality also included an active, positive foreign policy in pursuit of international peace and justice, in order to make contributions to peace and stability. As Austrian President Heinz Fischer (2004–2016) explained during the presidential election campaign in 2004, "only neutrality combined with international solidarity, only that kind of neutrality policy Austria is focusing on, can be the fundament for a new peace policy today the world particularly needs" (Gunther Hauser, 2007).

Ireland. Ireland's military neutrality is a core element of its foreign policy, as stated in 2015 Foreign Policy Review "The Global Island" and reconfirmed in the White Paper on Defence (Dáil Éireann Debate, 2019). Ireland's historic neutrality does not however indicate isolationism. It brought a deep commitment to international peace and security, conflict-prevention and support for human rights. Since joining the United Nations, Ireland has demonstrated its readiness to deploy its armed forces overseas in the service of international peace and security. Through the United Nations, as well as regional organisations, such as the European Union, Ireland has sought to play a proactive role in preventing and managing conflicts and keeping peace. This has reflected the view that military neutrality on its own is not enough to maintain conditions of peace and security internationally, and that it is also desirable to play a constructive role internationally (Keith McBean, 2003).

Irish participation in NATO during the Cold War would have been difficult due to legal issues as NATO members have to accept and respect each other's borders and back then a territorial claim on Northern Ireland was still a part of the Irish constitution (Peppi Heinikainen, 2019).

Ireland cooperates with NATO in a variety of areas, including peace-support operations. An important focus is to work together to develop military capabilities and improve the interoperability of the Irish armed forces with Allied and other partners' armed forces in NATO, EU and UN-led missions. Irish troops have been deployed on many peacekeeping missions. NATO fully respects Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality, which allows its armed forces to be used for peacekeeping and crisis management operations, where there is a UN mandate, a government decision and parliamentary approval (Relations with Ireland, 2018).

However, Andrew Cottey assesses the relationship between Ireland and NATO, characterising it as a distinctly low-profile partnership (Andrew Cottey, 2018). Despite the open door invitation from NATO leaders, it does not seem that Ireland will be making any moves to join the alliance (Emily Simonin, 2013).

Switzerland. The Swiss neutrality is a strategic concept, which has preserved Switzerland from getting involved in wars for two centuries. Neutrality is based not only on the resolve to keep Switzerland out of international wars, but also on a domestic consideration – to prevent the country from dividing along cultural and linguistic lines. It is Switzerland's historical experience that wars between its neighbours would have threatened national cohesion if Switzerland had chosen sides. Switzerland managed to stay out of both world wars, and this is attributed by many Swiss to the legal, political and emotional aspects of Swiss neutrality. As far as Switzerland is concerned, neutrality is less a freely chosen position of government, but rather an essential part of national identity (Philippe Welti, 2003). However, the character of the Swiss neutrality also changed after the demise of the Cald War. Thus, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia a huge number of refugees seeking asylum flocked into Switzerland. Then it proved that that crises outside their immediate neighbourhood could have a similar impact on Switzerland. It soon became obvious that strict neutrality would not serve Switzerland's interests. The Swiss government recognised the need to support the international action, first by opening the air space for transit flights of AWACS aircraft needed to supervise the no-fly-zone in Bosnia, and in the end by even authorising transit by land for military supplies needed for the implementation of the Dayton Accord. Thus, government had adapted within three years – between 1992 and 1995 – the practice of Swiss neutrality policy without changing the overall profile and status of Switzerland as a neutral state (Philippe Welti, 2003).

Swiss cooperation with NATO is based on a longstanding policy of military neutrality and areas of practical cooperation that match joint objectives. NATO fully respects its neutrality. Switzerland has supported NATO-led operations in the Balkans, where it contributes to the Kosovo Force. The country also supported the operation in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2007. Switzerland shares its expertise with NATO by offering education and training to Allies and other partner countries. Areas of speciality include: humanitarian missions, international humanitarian law, human rights and civil-military cooperation, search and rescue training, security policy, arms control and disarmament, transparency and democratic control of armed forces (Relations with Switzerland, 2018).

Serbia. Serbia is one of the countries, which claims military neutrality even though its neutral policy has not been recognized by any country within the international community. General Milan Mojsilović, Chief of the General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces justified the military neutrality on the case of Serbia: This choice was based on historical circumstances, as well as political estimation that the foreign policy goals of the country can be best achieved by pursuing that policy. However, Serbia is also cooperating with various international actors on security matters, from United Nations to Partnership for Peace with NATO. "I believe that military neutrality is not a threat for widespread cooperation with other stakeholders. Even though Serbia is neutral has strong partnership with other international organisations, OSCE, EU, UN", General Mojsilović emphasized (Military neutrality, 2019). Dragan Luković claims that, continuous pursuit of the concept of military neutrality of Serbia, especially in the conditions of the spread of low-intensity conflicts between the US and Russia, does not "make" Serbia an enemy to any important global political superpower, and based on this, political, economic, military and cultural relations with all states – alliances can continue to evolve (Dragan Luković, 2019).

