

A POSSIBLE ANSWER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO HYBRID THREATS

Ionuț Alin CÎRDEI
cirdei_alin@yahoo.com

Lucian ISPAS
ispaslucian04@yahoo.com

“NICOLAE BĂLCESCU” LAND FORCES ACADEMY, SIBIU, ROMANIA

ABSTRACT

The international security environment is marked by a certain state of anomy, which in reality does not conceal a state of chaos, but an attempt to restore and redesign spheres of influence, creating a new world order involving both state actors: the US, Russia, China India, supra-states actors: EU, NATO, etc or non-state actors. The European Union is confronted with a series of internal and external challenges that affect the state of security. Challenges are very diverse, difficult to anticipate and counteract, and can be attributed, on the one hand, to the cyclical evolution of society and, on the other hand, to intentional interventions using unconventional methods and means of hybrid type, which are aimed at destabilizing one of the most powerful supra-state structures, enjoying significant economic and political strength, which has a large population and can influence the evolution of events globally. Lately, EU countries have begun to tackle the most diverse issues, such as migration, terrorist threat, radicalization of a part of the population, supporting direct or indirect jihadist organizations, organizing attacks within the union, developing nationalism, separatism, ethnic or religious intolerance, etc.

KEYWORDS:

Hybrid, threat, European Union, security

1. Introduction

The EU is faced with some of the greatest challenges in its security history, covering diverse areas and using different methods and means. All these challenges, coupled with international conflicts and crises, challenge the European construction, the cohesion of union members and make it necessary to identify realistic, short-

medium- and long-term measures. Threats take on increasingly unconventional forms, some of which are physical, such as modern types of terrorism, others using the cyber space to launch complex informational attacks on state institutions or critical infrastructure in the energy, transport, financial – banking sectors, etc. and even targeting civilian population. Other types

of threats are more subtle and pursue coercive pressure, including disinformation campaigns and media manipulation (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2017, p. 1), which aimed at influencing and manipulating public opinion to support initiatives such as autonomy and state fragmentation, supporting parties or candidates with certain orientations to win the election, polarize the public opinion on certain directions, to mobilize the population to support or ban activities, as was the case with the protests in Pungești, Romania, against the exploitation of shale gas, etc. Also, attacks on the population, which are being carried out by radicalized persons born and raised within the European Union or by newly arrived migrants in the community, aim at creating and maintaining panic, fear, disruption of normal processes, and winning proselytes, willing to sacrifice themselves to achieve the goals. All of these activities fall into the sphere of hybrid activities and threats, which are increasingly intense and harder to anticipate and counteract. The European Union must adopt a number of active and passive measures aimed at preventing, identifying and counteracting hostile actions, alongside educating the population and authorities and creating and increasing resilience.

Behind these developments is, in our view, the phenomenon of globalization, which has been accentuated and accelerated in the last period, and which encompasses more and more areas of the world. Globalization has positive effects for a large part of society, but it allows also the development of negative effects that are difficult to predict and control. According to some authors, globalization seems to contribute to generating simultaneous processes that create tensions that in turn shape the security environment globally. We are witnessing in this context a phenomenon that can be called the “*globalization of insecurity*” (Pricopi, 2014, p. 77).

The globalization of insecurity allows the transmission of effects at great distances, their transposition into other societies, social systems other than those that have generated them and which do not have a full understanding of them and consequently can not identify an optimal solution to combat or mitigate. Due to the “*expansion of the phenomenon of globalization, states and the EU in particular become more vulnerable due to interconnections and interdependencies between states, regions and networks and the exploitation of these vulnerabilities becomes an objective of actors aimed at destabilizing the system or its parts*” (Cîrdei, 2017, p. 76).

2. Addressing hybrid threats at EU level

Starting from this situation, we can not ask whether all these developments are influenced by certain actors or whether the European Union is a collateral victim, suffering the cascading effects of actions or inactions of local, regional or global powers. The most likely answer to this question is that the European Union is target of non-conventional, non-linear threats, some being carefully prepared by some directly interested actors who want to weaken EU cohesion on the principle of divide et impera, others being the consequence of organized crime groups, trafficking in human beings, etc., the characteristic of these actions, regardless of the originator, being the fact that all available means can be used in all fields, except the military, without even the target to be aware.

All these threats and challenges can be included in the sphere of hybrid threats, which must be understood as “*the mixture of coercive and subversive activities, conventional and unconventional methods (eg diplomatic, military, economic, technological) that can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives, but remain below the declared state of warfare*”

threshold” (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2016). Hybrid type actions are particularly complex and aim at threatening, intimidating, destabilizing, destroying the target or disrupting services in order to keep the adversary in a state of political, economic, military, societal imbalance, and to keep the initiative on the side the attacker so that the latter can decide on the evolution of the events (Drent, Hendriks & Zandee, 2015, p. 30), without realizing that he is attacked and with no possibility to easily identify the source and real objective of the attack and the means of counteraction. This intimidation, often through violence, *“aims to create chaos, national instability, and a general feeling of uncertainty among ordinary citizens. The state of insecurity becomes unbearable in time, and the ‘accusatory finger’ of public reluctance is stopping on the ruling authorities who can not provide the necessary protection”* (Bojor, 2012).

