

# Executive Summary

24 November 2023



## Challenges in European Security Politics

Stakeholder Forum in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence and the  
University for Continuing Education Krems

Participants:

**Univ. Prof. Dr. Iulian Chifu** is the president of the Center for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning in Romania, and University Professor at the National Defense Academy in Bucharest. He was also a state councilor of the Presidency of Romania for many years on the particular issues of strategic affairs and international security.

**Erik Hacker**, LL.M. works at SCENOR in Austria and is a researcher on the topic of jihadism, terrorism, extremism with a focus on the online sphere.

**Dr. Thomas Eder** is working as a researcher at the oiip with a focus on Chinese foreign and security policy, China and international law, and European China policy. He holds a PhD (Department of International Law and International Relations) and MA (Chinese Studies) from the University of Vienna, and an LL.M. (Chinese Law) from the University of Hong Kong.

Moderation:

**Dr. Daniela Pisoiu** is a senior researcher at the oiip. She works on the issues of security, in particular terrorism, extremist radicalization, but also security policy more broadly.

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The panel discussion encompasses three distinct yet interrelated global scenarios that demand attention due to their potential implications on regional stability, international relations, and security. Despite their differences, these scenarios share common threads of conflict, geopolitical tensions, and the need for proactive strategies to mitigate risks and prevent further escalation.

Escalating conflict zones like Ukraine, the Israel-Palestine region, and potential scenarios in the Taiwan Strait underscore regions marred by increasing tensions, marked by power struggles, geopolitical maneuvers, and complex historical and strategic interests. The hybrid warfare in Ukraine and Russia's aggressive actions, coupled with the evolving nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict, accentuate the severity of these geopolitical hotspots. Moreover, extremist groups, notably ISIS, exploit global crises to expand influence, incite violence, and propagate radical narratives, posing significant security threats. The disparity between extremist narratives and the actual realities of conflicts heightens the risk of these ideologies gaining global traction and fostering volatility beyond immediate conflict zones. The interconnections between global powers and regions illuminate the far-reaching implications of these conflicts on global geopolitics, security alliances, and economic stability. The European Union's reliance on the US, China, and Taiwan underscores intricate interdependencies among major global economies and alliances, amplifying the repercussions of conflict escalation across these regions.

### 1. Russian Aggression in Ukraine

- The conflict in Ukraine, a blend of conventional and hybrid warfare, represents a long-standing challenge.
- Russia's actions since 2007, from treaty withdrawals to military aggression, underscore its strategic goals.
- Romania's role in supporting Ukraine, both economically and logistically, has been pivotal amid the ongoing crisis.

### 2. Media Jihad and ISIS Exploitation

- Analysis of ISIS's response to global conflicts, particularly the Israel-Palestine situation, shows a push for global expansion.

- Calls for violence, especially against Jewish communities in Europe and the US, are concerning.
- ISIS's exploitation of social media platforms like TikTok poses a significant challenge in countering their influence.

### **3. Risks in Taiwan Strait after Presidential Election**

- The impending Taiwanese presidential election holds substantial implications for China-Taiwan relations.
- The US's evolving stance on Taiwan's defense and China's potential reactions based on the election outcome carry significant implications.
- Europe's triple dependency on the US, China, and Taiwan demands a proactive strategy to avert potential conflict.

## **Deutsche Zusammenfassung**

Die Podiumsdiskussion befasst sich mit drei unterschiedlichen, jedoch miteinander verbundenen globalen Szenarien, die aufgrund ihrer potenziellen Auswirkungen auf die regionale Stabilität, die internationalen Beziehungen und die Sicherheit Aufmerksamkeit erfordern. Trotz ihrer Unterschiede sind diesen Szenarien Konflikte, geopolitische Spannungen und die Notwendigkeit proaktiver Strategien zur Risikominderung und Verhinderung einer weiteren Eskalation gemeinsam.

