

Hybrid foreign policies in the EU's Eastern flank: adaptive diplomacy

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Abstract

Over the past decade, an increasing number of EU countries have diversified their foreign policies. The new directions aimed to maintain the benefits of Western alliances but sought to attract non-Western partners. The paper argues that not only domestic factors triggered these strategic shifts, and the systemic emergence of multipolarity, which forced states to respond to the rise of new powers. The study aims to identify how selected countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus) located in the EU's eastern flank have responded to the multipolar transition and what foreign policy acts they have adopted. Findings reveal that sample states did not follow the expected straightforward selection of foreign policy acts, starting with bandwagoning during the unipolar momentum, continuing with hedging when non-Western actors emerge, and ending with balancing in times of external security threats. On the contrary, they applied multiple strategies simultaneously. The paper labels this hybrid foreign policy as adaptive diplomacy which seeks to capture the needs of small states to constantly adapt, but also indicates that EU and NATO members can apply proactive diplomacy to navigate between great power interests.

Keywords: foreign policy, multipolarity, balancing, bandwagoning, hedging, European Union

Introduction

By the first decade of the 2000s, it had become increasingly recognised that the United States' (US) unbalanced hegemony was incapable to constrain the emergence of alternative power centres. The rise of political, economic and technological challenges and the resulting dynamics of global transformation have

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become too diverse to be managed by a single superpower, thus Washington needed to recognize and accept the rise of a multipolar system (Layne, 1993; Deák, 2014). Although a group of minor powers may also challenge the dominance of hegemon, major powers such as China and Russia possess broader capacities to contest US domination. These powers can gain positions by promoting multilateralism, setting up new international mechanisms, maintaining effective soft and hard power and developing alternative agendas within international and regional structures (Schweller and Pu, 2011). The combination of these strategies led to fundamental changes in international polarity and the gradual emergence of a multipolar system (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016).

The unipolar-multipolar transition has posed significant challenges for small member states on the eastern flank of the European Union (EU). Systemic changes meant that by the end of the first decade of the 2000s, their transition towards Westernisation or Europeanisation had to be altered and appropriate responses had to be found to the new systemic realities. One of the key challenges was how to respond to the aspirations of emerging power centres while maintaining Western embeddedness and not clashing with Euro-Atlantic interests. Complex tensions between various international and domestic interests were greatly complicated by the geographical location of these states. Located on the eastern flank of Western alliances, they found themselves facing global and regional challenges in their own backyard, while their border regions were constantly confronted with other regional subsystems and became the centre of overlapping geopolitical interests (Szalai, 2020). Although hopes were raised that these tensions would be defused through joint actions, eastern members of the EU were often disappointed with the results of common responses.

Against this background, member states on the EU's eastern flank have developed different foreign policy strategies. In this paper, four case studies have been selected to identify the main directions of these strategies. In the following pages, the study tries to comprehend how Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) have reacted to the emergence of multipolar uncertainty. In addition to identifying the main foreign policy orientations, the study also attempts to determine what types of foreign policy acts can label the policies of selected case studies. In this regard, we distinguished three archetypes of foreign policy acts that can be applied in multipolar environments: balancing, bandwagoning and hedging. Briefly, balancing is a proactive strategy of states to counterbalance the growing capabilities of others (Morgenthau, 1948). Bandwagoning refers to actions of weaker states to ally themselves with stronger powers to gain security and benefits (Schweller, 1994), while hedging is a reactive act to perceived risks, seeking to maintain comfortable relations with threatening actors (Medeiros, 2005). By identifying these foreign policy acts, the study seeks to categorise the foreign policy orientations of the selected sample states and attempts to determine periods of balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging strategies. Our aim is to understand which of

these terms define most accurately the foreign policy stance of selected sample states, and if none of them do correctly, then what terminology could update the existing vocabulary.

To achieve these goals the paper first identifies potential foreign policy acts in multipolar environments: in the theoretical section, mainstream definitions and interpretations are determined, and the meanings of balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging are specified. The paper then briefly analyses the main foreign policy orientations of the selected case studies. The most important guiding principle at this stage is to recognise the main shifts after the end of Cold War, which can range from Westernisation/Europeanisation to de-Westernisation/de-Europeanisation to re-Westernisation/re-Europeanisation. We assume that during these shifts selected case studies applied foreign policy acts that correspond with the definitions of balancing and/or bandwagoning and/or hedging. Corresponding cases are identified in the discussion section, where the lessons from the case studies are synthesised and compared with the theoretical accounts. In this section, the paper also analyses possible implications and clarifies whether the existing terminology is suitable for describing the strategic behaviour of sample states.

1. Theoretical background

The literature has identified several types of foreign policy acts, extending from non-aligning, non-engagement, or neutrality through buck-passing and hedging to underbalancing, internal balancing or external balancing. As indicated earlier, from this incomplete list, the paper attempts to specify three archetypes: balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. Although there are other models and strategies that could be included into the scope of our analysis, we argue that these basic categories contain most of the behaviours that states may adopt in their foreign policy actions.

Departing from the first category, *balancing* has traditionally been seen as a proactive strategy, whereby states counterbalance the growing capabilities of others to avoid losses and weaken the rising power (Schweller, 1994). According to Hans Morgentau and Kenneth Thompson (1958, p. 13; He, 2012, p. 160) balancing is an “attempt on the part of one nation to counteract the power of another by increasing its strength to a point where it is at least equal, if not superior, to the other nation’s strength.” Schweller, using the traditional hard power interpretation, argues that “[b]alancing means the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition” (Schweller, 2004, p. 166). He takes a broader approach and suggests that balancing refers to “state’s strategy to change its relative power vs. its rival’s to its own advantage for pursuing security under anarchy” (He, 2012, p. 152).

The diversity of these definitions indicates that balancing is a widely recognized and broadly applied strategy. According to Morgenthau, societies, as

other systems in physics, biology, or economy, instinctively seek to maintain equilibrium in their domestic and external affairs, hence tend to “search for a proper balance between different geographical regions” (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 126). Levy and Thompson (2005, p. 1; He, 2012, p. 159) confirms this belief by arguing that “the central proposition of nearly all balance of power theories is that states tend to balance.” Nevertheless, balancing is far from being homogenous. States adopt different balancing strategies depending on capabilities, national interests, foreign policy attitudes, international embeddedness or systemic circumstances. Accordingly, the literature has identified a broad variety of balancing strategies extending from hard balancing, internal and external balancing through negative, positive and soft balancing to underbalancing and non-balancing (Waltz, 1979; Schweller, 2004; Pape, 2005).

