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The Borders of the “Near Abroad”: the Russian War in Ukraine and its Consequences for the Geopolitical System of Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract:

This article considers analyses of the Russian–Ukrainian war from the perspective of a person living for over a half a year under conditions of Russian invasion in Ukraine. As a result of the Russian invasion of the territory of the independent state of the region, we can predict changes in the geopolitical structure of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as changes in the world order. This conflict is in the heart of Europe – a conflict involving a nuclear power and with the potential to spread to other countries, which risks undermining the entire system of geopolitical control and geopolitical balance, with unpredictable consequences for human rights around the world. Russia’s rejection of the Western-led “rules-based order” signals its withdrawal from Europe and its attempted new division of the continent three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall.



At all stages of the development of human society, wars and military conflicts have been its essential companions. They have usually been the catalyst for the emergence and collapse of states and civilisations, changes in historical epochs. Thus, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), more than 30 armed conflicts are recorded on the planet every year, killing about 1,000 people.¹

¹ Щорічник СІПРІ. Озброєння, розброєння та міжнародна безпека (2013).

The conflict is the result of the action of forces inherent in the imperfect nature of man himself. Therefore, it is necessary not to oppose these forces, but to take them into account in politics. The most important guideline that helps to find a rational path in the field of international politics is interest. In international politics, it acts mainly as a national interest, so any state policy should be based on the physical, political and cultural reality of the nation. All nations, in accordance with their capabilities, strive for one thing – to protect their physical, political and cultural identity from the threat of external attack. According to the concept of “political realism,” the essence of international relations is the struggle for power between sovereign states seeking global or regional dominance. In the process of struggle for the realisation of national interests in the field of international relations, each state occupies a place that corresponds to its strength.²

At the same time, the strength of a state is determined by its economic and military potential, as well as allied relations with other states, and its authority in the international arena. The main mechanism that regulates relations between states in the international arena is the “balance of power” between blocs and alliances led by the most powerful states in the world. The centers of power maintain a balance in a certain dynamic equilibrium. Accordingly, war or active preparation for it is a consequence of imbalance.

As a result of the Russian invasion of the territory of the independent state of the region, we can predict changes in the geopolitical structure of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as changes in the world order. Today, we have an armed conflict in the heart of Europe – a conflict involving a nuclear power with the potential to spread to other countries, which risks undermining the entire system of geopolitical control and imbalance, with unpredictable consequences for human rights around the world. It is clear that if the West and Russia enter into a fierce confrontation, it could potentially lead to more parties interfering in regional conflicts around the world and more countries willing to use force in their foreign policy. That conflict has occurred because of three factors: the security dilemma, the impact of democratisation on geopolitics, and the incompatible goals of post-Cold War Europe according arguments of D’Anieri.³

A number of possible explanations have been offered as to the reason for the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, ranging from the increased autocratisation of the Russian regime⁴ to President Putin’s personal

² Татьяна Алексеева, Андрей Казанцев, *Внешинополитический процесс. Сравнительный анализ* (Москва: Аспект Пресс, 2012).

³ Paul D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilised Divorce to Uncivil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 292.

⁴ I. Daalder, “Vladimir Putin deepest fear is the freedom of Russia’s neighbours,” *Financial Times*, 18 I 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/6c0c9e21-0cf7-4732-a445-bc117fb5d6f8>, accessed on 6 II 2022; Robert Person, Michael McFaul, “What Putin fears most,” *Journal of Democracy* 33/2 (2022):

worldview⁵ to NATO enlargement and the shifting distribution of power in the international system.⁶

The Putin regime is increasingly drawing red lines, the crossing of which by the West will be seen as a threat to the national interests of the Russian Federation. Putin himself expects the West to make concessions regarding Ukraine, which will allow him to complete the project of returning the country to Russia's sphere of influence which began with the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of Donbass. The condition for Russia's continued dialogue is a guarantee that NATO will not expand to the east, a guarantee that is opposed by the EU, the United States and NATO. The escalation of Russia's demands poses a serious threat to security in the region, to which the countries of the Lublin Triangle, the most experienced and at the same time vulnerable to Russian aggression, are responding.

Analysis of the main trends in the current geopolitical situation shows that a new multipolar model of world order is being formed, within which new centers of power are emerging along with the United States, including China, the EU, India, Brazil, Russia and others. The interests of each of these countries do not coincide in the political, economic, security and other spheres, which leads to confrontation between them at the global and regional levels, with the concomitant results of increasing global instability, armed conflict or war. At the same time, there is a decrease in the effectiveness of leading international organisations and unions, including the UN and the OSCE, the Red Cross, the European Union, in the political settlement of existing security problems.⁷

Here it is important to understand the significance that the conflict is taking place in Central and Eastern Europe. I. Pilyaev argues that Central and Eastern Europe is not just a mechanical combination of Central and Eastern Europe, but a regional construct that has geographical, historical, ethnocultural, geostrategic identity and its specific features. Describing common trends and problems for the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe, the author notes that membership in the European Union is not a guarantee of obviating the systemic transformation crisis. Long-term interstate projects remain important for the region, which testify

18–27, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0015>, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/what-putin-fears-most/>, accessed on 6 V 2022.

