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Politico-Legal Aspects*

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## Secção

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## Security of the Eastern Border of the European Union. The Politico-Legal Aspects

### *Segurança da Fronteira Oriental da União Europeia. Os Aspectos Político-Jurídicos*

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**ABSTRACT:** When Russia launched a wide-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it became obvious to the entire European Union that the Russian Federation posed one of the most serious threats to the entire region, including the European Union. Therefore, the countries of the EU's eastern flank have undertaken initiatives to strengthen the defence system of their eastern borders forming also the EU's eastern border. Based on the following methods: legal dogmatic method, legal theoretical method, comparative method, systemic method, qualitative and quantitative analyses supplemented by a historical approach, the article analyses the current security environment of the Baltic States and Poland (as European Union countries). This allowed us to understand the motives behind undertaking the East Shield and Baltic Defence Line initiatives. The main purpose of the article is to analyse the evolution of the European Union's approach to the security of its eastern external border, with particular emphasis on investments in defence infrastructural projects in the Baltic States and Poland.

**KEYWORDS:** European Union; Eastern Flank; Security; Russian Federation; Imperialism; Defence Lines.

**RESUMO:** Com a massiva invasão à Ucrânia, em fevereiro de 2022, pela Federação Russa, tornou-se evidente para a União Europeia que a Rússia representa uma das ameaças mais sérias à segurança da região, incluindo à própria União. Perante tal cenário, os Estados-membros da ala oriental da União Europeia encetaram diversas iniciativas com vista ao reforço da sua capacidade defesa nas suas fronteiras orientais, que correspondem, simultaneamente, à fronteira externa oriental da União Europeia. A abordagem metodológica do presente artigo integra uma combinação de método dogmático-jurídico, teórico-jurídico, comparativo e sistémico, complementada com recurso a métodos qualitativos e quantitativos, bem como de uma perspetiva histórica que permite a análise do actual ambiente de segurança nos Estados Bálticos e na Polónia, enquanto Estados-membros da União Europeia. Esta abordagem metodológica permite compreender os fatores que estiveram na origem do lançamento das iniciativas Escudo Oriental e Linha de Defesa Báltica. O principal objetivo do artigo consiste em analisar a evolução das políticas da União Europeia em matéria de segurança da sua fronteira externa oriental, com especial ênfase no investimento realizado em projetos de infraestrutura de defesa nos Estados Bálticos e na

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Polónia.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** União Europeia; Ala Oriental; Segurança; Federação Russa; Imperialismo; Linhas de Defesa.

## Introduction

The Member States of the European Economic Community (EEC) formally established their foreign and security policy cooperation on 7 February 1992 with the signing of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), one of the foundations of which was the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). However, it should be emphasised that the very origin of the CFSP dates back to the 1950s<sup>4</sup>. The principles of activity, loyalty and solidarity were considered the basic principles of the CFSP. Pursuant to these principles, Member States were obliged to actively support the Union's external and security policy and to refrain from actions that would be contrary to the Union's interests or could harm its effectiveness as a cohesive force in international relations. The substantive scope of the CFSP covered all areas of foreign and security policy, including progressive framing of a common EU defence policy, with the possibility of establishing a common defence at the EU level<sup>5</sup>.

The CFSP has evolved and been reformed multiple times over the years, but the European Union's preventive and defence activities have not kept pace with the dynamically changing international realities and security environment<sup>6</sup>. This state of affairs is demonstrated by the EU's response to the aggressive policy pursued by the Russian Federation towards its neighbours, including the war in Georgia (2008), the annexation of Crimea (2014), the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (2022), and hybrid destabilisation efforts in Moldova and the Baltic States. Looking in retrospect, we can see that since the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR), Russia's relations with the West have been a series of crises. Admittedly, there have also been periods of seemingly positive and pragmatic cooperation between the two sides. In hindsight, it seems that that temporary thaw in relations was only the result of propaganda activities aimed at building a positive image of Russia and Russians in Western societies. This was also intended to consolidate Russian influence not only in Western European

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<sup>4</sup> WESSEL, Ramses A. *The European Union's Foreign and Security Policy: A Legal Institutional Perspective*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1999, pp. 1-2. ISBN: 90-411-1265-0 (HB).

