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Bucharest Nine: A Voice of the Region or an Emerging Security Community?

The aim of the article is to analyse the perceptions of the Bucharest Nine platform regarding the most recent security developments in the region and Europe, while attempting to evaluate whether this entity can be perceived as a voice of the region or as an emerging new security community. The Bucharest Nine was established in 2015 as a response by the states located on NATO's Eastern Flank to Russian aggression against Ukraine, with the aim of strengthening regional security through cooperation and regular meetings among representatives of different levels from the member states in order to find a common position towards European security topicalities and issues, as well as to deepen ties among the states within the region. The research suggests that after 2022, cooperation among the Bucharest Nine states intensified, as reflected by more frequent regular meetings aimed at demonstrating the region's shared position on security issues as well as to coordinating actions taken to strengthen the region's security ahead of major NATO events. Apart from that, the platform regularly attracted like-minded allies outside the Bucharest Nine, thus expanding its network of international states and organizations. Regularly issued joint declarations, being the main form of documentation of the platform, as well as statements by various politicians on different occasions, indicate that the Bucharest Nine states share a similar perception of security and a vision for the future development of the region. Despite some political differences and fluctuations observed within the platform recently, the region overall can be perceived as a sort of emerging security community corresponding to NATO's Eastern Flank, reflecting regional considerations and operating within the NATO format.

Keywords
Lithuania, Bucharest Nine, Europe, Security, Eastern Flank, Central Europe

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Introduction

International cooperation plays an essential role in ensuring the national security of Lithuania. While the key pillar in this regard is Lithuania's membership in NATO and the EU, in addition to the membership in both organizations, the network of bilateral and multilateral relations plays an increasingly important role in this process. Considering the fact that NATO consists of 32 member states with distinct perceptions of security and threats, which can be explained by various factors, including historical and geographical elements, the regional level of cooperation emerges as a vital tool for coordinating the response to emerging threats, particularly those commonly perceived as threats by states located in geographical proximity. Thus, regional cooperation with like-minded allies sharing similar or identical security perceptions in military, energy, economic, cybersecurity, and other security domains, while also serving as platform for deeper cooperation and enabling balanced response to threats, gained particular importance following the Russian attack against Ukraine in February 2022, which changed the European security situation.

In this context, the Bucharest Nine platform should be perceived as an instrument that, over the last three years, has been extensively used by its member states for deepening cooperation among the states located on NATO's Eastern Flank, coordinating a common response to security issues, and operating within NATO. The beginning of the Bucharest Nine can be traced back to 4 November 2015, when the Presidents of Poland and Romania at the time – Andrzej Duda and Klaus Iohannis, respectively – declared during the meeting in Bucharest the need to establish a new form of cooperation in the region in order to respond to the most recent security developments in the region following Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. Soon afterwards, the format was established consisting of nine states, namely Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, with all these states being member states of both the EU and NATO. The Bucharest Nine provides a platform for representatives of its member states (as well as other like-mined allies) to hold regular meetings for discussing security concerns, expressing their positions on these questions, and providing a framework for regional security developments. Regular meetings have been held since 2015, becoming more frequent after 2022 as a response to the transformation of the European security reality. It has to be noted, as Tomáš A. Nagy observed, that the Bucharest

Nine has gained recognition as a regional platform for security policy-oriented coordination and consultation, making it the most prominent framework within the realm of security cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. It has built a considerably more compelling track record of accomplishments in the security sphere than the two other main regional platforms, namely the Visegrád Four and the Three Seas Initiative (Nagy, 2024, p. 7), which, in fact, although partly covering security concerns, should essentially be described as platforms for cooperation in other domains.

The role of the Bucharest Nine to the regional security development has attracted consistent attention from various scholars. The works of Miroslaw Banasik (2021), Tomasz Pawłuszko (2021), Piotr Bajda and Agnieszka Staczek-Orzelska (2021), Ovidiu Vaida (2021), and Oleksandra Davymuka (2022) cover different aspects of the Bucharest Nine platform and its role in Central and Eastern Europe's security. However, these works do not reflect the most recent security situation in Europe after 2022. When considering the works focusing on regional security developments after 2022, the work of Sabina Olszyk (2023), analysing the Bucharest Nine states support for Ukraine, and also the work of Tomáš A. Nagy (2024), representing the rising number of reports in the field and focusing on the Bucharest Nine's impact on regional security, should be mentioned. Additional details regarding the platform can be occasionally found in other works dealing with questions of Central and Eastern Europe's security; however, the details highlighted in these articles provide only fragmented references to the question of the Bucharest Nine. Thus, it can be stated that the activities and role of the Bucharest Nine platform in regional political developments, as well as its dynamism after 2022, have been scarcely covered and require broader evaluation.

The aim of the article is to evaluate the dynamism within Bucharest Nine after 2022, attempting to assess the role of the platform in enhancing regional security and to determine whether this platform should be perceived as a voice of the region or as an emerging security community. The article was prepared by applying the insights of constructivist and post-structuralist methods associated with Copenhagen School and relying mainly on the works of Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (1998), as well as Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003), as the research is based on the assumption that the dynamism and role of Bucharest Nine, which is a platform of like-minded allies located in geographical proximity and united by the same or similar

security concerns in the contemporary European security environment, should be perceived as a form of regional unit.