Moving towards the second category, *bandwagoning* has traditionally been perceived as an alliance policy, whereby weaker states seek to align themselves with a stronger power or group of international actors in order to gain security and benefits. Although the principles are straightforward, there is a debate in the literature about whether bandwagoning involves siding with the source of danger or it is generally a matter of joining the most powerful. Waltz (1979), who popularized the term, used the notion to refer to international alliance-seeking behaviour, arguing that “bandwagoning refers to joining a stronger coalition, balancing to allying with the weaker party” (Schweller, 1994, p. 80). In this sense, Waltz perceived the stronger coalition not as a threatening, neutral or friendly actor, but rather as a powerful force that can offer benefits to bandwagoners. Walt (1987, p. 17) had a different interpretation. He argued that “bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger.” In this interpretation weaker actors align themselves with the threatening actors in order to survive, or as he put it “bandwagoning is an accommodation to pressure”, in which “vulnerable state makes asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power” (Walt, 1991, p. 55; Schweller, 1994, p. 80). While this may be the case in some contexts, Schweller argued that bandwagoning is usually about allying with a dominant actor, “[t]he presence of a significant external threat, while required for effective balancing, is unnecessary for states to bandwagon” (ibid., p. 74). Perhaps more importantly, he regarded balancing as a measure applied in static international constellations, while bandwagoning is an act used during systemic change. As the author put it, “bandwagoning and balancing are associated with opposite systemic conditions: balancing with stasis; bandwagoning with change. Accordingly, bandwagons roll when the system is in flux; either when the status-quo order starts to unravel or when a new order is being imposed” (ibid., p. 107). It should also be noted that bandwagoning is a positive-sum game, hence states expect to benefit by choosing the sides of influential actors.

Last but not least, *hedging* behaviour should also be defined. In this case too, the academic literature adopted different definitions, although it is generally accepted that hedging “is a form of insurance against opportunism” (Lake, 1996, p.

15), and a strategy of “keeping open more than one strategic option against the possibility of a future security threat” (Roy, 2005). According to Medeiros (2005, p. 145) hedging is a strategy “that, on one hand, stress engagement and integration mechanisms and, on the other, emphasize realist-style balancing”. Among these and other definitions, Haacke’s study (2019) provides an ordering principle. According to the author, four main conceptual frameworks can be distinguished among the definitions of hedging. The first perspective interprets hedging as a response to perceived risks resulting from strategic vulnerabilities, with the aim to maximize benefits and minimize risks (ibid., Ciorciari and Haacke, 2019). The second describes the concept as a middle position of small and middle powers, with the objective of navigating between balancing and bandwagoning on the one hand, and the interests of the great powers on the other (ibid.; Roy, 2005). The third concept is related to risks associated with alignment decisions and argues that small states tend to optimise the risks and rewards that emerge within and outside their alignments (ibid., Ciorciari, 2009). Finally, the fourth concept regards hedging as a deterrence strategy that provides a strategic opportunity vis-à-vis both the major powers and other international actors (ibid; Medeiros, 2005). In all cases, hedging has been interpreted as a response to perceived risks, seeking to maintain smooth relations with threatening actors, and aiming to maximise potential benefits and minimise risks by finding a middle ground between the interests of the major powers. Although there are different interpretations, the literature tends to make a distinction between balancing and hedging, indicating that the former focuses on gaining a position against other actors, while hedging is a security response to opportunistic behaviour (Koga, 2018). In other words, balancing is a proactive action, while hedging is a reactive one.

With these definitions in the background, the paper can now examine how polarities determine the application of foreign policy acts. As a principle, it should be underlined that the anarchic international system significantly influences the behaviour of states. With no sovereign above them, states must adapt to systemic structures by determining the characteristics of power distribution and identifying the potential costs and benefits of international interactions (Waltz, 1979). While individual leaders have several strategic alternatives, rational decision-making requires that they consider the interests of main power centres. Their actions are therefore significantly influenced by the number of poles; in other words, foreign policy must define possibilities and limitations vis-à-vis influential actors. The literature generally distinguishes three types of polarity: unipolar, bipolar and multipolar systems (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). These polarities produce different forms of international structures and therefore require different types of behaviour from states.

In a unipolar system, the primacy of the most powerful state greatly influences patterns of interactions, as responses to international anarchy are centralised and determined by the behaviour of the hegemon. Thus, unipolar structures lead to

decreasing interdependence for structural realists, asymmetric cooperation for neoliberals, and exploitation for radicals (Waltz, 1999; Keohane, 1984). While Brooks and Wohlfort (2005) debate the validity of balancing behaviour in unipolar structures, states, including the hegemon itself, still apply balancing strategies intending to maintain the imbalance or re-establish the equilibrium. Consequently, rational foreign policy behaviour in such systems requires strategies of bandwagoning, soft balancing or negative balancing (He, 2012).

While bipolar systems do not lack bandwagoning, soft and negative balancing, international patterns in two-centred systems are rather characterized by hard-balancing between competing hegemonies and their allies. Foreign policy behaviour in such structures is determined by increasing polarization and acute competition (Rosencrance, 1966). According to Mearsheimer (2001) these dynamics activate firmer and more durable alliances, in which great powers ally with smaller states to increase security and weaken competitors, while smaller states tend to bandwagon with one of the great powers in exchange for benefits. These conditions minimise abilities of external balancing, as the international arena is polarised, alliance systems are often institutionalized, and states have limited options to develop new partnerships or redefine existing ones (Waltz, 1979). Consequently, states in bipolar structures tend to focus on internal balancing by developing and aggregating greater economic and military capabilities (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008). Although less common, hedging behaviour is also possible in bipolar systems. The Non-Aligned Movement itself is a perfect example of seeking a middle ground position between the interests of the great powers, as during the Cold War some members of the movement sought to satisfy the interests of both the US and the USSR.

According to Posen (2009, p. 350), multipolar systems with three or more great powers produce one basic characteristic: “The arithmetic of coalitions influences matters great and small”. The statement indicates that in multipolar systems, alliances are shorter and more fragile, policy-making is driven by pragmatism, while foreign policy is guided by constant adaptation rather than ideological commitment. For Waltz (1979), these circumstances reduce predictability and reliability, but increase uncertainty and the possibility of misjudgement. For Mearsheimer (2001), these conditions lead to competition between regional hegemonies, clashes over spheres of influences and a permanent struggle for dominating weaker states. According to Morgenthau (1948), the response of states in such circumstances is quite straightforward: they tend to pursue proactive diplomacy and partner-seeking foreign policy, both helping to avoid isolation. Flesher (2013) defined this proactive behaviour as “networking”, that seeks to develop privileged network position for maintaining central role in international interactions. Although networking is described as alliance-building by realists and increasing interdependence by liberals, they both agree that multidimensional foreign policy is a key instrument for achieving national goals under multipolarity. Systems with more than two poles also enhance the scope of balancing, as

Rosencrance (1966, p. 317) put it, “multipolarity affords a greater number of interaction opportunities.” This argument determines the plausibility of possible foreign policy acts: in a multipolar environment, there is a great potential for applying different strategies, including proactive balancing, benefit-seeking bandwagoning or reactive hedging (Wohlforth and Brooks, 2008; Pape, 2005).

