SISEKAITSEAKADEEMIA
Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

SECURITY SPECTRUM:

Journal of Advanced Security Research

NEW CHALLENGES FOR INTERNAL SECURITY DUE TO THE WAR ON UKRAINE

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FOREWORD

Raul Savimaa, Editor-in-chief
Triin Rätsepp, Executive editor

Our research journal has undergone a significant change with this issue. To reflect the content of the journal and more explicitly express the focus and variety of research results, presented in this journal, the new name of the journal as from this issue is "Security Spectrum: Journal of Advanced Security Research". We focus on global and regional security issues and emerging topics and their implications to various levels and aspects of societies globally as well as in more detail in Europe. The specific focus is on the reflection of emerging global security issues to internal security and public safety.

However, to express continuity, we maintain the numbering of the volumes from the previous name (the Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences) and therefore, you are holding the 22nd volume of the journal. This issue is titled **"New Challenges for Internal Security due to the War on Ukraine"** It reflects the current security problem on all levels of societies for European countries and causes important changes worldwide. It consists of six articles that study the phenomenon from different viewpoints – global trends, international aspects and local reflections in different countries.

The global security background for the current journal volume has evolved since last year. The COVID-19 disease still emerges intermittently and seasonally, taking new forms. However, it's currently viewed as an additional but not the primary player in the security and safety theatre. Simultaneously, the large-scale conventional war in Ukraine continues. Besides direct security threats, it also affects various aspects of societal performance in Europe. For example, regarding the refugees who have left Ukraine and at least temporarily, have found shelter in other countries. The turbulence in various world regions and security threats is further exemplified by recent terroristic attacks from Hamas in

Israel and different responses in various countries to the consequences of these events.

Simultaneously, security threats in other areas persist. The war in Ukraine increases the threat of illegal trafficking of firearms. Climate changes increase the implications of climate migration as well as disinformation about sustainability actions and innovations and related economic crimes. After the reduction of the COVID-19 pandemic, illegally mediated migration to Europe and other regions has again increased.

These global and regional security trends and events indicate the intense relationships between different security events and their implications for societies. As one solution for global and community sustainability, it emphasises the need for increasing resilience at individual, family, community and societal levels. Simultaneously, at the country/state level, it increases the importance of a systemic approach to security and its risks to manage threats, awareness of the emergence and handling of misinformation and elaboration of solutions for supporting societal sustainability.

The current 22nd volume of *Security Spectrum: Journal of Advanced Security Research*, formerly known as *Proceedings of EASS*, consists of different interdisciplinary studies. It begins with an article on **the perception of police messages in Estonian and Russian language communities in Estonia during times of crisis**. Conducted by **Elen Laanemaa**, **Aida Hatšaturjan**, **Marju Taukar**, **Kerli Linnat** and **Veronika Ehrenbusch**, this research aims to delve into an in-depth analysis of how messages from the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board are received and interpreted, with a specific focus on the Estonian and Russian-speaking communities. By comparing comprehension and perception interpretation within these language groups, valuable insights can be gained to develop more effective public awareness campaigns. Spanning from September 2022 to April 2023, the study provides significant findings that can inform the design of campaigns, ensuring universal understanding across Estonia's two largest language communities. The results of this study may be of interest to law enforcement agencies not only in Estonia and also in other countries, aiding in the correction and improvement of communication strategies of law enforcement

agencies with multicultural populations and ensuring effective public notification.

In her publication, **Oksana Belova-Dalton** examines **Putin's regime as an aggressor in the current war with Ukraine**, employing Cassam's (2022) framework of extremism in terms of being an ideological extremist, methods extremist and importantly, having an extremist mindset. Her article offers insights into how Putin's regime's extremism serves as the foundation for securitising the invasion of Ukraine, framing its offensive as a counterterrorism measure through acts of terrorism. On the empirical level, an analysis of Russian MFA's statements is conducted, utilising Fairclough's (2003) CDA tool known as *assumptions* to detect both explicit and implicit processes of meaning-making, demonstrating how the extremist features of Putin's regime's underlie its securitisation of the war in Ukraine as a counterterrorism offensive.

The third publication of this issue is written by **Leonardo Sánchez Peláez**, who analyses the **internal security challenges within the EU after the Russian invasion of Ukraine**. The Russian invasion represents the most serious challenge the European Union has confronted since its foundation, with a profound implication for its security. The initial and unmistakable consequence of the European Union's internal security was the refugee crisis, yet it just one among many challenges in typical crises fashion, the European Union reacted promptly, showing unity and robustness, since no single Member State can face all the potential threats alone. Trafficking in human beings, firearms smuggling, organised crime, terrorism, public disorders or hybrid actions are just some examples of dangers that the conflict would bring to or intensify in a region without internal borders, like the European Union, where the threat to one Member State could become a threat for the entire European Union. Not all the threats were felt simultaneously and with a similar influence. While the impact of some threats was more limited than expected, a worse scenario cannot be ruled out. The European Union should adapt its response and be ready to counter and neutralise all possible threats to its internal security, a challenge that will persist long after the conclusion of the war.

The following fourth article concerns **security problems caused to the Republic of Lithuania by the Ukrainian war and Belorussian hybrid**

attacks. The author, **Gediminas Buciunas**, argues that the Russian invasion has brought new challenges for the national security of the Republic of Lithuania and other countries in predicting the next steps of the Russian Federation. Another significant event impacting the national security of the Baltic States is the fraudulent election of 2020 in Belarus and the ensuing migration crisis. These two events are closely intertwined and will be analysed together in his publication. The above-mentioned events are different in essence. Despite that, they serve as entry points for examining threats and challenges to national security, namely for the Republic of Lithuania from the Russian Federation perspective and Russia's closest ally in the war against Ukraine – the Republic of Belorussia.

In his article, **Märt Läänemets** explores **China's interests to be involved in the Ukrainian peace process**, examining two main aspects. Firstly, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership as the context for China's attempts and involvement and secondly, China's potential gain from the war in Ukraine. Märt argues that, from China's perspective, the primary concern is not achieving peace in Ukraine itself but rather maintaining and strengthening its strategic and geopolitical position by actively playing a role in this process. Russia's defeat in the war is not in China's interest and therefore China is trying to shape the peace process in Ukraine to maintain a status quo in Ukraine while ensuring Russia's control over the occupied territories.

Lastly, in the sixth article, **Jüri Saar** analyses how **the meaning of corruption has changed in today's rapidly developing security environment when corruption, as a type of crime, has increasingly become a hybrid weapon**. An immanent feature of today's world is the intense strategic competition, marked by the weaponization of diverse elements such as energy, investment, information, migration flows, data, crime, disease, etc. In this competitive environment, transnational organised crime groups find a new role for, presenting advantages for both criminals and authoritarian states. As a non-democratic, totalitarian state, Russia exercises control and collaboration with Russian-based organised criminal groups. Corruption, in this scenario, becomes a means of influence through which organised crime infiltrates various levels of foreign states' administration. The article endeavours to assess the specific threat posed by corruption emanating from Russia and aimed at Western states.

The author attempts to explain why a low resistance to corruption can be a weakness for the West, where the ability to resist is at its weakest.

The editorial team of the **Security Spectrum: Journal of Advanced Security Research** extends it best wishes to the readers of this updated 22nd issue of the magazine. May you find a meaningful reading experience within its pages and gain a wealth of new knowledge.

THE PERCEPTION OF POLICE MESSAGES IN ESTONIAN AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES IN ESTONIA DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

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Keywords: crises, public awareness, mass media, police messages, Estonian language community, Russian language community

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ABSTRACT

Two major crises, the COVID-19 crisis of 2019-2021 and the subsequent Ukraine conflict that began in 2022, have had a significant impact on the global political and social landscape. These crises necessitated the implementation of new rules and restrictions, which were communicated to the public through government orders and media channels. However, it became evident that there were divergent understandings and attitudes towards these measures within Estonian society. This highlights the importance of enhancing public awareness and responsiveness during crises. This research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of how messages from the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board are received and interpreted, specifically targeting the Estonian and Russian-speaking communities. By comparing comprehension and interpretation of messages among these language groups, valuable insights can be gained for the development of more effective public awareness campaigns. The study was conducted between September 2022 and April 2023, yielding significant findings that can guide the design of campaigns to ensure universal understanding across Estonia's two largest language communities. The results of this study may be of interest to law enforcement agencies in Estonia and other countries, as they can provide valuable insights for correcting and improving the communication strategies of law enforcement agencies when interacting with multicultural populations and ensuring effective public notifications.

ABBREVIATIONS

PBGB Police and Border Guard Board (in Estonian: *Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet* or *PPA*).

ET Readers of PBGB informational texts in the Estonian language version.

RU Readers of PBGB informational texts in the Russian language version.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis between 2019 and 2021 had a profound impact on our society, ushering in new rules and restrictions implemented through government orders and primarily communicated to the public via the media. During this crisis, it became evident that there were differing understandings and attitudes towards these new rules within Estonian society (see, for example, Tiit, Makarova, 2020). Furthermore, the war that began in Ukraine in 2022 has further influenced the global political and social situation. Based on the experiences from these significant crises, an important question arises: how can public awareness be increased and responsiveness strengthened for future crises? The Internal Security Development Plan 2020-2030 of the Estonian Republic also emphasises the importance of enhancing awareness and bolstering societal responsiveness (Internal Security Development Plan 2020-2030).

The objective of this study is to assess how the Police and Border Guard Board PBGB), as the authority responsible for ensuring internal security in Estonia, is perceived by representatives of the two largest language communities through their communication of informational texts with the public. Although the specific texts studied are not directly related to COVID or the war in Ukraine, they nevertheless enable us to examine whether and how the messages are perceived and considered by the audience. The aim is to propose improvements to enhance the awareness and preparedness of Estonian residents handling potential crises.

This study is based on the hypothesis that messages conveyed in different languages are perceived differently. The primary research question was, therefore, how the Estonian and Russian-speaking target communities perceive the informational texts from the Estonian Police, considering possible power dynamics detected within them. The purpose of this research was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how messages conveyed in different languages are received and whether there are variations in understanding and interpretation between the Estonian and Russian-speaking target groups. The findings of the study offer insights into the understanding and comprehension of police messages among various societal groups. They also provide us with a valuable foundation for designing and tailoring public awareness campaigns to ensure that the messages are universally understood across all language

communities. The study was conducted between September 2022 and April 2023.

1. COMMUNICATION POLICY OF THE ESTONIAN POLICE AND BORDER GUARD BOARD

The Estonian Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB) follows a communication policy that is guided by its core values. While the PBGB does not have a separate communication strategy, its external communication is founded on the general strategy, which encompasses principles for engaging with the public. The emphasis is on the effectiveness of preventive communication, necessitating a greater and more skilful utilisation of technology. Campaigns are tailored to the specific needs of target audiences and collaboration with other media institutions is deemed important to amplify each other's messages (Prevention Work Concept, 2018, p. 9).

Communication is not merely a supporting activity; it's an integral part of the PBGB's core work, as the police exist to serve the people. The PBGB strives to share necessary, important and interesting information with the public to increase safety and prevent risks. The "Police Handbook" emphasises the significance of well-designed recommendations within conveyed messages, empowering individuals to take action to prevent danger or accidents (Vanaisak, 2018, p. 14). The messages should focus on creating and promoting a sense of security (Ibid, p. 21). Honest, open and easily understandable communication is essential for preserving people's sense of security and trust in both the police and the state. The spokespersons are primarily officers who bridge the gap between those responsible for ensuring people's safety and the public.

The PBGB employs various channels for information dissemination, including a daily event overview (a summary of offences and border incidents provided once a day to the media, covering the past 24 hours), issuing press releases, responding to media inquiries and arranging interviews, proactively suggesting topics to journalists and posting updates posts on PBGB's social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter) and PBGB's external website, www.politsei.ee.

PBGB press releases are structured in the form of news articles (inverted pyramid format), enabling the media to publish them as news with minimal editing. The language used is intended to instil a sense of security and consequently, public messages from the PBGB also emphasise safety promotion and the prevention of potential dangers. In public communication, clear language principles are followed whenever possible, with a preference for simple wording and sentence structure and avoiding the use of officialese. The reasons behind the actions taken by the PBGB and how they contribute to enhancing safety are explained. Empathy is employed when addressing topics, ensuring that public messages do not needlessly offend anyone's feelings and that prevention messages do not come at the expense of victims.

Important press releases are also translated into Russian, along with messages directly relevant to the Russian-speaking population such as warnings about telephone scams that primarily target Russian-speaking individuals. The PBGB's Communication Office includes a specialist in Russian communication who assesses the necessity for Russian-language notifications. The PBGB maintains a separate media list for these press releases, encompassing all Russian-language media in Estonia.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

The study is based on an experimental approach aimed at determining how respondents from various language groups perceive the content of the same source text (message). Because the research unit lacked access to general national contact data for the study, a method called non-probability random sampling was used (Kumar, 2011). Colleagues, friends and acquaintances from both language groups, as well as individual email addresses (a total of 630 emails), were used and questionnaires were distributed. This approach guaranteed diversity in the sample (as described below) and the representation of various language groups.

The research employed an experimental approach that specifically focused on reactive reading and the perception of the message being read. The experiment was divided into two parts: in the first stage,

respondents were asked to read texts and in the second stage, they completed a questionnaire. In the first part, the aim was to determine the message perceived by the respondent in the text and its impact on their behaviour and emotional perception (whether the message was commanding, friendly, threatening, etc.). This approach offered insight into the message's impact on participants from both language groups and their interpretation of it.

The research method employed a self-administered questionnaire, combining qualitative content analysis with quantitative data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denscombe, 2010). The data collection questionnaire (see Appendix 1) comprised 32 questions, including both open-ended and closed questions, with the inclusion of a Likert scale in some of them. This versatile questionnaire allowed for gathering various responses and exploring participants' perceptions of the message on multiple levels. Based on the respondents' answers and comments, meaningful categories were formed, which are described in detail below.

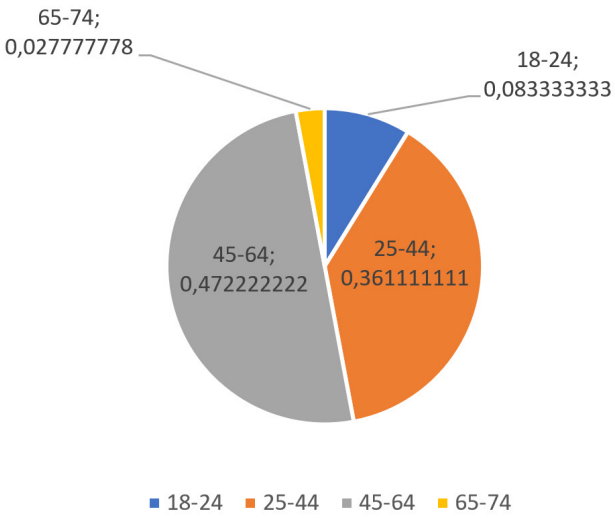

Figure 1. Age of Estonian-speaking (ET) respondents.

A total of 203 respondents participated in the study with 167 completing the experiment in Estonian and 36 in Russian. In both groups, the proportion of women was significantly higher, with 67% among Estonian respondents and 72% among Russian respondents. In terms of age, ET (Estonian) and RU (Russian) respondents exhibited a similar distribution (see Figures 1 and 2).

In the ET group, respondents were evenly distributed between the 25-44 and 45-64 age groups, while in the RU group, there was a slightly higher proportion of respondents in the age group of 45-64 compared to the 25-44 age group, with 47% and 36%, respectively. There were a few individual respondents in both groups who were younger and older. The groups had a relatively consistent educational level, with the majority of respondents having higher education – 51% in the ET group and 56% in the RU group (see Figures 3 and 4). In the RU group, more respondents had vocational education compared to secondary education, with 22% and 14% respectively, while in the ET group, both groups were equally represented at 19%.

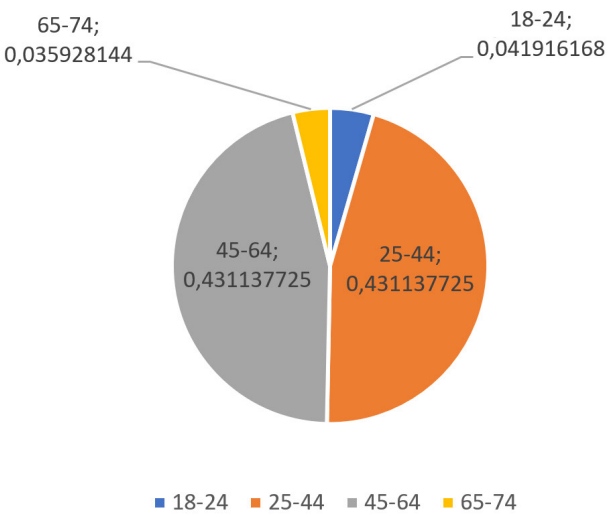

Figure 2. Age of Russian-speaking (RU) respondents.

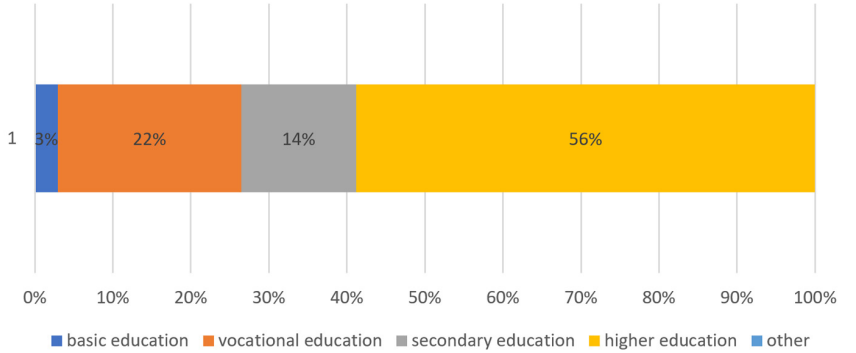

Figure 3. Figure 3. Education level of Estonian-speaking (ET) respondents.

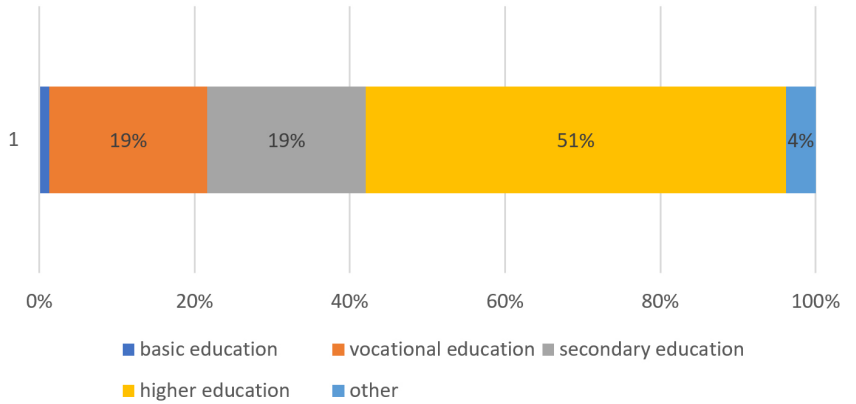

Figure 4. Education level of Russian-speaking (RU) respondents.

In analysing the results, it's essential to note two factors: firstly, the difference in the size of the two respondent groups, with 167 in the ET group and 36 in the RU group; secondly, the demographic characteristic that the majority of the respondents were educated women. This can be considered a limitation of the study and substantial conclusions cannot be drawn based on these results. However, it provides a good starting point for further research, which can target a different demographic group or dimension.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LINGUISTIC TEXT ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNICATION AND POWER RELATIONS

The purpose of the target texts is to establish a communicative situation between the author (in this case, an institution) and the reader through the use of specific language. In the context of this study, which examines the reception and perception of announcements issued by the PBGB, an overview of the linguistic text analysis used is provided.

According to Estonian linguist Reet Kasik (2002), in the 1970s and 1980s, linguistic research largely focused on the relationship between reality and the discourses that describe and shape it. However, by the end of the century, the focus shifted towards more detailed 'linguistic' analysis, primarily examining the language used in discourses and how meaning is expressed. Therefore, the goal of text analysis is to highlight language's polyfunctionality, serving both as a means to describe things and creating situations, connections and relationships. While texts never appear to be isolated or devoid of context, lacking a single definitive interpretation, interpretation is not entirely arbitrary. Text analysis helps to identify the possible interpretations of a given text and how they are related to the linguistic choices made within the text. Thus, this analysis examines linguistic units such as syntactic, lexical, thematic, argumentative and rhetorical choices, while also assessing the overall cohesion of the text and the communicative meaning it conveys. This method aligns with the meta functions of M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, namely the ideational function (describing and creating a representation of the world and experiences), the textual function (cohesively integrating content) and the interpersonal function (shaping social relationships) (Halliday, Matthiessen, 2004).

The concept of linguistic relativity, which suggests that language shapes the way people think, has been known and studied for centuries and it became a specialised field of linguistics in the first half of the 20th century, led by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf and further developed by other scholars (see: Brown & Lenneberg, 1954; Gumperz & Levinson 1996). When language is viewed as a tool for experiencing the world, it naturally becomes a vehicle for the exercise of power.

The issue of language and power has been and continues to be a subject of research at the interface of philosophy, sociology and linguistics. Thus, Pierre Bourdieu considered language as a medium of power that allows those involved in linguistic interaction to carry and express their interests, whereby any linguistic interaction between communication actors reflects the characteristics of the social reality they express (Bourdieu, 1991). Drawing on Bourdieu's concept and based on the main aspects of the manifestation of symbolic power, i.e., signification, interpretation, manipulation and construction of meaning, Claire Kramsch examines the process of constructing symbolic power in communication. She notes that linguistic interaction inevitably results in the construction of symbolic power, such as the transformation of communication from an information exchange to a linguistic performance (i.e., a demonstration of linguistic competence) in the communication between a native and a non-native speaker (Kramsch, 2016, 2020). Norman Fairclough examines language concerning power and ideology, employing the concept of critical discourse analysis, which aims to analyse social interaction from the perspective of linguistic components to reveal their hidden determinants in the system of social relations and the hidden consequences of their impact on society (Fairclough, 2001). Estonian linguist Tiit Hennoste notes that when we talk about the relationship between power and language, we usually tend to talk about how political, economic and journalistic power is realised through language, e.g., by obscuring certain concepts and using specific connotations or ambiguous formulations to influence readers' perceptions (Hennoste, 2018). Kasik (2007) explores how power relations are expressed through language and, conversely, how language creates new power relations. When an institution sends a message to a citizen, expecting an actionable response, such texts typically consist of two parts: a directive part and an explanatory background part. According to Kasik, the background section of official texts is usually rational and informative, aimed at convincing the recipient that the request is indeed reasonable. As directives aim to elicit specific behaviour from the message recipient, the survey conducted for this study included questions about the nature of the text's delivery, inquiring whether it came across as a warning, threatening, commanding, neutral, friendly-amicable, advisory or instructive-educational.

The pragmatic potential of a text results from the author's choices concerning both its content and linguistic expression. In language, the

author selects the necessary units that carry both a simple objective meaning and a connotative meaning. The author also constructs expressions using grammar to establish the necessary meaningful connections, ultimately shaping the final pragmatic potential, which refers to its ability to create a communicative effect (Komissarov, 1990; Kamenskaya, 1990; Galperin, 2007; Kolshanski, 2007 et al.).

4. THE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATIONAL TEXTS USED IN THE STUDY

4.1. THE INFORMATIONAL TEXT 1 IN ESTONIAN AND RUSSIAN

The informative structure of the text (see Appendix 2), comprising five paragraphs (six in the Russian version), adheres to the communication principles established by the PBGB, as it does not require specialised or terminological competence from the reader to understand the text. The responsible official in the field is quoted twice in the text. The text's purpose is to encourage readers to take note of the preferred locations of speeding drivers and to report them using a web application. The article begins with the directive part, i.e., the title and the first paragraph, explaining the necessity of taking action. This is followed by the background section, comprising the next three paragraphs, where the reader's civic duty, emotions and sense of community are appealed to through direct quotations from a police officer.

In the first text, the reader is addressed directly only in the headline, using the imperative form (*inform*). Subsequently, the personal indicative form is employed only for PBGB as the agent of the sentence (*is waiting, we steer*) and the text concludes with the impersonal form (*is expected*). On the other hand, as noted by linguist and researcher Ene Vainik from the Institute of the Estonian Language, "lexical effectiveness starts from presence", which is indicated, e.g., by deictic[1] temporal and locative markers and first-person singular and plural personal pronouns, which enhance the contextual coherence of sentences and the closeness of the

[1] *Deixis* refers to the use of linguistic expressions and other signs that can be interpreted only by the participants of a communicative act, referring to place, time and always being related to reality. The corresponding verbal means are called deictic expressions. Three main types of deixis are distinguished: personal, spatial and temporal (see, for example, Pajusalu et al., 2004, in Estonian).

speaker-listener relationship (i.e., the referents of expressions are known only to the participants and in the given speech situation) (Vainik, 2012, 654-655). In this text, examples of such deictic markers are the pronoun *we*, the verb form *we steer* directly indicating PBGB, the adverb *together* referring to PBGB and the readers, as well as temporal markers such as *now that there are* and *this year*.

Participation in the given situation can also be linguistically created using intensity markers, which either emphasise or diminish the degree of a particular quality. These include augmentative adverbs, emphatic adverbs, modifiers and qualifiers as well as figurative expressions. For, in the PBGB text, words such as *kõik* (all), *igaüks* (everyone), *pidevalt* (constantly), äärmiselt oluline (highly important), *kõige põletavam* (the most pressing), *eriti* (especially) and just (conveyed in the English translation with the grammatically emphatic structure *it is the excessive speed that*) illustrate the speaker's attitude. The level of intensity can also intertwine with evaluation, where emphatic adverbs affirm the truthfulness of the message or negate it. In the example sentence, the emphatic adverb *ikka* (still) conveys a silent presence and the expression of an opposing opinion: *suuname juhid mõtlema, kas mõni sekund ajavõitu on ikka väärt enda ja teiste elu ohtu seadmist* (we steer drivers to think if the few seconds they gain is worth putting their own and other people's lives at risk). While the text generally avoids figurative expressions, the figurative and alliterative superlative noun phrase *põletavam probleem* (the most pressing problem) emphasises the gravity of the situation.

The Russian version of text 1 is written in a more formal and informative style, typical of public announcements and official documents. The text uses specific vocabulary related to the area of police and traffic, such as *Департамент полиции и пограничной охраны* (PBGB), наблюдения (observations), *надзор за дорожным движением* (traffic surveillance), *превышение скорости* (speeding), *разрешенная скорость* (permitted speed).

The author presents facts and justifications to persuade readers to participate in the decentralized initiative and provide information about cases/dangers of exceeding the speed limit. Intensity markers are similarly used in the Russian text to emphasise the importance of safety and highlight the possible consequences of speeding, including serious injuries and

death. Therefore, the text contains arguments directed towards the emotional aspect, such as *трагические последствия* (tragic consequences), *опасность* (danger), *смерть* (death), *тяжелые повреждения* (severe injuries), *задуматься* (to think), *подвергать опасности свою жизнь* (to jeopardise one's life), *родной край* (homeland, native land). Similar to the Estonian text, words with a negative connotation predominate to evoke concern in the reader and thereby create a desire to take action and contribute towards avoiding negative scenarios on Estonian roads.

Also, the text in Russian directly addresses the audience with imperative calls to participate in the campaign and report observations through a dedicated application. This is evident in the use of the imperative verb and the pronoun вы (you) in the title[2]. It mentions that the police are anticipating observations through a special application. The Russian text also includes presence markers, such as the pronoun *мы* (we, referring to PBGB and the readers collectively), the verb *заставляем* (we make/force to think) and time markers *сейчас* (now) and *в этом году* (this year).

Unlike the Estonian text, the Russian version is stylistically less uniform. On one hand, it exhibits characteristics of a formal style, incorporating specific terminology from the police and traffic domains, as well as the bureaucratic language: *сосредоточена* (centred), *в рамках* (within the framework), *производить надзор* (to conduct surveillance), *обеспечение безопасности* (ensuring safety), *является* (is). On the other hand, it also incorporates words typical of colloquial style, such as the adjective *гоняющих* (racing, speeding) and other figurative expressions. The text also contains generalising word combinations and phrases that render the message meaningless, such as "*Цель толоки – с помощью сообщества многого добиться*" (The goal of the campaign is to achieve much with the help of the community). This phrase sounds somewhat ambiguous and clumsy in Russian, as the word сообщества refers to a narrower group of people, necessitating contextual clarification as it's unclear which community is being referred to. Presumably, the word *общество* (society) was intended. Similar stylistic and pragmatic mismatches can create ambiguity and impede successful communication.

[2] According to Russian grammar rules, the pronoun Вы is written with a capital letter when politely addressing one person and вы is used when addressing multiple people.

Another potential issue affecting the readability of the Russian text is syntactic inconsistencies, such as *именно слишком высокая скорость* (particularly too high speed). According to Russian syntax rules, using two parts of speech (an intensifying particle and an expressive adverb) within one sentence to enhance the intensity of an adjective (*именно слишком высокая* / especially too high) is redundant and incorrect. The Russian text also relies on intensity markers to emphasise the gravity of the situation and encourage participation, such as *особенно сейчас* (especially now), *именно* (namely), *слишком* (too much), *самая острая* (most acute), *нуждается* (in need of), *высокая скорость* (high speed), *основная причина* (the main reason). It's essential to note that from a pragmatic perspective, the use of intensity markers primarily aims to strengthen the evaluation. However, an evaluation alone may not be persuasive unless supported by facts or illustrations. Therefore, the use of intensity markers might have the opposite effect of what is intended.

4.2. THE INFORMATIONAL TEXT 2 IN ESTONIAN AND RUSSIAN

In the second analysed text (text 2), the reader's participation in the communication is indirect as they are not directly addressed. However, the text describes past events and offers recommendations for certain behaviours. The text consists of seven paragraphs of varying length, ranging from one to three sentences, including three quotes from the respective head of the department.

The conveyance of information starts with a descriptive background section, describing recent, seemingly mysterious cases of money disappearing. The directive part appears towards the end of the article where recommendations are given, either indirectly or in an impersonal form: *tasub meeles pidada* in Estonian / *надо помнить* in the Russian version (it is worth keeping in mind); *tasub olla kriitiline* / *следует соблюдать осторожность* (it is worth being critical); aitab *ainult hea küberhügieen* / *поможет только хорошая кибергигиена* (only good cyber-hygiene will help) or even the first-person plural form *soovitame* (we recommend). However, in the Russian-language text, there is a direct directive sentence in the final part: *нельзя загружать и открывать такие файлы* (one must not download and open such files), where the modal

verb *нельзя* (one must not) expresses both prohibition and obligation. This directive tone is reinforced by the use of two verbs forbidding action in the text: *загружать* (to download) and *открывать* (to open). It should be noted that the Russian text also contains several intensity markers, such as *самый* (most common), *довольно* (quite), *надо* (necessary), *достаточно* (sufficient), *даже* (even), etc.

Presence markers occur in both temporal and locative expressions in every paragraph of the text, such as *viimasel ajal* / *в последнее время* (recently/lately), *hiljuti* / *недавно* (recently), *tänapäeval* (these days) / *довольно распространено* (in the Russian text, there's a reference to the current state using adverbs and adjectives in combination with the predicate: *quite widespread*), *viimastel aastatel* / *в последние годы* (in the recent years), *sääraseid juhtumeid* / *другие похожие случаи* (such cases), *taolisi* / *такие* (such), *eelmainitud* (described above) / *другие похожие случаи* (other similar cases). There are fewer intensity markers in this text and they appear in the direct quotation of the police officer (*sagenenud* / *участились* (increasing), *vaid* / *лишь* (only), *достаточно* (enough). In the concluding instructive and advisory paragraph, there are also intensity markers (*ainult* / *только* (only), emphasising the directive function of the text.

The overall vocabulary used in the text is assessed as neutral by the emotion detector software of the Institute of the Estonian Language. However, in the comparison of positively and negatively charged words, the negative ones dominate. This includes phrases such as *pahavaraga nakatumine* (infection with malware) mentioned five times in the Estonian text and four times in the Russian text, where the word *вирус* (virus) is also used twice. The phrase *raha kadumine* (disappearance of money) is mentioned twice, with variations like *исчезновения* (disappearance), *пропадают* (go missing, disappear), *пропажи* (missing, disappearances) in the Russian version of text 2. Additionally, various expressions referring to criminal activities are mentioned, such as *vargus* (theft) in the Estonian text corresponding to *пропажа* in the Russian text, *kahjud* / *ущерб* (losses), *kelmid* / *мошенник(и)* (scammers), *küberkuritegu* / *киберпреступления* (cybercrime) and *kergeusklik* / *доверчивые* (gullible, trustful).

The second informational text primarily has an informative and cautionary modality, providing specific details about the cases and giving advice on how to protect oneself from malware infection. The Estonian text does not contain strong emotional language but focuses on raising awareness and offering practical guidance through particular methods. In the Russian version of the text, the first part is mainly advisory, while the final section contains a straightforward directive instruction with a strictly prohibitive valence. While the Estonian text is assessed as more neutral by the emotion detector, with the repetition of negatively charged words possibly creating a somewhat sinister tone, the Russian text features a strong presence of reinforcing words with prohibitive tonality.

In summary, the Estonian notification texts of the PBGB are not direct orders or requests, but rather take the form of newspaper articles that encourage readers to be vigilant or attentive. The directive verbs used in the texts do not issue commands or threats; instead, most of the verb constructions pertain to the PBGB (in the first text: 'expects-expected', 'invites', 'to do together', 'to make one think and understand', 'offers everyone an opportunity', 'direct', i.e., no obligation with respective modal verbs such as 'must', etc.; in the second text, mostly the impersonal approach is used, 'a few steps worth remembering', 'it is worth being critical', 'only good cyber-hygiene can prevent it'). Hence, there are no direct obligatory functions, no mention of sanctions and the texts are primarily characterised by an instructive and guiding desire to enhance our lives – a rationale that would benefit both readers and others, traffic would calm down and there would be fewer cybercriminals threats. Although, in general, similar linguistic and semantic tools are presented in the Russian versions of informational texts, there's a slight prevalence of emphasised directives and a certain level of formality in terms of modality and valency, which in turn may influence the reception of the text's message.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND THE RESULTS OBTAINED

To analyse the perception of the texts, the following categories were formed, about the linguistic and communicative aspects of the texts:

I. ***Readability of the text***. The category refers to how easily the text can be read and understood by the reader. It may involve factors such as sentence structure, choice of vocabulary and the overall clarity of the writing.

II. ***Nature of the text***. The category refers to the genre or type of text being analysed. It could include categories such as informative, persuasive, instructional, etc., which describe the overall purpose and style of the text.