The research was conducted by applying a combination of case study and discourse analysis methods, the latter supplemented with some elements of content analysis[2]. Such a methodological combination applied in the research was based on the assumption that the Bucharest Nine is not an organization with an established and clearly defined institutional apparatus allowing to rely on formally issued documents issued or signed treaties. It is rather an entity providing a platform for regular meetings ahead of major NATO events and operating within the NATO framework, with the main forms of communication being either joint declarations issued following each meeting or statements provided by various officials participating in these events, reflecting the main concerns shared by the members of the organization. The research was conducted with the aim of elaborating on two factors. First, the joint declarations issued following the meetings of the Bucharest Nine states and other interested partners[3], and signed by various representatives participating in these meetings, including presidents of the states, ministers of foreign affairs and ministers of defence, during the period between 24 February 2022 (marking the start of the Russian war against Ukraine) and 1 July 2025, were analysed. The analysis of this primary form of official documentation reflecting the Bucharest Nine platform was also supplemented by an analysis of statements made by various representatives of the Bucharest Nine related to the meetings of the platform, mainly representatives of Poland and Romania, who were the most active representatives operating within the Bucharest Nine framework. While attempting to understand the main concerns of the Bucharest Nine, five components found in the declarations and statements were evaluated: 1) the self-perception of the Bucharest Nine; 2) the measures declared for strengthening regional security; 3) condemnation of the Russian war against Ukraine; 4) support for the European path of other states, mainly neighbouring countries; 5) other

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[2] The reason for applying the combination of discourse and content analysis is based on the assumption that discourse does not merely describe objects or communicate certain meaning, but it also produces more or less fixed representations of reality and is constitutive of what is understood as reality. In security studines, the method has been applied to demonstrate the impact of language on discourses and practices of security, not only highlighting the linguistic origins of insecurities but also demonstrating the impact of competing narratives (Lupták & Walach, 2015, p. 61–62).

[3] Table No. 1 listing all the Bucharest Nine meetings after 2022 is provided in paragraph 2.2.

significant factors (where applicable)[4]. Secondly, the research was supplemented by the evaluation of the Bucharest Nine dynamism in the context of major NATO events, also attempting to assess the network of participating partners in Bucharest Nine meetings, reflecting how the main concerns shared by the member states of the organization are spread to other allies and perceived by them. Both factors, taken together, provide an understanding of how intensive cooperation within the Bucharest Nine is, what factors are emphasized by the states, and how the general perception of the platform and its role in the region can be defined.

The article is divided into two parts. In the first part of the work, the concept of the security community and the importance of regional units in international relations are discussed. In the second part, both the establishment of the Bucharest Nine and the platform's dynamism after 2022 are analysed.

1. Security Communities and Regions in International Relations

There are two questions to be answered in order to understand the role of a regional unit (and its possible transformation into a security community) in international relations. The first question is related to the perception of a regional unit in general and the reasons why this level, in some specific conditions, is essential for understanding international and security politics. The second question is related to the formation of regional units by identifying the key aspects that unite states into larger units and the mechanisms behind this process.

The concept of security community was proposed by Richard Van Wagenen in the early 1950s; however, it is Karl Deutch who is considered to be the pioneer of introducing this concept in the field. Back in 1957, he proposed that a pluralistic security community emerges whenever a certain number of states become integrated to the point that they develop a sense of community, creating the assurance that they would settle their differences and create not only a stable order, but also stable peace. However, despite its introduction in the 1950s, the term became widely applied only after the collapse of the

[4] For a more detailed information, see Paragraph 2.2.

Cold War system, when scholars attempted to explain security issues and responses to them by small states in the new reality of international relations. Thus, the currently applied concept of security communities was reconceptualized by Emanuel Adler and Michael N. Barrett, who introduced methodological developments reflecting the most recent social, geopolitical, and security context of the late twentieth century. They applied the concept to the new era in international relations by elaborating on the development of shared perceptions, transnational values, and transaction flows that encourage the construction of communities aimed at achieving peace based on shared values, security concerns, and transnational linkages (Adler & Barnett, 1998a, pp. 3–9).

The new paradigm of international relations, based on the emergence of regionalism, relies on the assumption that the regional unit is a core layer in the international relations, as proposed by another key contribution to the field provided by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver. The regional approach relies on the idea that a regional security complex can be described as a unit whose security processes and dynamics are interlinked to the extent that they cannot be analysed separately from one another (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 44). These connections are based on several aspects such as domestically generated vulnerabilities, state-to-state relations, the region's interactions with neighbouring regions, the role of global powers in the region, eventually turning regional clusters into pluralistic security communities forming transnational regions comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change. The members of such a community share identities, values, and meanings, while also maintaining many-sided relations and interactions that exhibit reciprocity and express some degree of long-term[5] interest (Adler & Barnett, 1998a, pp. 30–31).

The idea of regionalism is based on the need for collaboration between the states with similar or shared perceptions of security and can be explained by the three-tiered scheme of international relations consisting of superpowers, great powers, and regional powers. Regions themselves must be composed of geographically clustered sets of units, and these clusters must be embedded in a larger system, as positioning the regional level within the global system requires distinguishing

[5] Yet, it has to be observed that although actors will come to identify with each other and derive many of their interests based on social values, they also continue to harbor distinct interests that can even generate competitive behavior; yet these different interests lead to the peaceful settlement of disputes (Adler, Barnett, 1998b, p. 32).

between great, middle, and small states (Buzan &Wæver, 2003, pp. 27–28). The regional level is a distinct middle level between the state and the global system, capable of reflecting regional concerns, and can be understood through its differences from the national and global security levels. While the national level lacks contextualism, the global level does not reflect specific to individual countries, which only the national level is capable of addressing. At the same time, the regional level is a place where national and global security interplay, and where states or other units are linked sufficiently closely that their security concerns cannot be considered separately from one another (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, pp. 43–44).

As the ties between the perceived members of a security community deepen, states become embedded in a set of social relations that can properly be understood as a community, with several conditions needing to be fulfilled. The first condition (or tier one) is the mutual identification of an external threat that causes states to form alliances and creates the desire to reduce mutual fear through security coordination (Adler & Barnett, 1998b, pp. 37–39). The second condition (or tier two) is the involvement of states and people in a series of social interactions that begin to transform the environment in which they are embedded and to shape the structural context, while power and knowledge become the structural girders for the development of a security community and transactions amongs its members. In this context, international organizations and institutions contribute directly and indirectly to the development of security communities and are part of the process, also promoting mutual trust by facilitating norms of behaviour (Adler & Barnett, 1998, pp. 39–45). The third condition (or tier three) is the development of both mutual trust and collective identity, which are necessary conditions for the emergence of dependable expectations of peaceful change. States no longer rely solely on concrete international organizations to maintain trust, but rather on knowledge and beliefs about one another based on years of experiences and encounters that shape cultural definitions of threat, which, in turn, can also transform over time (Adler & Barnett, 1998b, pp. 45–48).

