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## **THE NEED TO COMPREHENSIVELY MINIMISE RISK IN THE STATES OF THE FORMER SOVIET BLOC**

### ***Abstract***

*The widely varied states of the former Soviet bloc, particularly economically, are undergoing the processes of globalisation, which makes social expectations grow as rapidly as in other parts of the old continent. We are acquiring the features of a risk society and an information society; the need to comprehensively minimise risk arises, and a stronger propensity for overemphasis of risk is revealed. Consequently, in accordance with expectations of increasingly aware individuals, improving their living conditions at the same time as maintaining the risk level require a total shift of the comprehensive protection of everyday life to the public administration. In order for it to be socially accepted, it needs to commit to the cause, which in turn involves systematic modernisation (increased flexibility) and an adequate information policy.*

**Key words:** *security studies, strategies of minimizing risks, complex minimization of risks*

The ramifications of WWII and decades of Cold War rivalry significantly changed Europe in political, economic and social terms.<sup>1</sup> It suffices to refer to several basic indicators regarding the effectiveness of the state, quality of life, wealth and society's mentality to notice the consequences of the bipolar confrontation or contention between these two opposing visions of the world. While the Western Europe remains relatively homogeneous in the above-mentioned aspects, the part of the old continent which is situated to the east of the 'iron curtain' varies widely.<sup>2</sup> The former German

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<sup>1</sup> Those adjectives, despite not being a significant contribution to the considerations therein, show the scope of consequences that WWII and the subsequent Cold War rivalry led to.

<sup>2</sup> The commonly applied indicators such as GDP *per capita*, Human Development Index, Quality of Life Index and Human Poverty Index attest to the disparities

Democratic Republic, after joining the Federal German Republic, has achieved the highest level of wealth of all the Eastern bloc states. However, even though billions of German marks and later euros were transferred to the Eastern German states, it did not redress the inequalities, or cultural and mental disparities in this relatively divided country. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary (after the EU enlargement on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2004) as well as Bulgaria and Romania (after the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007) have been bridging the socio-economic differences, thanks to EU support, just as in the past the Western European states developed economically as a result of the Marshall Plan. The rest of the Eastern bloc states that are not part of EU structures have faced less favourable conditions, especially given the fact that, so far, their authorities have not opted for closer cooperation. While Belarus decided to follow an east-oriented policy and successfully uses its privileged position with Russia, Ukraine still remains at a crossroads. Nowadays, it seems less advantageous to build a complicated network of connections with both the European Union and the Russian Federation than a rapprochement with only one of the parties. Joining a customs union (guaranteed by the European Union or the Eurasian Economic Community) would make it easier to meet the social expectations in Ukraine, which are rising there due to globalisation, as fast as they are in other parts of the old continent.

A quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War, the processes unfolding around the world have gained a previously unheard-of impetus and dependencies which resulted in reducing and even eliminating former time and space constraints. Nowadays, with just a little input, world-wide changes can be made; hence the interest of states, societies and individuals in hitherto ignored threats. Currently, small, local conflicts, contentions and crises can considerably exacerbate living conditions in the most remote parts of the world. Moreover, more importance is placed on security from a broader perspective – not only military, but first and foremost civic. The above-mentioned concerns demonstrate the existence of the need to comprehensively minimise risk in our society i.e. the demand for exploring potential threats in virtually every aspect of life, in order to identify and eliminate them. The guarantee of survival is no longer sufficient, and

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within the former Eastern bloc, however, certain imperfections of those indicators should be taken into account.

what is actually called for, though to different extents, is the security of daily life, and even its better quality. Indeed, a minimum wage, free services (education, health care, etc.), lifestyle benefits, higher social benefits and employment in a person's chosen profession have become common demands. An interesting situation has arisen in which societies can be satisfied only by civic protection that minimises all risks, i.e. the highest level of protection, often associated with total security in all aspects of life. There is a tendency to excessively approve, certify, train, regulate and control with a view to meeting the need to belong, of recognition and fulfilment, without being exposed to danger.<sup>3</sup> Thus, modern risk societies have been created where "the social generation of wealth goes hand in hand with the generation of risk. Therefore, problems and conflicts related to increasing social scarcity were overshadowed by problems and conflicts triggered by the production, definition and distribution of risk generated by science and technology" [1, p. 27].