III. ***Comprehensibility of the text content***. The category relates to the extent to which the information presented in the text is clear and understandable to the reader. It considers how well the content is organised, explained and presented.

IV. ***Understanding the purpose of the text***. The category refers to the reader's ability to grasp the intended purpose or goal of the text. It involves understanding the primary message or call to action conveyed by the text.

V. ***Impact of the text's message on the reader's behaviour***. The category explores the influence or effect of the message on the reader's actions or behaviour. It examines whether the text motivates or prompts the reader to take a certain action or change their behaviour in some way.

VI. ***Importance of the message for the reader***. The category focuses on the perceived significance or relevance of the text's message to the reader. It considers how meaningful or valuable the information presented in the text is to the reader's needs, interests or concerns.

5.1. THE PERCEPTION OF TEXT 1

(I) The category 'text readability'

In the Estonian-language informational text, 47% of respondents found it quite easy to read, while in the Russian-language text, 33% of respondents shared the same opinion. In both languages, 27% of readers considered the text easily readable, but a significant 30% of Russian-language text readers found it quite difficult to read. Regarding the Estonian-language text, 17% perceived it as somewhat difficult to read. Since the text's topic was traffic and speeding, a relatively common subject, further examination of the Russian-language text is needed to determine the causes of its readability challenges.

(II) The category 'nature of the text'

To describe the nature of the text, respondents could choose from 8 options. The majority of responses leaned towards the 'friendlier' end of the scale. Only a small number of respondents felt that the text was commanding or threatening (4% ET, 9% RU, 1% ET, 0% RU). In both groups, the most selected option was 'recommendation' (30% ET, 43% RU), aligning with the intended message of the PBGB. Thus, the emotional attitude of the message was perceived as intended. A similar choice was made for 'instructive/didactic', although opinions of Estonian and Russian readers slightly diverged, with only 6% of Russian respondents considering the text as instructive and didactic compared to 15% of Estonian respondents. The perception of the text as simply friendly also differed between ET and RU respondents, with 27% of ET and 9% of RU respondents making that choice. Both groups found the first text more neutral than the second text, which is quite natural considering the content of the text and other options (13% ET, 18% RU), as the second text had a more explicit warning nature. Therefore, the text was mostly perceived as a recommendation, but overall, respondents predominantly chose softer, friendlier attitudes from the available options.

(III) The category 'comprehensibility of the text's content'

Despite the difficulties in text readability, respondents in both languages indicated that they understood the message of the text either very well (ET 62% and RU 48%) or rather well (ET 34%, RU 33%). The responses were generally unanimous, indicating that the respondents found the

text's message easily understandable. About 9% of Russian-speaking readers were uncertain about whether they understood the message or not, while only 2% of Estonian-speaking respondents expressed uncertainty. Additionally, 9% of Russian-speaking readers stated that they only partially understood the text, compared to 1% of Estonian-speaking respondents. One Estonian-speaking reader did not understand the text at all. In summary, the message was slightly less comprehensible in the Russian-language text, but overall, both groups understood the text equally well.

(IV) The category 'understanding the purpose of the text's message'

The text aimed to encourage reporting places where speed limits are frequently violated. Slightly over half of the respondents in both groups believed that the purpose of the text was to uphold their safety (ET 52%, RU 56%). Meanwhile, 33% of Estonian-speaking readers and 27% of Russian-speaking readers interpreted the text as offering recommendations on how to act, but in a suggestive and instructive manner. A slightly smaller proportion of respondents (9% ET and 7% RU) chose the more specific option of 'changing my behaviour' compared to the previous interpretation. Only a few individuals perceived the text as a scare tactic with consequences (3% ET and 4% RU), while 3% of Estonian-speaking readers and 7% of Russian-speaking readers chose 'other' as their response.

(V) The category 'impact of the text's message on the reader's behaviour'

This category aimed to assess whether the text prompted the reader to take action. Actual behaviour in a similar situation may differ from what is anticipated and the responses varied. Among Estonian-speaking readers (ET 33%), the majority believed that they would respond to the message's call. The most popular response among Russian-speaking readers was 'cannot say' (RU 33%). On the other hand, in this group, more respondents stated that they would definitely act compared to the ET group (ET 19%, RU 30%). In the ET group, 17% believed that they would rather not act after reading the message and 6% were quite certain about it. In the RU group, these responses were less common: 6% chose 'probably will not act' and 3% selected 'do not intend to act'.

(VI) The category 'importance of the text's message for the reader'

Regarding the importance of the message, 45% of ET respondents found the message quite relevant and 18% considered it very relevant. In the RU group, the trend was similar but, compared to the ET respondents, slightly more found the message very relevant (RU 27%) and slightly fewer found it quite relevant (RU 39%). 17% of Estonian-speaking and 12% of Russian-speaking readers could not say whether the message was important to them or not and 15% of both groups believed that the message was not particularly relevant to them. 5% of the ET respondents and 6% of the RU respondents did not consider the message to be relevant at all and felt that it did not concern them. Among the reasons for deeming the message important, general safety was the overwhelming factor, deemed relevant by 76% of the ET respondents and 58% of the RU respondents. The safety of loved ones and oneself was generally considered equally important by both ET and RU readers, at 10% and 12%, respectively. However, a greater difference can be observed in perceiving the authoritative role of the PBGB as an institution in delivering the message. 15% of RU respondents considered the impact of the message important due to it being an official message from the PBGB. Among Estonian-speaking respondents, only 7% considered the institutional role as a message deliverer important. As an additional note, among the reasons mentioned, the phrase 'the safety of all of us' was used, combining both the first and second response options. In one comment, the respondent expressed a desire to emphasise both general and personal safety. Two other comments expressed appreciation for such initiatives and speculated that this additional opportunity might motivate people to take more action.

5.2. THE PERCEPTION OF TEXT 2

(I) The category 'text readability'

The majority of respondents indicated that the message was quite easy to read (ET 38% and RU 52%). Given that the proportion of RU respondents is 14% higher, it can be inferred that the Russian version of the text was more readable than the Estonian version. The proportion of

respondents who stated that the text was easy to read is relatively equal (ET 36% and RU 31%), suggesting that both text versions were generally readable. The proportion of respondents who found it somewhat difficult to read is also similar (ET 17% and RU 14%). Only 2% of respondents found it very difficult to read and they were all ET respondents (none of the RU respondents felt this way). The percentage of neutral responses is relatively equal, with 7% for ET and 3% for RU. It can be assumed that respondents who remained neutral may not have understood the criteria for readability or found it difficult to assess the text's readability. In terms of the readability of text 2, it can be concluded that it was easy or quite easy to read for both language groups.

(II) The category 'nature of the text'

When characterising the text's message, the majority of respondents recognised it as having a warning nature (ET 49% and RU 71%), despite the difference in proportions between ET and RU (22%). There are noticeable differences between ET and RU in perceiving the message of the text: 32% of ET respondents viewed the text as instructive-didactic (only 7% for RU) and 11% of RU respondents considered it a recommendation (only 6% for ET). A relatively small number of respondents (ET 4% and RU 7%) viewed the message of the text as friendly and well-intentioned. Only 4% of RU respondents perceived an imperative message in the text, while none of the ET respondents did. No one considered the message to be threatening. Only 7% of ET respondents perceived the text as neutral, while none of the RU respondents did. In their comments, respondents associated neutrality with the excessive length of the text or not understanding the meaning of the text. It cannot be ruled out that the text did not evoke any emotions in the respondents who did not justify their choice of response. Unlike the descriptive adjectives provided in the questionnaire to characterise the message of the text, only 2% of ET respondents chose the 'other' category. In describing the 'other' category of the message, respondents stated that they could not provide an assessment, they were not familiar with the subject matter or they did not belong to the target audience of the message. The warning nature of the message prevailed in this category.

(III) The category 'comprehensibility of the text's content

The majority of respondents acknowledged that they understood the message of the text very well (ET 64% and RU 59%). Among respondents

who indicated that the message of the text was rather understandable, 29% were ET and 38% were RU. Here, a clear equality between ET and RU respondents is evident, suggesting that the text was understandable to both language groups. Only 2% of ET respondents partially understood or did not understand the text at all (0% for RU in both evaluation criteria). An equal number of respondents from both language groups remained neutral (ET 3% and RU 3%). It can be assumed that 3% of respondents had no comments on the content of the message This could be due to uncertainty between the two options, a lack of clarity in the text 's contents or a general disinterest in the content of the text. The clarity of the text's content prevailed in this category.

(IV) The category 'understanding the purpose of the text's message'

Both language groups understood the purpose of the text's message in a similar way: both ET (43%) and RU (38%) saw the message as upholding their safety and providing recommendations on how to act (ET 42% and RU 38%). 21% of RU respondents believed that the purpose of the message was to change behaviour, while in the ET group, this was only 9%. Both ET (3%) and RU (3%) respondents unanimously believed that the message was rather threatening with the possible consequences described in the text. 3% of ET respondents suggested the 'other' option, which means that the message was informative and cautionary, but at the same time confusing and not related to the respondent's safety because they were not dealing with the issue mentioned in the message (such as cryptocurrency). In this category, the predominant number of respondents saw the purpose of the message as supporting safety and providing specific instructions on how to act.

(V) The category 'impact of the text's message on the reader's behaviour'

In terms of willingness to change their behaviour, 58% of RU respondents and only 30% of ET respondents intended to act after reading the message. A smaller percentage of RU respondents (18%) were more likely to act, compared to 32% of ET respondents. Based on these results, it can be speculated that RU readers trust or express obedience to the police message more than ET readers, who weigh their options (30% and 32% respectively). The respondents' comments primarily emphasise the importance of cybersecurity and the usefulness of PBGB's

recommendations. Approx. 10% of ET respondents and 3% of RU respondents are less likely to change their behaviour after reading the message, while a similar number of respondents in both language groups (7% ET and 6% RU) do not intend to take action after reading the text. The comments indicated that some respondents believe that they are already well informed about cyber threats, while others abstain from cryptocurrency and consequently, do not take any action. It can be concluded that respondents take action based on their interest in the PBGB message. 15% of ET respondents and 3% of RU respondents remained neutral. The comments from respondents in this category were similar to the previous option concerning behaviour change: an awareness of the dangers and a lack of interest in the problem. In this category, a larger portion of respondents indicated a willingness to change their behaviour.

(VI) The category 'importance of the text's message for the reader'

The responses in the previous category are closely aligned with the results of the category assessing the relevance of the message. 30% of ET respondents and 24% of RU respondents deemed the message to be very relevant to themselves, while 39% of ET and 56% of RU respondents considered it to be quite relevant. Comments from respondents can be divided into four groups:

- Emphasising the importance of informative text for society, enhancing public safety and awareness;
- Advocating the occasional reminder to citizens about cyber threats;
- Sharing negative personal experiences as IT users, particularly related to malware:
- Providing specific instructions on how to take action.

17% of ET respondents and 4% of RU respondents deemed the message to be quite irrelevant. The reasons given in the comments can be divided into two categories: a lack of awareness and a lack of interest in the topic. 5% of ET respondents and 12% of RU respondents directly stated that they were not interested in or affected by the message. 9% of ET respondents and 4% of RU respondents took a neutral position

and their comments provided the same reasons: an awareness of cyber threats and a lack of interest in the problem. A larger number of respondents (55% of ET and 52% of RU) chose general safety as the reason for the importance of informative text. The justifications provided by the respondents mainly revolved around two aspects: the constant relevance of cyber threats and the importance of cybersecurity. 31% of ET respondents and 24% of RU respondents stated that the informative text would personally affect them or their families. The reasons given included three aspects: improving IT skills, concern for oneself and loved ones and personal financial considerations. A relatively small number of respondents (8% of ET and 17% of RU) cited the official nature of the PBGB message as a reason for its importance. The justification given is a reliable source. This low result may suggest that respondents have less institutional trust or a critical attitude not only toward the PBGB but also toward other state institutions. It cannot be ruled out that the negative results in the category of behaviour change indicate the same underlying reason. 5% of ET respondents and 3% of RU respondents did not deem the informative text to be relevant to themselves and 2% of ET and 3% of RU respondents chose the 'other' response option, citing awareness of cyber hygiene as the reason. In this category, two dominant aspects were general safety and personal interest in the message.

5.3. THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXTS 1 AND 2

Two texts were compared and their readability was analysed among different language groups (ET and RU readers). In terms of readability assessment, the first text exhibited the largest difference. Reading the text was quite difficult for RU readers, as indicated by 30% of the respondents. On the other hand, reading the text was quite easy for ET readers, as acknowledged by 47% of the respondents. The second text, was relatively easy to read for the majority of RU readers (52% of the respondents), whereas only 38% of ET readers chose the same response. However, contradictory results are evident. For instance, in the case of text 1, 27% of ET readers found it easy to read, whereas for text 2, this figure was 36%. However, when considering the response 'quite easy to read', the results are reversed: 47% for text 1 and 38% for text 2 among

ET readers. Among RU readers, the responses for both 'easy to read' and 'quite easy to read' for text 2 are consistent (31% and 52%, respectively) and there are no contradictions. In conclusion, the results indicate that reading the first text was more difficult for Russian speakers compared to Estonian speakers. In contrast, reading the second text was easier for Russian speakers compared to Estonian speakers. These differences may indicate variations in the complexity and style level of the texts.

In the category of text comprehensibility, the results are relatively equal, except for the results of text 1: 62% of ET readers and 48% of RU readers understood the text very well, while 34% of ET readers and 33% of RU readers understood it to some extent. The results in this category correlate with the indicators of text readability by language communities: if the text was easy to read, the message was also understandable.

When characterising the texts, ET and RU respondents mostly reached a consensus: text 1 is viewed as a recommendation (ET 30% and RU 42%) and text 2 is regarded as a warning (ET 49% and RU 71%), except for the response options 'friendly, well-intentioned' and 'instructive, didactic'. While 27% of ET readers perceived the message of text 1 as friendly and well-intentioned, only 9% of RU readers shared this view. Similarly, 32% of ET readers deemed the message of Text 2 as instructive and didactic, while only 7% of RU readers shared this view.

Both language groups' understanding of the texts' objectives was relatively consistent. Text 1 was perceived as promoting one's safety by 52% of ET readers and 56% of RU readers, while 33% of ET readers and 27% of RU readers considered it as providing recommendations. Text 2 was perceived equally, with 43% of ET readers and 38% of RU readers considering it as promoting safety and 42% of ET readers and 38% of RU readers considering it as providing recommendations.

The impact of the message of text 1 on the behaviour of readers from both language groups was relatively similar: 33% of ET readers and 27% of RU readers would probably take action, while 19% of ET readers and 30% of RU readers would definitely take action. For the same text, 26% of ET readers and 33% of RU readers were unsure about their response. For text 2, there was a noticeable difference in the response option 'will definitely act' (30% for ET readers and 58% for RU readers), indicating

that the message of text 2 appeared more convincing to RU respondents. In the response option 'probably will act', 32% of ET readers and 18% of RU readers chose it, while 15% of ET readers and 3% of RU readers were unsure about their response.

Both language groups equally recognised the relevance of text 1: 45% of ET respondents and 39% of RU respondents deemed the message quite relevant, while 18% of ET respondents and 27% of RU respondents deemed it very relevant. 15% of ET respondents and 15% of RU respondents deemed the message of text 1 to be less relevant. For text 2, 30% of ET respondents and 24% of RU respondents deemed the message to be very relevant, while 39% of ET respondents and 56% of RU respondents saw it as more relevant. Only 17% of ET respondents and 4% of RU respondents deemed the message of text 2 as less important.

Most ET and RU readers found the message of both texts to be important because of their relevance to general safety: For text 1, it was 76% of ET respondents and 58% of RU respondents and for text 2, it was 55% of ET respondents and 52% of RU respondents. The perception of message importance was similar across language communities, but there were differences between the two texts. Text 2 resonated more with readers and their close ones (31% ET and 24% RU) compared to text 1 (10% ET and 12% RU). As an official message from the PBGB, 7% of ET respondents and 15% of RU respondents considered text 1 relevant, while for text 2, it was 8% of ET respondents and 17% of RU respondents. This suggests that the official message from a government agency is more important to RU respondents than to ET respondents.

The results indicate that reading the first text was more challenging for RU respondents compared to ET respondents while reading the second text was easier for RU participants than for ET participants. This can be attributed to the differences in text complexity and style. In the category of comprehensibility, the results were generally similar, except for the first text, where ET participants had a higher percentage of 'very well understood' compared to RU participants. The comprehensibility results align with the readability results: when a text was easy to read, the message was also better understood.

In characterising the texts, respondents largely agreed, with some variations between the language groups observed in specific response choices. Both language groups perceived text 1 as a recommendation, while text 2 was seen as a warning. The differences emerge in response to the choices of 'friendly, well-intentioned' and 'instructive, didactic', where RU respondents had different reactions compared to ET participants.

The understanding of the texts' objectives was generally consistent among respondents of both language groups: Both text 1 and text 2 were perceived as upholding one's safety and providing recommendations.

The impact of the texts on behaviour displayed relative similarity among participants in both language groups, except for text 2, where RU respondents more frequently chose the option 'will definitely act'. Both language groups acknowledged the importance of the texts, but there were some distinctions between them. Overall, the results indicate that the perception patterns of both texts are generally similar among the two language groups, with no significant differences. The observed variations may be attributed to differences in linguistic complexity and stylistic inconsistencies between the Estonian and Russian versions of the texts.

6. DISCUSSION: PERCEPTION OF INFORMATION TEXTS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

The study analysed the reception messages of police announcements among Estonian and Russian-speaking target groups. The study found that the Estonian and Russian versions of information texts disseminated by the Estonian police were perceived somewhat differently within the target communities but not to the extent that would cause any confusion or unexpected behaviour in either. The linguistic analysis of the texts showed that both texts had an instructive and guiding nature.

The study employed various categories to analyse the perception of the two information texts. These categories encompass readability, the nature of the text, comprehensibility of the text's content, understanding of the aim of the text's message, impact on the reader's behaviour and the significance of the text's message for the reader. The analysis offered

an insight into how the texts were received among different language communities and identified potential strengths and weaknesses in the comprehensibility and effectiveness of the police messages.

The analysis of the first text revealed that the Estonian text was perceived as fairly easy to read by 47% of respondents, while the Russian text was deemed so by only 33% of respondents. Both texts were characterised as friendly and advisory and both language groups understood the message well. Most respondents felt that the purpose of the text was to support their safety and guide their actions. The importance of the text's message was recognised by both Estonian and Russian readers and some respondents indicated a willingness to act as per the instructions or recommendations provided.

The analysis of the second text showed that respondents from both language groups generally found it readable. The Russian text was perceived as slightly easier to read and the majority of respondents saw the message as a warning. The purpose of the text was seen as upholding one's safety and behaviour change. Russian-speaking respondents showed a greater willingness to change their behaviour compared to Estonian-speaking respondents. The importance of the information text, its significance to society and the awareness of cyber threats were recognised, although some respondents did not deem the text important or personally relevant. Overall, safety and personal interest in the message were crucial aspects of how the text was perceived.

CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to analyse the reception and differences in understanding and interpretation of informational texts delivered in two languages within Estonian and Russian-speaking target groups. The study revealed variations in the perception of Estonian and Russian versions of these texts. The analysis showed that the texts had an instructive and guiding nature; supportive, rather than giving direct orders. Various categories were used to analyse the perception of the texts, including readability, the nature of the text, comprehensibility of the content, understanding the aim of the message, impact on the reader's behaviour and relevance

for the reader. The analysis provided an overview of how the texts were received among respondents from the two language communities, identifying strengths and potential issues in their comprehensibility and effectiveness. The study found variations in the level of difficulty in reading the texts between respondents from the Estonian and Russian language groups. The first text posed more challenges for Russian readers, while the second text was easier to comprehend. Respondents from both language groups perceived the texts as advisory, aiming at promoting safety and providing recommendations. The impact on probable behaviour was relatively similar for the first text, but in the case of the second text, Russian readers expressed a greater willingness to take action. The relevance of the texts was acknowledged by respondents from both language groups, with some variations between the texts.

All the aforementioned findings suggest potential areas for future research. Further studies could delve deeper into the linguistic and cultural factors influencing the reception of information texts. This could involve examining specific linguistic features such as sentence structures and vocabulary choices that contribute to differential perception among language communities. Additionally, studying the cultural nuances and context-specific factors that shape the interpretation of these texts could provide valuable insights. To enhance the effectiveness of information texts, several improvements can be considered. Customising the texts to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the target communities can increase their comprehensibility and resonance. Collecting feedback from the target communities and involving them in the evaluation process can provide valuable insights for enhancing the effectiveness of future communication efforts.

In conclusion, despite the study's limited participants, which was determined by the research team's limited access to data from the broader target group, this study sheds light on the disparities in the reception of informational texts among Estonian and Russian-speaking communities. Further research should delve into linguistic and cultural factors, while improvements can be achieved by tailoring the texts and conducting feedback sessions and regular evaluations. Through the refinement of communication strategies, it's possible to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of informational texts, thereby fostering safer and more informed communities.

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APPENDIX 1. A QUESTIONNAIRE WITH TEXTS 1 AND 2 TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY THE AUTHORS SPECIFICALLY FOR THIS PAPER.

Dear Estonian citizen! We invite you to answer a questionnaire by the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences exploring the reception and comprehension of the messages by the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board. Answering the questionnaire takes about 15 minutes and it is anonymous. In case you wish to participate in a draw for 30 bookshop vouchers worth 10 euros each, please write your e-mail address at the end of the questionnaire. The answers should be submitted by 20 December 2022. We sincerely hope you will find the time to contribute! Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

Part A: General questions

This section includes questions about the respondent.

A1.Gender:

- male ☐
- female ☐
- Do not wish to reveal ☐

A2. Age:

- 18- 24 ☐
- 25- 44 ☐
- 45- 64 ☐
- 65- 74 ☐
- 75+ ☐

A3. Level of education:

- basic education ☐
- secondary education ☐
- vocational education ☐
- higher education ☐
- other

Part B: Part I Please read the following text and answer the questions.

Message 1

Inform the police of places where speeding is a problem 5 September 2022 The Police and Border Guard Board is waiting for observations on locations where drivers constantly exceed the speed limit to be posted at www.liiklustalgud.ee. Based on the given information,
the police will conduct speed checks on 22 September. Police Lieutenant Colonel Sirle Loigo invites all people to register their observations on the map application as traffic safety needs everyone's contribution. "The *Liiklustalgud* event will focus on speeding as it is the most pressing problem in traffic at the moment. Following the speed limit is highly important in preventing tragic consequences. Especially now that there are more drivers and children starting their school in traffic," Loigo stresses. The aim of *Liiklustalgud* is to take action by involving the community, make people think about the safety of their neighbourhood and understand the dangers of speeding. "It allows everyone to contribute to traffic safety by letting us know of places where following the speed limit is a problem. It is excessive speed that is the main cause of traffic accidents resulting in serious injuries or death. With the event, we steer drivers to think if the few seconds they gain is worth putting their own and other people's life at risk," the police officer added. Additions on the map application can be made until Friday, September 9. This year, the *Liiklustalgud* event will take place for the sixth time.

Annika Maksimov PBGB press officer 5655771

B1. 1. Was it easy or difficult to read the text?

- 1- It was very difficult to read it. ☐
- 2- It was quite difficult to read it. ☐
- 3- Cannot say. ☐
- 4- It was quite easy to read it. ☐
- 5- It was easy to read it. ☐

B2. 2. How would you characterise the message of the text? Please explain.

- Warning ☐
- Threatening ☐
- Commanding ☐
- Neutral ☐
- Friendly, well-intentioned ☐
- Recommendation ☐
- Instructive, didactic ☐
- other ☐

B3. Please explain:

B4. **3. Did you understand the content of the message? (select on the scale 1-5)**

1- did not understand at all ☐
2 -I understood partially ☐
3 - cannot say ☐
4 - I rather understood ☐
5 – I understood very well ☐

B5. **4. The aim of the message was to:**

1 - uphold my safety ☐
2 - give recommendations on how to act ☐
3 - change my behaviour ☐
4 - frighten me with the possible consequences ☐
5 – other ☐

B6. **Please explain:**

B7. **5. Will you act after reading the message?**

1 - I do not intend to act ☐
2 - I probably will not act ☐
3 - cannot say ☐
4 - I probably will act ☐
5 – I will definitely act ☐

B8. **Please explain:**

B9. **6. How relevant is the message for you?**

1 - the message does not interest / concern me ☐
2 - quite irrelevant ☐
3 - cannot say ☐
4 - quite relevant ☐
5 – the message is very relevant to me/ I will definitely consider the message ☐

B10. Please explain:

B11. 7. Why do you consider the message relevant?

- ☐ It is the official message sent by the Police and Border Guard Board
- ☐ The message concerns general safety
- ☐ The message concerns me and my family
- ☐ I do not find the message relevant
- ☐ other

B12. Please explain:

Part C: Part II Please read the following text and answer the questions.

Message 2 Police: Good Cyber-Hygiene Prevents Money from Disappearing Mysteriously 7 April 2022

Recently, there have been increasing cases of large sums of money disappearing from crypto-currency wallets Upon closer inspection, it turns out that their devices, such as computers or cell phones, have been infected with malware. The police recently received a report that 60,000 euros had been transferred from the cryptocurrency wallet without the owner's knowledge. "To the owner's knowledge, he had not shared his passwords or other data with anyone. There are similar cases with losses varying from a few hundred to around twenty thousand euros," says Hannes Kelt, the Head of the Cyber and Economic Crime Division of the North Prefecture. These days, investing in cryptocurrency is nothing new and also scammers have discovered a quick way to make money off gullible people. "The seemingly mysterious thefts described above are possible only if the computer is infected with malware. For this, the owner does not even have to enter his data anywhere, clicking on a suspicious link is enough. Such links are spread, for instance, in social media, via e-mails, text messages or ads, but in reality they are not sent by a specific person but by a device infected with malware," Kelt added.
There are a few simple steps to keep in mind to prevent malware infection. "The most common requests accompanying malware-infected links are, for instance: "Is that you in this video?", similarly "Look what I found," with an active link attached. Before clicking on anything, we suggest you ask the sender if he really sent it and what could it be. It is worth being critical of opening and downloading unknown files," the police officer explains. Cybercrimes have been on the rise in the recent years and only good cyber-hygiene can prevent it. Annika Maksimov PBGB press officer 5655771

C1. 1. Was it easy or difficult to read the text?

- ☐ 1- It was very difficult to read it.
- ☐ 2- It was quite difficult to read it.
- ☐ 3- Cannot say.
- ☐ 4- It was quite easy to read it.
- ☐ 5- It was easy to read it.

C2. 2. How would you characterise the message of the text? Please explain.

- ☐ Warning
- ☐ Threatening
- ☐ Commanding
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Friendly, well-intentioned
- ☐ Recommendation
- ☐ Instructive, didactic
- ☐ other

C3. Please explain:

C4. 3. Did you understand the content of the message? (select on the scale 1-5)

- ☐ 1 - did not understand at all
- ☐ 2 - I understood partially
- ☐ 3 - cannot say
- ☐ 4 - I rather understood
- ☐ 5 – I understood very well

C5. 4. The aim of the message was:

- ☐ 1 - uphold my safety
- ☐ 2 - give recommendations on how to act
- ☐ 3 - change my behaviour
- ☐ 4 - frighten me with the possible consequences
- ☐ 5 – other

C6. Please explain:

C7. **5. Will you act after reading the message?**

- 1 - I do not intend to act ☐
- 2 - I probably will not act ☐
- 3 - cannot say ☐
- 4 - I probably will act ☐
- 5 – I will definitely act ☐

C8. **Please explain:**

C9. **6. How relevant is the message for you?**

- 1 - the message does not interest me / the message does not concern me ☐
- 2 - quite irrelevant ☐
- 3 - cannot say ☐
- 4 - quite relevant ☐
- 5 – the message is very relevant to me/ I will definitely consider the message ☐

C10. **Please explain:**

C11. **7. Why do you consider the message relevant?**

- It is the official message sent by the Police and Border Guard Board ☐
- The message concerns general safety ☐
- The message concerns me and my family ☐
- I do not find the message relevant ☐
- Other ☐

C12. **Please explain:**

APPENDIX 2: ORIGINAL VERSIONS OF TEXTS 1 AND 2 IN ESTONIAN AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES.

TEXT 1 (IN ESTONIAN)

Anna politseile teada kohtadest, kus oled märganud kihutavaid juhte

05. september 2022

Politsei- ja piirivalveamet ootab veebilehel www.liiklustalgud.ee tähelepanekuid kohtadest, kus autojuhid pidevalt kiirust ületavad. Selle info alusel teeb politsei 22. septembril kiirustalgute raames liiklusjärelevalvet.

Politsei kolonelleitnant Sirle Loigo kutsub kõiki inimesi oma tähelepanekutest kaardirakenduses teada andma, sest turvaline liiklus vajab igaühe panust. „Talgud keskenduvad kiiruseületamisele, sest see on liikluses kõige põletavam probleem. Traagiliste tagajärgede ennetamiseks on piirkiiruse järgimine äärmiselt oluline. Seda eriti praegusel ajal, kui liikluses on rohkem autojuhte ja kooliteed alustanud lapsi," rõhutas Loigo.

Talgute eesmärk on kogukonda kaasates palju koos ära teha, panna inimesi mõtlema oma kodukoha turvalisusele ning mõistma kiiruse ületamise ohtlikkust.

„Talgud pakuvad igaühele võimaluse panustada liiklusturvalisusesse andes teada kohtadest, kus piirkiirusest kinnipidamine on probleemiks. Just liiga suur kiirus on raskete vigastustega või surmaga lõppenud liiklusõnnetuste peamine põhjus. Kiirustalgutega suuname juhid mõtlema, kas mõni sekund ajavõitu on ikka väärt enda ja teiste elu ohtu seadmist," lisas politseinik.

Tähelepanekuid kaardirakendusse oodatakse kuni reede, 9. septembrini. Liiklustalgud toimuvad sel aastal kuuendat korda.

TEXT 1 (IN RUSSIAN)

Сообщите полиции о местах, где вы заметили гоняющих водителей

05 сентября 2022 г.

Департамент полиции и пограничной охраны ждет на веб-странице www.liiklustalgud.ee наблюдения о местах, где водители постоянно превышают скорость. На основании информации полиция 22 сентября в рамках дорожной толоки будет производить надзор за дорожным движением.

Подполковник полиции Сирле Лойгу призывает всех людей сообщать о своих наблюдениях в приложении, потому что безопасное дорожное движение нуждается во вкладе каждого.

«Толока сосредоточена на превышении скорости, поскольку это является самой острой проблемой в дорожном движении. Для предупреждения трагических последствий крайне важно придерживаться разрешенной скорости. Особенно сейчас, когда на дорогах больше водителей и школьников», – подчеркнула Лойго.

Цель толоки – с помощью сообщества многого добиться, заставить людей задуматься о безопасности своего родного края и опасности превышения скорости.

«Толока дает каждому возможность внести свой вклад в обеспечение безопасности дорожного движения, сообщив о местах, где превышение разрешенной скорости является проблемой. Именно слишком высокая скорость является основной причиной дорожных происшествий, закончившихся тяжелыми повреждениями или смертью. С помощью дорожных толок мы заставляем водителей задуматься, стоит ли ради нескольких выигранных секунд подвергать опасности свою жизнь и жизнь других людей», – добавила полицейский.

Наблюдения ожидаются в приложении до пятницы, 9 сентября. Дорожная толока проходит в этом году в шестой раз.

TEXT 2 (IN ESTONIAN)

Politsei: müstilise raha kadumise hoiab ära hea küberhügieen

07. aprill 2022

Viimasel ajal on sagenenud juhtumid, kus inimeste krüptorahakotist kaovad suured summad. Lähemalt uurides selgub, et nende seadmed nagu arvuti või mobiiltelefon on nakatunud pahavaraga.

Hiljuti laekus politseile avaldus, et krüptorahakotist on omaniku teadmata kantud edasi 60 000 eurot.

"Rahakoti omanik enda teada kellelegi oma paroole või muid andmeid jaganud ei ole. Sääraseid juhtumeid on veel, kahjud on varieerunud paarisajast kuni paarikümne tuhande euroni," kirjeldas Põhja prefektuuri küber- ja majanduskuritegude talituse juht Hannes Kelt.

Krüptorahasse investeerimine ei ole tänapäeval midagi uut ning ka kelmid on avastanud kiire võimaluse tulu teenimiseks kergeusklike inimeste pealt.

„Eelmainitud pealtnäha müstilised vargused on võimalikud siis, kui arvuti on nakatunud pahavaraga. Selleks ei pea rahaomanik isegi kuhugi oma andmeid sisestama, piisab vaid kahtlasele lingile vajutamisest. Taolisi linke edastatakse näiteks nii sotsiaalmeedias, e-kirja teel, SMS-i kui ka reklaamide kaudu, kuid tegelikult ei saada neid konkreetne inimene, vaid pahavaraga nakatunud seade," lisas Kelt.

Pahavaraga nakatumise vältimiseks on paar lihtsalt sammu, mida tasub meeles pidada. „Levinumad pahavaraga nakatanud linkidega kaasnevad üleskutsed on näiteks: „Kas siin videol oled sina?" aga ka „Vaata, mis ma leidsin," mille juurde on lisatud aktiivne link. Enne kuhugi vajutamist soovitame saatjalt küsida, kas ta saatis selle lingi teadlikult ning millega võib olla tegu. Kriitiline tasub olla ka tundmatute failide avamisel ja ka alla laadimisel," selgitab politseinik.

Küberkuriteod on viimastel aastatel selges tõusutrendis ning nende vastu aitab ainult hea küberhügieen.

TEXT 2 (IN RUSSIAN)

Полиция: хорошая кибергигиена защитит от мистического исчезновения денег

07 апреля 2022 г.

В последнее время участились случаи, когда из криптовалютных кошельков пропадают крупные суммы. Выяснилось, что компьютер или мобильный телефон жертвы был заражен вредоносной программой.

Недавно полиция получила заявление о том, что из криптовалютного кошелька без ведома владельца было переведено 60 000 евро. “Владелец кошелька никому не передавал ни паролей, ни других данных. Были и другие похожие случаи, суммы ущерба варьировались от пары сотен до пары десятков тысяч евро“, – рассказал руководитель службы экономических и киберпреступлений Пыхьяской префектуры Ханнес Кельт.

Инвестирование в криптовалюту довольно распространено и мошенники также открыли для себя возможность быстро заработать на доверчивых людях.

„Такие на первый взгляд мистические пропажи денег возможны лишь в случае, когда компьютер заражен вредоносной программой. Для этого владелец криптовалюты даже не должен сам вводить куда-то свои данные, достаточно нажать на подозрительную ссылку, которые распространяются, например, в социальный сетях, мессенджерах, по э-почте, СМС и через рекламу. Такие ссылки рассылает не конкретный человек, а зараженные вредоносной программой компьютеры или мобильные телефоны“, – добавил Кельт.

