Strategic Communication's Role in Eliminating Disinformation's Impact in Time of Current Geopolitical Challenges

Tomáš KOLOMAZNÍK

Department of Law and Cyber Security, AMBIS University, Lindnerova 575/1, 180 00, Prague, Czech Republic

Correspondence: t.kolomaznik@seznam.cz

Abstract

The article presents strategic communication as one of the tools used to counter disinformation, especially during global security challenges, which undoubtedly includes the fight against disinformation. Disinformation has recently become a significant global security challenge that individual states must face. In this context, individual states and international organizations are looking for practical tools to eliminate the effects of disinformation campaigns. Strategic communication undoubtedly belongs among these tools. Nevertheless, strategic communication has several advantages compared to other approaches, such as restrictive measures or educational activities based on critical thinking. The advantage of strategic communication is that we choose the topics we want to communicate ourselves and the methods and tools for their dissemination. In this way, we will avoid several negative effects, such as deepening the polarization of society or cognitive dissonance. Attention is paid to the institutional security of strategic communications. Creating an "ecosystem" that would mainly operate outside state institutions appears to be effective. This contribution aims to present the optimal strategic communication model and its pillars. Another effort is to present the so-called "strategic communication ecosystem," its mission, and its role in the fight against disinformation.

KEY WORDS: *Polycrisis, Disinformation, Fight Against Disinformation, Strategic Communication, Behavioural Nudging, "Ecosystem"*

1. Introduction

Disinformation has become a phenomenon today and is the subject of discussion. The COVID-19 pandemic started the so-called infodemic, which meant that the information space was filled with different narratives. In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the financial and energy crisis, the world has entered a period of so-called polycrisis. Polycrisis means great danger, which can even result in a war conflict [6]. The polycrisis, or several parallel crises, brought another wave of disinformation narratives, which are associated with the war in Ukraine, the energy or financial crisis, migration, etc. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that risks like disinformation and societal polarisation are very serious as they can limit our capabilities to deal with other challenges. In a special address at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024, she mentioned that this is not the time for polarisation but for rebuilding trust [10].

Disinformation, manipulation of facts, and other influence operations thus pose a great danger to society's stability and citizens' trust in democratic principles and official authorities. There is no doubt about the seriousness of this situation. Recent revelations of activities around the pro-Russian Website Voice of Europe are concrete evidence of interference in the European Parliament elections. The Czech intelligence services revealed a network that was involved in the spread of Ukrainian propaganda in Europe. According to the Czech intelligence services, money was provided to politicians in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Hungary and Poland in exchange for spreading Russian propaganda. In Poland, for example, it is being investigated very intensively [15].

Disinformation thus represents a new security challenge that has been talked about for many years. The information space thus represents a new battlefield. This phenomenon is specific because it blurs the boundaries between the purely military and civilian spheres. For this reason, it is urgent to find solutions that will be applicable to the whole society. Thus, society's resilience becomes one of the key challenges for ensuring national defence.

The key question remains: How can disinformation narratives and depolarization of society be eliminated? There are several approaches to eliminating the spread of disinformation narratives, from restricting and shutting down websites to educational campaigns and developing critical thinking.

The mentioned activities have their limits, especially in times of crisis. Restrictions can lead to even greater polarization of society, education, and the development of critical thinking, which is a long-term issue. For this reason, strategic communication is an effective tool in eliminating disinformation narratives. The goal of this contribution is not only to present strategic communication but also to analyze to what extent the Czech Republic can use it to build a resilient society facing global risks.

2. Strategic Communication and Behavioral Nudging: Tools for Countering Disinformation in Crisis Situations

As we have already indicated, several approaches exist to eliminate disinformation narratives. Each approach has its advantages and limitations. Let's introduce them step by step and show how effective they are.

One of the very often mentioned tools for combating disinformation is critical thinking. Developing critical thinking is not a one-time task but a daily commitment. It involves the systematic analysis of information, the ability to recognize its validity, analyse arguments, and avoid misleading content. This process includes logical reasoning, integration of evidence, and cross-referencing with other sources. Moreover, critical thinking necessitates introspection, where individuals examine their beliefs, admit mistakes, and show a willingness to correct them [2].

Psychologists and scientists who study the influence of human behaviour and decision-making processes believe that critical thinking is a relatively insignificant part of solving everyday situations compared to human spontaneity. Critical thinking relies on rational thinking, which predominantly engages the conscious brain system two, making up just 5% of brain capacity, while emotions and intuition control the remaining 95%. It is generally known that disinformation narratives primarily use emotion, which guarantees their success. In everyday life and when dealing with common situations, people do not make decisions rationally but subconsciously based on predefined patterns of behaviour. Factual argumentation is based on so-called heuristic approaches, which we use when problems seem familiar to us and, therefore, we no longer need additional information. In everyday life, we make decisions based on so-called cognitive bias. However, disinformation uses just cognitive bias. These "mental shortcuts" that usually break the rules of logic make us easy to manipulate [8]. Critical thinking does not 100% guarantee that people will not succumb to disinformation.