During the visit of the Russian Minister of Defense, Sergey Shoygu, to Belgrade in mid-November 2013, the Deputy Prime Minister at the time, Aleksandar Vuc ic, had the difficult task of defending the policy of Serbian military neutrality in the light of Russian expectations.

"Serbia will not join NATO, but neither will it join CSTO, which is under the umbrella of Moscow. Her goal is to be a militarily neutral country", Vuc ic stressed at the time (Security sector reform). Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said on November 13, 2019 that cooperation with NATO is important for Serbia and that Serbia wants it to be even better, but that the country's military neutrality is absolutely not in question. "Cooperation with NATO is based on clear premises and rests on the respect for Serbia's military neutrality, without any conditions requiring it to become a member of the Alliance. At the same time, Serbia is open to further advancing of the political dialogue and concrete cooperation with NATO in all areas of common interest. The policy of military neutrality, as the foundation of our policies not only regards NATO, but all other military alliances, is not being brought into question", Dacic said at the opening of the Seventh Belgrade NATO Week in Belgrade (Dacic: Serbia's Military, 2019).

Azerbaijan. Geopolitical realties are what largely shape a state's attitude towards others. The geopolitics of the South Caucasus is complicated, volatile and fragile. The paths of the three South Caucasus republics have been different ever since in terms of their geo-political orientations, with Armenia being a CSTO member, Azerbaijan pursuing an independent policy regarding global powers, and Georgia, apparently, demonstrating a pro-NATO position (Khayal Iskandarov, 2018). The lack of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia's increased assertiveness in the region and the absence of a NATO presence are central elements in understanding the current situation in the region (Elman Nasirov, 2018).

A non-aligned approach to relations with global and regional powers has been in practice long before Azerbaijan's formal integration in Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 2011. It makes sense to differentiate three phases of Azerbaijan's foreign policy after it gained the independence for the second time: 1991-1993, 1993-2003, 2003-present). The overridingly important objective goal in the last two phases was to maintain Azerbaijan's multivector policy. Thus, Azerbaijan's non-alignment is an upshot of pragmatic foreign policy rooted in ground realities. Rather than representing a drastic shift in its external orientation, Azerbaijan's membership in NAM is a natural extension of the "multivector policy" introduced by the national leader Heydar Aliyev and is successfully conducted by the incumbent government. Azerbaijan has tacitly supported NATO while strategic objectives chime with each other's and contradicted the policy measures what it found irrelevant (for instance Kosovo issue). Azerbaijanis is one of the active members of the anti-terrorist coalition, dedicates certain amount of troops to these operations. Between one third and 40 percent of US supplies to Afghanistan went through Azerbaijan or its air space. Then, Azerbaijan eschewed imposing sanctions on Iran while the whole Europe did it. On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that siding with the West it opposed to some of the moves that Russia and Iran made (regarding Russo-Georgian and Syrian wars and Crimea crisis). The objectives of Azerbaijan's security policy are to preserve its independence, maintain peace, contribute to stability and security in the region and strengthen international peace and security. Azerbaijan as a NAM country pursues a policy of non-participation in military alliances. This security policy, enabling the country to remain neutral in the event of conflicts, serves it well. For instance, choosing Baku to arrange the meetings between the US and Russian (February 2017), as well as NATO and Russian (September 2017) military leaders was not a coincidence. Azerbaijan's multivector policy enables it to earn friends in an international level. Azerbaijan's membership in the NAM provides it with a formal foundation for its independent foreign policy that potentially reinforces its leadership position within and beyond the South Caucasus region. Looking to the future, it is more apparent than ever that security is more than the absence of military conflict. Threats to peace and the security of the country can best be averted by acting concertedly and in cooperation with other countries (Khayal Iskandarov, 2019). As

General Robert Brieger, Chief of Defence Staff of the Austrian Ministry of Defence stated: "If you don't export security, you will import uncertainty" (Military neutrality, 2018).

