

The Challenges of Formulating National Security Strategies (NSS) in the Presence of Overarching Existential Threats

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Abstract

The overall objective of the paper is to examine how states that face an overarching (perceived) existential threat may be at a disadvantage when developing their National Security Strategies (NSS). The main hypothesis is that states facing an overarching threat tend to focus almost exclusively on that and may subsequently ignore or under-estimate other potential great threats, while at the same time they may miss out on opportunities to enhance their domestic, and even regional, security and geopolitical standing. A secondary hypothesis aims to test whether these myopic situations develop due to the sociopolitical expectations for a single-issue NSS focus. Furthermore, being an EU Member State may potentially exacerbate a false sense of both insecurity (from the overarching threat) and security (from other potential threats). This raises questions on i) whether the EU is in a position to understand the localized security perceptions and thus provide the necessary support to mitigate those fears, and ii) whether it can act as a security provider, not only in real terms (point i), but also by re-orienting the Member States' view of security and threats.

Keywords: National Security Strategies (NSS), existential threats, EU Member States, overarching threats, security

Introduction

Formulating National Security Strategies (NSS) is almost never a straightforward task, free of major theoretical or empirical complexities, even in cases where there is a single overarching and very dominant existential threat. In such cases, the focus of the NSS is usually unquestionable; it revolves around the source of the overarching threat (OT). This paper explores on one hand the potential challenges of formulating a comprehensive NSS in states dominated by a single OT, and on the other it questions the potential true functionality or purpose of the NSS in such environments.

The paper is separated into three major sections. The first explains the importance of overarching threats in contributing to the formation of unique mentalities

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and culture, which in turn become themselves obstacles to the development of comprehensive NSSs. The second part focuses on the potential impact on an NSS, and more specifically how the latter may be either too focused on a single issue – i.e. the overarching threat – or very ‘thin’ when it comes to the other potential threats that fall outside the realm of the OT. The third part focuses on the role of the EU as a potential security provider whose actions or inactions shape the national security paths of a state under an overarching threat. The paper draws empirical data from the case of Cyprus and more specifically from the Republic of Cyprus and, to a much lesser degree, Georgia. It must be noted on the outset that the Republic of Cyprus has been working on an official National Security Strategy document, but it is not yet, to my knowledge, complete, or indeed public. Thus, in the case of Cyprus (as opposed to that of Georgia), the reference to a NSS does not necessarily refer to an actual written document, but rather to National Security Strategy as part of the country’s security culture, mentality and practices.

Overarching Threats (OTs)

Overarching threats are defined as existential threats, which, if they materialize, will have an extremely high negative impact on the state and on society. Such threats are not necessarily limited to a single referent object such as the physical security of the people in a state, or the political survival of a government. In line with the Copenhagen School of thought, existential threats could extend into other areas using a logic of a more widened and ‘sociologized’ analysis of security.² Thus, existential threats could also be based in the political, economic, societal and environmental sectors. Wæver³ points out that ‘a discussion of security is a discussion of threat’ meaning that security becomes ‘what actors make of it’.⁴ It is precisely this intersubjective sociological approach to security that allows for the development of a widened security agenda with multiple sectors and numerous potential referent objects that could be under existential threat. Indeed, since its conception, securitization theory has been used to study security-related issues and processes in several areas including terrorism.⁵

2 S. Guzzini, ‘Securitization as a causal mechanism’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (2011), 329-341.

3 O. Wæver, ‘Politics, security, theory’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 42, Nos. 4-5 (2011), 472-473.

4 B. Buzan, et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997).

5 See B. Buzan (2006) on terrorism; D. Bigo, ‘Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Government of Unease’, *Alternatives*, Vol. 27, Special Issue, (2002), D. Bigo ‘From Foreigners to “Abnormal Aliens”’, in *International Migration and Security: Opportunities and Challenges*, eds. E. Guild and J. Van Selm (Abingdon: Routledge 2005), and M. Alexseev, ‘Societal security, the security dilemma, and extreme anti-migrant hostility in Russia’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2011) on immigration; R. Floyd, ‘Human security and the Copenhagen School’s securitization approach: Conceptualizing human security as a securitization move’, *Human Security Journal*, Vol. 5, Winter,

That said, most overarching threats focus on the survival of the state, which subsequently means that more than one ‘sector’ or referent objects are directly or indirectly affected by the OT. For instance, a military invasion does not only pose an existential threat to the people and the state, but inevitably to the economy, the societal structures and potentially the environment. Frequently, OT are also persistent, in the sense that they are not usually a ‘one-time incident’, but rather the outcome of medium or even long-term actions or adversarial relationships, as is the case, for instance, of states or communities that are the recipients of negative actions or threats from neighbouring rivals.

Expectedly, OTs have a significant impact on the perceptions and security cultures of the societies facing the threat, and the impact should be expected to be even greater in cases where the perceived probability of the threat materializing is higher due to historical and contemporary incidences related to the threats. Unsurprisingly, OTs with significant impact are found in protracted or persistent conflicts; that is, enduring – usually dyadic – rivalries engaged in conflict over an extended period.⁶ In such cases, more often than not the same source of threat is imbedded in the society’s routines and remains unchallenged by the majority of the population.⁷ For the Palestinians the source of threat would be Israel, for Georgians, Russia, for South Korean, North Korea, and for (Greek) Cypriots, Turkey, just to name a few.

It is worth noting that the use of violence, acceptable as it may be as a tool in such environments, is not a necessary ingredient to observe an enduring rivalry. North and South Korea – in the post Korean war period – is such an example.⁸ However, intense or frequent violent acts not only enhance the chance for conflicts to remain

(2007), on human security; E. Wishnick, ‘Dilemmas of securitization and health risk management in the People’s Republic of China: The cases of SARS and avian influenza’. *Health Policy and Planning*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (2010) on the environment; L. Hansen, ‘The Little Mermaid’s silent security dilemma and the absence of gender in the Copenhagen School’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2000) on women’s rights.