Eskalierende Konfliktzonen wie die Ukraine, die israelisch-palästinensische Region und mögliche Szenarien in der Straße von Taiwan unterstreichen Regionen, die von zunehmenden Spannungen, Machtkämpfen, geopolitischen Manövern und komplexen historischen und strategischen Interessen geprägt sind. Die hybride Kriegsführung in der Ukraine und das aggressive Vorgehen Russlands sowie die Entwicklung des israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikts verschärfen die Lage an diesen geopolitischen Brennpunkten. Darüber hinaus nutzen extremistische Gruppen, insbesondere ISIS, globale Krisen aus, um ihren Einfluss auszuweiten, zur Gewalt anzustiften und radikale Narrative zu verbreiten, was eine erhebliche Sicherheitsbedrohung darstellt. Die Diskrepanz zwischen extremistischen Narrativen und der tatsächlichen Realität von Konflikten erhöht das Risiko, dass diese Ideologien weltweit Fuß fassen und die Volatilität über die unmittelbaren Konfliktzonen hinaus

fördern. Die Verflechtungen zwischen globalen Mächten und Regionen verdeutlichen die weitreichenden Auswirkungen dieser Konflikte auf die globale Geopolitik, Sicherheitsallianzen und wirtschaftliche Stabilität. Die Abhängigkeit der Europäischen Union von den USA, China und Taiwan unterstreicht die komplizierten Interdependenzen zwischen den großen globalen Volkswirtschaften und Bündnissen und verstärkt die Auswirkungen einer Konflikteskalation in diesen Regionen.

### **1. Russische Aggression in der Ukraine**

- Der Konflikt in der Ukraine, eine Mischung aus konventioneller und hybrider Kriegsführung, stellt eine seit langem bestehende Herausforderung dar.
- Russlands Handlungen seit 2007, vom Rückzug aus Verträgen bis zur militärischen Aggression, unterstreichen seine strategischen Ziele.
- Rumäniens Rolle bei der Unterstützung der Ukraine, sowohl wirtschaftlich als auch logistisch, war in der anhaltenden Krise von zentraler Bedeutung.

### **2. Medialer Dschihad und ISIS-Ausbeutung**

- Die Analyse der Reaktion von ISIS auf globale Konflikte, insbesondere auf die israelisch-palästinensische Krise, zeigt einen Drang zur globalen Expansion.
- Gewaltaufrufe, insbesondere gegen jüdische Menschen in Europa und den USA, sind besorgniserregend.
- Die Nutzung von Social-Media-Plattformen wie TikTok durch ISIS stellt eine große Herausforderung bei der Bekämpfung ihres Einflusses dar.

### **3. Risiken in der Taiwanstraße nach den Präsidentschaftswahlen**

- Die bevorstehenden Präsidentschaftswahlen in Taiwan haben erhebliche Auswirkungen auf die Beziehungen zwischen China und Taiwan.
- Die sich entwickelnde Haltung der USA zur Verteidigung Taiwans und die möglichen Reaktionen Chinas auf den Wahlausgang sind von großer Bedeutung.
- Die dreifache Abhängigkeit Europas von den USA, China und Taiwan erfordert eine proaktive Strategie, um einen möglichen Konflikt zu vermeiden.

## **1. The war in Ukraine and implications for European security at the Eastern front**

*Univ. Prof. Dr. Iulian Chifu*

First, it is widely acknowledged that there is currently a high-intensity, full-scale war of aggression being waged by Russia in Ukraine. This conflict has been ongoing for a considerable period of time and is characterized by both conventional and hybrid warfare. It is important to recognize that the hybrid aspect of this conflict is not a new phenomenon and is being felt across many countries. We experienced a 30-year period where, according to Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' theory, the world was expected to move towards liberal democracy and open societies. However, reality turned out to be quite different. Unfortunately, Romania, along with some other Eastern European states, found itself in a position where it had to inform our EU partners and allies about what we had warned them about in 2007, when Russia withdrew from the CFE Treaty. In 2008, we informed the EU about Georgia's appeal. In 2014, we reported on the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the military aggression in the eastern regions of Ukraine. Regrettably, we find ourselves in 2023, still facing these issues.