Чтобы избежать заражения вредоносной программой, надо помнить простые правила. „Самый распространенные способ распространения вирусам – зараженные вирусом ссылки рассылаются в мессенджерах с фразами „Kas siin videol oled sina?“ (Это ты на этом видео?) или „Vaata, mis ma leidsin“ (Посмотри, что я нашел), за этим следует активная ссылка. Но до того, как нажать на ссылку,

спросите у человека, который ее выслал, прислал ли он вам эту ссылку сознательно и что это за ссылка. Осторожность следует соблюдать и тогда, когда вы получаете неизвестные файлы, нельзя загружать и открывать такие файлы“, – сказал Ханнес Кельт.

Количество киберпреступлений в последние годы выросло и защититься от них поможет только хорошая кибергигиена.

PUTIN'S EXTREMIST REGIME AND ITS SECURITISATION OF THE INVASION OF UKRAINE THROUGH THE LABEL OF TERRORISM

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Keywords: Russia, terrorism, extremism, securitisation, Russia-Ukraine War, critical discourse analysis

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ABSTRACT

In this article, Putin's regime as an aggressor in the current war with Ukraine is examined against Cassam's (2022) extremism framework, encompassing ideological extremism, methods extremism, and, notably, extremist mindset, which is independent of any specific ideology and motivates extremist behaviour. This article offers insights into how Putin's regime's extremism underpins the construction of Russia's offensive actions against Ukraine as counterterrorism measures. An analysis of Russian MFA's statements is conducted on the empirical level, employing assumptions (Fairclough, 2003) to detect both explicit and implicit processes of meaning-making and to demonstrate how Putin's regime's extremist features underlie its securitisation of the invasion of Ukraine through terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorist attacks are crises by default and tend to be perpetrated by extremist actors. In today's security as well as socio-political discourse, extremism and terrorism are consequential stigmatising labels. According to Crenshaw (2011, p. 2), the use of the term *terrorism* "is not merely descriptive but as currently understood deprives the actor thus named of legitimacy". As per Hoffman (1998, p. 31), if one party succeeds in labelling its opponents as terrorists, then it also indirectly succeeds in convincing others to adopt its moral stance. Furthermore, according to Cassam (2022, pp. 7, 11), *extremist* is "a political label, the application of which is a political act with political consequences". At times, this label and the label *terrorist* are misapplied to delegitimise opposition to the established order.

It can be said that, since the announcement of the Global War on Terrorism (GWT) by G. W. Bush, terrorism has, in terms of Laclau and Mouffe's (2001), become a socially significant nodal point and an empty signifier, which various forces seek to fill or articulate with their own meaning and struggle for hegemony of their articulations. Since the outset of the GWT, the hegemonic articulation of terrorism has been with Islamist extremism/terrorism and jihadist organisations like / associated with al-Qaida, ISIS, and the Taliban. Although this articulation has been largely accepted and is reflected in UN Security Council resolutions[1], various actors struggle to articulate terrorism equally with other forces/states and to make these articulations prominent in the international discourse on counterterrorism. In this manner, attaching the label of a terrorist threat to a chosen actor can prove to be an effective means for securitising an issue of interest. In other words, constructing a crisis as terrorism or a counterterrorism offensive is a discursive strategy that can be employed rather diversely – for example, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was constructed by anti-government actors as *COVID terrorism* (Belova-Dalton, 2021, p. 199) – while, during climate crises, governments in different countries used counterterrorism measures against environmental defenders (Tayler & Schulte, 2019).

[1] For instance, UNSC resolutions No. 1267 (1999), No. 1989 (2011), and No. 2253 (2015) concerning Da'esh [or ISIS] and al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.

Among its various objectives, Putin's regime seeks to designate individuals, organisations, and states that oppose its policies as extremists and/or terrorists. As to Ukraine, since Russia deployed portions of its armed forces to take control over parts of the Ukrainian territory in 2014, Russia has continuously claimed that Ukraine was employing terrorist tactics against residents of Donbas in its political struggle against the so-called peaceful Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (hereinafter jointly as *the LDNR*) (EUvsDISINFO, 2021). The claims made by Putin's regime after launching an all-out war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 are diverse, including allegations that Ukrainian nationalists are employing terrorist tactics against civilians in Ukraine (EUvsDISINFO, 2022); that the Ukrainian authorities are a fascist regime and a real terrorist organisation (EUvsDISINFO, 2022a); that Ukraine threatened Russia with terrorist attacks on its territory (EUvsDISINFO, 2022b); that Russia's military operation in Ukraine is aimed at containing the expansion of NATO, a terrorist and hostile organisation (EUvsDISINFO, 2022c); that the U.S. is recruiting ISIS terrorists to fight in Ukraine (EUvsDISINFO, 2022d), etc. Therefore, it can be said that, following the commencement of the full-scale invasion in 2022, Russia significantly increased its references to Ukraine in terms of terrorism. However, Russia has been associating terrorism with Ukraine since at least 2014.

In Ukraine, following the conflict orchestrated by Russia in 2014 between the LDNR and the Ukrainian establishment, Ukraine initiated an anti-terrorist operation in the Donbas region. Subsequently, Ukrainian law enforcement authorities have brought terrorism charges against the LDNR militants, and Ukraine has lodged allegations in the United Nations International Court of Justice, claiming that Moscow supported terrorist activities in the Donbas conflict (Euromaidan Press, 2019). In light of the intensive and wide-scale hostilities, which included missile strikes conducted by Russian military forces against Ukraine's civilian population since February 2022 (see, e.g., UN OHCHR, 2022), President Zelenskyy asked the U.S. to add Russia to the list of state sponsors of terrorism (Hudson & Stein, 2022). Furthermore, President Zelenskyy, along with other Ukrainian officials, repeatedly accused Russia of being a terrorist state (see, e.g., VOA News, 2022; Kyiv Independent, 2022). Ukraine also accused Russia of inflicting terror on Europe by cutting gas supplies (Nanji, 2022) and perpetrating food terrorism by stealing Ukrainian

grain and blocking its exports, which is leading to a world food crisis (Currents News, 2022).

Despite the considerable support for the terrorism sponsor designation for Russia within the U.S. Congress (e.g., see S. RES. 623 of 07/27/2022), Russia has not been designated as a state sponsor of terrorism by the U.S. government (Ward & Swan, 2022). In contrast, Russia has been designated as a state sponsor of terrorism by the European Parliament, as a terrorist state by NATO Parliamentary Assembly, while the Russian regime has been designated as terrorist by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. However, there are currently not many academic accounts that conceptualise the current Kremlin regime as extremist or Russia as an extremist/terrorist state or a sponsor of terrorism. Regarding extremism, academic accounts tend to focus on extremist non-state actors within Russia rather than examining the regime itself (e.g., Mitrokhin, 2006; Myagkov, *et al*., 2019). When it comes to terrorism, there are accounts of Russia's counterterrorism strategy, shedding light on Russia's persistent imperial traditions (Omelicheva, 2009), the rise of militant Islam in Russia as a consequence of human rights abuses (Borshchevskaya, 2013), the deficiencies of Russia's 2016 antiterrorism legislation regarding the restriction of missionary activities which has led to groundless state prosecution of non-Orthodox churches in Russia (Homer, 2017), etc. The aim of this article is twofold: first, to apply Cassam's (2022) framework to analyse the current Kremlin[2] regime and examine how it relates to the elements of extremism; second, to analyse how the Kremlin regime, in view of its own extremist features, has employed the concept of terrorism in its rhetoric to securitise Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, it can be asserted that this research constitutes a contribution to the field of Russia studies and, more broadly, to the study of political violence.

[2] The Kremlin in this article is used synonymously with Putin's government or Putin's regime, currently waging the war against Ukraine. Sometimes Putin's regime is difficult to distinguish from Russia as a whole – as former Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Vyacheslav Volodin (now Chairman of the Russian State Duma) said, "There is no Russia today if there is no Putin", while "any attack on Putin is an attack on Russia" (The Moscow Times, 2014) In Galeotti's (2019, p. 250) terms, in Putin's Russia, interests of the current regime are framed as the interests of Russia as a whole, while dissent is framed as treason. This article focuses on Putin's regime and its invasion discourse, without extending Putin's regime's extremist properties to the wider Russian population or researching whether the regime's securitisation moves have been successful.

METHODOLOGY

In today's security environment, terrorism is heavily primed, while terrorists have become close to the ultimate outgroup. A terrorist label is often instrumentalised, allowing politicians and policymakers to delegitimise targets, legitimise ethically disputable security policies, shape public opinion, and win political support. Baele and colleagues (2017, p. 535) demonstrate the performative power and effect of the terrorist label by experimentally showing that it significantly alters the audience's perception of the security environment and their security policy preferences when the label is used by an authorised actor within the context of high terrorism saliency. Thus, terrorism as a performative label can be considered in the context of securitisation theory: presenting something as terrorism is a powerful securitising move which implies the existence of an existential threat to the referent object and requires extraordinary countermeasures or urgent counterterrorism measures, going beyond the realm of normal politics. Baele et al.'s (2017) experiment shows that the audience tends to accept such a securitising move by an authoritative actor in a terrorism-salient context and, hence, legitimises emergency measures. There are many examples of securitising moves using terrorism: for instance, the securitisation of migration and asylum (Balzacq, 2011; Vezovnik, 2018; Hraishawi, 2021); the Uyghur community in the PRC (Finley, 2019); Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asian states (Lenz-Raymann, 2014), cyberspace in Singapore (Aljunied, 2020), but also the securitisation of Greek domestic terrorism (Karyotis, 2007) and organisations connected to ETA in Spain (Bourne, 2018), etc.

Securitisation combines in itself a theory, a policy, as well as a framework and can be defined as

> an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilised by a securitising actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitising actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customised policy

> must be undertaken immediately to block its development (Balzacq, 2011, p. 3).

In securitisation theory, language is deemed constitutive in the realm of world politics (Balzacq, 2011, p. xiv). This premise unites securitisation theory with discourse analysis, in which text and social reality are mutually constitutive, while language is considered as social practice (Fairclough, 1989, p. 1) Furthermore, securitisation theory sees an existential threat as presented and constructed as such through discourse (Vezovnik, 2018, p. 40). In many cases, the operationalisation of securitisation theory has involved the application of critical discourse analysis (CDA); e.g., Vezovnik (2018), Hraishawi (2021), Aljunied (2020). In the terms of Buzan and colleagues (1998), securitisation is achieved through speech acts. Nevertheless, they also emphasise the importance of context in the study of securitisation. Security is always seen as a "political construction in specific contexts" (Strizel, 2014, p.16). In turn, CDA, which focuses on the relationships between text and its socio-political context, can assist in detecting the deeper motivations and pre-conceived assumptions underlying securitisation moves.

This article analyses the socio-political context of Putin's regime concerning its war on Ukraine and the securitisation of that war through terrorism, using Cassam's (2022) framework of extremism, partly because conventional warfare constitutes the most extreme form of political violence. Cassam categorises extremism into analytical categories: ideological extremism, methods extremism, and psychological extremism. The value of Cassam's approach is that it offers an analytical tool for determining whether an object of analysis exhibits extremist characteristics and, if so, in which particular ways (Cassam, 2022, p. 91).

While a universally accepted definition of extremism is lacking, extremists typically aim to replace the liberal democratic order and alter the fundamental constitutional principles associated with it. Hence, terrorism can be viewed as a set of violent tactics primarily employed by extremists. (EU TE-SAT, 2020, p. 7) This is how terrorism is perceived in this article, in line with Tore Bjørgo (2005, p. 2), for whom "terrorism is primarily an extremism of means, not one of ends". Extremism is often conflated with radicalism. It is assumed, however, that radicalism can function within the limits of democratic action, while extremism goes

beyond these limits, rejecting diversity and the rule of law, often considering the use of violence as a legitimate tool. (Coolsaet, 2022, p. 189) The reason that Putin's regime is analysed through the lens of extremism in this article is precisely because it deems violence against Ukraine as acceptable means.

Extremism has been widely conceptualised in terms of ideology (Finley, 2019; Canetti-Nisim, 2003, Cassam, 2022): "terrorism is a tactic, whereas extremism is a belief system" (Berger, 2018, p. 30). However, in this case, the link between a belief system and the perpetration of political violence remains ambiguous. Hence, extremism is understood here in line with Cassam's (2021) definition: "Extremism is a mindset, a way of seeing the world and others that cuts across ideologies and methods of achieving them". In Cassam's terminology, radicalisation, or the process of becoming an extremist, entails either acquiring an extremist mindset or is a process facilitated by the possession of an extremist mindset (Cassam, 2022, p. 173). An extremist mindset develops hand in hand with cognitive radicalisation and facilitates potential behavioural radicalisation when an individual begins to perceive themselves as a soldier with a duty to fight for their cause (Cassam, 2022, p. 175). In this article, Putin's regime is analysed in terms of cognitive, behavioural, and psychological radicalisation.

The overarching framework for this article is securitisation theory. As per Buzan and colleagues (1998, p.32), "based on a clear idea of the nature of security, securitisation studies aim to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitisation, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results and, not least, under what conditions". Cassam's framework of extremism is employed to address these questions, offering insights into the ideological, behavioural, and psychological factors that underlie Putin's regime's securitisation of its invasion of Ukraine through terrorism. A limitation of this study is that it does focus on the results of securitisation, or the legitimisation of the invasion by Russian society.

In the empirical section, Putin's regime's securitisation strategies, grounded in its ideological, methods, and psychological extremism are examined as discursively projected both domestically and internationally by the spokespersons of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

According to Widdowson (2007, p. 70), "discourses are kinds of genre, institutionalised modes of thinking and social practice, and those who compose texts are taken to be not so much individuals as socially construed spokespersons or representatives of discourse communities". The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs operates under the Russian government and is overseen by the Russian president; hence, Putin's discourse is inherently embedded in the MFA's text production, which encompasses the drafting and execution of Russia's foreign policy and legal regulations in the realm of foreign relations.

The reception or consumption of the Russian MFA's messages is extensive, both internationally and nationally, and is heavily influenced by the key figures within the MFA. In addition to Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lavrov, who has served as the Kremlin's primary representative in major international negotiations and has been active in giving interviews to foreign as well as Russian state media, another remarkable figure within the Russian MFA is Maria Zakharova, the head of the Information and Press Department of Russian MFA since August 2015. She has become the "official voice" of Russian foreign policy course, presenting Russian foreign policy in the most favourable light (Martynenko & Melnikova, 2016). Presently, Zakharova stands as one of the most frequently cited Russian diplomats, having achieved fame through her participation in political talk shows on Russian state TV and her commentary on current political issues on her public social media (ibid.). As per Martynenko and Melnikova (2016), Zakharova altered the language of the Russian MFA, merging the traditional official style with an informal, conversational style on social media, thereby making "the ministry more modern and using the best practices of foreign states" (ibid.). Zakharova herself has now emerged as one of the central newsmakers in both Russian and foreign media (ibid.). Consequently, it can be affirmed that the primary audience for Russian MFA comprises not only other states but also Russian population.

This article conducts an empirical analysis of the properties of texts contained on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, using Fairclough's (2003) assumptions as a tool. The examination of assumptions helps to uncover the subtlest nuances of meaning-making that are largely overlooked and taken for granted. In Fairclough's (2003) methodology, the term *assumptions* is used to describe the implicit processes

of meaning-making in texts. Fairclough's account delineates existential (assumptions about what exists), propositional (assumptions about what is or can be the case), and value assumptions (about what is good or desirable). Most assumptions are implicit, but some are triggered by linguistic features in texts. Assumptions assist the interpreter in revealing the value systems that underlie a text. The content of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs webpage was analysed from 24 February 2022 to 31 August 2022. Texts containing keywords *«терроризм» (terrorism), «террорист»*, and *«террористический» (terrorist)* as well as *«террор» (terror)* during this period were checked for their references to the current war on Ukraine and, if relevant, copied into a separate Word file. Out of a total of 94 texts in the Word file, assumptions were detected, which helped in the examination of the securitising strategies employed by Putin's regime, grounded in its own extremist properties.

1. PUTIN'S REGIME AND EXTREMISM

1.1. PUTIN'S REGIME AND IDEOLOGICAL EXTREMISM

One way to define extremist ideology is to determine its position at the extreme left or the extreme right end of the Left/Right ideological spectrum, or to identify how extremist the ideological position is on the following issues: the size and role of the state, private property, freedom, human rights, democracy, justice, equality, nationalism, and free speech (Cassam, 2022, pp. 42, 45). Nevertheless, in Cassam's terms, not all ideologies can be neatly categorised along the Left/Right ideological spectrum; some may occupy extreme ends on other spectrums, e.g., the Pro-Violence or Authoritarianism spectrum. At the extreme end of the latter, you find anarchism, whereas, on the opposite extreme, there is a "strictly ordered society in which infringements on authority are to be punished severely" (Cassam, 2022, p. 57). Concerning the Pro-Violence spectrum, on one extreme end, you find pacifism, whereas, at the opposite extreme, ideologies advocate violence for political ends (Cassam, 2022, p. 40). Promoted violence is not a measure of the last resort and is indiscriminate on a large scale (ibid.). An extremist pro-violence ideology views violence as the first resort, a means of imposing its views on the politically recalcitrant, and a way to protect "our deepest values and

our collective survival" from imminent danger (loc. cit., p. 57). Notably, it is typically states rather than sub-state actors that tend to be the perpetrators of the most extreme violence (ibid.). Furthermore, "all forms of political extremism, regardless of their specifics, are distinguished by their penchant for taking political ideas to their limits" (e.g., pushing the idea of violence as a legitimate means of achieving one's political objectives to its limits) (Cassam, 2022, p. 59).

On the Left/Right ideological spectrum, it is evident that Putin's regime is firmly positioned on the extreme right end. According to Laqueur (2015, p. 248), following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism in Russia has been replaced by authoritarian nationalism. This shift was accelerated by the annexation of Crimea, the concurrent war in eastern Ukraine, and the attack on the MH17 airplane, while "the Russian Extreme Right and the lunatic fringe have grown in influence over the years" (loc. cit., p. 250). Morozov (2015, pp. 5–6) defined Russia's radical traditionalist ideology as paleoconservatism, a perspective that aligns with Western far-right movements. Russia's politics has shifted towards imperialism, with a focus on the securitisation of the West and implementing offensive policies in the post-Soviet region. In Kuzio's (2022) view, the seizure of Crimea and the denial of the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians have driven Russian conservatism towards an emphasis on imperial nationalism as a central concept. Nationalism in Putin's Russia has combined Tsarist imperial and Soviet nationalisms into an eclectic ruling ideology, which fuels Putin's regime's aggression against Ukraine. The former type of nationalism serves as the ideological basis for denying the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians, whereas the latter contributes to the ideological discourse that describes as Nazis the Ukrainians who resist being labelled as Little Russians and endorse Ukraine's European orientation (ibid.)

Building on the above, there are three central ideas that Putin's regime is taking to their limits in the war on Ukraine. Firstly, the idea that Ukrainians constitute an artificial nation and that Ukraine is not a sovereign state. It suggests that Ukraine's existence is a historical error made by Lenin and Soviet politicians and that, despite gaining independence, Ukraine failed to establish a stable statehood and has instead become a puppet state of the West. Significantly, upon reassuming presidency in 2012, Putin portrayed himself as the 'gatherer of Russian [or

eastern Slavic] lands', willing to incorporate Belarus and Ukraine into the Russian World, a concept formulated in 2007 and based on the notion that the three eastern Slavs form a pan-Russian nation, sharing common language, culture, and history. This was the unresolved matter that Putin aimed to address before entering the history books. (Kuzio, 2022) During the Soviet era, Ukrainians were considered a separate nation, although closely linked to Russians. In Putin's Russia, however, the notion of Ukrainian national statehood, the Ukrainian people, and their language was disparaged as artificial (ibid.). For instance, in a 2020 interview, Kremlin ideologist and political technologist Vladislav Surkov emphatically denied the existence of Ukraine: "There is no Ukraine... There is a brochure "Samostiyna Ukraina" [Independent Ukraine], but there is no Ukraine" (cited in Sazonov & Saumets, 2022, p. 13). Consequently, the idea that Ukraine is an inherent part of Russia forms an essential component of Russian imperialist nationalist ideology and is being pushed to its limits in the course of Putin's regime's invasion of Ukraine.

Secondly, the idea is taken to the limits is that Ukrainians are neo-Nazis. Putin (2022a) refers to nationalist aspirations within the Soviet Union as a virus and attributes the collapse of the Soviet Union to the "disease" of nationalism. In independent Ukraine, "Neanderthal and aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism have been elevated /…/ to the rank of national policy" (Putin, 2022a), with its current government consisting of "fascists" and "drug addicts" (Putin, 2022c). In Putin's (2022a) terms, the reasons for the rise of far-right nationalism which quickly transformed into aggressive Russophobia and neo-Nazism can be attributed to the fact that Ukrainian authorities set out to build Ukrainian statehood on the negation of everything that united Ukraine with Russia. So, in Putin's view, Russian soldiers in Ukraine are defending Donbas and Russia against the threat emanating from the anti-Russia enclave. Putin securitises Ukrainians as intending to attack Crimea like Donbas to kill innocents just like Ukrainian nationalists who were Hitler's accomplices did during the Great Patriotic War (Putin, 2022b). Putin's cult of the Great Patriotic War is deeply connected with the promotion of Russia as the country which defeated Nazism in WWII and is now fighting Nazis in Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic States (Kuzio, 2022). The narrative involving Nazis, Nazi collaborators, and fascists was revived by Russian political technologists in Ukraine back in 2004 to discredit presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko. Following the 2004 Orange Revolution,

the Russian media described Ukraine as being governed by fascists and neo-Nazis, where Russian speakers were persecuted and subjected to genocide [though the International Court of Justice dismissed this claim on 16 March 2022] and pro-Russian politicians and media were suppressed (ibid.). Hence, Putin constructs Russia's clash with anti-Russia forces in Ukraine as inevitable, taking the idea of denazification of Ukraine to the limits.

To strengthen his argument, Putin securitises Ukrainians as terrorists. For instance, in Crimea, he claims that Ukrainian authorities, unable to challenge the people's free choice, resorted to activating extremist cells, including radical Islamists, who staged terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure and kidnapped Russian citizens, all with the support of Western security services (Putin, 2022a). About Ukraine's 2021 Military Strategy, Putin says that it advocates for the establishment of a terrorist underground movement in Crimea and Donbas and it even mentions a potential war with Russia (ibid.).

Thirdly, Putin is pushing the idea that Russia is being persecuted and existentially threatened by NATO and the collective West, both led by the U.S., to its extreme limits. In his view, the West supports nationalists in Ukraine, while NATO is militarising Ukraine to target Russia from that vantage point. Putin blames the U.S. and NATO for not accepting Russia's proposals for an "equal dialogue" in the context of increased threats to Russia, justifying Russia's right to respond to ensure its security (Putin, 2022a). Putin also claims that Ukraine might acquire weapons of mass destruction with Western assistance in order to target Russia, necessitating Russia's response. According to him, the West is "pumping" Ukraine with arms, while the U.S. and NATO are conducting anti-Russia joint military exercises there. Putin stresses that Ukrainian accession to NATO constitutes a direct threat to Russia's security (ibid.). Notably, neither Ukraine's NATO membership (despite joint military exercises) nor the installation of offensive missiles in Ukraine was on the agenda of NATO or the U.S. (Kuzio, 2022) As per Laqueur (2015, p. 4), the besieged-fortress feeling and fear of the West (*zapadophobia*) have been inherent in Russia's doctrine and ideology for centuries.

To further securitise the U.S. and NATO, Putin constructs them as perpetrators and instigators of terrorism worldwide. In his view, in 2000,

when he asked Clinton if Russia could be admitted to NATO, the U.S. overtly supported terrorists in the North Caucasus, while NATO continued to expand. This all led to making an enemy out of Russia who wanted to be an ally (Putin, 2022a). Furthermore, the U.S. is blamed for breaching international law and creating "bloody, non-healing wounds and the curse of international terrorism and extremism" (ibid.). Putin also blames the collective West for supporting separatism and, through this, international terrorism in the Caucasus (ibid.).

Looking at Putin's extremist ideas on the Pro-Violence spectrum, they lean towards the extreme end of advocating violence, but rather implicitly, explaining that violence committed against Ukraine is a supreme emergency defence against an existential threat to the referent object, which is Russia. Justifying the need for violence, Putin contextualises the planned offensive against Ukraine within the framework of counterterrorism, arguing that it is legitimate to use the military against terrorists: first, Russia used its military to combat terrorists in the Caucasus to preserve Russia's integrity; then, in 2014, Russia supported Crimea, and, in 2015, Russia employed its military to prevent terrorists from Syria from infiltrating Russia. The war on Ukraine is also constructed in this chain of events as defending Russia, presented as the only available option. (Putin, 2022b) Nevertheless, some of the Kremlin's top officials and pro-Putin elites are more explicit in their endorsement of violence and genocide against Ukraine and Ukrainians for political purposes. For example, Dmitry Rogozin, former head of Roskosmos, proposed "to put an end to Ukrainians once and for all", as Ukraine represents "an existential threat to the Russian people, Russian history, Russian language, and Russian civilisation" (EUvsDISINFO, 2022e).

On the Authoritarianism spectrum, Russia is currently clearly authoritarian, with any infringements on authority being severely punished. In 2020, changes to the Russian constitution effectively made Putin president for life, leading to an increase in political repressions and worsening media censorship during Russia's aggression against Ukraine. All these developments signal Russia's transition to a totalitarian regime (Kuzio, 2022).

Overall, Putin's regime exhibits ideological extremism by positioning itself at the extreme right end of the Right/Left ideological spectrum,

advocating for violence on the Pro-Violence spectrum, embracing extreme authoritarianism on the Authoritarianism spectrum as well as making fierce attempts to push to the limit the ideas of Ukraine being a part of Russia, Russia being a victim of NATO, the U.S. and the West's persecution, as well as the idea of liberating Ukraine and, by extension, the entire world from Nazism. Consequently, by taking the above ideas to their limits, Putin anticipated that the Russian military would be welcomed by the Little Russians as liberators of Ukraine from the U.S.-imposed nationalist and neo-Nazi captivity, ultimately leading to the fall of the artificial Ukrainian state and its retake by Russian forces within two days. Notably, terrorism is used as a securitisation mechanism in pushing the above ideas to their limits.

It is worth noting that all aspects of the ideological extremism exhibited by Putin's regime grew exponentially with the commencement of Russia's aggression, aligning with the idea that conventional war represents an extreme form of political violence and is inevitably about extremes. For instance, the idea that Ukrainians are neo-Nazis became drastically more prevalent in Russia's rhetoric on Ukraine following the commencement of the aggression, as compared to the months preceding it (Semantic Visions, 2022, p. 2). It can be observed that all other elements of extremism discussed above (e.g., the extreme right and the extreme authoritarian ideology) also intensified in Putin's regime, although they were already strong before the invasion and largely facilitated it. It can also be said that evolving ideological extremism facilitated the superficial interpretation by the Kremlin regime of the FSB survey which measured the opinions of Ukrainians before the invasion, without providing any indications of how sentiments could change after the invasion (Reynolds & Watling, 2022).

1.2. PUTIN'S REGIME AND METHODS EXTREMISM

In Cassam's view, "a methods extremist is an individual or group that uses extreme methods (however exactly these are defined) in pursuit of its [political] objectives" (ibid.) Violent methods extremists (VMEs) commit unnecessary violence without exploring alternative options, taking the need for violence for granted and making no effort to minimise

their violence (Cassam, 2022, p. 70). Some extremist political objectives are so unrealistic that violence appears to be the only way to achieve them, and even in this case with little chance of success. Furthermore, VMEs commit disproportionate violence, claiming that it is proportionate and enacted in self-defence (loc. cit., pp. 73–74). When it comes to selecting targets of violence, some VMEs do not specifically target non-combatants but, at the same time, do not consider civilian casualties as a compelling reason to stop the violence (loc. cit., p. 76). Other types of VMEs may target the military, civilians, and innocents. In their view, the first two categories are legitimate targets, while innocents, such as children, are seen as illegitimate targets, as they "had done nothing to make themselves liable to attack" (ibid.)[3]. Hence, such VMEs often commit indiscriminate violence as they have a broad perspective on who is considered liable to attack[4] (loc. cit, p. 78). Even if the target is found to be illegitimate, an extremist fails to feel distressed or modify their tactics.

Putin's regime's violence in the war on Ukraine can be viewed as extremist for several reasons. First, the violence being committed by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine is unnecessary. On 2 March 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/ES-11/1 which strongly deplored Russia's aggression against Ukraine. According to the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo (2022), the war on Ukraine had no just cause; it was initiated by choice without any unavoidability of the suffering it has caused. Similarly, most commentators consider the aggression irrational (Kuzio, 2022). Second, the violence being perpetrated by Russian soldiers is disproportionate, as it is not committed in self-defence, although Putin's regime claims the opposite. The abovementioned resolution of the UN General Assembly refers to reports "of attacks on civilian facilities such as residences, schools and hospitals, and of civilian casualties, including women, older persons, persons with disabilities, and children (A/RES/ES-11/1, p. 2).

[3] "A person is liable to harm as long as they are 'implicated in some way' in the problem to which the extremist is reacting with violence" (McMahan, 2009, p. 8, cited in Cassam, 2022, p. 77).

[4] Similarly, according to Crenshaw (2011, p. 5), terrorism is never purely random and indiscrimination in terrorism is relative.

In response to the numerous airstrikes on civilian targets in Ukraine, Putin's regime either completely denies Russia's involvement, blaming the strikes on the Ukrainian military and securitising Ukrainian Defence Forces as committing violence as well as using terrorist tactics against their own people (e.g., Zakharova, 2022; Zakharova, 2022a; Buyakevich, 2022, etc.) or, alternatively, after some time, claims that the strikes aimed at legitimate targets (e.g., the Ukrainian forces, officials, Western arms dealers, etc.). The main findings of the Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, submitted in March 2023, read as follows:

> The Commission has concluded that Russian armed forces have carried out attacks with explosive weapons in populated areas with an apparent disregard for civilian harm and suffering. It has documented indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, and a failure to take precautions, in violation of international humanitarian law.

Mueller (2022) notes that Russian leaders appear to have little concern about causing civilian casualties and may even view the tactic of terror attacks on civilian targets as useful for diminishing the enemy's morale and resources. Consequently, Putin's regime can be defined as a methods extremist because its instigated violence in Ukraine is unnecessary, indiscriminate (including innocents and children) and disproportionate, while no effort has been made to minimise it and no adjustment of tactics has been made following the acknowledgement of causing civilian casualties.

1.3. PUTIN'S REGIME AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EXTREMISM

In Cassam's terms, it is best to view extremist psychology as an extremist mindset. Elements of the extremist mindset include interrelated extremist preoccupations, emotions, attitudes, and ways of thinking. Extremist preoccupations include purity (racial, religious or ideological, so that many extremists engage in a respective 'cleansing'); victimhood and supposed humiliation; virtue (meaning that extremists are solely doing what is right to defend themselves and their people) (Cassam, 2022, p. 5). Cassam does not attempt to present an exhaustive list of

extremist preoccupations and rather stresses their interrelation (loc. cit., 96). Related to the above preoccupations are Saucier's (2009, quoted in Cassam, 2022, p. 87) identified 16 components of a militant extremist mindset (MEM). Although not all extremism is militant, in the context of Putin's regime and its aggression against Ukraine, the following MEM themes appear to be important: the indispensability of unconventional and extreme measures; the application of tactics to avoid responsibility for aggravated consequences of promoted or perpetrated violence; the use of military vocabulary where it is uncommon; the feeling of the group that it is being prevented from achieving its deserved position; the glorification of the group's past; the utopianism, or constantly speaking about a future heaven or a land of milk and honey; a duty to purify the entire world from evil; praise for dying for the cause; a strong imperative to kill or start an offensive war; the dehumanisation and demonisation of opponents; perceiving the present-day world as a calamity. These themes serve as ways of framing and interpreting events by those having a militant extremist mindset (Cassam, 2022, p. 88).

Furthermore, as actions are spurred by emotions, Cassam identifies emotions that are central to the extremist mindset: anger, resentment, self-pity, and feeling humiliated. Within the extremist mindset, all of these emotions are disproportionate, irrational and disconnected from reality. Extremists fail to see the extent to which their emotions are inappropriate and, even if they do, they fail to modify these emotions. (Cassam, 2022, p. 98) Another relevant emotion closely related to the extremist mindset is ressentiment, described by Nietsche as "an existential resentment of other people's being, caused by an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness" (Mishra, 2018, p.14, cited in Cassam, 2022, p. 99).

Among the core components of the extremist mindset are the following attitudes: hostility to compromise (compromise is seen as a shameful capitulation or betrayal of the core principles); indifference to the suffering of those they harm while imposing their principles; intolerance of the Other (manifested in complete absence of tolerance of any member of the disdained outgroup); and anti-pluralism (believing that there is only one right way and answer as well as only one good side, or Us) (Cassam, 2022, pp. 102–107). Additionally, there are ways of thinking associated with extremist mindset: conspiracy thinking (or seeing conspiracies of

the Other as the cause of one's victimisation); apocalyptic thinking (or being preoccupied with the end of the world); and catastrophic thinking (the perception that great disasters have occurred, are occurring or will occur) (Cassam, 2022, pp. 109–110).

During the war on Ukraine, Putin's regime's preoccupation with purity has been manifested in the filtration camps set up in various places of Ukraine occupied by Russia. It can be said that Russian soldiers engage in hostile ideological cleansing, detaining Ukrainian citizens who are either prisoners of war, have connections to the Ukrainian armed forces or have symbols (on their bodies) that support Ukrainian sovereignty (these are equated to Nazi symbols) (Tsyganov, 2022). For instance, as of 25 August 2022, there were 21 filtration camps in Donetsk oblast, where people were treated in a humiliating and inhumane way, including torture (Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health, 2022). Additionally, Putin's regime's preoccupation with purity is also evident in the narratives of denazification and demilitarisation of Ukraine. For example, in the Kherson oblast on 18 August 2022, Russian officials arrested teachers and burnt coursebooks, as they contradicted Putin's curriculum for the new academic year. The coursebooks imposed by the Russian authorities do not mention key events in Ukrainian history; also, students are required to wear Soviet uniforms (Kivil, 2022).

Putin's regime's hostility to compromise has manifested not only in the impasse at peace negotiations with Ukraine but also in its activities aimed at undermining the agreements achieved through negotiations. For instance, a missile strike on the port of Odesa occurred after a deal had been reached on the exports of Ukrainian grain (Voa News, 2022a). Additionally, as per Kuzio (2022), achieving a compromise was impossible for Zelenskyy already in 2019 when he became president and attempted to negotiate with Putin. In line with Minsk peace process, Ukraine was to capitulate to Russia's demands and placed within Russia's sphere of influence. As Ukraine's submission was not achieved through the Minsk peace process, it had to be achieved by what Lavrov called 'military-technical means' or launching the so-called special military operation (ibid.).

