

Conference Report
7th ZAGREB SECURITY FORUM 2022
Hybrid Threats and Resilience of Society,
Critical Infrastructure and the State

The 7th Zagreb Security Forum on Hybrid Threats and Resilience of Society, Critical Infrastructure and the State was held on October 7 and 8, 2022 at the Sheraton Hotel. The forum was organised by the Hybrid Warfare Research Institute and St. George Association. The forum brought together 37 speakers from 20 countries representing educational and research institutions, universities and institutes that focus on defence and security issues alongside representatives of foundations, international organisations, ministries, and civil servants of European countries. It surpassed last year's successes with attendance, interest, number of lecturers and papers. Lifting of Covid-19 measures allowed for live conferences to be conducted, while some presenters were given the opportunity to deliver online lectures as they were prevented from attending in person. The organizers took into account the needs and possibilities of the speakers when organizing the panels. According to the available information, they came from: Croatia, Israel, Germany, USA, Canada, Denmark, United Kingdom, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belgium, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Greece, Montenegro, Poland, and Finland.

Keynote speakers introduced central themes by providing a fundamental framework for discussion and analysis for other speakers to follow. Mr Gordan Akrap, an expert in information and communication sciences and hybrid warfare, and a military analyst, regular commentator on global events, current challenges and future trends, opened the forum by saying that hybrid destabilization was at work. Hybrid destabilization can be seen in Ukraine, and the next in line is Germany, which is facing an induced recession, as well as right and left-wing populism. Today Ukraine, tomorrow that can be someone else. The NATO is the solution; not building a new security architecture, but improving the current one. Mr Shlomo Shpiro of Bar-Ilan University from Israel, an expert in intelligence, security, terrorism, crisis management and communication, continued by saying that the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression

are paradigm changers. Due to economic prosperity and development, sufficient attention was not being paid to critical infrastructure. One should expect the unexpected. Instead of an incremental approach, strive for a comprehensive one. Multi-crisis management and reaction speed pose fundamental challenges that require a different mindset. Croatian Major General Slaven Zdilar, PhD, talked about the changing security paradigm that encompasses natural and climate disasters, terrorism, migration, crime, and now the Russian aggression and the threat to international order. Early warning capability and preventive action with a united response to threats together with partners and allies are needed, while leaving open the channel for communication with Moscow. Mr James Appathurai, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, said NATO had to be ready to deter, but also defend itself against hybrid threats. Different actors have different instruments and means, different weaknesses; work needs to be done on national and civilian resilience. Mrs Dubravka Šuica said hybrid threats were particularly dangerous for the EU because they target weaknesses. Autocratic regimes use energy, food, migration. The EU Hybrid Toolbox Unity, new tools and methodology for opposing hybrid threats, can serve as an example. Croatian Defence Minister Mr Mario Banožić believes that being too casual caused this unpreparedness. The annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbass were a strategy in steps; Russia is a rival; it is necessary to connect the academia and politics in unified action. Mr Byron Harper from the NATO Special Operations Headquarters stated that Russo-Georgian War showed that the NATO was not ready for a direct confrontation with Russia, but could oppose it indirectly through the development and strengthening of partners and vulnerable countries. Mr Holger Hai-bach, Head of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Office in Zagreb and Ljubljana, declared that people must be prepared for the worst. The issue of interventions and resilience is crucial for the future, while forums are important for the exchange of ideas and the formation of opinions, ideas and solutions. Professor Schlie, Director of the Center for Advanced Security, Strategic and Integration Studies (CASSIS), Henry Kissinger Chair for Security and Strategic Studies at the Institute for Political Science and Sociology, said that the war in Ukraine had the same significance as the fall of the Berlin Wall. A big turning point happened, and it is necessary to make the right decisions. It is also necessary to link foreign and domestic policy, strengthen transatlantic relations and the EU's global role by reforming strategy and mindset.

Speakers divided the debate into two fundamental units. The first covered geopolitical dimensions and factors that irreversibly changed as a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The second highlighted the vulnerability of critical infrastructure and society to hybrid threats and instruments. The papers presented in the first unit focused on aspects of geopolitical relations such as the formation of a new form of global order that includes the importance of energy, economy, state-to-state

relations, the position and importance of international organizations and institutions, systemic causes and consequences, alliances and connections between the US, the UK and the EU in relation to global challenges to both Russia and China. The papers of the second unit focused mainly on hybrid threats, definitions, interpretations, and how to recognize them, how they can affect critical infrastructure, social cohesion, democratic processes; what instruments they use, whether they are spatially or temporally limited, whether they are used in war or non-war conditions. They then sought key answers to how to respond effectively to those threats, highlighting above all concepts such as global strategic environment, resilience, critical infrastructure protection, election manipulation, cyber warfare, impression manipulation, deterrence strategies, enhanced forward presence, speed of action, flexibility and adaptability. They see war as a permanent phenomenon, which comes alongside conventional ones in new forms; threat prevention requires solidarity and a unified response while hybrid instruments are extremely dangerous and unpredictable. There is much less room for prediction, which requires greater resilience and reaction capabilities.

The conference lectures were divided into six panels chaired by Prof. Shlomo Shpiro, PhD, of Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, from Israel, Assistant Professor Gordana Akrap of Hybrid Warfare Research Institute from Zagreb, Neil Chuka from the Ministry of Defence of Canada, Prof. Iztok Podbregar, PhD, University of Maribor, Slovenia, Prof. John M. Nomikos, PhD (RIEAS), Greece, ir. Yvan de Mesmaeker of ECSA, Belgium, Mr Hrvoje Sagrak, INFODOM, Croatia. There was also a seventh closed session about national case studies chaired by Mr Neil Chuka.

The first panel investigated national cases of hybrid threats on the examples of Kosovo and Latvia, where Russia's hybrid activity is significant. It also highlighted the importance of NATO's enhanced forward presence in eastern Europe and the psychology behind military exercises and demonstrations of power with weapons. The second panel described social resilience and the concept of total defence in Latvia while analysing Ukraine's experience with hybrid threats and military operations on land and sea. The third panel addressed hybrid challenges in the context of democratic processes and elections in Israel, pressure from Russia towards the Czech Republic, Latvian and Ukrainian experiences with hybrid warfare. The fourth panel focused on the regional context, sensemaking and cognitive warfare, the importance of psychology in subversive instruments and operations. The fifth panel dealt with the regulation and protection of the electoral process against misuse of technology on the example of Greece, the protection of critical infrastructure in Poland and regional security in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The sixth panel dealt with systemic factors, the benefits of resilience, technological trends and the resilience of the EU's critical energy infrastructure. The seventh panel dealt with national cases of Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro, with a special form of closed type presentations.

In conclusion, papers, presentations and discussions were driven by the importance of geopolitical changes in the global order, a different international environment and the increasing importance of critical infrastructure and its protection. Economic prosperity leads to the neglect of the security aspect that comes to the forefront. Hybrid threats pose a significant danger to the cohesion of society and the stability of states. The art of countering the aforementioned challenges rests on two pillars – a strategic and operational philosophy that gives a framework and foundation, and on the resources invested for this purpose, thus creating the preconditions for adequate strategic reception, deterrence and response to threats.

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