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THE EASTERN EXTERNAL BORDER OF THE EU: TRANSFORMATION OF FUNCTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

СХІДНИЙ ЗОВНІШНІЙ КОРДОН ЄС: ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ФУНКЦІЙ У КОНТЕКСТІ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

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Abstract. *The article investigates the distinctive features of the eastern external border of the European Union (EU) as an object of international political interaction. In the east, eight EU member states share borders with their four neighbours, including Russia and Belarus, which account for two-thirds of the EU's entire eastern border. It is obvious that at the current stage such a neighbourhood has become a great challenge for the European security and requires a change in approaches to the EU common policy of integrated border management.*

The paper analyses the dynamics of the EU's eastern external border functions in the period before and after February 24, 2022. From the early 1990s to 2004, the functions of the borders evolved from rigid barriers to integration boundaries. After the largest EU enlargement in 2004, the configuration and the length of the eastern border line changed, and its filtering and regulating functions became decisive. The authors have evaluated the impact of the latest threats that arose as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the changes in the ratio of the EU's eastern external border functions. The barrier function has become dominant on the border sections with

Russia and Belarus, and the integration function – on the border sections with Ukraine and Moldova.

It should be noted that the external boundaries of the EU serve as both state and common borders. The activities of border states aimed at coordinating efforts to monitor the EU's eastern border and counter growing hybrid threats to international security are examined.

Keywords: *external borders, eastern border, border functions, security, threats, barriers, European Union, Russian-Ukrainian war.*

Анотація. У статті розглянуто характерні особливості східного зовнішнього кордону Європейського Союзу (ЄС) як об'єкту міжнародно-політичної взаємодії. На східному напрямку вісім держав-членів ЄС межують з чотирма сусідами, зокрема з росією та Білоруссю, на які припадає дві третини усього східного кордону ЄС. Доведено, що на сучасному етапі таке сусідство стає викликом для європейської безпеки та вимагає зміни підходів у спільній політиці інтегрованого управління кордонами ЄС.

Проаналізовано динаміку функцій східного зовнішнього кордону ЄС у період до та після 24 лютого 2022 року. Від початку 1990-х до 2004 р. функції кордонів зазнали еволюції від жорстких бар'єрів до інтеграційних ліній. Зазначено, що після найбільшого розширення ЄС (2004) відбулися зміни конфігурації та довжини лінії східного кордону, в той час визначальними стали його фільтрувальна та регулююча функції. Розкрито вплив новітніх загроз, які виникли внаслідок повномасштабного вторгнення росії в Україну, на зміни у співвідношенні функцій східного зовнішнього кордону ЄС. На ділянках кордону з росією та Білоруссю домінуючою стала бар'єрна функція, а з Україною та Молдовою – інтеграційна.

Зазначено, що зовнішні межі ЄС виконують роль як державних, так і спільних кордонів. Досліджено діяльність прикордонних держав з метою координації зусиль для моніторингу східного кордону ЄС та протидії зростаючим гібридним загрозам міжнародній безпеці.

Ключові слова: *зовнішні кордони, східний кордон, функції кордонів, безпека, загрози, бар'єри, Європейський Союз, російсько-українська війна.*

Introduction. In the modern world, the number of armed conflicts and wars associated with the violation of state borders is increasing, which threatens international stability and leads to an aggravation of the confrontation between major powers. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has created a new chain of dangers in Europe caused by the violation of the fundamental principles of international law, migration flows, energy crisis, hybrid attacks, etc. Therefore, the security, protection and strengthening of the EU's external borders and the change in their functions are becoming increasingly relevant and require thorough and comprehensive research.

Literature Review. The issues of the external borders of the European Union, their dynamics, functioning, challenges and threats that affected international security and the development of border regions have been studied and covered by many foreign scholars. Historical aspects of the formation of Europe without borders and changes in understanding of their meaning were studied by I. Stanley-Becker (*Stanley-Becker, 2025*). The openness of the European borders at the beginning of the 21st century was analyzed by L. O'Dowd (*O'Dowd, 2002*). The problem of security of the European Union external borders in connection with the deepening of integration processes and the openness of internal borders was studied by J. Oltmer (*Oltmer, 2022*). V. Cucerescu examined the characteristic features of certain sections of the EU's eastern border in the context of regular and illegal migration (*Cucerescu, 2019*). The problems that arise on the internal and external borders of the EU from the perspective of current events and crises, including the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, were analysed by A. Bakardjieva Engelbrekt, P. Ekman, A. Michalski, L. Oxelheim (*Bakardjieva Engelbrekt, Ekman, Michalski, Oxelheim, 2024*). The conceptual interrelations between security, borders and national identity in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine were investigated by A. Makarychev and C. Dufy (*Makarychev, Dufy, 2024*). The issue of strengthening the EU's external borders by building walls and other physical barriers was investigated by