Secondly, Russia is sacrificing crucial aspects of its core identity. The first of these is the social contract, which in Russia is characterized by the expectation of obedience and respect towards the authorities. The government is responsible for providing security and ensuring a certain level of prosperity for its citizens. While some individuals may achieve wealth and positions of authority, these are not the primary goals of the state. It is concerning that Putin's Russia appears to be actively seeking war, beginning with partial conscription and potentially leading to full conscription. Inflation has resulted in a shortage of goods and an increase in living costs. After the Russian presidential election next year, there may be a general conscription mobilization and an economy-wide mobilization for war due to the inability to sustain the current situation. The strategic partnerships that have been cultivated over the years, with Germany being the most significant one, are the second casualty. Russia terminated a significant bilateral partnership that led to war. Recently, there has been a focus on investing in the relationship with Israel. This investment follows a similar pattern to the previous partnership that Russia ended for individual reasons. Additionally, Russia aims to maintain its prestige, political legitimacy, and global responsibility. However, Putin's need to maintain power was the driving force

behind these decisions. Since 2014, the regime has been unable to deliver economic growth, even for the elite.

Third, Ukraine recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of Euromaidan. Euromaidan was a revolution of dignity, which was actually a revolt of the people. President Yanukovich came from Vilnius without signing the Association agreement. This is the only known instance where 101 people lost their lives in support of the principles and values of the European Union. The victims were shot in the streets, as a result of actions taken by Putin and Yanukovich to suppress and quell the uprising. Meanwhile, Ukraine has developed a national identity and a strong civil society, which has led to the establishment of a democracy, albeit imperfect. It is worth noting that no Ukrainian president has yet served two full terms, with the majority only completing one. The intangibles of war, such as the will to fight and national patriotism, also play a role. The goal of achieving true independence from Russia united the people. Three aspirational themes will be explored, along with five end game scenarios and three negotiation options: the German, Korean, and post-Soviet options. However, it is important to face reality. Russia is not willing to negotiate and has not changed its ultimate goal: to install a proxy government in Kiev and take control of the four regions it already occupies, with the potential addition of Donetsk and Lugansk, Kherson and Saporischschja. This is accompanied by efforts to isolate Ukraine, which is now landlocked. Upon reaching the Danube River, specifically at Romania's external EU Eastern Border with the Republic of Moldova, which will be affected by the process, the objective is not to establish a proxy government, but to fully take over the country. The situation in the southern flank is undoubtedly less significant than that of the eastern flank in the wider Black Sea region.

As for Romania, we have taken on the responsibility. Overall, we must demonstrate our responsibility. Discussing the assistance that Romania provided to Ukraine, including support for the energy economy, transit of goods, and exports, is a separate topic from discussing refugees and humanitarian aid. It is fortunate that our economy was strong enough to support both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. We are now part of Ukraine's corridor for exporting goods via our water territories. To date, they have successfully exported 24 million tons of grain through this corridor, in addition to what is exported from our country. This is a significant achievement, with 12 border points established and managed in compliance with European Union regulations. At one point, the transit level at our border was nine times higher than usual due to the redirection of transit from its usual route, specifically to

the harvested ports and out of the country via Romania. This created immense pressure, but we were able to successfully manage it with the help of the European Union.

## **2. (Social) Media jihad: jihadists' co-optation of global crises**

*Erik Hacker*

The reason for addressing jihadism during an ongoing conflict is multifaceted. From a European and Austrian perspective, the main security threat still comes from jihadism. In the past few months since the conflict began, both attacks in Austria have been related to ISIS. It is important to discuss how to react to the exploitation of conflict and the incitement of hatred and violence in Europe by ISIS, without justifying their actions.

Initially, the central leadership did not address the situation in the Middle East in their publications, resulting in a belated response that took over a week. It is worth noting that they continue to publish editorials and newsletters on a weekly basis. It took over a week for the leadership to release a statement and respond to the attacks. However, when they did respond, they praised the attacks of the 7th of October without mentioning Hamas. They initially expressed solidarity for the civilians in Palestine and Gaza, but later, when they addressed Hamas, it was mainly criticism. It is problematic to draw parallels between the two organizations. While there may be some operational similarities between the 7th of October and their operations, the two organizations are distinct.

