ATLANTICISM AFTER THE COLD WAR – BETWEEN CHANGING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT AND CONFLICTING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract

This research focuses on the role of Atlanticism in the changing post-Cold War international environment, taking note of the diversity of interests and postulating what shaped the world in that period of time. A broad trend of deregulation of international relations, and challenges it carries along with it, require a thorough strategic analysis. Two capital concepts of international relations theory, realism and constructivism, have been applied and empirically tested by the use of semi-structured interviews in order to adequately assess the position of the phenomena in focus and suggest viable recommendations for the period to come. The paper argues in favour of gradual modification of Atlanticism in accordance with its fundamental values and mindful of strategic challenges it faces in a very dynamic and unpredictable contemporary environment.

Keywords: *Atlanticism, defence and security, strategy, international relations*

Introduction

The concept of Atlanticism has attracted much attention in different areas of the globe, regardless of the fact that there was seldom a consensus on its definition, main determinants and important elements. Its dynamics and main policy developments differed depending on the momentum of international relations (IR), its partners and rivals. On the other hand, the Atlanticism itself consistently influences the main developments in the international arena, shaping the way in which the international community tackles contemporary challenges and threats.

Fundamentally, the concept advocates for close co-operation between the two shores of the Atlantic in strategic, political, economic, cultural and many other fields. It is based on a shared understanding of common principal values among states and societies in the western hemisphere, as a departure point for multifaceted collaboration, development of joint interests, positions, policies and institutional structures of different kinds. One of the theoretical frameworks to which the development of transatlantic co-operation is regularly tied is the so-called security community of a renowned 20th century social scientist and IR theorist, Karl Wolfgang Deutsch (Deutsch, 1957). In essence, the security community represents a group of political entities, most frequently nation-states, that enjoy relations of dependable expectations of peace. In other words, due to an understanding of shared values and a gradual definition of a common identity (sense of we-ness), potential social problems are to be resolved in a peaceful way, in which all parties restrain from using coercive means.

While there is a track record of endurance of the transatlantic partnership in different challenging periods, where the security community that connects two shores of the Atlantic not only ensured stability within the bloc but also enhanced its capacity to tackle contemporary challenges and fortified its position *vis-à-vis* its opponents, we have also witnessed turbulent times with hasty rhetoric and lack of interest for functional co-operation. So, while the intensification of the transatlantic co-operation and its gradual institutionalisation was directly related to the geostrategic consequences of the Second World War and emergence of the Soviet threat, which kept two shores of the Atlantic in close co-operation regardless of existing differences and sporadic cleavages, the developments after the fall of the Iron Curtain have multiplied the complexity of international affairs and carried along new challenges for the concept of Atlanticism. While the immediate post-Cold War period introduced the era of undisputed US domination and unipolarity, followed by gradual EU enlargement and the development of policies in the field of security and defence, the years that succeeded brought a new structural feature of international affairs. The new millennium has seen a global shift of power, characterised by the rise of new actors and re-emergence of old ones at the expense of strategic position of transatlantic community and its most prominent subjects. These trends were followed by the emergence of alternative visions about the world order and the gradual erosion of global leverage of liberal-democratic value system established and promoted by 'the West'.[1]

The unprecedented amount of complexity of contemporary transatlantic affairs, topped by the US strategic shift to the Pacific and cumbersome EU policy developments, are making an assessment of their current state and prediction of their future trends an uneasy but necessary task. Therefore, the author of this

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[1] For details, consult the following source – Herd, G.P. (edt) (2010) Great Powers and Strategic Stability in the 21st Century – Competing Visions of World Order. London and New York: Routledge

paper decided to undertake a thorough analysis of the concept of Atlanticism and its evolution in different periods of post-Cold War IR, in an academic effort to contemplate current strategic developments, anticipate future trends and provide intellectual guidance for implementable recommendations in the period to come. In order to ensure academic proficiency of this research, the methodological tools of IR theoretical frameworks like realism and constructivism were employed, while semi-structured interviews were used to empirically test them.

This work aims to provide a response to the question of implementability of the two opposing theoretical approaches in such a demanding geostrategic environment. Should the Atlanticism employ exclusively the constructivist measures and tools, in accordance with its nature and political philosophy? Or else, should it change the character and focus by acquiring and further developing the realist ones, given the nature of rivals and challenges it currently faces? Is there any compromised solution to the existing challenges?