2. Case studies

Characteristics of systemic polarity affect all actors in the international arena. Among these, small states are particularly affected as they possess fewer capacities to influence global affairs and thus need to develop adaptive responses to systemic changes (Rosenau, 1981). Small states developed several strategies to escape their structural vulnerabilities. They may utilize functional domestic arrangements, consensual decision-making processes, or specification of economic sectors (Katzeinstein, 1985). Weaker countries may also seek the protection of larger states or join alliances (Keohane, 1984). According to Cooper and Shaw (2009), bandwagoning or balancing approaches may also be characterized as traditional small state responses, while Kurecic (2017) adds the options of integration, neutrality, non-interference, and cooperation. The latter examples indicate that hedging behaviour is also a strategic option for small states, as was demonstrated in the case of East Asian, Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern countries (Medeiros, 2005; Koga, 2018; El-Dessouki and Mansour, 2020). The preference of what to select among these responses depend on policymakers, specific situations, and particularities of regional subsystems (Szalai, 2020).

In the following section, the paper seeks to review the foreign policy strategies of selected states in response to multipolar challenges. This chapter focuses on the main foreign policy transformations between the collapse of the Soviet Union (December 1991) and the second phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war (April 2022). In this timeline, the unipolar momentum is considered as the baseline for each case study: it is assumed that sample states pursued a pro-Western foreign policy during this early period. From this departure, the paper attempts to detect major foreign policy shifts which may range from Westernisation/Europeanisation through de-Westernisation/de-Europeanisation to re-Westernisation/re-Europeanisation. It is presumed that systemic changes and the emergence of multipolarity have put pressure on the sample states to change their Western-oriented baseline and adopt foreign policy acts that corresponds with the definitions of balancing and/or bandwagoning and/or hedging. To identify such transitions, we seek to identify partnerships with powerful non-Western actors and determine how their influence fits into a Western-based foreign policy framework. It is important to stress that case studies cannot provide a comprehensive analysis, but rather aim to synthesise the main trends.

2.1. Hungary

Hungary has historically had a larger impact on the balance between West and East. This situation is linked not only to geographical but also historical trends. As Molnár (2001) underlined, after the First World War, Hungary was incorporated into a Europe forged by Western victors, but soon after the devastating Second World War, the country was subjected to Soviet domination. After 1989, when the defeat of communism was pronounced, Hungary entered the process of rapidly adopting Western ‘democratic’ values and became the vanguard state of neoliberal transformation (Fábry, 2019).

This structural transformation is the most distinctive determinant that helped the extensive modernization of the 1990s, which fundamentally changed the country’s basic strategic perceptions. The newly adopted tripartite foreign policy concept followed a Euro-Atlantic orientation, promoted regional cooperation and aimed to protect Hungarian minorities abroad (Varga, 2000). The orientation was significantly influenced by the historical experience of Hungarian foreign policy, which, after decades of communist hegemony, regarded Westernisation and integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions as a guarantee of stable security and economic progress. Although the protection of Hungarian diasporas kept some distance between Westernisation and Hungarian foreign policy, the Euro-Atlantic orientation remained a core element of Hungary’s external strategy (Tulmets, 2014).

However, it is also clear that Hungary’s Westernisation was also offset by economic motives. From this point of view, Hungary’s economic-based Westernisation and European integration focused on rapid economic stabilization intending to reach developed levels of Western economies. The expectation of fast economic progress, however, unveiled Hungarian Westernisation’s weakness. The decreasing involvement of the state in economic dynamics has made Hungary face high unemployment in the Westernisation period with inequalities in income distribution, development differences, and concentration of growth in foreign capital holders (Kovács and Kollár, 1999). This fundamental frailty of Hungarian Westernisation has kept the journey from the semiperiphery to the core of Europe incomplete (Magyarics, 2011).

Perhaps more crucially, perceptions of national identity have also limited the success of Westernisation. For potential members, including Hungary, a certain degree of Europeanisation of national identity has been stipulated as a condition of EU membership. These expectations were fulfilled by the Hungarian elite, but significant parts of the society either could not or did not want to accept the Europeanisation of national identity (Füredi, 2018). This dichotomy was a decisive factor in the transition to multidimensional foreign policy in the 2010s, which emerged as a challenger to the identical Europeanisation of Hungary. The society’s scepticism to accept the European identity has also been an element that pushed the political elites to bring Hungarian nationalism to the fore. Thus, as early as 2006,

Hungarian leaders expressed scepticism about the future of European integration (Sárváry, 2007).

The populist discourses emerging since the mid-2000s exploited these controversial trends. Among the many root causes of Hungarian populism, two should be highlighted. Firstly, the Hungary's European integration was achieved through the promise of higher living standards and the creation of a welfare state similar to the West (Lázár, 2015). Failure to deliver such conditions caused disappointment among the public, thereby influenced foreign policy choices. Secondly, the EU's expectations to consolidate a sense of European identity not only clashed with historical Hungarian nationalism, but also resembled the hegemonic identity formation of the infamous communist years. Accordingly, in the years that followed, the Hungarian political elite exploited these fault lines and showed little intention to replace traditional societal perceptions with European values, instead transforming the country's political structure into a highly centralised state based on a populist debate between Europeanism and nationalism (Glied, 2020).

Nevertheless, the foreign policy shift that followed the inauguration of Viktor Orbán's second government in 2010 was not only based on the failure to adopt Europeanised identities, but also on the flaw to achieve the level of welfare that society expected from Europeanisation. Although the literature applies different terms to label the new policy direction, e.g. "Opening to the East" or "pragmatic foreign policy", all seek to capture a new configuration in which Hungary enhanced its relations with emerging powers to attract new commercial and economic opportunities, and exploit political opportunities (Rácz, 2011; Tarrósy and Vörös, 2020). The new orientation did not mean a complete disengagement from Westernisation but attempted to respond to domestic expectations and political objectives in addition to regional and systemic changes. Although the statement of the "East" has never been clearly defined, the concept of "Opening to the East" focused mainly on politico-economic powers such as China, Russia, Turkey and some other Asian countries, representing emerging powers of the "Asian century" (Irimescu, 2019). The policy also incorporated a pragmatic approach arguing that systemic changes can benefit Hungary through exploiting opportunities outside the EU-NATO circles. Therefore, the new doctrine sought to pursue a transactional foreign policy vis-à-vis dynamic powers emerging in Asia, exploiting the closer partnerships as a political leverage and an effective economic tool (Végh, 2015).