During the war on Ukraine, Putin's regime put the blame for the events on NATO and the collective West. For instance, Russia's permanent

representative to the UN Gatilov accused the West of using the war in Ukraine "as a matter of pressure on Russia, as a tool to isolate Russia, damaging our position, economically and politically" (Financial Times, 2022). Such statements are numerous in the Russian official political discourse and manifest Putin's regime's preoccupation with victimhood and humiliation as well as perceived persecution by the West, accompanied by the emotions of self-pity and feeling humiliated. This situation can be explained by Morozov's (2015) account of Russia as a subaltern empire in a Eurocentric world, meaning that Russia is not only an empire that conducts imperialist politics in the post-Soviet space (its so-called colonial periphery), but it is also a European colony, a peripheral country, whose agency is limited and whose voice is not heard in the international Eurocentric hegemonic order. Russia, as a nation, has internalised the neo-liberal capitalist model of development and has no other consciousness than Eurocentrism, while Russia's being a peripheral country is due to uneven and combined development (Morozov, 2015, p. 5). Hence, Russia is heavily reliant on the West economically[5] and normatively, while increasingly trying to justify its foreign policy by blaming the West for neocolonialism and criticising the injustices of the current international order (loc. cit., p. 9).

Russia's feeling of subordination and speechlessness in the relations of domination with the West, as well as constantly feeling threatened by what Russia views as an expansion of Western empire and its hegemonic position in the world, can be seen as the source of ressentiment (or envy of the West, intense resentment of its existence, and Russia's powerlessness in trying to make its voice heard) that escalated to the extremist level with Putin's regime's aggression against Ukraine. Laqueur (2015, p. 251) also stresses that Russia has always blamed its internal issues on foreigners and felt like a besieged fortress, which served as the justification for Russia's authoritarian rule.

Furthermore, Putin's regime's extremist emotions of anger and resentment during the war are manifested not only in Putin's addresses, where he, for example, explicitly refers to the Ukrainian government as a gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis (Putin, 2022c). Russia's ex-president Medvedev, who used to manifest liberal attitudes and promote Russia's modernisation, has switched to a belligerent language in the current

[5] Laqueur (2015, p. 249) also stresses Russia's financial dependence on the West.

overly conservative environment in Russia, claiming that Russia will ensure that Ukraine will disappear from the map soon and saying "I hate them. They are bastards and degenerates. They want us, Russia, to die. And while I'm still alive, I will do everything to make them disappear" (Walker, 2022). Genocidal rhetoric similar to Medvedev's has become central in Russia's wartime political discourse.

These emotions are disproportionate, irrational and disconnected from reality, as they are not justified by facts. Those who express these extremist emotions fail (or simulate to fail) to see the extent to which these emotions are inappropriate. Notably, such angry and frequent calls for genocide influence the Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine, as "this continued maelstrom of "disappear / cease to exist / hate them" is one big green light for soldiers to go ahead with any action one could imagine" (EUvsDISINFO, 2022e). All of the above manifests dehumanisation and demonisation of the opponent as well as the attitude of intolerance of the Other, or members of the despised outgroup, based on their supposed evil nature and posing an existential threat to Russia.

Other elements of the extremist mindset exhibited by Putin's regime are: a preoccupation with virtue (for instance, Putin expressed that, as opposed to the U.S. and NATO, Russia has always promoted "the resolution of the most complicated problems by political and diplomatic means, at the negotiating table" (Putin, 2022a)); an attitude of indifference to casualties (as manifested by Putin's statement at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok on 7 September that, in the war on Ukraine, "we have lost nothing. And we will not lose anything. The main goal is strengthening our sovereignty" (Preobrazhensky, 2022); conspiracist thinking (e.g., according to the Kremlin's discourse, an artificial Ukrainian nation and Ukrainian puppet state were created by the West as an anti-Russian conspiracy to divide and rule the pan-Russian nation (Kuzio, 2022)); in addition, there has historically been a prevailing sense that "the whole world was engaged in conspiring against Russia" (Laquer, 2015, p. 6). There is also a fixation on Soviet nostalgia and the glorification of the past as expressed in, for example, the imposition of Soviet uniforms in schools.

In summary, as evident from the above, Putin and his regime display a sufficient number of interrelated extremist preoccupations, attitudes,

emotions, and thinking styles. It can be reasonably concluded that Putin and his regime are cognitively, behaviourally, and psychologically radicalised, aiming at taking the entire Russia in this direction. To further discuss the extremist properties of Putin's regime, being discursively projected on Russia and internationally, a textual analysis has been conducted, examining cases in which Russian officials securitise Ukraine and the West as extremists and terrorists during the so-called special military operation in Ukraine.

2. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

2.1. OVERALL RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF 94 TEXTS BY THE RUSSIAN MFA

Overall, at the level of assumptions, representatives of the Russian MFA securitise Ukraine based on its extreme right ideology, with members of neo-Nazi military formations assuming important positions in the government instead of criminal punishment and with current Kyiv authorities relying on ultranationalists and neo-Nazis who, since 2014, have gained control over Ukraine and terrorised its population. The Ukrainian government is also securitised based on its extreme authoritarianism, as Kyiv's new authorities came to power in 2014 after an unconstitutional coup d'état supported by the West. Hence, there is an assumption that Kyiv's regime is illegitimate and denies the Donbas people, who legitimately opposed the coup, the opportunity for political self-determination, declaring them terrorists and initiating antiterrorist operations against them. Furthermore, Ukraine's government is securitised based on the extreme pro-violence ideology. It is assumed that the Ukrainian armed forces have attacked civilians in Donbas without any justification, thus perpetrating state terrorism acts irrationally; that the inhuman and immoral Kyiv regime also approves of the extremist violence conducted by Ukrainian neo-Nazis and Islamist terrorists who are part of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces.

Taking ideas to their extreme limits involves the forceful securitisation of the West, as it promotes an impending terrorist threat to the entire world by supplying military aid to Ukraine; the securitisation of NATO's

transformation of Ukraine into a hub of experienced foreign terrorists and mercenaries; the securitisation of neo-Nazi, Nazi, and nationalist ideologies that are spreading from Ukraine; the securitisation of absence of control by the Ukrainian government over migration, the distribution of weapons, and virtually any aspect of governance.

Ukrainian combat methods are securitised as terrorist tactics and extremist violence, characterised as being unnecessary, indiscriminate, disproportionate, taken for granted, and seeking to maximise civilian casualties. The emphasis is consistently on the atrocities harming innocent civilians, particularly women, the elderly, and children, as well as maternal hospitals, kindergartens, schools, and medical facilities. When it comes to the extremist mindset, Ukraine is securitised based on the assumed preoccupation with purity (elimination of everything Russian), hostility to compromise (imposed by the West), demonisation and dehumanisation of the opponent (e.g., calling Russian soldiers "cockroaches"), the need to kill or start an offensive war (primarily in Donbas), indifference to casualties, even on a global scale. Within this context, Ukrainians are constructed to avoid responsibility for the perpetrated violence and to even plan chemical and nuclear attacks to shift blame onto Russia.

Beneath these securitisation strategies, on the level of assumptions, are the forceful extremist properties of Putin's regime. Notably, a strong emphasis is placed on the preoccupation with virtue, constructing Russian soldiers as doing everything to protect civilians, providing them with humanitarian and medical aid, and destroying Western weaponry left behind by the retreating Ukrainian soldiers, thereby preventing these weapons from ending up in the hands of terrorists, etc. Russia's combat methods are constructed as being aimed at preventing (nuclear) terrorist attacks and exclusively targeting military infrastructure, ISIS terrorists, and foreign mercenaries. Russia is constructed as "unable to remain indifferent" and protecting its deepest values, or human rights, assumed to have been ruthlessly violated in Donbas. Furthermore, there's a strong preoccupation with legitimacy, as Russia is assumed to possess the ability to distinguish between a terrorist and a freedom fighter, while the West wrongfully treats actual terrorists as freedom fighters. Russia is assumed to speak the truth and promptly debunk false information regarding its armed forces.

Ressentiment has become increasingly prominent as Russia is constructed as persistently reaching out and appealing to the West, yet not being heard by it, implying a sense of powerlessness on Russia's part. Simultaneously, there's a strong expression of resentment for the West: the assumption is that the West supports terrorists, creates and spreads terrorism, lacks principles and values, applies double standards, imparts terrorist tactics to nationalists, etc. Russia's preoccupation with victimhood and persecution by the West is expressed in the West's assumed informational and cyber-terrorism against Russia; the urging of Ukraine to attack Russia with Western weapons; NATO's refusal to give Russia security guarantees; taking Ukraine hostage and using it as NATO's front against Russia; blaming all the problems and threats on Russia as their way of conducting foreign policy, etc.

Extreme dehumanisation and demonisation of the opponent are evident in constructing Ukrainian combatants, foreign mercenaries, and Islamist terrorists in Ukraine as intentionally targeting everyone with inhuman brutality. Hostility to compromise is reflected in the unbendable demand for demilitarisation, denazification, the neutral status of Ukraine, and the recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea. A duty to purify the entire world of evil is reflected primarily in the assumed need to eradicate Nazism and Nazi ideology that is assumed to have been revived in Ukraine. Against this background, it is implied that Putin's regime has an incentive to start an offensive war. It remains unclear, however, how Ukraine is being denazified if Russian soldiers only target military infrastructure, Islamist terrorists, and foreign fighters: attacks on assumed Ukrainian neo-Nazis or other soldiers are never mentioned or implied. Instead, tactics to avoid responsibility for the aggravated consequences of Russia's perpetrated violence are employed by accusing Ukraine of orchestrating nefarious deceptions to blame Russia for Ukraine's violence.

The analysed texts prominently feature Putin's regime's conspiracy thinking: assumed is, for instance, a planned invasion of the LDNR and adjacent Russian territories on 8 March 2022; the U.S. testing of dangerous biological substances on Ukrainians; all combat activities of Ukrainian armed forces amounting to their fear of neo-Nazis, etc. Furthermore, the analysed texts exhibit extreme anti-pluralism: on the level of assumptions, only Russia has principles and values and is always

right; only Russia genuinely saves, helps, and protects. It is stressed that Russia has not started the war but is ending it, so Russia's invasion is assumed to be desirable and urgently needed. Due to space constraints, this article provides a detailed examination of only three representative excerpts from the analysed texts.

2.2. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THREE REPRESENTATIVE EXCERPTS

2.2.1. Excerpt 1

The following excerpt comes from the briefing of Maria Zakharova on 31 August 2022:

> Today, the allied forces are moving forward, albeit gradually but steadily, step by step, relieving and liberating Donbas from the neo-Nazis who have established strongholds in its towns and villages over the past eight years. All of this has caused anger in the military and political leadership of the Kyiv regime, prompting them to issue insane and criminal orders for massive strikes against civilian targets in the DNR and the LNR, as well as the liberated territories of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, causing maximum damage and an even greater number of civilian victims and casualties. The Ukrainian armed forces are especially savage in their attacks on kindergartens, schools, and other educational establishments, which is even more blasphemous on the eve of 1 September. We have been through all of this. We remember the Beslan tragedy vividly, which unfolded as children were heading to school. The individuals who committed this are called terrorists by the whole world. Those who shell and strike at children's institutions (especially on 1 September) are terrorists. There can be no other definition for them (Zakharova, 2022).

The propositional assumption in "allied forces" is that it is not only Russian troops fighting in Ukraine, indicating that Russia has allies. Through this, Russia implicitly claims legitimacy. The propositional assumption in "albeit gradually but steadily" is that Russian troops could move faster, the implication being that there is an obstacle on their way and that Russia is not using extreme measures. The existential assumption is that the Kyiv regime does indeed exist, implying that the Ukrainian

government has not been elected fairly and is thus illegitimate. The propositional assumption here is that the Ukrainian government "issues insane and criminal orders for massive strikes against civilian targets" out of anger at the gradual progression of Russian troops in Donbas, implying that Ukraine has no alternative means of expelling Russian troops from the LDNR, the Kherson as well as the Zaporizhzhia regions, and that the people in those regions, including the Russian troops, are at risk of being harmed. The Ukrainian government is constructed as insane and criminal, and, therefore, illegitimate. In the phrase "to cause maximum damage and even more civilian victims and casualties", the propositional assumption is that the Ukrainian government (implicitly equated with the neo-Nazis and constructed as giving them orders) has already caused damage and civilian casualties in Donbas, and now they are seeking maximum damage, the implication being that their anger and desperation has grown, being irrational and disproportionate.

The propositional assumption here is that the Ukrainian armed forces are savage, but they are especially brutal in attacking educational facilities for children and innocent victims, implying that the Ukrainian armed forces are inhuman to the highest degree. They are also constructed as blasphemous, because they seek the extermination of children in schools on the eve of 1 September, the implicit assumption being that they are godless, while God is, therefore, on the Russian side. Ukrainians are equated with the Chechen militants who attacked a school in Beslan and, consequently, with terrorism. Emphasising the date of 1 September implies that the Ukrainian armed forces are even more extreme terrorists in their targeting of innocent civilians than the Chechen militants who attacked the school in Beslan in 2004. In the phrase "we have been through all of this", the propositional assumption is that Russia has experience in dealing with terrorism and, therefore, has the right to designate actors as terrorists. By emphasising that the Beslan perpetrators are called terrorists "by the whole world", a similar international designation of the Ukrainian armed forces as terrorists and, by extension, defining Ukraine as a terrorist state, is demanded and also considered a legitimate claim. "No other definition" implies that the degree of Russia's certainty and knowledge of the matter is absolute, implying a strong unwillingness to compromise.

In this extract, on the level of assumptions, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is justified by securitising Ukraine primarily on the grounds of extremist ideology, which is constructed to be at the extreme end of the Pro-Violence spectrum (as the government only issues orders to commit violence and takes violence for granted); at the extreme end of the Authoritarianism spectrum (as the Ukrainian government was elected illegitimately; issuing criminal and insane orders); and at the extreme right end of the Left/Right ideological spectrum (as the boundary is blurred between the Ukrainian government, the Ukrainian armed forces, and the neo-Nazis in Donbas). Indeed, here, Russia is taking to the limit the idea that the Ukrainian government (including its political and military leadership), as well as the Ukrainian armed forces, are all neo-Nazis. Secondly, on the level of assumptions, Russia securitises Ukraine as employing extremist methods: being brutally savage and committing acts of terrorism which are constructed as more inhumane than even the Beslan school siege. The violence of the Ukrainian armed forces is constructed as disproportionate (involving massive and maximum force, aiming at even more casualties and victims), indiscriminate (targeting innocents), unnecessary, and taken for granted, while efforts are made to rather maximise than minimise the violence. Thirdly, in terms of extremist psychology, on the level of assumptions, securitisation is employed by blaming Ukraine for demonstrating the need for unconventional and extreme measures, as well as for their indifference to all the innocent victims of airstrikes. The Ukrainian government is accused of irrational and disproportionate anger. Importantly, what characterises Putin's regime itself, based on the underlying assumptions present here, are features of the extremist mindset. First of all, its preoccupation with virtue (doing the right thing by "liberating" Ukraine from neo-Nazis gradually and steadily), the absolute dehumanising and demonising of the opponents, and the attitude of absolute intolerance towards the Other. Additionally, its preoccupation with legitimacy (Russia has allies; Russia knows what terrorism is; Russia seeks to prove that the Ukrainian government is illegitimate), although closely related to the preoccupation with virtue, could be added to the list of preoccupations strongly manifested by the Putin's regime.

2.2.2. Excerpt 2

The following extract comes from an address by a member of the Russian delegation at the Vienna talks on military security and arms control, at the 1018th plenary meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation, on 20 July 2022:

> Third. For some reason, the Western participating states in the FSC [Forum for Security Cooperation] think they have the right to lecture others on how to fulfil their politico-military commitments. At the same time, as the saying goes, they cannot see the log in their own eye. In violation of the principles of responsible export control policy, the OSCE Document on SALW [Small Arms and Light Weapons] and the OSCE Principles Governing Conventional Arms Transfers, for eight years they have been actively "helping" Ukraine to kill civilians in Donbas by supplying tons of military products. Not only does it risk "settling" with terrorists outside Ukraine, but it is already being used for terrorist purposes. Today, the key to maximum damage to the civilian population of Donbas is strikes from American multiple rocket launchers together with similar Soviet-designed systems with a minimum launch time interval. This is terror in its purest form. Since mid-February, intensive shelling, including by Western military equipment, has destroyed more than 5,500 residential buildings in the DNR alone, killing 258 citizens, including 16 children. Their blood is also on your hands (Zhdanova, 2022).

In "for some reason", the propositional assumption is that there is no mutual understanding between Russian and Western FSC participants, and a clear distinction between Russia and "them" is being created; there is a reason for "their" actions, but Russia is unaware of it, the implication being that, for Russia, this reason is null and void. Therefore, the propositional assumption is that the West has no right to "lecture" Russia on politico-military commitments, with the implication being that such actions hurt Russia's virtue. "Lecture" implies an unequal power dynamic between Russia and the West, suggesting conceit on the part of the West and evoking feelings of victimhood and humiliation on the part of Russia. Another implication here is that Russia knows well how to fulfil its "politico-military commitments", needs no recommendations and, hence, manifests its hostility to compromise. In "they cannot see the log in their own eye", the propositional assumption is that the West is

being hypocritical, while there is only a speck in Russia's eye, the propositional assumption being that Russia fulfils its politico-military commitments more effectively than the West. By using a Bible verse [while referencing it as something commonly said], Russia's emphasis on virtue is reiterated.

Additional propositional assumptions include the belief that Ukraine has been killing civilians in Donbas for eight years for no reason, or irrationally; that the West's aid to Ukraine equals the killing of civilians, while "supplying tons of military products" implies that the West's military support to Ukraine is irrationally unlimited, leading to more innocent people being killed by these weapons. Here, both Ukraine and the West are demonised and considered irrational, while true help is implicitly monopolised by Russia, as help is closely tied to doing the right thing, virtue, and legitimacy. Additional propositional assumptions include the idea that the West's weapons could potentially end up in the hands of terrorists outside Ukraine, implying that the West's military equipment export policy is irresponsible and even criminal, as it facilitates terrorism globally and "actively" contributes to terrorism in Ukraine. The propositional assumption in "key to maximum damage to the civilian population of Donbas" is that the West is indifferent to casualties among the civilian population, as it continues to supply Ukraine with the weapons that cause maximum harm to the civilians of Donbas. The propositional assumptions are that "terror in its purest form" is taking place in Donbas, and that the West is not countering it effectively, but is instead facilitating it. Here, both Ukraine and the West are implicitly constructed as inhuman. Notably, once again, Ukrainians are constructed as irrational, with the implicit assumption being that they engage in terrorism in its purest form for no reason and this method is common for them. In "their blood is also on your hands", the propositional assumption is that Ukraine and the West share equal blame for the civilian casualties, including children. In turn, the implication is that Russia is struggling to ensure the security of the people in Donbas and to counter terrorism in Ukraine and worldwide.

In this excerpt, Russia's "politico-military commitments" in Ukraine are justified through the securitisation of both Ukraine and the West, equally constructed as terrorists, whereas the West, through its unlimited military aid to Ukraine, is constructed as endangering the wider

world by potentially escalating terrorism. Moreover, on the level of assumptions, both Ukraine and the West are blamed for using extremist methods, with the emphasis on the "tons" of military equipment for terrorist purposes that cause "maximum damage" to the civilian population in Donbas. Ukraine and, by extension, the West, are constructed as taking the intensive use of terrorism for granted. In terms of the extremist mindset, Ukraine, together with the West, is securitised on the level of assumptions as having a strong attitude of indifference towards civilian casualties of the intensive terror that Ukraine is committing on its territory with Western military aid.

As for Putin's regime's ideological extremism, on the level of assumptions, the idea is taken to the limit that both Ukraine and the West are terrorists, and their behaviour and motivations are irrational. Regarding the extremist mindset, Putin's regime manifests an extremist preoccupation with victimhood and being humiliated by the West (through being lectured), a strong preoccupation with virtue, along with a preoccupation with legitimacy (e.g., using a Bible verse, constructing Russia as the sole provider of the right help and right counterterrorism struggle), a hostile attitude to compromise (manifested in rejecting Western recommendations as hypocritical), absolute demonisation and dehumanisation of the adversary as well as absolute intolerance of the Other. "Their blood is also on your hands" implies this extreme degree of uncompromisingness and resentment on the part of Putin's regime.

2.2.3. Excerpt 3

The following excerpt comes from the briefing by Maria Zakharova on 22 June 2022 in Moscow:

> 81 years later, the Russian military is once again fighting Nazism, neo-Nazism, and the very same kind of virulent fascism (which apparently was not finished with back then), freeing Ukraine from the neo-Nazi stranglehold fostered there over the decades by Western "partners". Now, our [soldiers] are being killed again with weapons now manufactured in NATO countries. Let me remind you what the motto of the Third Reich was: "Drang nach Osten". It has now effectively become the motto of the alliance (I did not make that up, that is what they say). Remember the

> statements by all the EU and NATO representatives in their integration and national capacity about the "battlefield", that nothing positive concerning Russia can be allowed, let alone victory, denying Nazism and fascism, raising funds and sending military equipment just to the east of Brussels? All this against the backdrop of years of moving the alliance's military infrastructure closer to our borders. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian armed formations, retreating from the battlefield, are waging real terror against civilians. Even now, their Western supervisors do not notice their nationalist and misanthropic nature (Zakharova, 2022a).

"Not been finished with back then" triggers the propositional assumption that what was fought against 81 years earlier in WWII, "the very same kind" is now escalating in an identical form, the implication being that it needs to be conclusively resolved and that this is what Russia's military is doing. The existential assumption is that there is a neo-Nazi stranglehold in Ukraine. The propositional assumption here is that the West's partnership with Ukraine is harmful, as it fostered this stranglehold, the implication being that the West reinforces Nazism and virulent fascism. "Is once again fighting" triggers the propositional assumption that Russia is in an identical situation to WWII, implying that Russian soldiers are heroes, Russia's cause is just, and victory will be with the Russia's side. The propositional assumption in "now, our [soldiers] are being killed again with weapons now manufactured in NATO countries" is that this time, NATO is the enemy just like Nazi Germany was in WWII.

"Let me remind you" triggers the propositional assumption that the audience might not remember this specific motto of the Third Reich ("Drang nach Osten", or "Drive to the East"). "I did not make that up" triggers the propositional assumption that the audience might suspect Zakharova of lying; moreover, "that is what they say" implies that the audience trusts NATO and its statements. By equating their mottos, NATO is likened to the Third Reich based on anecdotal evidence, which signals conspiracy thinking. The implication here is that NATO wants to conquer Russia, just like the Third Reich did.

The existential assumption here is that there exists a battlefield where the EU and NATO are acting with their statements against Russia. NATO and the EU are collectively constructed as Russia's Other, with

the propositional assumption being that they intentionally communicate only negative perceptions of Russia, viewing it as an adversary and withholding acknowledgement of Russia's achievements. NATO is constructed as having been moving its military equipment closer to Russia's borders for years, the implication being that this is the military extension of the above symbolic battlefield. On another battlefield, or in Ukraine, Russia is constructed as winning the war and causing the Ukrainian military to retreat. The propositional assumption is that, in the event of retreat, the Ukrainian military wages a form of real terror against civilians. "Real terror" triggers the propositional assumption that Ukrainian armed forces are particularly savage. In "even now, their Western supervisors do not notice their nationalist and misanthropic nature", the propositional assumptions are that the Ukrainian armed forces have become even more nationalist and misanthropic; in "their", the boundary is blurred between the Ukrainian armed forces and Ukrainians in general; that Western supervisors view the Ukrainian armed forces (and Ukrainians in general) in a positive light, are strongly connected to them, but have a different nature; Ukrainians cannot act on their own or without Western supervisors; Russia wants the West to view the Ukrainian armed forces as nationalist and misanthropic and, subsequently, end their support to Ukraine due to the loss of legitimacy. Consequently, even though NATO is constructed as the Third Reich, the facilitator of Nazism, neo-Nazism, and fascism worldwide as well as Russia's enemy, Russia wants to manage the two battlefields separately, with the implicit hope of achieving victory in each.

As in the previous excerpts, here, on the level of assumptions, the securitisation of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine occurs through constructing the Ukrainian armed forces and, by extension, all Ukrainians as extremists. Ukrainians are constructed as ideological extremists (taking nationalism to the limits); methods extremists (using "real terror", or unnecessary, disproportionate, and indiscriminate violence, taking it for granted); and psychological extremists (having a misanthropic nature implies having an indifferent attitude to the suffering of the casualties of their attacks; having an attitude of absolute intolerance towards other people; having extreme emotions of anger and resentment as well as being preoccupied with purity due to their extreme nationalism). The degree of these extremist features is constructed to be escalating. Another securitisation strategy is manifested in constructing NATO as

the Third Reich and, thus, a threat to the entire world. The EU, NATO, and the collective West are constructed as the facilitators of Nazism, neo-Nazism, and virulent fascism on a global scale (although they are not nationalist or misanthropic like Ukrainians). Their partnership with Ukraine is constructed as harmful.

This excerpt exhibits a significant number of features associated with Putin's regime's extremism. When it comes to ideological extremism, the idea is taken to the limits that Russia is once again fighting to free the world (with a primary focus on Ukraine) from Nazism, neo-Nazism, and virulent fascism. Another extreme idea is that NATO is the present-day Nazi Germany. In terms of the extremist mindset, there is obviously preoccupation with virtue (Russia being the beacon of the fight against Nazism, neo-Nazism, and fascism as well as a major party to victory in WWII); the preoccupation with legitimacy (evident in the desire to discredit Ukrainians in the eyes of the West); the preoccupation with purity (evident in the desire to completely purify the world of Nazism, neo-Nazism, and fascism). Most prominently, Putin's regime is preoccupied with victimhood, humiliation, and perceived persecution (evident in the assumptions that the EU and NATO always speak negatively of Russia, intending to humiliate it; they do not support Russia's objectives in Donbas; there are NATO's continued militarily presence near Russia's borders and symbolic attacks through official statements). Equating all EU and NATO representatives with the Other reinforces the sense of victimhood that Russia is surrounded by enemies, like a besieged fortress. All of that signals Russia's powerlessness, resulting in the feeling of ressentiment.

On the level of assumptions, Putin's regime exhibits extremist attitudes of intolerance (NATO, the EU, the West, and Ukrainians are all constructed as linked to Nazism and fascism and, hence, as Russia's enemies) and hostility to compromise (fascism must now be eradicated). In this excerpt, Russia's sense of victimhood is explicitly attributed to a Western conspiracy, thus manifesting conspiracy thinking which, as per Cassam (2022, p. 110), plays an important role in the extremist mindset (assumptions that NATO's self-proclaimed motto revolves around eastward expansion, that NATO and the EU are intentionally concealing any positive aspects of Russia, and that NATO is advancing militarily towards Russia's borders). Furthermore, there are several components of

the militant extremist mindset to be brought up. For instance, the use of military terminology in areas of discourse where it is uncommon (a "battlefield" when referring to political talks); glorifying the past in relation to one's group (glorifying the Soviet Union's victory over the Nazi Germany); the duty to purify the entire world from evil (in Russia's case, eliminating alleged Nazism and fascism); praise for dying for the cause (Russian soldiers who are dying for the liberation of the world from Nazism, neo-Nazism, and virulent fascism); a strong imperative to kill or initiate an offensive war (to free Ukraine from neo-Nazi strangleholds and the entire world from fascism); dehumanisation and demonisation of opponents (viewing the EU, NATO, the West, and Ukrainians as absolute adversaries); and perceiving the present world as a catastrophe (evident in the escalation of Nazism, neo-Nazism, and fascism).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis conducted, Putin's regime can be regarded as extremist, specifically as an ideologically, behaviourally, and psychologically extremist actor. In terms of ideological extremism, the belief that Little Russians (Ukrainians who support Ukraine's alignment with Russia within the Russian World) would welcome the Russian military as liberators from the U.S.-imposed nationalist and neo-Nazi yoke, leading to the rapid fall and recapture by Russia of the artificial Ukrainian state within two days, can result from taking these ideas [Ukraine is not a sovereign state / the Ukrainian government does not control anything; Ukrainians are (neo-)Nazis / Nazism is spreading from Ukraine; NATO (and the West in general) is persecuting and posing an existential threat to Russia and, by extension, to the entire world through military aid to Ukraine] to the limit, which signals ideological extremism. Extreme right, pro-violence, and authoritarian ideologies only contributed to these extremist beliefs. In turn, the analysis has shown that the Kremlin securitises Ukraine as an ideological extremist, whose ideology is on the same spectrums as Putin's regime's ideological extremism.

Putin's regime can further be clearly defined as methods extremist, since its instigated violence in Ukraine is unnecessary, indiscriminate, disproportionate, and not minimised or avoided despite the acknowledgement

of civilian casualties. Additionally, when examining the Russian missile strikes on critical infrastructure facilities in Kharkiv and the Kharkiv region as the Russian troops were retreating from Russia-occupied territories due to the successful counteroffensive by the Ukrainian forces (e.g., Tondo & Koshiv, 2022), one can say that this is exactly the basis of securitisation of the Ukrainian military in Zakharova's statements, namely using extremist methods against civilians during their alleged retreat. Hence, the Russian military does exactly what the Russian MFA strongly denounces as terrorism. Notably, according to Kuzio (2022), "fascists rely on projection; that is, they accuse their enemies of the crimes which they themselves are guilty of". The analysis revealed that Putin's regime securitises Ukraine (and the West) as terrorists, blaming them for using extremist methods, considering it normal, and seeking to escalate.

As for psychological extremism, during the war on Ukraine, Putin's regime's preoccupation with purity has been manifested in the filtration camps, set up in different Russia-occupied locations of Ukraine, as well as a strong desire to completely purify the world of Nazism. Putin's regime's preoccupation with humiliation (e.g., through being "lectured") and victimhood, perceived persecution by the West, as well as emotions of resentment and ressentiment (e.g., the EU and NATO ignore or intentionally always speak negatively of Russia to humiliate it) result, among other things, from Russia's subordination and powerlessness in its relationship of domination with the West, along with the perceived threat of the Western colonial expansion. Putin's regime exhibits a hostile attitude towards compromise with the West (through, among other things, aggressively rejecting Western "hypocritical" recommendations) and with Ukraine (as the stronger party is always right) as well as uses tactics to avoid responsibility for the perpetrated violence. Putin's regime's emotions of resentment and anger (for instance, as expressed in the wartime genocidal rhetoric against Ukrainians) are disproportionate, irrational, and disconnected from reality.

The analysis also revealed Putin's regime's strong preoccupation with virtue, dehumanisation and demonisation of the opponents, and attitude of complete intolerance of the Other. Additionally, its preoccupation with legitimacy is manifested, which is intricately linked to its preoccupation with virtue. Putin's regime employs military terminology in contexts

of communication where it is typically uncommon; it exhibits the duty to purify the entire world from evil, glorifies Russia's past, praises the military for dying for the cause, expresses a strong imperative to kill or initiate an offensive war (but only to protect civilians and target terrorists, foreign mercenaries, as well as military infrastructure), perceives the modern world as a catastrophe, and exhibits extensive conspiracy thinking. The analysis suggests that when political rhetoric becomes too difficult to take seriously due to the overwhelming conspiracies, this is a signal that a government is extremist psychologically, as extremism is often inherently connected to conspiracy thinking. Notably, the analysis detected that Putin's regime employs far fewer elements of the extremist mindset (only demonisation and dehumanisation of the opponent, intolerance of the Other, indifference to civilian casualties, a strong imperative to kill or start an offensive war, use of tactics to avoid responsibility for the perpetrated violence, the preoccupation with purity, and hostility to compromise) to securitise Ukraine and the West than the Kremlin itself exhibits, meaning that the Kremlin's own psychological extremism outweighs that of any adversary it seeks to securitise as such.

The analysis has revealed a wide spectrum of features of the extremist mindset manifested by Putin's regime. In summary, it can be concluded that Putin's regime is cognitively, behaviourally, and psychologically radicalised. That extremism drives the Kremlin's multifaceted securitisation strategies, which involve constructing Ukraine and the West as extremists and terrorists to justify Russia's aggression against Ukraine and/or obscure the fact that what Russia is waging in Ukraine is a conventional war rather than anything else (e.g., a counterterrorism operation or special military operation). Cassam's framework for analysing extremist actors has proved to be effective in the examination of securitisation moves through attaching the label of terrorism. On the textual level, an analysis of assumptions has revealed both securitisation strategies and the extremist properties of the securitising party, with the latter largely driving the former. It can be observed that the Kremlin's extremism is strongly projected onto Russian society and the international community through extensive propaganda. One of the limitations of this analysis is that it did not address the matter of whether the Kremlin's securitisation of the invasion of Ukraine through terrorism was successful with the Russian audience or whether the citizens share the extremist attitudes promoted by the government. According to Pocheptsov (2022,

p. 118), "propaganda is propaganda when it is successful, and, in it, at least the majority of the population should find answers to their questions. According to Russian data, 20% of the population does not support the war". While it is beyond the scope of this article to assess how extremism, in its various forms, is rooted and manifested within Russian society, it is evident that the Kremlin's extremism is undeniably having a profoundly destructive impact on Russian political identity and society as a whole.

It was clear already during Medvedev's presidency that an anti-Western shift in Russia's foreign policy discourse was the only option for Russia, as Obama and Medvedev could not overcome the deeply ingrained structure of adversarial relations between the U.S./West and Russia (Belova-Dalton 2020, p. 308). Notably, in Cassam's (2022, p. 2) view, the rising levels of political polarisation result in extremism. Thus, it can be stated that Russia's regime's psychological extremism (a sense of victimhood and humiliation by the West as well as the fear of losing its core values) has continued to evolve since the end of Medvedev's presidency and Putin's return to office in 2012. As to Ukraine, Russia demanded that the Minsk peace process be adhered to for Ukraine to capitulate to Russia's demands. Russia made efforts to hinder Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO through the annexation of Crimea and the initiation of the war in Donbas as well as officially demanding, in 2021, that the U.S. and NATO reject Ukraine's NATO membership bid (Russian MFA, 2021). Since the Euromaidan, Russia has also engaged in hybrid warfare against Ukraine. However, after the U.S. and NATO rejected Russia's aforementioned ultimatum, Russia committed aggression against Ukraine. Hence, Russia's pro-violence ideology and its preference for extreme violence as a legitimate and preferred choice concerning Ukraine has increased exponentially since 2014.