6 E. Azar, ‘The Theory of Protracted Social Conflict and the Challenge of Transforming Conflict Situations’, in *Conflict and the Breakdown of International Systems*, ed. D. A. Zinnes (Denver, CO: University of Colorado, 1983); K. Boulding, ‘Conflict and Defense: A General Theory’, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989); G. Friedman, ‘Conceptualizing Protracted Conflict and Protracted Conflict Management’, in *The Understanding and Management of Global Violence: New Approaches To Theory and Research on Protracted Conflict*, ed. H. Starr (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

7 C. Adamides, ‘Negative perceptions of foreign actors: an integral part of conflict perpetuating routines’, *Great Power Politics in Cyprus: Foreign Interventions and Domestic Perceptions*, eds. M. Kontos, N. Panayiotides, H. Alexandrou, and S. C. Theodoulou (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

8 P. F. Diehl and G. Goertz, *War and peace in international rivalry* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

unresolved, but also contribute to the internalization of the overarching threats. Violence also allows for the development of stronger links between negative past experiences and potential future threats, even when there is no strong evidence that a current or future perceived threat is likely to materialize. In other words, individuals and states may frequently evaluate future threats – and similarly future security providers – based on their past experiences and not necessarily based on current developments or on other security-related indicators. In other words, threats are usually linked to the ‘enemy other’ and not necessarily due to the presence of violence (or active conflict) as it is frequently assumed.⁹ This is not surprising, especially in protracted conflicts, as security-related discourses tend to resonate for a long time, frequently for generations, and remain resilient in the collective memory of the communities. Indeed, as Horowitz notes, in ethnic conflicts, antipathies towards ‘the other’ are so strong that they can ‘survive even the powerful solvent of modernization’ and contribute to the perpetuation of ethnic antagonisms.¹⁰ Official and non-official positions contribute to the perpetuation of the relevant security discourses, frequently creating an insurmountable obstacle for political elite who cannot ignore the public sentiments, even if politically it would be more beneficial for the country to do so. Similarly, education has a major role to play both in terms of peacebuilding and the perpetuation or even exacerbation of the conflict. Taking a potentially negative role of educators to the extreme, Sommers¹¹ notes that ‘many who conduct modern wars are expert at using educational settings to indoctrinate and control children’. Indeed, the internalized security-related perceptions are too strong, too resilient and too ‘visible’ (in opinion polls) to be ignored.

What is argued in this paper is that in the presence of overarching existential threats – especially in the military sector – states and people tend to focus entirely on that, frequently ignoring other potential threats. Considering the actual or potential impact of an OT, this should not be seen as either irrational or as unexpected, especially if the OT has a high probability of materializing. Interestingly however, this ‘over focus’ on a single issue may also exist in cases where the probability of threat materializing is relatively low. In the latter case, this is predictable irrationality, at least in the eyes of outsiders. It is certainly predictable behaviour to focus on potentially big threats; however, it can be perceived as irrational to ignore, or under-focus, on much more probable threats. It is likely that outsiders will be the only actors to see this irrationality, as locals, due to

9 L. Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

10 L. D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 97-98.

11 M. Sommers, *Children, education and war: reaching Education for All (EFA) objectives in countries affected by conflict*. Conflict Prevention and Reconstructing Unit. Working Papers. Paper 1. June 2002. Social and Development (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2002).

the internalized perceptions they hold vis-à-vis the OT, are unlikely to consider such behaviour as anything but expected and legitimate. Indeed, in environments where there is an OT, it is very likely to observe group-think mentality, which would only perpetuate the internalized positions, as well the recycling of knowledge with few opportunities to ‘think outside the box’, or rather ‘outside the OT’.

Can or Should Overarching Threats Be Excluded from a National Security Strategy?

Is it even possible in protracted conflict environments for an NSS *not* to focus on the OT? The answer is a resounding ‘no’. Any national security strategy that does not focus on the most existential threat of the state will essentially be completely meaningless as it will lack legitimization in the eyes of the locals, and most likely the non-locals. Lack of legitimization will essentially render any NSS pointless at best, and at worse, it will create a backlash for the government that drafted it. Indeed, ignoring the OT would be nothing less than political suicide, as OTs are central to society, routinized, and more often than not, *unchallenged domestically*.¹² The centrality of the threat means that society, the political elite, the media and the public, are constantly preoccupied with the threat and the political developments that are linked to it. The centrality of the issue is not only evident from the focus it receives in the press and the political discourses, but also in education material and societal activities. OTs are also routinized in the sense that the same discourses, that are usually presented as zero-sum positions, tend to appear repeatedly in official and non-official positions. Lastly, they are unchallenged in the sense that the threat (and source of threat) is so deeply securitized that its presence and importance are unlikely to be challenged in any convincing way by political elite, media or the public.

While the aforementioned conditions may make it impossible for governments not to ‘over-focus’ on the OT, it does not mean that the focus is not justified. On the contrary, it is as justified as it is expected. What is being discussed here is the possibility that the focus on the OT comes at the expense of focusing on other potential threats. A National Security Strategy aims not only to define and outline the threats a state is facing, but also to explore the options on how to deal with them. Thus a NSS should help determine the strategic security objectives of a state and subsequently the necessary means to achieve them. With this in mind, the paper does not question whether an OT should be part of the NSS – it should – but rather the potential opportunity cost, namely the inability or unwillingness to focus on other (potentially

12 C. Adamides, ‘A comfortable and routine conflict’, in *Resolving Cyprus: New approaches to conflict resolution*, ed. J. Ker Lindsay (I.B. Tauris, 2015).

much more probable) threats. This opportunity cost is not necessarily in reference to the actual NSS paper – that may or may not focus on all kinds of threats – but also on the means and resources allocated to achieve the objectives outlined in the NSS. In other words, this potential neglect due to a potential over-focus on an OT should be seen in practical, societal and cultural terms.

Specifically, on paper, no decent NSS would ignore other potential threats such as cyber warfare, environmental threats, etc. Thus, it should be considered a given that an NSS would, on paper, pay attention to all different kinds of threats. In reality, however, to what extent would such a comprehensive NSS influence the practical aspect that deals with threats? The assumption is that the NSS should be shaping the path for a state's security focus. This paper argues that in the presence of an OT, it is the OT and the associated security culture that will determine the security orientation of the state and not an NSS. Furthermore, the paper questions the sincerity of the NSS vis-à-vis the actual actions taken to deal with non-OTs outlined in the NSS. For instance, how many resources and time are actually allocated to threats other than the ones that are linked to the OT? Simply put, to what extent can a theoretically comprehensive NSS actually change the security culture of a state that is faced with an OT? Similarly, should we expect that the strategic approach towards the OT will be altered in any significant way because of the development of an NSS? This paper argues that it is unlikely that an NSS would influence, in practice, the security orientation of the state in any direction other than the OT, while at the same time it is unlikely that it would influence the practices followed for dealing with the OT as they are already well-formed, institutionalized and not easily alterable. Equally important is the question on whether society actually cares enough about any other kind of threats to the degree that it would demand a change of focus for the national security. Lastly, it is questionable whether in an OT culture society and the government mechanisms are actually capable of either initiating or handling such a change.

The Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Overarching Threat

While it is beyond the scope of the paper to provide a literature review of the Cyprus problem, it is still essential to briefly outline some key variables of the conflict that will contribute to the theoretical premises presented above. The five-decade long Cyprus Problem is one of the most contemporary protracted ethnic conflicts, with abundant literature on the subject and with conflicting views on what has caused it, on who is to be blamed for its perpetuation and on the structure of the 'final settlement'. The conflict is viewed as ethno-national,¹³ with disputes between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, as an

13 Y. Papadakis, et al., 'Modernity, History and Conflict in Divided Cyprus: An Overview', in *Divided*

issue of incompatible subject positions,¹⁴ as the outcome of regional and superpower interests and interferences,¹⁵ or as a combination of any of the above. Irrespective of the position one holds on the causation of the conflict and its perpetuation, what is certain is that the problem remains very central to Cypriot society.¹⁶ Precisely because the problem is so central, most foreign policy decisions – of the Republic of Cyprus – are almost always linked to improving security against the Turkish OT. Perhaps the most indicative example is the RoC accession to the EU, which, as the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ioannis Kasoulides noted, ‘is the greatest guarantee for our existence’.¹⁷ This is a position held by essentially all Greek Cypriot political elite, which clearly indicates on one hand the existential fear deriving from the Turkish OT, and on the other the fact that security from the OT is far more important than anything else, such as economic prosperity. That said, it should be expected that in the presence of extraordinary developments, such as the unprecedented (for Cyprus) financial crisis in 2013, the governmental and public focus will temporarily shift to those issues. However, once the major (temporary) crisis is over, the focus is expected to return back to the ‘ethnic problem’ and the associated threats.

The behaviour and positions of international actors are key for Greek Cypriots and how much they can be trusted or not depends almost solely on their position on the Cyprus Problem. Despite the fact that the RoC asks for more international involvement, more often than not, Greek Cypriots perceive the international community as biased and as a potential threat, rather than as a force for settlement, while they frequently have a misplaced perception on what the role of international actors are or should be vis-à-vis the problem.¹⁸

Cyprus is also a complex double minority environment where both Greek and Turkish Cypriots feel, and could be, considered minorities. The Turkish Cypriots constitute approximately 20% of the island’s population and they are, therefore, a minority in Cyprus. However, if the two so-called motherlands, Greece and Turkey,

Cyprus: Modernity, History and an Island in Conflict, eds Y. Papadakis, N. Peristianis, G. Welz (Indianapolis: Indiana University, 2006).

- 14 T. Diez, ‘Last exit to paradise? The European Union, the Cyprus conflict and the problematic “catalytic effect”’, in *The European Union and the Cyprus Conflict: Modern conflict, postmodern union*, ed. Thomas Diez (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).
- 15 C. Hitchens, *Cyprus* (New York: Quartet Books, 1984).
- 16 Adamides, ‘Negative perceptions of foreign actors’.
- 17 A. Arsalidou, ‘EU participation the greatest guarantee for our own existence, Foreign Minister tells CAN’, *Cyprus News Agency* (2017, May 9), available at <http://media.cna.org.cy/WebNews-en.aspx?a=ed7bbaa5f24946258625cbc2b79fb426>.
- 18 Adamides, ‘Negative perceptions of foreign actors’; C. Adamides and M. Kontos, ‘Greek Cypriots Perception of the UN’, in *Cyprus Roadmap for Peace: A Critical Interrogation of the Conflict*, eds Michael Michael and Vural Yucel (Northampton MA: Edwar Elgar Publishing, 2018).

are considered, then Greek Cypriots become the minority. The close ties with and partial dependence of the two communities on their respective motherlands (especially between Turkish Cypriots and Turkey), coupled with the historical and frequently violent intercommunal and interstate relations, have rendered Cyprus vulnerable to external influences¹⁹ and have contributed to the development of a climate of deeply securitized relations between the two sides. Despite the deep distrust between the two and the illiberal environment, there is a non-hurting stalemate; indeed, and the conflict remains comfortable.²⁰

Irrespective of the absence of major violent incidences for over four decades, the fact that Turkey maintains tens of thousands of troops north of the Green Line, while concurrently continues to occupy 37% of the island, makes the neighbouring country the unquestionable and unchallenged overarching threat for Greek Cypriots. Thus, for decades there are deeply internalized negative perceptions and conflict-perpetuating routines that all revolve around the Turkish OT.²¹ The Turkish OT is associated with future proposed settlement plans and is heavily linked to the violent past, but also to the ongoing Turkish regional relations and actions, many of which are completely unrelated to Cyprus, but are still seen as ‘indicators’ of Turkey’s potential future behaviour. The Greek Cypriot perceived threat is not necessarily openly linked to future aggression – at least not on land²² – but rather to the security dimension in case of a settlement and to any relative advantages that Turkey may gain at the expense of the RoC. In other words, the conflict is perceived in zero-sum terms and any positive development for Turkey is usually perceived as a negative development for the RoC and as a potential threat. Ultimately, the perceived threat is that Turkey could achieve its goals in Cyprus, which would be anything from full control of the island, to indirect control through the Turkish Cypriots, to a more permanent and ‘legitimate’ (to the extent this is possible) dichotomization of the island, to the complete change of the sociocultural and demographic character of the island. Thus, the Turkish presence is seen as an overarching threat in the military, political, societal and economic sectors.

19 O. P. Richmond, ‘The multiple dimensions of international peacemaking: UN and EU involvement in the Cyprus conflict’, in *The European Union and the Cyprus Conflict*, ed. T. Diez (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

20 C. Adamides and M. C. Constantinou, ‘Comfortable Conflict and (il)liberal peace in Cyprus’, in *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From the ‘Everyday’ to Post-liberalism*, eds O. P. Richmond and A. Mitchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2012).

21 Adamides, ‘A comfortable and routine conflict’.

22 Since the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Turkey frequently sends warships in the Cypriot EEZ in an attempt to stop the exploration and exploitation of the Cypriot natural gas. The most indicative example was in February 2018 when Turkey sent five warships to literally block the Italian Saipem 12000 drilling ship (hired by the Italian ENI), forcing it eventually to cancel, for the time being, the planned drill in the Cypriot EEZ.