The development of critical thinking is possible through educational initiatives. Effectively setting up educational activities containing information and digital skills requires a longer period, and its results will manifest only in a longer time horizon. In other words, rationality plays a minor role in everyday decision-making and problem-solving. While developing critical thinking in the form of educational activities is essential, it does not guarantee that the "consumption" of disinformation will decrease since disinformation is not based on rationality but on emotions. As stated above, emotions are essential in people's everyday decisions (see Fig. 1).
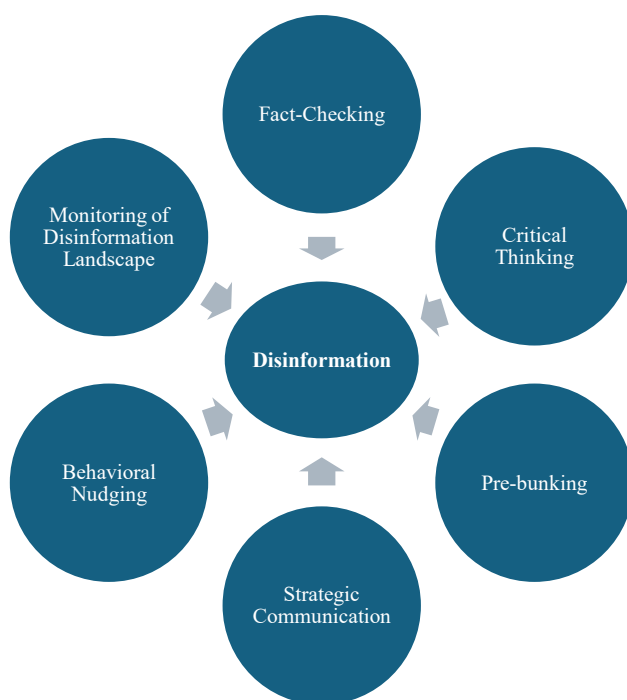

Fig. 1. A system of tools for countering disinformation narratives. Created by author.

Another approach is fact-checking. Fact-checking goes hand in hand with critical thinking. Fact-checking is one of the primary and first methods to uncover disinformation. However, fact-checking is more of the domain of journalists, politicians, and scientists. It is the very optimistic assumption that the average reader will check every article after reading it to see if it is true. However, the role of fake checking must be considered precisely because it is a crucial method by which we can analyse disinformation narratives. Currently, several platforms are dedicated to debunking disinformation narratives. These platforms should primarily be used by journalists, politicians, scientists or opinion makers, all those who are significantly involved in shaping [3].

Along with the fact-checking method, monitoring individual disinformation narratives and campaigns is essential. Practical tools have been developed in this regard, and several companies or platforms are dedicated to this. As an example from the Czech and Slovak environment, we can mention companies such as Semantic Vision, Gerulata, or the Czech Elves platform. Campaign monitoring is important, especially when setting up a strategy to eliminate disinformation narratives. We need to know and understand the information environment and its dynamics to develop the right plan.

Another method associated with fact-checking and critical thinking is various forms of pre-bunking. Google began using this method, which is called vaccination against disinformation. This method searches for and detects in advance possible errors and flaws in arguments or claims that could be spread as disinformation. This will increase the likelihood that people will be guided by facts and correct information and not fall victim to manipulation [7].

Strategic communication and behavioural nudging are another tool for countering disinformation narratives. Strategic communication is an active form of combating disinformation. Compared to the approaches mentioned above, which are oriented towards individual attitudinal changes, strategic communication and behavioural nudging rely more on behavioural changes. This aspect is crucial for us, especially when dealing with a crisis. Especially in times of crisis, when we need to act very quickly, we have to use tools to persuade the population to do what we want them to do, regardless of whether they fully identify with them. It is generally known that people rarely change their attitudes, and when they do, it is over a long period of time [9].

On the other hand, this does not mean that we should give up on other approaches. Critical thinking, as well as fact-checking or monitoring disinformation narratives, plays a key role in the resilience of the population's resistance to disinformation narratives, it sets us a real mirror of the situation in which we find ourselves. The disadvantage, especially with critical thinking, is the time frame when we get results over a more extended period. Other methods require a certain level of expertise that the general population does not possess. Strategic communication, together with behavioural nudging, thus appears as a flexible tool, especially in times of crisis when we have to take quick measures.

3. Summarizing the Essence of Strategic Communication: Supporting Goals and Gaining Support

Strategic communication is one of the most discussed topics in the Czech Republic. In 2021, the Czech Republic adopted the National Strategy for Countering Hybrid Impact and subsequently the Action Plan for the National Strategy for Countering Hybrid Impact. In 2024, a government coordinator for strategic communication was appointed [14]. However, there is still a discussion on how to tackle this issue and create an effective and functional system.

Strategic communication is not a new phenomenon, but historically, it has related to the existence of organizational units of different levels. Paul A. Argenti, Robert A. Howell, and Karen A. Beck define strategic communication as a tool for promoting a company or firm's overall strategy and thus strengthening its position [1].

According to Haseeb Tariq, strategic communication can be understood as an in-depth process that considers who we are talking to, why we are talking to them, how and when we will speak to them, what form the communication content should take and what channels we should use to share it [16].

In book Information War from 2017, Karel Řehka discusses strategic communication as a complex communication process that tries to plant a specific message in the target group's mind, while all messages sent must be coherent and mutually supportive. Such communication can subsequently change people's behaviour, which is the desired goal of strategic communication [12].

In security [5], for example, strategic communication is understood as:

- "integrated communication"; that is understood as an umbrella term for any communication aimed at achieving a goal, and thus including different disciplines;
- communication conducted at the strategic level of the organization's management; clearly distinguished from the tactical and support level of communication;
- communication conducted in the context of military and national power;
- an alternative name for the discipline of public communication.

