

# ПОЛІТИЧНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ МІЖНАРОДНИХ ВІДНОСИН

## CRISIS ON BELARUSSIAN-EU BORDER AND RUSSIAN PLANS FOR INVASION OF UKRAINE

## КРИЗА НА КОРДОНІ БІЛОРУСЬ-ЄС ТА РОСІЙСЬКІ ПЛАНИ ЩОДО ВТОРГНЕННЯ В УКРАЇНУ

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### **Войтюк О.**

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**Abstract.** The main point of the study is to prove that the crisis on the Belarusian-European border was a jointly planned action by the special services of Russia and Belarus with the aim of provoking a crisis on the eastern borders of the EU and diverting attention from Putin's plans for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The article provides examples of the aggravation of the situation on the eastern borders of the EU, related to the illegal crossing of the border by migrants in 2015-2016 from Russia, as well as in 2021 from Belarus. In addition, the crisis on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border is mentioned. The reasons and goals pursued by Russia and Belarus, creating a migration crisis on the border with the Baltic states and Poland, are listed.

**Key words:** migration crisis, Ukraine, European Union, Russia, Belarus, military aggression

**Анотація.** Головною метою статті є довести, що криза на білорусько-європейському кордоні, була спільно спланованою акцією спецслужб Росії і Білорусі з метою провокування кризи на східних кордонах ЄС та відвернення уваги від планів В. Путіна щодо повномасштабного вторгнення в Україну у лютому 2022 року. У статті наводяться приклади загострення ситуації на східних кордонах ЄС, пов'язані з незаконним перетинком кордону мігрантами у 2015-2016 роках з боку Росії, а також у 2021 році з Білорусі. Крім того, згадується криза на білорусько-українському кордоні. Перераховано причини та цілі, які переслідували Росія та Білорусь, створюючи міграційну кризу на кордоні з країнами Балтії та Польщею.

**Ключові слова:** міграційна криза, Україна, ЄС, Росія, Білорусь, збройна агресія

**Introduction.** Migration processes have become not only an objective reality but sometimes it is also an instrument of the policy of some countries exerting pressure on others. This is the phenomenon that the European Union (EU) has encountered at its external borders, where migrants are often used as a policy tool of non-EU countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Russia, Morocco, and Turkey) against EU Member States (Romania, Poland, Spain, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, Croatia). In March 2020, Turkey opened its borders with Greece to allow Syrian refugees to enter Europe, and in May 2020 and July 2021, Morocco allowed migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to cross the border with the EU in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. By opening its borders to Syrian refugees, Turkey pursued two main goals: a) to get NATO, and especially the EU, to support its position in the Syrian war after the 2020 conflict between Syrian government forces and Turkish-backed rebels, b) to obtain financial assistance for maintaining camps for migrants [Kucharczyk, 2020]. On the other hand, Morocco wanted to persuade the Spanish government to support its position on the settlement of the Western Sahara issue. By opening their borders, both Turkey and Morocco have partially achieved their goals. It seemed that Belarus planned to follow in their footsteps and use migrants as a lever/instrument of blackmail and pressure on the EU in order to lift individual and international sanctions imposed by the EU on A. Lukashenko and his regime after the August 2020 events in Belarus [Чайковський, 2021]. However, from the perspective of February 24, 2022, it turned out that the roots of this problem reach deeper and lead to Russia ...

**The purpose of research** is to prove that the crisis on the Belarusian-European border was a jointly planned action by the special services of Russia and Belarus with the aim of provoking a crisis on the eastern borders of the EU and diverting attention from Putin's plans for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 of February 2022.

**The latest literature review.** The literature on the subject is very extensive. Migration crises in Europe, including those on the eastern border of the EU, are analyzed mainly in several categories: the political and security aspect, the legal aspect, and the social and humanitarian aspect. The article uses the monograph by Dembour, M. B., & Kelly, T. [2011], Fassin, D. [2012], Huysmans, J. [2006], Maciejewski. [2022], Pieczyński, M. [2022], Sirriyeh, A. [2018].

**The situation on the eastern borders of the European Union.** The migration crisis (2015) caused by the Arab Spring (2010) and the civil war in Syria (2011) became a test of endurance and solidarity for EU countries, and at the same time showed differences in the approaches to this problem. The crisis affected mainly the countries of Southern and Western Europe, and to a lesser extent (taking into account the number of migrants) the countries of Eastern Europe. In terms of the influx of migrants in the northeast borders of the EU, Norway and Finland faced the greatest problems in 2015-2016.

