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## KOLEKTIVNA VARNOST V EVROPI IN SLOVENIJI

## COOPERATIVE SECURITY IN EUROPE AND SLOVENIA

**Povzetek** Članek obravnava kolektivno varnost kot strateško alternativo tradicionalnim modelom, osredotočenim na moč, v okviru evropske varnostne politike. Osredotoča se na Evropo in uporablja Slovenijo kot primer študije, pri čemer poudarja, kako okviri sodelovanja, ki poudarjajo medsebojno odvisnost, multilateralizem ter preventivno diplomacijo, prispevajo k regionalni stabilnosti in odpornosti. Analiza poudarja vlogo malih držav pri oblikovanju varnostnih rezultatov prek institucionalnega sodelovanja in specializacije politik. Članek zagovarja oživitve mehanizmov sodelovanja za obravnavanje nastajajočih groženj in ponovno vzpostavitev zaupanja v razvijajočo se evropsko varnostno arhitekturo.

**Ključne besede** *Slovenija, Evropska unija, kolektivna varnost, Nato, skupna varnostna in obrambna politika.*

**Abstract** This article examines cooperative security as a strategic alternative to traditional power-centric models within European security policy. Focusing on the European continent and employing Slovenia as a case study, it highlights how cooperative frameworks—emphasizing interdependence, multilateralism, and preventive diplomacy—contribute to regional stability and resilience. The analysis underscores the agency of small states in shaping security outcomes through institutional engagement and policy specialization. The article advocates for the revitalization of cooperative mechanisms to address emerging threats and rebuild trust in the evolving European security architecture.

**Key words** *Slovenia, European Union, cooperative security, NATO, Common Security and Defence Policy.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Traditional security concepts do not offer adequate solutions to the current challenges posed by intrastate conflicts and regional instability. The main schools of thought in international relations – realism and liberalism – reflect an era in which war was a legitimate means of politics. Today, many states, especially in Western Europe, are less concerned with deterring or repelling aggression than with maintaining the overall stability of their region. These countries have much to gain by working together to reduce the likelihood of conflict. Their goal is often referred to as »cooperative security«

According to Grizold and Bučar (2011, p 829), security is a fundamental element of human existence and development from ancient times to the present. The concept of security encompasses both the preservation of an individual's existence as a physical, mental, spiritual, cultural and social being and the assurance of the quality of his or her existence in the social and natural environment. Today's world is a world of interdependence. Sharing responsibility is a guiding principle of policy that ensures the effectiveness of the response to new threats and security challenges. Not only the sharing of responsibility, but also the internationalisation of threats and the dissolution of borders is one of the main characteristics of today's international community.

According to Senčar (2021, p 15), several different sources of challenges and threats can be identified. »The southern and south-eastern flanks of the EU are confronted with a variety of threats and challenges – be it terrorist threats, irregular migration flows or the consequences of possible state collapse. The northern and eastern flanks face a different challenge: the European security order has been severely breached and remains under pressure from a revisionist power. Moreover, the EU is confronted with a rapidly rising China«. (ibid.)

The cooperative model of security is the main guide for liberal cooperation in ensuring security, as opposed to the competitive model of security based on realism. Liberalism assumes that the role of the state in the international community is changing and that countries are increasingly interdependent. In addition to states, the international community also includes other actors operating at different levels and in different areas, namely at subnational, supranational and transnational levels (Malešič, 2012). They tend to cooperate and, when it comes to peace and security, have a strong incentive to cooperate in solving common problems for the benefit of the international community. Liberal theorists believe in the positive role of institutions and other types of relationships between nation-states that moderate relations between them and

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thus moderate the politics of (military) power. »A large number of actors in the international community and their interactions raise many questions and justify the need to regulate interactions and relations between them and to create a system of behaviour based on common rules.« (Malešič, 2012, p 270). There is no doubt that the state is still an important actor in international relations, but the global context in which it operates has changed dramatically and with it the concept of sovereignty. Interdependence is now part of our lives at all levels, whether national, regional or international.