Among the new partners, China stands out as the most significant global actor. A brief overview of bilateral partnership shows that the Hungarian-Chinese trade relations have become increasingly self-sustaining. The commercial influence of Western companies on the Hungarian economy may be disturbed by large Chinese corporations which added 8% value to Hungarian export of goods since the mid-2010s (Losoncz and Vakhal, 2019). At this point, however, the political consequences of economic influence should be also highlighted. Beijing's growing influence is certainly not helping the failing Westernisation process, while the

additional economic bridgeheads that China is establishing in Hungary and in the region may strengthen its global positions (Eszterhai, 2019).

Assessed from a broader perspective, China's influence on Hungary is a mechanism that appeals mostly to the ruling class using soft power instruments through educational networks targeting future intellectuals and bureaucrats, and commercial networks targeting business circles and economic dynamics (Matura, 2021). China, especially since 2013, has used financial capital as a powerful tool in its policy towards Europe by working closely with Hungary to internationalise the Chinese currency through financial agreements, and by considering Hungary as a natural hub to reach other EU members (Stanzel *et al.*, 2016). The economic moves that are part of China's global initiatives to increase Hungary's infrastructural and industrial capacity and to promote China-Europe connectivity, such as the Serbia-Hungary railway (Zuokui, 2019), ensure that the Hungarian ruling elite supports China's soft presence in Europe. In this respect, Hungary's foreign policy approach towards China inevitably shifts from economic pragmatism to political pragmatism, forcing Budapest to balance between China and the West (Matura, 2018).

Beside China, the Russian influence in Hungary should be emphasized. The Russian influence on Hungary differs from China's, both in terms of historical background and the complexity of energy relations. While Russia has historically used its hard power to maintain its influence over Hungary, these hard measures have essentially been replaced by softer forms of intelligence activities and economic partnerships. Russia, with a controversial historical role and legacy due to the socialist era, is still regarded by the Hungarian political elite as a great power and an important energy partner (Tarrósy and Vörös, 2020). Thus, Budapest seeks to maintain pragmatic relations with Moscow, even though the majority of Hungarian society rejects the pro-Russian stance (Hegedűs, 2016). For this reason, Russian influence in Hungary can be regarded as a political configuration. This configuration includes both external and internal, as well as political and economic elements. From the domestic political point of view, the most important factor was the elimination of the external "hinterland" of the far-right Jobbik party, which was supported by Moscow in the early 2010s. The external policy benefits of pragmatism towards Moscow have provided bargaining opportunities in the disputes between the EU and Hungary. Economic benefits of the configuration have been exploited in the energy sector and in the context of business deals by oligarchs linked to the inner circles of Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin (*ibid.*).

Whereas in the early 2010s, the dynamics of Hungarian-Russian relations were mostly determined by the economic motives, Hungary's balancing foreign policy began to incorporate aspects of political pragmatism since the late 2010s. While the beginning of a new era in Hungarian-Russian relations was announced in 2012, the main decriptive dynamics of this new partnership have been moulded by energy-oriented issues such as Hungary's support for the South Stream pipeline and Russia's special role in the recovery of Hungarian economy in the energy field

(Marušiak, 2015). However, with these extensive economic inputs, the growth of Russia's influence in the political arena has become inevitable. While there was increasing anger in Europe after the annexation of Crimea by Russia, Hungary chose to regard the events as a *fait accompli* and considered Russia a potential partner rather than an enemy (Schmitt, 2016). This position changed only slightly after February 2022. Although Hungary has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, hosted 557,001 refugees as of 6 May 2022, provided non-lethal aid to Ukraine and supported sanctions against Russian financial institutions, the Orbán government has threatened to veto oil and gas embargoes (UNHCR, 2022; Kijewski, 2022).

2.2. Bulgaria

The disintegration of the Warsaw Pact forced former member states to chart new foreign policy directions. While almost all post-communist countries adopted Westernisation and rotated towards the Euro-Atlantic axis, Bulgaria pursued a disoriented foreign policy in the 1990s. The disorientation was associated with the deep historical roots between Moscow and Sofia, which left Bulgaria confused about how to respond to the new security vacuum (Demirtaş-Coşkun, 2001). Unlike other former Eastern Bloc countries, the deep cleavage among the ruling elites intended to maintain Bulgaria's traditional alliance with Russia and debated how to involve actors of the new unipolar reality (Clyatt, 1993).

Thus, Bulgaria can be described as one of the states where the internal-external correlation has the most explicit effect on foreign policy orientation. In fact, domestic uncertainties engendered by the post-communist environment deepened the foreign policy disorientation and fuelled suspicious approaches towards Westernisation. The socialist leadership that ruled the country between 1992 and 1997 sought to exploit these tendencies by trying to solve the domestic political problems caused by the deteriorating economic situation and corruption through restoring relations with Russia, thus isolating Bulgaria from the beginnings of Euro-Atlantic integration (Tashev, 2005). The main constitutive factor of this isolation was the habit that international dynamics could not be conceived without Russia. This attitude was so embedded in the foreign policy elite's mindset that the 1995 National Security Strategy ruled out Bulgaria's membership of NATO unless it was transformed into a pan-European security organisation with a decisive Russian role (Pantev, 2005).

Opinions on Westernisation have altered due to the economic crisis of 1996, when the national currency depreciated by 98% and consumer inflation increased to 242% (Wyzan, 1998). The pro-Western United Democratic Forces (UDF), which came to power in 1997, ended the period of disorientation and turned towards the West. Although the shift was mainly economy-oriented, Westernisation has also developed an effusive Euromania that emphasized the liberal character of reforms rather than Bulgaria's geopolitical interests (Fish and Brooks, 2000). Despite

Euromania, only 50% of the Bulgarian public supported European integration in the early 2000s, indicating that Westernisation had emerged as a conjunctural exigence, not as a societal consensus (Tashev, 2005).