In 2015, the migration crisis took place on the Russian-Norwegian border called the “Arctic route”. At that time, about 1,600 people crossed the Russian-Norwegian border (for comparison, in 2014, the border was crossed by several dozen people) [TVN24, 2015]. Most of them were Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans. About three-quarters of them claimed to be from war-torn Syria. Norwegian authorities reported that 20-30 percent of them had the right to stay in Russia [Newsweek, 2015]. In early December 2015, Norway began sending back migrants with residence permits for living in Russia. The vast majority of migrants entered Norway (Storskog border crossing) on bicycles, as there are no pedestrian crossings in this region. In addition, the Norwegian border guard fined drivers of cars transporting migrants across the border. This wave of migration was symbolized by the piles of used bicycles that were bought on the Russian side of the border and abandoned immediately upon arrival in Norway [Polska Agencja Prasowa, 2021].

Shortly after the closure of the „Arctic route”, the “Northern route” was discovered on the border with Finland (Salla border crossing). As reported by the Finnish media, the Federal Security Service (FSB) helped to organize the movement of migrants on the Russian side of the border [Polska Agencja Prasowa, 2021]. From September 2015 to February 2016, Finland experienced the biggest migrant crisis in the country's post-war history. In 2015, the number of asylum applications amounted to 32,5 thousands (a 9-fold increase compared to 2014) [Rodkiewicz, Szymański i Żochowski, 2016]. According to Finnish regulations, the border could not be crossed on foot or by bicycle, so asylum seekers began using old Russian cars. The large increase in the number of migrants seeking asylum on the northern section of the Finnish-Russian border has forced Finland to start talks with Russia. On March 22, 2016, during the visit of Finnish President Sauli Niinistö to Moscow, inter-ministerial agreements were signed to limit the influx of migrants from Russia to Finland. The talks resulted in a sudden halt to the flow of migrants to Finland in March 2016. The price of an agreement on migration issues was Finland's withdrawal from the policy of limiting bilateral contacts, adopted as a reaction to the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014. In this way, the opening and control by Moscow of the “Arctic migration route” leading through Russia to Finland was a deliberate demonstration of “soft power” aimed at persuading Helsinki to activate efforts to normalize relations between the European Union and Russia and to show restraint in developing cooperation with NATO and in the region [Rodkiewicz, Szymański i Żochowski, 2016].

Migrants called the “Arctic route” and the "Northern route" the cheapest and shortest route to Europe, and safer than traveling across the Mediterranean sea. Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans flew to Murmansk from Moscow. Their stay in Russia was fully legal. Most were granted tourist or student visas [Polska Agencja Prasowa, 2015]. The influx of migrants to the Russian border with Norway and Finland could not take place without the supervision of the Russian internal security authorities. The migration route leading to the northwest of Russia, passing through the zone of special military importance (especially the Murmansk region), is under their constant supervision. This excludes the free movement of migrants or the uncontrolled activity of criminal groups involved in people smuggling [Rodkiewicz, Szymański i Żochowski, 2016].

These and other actions of the Russian Federation (territorial claims) have prompted many countries to build walls on the north-eastern border of the EU in order to prevent illegal people smuggling and ensure border security. As can be seen from table 1, the first wall on the border with Russia was raised by Latvia (2015), followed by Norway and Estonia in 2016, and Lithuania in 2017. In 2022, Poland announced the construction of a wall with the Kaliningrad Oblast in the north of the country. In 2021-2022, walls were built on the border with Belarus. All countries indicated security as the main reason for building walls on the eastern borders of the EU, the Baltic states indicated tensions and territorial claims as the second reason, and the issue of migration was given as the third one, which means that the likelihood of migrants from the Middle East and Africa appearing is unlikely the natural way.

**Table 1**

**Dynamika budowy murów na wschodnich rubieżach UE**

Rok	Miejsce	Cel	Parametry	Militarization status
2015	Latvia - Russia	Safety, territorial tension, Immigration  Smuggling	276 km border  90 km width x 2 m (wall)	Wired fence;  Cameras and video surveillance system;  Border patrol
2016	Norway- Russia	Safety, immigration	196 km border  200 km width x 4 m (wall)	Wired fence;  Cameras and video surveillance system;
	Estonia - Russia	Safety, territorial tension, Immigration  Smuggling	294 km border  1,6 km width x 2,5 m (wall)	Electronic surveillance system or movement sensors;  Barbed wire.  Drones
2017	Lithuania - Russia	Safety, territorial tension, Immigration	227 km border  1,6 km width x 2,5 m (wall)	Cameras and video surveillance system;
2021- 2022	Poland - Belarus	Safety, Immigration	418 km border  170 km width x 5,5 height  (wall)	Steel-concrete wall  Cameras and video surveillance system  Electronic surveillance system or movement sensors;  Barbed wire
2021- 2023	Lithuania - Belarus	Safety, Immigration	678.8 km border  330 km width x 4 height  (wall)	Cameras and video surveillance system;  Electronic surveillance system or movement sensors;