The aim of the article is to present the main principles of cooperative security and its development in Europe, emphasizing the importance of cooperation and alliances between states. The second part of the article deals with cooperative security and Slovenia as a small state in the international community. The article draws on the findings of the research project, which examines the evolving dynamics of cooperative security in Europe and the strategic approaches of small states such as Slovenia to strengthening regional and international stability. The article contributes to the theoretical deepening of the concept by distinguishing between collective security and cooperative security. It emphasizes that cooperative security encompasses a broader range of activities (e.g. promoting stability, protecting individual security and early conflict prevention) and goes beyond the traditional understanding of collective security, which focuses mainly on joint military defence against external threats. In particular, the article highlights the role of small states (such as Slovenia) in shaping cooperative security. It shows how small countries, despite their limited military capabilities, can significantly influence international security policy through specialization, participation in multilateral forums (EU, NATO, OSCE) and wise prioritization. The article argues for the revitalization of multilateral platforms such as the OSCE and proposes conceptual foundations for a new European security architecture based on cooperative elements that contribute to the search for solutions in times of increasing instability (such as the war in Ukraine and the new divisions in Europe).

## 1 UNDERSTANDING COOPERATIVE SECURITY

Security is a fundamental value of human relations, the guarantee of which is institutionalized through the emergence of a sovereign state and state systems on a global scale.

The individual, the society or state and the international system are three entities that, in a security-threatening environment, strive to secure the status quo or attempt to balance each other's existence within a narrower and broader framework. Today's understanding of the phenomenon of security is necessarily holistic. »It encompasses all aspects of human existence and functioning in society (economic, social, political, educational, communication, information, defence, etc.) and all levels of integration and forms of social organization (national, regional, international and global)« (Grizold, 1999a).

Although the concept of cooperation and alliances between different groups, families and states in times of peace and war is »a common feature of human history« (Cohen, 2001), the terms collective security and collective defence are inventions of the last century. »Both concepts imply a long-term, formal commitment between groups of states to protect the security interests of individual members within their common spheres.« (ibid.)

At the end of the Second World War, the newly founded United Nations took over the mantle of collective security from the League of Nations. Articles 41 and 42 of the Charter of the United Nations provide for measures by member states to maintain and restore international peace and security. In the 1970s, the Conference on Cooperation and Security in Europe, now the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), was founded to provide collective security to virtually all states in the Eurasian–Atlantic region. »Both organizations, however, have been at best partially effective« (Cohen, 2001).

Collective security is a means of ensuring international peace and security that prevents and limits inter-state disputes. The basic assumption of the concept of collective security, in addition to universal membership, is the unity of states in securing peace and the unity in the belief that peace and security are indivisible, which necessitates collective action against potential countries that violate these values. The concept of collective security is implemented through various mechanisms and instruments that were first institutionalized in the League of Nations and later in the UN. Necessary prerequisites for the functioning of collective security are the universality of membership and the achievement of a consensus for collective measures (Grizold, 1999b).

What distinguishes collective security from cooperative security is that, according to Cohen (Cohen, 2001), cooperative security must look in both directions, inwards and outwards. However, it must also include two other dimensions that are not explicitly covered by either collective security or collective defence.»The first of these dimensions is the concept of individual security and the second is the active promotion and projection of stability into areas adjacent to the cooperative security space where instability and conflict could affect the security of members« (Cohen, 2001). The same author writes: »Cooperative security is a strategic system formed around a core of liberal democratic states linked together in a network of formal or informal alliances and institutions characterised by shared values and practical and transparent economic, political, and defence cooperation« (Cohen, 2001).

Cooperative security is a form of security cooperation that contributes to a more stable development of relations between the subjects of international relations. The starting points of the concept of cooperative security are based on the idea of common security and the idea of preventing and limiting threats to international security from the outset, especially within countries. The concept of cooperative security does not deny the existence and existence of conflicts in the international community, it only

seeks to control them with previously accepted norms and procedures and to prevent an outbreak of mass violence. It is therefore based on the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes, the indivisibility of security, a comprehensive understanding of security, the balance between military forces and non-military security mechanisms and instruments, and the agreement of all countries on the mutual regulation of the size, composition, financing and procedures for the deployment of armed forces. Cooperative security usually manifests itself in the form of unilateral (cooperatively oriented) self-restraint, restriction by powerful countries, measures to strengthen confidence and security between countries, regulatory agreements on weapons systems and military personnel, nuclear non-proliferation regimes, conversions of the arms industry, including international alliances (Grizold, 1999b, pp 43–44).

