

Perception and Rhetoric in 'Frontline States'

An Early Assessment of the Consequences of Russia's War in Ukraine

Edited by Agata Mazurkiewicz and Wojciech Michnik





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Perception and Rhetoric in 'Frontline States'

An Early Assessment of the Consequences of Russia's War in Ukraine

Executive Summary

This policy research paper aims to serve as an invitation for a broader discussion about the political, social, economic, military, and security consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe. As the paper introduces a 'frontline state' concept as an analytical lens, it focuses on reactions, narratives, and perceptions of the selected 'frontline states' towards Russia's war in Ukraine.

Particularly it analyses initial responses to the war in these states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia), including societal and governmental support for Ukraine. The paper also attempts to shed light on propaganda, as well as the cyber and disinformation domains of the war, looking not only into the strategies of, but also into, Ukrainian's predominant narrative. In the conclusion, there is a brief assessment of the consequences of the aggression faced by the 'frontline states', with a special emphasis on regional and transatlantic security dynamics.

Introduction

The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and the subsequent war have already had a dramatic effect in multiple fields, from the international order, through to the regional economy, and individual lives. The aggression is being widely analysed by politicians, journalists, academics, and citizens around the world, yet it has gained particular importance in NATO's 'frontline states', including Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states. These countries share a complicated historical relationship with Russia, as well as a particular geopolitical position on the Eastern Flank of NATO and the EU. Hence, the perceptions and rhetoric surrounding the conflict and its consequences visible in these frontline states have become significant in shaping both international and national policies and security. While the Russian war against Ukraine is still ongoing, it is vital to identify, assess and discuss the main strands and tropes of the political and security discourse surrounding the war and its consequences.

These assumptions have become the basis for an expert seminar entitled 'Perception and rhetoric in "frontline states": An early assessment of the consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine', which took place in Kraków, Poland on 28 November 2022; the seminar was funded as part of the programme titled 'Excellence Initiative – Research University' at the Jagiellonian University. The seminar was aimed at bringing together scholars and think tank experts. It became a forum for the exchange of ideas, opinions and research dedicated to examining the immediate consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine from the perspective of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, and particularly of the so-called frontline states. Through the participation of scholars, journalists and practitioners, the joint expert seminar popularised the interdisciplinary effects of research that are key to understanding the complex security situation in the CEE region. The integration of these three perspectives allowed us to develop a broad outlook on the common imagination and construction of the new security order that is emerging following the Russian aggression. To gain a comprehensive picture of this new reality, the discussions reflected different levels of analysis, from international to individual. Furthermore, the seminar opened the possibility of considering the perceptions of and rhetoric about current threats and uncertainties in CEE, as well as proposing common solutions for mitigating these uncertainties and building a common understanding of the future of the European security architecture.

This policy research paper is designed to serve as an invitation for a broader discussion about the political, social, economic, military, and security consequences of the war. It focuses on two main aspects: the reactions, narratives, and perceptions of the frontline states towards Russia's war in Ukraine, as well as the consequences of the aggression faced by the frontline states, the wider region, and transatlantic relations. As such, the paper consists of eight contributions spanning such topics as cybersecurity, societal

responses to the conflict in Ukraine and in the frontline states, and transatlantic relations.

The first section of the paper, authored by Agata Mazurkiewicz and Wojciech Michnik, focuses on the conceptualisation of the term frontline states, using Poland as a primary example. To this end, it points towards the key characteristics of frontline states and discusses the various ways in which Poland has responded to the Russian aggression. In the second section, Iwona Reichardt continues the examination of Poland as an example of a frontline state by analysing Polish reactions to the ensuing refugee crisis. This section focuses on the factors which shaped Poland's wide-ranging support for Ukraine and Ukrainians, as well as the potential future responses to the possible next waves of refugees. The third section by Julia Ryng broadens this discussion by analysing the socio-political responses of Poland, Romania and Slovakia to the challenges related to the presence of Ukrainian refugees. The paper then proceeds to address the long-term integration of refugees, as well as the necessary preparations for possible future waves of refugees. In the fourth section, Leon Hartwell brings attention to Northern Europe by examining the three Baltic frontline states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This section discusses both the responses of the Baltic states to the war and the war's impact upon them, placing these considerations in the wider framework of NATO.

In the fifth section, Roman Kozlov delves into the narratives about and attitudes toward Russia and the war prevalent in Ukrainian society. This section also touches upon the issues resulting from these narratives, such as the integration of citizens into the war effort and Ukrainian attitudes towards peace negotiations. The sixth section, authored by Dominika Dziwisz, contemplates the cyber dimension of the war and presents the use of cyber and information tools by Russia in Poland as an example of a frontline state. It also provides conclusions on the lessons that the frontline states should learn from the war in terms of their cyber defence. The topic of information warfare is elaborated upon in the seventh section written by Julia Kazdobina. This section uncovers the mechanisms of Russia's influence operations which are applied by the Kremlin against both Ukraine and its Western allies, including the frontline states. The concluding, eighth section, written by Adam Reichardt, provides a broader perspective to the topic of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the position of the frontline states, by discussing the challenges of transatlantic relations in particular in the face of a prolonged conflict. The paper ends with conclusions and recommendations.

Agata Mazurkiewicz, Wojciech Michnik:

From concept to reality? Poland as a 'frontline state' and its early responses to the war

Becoming a frontline state

In most basic terms, a frontline state is a country that borders on an area troubled by a war or other crisis. A more advanced definition would describe a frontline state as a country that either borders or is near an area of military conflict, and thus faces a direct threat to its own security. Such a state faces adversities in a region of conflict or geopolitical tension, making a frontline state particularly vulnerable to any spill over effects or direct military threats. Even though a frontline state concept is not new – as it usually refers to a loose group of African states from the 1970s to the early 1990s¹ – the concept experienced renewed interest in the 2010s, especially in the face of Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014 (the annexation of Crimea and subsequent war in Eastern Ukraine). After 2014, the debate about NATO's so-called Eastern Flank intensified. In this perspective, the term frontline states has been used to address security concerns and the defence responsibilities of the Central and Eastern European member states of NATO: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia². After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the threat of war made these geographically exposed states more unified (except for Hungary) in their regional response to Russia's threat.

Even though before 24 February 2022 there was a degree of unity among NATO's Eastern Flank frontline states, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine only exacerbated ongoing regional security challenges in Europe. The concept of the frontline state in Central and Eastern Europe not only became clearer but also the responses of these states became more coherent³. Poland has viewed its regional role as one of a frontline state with Russia for a significant period of time; it did not become one suddenly on 24 February 2022, as this process had started in 2014. This view has therefore both limited some of Warsaw's diplomatic options and increased its significance to the West. As Russia's military posture rose and its aggressive rhetoric increased, Poland focused on safeguarding its own security, as well as that of its closest allies – particularly those in the Baltic region⁴. And since Russia launched its full-scale war in Ukraine, no country has become more important to Western efforts to push back against Russia's aggression and provide aid to the numerous Ukrainian refugees⁵.

Poland's reactions to Russia's aggression could be placed into four categories: political and diplomatic reactions; the application of economic tools; the use of the military; and humanitarian aid and assistance to civilian populations. While the fourth category will be discussed in the following chapters of the report, this chapter will focus on the three other categories of state reactions.

Political and diplomatic reactions

Poland's political and diplomatic reactions to Russia's aggression can be viewed within both multilateral and unilateral frameworks: NATO and the European Union are the most important forums for presenting the political and diplomatic stance towards Russia and Ukraine. Immediately following the aggression, Poland together with other states - including frontline states Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia - invoked Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, requesting consultations with all political Allies^[6]. As a member of NATO, Poland is also a signatory of the Alliance's declarations and statements⁶ strongly condemning Russia's actions, expressing solidarity with and pledging support to Ukraine. Poland also provides diplomatic and political support for Ukraine within the framework of the EU – including sanctions against Russia discussed

A frontline state is a country that either borders or is near an area of military conflict, and thus faces a direct threat to its own security. Such a state faces adversities in a region of conflict or geopolitical tension (...)

in the following section – as well as an outspoken supporter of Ukraine's future membership of the Union⁷. Polish politicians have also been actively advocating among their counterparts⁸ for increased pressure on Russia and transfers of military equipment to Ukraine.

In terms of unilateral responses to the aggression, the Polish political sphere has been largely in agreement for strongly condemning Russia and a pledge of support to Ukraine⁹. Next to declarations and resolutions, this has also taken the form of legislation and programmes aimed at assisting Ukraine and Ukrainians: including a fast-track border crossing procedure for Ukrainian refugees¹⁰, or the transfer of military equipment (discussed in the following section).