<sup>5</sup> CHRUŚCIEL, Marcin. Wspólna polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwa. In: ŚWISTAK, Marek and TKACZYŃSKI, Jan Wiktor (eds.), *Wybrane polityki publiczne Unii Europejskiej : stan i perspektywy*. Karków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2015, p. 201. ISBN: 978-83-233-3881-9.

<sup>6</sup> FISZER, Józef M. Reformy i ewolucja Wspólnej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa i Obrony UE w latach 2016-2023. Osiągnięcia i niepowodzenia. *Politeja*, 2024, vol. 88, n°1, p. 122. ISSN: 1733-6716.

countries but also in international organizations. Consequently, many Western European politicians could act for Russia while at the same time enjoying acceptance for such a policy from large parts of their societies. Even after the attack on Ukraine, when Russian goals became fully clear, some European politicians seemed to disregard the threats posed to themselves<sup>7</sup>.

The real change in the approach to securing the EU's eastern border took place in May 2024, when the Polish government announced the implementation of the East Shield programme, which involves the construction of comprehensive regional defence infrastructure built in cooperation with the Baltic States to counter military threats on NATO's eastern flank and the EU's eastern border, while the own Baltic States' initiative is the Baltic Defence Line announced by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in January 2024 at a meeting of defence ministers in Riga.

These initiatives and the support for them by countries located in the immediate vicinity of Russia or Russia-dominated Belarus demonstrate a growing sense of reality of the military threat from the east. Despite a significant number of studies and analyses regarding EU security in the context of the imperial policy pursued by the Russian Federation, there is still no comprehensive analysis of recent infrastructure initiatives.

Therefore, the authors hereof have set themselves the task of analysing the evolution of the European Union's approach to the security of its eastern external border, with particular focus on investments in defence infrastructure in the Baltic States and Poland. The research hypothesis assumes that changes in the global balance of power and the aggressive policy pursued by Russia are the causative factor behind the redefinition of the EU's security policy and taking resolute action aimed at infrastructurally increasing the defence potential of its eastern border. For the purposes of this article, the term "eastern flank of the EU" refers to the group of Member States whose eastern borders also constitute the eastern external border of the European Union and NATO, namely: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

In order to verify it, comparative and systemic methods, as well as qualitative and quantitative analyses, were used. The methodology is complemented by a historical

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<sup>7</sup> KACZMAREK, Krzysztof. Rosyjska dezinformacja jako element budowania wpływów w Europie: analiza i perspektywy. *Roczniki Nauk Społecznych*, 2024, vol. 16(52), n°1, p. 116. ISSN: 01374176. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.18290/rns2024.0002>. Viewed 8.04.2025.

approach.

## 1. Security policy of the European Union

It is emphasized that the EU, to ensure its own security, needs to act urgently, including strengthening partnerships with like-minded countries and significantly reducing its dependency on third countries. The EU is at a crucial moment in its history, and the previous scenario of measures being taken for security should be changed, or it may mark an end of Europe's protection and security. The EU and its Member States face a decision on whether to consolidate forces and take joint coordinated action to counter threats to the EU's security. Otherwise, these countries will be left alone and exposed to risks from both aggressive enemies and unpredictable partners<sup>8</sup>.

The goal of the European Union's policy is to integrate the management of external borders, at national and EU levels, which is an inevitable consequence of the free movement of persons within the EU and a fundamental element of an area of freedom, security and justice. The European integrated border management is crucial to improving migration management<sup>9</sup>. Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 aims to strengthen the management of the EU's external borders by addressing migratory pressures and cross-border crime, while ensuring respect for fundamental rights and maintaining the free movement of persons within the Union<sup>10</sup>.

The EU's common security and defence policy must take into account threats at its eastern border, especially at a time of war in Ukraine and offensive action undertaken by Belarus. The Common Security and Defence Policy is an element of the EU's overall Foreign and Security framework. It is intended to provide an operational capability based on civilian and military assets. Effective implementation of these policies requires coordination across multiple governance levels, from supranational EU institutions to national governments and regional authorities. The European Union's approach to security challenges increasingly relies on multilevel

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<sup>8</sup> EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. *Resolution on the White Paper on the Future of European Defence*. Available from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-10-2025-0146\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-10-2025-0146_EN.html). Viewed 18.04.2025.