I. Goldner Lang (*Goldner Lang, 2024*), C. Dumbrava (*Dumbrava, 2022*), J. Karčiasuskas (*Karčiasuskas, 2024*) and others.

Ukrainian scientists study mainly the problems of protecting the state border of Ukraine, assess the main threats and risks for border security, some authors take into account the experience of the EU countries, among them are O. Androschuk, M. Dement, O. Kyrychenko, D. Kuprienko, M. Lysyi, A. Makhniuk, V. Polovnikov, A. Pomaza-Ponomarenko, O. Tseveliov, O. Shynkaruk and others. The empirical analysis of the current state of the Ukraine's common border with the EU, the problems of integrated border management are covered by the researchers of the NGO "Europe without Barriers", in particular P. Kravchuk, K. Kulchytska, I. Sushko and others.

Emphasizing the previously unresolved parts of the general problem to which the scientific article is devoted. An analysis of recent research and publications proves that in the foreign academic environment compared with Ukrainian academic circles much more attention is being paid to the study and analysis of security problems and the functioning of the EU's external borders, especially in the conditions of growing new challenges and threats. However, the research of the changing functions of the EU's external borders in the context of actual transition from the popular project "Europe without Borders" to a peculiar format of Europe with fortified and sometimes partially closed borders, which is due to a number of hybrid threats from Russia and Belarus, remains beyond the attention of foreign and Ukrainian scholars.

In Ukraine, as a state with the status of a candidate for EU membership, the study of a wide range of topical issues of the EU's eastern border functioning based on the analysis of the impact of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation remains beyond the attention of scholars.

The purpose of the scientific article is to identify the peculiarities of the transformation of the European Union's eastern external border functions under the influence of real and potential challenges and threats caused by Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine.

Presentation of the material. In the new historical and geopolitical realities that emerged in the early 1990s after the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain, conceptual approaches to interpreting the role and functions of state borders in Europe gradually changed. At that time, the European states were rethinking their civilizational and international political significance for regional stability, the formation of a common market and a free and secure space on the continent, which was in line with the main provisions of the founding treaties of the European Union. As a result of signing of the Schengen Agreement on 14 June, 1985 and its entry into force on 26 March, 1995, the member- states abolished border control. This gave a significant impetus to the process of European integration and the formation of a "Europe without Borders", which aimed to create an area of freedom, security and justice without visas and controlled internal borders (*Buzmaniuk, 2021*).

Since then, the regime of state borders in Europe was changing dynamically. Within the Schengen area, borders became open, their contact function strengthened, and their regulatory and filtering functions degraded due to the abolition of internal border control and customs checks. The closure of existing border crossing points at land borders, airports and seaports took place. This led to the introduction of a common visa policy towards third countries and ensured the free movement of people, capital, goods and services. At the same time, a number of restrictions were introduced for the citizens of neighboring countries which were not integrated into the Schengen area, and the filtering function of the border became dominant.

In the 1990s, the external borders from fortified lines of demarcation with enhanced border control, which served as barriers, gradually turned into semi-permeable lines of interstate interaction based on the principles of mutually beneficial economic cooperation of the EU with the Eastern Partnership countries and with Russia. Thus, as a result of a number of factors, the ratio of the EU's external border functions changed, and they began to perform more stringent filtering and regulatory functions.

The configuration and length of the external border of the European Union underwent radical changes and shifted towards the south and east. As a result of successive processes of its spatial expansion, new closest neighbours were identified, most of which were covered by the European

Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This partnership strategy was aimed to prevent the creation of new dividing lines in Europe by building a qualitatively new system of relations with neighbouring states by establishing long-term mutually beneficial cooperation to ensure stability and prosperity not only within the European Community, but also beyond. Such a common policy required a significant change in approaches to the management of new external borders and influenced their arrangement, crossing regime, as well as strengthening their contact function (*Communication from the Commission...*, 2003).