2022-2024	Latvia – Belarus	Safety, Immigration	172.912 km border  The first round of 85,9 km will be completed by spring 2023 and the second round at 63,9 km by spring 2024.	Under construction
2022-	Poland – Kaliningrad region	Safety, Immigration	About 200 km  Wide 3 m, height 2,5 m	Under construction

Source: the own study based on: [Bilotaitė, 2022], [Building Walls, 2022], [Five kilometers of fence constructed on Latvia-Belarus border, 2022], [TVP3, 2022].

The migration crisis on the north-eastern border of the EU was not a spontaneous phenomenon, but a well-planned action of the Belarusian services in cooperation with the Russian services in order to destabilize the situation in Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, and the entire European Union. As the above analysis shows, this was not the first attempt to transfer migrants from the East to the West. For the first time, migrants from the Middle East and Africa appeared on the border of Russia with Finland and Norway in 2015-2016 [Kozłowski, 2022]. Then Russia tested the tactic of shifting migrants on a smaller scale by opening its border crossings with these countries. So, it can be said without a doubt that two countries – Russia and Belarus – were involved in destabilizing the situation on the eastern borders of the EU in 2021. Russia, which had already checked a similar practice earlier, prompted the Belarusian authorities to repeat the attempt to transfer migrants from the Middle East and Africa to the EU, but on a much larger scale, as it was in 2015-2016. As you can see, Belarus agreed to this proposal. In this process, each side persecuted both its own and common goals.

The aim of the Belarusian authorities was to create an artificial political crisis in the countries that most support the Belarusian opposition. In addition, the appearance of Belarus on the side of Russia after February 24, 2022, was partly Lukashenko's revenge on the Kyiv authorities, which, in solidarity with the EU in 2020 and 2021, supported the sanction and banned Belarusian airlines from using the airspace over Ukraine.

The Russian Federation intended to achieve much more goals. One of the main ones was to divert attention from preparations for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Intending to attack Ukraine, the Kremlin regime hoped that triggering a migration crisis in the eastern borders of the EU would not only distract the West from Ukraine but also discourage assistance to Ukraine and its citizens. Moreover, Russia hardly expected that after the invasion, the influx of refugees from Ukraine to the EU would be so numerous. As the situation after the liberation of the northern regions of Ukraine showed, the Russians intended to take over Ukraine in 3 days and hoped that the population would not object and would welcome them to their territories. However, they miscalculated. Ukraine only fought heroically, which resulted in the de-occupation of the northern regions and eastern parts. Among the other goals that Russia pursued by directing the crisis on the eastern borders of the EU include: accelerating the process of launching “Nord Stream-2”; placing refugees in Europe, in particular from unstable regions in the Middle East; reduction of sanctions against Russia; legalization of the “DNR” and “LNR” groups in the occupied part of the Ukrainian Donbas; recognition by the European Union of the annexation of Ukrainian Crimea by Russia [Солони́на, 2021]. None of these goals after February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation has achieved.

The common goal was to weaken the collective West, especially the European Union, and force it to make concessions on political, economic, defense and security issues [МИД, 2022].

The 2021 migration crisis on the eastern borders of the EU was also aimed at checking the vigilance of EU and NATO countries, looking for weak points. At that time, it was already known

that the invasion of Ukraine would take place, but only the date and scale of Putin's plans were unknown. As the year 2022 showed, Putin was convinced that he would quickly conquer the territory of eastern Ukraine together with Kyiv. So assuming that if he succeeded, the next on the list would undoubtedly be Moldova along with Transnistria, and the threat to the security of the Baltic states and Poland would increase significantly.