Evidence of Greek Cypriot Threat/Security Perceptions

The political elite discourse, as expected, focuses on the need for a conflict to problem, which as Greek Cypriot elites constantly note is one of invasion and occupation,²³ thus clearly and consistently anchoring the issue to a single source: Turkey. Equally clear is the fact that the use of terms ‘invasion’ and ‘occupation’ have a very significant impact on the security perceptions of the people. These perceptions are frequently reflected in opinion polls focusing either on the prospects of settlement or on issues of security. One such indicative survey, conducted by the bi-communal Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SEED) in 2017, clearly demonstrates how the Turkish OT is so dominating, that any potential settlement scenario that involves Turkish guarantees (for intervention) and/or Turkish military presence on the island creates a bigger insecurity for Greek Cypriots than the current status quo. In other words, the status quo, which is essentially the aforementioned illiberal, but comfortable conflict, provides a sense of security, as Cypriots seemed to have learned to live with their conflict-based routines and any change – including a settlement – would actually lead to more insecurity, if the OT is not completely eradicated from the proposed framework. Unfortunately, for both sides, the zero-sum environment that exists in Cyprus makes the eradication of the mutually exclusive OTs practically impossible, as Greek Cypriots cannot seem to accept anything that involves the Turkish military in the settlement, while the Turkish Cypriots do not seem to accept anything that does not involve the Turkish military or the Turkish right to intervene.

The survey presented six different scenarios regarding the Treaty of Guarantee (ToG) to both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The ToG is one of the most, if not the most, difficult parts of the problem to resolve, not only because it is an overarching threat, but also because it is not entirely up to Cypriots to reach an agreement, as Turkey (and to a lesser degree Greece and the UK) must also agree to the terms. As can be seen in Figure 1 (next page), all six proposed scenarios related to the ToG and a potential settlement, actually create more insecurity for Greek Cypriots than security. This is particularly interesting, considering that the first one proposes the

23 Greek Cypriot political elite maintain the same position vis-à-vis the Cyprus Problem, namely that it is a problem of ‘invasion and illegal occupation’, in all local and international fora. One of the most recent examples was by President Anastasiades at a European Parliament debate on 12 December 2018, where he noted that ‘[...] the Cyprus question basically remains a problem of foreign invasion and occupation and violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms’. Source: European Parliament ‘Debate on the Future of Europe: Opening Statement by Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus’, (2018, December 12), available at https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/debate-with-nicos-anastasiades-president-of-the-republic-of-cyprus-on-the-future-of-europe-opening-statement-by-nicos-anastasiades-president-of-the-republic-of-cyprus-1015_I164946-V_rv.

cancellation of the ToG after some ‘reasonable progress’ has been achieved, namely the successful implementation of important parts of the agreement, such as successful power-sharing and major absence of violence. While we do not have a definitive answer on why this feeling exists, there are a few reasonable educated guesses. The first is that Greek Cypriots do not believe there can be ‘reasonable progress’, which, subsequently would also mean that the ToG will not be cancelled. They may also believe that ‘reasonable progress’ can easily be disputed by the Turkish side for the benefit of maintaining the ToG. A more conspiratorial possibility along the latter scenario is based on the notion that a major violent incident may be the outcome of a provocative act in order to justify the continuation of the ToG; we have seen wars start on pretexts and falsified or false information, so this should not be entirely in the sphere of science fiction. On the other side of the spectrum, of course, there may also be Greek Cypriots who do not trust right-wing (Greek Cypriot) elements in society, who may indeed engage in violent incidences. Either way the outcome will be the same. Alternatively, Greek Cypriots may simply not trust that Turkey would hold its end of the deal and that it would cancel the ToG even if there is ‘significant progress’. Irrespective of the potential explanation, these kinds of responses clearly demonstrate the importance Greek Cypriots place on the overarching threat. Needless to say, all other options, which are considered to be worse than the first one, created even more insecurity than the status quo.

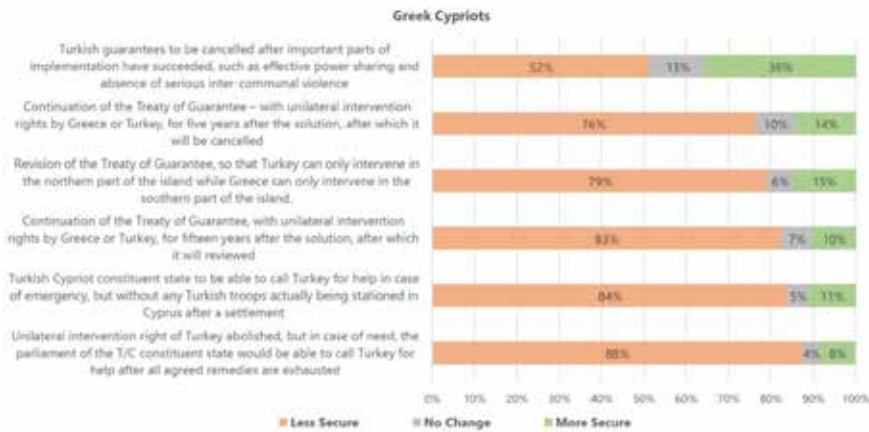


Figure 1: Scenarios - Greek Cypriot sense of security (Source: SEED, 2017)

Figure 2 shows the Turkish Cypriot responses to the same scenarios. The least problematic option for Greek Cypriots – the one described above – is the most problematic for Turkish Cypriots, clearly demonstrating the zero-sum positions on the specific issue, but also the deep distrust between the two sides.

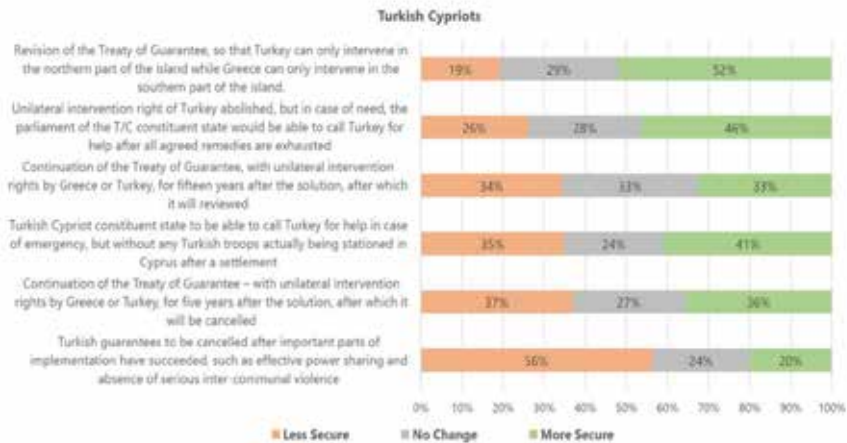


Figure 2: Scenarios - Turkish Cypriot sense of security (Source: SEED, 2017)

Cyprus is not Unique: The Case of Georgia

Georgia is another indicative example of how a single overarching threat dominates security perceptions. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a detail analysis of the Georgian case study, a brief mention will help demonstrate how OTs have a significant influence on NSSs, while it will also help differentiate the level of impact from between more and less ‘active’ conflicts. Equally important is the fact that Georgia does have a written (public) National Security Concept, which contributes to providing more concrete evidence between the link of OT and NSSs.