<sup>9</sup> CASTRO MOREIRA, Fátima and BRAVO, Bárbara Magalhães. EU Integrated Maritime Policy and multilevel governance. *Juridical Tribune*, 2019, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 538-539. Available from: <https://www.tribunajuridica.eu/arhiva/An9v3/2.%20Bravo,%20Moreira.pdf>. Viewed: 5.06.2025.

<sup>10</sup> EUROPEAN UNION. *Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624*. Available from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019R1896>. Viewed 18.04.2025.



governance mechanisms that coordinate action across supranational, national, and subnational levels<sup>11</sup>. Where any Member State becomes a victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States are obliged to help using all means they have at their disposal. Commitments and cooperation in this area must not contradict obligations arising from membership of NATO, which, for countries which are members of that international organization, remains the basis of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation<sup>12</sup>.

The security of the European Union's eastern border also entails counteracting cyber threats. Therefore, the security of network and information systems used by entities responsible for strategic sectors, including operators of critical infrastructure, becomes crucial. According to the European Union's legislation, the security of network and information systems means "the ability of network and information systems to resist, at a given level of confidence, any event that may compromise the availability, authenticity, integrity or confidentiality of stored, transmitted or processed data or of the services offered by, or accessible via, those network and information systems"<sup>13</sup>. Effective cybersecurity governance requires coordinated action across multiple administrative levels, integrating national, regional, and local public entities within a coherent legal framework<sup>14</sup>. In the field of cybersecurity risk management, Article 21 of the NIS 2 Directive introduces important rules. According to this provision, Member States have been obliged to ensure that essential and important entities take appropriate and proportionate technical, operational and organisational measures to manage the risks posed to the security of network and information systems which those entities use for their operations or for the provision of their services, and to prevent or minimise the impact of incidents on recipients of their services and on other services.

<sup>11</sup> CASTRO MOREIRA, Fátima and MATOS, André Pereira. A governança multinível na proteção do direito fundamental ao ambiente da União Europeia: o Pacto Ecológico Europeu e o projeto Cities Mission. *Revista Jurídica Portucalense*, 2022, no. 32, pp. 370. Available from: [https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705\(32\)2022.jm-01](https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(32)2022.jm-01). Viewed 18.05.2025.

<sup>12</sup> EUROPEAN UNION. *Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union (consolidated version)*. Official Journal C 115, 09/05/2008, pp. 38–39. Available from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu/2008/art\\_42/oj/eng](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu/2008/art_42/oj/eng). Viewed 18.04.2025.

<sup>13</sup> EUROPEAN UNION. *Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 and Directive (EU) 2018/1972, and repealing Directive (EU) 2016/1148 (NIS 2 Directive)*. Official Journal L 333, 27.12.2022, pp. 80–152. Available from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2555/oj/eng>. Viewed 18.04.2025.

<sup>14</sup> CHAŁUBIŃSKA-JENTKIEWICZ, Katarzyna, KARPIUK, Mirosław and KOSTRUBIEC, Jarosław. *The Legal Status of Public Entities in the Field of Cybersecurity in Poland*. Maribor: Institute for Local Self-Government Maribor, 2021. ISBN 978-961-7124-03-3. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.4335/2021.5>. Viewed: 17.05.2025.



Taking into account the state-of-the-art and, where applicable, relevant European and international standards, as well as the cost of implementation, these measures are to ensure a level of security of network and information systems appropriate to the risks posed. When assessing the proportionality of those measures, the degree of the entity's exposure to risks, the entity's size and the likelihood of occurrence of incidents and their severity, including their societal and economic impact, must be taken into account.

It should be noted that it is the information and communication technologies that largely determine the status of public entities in cyberspace vulnerable to cyber attacks. Consequently, it should be stressed that the use of such technologies must be secure, as this will allow the uninterrupted provision of services electronically<sup>15</sup>.