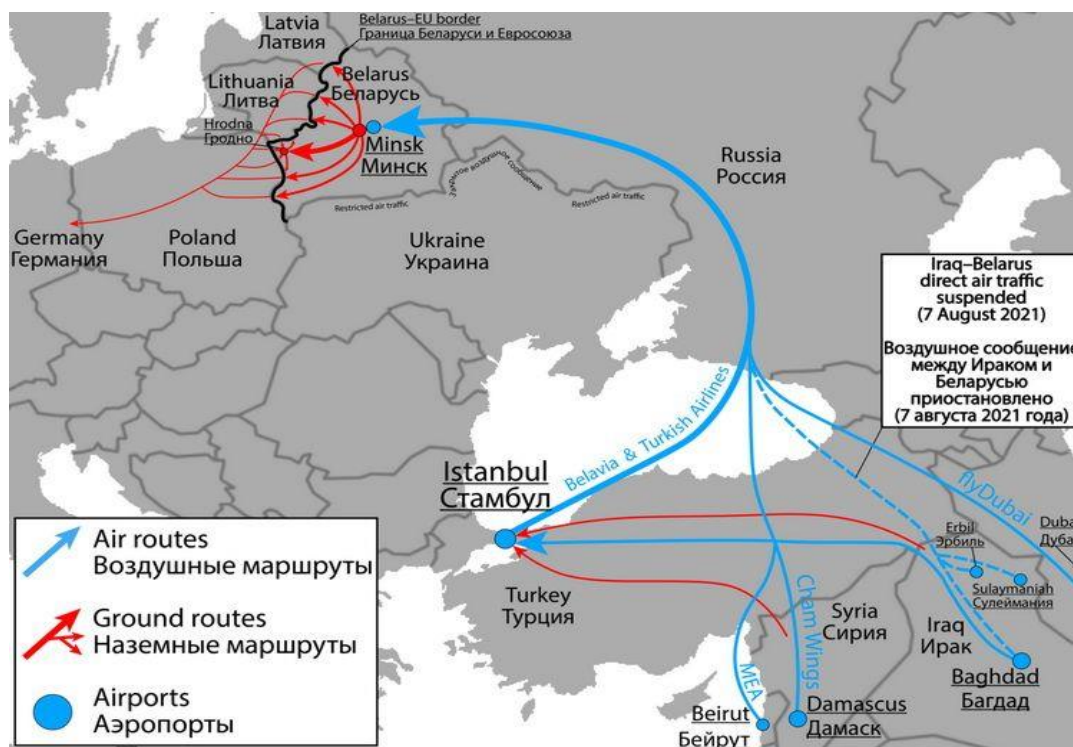
**Operation “Sluice”.** The EU migration crisis with Belarus was called Operation “Sluice”. This is an action to bring migrants to Belarus from the Middle East or Africa, to transfer them to the EU, and cause a migration crisis there. In the context of the analysis of earlier events, it seems that the main originator of this operation was Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the self-proclaimed President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was its executor. The plan for this operation was devised in 2010-2011, and its co-organizers were the KGB of Belarus together with the border special forces OSAM and the Russian FSB, which at that time brought migrants through Russia to Belarus, and from there to the EU via the so-called “eastern route”. There is no border between these two countries and bringing migrants is not a problem [Kamińska, 2021]. The FSB recruited illegal migrants and then brought them to the border with the Smolensk region and handed them over to OSAM employees. OSAM then took over migrants at the border and, according to the command's orders, took them to the Lithuanian and Latvian parts of the border. And there they were transferred to the EU. OSAM is a border special forces unit responsible for transferring migrants to unobvious places on the border [Kamińska, 2021].

The fact that the migration crisis in Belarus is one of the tools of the Russian hybrid war with the West is indicated by many factors, such as the fact that the Belarusian secret services do not have sufficient resources and funds to organize the entire process of resettling several thousand people from the Middle East to Europe. The Russian GRU specializes in such operations, so it is quite possible that without the Kremlin's coordination, it could not have taken place here. It is worth mentioning, for example, the organization of a mass migration crisis on the southern flank of the EU after the Russian invasion of Syria in 2015 [Волошин, 2021].

Operation “Sluice” began shortly after the forced landing of a plane heading from Athens to Vilnius and the arrest of Belarusian blogger Raman Pratasevich at Minsk airport. In 2021, smuggling people through the eastern border with the EU looked like a much better-organized action compared to 2015-2016. Now, migrants not only were arriving from Russia but flew directly to the airport in Minsk (Fig. 1.).

President Lukashenko personally encouraged the arrival of migrants from the Middle East to Belarus and assured him that he would not prevent them from getting from its territory to the EU [Giczan, 2021]. Lukashenko's words were repeatedly broadcast on Iraqi television, and in the meantime, the Belarusian president took care to intensify air connections with Iraq [Pieczyński, 2022]. In this way, in 2018-2021, the Belarusian regime brought, according to various data, from 10,000 to 20,000 migrants to Belarus [Sieczkowska i Kunert, 2021]. Most of the migrants who in 2021 tried to cross the borders of three EU countries - Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, were Iraqis.