Aware of the impact that hybrid threats can have on Member States and the population, there has been an interest in the European Union in addressing common security issues that require the development of stronger synergy and cooperation at all levels. Thus, the European Commission adopted the European Security Agenda in 2015 (European Commission, 2015), which sets out a common approach for EU states on security, a comprehensive, realistic and results-oriented approach. According to this agenda, all actors involved must cooperate in the field of security, taking into account five basic principles: full respect for fundamental human rights; ensuring transparency and democratic control in order to increase citizens’ confidence; Ensuring the application and implementation of existing legal provisions; encouraging a holistic approach, interagency and multisectoral approach and a comprehensive approach to the internal and external dimensions of security.

Against this background, a Common Framework for Combating Hybrid Threats

has been developed at EU level to facilitate a global, multidimensional approach that will enable the EU, in coordination with the Member States, to combat hybrid threats specifically by creating synergies between all relevant instruments and encouraging close cooperation between all relevant actors (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2016). The common framework is based on 22 actions that, taken separately, contribute to achieving a higher level of security and create the prerequisites for combating hybrid threats. The actions aim at diverse fields and modalities of diverse, gradual approach, tailored to the situation and type of threat and addressed to different categories. The framework combine in a coherent way the passive type with the active ones but lack the measures in force with short-term efficiency. This common framework establishes the basis of cooperation and dialogue, tries to consciously transform the EU in order to respond to these hybrid threats, but also to respect the principles and values of the community. In the next lines we are going to present the above mentioned actions, as listed in the Common Framework, the official EU document, and to group them in action areas or domains. The actions go from identifying risks, vulnerabilities and knowledge and situation awareness (launching a hybrid risk study to identify the main vulnerabilities that may affect national and pan-European structures and networks, carry out a study on hybrid risks in neighboring regions, create a fusion cell the EU against hybrid threats capable of receiving and analyzing classified and open source information on hybrid threats, setting up a Center for Excellence for “Countering the Hybrid Threats”), are complemented by actions aimed at developing and increasing individual and collective resilience (improving the protection and resilience of critical infrastructure against hybrid threats in relevant sectors, increasing the resilience of space infrastructures against hybrid

threats, improving awareness and resilience to hybrid threats within existing training mechanisms and coordination, in particular the Health Security Committee, the implementation of anti-radicalization actions under the European Security Agenda). The EU Plan to Combat Hybrid Threats is complemented by the intention to communicate effectively and develop the exchange of information (updating and coordinating the capacity to achieve proactive strategic communication, creating and using a network of 28 CSIRTs (Computer Security Incident Response Teams) and CERT-EUs (European Computer Emergency Response Team), and a framework for strategic cooperation, the establishment of a joint operational protocol and the conduct of periodic exercises to improve strategic decision-making capacity in response to complex hybrid threats based on crisis management procedures and integrated EU mechanisms for political response to crisis) including the development of combat and defense capabilities both in physical and cybernetic environments (adaptation of defense capabilities and development of EU relevance, in particular to counteract hybrid threats against one or more Member States, development and testing technologies that better protect users and infrastructures against the cyber threats of hybrid threats, develop guidelines for asset owners in smart grids to improve the cyber security of their facilities, examine how to respond to hybrid threats, in particular on the threats related to cyber-attacks in the transport sector, the implementation of the Terrorist Finance Action Plan to also contribute to countering hybrid threats). At the same time, the EU aims at developing military response mechanisms to hybrid threats (examining, in their areas of competence, the applicability and practical implications of Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on joint action in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster and Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on European Union, on mutual

defense in the event of a major and serious hybrid attack, the integration, exploitation and coordination of military action in the fight against hybrid threats under the Common Security and Defense Policy, the continuation of the informal dialogue and the intensification of NATO cooperation and coordination on situational awareness, strategic communications, cyber security, crisis prevention and crisis response to tackle hybrid threats, respecting the inclusion and autonomy of the decision-making process principles of each organization), as well as protecting sensitive areas such as energy and transport (monitoring emerging threats across the transport sector and updating legislation, diversifying energy sources, and promoting safety and security standards to increase the resilience of nuclear infrastructures).