The article focuses on the strategic landscape and the transatlantic relations of the post-Cold War period, the process of deregulation of international affairs, emergence of contemporary asymmetric threats and (re)emergence of assertive global actors. For the sake of analytical clarity, the body of the text is divided into four chapters. The first one provides a comprehensive explanation of research design, outlines fundamental determinants of selected theoretical frameworks and offers a detailed description of the empirical components of this study, the semi-structured interviews. The second one deals with the immediate post-Cold War period marked with collapse of bipolar international affairs' system based on realist fundamentals of international order, hard power, deterrence, spheres of influence and geopolitics. The third one focuses on the era of transatlantic, and in particular European, enthusiasm when 'the western community' spread to the East and South in an unprecedented manner. This period was dominated with constructivist approach to IR, based on spreading of liberal-democratic values and functional multilateralism. The fourth one analyses the period of deregulation of international affairs, waning multilateralism and the return of geopolitics and hard power to the international arena, where constructivist Atlantic community faces purely realist assertive factors in an attempt to consolidate its security in an increasingly turbulent environment. The conclusion attempts to offer well-balanced and viable, yet forward-looking arguments that could potentially enrich the current transatlantic security and defence discourse, as well as help yield implementable policy solutions for the period to come.

Considering the fact that the strategic position and leverage of the transatlantic community undoubtedly impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of a wide range of its policies, as well as of individual policies of its subjects, this research is relevant not only to IR researchers and practitioners but also to the citizens of 'the western hemisphere' since the strategic developments in the transatlantic community are likely to influence their everyday lives.

1. The methodology

As was already mentioned in the introduction, this research rests on two fundamental IR theoretical frameworks – realism and constructivism.

Realists recognise the state as the main actor in international affairs, admitting only marginal importance to international and non-governmental organisations, whom they perceive as only a useful tool in relations with other states (Hough, 2008). The concept of international order is fundamentally lacking in this paradigm, where the concept of national interest reigns. In this paradigm, the state is obliged to defend national interests, regardless of the possibility of conflict with another state, which is the fundamental reason for their need to rely on the concept of accumulation of power. Constructivists, on the other side, focus on normative structures and the concept of identity in comprehending relations between political actors. They reckon ideational structures as more important in shaping and influencing social and political actions than material structures. As their famous theorist claims, "Material resources are only given meaning by the human process of shared knowledge…the norms of international system condition the social identity of the sovereign state." Burchill (2013, p.121)

Semi-structured interviews that were conducted with a selected list of esteemed security policy experts and middle-level officials from different sections of NATO and the EU in the second quarter of 2023, offered an opportunity to empirically test the chosen theoretical constructs. Under the condition of anonymity, the interviewees participated in this research and contributed with their insights to its conclusions. Five paramount questions related to core principles of the two aforementioned theoretical frameworks were raised in order to yield empirical findings that could test their relevance. These questions reflect their implementability in practice in three different periods in focus of this research. More concretely, these questions consider the perception of the character of IR and the role of national states in it, as well as their preferred functioning principles and optimal economic model in the international arena.

The total of twenty-two interviewees that participated in this research offered variety of different responses in five categories, opting for one of theoretical frameworks that better reflected the behaviour of international actors. While the percentage of responses of interviewees indicated the balance of relevance between the two theoretical frameworks in different periods of time, as presented in graphs, the nature of semi-structured interviews offered a possibility to acquire more context-relevant information that was important for the process of systematisation of research findings. Namely, thematic analysis helped to identify and interpret patterns or themes of gathered data. It involved coding and organising data into meaningful thematic units, which enabled the understanding of interviewees' perspectives and experiences.

2. Tectonic changes in the international arena after the Cold War

Dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought changes in the international arena that ended the period of bipolar international relations. The entire process started with the election of Mikhail Gorbachev to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1985. Rapid technological development of the West that the Soviet Union was not able to follow created enormous economic pressure on the biggest socialist economy that had already started facing severe difficulties in funding the extremely high costs of an arms race with the US (Wolf and Popper, 1992).[2] In parallel with that, the political uprising and national emancipation in countries of the communist block caused cracks in the USSR, with disunity and serious political challenges within the state itself.