At the same time, the formation of security communities has its own phases of development. These communities are socially constructed and shaped by their own historical background and path-dependent approach, meaning that the institutionalization of dependable expectations of peaceful change — from the moment such

communities are merely imagined to exist to the processes that lead to their development — can be defined in three phases. *The first phase* is the nascent phase, during which governments do not explicitly seek to establish a security community, yet begin to consider how they might coordinate their relations in order to increase mutual security through various diplomatic exchanges based on mutual threat perceptions. However, at this stage, expectations regarding shared knowledge and identity among peoples may still be lacking, despite the discovery of mutual interests and coordination. *The second phase* is the ascendant phase, defined by increasingly dense networks, new institutions, and organizations reflecting tighter cooperation, social learning, and increasing knowledge. *The third phase* is the mature phase, characterized by deeper integration, shared identity, and dependable expectations of peaceful change. At this point, a security community comes into existence, and one of its main features is a common definition of threat, alongside military integration or policy coordination through shared and coordinated practices (Adler & Barnett, 1998b, pp. 50–57).

It should also be noted that within a unit or complex, some subcomplexes can exist with essentially the same definition as the complex itself, except that a subcomplex is firmly embedded within a larger complex, although subcomplexes are not a necessary feature of complexes. At the same time, these complexes can expand or contract (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, pp. 51–53), meaning that some older members may begin to share different security perceptions, while new members with similar security perceptions may join the structure. Apart from that, it can be stated that in long term, new formations can replace older structures, thus creating similar yet new linkages or alliences based on the dynamism of security perceptions and interconnections between various states.

2. Bucharest Nine: An Emerging Security Community?

2.1. The Establishment of the Bucharest Nine

The Bucharest Nine, with its nine members stretching from the Baltic Sea in the north through the Central Europe to the Black Sea in the south, corresponds to the NATO's Eastern Flank and also c overlaps with several regional formations such as the Visegrád Group or the Three Seas Initiative (discussed later), as well as others on a smaller scale[6]. In most of works, the Bucharest Nine platform is connected to the concept of Central Europe and its geopolitical structure, alongside several other formations established in the region over the last three decades. Most member states of the Bucharest Nine belong to Central Europe in its broadest definition, although the region's boundaries remain a matter of debate, with no clearly defined borders separating it from Western, Eastern, Northern, and Southern Europe (Daniel & Turcsányi, 2015, pp. 7–8). One of the reasons for the existence of various definitions is the fact that Central Europe, for centuries, with some exceptions, has been dependent on other regions in political, economic, and cultural domains (Pawłuszko, 2021, p. 7). Thus, only after the fall of the Iron Curtain were its own organizations and regional formations established, based on various interests and topicalities, making these structures relatively new[7].

Soon after the fall of Iron Curtain local structures and formations in Central Europe started to develop, with Visegrád Group, established in 1991 and consisting of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, being one of the first regional formations in the post-1989 era. It can be described as a pragmatic instrument mainly focusing on political and economic cooperation. One of its main goals in the 1990s was to accelerate integration processes with the EU and NATO and, after all the states joined both organizations, to strengthen the Group's position in the European forum, while also covering some security issues (Bajda, 2021, pp. 10–11).

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[6] Some other platforms for cooperation might also be mentioned, such as the Lublin Triangle declaration, adopted in 2020 by Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, or the Slavkov delcaration, adopted on 29 January 2015 by the heads of government of Czechia, Austria, and Slovakia; however, they have not reached the level of cooperation achieved by the Bucharest Nine.

[7] Many scholars refer back to the *Intermarium* concept of the interwar period, proposed to integrate countries located between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas into a large defence entity aiming to oppose Russian imperialism. Yet this did not materialize, as the countries preferred smaller-scale formats or bilateral alliances (Vaida, 2022, pp. 186–187).

Yet the turning point in the current development of regional cooperation and its structures in Central Europe, in its broadest definition, was the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. In order to provide coordinated actions that would ensure region's security, Central European states, together with other states from NATO's Eastern Flank, startedcooperating on the establishment of joint geopolitical projects. A significant response was the Three Seas Initiative, established following the Dubrovnik Statement in 2016 and presenting itself as a regional lobby within the European Union aimed at promoting the development of European infrastructure along the north–south axis, which is also critical to the security of the region, while adopting a formula of annual summits (Pawłuszko, 2021, pp. 14–16).

In 2015, the Bucharest Nine format emerged as a joint project initially between Poland and Romania, but it soon spread across the region with the aim of establishing a platform for regional intergovernmental consultation based on conference diplomacy and deepening cooperation in the security domain among the states on NATO's Eastern Flank. It also aimed to increase defence spending capabilities among participating states and safeguard the interests of the countries located in the region (Banasik, 2021, pp. 28–29). The idea of establishing the Bucharest Nine can be traced back to March 2015, when Andrzej Duda and Klaus Iohannis announced plans to organize a meeting in Bucharest later that year with the presidents of like-minded allied states. Representatives of nine states met in Bucharest on 4 November 2015 and established the Bucharest Nine platform, issuing a joint statement that labelled the platform as a voice of flank's security, intended to deepen dialogue and consultations among participants within the NATO framework, while also aiming to ensure a more regular presence of allied troops in Central and Eastern European member states. The format was not based on a treaty, and no institutions or coordinating organs were established. Rather, it functioned as a form of dialogue between representatives of member states, with regular meetings between presidents, ministers of foreign affairs, and ministers of defence, as well as occasional meetings at other levels (Vaida, 2022, pp. 187-189). Among the most important initiatives undertaken within the format before 2022, efforts aimed at enhancing the presence of allies in the region should be noted. It should also be observed that Bucharest Nine countries were among the leading states in terms of defence spending as a share of GDP during the period 2015–2022, with most reaching the 2% target by 2022, except

for Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechia (Vaida, 2022, pp. 190-192).