**Figure 1. Air connections from the Middle East and Turkey with Belarus**



Source: [Січень, 2021]

The main purpose of bringing migrants through Belarus to the EU was to cause numerous problems in European countries and to divert the attention of the European Union from Belarus and Russia. In this way, Lukashenko could continue to fight the opposition and destroy the remnants of democracy with impunity. And Vladimir Putin hoped that he would take over Ukraine calmly and no one would stop him. Poland, in cooperation with Lithuania, Latvia, and the European Union, managed to contain the migration crisis for a while, but the problem has not been finally resolved.

According to statistical data based on Flightradar24, the number of countries that operated flights with Belarus until 2018 was about 50, in 2020, there were 58, and in 2021 - 51. The decrease in the number of countries in 2021 is explained by the fact that the leaders of the European Union decided on the closure of airspace and airports for Belarusian airlines and banned EU carriers from flying over Belarus, which was a reaction to the fact that Belarus forced a Ryanair plane to land in Minsk in May 2021 [Rzeczpospolita, 2021].

Broken down by years and the number of flights to Minsk, the situation was as follows: in 2018, 22,451 flights were made; in 2019 - 25,384 flights; in 2020 - 11,220 flights (the number decreased due to the covid-19 pandemic); in 2021 (until November 8) - 9,543 flights [Sieczkowska i Kunert, 2021]. In 2018-2020, most flights to Belarus were made from Russia, Ukraine, and Turkey. As for Ukraine, the number of flights to Belarus increased in 2015, when Ukraine banned the flights of Russian airlines on its territory [Українська правда, 2015]. Since then, to reach Russia, Ukrainians flew through Belarus or Turkey. In 2021, Ukraine joined the EU sanctions against Belarus and banned the flights of Belarusian airlines over its territory [Українформ, 2021]. As can be seen in Figure 1, after the closure of European and Ukrainian airspace to Belarusian carriers, the majority of flights to Belarus were via Russia. From January to November 8, 2021, the most flights to Minsk were from Turkey and Russia - 1,896 and 1,874 respectively. The following countries in the top ten are Egypt - 861, Georgia - 748, Ukraine (until May 2021) - 659, United Arab Emirates - 267, Uzbekistan - 260, Armenia - 256, Kazakhstan - 252, Azerbaijan - 200 [Sieczkowska i Kunert, 2021]. In addition, the number of flights from Iraq increased in 2021. As the Belarusian journalist Tadeusz Giczán points out, at the beginning of 2021 there was only one flight a week between Iraq and Belarus, from May 2021 this number was four flights a week. Initially, flights took place from Baghdad, and in August they opened new connections from three other cities - Erbil, Basra, and Suleymaniya [Giczán, 2021].

Bringing the Iraqis to Belarus was handled by the Belarusian state-owned company, Centrkurort, which belongs to the President's Affairs Administration. The center cooperated with

Iraqi travel agencies that sold trips to Belarus and provided the center with lists of Iraqis who, after landing at the Minsk airport, received Belarusian tourist visas on the spot [Kamińska, 2021]. The price of a week's "tourist" visa ranged from \$600 to \$1,000. The "tourists" were accommodated in state-owned hotels in Minsk. After that, these people were recruited, formed into groups, and sent to the border. They reached the border on their own or by buses belonging to the Belarusian Ministry of National Defense [Pieczyński, 2022]. Some Iraqis used the help of smugglers, to whom they paid 1000-1500 dollars for transport to Vilnius [InfoSecurity24, 2021]. On internet forums, Iraqis exchanged instructions and advice on how to reach the EU border. Their content shows that they were aware that they were taking part in the illegal practice of crossing the border with the EU in cooperation with the Belarusian regime [Pieczyński, 2022]. Confirmation of the involvement of the Belarusian services in the illegal border crossing by migrants is also the specificity of the Belarusian border. To stay in the border zone in Belarus, you need a special pass. On the Belarusian side of the border (Belarusian border zone) no one can stay so close to Polish territory [DoRzeczy, 2021]. Earlier, administrative penalties were provided for foreigners for staying in the border area. And in 2021, they were suddenly abolished to legalize the current activities in the border zone. The point is that migrants should be able to stay there [Kamińska, 2021].

In 2021, the Border Guard recorded 39,700 attempts to illegally cross the Polish border from Belarus. The exponential growth began in August 2021, when 3.5 thousand attempts were recorded. In September, the number of attempts to cross the border illegally increased to 7,700. For comparison, in 2020 there were only 120 such attempts [Pieczyński, 2022]. Iraqis, who were the largest group, encouraged their compatriots in chat rooms and on internet forums to force borders and openly advise them to hide from the police in Poland, Lithuania, or Latvia in order to avoid having to apply for asylum in these countries. The main destination of migrants has been Germany from the beginning [Pieczyński, 2022].