## 2 COOPERATIVE SECURITY IN EUROPE

In the foreseeable future, we are likely to remain in a security environment in which deterrence prevails, and political conditions will prevent a comprehensive reintroduction of cooperative elements into the European security order. But even in such an environment, certain forms of dialogue and cooperation are justified. At some point, Europeans will have to make another serious attempt to return to a European cooperative security architecture. This will require a conducive political environment and political leadership from the key players in European security. As long as the war in Ukraine continues and has not been satisfactorily resolved, this is inconceivable. As soon as the conditions are right, such a process could draw on existing institutions. An intelligent combination of bilateral and multilateral formats should be sought. Bilateral institutions such as the Turkish-sponsored Istanbul Process between Ukraine and Russia or the Strategic Stability Dialogue (SSD) between the United States and the Russian Federation could be complemented by multilateral platforms such as a revitalised NATO-Russia Council or the OSCE. In particular, the broader discussion on the principles of European security should be conducted on an inclusive platform such as the OSCE. This would allow Europe's voice to be amplified by the EU and its member states but also allow for robust representation of Ukraine and other »intermediate« or »bridge« states. A process inspired by the Helsinki process of the 1970s, a Helsinki 2.0, could structure a broader discussion on the meaning of the principles of European security in the 21st century. In this sense, a revitalised OSCE could serve as a coordination platform for European security, as envisaged in the 1999 Istanbul Summit Declaration (Greminger, 2023). Even though EU security is much narrower than European security, it is necessary for Europe (and the EU) to develop its strategic autonomy, which most authors understand as developing its military and defence capabilities as well as its economic and civilizational norms (Brožič 2024, p 164). »The EU wants to become a global actor« (ibid.)

Security in Europe is in danger. Within a generation, the new era of democracy, peace and unity proclaimed in the 1990 Charter of Paris is threatened by authoritarian and illiberal regimes, kleptocrats and instability. While until recently war in Europe

was considered »unthinkable«, the last two decades have seen conflicts in Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Borders have been changed unilaterally and by force. The dream of a united and free Europe has been replaced by the reality of new dividing lines, even barbed wire fences and walls. Relations are characterized by mistrust instead of being based on respect and cooperation. Instead of feeling safe, people fear a variety of threats: from pandemics to cyberattacks, terrorism, organized crime, climate change, energy and job security. Changing this requires a rethink of European security towards a more comprehensive and cooperative approach (Remler, 2019).

After the end of the Cold War, it was assumed that Europe would develop in a linear, liberal fashion; countries interested in joining the European Union would begin to look and act more like EU members, and the rest of the continent would undergo processes of democratic transition that would lead to peace and prosperity. Although European countries are arguably better off today than they were thirty years ago, the continent is far from stable. While the conflicts in Kosovo and Georgia looked like stumbling blocks on the road to normalization of relations between Russia and the West, the crisis in and around Ukraine has highlighted fundamental disagreements between both Moscow and Kyiv and Moscow and the West.

If the United States and Russia are looking for ways to work together, then resolving the conflicts in Europe is a good place to start. Conversely, an escalation of the conflict in and around Ukraine would set in motion a chain of events that even the great powers may not be able to control. The COVID pandemic has shown how quickly basic assumptions can change. Without wanting to be doomsayers, this shock should motivate us to be prepared for other potentially game-changing events, such as a major cyber-attack (and power outages), man-made or natural disasters, a space incident and other wars. We need to think the »unthinkable« to be better able to prevent it.

However, most of the problems identified relate to threats and challenges within the OSCE area, including conflicts in the EU's neighbourhood, challenges from state actors (such as Russia), threats from non-state actors and hybrid threats. While the OSCE may not have been on the EU's radar when developing the strategic compass, once finalized, the compass will undoubtedly point directly to the OSCE area. In the short term, for example, the EU will have a strategic interest in promoting stability in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. It will continue to promote security, freedom and democracy in the Western Balkans. It will continue to engage in the South Caucasus. And it has a vested interest in improving security and cooperation in Central Asia, particularly to stem the spillover of insecurity from Afghanistan. Many of these goals can be achieved by working within the OSCE framework, among others, and not just bilaterally (Greminger, 2021).