With no intention to question the symbolic significance of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, there is an impression that the event that actually ended the Cold War in the political sense was the US-Soviet summit in Malta (December 1989), where both US and USSR leaders (President Bush and President Gorbatchev) declared the end of their global rivalry, which is a reason for some authors who dealt with the era of bipolar international affairs to write about a period *from Yalta to Malta* (Chowdhury, 1990).
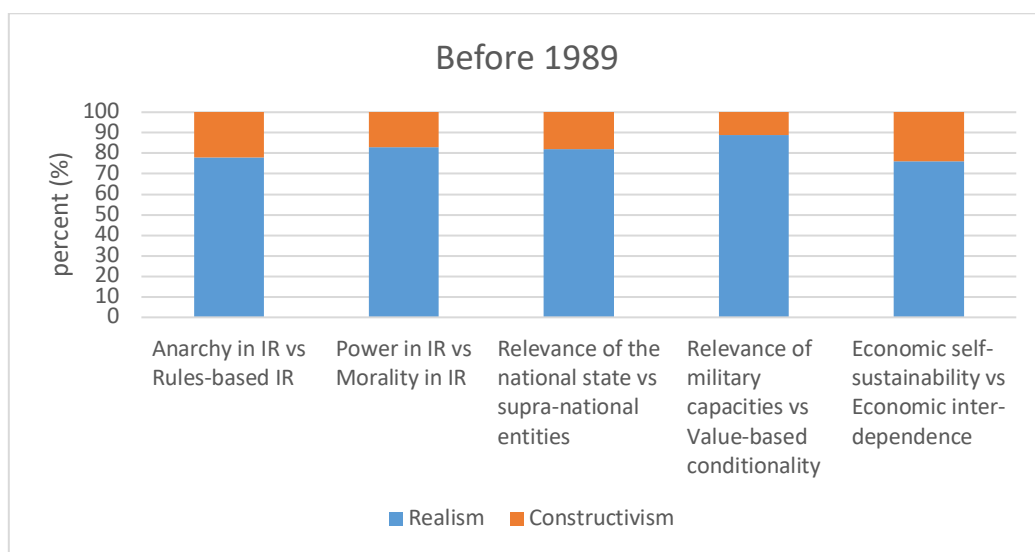
Graph No1 – Relevance of realism and constructivism during the Cold War

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[2] The USSR was spending more than 20% of its GDP for military purposes in the eighties.

As is clearly visible from the compilation of responses of our interviewees in the graph above, the period of Cold War was characterised by recognisable dominance of realist principles in the security environment of the Atlantic community. The IR arena was portrayed with lack of widely accepted and shared value-based regulation, strong prevalence of power over morality and the pivotal place of a national state in all essential processes in IR. In that environment, national capacities in the field of defence and the economy represent a valuable asset for ensuring strategic leverage and deterrence of potential foes. While alliances, communities and pacts existed, they were there exclusively to multiply capacities for the defence of national interests in different fields of IR. An indicative variable in that sense was the purely intergovernmental character of decision-making procedures in different multilateral bodies.

The fundamental factual consequence of beginning of process of détente was the deconstruction of all elements of the Cold War structures and mechanisms and a beginning of the development of western-styled political and economic systems in the countries of the former Eastern bloc. Changes in the political character of regimes in Eastern Europe, the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, the withdrawal of the Soviet military from Europe, the unification of Germany, to name few outstanding indicators, started changing the European continent and the entire international arena.

With the deconstruction of the Eastern bloc, the bipolar system effectively ceased to exist, affecting all spheres of international affairs. Rapid changes that started occurring raised the issue of the configuration of a new world order that would reflect new trends and developments, as well as a new balance of power and influence at the international level. The end of the eastern bloc and the dissolution of the Soviet Union dramatically changed the strategic balance at the global level, leaving it with only one super-power, the United States. In new circumstances, the West maintained all means of influence in political, economic and technological fields, which meant its absolute dominance in the creation of the framework for post-Cold War relations that were designed predominantly in accordance with its interests.

The transformations in different international political and economic institutions clearly reflected the structural changes in the international arena, while new ones (predominantly non-state actors) showed a capacity to influence political developments in the new international environment. Some fundamental principles that drove the bipolar system of international affairs for more than a half a century became less relevant as new ones started taking their place. The undisputed principle of territorial sovereignty and exclusive authority of the state for its internal affairs has been primarily supplemented with the principle of respect of democratic standards and human rights that paved a way for international engagement in political processes within a state.

Tectonic changes in the international arena after the Cold War had a substantial impact on the developments of European policy realm, creating pressures for further integration, as well as opening the opportunity for those who had belonged to former rival bloc to acquire membership upon meeting a very demanding membership criteria.

Clearly, the immediate post-Cold War period that brought along the collapse and deconstruction of former structures of bipolar relations represented an end of domination of realism in the international arena. Together with the gradual process of development of a new global strategic reality, the realist principles that dominated the world in the previous five decades or so, like spheres of influence, hard power, nuclear deterrence and coercion, started losing ground and giving way to new concepts and frameworks. This, however, did not happen overnight, since it required significant transformations in different processes, actors and layers of international relations.