Although Bulgaria is now institutionally attached to the Euro-Atlantic axis, having joined NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, the legacy of strategic debates that link Bulgarians to non-Euro-Atlantic actors has not completely disappeared. These links have been particularly strong in the energy sector, creating an asymmetric energy dependency with Russia (Ganev, 2007). Despite the economic and infrastructural aspects linking Sofia and Moscow, Bulgaria's energy security has also posed geopolitical risks and offered Russia several opportunities to influence the EU's Black Sea flank (Heilmann *et al.*, 2019). In geopolitical sense, two main factors have allowed Russia to influence Bulgarian politics. The first is that Bulgaria's commitment to NATO has not been as strong as expected and its accession to the alliance has not been a key factor for the core members. Secondly, if Bulgaria's position within the Euro-Atlantic axis were to reach a level that threatened Russia's spheres of influence in the Black Sea, the country would have not been able to resist possible Russian resentment (Nieto, 2008). These reasons, together with geographical proximity and energy dependence, have forced Sofia to pursue a controversial foreign policy between its Western allies and Russia. The main indicators of this foreign policy have been the partial Europeanisation process, the continued consideration of Russian interests and the erosion of EU decisions aimed at Moscow (Crombois, 2019). Consequently, Bulgaria has not fully embraced the common European narrative that Russia is the greatest threat to Europe's security, and in fact, Moscow's soft power has had a major impact on Bulgaria's political climate (Nitoiu and Moga, 2021). The substantive impact can be attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, to the deep-rooted pro-Russian mentality among Bulgarian elites and society which is influential both historically and socially. Secondly, to Russia's dominant role in Bulgaria's economic dynamics through its penetration into key sectors such as energy (Hadjitodorov and Sokolov, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is still questionable how sustainable is the Russian influence in Bulgaria. Events are still unfolding, yet the dual foreign policy described above seems to falter as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war. In the early stages of the war, Bulgaria immediately condemned the events and decided to provide humanitarian aid and protective gears to Ukraine. As Russia retaliated by cutting off gas supplies to Bulgaria (and Poland) at the end of April 2022, the parliament in Sofia voted to support Ukraine by repairing heavy military equipment (Todorov, 2022). The decision to still refrain from sending lethal weapons is an indication that the pro-Western Kiril Petkov government must still consider the significant pro-Russian sentiments within the society. Although Petkov's election victory indicates that at least a narrow majority embraces pro-Western policies, Bulgarian society is still deeply divided on the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

It seems too early to determine whether these external and internal changes are signs of a new, more pro-Western foreign policy orientations or merely temporary experiments that fail due to the considerable Russian influence in Bulgaria. However, the issue will also be determined by China, which prefers to maintain Bulgaria's pragmatic stance. China's investments in Bulgaria are also increasing steadily and Sofia appears to be Beijing's important partner in the strategic Caspian-Black Sea-Europe route (Kandilarov and Dimitrov, 2018). Against this background, it is more rational to expect that the current pragmatic stance of Bulgarian foreign policy will continue to balance between the West and the East, and that the country's geographical location, historical legacy, economic needs, and political perception will continue to result in a strategic dichotomy.

2.3. Greece

In contrast to other case studies, Greece joined Euro-Atlantic integration relatively early. The country has had turbulent relations with the NATO and the European Communities due to the Greek-Turkish disputes and the Cyprus conflict, yet it ended the 1990s with a predominantly Western-oriented foreign policy and a less successful process of Europeanisation. The country's entry into the eurozone in 2001 has greatly improved this Europeanisation process, though it has also contributed greatly to the accumulation of excessive national debt and the emergence an economic crisis.

The financial crisis, which has hit the country particularly hard since 2009, has significantly transformed Greece's traditional political framework. The crisis put a heavy burden on public policies and allowed only moderate autonomy for policymakers. Beyond the domestic sphere, the crisis has also impacted the country's foreign policy and revealed the need for diversifying the traditional framework of Euro-Atlantic direction. Above all, the reorientation process was triggered by the needs of the recovering Greek economy, which was desperate to attract foreign capital. Secondly, it was also fuelled by the emerging security challenges, which generated new threats in the eastern and southern frontiers. Thirdly, the diversification of foreign policy partnerships has also been driven by political disputes between Greece and the EU over controversial issues such as austerity measures, migration challenges and threats posed by Turkey (Gibárti, 2021). These economic, security and political factors need to be further examined, as they have not only undermined the superficial Europeanisation of Greek foreign policy, but also generated a new, more flexible foreign policy strategy (Chryssogelos, 2018).

On the economic front, the Greek financial crisis pressured policymakers to seek new external opportunities. While the policy did not intend to undermine economic benefits of the Western-oriented foreign policy, it sought to rebalance weak points by new partnerships. Despite the limited attractiveness of the Greek economy, partnerships with China seemed the most promising option. In this regard,

the first major investment took place in October 2009, when China's COSCO Shipping leased the port of Piraeus for 35 years. Having tripled cargo levels in just two years, COSCO became majority shareholder in 2016 (Doga *et al.*, 2021). Control over the port has allowed Beijing to increase its export value to Greece from \$3.45 billion in 2009 to \$7.04 billion in 2019, thus becoming the country's largest import partner (AEC)¹. Beyond shipping, Beijing has also invested around \$320 million in the electricity sector: in 2017, China's State Grid Europe Limited acquired a 24% stake in Greece's Independent Electricity Transmission Operator (*ibid.*).

Beyond China, opportunities have also attracted Russian interests, particularly in the Greek energy and tourism sectors. Moscow has traditionally been one of the most important energy suppliers to Greece: energy exports reached their peak in the early 2010s, with Russia accounting for an average of 30% of all mineral fuel exports between 2010 and 2014 (AEC). Bilateral energy relations began to deteriorate in 2014, when oil exports to Greece fell sharply (Pritchett, 2021). Although the volume of gas imports has not fallen as steeply, from this period onwards Greece's goal to diversify gas supplies became more apparent. As Greek governments persistently side-lined Russian efforts to gain stakes in the energy sector, Moscow was only able to secure episodic achievements, including the TurkStream pipeline starting to flow Russian gas to Greece in January 2020. Other economic sectors reflected similar contradictions. The value of bilateral trade has declined over the past decade, with the total value of Greek exports to Russia shrinking from \$428 million in 2010 to \$233 million in 2019, and imports falling from \$5.23 billion to \$4.03 billion over the same period. Tourism statistics represented similar figures (AEC). After a slow but steady increase, the number of Russian tourists visiting Greece peaked at 1.3 million in 2013, before falling to nearly 520 000 in 2018 (UNWTO, 2020).

As potentials of Russian-Greek partnerships were constrained by Western sanctions against Moscow, Athens sought to find new opportunities in the Eastern Mediterranean. While Turkey could have been a natural choice, bilateral disputes constrained economic opportunities. Even so, Greek-Turkish trade and investment volumes have improved since the early 2000s (Tsarouhas, 2019). Despite the positive balance in trade and tourism, Greece could not rely on Turkey's economic input during the years of economic crisis, which raised the need to find alternative resources. Greek economic experts have determined many potentials in this regard, extending from establishing regional partnerships in tourism, construction, or shipping. In the eyes of the Greek public, however, these regional opportunities were overshadowed by the country's offshore energy potentials. While economic revenues have not been realised yet, Greece has developed close partnerships with Israel, Egypt, and Cyprus (Tziarras, 2019).