Why do Iraqis choose Belarus as a transit route? Belarusian and Lithuanian journalists who went to Iraq to talk to people and better understand the causes of mass emigration from the country decided to find the answer to this question. From these conversations, it appeared that the Belarusian route is the cheapest, fastest, safest way to get to the European Union and then apply for asylum compared to other options. Previously, Iraqis traveled by truck through Turkey and the Balkans to reach the EU, a route considered dangerous, expensive, and complicated. With his "invitation", Lukashenko opened the gate that allows immigrants to get to the European Union - quickly and cheaply with the comprehensive support of the Belarusian authorities [Gazeta Prawna, 2021]. The crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border was reported by, among others, Kurdish TV Rudaw, where most of the migrants come from. The purpose of this broadcast was to make residents think before they decide to fly to Minsk. However, many of them were aware that this journey was a risk that they might lose their lives on the way to Europe. But some say to themselves: "No pain, no gain" and bought tickets, and flew to the EU [Kobla, 2021]. According to Tadeusz Giczka, the majority of people who try to get to the EU via Belarus "are not refugees, they are economic migrants from Iraq" [Gazeta Prawna, 2021]. Due to the decisive actions of the EU, a large number of migrants brought to the borders by the regime have become stuck in Belarus. As a result, Lukashenko had to stop bringing in more groups from abroad. Poland and Lithuania strengthened their borders, preventing migrants from crossing them illegally. Unable to cross it, they stay in Belarus, often near the borders [Kamińska, 2021].

According to the spokesman of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed As-Sahaf, the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border has become political, and "groups of Iraqi migrants have fallen victim to smuggling networks responsible for issuing illegal entry visas to Belarus" [Forsal, 2021]. In November 2021, when the crisis on the border between Poland and Belarus intensified, thanks to diplomatic efforts, a number of decisions were made regarding flights to Minsk, including The General Directorate of Civil Aviation of Turkey issued a ban on the sale of tickets for citizens of Iraq, Syria, and Syria traveling to Belarus and Yemen [Business Insider, 2021]; The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the country was suspending direct flights to Belarus and offered the possibility of returning to Iraqis stranded at the border [TVN24, 2021]; the Syrian carrier Cham Wings announced that it was suspending its flights to Minsk [PAP, 2021] transit restrictions were also introduced by Lebanon and Uzbekistan [Sieczkowska i Kunert, 2021].

On the territory of Belarus, there are not only citizens of Iraq, but also migrants from Congo, Syria, Mali, and Iran. According to French journalist Gulliver Gragg, migrants of another origin than Iraqis are found in a difficult situation. There are no repatriation flights from their countries of origin, so they have no chance to return to their countries of origin at all. And they can't go back to Minsk either. So they just stay in the Bruzgi camp near the Polish border [Прищеп, 2021].

**Migration crisis and Ukraine.** An attempt to smuggle migrants across the Ukrainian-Belarusian border was carried out by A. Lukashenko in 2020. An example of this is the situation with Hasidim who tried to cross the Belarusian-Ukrainian border in September 2020, while the borders of Ukraine were closed due to the covid-19 pandemic. The Lukashenka regime, as it happened in 2021, deliberately facilitated the entry of a large number of pilgrims to the territory of Belarus and enabled their transit to the border with Ukraine in 2020 [Слово і діло, 2020]. According to the Belarusian authorities, there were over 2,500 Hasidic pilgrims in the country, including 1,200 in the areas bordering Ukraine [Українська правда, 2020]. Wanting to get to Uman to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, but were not allowed to enter Ukraine due to restrictions on the entry of foreigners and stateless persons introduced to combat the spread of coronavirus infection (Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine) [Кондратенко, 2020].

The situation with Hasidim on the Ukrainian-Belarusian border in 2020 and the migration crisis on the eastern borders of the EU in 2021 showed the vulnerability of the Ukrainian border. The border between Belarus and Ukraine is 1084 km long. Until the beginning of the armed invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, border guards were on duty in the northern borders of Ukraine. The border between the two countries was marked, but there was no physical barrier.

After Ukraine regained its independence, the issue of demarcation of borders with Belarus was not a priority issue, partly because Ukraine has always treated Belarus as a friendly state and not a threat to its security, which cannot be said about Russia. The demarcation of the Ukrainian-Belarusian border began only in 1997 when an appropriate agreement was signed [Верховна Рада України, 1997]. However, the agreement was not ratified by the Belarusian parliament, as the Belarusian side directly linked the ratification of the agreement to the extinguishment of the debt of 80 to 150 million. \$, which appeared in the early 1990s. The Belarusian side claimed that after the collapse of the USSR, its enterprises transferred money to Ukraine for manufactured but not delivered products. Ukraine, in turn, did not consider this debt as state debt. The issue of border demarcation dragged on for years. In 2003, Ukraine and Belarus signed a bilateral protocol, according to which the amount of Ukraine's financial obligations was set at USD 134 million [УНІАН, 2010]. The Ukrainian side offered Belarus to repay 80% of the debt by tidying up the borders and building border crossings.