We also need to reflect on what is meant by security and threats to it. Despite the trend towards de-globalization and the focus of states on national solutions, most

new threats and challenges transcend borders and therefore require multilateral cooperation. All countries, including the major powers, have a national interest in working together on issues such as climate change, pandemics, organized crime, terrorism and migration. Indeed, they must work together. Cooperation is realpolitik, not altruism. In addition, we need to engage a broader range of actors to work on security issues – not just diplomats, politicians or security sector experts, but also scientists, the private sector, civil society, academia and youth to explain and prepare for the potential impact of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, blockchain and nanotechnology. We also need to ensure that global governance keeps pace with innovation, for example in relation to cryptocurrencies, cybercrime or automated weapons systems.

Unfortunately, in recent decades there has been a tendency to focus on security in the narrow sense of stability. Given the many problems in the world, states – including in North America and the European Union – have tended to make pacts with leaders who promise stability. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the fight against corruption are given a lower priority. However, such an approach undermines the very values on which open societies and security communities are based and can increase instability in the long term. Consequently, accountable, pluralistic democracies that protect and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of their citizens should be the system of government that every European country aspires to. But let's be honest: not every country in the enlarged Europe – in the OSCE area – fits this description. However, that should not prevent like-minded countries from talking to each other.

However, there are only a few places left where Russia and the West can meet and talk to each other. The NATO-Russia Council and formal EU-Russia consultations have collapsed, and there is less dialogue between the militaries than during the Cold War (Mija and Teosa, 2013). The OSCE is one of the few remaining multilateral forums for discussing European security issues and peaceful relations. But even here, there is no common goal or vision for the future. The Geneva Centre for Strategic Policy has therefore launched a track1.5 process to explore options and test ideas for promoting a more cooperative approach to security in Europe. The intention is to bring together experts from across the OSCE area, in particular from the United States, the Russian Federation and the rest of Europe, to consider the design of the process and identify security issues where countries have common interests.

But hope is not a strategy. If there is to be a more cooperative approach to security in Europe, then a process needs to be developed. Some building blocks are already in place, such as the structured dialogue process within the OSCE in Vienna and the strategic stability dialogue in Geneva between Russia and the United States. Finland could play a key role in reviving the »spirit of Helsinki« as a possible OSCE Chair in 2025. Some may say that the time is not ripe to talk about cooperation because relations between Russia and the West are so bad. But it is precisely because relations are so bad that a case must be made for cooperative security; not necessarily as an

alternative to deterrence, but certainly as a complement to it. This logic is not new. It was at the core of NATO doctrine in the late 1960s when Europe was caught in the crossfire of mutually assured destruction between the USSR and the US.

According to Zandee (2021, 46), »the disagreements between EU member states must be bridged«. There is simply no other option. Another element to consider, according to the same author, is realism. »The EU is known for its bold statements and strong verbal pronouncements on international crises without any action or results to show for it. One of the reasons for this is that political-diplomatic initiatives cannot be fully supported by military force because the available resources are too limited and too scarce«. (ibid.)

### **3 SMALL STATEHOOD AND COOPERATIVE SECURITY: THE CASE STUDY OF SLOVENIA**

The Republic of Slovenia is a member of both (security) organisations, NATO and the EU. Therefore, like most small European member states, it is caught between two concepts, the concept of collective defence and the concept of collective security. Both concepts are extremely important for a small country in terms of ensuring security. However, as will be noted later in this section, NATO is much more important than collective security in the Slovenian defence context.

With the establishment of the Slovenian state in 1991, Slovenian politics also faced a dilemma in terms of ensuring national security. Having become an independent state, Slovenia found itself in a situation that differed significantly from the preceding Cold War period. While the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a more stable and peaceful period for most European countries, it also marked the beginning of several low-intensity armed conflicts that broke out on the territory of the former socialist states (Soviet Union and Yugoslavia). When the independent Slovenian state was founded in 1989-1990, various options for ensuring national security were discussed. According to Bebler (1996, p 131), two options were seriously considered: one tended towards an unarmed and demilitarised Slovenia, the other towards armed neutrality. After 1991, however, the Slovenian government began to reconsider its orientation towards European integration (Grizold et al, 2002, p 384). Among the theoretical concepts of how Slovenia should ensure the military aspect of its national security, the following relevant options were discussed: forming its own armed forces and joining the collective security system; achieving armed or unarmed neutrality status; signing defence agreements with other countries; joining NATO and/or the WEU; and a combination of several of the above (Grizold, 1999a, p 129). In 1994, full NATO membership officially became Slovenia's political goal, and cooperation with and within NATO became one of the most important elements of national security policy (Grizold et al., 2002). The democratically expressed political will of Slovenia to join NATO was first expressed in the amendments to the Resolution on the Starting Points for a National Security Plan, which was adopted by the Slovenian National Assembly in January 1994.