⁵ Kadri Liik, "War of obsession: Why Putin is risking Russia's future," European Council on Foreign Relations, 25 I 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/war-of-obsession-why-putin-is-risking-russias-future/>, accessed on 6 II 2022; Igor Torbakov, "Putin's sick political imagination," *Eurozine*, 25 I 2022, <https://www.eurozine.com/putins-sick-political-imagination/>, accessed on 6 II 2022.

⁶ "John Mearsheimer on why the West is principally responsible for the Ukrainian crisis," *The Economist*, 19 I 2022, <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2022/03/11/john-mearsheimer-on-why-the-west-is-principally-responsible-for-the-ukrainian-crisis>, accessed on 6 II 2022; Stephen M. Walt, "Liberal Illusions Caused the Ukraine Crisis," *Foreign Policy*, 19 I 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/19/ukraine-russia-nato-crisis-liberal-illusions/>, accessed on 6 II 2022.

⁷ Ігор Піляєв, „Концепція регіону Центрально-Східної Європи: актуальний погляд,” *Актуальні проблеми міжнародних відносин* 116 (2013): 34–48.

to the existence of common strategic interests throughout the Central and Eastern European area. The scholar concludes that the idea of pan-European integration, which is already being implemented in the institutional format of the Council of Europe, will continue to stimulate the identification of Central and Eastern Europe, which is a key region in the Greater Europe project. Given today's changes, the words of the Belarusian historian Jaroslav Shimov have especial relevance: "In the foreseeable future Central Europe is included in the Western, Euro-Atlantic civilisation project, and its prospects are closely linked to the future of this project in which Ukraine plays a leading role."⁸

Causes of the situation

NATO's game with Russia was launched during the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit which took place on 2–4 April 2008.⁹ During the talks the Alliance stated that it welcomed the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia as expressed by their desire for membership in NATO. The Alliance has repeatedly stated its policy of open doors. However, Ukraine has not received a NATO Membership Action Plan. At the same time, promises of security guarantees for Ukraine's nuclear-free status by strong players in the world political arena have dissolved in the first weeks of Russia's military invasion of the sovereign state.

Before Russia invaded Ukraine, it invaded Georgia in 2008.¹⁰ Both countries are part of Russia's CIS – a newly independent state that was once part of the Soviet Union and is now Russia's neighbour. While the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008 disappeared from the headlines after the global recession, the geopolitical struggle that gave rise to it has not disappeared. Six years later, the specter of revanchist Russia returned when Putin's troops invaded and annexed the Crimean peninsula, once part of Russia but an internationally recognised part of Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The annexation of Crimea and the subsequent conflict in eastern Ukraine have created the biggest geopolitical crisis on the European continent since the end of the Cold War.¹¹

⁸ Ярослав Шимов, „Центральная Европа: небольшие народы в поисках 'большой родины',” *Неприкосновенный запас* 6/56 (2007), http://www.intelros.ru/readroom/nz/nz_56/1918-jaroslav-shimov.-centralnaja-evropa.html, accessed on 29 I 2022.

⁹ Володимир Головка, „Бухарестський саміт НАТО,” Website of the project: Цей день в історії, <https://www.jnsn.com.ua/h/0404Q>, accessed on 6 I 2022; „П'ять днів у серпні 2008 року: хроніка російсько-грузинської війни,” 7 I 2018, BBC News Україна, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-45102927>, accessed on 19 I 2022.

¹⁰ „П'ять днів у серпні 2008 року.”

¹¹ „Окупація та анексія Криму Росією,” Radio Liberty, 3 I 2021, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30451636.html>, accessed on 17 I 2022.

The main preconditions for the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, which escalated into Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, are the systemic crises of Russian statehood transformed by Russian politicians into attempts to restore the Russian Empire, expand control over part of the world and regain world hegemony lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the precipitous economic decline following it.¹² The key precondition for the conflict was the increasingly hostile policy of the Putinist Russian Federation towards Ukraine. This policy, given the content of Russian propaganda in the media, has become openly hostile in recent years, transforming from anti-Ukrainian propaganda to war propaganda. The aggressiveness of Russia's policy toward Ukraine was one of the first casualties on the Ukrainian side under the Russian-controlled Yanukovich regime.¹³ In order to counter the influence of Russian propaganda, in the summer of 2014, Ukraine's State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting began to counter separatist and anti-state materials in the media.