¹ AEC (n.d.), Trade statistics of Greece, Atlas of Economic Complexity (retrieved from <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/countries/90>).

Disputes over offshore gas resources and exploitations are factors that also created new orientations in the security sector. The urgency to change the traditional security framework was triggered by two interrelated dynamics. The first was associated with the geopolitical advance of Turkey, while the second was linked to the Arab Spring and the destabilisation of Greece's southern and south-eastern neighbourhood. These transformations required the revision of Greek security policies. In addition to increasing its military capabilities and attempting to "Europeanise" its geopolitical threats, Athens sought to find regional allies. In this context, Greece could not rely on Chinese or Russian assistance, as practical security arrangements were prevented by US and EU opposition. Consequently, beside cooperating with NATO allies, Greece focused on regional actors. Israel seemed to be a natural choice in this regard, as its foreign policy towards Turkey and the exploration of natural gas created common links. The defence cooperation began with joint naval exercises and continued with cooperation between defence industries, with the largest deal announced in April 2021 with the value of \$1.65 billion (Kogan, 2021). The intensified relations between Greece and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are also indirectly linked to Israel, as they are a by-product of the Abraham Accords. Closer engagement finally reached strategic importance with the signing of the bilateral defence pact between Greece and UAE in November 2020. In addition to military and intelligence cooperation, the agreement includes mutual defence assistance clauses that can be activated in the event of a threat to the territorial integrity. Similar drivers encourage the Greek-Egyptian security cooperation with several common interests (Ghafar, 2021).

Economic and security challenges listed above led to political disagreements between Greece and the EU. Tensions have been triggered by issues such as austerity measures, migratory pressures, and disputes with Turkey. In these issues Greece has expected greater solidarity from the EU and felt that core members have repeatedly sidelined its interests. On the other hand, the EU has expressed several concerns, such as the falsification of economic data, high levels of clientelism, inhumane conditions in refugee camps and Greek opposition to Turkey's EU membership (Tziampiris, 2012). The debate has affected both political elites and societies at large and has not only influenced Greek domestic politics but also damaged its external relations with core EU members.

Greece's foreign policy has naturally altered due to these circumstances. While the official narrative defined the new orientation as a necessity driven by geopolitical changes, reality reflected two, not too distinct discourses. The first, which represented the period between 2015 and 2019, was labelled as de-Europeanisation process and intended to forge strategic partnerships with non-Western actors (Raimundo *et al.*, 2021). The second, that defined the period since 2019, sought to re-Europeanise the foreign policy and strengthen relations with Western allies. Although both have achieved important results, neither has been able to deliver original objectives. According to Chryssogelos (2018), the strategy of de-

Europeanisation focused mainly on areas of potential economic gains, while areas with low renegotiation prospects remained defined by the EU framework. Similarly, re-Europeanization process failed to abandon “the foreign policy of artificial proactive multidimensionality” and had to accept that Chinese economic influence and Russian regional presence cannot be side-lined². The result is the emergence of a multivectoral foreign policy with three main pillars. The first is the strategic alliance with the West, recently generating closer partnerships with the US, France and the EU. The second is China and partly Russia, both of which can offer diplomatic and economic benefits, but in return require political support. In this sense, China appeared to be more successful, having put pressure on Greece to slow down or block EU resolutions on sensitive issues such as the disputes over South China Sea or human rights in Hong Kong (Doga *et al.*, 2021). The already declining Russian influence is now less convincing: Greek-Russian relations have been particularly affected by the Russian-Ukrainian war and the sufferings of the Greek diaspora in the Azov region. Lastly, the third pillar seeks to forge new bilateral and multilateral partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean. As seen earlier, the policy produced close cooperation with Israel, UAE and Egypt.

2.4. Republic of Cyprus

The Greek Cypriot foreign policy has traditionally been Western-oriented. Although the orientation was supplemented by non-alignment and multilateralism, the RoC remained in the sphere of Western interests. Among the regional actors, Greece played a leading role in shaping the foreign policy of Greek Cypriots, assisting, and often influencing Nicosia’s efforts to reunify the island. The role of Athens was also instrumental in Cyprus’ accession to the EU, which has provided an influential political and diplomatic leverage for the Nicosia since 2004. Nevertheless, according to Tziarras (2019b), the RoC’s foreign policy remained to be reactive and predominantly pursued strategies of non-balancing or under-balancing. In the following years, the Cyprus conflict³ continued to dominate agendas of foreign policy, which unsuccessfully tried to resolve the conflict by exploiting EU membership (Theophanous and Koukkides-Procopiu, 2020).

The traditional framework of Greek Cypriot foreign policy began to alter in the early 2010s, due to the emergence of several regional dynamics. During this period, the role of the traditionally low-key Eastern Mediterranean region has gained a geopolitical significance, while new regional dynamics has presented the RoC with

² Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2019), Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias’ address in the context of the Parliamentary debate on the government’s policy statements, (retrieved from <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs>).

³ The details of the Cyprus conflict and the debates on the recognition of the RoC or the TRNC cannot be explained in this short paper. Nevertheless, they strongly influence the decisions of Greek Cypriots and should be taken into account.

challenges and opportunities (Tziarras, 2019b). The challenges included new concerns such as regional destabilisation, threats from state and non-state actors or financial troubles. On the other hand, opportunities offered greater geopolitical leverage, the possibility of forging new partnerships, and the possibility of achieving energy independence. To address these challenges and opportunities, the Greek Cypriot leadership decided to diversify its foreign policy at the beginning of the 2010s (Ioannides, 2021).

As in Greece, the diversification of foreign policy was associated with a series of economic, security and political factors. From an economic perspective, the Greek Cypriot economic crisis in 2012-2013 should be highlighted for at least two reasons. Firstly, the crisis has put the Greek Cypriot economy under pressure to attract foreign investments. Secondly, however, the conditions of the bailout imposed by the Troika sought to cripple precisely those sectors (e.g. offshore banking) that were attractive to non-Western partners. For these reasons, the rapid exploitation of gas resources has become another important element of foreign policy diversification and required the involvement of new partners. Since the first (2007) and second (2012) licensing rounds of EEZ sectors, Nicosia tried to involve shareholders that would not only provide technological expertise but also a defensive umbrella (Proedrou, 2021). The result was a rather diverse mix of actors involved, including US (Exxon Mobil, Chevron), French (Total), Italian (ENI), Israeli (Delek Drilling) and Qatari (Qatari Petroleum) companies.