It goes without saying that, the lack of military integration makes it difficult, even impossible to facilitate the solution of different problems and security challenges. Azerbaijan's participation in NAM is entrenched in its identity and is a telltale sign of neutrality. Integration into NATO is incompatible with neutrality. However, within the partnership programmes, Azerbaijan can boost its military capacity that is similar to those of the members consistent with the measures to provide its neutrality. Azerbaijan's neutrality does not mean "isolation", it is an engaged neutrality which necessitates the cooperation with NATO, without aiming membership. The old Swiss concept of "sitting still" should definitely be left behind (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

At the political level, Azerbaijan pursues a strategy of strengthening relations with the West, Turkey, Russia, Iran and China simultaneously. At the military level, it is particularly interested in cooperation with NATO and Russia. As a non-aligned country, Azerbaijan is looking up to the most successful models with strong defence strategy. The key elements Azerbaijan's today's strategy coincide perfectly with Swedish "Hultqvist doctrine" (Heinz Gärtner, 2018), which intends boosting capabilities and seeking international cooperation. While its soaring economy enables Azerbaijan to boost its capacity, the cooperation with different organizations, particularly with NATO facilitates its integration. The objective is crystal clear: to be non-aligned, reliable, strong and well-integrated state.

The evolution of non-alignment has clearly shown that neutrality and non-alignment are not mutually exclusive concepts. Neutrality has not prevented the emergence of non-alignment, and nonalignment, with its more active role, has not eliminated neutrality. On the contrary, the neutral and non-aligned countries have adopted joint positions in a number of meetings (from the United Nations to major international conferences), and it was under the influence of the large group of non-aligned countries that the European neutral states began to adopt a more international role (Between the blocs). In short, military non-alignment is the policy of not joining any military alliance while cooperating with everyone.

The strategy of "non-alignment" in the context of cooperation with NATO

The conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the Crimea crisis in 2014 provoked a new debate, particularly within NATO, regarding the range and future of military obligations of the alliance.

According to Barbara Kunz, after Russia's revisionist policy became more noticeable, its relations with some non-NATO countries can be a new "litmus test" (while Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were considered the same in 1994) (Barbara Kunz, 2015). As Clifford Gaddy and Fiona Hill persuasively argue that, 2007 and 2008 marked the decisive turning point in relations between Vladimir Putin and the West. At the February 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin gave the following public remarks: "It turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, and we continue to strictly fulfill the treaty obligations and do not react to these actions at all. I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?" (Michael E. O'Hanlon, 2017).

Officially, NATO stood by its decision to continue its expansion into the East and South of Europe. The Alliance proved it by incorporating Montenegro. However, NATO has worked hard on its relationship with Russia since the Cold War. It agreed not to station significant foreign combat forces on the territory of any of its members admitted since the Cold War ended till Warsaw Summit when a decision was made to station more forces in Baltic countries and Poland. It also created mechanisms, such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the Partnership for Peace program, and the NATO-

Russia Council to reach out in collegial and collaborative ways to Russia and other former members of the Warsaw Pact. Yet this is an American, and Western perspective. Russians see NATO as a physical threat (Michael E. O'Hanlon, 2017).

Barbara Kunz claims that, when the Georgian War broke out in August 2008, this litmus test proved to be highly relevant. The Russo-Georgian conflict had little effect on general Western approaches to Russia. It thus took the events unfolding in Ukraine from the Maidan demonstrations onward for Sweden to reassess the Russian threat (Michael E. O'Hanlon, 2017).

Yet the dilemma is obvious. If Georgia joined NATO and a further military conflict between Georgia and Russia erupted or was provoked, NATO could even, in an extreme scenario, be dragged into a conflict with nuclear Russia, due to the commitment of assistance in Article V of its Treaty. If NATO did not act, its commitments of assistance would seem unreliable both internally and externally, potentially with fatal consequences. Under these circumstances, a seemingly strange solution becomes a viable political option: neutrality for Georgia and security guarantees from NATO and Russia (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

The chances of neutrality being accepted look bleak currently in Georgia as well as in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and, of course, Moscow. Certainly though, it might be an interesting political option for all involved parties (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

It was clearly evident that, both Georgia and Ukraine were more or less encouraged by the West before the conflicts broke out within their territories. It was a lesson for both countries that, the Western support was not unflinching. During the period of bipolarity in the Cold War, Eisenhower did not come to the aid of the Hungarian insurgents although the United States supported them rhetorically, President Johnson was silent during the uprising of the Prague spring 1968, and President Reagan only verbally supported the Polish protests in 1981 (Heinz Gärtner, 2018). With the benefit of hindsight, Ukraine understands that it cannot rely on the United States to go to war with Russia.