Furthermore, there is an escalating demand for a higher standard of living, in keeping with the idea of consumerism, however, at the same time modern societies tend not to accept emerging risks and call for their elimination. In particular, Europeans are no longer accustomed to military threats, and would also like to see risks decreased in other aspects of life. Nevertheless, the problem lies in the fact that innovations do both a service and disservice to society, and thus on the one hand, the spread of information technology enables communication with no limits on time and space and, on the other hand, the virtual world has become an ideal environment for unconventional threats where little input causes substantial losses.

Technical and technological progress, together with advanced globalisation, gave rise to yet another significant change. The societies of the former Soviet bloc for nearly twenty-five years of the post-Cold War era have been undergoing westernisation, gradually becoming dependent on information, which is becoming the centre of their private and professional lives. As a consequence, they are acquiring the features of an information society, where the information perceived as its backbone and a public good needs to be collected, processed, forwarded, controlled and

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<sup>3</sup> Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there has been a progressive fragmentation of security, which manifests itself in terminological and axiological redefinitions and new specialisations strictly related to living conditions such as economic, energy, physical, personal, psychological, social, health or nutritional security, to name a few.

protected. It makes individuals feel fully informed and strongly opposed to marginalisation. Most importantly, however, information enhances the sense of security, which is crucial within the above-outlined risk society. Even though the pressure to gather information minimises risks, it results in uncontrollably growing social awareness. Electronic media provide access to practically any data and remove the limitations of time and space. In this way, they have grown to be a free platform for conveying and receiving communications. Social networks, as well as instant messengers, actually require no investment in order to spread information on a massive scale. Moreover, the internet resists regulations imposed by governments, and consequently the new media autonomously emancipate individuals, which leads to the uncontrolled formation of a specific mind-set. Knowledge, often littered with half-truths, spreads raising awareness of the variety and tragic nature of risks and at the same time fallaciously lends credence to their imminent occurrence, which even leads to panic about imaginary threats. In spite of this, risk-oriented information societies existing in a dynamic environment endeavour to diagnose hazards through intermediaries, most often the mass media themselves. In fact, quite frequently it is the information about reality, rather than the reality itself, that matters, which, combined with the absence of control of massively propagated information, poses certain dangers. Most importantly, due to the specific nature of the profit-oriented media industry, editorial teams, a journalist or presenter offer their audiences modified (enhanced) news, often integrated with an absorbing political commentary.

“Many a time the most important aspect of the reported news is overlooked or ignored, certain people or problems (the ones that are not mentioned *de facto* do not exist) are not presented. It is a manipulation to partially select facts (it is mainly the hot topics that are chosen), put them together dishonestly, delay coverage of a given event, exaggerate, stress the negative elements and sensation” [2, pp. 201-202]. Usually, programmes that enjoy the highest popularity cause dissatisfaction, unease, uncertainty and apprehension. Societies that are overcome with negatively charged emotions are easier to manipulate, especially when the radicalisation of views sparks deep internal divisions; a situation that is often experienced by people in Poland as well as in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, for many

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<sup>4</sup> As a result of neglected information policy, fractions fuelled by the mass media antagonise the society which is built on contradictions. Consequently, theoretically objective, universal and often unsolvable social conflicts turn into destructive and un-

only those uncertain media messages “provide material needed to rationalise everyday life, a sense of being informed, a feeling of security and knowledge about the world” [3, p. 319]. When combined with the sensitivity proper to risk societies, the issues described lead to imposing on the public authorities the obligation of safeguarding all aspects of the citizens’ daily lives; from potential (unlikely) emergencies, to unsolvable problems. The range of those activities increases disproportionately to the resources, which negatively affects the condition of each state and is always beyond its capabilities. Even wealthy states face difficulties as the social expectations grow according to the state’s resources [cf. 4, p. 25-26].

The concurrent processes of becoming a risk society and an information society result in a greater propensity for dramatising risks and their explicit presentation. Nowadays, news about any danger, no matter how negligible, is given a lot of media coverage.<sup>5</sup> This has been happening since the rivalry between the traditional and the electronic media reached its final stage, where the former are usually marginalised or declared bankrupt. Editors use social sensitivity to risk and thoughtlessly magnify it, driving up the viewership but compromising reliability at the same time. In such conditions where the information flow is not limited by time and space and the list of dangers is longer, the social need to comprehensively minimise risks has gained in importance. Moreover, the increasingly complicated and complex tasks discharged within this field are beyond the capacity of the individual to undertake, and therefore they are entrusted to the public administration. Limiting new risks requires the involvement of central and local governments, which dispose of a massive accumulation of resources and, more importantly, have enforcement bodies. It has transpired that in the globalised reality “the natural state of the social world is comprehensiveness. Comprehensiveness means a complexity of a social order where numerous elements coexist and interact in a variety of ways. Social systems are comprehensive and operate in comprehensive environments which contribute to creating other social systems. Furthermore, while the comprehensiveness of social problems grows geometrically, the human ability to deal with those problems grows arithmetically” [5, p. 96].