Strategic communication has a wide range of definitions; for this reason, it refers to various communication activities that are not strategic communication in themselves but can be part of it, such as crisis communication or public relations. If we summarize the individual definitions, we can conclude that strategic communication, on the one hand, is intended to support the goals that we are trying to achieve, whether it is a private or societal subject. We must convince individuals of the correctness of our goals and efforts so that they identify with them and support them. If we were to give a specific example, if we want people to vaccinate us, we have to convince them that this step is correct. In this regard, we do not have time to educate people about what vaccination will bring them and to what extent it is safe or not. Another example is

Ukraine's support. In the Czech Republic, there are different opinions on whether to continue supplying weapons to Ukraine or to create pressure to conclude peace at any cost. In this situation, explaining the essence of the problem is less effective, but the goal is rather to focus on what the support mentioned will bring us and what impact it will have. Another topic that strategic communication can cover is the motivation of the population to actively participate in the defence of the country, whether by joining the armed forces or active reserves.

4. Understanding Behavioural Nudging

An important part of strategic communication is behavioural nudging, i.e. "pushing" or "pushing" towards certain behaviour. The nudging theory was described by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein in their publication Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness [13].

Nudging is used mainly in marketing and economics, but this is not the case. We can also see the use of nudging in politics and other social spheres. In 2010, David Cameron's UK government created The Nudge Unit. The name "Nudge" is based on the book above by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein. The Nudge department has worked on various policy areas, such as encouraging people to pay their taxes on time or increasing organ donation. This centre played an irreplaceable role during the COVID-19 period [11]. France has also created a similar centre. Eric Singler created this centre in 2013. Eric Singer is among the world's recognized experts in behavioural nudging. Centre played a significant role in the fight against COVID-19, in particular [4]. Why is behavioural nudging an important part of strategic communication? In general, it can be said that it is a persuasive tool that creates a positive message. Above all, it can be effective in communicating sensitive topics that can cause a negative reaction in society. Examples can be mentioned topics such as Covid-19 or the war in Ukraine.

5. The Main Steps for Creating a Strategic Communication System

We will try to create an optimal model of strategic communication based on the approaches mentioned above. This is not an ideal model but rather a line of thinking we should follow when creating it.

Creating a strategic communication system is not a simple process. It consists of several steps. Let's introduce them briefly (see Fig. 2).
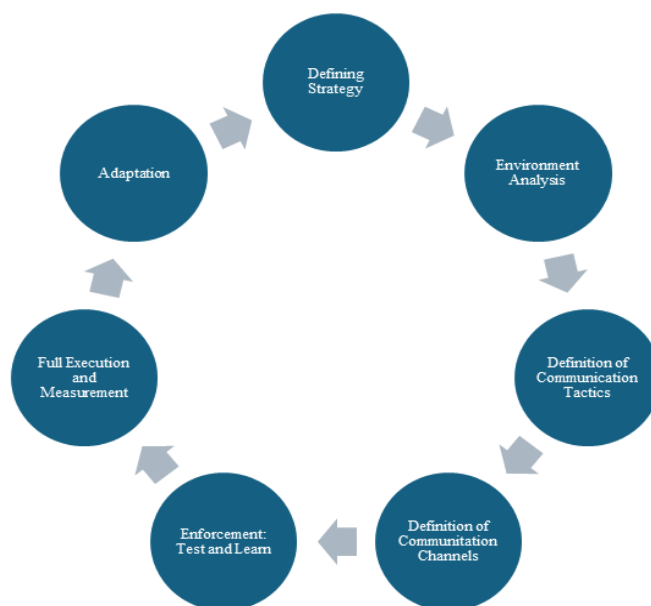

Fig. 2. A system of Strategic Communication. Created by author.

The key questions are how to set up a strategic communication system and the key activities:

1) The **planning process** must undoubtedly begin by defining a long-term but achievable goal. If we were to give a practical example from the time of Covid-19, a defined goal would be a high vaccination rate for the population.
2) The cornerstone of our strategy is a comprehensive **understanding of the current state**, encompassing both the internal and external environment. This environmental analysis is crucial, as it includes an assessment of knowledge, target groups, communication spaces, expenditures, and relevant topics, providing a solid foundation for our strategic planning process.
3) The following steps involve defining **communication tactics** based on the target audience we want to influence. If we were to use Covid-19 as an example again, the different ways of communicating with the older and younger populations would be important.
4) The next step is defining effective channels and **Touch Points.** This communication matrix, which specifies messages, media and touch points, is essential for effectiveness, considering the different impacts of the same

message in different contexts. We will use other Touch Points for the younger target group and others for the older, etc.

5) The implementation phase involves **testing and learning, optimizing communication** formats for different environments, and fine-tuning the media mix for various population groups.

6) Once we have optimized the communication and media mix, we embark on **full implementation**. This phase is marked by continuous measurement of key metrics, which serve as our compass, guiding us to verify the extent to which we have achieved our set goal. This data-driven approach ensures we stay on track and make informed decisions. If metrics prove insufficient for strategic goals, adjustments are made to ensure alignment with overall goals.

7) If we verify that the metrics are functional, we enter the **adaptation phase,** when the strategic communication system fulfils our goals. What is important is how we will measure communication effectiveness and what we will consider success. For example, indicators can include the population's awareness of the need to wear masks or the percentage of the population that has been vaccinated.

The effectiveness of strategic communication in influencing behaviour depends on several factors:

1) Scope of interventions, or reaching a broad part of the audience or our target group. Sometimes, we don't have to focus exclusively on the entire population, but only on a selected group.