One of the aspects of Russia's preparation for aggression was the legal confrontation between Russia and Ukraine. Legal and illegal support for the confrontation on the part of Russia was carried out at the highest legislative levels by adopting certain resolutions on issues that from the point of view of Russian politics allowed the most effective means to help solve the problem of regaining control over Ukraine. The most well-developed of such issues were the legal status of Crimea,¹⁴ the level of Ukraine's cooperation with NATO and the status of the Russian language in Ukraine.¹⁵

The precondition for the beginning of the armed aggression against Ukraine was to bleed Ukraine economically by means of direct economic pressure through trade and tariff confrontations, blocking Ukrainian trade, blocking gas supplies, and more. At the same time, the economic warfare against Ukraine's often took place in the absence of effective opposition from Ukrainian politicians, and sometimes with their direct support. As an example, Yulia Tymoshenko's signing of a gas deal that was extremely unfavourable for Ukraine was presented as a significant political achievement of the Cabinet of Ministers that was headed by none other than Tymoshenko herself.¹⁶ The economic war against Ukraine was directed primarily

¹² "Україна готує заявку на вступ до Європейського Союзу," Financial Club (News), 28 I 2022, <https://finclub.net/ua/news/ukraina-hotuie-zaiavku-na-vstup-do-yevropeiskoho-soiuzu.html>, accessed on 6 II 2022.

¹³ Brit McCandless Farmer, Video Interview with Aleksandr Dugin, "The far-right theorist behind Putin's plan," 60 Minutes. CBS News, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/aleksandr-dugin-russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-60-minutes-2022-04-12>, accessed on 12 V 2022.

¹⁴ „Український історик розкрив правду про захоплення Криму: «результат компромісу»,» <https://politeka.net/uk/news/politics/929556-ukrainskij-istorik-raskryl-pravdu-o-zahvate-kryma-rezultat-kompromissa>, accessed on 12 V 2022.

¹⁵ „В яких регіонах і коли через суд скасували статус російської мови,” Слово і Діло, 31 V 2021, www.slovoidilo.ua/2021/05/31/infografika/suspilstvo/yakyyh-rehionax-koly-cherez-sud-skasuvaly-status-rosijskoyi-movy, accessed on 15 V 2022.

¹⁶ „Газова угода Тимошенко-Путіна. Повний текст,” Економічна правда, 22 I 2009, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/publications/2009/01/22/178512/>, accessed on 14 I 2022.

against the economies of eastern and southern Ukraine, which due to certain features depended on the Russian Federation, in particular as recipients of raw materials and energy from Russia and as a market for a significant share of Russian products. Much of the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine, the strong influence of the Russian media and the Russian church, and the hybrid nature of Russia's war against Ukraine have led to the Russian Orthodox Church's direct and indirect involvement in armed aggression against Ukraine. Among the indirect involvement of the ROC in the aggression against Ukraine is the message of Moscow Patriarch Kirill to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, in which Patriarch Kirill stated that since Maidan, "schismatics" (i.e., UOC-KP) and Uniates "openly called for the eradication of Ukraine" and "with the start of hostilities, Uniates and schismatics, having received weapons, under the guise of an anti-terrorist operation began to carry out direct aggression against the clergy of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the east." In addition to the indirect involvement of the church, the facts of its direct participation in the aggression were also recorded. In particular, it was found that some terrorist groups in Russia were concentrated in churches, and some "holy fathers" were directly involved in hostilities against Ukraine.¹⁷

The war in eastern Ukraine (Donbas) since April 2014, began with the creation of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics" under the guise of "people's" speeches by the Russian special services.

On 17 March 2014, in Ukraine for the first time mobilisation was announced by the decree of the acting President of Ukraine Oleksandr V. Turchynov.¹⁸ On 21 March, the Russian Federation Council passed a law ratifying the 18 March Treaty and a law establishing new subjects of the federation, the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol, consolidating Russia's annexation of these regions. The response of the Ukrainian side was the anti-terrorist operation (13 April–20 June 2014). Between 12 and 14 April, terrorists seized a number of administrative buildings in the cities of the Donetsk region: Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, Artemivsk, Lyman, Druzhkivka, Yenakiyevo, Makeyevka, Mariupol, Horlivka, Khartsyzsk, Zhdanovka and Kirovske.¹⁹ From 16 April to 1 May 2014, DNR terrorists seized 7 Ukrainian cities.²⁰ On 28 April 2014, in Luhansk, separatists

¹⁷ Марічка Набока, "У Криму й на Донбасі переслідують всіх вірян, окрім УПЦ (МП) – правозахисники," Radio Liberty, 26 I 2014, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26710902.html>, accessed on 10 I 2022.

¹⁸ Указ Президента України Про часткову мобілізацію, 17 I 2014, Указ затверджено Законом, по. 1126-VII від 17 III 2014, БВР, 2014, no. 15, ст. 328, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/303/2014#Text>, accessed on 11 I 2022.