At the end of 2009, presidents Alexander Lukashenko and Viktor Yushchenko announced a solution to the problem. In exchange for debt forgiveness, Ukraine undertook to sell electricity to Belarus at a discount for re-export to Lithuania. In 2010, the Agreement on the state border was submitted to the Belarusian parliament. The document was ratified by both chambers of the Belarussian parliament and then had to be signed by President Lukashenko. The last step predicted the exchange of ratification documents, but Minsk refused to carry out this formal procedure. And only in June 2013, as a result of Lukashenko's visit to Ukraine, the parties signed the Protocol in exchange for letters of ratification of the Agreement between Ukraine and the Republic of Belarus on the state border of May 12, 1997, which was necessary for the entry into force of the Agreement on the border [Матола, 2013].

The Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 and the increasing rapprochement of Belarus with Russia required a more firm approach to the issue of borders on the Ukrainian side. Unfortunately, the issue of demarcation of the border was downplayed, to some extent because, until February 24, 2022, Ukraine did not perceive Belarus as hostile, despite some deterioration of relations after 2020. As the threat increased in recent years, the Ukrainian authorities intended to build a physical border not only with Belarus but also with Russia, which was prevented by the Russian invasion with the support of the Belarusian state [Шумило, 2021].

Ukraine stayed out of the crisis on the EU's eastern borders but was aware of the threats. After the situation on the Belarusian-Polish border escalated, there were reports of a possible redirection of



migrants to the border with Ukraine. It was about the possibility of illegal immigrants entering the EU from the territory of Ukraine if the Polish border guards manage to stop their attack from Belarus.

The greatest threat to Ukraine in connection with this crisis could be the loss of the visa-free regime with the EU if illegal migrants were not stopped, who could potentially also try to cross the EU border from the Ukrainian side [Костюченко, 2021]. Such actions in this situation would be quite logical because there was a high probability that Belarus would send all these migrants to Ukraine. Ukraine could be used as another transit country. Arranging a migration crisis on the Dnieper could be quite possible, especially since Ukraine borders EU countries such as Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania [Волошин, 2021]. The largest faction of the German Bundestag, the SPD, came up with an unexpected proposal to place refugees stuck on the Polish-Belarusian border in Ukraine. However, Ukraine responded to this proposal in a not very diplomatic way. Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (NSDC) Oleksiy Danylov proposed that the Social Democrats take the refugees home or place them in the Bundestag [Шумило, 2021]. Such statements prove that some political circles in the West perceive Ukraine as a transit country where illegal immigrants will be able to wait for the decision of European countries to accept them. In particular, migrants from Belarus could wait for their asylum application to be processed in the EU in Ukraine [Волошин, 2021].

W związku z zaostrzeniem sytuacji na wschodnich rubieżach UE, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Państwowa Służba Graniczna zidentyfikowały 10 obszarów granicy Ukrainy z Białorusią, gdzie można spodziewać się masowych skupisk migrantów ze strony białoruskiej. Na tych odcinkach granicy Ukraina zwiększyła liczbę patroli oraz wzmocniła jednostki straży granicznej, przerzucając tam siły Gwardii Narodowej i policji. Głównym celem takich mobilnych grup było "zapobieganie masowemu przekroczeniu granicy państwowej" [Волинські новини, 2021].

Against the background of the unstable situation on the eastern borders of the EU, an additional 8,500 soldiers were sent to the border between Ukraine and Belarus. The enhanced border control regime was ensured by: 3,000 border guard units; 3,500 National Guard troops; 2,000 employees of the State Police; aviation of the Ministry of the Interior, in particular, 15 helicopters (should ensure mobility and deliver law enforcement officers and military personnel to specific border areas if necessary) [Волинські новини, 2021].