2) Hit frequency emphasizes the need for frequent and successful content delivery. The point is that frequent repetition of the message better reaches the audience's awareness.

3) The third factor, quality and relevant content, plays a key role in attracting attention. Its timeliness is essential, underscoring the importance of your role in creating impactful content.

4) "Flooding the media space" is, in essence, about gaining the dominance of our communicated narratives over the narratives of disinformers.

6. The Need to Create a Strategic Communication Ecosystem

Setting up the system, especially who will implement and support strategic communication, remains a key issue. What should be its institutional and personnel provisions? If strategic communication is exclusively provided by the state administration, it may be perceived as government propaganda.

Table 1.

Strategic Communication Ecosystem

Know-how	Organizations
Data experts	State Institutions
Behavioural / Nudge experts	Incubators / start ups
Marketing experts	Think Tanks
Social media experts	Ad / PR agencies
Journalists	NGOs
Designers	Bureaucrats & politicians
Creatives	IT & Data experts

At the same time, an overall strategic communication system needs to be created over time and not dependent on one election period. One way is to create and support an "ecosystem". Under the ecosystem, we can imagine institutions, experts, and know-how. The advantage of the ecosystem is its timelessness. Most of the elements of this ecosystem are outside state institutions, thereby declaring a certain independence. The ecosystem consists of two pillars (see Table 1). One of the pillars is know-how, which is carried by experts in communication and marketing, as well as designers, journalists, and creatives. The second pillar is institutions, not only state ones but also non-governmental organizations, think tanks, IT companies, etc. However, we must perceive the system set up in this way as a natural element of our efforts. Its possible institutionalization could lead to its less effectiveness, while at the same time, it could give the impression that it is ultimately a system supporting state or government propaganda.

7. Conclusions

There is no doubt that disinformation has become a major global security challenge. Central and Eastern European states are exposed to extensive disinformation campaigns and influence operations, especially by Russia. In this regard, they are logically looking for ways to counter these campaigns and eliminate their impact. Fighting disinformation and eliminating

its impact on society has become a significant challenge for national security. Restrictive methods are less effective and can be perceived as an attempt to limit freedom of speech, which is a very sensitive topic in post-communist countries. Other approaches related to education and the development of critical thinking require a more extended period. For this reason, strategic communication is an effective tool. What is essential, however, is the creation of a concrete system of strategic communication based on its individual pillars, which we have presented. In the Czech Republic, as well as in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, we are at the beginning of the whole process. We are gathering experience not only from the states that have this system in place but also from our experience so far, which has been gained from the period of COVID-19 and from facing Russia's disinformation campaigns. If we were to mention the situation in the Czech Republic, so far, many of the measures mentioned in the strategic documents have not been effectively implemented. Currently, our system lacks an institution that would coordinate the entire process. However, the Czech government is starting to address this problem. The appointment of a government coordinator of strategic communication is the first concrete step.

On the other hand, the key steps in creating an overall system are still ahead of us. It will be important to define the topics to be communicated and the tools and methods of communication. The next step is to create an effective ecosystem in which a wide range of experts and scientifically recognized capacities will need to be involved. Creating an ecosystem is key, especially to gaining societal trust in communication activities.

Acknowledgements

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Security Strategies of the Visegrad Group Countries in the Current Security Environment

Jiří BARTA[1]**, Jiří KALENDA**[2]**, Pavel KINCL**[3]

[1]*Department of Military Theory, Faculty of Military Leadership, University of Defence, Kounicova 156/65, 662 10 Brno, Czech Republic*
[2]*Department of Military Theory, Faculty of Military Leadership, University of Defence, Kounicova 156/65, 662 10 Brno, Czech Republic*
[3]*Department of Military Theory, Faculty of Military Leadership, University of Defence, Kounicova 156/65, 662 10 Brno, Czech Republic*

Correspondence: jiri.barta@unob.cz

Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the security strategies of the individual Visegrad Group countries in the context of current security threats, considering the development of the global geopolitical situation. The security strategies, fundamental to the governmental approaches of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary, serve to secure national safety and can be utilized to protect the population and defend sovereignty and territorial integrity. The security strategies of these nations are subjected to a comparative and multicriteria analysis. Criteria were established based on the security documentation of the European Union and the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic, the latter being the most recent strategy from 2023 among those compared. Within the established criteria, weights were assigned using the Fuller's method. Through multicriteria analysis employing the weighted sum method, a ranking of the Visegrad countries was determined in terms of the content of their security strategies relative to the current security situation in the Euro-Atlantic space.

KEY WORDS: *security strategy; Visegrad Group; threats; European security strategy; security environment; comparison.*

1. Introduction

In the international security environment, currently undergoing a significant transformation aimed at restoring the influence of major powers, substantial changes are taking place. The concepts of security and security strategy are highly pertinent in the current geopolitical context. The security environment within the European Union has been continuously evolving, often dramatically, in recent years [1]. Therefore, it is crucial to actively and correctly respond to these changes and challenges by identifying and analysing new threats and the often-unacceptable risks they pose. Suitable, timely, and effective measures must be adopted to address these issues [2].

A security strategy is a foundational document that outlines a government's approach to ensuring national security and can be directed towards safeguarding the population and defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country [3]. It is one of the key documents that should contain essential information and evaluations of the security environment, the direction of security policy, and the security interests of the country. Additionally, it should identify the most significant threats to these interests and determine how the state will confront them to ensure national security [3], [4].