¹⁹ Новоросси́я: оперативная сводка за 15 июля 2014 года, Военный обозреватель, <https://warfiles.ru/64044-novorossiya-operativnaya-svodka-za-15-iyulya-2014-goda.html>, accessed on 7 I 2022.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

announced the creation of the Luhansk People's Republic, and began seizing administrative buildings in the Luhansk region. Between 28 April and 2 May 2014, 8 more cities were captured.²¹ On 11 May 2014, pseudo-referenda were held on the independence of the DPR and LPR. According to them, 89.07% and 96.2% voted for independence, respectively.²² On 22 May, an anti-terrorist operation (ATO) camp near Volnovakha was attacked, separatists struck an unexpected blow against the Ukrainian army at night, and 18 servicemen were killed.²³ On 26 May, the battle for Donetsk airport took place. It was the first large-scale successful operation of the ATO forces, with the help of aircraft and ground military operations, up to 300 separatists were killed, while the Ukrainian army suffered no losses. Preparations for the armistice began on 19 June 2014, and by that evening the main anti-terrorist operation forces had been successfully placed under the control of the Donbass.²⁴ These events soon became one of the reasons for concluding the Minsk agreements on 5 September 2014 and to introduce a temporary ceasefire at the front and to initiate the process of a political settlement. However, this did not stop Russia's military intervention in the affairs of sovereign Ukraine through Russia's Novorossiia pocket project.²⁵ According to the UN, the total number of Ukrainian casualties as of January 2021 was 13,100–13,300. This includes 3,375 civilian casualties, approximately 4,150 Ukrainian military casualties, and approximately 5,700 pro-Russian militants. Almost 1.8 million people have become Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs.²⁶ Russia occupied more than 7% of Ukraine's territory.²⁷

Airspace violations, incidents at sea, military exercises and the hysteria of hybrid warfare have fueled tensions in the region. After Crimea, NATO has strengthened

²¹ Антитерористична операція на Донбасі: хроніка за 1–31 травня, Liha, http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/1596426-vtorzhenie_v_ukrainu_poslednie_sobytiya_v_donbasse_i_krymu.htm, accessed on 7 I 2022.

²² Сепаратисти оголосили остаточні результати „референдуму”: За ДНР проголосувало 89%, Internet Site: Espresso, https://espreso.tv/news/2014/05/12/za_nezalezhnist_dnr_na_psevdoreferendumi_proholosuvalo_89_yavka_7487, accessed on 12 I 2022.

²³ Силы АТО понесли большие потери: фото и видео из Волновихи, Liha, https://news.liga.net/politics/photo/natsgvardiya_ponesla_bolshie_poteri_foto_i_video_iz_volnovakhi, accessed on 14 I 2022.

²⁴ Турчинов каже, що кордон з Росією «фактично» закритий, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-other_news/1676368-turchinov_kage_shcho_kordon_faktichno_zakritiy_1948413.html, accessed on 7 I 2022.

²⁵ “Повний текст документів, ухвалених на переговорах в Мінську,” Тиждень.ua, 12 I 2015, <https://tyzhden.ua/Politics/129751>, accessed on 6 I 2022; “ООН підрахувала кількість жертв бойових дій на Донбасі,” Radio Svoboda, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-oon-kst-gertv-boyovyh-donbas/31110937.html>, 19 II 2021, accessed on 29 XII 2022.

²⁶ ООН підрахувала кількість жертв бойових дій на Донбасі, починаючи з 2014 року, News website: Radio Swoboda, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-un-donbas-vtraty-gertvy/31359458.html>, accessed on 10 I 2022.

²⁷ Президент: Росія окупувала 7% території України, Ukrinform.ua, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/2644798-rosia-okupuvala-7-teritorii-ukraini-prezident.html>, accessed on 11 I 2022.

its ability to respond to possible Russian encroachment on the Baltic States.²⁸ The Obama administration's European initiative was launched in June 2014 with a budget of \$1 billion for training. In a speech in Riga in September 2014, President Obama said: "We will be here for the sake of Estonia."²⁹

On 24 February 2022, at 5 o'clock in the morning, Vladimir Putin officially announced a "special operation" in Ukraine; in fact, it was the beginning of a very common invasion of a sovereign state.³⁰ Ukrainian Armed Forces units in the east came under intense artillery shelling and airfields and weapons depots throughout Ukraine underwent rocket and aerial bombing attacks as Russian troops began crossing the northeastern border. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which began after a long military build-up and Russia's recognition of the terrorist quasi-states DPR and LPR as state entities brought changes to the Ukrainian and world political map.

The DPR and LPR are completely dependent on financial and logistical assistance from the Russian Federation, which is carried out to ensure the occupation regime, maintaining the minimum necessary social standard of living in the "republics" and linking the region to Russia. The DPR and LPR, which are not recognised by any country in the world, can count only on Russian support, which determines their complete dependence upon and control by Moscow. In the occupied territories, both Soviet ideology and the symbols and concepts of the "Russian world" are actively used to propagandise the population. On the other hand, with the help of local mass media, a pro-Russian education system, and the "cultural intervention" by the Russian Federation, a negative image of the Ukrainian government is rooted in the public consciousness, and socio-cultural and psychological alienation from Ukraine is cultivated.³¹

Changing the political situation in Europe

The new strategic reality in Europe come of the war between Russia and Ukraine will have far-reaching consequences for the Western Balkans region, which is only partially integrated into Euro-Atlantic political and security structures.

Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine affects the security situation in the Western Balkans, especially with regard to non-NATO and/or EU member

²⁸ „Україна в безпековій політиці США». Аналітична записка, National Institute for Strategic Studies, 15 I 2017, <https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/nacionalna-bezpeka/ukraina-v-bezpekovi-politici-ssha-analitichna-zapiska>, accessed on 11 I 2022.

²⁹ Маргарита Лимар, „Європейський вектор зовнішньої політики адміністрації Б. Обами,” *Грані* 8 (2014): 131–137.

³⁰ „Війна Росії проти України. Відсіч. Усі новини на цей час,” Radio Liberty, 24 I 2022, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/rosiya-ukrayina-zahroza-viyny/31703318.html>, accessed on 14 II 2022.

³¹ „Путин заявил о праве ДНР и ЛНР на суверенитет после прецедента Косово,” Interfax News Agency, 26 V 2022, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/838091>, accessed on 6 VI 2022.

states. Russia's strong political and economic influence in the region deepens differences between the "pro-Russian camp" of Serbia and Republic Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the rest of the region, fueling political tensions.

The war in Ukraine could be a powerful impetus for the resumption of the European Union's enlargement process, ending a twenty-year delay in the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. The dynamics of regional security are prompting the EU to take an active part in resuming dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo and in resolving the issue of preserving the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Serbia is still Russia's main partner in the region. The pro-Russian policies of President A. Vucic and the Serbian Progressive Party have broad public support. Given growing regional instability, the West is likely to increase pressure on the Serbian government to choose between EU membership and support for Russian interests. As compensation, Serbia can be given attractive terms and accelerated accession to the EU, the provision of certain guarantees for energy supplies, other political and economic preferences.³²

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused a humanitarian catastrophe," said an IMF report on the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine for Europe. Russia's war has already led to higher prices and broken supply chains. The so-called "energy inflation," due to rising energy prices, will inevitably affect the wallets of every European family. "This war will have serious economic consequences for Europe, especially given that it began when the pandemic crisis was not over," the IMF said. Particularly negative consequences for the IMF are expected from the cessation of supplies of Russian energy to Europe, and the most vulnerable to this are the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. For example, for Poland, which has received the largest number of refugees from Ukraine, support could amount to 0.5–1% of the country's GDP, depending on how intense the influx of refugees will be in the future.³³ Since February 24 no dilemmas have arisen in Poland: Warsaw immediately declared its assistance to Kyiv. First, it was about the reception of Ukrainians fleeing the war, and secondly about providing humanitarian, financial and military assistance to our country. In addition, Poland has become a hub through which the vast majority of foreign humanitarian aid arrives in Ukraine.

Poland is aware that large-scale assistance to Ukraine is in the national interests of the country. If Ukraine loses its independence, Russia's next goals will be the Baltic States and Poland. Warsaw has no illusions about this. Recently, the Polish law "On Defense of the Fatherland" came into force, which, in particular, provides for doubling the army to 300 thousand troops and increasing defense spending from 2% to 3% of GDP. According to this indicator, Poland, along with Greece and the United

³² Serbia will denounce Russia if Zelenskiy condemns NATO's 1999 bombing, Euractiv, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/serbia-will-denounce-russia-if-zelenskiy-condemns-natos-1999-bombing, accessed on 25 I 2022.

³³ Анастасія Зануда, «Як вторгнення Росії обвалить бюджет України та вдарить по економіці Європи – прогнози МВФ», BBC News Україна, 22 V 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-61190565>, accessed on 6 VI 2022.

States, will be among the three NATO countries that spend the most on their own budgets for defense.³⁴

Belarus is playing a double game. Since the beginning of the large-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia has used the territory of Belarus as a springboard for the attack on Ukraine. Alexander Lukashenko, the self-proclaimed President of Belarus, said on 24 February 2022 that Belarusian troops were not taking part in the war, but "if necessary, they will be."³⁵

On 3 March 2022, Alexander Lukashenko said that they wanted to "push Belarus into the war in Ukraine" and stressed that Belarusians would fight only on their own land. According to him, "The war between Belarus and Ukraine is needed by the enemies to expose other borders of Belarus, but he [broke] this plan."³⁶

On 25 March 2022, the Belarusian Volunteer Battalion named after Kastus Kalinowski took the oath and joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine.³⁷

Baltic leaders say there is no immediate military threat to them. However, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have joined calls to invoke the fourth article of the NATO agreement to launch consultations in the face of "threats to integrity and security".³⁸ "The situation may change at any moment," Latvian MP Ainar Latkovskis told the BBC. "This potential threat stems from the fact that our neighbour is an aggressor country that attacked another country, and this other country, although not a member of NATO, is close by."³⁹

Prospects for the development of the situation

The emerging situation prompted the countries of Eastern Europe, both inside and out of NATO and the EU to undertake serious discussions about reviving

³⁴ "Найближча Україні не лише на карті: як Польща приймає біженців," Ukrinform, 23 I 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3437686-najblizca-ukraini-ne-lise-na-karti-ak-polsa-prijmae-bizenciv.html>, accessed on 6 II 2022.