The European Union shares land borders with twenty-one countries. We consider external borders to be an object of international political interaction with a complex structure and dynamic relationships. External borders are at the center of attention of the EU, which implements a common policy in the field of integrated border management (IBM). External borders are viewed and handled as both state and common. That is why the protection of external borders is extremely important and, at the same time, complex and difficult. For some bordering member states such responsibility often becomes a great challenge, because they have to bear full responsibility for border management, protection and security. There are a number of examples when unfriendly neighbours, pursuing their own geopolitical and foreign policy interests, artificially provoked and carried out hybrid operations to destabilize the situation on the common border.

By and large, the EU external borders are divided into four sections along the horizon: eastern, south-eastern, western and south-western. The reconfiguration of these borders has been changed several times due to the EU enlargement process, first to the south and then to the east (Fig. 1). Recently, after Brexit (2020), the EU territory decreased and the borders changed, respectively, the EU lost 12,429 km of coastline. Today, the European Union has approximately 67,571 km of coastline and 14,647 km of land borders (*Buzmaniuk, 2021*).



Figure 1. The EU Eastern Border Line

Source: Eastern Borders Annual Overview. 2012. Frontex.

In the eastern direction, eight EU countries share borders with four neighbours; the length of the borders with them is over 5700 km (Table 1). From north to south, the EU borders with the following neighbours: Russia, which Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland share a

common border with; Belarus, which borders Latvia, Lithuania, Poland; Ukraine, which neighbours Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania; Moldova, which borders Romania (*Cucerescu, 2019*).

The longest border is that with Russia, its length is 2432 km, the shortest is with Moldova – 682 km. In total, two thirds of the entire eastern border of the EU is the neighbourhood with Russia and Belarus, which is a source of constant challenges and threats. Therefore, it requires increased attention and strengthening.

Table 1. The length of the EU eastern border line (km)

Land boundaries	Russia	Belarus	Ukraine	Moldova	Total
Finland	1309				1309
Estonia	324				324
Latvia	292	171			463
Lithuania	275	678			953
Poland	232	418	535		1185
Slovakia			97		97
Hungary			137		137
Romania			613	682	1295
Total	2432	1267	1382	682	5763

Sources: Cucerescu, 2019; Straż Graniczna, 2024.

Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Russia became proximate neighbours of the European Union after the fifth largest wave of its expansion to the east in 2004. This neighbourhood led to the introduction of a visa regime and increased checks of vehicles and cargo at border checkpoints in accordance with the EU requirements.

At that time, tensions between the Russian Federation and the EU increased. Their bilateral relations became more complicated, despite the persistent efforts of the European side to involve this eastern neighbour in the European integration process. This confrontation was caused by a combination of factors, in particular: the Russian Federation refused the status of a semi-peripheral country within the framework of the ENP, which was offered to it; the Baltic and Central European states became members of NATO and joined the EU; Ukraine and Moldova chose pro-European foreign policy strategies that took them out of the orbit of Russian geopolitical and geoeconomic influence. All this prevented Russia from fully asserting its influence over its post-Soviet neighbours.

It should be noted that the Russian Federation tried in various ways to maintain its political influence and control in the Eastern European region and minimize the negative consequences of the EU enlargement for itself. In 2005 it applied economic restrictions and sanctions against the countries of the post-Soviet space and individual member states of the Community. During this period, the Kremlin regime accelerated the development of new weapons systems and increased weapons production, implementing a policy of selective dialogue on energy supplies with the following European countries: Germany, France, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and Italy. Over time, this list expanded. At the same time, agreements were reached with the EU on reducing trade tariffs, increasing quotas for the import of Russian steel, etc (*Tolstov, 2015*).

In general, such short-sighted policy of some EU member states caused extreme dependence on Russian energy resources. This later grew into a major threat to their national security and European security altogether. After the full-scale invasion in 2022, only some countries, in particular, Lithuania, Poland and others began to refuse to import Russian fossil fuels (*Maj, 2023*).

As a result, both the new rules for crossing the external border under the requirements of the ENP, as well as geopolitical changes and geoeconomic interests of individual states after the start of the Russian Federation's hybrid war against Ukraine in 2014, determined trends towards changing the functions of the EU's eastern border – from the predominance of the contact function to the strengthening of filtering and barrier functions.