The aim of this article is to analyse the approaches of selected countries towards national and citizen security, comparing the priority directions in security within the context of current global events. The issue of state security within the European Union is examined from the perspective of the main directions in the European Union Security Strategy [5], [6] and the security strategies of the Visegrad Group countries, namely the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic (Slovakia), Republic of Poland (Poland), and Hungary. The article evaluates the extent to which the current Security Strategy of the Czech Republic [7] and other Visegrad countries are prepared to address security threats.

A comparison of individual key elements [8] of the security strategies of the Visegrad countries will allow for an assessment of the security threats, objectives, and interests of each state [3], evaluate the readiness of security strategies to current security threats in the environment of the ongoing war conflict in Ukraine, the recent Covid-19 pandemic [4], and other current security threats.

2. Comparative Countries

The selection of countries from the Euro-Atlantic area was based on the shared historical and political experiences of the chosen states. The four selected countries included three post-communist nations in Central Europe. The Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Hungary, and Poland formed a group of states that sought economic, political, and cultural cooperation in Central Europe following the collapse of the bipolar world. During a joint meeting in the northern Hungarian town of Visegrad on February 15, 1991, representatives of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Hungary, and Poland agreed on close cooperation in political and trade matters with the aim of ensuring regional stability and coordinating their approaches in these areas [2], [3], [9].

The process of forming the Visegrad Four into a group of four independent states was completed as a result of the dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on January 1, 1993. The signing of the declaration on close cooperation among Central European countries on their path to European integration led to the establishment of a successful Central European initiative. Among other goals, this initiative aims to influence and respond to security risks arising from global developments in recent years [2]. The locations of the individual countries within Europe and the European Union are shown in Fig. 1.

The declaration does not explicitly mention foreign security cooperation but anticipates the establishment of a comprehensive democratic social order in each state, based on fundamental human rights and freedoms, spiritual and cultural traditions, and respect for moral values [9]. The Visegrad Four developed cooperation, coordination, and consultations not only among themselves but also in their joint approach to relations with other countries. It can be said that all Visegrad Four countries uniformly regarded regional security as a fundamental prerequisite for their continued democratic development [2].

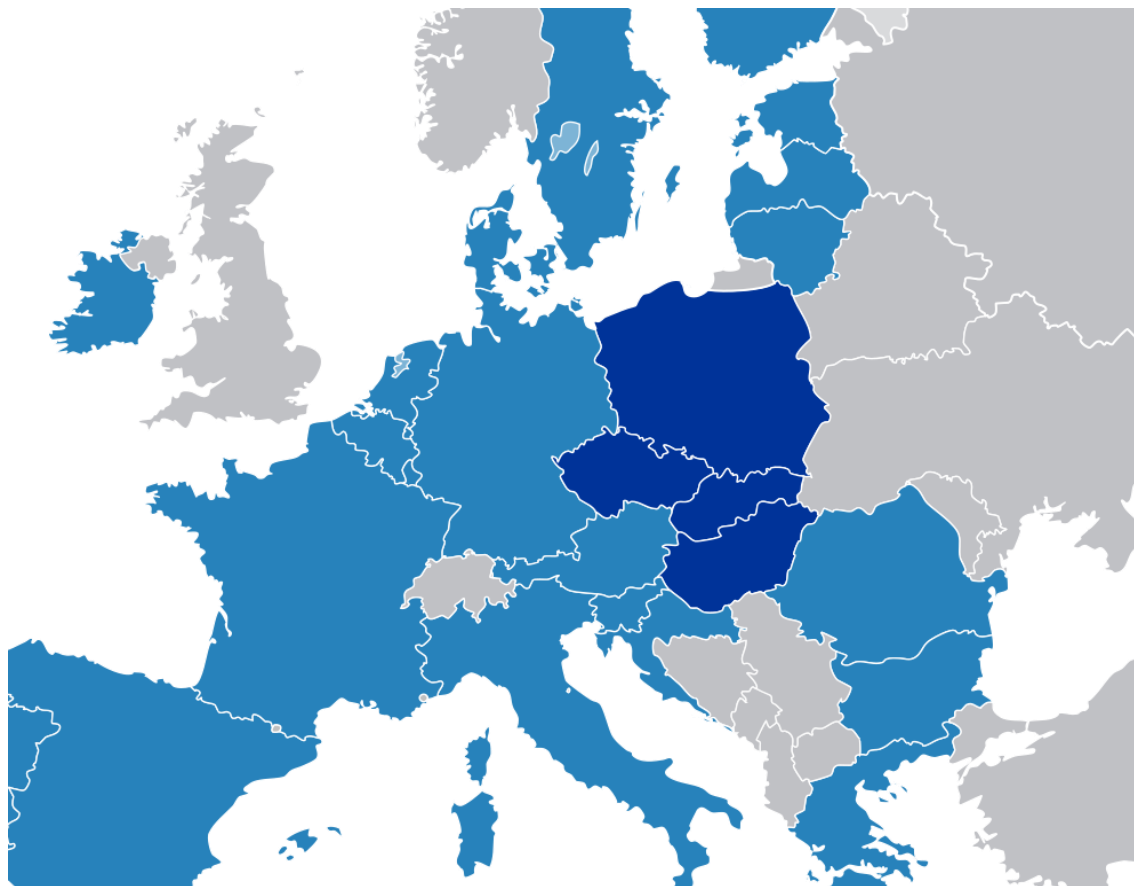Fig.1. The location of the Visegrad Four countries within the European Union. Author: CrazyPhunk, Wikimedia

3. Aspects of the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic

According to the constitutional order of the Czech Republic, the government is responsible for the implementation of security policy. In 1998, the National Security Council was established as an advisory and working body of the government

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by Constitutional Act No. 110/1998 Coll., on the Security of the Czech Republic. It consists of the Prime Minister and other appointed members of the government. The National Security Council does not have any executive powers by law; instead, it prepares proposals for measures to ensure the security of the Czech Republic based on the government's mandate. For this purpose, it has six permanent working committees: the Civil Emergency Planning Committee, the Defence Planning Committee, the Intelligence Activity Committee, the Committee for the Coordination of Foreign Security Policy, the Internal Security Committee, and the Cyber Security Committee [10].