Returning to the topic of solidarity with civilians, it is important to note that this does not extend to Hamas. It appears that there is an attempt to exploit the attention that the conflict is receiving and to use it to expand globally. The conflict has been reframed as a crusade, with Israel's military campaign being portrayed as a war against Muslims, not just by Israel but by the West. The term 'Crusader' is often used as a code word for ISIS and other jihadist groups in the West, particularly in the USA and Europe. This has led to an increase in calls for attacks by ISIS, which poses a significant security threat to Europe. Such calls for attacks are frequent and ongoing since the initial attack. However, the past two months have been characterized by a detailed set of instructions for their supporters. These instructions, which include titles such as 'Practical Steps for Fighting the Jews', provide specific guidance on their desired actions. The group is not only advocating for attacks on Israel, but also on



Jewish neighborhoods in Europe and the US. The group is advocating for attacks on nightclubs, synagogues, and embassies, and there is discussion of the use of weapons. One criticism of Hamas is the lack of suicide vests in their attacks. There have been repeated calls for supporters to use suicide vests when attacking synagogues if other means are not available. According to the propaganda, arson is a good destructive act that can cause significant harm. Also, vandalism is an acceptable form of behavior.

It is important to note that some groups are attempting to expand the scope of this conflict beyond the Middle East by criticizing other jihadi organizations. They argue that the limited action is insufficient because, in their view, Jews control the governments of the Middle East, the US, and the European Union. Their aim is to globalize the war. They promote their own military doctrine, which has been criticized by other jihadist organizations.

When examining the online and Telegram communities of German-speaking ISIS supporters, it is evident that they are largely echoing the reactions of their English-speaking counterparts. However, there are a few notable differences that carry significant implications. Notably, there has been no expression of support or praise for the attacks from these German-speaking ISIS supporters. Some of these channels even took 2 to 3 weeks to acknowledge the attacks. When they did address the attacks, their focus was on framing it as the West's genocide against Muslims worldwide, going beyond the original message. So once again, we see how they're trying to take all that attention that people have in a conflict right now and use it for their own causes. They also try to build bridges between their situation and what's going on in Gaza and in Palestine by saying, sure, it is horrible how much suffering there is in Gaza. But if you feel bad for them, why don't you feel bad for us? Look at what happened in Baghouz, in Mosul, in Raqqa. Why did you not support us? Why don't you act in other situations where Muslims are suffering?

There have also been calls for violence. It is noteworthy that German-speaking supporters have not shown this level of incitement since 2016/17. However, unlike the central leadership's communication, these supporters are more critical of the inaction of jihadists in the West. They do not suggest attacking specific targets or using particular weapons. The issue of migration seems to be connected to these events. German-speaking supporters have been highly critical of the ongoing demonstrations, admonishing attendees for participating in a democratic process. It has been suggested that inactivity

and failure to wage jihad are to blame, but no specific targets have been identified. Demonstrations are not considered helpful. In their view, the recommended course of action is to engage in jihad. Based on these accounts, it appears that we are in a perilous period due to the similarities observed over the past decade. As is well known, this has been the modus operandi of ISIS in terms of inciting attacks. The video footage depicts numerous civilian Muslim victims, along with combat footage, which is being used to influence the public's mood following the 7th of October attack. The attackers are attempting to demonstrate that the Western system and Israel's security are not invincible. They are framing the attack as a victory for Muslims.

The current mood in the scene is one of anger and rage, which may lead to a sense of urgency to take action. In the 2020s, ISIS mainly shared and circulated this type of footage first on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, but it did not take long until it was shut down. They had to migrate to Telegram, resulting in a smaller reach. It is concerning that footage is openly available on TikTok, particularly as young audiences do not need to search for it. Setting up a new TikTok account takes only five minutes, and if you are based in Vienna, you will have access to Palestine content within minutes. The content itself is not necessarily inciting violence, but it is easily accessible. However, when considering the target audience, it becomes apparent that *nasheeds* are prevalent. Upon selecting an audio file, one may think, 'This is in Arabic, I do not understand it, but it sounds nice.' However, this can lead to discovering ISIS content and related posts. Therefore, the current atmosphere suggests a larger issue at hand. Additionally, considering ISIS's past success in exploiting this conflict, it is crucial to remain vigilant and take measures to counter their influence.