3. European Union, the United States and post-Cold War transatlantic challenges

The process of transformation of the European Community into the Union, after the issue of German unification and strategic orientation has been solved, was built on the previous experiences and successes in the field of European integration and was characterised by voluminous debates about the desired level of balance between supra-national and inter-governmental decision-making patterns. The European Union, based on three fundamental pillars, was created with the Maastricht Treaty that was concluded in December 1991 and came into force in January 1993. While the first pillar, named 'European Communities', comprised the institutions created with the Rome Treaty and carried a significant number of prerogatives for the 'community level' of decision-making, the second and third, entitled 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' and 'Justice and Home Affairs' maintained a strong inter-governmental character. New institutional set-ups unfortunately fell short of showing the capacity to cope with contemporary security dysfunctions in the EU's immediate vicinity and its wider environment.

The US attitude toward the European integration process was basically affirmative. The creation of European Monetary Union was estimated as potentially challenging to the central role of US dollar in international financial affairs, but also something that would remove artificial obstacles to higher level of presence of American companies at a growing EU single market. Political consolidation of the EU was warmly welcomed for many reasons, from an opportunity to reduce US ground presence in Europe to the fact that it has the potential to become a strong ally with shared values in the place that used to be a geostrategic hot-spot of the Cold War. And lastly, even the Common Foreign and Security Policy was treated as something broadly acceptable if reconciled

with the undisputed role of NATO and the US within the framework of a joint co-operative security framework. Hence, it became clear that the new circumstances have led to the creation of a European pillar within the transatlantic security realm.

Regardless of the aforementioned changes, a co-operative framework of the transatlantic community remained intact, keeping NATO as a backbone of its security and US leadership relevant for the European continent. Hence, while the fundamental elements of transatlantic security community remained in place, the technical aspects of co-operation required certain remodelling. In particular, the issue of burden-sharing became very important within the alliance, where the US wanted to reduce the costs at the expense of European partners while keeping its strategic leverage[3], and Europeans strived for more influence and opposed the idea of taking on more burdens.

Furthermore, it became clear that the stability of the European continent cannot be built by focusing exclusively on post-Cold War developments in the transatlantic community of the early nineties and that the process of transition of former socialist states that started with the dissolution of socialist bloc requires strategic guidance and a clear set of criteria and policy perspectives.[4]

At that moment, there was a clear need to advance the understanding of European security from temporary absence of substantial threat and fear that dominated the Cold War discourse to the creation of a security community based on common values and high democratic standards that was being attributed to the new European security landscape. This required transformation and adaptation of both NATO and newly founded EU to contemporary challenges, opening perspectives of their strategic and operational reorganisation and their enlargement to former socialist countries.

First signs of NATO's efforts to adapt to a new strategic environment were displayed in the process of adoption of a new Strategic Concept that was introduced at the Rome NATO Summit in 1991. In the changed international environment that ended the period of balance of power of two global poles, a new American globalism promoted its liberal democratic values and the system that should ensure stability and prosperity, with an inclination to claim

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[3] Here, the issue of withdrawal of US troops from Europe created much controversy, since it was clear that it would enable significant reduction of expenses, but also symbolically imply reduced US interests in Europe.

[4] In addition, contemporary challenges and threats to European security have been complicating the continent's security landscape and asking for a consolidated approach to security in a new environment. The vacuum created with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact was not perceived as a potential threat only by Eastern European states, but also by Western states which viewed it as a possible source of backsliding and destabilisation in this part of Europe and a threat to western political unity and prosperity.

applicability not only in Europe, but also in different corners of the globe. Fighting against the argument about its obsolescence in the period after the Cold War, NATO was building new capabilities and creating a new image of a framework of co-operative security, based on the transatlantic consensus, open to all who are willing to adopt to its values and principles.

The gradual opening of NATO was displayed by the 1994 launching of Partnership for Peace (PfP), a framework of political-military co-operation between NATO and Central and Eastern European countries, that were trying to redefine their approach to security policy after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the USSR. The US, as an undisputed leader of the bloc behind the wheel of the process, started gradually adopting affirmative attitude towards the idea of NATO enlargement towards the East.

The process of enlargement successfully developed, regardless of different obstacles and delays, transforming a 19 member alliance in 1999 into 30 members today, with continued open doors policy to other potential candidates. In parallel with that, the US supported the process of gradual EU enlargement and institutional transformation unfolded, adding new elements to a *sui generis* European integration project. The Clinton administration in particular was very supportive of the European integration project and its enlargement to the Central and Eastern European potential candidate countries, understanding it as a tool for the expansion of 'the western world' eastwards, political consolidation of the European continent and expansion of market-based liberal-democratic model that would open new markets for American capital. The historic 5th enlargement of the EU in 2004 added 10 new members, with the Union today consisting of 27 member states.[5]