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stoppable forces. When the state loses this battle, the individuals are filled with increasing impatience, pretentiousness and a subjective sense of danger (obsession).

<sup>5</sup> This overemphasised display becomes evident in the case of the threats posed by new infectious diseases such as influenza A/H1N1, which in fact caused very few deaths compared with the seasonal flu – poorly reported in the media.

Thus – as a result of globalisation processes (dynamisation of reality) as well as due to the universal desire to maintain a high standard of living (consumerism) without escalating risks, and in compliance with the expectations of ever more aware individuals – the social need to comprehensively minimise risks has been fully shifted to the public administration. The latter, in order to be socially accepted, needs to respond to this challenge.<sup>6</sup>

In Poland, the need to comprehensively minimise risks comes down to the modernisation of resources (efforts and means) and reorganisation e.g. through transferring know-how. When referring to risk culture, it becomes evident that the third and last component has been neglected, in spite of the indispensable need of radical changes in the mentality of both the public administration and society. Even though meeting western standards cannot succeed without leaving behind the old mentality, each environment in Poland struggles with the legacy of the communist Polish People's Republic. "Not until a certain level of general culture is achieved, can a desirable sense of duty and work be formed and a perception of technological norms, care for others, harmonious cooperation and discipline be taught. In the Polish tradition, little weight has been attached to such uncivil behaviours as mediocrity, insubordination, the absence of executive discipline, carelessness, negligence, etc. Manifestations of those flaws and vices tend to be ignored and deemed negligible, regarded as seemingly unimportant elements, irrelevant matters. When it comes to security, let us be clear about this, details are predominantly the weakest link" [7, pp. 65-66]. Generally it could be said that societies of the former Soviet bloc resemble their western neighbours in terms of needs and expectations, however, high reliance on the state and a poor sense of responsibility for their own actions still remain distinctive features.

It is worth noticing that it is not enough to know how to modernise, but it is also important to establish the direction of those changes. Efforts that

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<sup>6</sup> Carrying out such a complex task as the comprehensive protection of daily life demands reference to the culture of security, through which activities can be systematised and social expectations met more effectively. On the one hand, the culture of security is a very broad term, as it is understood as "the way challenges, opportunities and threats are perceived, the way security is defined, the way its absence is felt and the way it is ensured" [6, p. 44]. On the other hand, it enables to organise the subject of the research in terms of three components: resources (efforts and means), organisation (law, know-how) and mentality.

do not comply with the expectations of society can only yield insignificant results. Therefore, what society lacks needs to be well defined, the values prioritised and the risk areas identified and ordered according to where the need for risk mitigation is strongest. Subsequently, actions should be adjusted to a given level of security culture, especially in terms of its third component (mentality). “Only the culture of the government and the public administration joint with the culture of society is the guarantee of success in current activities for security” [8, p. 327]. In fact, comprehensive protection of public order implies numerous, often abstract commitments, such as “control of public morality so as to ensure properly functioning social life” [9, p. 21]. Unfortunately, in Polish conditions the exploration of this area has just begun, which only confirms the randomness of the correlations between the beneficiaries (individuals, groups, societies) and the machinery of the state in its broad meaning and the local government (not only territorial but also professional organisations and self-regulating business associations). As a result, the public administrations in Poland and in practically all the states of the former Eastern bloc, to various extents, do not comply with their societies’ expectations. However, the dissatisfaction resulting from there can be overcome in numerous ways. Firstly, by instigating modernisation processes especially within the component of resources and organisation. However expensive they are, their impact is lessened by the still old-fashioned mentality – a hangover from the former system. It needs to be remembered that the main factor defining the potential of an office is “its internal resources – the staff, their competency, a common set of values, working style” [10, p. 91]. Secondly, in existing circumstances society is more likely to be satisfied provided a skilful information policy is implemented, which is something that the states of the former Soviet bloc lack. The ideal case scenario would result in the elimination of information noise, i.e. reducing the mass media to a passive means of information. Thirdly, within the areas belonging to the EU, dissatisfied individuals can relatively easily leave their countries and upgrade their standard of living in more developed states. Since 2004, where the European Community saw its biggest enlargement, over 2 million Poles have chosen economic migration [11, p. 182]. Ukraine lacks this type of safety valve, and in spite of the attempts of the Polish authorities to liberalise visa regulations between Poland and Ukraine as soon as possible, one can observe clear divisions as regards the social mood, radicalism in society, level of salaries, prospects and being hopeful about the future [cf. 12, pp. 215-231]. Consequently, a significant number of Ukrainian citizens have radicalised their