Given the extent to which all the constituent elements of extremism can be detected in Russia's current domestic and foreign policy discourse, it is crucial to produce and spread effective counter-narratives to challenge the Kremlin's securitisation of the invasion. One should also be prepared for negotiations with Putin's regime to become complicated, time-consuming, discouraging, and, even if fruitful, to prove unstable, deceptive, narrow, and unenforceable (U.S. Institute of Peace, s. a.). In the current situation, there appear to be no practical measures that are

both politically feasible and would sufficiently satisfy the Kremlin's demands in the long run. For instance, the idea that the formation of the Ukrainian state by Lenin, largely from historically Russian lands, was not just a mistake but an extreme one, aligns with the belief that the independence of the Baltic States was also a grave error. A state Duma bill was initiated on 8 June 2022 to de-recognise Lithuanian independence, as it went against the Soviet constitution in 1991 (Labanauskas, 2022). Additionally, Medvedev commented on the Estonian Prime Minister's call not to issue tourist visas to Russian citizens by stating: "you being at large not your merit, but our shortcoming"[6] (The Baltic Times, 2022). Putin (2022b) openly declared that territories adjacent to Russia are considered its "historical land", while Crimea chose to return to its "historical homeland", aligning with Russia's imperial nationalism. Hence, the situation can be described in terms put forth by Cassam (2022, p. 213): "Some extremists are too far gone and must be defeated rather than deradicalised".

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[6] In Russian; „То, что вы на свободе, не ваша заслуга, а наша недоработка".

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THE EUROPEAN UNION INTERNAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AFTER THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT

The invasion of Ukraine is the most serious challenge that the European Union has faced since its inception and the impact on its security is immense. The first evident consequence of the European Union's internal security was the refugee crisis, but there have been more challenges.

As is customary in crisis situations, the European Union reacted promptly, displaying unity and robustness, as no single Member State has the capacity to face all potential threats alone. Trafficking in human beings, firearms smuggling, organised crime, terrorism, public disorders or hybrid actions are just a few examples of the dangers that the conflict would either bring to or intensify in a space without internal borders, like the European Union, where a threat to one Member State could become a threat to the entire European Union.

Not all the threats were felt simultaneously or with equal intensity. In fact, the impact of some was more limited than initially expected, but a worse scenario cannot be ruled out. The European Union should adjust its response and be prepared to counter and neutralise all potential threats to its internal security, which may persist long after the war has ended.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was like an earthquake for the world's geopolitical situation and while the world was still recovering, the invasion of Ukraine came as a shock to most European citizens and decision-makers, adding complexity and insecurity (Deliu, 2022, p.4).

The European Security Strategy (ESS) considered regional conflicts as one of the key threats to the European Union (EU), indicating that these conflicts could have an impact on European interests both directly and indirectly (Council of the European Union, 2003, p.6).

Seven years later, the Council of the EU complemented this strategy by adopting the Internal Security Strategy (ISS). It listed the main challenges to the internal security of the EU and the responses to those challenges, suggesting paying *special attention to 'weak and failed states' so that they do not become hubs of organised crime or terrorism* (Council of the European Union, 2010, p.30).

The European Agenda on Security introduced the concept of the Security Union (European Commission, 2016). The subsequent Security Union Strategy consolidated security requirements, focusing on the most critical areas and acknowledging that security threats did not respect geographical borders (European Commission, 2020). Among these critical areas, notable mentions were made of cybercrimes, terrorism or hybrid threats.

All the strategies concurred on one important aspect: the necessity to act in unity. The ESS stated that *no single country can tackle today's complex problems on its own* (Council of the European Union, 2003, p.3). The ISS requested *solidarity between Member States (MS) in the face of challenges that cannot be met by MS acting alone or where concerted action is to the benefit of the EU as a whole* (Council of the European Union, 2010, p.20). The Security Union Strategy underlined that *recent years have brought an increasing understanding that the security of one MS is the security of all* (European Commission, 2020, p.1).

Although these strategic documents included most of the challenges that the EU's internal security currently faces, the EU did not fully foresee the

possibility of an armed conflict between two states close to its border. The invasion, despite all the warnings, took the EU by surprise.

In a globalised world, to believe that armed conflicts are confined to a specific territory appears to be idealistic. Besides the belligerent parties, it can have various degrees of impact on neighbouring countries, allied countries and the rest of the world. The war in Ukraine has had a great economic impact on the entire world, but the negative effects of any armed conflict are firstly perceived and suffered by neighbouring countries. This is well known, but in the case of the EU, the consequences are not limited to those MS close to the conflict area. Ukraine shares its borders with several EU MS (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania), but in a space without borders and with the right to move freely within the territory of MS, a threat to national security in one of its members can and probably does constitute a threat to the national security of the other partners. This means that the challenges to be met by those neighbouring countries will be expanded to the 27 MS.

Therefore, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, although a tragedy for the Ukrainian people, is also a matter of concern for the EU and its MS and can be considered the most dangerous situation the EU has ever faced. As per NATO, the Russian invasion of Ukraine poses the gravest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades, jeopardising European security (NATO, 2022). Catherine De Bolle, the Executive Director of the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), declared in the TE-SAT 2022 report, that the war in Ukraine will have a lasting impact on the EU's security for years to come (Europol, 2022c, p.3).

This article attempts to provide a list of the most relevant challenges that the EU has identified as threats to its internal security after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. To achieve this objective, an in-depth study has been conducted to analyse how the EU Institutions, preparatory bodies and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies have responded and to identify the main concerns in the field of internal security that could be drawn from the meetings held and documents approved since the beginning of the war.

The sources consulted for this research include documentary materials from the European Commission Library, the EU legislative synthesis

(EUR-LEX), EU official documents from the Delegates Portal of the Council of the EU, as well as scientific and media articles. Specifically, we have analysed all the European Council meetings, JHA Council meetings and COSI meetings, as well as other relevant Council meetings held since the Russian invasion, with particular attention being paid to their agendas, outcomes of proceedings, conclusions and public official documents related to internal security, as well as press releases. Furthermore, the author's firsthand experience gained through working in internal security at both national and EU levels, has also served as a valuable source of information.

Using these sources as the primary material, the work began with a descriptive legal methodology aimed at presenting the responses of the EU after the invasion. The article is based on a thorough review of the meeting conclusions and official documents of the EU Institutions, primarily the European Council and the Council of the EU, as well as some of its preparatory bodies.

Next, an analytical methodology was employed to examine the EU actions from both a quantitative perspective, considering the number of actions developed in the field of internal security, and a qualitative perspective, with a detailed analysis addressing the nature of the actions and measures adopted in that area, along with subsequent implementation.

Given the qualitative nature of analytical legal research, the application of this methodology has served to make a series of considerations on the impact of the invasion on the essentially reactive nature of the EU in internal security actions and the attitudes of some MS. This is relevant given the traditional reluctance of MS concerning national security as most of them strictly follow the principle that this is one of the exclusive competences of national authorities.

Furthermore, pursuing this methodological line has enabled us to use the findings as a starting point to draft a prospective analysis, identifying the primary challenges to the EU's internal security, both in the present and in the future.

The results have been structured in two well-defined sections. Firstly, section 1 demonstrates how the Russian aggression prompted the

reaction of the EU Institutions, convening both ordinary and extraordinary meetings to condemn the invasion and adopting political decisions aimed at fighting the negative effects of the conflict on the EU's internal security domain. Next, some of the subsequent operational work conducted by the EU Agencies was analysed. Section 2 is devoted to listing, though not exhaustively, the key challenges to the EU's internal security, derived from the official documents approved by EU Institutions and preparatory bodies, as well as the work of the JHA Agencies. Finally, the article concludes with some insights into the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the EU's internal security area.

As the war is still ongoing, this article could help to better know the challenges that the EU might be facing in the coming months and years. It could be taken as a foundation for future research concerning the ramifications of the Russian invasion on the EU's internal security, or the consequences of any other conflict near its borders. It could also be valuable to confirm the previously mentioned reactive nature of the EU when it comes to internal security, a field in which, from the author´s perspective, greater integration would be desirable.

1. THE REACTION OF THE EU TO THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE IN THE FIELD OF INTERNAL SECURITY

1.1. EU INSTITUTIONS AND COUNCIL PREPARATORY BODIES

The EU realised almost immediately the dangers to internal security. On the same day of the invasion, 24 February 2022, the High Representative issued a declaration (European Union External Action, 2022) at the Permanent Council of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), condemning the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

A similar statement was issued by members of the European Council just before they convened in a special meeting where they also unanimously called on Russia to respect international humanitarian law, halt their disinformation campaign and cyber-attacks and adopt restrictive measures in response. They also urged preparations for individual and

economic sanctions and reiterated the EU's support for and commitment to Georgia and Moldavia (European Council, 2022a).

In the following days, several Council meetings dealt with the situation in Ukraine: an extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council on 25 February, which resulted in the adoption of new sanctions and a strong consensus on tackling disinformation; on 27 February, an informal video conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers discussed further measures to cover various strands of action, inter alia, initiatives to counter disinformation, including the prohibition for state-owned Russian media to broadcast in the EU; on the 28th, another informal video conference of EU Defence Ministers was held, focusing on the efforts to be made to support the Ukrainian armed forces; also on the 28th, the EU Energy Ministers exchanged views on the energy situation in Ukraine and Europe; on the 4 March, Foreign Affairs Ministers held an extraordinary Council meeting to discuss the latest developments.

The first meeting of the JHA Ministers on 27 February focused on several aspects of internal security, such as the management of external borders, opening the possibility to support the neighbouring countries in conducting security checks and registrations and mobilising European instruments from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and Europol (Council of the European Union, 2022a). Ministers also agreed on the need to anticipate the use of hybrid threats, calling for the enhancement of information exchange and coordination to effectively respond to any attempt at destabilisation. Considering the experience of actors, hostile to the EU, and willing to employ new means of pressure, such as the weaponization of migration flows, cyber threats or disinformation, the Presidency of the Council of the EU invited MS to provide reports on the preparatory measures taken at both national and European level and to specify their needs.

On 3 March 2022, Ministers engaged in a new discussion on Ukraine during the Council meeting. They reached a unanimous agreement on the establishment of a temporary protection mechanism in response to the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine. Following the European Commission's proposal, Ministers agreed to activate, for the first time, Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001, which establishes minimum standards for providing temporary protection in the event of a

mass influx of displaced persons (Council of the European Union, 2001). The following day, the Justice Ministers chose not to process the requests for cooperation in criminal matters submitted by Russia and Belarus and decided to collectively refer the situation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a means to combat impunity. The EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) was encouraged to fully exercise its coordinating role in this regard.

On the same day, the 4th of March, an extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council examined the latest developments and raised the issues of cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns.

During the informal meeting in Versailles, on 10-11 March 2022, the European Council adopted a declaration regarding the Russian aggression against Ukraine (European Union, 2022a), welcoming the ICC's investigation, confirming the imposition of new sanctions and highlighting the need to proactively prepare for rapidly emerging challenges, such as the hybrid warfare, strengthening cyber-resilience, safeguarding infrastructure, particularly the critical infrastructure and fighting disinformation.

The extraordinary JHA Council meeting of 28 March 2022 addressed European coordination for receiving people fleeing Ukraine, focusing on issues concerning external border control and security, while also supporting the mobilisation of the EU network to fight organised and serious crime (EMPACT) to prevent the exploitation of the situation by criminals (European Union, 2022b).

EMPACT, formerly known as the EU Policy Cycle, serves as the framework for structured operational cooperation to prevent and fight organised crime in the field of EU internal security. In 2021, the EU Council decided on the priorities for the period 2022-2025 (Council of the European Union, 2021). Following the invasion of Ukraine, it was evident that nearly all of these priorities would inevitably be affected by the consequences of the war, with the potential to benefit criminals in the EU.

The European Commission, in collaboration with the French Presidency of the Council, presented a 10-point plan for stronger European

coordination for welcoming people fleeing the conflict zone (European Commission, 2022a). Although primarily designed to assist displaced persons, it contained some references to internal security. For instance, point 6 referred to the development of a common anti-trafficking plan to prevent trafficking and exploitation. Point 9 addressed the internal security implications of the war, calling for maximal vigilance against organised crime and trafficking groups and the enforcement of EU sanctions against Russian and Belarusian individuals.

The EU Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI) also addressed Ukraine, but the first time was in an informal meeting two months after the military aggression. Surprisingly, there were no more COSI meetings during that semester, resulting in missed opportunities to leverage the significant role that COSI could have played in this field, being a working forum with a global and comprehensive view of internal security issues.

COSI delegates talked about the criminal and security threats following the Russian invasion and the EU's operational response. It called for increased vigilance in the face of a resurgence in organised crime, namely infiltration of criminals or terrorists, online fraud, weapons trafficking, trafficking in human beings (THB), drugs, cyberattacks or financial crimes. It was deemed necessary to mobilise resources at every level, to monitor and analyse the threats and to provide a suitable operational response, involving the mobilisation of the EU JHA agencies. Another point was the activation of the EMPACT community, as previously mentioned.

The European Council commended the efforts to collect evidence and investigate war crimes in Ukraine on 30 and 31 May 2022 (European Council, 2022b). The agenda also included a discussion on the impact on food security and energy.

One of the primary concerns for both internal security actors and citizens is terrorism. Although in recent years, public opinion appeared to be less concerned about it, EU leaders emphasised that the return of terrorist fighters in Europe still represented a significant threat. As per the conclusion of the JHA Council on 9 June 2022, the deterioration of the security situation in Ukraine had already led to significant population

movements towards EU territory, increasing the risk of infiltration by individuals who might pose a terrorist threat (Council of the European Union, 2022d, p.4). The Council emphasised the impact on the EU's global security stemming from the situation at the European borders.

Home Affairs Ministers gathered informally in Prague on 11 July 2022, with an agenda that included a session on the security impact of the war. They were invited to discuss the repercussions on internal security and the possible measures to address them, referring to illegal firearms trafficking, THB, document forgery, money laundering, hybrid threats and the trafficking of cultural objects or drugs (Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2022).

Just a few days after the Ministerial meeting, COSI representatives also held an informal meeting in Prague, to examine the impact of the war in Ukraine from a law enforcement perspective.

At the regular JHA Council meeting held on 13 and 14 October 2022, Ministers emphasised the increased risks of migrant smuggling, THB, illicit firearms trafficking, terrorism and other serious crimes. They also endorsed the need for a joint EU response against the ongoing dissemination of disinformation.

Since the beginning of the war, one of the risks for the EU has been the possibility of becoming the target of hybrid actions. On 26 September 2022, a series of clandestine bombings and subsequent underwater gas leaks occurred on the Nord Stream natural gas pipelines. The perpetrators' identities and the motives behind this action remain debated (Wikipedia, 2023). The European Council of 20 and 21 October 2022 strongly condemned acts of sabotage against critical infrastructure and stated that the EU would meet any deliberate disruption or other hybrid actions with a united and determined response (European Council, 2022c, p.4).

In this meeting, as in nearly all EU high-level meetings over the previous eight months, the MS representatives devoted part of the agenda to the situation in Ukraine. EU leaders showed a determination to counter disinformation, reiterated their firm commitment to holding Russia accountable for the violation of international law and endorsed the

investigations by the Prosecutor of the ICC. The European Council also concluded that Russia was responsible for weaponizing food and energy, provoking a global food security crisis and an energy crisis.

The first formal COSI meeting addressing the Russian invasion of Ukraine took place on 30 September 2022. One item on the agenda was the EU internal security implications of the war in Ukraine, dedicated to discussing the practical steps to be pursued within the Council, following the informal meeting of the Home Affairs Ministers in July 2022 (Council of the European Union, 2022i).

During the meeting on 25 November 2022, COSI endorsed two documents that included references to the security implications of the war: the *EU threat assessment in the field of counterterrorism*; and the *Feedback to COSI on the Terrorism Working Party debates in the second half of 2022 on the impact of the war in Ukraine on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism* (Council of the European Union, 2022j).

The JHA Council meeting of 8-9 December 2022 exchanged views about Ukrainian refugees in the EU and reviewed the internal security dialogue with Ukraine to address shared security challenges stemming from the war, such as border security, illicit firearms trafficking and other serious crimes. More significantly, the Ministers endorsed the conclusions on combating impunity for crimes related to Russia's aggression (Council of the European Union, 2022k). The Council urged MS to continue supporting the investigations and to take measures to strengthen the support and protection of victims of core international crimes in criminal proceedings. The Council also encouraged an increase in efforts to counter disinformation and attempts to rewrite history.

The final European Council meeting of 2022, which took place on 15 December, did not provide any relevant updates on the internal security field. However, in the security and defence domain, it called for various actions related to internal security, such as investments in strategic enablers, including cybersecurity, a strong EU policy on cyber defence and the swift implementation of the EU hybrid toolbox, to strengthen the EU's ability to effectively counter hybrid threats and campaigns (European Council, 2022d).

Ukraine was also featured prominently in the programme of the Swedish Presidency (Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2022). The JHA Council meeting held on 26-27 January 2023 devoted some time to deliberate on the prosecution of core international crimes in Ukraine. In the subsequent weeks, the focal point of the debate was the impact of the war on counterterrorism and efforts to counter violent extremism, the prevention and combating of firearms smuggling, as well as the interlinkages between internal and external aspects of security.

During a Special European Council meeting held on 9 February 2023, the EU leaders adopted conclusions regarding Ukraine to ensure effective control of its external land and sea borders. Furthermore, they strongly condemned attempts to manipulate migrants for political purposes, especially when used as leverage or as part of hybrid destabilising actions (European Council, 2023).

COSI met with the Political and Security Committee[1] on 21 February 2023, to debate the state of play and outlook of CSDP/JHA cooperation regarding the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The following day, the Committee reflected on strategies to counter firearms trafficking, noting the list of actions designed to counter firearms and other small arms and light weapons diversion in the context of the war. These actions were jointly prepared by the European Commission and the European External Action Service. An agreement was also reached to continue monitoring the progress made in the implementation of these specific actions (Council of the European Union, 2023a).

During this meeting, the Presidency briefed delegations about the Conference to Prevent Smuggling of Firearms, which took place in Stockholm a week before (Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2023).

The JHA Council meeting held on 9-10 March 2023 once again discussed the internal security dialogue with Ukraine, the status of judicial responses and efforts to combat impunity-related crimes committed in connection with the war. On 23 March, the European Council revisited topics previously included in their agendas.

[1] The body responsible for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

1.2. EU AGENCIES

Concerning JHA agencies, in April 2022, Europol released a threat assessment on the *Impact of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine on crime and terrorism in the EU*. Its key finding was that there would be significant implications for crime and terrorism in the EU due to several factors: the vulnerability of refugees arriving in the EU; the exploitation of new opportunities by criminal groups; the presence of Ukrainian and Russian criminal groups in the EU; disinformation; the potential threat of foreign fighters; the flow of illicit money; and the challenging economic situation (Council of the European Union, 2022c).

In June, Europol updated the report, reaffirming that the threats to internal security were of an evolving and adaptable nature. The report also identified other crime areas, like firearms smuggling, excise fraud and vehicle trafficking (Council of the European Union, 2022e). It also warned that several disrupted criminal activities were likely to resume and that, while specific challenges were felt in the short term, others with limited initial impact would worsen over the medium to long term (THB, money laundering, disinformation and terrorism).

From the outset, Europol has responded by deploying resources to support partners affected by the consequences of the war. It launched Operation Oscar to help the enforcement of EU sanctions. It played a part in responding to large-scale cyberattacks and cyber crises. It participated in a THB Task Force aimed at tackling the threats posed by criminal networks that might recruit and exploit vulnerable refugees arriving in the EU. It intensified its monitoring activities of extremist right-wing groups and individuals in the context of the war. This involved gathering relevant material and information from open sources and online, including data related to potential war crimes.

Furthermore, as the primary actor of the EMPACT framework, Europol played a crucial role in delivering opportunities to mitigate emerging criminal threats by implementing new operational actions or making amendments to existing ones.

Frontex, another noteworthy agency in the field of JHA, also played a key role in the EU's response and in assessing the implications of the war on the EU's internal security.

Frontex has provided support to the countries affected by migratory flows. Thanks to the agency, MS and EU Institutions have received regular updates on the situation at border crossing points and refugee flows. Furthermore, it offered assessments on the impact of the war on crime and terrorism in the EU. Frontex supported the MS in addressing cross-border crime through prevention, detection, and the fight against THB, with a specific focus on child trafficking, firearms smuggling, drug trafficking, stolen vehicles, as well as excise goods trafficking and other illegal trans-border activities.

The role of Eurojust in the investigation of war crimes has already been stated. A Eurojust-supported joint EU investigation team has been active in Ukraine since March 2022. In April 2022, the European Commission published its proposal to extend Eurojust's mandate following the Russian invasion, which was finally approved at the end of May (European Union, 2022c). These new powers enable the agency to store and analyse evidence related to war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

The rest of the JHA agencies were also involved. In September 2022, the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) compiled an overview of the support provided to the EU, MS and other partners by the nine agencies[2] given the war in Ukraine (Council of the European Union, 2022g). The agencies' responses covered several key areas, including the identification of key fundamental rights challenges and strategies to overcome them, operational support for the investigation of core international crimes committed in Ukraine, assistance to MS authorities and contributions to the enforcement of EU sanctions. In April 2023, the agencies, under the coordination of the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA), released a new report covering the first year of the war. Some of the updates of this report were related to Eurojust's support for the establishment of an International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression (ICPA), announced on 2 February 2023, the MS's judicial response to alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine and the prosecution of violations of the sanctions against Russian and

[2] CEPOL, EIGE, EMCDDA, EUAA, eu-LISA, Eurojust, Europol, FRA, Frontex.

Belarusian individuals and companies. Additionally, it included information on Frontex's technical assistance to support the Ukrainian State Border Guard (Council of the European Union, 2023b).

1.3. CONSIDERATIONS OF THE EU REACTION

Despite the Russian military build-up around Ukraine and other warning signals of a possible conflict close to its territory, the EU did not implement specific measures in the field of internal security before the invasion.

Historically, the EU integration has made more progress in the field of internal security while responding to crises, notably terrorism (Sánchez, 2021, p.559). Major terrorist attacks perpetrated in the territory of EU MS led to the adoption of extraordinary and emergency measures at the EU level.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine also prompted an EU reaction. Both the European Council and the Council of the EU held both extraordinary and ordinary meetings to deal with the response to that action. Additionally, EU JHA agencies provided early support, although a stronger involvement of COSI would have been preferable.

The EU displayed a high degree of unity and robustness in its reaction, as demonstrated by its strong messages and sanctions against Russia, military support to Ukraine, aid provided to millions of refugees and the measures taken to reinforce internal security. However, it should not be forgotten that, as per the Lisbon Treaty, national security and public order remain the exclusive responsibility of MS[3]. This means that issues such as the fight against organised crime or terrorism fall under the jurisdiction of national authorities.

When it comes to responding to specific terrorist attacks in the past, the EU's actions were immediate and reactive, but often short-lived.

[3] Article 4.2 Treaty on EU and articles 72 and 73 Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

However, in the case of Ukraine, the EU's response was not only immediate and reactive but also sustained over time.

One issue of the measures adopted in the field of EU internal security is their dependency on the will of national authorities in MS (Sorroza, 2011, p.6). Internal security is one of the most complex areas of European integration, primarily due to the zeal of MS to preserve their sovereignty (Tereszkiewicz, 2016, p.245). However, considering the magnitude of the dangers, some EU MS also reacted quickly by implementing extraordinary measures. For example, the three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, drastically changed their attitudes towards participation in the existing EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and NATO (Moser, 2022): Denmark officially joined CSDP on 1 July 2022, ending a 30-year-long policy of non-participation in security and defence matters. Furthermore, in May 2022, both Finland and Sweden applied for membership in NATO, abandoning their tradition of neutrality.

Another example is Germany. This country has experienced a change in its perspective on the purpose of its armed forces and has witnessed an increase in its defence spending. Immediately following the invasion, Germany reversed a long-standing policy of never sending weapons to conflict zones (Herszenhorn, Bayer and Burchard, 2022). Furthermore, the German government agreed to draw up the first comprehensive National Security Strategy.

When it comes to internal security, prevention is always better than reaction. However, in practice, EU actions in this field are often triggered by crises. Joint decisions and concerted actions at the EU level are easier to accept if MS national authorities show an actual willingness.

2. CHALLENGES TO THE EU'S INTERNAL SECURITY

The war in Ukraine commenced in February 2022 and there are no clear indications regarding its duration.

Criminal activity has continued in the area despite the logistical difficulties and challenges imposed by military activities. The repercussions of the conflict are being felt across all MS of the EU. The war has caused not only immediate problems for the EU's internal security but also for the medium and long term.

The neighbouring countries were the first to be affected due to the influx of refugees. However, in a borderless space, a threat to one MS constitutes a threat to the entire Union.

The impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the EU's internal security has been significant and it's expected to remain so in the future. The situation could deteriorate further if Russia contemplates the possibility of retaliation against any MS providing support to Ukraine.

There's a lengthy catalogue of challenges that are not always easy to classify, as frequent interconnections among them can lead to similar actions falling into different categories. Several of the challenges were visible from the very outset of the war, while others emerged in the mid-term and the remainder are being developed or will arise at a later stage. The implications of these challenges will vary, but most of them are expected to last long after the armed conflict comes to an end. If there's one thing that criminal groups have demonstrated so far, it's their flexibility and adaptability.

After analysing the meetings of the European Council, the Council of the EU, the COSI, and the work of the European Commission and the EU Agencies in the field of internal security, and considering the work already accomplished under the EMPACT framework, it can be inferred that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has presented, is presenting and will continue to present, among other challenges, the following challenges to the EU internal security:

2.1. ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

The first problem for the EU was the refugee crisis. The Russian aggression set off the largest wave of refugees in Europe since the Second World War (Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community of Germany, 2023). The unprecedented flow of migrants entering the EU initially strained the neighbouring countries, but its effects were soon felt in the remaining MS.

The EU MS exhibited a great deal of solidarity in hosting Ukrainian refugees, especially Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania at the outset of the crisis. Interestingly, this was not the same scenario seen during the Syrian refugee crisis, when certain countries had been *vocal against them and went as far as building a wall to stop their movement* (Deliu, 2022, p.22).

What made this scenario particularly dangerous was the relaxation of security checks, owing to the sheer volume of refugees attempting to enter, hindering the detection of high-risk individuals among them, such as terrorists, foreign fighters, saboteurs or criminals.

Another effect could be the increase of the illegal market for fraudulent documents, which might persist in seeking subsidies provided by EU MS social services.

2.2. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

THB was assessed as one of the most pressing consequences of the war, primarily due to the risk of refugees being subject to sexual or labour exploitation, as well as the illegal adoption of minors. Only a few weeks after the invasion, Europol warned about the risks in the area of THB (Europol, 2022a). The International Organisation for Migration has also expressed concern that the deteriorating situation was putting people on the move at a heightened risk of exploitation (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Instances of sexual violence had already been reported and there were indications of potential exploitation.

Sexual exploitation of refugees by organised criminal groups may be happening in all MS. Additionally, labour exploitation can also take place, not only due to criminal networks but also by employers trying to take advantage of the precarious situation of many refugees.

Furthermore, once they arrive in the host MS, Ukrainian refugees may be vulnerable to criminal recruitment if the living conditions do not match their needs.

2.3. SMUGGLING AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

Military activities affected smuggling and drug trafficking and disrupted the well-established routes and the criminal modi operandi (Frontex, 2022, p.35). Consequently, criminal networks were expected to look for new illegal markets in the EU and alternative routes and destinations of drugs, tobacco and other goods. The influx of refugees fleeing the war presented new opportunities, later reduced because of the increased security and military presence, but smugglers are constantly adjusting their modus operandi (Frontex, 2022, p.34).

The economic crisis in the EU could incentivise the activity of criminal groups. Additionally, the situation in Ukraine is making contraband more lucrative and may lead to the relocation of criminal groups from one side of the border to the other, particularly for smuggling activities. This situation can jeopardize the safety of customs and border guards and increase the risk of corruption within their ranks.

2.4. HYBRID ACTIONS

From the outset of the conflict, EU MS were aware of the challenges posed by hybrid actions, emphasising the importance of anticipation and a coordinated response (Council of the European Union, 2022a, p.4).

Hybrid actions, when employed in conjunction with military actions, can be a very effective way of amplifying the impact on the adversary.

These tactics can establish conditions for the radicalisation of EU citizens and be employed with relative impunity in other scenarios, far removed from the conflict zone.

Disinformation, manipulation of public opinion, interferences and cyberattacks can be categorised as hybrid threats (Federal Ministry of Interior and Community of Germany, n.d.) and pose major threats to internal security, as well as the weaponization of energy, food and immigration.

Russia may attempt to interfere in the domestic policies of EU MS by taking advantage of the existing tensions, separatist movements, domestic unrest or local crises. Foreign agents may infiltrate the EU with similar objectives, such as interfering in domestic policies, sabotaging critical infrastructure, compromising the supply of energy or food, intimidating Ukrainian refugees, undermining support for Ukraine, promoting instability, gathering intelligence or just simply complementing other hybrid actions. The presence of undetected Russian-controlled agents in the territory of the EU MS constitutes a big challenge for the national intelligence services and law enforcement agencies.

2.4.1. Disinformation

Disinformation, propaganda and fake news from Russia were noticed in EU MS before the war. The EU, aware of the dangers it may pose, adopted early measures to counter these actions.

The spreading of false information can play a significant role in shaping, mobilising, manipulating and trying to influence public opinion. A likely target of Russian disinformation campaigns could be the upcoming electoral processes in various EU MS. Moreover, it has the potential to fuel terrorist and extremist narratives, enhancing the capabilities of those groups. Likewise, it can contribute to an increase in the number of radicalised individuals and be leveraged to heighten the vulnerability of those predisposed to radicalisation, ultimately facilitating recruitment and financing.

This is not a new threat, but its widespread utilisation by Russian actors or their allies may pose additional risks to the political stability of EU MS.

2.4.2. Cyberthreats

Cyberspace is a new dimension in which various threats can be developed quickly and inexpensively, without territorial constraints and with the cloak of anonymity.

Russia has been accused of conducting cyberattacks against EU MS and Institutions, though no major actions have occurred as yet (Council of the European Union, 2022c, p.4). Both the frequency and the number of MS affected have increased since the beginning of the war. Despite their limited consequences thus far, they cannot be underestimated.

The risk of becoming the target of cyberattacks will remain high. Additionally, criminal groups or individuals may exploit online methods to deceive people into making donations or provide government support, for example.

2.5. VULNERABILITY OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

EU MS critical infrastructures, even those situated far from the Ukrainian borders, are vulnerable to cyberattacks, terrorist attacks, sabotages or public disturbances. The disruption of any critical infrastructure, especially if it pertains to energy supply, is a significant cause for concern for national authorities.

One example was the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines. Although it has not been possible to confirm the party responsible for this action, it has shown that critical infrastructures are highly vulnerable and challenging to protect.

EU leaders are well aware of this vulnerability and as a result, they have called for increased investment in the resilience of critical infrastructure (European Council, 2023, p.7).

2.6. ORGANIZED CRIME

From the onset of the conflict, it was evident that there would be significant implications for serious and organised crime within the EU. The war presented new opportunities that criminal networks were ready and eager to seize. In fact, it triggered a substantial shift in the *geocriminal* situation.

Criminal activities would shift their locations and procedures and organised crime groups based in Ukraine and Russia would consider the EU territory as an attractive option to relocate. This demonstrates their ability to adapt to new circumstances and scenarios (Council of the European Union, 2022c, p.4).

The challenging economic situation within the EU might create a risk of criminal infiltration in the EU's legitimate economy (Council of the European Union, 2022c, p.4).

If migrants of Ukrainian or Russian origin tend to establish communities in their host countries, they might be targeted by organised criminal groups seeking to take control.

2.7. TERRORISM

Any armed conflict is prone to attract foreign fighters, who may subsequently return to their countries. In Ukraine, the movement of these fighters was boosted by the President, who, just three days after the invasion, issued a public appeal to foreign citizens to assist Ukraine in its fight against Russia's aggression (President of Ukraine, 2022).

The Russian President also approved the recruitment of foreign *volunteers* to reinforce the Russian troops in Ukraine (Ilyushina and Suliman, 2022). It's also worth mentioning the activities of private military companies, such as the Wagner Group.

In terms of foreigners fighting for Ukraine, some researchers argue that they are not terrorists. Instead, they have enlisted in a formal army and

should be more accurately labelled as *foreign volunteers* (Rekawek, 2023, p.21). Without disputing this statement, the reality is that, regardless of the motivations of most of them, in the months and years to come, there will be hundreds or even thousands of people with military experience, extensive network of contacts and access to firearms and explosives. Some of them may choose to join terrorist or extremist groups or criminal networks, where their abilities will be highly appreciated. Others may undergo radicalisation or seek revenge against former enemies. Additionally, a few may suffer from mental disorders stemming from their wartime experiences.

In any case, we cannot exclude the fact that among all the foreign fighters, there could be some radicalized individuals who might view the war as an opportunity to gain military experience or connect with like-minded individuals in an operational setting (Rassler, 2022, p.22).

Some of these foreign fighters are EU citizens, which means that MS are forced to monitor them due to their potential to pose a threat to internal security.

In the second year of the armed conflict, the terrorist threat is considered limited but the medium to long-term repercussions could be substantial and the future consequences remain unknown (Council of the European Union, 2022f).

In addition to foreign fighters, terrorist organisations could exploit the war to perpetrate terrorist attacks against EU interests. There are also concerning factors, such as the availability of weapons of mass destruction and CBRN materials.

2.8. FIREARMS TRAFFICKING

One of the most challenging and enduring issues to be addressed by internal security authorities is the immediate availability of weapons and explosives. The proliferation of weapons at the gates of the EU, coupled with the movement of refugees fleeing from Ukraine, has raised serious

concerns about the potential for some of these weapons to find their way into the EU.

Weapons can cross borders without significant difficulties, and it cannot be ruled out that some firearms, military equipment, ammunition and explosives may end up in the hands of terrorists or criminal groups, equipping them with new and far more dangerous capabilities. The worst possible scenario involves the trafficking of weapons of mass destruction and CBRN materials, all of which are likely to be present in the current conflict zone, which could potentially be smuggled into the EU and ultimately used for terrorist purposes (Europol, 2023, p.18).

The availability of weapons tends to increase as the armed conflict nears its conclusion. Therefore, it would be wise to begin considering methods for the disposal of surplus weapons.

2.9. WAR CRIMES

While this may not pose a direct threat to the EU, it does challenge its internal security, as the EU cannot dismiss the possibility that war criminals may try to hide within the EU. This means, among other things, that MS may need to investigate the presence of alleged war criminals within their territories. Even EU nationals or fighters entering the EU could have committed war crimes and consequently, may be subject to investigation by EU MS law enforcement agencies.