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[5] For the reasons listed above, the projects like Schengen Area and European Monetary Union received strong support of the US. Even the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU, under the precondition of being reconciled with the absolute dominance of NATO in security and defence realm, received staunch support of the US and a clear go-ahead in the process of designing European security institutions.
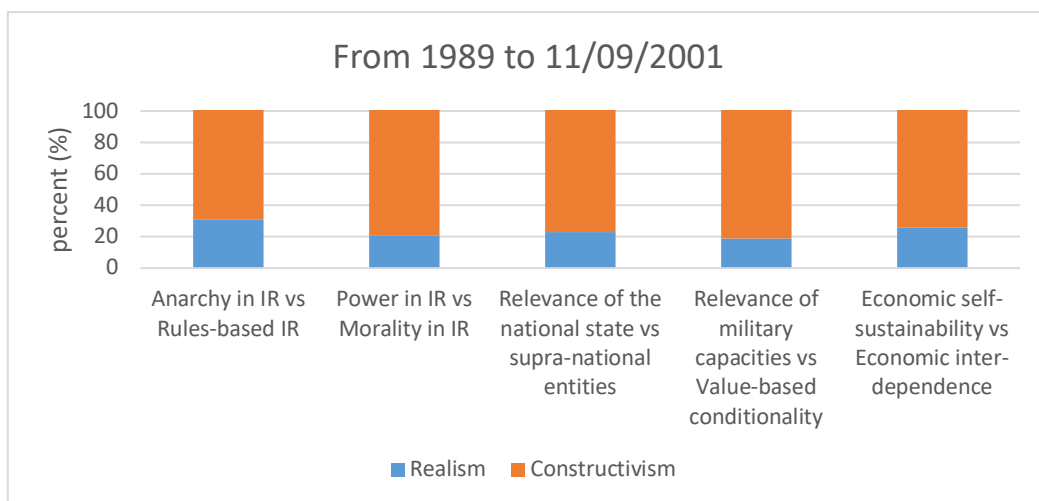
Graph No2 – Relevance of realism and constructivism during the period between the end of the Cold War and 11/09/2001

Paramount changes elaborated above introduced new practices in the IR arena of that period. This has been clearly displayed in responses of our interviewees. Unlike the previous period, the IR arena was perceived as being operated under a clear set of international rules, based on common values, where morality represents a leading principle. While the previous period emphasized the relevance of nation state as a fundamental actor in IR, the integration processes that unfolded brought in the supra-national, as well as non-state actors, which significantly diversified the entire international landscape. Processes like globalisation and EU and NATO enlargement highlighted the importance of value-based conditionality and economic interdependence, signalling their prevalence over leverage of military might and economic self-sustainability that previously dominated the IR arena.

The period of adaptation of transatlantic structures to new realities in the international arena brought paramount and unprecedented changes to a global strategic paradigm, where constructivist approach gained ground at the expense of realism that had dominated before. The processes of globalisation, Europeanisation and in particular enlargement of the Atlantic community were based on the idea of expansion of fundamental liberal-democratic values that should yield long-term stabilisation and development in both political and economic sense. Not only the principles, but also resources and technology of the Western world, were distributed in different corners of the globe in an attempt to bridge the developmental gaps primarily between the West and large developing countries, promote western democratic standards and gain access to large remote markets.

4. Consequences of 9/11, general IR deregulation and challenges of a multipolar world

NATO's Kosovo military campaign in 1999 was probably the last major development attracting significant US attention and participation, not only in Southeast Europe, but in the entire European continent at that time. The US gradually started showing signals of its strategic pivoting towards the Middle East and Indo-Pacific. Additionally, with the change of US administrations and gradual backsliding to another episode of American unilateralism during the mandate of George W. Bush, dialogue with European partners and US dedication to Atlanticism started gradually waning.

The terrorist attack on US soil on 11 September 2001 marked a turning point in American foreign and security policy[6], concentrating almost entirely on the fight against terrorism, both at the domestic and international arena.[7] The move did not change only the security discourse at the policy-making level in the US, but also in the transatlantic community, as well as in the rest of the globe. The American attitude towards multilateralism reached one of its lowest points in history, affecting dramatically the transatlantic partnership and IR as a whole, paving way to traditional realist approach to contemporary relations and challenges.