Ensuring security is a fundamental responsibility of the state, international structures and the European Union as well. Due to the development of new technologies and the use of cyberspace for many services, crises can induce cyber threats of very high dynamics and diversity. Due to the intensity of cyberattacks, in particular those taking place in strategic areas of public activity and in important sectors of the economy, special attention should be paid to crisis management in the cybersecurity environment, which is becoming more and more frequently used, both for commercial, social and public activities<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. Geopolitical context of security of the eastern border of the European Union

The security of every society, every nation and every state is a derivative of their history, geopolitical location and many politically neutral factors such as climatic conditions and natural resources. All these factors form a single whole in the systemic perspective and a continuum in temporal terms<sup>17</sup>. In view of the above, the understanding of each political and social phenomenon requires knowledge of its

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<sup>15</sup> GAIE, Christophe, KARPIUK, Mirosław, STRIZZOLO, Nicola. Cybersecurity of Public Sector Institutions. *Prawo i Więź*, 2024, vol. 53, n°6, p. 359. ISSN: 2299-405X. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.36128/PRIW.VI53.1129>. Viewed: 18.04.2025. See also: CZURYK, Małgorzata. Cybersecurity and Protection of Critical Infrastructure. *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia*, 2023, vol. 32, n° 5, pp.43-52. ISSN: 1731-6375. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17951/sil.2023.32.5.43-52>. Viewed: 18.04.2025; KARPIUK, Mirosław, KOSTRUBIEC, Jarosław. Provincial Governor as a Body Responsible for Combating State Security Threats. *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia*, 2024, vol. 33, n°1, p. 118. ISSN: 1731-6375. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17951/sil.2024.33.1.107-122>. Viewed: 18.04.2025.

<sup>16</sup> CZURYK, Małgorzata. Zarządzanie kryzysowe w obszarze cyberbezpieczeństwa. *Ius et Securitas*, 2025, vol. 3, n°1. ISSN: 3071-799X.

<sup>17</sup> HIMMELFARB, Gertrude. *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 172. ISBN: 0-674-01384-0.

genesis<sup>18</sup>. This also applies to such phenomena like policies of the European Union<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, conducting an analysis of the EU security policy on the eastern flank needs tracing the Community's activity in this area and presenting the security environment of its eastern flank in a broader geopolitical context.

These analyses should begin with a reminder of what the EU's eastern flank is and which countries are covered by this term. In the literature, most commonly it coincides with the term "NATO Eastern Flank" and concerns countries whose eastern border is the eastern border of both the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU<sup>20</sup>: currently, this group includes Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. All these countries have historical experience of facing the imperial policy of the Russian Empire, Soviet Union and Russian Federation and each of them, although differently, was dependent on the Moscow's rule after World War II. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania formed part of the USSR, while Poland, Slovakia (as part of Czechoslovakia), Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria were Moscow's satellite states and in fact they did not pursue their own foreign or internal policy. The situation was different for Finland, which after World War II pursued its policy with caution, so as not to give the USSR any pretext for possible intervention. This was particularly true of foreign policy. The then authorities of Finland assumed that the country was independent and could keep its democratic system only because of its marginal importance to the Soviet Union, and this importance could only remain marginal by avoiding any international agreements with Western countries. Hence, this type of policy-making is referred to as Finlandisation<sup>21</sup>.

The formal dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 and the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe initiated social, political, and economic transformation that took place in the former Eastern Bloc countries, which enabled their economic and military integration with the West<sup>22</sup>. Ultimately, all the countries subject

<sup>18</sup> HOFFER, Peter Charles. *The Historians' Paradox: The Study of History in Our Time*. New York: New York University Press, 2008, pp. 106-127. ISBN: 978-0-8147-3714-9.

<sup>19</sup> GOODMAN, Joseph William. *Telecommunications Policy-making in the European Union*. Cheltenham–Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006, p. 50. ISBN: 978-1-84376-806-7.

<sup>20</sup> BIZIEWSKI, Jerzy. Eastern Flank of EU and NATO – Challenge and Opportunity. In: RAMÍREZ, Jesús Martín and BIZIEWSKI, Jerzy (eds.), *Security and Defence in Europe. Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications*. Cham: Springer, 2020, pp. 177-178. ISBN: 978-3-030-12292-8. Available from: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12292-8\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12292-8_14). Viewed 8.04.2025.