EU citizens may also become involved in other ways: they could become victims of war crimes or commit crimes that are subject to prosecution in their countries of origin. In either case, the EU would need to respond. Foreign victims of war crimes may also choose to settle in the EU, which would necessitate the implementation of protective measures, including the establishment of witness protection programs.

2.10. PUBLIC ORDER

Since the onset of the war, numerous protests have taken place and the maintenance of public order and security in EU MS can be compromised in various ways, including unrest due to the economic impact of the war on energy prices, food supply, the cost of living or inflation. Additionally, violent extremist groups may exploit the dissatisfaction of those affected by the socio-economic situation, seeking to foment instability. This can manifest as violence against Russian or Ukrainian communities or conflicts between them, hate crimes or protests against NATO and defence expenditures.

The inability of refugees to integrate into MS social structures could also lead to potential social and political instability. The sudden influx of new needy migrants in EU MS may pose difficulties and potentially lead to discontent among other foreign nationals who are trying to integrate into their host country.

Even terrorist and extremist groups may attempt to capitalise on economic troubles to disseminate their propaganda and narrative and search for new recruitment opportunities. Furthermore, the situation can be exploited by extremist groups to intensify racist, xenophobic, hateful or discriminatory ideologies within MS.

Furthermore, given that there are Russian and Ukrainian interests and individuals dispersed throughout the territory of the EU (diplomatic missions, companies or other entities), MS authorities are obligated to ensure their protection and security.

2.11. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

In April 2022, Europol initiated Operation Oscar to support financial investigations conducted by EU MS aimed at targeting criminal assets owned by individuals and legal entities subject to sanctions in connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Europol, 2022b).

In the field of internal security, the financial sanctions imposed on Russian oligarchs resulted in asset seizures within the EU MS. Therefore, it was crucial to ensure that those sanctions were effective.

EU MS are committed to enforcing sanctions within their territories, necessitating an escalation in the workload for EU internal security actors.

2.12. FUTURE THREATS

The post-war period will require a different approach to internal security threats, if not to all, at least to some. The reconstruction of Ukraine, the return of foreign fighters to the EU, the repatriation of refugees to Ukraine, the investigation of war crimes, the illegal market, the number of available weapons, etc., will all evolve and adapt to the new situation, introducing profound changes and new opportunities that organised criminal groups are likely to exploit.

Furthermore, it is not unrealistic to envision a scenario along the EU's Eastern borders, with limited cross-border cooperation and heavily fortified borders, resembling a return to Cold War-style military border management (Frontex, 2022, p.41).

Hence, it's time to start planning for the post-war implications and contemplate how to adapt the EU's response.

CONCLUSIONS

The Russian invasion against Ukraine represents an external threat to the EU which influences its internal security across various areas, including terrorism, organised crime, and the safeguarding of critical infrastructure, among others. Issues such as food security and the energy crisis, and their impact on EU MS, should also not be underestimated.

These threats affect not only the EU as a whole but also individual MS. Today, no country possesses the capability to face all the potential

internal security threats on its own. This is especially evident in the EU, an area without internal borders and characterised by freedom of movement, where a threat to one MS could pose a risk to several or all MS. Any country in the world requires cooperation with others to address internal security threats, but the EU necessitates not just cooperation, but also a coordinated effort among its MS and European bodies.

The EU responded in several ways to the Russian invasion of Ukraine: implementing economic sanctions that target different sectors of the Russian economy as well as individuals and companies from Russia and Belarus; providing military support to Ukraine, including training, equipment and financial aid; actively engaging in diplomatic efforts to restore peace; intensifying security cooperation with Ukraine and Moldavia; bolstering its defence cooperation and strengthening its internal security capabilities to be able to respond to the security threats arising from the situation along its border.

From the outset, the EU acknowledged the necessity for broader and more strategic debates concerning the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the EU's internal security. As a result, the war in Ukraine has been a priority topic on every agenda of the European Council, JHA Council, Foreign Affairs Council and several other Council meetings. However, the strategic debates should have been followed up by more operational discussions to translate the strategic direction into operational actions. This could have been enhanced by profiting from the existence of a preparatory body like COSI. It's difficult to understand why this committee has not been involved to a greater extent.

It's not entirely accurate to characterise these as entirely new threats to internal security, as many of the threats linked to the war were already present in the EU or were anticipated before the start of the hostilities. In fact, some of those threats have intensified, while others have reemerged due to the armed conflict, posing new challenges to the EU's ability to deal with its internal security.

While there were no actions taken in the EU's internal security field before the Russian aggression, the response was swift, united and unexpectedly robust. Typically, in the EU, crises facilitate quick decision-making. However, this is a sustained situation and the threats facing the

EU are evolving and changing, demanding ongoing attention to address them effectively. Another aspect that cannot be dismissed is the potential for Russian retaliation against EU MS for their support of Ukraine. This could serve as a multiplying or facilitating factor for threats to the EU's internal security.

Contrary to what might be expected, the impact of various threats has been limited. However, it's worth noting that, on the one hand, irrespective of their initial degree of influence, some of them are likely to escalate; and on the other hand, the challenges were, are and will be evolving and developing as per the situation on the ground.

Ultimately, the armed conflict will end, implying the termination of military actions, a reduction in violence and the gradual return of refugees. However, this does not mean that the security threats to the EU's internal security will disappear. The EU needs to make progress towards more integration in the internal security domain. What is most crucial at this point is to prepare for the post-war challenges and the consequences of potential future conflicts. In this regard, anticipation, prevention, flexibility and cooperation are key concepts.

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SECURITY PROBLEMS CAUSED TO THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA BY THE UKRAINIAN WAR AND BELORUSSIAN HYBRID ATTACKS

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ABSTRACT

"Those who fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it"
Winston Churchill

The second stage of Russia's war against Ukraine began on 24 February 2022, with a new invasion into other parts of Ukraine and the occupation of more territories. This invasion led to a massive influx of refugees from Ukraine into other countries, including the Baltic States, in search of shelter. It brought new challenges to the national security of the Republic of Lithuania and other countries as they anticipated the Russian Federation's next moves. Another event with relevance to the national security of the Baltic States is the fraudulent Belarusian election of 2020 and the subsequent migration crisis. As these two events are closely intertwined, they will be jointly analysed in this paper. Despite their different natures and essences, they serve as entry points for an analysis of the threats and challenges to national security, specifically for the Republic of Lithuania, emanating from the Russian Federation and its closest ally in the war against Ukraine, the Republic of Belorussia.

INTRODUCTION

"Study the past if you would define the future"
Confucius

Every country and region is faced with an array of threats, the origins or rather, the source of which, can vary from the impacts of natural disasters to the deliberate actions of individuals, groups or even countries aiming to destabilise the situation in a local area, region or state for geopolitical aims. These threats are encountered by countries with strong economies and stable societies, as well as countries taking their initial steps towards democracy. The source of the threat need not be internal, i.e., in the territory of the country. The threat can, like a virus, emanate from the territories of other nations. As an example, migrants from Asia and Africa are being employed as a hybrid warfare strategy by Belarus against the Republic of Lithuania, Poland and the Republic of Latvia.

Following the collapse of the Soviet empire, all former Soviet Republics gained independence and moved at varying speeds toward a market-based economic model, democracy and the rule of law. While the Russian Federation was initially on the path to democracy, by paving friendly relations with neighbouring countries, especially the former Soviet Republic, it has steadily shifted its focus towards centralising power in the hands of the president, suppressing opposition within Russia and pursuing more ambitious goals in the international political arena. Furthermore, it employs different tactics to force independent states, especially its neighbouring countries, to accept Russia's view on the World order. The instruments used to achieve this objective range from manipulating the prices for gas, oil and other raw materials, indirectly financing political movements and creating favourable conditions for influential individuals to engage in business with Russian companies in the gas and oil sectors to resorting to brutal military interventions, all with the singular aim of drawing former Soviet Republics into Russia's sphere of influence.

The author of this paper would like to highlight several events that reflect Russia's shift towards the restoration of the Soviet empire and its exceptional role in global political affairs. For example, in 1999, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov's decision (during an official visit to

the United States of America), to turn his plane around mid-flight over the Atlantic and return to Moscow, in protest of NATO actions against Serbia; the 2003 Tuzla Island conflict; V. Putin's 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference; the 2008 military invasion and occupation of parts of Georgia; and the 2010 Ukraine-Russia gas war, among others.

In its 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, the Russian Federation stated: "The world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system". After the collapse of the Soviet empire, Ukraine gained independence and steadily moved toward a market-based economic model, despite all attempts by the Russian Federation to keep Ukraine within its sphere. In 2014, the Russian Federation initiated a brutal war against sovereign and independent Ukraine, marked by the appearance of the so-called "*little green man*" during the occupation of several Ukrainian regions. This development was unexpected for many politicians and societies in countries around the world. The term "*little green man*" was coined by residents of the Crimean peninsula.[1] This concept was something new in the context of modern warfare and these were unexpected actions conducted by the Russian invaders. The next stage of Russia's war against Ukraine began on 24 February 2022, with a new invasion into other parts of Ukraine and the occupation of additional Ukrainian territories. This bloody aggression from the Russian Federation brought about significant changes within Ukrainian society and beyond, raising numerous questions for policymakers, military organisations and civil societies in countries worldwide regarding the effectiveness of existing preventive measures to stop the war. This topic could serve as a distinct subject for academic research, focusing on the exertion of influence through various tools and methods. These methods include manipulating the price policy for gas and oil, engaging in information warfare through the dissemination of false information, interference in Ukraine's political life using a variety of tools and ultimately resorting to brutal military aggression (*Author's note: The first stage of war against Ukraine began in 2014, while the second stage of war commenced on 24 February 2022*).

This research paper aims to analyse the challenges to the national security of the Republic of Lithuania arising from two closely intertwined

[1] The Changing Story Of Russia's 'Little Green Men' Invasion. https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-crimea/29790037.html

events: The first event is the response of the A. Lukashenko's regime to the sanctions imposed due to the fraudulent results of the 2020 elections in Belarus, which resulted in mass migration from Belarus to the European Union Member States bordering the Republic of Belorussia. The second event is linked to the second stage of the Russian Federation's aggressive war against Ukraine, which has created one of the largest migration crises in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

The research questions that this paper seeks to address are as follows:

- What problems and challenges have emerged in the internal security of the Republic of Lithuania as a result of the border crisis following the fraudulent presidential election in 2020 in Belorussia?

- What problems and challenges have emerged to the internal security of the Republic of Lithuania due to the aggressive invasion by the Russian Federation into Ukraine in 2022?

- How might the Russian Federation leverage the influx of migrants into European Union Member States and third countries?

- What potential threats do these two events pose to the national security of the Republic of Lithuania?

The aims of this research paper are as follows:

- To analyse the impact of the fraudulent presidential elections in the Republic of Belorussia in 2020 and the second stage of the Russian Federation's aggressive war against Ukraine on the national security of the Republic of Lithuania.

- To examine the vulnerabilities and threats to the national security and public order of the Republic of Lithuania resulting from the aforementioned events.

- To identify potential instruments that could be employed by the Russian Federation in cooperation with the Republic of Belorussia to create potentially dangerous situations within the country.

To achieve the aim of this research, the author will analyse the following topics:

- **The importance of the strategic location of the Baltic States and Russia's geopolitical ambitions in the Baltic Sea area.**
- **Military cooperation between Russia and Belorussia.**
- **The weaponization of migration.**
- **Espionage operations conducted through deep cover illegals.**
- **Tools used for gathering sensitive information.**
- **Russia's ideology and information warfare.**
- **The risk of diversion.**
- **The risk of an influx of weapons, explosive materials and devices from Ukraine.**
- **The free visa regime policy for visiting the Republic of Belorussia and the Russian Federation.**
- **The propagation of fake narratives about Ukrainians in Lithuania and Ukraine.**

Other topics, such as the indirect financing of political movements, creating exceptional conditions for specific individuals to engage in business with Russia and diplomatic instruments including official statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on various events in Lithuania, public comments made by Russia's officials and politicians on decisions made by the Republic of Lithuania, as well as the use of gas and oil prices as instruments of pressure and the presence of the notorious private military group "Wagner' troops in Belorussia, will not be addressed in this paper.

Research methods: The research employed various theoretical and empirical research methods, including content analysis, textual analysis,

archival research, analytic induction, systematic analysis, comparative research and descriptive-interpretive analysis.

Content analysis was used to analyse data sources, both online and offline, to categorise and compare different pieces of information and to summarise it into valuable insights.

Textual analysis was employed to study and comprehend written texts.

Archival research was conducted to search for and extract information from original archives.

Analytic induction and systematic analysis methods were employed to unveil the relationships between events and facts, enabling a systematic and exhaustive examination of a limited number of cases to draw generalisations and formulate conclusions.

1. IMPORTANCE OF THE STRATEGICAL LOCATION OF THE BALTIC STATES AND RUSSIA'S GEOPOLITICAL AMBITIONS IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

"The best way to predict the future is to study the past or prognosticate"
Robert Kiyosaki

The Baltic Sea area holds great significance for Russia. In the late 17th century, Russia's expansion was stymied by its lack of access to the sea. The dream of Russia's young czar, Peter the Great, was to establish a "*window on Europe*" for Russia, an outlet to the sea. Unfortunately, to the south, access to the Black Sea was blocked by the Ottoman Empire. So, Peter the Great turned his attention north, where Sweden controlled territory bordering the Baltic Sea.[2] During his reign from 1682 to 1725, Peter the Great founded the city of Saint Petersburg, often referred to as Russia's "**window to Europe**". He founded the Russian Empire in 1721. Dmitry Peskov, a Kremlin spokesman, noted in 2022, "If we are

[2] St. Petersburg—Russia's "Window on Europe". https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/102003608

specifically discussing Peter the Great, Putin deeply values the role of this particular individual in our country's history ".[3]

When we examine the historical events of the past century in the Baltic Sea area, we see tragic events related to the Baltic States in the past. For example, the occupation of the Baltic States in 1940 allowed the Soviet Union full access to the Baltic Sea, thereby enabling their ports to operate all year round.

The author of this paper has provided a visual representation of the locations of the Baltic States, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belorussia on the map below. This will offer a better view and understanding of why Russia seeks to keep the Baltic States within its sphere of influence or in other words, in the backyard of the Russian Federation as the successor must be undisputable after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Figure 1. Map of Belarus. Source: mappr

[3] Russia won't close Tsar Peter's 'window to Europe', Kremlin says. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-does-not-plan-close-window-europe-kremlin-says-2022-06-02/

Figure 2. Neman river. Source: Wikipedia.

Figure 3. Suwalki gap. Source: Yahoo! finance.

The author of this paper presents information and maps of the border with the Russian Federation to enhance visual comprehension of the geographical terrain and identify vulnerable border areas that could be exploited for special operations targeting objects within Lithuania.

The Lithuania–Russia border is an international border between the Republic of Lithuania (an EU external border) and the Kaliningrad Oblast, an exclave of the Russian Federation. It serves as an external border of the European Union. This 274.9-kilometre-long border traverses the Curonian Spit and Curonian Lagoon before following the course of

the Neman River, Šešupė, Širvinta, Liepona and Lake Vistytis. The sea border extends for an additional 22.2 kilometres. Along the 116-kilometre stretch of the Neman River, is the border between Lithuania and Russia's Kaliningrad oblast. Its maximum depth is 5 metres and it widens to about 500 metres. The Neman is a slow-flowing river, with a current of approx.1 to 2 m/s. It serves as a natural obstacle for illegal border crossings, making it much easier to control the border by utilising technical means.

2. RUSSIA'S AND BELORUSSIA'S MILITARY COOPERATION

For the Russian Federation, Belarus holds critical geostrategic importance. From a military perspective, the Suwałki corridor is of particular significance. Only 120 kilometres are separating the Kaliningrad region from the Republic of Belarus. The Suwałki corridor/gap is often considered the Achilles' heel of NATO. See the map (Figure 3) above.

Russian politicians, military experts, Western politicians and NATO military experts all agree on one thing: The Belarusian region is of significant importance to Russia due to its proximity to the Kaliningrad enclave, where the troops of the Western Military District are stationed. In the event of a potential crisis between Russia and NATO, the role of the Kaliningrad enclave will become more prominent and establishing a land connection with Kaliningrad via Belarus may become essential for Russia's interests.

Belarus is an important region for Russia, serving both as part of Russia's strategic deterrence and as part of Russia's internal military policy. This is demonstrated by Russia-Belarus joint military exercises, known as "Zapad", which Russia initiated in 1999. These military exercises with the Belarusian military forces involve the testing of test military readiness, refining operational concepts, evaluating new equipment and technologies and enhancing command-and-control capabilities. In 2013, Russia conducted joint military exercises ("Zapad") with Belarus, aimed at integrating the lessons learned from the 2008 war in Georgia. The 2017 "Zapad" military exercises focused on defending Russia against

potential attacks by several hypothesised hostile states. One of the military exercise's scenarios encompassed the northwest region of Belarus, not far from the Suwałki gap, a corridor along the Lithuanian-Polish border that separates Kaliningrad from Belarus. An area of 12,000 square kilometres encompassed the Grodno, Minsk and Vitebsk regions, where special forces operated and the more tactical phase of the drill took place. The location of the military exercise near the Suwałki gap may have been a hint that what Russia views as defensive operations could potentially include limited operationally offensive actions, such as the seizure of key arteries. The "Zapad" military exercise in 2021 marked a major tactical shift in operational and strategic intensity. The drills involved approx.200,000 military personnel, over 80 aircraft and helicopters, as well as up to 760 units of military equipment, including over 290 tanks, multiple-launch rocket systems and 15 ships. The scenario was built around a massive operation and conventional war response to an allied invasion by three different countries, similar to the Baltic states and Poland.[4]

On 3 December 2022, Russian Defense Minister Shoigu and his Belarusian counterpart Viktor Khrenin signed a protocol (classified) amending the countries' joint regional security agreement dating back to 1997. In 2023, Moscow and Minsk signed an agreement formalising the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear missiles on Belarusian territory. Shoigu stated that Moscow would retain control over the weapons and make decisions regarding their use. TASS quoted him as saying that Iskander-M missiles, capable of carrying conventional or nuclear warheads, had been provided to the Belarusian armed forces and some Su-25 aircraft had been adapted for the potential use of nuclear weapons. …It's political signalling… The Russian government, at the highest levels, may issue warnings about the risk of nuclear war if NATO provides Patriots to Ukraine, and gives F-16s to Ukraine.[5]

The author's opinion is that it's a smart step done by the Russian political-military establishment. Let's consider the worst-case scenario: Russia might employ a nuclear tactical weapon against Ukraine to

[4] Understanding Russia's Great Games: From Zapad 2013 to Zapad 2021. https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/understanding-russias-great-games-zapad-2013-zapad-2021

[5] Russia signs deal to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/25/russia-signs-deal-to-deploy-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus

prevent Ukrainian victory and simultaneously force Ukraine to initiate talks on a truce agreement with Russia or to provide leverage in negotiations with the democratic world and Ukraine, favouring the Russian Federation. How NATO and Western politicians will respond to the use of tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine, a non-NATO member, remains uncertain. Several scenarios could be considered. One possible scenario might involve Western powers supplying lethal weapons, e.g., long-range rocket systems, advanced military jets and ships. Another scenario for discussion could involve an attack on military installations of the Russian Federation, which will lead to a confrontation with the world's largest nuclear power. Are Western countries prepared to take such action? Among the many questions that will arise is the simple one: should the territory of Russia or the territory of Belorussia be attacked? This will lead to endless and extensive discussions among policymakers and the military of NATO members. Different opinions will be presented and reaching a final clear decision is highly unlikely. It is the weakness of democracy, and the Russian Federation has been well aware and has skillfully exploited this for an extended period. Furthermore, Russia's decision to deploy a nuclear weapon in Belarus can be considered an additional attempt to divide the united Western leaders who stand for the territorial integrity of Ukraine into several quarrelling camps. This move aims to instil fear of a potential nuclear winter among the population of the Western hemisphere, intended to foster or incite possible unrest and demonstrations in the Western European countries, similar to what happened during the Vietnam War in the USA and Western European countries. On the other hand, the use of nuclear weapons will lead to environmental catastrophe, causing pollution in the air, water and soil in many East, Central and even Western European countries.

3. WEAPONISATION OF MIGRATION

War, poverty, military conflicts and famine force people to leave their homes looking for safer havens in other countries or continents. As per the official portal of the Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, the steadily increasing influx of illegal migrants coming from Belarus to Lithuania has become a serious challenge from 2021 onwards. For example, the number of foreigners

temporarily accommodated at the Parade Detention Centre (Foreigners Registration Centre) in the first half of 2021 increased 3.6 times compared to the second half of 2020. Information about possible migrant flows has been obtained through various channels, beginning with the movement of migrants from their countries of origin to intermediate countries where they await an opportune moment to enter the territory of the European Union. In this case, that territory is Belarus. Indicators such as a sharp increase in international transport services, local traffic towards the EU external border, developments in the human trafficking market, political processes in Belarus and the response of the A. Lukashenko's regime to the sanctions imposed for the fraudulent results of the 2020 elections in Belarus have all contributed to the mass migration threats. The influx of migration, as part of the hybrid attack against Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia, supported by Belarusian authorities in 2021, necessitates that Lithuanian institutions take immediate and coordinated countermeasures to halt the hybrid attack on the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU).

Accordingly, Lithuania is responsible for ensuring the protection of its border, and as a sovereign state, has the exclusive and discretionary right to make final decisions in a given situation and employ the most suitable and effective measures to address threats to national security. The Belorussian authoritarian leader, Alexander Lukashenko, employed similar tactics toward Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia as Gaddafi did in Libya. Gaddafi used the threat of maritime migration to pressure the lifting of the embargo and he continued to do so until the NATO air campaign of 2011. The unrecognised Tripoli government has similarly issued threats, much like Gaddafi did in 2010, suggesting that Europe would 'turn black' unless it received more resources and political recognition. In Morocco, the government has managed to extract substantial 'geographical rent' (Natter 2013), due to the country's strategic location on irregular migration routes and it has done so in a more subtle manner. In Spain, it's widely acknowledged among border professionals that 'if migrants pass, it's because they [the Moroccan authorities] want them to pass'. By selectively 'opening' and 'closing' its borders, Rabat can maintain pressure on Spain and the EU while seeking recognition of Morocco as a key European partner (Andersson, R., 2016).

The utilisation of migration processes by the authoritarian Belarus leader, A. Lukashenko, against Poland, the Republic of Lithuania, and the Republic of Latvia, which are responsible for safeguarding the external border of the European Union, as a weapon of "*soft power*", represented a new development in the coordinated policy of the Russian Federation and Belarus during the escalating geopolitical confrontation between the Russian Federation and the West. The utilisation of migration as a weapon against other countries is not a new phenomenon in human history. However, what makes this situation unique is that it was used against member states of the European Union. In these border territories with Belarus, a significant part of the population has kinship, economic and cultural ties to Belarus. Additionally, many share the same religion, Orthodox Christianity under the control of the Patriarchate of Moscow. Other member states of the European Union, such as the Kingdom of Spain, the Republic of Italy and Greece, have faced and continue to face waves of migrant influx. However, the methods migrants used to access the external southern border of the European Union are radically different from how migrants reached Belarus. With the assistance of the regime's repressive structures, they reached the external eastern border of the EU. These migrants crossed the border between the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Belorussia in places not designed for border crossing, which, in legal terms, is considered illegal border crossing. They did not go through the border crossing points, the official gate to the country. This action carries criminal liability, as outlined in Article 291 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania. Since 3 August 2022, the State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania was granted the right to turn back illegal migrants. In 2022, "Amnesty International" prepared a report and among its recommendations, it called for an end to pushback.

In all municipalities bordering Belarus and the Russian Federation, there is no language barrier for cross-border communication. In many cases, the population is linked by kinship. For some people, small-scale smuggling of tobacco, alcohol, food and other consumables serves as an additional source of income. This is due to the much lower prices in Belarus and the environment, which is favourable for such activities, including swamps and extensive forests covering over 500 hectares. Approx.43% of the total land area in the districts bordering Belarus

is covered by forests. In some districts, this forested area is even larger than the average. The land border between Belarus and Lithuania spans 677 kilometres and is called a "*blind border*", serving a strictly controlled, barrier-isolating function, with only a few exceptions for crossing on foot to visit neighbouring regions.

At the border with Belarus, the ethnic composition of the population has a significant impact on both the development of the economy and on its underground illegal activities. Due to Belaru's different economic system, its price policies featuring especially low prices of tobacco, alcohol, fuel and some food products attract a segment of the population to profit from this situation. For example, in the city of Salcininkai, every second pack [of cigarettes] is illegal and "Every fifth pack [of cigarettes] discarded in rubbish bins is non-Lithuani."." and illegal." Furthermore, since only public rubbish bins are covered, the percentage may be somewhat higher. If we look at what Lithuanians discard in their domestic rubbish bins, it's possible that people might tend to hide [illegal goods] and throw them away where nobody can see them.[6]

This leads to the conclusion that certain goods, such as tobacco, might be brought into the territory of Lithuania through various smuggling schemes. The aforementioned vulnerability, which is linked to the geographical terrain and the likely persistence of smuggling routes from Belorussia to Lithuania, could be exploited for special operations against the Republic of Lithuania by Russian spy agencies.

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Millions of people have fled Ukraine. As per "**Statista**", a German online platform specialised in data gathering and visualisation that provides statistics, reports, market insights, consumer insights and company insights on the global digital economy, industrial sectors, consumer markets, public opinion, media and macroeconomic developments, the estimated number of refugees from Ukraine recorded in Europe and Asia since February 2022, as of May 9, 2023, varies by selected country.

[6] Neapskaitytų tabako gaminių problemos vertinimo galimybės Lietuvoje. https://www.elta.lt/storage/pressreleases/2021/01/22/96/9646.pdf

COUNTRY	AS OF DATE	NUMBER OF REFUGEES
Russia	10/3/22	2,852,39
Poland	5/9/23	1,593,860
Germany	4/19/23	1,061,623
Czechia	4/30/23	516,100
United Kingdom	5/1/23	203,700
Spain	5/8/23	175,962
Italy	4/21/23	175,107
France	10/31/22	118,994
Slovakia	5/7/23	114,628
Moldova	4/30/23	107,645
Romania	5/7/23	97,085
Austria	5/9/23	96,766
Turkey	1/26/23	95,874

4. ESPIONAGE THROUGH DEEP COVER ILLEGALS

As per the document "National Threat Assessment 2020", which was prepared in cooperation with the Second Investigation Department under the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Lithuania and the State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, "Russia's intelligence and security services, which closely collaborate with Belarusian intelligence and security services, represent the primary intelligence threat to the Republic of Lithuania. Russian and Belarusian intelligence agencies are looking for new methods, ways and opportunities to continue their intelligence activities within the territory of the European Union Member States."

The infiltration of sleeper agents and the creation of spy networks/rings are the *modus operandi* of Russian intelligence agencies, including the Main Directorate of Military Intelligence of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as the

GRU), the Federal Service of Security (responsible for intelligence activities and operations in the territories of former Soviet Republics) and the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation. This strategy is usually employed during economic, and migration crises, civil unrest and in times of military conflicts and wars. The Illegals Program (so named by the United States Department of Justice) was a network of Russian sleeper agents under unofficial cover. Edwards (2018) pointed out that the investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (hereinafter referred to as FBI) culminated in the arrest of ten agents (*Anna Chapman et al.*) on 27 June 2010, following a decade-long FBI operation (Edwards, 2018). A prisoner exchange occurred between Russia and the United States on 9 July 2010. The spies were sent to the USA by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (Russian abbreviation SVR). Posing as ordinary US citizens, they sought to reach out to academics, industrialists and policymakers to gain access to intelligence. Russia's program for deploying dormant agents abroad has proven to be an effective way of gathering sensitive information. In court documents, the US Department of Justice referred to the Russian spy group discovered in 2010 as a program of "illegals" (*The United States of America v. Anna Chapman and Mikhailo Semenko*): "The spies were trained in Russia and then sent to the United States (often through Canada, where they could establish a more reliable history) to gain access to intelligence from senior government and academic officials." Many of these spies had lived in the United States for a long time, spoke good English, had a regular job and even

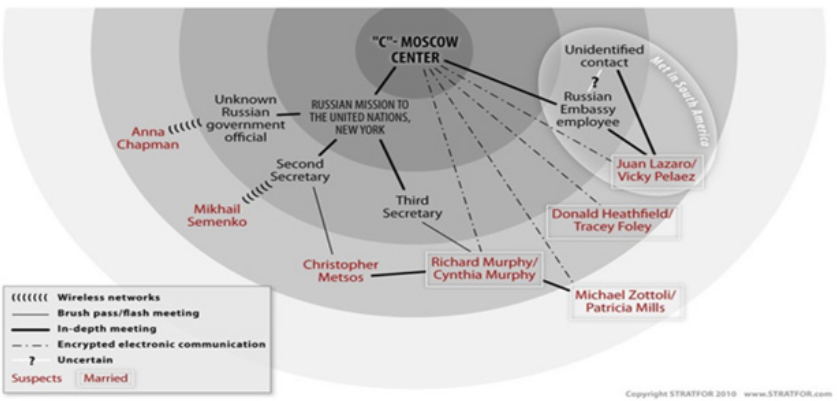

Figure 4. Russian spy ring. Source: Wired.

had children. Occasionally, they adopted the identity of deceased individuals who had died at a young age. Couples were brought together in Russia "…so that they could live and work together in the country of destination under the guise of being a married couple" (*The United States of America v. Anna Chapman and Mikhailo Semenko*). Above is a diagram[7] illustrating the communication system used among spies.

Russian officials publicly admitted the usage of illegal agents for gathering information abroad (interviews with former dormant agents and acting officials)[8],[9].

In recent years, espionage scandals involving Russian intelligence have emerged in some EU Member States. For example, in 2022, a Brazilian university researcher was arrested in northern Norway on suspicion of being a Russian. Norway's domestic intelligence service informed the state broadcaster NRK on Tuesday that they intended to expel the researcher, who is currently being held in custody, as he represented "a threat to fundamental national interests." The Police Security Service (hereinafter referred to as the PST) believes this researcher is the first Russian spy operating under deep cover to be identified in Norway.

The man now alleged to be a Russian spy was studying at the prestigious Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies, an elite graduate programme favoured by US military personnel, young diplomats and sources say, future spies. "*Muller*" graduated from SAIS in 2020. In June 2022, a Dutch intelligence agency publicly identified him as Sergey Vladimirovich Cherkasov, a Russian military intelligence officer who, in April 2022, travelled to the Netherlands to start an internship at the International Criminal Court (hereinafter referred to as ICC). From there, he would have had a vantage point to spy on war crimes investigations related to Russian military actions in Ukraine and other locations.[10]

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[7] Who's Who in the Russian Spy Ring. Retrieved on June 2nd 2023 from: https://www.wired.com/2010/07/whos-who-in-the-russian-spy-ring/

[8] Служба, которой не видно Эксклюзивный репортаж Вестей в субботу из штаб квартиры СВР. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrXhNEdoAd0

[9] 100 лет СВР «Без права на славу» Алексей Козлов. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1RCUL-FvM0

[10] Бразильский кандидат: тщательно подготовленная легенда предполагаемого российского шпиона. https://bellingcat.com/novosti/russia/2022/06/17/the-brazilian-candidate-the-studious-cover-identity-of-an-alleged-russian-spy-ru/

Criminal cases of espionage involving Belarusian intelligence on Lithuanian territory are not uncommon. For example, in 2015, a criminal case was opened involving espionage. As per the case files, an employee of the state-running enterprise "**Air Navigation Services**" R. L. secretly photographed documents and other objects in his office, later passing them to Belorussia's spy agency through secret agent S. K.[11] Another criminal case related to the same secret agent S. K. was also opened in 2015. The court found that, while serving in the Lithuanian army, this individual collected information related to Lithuanian military equipment, military training programs, military facilities and soldiers' loyalty to their country and then passed this information on to a Belarusian intelligence officer. Due to their diplomatic immunity status, some officials from the Russian Federation Embassy in Lithuania were declared as *persona non grata*.[12]

Director of the public institution "Our Home", Olha Karachi, stated at a press conference held on 7th October 2022 that there is reason to believe that a network of Lithuanian citizens recruited by Belarusian special services is operating in Lithuania. According to her, the Belarusian KGB is particularly interested in the activities of "Our Home" and "Dapamoga", as they are the biggest supporters of the Belarusian refugees in Lithuania. She also mentioned that a lawyer, M. D., was attempting to infiltrate into organisations that assist the families of persecuted Belarusians within Belarus. According to O. Karach, M. D. was interested in how to prevent the escape of persecuted Belarusians from escaping Belarus through Lithuania. She claimed to know that M. D. was attempting to establish connections with the American organisation "Salvation Army" and other entities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania. She further stated that after the start of the war in Ukraine, M. D. also targeted the Ukrainian diaspora in Lithuania. The law enforcement agencies of Lithuania opened a criminal case on espionage and M. D. was arrested before escaping to Belorussia.[13]

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11 Paviešinti slapti įrašai šnipinėjimo byloje: kaip buvo perduodamos žinios. https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/paviesinti-slapti-irasai-snipinejimo-byloje-kaip-buvo-perduodamos-zinios.d?id=67753810

12 Svarbiausios šnipų bylos Lietuvoje. https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/svarbiausios-snipu-bylos-lietuvoje-56-823106?utm_medium=copied

13 Baltarusių visuomenininkai įspėja: Lietuvoje veikia visas šnipų tinklas. https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/baltarusiu-visuomenininkai-ispeja-lietuvoje-veikia-visas-snipu-tinklas.d?id=91431691

As mentioned earlier, the Soviet Union and Russian spy agencies have been using and continue to use periods of unrest, especially the influx of migrants, to infiltrate illegal agents into foreign countries. As per the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 130 thousand Russian citizens have crossed the Lithuanian border from 24 February 2022 to 01 September 2022 – since the onset of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Some of them may have crossed several times.[14] Between 19 September 2022 and 30 September 2022, a total of 15,483 citizens of the Russian Federation were admitted to Lithuania, while 244 were not. 12 million Russian citizens have Schengen visas.[15]

Nowadays, specialists in information technology are in high demand in many developed countries. For a long time, the Republic of Belarus was best known for its tractors, fertilizers and oil products. However, when Lukashenko signed a decree in 2017 exempting technology companies from various taxes, including corporate tax, the country's capital Minsk has become a regional high-tech hub in recent years. This taxation policy has enabled the establishment of over a thousand information technology companies in Belarus, employing more than 70 thousand people. Among them is the famous high-tech company "**Wargaming**," the creator of the extremely popular computer game "World of Tanks" that is loved worldwide.