³⁵ Лукашенко: белорусские войска не принимают никакого участия в российской спецоперации в Донбассе, Belta, <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-belorusskie-vojska-ne-prinimajut-nikakogo-uchastija-v-rossijskoj-spetsoperatsii-v-donbasse-486648-2022>, accessed on 17 I 2022.

³⁶ Лукашенко: нас хочуть заштовхати у війну з Україною, News webcite: Unian, <https://www.unian.ua/world/lukashenko-nas-hochut-zashtovhati-u-viynu-z-ukrajinoju-novini-svitu-11727079.html>, accessed on 15 I 2022.

³⁷ Білоруський батальйон увійшов до складу Збройних сил (video), News webcite: Unian, <https://www.unian.ua/war/biloruskiy-batalyon-sklav-prisyagu-i-uvijshov-do-skladu-zsu-video-novini-vtorgnennya-rosiji-v-ukrajinu-11760109.html>, accessed on 16 I 2022.

³⁸ Країни Балтії готуються до збройного конфлікту з Росією. Наскільки він реальний?, BBC News Україна, 25 I 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-60524745>, accessed on 6 II 2022.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

the 20th-century project known as Intermarium. The goal of this project would be collectively to increase the region's security and, most importantly, "improve the balance of power against Russia".⁴⁰ If all the nations in the region cooperated under this common objective, they would not need to expand NATO further eastward nor add members to the European Union. Intermarium in the 21st century would function as an independent project and, with time, prove itself to be a leader on the international stage.

Analysis of current trends in the current geopolitical situation shows that a new multipolar model of world order is being formed. The interests of each of these countries do not coincide in the political, economic, security and other spheres, which leads to confrontation between them at the global and regional levels, bringing with it increased global instability and elevated potential for armed conflict. or war. Today, the world is witnessing a clash of worlds, where Ukraine is defending its integrity and the peace that is under threat in Europe. It is on a "cultural rift" and performs its defensive function.

It was hoped that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Soviet Eastern bloc would lead to a more united Europe. However, neither the EU nor NATO has decided to include Russia in its enlargement plans. The result is a gray geopolitical zone between Western organisations on the one hand and the space dominated by Russia, on the other. The security of "gray countries" such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan and others depended on which side decided to cooperate with them. This model of switching between East and West proved to be very unstable, as it did not help solve the Transnistrian problem in eastern Moldova or the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in southwestern Azerbaijan,⁴¹ and was jolted by the Russian-Georgian war in 2008.⁴² Finally, in 2014, the Russian annexation of Crimea proved to be the "last straw," and the countries of the region knew they could not for long continue to live in this uncertainty.

The 20th-century project known as the Intermarium was now on the table, with its aim to jointly increase the security of the region, in particular by addressing the balance of power against Russia. If all countries in the region cooperated within this common goal, neither the EU nor NATO would need to expand to the east. Moscow's national security establishment regarded Ukraine's move toward the West as a major threat to both Russia's security interests and its status as a great power.⁴³

⁴⁰ Agnes Tycner, „Intermarium in the 21st Century,” The Institute of World Politics, 23 I 2020, <https://www.iwp.edu/articles/2020/12/23/intermarium-in-the-21st-century>, accessed on 11 I 2022.

⁴¹ „Конфлікт в Нагірному Карабасі: причини розгортання та ескалації,” Center for Security Studies (CENSS), 6 I 2021, <https://censs.org/Конфлікт-в-Нагірному-Карабасі-причини/>, accessed on 6 I 2022.

⁴² Віталій Червоненко, „Війна Росії з Грузією: невивчені уроки для України,” BBC News Україна, 8 I 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-45062473>, accessed on 13 I 2022.

⁴³ Elias Götz, Jorgen Staun, “Why Russia attacked Ukraine: Strategic culture and radicalised narratives,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 43/3 (2022): 482-497, doi: 10.1080/13523260.2022.2082633.

In the past there have been several attempts by NATO and the EU to prevent the division of Europe; however, none of their initiatives were successful. The reality is that these institutions will not be able to provide the post-Soviet zone of Eastern Europe with the necessary security. It has been proved that both organisations have demonstrated their inadequacy as strategically-minded geopolitically determined actors.⁴⁴ As a result, Intermarium was discussed as a viable alternative to Western organisations.