Economic tools

The economic tools employed as a direct response to Russia's aggression by Poland can also be grouped into the instruments applied as part of the EU. The first group of actions comprises multiple rounds of sanctions against Russia and Belarus¹¹, restrictive measures against individuals and companies, as well as bans on media outlets and economic cooperation with areas controlled by Russia: Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk. Poland, together with several other frontline states, has put pressure on other EU members to expand the sanctions¹² and further constrain Russia's ability to continue with the invasion.

Alongside these multilateral efforts on the macro level, Poland has also introduced unilateral changes to its own legislation and started programmes aimed at supporting Ukrainian

refugees¹³. Among these, include

the accelerated process of assigning a social security number (PESEL), and allowing refugees from Ukraine to benefit from social and welfare programmes (e.g., reduction of the fee for a child's stay in a nursery or direct transfers of money). The legislative changes also facilitated the employment of Ukrainian refugees (especially with regards to medical practitioners and teachers). These efforts were oriented towards providing a basic level of economic security to individuals coming to Poland.

Poland has been one of the top suppliers of military assistance to Ukraine (0.3% of GDP), much like other frontline states: Estonia (1%), Latvia (0.88%), Lithuania (0.35%), and Slovakia (0.2%).

The use of the military

While Poland is not a party to the conflict, it has applied its military toolkit as part of its response. This includes direct transfers of military equipment to Ukraine, such as armoured fighting vehicles, tanks, guns, and rocket launchers worth over seven billion Polish zlotys (as of August 2022)¹⁴. In terms of GDP, Poland has been one of the top suppliers of military assistance to Ukraine (0.3% of GDP), much like other frontline states: Estonia (1%), Latvia (0.88%), Lithuania (0.35%), and Slovakia (0.2%)¹⁵. The Polish Armed Forces have also been activated, as part of two operations, in response to crises connected to Russia's aggression. Operation 'Reliable Help' (*Niezawodna pomoc*)¹⁶ was launched in March 2022, involving the Territorial Defence Forces supporting refugees from Ukraine. This included such activities as: assistance at reception and information points; the distribution of humanitarian aid, including food; the transport of aid and, to a limited extent, transport of people; and the construction or expansion of temporary accommodation for refugees. The second operation, 'Strong Support' (*Silne wsparcie*)¹⁷, was initiated before the February escalation and has involved the deployment of the military in areas under the state of emergency within the border zone with Belarus. This operation, conducted since September 2021, included such activities as support to the Border Guard and the Police, patrols, and monitoring of the border.

¹ Robert S. Jaster, "A Regional Security Role for Africa's Front-line States: Experience and Prospects", London, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper no. 180. 1983, p. 8.

² See: "Frontline Allies: War and Change in Central Europe", U.S.-Central Europe Strategic Assessment Group Report, November 2015, Center for European Policy Analysis, https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id_plik=2102.

³ We find a frontline state concept with its explanatory strength quite potent as it seems to be more precise than alternative terms used to describe the geopolitical coherence of this part of Europe, like Central and Eastern Europe, the Eastern Flank etc. In terms of practical political terms, this concept brings together states in the region with similar or the same security concerns (in certain aspects it brings other regional initiatives, such as the Three Seas Initiative and the Bucharest Nine, under a greater umbrella of common security perception).

⁴ See: Marcin Zaborowski, "Poland: Nato's Front Line State", Whitehall Papers, 2018, 93:1, p. 88.

⁵ "How Poland has become 'the frontline of the NATO alliance'", PBS NewsHour, 25.03.2022, Interview with Stephen Mull (Transcript), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-poland-has-become-the-frontline-of-the-nato-alliance>.

⁶ The consultation process and Article 4, NATO Topic, 08.12.2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49187.htm. See e.g.: Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government on Russia's attack on Ukraine, Press Release (2022) 046, 25.02.2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_192489.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁷ Joint Declaration on the European perspective of Ukraine, The official website of the President of the Republic of Poland, 07.05.2022, https://www.president.pl/news/joint-declaration-on-the-european-perspective-of-ukraine_37193.

⁸ Anna Widzyk, „Polska i Litwa naciskają na Berlin: Nie czas na egoizm”, Deutsche Welle, 26.02.2022, <https://www.dw.com/pl/polska-i-litwa-naciskaj%C4%85-na-berlin-nie-czas-na-egoizm/a-60928922>.

⁹ Uchwała Sejmu ws. agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę. "Atak na cały porządek międzynarodowy", Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 24.02.2022, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/komunikat.xsp?documentId=46D05344F0494503C12587F30050EC4B>.

¹⁰ Robert Hrobaczewski, „Uchodźcy z Ukrainy nie muszą się rejestrować w punktach recepcyjnych”, Prawo.pl, 28.02.2022, <https://www.prawo.pl/samorzad/uproszczenia-graniczne-dla-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy,513674.html>.

¹¹ EU restrictive measures against Russia over Ukraine (since 2014), European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/>.

¹² Barbara Moens, „Eastern Europeans push for new penalties as EU sanctions fail to end Putin's war”, Politico, 01.04.2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eastern-europeans-conjure-up-plans-to-raise-new-penalties-pressure-on-vladimir-putin-russia/>.

¹³ Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 r. o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa, Dz.U. 2022 poz. 583, Internetowy System Aktów Prawnych, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20220000583>.

¹⁴ „Pomoc Polski i Polaków dla Ukrainy. Dworczyk: Ponad 17 mld zł”, Rzeczpospolita, 22.08.2022, <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art36909941-pomoc-polski-i-polakow-dla-ukrainy-dworczyk-ponad-17-mld-zl>.

¹⁵ Marek Kozubal, „Nasz kraj w światowej czołówce pomocy wojskowej dla Kijowa”, Rzeczpospolita, 19.12.2022, <https://www.rp.pl/biznes/art37630121-nasz-kraj-w-swiatowej-czolowce-pomocy-wojskowej-dla-kijowa>.

¹⁶ Informacje „Niezwodna pomoc”, Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej, <https://media.terytorialsi.wp.mil.pl/informacje/kategoria/5650/niezawodna-pomoc?offset=0#publication-list-header>.

¹⁷ Informacje „#SilneWsparcie”, Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej, <https://media.terytorialsi.wp.mil.pl/informacje/kategoria/5569/silnewsparcie>.

Iwona Reichardt:

Poland's assistance to Ukraine: causes and prospects

Immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was launched, a share of the Ukrainian population began to flee into neighbouring states, which as a result became frontline states. Poland, which shares a 535-kilometre border with Ukraine and had already been home to over 1.5 million Ukrainians, turned into the main crossing point and destination for many of these war refugees. The Polish state, despite having no prior experience, infrastructural or administrative, with managing a large inflow of migrants, opened its borders and offered support to Ukrainians fleeing the war.

The positive reaction of the Polish state toward migrants from Ukraine was not unfounded; however, it remains to be seen whether it can be maintained in the long-term. At the Polish state level, the unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine is seen as a security threat. In fact, this has been the official Polish position since the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, as well as the start of the war in Donbas¹. Since then, recognising Russia as an aggressor state and understanding its own position as a frontline state, the Polish Government has opted for strengthening the country's defence capacity, focusing on deterrence and stronger alliances with both NATO and the United States.

At the social level, the attitude towards Ukrainians was that of 'neighbours in need'; politically, it can be argued this gave the largest impetus for the Polish state structure to absorb a large number of Ukrainian refugees. However, this Polish perception of Ukrainian migrants was nothing new; it was already evidenced in public opinion research from 2020 conducted by the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe and the Council of Foreign Relations 'Ukrainian Prism', which was financially supported by the Kyiv and Warsaw offices of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation². The results of the survey revealed an overall positive mutual perception of both societies towards one another. Both groups of respondents perceived the other side as 'neighbours'; however, Ukrainians also used such terms as 'friends' or 'brothers' for their Polish neighbours more than vice versa.

Importantly, from the perspective of current developments in the region and Poland's readiness to assist Ukraine and Ukrainians, the findings of the 2020 evidence point to Ukrainian historical migration in Poland as the main factor explaining positive relations between Ukrainians and Poles. Specifically for Ukrainians, Poland was the country where they would go in search of employment and improved living conditions; for Poles, Ukraine was a country affected by an economic crisis, which thus explained the migration of its people to Poland. Interactions between Poles and Ukrainians thus took place mainly within Poland, particularly at the workplace. This, the research concluded, created a certain asymmetry in relations, where Ukrainians know more about Poland,

Poles and the Polish language than Poles about Ukraine's society, and yet are in a lower social and economic position due to their migrant status in Poland. This asymmetry was identified as a potential risk for the future if not addressed adequately by the Polish state and society. Most importantly for the analysis of the current situation and the new wave of migrants from Ukraine, the research revealed that the positive view among Polish respondents towards Ukrainians was based on the belief that their migration to Poland was caused by a harsh economic situation and is therefore temporary.