On the basis of the resolution passed by the Slovenian Parliament, Slovenia was one of the first countries to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) on March 30, 1994 and became an associate partner of the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA) in the same year (Nato.gov.si). At the Washington Summit in April 1999, the NATO member states adopted the Membership Action Plan (MAP). With the adoption of the Annual National Programme of the Republic of Slovenia for the Implementation of the NATO Membership Action Plan (ANP MAP 1999–2000) in October 1999, Slovenia was included in the Membership Action Plan. At the NATO summit in Prague on November 21 and 22, 2002, Slovenia was invited to begin accession talks for NATO membership together with Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. On February 24, 2004, the Slovenian National Assembly ratified the Washington Treaty (ibid.)

According to Grizold and Ferfila (2000), the European security system consists of three basic levels: the national level, where states ensure national security as a political and personal good, involving the entire national security structure; the multinational level, with several bilateral and multilateral security agreements; and the international level, with the establishment of international organisations whose task is to ensure peace and security in the international community (UN, NATO, EU, OSCE).

The year 2024 has marked the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), its activities and mechanisms. The most visible form of Slovenia's participation in the CFSP5 (and later in the CSDP) are EU missions and operations. EU missions and operations are »the most visible expression of CSDP and the EU's efforts to become a more visible political and security actor in the world« (Malešič et al, 2015).

NATO-led operations are those in which Slovenia and the SAF have deployed the majority of their members and capabilities. Similar conclusions were reached by Zupančič, who concluded in his analysis of Slovenian participation in military operations and missions that »a NATO-led discourse is overwhelmingly dominant within the Slovenian national security system« (2014, p 106). One of the most important questions is whether there was an official national interest in focusing the majority of our efforts on NATO-led operations and neglecting the EU and CSDP, which strongly influenced Slovenia's role and position within the CSDP. To answer this question, we need to go back in time, to the end of the 1990s, when Slovenia strongly sought NATO membership and directed all its foreign policy actions towards achieving this goal. However, when at the NATO summit in Washington in 1999 the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary joined NATO as part of the Alliance's first post-Cold War enlargement round, Slovenia was extremely disappointed because it had not received an invitation. The unofficial reason given was also the insufficient participation of Slovenia and its armed forces in NATO-led missions. Therefore, in the following decades, Slovenia deliberately deployed most of its forces in NATO-led missions and has not stopped doing so.

At the declaratory level, Slovenia has repeatedly expressed its support for a strong common CFSP, but at the practical level, Slovenia seems to only follow and not lead. One of the latest initiatives in the CFSP in which Slovenia is involved is the initiative to change the decision-making process in order to reach common positions more quickly. »Germany, together with Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain, is establishing a group for greater use of qualified majority voting in the common foreign and security policy« (RTVSLO, 2023). It is unclear and no official documents or explanations can be found as to why Slovenia decided to join this initiative. It should be noted that this is not a new initiative, as several similar initiatives to reform the CFSP decision-making process have been announced in the past, but to no avail. Time will tell what will become of the latest initiative under German leadership.

On July 1, 2021, Slovenia took over the EU Council Presidency from Portugal. Slovenia has set several priorities for the presidency period. The Slovenian Presidency was dominated by a broader debate on strategic autonomy, including the adoption of the Strategic Compass.

After several months of debate and delays, the EU adopted and published a document entitled »Strategic Compass for Security and Defense« on March 21, 2023, which can be seen as an attempt to align the strategic thinking of the 27 Member States, each of which has its own foreign and defence policy. The strategic compass was intended to be a basic document for a geopolitical EU. However, the war in Ukraine set the European continent back several decades.

### 3.1 Small states and Cooperative security

The powers of small states are limited, and their economic and military capabilities do not match those of their larger neighbours, but small states enjoy certain advantages that increase their ability to influence international politics. »Small states can become more than negligible actors if they actively pursue their agenda and consolidate all elements of their national power to achieve their desired goals« (Urbelis, 2015).

