



Zagreb, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2024



## CONCLUSIONS OF THE 9<sup>TH</sup> ZAGREB SECURITY FORUM NATO AND EU COOPERATION – A KEY FOR RESILIENT FUTURE

1. Hybridity of present and future security challenges, risks and threats is our reality. Influence operations aiming our cognitive abilities and decision-making processes (both the content of those decisions and the moment of their making) are and will be the primary vector of the aggressor's offensive actions. The year 2024 is a (super) election year in many countries. More than 100 countries with 4 billion voters have voted or are yet to vote. The time before, during and after elections and referendums, as well as the time during preparation and management of conflicts and wars, constitute a real information front. Malicious, mostly autocratic, regimes are trying to impose their will on the electorate by manipulating their information environment. They abuse the democratic system of freedoms, opinions and actions, spreading untrue, half-true and true information but in a deliberately wrong informational context, in order to induce decision-makers to make mistakes. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the defense and resilient capacities of the EU with the aim of preventive activities by deterring a possible attacker over the European territory, information and digital space. The development of defense capabilities of the EU should be built in such a way that they are complementary to the current and anticipated capabilities of the NATO alliance. Encouraging full interoperability is a necessity, not just a fad. There is no EU member state that can build several separated armed forces within its own population (for the itself, the EU and NATO). Therefore, these national armed forces should be able to cooperate with other forces of EU member states, the NATO allies, as well as our partners through various security initiatives and programs.
2. Since the first Zagreb Security Forum, we have been warning about non-kinetic threats and risks, especially in the information domain. Facing and preventive activities aimed at suppressing disinformation activities and politics requires the whole of society approach. Recognizing disinformation and disproving it publicly is a demanding process that requires true and in-depth knowledge of numerous topics





and fields. Therefore, ZSF indicates the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach. At the same time, the need for a clear, complete and unambiguous determination of the real authors and planners of disinformation activities is indicated. By identifying the source, significantly better results can be achieved in the fight against the scourge of the modern age. It is a more difficult but significantly better way to fight against disinformation.

3. Determining the cause-and-effect relationship between different crisis situations is a necessity in order to: (a) be able to recognize and understand their causes, (b) recognize early warning signals for crisis that might appear, (c) organize and prepare the whole-of-society defense and security system for reaction to the crisis, (d) improve resilient intelligence based community at the national and international level according to the lessons learned and (f) enable the development of trust and the exchange of information and knowledge at the national and international level.
4. Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine remains a significant threat. We must clearly outline and communicate Putin's Russia's Grand Strategy to our public, and then devise effective countermeasures. Ukraine is courageously fighting on both the kinetic and informational fronts. Meanwhile, the EU and NATO face Russian attacks in the information and other non-kinetic domains, as part of a broader spectrum of hybrid threats.
5. In our defense and preventive activities, we should be consistent, reliable, decisive and responsible friends and allies. Namely, Ukraine and Ukrainians are fighting for their independence, sovereignty, history, democratic and free present and future. They are fighting for all those values, beliefs and principles that we are gathered around in EU and NATO. If we do not defeat the Grand Strategy of Putin's Russia, such a Russia will continue with an aggressive policy and will directly threaten the independence and sovereignty of other countries such as, first of all, Moldova and the countries from the Caucasus region. It should always be kept in mind that Russia will continue to try to adversely influence the political processes in NATO allied countries and EU members, but also in those that are not in those organizations such as some countries from the Western Balkans. Also, Russia will continue with the complete destabilization of the countries of the Western Balkans as well as the Middle East in order to fulfill its goal: an attempt to return to the world stage and transform from a regional/local leader into a global power. Russia will have a support by countries like Iran, North Korea, China and Serbia in those malign activities. If Russia succeeds in achieving at least some of these goals, the credibility and future of NATO and the EU will be very questionable.





6. By placing a huge quantity of disinformation, by covertly financing populist groups and organizations with which they try to strengthen their harmful political influence in the attacked societies, by abusing democratic rights and freedoms and the media, Russia and its proxies are attempting to manipulate our information environment and strongly influence the decisions made by attacked societies. We must stick to the defense of our principles, rules and values, and preserve our credibility, integrity and reliability. We need to improve existing security procedures, rules and relationships on regional and global level. That means to adapt the security architecture at different levels of visibility based on lessons identified and lessons learned process. The mistakes from the experience with the autocratic Russian Federation must not be repeated in a possible conflict with other autocratic regimes. An essential role in these processes (fighting against disinformation) is played by objective and unbiased experts who should participate in educational processes in order to build future generations who will be aware of the challenges we faced so that they do not repeat our mistakes.
7. Conflicts and wars in the Middle East show how wrong we can be by placing our trust in, as it turned out in the end, false promises of suspicious organizations such as Hamas. Their claims of using financial aid from the West for youth development, education, and the construction of essential social infrastructure have proven to be little more than empty promises. They used it to plan, organize, promote and conduct acts of violence, and terrorism for which there is no justification. The foundations for the establishment of conditions that could be used to move towards a more sustainable and long-term peace in the Near and Middle East were destroyed by a brutal terrorist act done by Iranian proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah. We hope that the time will come and that responsible politicians will appear who will be able to move their communities towards the difficult and demanding path of achieving peace, for accepting responsibility for the future, and demotivating the use of violent acts as a means and way of resolving political differences
8. Also, security and stability of the Indo Pacific area is at vital importance at this moment. Any rise of crisis in this area could lead to a serious global conflict. China's intentions of increasing its influence in middle Russia to gain advantage of cheap and available raw materials such as fuel, gas, rare earths materials, just as much as reaching Arctic area for the same reasons is a threat to Russia alone. Russia needs to understand: NATO, EU and Ukraine are not Russia's enemy. None of them pose a threat to Russia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. However, China, expanding its influence to the east and north, does. NATO should encourage the





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creation of regional security partnerships so that they can be connected with NATO in joint efforts to prevent and suppress the aggressiveness of autocratic regimes in the area where these initiatives exist.

9. During previous Forums, we already have been trying to stimulate more active engagement of our female colleagues from security and defense sciences. Therefore, we are proud that, based on the quality of their paper proposals, we have more than 50% of female speakers with us. Second important fact about this Forum is a high number of young researchers and scholars that have a possibility to present their work and to connect with many other experts. Cooperation, communication, exchange of information and knowledge in this Forum present a solid base for future joint activities, interoperability and building trust and confidence among experts. That is one of the reasons why this Forum exists.



Institut za istraživanje hibridnih sukoba, Teslina 10, Zagreb; OIB: 31073348655,  
IBAN: HR35 2390 0011 1009 9221 2, Hrvatska poštanska banka, Zagreb  
[www.zagrebsecurityforum.com](http://www.zagrebsecurityforum.com)