Through this common framework of action, the European Union gives a clear signal of the importance it attaches to hybrid threats and tries to make all Member States aware of the danger posed by the proliferation of cross-border hybrid threats that have cascading effects, hard to predict, which makes it impossible to shelter individually without the adoption of complex and comprehensive measures. The EU thus creates a framework for the fight against hybrid threats and supports the Member States, which have to take individual measures to reduce their vulnerabilities and thus contribute to the reduction of collective vulnerability. Action against hybrid threats involves considerable effort, unconventional thinking, the allocation of necessary resources and a comprehensive approach that addresses not only the effects of certain actions or activities but also their causes, whether the source is inside or outside the EU. The EU intervention to identify and neutralize the causes of cross-border hybrid threats involves important human, material and financial efforts, which are justified by the medium and long-term benefits. For example, the issue of migration can not be solved

either by receiving and trying to integrate all migrants, or by forbidding their access to the European space. The solution may consist of EU intervention to resolve conflicts, encourage infrastructure investments, engagement in addressing issues of access to basic water and food resources, access to education and health services. EU efforts must also be supported by other states or organizations such as NATO, the UN, etc. and must translate into a long-term plan that identifies and addresses the causes of the problem, not only the effects.

3. Energy security and hybrid threats

The European Union, due to its specific nature, has many vulnerabilities, the reduction of which can be attributed to national authorities, but also a number of vulnerabilities whose reduction can only be achieved through a common, supra-state approach that goes beyond the physical boundaries. The Union as a whole and each Member State are vulnerable to these threats, and counter-measures must include a mix of measures that fall within national security policies, taking into account the specificities of each individual state, a series of common measures addressing cross-border issues or threats that can be tackled more effectively by coordinated action at EU level. One of the most sensitive areas at EU level is the energy sector underlying the good functioning of the entire society, and the issue of ensuring energy security must be addressed with due attention both from the point of view of classical threats, and especially from the point of view of hybrid threats, which can be created and directed against a specific target, but can also be unintentional, in the sense that the attacker does not anticipate the effects of his actions, which are not limited to the original target, but reflect, on the principle of snowball, to other actors, and the consequences can not be controlled.

In order to ensure its own energy security, the European Union must have a

global approach to developing new partnerships with countries in different global areas, states that can supply the energy resources and are willing to respect a minimum set of rules imposed by EU standards, both in the area of economic exchanges and in the field of human rights. The global opening of the EU states must translate into long-term agreements, favorable both for suppliers and beneficiaries, which force them to maintain and develop the exchange relations (Youngs, 2014).

Energy resources are goods that are very exposed to the most diverse risks, even if there is no direct relationship between them, with the so-called butterfly effect. Energy security is a problem that has long passed the boundaries of states, solving this problem requires a common solution. Energy security may be threatened, inter alia, by conflicts, political and legislative instability, strikes, protests, sabotage, terrorist attacks, cyber attacks, embargoes, blocking or accidental or intentional closure of supply routes, accidents (fires, weather conditions, economic practices of states or companies, etc. These actions or activities can directly target the domains of ensuring a continuous flow of energy resources, or they may have cascading consequences for actions targeting other domains or not having a specific target but wishing to spread terror. The hybrid dimension of the threats to energy security is accentuated by the high vulnerability of the entire energy system, critical energy infrastructures and the lack of alternative solutions to supply disruptions.

The events that have taken place in the international environment in recent years, since the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia to the war in the East of Ukraine, the emergence, expansion and countering of the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria, terrorist attacks, the crisis of North Africa, as well as tensions in the Middle East area, have again brought attention to the issue of EU security in general and energy security in particular. Although

these events, taken separately, do not directly jeopardize energy security, the cumulus of factors and circumstances can affect the energy security dimension of Europe and bring into question the issue of securing the supply of energy resources. Of all threats, the most important are, in recent times, hybrid threats that can disrupt the supply of energy resources in the short and medium term. These hybrid threats are particularly complex, difficult to identify and difficult to counteract, because they exploit the weaknesses of the system and use modern technology along with classic threat methods. Often, the effects of actions are difficult to measure and protective measures are ineffective due to the characteristics of the energy systems, the size and geographic extension of critical energy infrastructures, etc., which makes energy security an extremely difficult task, especially if, these hybrid threats are combined with “classical” threats and in addition to the issues raised by tense relations with Russia, which can be managed in a favorable way, the EU is facing a number of more complex and difficult-to-manage hybrid issues, such as the southern instability that causes a spill-over effect (Drent, Hendriks & Zandee, 2015, p. 23), enhancing migration, organized crime and terrorism, which can influence both the internal security of the EU and energy security through the local, regional or global effects that they may have.