However, it should also be noted that neither the Bucharest Nine, nor the Three Seas Initiative, nor the Visegrád Group possesses the status of a formal institutional political organization, as none of them has established statutes, headquarters, formal accession criteria, secretariats, or permanent structures. These structures can instead be understood as flexible substitutes for organizations, based on non-legally binding declarations and functioning as cooperation forums for the participating states. The Bucharest Nine initially even defined itself as an open platform for consultations and dialogue, with the main declared purpose being the enhancement of transatlantic security through strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank (Bajda, 2021, p. 8). Currently, the Bucharest Nine has several priorities within NATO, including defence spending, resilience – particularly in countering hybrid threats – and strategic deterrence, as it has been instrumental in shaping NATO's strategic deterrence posture on its Eastern Flank since its early days (Nagy, 2024, p. 6). The combination of the Bucharest Nine and the Three Seas Inititative, involving most states in the region, can be considered an effective way to enhance region's security. While the Bucharest Nine is the only platform specifically focused on improving regional security, the Three Seas Initiative supplements it by advocating investment in transport and logistics, which are important factors for military mobility, as well as investments in energy security (Bajda, 2021, pp. 14–17). Nevertheless, both platforms operate within the broader frameworks of the EU and NATO.

2.2. Bucharest Nine after 2022 and the Increasing Cooperation of Its States

Since 2022, cooperation between the Bucharest Nine states significantly intensified, not only through more frequent meetings among politicians of various ranks8, but also through the expansion of its international network. In addition to the nine member states of the

[8] Since February 2022, 11 meetings have been held over the course of three and a half years, with the participation of the presidents and ministers of foreign affairs and defence. Previously, since the establishment of the platform between 2015 and 2021, 11 meetings were also held: meetings at the presidential level were held on 4 November 2015 in Bucharest, on 8 June 2018 in Warsaw, on 28 February 2019 in Košice, on 10 May 2021 in Bucharest; meetings of ministers of foreign affairs were held on 8 November 2016 in Bucharest, on 9 October 2017 in Warsaw, on 10 March 2020 in Vilnius, on 27 October 2021 in Tallinn; meetings of ministers of defence were held on 12-14 March 2018 in Bucharest, on 4 April 2019 in Warsaw, on 25 November 2021 in Bucharest.

Bucharest Nine, representatives from other states (such as the Nordic states, the US, the UK, and Ukraine)[9] and institutions (including the EU and NATO) including. Although representatives of non-member states were present at most meetings, the meeting of presidents held on 2 June 2025 in Vilnius should particularly be mentioned as an event that attracted representatives from the five Nordic states, Ukraine, and NATO, reaching its widest geographical scope to date.

However, it also has to be noted that despite expanding network of international cooperation, as well as successful cooperation within the Bucharest Nine, some disagreements between the platform's states have recently been observed, mainly based on different approaches officially expressed by Hungary and Slovakia towards relations with Ukraine. This topic has already received wide media coverage evaluating its political significance; however, it is still difficult to predict its long-term influence on regional cooperation. As of today, from the perspective of cooperation within the Bucharest Nine, it should be stated that from 2022 onwards, for two years, despite political differences, joint declarations were signed by every member state of the Bucharest Nine, with every leader participating in each meeting. This practically means that, at least officially, no disagreements were publicly expressed until recently. The situation changed for the first time in 2024, as following the meeting of the presidents of the Bucharest Nine in Riga on 11 June 2024, no joint declaration was issued (instead, a declaration was signed only by the presidents of Latvia, Poland, and Romania). In addition, the President of Hungary did not participate in the event and was substituted by the Hungarian ambassador to Latvia (Sytas, 2024). Although later that year, during the meeting of defence ministers in September, the Hungarian counterpart was present and also signed the joint declaration, at the next presidential meeting, held on 2 June 2025 in Vilnius, the President of Hungary was once again substituted, this time by the Hungarian Minister of Defence (MTI-Hungary Today, 2025), while the joint declaration was signed only by the presidents of Lithuania, Poland, and Romania[10]. However, it should be observed that despite these disagreements, the

[9] Although not participating in the meeting, another act of cooperation should be mentioned. On 11 October 2022 all nine Bucharest Nine states condemned Russian bombardments of Ukraine with Montenegro and North Macedonia also joining the joint declaration (President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2022).

[10] It has to be observed that in both cases when joint declarations were signed by only three participants in the meeting, it was the host of the event together with Poland and Romania, demonstrating an active role of both states in the platform's developments since its establishment.

format remains actively developed, with regular meetings continuing to take place (although less frequently in 2024 and 2025 than in 2022 and 2023). The year 2025 also marked the tenth anniversary of the platform's establishment. Furthermore, the states of Central Europe remain so interlinked that even political disagreements — which are also dependent on internal political cycles and other factors — cannot significantly affect joint initiatives in the short term. In the table below, the list of participating partners in Bucharest Nine meetings, together with information on participating states and signatories of joint declarations issued by the platform's member states, is provided.