According to Urbelis (2015, p 62), »small states pursue active policies in internal NATO and EU affairs«. A highly successful example of small state policy is the NATO air policing mission in the Baltic States. From the beginning of the NATO air policing mission in 2004, the mission was considered temporary. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were not satisfied with this arrangement and sought a permanent solution. »The Baltic states, with the support of the US and Denmark, were able to convince other allies that NATO must agree to turn the temporary NATO air policing mission into a permanent one« (Urbelis, 2015, p 70). Actively pursuing their priorities is one of the most important rules for the success of small states. »Clearly defined and persistently pursued priorities can lead to astonishing results, unless those priorities clash with strong opposition from larger allies« (ibid.). However, prioritization remains crucial; small states cannot fight for their interests

on multiple fronts due to their limited resources. Small states must choose wisely which battle to fight. If prioritization is the first rule for success, then specialization is the second. »Specialization allows small states to gain expertise in one area or another and thus gain respect and prominence when discussing these issues in NATO and the EU« (Urbelis, 2015, p 70).

An excellent opportunity for a small state to shape and influence EU (and CSDP) decisions is the Presidency of the Council of the EU. However, it is important to note that the role of the Council Presidency in the area of CSDP has declined since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. Urbelis (2015) analyzed the Lithuanian presidency in the second half of 2013, and based on several examples of Lithuania's influence during the presidency, Urbelis concluded »that while small states can play a role by assuming the EU Council presidency, their ability to influence decision-making is limited« (2015, p 77). Small states can quite easily put an issue on the agenda, but when national interests come into play, the role of the presidency disappears. A very good example of the national interests of Member States prevailing is the issue of the EUBG. The EU countries were unable to agree on the deployment option, and in the event of a crisis there was a lack of political will to deploy the EUBG. The discussion clearly showed that neither the Lithuanian Presidency nor the EEAS have the power to impose a decision on the use of force on an EU member state. When the time came for real decisions, the sovereign nations pursued their national interests with little regard for the presidency or the CSDP (Urbelis, p 2015). The Presidency's powers are also limited in terms of influencing broader policy debates such as the NATO-EU Dialogue (Urbelis, 2015, p 77).

Slovenia took over the Presidency on July 1, 2021 as the last country of the Germany-Portugal-Slovenia trio. The period of the Trio Presidency was determined by an 18-month Council programme (Council of the European Union, 2020). The Trio Presidency programme focused strongly on post-pandemic recovery plans, so this was also the priority for the Slovenian Presidency period. The trio also pledged to take all possible steps to strengthen the EU's ability to act decisively and cohesively to effectively promote Europe's interests and values and to defend and shape a rules-based international order. The trio also pledged to improve the EU's emergency response capabilities and make it more effective in complex emergencies. The Covid-19 pandemic and other threats (cyber-attacks, natural disasters, etc.) have highlighted several gaps in the EU's crisis and emergency response, with plenty of room for improvement.

Special mention was made of the Strategic Compass and the importance of a "common threat analysis as a basis for this strategic dialogue" (Council of the European Union, 2020, p 30). The trio also highlighted the importance of several new defence initiatives, including PESCO, CARD and the EDF. What the programme lacked, however, was a clearer and more explicit statement on improving the CSDP towards a more coherent and stronger European defence.

**Conclusion** The concept of collective security, long hailed as the cornerstone of peace and cooperation in the EU, is under considerable pressure. While it claims to be the »norm«, the geopolitical and security realities of today's Europe call this ideal into question. The vagueness of the term itself – characterised by its dependence on consensus, common threats and mutual action – reveals its limitations, especially in times of crisis.

The success of cooperative security depends on several factors. Above all, it requires the conviction that certain countries have a common future and that cooperation is the best possible means of asserting their national interests. In the past, the perception of a common threat was the most common and also the most effective basis for creating a security system. This was certainly the case for the European Concert, NATO, the EC/EU and ASEAN.

As national elites were willing to work together in the face of a common threat, they developed a common identity that transcended national borders and reinforced their sense of common purpose. Once this new identity has emerged, it can be quite persistent and lead to security arrangements outlasting the threats that brought them together in the first place. Just as the Concert of Europe has long outlasted the threat of another French revolution, NATO and the EU have been transformed since the collapse of communism and the full integration of Germany into Europe.

The war in Ukraine, hybrid threats, insecure energy supplies and increasing authoritarianism have clearly shown that military threats are no longer abstract or distant. They are immediate, dynamic and multidimensional. In this context, the EU must move from declarative commitments to demonstrable defence capabilities. The adoption of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 2023 is an important step towards a more coordinated and assertive defence posture, but also underlines the urgency of an actionable unity that is not limited to mere declarations of intent.