Russia, as the largest neighbour, in its bilateral relations with the European Union chose the tactics of political manipulation using hybrid threats (sabotage, blackmail, cyberattacks, diversions, disinformation campaigns, etc.) in order to intervene and destabilize the situation in the neighbouring countries and to weaken the EU as a whole. At the same time, since June 2007, citizens of Russia (a state that had no intention of integrating into the EU) enjoyed the benefits of a visa-free regime and for a long time remained among the leaders in obtaining Schengen visas and with the lowest percentage of refusals (*Eastern Borders..., 2012*). Only after the full-scale invasion at the request of Ukraine and other states did the Council of the European Union approve the decision to completely suspend the visa facilitation agreement with Russia on September 12, 2022 (*Council Decision on the suspension..., 2022*).

At the height of the migration crisis of 2015-2016, due to the influx of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries, when more than 1 million migrants arrived in Europe, the vulnerability of the EU's external borders and its insufficient protection in various areas became obvious. This prompted decisive actions by individual countries (through whose territory the "Balkan route" passed) to introduce regular checks and strengthen control on the internal and external borders of the European Union to counter illegal migration. In response to increasing migration pressure, the growth of organized cross-border crime and other border protection and security challenges, the mandate of the Frontex Agency (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) was expanded in 2016. The Agency is responsible for securing the EU's external borders and works with member states to quickly identify and address any problems.

The greatest challenge to the security of the European Union's eastern border became the massive attempts of illegal border crossing from Belarus in July 2021. This created new risks and threats to the national security of the Baltic states and Poland. The deterioration of relations between the EU and Belarus was due to the sanctions against the Lukashenko's regime, which the European Union imposed after the 2020 presidential elections. The Belarusian authorities used illegal migrants from the Middle East (mostly the citizens of Iraq) in order to destabilize the European Union for the sake of their own political interests (*Situation on the eastern borders..., 2022*).

The sudden and unprecedented mass influx of migrants from Belarus led to the crisis on the EU's eastern border, putting enormous pressure on the national asylum systems of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. They had never before encountered such a large number of third-country nationals trying to enter their territory. As a result, these three countries declared a state of emergency and took a number of countermeasures to strengthen their borders with Belarus and to build physical barriers. In response to the hybrid attack, the EU supported the affected member states in implementing temporary measures to effectively address the emergency migration situation at the EU's external borders (*Proposal for a Council Decision..., 2021*). That was a new practice, since Europe had been moving towards open borders for quite a long time.

Lithuania was the first country to start building a wall along its border with Belarus. From October 2021 to August 2022, a 4-meter-high fence with a barbed wire barrier was erected, stretching 678 kilometers (*Karčiasukas, 2024*). From January to June 2022, Poland built a 5.5-meter-high steel fence on a 187-kilometer section of the border with Belarus, consisting of 38,800 metal posts and barbed wire and equipped with special monitoring systems for 24-hour surveillance of the border (*Granice RP..., 2024*).

After the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, there was a trend towards the introduction of various restrictions and the construction of physical barriers on the eastern border of the EU. In particular, as noted above, in September 2022, the visa-free regime between the EU and the Russian Federation was abolished. A number of European countries closed their airspace to flights (including transit) by Russian airlines. And some states decided to close border crossing points on the border with Russia, which the European Parliament recognized as a state sponsor of terrorism in November 2022 (*European Parliament declares Russia..., 2022*). For example, due to a sharp increase in the flow of migrants, Finland closed the border crossings on the Finnish-Russian land border on December 15, 2023. In April 2024, the Finnish authorities

stopped the movement of pleasure boats through the Saimaa Canal through Nuijamaa, and the sea crossings of Haapasaari and Santio were closed for an indefinite period (*Finnish Government..., 2025*). Following Finland's experience, Estonia also plans to close its border with Russia in 2025 as the number of potential threats and hybrid attacks from its eastern neighbour is increasing.

In addition to closing checkpoints, countries are implementing projects to build walls and other physical barriers to strengthen their borders with Russia. In particular, in March 2023, Finland began building a 3.5 m high barrier fence on separate sections with a total length of 200 km in the South-Eastern part of the country, in North Karelia and Kainuu. The barrier fence is planned to be completed in 2026 (*The eastern border barrier fence, 2022*).