Table No. 1. **Information on the Bucharest Nine's meetings, participating states, partners, and signing sides of joint declarations**

Meeting	Participating states of the Bucharest Nine	Declaration signed by	Other participating partners
25 February 2022 Warsaw (Presidents)	All	Not issued	President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen[11]
31 March 2022 Bratislava (Ministers of Foreign Affairs)	All	Not issued	NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană; Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasian Affairs of the United States Dr Karen Donfried[12]
6 June 2022 Videoconference (Ministers of Defence)[13]	All	All	Secretary of Defence of the UK Ben Wallace; the US Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander; NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning Patrick Turner[14]
10 June 2022 Bucharest (Presidents)[15]	All	All	NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg[16]
22 February 2023 Warsaw (Presidents)[17]	All	All	President of the US Joe Biden, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg[18]
26 April 2023 Warsaw (Ministers of Defence)[19]	All	All	Secretary of State for Defence of the UK Ben Wallace, the Assistant Secretary General for Operations, Thomas Goffus online[20]

11 European Commission. Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood, 2022

12 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022

13 Ministry of National Defence, 2022, June 7

14 Ibid.

15 President.pl, 2022, June 10

16 Ibid.

17 Prezydent.p, 2023, February 22

18 Government of the Czech Republic, 2023

19 Ministry of National Defence, 2023, April 26

20 Ministry of National Defence, 2023, April 27

31 March 2023 Lodz (Ministers of Foreign Affairs)[21]	All	Poland, Romania	NATO Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning
6 June 2023 Bratislava (Presidents)[22]	All	All	NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg
11 June 2024 Riga (Presidents)[23]	Hungary represented by it ambassador to Latvia	Latvian, Polish, Romanian Presidents	Presidents of Finland and Sweden, NATO Secretary General[24]
18 September 2024 Bucharest (Ministers of Defence)[25]	All	All	None
2 June 2025 Vilnius (Presidents)[26]	Hungary and Bulgaria represented by minister of defence	Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian Presidents	President of Ukraine Volodimir Zelensky, representatives of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte.

Additional remark should be made regarding the timing and character of the Bucharest Nine meetings, which are typically held ahead of major NATO events. Of the 11 meetings held from 2022 until 2025, four presidential-level meetings were organized shortly before NATO Summits[27], while at least two additional meetings at the level of ministers of defence (31 March 2023 and 18 September 2024) were held ahead of NATO defence ministers' summits. Additionally, two meetings were held in February: the first one was held in 2022, just a few days after the Russian attack against Ukraine, and another one was held in 2023, marking one year since the start of the war. This indicates that the platform reacts to the most recent developments in the region and Europe and also attempts, through consultations and discussions, to find a common approach reflecting the region's voice.

To sum up, all the above-mentioned factors demonstrate not only how the Bucharest Nine is effectively used as a platform for deepening cooperation in the region and also involving additional like-minded neighbouring states, but also how it provides a framework for deeper

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21 Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 2023, March 30

22 President of the Slovak Republic, 2023

23 Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja, 2024

24 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2024

25 Ministerul Apărării Naționale, 2024

26 President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2 June 2025

27 NATO Summits were held on 29-30 June 2022 in Madrid, 11-12 July 2023 in Vilnius, on 9-11 July 2024 in Washington, on 24-25 June 2025 in the Hague. Additionally, two extraordinary NATO Summits were held on 25 February 2022 in the virtual format, and 24 March 2022 in Brussels.

cooperation among NATO allies within the Alliance's structure while reacting to the most recent European security developments.

2.2 Bucharest Nine and Its Formation as a Regional Unit after 2022

Following the analysis of the joint declarations issued after the meetings of the Bucharest Nine states at the levels of presidents, ministers of defence, and ministers of foreign affairs, as well as the analysis of the statements made by various representatives of different ranks of the Bucharest Nine states, several thematic topics appearing regularly and emphasizing the main concerns of the states belonging to this format of cooperation can be discussed. The first element (1), titled *Bucharest Nine*, aims at understanding the self-perception of the Bucharest Nine participants and how the platform is collectivelly defined by its members. At the same time, this element can be perceived as a reflection of the collective identity of the formation. The second element (2), titled *Strengthening security and deepening cooperation*, aims at understanding the measures declared by the states of the platform in order to assess the common actions undertaken by the community. The third element, (3) titled *Russian war against Ukraine*, aims at understanding how the main security threat to the region is perceived and addressed, while also representing the external threat perceived by the community. This element is critically important considering the fact that Russian aggression against Ukraine already became the main stimulus for the establishment of the platform in 2014 and, after 2022, remained the primary reason for deepening ties within the region. The fourth element (4), titled *Support to European path of other states*, aims at understanding the possible further partners and potential enlargement of the platform. While this element is not directly connected to the theoretical framework, it allows consideration of the geopolitical elemenent based on the international network of the formation. The last, additional, element (5), titled *Other observations*, aims at understanding other significant factors provided in the declarations (where applicable), attempting to assess the overall scope of the Bucharest Nine and whether it transcends the boundaries of the region. In the table below, information regarding each element contained in the joint declarations issued following the meetings of the Bucharest Nine.

Table No. 2. **Information on the content of the joint declarations issued following the meetings of the Bucharest Nine**

Meeting	1	2	3	4	5
25 February 2022 Warsaw	-	-	-	-	-
31 March 2022 Bratislava	-	-	-	-	-
6 June 2022 videoconference	To consult and cooperate	Increase security of the region by enhanced battleground. Preparing for Madrid Summit	Support and assist to Ukraine, counter Russian aggression	None	Southern Flank of Alliance
10 June 2022 Bucharest	Promoting format as joint approach	Increase defence spending, Preparing strategic NATO concept, preparation for Madrid Summit	Support to Ukraine, condemn Russian aggresion	Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine. Welcoming Finland and Sweden	Southern Flank of Alliance
22 February 2023 Warsaw	None	Reaffirming Madrid Summit, preparation for Vilnius Summit	Support to Ukraine, Condemn Russian aggression. Russia defined as direct threat to Alliance.	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. Welcoming Finland and Sweden	None
26 April 2023 Warsaw	Aim to cooperate	Investment into defence, Madrid Summit implementation, Preparation for Vilnius Summit	Support to Ukraine, need to enhance it assist	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. Welcoming Finland and Sweden	None
31 Lodz 2023 Lodz	Successful previous outcome	Preparation for NATO Ministerial Meeting and Vilnius Summit; Strengthening NATO-EU cooperation, enhanced presence	Fighting against Russian aggression	Moldova, Ukraine, Welcoming Finland and Sweden	None
6 June 2023 Bratislava	None	Increasing NATO defence, preparation for Vilnius Summit	Support and assist to Ukraine, defining Russian threats	Bosnia and Herzergovina, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. Welcoming Finland and Sweden	Western Balkans and Indo-Pacific