The results of this research were almost immediately verified in the spring of 2022, when a large number of Ukrainian refugees arrived in Poland seeking safety and adequate conditions to settle, even temporarily. It also explains why a large number of Ukrainians decided to stay in Poland. Depending on many factors, including the situation in Ukraine, some will possibly opt to live in Poland for a longer period of time. The results of the 2020 research also explain the rare occurrences of negative reactions against the Ukrainian migrants which took place during the first phase of the war.

With the passage of time, however, the situation has changed in Poland. Like many other European states, Poland too has been negatively affected by the rise of energy prices and resulting inflation. Many indicators suggest that Polish resources for Ukrainian migrants have significantly decreased and the offered help has been reduced³. Although undeclared, the policy of the state is that Ukrainian migrants in Poland should become financially independent and capable of providing for themselves. This assumption is most likely a reflection of the social mood revealed in opinion polls, which since September 2022 have started showing the first decrease in support towards Ukrainian refugees in Poland, and a slight increase in the share of those who are against them. While the available data does not yet point to a worrisome trend – and the size of social support for assisting Ukraine and Ukrainians is still larger than in other European states – it is becoming more evident that the policy of the Polish state, most likely responding to changing social moods, is now more focused on helping Ukrainian victims of war within the territory of Ukraine. This explains the decision of the Polish Government to invest in temporary housing for refugees in Ukraine, and not in Poland.

Given the 2020 survey results and current situation in Poland – the number of Ukrainian migrants has reached roughly three million people and the economic slowdown has already affected the social mood – we can expect less willingness to help the newcomers. In this light, it is recommended that the Polish state, which may no longer have sufficient resources to adequately address the needs of the Ukrainian migrants, starts cooperating with external partners, for example the European Union. Moving assistance to a more multilateral platform would not only ensure its continuation, which is the most important factor from the perspective of those who are fleeing from the war, but also could reduce the potential growth of anti-migrant sentiments in Poland.

¹ See e.g.: Prezydent RP: "Konflikt Rosja-Ukraina to największe wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa", Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, 22.07.2014, <https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/5706,Prezydent-RP-quotKonflikt-Rosja-Ukraina-to-najwieksze-wyzwanie-dla-bezpieczenstw.html>.

² Nadiia Koval, Laurynas Vaičiūnas, Iwona Reichardt, „Poles and Ukrainians in daily contacts”, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Kyiv 2021, <https://www.kew.org.pl/en/2021/06/11/pires-and-ukrainians-in-daily-contacts/>.

³ Łukasz Baszczak, Aneta Kielczewska, Paula Kukołowicz, Agnieszka Wincewicz, Radosław Zyzik, „Pomoc polskiego społeczeństwa dla uchodźców z Ukrainy”, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa 2022, pp. 35-36, <https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Pomoc-pol-spol-UKR-22.07.2022-D-1.pdf>.

Julia Ryng:

Growing socio-political tensions in frontline states: the cases of Poland, Romania and Slovakia

The support of frontline states has been vital not only for Ukrainian battlefield victories, but also for providing humanitarian aid to people fleeing the Russo-Ukrainian War. Written ahead of the winter, when more migration out of Ukraine was expected, this section aims to analyse the changing domestic situation in the frontline states, comment on the challenges of sustaining the level and type of aid provided to refugees, and recommend the policy approach needed at the state level. Focus is given to Poland, Romania and Slovakia, as they are the nations which have taken in the most Ukrainian refugees out of all countries bordering Ukraine¹. The analysis is based on data gathered through seven semi-structured interviews conducted in late November 2022. All interviewees work within one of the focus countries – two in Poland, three in Romania and two in Slovakia – and are professionally involved in humanitarian work across various sectors – two non-governmental organisations, four in the private sector and one in the public sector. The information from the interviews was supplemented by an analysis of national legislation and policies, governmental and non-governmental reports, and local and international media publications.

Unprecedented challenge

Between 28 February and 22 November 2022, approximately 7.5 million people crossed the Ukrainian border to enter Poland, 1.5 million to enter Romania, and 950,000 to enter Slovakia². During this period, most moved further west or returned to Ukraine. But a substantial part of the ten million people remained, with 1.5 million registering for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in Poland, while 87,000 did so in Romania and 101,000 in Slovakia³. These figures represent respectively 3.9%, 0.5% and 1.9% increases in each country's population in the span of eight months⁴. The number and shortness of time within which people crossed the borders represented a new challenge for all three states. Prior to the February escalation in Russian aggression against Ukraine, refugees were present in low numbers in the three countries, with hostile policies and public attitudes towards asylum seekers present in their societies. In 2020 for example, Poland received 2,803 asylum applications and granted 392⁵, while Romania received 6,158 and granted 251⁶. Slovakia received 220 and granted 10⁷.

The first two months after the February escalation saw an unprecedented amount of humanitarian aid mobilised at various levels of the Polish, Romanian and Slovakian societies. 'Spontaneous' and 'reactive' were two terms that were repeatedly used among interviewees to describe this initial phase of responses. The shock of the

The support of frontline states has been vital not only for Ukrainian battlefield victories, but also for providing humanitarian aid to people fleeing the Russo-Ukrainian War.

existential threat that the escalation represented stirred people to act, at times committing themselves to decisions that would not be sustainable longer term. The sense of 'unity' was further noted

as a unique social phenomenon. Despite the Polish, Romanian and Slovakian societies being characteristically polarised, the crisis brought various segments of the national and Central and Eastern European populations together, fighting against a common and historical enemy. Another key feature of the initial phase of responses was that mobilisation in the three countries represented a bottom-up approach. The speed of responses to the escalation depended on the complexity of the actors, meaning that the quickest responses came from individual citizens. Individuals, local groups and various non-governmental actors stepped in as emergency responders. At the same time, it was understood that the state authorities were preparing larger-scale mechanisms to coordinate and integrate the influx of refugees in the medium term. There was a sense that grassroots activities were 'buying time' for the larger systems to be put in place.

The three state authorities implemented several key policies that allowed refugees to quickly receive temporary protection statuses under domestic laws. In Poland, for example, the government liberalised the right to stay process for Ukrainian refugees within two and a half weeks⁸ of the escalation and gave them access to register for a national ID number, which is required to make use of the Polish labour market and health services. Interestingly, the Romanian state made use of emergency response systems that were created during the COVID-19 pandemic to shorten the legislation process, proving that some lessons were learned from previous emergency situations.

Apart from these formal processes, none of the three states executed a strategy for coordinating the various humanitarian actions that were being carried out across different sectors, regions and levels of society. Romania had a strategy on paper; however, sources working with the government claim it is not being executed. The lack of new infrastructure to account for the influx of people – for shelter, food and transport – meant that existing resources had to be used to satisfy the basic needs of the refugees. The lack of this type of systemic solution meant that the reliance on grassroots aid continued beyond the initial phase.

Changing responses

After the first few months of the Russo-Ukrainian War, it became clear that the conflict would not come to a swift end. As such, the humanitarian responses to the influx of refugees needed to change from short-term orientated ones to medium-term

integration. Several factors affected the ability of the host nations to sustain the level of help that was reported in the initial phase of the war, namely war fatigue, deteriorating economic circumstances and rise in anti-refugee sentiments.

Fatigue regarding the war was reported across the region and the world. This is a natural response to a prolonged crisis and meant that the amount of energy initially exerted as a reaction to the shocking events declined. The deteriorating economic circumstances felt across the world post-pandemic, and to which the war added to, were another factor that affected the willingness and ability of neighbouring countries to respond. Inflation and the cost-of-living crisis meant that the host-country populations were experiencing personal difficulties, which encouraged people to focus on their own issues.