In Western Europe and North America, cooperative security has developed into a way of life that is shifting ever further to the East and Southeast. The security communities of these regions derive their unusual strength primarily from one factor: they consist of consolidated, liberal-democratic states. As security communities, both NATO and – to an even greater extent – the EU have developed dense networks of multilateral institutions that promote the denationalization of security policy and serve the needs of entire regions. It is no coincidence that both NATO and the EU promote liberal democracy. They do so in part because they believe that security among states that have adopted a liberal democratic form of government can be better ensured through cooperation.

Interdependence leads to a common identity – especially economic interdependence. The fact that Central and Eastern European countries are seeking reaffirmation of their European identity through EU membership, while several countries consider it important to actively reject their Balkan identity, is indicative of this strong need

for an economically protective common identity. At the same time, the need for multilateral approaches to security is growing in the direction of cooperative security. This is especially true for small countries that need to pool their resources. The Baltic countries are a good example of this, and recent efforts in Southeast Europe are promising. Consensual decision-making practices often help in this multilateral approach to security to create a common identity and thus the need for cooperative security. The ASEAN countries have only two factors in common: geographical proximity and a belief in a common future, but they are successful as a cooperative security unit (Mihalka, 2005).

Cooperative security is increasingly being used as a mechanism to promote national security. As the prisoner's dilemma illustrates, countries will behave rationally individually but act against their own long-term interests in doing so. Reliance on self-help and old-style equilibrium behavior has given way to cooperative efforts to promote stability. Even among states that lack common values, cooperative security is possible. ASEAN is an important practical example. Cooperative security has been approached on a case-by-case basis, but several security communities have developed since the end of the Second World War – especially in Western Europe. The EU, unlike ASEAN, is proof that common values and a common economic destiny lead to more cooperative security. The closer the interaction between states and their citizens, the more likely they are to find ways to promote their security cooperatively. It is the EU members of the OSCE that take the organization most seriously as a venue for co-operative security. If they wish, non-democratic OSCE members can also participate in the OSCE's cooperative opportunities. However, it is clear that those OSCE members that are already united by the common values of liberal democracy will make the best use of the organization. Liberal democracy may not be a prerequisite for the begin or continuation of co-operative security, but it broadens the range of opportunities and benefits for all.

The success of cooperative security depends on several factors, particularly a belief in a common future and a preference for cooperative approaches to advancing national interests. Slovenia, as a small European state, has embraced cooperative security primarily through its integration into NATO and the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

Although Slovenia has declared its support for the EU's foreign and security policy initiatives, in practice it has mainly been involved in NATO operations. The Slovenian EU presidency has shown that the country wants to make a strategic contribution to European security debates. However, due to its small size and limited resources, Slovenia's role in the area of cooperative security is primarily a supporting role in the multilateral framework. Active participation, strategic prioritization and specialization remain crucial for maintaining and expanding Slovenian influence. Interdependence and sharing of responsibilities between different actors at different levels of society are emphasized as a key factor for an effective response to global

threats and security challenges. Small states such as Slovenia must actively participate in cooperative security initiatives and contribute to collective efforts for the benefit of the international community.

Collective security in the classical sense depends on a solid framework of trust and unity. However, today's fragmented geopolitical environment – characterized by divergent national interests, uneven commitment to common defense, and eroding multilateralism – raises fundamental questions about whether such unity can be consistently achieved. As the article suggests, cooperative security that emphasizes proactive stability, individual and regional resilience, and multilateral engagement may offer a more flexible and realistic way forward.

Nevertheless, collective security must not be abandoned. Rather, it must be redesigned and strengthened – more flexible, more responsive and more credible. This means investing in military readiness, enabling rapid response mechanisms such as PESCO and the European Peace Facility, and reducing dependence on NATO by strengthening EU-led defense initiatives. Only if the EU combines its values with its capabilities can it credibly deter aggression and protect its members.

Whether collective security becomes the norm therefore depends not on rhetoric but on determination. To achieve this, the EU must reconcile its strategic ambitions with operational realities. The time for theoretical posturing is over. Europe is at a crucial point where its ability to act will determine not only the importance of collective security, but also the stability of its future.

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