The impact of 9/11 terrorist attack on political discourse and threat perception was significantly different in the US and in Europe. Vast majority of American transatlantic partners declared unequivocal support to the US, both bilaterally and within the alliance, and offered different types of assistance. However, it soon became clear that there were conceptual differences in their understanding of combat against terrorism at the domestic and international level. At the domestic level, the Europeans prioritised individual liberties over an ability of the state to exercise control in the field of homeland security, while the US was headed exactly in the opposite direction. Additionally, while Europeans were more cautious with the use of coercive measures at the IR arena and insisted on multilateral compromise-based behaviour, the US focused on unilateral measures and extensive use of force in combat against terrorism. This was clearly displayed in the way they handled their military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This showed a display of distrust between partners and clear distancing from multilateral and compromise-based operational patterns. Actually, in that period, the US was operating either unilaterally or by forming *ad hoc* coalitions with those willing to support missions and policy goals defined solely by

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[6] Perhaps the most indicative element in that regard was the fact that NATO invoked its Article 5 for the first time in history.
[7] At the domestic level, a newly introduced Homeland Security Act shifted the balance between individual liberties and state's ability to control and prevent towards the later, sparking criticism and protests in the American society.

Washington, conducted under the moto that "missions determine the coalitions and not the other way around". In words of then Secretary of Defence, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld in 2001, "Let me reemphasize that the mission determines the coalition, and the coalition must not determine the mission. As President Bush has said, the mission is to take the battle to the terrorists, to their networks and to those states and organizations that harbour and assist terrorist networks." (Rumsfeld, 2001)

Significant initial military success in Afghanistan propelled American unilateralism and strategic self-confidence that led to another military intervention, Iraq in 2003, creating additional cleavages in an already shaken transatlantic partnership. While the US insisted on a military intervention in Iraq with the aim of destroying the WMDs, the European partners preferred the diplomatic solution based on provisions of international law that would force Iraqi authorities to respect relevant UN Security Council resolutions. France and Germany were particularly vocal in that regard, displaying serious scepticism toward the intentions of the US administration and using international forums to articulate that.

The American military intervention in Iraq in 2003 developed a more substantial cleavage in the transatlantic security community, creating unprecedented relational situations among its members. For example, France decided to veto any UN Security Council resolution proposed by the US and its partners, which it regarded as an ultimatum to the Iraqi regime, with the support of Russia and China. Needless to say, this type of development within the UN Security Council was beyond imagination in the period of Cold War and its immediate aftermath. Furthermore, Germany used all diplomatic means to distance itself from US activities in Iraq and to condemn them, which cumulatively created a large divide among the main actors within the transatlantic community, symbolically reaching its peak with the remark of then US Secretary of Defence about "Old and New Europe".[8]

The process of deregulation of international affairs, that gradually started with the delegitimization and bypassing of international institutional procedures in the post-Cold War period, gained ground with consolidation of economic and military might of international actors that considered the western rise as a direct threat to their interests. China grew remarkably in the economic sphere, which affected its political and strategic leverage as well, to the extent that the geostrategic focus of global affairs shifted to the Indo-Pacific. Russia managed to consolidate its power after the post-Cold War shock and in particular the dissolution of the USSR, mainly by using its energy resources as a foreign

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[8] For details about Mr Rumsfeld's remark on Old and New Europe, please see - *U.S.: Rumsfeld's 'Old' and 'New' Europe Touches on Uneasy Divide*, Radio Free Europe, https://www.rferl.org/a/1102012.html, accessed on 2nd June 2022.

policy tool as well as its growing military might and hardware export. Regardless of the rivalry between them in many fields, these two permanent UN Security Council members and countries with recognisable leverage at the international arena, have shown interest into consolidating and expanding their efforts with the desire to counter the political and economic enlargement and strengthening of the West. Apart from their assertive foreign and economic policies in different pockets of the globe, they invested efforts in regional and transregional groupings that amplified the visibility and outreach of their policies. The example of the first is a regional co-operation called Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that gathered China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, fostering co-operation in the political, economic and security fields. The case for the second regional pact is called BRICS, representing Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa in an informal intergovernmental union of emerging market economies that fostered bilateral and multilateral co-operation in many different fields.