As expected, for Georgians, the single OT is the Russian Federation. The violent incidences of the recent past clearly created a dominant security concern that is heavily linked to a single source of threat: Russia. As shown in Figure 3 (next page), in a national survey conducted in March 2018, the top three national security threats for Georgia are linked to Russia. Unsurprisingly, the top spot is occupied by the prospect of further Russian military aggression, followed by the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, followed by terrorism, which too is also linked to Russia. All in all, more than 50% of all security concerns are linked to Russia.

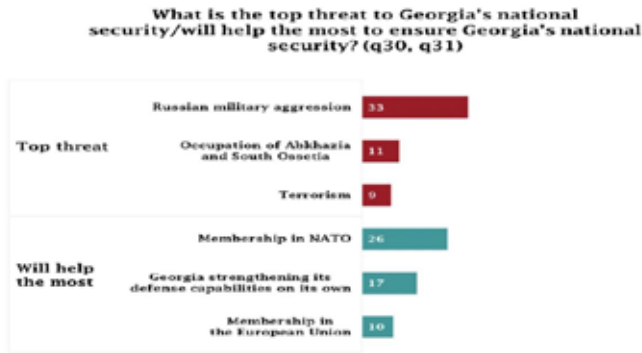


Figure 3: Top threat for Georgia’s national security and who can help

The perceived way to reduce this form of insecurity is, predictably, military improvements and a closer link to NATO, which is the optimum option. Interestingly, EU membership, much like the case of Cyprus, is also considered to be a good solution as it is presumably believed that Russia would be less likely to act aggressively against an EU member state. This is interesting, because, as argued in more detail in later sections, there is no clear indication that the EU can be a ‘solid’ security provider, at least not vis-à-vis ‘hard’ security; on the contrary, it could potentially create a false sense of security.

While the survey results only reflect the public’s opinion, the Georgian National Security Concept (GNSC) reflects the official positions and concerns. A content analysis of the 28-page long GNSC reveals that the word ‘Russia’ appears 85 times; every single time the reference is either directly or indirectly negative for the country’s security. Out of the 85 references, 64 were unique (i.e., not in the same sentence or paragraph), and 39 of those 64 times were linked to hard security concerns with expressions such as ‘military aggression’, ‘occupation’, ‘breach of sovereignty’ and ‘terrorism’. Another 11 times Russia was linked to political threats while the rest were linked to societal, economic and even environmental threats. In sum, there was not a single issue – ranging from sovereignty to political stability to the environment and to the economy – in the Georgian national security concept that did not include Russia as a source of threat.

Dealing with the OT Impact

While it is inevitable that the NSSs of countries like Cyprus and Georgia will inevitably focus on the overarching threat, the actual OT impact is not universal; on the contrary, the kind and degree of impact depends primarily on two factors, namely on how 'active' and probable the threat is perceived to be, and secondly on the ultimate political goal of each state vis-à-vis the OT. The case of Georgia for instance is an example of a relatively active threat given that it is a much 'warmer' and violent conflict, and ultimately the Georgian authorities' goal is much more direct, aiming at highlighting the Russian threat without any consideration for potential political backlash or consideration for political correctness. The case of Cyprus is an example where it is expected that the OT will still be dominating – especially on official documents – albeit potentially indirectly, given the nature of the status quo as a 'frozen conflict'. Cyprus' goal is, obviously, to highlight on one hand the threat, but on the other to also gain the moral and political high ground, and towards this end it has tread much more carefully. Inevitably, in the case of Cyprus much concern is given on ongoing negotiations, on potential political backlash, but also on the actual possibility for further military aggression (which in the case of Cyprus it seems to be much smaller compared to that of Georgia).

In cases like Cyprus, political correctness is essential in order to avoid any potential international political backlash that would hurt the negotiations' front, while being part of the EU, it becomes rather important to focus on specific security concerns that are echoed by the EU Member States. This opens the door for the development of a more comprehensive NSS where there is not a single focus point – the OT – as is the case for instance in Georgia; on the contrary, the focus is on multiple potential threats, ranging from cyber warfare to environmental risks. While on the surface an approach where a state focuses less on the OT and more on all potential threats appears to be the proper way to proceed for the development of an NSS, in practice there are numerous questions regarding the actual impact the latter would have in the security orientation of the state. Specifically, there are questions of legitimacy in the eyes of the people and other (international) actors, as well as doubts on the actual practical impact in terms of concrete actions followed to deal with the theoretically comprehensive NSS.

Public Legitimacy and the Issue of Allocated Resources

Legitimacy, in liberal democracies, is perceived to be one of the most essential conditions for the smooth governance of a state or region by the governing authorities. As Tyler notes, if authorities are deemed to be illegitimate, 'social regulation is more

difficult and costly'.²⁴ In other cases, the legitimacy of a political action or suggestion is achieved through referenda, leaving essentially the final approval to the people. This was the case when Scandinavian countries asked their populations if they would like to join (or not) the European Union.²⁵ In other cases, legitimacy may be subtler and manifested through the absence of major reactions by the political opposition or the public. This section aims to examine how an NSS must enjoy public legitimacy in the sense that the public must consider it as a correctly focused approach to the state's security.

While there is not yet an official, public Cypriot NSS document to examine in detail, any official security-related documents that attempt to outline the security threats of the state in a comprehensive manner as described above, may be to some extent illegitimate in the eyes of the people. While any state will attempt to provide a 'correct' or 'proper' document that focuses on all potential threats and much less on the OT, the public would expect exactly the opposite. Similarly, the state must determine whether the security-related threats that are outlined in official documents, such as an NSS, deserve the respective resources to deal with them. In countries like Cyprus, it is very clear that the vast majority of security-linked resources and routines are tailored towards the OT – Turkey – with the national guard being the prime example. As a result, what we expect to observe is a security strategy that dictates a focus on multiple (contemporary) threats, and on the other a resource allocation that focuses by and large on a single established threat. Thus, the strategy may in essence have little, if any, use to actually formulating a new security orientation. This is not surprising given that individuals in conflict environments are used to conflict perpetuating routines, and frequently actually contribute to their perpetuation as it helps them maintain their ontological security.²⁶ Such routines also include the defense mechanisms that are perceived as necessary to defend against the OT. Any changes to such established security structures would be considered as a disruption to the existing routines, and, as Mitzen²⁷ notes, disruptions create anxiety and are likely to be opposed, even at the expense of a more productive and efficient resource allocation, which would provide a more comprehensive security environment.