<sup>21</sup> SINGLETON, Fred. The Myth of 'Finlandisation'. *International Affairs*, 1981, vol. 57, n°2, pp. 270-271. ISSN: 0020-5850. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2619164>. Viewed 8.04.2025.

<sup>22</sup> KORNAL, János. The great transformation of Central Eastern Europe. Success and disappointment. *Economics of Transition*, 2006, vol. 14, n°2, p. 228 (207-244). ISSN: 0967-0750.

to research and analysis herein accessed the EU and NATO. Finland joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as the last of this group on 4 April 2023.

Presenting the geopolitical context of the security of the EU's eastern flank also needs an analysis of the changes Russia was undergoing at the time, because it is this country that poses the greatest direct threat to the security of the West. This is manifested by the Russia's use of cyberattacks and disinformation operations aimed at weakening geopolitical opponents, including the EU<sup>23</sup>. However, to fully understand the threat posed by the Russian Federation to its neighbours, it is necessary to look at the manner it has pursued its foreign policy from the collapse of the USSR to the military aggression against Ukraine in 2022 and the Finnish accession to NATO.

In the 1990s, Russian elites referred more or less openly not only to e.g. the Soviet anti-Western rhetoric, but also to philosophical and ideological currents from the era of the Russian Empire, which put an emphasis on Russia's special role and tasks and its unique character. It was also a crucial period in the formation of the Russian foreign policy. At the same time, the Russian Federation fell into permanent crisis and began to lose its imperial status. At the same time, the internal situation of the country was conducive to the growth of support for ethno-nationalist forces, which began to shape an expansionist foreign policy, especially towards the so-called near abroad, i.e. the former republics of the USSR<sup>24</sup>.

As a result of the presidential election in March 2000, power in Russia was assumed by Vladimir Putin, at the time a figure unknown to anyone in Western countries. On 24 October 2007 he delivered a speech at the Munich Security Conference, in which he presented Russia's perception of international relations of the time. Putin's main points were that the world could no longer be unipolar, and that the US foreign policy had already crossed national borders in all areas. Many of Putin's allegations were directed at NATO, that this organization failed to fulfill the guarantee of non-expansion after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) had been transformed into a political tool. Putin also stressed that Russia's foreign policy would be independent. It was a clear

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<sup>23</sup> KACZMAREK, Krzysztof, KARPIUK, Mirosław, MELCHIOR, Claudio. A Holistic Approach to Cybersecurity and Data Protection in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Big Data. *Prawo i Więź*, 2024, vol. 50, n°3, p.110. ISSN: 2299-405X. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.36128/PRIW.VI50.907>. Viewed 11.04.2025.

<sup>24</sup> JEDLIŃSKI, Marek. Polityka zagraniczna Federacji Rosyjskiej w latach 90-tych. Kontekst historyczno-ideowy. *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, 2009, n°3, pp. 126-128. ISSN: 1731-7517.

rejection of the then system of international relations<sup>25</sup>.

At the same time, the entire West seemed to disregard Russia's real intentions and continued to pursue a policy of avoiding to give Russia pretexts for discontent. At the same time, a large part of EU societies functioned in an information bubble, still believing that the world was a global village where one can live in peace. There was no resolute Western response to the war in Georgia in 2008 or the annexation of Crimea in 2014<sup>26</sup>. Russia's actions, one of the objectives of which was to test Western countries, usually proved to be successful, which often involved even legitimisation of Russia's aggressive actions by the EU<sup>27</sup>.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the European Union fell into an existential crisis, struggling with the question of whether integration or disintegration forces would prevail. It has also become obvious that it is Russia that is the most polarising force. While the EU eastern flank countries traditionally took a resolute stance, southern and western countries sought cooperation<sup>28</sup>. The Community is currently making efforts to strengthen its defensive capabilities through the development of the defence industry and territorial defence forces<sup>29</sup>. It seems, however, that the EU's efforts are still lagging behind the growing threat from Russia. It is worth mentioning that the international community's response to armed aggression requires clear legal frameworks. These frameworks should particularly address the responsibility to protect and humanitarian intervention principles that guide collective security actions<sup>30</sup>.