Recent developments explained above display a worrisome trend of deregulation of international affairs, characterised by a broad disrespect for provisions of international law and institutions of multilateral governance, a return of geopolitics to the arena, a decreased level of co-operation and confidence among the main actors and reinstitution of the use of military hardware as a legitimate tool for political goals. It reached its culmination with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that will have a tectonic impact on the European security landscape and international affairs in general.
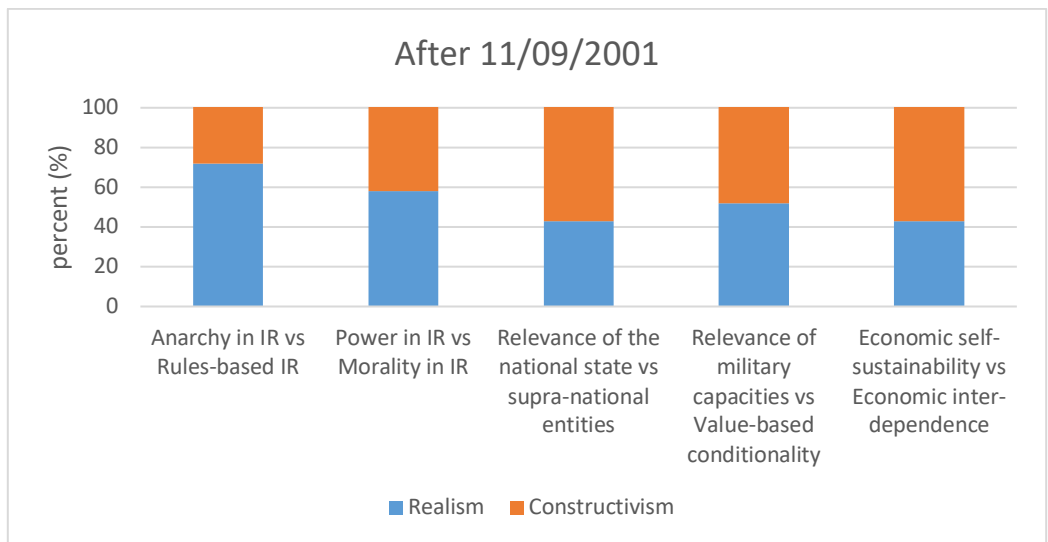
Graph No3 – Relevance of realism and constructivism after 11/09/2001

The process of gradual deregulation of IR started changing the global security landscape in the period after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and reached its peak with full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian Federation in 2022. The period of heightened instability on the European continent started with the forced Russian annexation of Crimean Peninsula in 2014, proving wrong all claims that deemed the use of hard power for national security purposes obsolete. It dramatically affected security of the transatlantic community, in particular of the EU, forcing it to reconceptualise its security policy and significantly increase defence spending. Our empirical findings witness strong deregulation of IR, where power and military might gain significant ground again. However, unlike in the Cold War period there seems to remain a strong common sense of the importance of the co-operative concept of security where supra-national entities and value-based conditionality still remain very important, as well as open and interlinked economies. These indicators hint at the changing patterns of the Atlanticism that tries to boost and utilise its realist capacities in an attempt to protect its constructivist habitus.

The concept of Atlanticism, despite certain obstacles and functional problems, proved to be capable to meet the challenges of this security dysfunction. While maintaining certain differences, in particular with regards to threat-perception and the way joint transatlantic response to Russian aggression in Ukraine affects their economies, members of the western security community were united in taking a stand towards the new challenge and the way to cope with it.

However, it is obvious that declining synergy within the transatlantic community, which is faced with serious conceptual threats to its security and rising opponents at the international level, is changing the rules of the game at the global level. Broader trends of aforementioned deregulation of international arena and severe challenges to multilateralism are complicating the international strategic landscape, making it more prone to unilateral assertive actions and a return of realist approach to contemporary reality. This brings significant challenges primarily to the Atlantic security paradigm and its main actors, which are forced to develop realist capacities in order to defend its constructivist nature.

5. Conclusion

If there is a recognizable constant related to international affairs, it is undoubtedly the changing dynamic of its nature and its unpredictability. It is a multidimensional societal construct affected by various internal and external developments, as well as by different national, regional and global trends. While some epochal turning points, like the fall of the Berlin Wall, signaled potentially predictable trends in the period to come and motivated different social scientists to claim to understand the 'history of the future', the

developments that followed denied them and reminded us of the only recognizable constant in the field, change.

The last decade has been rather challenging for transatlantic relations, marked by wider trends of deregulation in the international arena, a rise of assertive players that challenge the position of the West, as well as a growing unilateralism and waning synergy in the club and its leverage at the global scale. The geostrategic consequences of that are visible around the globe, from barely sustainable global governance, absence of basic compromise on burning issues like climate change and immigration, to the unbearable consequences of ill-managed interventions and presence in different countries in the region of the Middle East and Northern Africa as well as Afghanistan, strategic losses in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, unfinished business in the process of the consolidation of Southeast Europe and the political unification of Europe. One of the notable indicators of the strategic limbo and complexity of mutual relations with which the transatlantic community is currently dealing were the delays in adoption of the new NATO Strategic Concept.

The concept of Atlanticism therefore has to modify itself against broader societal trends, in order to be able to respond and adjust to them in the most appropriate way. On the other hand, given its global relevance, the Atlanticism itself in many ways affects and determines these trends, shaping the global order and its main characteristics.