24 T.R. Tyler, 'A psychological perspective on the legitimacy of institutions and authorities', in *The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice and Intergroup Relations*, eds. J. T Jost and B. Major (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 416.

25 See for instance J. D. and A. S. Storsved, 'Legitimacy through referendum? The nearly successful domino-strategy of the EU-referendums in Austria, Finland, Sweden and Norway'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (1995).

26 J. Mitzen, (2006) 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma'. *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2006).

27 Ibid.

There is yet another important variable that could raise legitimacy questions, namely the absence of potential threats from states that otherwise offer political and economic safety. Specifically, overreliance on any single state for military, economic or political support should not be considered a sound security strategy, yet it is frequently deemed as necessary, either because it is the only possible option or for lack of possible alternatives. Therefore, there is an issue when the political realities on the ground force a state to rely too much on a single country, to the point that the over-reliance is a potential threat, which, however, cannot easily be portrayed as one in any official document or discourse. Even more specifically, it is not a secret that the Republic of Cyprus heavily relies on Russia's support and, indeed, Russia has consistently supported Cyprus in the UN Security Council and elsewhere. Therefore, there is little doubt that Russia is one of the closest partners of Cyprus. Similarly, it is not a secret that there is quite a heavy reliance on Russian capital both in the financial/accounting/legal industry as well as in the field of real estate. Under other circumstances this economic over-reliance should be an issue of concern, yet it should not be expected to appear as such, as the help towards the OT is considered to be of much greater importance than anything else.

With the above in mind, the presence of an OT in environments such as Cyprus may lead to the development of national security strategies that 'tick all the right boxes', but in reality are of little use in the actual security strategy of the country, or have an actual impact in reorienting the state's security mentality and processes.

The next sections focus on the European Union as a potential security provider and as a variable for contributing to the security strategy of Cyprus.

The EU Factor: A Sense of Security for the RoC

It is generally accepted that the primary factor for the Republic of Cyprus joining the EU is to strengthen its security vis-à-vis its overarching threat and, more generally, to further internationalize the conflict and concurrently to enhance its negotiation power.²⁸ There were no illusions that the EU would militarily protect Cyprus in case of further Turkish aggression, or that it would militarily force Turkey out of Cyprus, yet there was a widespread feeling that Turkey would not act aggressively against an EU member state and, perhaps more importantly, that the RoC's relative political power would be significantly bigger as an EU member. A side effect of EU membership is that the RoC, despite its close relations to Russia, has become much more West-oriented after its accession in 2004. Thus, a secondary goal is the RoC's aspiration to have a much more important security role for the EU given that it is the EU Member

28 See n.16 for the aforementioned statement by former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ioannis Kasoulides

State closest to the turbulent Middle East: a state that also has very good relations with the Arab states, Iran, and Israel.

While the two goals can indeed be quite complementary, the geopolitical realities and complexities of the specific regional security complex of the Eastern Mediterranean highlight the limitations of the EU as a security provider. The most indicative example is the February 2018 Turkish naval blockade in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone. Despite the strong EU warnings towards Turkey, it was very clear that the EU was neither willing nor capable of taking further actions against Turkey for the sake of enhancing the Cypriot security. Thus, the EU's image as a security provider for Cyprus is at best a vague one, in the sense that the EU is the first – and perhaps most important – actor the RoC reaches to once there is a security threat, but at the same time it is evident that there are very clear limitations to how much security the EU can offer in the presence of 'hard' geopolitically driven security issues. It is worth noting that some Greek Cypriot political elites explicitly supported the idea of invoking Article 42.7 of the TEU, which provides for the collective defense of a member state in case it is attacked. However, Article 42.7 was never evoked, not least because the blockade was not a clear cut case of an attack, but also because it was unclear how the EU would actually respond to such a request. The absence of a clear picture of the potential EU reaction and the level of support for such hard security issues is indicative of the EU's limitations to act as a regional security provider.

The 'EU as a security provider' is yet another essential variable in an NSS of an EU Member State, even though the credibility of the specific security provider is questioned. The EU's inability to act as a solid security provider, coupled with the fact that Cyprus is not – and most likely will not become – a NATO member, the RoC has turned to other solutions through bilateral agreements and enhanced interstate relations with countries like France, Israel and, of course, Russia.

However, bilateral approaches can be particularly complex if one of the security providers is also a potential threat for other EU states, as is the case of Russia. This automatically means that Cyprus has to tread very carefully between the West/EU and Russia. As mentioned, the issue is further complicated when there are also deep economic and societal ties that extend beyond the issue of security.

Figures 4 and 5 show the views of Greek and Turkish Cypriots respectively regarding their preferences for potential security providers (guarantor states). As expected, Russia is the primary choice for Greek Cypriots, but the least favourable option for Turkish Cypriots. France is equally important for Greek Cypriots given the close military and political relations between France and the RoC.

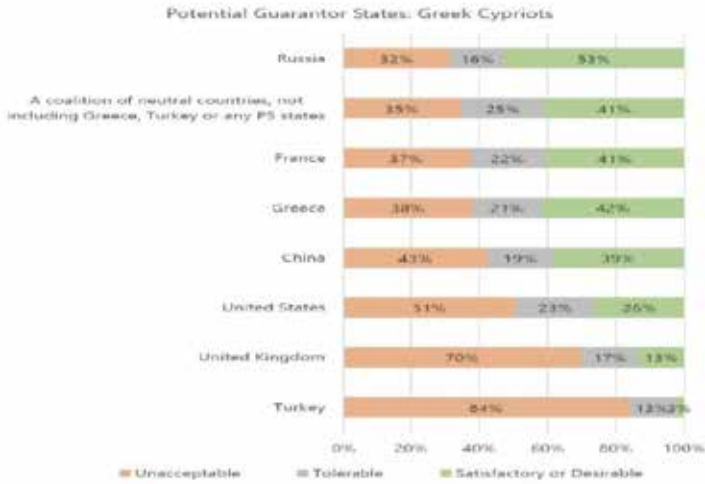


Figure 4: Security providers (potential guarantor states) for Greek Cypriots (SEED 2017)