Military neutrality does not mean demilitarization or disarmament. Militarily neutral countries own the right of advancing their military capabilities. Eisenhower justified it in the case of Austria at a press conference in May 1955: "It seems that the idea has developed that one could build a number of neutralized states from North to South through Europe. Now, remember: The Treaty regarding the neutralization of Austria does not mean that Austria would be disarmed. It is not a void, not a military void. This kind of neutrality is very different from a military vacuum" (Heinz Gärtner, 2018). According to Gerhard Jandl, Austria has to embrace the current security situation and deal with serious problems. To this end, active and forward-looking participation in the EU and as a NATO partner is necessary. Austria has to be taken seriously as a player in foreign policy and not dismissed as a freeloader" (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

The model of "Austrian neutrality" could be an interesting solution for Georgia. Following the logic of neutrality, it would furthermore imply the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Georgia, including those rogue provinces, which declared themselves independent: South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The price to pay for the withdrawal – the waiving of a Georgian membership in NATO – would be less a concession to Russia, but rather a requirement for a sovereign Georgia, freed from foreign troops and with territorial integrity. This step would in no way exclude the possibility of close cooperation with NATO – such as the ones practiced by Austria, Finland and Sweden (Heinz Gärtner, 2018). In 2019, the members of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia began to dynamically push forward the idea of Georgia adopting a military non-alignment status. The leaders of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia consider this initiative within different contexts. For instance, Ada Marshania called upon the Georgian population to become a member in the "military non-alignment" organisation and stated: "Georgia, similar to 140 nations, should join the famous international organisation – the

NAM. After the UN, this organisation is the most representative, largest and most famous in the world." Whilst speaking on the non-alignment issue, Irma Inashvili states: "Today, models of Austria, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland are unique for Georgia. We do not need any country's military base in Georgia" (Initiative of the Alliance). Regarding Ukraine, a guarantee that it will not join a military alliance based on international law might be acceptable for Russia. In addition to its neutrality, a separate State Treaty regulated minority rights, limited certain capabilities of the military and also guaranteed that Austria would not join a new union with Germany ("Anschluss"), as it happened in 1938 (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

12 years have passed since NATO's Bucharest Summit, when Georgia and Ukraine were promised membership. For the time being and foreseeable future the the realization of their NATO membership remains bleak. Russia is an integral part of new security architecture in its "near abroad". In case these countries (Ukraine, Georgia) adopt the strategy of military neutrality Russia would be motivated to withdraw its troops from their territories in a verifiable manner.

Georgia's attempts to integrate into the West might be implemented through EU. In the Ukrainian case, such a provision for the Ukraine or parts of it combined with the status of neutrality might guarantee Ukraine's unity. Moreover, a State Treaty could expressly detail the Russian minorities within the country's borders, as well as clarify the future status of Crimea, whereby the unity of Ukraine should be guaranteed (Heinz Gärtner, 2018).

To sum up, the strategy of military non-alignment and close relations with NATO do not exclude each other. All aforementioned countries desperately need cooperation with well advanced organizations and NATO provides a golden opportunity for it. The close interaction between member country and partners in the NATO context will definetely contribute to durable security in different regions. NATO's efforts to project stability are multifaceted. Therefore, the Alliance may offer tailored programs to the partners mentioned in the paper to help them enhance their resilience and provide for their own security (Brauss Heinrich, 2018). Through the constant adaptation of its courses, training events, exercises and the introduction of new concepts and capabilities, NATO ensures it is able to respond to emerging security challenges (Education and training, 2019). Exercising is paramount for maintaining, testing and evaluating the readiness and interoperability of Allies and partners.

Conclusions

The context in which neutral states shape their security strategy has undergone serious quality changes. However, this strategy still remains viable in the contemporary international environment. Since the nature of the concept evolves, it has a significant impact on the security environment. Because, nowadays neutral countries do not stay on the sidelines of the international politics. As long as the international organizations remain open to diversity, neutrality is not an impediment to common efforts in pursuit of security and peace. The concept of "military non-alignment" (for instance, adopted by the Republic of Azerbaijan) may serve as a model for the countries, which face with the dilemma of choosing sides. There is a chance both for the West and Russia to prove that they are interested in the detente between them. That is an opportune moment to grant Azerbaijan's efforts in order to motivate others squeezed between aforementioned parties. The choice of Baku as a place for the negotiations between the US and Russian (February 2017), as well as NATO and Russian (September 2017) military leaders makes us recall the same way that Austria presented itself as a meeting point, by hosting, for example, meetings between the Presidents of the United States and the Soviet Union, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in 1961, and Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev in 1973. All countries, which adopted military nonalignment policy, need to implement intensive reforms in the security and defence sector in order to

enable them to rely purely on their own military capabilities. NATO provides unique tools to facilitate these reforms. Taking this factor into account, these countries should use all the possibilities offered by NATO of course without renouncing their neutrality. Remaining outside military alliances enables them to pursue a multi-pronged policy to enhance their security.

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