The Constitution of the Czech Republic and the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms establish the scope and limits of the functioning of security forces and all state authorities, which can exercise state power only within the extent defined by law. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms sets certain restrictions on individual rights and freedoms in cases where it is necessary in a democratic society to avert serious threats to state security or to maintain public order. Restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals are closely linked to the declaration of crisis states, which are regulated by Constitutional Act No. 110/1998 Coll., on the Security of the Czech Republic and Act No. 240/2000 Coll., on Crisis Management [4], [7].

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic [7] is developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and approved by the government. The current Security Strategy was adopted in 2023, marking the sixth conceptual document in the field of security (previous concepts were from 1999, 2001, 2003, 2011, and 2015). In order to ensure the security interests of the Czech Republic, this document includes statements that directly respond to current developments in the international environment. This security strategy introduces so-called areas of strategic concern to the citizens, focusing on various security domains and their assurance. Compared to previous versions, this strategy is highly proactive, with the greatest attention devoted to Russian aggression and China's power tendencies, identified as the most serious threats. According to the current Security Strategy, these are the most significant threats [7].

The Security Strategy emphasizes the necessity of the Czech Republic's involvement in collective defence and attaches significant importance to alliance relationships, which are to remain crucial for the country in the coming years. A notable aspect of the current strategy is its consideration and response to new threats that were not accounted for in the previous 2015 version [10]. The Security Strategy addresses the security environment comprehensively, with all its components being much more elaborated than in previous versions. This Security Strategy highlights the involvement of individuals in ensuring security, emphasizing that citizens of the Czech Republic should not merely be consumers of security, taking it for granted, but should also actively engage in it and recognize the importance of contemporary security threats [4], [7], [8].

4. Aspects of the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic

The Slovak Republic, under its 1992 Constitution, is established as a parliamentary and representative democracy, where the government, as the main executive authority, is primarily responsible for the country's internal security policy. The National Council of the Slovak Republic, as the representative of the legislative power, holds oversight authority over the intelligence services and the police [11].

The Security Council of the Slovak Republic serves as an advisory body to the President during times of war. In peacetime, its primary tasks include creating and implementing the security system, assessing the security situation in Slovakia and abroad, fulfilling international security commitments, preparing proposals for government measures to maintain security and prevent crisis situations, and proposing solutions for arising crises. The handling of these crises during declared states of emergency is governed by the National Council of the Slovak Republic Act No. 42/1994 on the Civil Protection and Constitutional Act No. 227/2002 Coll., on State Security at the Time of War, State of War, State of Emergency, and State of Crisis. The Security Council has several working committees at its disposal: the Foreign Policy Committee, the Defence Planning Committee, the Civil Emergency Planning Committee, the Intelligence Services Co-ordination Committee, the Cybersecurity Committee, the Energy Security Committee, and the Hybrid Threats Committee [12].

The Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic [11] was developed by the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic in 2021. It was subsequently approved by the government and then submitted for approval to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. This document marks the fourth security strategy since the establishment of the Slovak Republic, with previous versions issued in 1996, 2001, and 2005. The Security Strategy notes that global security has deteriorated in many respects, directly impacting the security and resilience of Slovakia [13]. Based on the assessment of the security environment, the strategy formulates the security policy of the Slovak Republic and defines its objectives, methods, and tools for implementation in a manner that creates conditions for the security, stability, prosperity, and development of the Slovak Republic and its citizens. The Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic identifies the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the best option for ensuring the state's defence capabilities, and it designates the United States as a strategic transatlantic ally [11].

As part of the security environment analysis, the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic emphasizes the low predictability of the international environment and the increasing importance of non-military threats, focusing on hybrid threats [13]. The strategy further distinguishes threats in a broader regional context, such as unresolved conflicts, instability, conflicts in Eastern Europe, the fragile stability of the Western Balkans, and instability in areas such as the Middle East. Among its security interests, it highlights energy, raw material, environmental, and food security. It emphasizes the building of reserves of strategic energy and non-energy raw materials, as well as other natural resources, identifying water as the main strategic resource [13], [14].

5. Aspects of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland

According to the Constitution of Poland of May 2, 1997, which establishes the fundamental provisions on the functions of the state and the limits of public power, the President is the guardian of the constitution, state sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity. As an advisory body in matters of internal and external security, the President appoints and dismisses members of the National Security Council (Rada Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego). Members include the Speakers of the Sejm and the Senate, the Prime Minister (head of government), selected ministers, leaders of political parties, and others. Among them is the head of the National Security Bureau, who is responsible for strategic planning and the functioning of the integrated national security system [15], [16].

This office primarily assists the President in fulfilling tasks related to security and defence. It provides support for the National Security Council and conducts analyses of national security developments, prepares materials on national security matters, evaluates legislation in the field of security, and more. The real performance and oversight of security are the responsibility of the Council of Ministers, which, according to Article 146 of the Constitution, ensures the internal security of the state and public order, and maintains the external security of the state [9].