In this context, anti-refugee rhetoric rose. The main driver of such rhetoric is the fear of the host-country population losing priority status to Ukrainian refugees. Social media is the main channel through which such rhetoric propagates, but singular voices from right-wing politicians also promote it. In Poland, studies of attitudes and perceptions about the Ukraine war and Ukrainian refugees show that resentment is spreading, but such rhetoric has not entered the public sphere as much as in Romania and Slovakia⁹. Most of the anti-refugee rhetoric in Poland comes from anecdotal evidence, with stories of Ukrainian refugees receiving and demanding services ahead of Poles. The majority of these stories are unfounded; however, an interviewee reported that some stem from real local policies. One municipality put in place a policy offering priority access for Ukrainian refugees to medical services, which should be understood in the context of goodwill, a lack of previous experience in managing such situations, and short-term actions. In Romania, anti-refugee sentiments can be, to some extent, tied to the fact that many of the refugees fleeing the Ukrainian war were more affluent than the general Romanian population. An atmosphere of resentment and the questioning of the necessity to help therefore grew. In both Romania and Slovakia these sentiments were co-opted by politicians to further their isolationist policies. In Slovakia, the rhetoric came from popular MPs currently in government, meaning it had wider influence on the population¹⁰. This was evidenced by a recent study conducted in September 2022, which reported that 50% of Slovaks want a clear victory for Russia, as the way to end the war¹¹.

Future integration

In addition to understanding the changing context within which host countries find themselves, two issues need to be kept in mind for future integration policy making. Foremost, there needs to be a better understanding of the people fleeing this war. The approach of states seen so far can be described as giving wide-ranging rights to refugees – access to the labour market, education and health services – with an

expectation that this would allow people to take care of themselves. This logic fails to grasp the variety and longer-term needs of people fleeing war. Groups like the elderly, parents, or people with disabilities have different needs that may not match the types of state aid offered. Retired people for example do not benefit as much from access to the labour market, and instead require specialised medical, monetary and housing care.

It is also vital to remember that integration is a two-way street. Integration is not easy for those fleeing war in the short- and medium-term, when emotional exhaustion stemming from traumatic events persists and the fate of refugees remains uncertain. Reports of the non-engagement of some refugees in the socialisation and integration activities prepared by the host-country societies needs to be understood in this context. For example, the lack of mass school enrolment by Ukrainian children, despite months of preparation by the Polish education sector¹², can be explained by the hesitation of parents to place children in a foreign schooling system. Accepting this is the first step to developing a more varied approach to schooling, for example, by offering after-school sessions to refugee children, to ease them into a foreign community without placing longer-term commitment on the parents and students.

Are we prepared for a second wave?

As the winter months passed, more people were expected to flee the conflict zone. The rate of refugee movement out of Ukraine has not drastically increased as predicted, however displacement from Ukraine into Europe continues at around 35,000 per day¹³. Lessons must be drawn from the experiences of the first year of the war to better prepare host countries.

Foremost, the circumstances within which both refugees and host-country populations find themselves today are different from the initial phases of the war. From the host country perspective, individuals are no longer able to help to the same extent as they did in the first months of the war. This means that caring responsibilities need to urgently be shifted away from grassroots help to the state. An understanding of the heterogeneity of current and future refugees must also be made clear. The next waves of refugees are likely to be made up of less economically affluent people, who chose to remain in Ukraine during the warmer months, but now are fleeing due to a lack of basic infrastructure that is needed for them to survive¹⁴. This will therefore require an even more specialised approach to satisfy the various needs of people fleeing the war.

None of the three focus countries are prepared to execute such a systemic and needs-based policy. The overall assessment is that the societies are unable to adequately help the current refugee population due to a lack of systemic and coordinated solutions at state level. A lack of new infrastructure to support current and future groups of vulnerable people means that there is a reliance on existing resources, which have been

strained by the pandemic and current economic circumstances. The livelihoods of both the host-country populations and refugees depend on the ability of states to take on leadership roles in coordinating and driving support at all levels of society.

¹ “Estimated number of refugees from Ukraine recorded in Europe and Asia since February 2022 as of February 15, 2023, by selected country”, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1312584/ukrainian-refugees-by-country/>.

² UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Ukraine Refugee Situation, <https://data.unhcr.org/es/situations/ukraine>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ World Population Review, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/>.

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⁶ Asylum Information Database, “Country Report: Romania”, 2020, https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AIDA-RO_2020update.pdf.

⁷ Freedom House, Slovakia, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/slovakia/freedom-world/2021>.

⁸ Ustawa o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa podpisana przez Prezydenta, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji RP, 12.03.2022, <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/ustawa-o-pomocy-obywatelom-ukrainy-w-zwiazku-z-konfliktem-zbrojnym-na-terytorium-tego-panstwa-podpisana-przez-prezydenta>.

⁹ Przemysła Sadura, Sławomir Sierakowski, „Polacy za Ukrainą, ale przeciw Ukraińcom”, Wydawnictwo Krytyka Polityczna, Warszawa 2022, <https://wydawnictwo.krytykapolityczna.pl/polacy-za-ukraina-ale-przeciw-ukraincom-sierakowski-sadura-1100>.

¹⁰ “Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania”, European Digital Media Observatory, 05.04.2022, <https://edmo.eu/2022/04/05/ukrainian-refugees-and-disinformation-situation-in-poland-hungary-slovakia-and-romania/>.

¹¹ Daniel Kerekes, “Plurality of Slovaks Back Russia’s War Aims: Poll”, Transitions, 20.09.2022, <https://tol.org/client/article/plurality-of-slovaks-favor-russias-war-aims-poll.html>.

¹² Daniel Tilles, “Number of Ukrainian refugees in Polish schools falls to 185,000”, Notes from Poland, 02.09.2022, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/09/02/number-of-ukrainian-refugees-in-polish-schools-falls-to-185000/>.

¹³ Centre for Research & Migration Analysis, “Current migration flows from Ukraine”, Centre for Research & Migration Analysis, 15.02.2023, <https://cream-migration.org/ukraine-detail.htm?article=3573>.

¹⁴ “UN fears new Ukrainian refugee crisis will follow Russian attacks”, Al Jazeera, 11.10.2022 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/11/un-warns-of-more-ukraine-displacements-after-new-russian-strikes>.

Leon Hartwell:

The Baltics and the Russo-Ukrainian War: impacts, contributions, and the way forward

The three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – border Russia and its ally Belarus, therefore playing crucial roles in protecting NATO's northeastern flank. Since the Baltic region shares a border with both the main aggressor in the war – Russia – as well as its close ally in Minsk, it begs the following questions: How has the Russo-Ukrainian War impacted the Baltics? And importantly, how have they responded to the conflict situation?

All three Baltic states are hyperconscious of the fact that the fate of Ukraine is intimately linked to their own, and more broadly, to transatlantic defence, security and prosperity. For a long time, a variety of government officials and analysts from the Baltics have warned about the looming Russian threat. Until the February 2022 escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War, such claims were often dismissed as Russophobic, despite Russian aggression in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Syria and Chechnya.

In the Baltics, the Russo-Ukrainian War is largely perceived, not only as a war between Moscow and Kyiv, but as a conflict between authoritarianism and democracy. They therefore place a lot of emphasis on the importance of Ukraine winning the war. They fear that a Russian victory would merely embolden authoritarianism and create a deep sense of insecurity.

Early on, the Baltic states used diplomacy as a vehicle to isolate Russia and empower Ukraine. The Baltics expelled a variety of Russian diplomats while they recalled some of their own. In early April 2022, the three presidents of the Baltics, together with Poland's president, also visited Kyiv. The visit sent a political message of support for Ukraine and signalled that Kyiv was relatively 'safe'. Furthermore, the three Baltic states have been adamant supporters of economic sanctions against Russia and, since October 2022, they have been calling for the setting up of a 'Special Tribunal' to prosecute Russia's heinous crimes in Ukraine.

Unsurprisingly, in terms of bilateral government support to Ukraine as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) from 24 January 2022 to 24 February 2023, Latvia (1.2%), Estonia (1.1%), and Lithuania (0.9%) rank as the top three donors respectively¹. The US rightfully receives a lot of credit for mobilising support for Ukraine, but it should be pointed out that Washington's contribution as a percentage of GDP has only been 0.4% - three times less than Estonia's contribution.

All three Baltic states are allocating over two percent of their GDPs towards defence spending – more than the threshold recommended by NATO – and although the Russo-Ukrainian War has not radically altered their defence strategies, it is clear that their

efforts for achieving certain goals have been sped up. One concern that is slowly starting to surface is that the Baltic states may not be able to supply Ukraine with certain military weapons and equipment without putting themselves at risk. NATO and the EU will have to recognise the role that the Baltics are playing and the heavy burden that they have been carrying.

Socio-economic indicators also suggest that the Baltics have been hit hard by the Russo-Ukrainian War². Collectively, the region's GDP plummeted from 5.9% in 2021 to 1.6% in 2022. This year, it is forecast at 0.4%. The Baltics have also experienced some of the highest inflation in Europe, ranging from 16.9% (Latvia) to 19% (Lithuania) in 2022. This year, inflation will be between eight and nine percent.