Another Belarusian success story is the messaging and video calling application "**Viber**." Initially, the application was developed in Belarus and in 2014, the company was acquired for 900 million US dollars by the Japanese technology giant "Rakuten". In 2019, the export of products and services of the Belarusian information technology sector reached 2.7 billion US dollars and was 25% higher than in previous years. In 2020, the information technology (hereinafter referred to as IT) sector of the Republic of Belorussia accounted for approx. 4% of the country's GDP. Several IT specialists took part in the demonstrations due to the fraudulent presidential election on 9 August 2020 and later became the target of

[14] Landsbergis G.: rusai nuo karo pradžios Lietuvos sieną kirto. https://durys.daily.lt/naujienos/lietuva/politika/g-landsbergis-rusai-nuo-karo-pradzios-lietuvos-siena-kirto-130-tukst-kartu-1093662

[15] Ilgalaikes Šengeno vizas turi net 12 mln. Rusijos piliečių ir netrukdomai marširuoja po Europą: bet tai keisis
[ht]tps://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/ilgalaikes-sengeno-vizas-turi-net-12-mln-rusijos-pilieciu-ir-netrukdomai-marsiruoja-po-europa-bet-tai-keisis-n1186763

law enforcement agencies. Thousands of IT specialists left Belarus, and IT companies moved to neighbour EU MS (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia). As per the magazine "Verslo žinios (in English "Business News"), from 2020, the Belarusian IT companies that began to move more actively have had a significant impact on the real estate market in the Lithuanian capital city, Vilnius. In the first half of 2022, Belarusian IT companies were the main drivers of the real estate market in the office segment in Vilnius.[16]

In the author's opinion, Russian and Belorussian spy agencies might use opportunities to gather sensitive information through IT specialists who left the country. There are numerous ways to force migrants working at IT companies to cooperate with spy agencies. Additionally, there are also numerous legal methods for infiltration.

The author of this research paper would like to present one of many scenarios. Many private companies, especially state institutions, provide a wide range of online services and an increasing number of e-services are expected to be available shortly. State institutions often announce a public tender for the creation of new document management systems or the upgrading of existing ones. As per the law on public procurement, certain exemptions and tenders can be conducted under other regulatory laws. Let's consider a scenario where a company won a public tender to create a new document management system for the National Health Insurance Fund under the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania. The winning company, tasked with completing projects on time, entered into a subcontractor agreement with an IT company based in Belarus to develop mobile applications. The information about this contract was intercepted by a Belorussian spy agency. Let's imagine the next steps these spy agency agents might take, especially if family members of the IT specialists are living in Belorussia. Numerous other scenarios can be used to collect sensitive information through established SPA centres, etc. So, to sum it up, amendments to the Law on Public Procurement of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts related to public tenders should be made to prevent the leakage of sensitive information. These amendments should be done in a non-discriminatory manner.

[16] Baltarusijos IT kompanijos keliasi į Lietuvą ir tikrina NT sektoriaus ribas. https://www.vz.lt/nekilnojamasis-turtas-statyba/2022/07/28/baltarusijos-it-kompanijos-keliasi-i-lietuva-ir-tikrina-nt-sektoriaus-ribas

Additional attention should be paid to the involvement of information technology companies originating from third countries and non-NATO member countries as subcontractors to provide the most important services related to the information infrastructure within state institutions, enterprises and strategic enterprises run by the state or privately owned.

4. TOOLS FOR GATHERING SENSITIVE INFORMATION

The official commentary from the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Lithuania stated that "For the intelligence and security services of Russia and Belarus, gathering information about Lithuania's special and military objects is important. The collection of information about objects important for military planning can be conducted by various means and methods, including the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over these objects". However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it currently had no data "confirming the use of drones for the interests of the intelligence and security services of Russia and Belarus".

Comparing the data from 2022 and 2021, the military has noticed a significant increase in the number of remotely controlled aircraft illegally flying over military territories. One of the military facilities recorded more violations in one month this year than in the entire previous year. The former Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, Reserve Lieutenant General Jonas Vytautas Žukas, informed BNS that the activation of unidentified drones over military territories was initially recorded during the large-scale Russian-Belarusian exercise "Zapad" in 2017. This raised concerns among officials about possible incidents. Consequently, rules were introduced to allow such drones to be physically shot down. The general stated, "Activity decreased and practically stopped after the decision to physically shoot down drones." According to J. V. Žukas, during his leadership of the army from 2014 to 2019, not a single controller of the drones that flew over military territories was identified. Therefore it's practically impossible to confirm their links with espionage. Prohibited zones are established over important, sensitive infrastructure facilities where drone flights cannot be conducted without the permission of the owner of the location. Drones are only required to be registered when they fall into a certified category. At present, there are no such registered

aircraft in Lithuania. Common and private drones that are frequently seen in the sky do not fall into this category. Conducting drone flights over military territories or within specified distance from them or in prohibited, restricted and border zone airspace, without the necessary authorisation, results in **administrative liability,** which includes a fine of two hundred to four hundred Euros. Repeated offences can result in a fine of between three hundred and five hundred Euros, as well as confiscation of the drone.

In mid-October 2022, several mysterious drone flights were observed in Norway. Seven Russians were arrested in Norway, suspected of illegally flying drones or taking pictures in prohibited areas. One of the Russians arrested was identified as Andrey Yakunin, the son of former Russian Railways chief Vladimir Yakunin, who is considered to be close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.[17]

Another unconventional method employed by the Russian Federation for gathering information is through the use of mobile phone devices. Firstly, to grasp how this information may be collected, we need to understand how the mobile network system operates. Mobile phones operate by transmitting and receiving low-power radio signals, similar to a 2-way radio system. These signals are exchanged with antennas connected to radio transmitters and receivers, commonly known as mobile phone base stations. The base stations are connected to the broader mobile and fixed phone network and relay the signal/call within these networks. In essence, a mobile phone needs to have a "clear line of sight' to a mobile phone base station. In other words, the radio signal from the phone to the base station needs to be uninterrupted.[18] A mobile phone establishes a connection with one of the available cellular towers by emitting radio waves. Most of the time, the receiver and transmitter are integrated into a single device known as a transceiver. The tower may have antennas that look the same or different, depending on the network generations in use. These antennas receive radio waves from various devices on different bands, depending on the network generation in use. Towers are typically connected to a data centre via underground

[17] Norway on edge over drone sightings, arrest of son of Putin confidant. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/20/norway-drones-russia-arrests-gas/

[18] How mobile networks work. https://amta.org.au/1041-2/

cables.[19] The International Telecommunication Union (hereinafter referred to as ITU) is the specialised agency of the United Nations for information and communication technology. This organisation has 193 member countries, including the Russian Federation. Signal strengths of mobile phone base stations/cellular towers typically range from -30 to -110 dBm. In general, a signal strength of -50 dBm is considered excellent. The maximum effective range of a cell tower is typically 25 miles (40 kilometres), although in some cases, cell tower radio signals can extend up to 45 miles (72 kilometres) in distance. Cell towers are vertical structures that vary in height from 30 metres to 120 metres. These towers use antennas to transmit radio signals from the tower to a customer's mobile device. By positioning antennas high above the ground, cell towers can provide wireless coverage over a wide area (or radius).[20] An official from the Communications Regulatory Authorities of the Republic of Lithuania explained that, as per the Vienna Agreement, mobile communication stations situated on the border must be constructed in a manner that prevents neighbouring operators from emitting signals that exceed a specified threshold into our territory. Specifically, when measured at a height of 10 metres, within 30 kilometres from the border, their signal should be nearly non-existent. However, problems may arise due to the peculiarities of the terrain and the positioning of the stations."[21] As per the regulations, mobile network operators are mandated to restrict the reach of their signal to the border of Lithuania. Antennas are installed at an angle that ensures a strong connection with Lithuania and minimises signal spillage into neighbouring countries. Indeed, the Russian Federation mobile network operators in some areas of the Kaliningrad enclave, particularly near the popular resort city of Nida bordering with Lithuania and Belorussian mobile network operators, have strategically installed cell towers along the border with the Republic of Lithuania in a such way that the antenna's signal towards Lithuania is stronger, overpowering the local (Lithuanian) operator's signal. In this scenario, if mobile phone users have not manually selected a network on their mobile phones, they may unintentionally connect to another country's mobile operator's network. Nowadays, with the advancement in technologies

[19] How mobile networks work. https://www.simbase.com/learning/how-mobile-networks-work

[20] Simmons. A., Cell tower range: how far do they reach? https://dgtlinfra.com/cell-tower-range-how-far-reach/

[21] At the border - a trap for mobile users.https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/148579/pasienyje-spastai-mobiliojo-rysio-vartotojams/

and signal surveillance, it's now possible to collect information remotely. As a result, there are no guarantees that Russian or Belorussian spy agencies may not have the technology to gather information from mobile phone devices remotely, such as extracting the list of contacts from the mobile phone's device memory.

This leads to the conclusion that drones could be used for gathering sensitive information. The legal regulation on preventing the use of drones over military installations, critical infrastructure, strategic objects, other flammable objects and communication networks should be revised. Specialised equipment should be set up to safeguard these protected areas from unauthorised drone access. Additionally, mobile phone devices may become targets for spy agencies even within your own country. This risk persists if your mobile phone lacks the manual network search function as you could connect to another country's mobile operators' network during your visit to the Silute and Nida districts located near the border with the Kaliningrad enclave or in the districts bordering Belorussia.

5. RISK OF DIVERSION

Terrorism remains one of the most serious threats to peace and security and it poses a direct threat to universally recognised democratic values. As per the National Threat Assessment 2023 prepared by the Defense Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defense and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, the threat of terrorism in Lithuania is low. However, the risk of terrorism-related offences by lone radicalised individuals remains. As per the National Threat Assessment 2023, the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces (GRU) constantly collects intelligence on strategic military and civilian infrastructure in countries bordering Russia. This information allows Russia to assess the military capability and weaknesses of its opponents. Russia utilises this knowledge for planning subversions that target state functions and democracy procedures and also military operations, like the one against Ukraine's critical infrastructure.

The author of this paper intends to classify potential targets for possible attack into the following categories: strategic objects, critical infrastructure, recycling facilities for used tires, objects of timber industry sites and shopping malls, especially those trading in agricultural and industrial products, e.g., example, fertilizers, paints and flammable liquids. As we can see, these categories encompass a range of objects with varying levels of protection. For instance, strategic objects are the most heavily protected. Therefore, to summarise, facilities used for the storage of used tires or sites related to the timber industry might be considered soft targets in the event of a diversion due to their lower level of protection.

The next question to consider is, who might be potential perpetrators of acts of diversion? Could it be radicalised residents, a Lone Wolf or members of paramilitary organizations in Russia? How would members of paramilitary organisations from Russia enter the territory of Lithuania to create diversions? There are numerous ways to do it. For example, they could choose to illegally cross the Belorussia-Lithuania border using routes employed by smugglers or they could use the regular transit of cargo trains that traverse Lithuania while moving from Belorussia to the Kaliningrad enclave, etc. This particular topic could warrant separate research.

6. RISK INFLUX OF WEAPONS, EXPLOSIVE MATERIAL AND DEVICES FROM UKRAINE

This issue is at the forefront of the agendas of EU MS law enforcement agencies. Wars create conditions conducive to the accumulation of weapons, often outside direct state control. Furthermore, the conclusion of wars tends to lead to an illegal outflow of these weapons into the hands of criminal and terrorist organisations. In many cases, most Western weapons find their way into southern Poland and are subsequently shipped to the Ukrainian border and then simply distributed in vehicles to make the crossing: trucks, vans and sometimes private cars. Weapons like the Javelin and the Stinger have become significant concerns for high-ranking officials of Western countries. These portable weapons are easy to handle and capable of neutralising an armoured vehicle at several hundred metres or of targeting helicopters and combat aircraft at

low altitudes. Despite concerns about the proliferation of weaponry, preventive measures have been taken by Ukrainian authorities and the law enforcement agencies of EU MS bordering Ukraine. As a result, there are no recorded instances of weapons being smuggled out of Ukraine. Western countries are concerned about the potential widespread distribution of weaponry in neighbouring countries, as was observed after the Balkan wars in the 1990s. This legacy continues to fuel weaponry trafficking in Western Europe. Concerning the war in Ukraine, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation has issued a warning "that the proliferation of firearms and explosives in Ukraine could increase firearms and munitions being trafficked into the EU via established smuggling routes or online platforms. This threat could be even higher once the war in Ukraine has ended."

7. RUSSIA'S IDEOLOGY AND INFORMATION WARFARE

Nowadays, exerting influence on other countries through the use of hard power, particularly military force, is not a popular tool. The reader might ask, why? There are many explanations for this. In the author's opinion, one of the explanations why military interventions have been getting less and less popular in the last 50 years is the ability of a nation to fight battles outside their country's territory. On the other hand, the celebration of military victories on the battlefield, the mystification of military commanders and the highlighting of successful operations conducted by intelligence services, both domestically and abroad, serve as powerful tools to mobilise a nation's population, diverting their attention from domestic painful concerns. A movie is a powerful tool in a country's soft power arsenal. The impact of just two or three films can affect millions of souls and minds, especially young, fragile youth. Today, many people crave instant gratification. This places pressure on the country's political and business leaders to take decisive actions to find ways to maintain the trust of the population if they wish to remain in their position. So, like chef de cuisine, the country's governing politicians are constantly looking for recipes to prepare meals for the eyes and minds of the population. What are the most suitable ingredients to prepare a popular meal? How should the final product be delivered? Who should be the

target audience? Will it be addressed inside or outside the country e.g., to neighbouring countries and/or other continents? Could the ingredients include a country's history, the accomplishments of its citizens in diverse fields of science and the arts or the country's victorious military battles in the past? A head of state is in charge of the foreign policy of the country, e.g., Article 86 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation states that "*The President of the Russian Federation: 1)* governs the foreign policy of the Russian Federation." (http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_28399/ (2020). The head of state's vision for the country's development serves as a firm foundation for the strategy on how the country will achieve or maintain its visions. A combination of both hard and soft power is essential and must be put into action to achieve a goal. Detailed information about the country's development visions, the tools and the methods to attain these goals can be found in the country's strategic documents. They help us to understand a country's strategy and tactics in shaping international relations and mobilising the population. For example, the Strategy of the State Cultural Policy for the period up to 2030 (comprising 44 pages), approved on 29 February 2016, by Order No 326-p of the Government of the Russian Federation states that: "The most significant potential threats to the future of the Russian Federation possibly showing the humanitarian crisis include: … deformation of historical memory, negative assessments of significant periods of Russian history …. attempts to falsify Russian and world history, illegal attacks on cultural objects. Attempts to falsify Russian history and subject it to revision, to revise the results of the Second World War, continue. Under these conditions, the most important condition for the success of the soft power of Russian humanitarian influence abroad is the implementation of an effective cultural policy. …The priority directions of the Strategy are strengthening and expanding the influence of Russian culture in foreign countries" (*http://government.ru/docs/22083/, (2016),* page 27 of the Strategy. Translation done by the author of this paper).

There are several concepts related to historical events, fully supported by Russian Federation authorities and evidenced in 2005-2020. Firstly, the concept of "**The Immortal Regiment"** (in Russian "Бессмертный полк") has a long history. The main objective is "immortalising" the memory of home front workers, armed forces service personnel, partisans, members of resistance organisations and personnel of law enforcement and emergency services. It involves people honouring war veterans

by carrying pictures of relatives and/or family friends who served in the country's labour sector, paramilitary units, the Soviet Armed Forces and law enforcement organisations during the Second World War." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immortal_Regiment). This concept was first announced and implemented in practice in 1965 in Novosibirsk. (https://academ.info/news/28151). This concept from the Soviet times was later reintroduced and revitalised in Russia and around the world in 2011. Today, it has become a massive civil event held in major cities in Russia and across the globe every 9 May as a part of the Victory Day celebrations.

Other concepts supported by top Russian Federation officials are the "**Russian World**" and the "**Exceptionalism of Russia in world history**". Some of these concepts are based on the studies of a Russian scholar, strategist and political activist Aleksandr Dugin. The "Russian World" concept was devised by intellectuals, academics and journalists with close ties to the Kremlin around 1995–2000 and it was publicly introduced into political discourse by Putin in 2001. The concept of the "Russian World" is associated with the totality of Russian culture. In the years that followed, pro-Kremlin policymakers systematically linked this concept to their efforts to legitimise both domestic and foreign policy, e.g., President Vladimir Putin justified the annexation of Crimea by invoking the concept of a "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir). He spoke of Russians as living in a "divided nation" and highlighted the "aspiration of the Russian world, of historic Russia, for the restoration of unity." He also stressed the existence of a "broad Russian civilization," that needed protection from external forces (particularly from the West) and defined it as the sphere of Russian interests.

The revival of the **Russian Historical Society** in 2012 underscores the significance of historical policy for the Russian Federation. The main goal of the Russian Historical Society is to promote Russian history both within the Russian Federation and abroad, preserve the historical heritage and traditions of the peoples of Russia and support historical education programmes. The Permanent Chairman is Sergei Naryshkin, who has been the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation since 2016. He also serves as the head of the Board of Trustees for one of the largest film studios in the Russian Federation, the "Lenfilm" film studio. The Fund (non-profit organisation), the "**History**

of the Motherland", was created by the decree of the President of the Russian Federation on April 6, 2016, No. 163. Sergei Naryshkin is also the Chairman of the Board of the Fund. He stated "The main goals and tasks of the fund's activities correspond to the priorities of the activity of the Russian Historical Society. First, educational work, fostering patriotism and promoting respect for Russia, its history and the struggle to preserve the truth of the interpretations of historical events based on the most objective and transparent presentation of historical facts" (https://fond.historyrussia.org).

A highly effective tool for influencing both the minds and perceptions of the population is cinema. Historical movies have been, are and will continue to be one of the most attractive genres within the visual arts for the general public. Simultaneously, it serves as a platform for state institutions to influence the interpretation of historical events. A state which aims to keep the interpretation of historical events in a desirable direction must create suitable conditions for both professional and amateur interpretation, offering sufficient financial support, and access to archives at the same time, a state offers guidance to filmmakers on how to align their interpretation of events with done the state's historical policy. Most of the movies in the Russian Federation work exclusively with the events of WW2. In the year of the 75th anniversary of the Victory against the Nazis, history took centre stage in political discussions. Amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation in 2020, the cultural development strategy until 2030, the establishment of a fund (non-profit organisation) "History of the Motherland", as well as public statements made by President V. Putin and other top officials regarding historical events, highlighted the importance of interpreting historical events in both the country's domestic and foreign policy. It has become a significant tool in the arsenal of soft power. For example, during an informal summit of the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (hereinafter referred to as "CIS") in Saint Petersburg on 20 December 2019, V. Putin proposed the creation of a commission of historians from CIS countries to shape a single historical discourse within the territories of CIS countries (Buciunas. G., (2021), Interpretation of historical facts in documentary movies about the occupation of Lithuania in 1940 by Soviet troops. (*Buciunas, G., 2021, Springer Nature, 373-396*).

Today, the Russian Federation employs history for political mobilisation purposes, using technology to increase the degree of support from the general population to the authorities, especially the institution of the President of the Russian Federation. The victory of 1945 is not just a central axis of Soviet history. It also serves as a positive reference point for the national identity of Russian society. In this context, the Russian saying, "*winners are not judged*", is apt. In other words, "*the ends justify the means, so long as you achieve the ends*" https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/103491/idiom-wanted-for-means-and-ends).

Information warfare is becoming increasingly important nowadays due to the large amounts of fake information disseminated by different players pursuing their agendas. Based on the methods of how information reaches each habitant, it can be distinguished by way of information spreading. The number of households with Internet access is also important. Both local and central authorities should prepare a comprehensive set of measures to counter the influx of fake information from neighbouring unfriendly regimes. The most effective weapon against the spread of fake information, the misinterpretation of facts and interpretation of the provisions of restrictions, is to make the population aware of the upcoming and ongoing changes in their personal lives. Unclear information about certain matters and confusing procedures for accessing e-services can be skilfully exploited by authorities and media from an unfriendly side. As Winston Churchill rightly noted, "*A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on*".

In 2016, a survey commissioned by the Centre for East European Studies showed that over half of the Poles and Russians living in Lithuania watch Russian-language channels every day or several times a week. Lithuania, with the support of Poland, implemented countermeasures in the information field against Russian and Belorussian TV channels in the areas of Lithuania bordering Belorussia. Since 2017, the official rebroadcasting of five 5 non-coded Polish TV channels, including "TVP Polonia", "TVP Info", "TVP Historia", "NUTA.TV" and "Power" was initiated in south-eastern Lithuania, which provided access to a wider range of information sources for the population, including in most municipalities bordering Belarus.

Language is a vital part of human communication. Language allows us to share our ideas, thoughts and feelings with others. The largest number of Russian language users outside the Russian Federation territory were citizens of Ukraine. Due to the war in Ukraine, the Russian language has become less and less popular in East European countries. For example, as per the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, the number of students taking Russian language lessons at school decreased by 8.6% in September 2022.

The Russian Orthodox Church plays an important role in implementing the Kremlin's concepts, and policies and conveying the appropriate message to. Today, approx. 85,9% of the Lithuanian population are Roman Catholic. The second largest faith is Russian Orthodox, comprising approx. 4,6%, primarily ethnic Russians. 0,9% of the population consists of Old Believers, whose Russian ancestors sought refuge in Lithuania when they were persecuted in Russia for refusing to adhere to Nikon's religious reform. Lutherans, the 4th largest religious group (0,7%), enjoy a centuries-old stronghold in the Klaipeda Region, while the Lithuanian centre of the Reformed Christianity (0,2%) is in the Birzai district in the northeast. The map below illustrates the distribution of religious communities in the Republic.

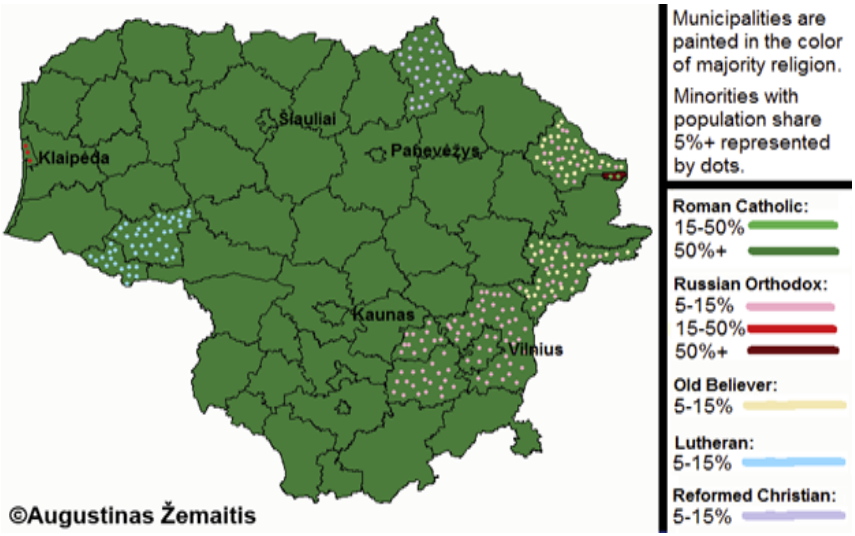

Figure 5. Religion in Lithuania. Source: truelithuania.com.

So, the instruments for implementing the concept of the Russian World and the Kremlin's values vary from using the Russian language as the means of communication among people to religion as a means of influencing the human psyche.

8. FREE VISA REGIME POLICY TO VISIT THE REPUBLIC OF BELORUSSIA AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

In June 2022, Belarus announced that it had abolished visa requirements for Polish nationals to foster" good neighbourly" relations. The decision to implement a "temporary visa-free entry regime" for six months was made by President Alexander Lukashenko, as confirmed by Belarus' National Border Guard Committee. This measure will be in effect from 1 July to 31 December 2022, as confirmed by the committee. Polish citizens will now also be able to travel to the Belarusian border areas without special permission. Instead, citizens will be required to verbally explain their presence in the area and their intended destination, as stated in an official announcement. Lukashenko has already allowed citizens of Lithuania and Latvia to travel to Belarus without a visa until the end of the year. This might be a honey trap for travellers. As per the National Threats Assessment 2023 report, as a response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, European countries expelled more than 400 Russian intelligence officers working under diplomatic cover. This coordinated decision has negatively affected Russia's intelligence-gathering capabilities. Under such circumstances, it's highly likely that Russian intelligence will resort to other information-gathering methods and will search for new intelligence opportunities. The free visa policy provides excellent opportunities for spy agencies to gather information from travellers' communication devices and computers. It also creates a conducive environment for recruiting new agents from among travellers utilising various methods.

9. FAKE NARRATIVES ABOUT UKRAINIANS IN LITHUANIA AND UKRAINE

As per the National Threats Assessment 2023, distributors of pro-Kremlin propaganda in in Lithuanian information domain primarily use social media. They run targeted campaigns against Ukrainian refugees, accusing them of law violations, abuse of social support and promotion of extremist ideologies. After tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees settled in Lithuania, several messages with unconfirmed information appeared online. They falsely accused the refugees of committing crimes and instigating ethnic hatred. For example, a false message was spread on social networks in January 2023, that the municipality of Vilnius city will search Ukrainian conscripts.[22] Another example is, "Don't just register us as fugitives and then not take us to the refugee centre." We asked: "Why?" We think that maybe the man was afraid of the army or afraid that we would not take them in... It turns out that they had heard rumours that if they registered as refugees, they wouldn't be allowed to leave the European Union and return to Ukraine until they paid back the assistance provided by the Europeans.

The European Digital Media Observatory (hereinafter referred to as "EDMO"), comprising 37 fact-checking organisations from 25 European Union Member States and Norway, conducted an analysis of fake information about Ukraine spread throughout the year 2022. EDMO classified all false narratives about Ukraine into four categories.

The first category – narratives compromising Ukrainians' image (38% of analysis):

- Ukrainians are corrupt and embezzling international aid funds.
- Ukrainians are planning to use dirty bombs to escalate the conflict.
- Ukrainians are staging the war.
- Ukrainians are Nazis and murderers.

[22] Savivaldybė įspėja, kad platinama melaginga žinutė su Vilniaus mero pasisakymu apie ukrainiečius. https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1875847/savivaldybe-ispeja-kad-platinama-melaginga-zinute-su-vilniaus-mero-pasisakymu-apie-ukrainiecius

The second category of narratives attacks NATO and Ukraine's foreign supporters (23% of analysis):

- EU sanctions on Russia and inflation are backfiring on the Western Governments.
- NATO is militarily involved in the war.

The third category of narratives is damaging to Zelensky's public figure (17% of the analysis):

- Zelensky is a Nazi and is corrupt and a liar, as well as a coward and a drug abuser.

The fourth category of narratives discredits Western media reporting on the war (13% of the analysis):

- Unethical and sensational publications on the war.[23]

The main platforms for spreading fake information are social networks: Facebook, Twitter and others.

CONCLUSIONS

The geographical terrain and most likely the still-existing smuggling routes from Belorussia to Lithuania could be used for special operations against the Republic of Lithuania by Russian spy agencies.

The territory of Belarus is important for Russia due to its proximity to the Kaliningrad enclave, where the troops of the Western military district are located. Russia's decision to deploy a nuclear weapon to Belarus can be considered as an additional attempt to split united Western leaders, supporting the territorial integrity, of Ukraine into several quarrelling camps, to spread a virus of fear on possible upcoming nuclear winter

[23] Disinformation narratives about the war in Ukraine. Periodic insight N°14. 21/10/2022 to 22/11/2022. https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Periodic-insight-n.14-Disinformation-narratives-about-the-war-in-Ukraine.pdf

among the Western hemisphere population, to ignite possible unrests, demonstrations in the Western European countries similar to during the Vietnam war in the USA and Western European countries.

The Suwałki corridor (part of Poland, bordering Lithuania, Belarus and Russia) is particularly important from a military point of view and is considered NATO's Achilles heel.

The utilisation of migration processes by the authoritarian Belarus leader, A. Lukashenko, against the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Latvia, responsible for the safeguarding of the external border of the European Union, as a weapon of "*soft power*".

The Soviet Union and later, Russian spy agencies, have used the influx of migrants from one location to another as a means for infiltrating illegal agents into foreign countries. The infiltration of sleeping agents and the creation of spy networks/rings is the *modus operandi* of the intelligence agencies of the Russian Federation. The migrant crisis offers the Russian and Belarusian intelligence services a great opportunity and possibility for the infiltration of dormant agents into the EU Member States.

Russian and Belorussian spy agencies might use the opportunity to gather sensitive information through IT specialists who left Belorussia and Russia.

The amendments to the Law on Public Procurement of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts related to public tenders should be made to prevent the leakage of sensitive information and should be done in a non-discriminatory manner. Additionally, special attention should be given to the involvement of information technology companies originating from third countries that are not NATO members. They may participate as subcontractors in providing crucial services related to the information infrastructure of state institutions, enterprises, and strategic enterprises run by the state or private businesses.

Drones can be used for gathering sensitive information. The legal regulations to prevent the use of drones over military installations, critical infrastructure, strategic objects, other flammable objects and communication networks should be revised. Special equipment should be

installed to protect the territory of sensitive objects in case drones enter prohibited areas.

Mobile phone devices might be potential targets for spy agencies, even if you're within your own country and your mobile phone doesn't have a selected manual network search function. You could find yourself connected to another country's mobile operators' network during your visit to Silute and the Nida districts located near the border with the Kaliningrad enclave or at the districts bordering Belorussia.

The storage of used tires or timber industry objects might be soft targets for diversion due to their limited protection.

In Soviet times, history was used as a political tool to foster patriotism, and a similar approach is being employed in the Russian Federation today. Several concepts related to historical events are fully supported by authorities in the Russian Federation, such as "The Immortal Regiment", the "Russian World" and the "Exceptionalism of Russia in World History**".** The revival of the Russian Historical Society in 2012 underscores the significance of historical policy for the Russian Federation.

The instruments for implementing the concept of the Russian World and the Kremlin's values vary from using the Russian language as a means of communication among individuals to using religion as a means of influencing people's psyche.

The free visa policy declared by Russia and Belorussia presents excellent opportunities for spy agencies to gather information from travellers' communication devices and computers and also creates a conducive environment for recruiting new agents among travellers through various methods.

All fake narratives about Ukraine can be classified into four categories: compromising Ukrainians' image; attacking NATO and Ukraine's foreign supporters; damaging Zelensky's public image; and discrediting Western media reporting on the war. The primary platforms for spreading fake information about Ukraine and Ukrainians are social networks: Facebook, Twitter and others.

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RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR AND CHINA'S GLOBAL INTERESTS

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we will explore China's interest in becoming involved in the Ukrainian peace process, focusing on two main aspects. First, we will examine the Sino-Russian strategic partnership in the context of China's efforts and involvement. Second, we will analyse the potential benefits that China could gain from the war in Ukraine. The author argues in favour of the position that achieving peace in Ukraine is not China 's primary concern. Instead, China's main objective is to safeguard its own strategic and geopolitical position by actively participating in this process. Russia's defeat in the war is not in China's interest. So, China is making efforts to promote its approach to the peace process in Ukraine, to keep the existing status quo and to maintain Russia's control over the occupied territories. A relatively weak Russia, albeit possessing significant military and nuclear capabilities, would be the best solution for China. This would enable the formation of a solid counterbalance to the U.S.-led West, with a further aim to gain global control and establish a new world order with its own set of rules. Ukraine would continue to fall within the spheres of influence of both Russia and China, while the Western powers would need to retreat and follow China's command.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the commencement of a full-scale war against it in February 2022, China's stance on this conflict has been a subject of acute concern among political actors and analysts. In 2023, during the second phase of the war when the Russian offensive faltered and the Ukrainian counterattack slowly progressed, Beijing exhibited some peacemaking efforts to address what it euphemistically terms the 'Ukrainian crisis'. However, Western and Ukrainian authorities have expressed skepticism regarding China's stance. This scepticism arises from the fact that, in its peace rhetoric, China has never demanded a withdrawal of Russian military forces from the annexed territories of Ukraine as a necessary precondition for any peace talks and agreement between the two sides.[1] Instead, China is urging both parties to seek a 'peaceful solution' to the crisis, as if both parties were equally responsible and Russia was not the aggressor. Furthermore, China is also demanding that the West immediately stop military aid to Ukraine. This peace rhetoric seems to align more with the Russian position rather than fostering the groundwork for an effective and constructive peace process aimed at restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

China's behaviour is quite understandable when considered within the broader geopolitical context as it has long positioned itself as a partner, if not ally, of Russia and is moving towards a more pronounced Cold-War style confrontation with the U.S.-led West, often accusing the latter of this escalation. Hence, in this war, China has consistently refrained from directly criticizing the aggressor and has even refused to call Russia's aggression against its neighbouring country a war or invasion. Instead, it frequently employs euphemisms such as 'Ukrainian crisis'[2] or, following Russia's rhetoric, 'special military operation'[3]. Additionally, China

[1] We can point out three important actions of Chinese peace initiatives in 2023. Firstly, its 12-point proposal from February 24 (China's Position 2023); secondly, visit of Chinese special envoy Li Hui to Kyiv in May with the message of "political solution" (McCarthy 2023, Tiezzi 2023) that was preceded by the telephon call of Ukrainian President Zelenskyi and China's Chairman Xi Jinping; and, thirdly, China's participation in Ukraine peace talks in Jeddah with delegation lead again by Li Hui in August (Graham-Harrison 2023). Comprehensive overview of China's statements and actions from 21 February 2022 through 26 April 2023 can be found in USCC 2023.

[2] In Chinese: 烏克蘭危機 *wū kè lán wéi jī*. On China's pervasive use of the very term as well as the next one (see note 5) in English see, e.g., related papers in CCP English language mouthpiece Global Times (https://www.globaltimes.cn/). On Chinese reasoning of avoiding the word 'war' in this context see also Shepherd, Rauhala and Tan 2022.

[3] In Chinese: 特別軍事行動 *tè bié jūn shì xíng dòng*

has opted not to join the sanctions against Russia imposed by Western countries and their democratic allies in Asia and other regions. On the contrary, throughout the war, China has notably increased its trade with Russia. (Sor 2023)

In the UN, China has consistently abstained from voting on GA resolutions that condemn Russian aggression and the initiation of an undeclared war against the sovereign state of Ukraine. Beijing has followed the same pattern in the UN Security Council, while the latter's other permanent member, Russia, has vetoed any attempts to block any resolutions demanding that Russia ceases its aggression.[4]

All these factors, coupled with China's regular official declarations affirming their mutual interest in sustaining 'all-sided co-operation' and fostering 'friendship beyond limits' with Russia[5] within the framework of its 'great power diplomacy'[6] (see: Yoshikazu 2019) underscore China's position. This position is further accentuated by its continuous denunciation of the US and NATO, which it blames for escalating the situation in Ukraine to the point where Russia felt compelled to react to protect its rightful interests and security in the region. It indicates that, at least politically, China is backing Russia in the latter's 'special military operation.' Ultimately, as it participates in the Ukrainian peace process in the role of a neutral mediator, China primarily pursues its interests, to strengthen its position on the international stand. China recognises that it cannot achieve this by decoupling itself from Russia and aligning with the West. Additionally, China is attempting to garner support from the Global South, seeing the Ukraine war as an opportunity to build a broader international alliance.