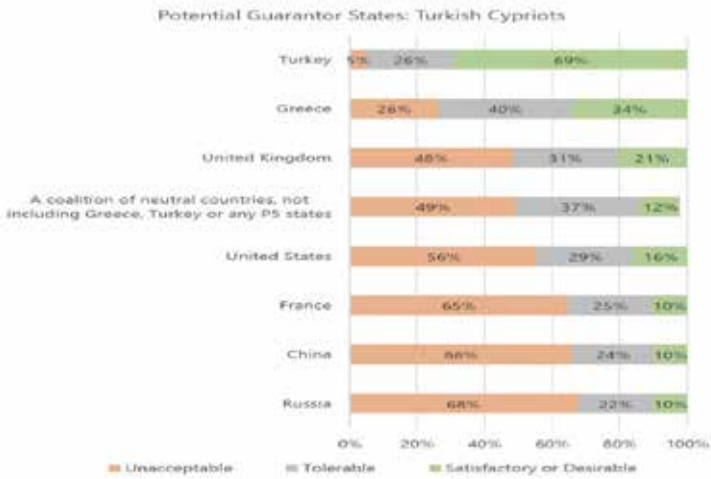


Figure 5: Security providers (potential guarantor states) for Turkish Cypriots (SEED 2017)

Solidarity Threat Perceptions

As already mentioned, any self-respecting NSS is expected to include the ‘trending’ threats, especially if the latter are important for one’s partners; one such case is the threat of terrorism. Europeans perceive, unsurprisingly, terrorism to be a major threat.

While this might be a justifiable fear for some EU states, there is no real reason why Cypriots would feel particularly threatened; and yet they are. The 2017 Eurobarometer (Figure 6) shows that Cypriots are the most concerned individuals in the EU regarding the challenge terrorism poses on the internal security of the EU. The results for other threats are very similar – the number in the parenthesis shows the rank of Cyprus in the specific opinion poll: organized crime (2nd), natural and man-made disaster (2nd), cyber-crime (1st), EU’s external borders (3rd).

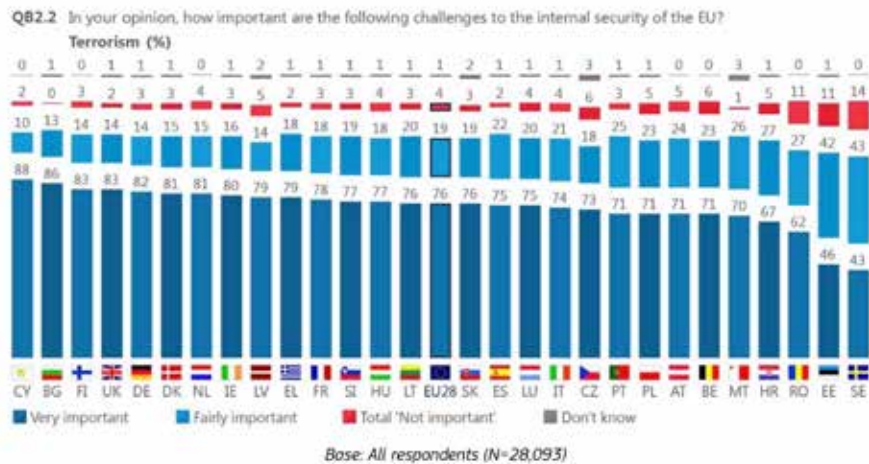


Figure 6: Terrorism as a challenge to EU security (Eurobarometer 2017)

Given the aforementioned data, it would not be unfair if one assumed that Cyprus is a particularly dangerous place, suffering from terrorist attacks and other crimes or threats that disrupt societal routines. One would be wrong if he or she made such an assumption.

Figure 7 shows all the terrorist attacks in Cyprus from 2013 onwards. All were non-mainstream attacks, as they did not have any form of political or religious motivation and were not aimed towards the public at large; they were mostly tailored towards ‘resolving’ private disagreements. As can also be seen from the figure, there were zero fatalities or injuries. Thus, it is questionable why Cypriots are so concerned about terrorism (or the other aforementioned issues).

GTD ID	DATE	COUNTRY	CITY	PERPETRATOR GROUP	FATALITIES	INJURED	TARGET TYPE	REGION	ATTACK TYPE
201612120693	2016-12-12	Cyprus	Empa	Unknown	0	0	Government (General)	Western Europe	Assassination
201602210635	2016-02-21	Cyprus	Denya	Unknown	0	0	Religious Figures/Institutions	Western Europe	Facility/Infrastructure Attack
201503080078	2015-03-08	Cyprus	Paphos	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201503050058	2015-03-05	Cyprus	Paphos	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201502040109	2015-02-04	Cyprus	Astromeritis	Unknown	0	0	Police	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201412150057	2014-12-15	Cyprus	Paphos	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201408040047	2014-08-04	Cyprus	Lamaca	Unknown	0	0	Police	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201406300046	2014-06-30	Cyprus	Limasol	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201404070091	2014-04-07	Cyprus	Lymia	Unknown	0	0	Unknown	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201403110095	2014-03-04	Libya	Ah Sidr	Cynsnaica Self-Defense Force	0	0	Maritime/Maritime	Middle East & North Africa	Hijacking
201401080030	2014-01-08	Cyprus	Limasol	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201311250035	2013-11-25	Cyprus	Ypsonas	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201311140034	2013-11-14	Cyprus	Lamaca	Unknown	0	0	Business	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201310250037	2013-10-25	Cyprus	Nicosia	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201310220004	2013-10-22	Cyprus	Nicosia	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201310170028	2013-10-17	Cyprus	Nicosia	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201307150025	2013-07-15	Cyprus	Limasol	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201307150024	2013-07-15	Cyprus	Limasol	Unknown	0	0	Private Citizens & Property	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201305290020	2013-05-29	Cyprus	Kissonergis	Unknown	0	0	Government (General)	Western Europe	Bombing/Explosion
201303280010	2013-03-28	Greece	Volos	Unknown	0	0	Business	Western Europe	Facility/Infrastructure Attack

Figure 7: Terrorist Attacks in Cyprus (Global Terrorism Database)

The data do not show why Cypriots are so concerned. A working hypothesis is that the above-average Cypriot concern may be related to how Cypriots are accustomed to always think in terms of security and threats because of the ever-present overarching threat (even though the specific threats are not linked to Turkey). Simply stated, threats are part of the Cypriots’ routines.

Cypriots seem to also believe that not enough is done to handle the threats. The hypothesis that ‘not enough is done’ to deal with security threats is not irrational; indeed, in Cyprus politics it is a constant struggle among the elite to demonstrate which one is the most capable of dealing with the overarching (and other) threats.²⁹ Thus, there also seems to be a built-in mentality that the threats are not sufficiently dealt with. Witness to this hypothesis is the Cypriots’ response to the question of whether the government/law enforcement is doing enough to fight terrorism. Cyprus scores below average, even though, as shown in Figure 7, in the past five years there were no major terrorist attacks that resulted to any injuries or deaths. Thus, there is

29 C. Adamides, *Securitization and Desecuritization Processes in Protracted Conflicts: The Case of Cyprus* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

little reason for Cypriots to believe that the law enforcement is not doing enough towards terrorism-related security; yet, it seems that the ‘default’ response that ‘not enough is done to deal with the threat’ dominates the society.