For example, if a Mediterranean Fleet under the auspices of Intermarium were created today, Ukraine would have priority. Next on the list will be Poland, the original creator of this Slavic union. Poland faces the threat of Kaliningrad in the north, and would not like Russia on its southern border if Ukraine is captured. In addition, the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary are also likely to follow suit, as the people of these countries are aware of the threat in the long run. Also to be considered in this case are the Nordic countries and the eventual accession to NATO of countries such as Sweden and Finland, which share security concerns about Russia. It is unclear at this time which countries will eventually join, but it would be worth keeping the door open to the Slavic states in the Western Balkans, as well as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The only real ambiguity in the region concerns Belarus. It is in the interests of Belarus' neighbours to help liberate the country peacefully from Russian influence, although it is closely intertwined with Russia politically, economically and culturally. But we must not forget how Belarusians died on the Maidan and in the war in Donbass, fighting for Ukrainian freedom – and ultimately for the freedom of Europe⁴⁵ – so this country cannot be ignored.

It should also be noted that no "successor state" within the former Soviet bloc can by itself successfully oppose Moscow. Therefore, only when these nations reject their differences will the proposed Mediterranean Fleet have a chance to come into being in the 21st century.

The question is, would Intermarium be relevant or needed in the 21st century? In fact, the project was largely forgotten until 2014, when Russia invaded Crimea and Ukraine was left to defend itself, to fight on its own. Uniting against Russian aggression and increasing overall security in Eastern / Central Europe would be the driving force behind this project today. Ukraine had to look for new alternatives to strengthen its army and security. Europe, in turn, faced the need to create an instrument to protect its borders.

Milan Kundera emphasised that Central Europe is a territory without established borders: "We would try in vain to clearly define them, because Central

⁴⁴ „НАТО 2020: упевненість у безпеці; динамічні підходи,” NATO Website, 17 V 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/official_texts_63654.htm?selectedLocale=uk, accessed on 6 I 2022.

⁴⁵ Серж Харитонов, „Як смерть білоруського героя Небесної сотні змінила долю його сім'ї,” 22 I 2019, Radio Liberty, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29639554.html>, accessed on 6 I 2022.

Europe is not a state, but a culture, a destiny. Its borders are imaginary and have to be delineated each time in a new way, based on a new historical situation.”⁴⁶ According to Kundera, Central Europe is a polycentric space: “It is a part of the Latin West that came under Russian rule; this is the part that is geographically located in the center, culturally in the west and politically in the east.”⁴⁷ A similar view is substantiated by the Ukrainian researcher Pilyaev. According to him, the region of Central and Eastern Europe consists of non-Balkan countries with a predominantly European population, which is now united by European institutional formats. The Visegrad countries and Slovenia meet this criterion, as well as the countries that have long been part of the Russian Empire and the USSR (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Moldova). A group of French and Polish historians, authors of the collective monograph “History of Central and Eastern Europe” extend this concept to a region that includes Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria, Belarus, Serbia, Estonia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia, Montenegro and Croatia.⁴⁸ The reaction of the Lublin Triangle to the situation around Ukraine should also be taken into account. Given the intensification of Russia’s efforts to destabilise the region, Poland and Lithuania are also not indifferent, which together with Ukraine form the Lublin Triangle in 2020.⁴⁹

One of the goals of the Triangle is cooperation for security in the region. Lithuania and Poland support Ukraine in developing mechanisms to counter Russian aggression (military cooperation, humanitarian support, training of soldiers, support for reforms of Ukrainian armed forces in accordance with NATO standards, countering Nord Stream II), as well as consolidating multilateral efforts (as EU members) for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within internationally recognised borders. The most important negotiations within the framework of the Lublin Triangle⁵⁰ took place during the first summit of the respective presidents on 20 December 2021 in Guta, Ukraine. The presidents of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine discussed the rising tensions with Russia. During a press conference, Gitanas Nausėda called for a stronger military presence on NATO’s eastern flank, noting that Ukraine’s security cannot be viewed in isolation from the Baltic states. Therefore, the response to threats must be regional. Volodymyr

⁴⁶ Milan Kundera, *The Tragedy of Central Europe*, *The New York Review of Books*, 26 V 1984: 33, https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2016/MEB404/um/Kundera_1984.pdf, accessed on 11 I 2022.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ Marta Drabczuk, „Trójkąt Lubelski – perspektywy współpracy polsko-litewsko-ukraińskiej,” *Komentarze Instytutu Europy Środkowej*, 13 I 2020, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/trojkat-lubelski-perspektywy-wspolpracy-polsko-litewsko-ukrainskiej>, accessed on 6 I 2022.

⁵⁰ Мирослав Ліскович, “‘Люблінський трикутник’: з Путіним треба не розмовляти, його треба стримувати,” *Ukrinform*, 21 I 2021, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3373335-lublinskij-trikutnik-z-putinim-treba-ne-rozmovlati-jogo-treba-strimuvati.html>, accessed on 6 I 2022.

Zelensky stressed that the unity of positions of all three countries on the challenges facing Central and Eastern Europe shows that the Lublin Triangle is a dynamic entity in the international arena, not a passive object of action.