11 June 2024 Riga	None	Strengthening region's defence, Commitment to Vilnius and Madrid Summit decisions, Increased defence spending	Support to Ukraine, Stressing hybrid threats, defining Russian threats.	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. Welcoming Finland and Sweden.	Assistance to partners across the world
18 September 2024 Bucharest	To discuss and coordinate common response	Reaffirming Washington Summit, enhance security measures, Defence plans and increased spending, developing defence industry	Assist to Ukraine, Condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine and Europe	Moldova	None
2 June 2025 Vilnius	None	Preparations for Hague Summit, commitment to earlier summits and article 5, increased GDP spending, accelerating defence industry	Support to Ukraine, condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine and Europe	Moldova, Ukraine	Indo-Pacific, South

It has to be noted that while evaluating each thematic element in greater detail, the selected quotes were chosen on the basis of their content, attempting to discuss the most informative examples covering a broader range of aspects and thus providing more information on the discussed topicalities.

Bucharest Nine

The first element to be mentioned in this context is the Bucharest Nine format itself and its role in regional security, as officially expressed by representatives of the Bucharest Nine states. It has to be admitted that references to the Bucharest Nine do not appear in every declaration, which typically contains only information about the aim of the meeting; however, this platform of cooperation has been discussed on several occasions. The most accurate example of such a reference can be found in the press release issued following the meeting of defence ministers on 6 June 2022, where the Bucharest Nine meeting was described as

an an opportunity to harmonize the positions of the defence ministers

> *of the platform's member states on topics of common interest in the context of the upcoming NATO meeting in Brussels on 16 June and the NATO Madrid Summit on 29–30 June (Ministry of National Defence, 2022).*

Another characteristic example can be found in the joint declaration issued following the Bucharest Nine meeting on 2 June 2025 in Vilnius, stating that

> *together, we assessed preparations for the upcoming NATO Summit in The Hague, including our firm commitment to significantly increased defence spending and enhanced defence industrial capacity against the backdrop of Russia's threat to Euro-Atlantic security and its ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine (President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2 June 2025).*

In addition to the above-mentioned quotes, it has to be noted that not only joint declarations, but also representatives of the Bucharest Nine states themselves, share similar views regarding the platform. The most active politician discussing the Bucharest Nine in the media was one of its initiators, Klaus Iohannis, who, during his speech at the meeting of presidents on 11 June 2024, emphasized the importance of strengthening regional security and the role of the Bucharest Nine in this process by stating that "through our shared vision and action, the B9 Format has contributed to NATO's enhanced deterrence and defence posture from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea. And, dear colleagues, we need to continue on this path" (President of Romania, 2024). Moreover, during the meeting of presidents of the Bucharest Nine on 6 June 2023 in Bratislava, Klaus Iohannis claimed that the Bucharest Nine format represents the values of solidarity, dialogue, and cooperation and aims to strengthen and consolidate the deterrence and defence posture on NATO's Eastern Flank. Apart from that, it also aims to ensure that the region speaks with a single voice at the NATO Vilnius Summit (Costea, 2023). Additionally, it should be observed that the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, following the Bucharest Nine meeting on 31 March 2022, emphasized the importance and relevance of coordination within the Bucharest Nine format, especially in the contemporary security context (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 31 March 2022). Thus, it can be stated that although references to the Bucharest Nine format are not frequent, they appear regularly enough to demonstrate that the platform is considered an important instrument for regional security by its member states, particularly by

Klaus Iohannis, who repeatedly emphasized its significance at the discourse level.

Strengthening Security and Deepening Cooperation

Another regularly emphasized element by representatives of the Bucharest Nine states was the strengthening of security and the deepening of cooperation aimed at improving the security situation in the region, covering several topics within this domain. The first aspect to be mentioned is increasing military spending, which was repeatedly emphasized in most declarations issued following the meetings, particularly focusing on a minimum of 2% of GDP allocated to defence spending or on the development of the defence industry. The following example, observed in the joint declaration issued after the meeting of presidents on 11 June 2024 in Riga, summarizes it profoundly by announcing that

> *we welcome the substantial progress that Allies have made on defence investment, along with our commitment to invest in defence annually a minimum of 2% of GDP and beyond, and underline that in order to meet the requirements across all domains arising from a more contested security order increased defence spending and investments are required. In addition, an Allied commitment to urgently deliver the most critical capabilities is key to execute NATO's defence plans. A strong defence industry across the Alliance remains essential. We are taking bold steps towards reinforcing our defence industry capacity to fill the gaps and shorten the supply chains (Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja, 2024).*

Investment in the defence industry also became an increasingly emphasized factor. In the declaration issued following the meeting on 2 June 2025 in Vilnius, elaborating the most recent approach and containing numerous details, it was stated that

> *we will accelerate efforts in boosting the Trans-Atlantic defence industry – expanded and faster production, smarter procurement, and more multinational projects. The European Commission's and the EEAS' White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 and the ReArm Europe Plan are significant steps towards turning Europe's and the EU's strategic ambition into real capabilities. Stronger European contributions within NATO means a stronger Alliance (President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2 June 2025).*

The above-mentioned factors were also present, although expressed in different forms, in most joint declarations, becoming a regular motive defining the perceptions of the Bucharest Nine states towards region's security.