Security considerations have also played a role in the development of “multi-sectoral foreign policy” (Pedi and Kouskouvelis, 2019). As seen in the case of Greece, geopolitical transformations have forced all actors in the region to develop more advanced defence capabilities. In this competition, the RoC was disadvantaged by its size and limited resources. Challenges, however, required proactive responses. The first concern was associated with the Syrian civil war, which created a protracted armed conflict 100-150 km off the coast of Cyprus (Hopkins, 2013). Another security hazard was the spread of jihadist activities, with several sources claiming that European jihadists were reaching Syria via Northern Cyprus (Abi-Habib and Parkinson, 2015). A more severe concern was the rise of migratory pressure, with the number of refugees arriving in Cyprus rising from 2,936 in 2016 to nearly 10,000 in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020). While the Greek Cypriot government was able to provide adequate responses to the former security challenges, the dispute over EEZ between Turkey and the RoC required external assistance. Nicosia has therefore developed close partnerships with several states, including the US, France, Greece, Israel, Egypt and some Arab states.

Political considerations have also influenced the transformation of Greek Cypriot foreign policy. By the early 2010s, the AKEL and especially the DISY governments recognized the need to capitalize Cyprus' EU membership (Tziarras, 2019). On the one hand, the intention responded to the economic and security challenges outlined earlier and sought to strengthen the bargaining position of Greek

Cypriots. On the other hand, proactive tendencies also aimed to bridge regional interests and EU foreign policies. As Pedi and Kouskouvelis (2019, p. 151) put it, the RoC's "status seeking strategy" sought to develop the image of "a good power" and "a useful partner", while it also aimed to assume "an enhanced role as a leader and bridge builder in the Eastern Mediterranean."

These economic, security and political factors and considerations reshaped the country's foreign policy. According to Tziarras (2019), the new direction introduced a proactive foreign policy with soft balancing and limited hard balancing strategies. Beside the revitalized relations with the EU, US and France, Nicosia also developed comprehensive ties with emerging actors. Among them, Russia continued to maintain a significant footprint in the island. The two countries have traditionally interacted through left-wing movements, due to Russia's membership in the UNSC, because of arms and oil sales, and as a result of religious ties (Sakkas and Zhukova, 2013). Since the early 2000s, offshore banking also became a key area of cooperation, though recent studies indicate a decline in Russia's financial contribution (Zavyalova *et al.*, 2019; Kacziba, 2021). The ongoing pandemic is producing similar decrease in tourism, with total tourist arrivals in 2020 declining by 84% compared to 2019. Nevertheless, Russia continues to exert an indirect influence at the political level and through the Russian diaspora which has constituted about 3-5% of the total population in 2018 (Stergiou, 2019). With this extensive Russian influence and presence, the RoC has tried to play a less prominent role in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Thus, it has supported the EU guidelines, while allowing pro-Russian rallies, which were concentrated in Limassol.

To a lesser extent, Nicosia also fosters closer relations with China (Ionnides, 2021). Among the political consensus supporting cooperation, the most important is the common recognition of "One China" and "One Cyprus" policies (Markides, 2020). Beyond general diplomacy, however, China is pursuing a pragmatic foreign policy towards Cyprus, avoiding sensitive areas that could disrupt Sino-Turkish and Sino-Greek partnerships. Among the economic benefits, China is interested in the shipping industry and the energy sector. Energy cooperation began in December 2019, when a consortium led by China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering signed an agreement to build the island nation's first LNG terminal. The project also complies with the Chinese ambition to develop ports and energy infrastructures in Central and Eastern Mediterranean states (Ekman, 2018).

In addition to global actors, Nicosia also aimed to forge closer links with regional actors. In this regard, the RoC and Greece form three trilateral platforms with the participation of Israel, Egypt and Jordan respectively (Pedi and Kouskouvelis, 2019). The platforms are designed to establish common mechanisms on trade, energy, diplomacy and defense. At the same time, closer partnerships will allow regional actors to put pressure on Nicosia to represent Eastern Mediterranean interest in the EU.

3. Discussion

The previous section briefly outlined the most important foreign policy trends, highlighting both the alliance-oriented Western partnerships and the emerging non-Western relations generated by the unipolar-multipolar shift. The discussion section attempts to synthesize the common traits of individual accounts and identify periods that resemble balancing, bandwagoning and hedging behaviours. The paper then proceeds to analyse the potential implications and clarifies whether the existing terminology is suitable for describing the strategic behaviour of sample states.

Starting with common traits, our research identified three broad foreign policy orientations across the case studies. The first was a period of intensive Westernisation, which sought to utilise Euro-Atlantic integration for defensive, political, and economic advantages. This period has been described in different terms and concepts – ranging from Westernisation through Europeanisation to Euro-Atlantic integration – and has taken place in different historical contexts in each of the individual countries. The second period began with the relative decline of US hegemony and the emergence of new centres of power. As a result of the global financial meltdown in 2008 and new security challenges, the sample states have attempted to find common Euro-Atlantic solutions and, in the absence of such solutions, have forged closer ties with non-Western actors. The period was characterised by growing disputes between “rogue” states and Western core countries, while diversified foreign policies were labelled with terms varying from de-Europeanisation through strategic flexibility to multidimensional approaches. The third period began in the late-2010s and early 2020s, which marked the emergence of high-level external security threats.⁴ In the late 2010s, Greece and the RoC began to regard the growing tension with Turkey as serious security threats and, in addition to seeking regional allies, sought to reinforce and re-consolidate their Western partnerships. During this process, the two countries have fostered closer ties with countries such as France, Britain, Italy and the USA. Although Greek-Turkish tensions were reduced after the inauguration of the Biden administration, the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war posed an even greater security challenge. In this situation, most EU states have repeated the pattern previously followed by Greece and the RoC: small states along the EU's eastern flank have sought to reinforce and re-consolidate their ties with the Western power centre and take advantage of the collective security umbrella. As in the previous stages, this process can be labelled with a variety of different terms, such as re-Westernisation and re-Europeanisation.