Hence the initiatives of the eastern flank countries to increase the defence potential. At the same time, according to experts, hybrid actions undertaken by Russia against the West may constitute a prelude to more aggressive actions, including an

<sup>25</sup> SZEWCZENKO, Oleksandr. 2023. *Polityka państw zachodnich wobec Rosji w latach 2007-2014. Appeasement czy niedocenianie?* [online]. Trimarium. Available from: <https://trimarium.pl/projekt/polityka-panstw-zachodnich-wobec-rocji-w-latach-2007-2014-appeasement-czy-niedocenianie/>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>26</sup> GRIGORYAN, Armen. *The war in Ukraine and western appeasement* [online]. March 2022. Available from: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/03/23/the-war-in-ukraine-and-western-appeasement/>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>27</sup> TCHANTOURIDZÉ, Lasha. The Aftermath of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Appeasement of Russia and the War in Ukraine. *Journal of Peace and War Studies*, 2022, n°4, p. 83. ISSN: 2641-841X.

<sup>28</sup> TOCCI, Nathalie. Europe and Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Where does the EU stand?. *LSE Public Policy Review*, 2023, vol. 3, n°1, p. 2. E-ISSN: 2633-4046. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.79>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>29</sup> ANDERSSON, Jan Joel and BRITZ, Malena. The European Union's role in European defence industry policy. *Defence Studies*, 2025, p. 17. ISSN: 1743-9698. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2025.2472694>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>30</sup> KOWALSKI, Wawrzyniec. Legal Preconditions for Armed Intervention in the Responsibility to Protect Concept: Remarks de lege lata and de lege ferenda. *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia*, 2023, vol. 32, no. 1, p. 161. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17951/sil.2023.32.1.159-189>. Viewed: 19.05.2025.

armed attack.<sup>31</sup> In this context, the countries of the EU's eastern flank are also frontline states which should act as a barrier to Russia's imperial ambitions.

### 3. East Shield – a Polish initiative for systemic protection of the eastern border

The implementation of the national deterrence and defence programme "East Shield" was officially announced by Poland on 18 May 18, 2024. It is the largest project to strengthen the eastern border of Poland, the eastern flank of the EU and the eastern flank of NATO since the end of World War II. The activities undertaken as part of this programme are aimed at, among other things, strengthening detection, warning and surveillance systems, preparing forward operational bases, preparing logistics hubs and building appropriate infrastructure for anti-drone systems. Activities under this programme contribute to the creation of a comprehensive, regional defense infrastructure built in cooperation with the Baltic states<sup>32</sup>.

Within four years, a strip of military installations will be built as part of East Shield along a 700-kilometer stretch of eastern and northern borders, even up to 50 kilometers into the country. In order to increase anti-surprise capabilities, a network of masts will be built in the border strip, which will serve as base stations for communications and reconnaissance systems<sup>33</sup>.

East Shield is solely intended to deter potential adversaries and limit their mobility, and to protect the military and civilians in the event of an attack. This programme involves the construction of fortifications and natural terrain obstacles along the eastern and northern borders of Poland<sup>34</sup>. However, it is to be not only a physical barrier, but also a system of protection against threat factors such as disinformation campaigns and weaponised migration<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> JONES, Seth Glen. 2025. *Russia's Shadow War Against the West* [online]. Center for Strategic and International Studies. Available from: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-shadow-war-against-west>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>32</sup> MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE (POLAND). „*Tarcza Wschód*” wzmocni bezpieczeństwo Polski i wschodniej flanki NATO [online]. May 2024. Available from: <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/tarcza-wschod-wzmocni-bezpieczenstwo-polski-i-wschodniej-flanki-nato>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>33</sup> CHILCZUK, Maciej. *Tarcza Wschód – odstraszanie i obrona* [online]. May 2024. Polska Zbrojna. Available from: <https://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/41791?t=Tarcza-Wschod-odstraszanie-i-obrona&utm>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>34</sup> MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE (POLAND). *East Shield National Deterrence and Defence Programme* [online]. Available from: <https://tarczawschod.wp.mil.pl/en/>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>35</sup> DAYIOĞLU, Attila Gökhan. *Poland's Wall of Defence: The Strategic and Political Impact of the East Shield Project* [online]. February 2025. Essaydo Magazine. Available from: <https://essaydo.com/2025/02/26/polands-wall-of-defence-the-strategic-and-political-impact-of-the-east-shield-project/>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