Emphasis on strengthening military capabilities was another element regularly appearing in the documents. One of the most profound examples demonstrating this trend can be found in the joint declaration issued following the meeting of ministers of defence on 18 September 2024, declaring that "we will continue our efforts to implement NATO's new defence plans to strengthen our collective defence. We recognise the importance of strengthening the defence industry across the Alliance". Yet, in addition to expressing the importance of strengthening defence, specific references to military capabilities were also provided in the same declaration. It was further stated that

> *we call on all Allies to prioritise delivering the most critical capabilities, such as air and missile defence and battle decisive munitions, required in the short term to execute NATO's defence plans, consistent with the NATO defence planning process. This will provide a clear demand signal to Allied defence industry through firm orders and contracts. Enhancing allied industrial base will ensure that NATO remains equipped with cutting-edge capabilities to meet current and future challenges (Ministry of National Defence Information and Public Relations Directorate, 2024).*

Calls to strengthen defence and deepen cooperation appeared regularly, becoming another significant factor shared by the members of the Bucharest Nine.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, some additional information was also provided based on the most recent topicalities relevant during particular periods in the context of Bucharest Nine meetings. As an example reflecting this category of news could be the references to the three NATO Summits that took place during the period of the research and relevant topicalities, for example, preparaton for the NATO Madrid Summit in 2022 (President of Romania, 2022), discussions ahead of the upcoming NATO Vilnius Summit in 2023, for example, claiming that

> *we firmly believe that the summit in Vilnius will be a historic success. The Alliance is stronger and more united than ever. We, the Bucharest 9 countries, will continue to work tirelessly to further strengthen our unity and solidarity, our enduring transatlantic bond, and to enhance*

> *our security, defence and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area (President of the Slovak Republic, 2023),*

or preparation to the NATO Washington Summit in 2024 (Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja, 2024). This demonstrates that Bucharest Nine meetings typically correspond to the major NATO events.

Russian War Against Ukraine

One more regularly appearing motive – explicitly emphasized support to Ukraine – was observed in every single joint statement issued following Bucharest Nine meetings of every rank, also regularly appearing in the interviews or statements of representatives of the Bucharest Nine states. One of the most characteristic examples expressing support to Ukraine can be observed in the joint declaration issued following the meeting of presidents of Bucharest Nine states on 10 June 2022. In one of the paragraphs of the declaration it is stated that

> *we reiterated our unwavering commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, its democratically elected President, parliament and government, and its people, in their brave fight to defend their homes, their country and their sovereign right to choose Ukraine's own security arrangements and foreign policy, free from outside interference. We emphasized our continued support to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. We also support the integration of Ukraine in the European Union. We are determined to continue and further step up our assistance for Ukraine, as a strong and democratic Ukraine is important for security and stability in Europe. We have provided protection to millions of Ukrainian refugees (President of Romania, 2022).*

As can be seen from the example above, Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, its foreign policy, and Euro-Atlantic aspirations are the main aspects perceived by the Bucharest Nine states to be crucial elements and are emphasized regularly. While the above-mentioned example provides the main aspects taken together in a single paragraph, in other declarations (as well as interviews or other statements of the representatives of the states) various aspects expressed alone were covered. Another repeatedly appearing motive was concern for Euro-Atlantic security, as can be seen from the following example provided in the declaration following the meeting on 6 June 2022:

> *we expressed our deepest concern and condemn Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. We agreed that this situation provides the gravest threat to the Euro-Atlantic security since the end of the Cold War, undermining stability and prosperity of the Euro-Atlantic area (Ministry of National Defence, 6 June 2022).*

In addition to the support for Ukraine expressed regularly, each declaration also contained statements referring to the threats posed by Russian policy to the region. As a remarkable example can serve a joint declaration issued following the meeting of presidents of the Bucharest Nine states in Riga on 11 June 2024 as it pointed that

> *Russia is and will remain the most significant and direct threat to Allied security. We will work on a comprehensive strategy to contest, constrain and counter Russia, including by limiting Russia's capacity to reconstitute its military and its ability to pose threats. We remain adamant in our efforts to sustain international pressure on Russia, including through sanctions and other measures for as long as Russia continues its hostile policies and actions, including blatant violation of international law. We are deeply concerned about Russia's recent malign hybrid activities on Allied territory, which constitute a threat to Allied security. These incidents are part of an intensifying campaign of activities which Russia continues to carry out across the Euro-Atlantic area, including sabotage, acts of violence, cyber and electronic interference, provocations related to Allied borders, disinformation campaigns and other hybrid operations28. We support and stand in solidarity with the affected Allies. We will act individually and collectively to address these actions, boost our resilience and continue to coordinate closely to ensure that the Alliance and Allies are prepared to deter and defend against hybrid actions or attacks (Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja, 2024).*

The above-mentioned example does not only address Russian destabilizing activities listing them specifically, but also provides clear information about the resilience and other steps that would be taken

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[28] Although not provided here, in some other cases the declarations provide more specific information. For example, following the meeting of ministers of defence of the Bucharest Nine states on 18 September 2024 specific reference was provided to NATO airspace violations by Russia by claiming that "we express our profound concern over the repeated incursions of NATO airspace, in Poland, Romania, Latvia and other NATO countries by the Russian Federation's drones and missiles, and the escalations of tensions along NATO's borders. This is a new reality that cannot be left disregarded" also providing information about the possible collective answer (Ministry of National Defence Information and Public Relations Directorate, 2024).

in order to improve the region's security. This aspect also appeared regularly in every single joint declaration issued during the researched period.

Support to European Path of Other States

Although appearing to a lesser extent, the repeatedly occuring topic in joint declarations – support for the European aspirations of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia, or at least one of these states – should be considered as well demonstrating the Bucharest Nine states' perceptions towards the future of the region and its security. For example, in the declaration issued following the meeting of ministers of defence on 26 April 2023 it was stated that

> *we fully recognize the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and Western Balkans regions for the Alliance. We will continue to further strengthen NATO's support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova to build their integrity and resilience against any malign influence. In this respect, we commend the Republic of Moldova for its efforts to maintain stability and advance reforms on its European path (Prezydent.pl, 2023).*

A very similar statement was expressed on 11 June 2024 following the meeting of the presidents in Riga by claiming that

> *we commend the Republic of Moldova for its efforts to maintain stability and advance reforms on its European path. We will continue to further strengthen NATO's tailored support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, recognising that these partners are most affected by Russia's malign influence (Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja, 2024).*

Yet it also has to be noted that not in every case demonstrating support for the European path of the above-mentioned states do all three states appear; if taken alone, the most often referred to state was Moldova, as, for example, in the declaration of 18 September 2024 following the meeting of defence ministers claiming that

> *we will also cooperate closely to support our partners from the region, who are most exposed to Russia's attempts at destabilisation, such as the Republic of Moldova. Strengthening their defence capacity and resilience is relevant to the security of the entire Euro-Atlantic area (Ministry of National Defence Information and Public Relations Directorate, 2024).*

The latter factor can be mainly explained by the geographical proximity of Moldova to the Bucharest Nine states as well as the importance of Moldova to Romanian security and foreign policy.