Since 2022, border states have significantly strengthened the interaction and coordination of their efforts to protect the eastern borders, implementing joint defense projects using innovative technologies and surveillance systems, including those based on artificial intelligence.

Drone Wall. The widespread use of drones in the Russian-Ukrainian war has prompted NATO's eastern flank states (most of which, except Norway, are EU members) to consider and assess the possibilities of using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to counter the growing real and potential threats to international security posed by Russia and Belarus. In May 2024, six countries – Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland – agreed on the main principles of the “Drone wall” initiative, which aims to use UAVs for comprehensive border protection and monitoring (*Karčiauskas, 2024*). This ambitious project has marked significant progress in the development of the defense strategies of the above-mentioned countries.

It is planned to build a “Drone wall” within three years through joint efforts of the states with possible financial support from the European Union, stretching for more than 3,000 km from north to south along the eastern border of the EU, starting from Norway and ending in Poland. The goals of this project are as follows:

1) preventing provocations by developing a border monitoring system which, if necessary, can protect against potential invasions by enemy states, uncontrolled migration, etc.;

2) combating smuggling using drones that will help identify violators in real time and detain them;

3) strengthening regional security and defense capabilities of the NATO member states using various types of UAVs, surveillance systems and other technologies to protect their borders (*A New Era of Border Security..., 2024*).

Baltic Defense Line. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 raised concerns that the Baltic states could become the next target of Russian armed aggression and hybrid attacks. Therefore, the states of the region began to develop plans to counter real and potential threats to national security. Lithuania was one of the first to modernize and strengthen its defense strategy. In July 2022, most political parties signed an inter-party defense agreement, which stipulates that Lithuania should deploy surveillance systems behind physical barriers and develop effective measures to counter mobility along its borders with the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Region and Belarus (*Karčiauskas, 2024*).

On January 19, 2024, in Riga the defense ministers of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania signed a Protocol of Intent to Strengthen Cooperation by developing effective measures to counter mobility along the border with the hostile states and agreed to establish the Baltic Defense Line. This line will consist of a complex of fortifications, anti-tank obstacles and other defense infrastructure along the borders with the Russian Federation and Belarus. Construction could take up to 10 years and requires significant investments and efforts (*Ryan, 2024*).

East Shield. The National Deterrence and Defence Program “East Shield” (*Tarcza Wschód..., 2024*) has become an important element of strengthening the eastern borders of Poland, and therefore of the European Union and NATO. The program is planned for 2024–2028 and has been the largest border reinforcement operation in Europe since 1945. It aims to strengthen the military readiness and security of Poland's borders through a comprehensive combination of modern surveillance systems, physical barriers and state-of-the-art airspace monitoring systems. East Shield involves not only the construction of fortifications and ammunition bunkers along the border, but

also the creation of natural obstacles in strategic border sections. It also plans to develop threat recognition systems, build advanced military bases, logistics centers, warehouses and implement electronic warfare and anti-drone effectors. The tasks of the program include: strengthening the capabilities to prevent unexpected attacks, limiting the mobility of the enemy (impeding the advancement of enemy troops), ensuring the mobility of its own troops and firepower, increasing the security of its own armed forces and protecting civilians (*Poland's new East Shield...*, 2024).

The length of the project border line is about 800 km, including the lands of the Pomeranian, Warmian-Masurian, Lublin, Podlaskie and Subcarpathian provinces. Thus, its implementation will contribute to the strengthening Poland's resilience, its readiness for defense and the capabilities to immediately deploy troops in the event of armed aggression. The East Shield program should be a complement to the Baltic Defense Line project. In the future, it is planned to unite them at two points: one along the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Region, the other – along the border with Belarus. Thus, a continuous "EU Defense Line" will be created (*Tarcza Wschód...*, 2024).