It should be noted at this point that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a factor catalysing the activities in the area of strengthening the defence potential of Poland's eastern border. Earlier actions aimed at securing Poland's border with Belarus or the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad Oblast were often met with opposition from some political circles and accusations of Russophobia. This was most likely due to Russian disinformation activities. It should also be noted that this was also influenced by the period of dependence on the Soviet Union, when not only the entire media message, but also the education system was focused on creating a positive image of the eastern neighbour and its population. Even now, there are voices trying to undermine the rationale of this programme. This applies to political circles both in Poland and in Europe, as well as the attitudes of some countries.

In March 2025, the European Parliament, during its plenary session in Brussels, recognised the East Shield project as a flagship project for the common security of the European Union, pointing to its key role in protecting the EU's eastern border. However, the European Parliament's support for East Shield is not unanimous. The key challenge is funding – in 2024, the EU defence budget was EUR 8 billion per year, and East Shield requires additional funds of approx. EUR 2-3 billion from EU funds by 2030. The situation is also complicated by political differences between Member States. In March 2025, Hungary and Slovakia, which have criticised the EU's policy towards Russia, expressed the opinion that East Shield would escalate tensions with Moscow. This opinion was rejected, yet it weakened the unanimity of the EU<sup>36</sup>.

#### 4. The Baltic Defence Line as an element of the EU security system

After the collapse of the USSR, in the Baltic states, which had regained their independence after decades of Soviet occupation, a strategic culture was born, assuming that they would never again surrender without a fight, and most certainly not to the Russians. This applies not only to the entire country, but also to individual localities. The war crimes and genocide committed by the Russians in the territories of Ukraine occupied by them prove these assumptions reasonable<sup>37</sup>. At the same time,

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<sup>36</sup> *Parlament Europejski uznał projekt Tarcza Wschód jako flagowy projekt Unii* [online]. March 2025. BiznesAlert.pl. Available from: <https://biznesalert.pl/tarcza-wschod-unia-europejska-polska/>. Viewed 12.04.2025.

<sup>37</sup> MILEVSKI, Lukas. Manoeuvre Warfare in the Baltic: Political Imperatives and Tactical Conditions. *The RUSI Journal*, 2024, vol. 169, n°6, p. 82. ISSN: 0307-1847. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2024.2407534>. Viewed 12.04.2025.



Russia is perceived as an existential threat to the neighboring states, which is particularly true for the Baltic States, whose inhabitants were subjected to Sovietisation and Russification throughout the period from World War II to the early 1990s<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, and in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, these states announced on 19 January 2024 their joint construction of the Baltic Defence Line<sup>39</sup>.

As part of it, comprehensive fortification of the eastern borders of the Baltic States of almost 1,000 km is planned. Around 1,000 bunkers with trenches, anti-tank ditches, ammunition depots and shelters are to be built there over the 10 years to come. But experts say that 10 years is too long because, due to the dynamically changing international situation, Russia may attempt an attack on the Baltic States much earlier<sup>40</sup>.

The Baltic Defence Line is being developed in cooperation with Poland and forms part of a comprehensive programme to defend the EU's eastern flank against military attack from the east. According to estimates from the project implementing countries, the cost of implementation will range from approx. EUR 8 billion to EUR 10 billion. The European Commission, on the other hand, estimates that at the EU level, the total cost of strengthening defence by 2028 will exceed EUR 100 billion<sup>41</sup>.

The defence of the territories and populations of the Baltic states should be effective and this end should be achieved with all available means. Meanwhile, it seems that some of the allied countries within NATO and the EU do not understand the fact that Russia operates under a completely different political and military culture than the West, and that international agreements and treaties, even those to which Russia is a signatory, are of no importance to it. This misunderstanding is manifested, inter alia, in the skepticism about the deployment along defence lines of anti-personnel landmines, the use of which is prohibited under the Ottawa Treaty<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand,

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<sup>38</sup> ŚLIWA, Zdzisław. Od odstraszenia do obrony - wyzwania bezpieczeństwa państw bałtyckich. *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe*, 2023, vol.43, n°2, p. 10. ISSN: 1896-4923.