In addition to the above-mentioned three states aspiring to connect their future with Europe and the West, in most of the joint statements the Bucharest Nine states reaffirmed their commitment to the Open Door policy not only emphasizing and welcoming the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, one of the most significant strategic developments in Europe since 2022, as was stated following the meeting of the presidents of the Bucharest Nine states on 22 February 2023 in Warsaw declaring that in Madrid NATO Summit both states were invited to the alliance and stating that

> *we welcome Finland as a new member of the Alliance and fully support Sweden to become a full–fledged member soon. Their accession further strengthens the Alliance and makes the Baltic Sea region as well as the whole Euro–Atlantic area more secure (Prezydent.pl, 2023),*

but also repeatedly referring to Ukraine's commitment to connect its future with Europe and the West as defined, for example, on 11 June 2024 following the meeting of presidents of the Bucharest Nine states in Riga by indicating that

> *we commend Ukraine for its commitment and substantial progress, despite the war circumstances, in its reform agenda, which is essential to further advance on the path toward EU and NATO membership. We encourage Ukraine to continue its reforms in accordance with the Allies' recommendations for Ukraine's adapted Annual National Programme (Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja, 2024).*

Other Observations

Finally, occasionally, the broader geopolitical landscape was covered as well referring to, for example, the Indo-Pacific and the South as can be found in the statement issued following the meeting of presidents on 11 June 2024 in Riga:

> *we will continue to strive for more strategic, more coherent and more effective partnerships to respond best to partners' needs and goals of the Alliance, in particular with the European Union, as well as with partners in our neighbourhood, in the Indo-Pacific and in the South (Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja, 2024).*

Yet despite that latter aspect, it can be stated that the main concerns of the Bucharest Nine states as expressed in various official statements were connected to the region's security with very few references to the other factors that appeared only occasionally.

Conclusions

It can be stated that regions play an important and expanding role in international relations being an intermediate level between the global and national levels, and thus corresponding to the most pressing issues and topicalities of each region. Regional units, comprising of small states that share similar security perceptions and collaborate within the framework of a larger entity, are capable of lobbying for the representations of their interests better than each state taken alone, having their own dynamics that can also lead to the accession of new members located in geographical proximity and sharing similar security perceptions.

The Bucharest Nine is a platform formed in 2015 as a response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine by the states located on the NATO's Eastern Flank, comprising the Baltic states, Central Europe and Black Sea region states. The platform intensified its internal cooperation following the Russian attack against Ukraine in 2022 gradually evolving into a structure that can be labelled as a sort of emerging security community and the voice of the region, attracting other partners as well. The Bucharest Nine is particularly active ahead of major events, particularly before the NATO Summits, attempting to find a shared position regarding various topicalities, mainly intended to strengthen regional security. However, it also has to be observed that the Bucharest Nine is not a formal organization capable of imposing specific measures mandatory for each member state; it is rather a platform for cooperating and coordinating the posture of the region by the states sharing similar security concerns. The platform member states share external threat perceptions, thus they have become involved in a series of various interactions forming a regular format for cooperation. Yet they still rely on NATO and in general consider the platform to be the voice within NATO, thus naturally not evolving into an independent regional entity. Thus it has not become a true security community, yet it can also be stated, that considering mutual expectations and shared security perceptions among the states, multiple ties in multiple

domains, supplemented by collaboration in other units and entities, the Bucharest Nine has already established a solid ground that can already be considered as a security region operating within NATO.

It also has to be noted that since the format is comprised of several states possessing different security approaches expressed officially, some disagreements may arise. In the recent political circumstances, it was essentially Hungary and Slovakia and their officially declared position towards relations with Ukraine, resulting in difficulties regarding the tradition of issuing joint declarations within the Bucharest Nine's context. However, the author suggests that despite some differences between the Bucharest Nine states regarding security in the region expressed on some occasions in the past, the platform has maintained a regular character of meetings. Apart from that, it is complicated to discuss the future scenarios of cooperation based on internal political cycles. It also has to be noted that the Bucharest Nine also attracted some other representatives from both NATO and the EU sharing similar security concerns into its format of cooperation and operating within NATO's framework, also involving Nordic states, Ukraine, the UK, and the US, demonstrating that the role of the organization in the region is increasing.

The research demonstrates that the Bucharest Nine proved to be univocal on the most pressing issues and topicalities relevant to the region after 2022. The main aspects expressed in regular meetings among representatives of various ranks of the Bucharest Nine states' were the need to strengthen regional cooperation and defence capabilities, the condemnation of the Russian war against Ukraine and the measures taken in order to strengthen security, as well as support for the states aspiring to connect their future to Europe and the West with some additional relevant elements being mentioned depending on the topicalities. And although, based on local political fluctuations inside each country and various preferences in politics, some disagreements can emerge, overall the Bucharest Nine can be assumed to constitute a region that serves as an important instrument advocating for improving NATO's Eastern Flank's security among like-minded allies and that is open for cooperation with the condemnation of the other like-minded allies. It is not a real security community, as there are no official structures established that could serve as the basis for the unified coordination. It is rather a sort of security community with plenty of interconnections among its members, being the voice of the region and an actively developing platform for the coordination of position towards various topicalities.

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