A key driver of high inflation has been the energy crisis related to the war. Nearly a decade ago, Lithuania took crucial steps to increase its independence from Russia with great results. It built a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal which has helped the country to store enough gas for domestic consumption. The urgency of the situation following the February escalation rapidly forced Estonia and Latvia to also take measures to address their energy crises, with positive results. Estonia, for example, constructed an LNG terminal in a record time of merely six months.

In the Baltics, the Russo-Ukrainian War is largely perceived, not only as a war between Moscow and Kyiv, but as a conflict between authoritarianism and democracy. They therefore place a lot of emphasis on the importance of Ukraine winning the war.

The three Baltic countries are hosting relatively large numbers of refugees. Estonia, with a population of just over 1.3 million people, has welcomed over 110,000 people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine – nearly the equivalent of nine percent of its own population – with over 60,000 having remained in Estonia³. Given the high proportion of refugees, they have put a fair amount of strain on socio-economic systems: especially those of healthcare, education, and welfare. The integration of refugees will also be a key issue to monitor in the medium- to long-term.

The 2022/23 winter turned out to be a hard one for Ukraine, particularly given Russia's deliberate targeting of critical infrastructure, especially in the energy sector. A joint report by the United Nations Development Fund and World Bank found that between 24 February 2022 and 31 December 2022, Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure has caused over US\$10 billion in damages leaving over 12 million Ukrainians without or with limited power supply and left many without access to fresh water and heating.⁴ Such dire conditions could lead to further waves of Ukrainian refugees in the coming months, which could also add greater pressure on the Baltic states.

Given the intimate links between Ukraine and the Baltics, for NATO member states and allies it is important to – in addition to deepening sanctions against Russia and beefing up support for Ukraine – promote the military and socio-economic resilience of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. As for the Baltic states, they have to maintain this moment of acting collectively. They need to highlight the high burden that they are carrying on behalf of NATO and inspire other member states to do more. “Spend like the Baltics” - that is, committing 1% of GDP to Ukraine - could become a useful diplomatic catchphrase for mobilizing greater support for the victim of this war. If all NATO allies spent like the Baltics, support for Ukraine in 2022 would have amounted to approximately \$400 billion rather than \$100 billion, which in turn, could help Ukraine to win this war rapidly.⁵

One area of neglect since the February 2022 escalation has been the failure to get stronger commitments from the Global South to impose sanctions against Russia. One factor that unites the Global South is a strong sense of anti-colonialism. The Baltic states, each with their own experience of Russian colonialism, should tap into their shared sense of oppression to engage the Global South regarding the Russian aggression in Ukraine and to situate the conflict as part of Russia's imperialist project.

For more detailed analysis, see Hartwell, L, Rakštytė, A., Ryng, J., and Selga, E.K. 2022. Winter is Coming: The Baltics and The Russia-Ukraine War. LSE IDEAS Special Report. December. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/reports/Baltics>.

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⁴ UNDP and World Bank, Ukraine Energy Damage Assessment. 05.04.2023. <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/ukraine-energy-damage-assessment>.

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Roman Kozlov:

The Ukrainian narrative after 24 February 2022

This section discusses the change in the Ukrainian narrative and describes the ongoing transformation of Ukrainian society's mindset after the start of Russia's full-scale war. This includes: a decidedly negative attitude toward Russia and Russians and a desire to isolate the country from the globalized order; the involvement of the civilian population in the defence of the state; a concrete position towards peace negotiations; the openness of politicians with citizens; and a statement that this is not just a war between Russia and Ukraine, but the entire Western world against Russia.

It is also important to address the change in the Ukrainian narrative since 2014; the anti-Russian position in Ukraine had been developing rapidly after the Revolution of Dignity and start of Russian aggression in Crimea and the Donbas. When Ukraine's pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich rejected signing the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, and instead opted for increased cooperation with Moscow, it was met with a strong response from the country's citizens. Following this decision, massive anti-government protests began in Ukraine, which turned into a revolution, dubbed Euromaidan or the Revolution of Dignity. Ukrainian society decided to break with the Soviet past and a lot of Ukrainian citizens did not want to continue any more cooperation with Russia. As a result, Yanukovich's government was toppled and the president himself fled to Russia. The country started a process of 'decommunisation' and 'derusification' in all spheres of human life. The Russian response to the events in Ukraine was quick. The Kremlin decided to enter the territory of the neighbouring state in order to restore the pre-revolutionary order and cut off part of the territory from Ukraine. This was followed by the annexation of Crimea and the start of armed conflict in the Donbass.

The effects of these measures varied depending on the region of the country. In the East and South of Ukraine, there was talk of easing relations with Russia. This was due to the fact that these regions had a predominantly Russian-speaking population and Russian propaganda was more effective in these regions. In other regions of Ukraine, on the other hand, the population had a more radical approach aimed at reducing Russia's influence as much as possible and severing all ties with the country¹.

24 February 2022 changed everything. Since then, there has been no split in Ukrainian society, as the vast majority of citizens have been against the Russians, and they have considered Moscow the greatest enemy of Ukraine². Russian actions have significantly raised the level of Ukrainian patriotism and united the citizens of the country. The Ukrainians have shown great resilience, courage and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing events on the battlefield against one of the largest and strongest armies in the world.

In the political life of the state there was also a unification of forces. Before 24 February there were sharp discussions and disputes in the Ukrainian parliament, and political parties could rarely come to an agreement. Once the full-scale war began political forces in Ukraine decided to unite to effectively oppose the enemy³. The only political party that refused to cooperate was the Opposition Bloc 'For Life'. The activities of this party, as well as other pro-Russian parties (including Party of Shariy, Volodymyr Saldo Bloc, Union of Left Forces and others) have been suspended due to anti-Ukrainian political and organizational activities and real threats to violate Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The decision was implemented on the basis of acts of Ukrainian law and the Constitution of Ukraine⁴.

As far as the Ukrainian political response to the war goes, the Government has been aware of the heavy involvement of the civilian population in helping the Ukrainian military, as well as foreign military advisers; the decision was made to coordinate these activities by creating the UNITED24 platform⁵. A large part of the Ukrainian narrative involves this unity between state and civilian efforts.

The central government, in response to evolving civilian attitudes towards the Russian aggressors and occupiers, has decided to allow civilians to contribute to the defence of the state. Local authorities have been obliged to set up consultation points, where every citizen can inquire about the possibility of participating in civil defence according to their abilities and skills. The government has also promised to provide a monetary reward: 100,000 US dollars for donating a Russian tank to the armed forces, 50,000 US dollars for an armoured personnel carrier, and one million US dollars for acquiring a combat aircraft or ship⁶.

Politicians themselves have turned themselves into part-time amateur journalists; a trend started by President Zelenskyy. The daily display of videos, with a brief summary of the day on social networks, has been seen nationwide, and every mayor, district governor or village council chairman displays such videos. In the case of war, when the situation can change cardinally at any moment, similar measures have a positive effect on the rapid transmission of information from officials to the civilian population. It gives greater understanding of situation for civilians and gives the public the opportunity to respond more quickly.

Another important issue in the overall Ukrainian narrative has been the possibility of diplomatic negotiations with Russia. Officially, the government in Kyiv has stated that any bilateral negotiations will only be possible after the complete withdrawal of Russia from Ukrainian territory, including Crimea⁷. This position is supported by the majority of Ukrainian citizens⁸. Ukraine's recent military successes have only intensified this narrative.

After the outbreak of the war, the Ukrainian narrative on relations with Russia became more radical⁹. At the centre of this lies a very negative stance on the Russian

Federation. Russia's aggression to destabilise and destroy the Ukrainian state and tear apart its society has failed so far. The unification of society and effective state management have led to tremendous successes on the frontlines. Despite the aggressor's large advantage in forces and number of troops, Ukraine is successfully resisting the enemy and is striving to completely drive Russian forces from its territory.

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² Ilko Kucheriv, "How the War Changed the Way Ukrainians Think About Friends, Enemies, and the Country's Strategic Goals", Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 30.05.2022, <https://dif.org.ua/en/article/how-the-war-changed-the-way-ukrainians-think-about-friends-enemies-and-the-countrys-strategic-goals>.

³ Ukrinform. Ukrainian multimedia platform for broadcasting, *Zelens'kij zvernuvsâ do ukraïnciv: Oboronna koaliciâ ročala pracuvati* [Зеленський звернувся до українців: Оборонна коаліція почала працювати], <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-uarazom/3410810-zelenskij-zvernuvsâ-do-ukraïnciv-oboronna-koaliciâ-ročala-pracuvati.html>.