Combining two opposing but interlinked theoretical constructs, realism and constructivism, in an attempt to understand the development of phenomena in our focus, provides an opportunity to fathom into their determining details. While different authors advocate exclusive application of one of those theoretical approaches, it seems that the combination of the two, with the balance between them determined by geostrategic requirements of the momentum in the IR arena, best suits the analysis of the concept of Atlanticism.

It is clear that from the very beginning of the Atlantic security community, joint values lie at the core of their co-operation. Protection of liberal democracy and market economy from a looming Soviet threat represented a fundamental motivation for partners on the two shores of the Atlantic to join forces and maximise their efforts to meet new challenges in the period after the Second World War. So, even back then, while the protection of societal and economic systems based on shared values pointed at constructivist approach to co-operative security, the character of the foe, Soviet Union and its communist bloc, urged the West to develop political, economic and defence capabilities in a typical realist attempt to outscore the opposing camp during the Cold War. In other words, while developing different instruments and institutional capacities at a national and transnational level in the Atlantic community based on shared liberal democratic values, the West was building up for the ongoing strategic contest with the Warsaw Pact in a typical realist zero-sum game. The aforementioned was visible in many fields, such as the arms race, spheres of

influence, sponsored military campaigns and proxy wars, intelligence and informational warfare, economic, cultural and other forms of confrontation.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought the Cold War era to an end, opening new perspectives for conceptualisation of transatlantic security in a changing geostrategic reality. The apparent demise of the eastern bloc yielded the rational conclusion concerning the victory of the Atlanticism as irreversible and determining the direction and the pace of the development of global affairs. The world entered the period of 'US's strategic unipolarism', the obvious economic predominance of the West and growing attractiveness of their fundamental liberal democratic values that sparked considerable interest of former socialist states to accede to Atlantic frameworks of co-operation and integration. The diverging perceptions of different international players regarding the processes that unfolded in next decades will be prevalent for strategic developments in international, and particularly European, contemporary security landscape. While the Atlantic community and the acceding states regarded the EU and NATO enlargement processes to Central, Eastern and Southeastern European states a win-win scenario of their democratic consolidation and strengthening of their market economy, the others, China and Russia in particular, considered these developments as the greatest geostrategic loss (a western expansion at their strategic expense) and trends that should be stopped, if not averted.

In the period of obvious political predominance of the West, that fabricated the notion of global applicability of liberal democratic values and some economic trends started determining the principal developments of the world economy. First of all, the process of globalisation and the Internet technology revolution created an opportunity to shift production capacities and contemporary technological know-how to big markets with cheap labour (China, Russia, India) in the search for the rationalisation of operating costs. Additionally, the expansion of the growing western capitalist industry eastwards and its increased profitability was based on sizeable import of cheap energy resources, predominantly from Russia, that created noticeable dependence in many European countries.[9]

These processes have gradually reduced the economic autonomy of the West and created great opportunities for the increase of profits and the growth of economies of developing countries. Consequently, in particular in China's case, the last few decades brought enormous economic growth with significant

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[9] The consequence of these shifts became visible during the crises that followed. The COVID-19 crisis showed considerable dependence of EU member states on imports of medical equipment and materials from China. On the other hand, voluminous dependence of energy imports from Russia was clearly shown within the EU decision-making processes on imposition of sanctions on the Russian Federation in response to its invasion of Ukraine.

strategic impact in wider regional and global affairs. In addition, it created an opportunity for the countries with looming economies to invest more in defence capabilities and technological development, which significantly altered the strategic balance at the expense of the West that had dominated the international arena in the immediate post-Cold War period. Frequent calls for the creation of a multipolar world order mirrored the strategic self-perception of those who considered themselves losers of the post-Cold War transition and required a revision of their position at the global arena. Recent assertive attitude of these countries, in particular Russia's activities in Ukraine and the Chinese in South China Sea, illustrates the expected patterns of their behaviour at the international arena in the period to come.

It unfortunately confirms the assumption from the beginning of this chapter that the main determinant of current and future international affairs would be uncertainty and unpredictability. It has to be clearly stated that the concept of Atlanticism was, is and will remain one of shaping figures in global affairs. However, unlike in the period after the end of the Cold War, it is clear that there are other increasingly relevant players that maximise their efforts in doing the same. It is more than clear that the Atlantic community requires unity and synergy in order to defend its values in such a turbulent period. These values undoubtedly represent an Atlantic glue and a base for functionality of the western security community, grounded on a common identity and restrain from use of coercive means.

However, the political character of current strategic rivals and foes openly displays a necessity for the community based on a co-operative approach to security to consolidate its hard power, as well as the ability to project this power, in order to maintain its stability and deter possible future attacks on its strategic interest and position in the world.

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