These broad foreign policy orientations would indicate a straightforward selection of foreign policy acts, starting with bandwagoning during the unipolar momentum, continuing with hedging when non-Western actors emerge, and ending

⁴ To define the concept of high-level security threats, we adopt Barry Buzan's notions of military threats, which involve the risk of seizure of territory, invasion, occupation, change of government or manipulation of policy (Buzan, 1983).

with balancing in times of external security threats. In reality, our results indicate that the sample countries applied multiple strategies simultaneously during these three phases, although the importance of balancing, bandwagoning and hedging varied depending on the requirements of historical phases. During the first stage of Europeanisation/Westernisation, selected countries indeed applied bandwagoning and joined the Euro-Atlantic integration in order to gain benefits. However, given the historical background of the Hungarian-Soviet, Bulgarian-Soviet, Greek-Turkish and Greek Cypriot-Turkish tensions, these alignments could easily be described as long-term strategic decisions aimed at balancing against existing or potential threats. The second stage is even more complicated as our results indicate that hedging has certain limitations in explaining the behaviour of sample states. We argue that secondary states with EU and NATO memberships have acted differently than similar states in East or Southeast Asia, as European small and middle powers have enjoyed the benefits of an effective security umbrella. We recognize that some member states adopted hedging strategies due to the emergence of multipolarity and as a result of domestic interests to exploit the benefits offered by new poles. However, we argue that these countries have adopted a rather hybrid strategy of hedging, balancing and even bandwagoning, applying both proactive policies to pursue opportunities and reactive responses to seek safe relations with threatening actors. As a result, the foreign policy agendas of sample countries in the new multipolar environment have sought to maintain and exploit Western embeddedness, while at the same time developing strategic flexibility, multidimensional engagement and, in some cases, middle-ground positions. Yet these strategies failed to address high-level security challenges in the third stage. Thus, policymakers in these countries have reinforced bandwagoning and balancing at the expense of hedging and sought to realign with EU and NATO partners and reduce ties with threatening actors. These reactions to high-level security risk reinforce the concerns of Lim and Cooper (2015, p. 700), who argued that “hedging offers little insight into critical alignment questions.” Our results indicate that it provides little insight, because hedging behaviour is about multidimensionality which terminates when states begin to rebalance or realign against security threats.

It should be also noted that individual states have placed different emphasis on specific foreign policy acts. For instance, in the 1990s, bandwagoning was more decisive in the case of Hungary than Bulgaria, while in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish relations, hedging was less relevant due to the ongoing tensions. On the contrary, Greek Cypriot and Russian relations included extensive hedging behaviour, in which Nicosia has adopted long-term hedging strategies with the aim to maximize benefits and minimize risks (Ciorciari and Haacke, 2019). In the case studies, a number of similar configurations could be mentioned, in which balancing, bandwagoning and hedging strategies alternated depending on historical, bilateral or international contexts. This context dependence also explains the Bulgarian and Hungarian reactions in the aftermath of the outbreak of Russian-Ukrainian war,

whereas bandwagoning, balancing and hedging policies are currently competing with one another, and the predominant application of one of them depends heavily on the actual threat level.

Despite the context-dependence, the main trends are clear: the multipolar world order indeed provides extensive opportunities for the simultaneous implementation of different foreign policy acts. Our results suggest that, in case of rational policymaking, the levels of benefits and risks determine which foreign policy acts are pursued, although in most cases the application is context-dependent and varies from partner to partner. It is important to stress that in principle this is not the privilege of small states. On the contrary, they either bandwagon or hedge against threatening actors with limited potentials to engage in proactive balancing. Small EU countries, however, have an extensive advantage compared to ordinary small states: they are veto members of both the EU and NATO, which not only provides an effective security umbrella, but also allows to articulate diverse foreign policy directions. It is important to underline that this strategic advantage is clearly provided by the Western alliance, and thus rational foreign policy would require members to ultimately support EU and NATO agendas. We argue that these countries support the most critical agendas but have a different idea of what constitutes a critical agenda. Different interpretations are linked to three interrelated challenges of the Western alliances, and in particular of the EU. First, the member states of the eastern flank have become a buffer zone between different global and regional power centres, which not only puts pressure on them to engage with all the conflicting parties, but also provides alternative policy choices for domestic actors. Secondly, the level of Westernisation or Europeanisation is also influential, as it reinforces centripetal tendencies when the level of threat is high, while stimulating disengagement from the bandwagon when the level of threat is low. Thirdly, and more broadly, the dominant concept of sovereign states significantly weakens the unity of the EU, as member states consider their own interests first and only secondly the interests of their alliances.

Finally, we argue that the term *adaptive diplomacy* would be the best suited to describe the hybrid foreign policies of selected countries. We argue that the term should be used as a collective notion that covers a wide range of foreign policy directions that secondary EU states with effective security umbrella can apply in multipolar environments (He, 2012). Thus, the concept is used as an umbrella term referring to the different types of behaviours that EU countries adopt in their hybrid foreign policy models during times of increasing uncertainty. Compared to bandwagoning, adaptive diplomacy attempts to incorporate both proactive and reactive strategies, which has allowed EU states to diversify their foreign policies and develop political, economic and even defence relations with non-Western actors. Compared to balancing, the term implies that small states on the EU's eastern flank sometimes must accept the opportunistic behaviour of non-Western powers and adopt middle-ground positions or hedging policies. Compared to hedging, adaptive

diplomacy indicates that in times of high-level security risks, states abandon hedging, realign themselves by using bandwagoning strategies, while at the same time proactively balancing to gain security and weaken hostile actors. All in all, the term seeks to capture the constant need for adaptation that small states, including EU members, must undertake in an anarchic multipolar system.

Conclusion

The study proceeded from the premise that the emergence of multipolar system altered the foreign policy orientation of small states located on the eastern part of the EU. To understand these transformations, the study selected four case studies and sought to identify how Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece and the RoC responded to the emergence of multipolar uncertainty. We argued that there were three basic foreign policies that could be pursued during this period: balancing, bandwagoning and hedging. The paper sought to identify when the selected case studies applied these strategies and aimed to categorize the foreign policy orientations of selected sample states.

Our results indicate that the selected countries have pursued hybrid foreign policies during the unipolar-multipolar shift, using various foreign policy acts simultaneously. We argue that this was enabled by multipolarity and alliance integration: the former has produced new poles with new threats and new opportunities, and the latter has provided a solid bargaining position against both emerging actors and those who opposed the hybrid foreign policies. The study has referred to this response as adaptive diplomacy, which sought to capture the need of small states to constantly adapt to international realities, but also indicated that EU and NATO member states with veto powers can apply active diplomacy to navigate between great power interests and historical transformations. Nevertheless, this paper did not aim to conceptualise the notion of adaptive diplomacy, which requires further research and the analysis of more case studies. It is important to note, however, that our notion of adaptive diplomacy was originally linked to pragmatic behaviors towards non-Western actors. In contrast, strategies recently pursued by selected sample states indicate that the systemic requirements of multipolar structures may alter the degree and direction of simultaneously used foreign policy acts, forcing states to reorient towards the West while retaining the advantages offered by others. This tendency supports Waltz's claim that "competing systems select for success" (1999, p. 697) and forces small states to constantly assess who succeeds and how to adapt to it.

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