⁴ *Rišennâ Radi Nacional'noï Bezpeki i Oboroni Ukraïni від 18 bereznâ 2022 roku, Šodo prizupinennâ diâl'nosti okremih polițičnih partij* [Рішення Ради Національної Безпеки і Оборони України від 18 березня 2022 року, Щодо призупинення діяльності окремих політичних партій], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/n0005525-22?lang=en#Text>.

⁵ UNITED24 Platform, [UNITED24 - The initiative of the President of Ukraine \(u24.gov.ua\)](https://u24.gov.ua).

⁶ È. Doronceva, *Deržavne reguluvannâ pid čas vijni: âk Prezident ta narodni deputati keruvali kraïnoû vprodovž perših sta dniv voënnogo stanu*, Indeks reform [Є. Доронцева, Державне регулювання під час війни: як Президент та народні депутати керували країною впродовж перших ста днів воєнного стану, Індекс реформ], [Державне регулювання під час війни: як Президент та народні депутати керували країною впродовж перших ста днів воєнного стану \(voxukraine.org\)](https://voxukraine.org).

⁷ *Arahamiâ nazvav umovi dlâ peregovoriv z rosîêû*, Slovo i Dilo. Analitičnij portal [Арахамія назвав умови для переговорів з росією, Слово і Діло. Аналітичний портал], [Переговори з росією – Арахамія назвав умови » Слово і Діло \(slovoidilo.ua\)](https://slovoidilo.ua).

⁸ Kiev International Institute of Sociology, *Obstrili Rosîêû ukraïns'kih mišt: Prodovžennâ zbrojnoï borot'bi či perehîd do peregovoriv*, 2.10.2022 [Обстріли Росією українських міст: Продовження збройної боротьби чи перехід до переговорів, 2.10.2022], <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1151>.

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Dominika Dziwisz:

The cyber dimensions of Russia's war in Ukraine

Russia's priorities in cyberspace in the early stages of the war

Russia has been perceived as a leading player in cyberspace, on the same level as China and the United States. However, the war in Ukraine has challenged this assumption. It is the first full-scale military conflict in which traditional warfare and cyber warfare have been used side by side. So far, very little of the dynamic between the two has developed as expected. Most experts agree that cyber operations have played only a minor role in the initial stages of the invasion. Until now, the only cyberattack successfully coordinated with the ground invasion was the targeting of the internet service provider Viasat on 24 February 2022¹.

Knowing that Russia's cyber capabilities are vast and have been intensively tested for many years, such as in Estonia, Georgia and Ukraine², it is hard to believe that Russia is not well prepared for cyber warfare. Much more likely is the scenario that Russian cyber capabilities have not been designed to do what experts were expecting. If this is correct and the Russian aim is different, then three basic questions need to be answered: Why has Russia not engaged in full-blown cyber warfare in Ukraine? What is the Russian strategy for implementing cyber tools? What lessons can frontline states learn from Russian cyberspace strategies in the early stages of the war?

Propaganda and disinformation versus attacking critical infrastructure facilities (CIF)

Since the beginning of the war, many competing theories and rampant speculation about why Russia has not generated any spectacular breakthroughs on the battlefield have appeared. In early March, the *Washington Post* compiled a dozen possible explanations for the limited success of cyber operations that accompanied the Russian invasion³. Being a couple of months wiser, it may be useful to analyse the most popular hypotheses.

The most popular one is that the Russians planned the annexation of Ukraine; they therefore did not target critical infrastructure, in order to avoid destroying that which they would require to administer seized territory (H1). Furthermore, the Russians hoped for a quick victory in Ukraine. They were unprepared to coordinate kinetic activities with those in cyberspace and organise sophisticated cyber operations that would complement the tasks in the field. (H2). The coordination problem may also stem from the fact that the Russian army is centrally managed, giving no room for greater autonomy among lower-ranking commanders. Another explanation may be the fear of escalating cyber tensions with the West (H3). Cyberattacks can quickly get out of control, and attacks aimed at Ukraine can spread and cause damage elsewhere; an

example can be seen with the 2017 NotPetya bug that Russia used to target Ukrainian energy companies, as it was leaked and caused severe damage to other countries⁴. Such situations could trigger retaliation from unintentionally attacked countries.

The above three hypotheses do not exhaust the catalogue of possible scenarios. At least one more should be taken into consideration: from the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the Russians did not plan to use direct cyber capabilities extensively against critical infrastructure facilities because they perceive cyberspace as the most useful tool in pursuing informational goals. These include gathering intelligence to get better insights about the conduct of war, stealing technology, swaying public opinion, creating and delivering disinformation, promoting chaos, and winning diplomatic debates (H4). Therefore, cybertools might be perceived as insufficient to fully capture a nation but the best to compete in the information sphere, through which one can attempt to win political goals and capture the hearts and minds of people. And when the goal is to seize territory, kinetic forces are more efficient. Therefore, different goals are each defined for the Russian cyber and kinetic forces in Ukraine. If that was the Russian plan from the beginning, then Russia is not necessarily less skilled at cyberwarfare than expected. We should instead assume that they did not see direct activities in cyberspace as the right tool for the situation.

While (as of now) cyberwarfare is not going to replace traditional forms of combat, according to some recent reports⁵, cyberattacks in Ukraine are more sophisticated and widespread than many experts recognise. Even if the strategic effects of Russia's cyber operations against Ukraine have been 'relatively mild' and we have not seen any real blowback against Western democracies, it cannot be ruled out that Russia keeps tools and offensive capabilities in reserve.

Frontline 'Cyber-state' - Poland's perspective

With the outbreak of war in Ukraine, there has been a sharp increase in the number of cyberattacks on Polish CIF. Up until now, the Russians applied only limited methods of low quality. The most damaging attacks (that we know about) include a campaign of ransomware against transport and logistics companies in Poland and Ukraine in mid-October, an attack on the Institute of the Polish Mother's Memorial Hospital in Łódź in early November, after which a shutdown of all IT systems was required; and the hacking of the website of the Polish Senate on October 27th. However, according to recent information published by Microsoft, Russia is preparing massive cyberattacks on the critical infrastructure of Ukraine and its allies, including Poland⁶. Therefore, Poland should be ready for the possibility that Russia will execute a ransomware attack which may be a harbinger of Moscow further extending cyberattacks beyond the borders of Ukraine. Especially at risk are countries and companies supplying Ukraine with vital supply chains of aid and weaponry.

At the same time, General Karol Molenda, the Polish Cyberspace Defence Forces commander, pointed out that the Kremlin's extensive disinformation capabilities are another source of worry⁷. The primary Russian goal of disinformation is to undermine coalitions essential to Ukraine's resilience, including the flow of humanitarian and military aid. The Russian propaganda machine was particularly active when the American news agency Associated Press began circulating information that Russian rockets fell on the Polish village of Przewodów, near the Ukrainian border, killing two people. Russian media and propaganda then accused Ukraine of a deliberate attack on Poland and NATO. It can be anticipated that any similarly ambiguous situation will be used to drive a wedge between Poland and Ukraine.

Additionally, while anti-Polish propaganda is not a new element of Russian cyber activities, the undesired Polish support for Ukraine after 24 February encouraged Russia to intensify disinformation and propaganda attacks on Poland. Russian media falsely portrayed Poland as a US vassal and enemy of both Russia and Ukraine, with the aspirations of building "great Poland from sea to sea"⁸. Analysing the previous successes and failures of Russian cyber operations in Poland, it can also be assumed that disinformation and psychological operations are the first Russian option.

Recommendations

The Internet is a perfect place for propaganda activities, and the longer a society is exposed to cyber influence, the more effective propaganda becomes. It is estimated that English-language websites with pro-Kremlin propaganda are visited 60 to 80 million times a month in the US; as often as website visitors for the Wall Street Journal. On the other hand, thanks to the Internet, people have access to more information from various sources, and a media-savvy public can consciously and reasonably act to counter Russian propaganda. Here, the state's public media plays a crucial role, which should be objective, impartial and informative. However, most importantly, public programmes and information channels should enjoy viewers' trust, and in the case of Poland there is a considerable deficit.

An extended version of this article by Dr. Dominika Dziwisz and Dr. Błażej Sajduk was published at the beginning of January 2023 in the thematic issue of the New Eastern Europe bimonthly journal.