Daniela PISOIU added that it is crucial to differentiate between various types of protests and Islamist organizations. Understanding their differences, narratives, and strategies is essential. And then we must take appropriate action.

### **3. Risks of escalation in the Taiwan Straits after the presidential election in January 2024**

*Dr. Thomas Eder*

Why discuss this topic here? Perhaps one reason is that many political parties in Europe focus solely on migration. However, there should be more resistance to this approach. These parties often lack substantive, comprehensive, and sophisticated answers to other challenges, particularly in domestic and foreign security policy. It is important to encourage them to develop more well-rounded policies. When considering China-Taiwan relations and the risks of escalation in the Taiwan Straits, it is important to note that Taiwan will hold a presidential election on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2024. Considering the time after the election and the potential for escalation, it is important to monitor Taiwan, the US, and China in this context.

Regarding Taiwan, it is important to note that the current president, Tsai Ing-wen, represents the status quo as a moderate and calm leader. However, due to her party, the center-left Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), being critical of Beijing and unification, China has broken off contacts. In the upcoming presidential elections on January 13<sup>th</sup>, Beijing would be critical of any candidate from the DPP, but particularly Vice President William Lai. In the past, he made comments that were more favorable towards formal independence. However, during the campaign, he has positioned himself as a moderate and a continuity candidate. His choice for a vice presidential running mate also confirms the status quo approach. Hsiao Bi-khim, a close confidant of President Tsai and Taiwan's current representative in the US, shall be his running mate. Currently, William Lai leads in the opinion polls. However, the reason for this is due to the split opposition vote between two rivals. These include Hou Yu-ih, a member of the traditional opposition party and the center-right government, along with the Chinese Nationalist Party and co-founder of the newly formed centrist Taiwan People's Party. Another candidate, the CEO of iPhone maker Foxconn Terry Gou, has just dropped out. This development will increase the chances of the other two opposition candidates winning, as they are only slightly behind William Lai. Negotiations were taking place regarding a unified opposition ticket. However, it appears that this may not come to fruition at present. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that one of the parties may withdraw at the eleventh hour. Additionally, voters may opt to cast their ballots strategically based on the latest opinion polls to secure an opposition victory.

Secondly, let's examine the United States. Recently, the Biden administration has sent several officials to Beijing, culminating in a meeting between Biden and Xi Jinping just days ago. Their goal is to establish guardrails and promote stability in the US-China competition. They would prefer that Taiwan not make any hasty decisions. However, President Biden has felt the need to increase deterrence against China at least four times. The US has departed from its traditional policy of ambiguity on Taiwan and has explicitly declared that it would defend Taiwan in the event of an attack.

Thirdly, China is a crucial factor to consider. Beijing claims to prefer a peaceful solution, but does not rule out the use of military force to achieve unification. Beijing opposes Taiwanese independence. If an opposition candidate wins, China will likely seek to reestablish contacts, increase economic and societal links, and gradually gain influence over Taiwan. The standoff between Beijing and Taipei should de-escalate, leading to greater stability in China-U.S. relations. It is important to note that any potential developments after January 20th, 2025, must be addressed separately. If the current Vice President William Lai of the DPP, a party that is critical of Beijing, wins, China is likely to react immediately by intimidating Taiwan through naval and air force exercises around Taiwan, shooting missiles into the waters off Taiwan, possibly on a larger scale and for a longer duration than before. Additionally, there may be more Air Force incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone. Cyber attacks, particularly disinformation campaigns, and economic sanctions are the most likely forms of attack against Taiwan by China. However, it is important to note that China is not currently prepared for a military attack, especially when considering Russia's war against Ukraine. Chinese expert debates express significant concern and a shared belief that China should avoid becoming stuck in a similar situation and suffering losses. It is important to maintain strong relationships with key economic partners, and therefore, it is not advisable to break ties. Additionally, it should be noted that China remains vulnerable to sanctions. When examining the Chinese growth model, it is evident that it is heavily reliant on exports. These exports are largely dependent on the United States, the European Union, and US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, China still relies on technological inputs from the US and its partners in East Asia and Europe. In conclusion, while there is a risk of escalation, it is unlikely to result in military conflict in the near future. However, it is important to note that Xi Jinping appears to be impatient and desires an earlier resolution to the unification question than the mid-century deadline previously set by Beijing.