The meeting in Guta was also an opportunity to emphasise that Poland and Lithuania support Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic and European integration, which Russia opposes, and to take into account Ukraine's dissatisfaction with the results of negotiations at the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels.⁵¹ During the summit, EU representatives, as well as the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission, met with the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Associated Trio. President Zelensky stressed Ukraine's disappointment with the Eastern Partnership formula and the lack of impetus to change it, given Ukraine's desire to play the role of a leader in the transformation within the region.

During the summit, Zelensky met with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. It was agreed, in particular, to continue the dialogue with Russia in the Normandy format. However, Zelensky pointed to the possibility of peace talks in the US-Russia-Ukraine configuration, as well as direct talks with Putin. He called on France and Germany to put pressure on Russia to cease fire in Donbass and exchange prisoners, and to impose sanctions before Putin decides to intervene. However, today we have an open Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, where France and Germany are on the sidelines, and NATO has not "closed the sky" over Ukraine.

Under such conditions, the issue of creating the Intermarium group becomes relevant. This group that is separate from the NATO alliance and will pay more attention to the concerns of Intermarium members.⁵² This is not to blame NATO's Western allies; this is just to emphasise the fact that Central / Eastern European countries share concerns that are not a priority for other NATO members.

Another factor to consider is that "those closest to Russia are more concerned than those next."⁵³ Of course, this is to be expected; however, all Central European nations were "subject to Russian rule" and therefore cautious about Russia's movements. For the eastern countries of Ukraine, Poland, the Baltics, Romania, and Moldova, Russia has become a major and existential threat.

After Russia's invasion, several EU countries called for Ukraine's membership, and Slovakia proposed a special procedure for Ukraine's accession to the EU. The day before, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that she considered Ukraine "one of us" and wanted to see it in the EU. Nevertheless,

⁵¹ Юрій Шейко, „Східне партнерство - курс на безпеку й вирішення конфліктів,” Deutsche Welle, 20 I 2022, <https://www.dw.com/uk/skhidne-partnerstvo-bere-kurs-na-bezpeku-ta-vyrishennia-konfliktiv/a-60144662>, accessed on 6 II 2022.

⁵² *Ibidem.*

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

she did not specify Ukraine's chances of joining the EU, especially under the accelerated program.⁵⁴

The battle for Ukraine is not just another regional war; it is a rupture of Russia–West relations that will have profound consequences for Europe and the world. In this regard, the EIU recently published a noteworthy analytical study, “Ten Ways the War in Ukraine Will Change the World,” which analysed ten assumptions about how the war could affect the global balance of power.⁵⁵ Russia's war in Ukraine will lead to a new division of Europe. Russia's military invasion aims to destroy Ukraine's sovereignty and prevent it from joining NATO or the EU.

Conclusion

The main goal of this situation is building the new system of collective security by many Central and Eastern European countries situated between two major geopolitical forces.

Russia intends to annex part of Ukraine, thus creating buffer zone between Russia and the West, which includes Belarus, Kazakhstan and for a short time Georgia. The war in Ukraine will accelerate the global arms race and the arms race in the Eastern European region especially.

The course of the war, in accordance with its duration and course, between Russia and Ukraine suggests that Russia will wage a war of attrition with Ukraine. Most Ukrainians are well aware that Russia will continue to pose an existential threat to their nation for decades come. That's why the international community needs to understand the long-term nature of the struggle ahead. Most analytics agree that Putin can't realise his plan of extinguishing Ukrainian independence and establishing a puppet regime in Kyiv. Most observers are now predicting either a prolonged stalemate or a Ukrainian victory. However, what would constitute victory for Ukraine?

It is mean the return of all occupied territories. Following a string of stunning counteroffensive advances in September and October, a lot of Ukrainian citizens believe that Ukraine could push Russia back to the front lines of February 24 by the end of this year and return the rest of the country to Ukrainian control by the middle of 2023.

⁵⁴ „Україна готує заявку на вступ до Європейського Союзу,” Financial Club, 28 I 2022, <https://finclub.net/ua/news/ukraina-hotuie-zaiavku-na-vstup-do-yevropeiskoho-soiuzu.html>, accessed on 14 II 2022.

⁵⁵ Report of *The Economist* (analysis division), “Ten ways the war in Ukraine will change the world Russia's invasion marks a defining moment in the reshaping of the geopolitical order,” <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/ten-ways-the-war-in-ukraine-will-change-the-world/>, accessed on 6 I 2022.

The macroeconomic risks are increasing, as well as threats to food security in countries of Western and Eastern Europe, primarily due to the growth of inflation, the formation of a shortage of energy resources and food, and an increase in their cost. The war increased risks in the field of energy security for the countries of the European Union and other states. The Russian Federation is one of the most important suppliers of natural gas to the world market. Under these conditions, it's important for Ukraine to continue to strengthen its defense and security potential and national resilience, including by joining efforts at the state and international levels to counter Russian aggression.