<sup>39</sup> MILEVSKI, Lukas. *The Baltic Defense Line* [online]. February 2024. Foreign Policy Research Institute. Available from: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/02/the-baltic-defense-line/>. Viewed 14.04.2025.

<sup>40</sup> *The Baltic States are building a defensive line against Russia. Will they do it quickly enough?* [online]. April 2025. Infa.lt. Available from: <https://infa.lt/122836/baltijos-salys-kuria-gynybine-linija-pries-rusija-ar-jos-tai-padarys-pakankamai-greital/>. Viewed 14.04.2025.

<sup>41</sup> *Frontline countries pitch €10 billion defence line for Russia-Belarus border* [online]. February 2025. Euractiv. Available from: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence/news/frontline-countries-pitch-e10-billion-defence-line-for-russia-belarus-border/>. Viewed 14.04.2025.

<sup>42</sup> *Graube: Baltijas aizsardzības līnija ļoti ievērojami apgrūtinās iespējamā pretinieka - Krievijas, virzīšanos Latvijā* [online]. January 2024. Available from: <https://nra.lv/latvija/444721-graube-baltijas-aizsardzibas-linija-loti-ieverojami-apgrutinas-iespejama-pretinieka-krievijas-virzisanos-latvija.htm>. Viewed 14.04.2025.



the attitude of Russia, which is not a signatory to this treaty, towards international law is evidenced by retaliation threats directed towards Poland and the Baltic states, which had announced their withdrawal from this treaty<sup>43</sup>.

It should be noted at this point that the Baltic Defence Line is part of the defence infrastructure of the entire European Union. At the same time, it should be emphasized that Russia is trying, and will continue to try by all possible means, to hinder its construction. These may include disinformation campaigns aimed at Western societies to deny the need to strengthen defence potential in the region, as well as sabotage or subversive actions.

The defence initiatives undertaken by the Baltic States and Poland are not isolated actions but should be seen in the context of the European Union's broader security agenda. While they respond directly to threats in the region, they also fit into ongoing discussions on the role of the EU in collective defence and crisis response. The projects correspond with efforts to strengthen the Union's eastern border, both through national means and in cooperation with EU instruments.

## Conclusions

When Russia started its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, it became obvious that the EU was by no means prepared to defend itself against military aggression, and that the EU's previous defence efforts were ineffective and based only on wishful thinking that it was possible to reach a peaceful agreement with Russia, often by making concessions. But countering any threat should be based on the assumption that if something may happen, it will happen. Therefore, one should be prepared for any contingency.

The analysis carried out herein shows that the goal of Russia's imperial foreign policy, based on expansionism and influence-building, is to restore the global balance of power that existed during the USSR's era. This entails the subjugation of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. At the same time, Russia uses all available means to achieve its political and strategic goals, from disinformation to hybrid activities and war crimes. Therefore, the countries at risk have decided to improve their defence capabilities by building the appropriate infrastructure on the eastern border.

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<sup>43</sup> *Polska wycofuje się z konwencji ottawskiej. Jest reakcja Rosji* [online]. Polstanews.pl. March 2025. Available from: <https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2025-03-20/polska-wycofuje-sie-z-konwencji-ottawskiej-jest-reakcja-rosji/>. Viewed 14.04.2025.

This is crucial for the security of the entire EU, because it is very likely that if an attempt is made to subjugate some portion of EU's territory with no appropriate response from the Community, Russia will continue to advance.

Consequently, the research hypothesis adopted, based on the assumption that changes in the global balance of power and the aggressive policy pursued by Russia are the causative factor behind the redefinition of the EU's security policy and taking decisive action to increase the infrastructural defence potential of its eastern border, has been positively verified.

On the other hand, it should be adopted as lessons learned that the building of EU security should be based on collective action, which should take into account conclusions based on the observation of the changing security environment, both regionally and globally. Prompt decision-making procedures to address security threats should also be developed.

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