The foundational document for security policy in Poland is the 2020 National Security Strategy. The Council of Ministers submitted the draft security strategy, which is approved by the President upon the request of the Prime Minister. It was adopted as the sixth national security strategy since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991 (previous strategies were from 1992, 2000, 2003, 2007, and 2014) [15], [16], [17]. The 2014 National Security Strategy was considered one of the most comprehensive compared to those of other Visegrad Group countries [9].

The development and implementation of the current National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland [15] stems from the necessity to ensure that the state is capable of countering threats and addressing challenges arising from the evolving security situation that Poland faces [18]. It aims to seize opportunities to enhance the security of the state and its citizens, ensure its further development, and strengthen Poland's position on the international stage. Consequently, it takes into account the context of Poland's membership in NATO and the European Union [18], [19].

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland focuses on reformulating the civil defence system and the population protection system as part of its objectives to ensure and increase the state's resilience and civil defence. The system should be universal, applicable both in urban agglomerations and in rural areas. The system is also intended to be flexible and continuously adaptable to changing challenges and threats. The national interests and strategic goals in the field of national security of the Republic of Poland are formulated in accordance with national values established in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland [15].

The provisions of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland are further expanded upon and incorporated into national strategic documents concerning the national security and development of Poland.

6. Aspects of the National Security Strategy of Hungary

The Fundamental Law of Hungary (Magyarország Alaptörvénye – the constitution) states that the government is responsible for security. The government is the general executive body and is to exercise all functions and powers not explicitly assigned by the Fundamental Law or by law to another body. The Fundamental Law of Hungary defines the basic framework for the activities of the police and national security forces. The police are primarily to serve in the prevention and investigation of criminal acts, the protection of public safety, and the safeguarding of state borders. The national security forces are tasked with protecting the independence and lawful order of Hungary and promoting national security interests. The activities of both the police and national security forces are governed by the government [20].

As part of the security processes, the Hungarian government established the National Security Cabinet (Nemzetbiztonsági Kabinet), which serves as its advisory body for strategic and political direction in national security. In 2011, the Working Group for National Security (Nemzetbiztonsági Munkacsoport) was established as an advisory interdepartmental body of the National Security Cabinet. Its main tasks include the exchange of information, coordination of operations, operational cooperation, execution of specialized tasks, and proposing security measures to the government.

Following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, Hungary, unlike the other Visegrad Four countries, developed its Principles of Security Policy (1993, 1998) and subsequently, Security Strategies (2002, 2004, 2012). In 2002, Hungary adopted its first historical Security Strategy. The 2004 Security Strategy responded to Hungary's entry into the European Union, and the 2012 Security Strategy responded to Hungary's accession to NATO and the adoption of a new constitutional law—the Fundamental Law of Hungary [21].

On April 21, 2020, the Hungarian government adopted the Hungarian National Security Strategy titled "A Secure Hungary in a Volatile World" [22], which was a response to the deteriorating security environment in Europe (the annexation of Crimea, destabilization of Ukraine, and crises at the borders of the European Union). The fundamental principles of the Hungarian National Security Strategy are contained in the Fundamental Law of Hungary and have remained unchanged over the years. The strategy is based on national values that are to be protected, the fundamental interests of the country, and the challenges, risks, and opportunities it faces [22].

Within the security strategy, visions of the nation in the context of security, fundamental values, Hungary's security environment, basic interests, main security risks, and strategic objectives were defined. In conclusion, comprehensive tasks and means for achieving these goals are defined. One possible response to the development of the security environment is

the establishment of defence cooperation, which will strengthen the stability of our region at the military level. The Hungarian National Security Strategy defines the defence industry as a key segment of state security [9].

As Hungary is on the outer border of NATO, the European Union, and the Schengen Area, it places significant emphasis on international cooperation. This is reflected in the emphasis on the common political and economic interests in Central Europe and in actively strengthening cooperation with both NATO and European Union member states, as well as with the Visegrad Four countries and through bilateral cooperation with other regional partners [22].

7.Research methodology

Based on methods of comparison and multicriteria analysis, the content of the security strategies of the individual Visegrad Group countries is evaluated. Fuller's method was used to determine the weights of the criteria [23]. For the multicriteria analysis, the weighted sum method was utilized [24].

The criteria were defined based on the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy [5], [6] in comparison with current security threats and the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic [7], which is the most recent among the assessed security strategies. The following criteria were established:

- k_1 – regional conflicts,
- k_2 – proliferation of weapons of mass destruction,
- k_3 – disruption of cooperation in international communities,
- k_4 – hybrid threats,
- k_5 – terrorism and organized crime,
- k_6 – cybersecurity,
- k_7 – energy security,
- k_8 – natural and anthropogenic disasters,
- k_9 – large-scale migration,
- k_{10} – spread of infectious diseases,
- k_{11} – environmental degradation.