The European Union is facing many challenges in terms of ensuring the necessary energy resources, such as the dilemma of providing energy from controversial states that do not respect fundamental human rights, have oppressive leadership systems, or are subject to international sanctions; insufficient interconnection of national networks, which may lead to subjective approaches; the issue of energy security which translates into 28 individual Member States’ approaches, which have their own agenda, often in contradiction with the common European agenda; the national

energy mix is different, depending on the characteristics and possibilities of the states, there is a concern to give more importance to natural gas and renewable energy, but there is the question of how states are referring to controversial resources such as shale gas; the introduction of shale gas into the energy mix of some states raises many controversies, and hybrid influencing techniques can be identified; reducing environmental impact and combating climate change; the high dependence of some external energy resources, the dependence on a limited number of suppliers and the lack of real alternatives; nationalism, religious extremism, separatism, internal or inter-state conflicts, nuclear proliferation under a new face; decrease of internal cohesion.

Among the possible solutions to the challenges facing the European Union we can list: implementing a European Energy Union to coordinate energy supply to be a focal point and to ensure energy security by directing the surplus to the areas in need both in terms of gas and electricity supply; imperative diversification of energy resources and sources; comprehensive approach of EU towards its energy security: measures both internally and externally; increasing internal cohesion; responses tailored to each threat as there are no miraculous solutions, universally valid; extended NATO – EU cooperation and with other states or organizations; developing resilience; taking joint decisions and measures at EU level; the development of interdependencies between consumers and suppliers of energy resources has a limit: how long can the supplier last, and how long the customer can withstand without selling that resource or without having that resource.

Adopting these measures can reduce the EU’s energy-related vulnerability and create the conditions for ensuring medium- and long-term energy security by identifying and counteracting classical, but especially hybrid, threats.

4. Conclusions

The fight against hybrid threats is very difficult because the nature of the threats is very diverse, these threats are very fluid and adaptable, have a high capacity of dissimulation, and can be materialized by individuals or groups that can not be supervised and controlled. Authorities should create the framework for identifying and combating these threats and develop effective mechanisms to prevent, deter and limit the effects, and prepare the population to understand these threats, know how to manifest and how to mitigate the effects, create a culture of resilience, promote partnership between authorities and the population, encourage information exchange and internal and international cooperation.

Comprehensive approach to a problem, adopting active and passive measures, prevention and combat, strategy implementation, etc. can help reduce vulnerability and reduce risk.

Combating cyber-related or informational threats is more difficult to achieve because virtual space is free from any real control, and any forceful intervention by the authorities can be interpreted as an attempt to limit the right of expression and access to information. A possible solution could be the development of protection systems, software to identify suspect activities, correct and timely information to citizens, and the implementation of targeted measures to counteract or block hostile factors. For this

purpose, there should be specialized services to fight cyber-threats of any kind, services whose activity is clearly regulated and on which real control can be carried out. Many of the illegal or violent hybrid activities are being prepared in the online environment but are practiced in the physical environment. That is why we believe that it is necessary to develop complex systems for the supervision of public spaces, allowing the collection, analysis and capitalization of data, and that these systems be interconnected and coordinated at local, national or regional level, which does not represent, in our opinion, a violation of the right to privacy.

Internally, the fight against hybrid threats has to be carried out on multiple fronts, and to start from the development of the resilience of the population and the state institutions and the adoption of a proactive attitude. Timely and correct information of citizens and decision-makers, development of a suitable culture, raising the level of education, simultaneously with encouraging the exchange of information between institutions and organizations, strengthening the specialized bodies of the state, adopting legislative measures adapted to the new challenges and increasing the degree of involvement of the population can reduce the vulnerability to hybrid threats, which are often masked by illicit activities and supported by organized crime groups or other interest groups.

REFERENCES

- Bojor, L. (2012). The Hybrid type of conflict – future challenge for military framework of actions, *The 18th International Scientific Conference „The Knowledge Based Organization”*, Sibiu, 24.
- Cîrdei, I. A. (2017). The Hybrid Warfare in the 21st Century: An Old Concept with a New Face, *The 23rd International Scientific Conference „The Knowledge Based Organization”*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 76.
- Drent, M., Hendriks, R. J., & Zandee, D. (2015). *New Threats, New EU and NATO Responses*, The Hague, Netherlands: Clingendael Institute, available at https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/New%20Threats_New%20EU_Nato%20Responses_Clingendael_July2015.pdf, 23, 30.

European Commission, (2015). *The European Agenda on Security*, 1, available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/125863/EU%20agenda%20on%20security.pdf>.

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRUFASP). (2016). *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats a European Union response*, Bruxelles, 2, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0018&from=RO>.

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRUFASP). (2017). *Joint report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats - a European Union response*, Brussels, 1, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52017JC0030>.

Pricopi, M. (2014). *Integrarea militară europeană*, Sibiu: Techno Media, 77.

Youngs, R. (2014). *New Geopolitics of EU Energy Security*, Vanguardia Dossier, available at <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/09/23/new-geopolitics-of-eu-energy-security-pub-56705>.