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Julia Kazdobina:

Russian propaganda and influence operations versus communication and regulatory means

Ukraine and Russian Disinformation in the War

When it comes to countering Russian disinformation, Ukraine's case in the current Russian war of aggression is generally presented as a success. Despite persistent propaganda efforts, Russia has so far failed to sway decision-making either in Ukraine or among its allies. Ukraine's success, however, should not be taken as a reason to believe that Russian activities in the information realm do not need to be taken seriously.

The term 'disinformation' would suggest that the problem is the spread of false information. However, this is only a part of the Russian effort which is called influence operations. They involve not only media and information but also the coordinated online and offline efforts of different actors, who use a wide variety of means to destabilize and disrupt societies to either force or manipulate them into decisions that meet Russian interests.

The diversity of means involved can be illustrated by the following examples. In 2021, Ukrainian law enforcement officers recorded more than 1,100 false mining reports¹. Schools, kindergartens, and shopping malls had to be evacuated regularly, disrupting people's lives and increasing tension². Russian influence agents inside Ukraine, just like in other countries, tried to organize protests against COVID-19-related restrictions³. There were cyber-attacks on Ukrainian government websites to undermine trust in government services⁴. False narratives were spread not only on social media but came from the top level of the Russian hierarchy: Putin himself.⁵ Telegram messenger, in combination with provocateurs on the ground, was used at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to instigate a local crisis that ended in violence⁶.

Sometimes, Russia went as far as physically moving large numbers of people to plant a false narrative for Russian and foreign TV viewers. On the eve of the full-scale invasion, the Russian puppet governments 'evacuated' residents of the Russian-occupied parts of Donbas to the Russian mainland. The 'evacuation' was reportedly needed to save people from the intended Ukrainian bombing, which Ukraine had never planned⁷.

Trying to influence Western decision-making, the Russians create multiple crises to increase tension and sow divisions. These include an energy crisis, a food crisis, and a refugee crisis. The Russian government uses nuclear blackmail to put pressure on Western audiences and make foreign governments stay out of the conflict. They activate their influence agents, or so-called 'useful idiots' in the West, who publicly argue a position that promotes Russian interests while looking like a legitimate voice in

a democratic debate. Concerns about possible sales of Western weapons supplied to Ukraine could serve as an example, as could the case of Elon Musk who came out with a 'peace plan'⁸.

What makes Ukraine's case a success in standing up to Russian propaganda is a good understanding of Russian methods, wide awareness of Russian narratives due to active civil society efforts, and government decisions to stall the spread of Russian propaganda materials. Starting in 2014, Ukraine tried to limit the presence of Russian social and traditional media in Ukraine. Russian books, movies and printed material glorifying the Russian government and questioning Ukrainian statehood were not allowed into the country. This was heavily criticised by freedom of speech defenders and the West at the time⁹. However, sanctions imposed on Russian social media gradually marginalized such pro-Kremlin media. If in 2014 they were in the top ten most popular sites, currently they are not even among the top twenty-five. Russian traditional media also lost its audience and trust, the trust amounting to 3% by January 26, 2023¹⁰. In the last 4 years before the Russian full-scale invasion remained mostly stable at about 5% with most of the audience being over 40 and concentrated in the South and the east of the county¹¹.

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As the war started, the situation became clear-cut. It was an unmistakable case of unprovoked aggression, and the majority of Ukrainian communications, cultural, NGO, and foreign policy communities, communicating

Ukraine's message at all levels from individual citizens to its president. The active role of the US and other intelligence agencies in uncovering Russia's false flag operations helped. Russian atrocities became known rather early in the war when Ukraine liberated Bucha, and they also had the effect of dispelling the Russian narrative about being a victim of Ukrainian and Western aggression. Some Russian narratives, in particular, that Ukraine is ruled by Nazis, were blatantly absurd.

In parts of Europe and in the US, however, the awareness is not as high. As societies that did not live under Soviet authoritarianism, their citizens have never been subjected to government manipulation on the same scale. There are also a lot more people who oppose media limitations. The Russian threat is not perceived as unanimously as it is perceived in Ukraine, and if the situation escalates there are likely to emerge divisions between groups proposing different solutions. Also, as the war moves to the next stage when Ukraine is even more dependent on the West and the effects of the energy crisis worsen in Europe, people are more likely to become more tense and polarised. If left unchecked, Russia will use all the instruments it has to sow dissent and make it difficult for Western governments to govern and make decisions.

Some of the narratives planted by Russia in the past remain alive: civil war in Donbas and the Ukrainian government posing a threat to its population; Crimea being historically Russian; the Nazis' involvement at Euromaidan. These narratives will pose a problem when trying to resolve the situation; perceptions and biases that have been learned will be hard to change. In addition, Russian efforts to draft Ukrainians from the occupied territories into the invading army have made civil war in Ukraine a reality¹².

The Russian narratives work on the Russian population. According to VTSlOM public opinion poll, 62% of surveyed Russians have become prouder of their country over the past year, mostly due to the 'special military operation'¹³. 80% support Crimea's annexation and 56% feel proud of it¹⁴. And this is going to make it very hard to come out of this conflict. This will be especially true if the Russian propaganda machine is not dismantled. The Russian population is taught to think that it is a victim of the West.

While there is no way and no need to completely eliminate certain narratives in society, limiting foreign malign influence is a necessary measure. The people who take part in Russian covert influence activities are not exercising their freedoms for legitimate democratic purposes. Their goal is actually to do harm. EU countries have already started limiting Russian state media, and this should continue. Efforts are being made to regulate platforms¹⁵. However, domestic actors, who in Russian parlance are either 'influence agents' or 'useful idiots', also play a significant role.

Although Ukraine's application of sanctions legislation regarding domestic actors¹⁶ – such as media affiliated with politicians connected to Russia, as well as several Ukrainian citizens involved in influence activities – helped make Ukraine safer, this is not the way to do it. Democracy requires a legal and transparent process. There needs to be criminalisation of participation in covert influence activities and the security services must be given the power to investigate these. Those who amplify Russian messages and switch between topics along with the Russian propaganda outlets should be treated as suspicious.

Ukraine also greatly benefited from understanding that Russia posed an existential threat. Soviet history portrayed relations between Russia and Ukraine as those of two brotherly nations, the portrayal that Russia continues to this day. Facts of repressions against Ukrainians, the artificial famine of 1932-33, and Soviet imperial policies aimed at replacing the Ukrainian identity and language with Russian came out into the public domain starting with Yushchenko's presidency in 2005. Although the Zelenskiy government did not place a lot of emphasis on these issues after its election, clear government communication about Russian activities, their consequences and goals are also a must.

Although Russia so far failed to break the will of Ukrainians to resist its brutal aggression and to undermine Western support for Ukraine, its influence activities on the one hand will most likely have lasting consequences for the post-war conflict resolution

and on the other may have an impact on Western societies which are a lot less protected due to their orientation towards trust and openness. Ukrainian experience with educating the public about Russia and its threat as well as limiting Russian presence in one's information space by government decision as well as limiting the role of Russian influence agents has to be taken into account to prevent Russia from destabilizing them and incapacitating their decision-making.

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Adam Reichardt:**Upcoming challenges in transatlantic relations and support for Ukraine**

24 February 2022 marks the most important event in Europe in the 21st century. It not only represents Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but also a major shift in the geopolitics and security of the region and all of Europe, highlighting the new importance of the frontline states. While not all NATO members perhaps, understand the scale of this shift, it is clear that security and the role of transatlantic relations is more vital than ever. However, while the Western alliance may have succeeded in supporting Ukraine in 2022, new crises and upcoming challenges related to the prolonged conflict will test the endurance and resolve of the West.

Overwhelming support

According to the Kiel Institute for World Economy, Ukraine received a total of 84.2 billion euros in government-to-government commitments between 24 January and 3 August 2022¹. This sum includes commitments by forty countries, including thirty-one G7 and EU member countries, plus commitments by the European Union institutions – EU Commission, EU Council and the European Investment Bank – and third countries considered allies in Western structures. The largest supporter of Ukraine in terms of financial and military aid is the United States, which, according to the Kiel Institute, has provided 9.38 billion US dollars in humanitarian aid; 25.45 billion in military assistance; and 10.51 billion in financial assistance between January and August. Other top countries providing support to Ukraine include the United Kingdom, Poland, Germany, Canada, and Norway. Weapons systems in particular have been vital in changing the tide of the invasion; pushing back Russian forces from the North – especially the Kharkiv area – and the South, including the most recent liberation of Kherson.

Training missions for Ukrainian soldiers by NATO and EU member countries are another important factor which helps advance the defence of the country. The EU recently announced plans to train 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers in EU countries, supported by a sixteen million euro investment². This will complement ongoing NATO missions, which have trained tens of thousands of troops as well.