Table 1.
Assessment of criteria using Fuller's method [23]

Criterion k_i	k_1	k_2	k_3	k_4	k_5	k_6	k_7	k_8	k_9	k_{10}	k_{11}	Sum S_i
k_1	-	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	5
k_2	1	-	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	9
k_3	1	0	-	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4
k_4	0	0	0	-	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
k_5	1	0	1	1	-	0	1	1	1	0	1	7
k_6	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	0	0	8
k_7	0	0	1	0	0	0	-	1	1	1	1	5
k_8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	-	0	0	1	2
k_9	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	-	1	0	4
k_{10}	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	-	1	6
k_{11}	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	-	3

To perform a multi-criteria analysis of the content of security strategies of individual Visegrad Group countries using the weighted sum method, a criterion matrix was constructed, as shown in Table 1. This matrix shows the results of comparing the importance of the criteria using the weights calculated according to Fuller's method. All criteria were designed to be maximization criteria. The proposal for the evaluation of each criterion is provided in the text. The calculation using the weighted sum method is then carried out based on Formula 1 [23], and the results are presented in Table 2.

$$w_i = \frac{S_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} S_i}$$
(1)

where:
w_i is the weight of the i-th criterion, i ∈ {1, 2, …, 11},
S_i is the sum of the relative importance evaluations of the i-th criterion.

The weight values determined using the Fuller's method are:

- $w_1 = 0,0909$
- $w_2 = 0,1636$
- $w_3 = 0,0727$
- $w_4 = 0,0364$
- $w_5 = 0,1273$
- $w_6 = 0,1455$
- $w_7 = 0,0909$
- $w_8 = 0,0364$
- $w_9 = 0,0727$
- $w_{10} = 0,1097$
- $w_{11} = 0,0545$

8.Multi-criteria analysis

A comparative study of the security strategies of the Visegrad Group countries was conducted using a multi-criteria analysis with the weighted sum method [23]. The established criteria were set as maximization criteria. The evaluation of the criteria was based on whether they were included in the security strategy of the respective countries and whether the issues represented by these criteria were adequately addressed in their security strategies.

Criteria setting:
0. The issue is not addressed in the security strategy of the respective country or is only mentioned marginally. This rating also applies in cases where the criterion cannot be evaluated.
1. The issue is sufficiently addressed in the security strategy of the respective country and is given adequate attention.

In Table 2, the results of a multi-criteria analysis are presented. The weights of the criteria were calculated using Fuller's method. Evaluations of the alternatives for each criterion were determined based on the consensus of the authors. The multi-criteria analysis itself was conducted using the weighted sum method.

Table 2

Multi-criteria analysis

Criteria	Weight (rounded)	Czech Republic	Slovakia	Poland	Hungary
Regional conflicts	0,0909	1	1	0	0
Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction	0,1636	1	1	0	0
Disruption of cooperation in international communities	0,0727	1	0	0	1
Hybrid threats	0,0364	1	1	0	1
Terrorism and organized crime	0,1273	1	1	0	1
Cybersecurity	0,1455	1	1	1	0
Energy security	0,0909	1	1	1	0
Natural and anthropogenic disasters	0,0364	1	0	0	1
Large-scale migration	0,0727	1	1	1	1
Spread of infectious diseases	0,1091	1	1	1	1
Environmental degradation	0,0545	1	1	0	0
Weighted sum		1	0,8909	0,4182	0,4546
Rank		**1.**	**2.**	**4.**	**3.**

9. Conclusions

In the introduction, it was stated that the security strategy is the fundamental document outlining the government's approach to ensuring national security. Based on a multi-criteria analysis conducted with a proposed set of criteria and calculated weights of importance for each criterion, it was determined which countries of the Visegrad Group have the most

comprehensive security strategy according to the degree of fulfilment of each criterion relative to the current security environment.

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic [7] was rated the highest because it encompassed all the established criteria. A distinct advantage of this security strategy is that it was developed and approved in 2023, making it the most recent security strategy among those evaluated. Additionally, the Czech Republic's security strategy addresses issues such as the protection of critical infrastructure and the development of the population protection system, along with other areas of security interest that were not specified in the criteria. In response to the war conflict in Ukraine, significant emphasis is placed on identifying Russia as the greatest immediate threat and also as a long-term direct security threat. Similarly, Russia is mentioned in the National Security Strategy of Poland [14], which, based on the evaluation criteria, ranked last among the Visegrad Group countries.

The second highest-rated security strategy is the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic [11]. It addresses most of the topics evaluated by the criteria, but it only marginally deals with issues related to disruptions in cooperation within international communities and the problems of natural and anthropogenic disasters. Significant emphasis is placed on current threats, and for this reason, historically recurring solutions to natural and anthropogenic disasters may have been relegated to the background of interest. The strategy mentions violations of international law by Russia, but at the same time, Russia is considered a strategic partner in addressing international threats. Given that the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic was approved in 2021, before the onset of the conflict in Ukraine, this stance may be revised in the future.

Based on the evaluation, Hungary's National Security Strategy [22], approved in 2020, was ranked third. The strategy addresses, beyond the evaluated criteria, primarily economic crises, unexpected military attacks on its territory, including those with weapons of mass destruction, and thus the building of defence and protection systems. However, these criteria were not selected for evaluation. It also pays significant attention to issues of cyber and energy security, and environmental damage, but it only defines these matters in the context of threats and does not elaborate further in the document. Therefore, in the evaluation matrix, these criteria were marked as unresolved.

Within the evaluation of the individual security strategies of the Visegrad Group countries, more detailed research in this area will be necessary when all the countries update their security strategies in response to the war in Ukraine and the current security situation in the Euro-Atlantic space. It should also be noted that the evaluation was conducted solely from the authors' perspective on the issue, and the decision-making process was influenced by personal opinions. Consequently, no strategic significance is attributed to the results in the context of security assessments within the Visegrad Group and the European Union. This is not a critique of the states' level of preparedness in the area of security.

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