stand on integration, either with the European Union or the Russian Federation. This discrepancy has led to breaking the need for comprehensive risk minimalisation into two different versions (pro-European Union and pro-Russian), and in such a case the Ukrainian public administration needs to be able to adopt them if the uniformity of the state is to be preserved. This will be possible only if Ukraine has a flexible structure open to discourse and, more precisely, when it enhances the “ability of the participants of a social system to actively adapt to and develop new solutions through the processes of social communication, negotiation and reaching an agreement” [5, p. 98]. It is worth remembering that within non-military security “newly protected values have been added such as: quality and standard of living, citizens’ prosperity, opportunities for growth, preserving cultural identity and the bonds holding society together” [13, p. 54]. Otherwise, a cultural disparity of one of the groups could lead to upsetting the already fragile symbiosis and subsequently to mutual aversions or hostilities.<sup>7</sup>

The dynamisation of the world and the reduction of time and space constraints are conducive to global communication between international communities. Information regarding practically every event, even hitherto marginalised ones, spreads across the world almost instantaneously. Moreover, through greater mobility of individuals and, in fact, free communication, awareness among the societies of the former Eastern bloc is growing and leading to people calling for conditions resembling those in the most affluent states. Nowadays, in line with the need to comprehensively minimise risk, they want to eliminate all everyday threats, the way, until recently, they thought they had countered all military risks.<sup>8</sup> A problem arises when the resources of the state do not allow meeting those costly expectations, which often, however to different extents, applies to the areas of the former Soviet bloc. Within the risk society, which has also become the information society, imperfections following the development (new types of risks) and the awareness of irreversible changes (free information flow) significantly determine the individual’s behaviour. The need

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<sup>7</sup> It seems that so far no events have taken place to disprove the adequacy of the term “fragile symbiosis” in the paper, as despite the existing situation in Ukraine its citizens have not lost the ability to coexist, which did happen, for instance, in former Yugoslavia.

<sup>8</sup> A false belief that there were no military threats led to the mental pacification (a strong opposition to military confrontations) of those societies, which is confirmed in the reaction of the western states and the Ukrainians themselves to the forceful takeover of Crimea.



to comprehensively minimise risk forces the public administration to take certain actions; otherwise, unanswered needs result in growing discontent with the authorities, and even aversion towards the state. However, “building trust in public institutions is a long-lasting process; therefore a strategy is needed whereby the objectives correspond with the expectations and hopes within society. It makes the institutions more resistant to political changes, as they consistently deliver what the end consumer of the service expects” [14, p. 29]. In such conditions, maintaining the level of social trust acceptable to the lawmakers requires a systematic modernisation (increasing flexibility) of public administration and the implementation of an adequate information policy. Meeting the first condition will reduce the negative consequences of a risk society, while satisfying the second one will limit the shortcomings of the information society.

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### **Резюме**

*Разнообразное во всех отношениях, особенно экономическом, пространство бывшего восточного блока подвергается глобализационным процессам, по этой причине социальные ожидания жителей этих территорий растут также быстро, как и в остальной части Старого Континента. Общество Центральной и Восточной Европы приобретают черты общества риска и информационного общества. В результате возникает необходимость комплексной минимизации рисков, проявляется большая склонность к чрезмерному экспонированию опасности. В итоге, согласно ожиданиям все большему числу сознательных единиц, улучшение (совершенствование) условий их функционирования при одновременном сохранении уровня опасности требует переборки в полном объеме комплексной защиты повседневной жизни на публичную администрацию. Чтобы быть принятой обществом, публичная администрация должна взять на себя обязательство модернизации (гибкости), а также ведения соответствующей информационной политики.*

**Ключевые слова:** исследования безопасности, стратегии минимизации рисков, комплексная минимизация рисков