It is crucial to consider the consequences for the EU, as it is in a triple dependent situation. Failure to address this could lead to dire consequences, including war. The European Union relies on the United States for security, trade, and investment. However, it also depends on China for trade, critical raw materials, and supply chains, particularly for the green transition, renewable energy, and electric vehicles. Additionally, the EU depends on Taiwan, which dominates the market for the most sophisticated semiconductor computer chips. A potential war in the future poses a significant risk that requires immediate preparation and attention. The global economy would suffer greatly, and the EU may become entangled in a sanctions spiral with China, resulting in a shortage of essential resources. Therefore, it is crucial to take serious measures to mitigate risks and prevent this type of confrontation. All political parties in Europe should face searching questions regarding their strategies to address this issue.

#### 4. Summary of the Questions from the Audience

##### Dr. Thomas Eder on Taiwan and Eastern Europe Relations:

- **Taiwan's Diplomatic Efforts:** Taiwan, facing diminishing diplomatic partnerships due to China's pressure, aimed to foster stronger ties with Central and Eastern European nations.
- **Central and Eastern Europe Response:** Disappointed by unfulfilled expectations from China's Belt and Road Initiative, these nations showed a receptive attitude toward Taiwan's initiatives.
- **Misdirected Media Discourse:** Instances like Lithuania's attempted renaming of Taiwan's representative office did not lead to formal diplomatic recognition, revealing complexities in diplomatic maneuvers.

##### Erik Hacker on Terrorism, TikTok, and Extremist Narratives:

- **Extremist Exploitation:** Extremist groups like ISIS leverage global crises for influence and violence. Blaming Western foreign policy simplifies the multifaceted issue.
- **Youth Education and Resilience:** Educating youth to build resilience against extremist ideologies on platforms like TikTok is crucial in countering their narratives.
- **Challenges in Regulation:** Enforcing legal regulations on social media moderation poses significant challenges due to the scale and complexity of these platforms.

**Dr. Daniela PISOIU on understanding terrorist dynamics:**

- **Terrorist Organization Focus:** Hamas primarily focuses on the local conflict in Palestine, while groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda operate globally under the banner of global jihad.
- **Exploitation of the prolonged Palestine situation,** framing it as a struggle against occupation, but these organizations don't necessarily collaborate directly due to differing ideological influences, notably Salafism.
- **Conflict Analysis:** Hamas, a key player in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, necessitates addressing root causes and advocating for a two-state solution, despite its reluctance to engage in peace efforts.
- **Multifaceted nature of the conflict:** The complexities of these conflicts emphasize the need to comprehend their multifaceted nature without oversimplifying the intricate dynamics involved.

**Dr. Thomas Eder on Taiwan's Military Readiness and China's Analyst Debates:**

- **Taiwan's Military Status:** Taiwan possesses modern weaponry but lags in military investment compared to China, impacting its deterrence capabilities.
- **Chinese Analyst Perspectives:** Debates among Chinese analysts revolve around the risks of military action against Taiwan, considering concerns about U.S. involvement and global consequences.
- **China's Alternative Strategies:** Apart from direct military action, China emphasizes economic interdependence and media influence as strategic alternatives in its approach toward Taiwan.

**Dr. Iulian Chifu on Russia-Ukraine Conflict and Negotiations:**

- **Russia's Stance on Negotiations:** Russia's objectives align with the conflict's initiation, showing no real inclination toward negotiations, as indicated by Putin, Peskov, and Lavrov's public announcements.
- **Unacceptability of Certain Negotiation Terms:** Negotiating territorial concessions in exchange for security terms is deemed unacceptable in Europe after 1975, presenting a stumbling block in peace talks.

- **Principles for Ending the Conflict:** Dr. Chifu outlined principles for resolving the war, emphasizing Ukraine's victory, Russia's losses, international support, and the need for those who aided Putin to bear consequences.