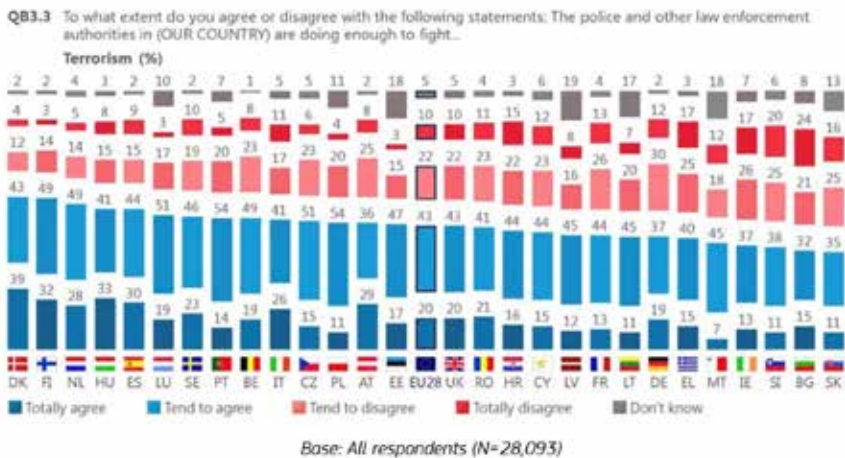


Figure 8: ‘Not doing enough’ (Eurobarometer 2017)

The fact that the EU is not perceived to be a reliable or capable security provider could partially be attributed to structural limitations; it was not, after all, designed to be a hard security provider. That said, there seems to be more willingness for a more regional and global role, as frequently advocated by EU officials and as noted in the EU Global Strategy. Indeed, the emergence of more security-oriented developments, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), directly and indirectly indicates that the EU wishes to have a much more important and autonomous security role. A role that many member and non-member states – such as Cyprus and Georgia respectively – consider to be of particular importance for their own security, especially vis-à-vis an overarching and existential threat.

The EU has the willingness to carry more weight in the international arena, but it lacks the geopolitical thinking and culture. It needs to re-educate itself on how to think geopolitically, and overarching threats and crises can be a blessing in disguise for the EU in its effort to establish itself as a major regional and global player. While such threats may highlight the EU’s limitations and lead to rifts within the Union, they also pose as an opportunity to demonstrate that the EU can ‘talk the talk and walk the walk’. At the same time however, the same opportunities, if not handled appropriately, could easily solidify the perceived EU limitations.

The aforementioned incident with the naval blockade in the Cypriot EEZ is a clear opportunity that could easily backfire. Essentially the crisis emerged when a candidate

state, Turkey, stopped militarily a Member State, Cyprus, from pursuing its national interests in its own EEZ – but disputed by Turkey – area. Following the incident, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, stated that he was ‘strictly against the behavior of Turkey’,³⁰ while in written responses

‘the EU has repeatedly stressed the sovereign rights of EU Member States, which include, inter alia, entering into bilateral agreements and exploring and exploiting their natural resources in accordance with the EU *acquis* and international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The EU continues to stress the need to respect the sovereignty of Member States over their territorial sea and airspace.’³¹

While such responses are useful and are utilized by Cyprus political elite to demonstrate the EU’s support, in reality they have not changed the developments on the ground. In the specific case, the Italian company was forced to leave and postpone (or cancel?) its drilling activities. Inevitably, Cypriots, as well as others who observe the developments, acknowledge the political and ‘theoretical’ EU support, but also focus on the EU’s inability to convince a candidate state that such behaviour is unacceptable. Thus, the EU’s inability to act in a more determined way is in sharp contrast with the locals’ need for concrete actions against an overarching threat. It is likely that other states will question the EU’s proclaimed goal of becoming a global security player if the EU cannot influence a potential ‘family member’ from hurting the interests of an existing ‘family member’. How can the EU be trusted to have a role in much more turbulent and complex regions such as the Middle East when it cannot handle the problems in its own backyard? Moving ‘from vision to action’, as the EU HR/VP Federica Mogherini noted,³² entails more concrete actions and perhaps a much better understanding on how it can offer security solutions to overarching threats first for its member states and then for the regional states, before aspiring to be a global player.

Despite the abovementioned challenges, the importance of the EU is not, and should not, be discounted despite the former’s limitations, as the security environment for countries like Cyprus would most likely have been much worse had it not been an EU member state. It is indeed central to the Cypriot national security strategy, but ultimately there is always the risk of creating a false sense of security that could

30 R.-J. Bartunek, ‘EU’s Juncker criticizes Turkey over ship incident’, Reuters (2018, February 14), available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyprus-natgas-turkey-eu/eus-juncker-criticizes-turkey-over-ship-incident-idUSKCN1FY1OG>.

31 European Parliament, ‘Parliamentary Questions, Answers given to Mr Hahn on behalf of the Commission’, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2017-006622&language=EN>.

32 European Union, ‘A Global Strategy to Promote Citizens’ Interests’, available at <http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy-european-union>.

potentially lead to more national insecurity. For instance, the assumption that Turkey would not engage in further military actions was disproved with the 2018 events in the EEZ. Thus, building an NSS based on the security provided by the state's EU membership may be useful and logical, but at the same time it is also relatively risky given the aforementioned EU's limitations.

Conclusion

It must not be surprising that a state facing an overarching threat will formulate its security strategies around a single source of threat. This is frequently politically necessary for the decision-makers as it is what will guarantee public legitimacy and political capital. However, this 'over-focus' on a single issue, as necessary as it may be, may lead to an insufficient NSS in terms of breadth – i.e. focus on other potential threats not necessarily related to the OT – or in terms of the quality of the state security structure – for instance, insufficient training for non-OT related threats, problematic resource allocation to handle other threats, etc.

The case of Cyprus, and despite the absence of an actual (public) NSS document (as of the time of writing) provides a good case study of how an OT can influence the NSS mentality and approaches of the decision-makers and public alike. Furthermore, the specific case also allows us to focus on the limitations of the EU as a potential security provider, which could have, theoretically, contributed to the formation of more comprehensive security strategies that would satisfy both the national, the regional and the EU's security needs.

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