Despite the ongoing war with Russia, on some sections of the EU's eastern border with Ukraine and Moldova a visa-free regime for citizens of these countries remains valid. The European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) continues its work. Existing and new border crossing points have been modernized and opened. For example, on May 23, 2023 a new border crossing point Leova-Bumbata was opened on the Romanian-Moldovan border, which allowed to speed up the border crossing by individuals and vehicles, facilitate cross-border movement and reduce waiting time at other border crossing points, which were significantly overcrowded. A joint border control was also introduced at the Albitas-Leuseni checkpoint (April 2023) and Giurgiulești-Galați (November 2024) – a key automobile checkpoint on the way from Ukraine to Romanian ports (*Crossing of state border...*, 2023). The introduction of joint controls has made it possible to speed up the border crossing procedures, including the transportation of Ukrainian grain. One of the "EU-Ukraine Solidarity Routes" runs through Galați and Giurgiulești, which was launched by the European Commission in May, 2022 as a sign of support for Ukraine. This was a response to the blockade of Ukrainian seaports by Russia after the beginning of the full-scale invasion. As a result, new transport routes were laid to ensure imports and exports to and from Ukraine by rail, road and waterways (*EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes*, 2022).

In order to increase the throughput capacity of the Ukrainian-Polish border, a new international automobile checkpoint "Nyzhankovychi-Malkhovychi" was opened on December 21, 2024, which operates under the procedure of joint border and customs control. With the support of the USAID Project "Economic Support to Ukraine", a number of checkpoints were comprehensively modernized, in particular, the automobile checkpoint "Yahodyn" on the Ukrainian-Polish border, "Porubne" on the Ukrainian-Romanian border, "Chop (Tysa)" on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border and "Uzhhorod" on the Ukrainian-Slovak border (*Modernization of the Border...*, 2025).

Thus, on the EU eastern border with Ukraine and Moldova, the opposite trend is observed – the degradation of the filtering function and strengthening of the contact function of the borders. In particular, despite the full-scale war, the eastern borders of the EU with Ukraine and Moldova remain open, as opposed to the closure of the borders with Russia and Belarus.

Conclusions. All in all, we argue that the evolution of the European integration process has determined the line of the modern eastern border of the European Union and influenced the dynamics of its functional development. In the 1990s, the filtering and contact functions of the state borders in Europe became more and more distinctive, as they ceased to be a source of conflicts between countries, and turned into drivers of integration and cooperation. The external borders of the EU underwent a linear evolution from the boundaries of alienation to the lines of interstate interaction.

As a result of the largest enlargement of the European Union in 2004, the external borders moved eastward, and its new neighbours became Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Russia, which a visa regime was introduced with. Since then, significant changes have occurred in the functioning

of the external border with a decrease in its throughput capacity and an increase in its filtering and regulatory functions.

The latest security threats of the 21st century such as migration crises and hybrid attacks have significantly affected the functioning of the EU's eastern border. Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine has necessitated significant transformations of the functional component of the European borders. This primarily concerns states that share borders with Belarus and Russia, since these countries pose a threat to the Eastern European region. Given this, European countries began to distance themselves from dangerous neighbours in various ways. On the border with Belarus and Russia, neighbour states built physical barriers. Finland closed all border crossings with Russia, and Estonia is planning the same actions. States are strengthening their defense strategies. In particular, the Baltic countries are constructing a new fortification system along the borders with Russia and Belarus – the Baltic Defense Line, and Poland has developed the National Deterrence and Defense Program “East Shield”. The combination of these two projects will create a joint “EU Defense Line” in the future.

The EU and NATO eastern flank countries are strengthening collective resilience, they have agreed on the “Drone wall” initiative, aimed at using UAVs for the effective and comprehensive border protection and monitoring. It is clearly evident that on the sections of the EU's eastern border with Russia and Belarus, the transformation from filtering to rigid barrier border function has taken place.

At the same time, on the sections of the eastern border of the European Union with Ukraine and Moldova, which have the official status of candidates for the EU accession, there is a decrease in the filtering function and an increase in the contact function of the borders. The visa-free regime for the citizens of Ukraine and Moldova continues to operate, new border crossing points are being opened and existing ones are being modernized. Moreover, the EU has supported Ukraine as a sign of solidarity and opened the new routes for the transportation of Ukrainian products, in particular grain.

To conclude, the history of the EU's external borders development, taking into account the current dynamic processes of interstate relations, indicates the changing nature of their functions. The transformation of the state borders functions is clearly on the go and there are no clear timelines that would indicate the completion of this process. Further research will be aimed at studying the key approaches of the European Union to assessing the importance of external borders for strengthening European security and at the same time deepening integration with Ukraine and Moldova.

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