This paper will explore some aspects of China's approach to the peace process in Ukraine, with a primary focus on two key themes: (1) The war

[4] China abstained voting UN Security Council resolution on 26 February 2022 that would have demanded that Moscow immediately stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw all troops (UN News 2022_1); it also abstained in Security Council voting to call for emergency special session of the 193-member UN General Assembly on Russia's military operation in Ukraine on 27 February 2022 (UN News 2022_2). China also abstained UN GA resolution from 2 March 2022 demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine (UN News 2022_3) as well as the UN Human Rights Council resolution that condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine and establishes an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate allegations of war crimes and human rights abuses (Resolution 2022).

[5] In Chinese: 中俄友誼無上限 *zhōng é yǒu yì wú shàng xiàn*. See the text of statement: Statement 2022.

[6] In Chinese: 大國外交 *dà guó wài jiāo*. On this very concept read more from Li and Yuan 2021.

in Ukraine and the Sino-Russian strategic partnership and (2) China's potential benefits derived from the war in Ukraine.

1. WAR IN UKRAINE AND SINO-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Over the one-and-a-half years since the Russian war commenced in Ukraine, the issue of the Sino-Russian partnership and the trajectory of cooperation between these two nations has been a frequent and extensively debated topic. The expression most frequently quoted to signify the special relations between China and Russia in this context is the declaration of friendship 'beyond limits' or 'without limits' as noted in the *Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development*. This statement was signed on 4 February 2022, just a couple of weeks before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, during a meeting in Beijing between the leaders of both nations. The relevant passage from this twelve-page document (Statement 2022) reads as follows:

> The sides call for the establishment of a new kind of relationship between world powers based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation. They reaffirm that the new interstate relations between Russia and China are superior to the political and military alliances of the Cold War era. The friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no "forbidden" areas of cooperation, strengthening of bilateral strategic cooperation is neither aimed against third countries nor affected by the changing international environment and circumstantial changes in third countries.

In light of ensuing events, the statement 'there are no "forbidden" areas of cooperation' sounds alarming as it implies the potential for military collaboration and arms supply by China to Russia, the worst nightmare of the Western powers supporting Ukraine in the ongoing war. Up to this point, despite offering ongoing political support, economic aid and some limited military cooperation, such as joint military exercises, e.g., naval exercises in the East China Sea in December 2022 (see Mahadzir 2022) and the joint naval patrol involving 11 warships, the largest of

its kind ever, near Alaska in August 2023 (see Mahadzir 2023), China seemingly has not supplied combat weaponry to Russia for use against Ukraine. However, there are still suspicions that China might be a source of dual-use technologies and other military-capable hardware to Russia, which could be used as components of lethal weaponry in the war in Ukraine. (See, e.g., Aarup, Panov and Busvine 2023.)

The convergence of modern Russia and China, aiming to reshape the world order, has a history spanning at least a quarter of a century. At the highest level of the relationship between these two nations, this process commenced with the signing of the *Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order* in Moscow on 23 April 1997 by Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin. (Joint Declaration 1997) The first sentence of the *Declaration* sets the course for their collaborative efforts to challenge the West-ruled liberal democratic world order. It serves as the fundamental principle guiding the subsequent bilateral agreements and statements as follows:

> In a spirit of partnership, the Parties shall strive to promote the multipolarisation of the world and the establishment of a new international order.

Such efforts have increasingly come to define Russia's and China's foreign policy during the early decades of the 21st century. The Declaration undeniably echoed the 'Primakov Doctrine' of Russia, formulated in the late 1990s and named after Yevgeny Primakov, who served as foreign and prime minister in Boris Yeltsin's administration. The doctrine emphasised Russia's opposition to NATO expansion, the promotion of a multipolar world order to replace the U.S. (Western) hegemony and the cultivation of a partnership with China. These core principles continue to be major pillars of Russian foreign policy today. (See, e.g., Rumer 2019)

Despite the hopes of the West, the Sino-Russian 'comprehensive strategic partnership' has shown no signs of weakening during the period of the Russian war in Ukraine. There's no apparent indication of China 'distancing' itself from Russia in any manner. High-level visits, including the visit of China's President Xi Jinping to Moscow in March 2023, along with related statements, not only confirm but reinforce these former developments.

China's stance on the deepening partnership with Russia was summarised by Li Haidong, a professor at the Institute of International Relations at the China Foreign Affairs University, in his comments on the Xi-Putin meeting for the CCP mouthpiece *Global Times* (Bai and Yang 2023):

> The Ukraine crisis and the worsening ties between Russia and the West cannot affect the development of China-Russia ties and this is the key message sent to the world.

On the other side, the developments in Sino-Russian relations and their partnership indicate that China is assuming an increasingly dominant role within the partnership, forming a kind of 'perfect imbalance' as described in Una Alexandra Bērziņa-Čerenkov'sa book (Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2023). Nevertheless, both countries still need each other's support to form a solid counterbalance to the U.S. and its Western allies in the struggle for global dominance. In this regard, the significance of the narrative surrounding the Sino-Russian 'strategic partnership' should not be underestimated or disregarded. The author states:

> The pragmatism of the two countries in the twenty-first century means that they are defined more by how they see common enemies than because they have any profound sense of alignment with each other. (Ibid., ix)

2. CHINA'S POTENTIAL GAINS FROM THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The question of whether Chinese leadership was aware of Russia's plan to attack Ukraine in February 2022 and whether Xi Jinping endorsed it, most likely remains unsolved, at least as long as the current leadership in Beijing remains in power. As of now, we can only rely on speculative analysis. If Xi and his inner circle were indeed informed about Putin's plan, they may have shared miscalculations regarding Russia's swift success and replacing Ukrainian leadership with a regime acceptable to Russia. Nevertheless, such a scenario could have aligned with China's interest, as a shift of Ukraine into the Western sphere of influence was

not in China's best interest. Therefore, supporting Russia's actions to counteract this shift was the most logical stand for China in this situation. China stood to gain more than it would lose from this situation and it acted accordingly. In its internal communications, China fully aligned with Russia's stance, while on the international stage, it maintained a restrained approach in its political statements while still affirming its loyalty to the strategic partnership with Russia.

Russia's failure to swiftly solve the 'Ukrainian problem' created a complex situation for China's regime. They needed to figure out how to maintain their partnership with Russia without losing face or risking harm to economic and trade ties with the West, which are of paramount importance for China's economy and political stability.

Over time, China has developed an approach that combines skilled diplomacy with lip service support for a peaceful political solution to the Ukrainian crisis. On one hand, it calls on the warring sides to engage in negotiations. Simultaneously, it places blame on the West for supplying combat weaponry to Ukraine which, according to China's rhetoric, escalates the conflict and compels Ukraine to continue fighting. With this approach, the so-called China's 'peace plan' was unveiled on the first anniversary of the commencement of the war in Ukraine. Officially titled *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*[7], it was not enthusiastically received by both Ukrainian authorities and Western allies. The plan was criticized for not providing any rational answers but only vague ideological and pro-Russian statements.

This agenda, however, was received with sympathy among China's partners in Asia, Africa and South America, as well as in a few European countries and political circles. Leaders and spokespersons from major European countries began urging China to use its influence on Russia to exhort its leaders to stop the war and enter into meaningful peace negotiations with Ukraine.

[7] 關於政治解決烏克蘭危機的中國立場 *guān yú zhèng zhì jiě jué wū kè lán wéi jī de zhōng guó lì chǎng* https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202302/t20230224_11030707.shtml English version see: China's Position 2023.

We might well agree with the opinion of American analyst Nick Danby, who derides the 'forlorn hope' of certain European statesmen relying on China's goodwill to bring an end to the war in Ukraine. Danby stated:

> In post-summit statements Xi may pay lip service to 'peace talks' and the reprehensibility of nuclear war, but European desires that he coax Putin into ending the war will keep falling on deaf ears. (Danby 2023)

For China and Chairman Xi, it's a sign of status when European leaders visit Beijing to seek their favour. In these moments, China perceives a boost in its position and has already gained something notably significant from the war in Ukraine – increased international prestige. On one hand, China uses this situation to strengthen its control and influence over Russia, while on the other hand, it manipulates the West, particularly some European countries, to keep its side and distance from the U.S., thus gaining even more global influence. Therefore, in China's best interest, it is to keep the ongoing Ukrainian war as a low-intensity conflict that gives it several advantages. Firstly, in the long term, this approach aims to weaken Russia while preventing its collapse. With a friendly government, abundant energy and raw material resources and considerable military forces and nuclear capabilities, Russia could still serve as a valuable strategic partner for China. Secondly, to build trust in European countries in China as a reliable partner and bolster economic cooperation, thereby expanding its influence and reducing Europe's dependency on the U.S. Thirdly, the war in Ukraine exhausts U.S. military capabilities and hampers its ability to operate effectively in the Indo-Pacific region. This, in turn, positions China to gain more control in the region and globally, paving the way to establish the new world order with its own set of rules - China's long-term aim.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) As a global player, China is not merely seeking involvement in the peace process in Ukraine; it aspires to be a leading player, offering an alternative approach that concurs with the Western perspective. While the Western approach insists on the victory of Ukraine and the withdrawal of Russian military forces from the occupied territories of

Ukraine as a necessary precondition for peace talks, China is striving to shape an alternative narrative.

(2) In the Ukrainian peace process, China is adhering to its strategic partnership with Russia, backing it politically and economically to counteract Western sanctions and other restrictive measures imposed on Russia to force it to stop the war and retreat from the occupied territories of Ukraine.

(3) China's interest lies in strengthening its ties with Russia and deepening Russia's dependence on China, all while preserving Russia's military and nuclear capabilities. This is necessary to establish a solid counterbalance to the U.S. and its allies, with the long-term goal of supplanting the U.S. as the world leader and the primary guarantor of the existing rules-based world order.

(4) China is pursuing its global strategy through an array of political, economic and military measures, with the ultimate objective of becoming the sole global superpower and establishing a new world order with its own set of rules. Its 'strategic partnership' with Russia and its involvement in its version of the Ukrainian peace process are just a few of the many components of China's present-day policies. However, these components hold significant importance and China constantly underscores them to remind the West and the Global South of its global ambitions, seeking to garner support for its objectives.

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CORRUPTION AS THE HYBRID THREAT IN A CHANGING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyse how the significance of corruption has evolved within today's rapidly developing security environment, as corruption has increasingly transformed from a traditional type of crime into a hybrid weapon. An inherent feature of today's world is the intense strategic competition where the weaponisation of numerous elements is occurring: energy, investment, information, migration flows, data, crime, disease, etc. The competitive environment presents a novel position for transnational organised crime groups, offering advantages to both organised criminals and authoritarian states. In its role as a non-democratic and totalitarian state, Russia controls and collaborates with Russian-based organised criminal groups. Corruption, therefore, serves as a means through which organised crime infiltrates various levels (national and local) of foreign states' administration. The article seeks to assess the specific dangers posed by corrupt activities originating from Russia and directed at Western states. This paper also attempts to address why a low resistance to corruption could be a weakness for the West, where the capacity to resist is rather modest.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to analyse how the significance of corruption as a phenomenon has evolved in a rapidly developing security environment, where corruption as a crime has increasingly become a hybrid threat and in some instances, a hybrid weapon. A distinctive feature in today's world is strong strategic competition wherein everything can be used as a weapon. The term „hybrid threat" refers to an action either conducted by state or non-state actors aiming to undermine or harm a targeted country by influencing its decision-making at the local, regional, state, institutional or international level. These actions are coordinated, synchronised and deliberately target vulnerabilities in democratic states and institutions, while remaining below the threshold of formal warfare (Hybrid CoE 2022).

A new situation in the contemporary security environment has arisen in which transnational organised crime (TOC) groups provide benefits for both criminals and authoritarian states. There is substantial evidence indicating that Russia, as a non-democratic and totalitarian state, in many ways controls Russian-based organised criminal groups and cooperates with them. Corruption is traditionally one of the means of influence through which organised crime infiltrates various levels of governance. This article endeavours to assess the specific hybrid threats posed by corruption originating from Russia and targeted at the Western world. It seeks to understand why the Western world exhibits comparatively low resistance to corruption, making it especially vulnerable to attacks from this direction (in Latin *locus minoris resistentia*).

1. AGE OF HYBRID THREATS AND THE NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES

Since the end of the Cold War, security concerns have become increasingly serious, both nationally and internationally. Real power competition unfolds between believers in autocracy and advocates of democracy – where authoritarian powers challenge the international order based on rules for their exclusive gain, while the international order defends the common good and promotes shared responsibilities (Bunde 2021).

It is plausible to argue that, since Putin came to power, a new Cold War has been emerging, with Russia standing at the forefront of totalitarian regimes (Lucas 2008).

Security issues have assumed far greater importance than a couple of decades ago. The world we had grown accustomed to, especially in the post-World War II era, no longer exists. Figuratively speaking, the Long Peace (Pinker 2012, pp. 228-354) has come to an end, but the change is even more fundamental as we already live in a world of radical uncertainty. Events that were once considered improbable are now unfolding one after another.

We are faced with primitive forms of warfare and criminal activity that, not long ago, were universally prohibited by the global community and disallowed by internationally established rules. Current conflicts have been described as "New Wars," highlighting their supposedly unique characteristics, such as the intentional use of extensive refugee flows, widespread sexual violence and transnational criminal groups (Kaldor 1999; Munkler 2005, pp. 5-31). Opponents of the Western world in the present day are dedicated, learn rapidly and swiftly adapt to more effective modes of causing harm and destruction. To achieve their goals, they spare no resources, show no restraint and are inventive and diligent. We can observe a so-called hermeneutic disorder (Сурков 2014, с. 106) and determining whether it is spontaneous or intentionally created is not always straightforward. As a Russian mobster told his lawyer: „You in the West, you think you`re playing chess with us. But you`re never going to win, because we`re not following any rules" (Belton 2020, p. 448).

Within the realm of security, there is a rapid mixing of genres, often described as „the blurring of genre boundaries" (Geertz 2017, pp. 3-36), giving rise to the emergence of new practices of social control (Saar 2012). It has become increasingly evident that certain actors on the world stage deliberately instigate chaos, anarchy and confusion as part of their strategic objectives (Thom 2023). Behind this lies a broader sense of irresponsibility, e.g., technological (a`la Chernobyl) and/or natural cataclysms (a`la climate warming), as if there is an assumption that "we may cause chaos and destruction without responsibility, but somebody else should fix it later." As we can see, this has often been the modus operandi in dealing with environmental (and other) hybrid shenanigans conducted regularly by totalitarian regimes.

There is an increasing necessity to replace former concepts of danger, which were applicable in specific fields such as warfare, crime control and medicine, with concepts that better meet the requirements of the modern world (Chalkiadaki 2016). The very essence of the concept of danger has undergone a profound change, primarily through an unprecedented expansion of the spectrum of danger. A defining feature of today's world is the pervasive competitiveness, where virtually everything has become a weapon or tool for attack, such as energy, investment, information, migration flows, data, crime, disease, etc. (Galeotti 2022; Spalding 2022).

The concepts of disease, crime and warfare are becoming increasingly blurred. Furthermore, there is an ever-increasing ambiguity within these concepts themselves. The traditional concepts of war and peace are undergoing a process of redefinition as the clear distinction between these two states is eroding. New forms of deviations are emerging that cannot be classified within the earlier approaches to deviation control. The concept of hybrid warfare only partially resembles the long-established phenomenon of `political warfare` (Galeotti 2018). As defined by George Kennan, political warfare is "the logical application of Clausewitz's doctrine in the time of peace" and includes "the employment of all means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives." (Kennan 1948). The state of peace has been replaced by a state of continuosly ongoing hybrid warfare, especially via generating hybrid threats and the use of hybrid weapons against adversaries (Hoffman 2007).

2. A RUSSIAN „HOLY WAR" AND CRIMINAL STATE

The Russian style of governance and base of foreign relations are better understood within the context of the enduring and perpetual Russian tradition of warfare as „holy, sacred war" or religious war. Three main characteristics make a religious war a special kind of warfare. First, what is the purpose and objective of the war and how is the concept of victory defined in this context? Second, who is the opposing force, i.e. what is the argument and how is the enemy identified? And third, how is the war fought, i.e. what methods and rules are used?

In the case of a religious war, all these elements can be reduced to religion – i.e., wars are fought for the global victory of a religiously defined

community and wars are waged against religious enemies, with the methods and rules of warfare sanctioned by God or a superhuman realm. Hence, war becomes sacred because religious warriors are convinced of the unlimited powers given to them by God (Lewis 1990). Much like the concept of jihad in islam, the religious war embraced by the Russians is not limited by time and space and consequently, will only end when the entire world is subordinated to the will of Moscow.

It is logical that such principles are not declared publicly by the Moscow authorities, as this would make it easier for the opponent to implement countermeasures. Hybrid warfare is often concealed in a way that makes it appear as if it were a spontaneously formed situation, becoming what is referred to as a „wicked problem ". A wicked problem is a problem that proves difficult or impossible to solve due to its incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognise. It refers to an idea or problem that cannot be fixed, where there is no single solution to the problem and the term "wicked" signifies its resistance to resolution, rather than implying evil (Ritchey 2011). Furthermore, due to complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems. Due to their complexity, wicked problems are often characterised by organised irresponsibility. For instance, the set of problems associated with migration is well-suited for presenting this as a wicked problem, as countries can intentionally trigger large-scale migration flows through targeted means (e.g. by creating unrealistic expectations, by spreading false rumors or inducing socio-economic disasters in specific regions).

During Putin's rule, the Russian state has acquired the characteristics of a criminal state, with the entire country functioning like a distinctive type of criminal organisation. The concurrent processes of criminalising Russia as a state (Miklaucic, Naim 2013) and the nationalisation of organised crime evolved gradually following the collapse of the USSR (Heathershaw et al. 2021). Several authors have used the term kleptocracy to explain this process (Dawisha 2015; Belton 2020). Kleptocracy is defined as a system of governance „in which public institutions are used to enable a network of ruling elites to steal public funds for their private gain" (Walker, Aten 2018). NGO Transparency International has implemented a parallel term 'grand corruption' (i.e. „the abuse of high-level power that benefits the few at the expense of many and causes

serious and widespread harm to individuals and society" (Transparency International 2016).

In Russia, as a long-standing tradition, there exists a well-established and still visible type of authoritative power, where the roles of the police, military and security services are amalgamated. This "evil trinity" or so called "oprichniks` tradition" constitutes a distinctly Russian centre of power with deep historical and cultural roots. The main task for this institution has been to unwaveringly serve the central government (ruler), to intensify the vertical of power and to forcefully suppress any form of dissent, let alone major objections. Such all-encompassing structures have no place in the Western tradition of government, following the principles of the separation of powers and the checks and balances. However, in today's Russia, these structures have acquired absolute power under the leadership of security sevices (Saar 2022). President Putin, while serving as prime minister, once addressed his KGB colleagues and stated: "The group of FSB operatives who were sent undercover to work within the Russian Federation government is successfully fulfilling their task" (Lucas 2008, p. 32). In fact, this public statement might potentially lead to accusations of conspiracy and high treason against Putin in the future; according to Western legal interpretations, it could be considered a plot. Those who are not well-versed in the governing tradition of Russia might have considered Putin`s statement as a mere platitude or empty bragging. But today, we can see that the objective of taking over the state structures has been achieved and the special services have, over time, become the true masters of Russia, often called the 'new nobility' (Soldatov, Borogan 2011).

3. EMERGING OF SHARP POWER

Hybrid warfare, as a form of hostile activity, does not fit well within the framework of international politics and relations, which is characterised by a strict distinction between hard and soft powers (Nye 1990). Hard power is primarily defined in terms of military force and/or the economic capacity to use negative economic incentives, some of which can escalate to the level of economic coercion. Hard power compels other states to act or refrain from certain activities. This type of power is often

openly aggressive and is most promptly and effectively employed when one political body imposes its will upon another with relatively weaker military and/or economic power.

Soft power is the ability of states to co-opt rather than coerce. In other words, soft power involves moulding the preferences of others by using appeal and attraction to gain people's loyalty through sympathy. A defining feature of soft power is its non-coercive nature. It operates in the cultural area through shared values and benign foreign policy. As Joseph Nye aptly stated, "the best propaganda is not propaganda", and "credibility is the scarcest resource." (Nye 2012).

Today, totalitarian regimes do not primarily rely on hard power and are often unsuccessful at generating soft power. However, they still manage to project a certain degree of influence abroad. Distinguished from coercive hard power (Kaplan 2013) and persuasive soft power, they employ a variety of different tools for adverse influence. As Christopher Walker puts it, they use these tools to "pierce, penetrate or perforate the political, media and social environments of targeted countries, to manipulate their politics and in some instances, to undermine their political institutions" (Walker, Ludwig 2017). These regimes have cleverly adopted certain superficial elements of soft power, but not the essence of this. What they are actually pursuing is more accurately characterised as `sharp power`, whose key attributes are outward-facing censorship, manipulation and diversion.

Russia has been especially adept at exploiting rifts and contradictions within democratic nations. This strategy is not primarily focused on attraction or even persuasion; rather, it centres around deceit, manipulation and distraction. The influence wielded by Russia and other totalitarian regimes is not a "charm offensive," nor is it an effort to share alternative ideas or "broaden the debate", as they and their supporters usually claim (Zappone 2017). They are not engaged in public diplomacy as democracies would understand it. Instead, their objectives seem to be more sinister, often associated with new manifestations of externally-orientated censorship and information control, directly at odds with the benevolent conception of "soft power."

These regimes are not necessarily seeking to "win hearts and minds," which is the usual goal in soft power initiatives. However, they are certainly striving to control their target audiences by manipulating or poisoning the information that reaches them (Orttung, Walker 2014). "Sharp power" likewise empowers authoritarians to infiltrate the functioning of a society, stoking and amplifying existing divisions. Unlike the blunt impact of hard power, "sharp power" entails a certain degree of stealth (Zappone 2017). Taking advantage of the open information environment within democracies, authoritarian regimes' "sharp power" initiatives are often difficult to detect, affording them a delay before the targeted democracies realise that there's a problem.

The transition from sharp power to the active measures implemented by the special services is smooth and deeply concealed. The oversight of clandestine operations is hidden so that governmental accountability is concealed. To achieve the desired result, authorities clandestinely amalgamate and synchronise activities at different levels. CIA director James Woolsey's remark from 1999 has become increasingly commonplace: "If you happen to have a conversation with an eloquent English-speaking Russian [...] who wears a $3,000 suit and Gucci shoes and says he's the director of a Russian company [...], then there are four possibilities. He may be who he says he is. He may be a Russian intelligence operative operating under the cover of a businessman. He may belong to a Russian criminal group. But the really interesting possibility is that he can be all three at the same time and for any of these institutions it will not be a problem." (Via Lucas 2012, p. 220).

When planning hybrid attacks, the central concept is to identify the weak spots and sides of the adversary or the target, where the ability to resist is at its lowest (*locus minoris resistentia*). While Russia and other totalitarian states may take somewhat different approaches to the application of hard, soft and sharp power, they all clearly take advantage of the openness of democratic systems. Democracies have assumed that engagement with authoritarian countries would lead to changes in their repressive systems, but there is little parity in an exchange between an open society and a deliberately closed one. In the marketplace of ideas, authoritarian regimes simply do not respect the rules. They protect their controlled environments while attempting to tip the scales abroad. This absence of reciprocity is evident concerning media, nongovernmental

organisations (NGOs), academia and business activities as well. (Walker, Ludwig 2017).

It is not difficult to see that low resistance to corruption can indeed be one of the weaknesses of the Western world, as corruption is directed against the core values of our society. Corruption can be likened to an assault on society, akin to the way HIV infiltrates the human body, prompting society's autoimmune system to turn against itself. The primary targets include free speech and the freedom of opinion in liberal democratic societies, along with the democratic state institutions established on the principles of fair elections and the rule of law. The Kremlin's goal is to find cracks in the free world and widen them into insurmountable gaps. Organising criminal disorders not only poses a direct threat to public order but also results in the internal undermining of the fundamental values and principles that hold society together on a day-to-day basis.

4. DANGER OF RUSSIAN-BASED CORRUPTION FOR THE WESTERN WORLD

The classical approach to corruption begins with criminologist Edwin Sutherland. According to his ideas, for a long period, corruption was tackled as a form of `white-collar crime`. White-collar crime was defined by Sutherland as "a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of their occupation". The term refers to financially motivated, nonviolent or non-directly violent crimes committed by individuals, businesses, and government professionals (Sutherland 1950, p. 9).

Later, corruption began to be increasingly associated and identified in many ways with organised crime (OC), especially with its mafia groups, when organised crime groups ("power ambition without readiness to respond") try to interfere with state power and governance to increase their revenues. A US national commission recognised nearly 50 years ago that there are more similarities than differences between organised crime and white-collar crime. It found that "the perpetrators of organised crime may include corrupt business executives, members of the professions, public officials or members of any other occupational group,

in addition to the conventional racketeer element." (National Advisory Committee 1976).

Organised crime and white-collar crime share a common objective, which is the constant effort to identify domestic channels for the exploitation of various degrees of power. This process involves both cultivating one's "own people" to ascend within the power hierarchy (especially in higher social strata) and identifying individuals with weak resistance to so called atractive offers among representatives at various levels of state power. Consequently, the control of white-collar crime is hindered by the entrenched interests of the legitimate sector, comprised of government officials, lobbyists and the elite who benefit from exploiting the financial vulnerabilities in the existing system, allowing for fraud, tax evasion and money laundering. The control of organised crime is similarly compromised, especially when it is used as a tool of business and government for corrupt purposes (Albanese 2021).

The state-OC (of foreign or domestic origin organised criminals) interaction focuses on criminals trying to infiltrate targeted state institutions through individuals connected to states using different tools. Corruption is thus one of the means of influence by which organised crime infiltrates the various levels of state management. In this type of interaction, OC groups are the main initiator and the main motivation is to keep "friendly relations" with the State authorities or to have an insider to take care of their interests. Keeping low profiles and being uninterested in overthrowing a government makes them different from terrorist and insurgent organisations. OC groups want to keep their illicit business safe through their hidden connections. It must be emphasised that the destructive effect of these groups is not a specific goal, but rather collateral damage.

A contemporary so-called strategic competition model describes the relationship between organised crime groups and totalitarian states in a radically different way. The strong competition environment offers a new role for transnational organised crime (TOC) groups which provides benefits for criminals and authoritarian states both. TOC groups provide opportunities for autocratic states against their rivalries. The new type of interactions starts from the state side when state institutions develop

connections with the OC groups to either control their actions or to use them for their domestic/international agenda.

In this scenario, institutions and representatives of the non-democratic state are either directly or indirectly collaborating with organised criminals. This collaboration includes tasks such as vetting and recruiting members for groups of criminals and determining the role of a particular organised group within one's own country. Special services conduct these types of contacts, but they are not the sole participants. The state may be in contact with organised criminal groups through private security companies and other intermediaries (Gürer 2021). The state exercises total control and at the same time, any self-established and independent groups are ruthlessly and swiftly dismantled. The authoritarian state consistently assumes a key and dominant role in this dynamic.

A typical example is the relationship between the Russian mafia (organised criminal groups) and the Kremlin. The Kremlin is able and willing to direct and coordinate the actions of organised criminals to align with Russia's national interests abroad. Mark Galeotti argues: "What makes RBOC (Russian-based Organised Crime) a severe and timely challenge is the growing evidence of connections between such criminal networks and the Kremlin's state security apparatus, notably the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), military intelligence (GRU) and the Federal Security Service (FSB)." (Galeotti 2017).

Organised crime of Russian origin (Russian mafia), which is an extension of the Russian state outside the country, has become a direct security threat because it attacks the basic values of the Western world. For example, when compared to the previously notorious Italian mafia, which primarily pursued economic interests, a qualitative difference from Russian mafia is evident. The Russian mafia is backed by national resources and harbours more ambitious ideological and political goals. Any Western businessman or politician who has been successfully bought off or blackmailed by the Russian mafia can, as a result, be manipulated by the Russian state`s special services. When a person begins cooperating solely for monetary gain, then his desires and greed have been exploited. Individuals targeted by the Russian side face huge pressure while simultaneously living in fear of being exposed by their domestic law enforcement authorities.

5. DIRTY MONEY OF RUSSIAN ORIGIN AS A SECURITY PROBLEM

Today, as already mentioned, there is a permanent active search for the weakest points of resistance in targeted societies. In the Western world, there are generally no strong criminal punishments in place as external constraints ensure that personal weaknesses remain at a modest level. In this context, the "dirty billions" coming from Russia and the fragility of people's moral bonds must be feared. Some individuals such as Mr Trump (Belton 2020, pp. 448-488), Mr Schröder and other „big names" have become prized "trophies" for Russia's clandestine business and subversive activities. They are akin to scalps taken from enemies that hang on the belt of a proud Russian warrior (Putin). Holding them and others like them, who occupy top positions in society, accountable under the rule of law is an extraordinarily difficult undertaking because they have enormous legal and economic resources at their disposal.

Western countries face the daunting and complicated challenge of distinguishing between illegal (so-called dirty, dark) money and legal (so-called clean) money. International collaboration among law enforcement agencies from various countries to combat money laundering related to Russia has, in essence, turned into a farce, as "dirty money" of Russian origin has two meanings. First, there is "dirty money No. 1", i.e. illegal income obtained by criminals operating in Russia or of Russian origin (e.g. drug dealing, human trafficking, arms smuggling). Until recently, it was possible to cooperate with Russian authorities when dealing with such kind of dirty money to prevent illegal income from infiltrating the West and being "laundered" there.

But there's also "dirty money No. 2", which has a very direct connection with the Kremlin authorities. This is money that flows into the West and is "laundered" there precisely at the request and in the interests of the Kremlin authorities. The international fight against this type of money laundering, in which Russia participates as a partner, is therefore a "fight against the shadows" because Russia's top officials and special services are active "launderers" of money obtained in Russia. As a result, the Russia's official anti-money laundering activity as a whole is selective, triggered only when the Kremlin's interests are not at stake.

The use of Russian money as a hybrid threat directed against the Western world serves two main purposes. First, these funds are used for subversive activities in the Western countries, such as financing campaigns like the Brexit campaign in the UK or supporting far-right leader Marine Le Pen's presidential campaign in France. The Mueller report demonstrates how Russian offshore finance and oligarchs were deployed by the Kremlin to interfere in and after the 2016 US election (US Department of Justice 2019). Second, Putin and his corrupt associates keep their riches in the West as Russia has no valid property rights and legal guarantees for asset preservation. This was in addition to the reserves of the Central Bank of Russia, which are held in the Western banks. It was an absurd situation from the point of view of both Russia and the West because one's possessions should be never stored in the hands of the enemy. However, at the same time, the West turned a blind eye to the real dangers associated with Russian money in the economy and social life.

Corruption, along with energy supplies, has been Russia's main export commodity to the West (Lucas 2008). The estimated amount of Russian „private dark money" in the West is approximately $1 trillion (Åslund, Friedlander, 2020). Nord Stream has brought to Europe not only dependence on cheap gas but also corruption, along with a large amount of Russian „dark money" being funnelled into places like London City, Cyprus or Vienna (Heathershaw et al. 2021). Corruption can be considered as the first step towards more serious crimes (e.g., high treason, espionage), particularly in situations of potential hot conflict (e.g. kinetic warfare), where a "fifth column" begins to emerge from among these individuals as their essential interests and even their lives are at risk. Therefore, corruption emanating from Russia should not be seen as a phenomenon that develops spontaneously, but rather as a result of deliberate activity led by Russian special services to create corrupt incentives and identify individuals susceptible to such temptations.

Russia and other totalitarian states have weaponised corruption, utilising it as a "core instrument of their national strategy to exploit democratic countries' vulnerability to this kind of malign influence." (Rudolph 2021). Assessing the level of corruption as very low with minimal danger potential in Western countries is a serious mistake in security context. It is incorrect to assess the impact of corruption on everyday life as essentially non-existent. When an authoritarian state, such as Russia,

systematically corrupts influential individuals in the West, it guarantees the acquisition of certain assets for the Kremlin. First, corrupt individuals can have a significant impact on decision-making in both political and economic spheres. Second, when a corruption case becomes public, a corrupt individual can be sacrificed and used as an example of the weaknesses within Western society, highlighting the decay of our entire „social fabric".

For a significant period, the West engaged in extensive discussions but did little to seriously combat the infiltration and influence of dirty money of Russian origin. The situation changed radically after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war on February 24 2022, when de facto all money of Russian origin began to be treated by Western authorities as dirty in the West. On 28 February 2022, the Central Bank of Russia was blocked from accessing more than $400 billion in foreign-exchange reserves held in Western banks. Overall, three types of sanctions were imposed against Russia: a ban on the provision of technology for oil and gas exploration, a ban on the provision of credits to Russian oil companies and state banks and travel restrictions on influential Russian citizens close to President Putin and Kremlin. Although the international sanctions must primarily reduce Russia's ability to wage war, they have a wider positive impact on the international security environment especially by reducing the corruptive influence of money of Russian origin.

CONCLUSIONS

Corruption, i.e. the abuse of power for personal gain, is considered a grave and despicable transgression according to Western understandings, which should be combated seriously, not merely superficially. The misuse of power is a danger to state security, causing unequal treatment of people, damaging competition and blocking economic development (Treisman 2000, pp. 431- 432). Corruption erodes democracy, diminishing people's equal opportunities to affect the collective decision-making in the common interest, their equality before public institutions and the efficiency of public activity. It is obvious that the Western world must remain in these challenges and must know how to use its strengths as

best as possible and not give new opportunities to enemies to exploit its weaknesses.

The perception and attitude towards corruption in Russia differ from the corresponding outlook in the Western world. Within certain limits, the use of public resources for personal interests is considered normal and permissible in the Russian power tradition (Saar 2019). At the same time, Russia`s economy itself is not immune to the negative effects of corruption. For instance, corruption has largely caused the Russian military, which on paper claimed to be "the second strongest military force in the world", to be unable to cope with the tasks assigned to the military during the ongoing Russian- Ukrainian war.

Corruption is at the core of the Putin regime but also represents one of its greatest vulnerabilities. In the long term, the tide is likely to turn against the asymmetric attacker itself, a fact proven by practice. The vertical of power has turned into a corrupt vertical, reaching a scale of corruption that has spiraled out of control. As the primary export commodity abroad, corruption has inflicted harm on Russia in the same manner as it always has - hindering socio-economic development, wasting resources and stifling people's productive initiative.

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