The migration crisis on the EU's eastern borders has accelerated efforts to ensure the security of the Ukrainian-Belarusian border. However, this did not save Ukraine from the invasion of Russian troops from the north, including from the territory of Belarus. Ukraine was aware of the possible aggravation of the situation but was not ready for the "Belarusian" scenario. Wishing to cause a crisis and problems for the EU, V. Putin contributed to Ukraine increasing its vigilance regarding the security of its borders until the launch of a full-scale invasion in February 2022. It is quite possible that this vigilance contributed to ensuring the defense of Kyiv. Thanks to the increase of special forces on the northern borders of the state, with huge dispatches, it was possible to stop the Russian army from entering the country and not allow it to enter Kyiv in the first months of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Ukraine joined the group of countries that introduced sanctions against Belarus. In connection with the above, a heated discussion began in political circles as to whether Ukraine had done the right thing by taking into consideration the increase of Russian troops on its borders.

Even in 2021, the Polish authorities did not exclude the possibility that in the event of a failed attempt to cross the border with Poland or the Baltic States, migration streams could be directed to Ukraine. The head of the Polish government Mateusz Morawiecki said that illegal migrants may try to get to Ukraine first and then to Poland and other European Union countries [Волошин, 2021]. The Ukrainian-Belarusian border was not compact and closely guarded until the beginning of Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine, which used the territory of Belarus to attack northern Ukraine. The situation changed in 2022, now over 1,000 km of the Ukrainian-Belarusian border is fortified and mined and cannot be crossed. Regardless of hostilities on the territory of Ukraine. In November 2022, a group of migrants crossed the Ukrainian-Belarusian border illegally, with Belarusian border guards helping them. A group of 6 people, citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh, was detained by the Ukrainian border guards in the Zhytomyr region. The detained men testified that they were driven to the border with Ukraine on the territory of Belarus by people in military uniforms, they presume that they were representatives of the border service of the Republic of Belarus. They were then told which

direction to go. In addition, while also on the territory of Belarus, the migrants contacted Security Council officers who organized their illegal route and ordered them to call and report their whereabouts after illegally crossing the state border. This is also confirmed by messages on migrants' phones [Корогодський, 2022].

**Conclusions.** The covid-19 pandemic has silenced the modern, dynamically developing world for over a year and thus slowed down the intensity of irregular migrations to the EU, and also postponed the Russian invasion of Ukraine. After its end, events in Central and Eastern Europe began to accelerate rapidly, and tensions between the EU, the US, Russia, and Belarus began to grow. The main events that took place after the end of the pandemic outside the eastern borders of the EU were: a) rigged presidential elections in Belarus in 2020; 2) grounding in the Belarusian airspace of a Ryanair plane flying from Athens to Vilnius on May 23, 2021, under the pretext of a terrorist attack, and on board the Belarusian blogger and oppositionist Raman Pratasiewicz, 3) imposing severe sanctions on Belarus in connection with fraudulent elections presidential elections in August 2020 and mass persecution of oppositionists, journalists and circles unfavorable to the government [Fraszka, 2021] and 4) Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The attempt of migrants from Belarus to illegally cross the border with neighboring countries is not the first case. Earlier attempts to overcome the “Arctic route” and the “Northern route” were quickly brought under control. In addition, the very practice of crossing the borders on the northern borders of the EU in 2015-2016 was legal, as migrants crossed the borders in places specially designated for this purpose (border crossings) and used legal documents. Unfortunately, the EU ignored previous migrant crises (on a smaller scale) and did not prepare for the current events. The problem of irregular migrations began to be discussed in August 2021, when migrants from Africa and the Middle East appeared on the borders of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Belarus. The migration crisis that the self-appointed president of Belarus has been leading since June 2021, cynically using migrants from Arab countries as a demographic weapon, seemed to be part of the EU's political revenge - questioning the legality of elections, imposed sanctions and criticism of actions taken in the internal sphere. However, the real causes of the migration crisis on the eastern borders of the EU should be sought not in Belarus, but in Russia, as it became one of the stages of Russian preparations for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine [Maciejewski, 2022]. Initially, the Belarusian authorities tried to present the migration crisis as Turkey and Morocco had done before, but neither Rabat nor Ankara brought migrants to their territory on purpose. Most of them found their way to these countries as a result of natural migration processes from neighboring countries. On the other hand, migrants on the Polish-Lithuanian-Latvian-Belarusian border found themselves there as a result of Operation Sluice. On the other hand, the events on the borders of Belarus with Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland looked much worse, as migrants were forced to cross borders in unauthorized places. To some extent, the migration crisis has been halted, but with much worse results than in the case of the “Arctic route” or the “Northern route”, as migrants still enter Poland and other EU countries illegally, very often with traces of beatings. The migration crisis has not changed the position of the EU, the USA, and the rest of the civilized world toward Ukraine. Military support for Ukraine is growing every month, as is the number of countries supporting Ukraine. Unfortunately, the war is still going on. The problem of migration in the northeastern borders of the EU has not been completely solved, but stopped.

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