This indicates that the transatlantic response in the first year has been successful from the point of view of the Alliance (NATO). This is despite the fact that many missteps have taken place. For example, in communication, such as Germany's unclear messaging and slow response which was met with serious criticism; or France's push for talks with Putin, especially in the early phases of the invasion. We can also note certain hesitations in the first weeks by many in the Alliance who believed Ukraine did not stand a chance in defending itself. Of course, the unusual role of Hungary and its

prime minister should be noted. Victor Orban has not only refused to allow the transit of military support to Ukraine through Hungary, but has also maintained relations with the Kremlin; a shameful position for a NATO and EU member state. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the Alliance has passed this first test.

Reality and challenges

However, recent events highlight oncoming challenges for NATO and now many questions remain as to whether the Alliance is resilient enough to pass the next phase. This will only be more difficult during the coming months, and as societies slowly start forgetting about the war.

While the Western alliance may have succeeded in supporting Ukraine in 2022, new crises and upcoming challenges related to the prolonged conflict will test the endurance and resolve of the West.

First, we need to recognise that transatlantic relations are built on consensus. And this consensus comes from political will and is based on popular support via democratic societies. One big challenge going forward will be how to maintain popular support

in the diverse number of Allied countries. This refers not only to fatigue, but also to active campaigns to end support for Ukraine. This was very visible in the most recent election campaign in the United States, where many Republican candidates made clear that they would question or reconsider US support for Ukraine. Fortunately, the results of the election will keep many of the loudest voices out of the US Congress and the Democrats have retained the US Senate. This will likely lead to continuous support for the policy of the Biden administration³.

Nevertheless, we have to be prepared for such trends to continue in the near term. Polling in the United States from October 2022 shows that 66% of Americans support providing weapons to Ukraine – yet, this number has dropped from 73% in April⁴. Moreover, only 46% of Americans support the administration's handling of Ukraine.

In the EU, the trend is similar. A Bertelsmann Stiftung poll from October (data from June 2022) indicates that 60% of EU citizens support sending weapons to Ukraine⁵. However, if you break it down by country, one can see that in Italy, for example, that number is only at 42%.

These trends will likely worsen especially in the energy security context. It is clear that the Russian invasion has exposed Europe's overreliance on Russian resources; and now with the brave decision to cut back on Russian gas and oil – together with Russian cuts – this decision will be painful. The economic damage will exacerbate the already difficult situation in many EU countries. One study by the European Stability Mechanism

found that while reduction in gas imports from Russia is survivable for 2022; the “rationing of gas would be required at the beginning of 2023, causing gas consumption in Germany, for example, to fall about 40% below the level expected without rationing”.⁶ This will lead to a new recession next year – the GDP of the Eurozone is predicted to decrease by 1.7% below the benchmark (if there are no cutbacks), leading to higher unemployment. The analysis predicts that “two of the largest economies in the euro area would be hit strongly: GDP in Germany and Italy would fall by about 2.5% next year”.

By 5 February 2023, the European Union will have instituted its full ban on Russian oil product imports. This follows the EU ban on Russian crude oil taking effect in December 2022. In this context, the key challenge for the EU’s economy here will be finding a replacement for Russian-produced diesel fuel – Russia has been the number one source of diesel for Europe, a key fuel for the transportation of goods and services. As the price of diesel fuel increases, there will be an even greater impact on the cost of transport of goods, which will lead to further inflation. This is a key challenge, as many European states, especially Poland, have been struggling with this already over the past several months.

Despite economic hardships of the transatlantic partners, Ukraine will continue to require massive support – financially and militarily. This will certainly place a strain on societies and there will be more calls for ending this support, especially by more radical elements which are often supported and fuelled by Russian propaganda and disinformation. We have already a foretaste of how a radical movement has managed to organise a mass anti-support rally. In September and October, tens of thousands of Czech citizens came out on to the streets to protest the country’s support of Ukraine, attacking government policy as responsible for inflation. Even in Poland, cracks are beginning to show, as certain radical movements have promoted anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, such as the ‘Stop Ukrainisation of Poland’ movement. There certainly is a chance that this movement, while still fringe, could draw more supporters in worsening economic conditions.

Finally, there is one more challenge from the security point of view that needs to be considered, especially from the perspective of NATO frontline states. This concerns how to respond to a possible Russian provocation or an accidental bombing of a NATO state. The incident in Przewodów, where missiles killed two Poles – most likely the result of Ukrainian air defence attempting to respond to a Russian mass bombardment – was a real test for NATO. The question as to whether NATO passed this test, however, remains unanswered. The response – while measured and involving a proper investigation – can be interpreted by the Kremlin as a sign of weakness. It may encourage Russia to test NATO even further, as future incidents are likely to occur, intentional or not. What is more, the incident in Przewodów demonstrates the dire need to assist Ukraine’s air defence – either directly, or indirectly. In addition to enhancing

NATO security, greater efforts should be made to protect civilians and infrastructure, also in Ukraine.

Hard truth

The immediate effects of this invasion are only now starting to take a toll on Western societies and transatlantic relations. That is why a Ukrainian victory should be the top priority for the Allies. Only with a Ukrainian victory, can all of these challenges be overcome.

Recently, at a conference in Lviv, one speaker described two approaches of the Allies in the West: there are countries who want Ukraine to win, and then there are countries who do not want Ukraine to lose. A push now for a ceasefire or compromise, or a peace to freeze the situation in its current state, will only allow Vladimir Putin to resupply and prepare the Russian forces to not only hit harder against Ukraine, but possibly other countries as well.

Hence, the task now is to change the approach and understanding of all Allies – so that we all want Ukraine to win. This is vital before Ukraine-fatigue sets in, before the economic pain starts wearing down societies, before incidents like Przewodów happen again. The hard truth is that Ukraine winning truly means Russia losing. The consequences of such a situation will be the next big challenge to deal with, but only after Ukraine's victory.

¹ Since the time of writing, US Republicans have gained control of the House during its 118th Congress, as of 03 January 2023. As presidential party nomination campaigning gets underway, voices against current level of financial, political and military support for Ukraine are increasingly louder; in particular from potential GOP-presidential nominee and Governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis. According to a recent study from the Pew Research Centre, 40% of Republicans now believe the US is providing too much support for Ukraine, and Democrats holding this view have increased from 5% last March to 15% nearly one year on. See: Amina Dunn, "As Russian invasion nears one-year mark, partisans grow further apart on U.S. support for Ukraine", Pew Research Centre, 31.01.2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/31/as-russian-invasion-nears-one-year-mark-partisans-grow-further-apart-on-u-s-support-for-ukraine/>.

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Conclusions/Recommendations

The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the ongoing war have had tectonic implications for the international order, regional security, and most importantly the lives, well-being and security of Ukrainians. The perceptions and rhetoric surrounding the war and their consequences in selected 'frontline states' have been used here as a means of providing an early assessment of the significant changes that Russia's war has caused for Ukraine itself and its neighbours. As this paper adopted a concept of 'frontline states' to refer to the security challenges and defence obligations of the Central and Eastern European countries that are members of NATO, it offered a regional framework to analyse the war and its clearest consequences for the region. Now, more than a year after, it seems almost self-evident that, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the danger of war has caused greater cohesion among these geographically vulnerable states in their collective response to the Russian threat and their support of Ukraine.

As contributors in this volume attempted to highlight some of the key consequences of the war there should be a caution that naturally comes with analysing events that are still underway. Yet, we would still argue that, based on the analysis above, here are some observations valid after fifteen months into Russia's full-scale invasion: First, the war has led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, with millions of people fleeing Ukraine for neighboring countries – mostly the 'frontline states'. Although these countries responded with a spontaneous mobilisation of humanitarian aid, they faced difficulties in sustaining the level and type of assistance provided to refugees in the medium-term. The changing domestic situation in these frontline states has made it difficult to continue to provide support to refugees, as they are facing fatigue and personal difficulties, such as inflation and a cost-of-living crisis. Anti-refugee rhetoric has also risen in some cases, highlighting the importance of building public and structural support for continued aid to refugees. Second, Russian propaganda and influence operations, even though currently mostly aimed at its domestic audience, should not be overlooked. Without coherent societal resilience in frontline states, Russia could still weaken Western support for Ukraine. For this reason, the cyber domain still will be playing a crucial role in countering Russia's active measures. Finally, if the West does not firmly grasp the importance of prioritising Ukraine's victory in the war, even if it means Russia will suffer defeat, the efforts of Ukraine and its transatlantic partners could ultimately be ineffective.

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