

Editorial: War and politics. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and refugee crisis on the eastern EU border from the perspective of border studies

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Since February 24, 2022, we have been witnessing the next stage of what began in the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War: a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. For the first time in the history of the European Union, the intensive armed conflict is now approaching the border of the EU and Schengen Zone. The consequences of war: the refugee crisis, humanitarian aid, and economic problems have affected EU countries both immediately and directly. While keeping in mind the human tragedy and the tragedy of Ukraine, we would like to address a few important questions from the perspective of regional and border scholars. From this perspective, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is another stage of the new political order in Europe, preceded by the war in Ukraine that started in 2014, the 2015 migration crisis, 2021 Belarus-EU border crisis, which altogether – from the perspective of the border studies – could be described as re-bordering and securitization of borderlands.

In this joint editorial, we address four main questions. Firstly, how we can interpret the Russian invasion in the wider, historical context, taking the frontier thesis as an explanatory category firstly developed by Turner (1994). Secondly,

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the Ukrainian refugee crisis, in the context of the previous Belarusian-EU border crisis, is a multi-layered issue, where religion, gender, geopolitics, and rationales meet. Thirdly, apart from the military and political actions, war and refugee flux could be seen from the perspective of a grassroots movement of aid. Fourthly, the war in Ukraine brings uncertainty and questions about democracy and peace in Western Europe.

Russian invasion of Ukraine in the light of frontier thesis

Grigorii Pidgrushniy, Katalin Kovály

The currently unfolding war in Ukraine as a result of the violent aggression of the Russian Federation requires thorough scientific reflection. First of all, it concerns the investigation of the roots and reasons underlying Russia's intervention against Ukraine. This complex problem desires a systematic scientific analysis using a large amount of empirical data, statistical and cartographic information, expert assessments, and other academic materials. However, even a pilot analysis of the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war allows us to draw some preliminary conclusions and generalizations.

The methodological basis of such an analysis can justifiably be several scientific theories and conceptual models that are widely recognized and practically used in modern political science, history, social geography, and other academic disciplines. Among these, the frontier thesis is worth mentioning.

The development of the frontier thesis (frontier – border, boundary) dates back to the end of the 19th century and is associated with the name of the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner. He interpreted the frontier as a transitional zone where an expansive society penetrates and consolidates, and civilization collides with barbarism. According to Turner, it was this clash that ensured the formation of the society of the United States of America (Turner, 1994).

The frontier thesis had been further developed in the works of Owen Lattimore (1937). Based on the research on the frontiers of Central Asia, the author formulated a set of new ideas that allowed not only a broader understanding of the frontier territories but also significantly transformed their meanings. First of all, this refers to the heterogeneity of the frontiers. Among them, Lattimore distinguished the border areas, as well as the internal and external frontiers, which differ from each other in certain patterns of ethnicity, identity, etc. (Lattimore, 1937).

In the subsequent period, the phenomenon of the frontier has been investigated in the works of numerous scholars, and the theory itself has significantly evolved and undergone certain transformations. Thus, in most modern

academic studies the frontier is perceived as a buffer zone where two or more societies (civilizations) collide and interact, which may have different forms of manifestation.

The development of the frontier territory can be achieved through peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation of different communities. By accepting and adopting values, a way of life, and civilization identity, the population of the frontier can integrate into a particular ethnic group or state. Quite often such integration has taken violent forms of military expansion of the more powerful society. Thus, the boundaries of the frontier territory, in the long run, have been changed.

The history of human society has many examples of the formation and development of frontier zones: frontiers, or “frontier-like” territories. Similar to the North American frontier were the Australian Outback, the South African Veld, and others (Haggett, 2001, p. 566). Mostly by the end of the 19th century, classical frontiers were areas of agricultural colonization. In the 20th century, spontaneous agro-colonization was practically non-existent, as conquering new territories required excessive socio-economic efforts, the implementation of which was possible only with serious state support. An example of this would be the development of the Kazakh steppe in the 1950s or the agro-colonization of Amazonia, which began in the 1960s (Probáld, 2005, p. 336).

The colonization of the frontier could be realized as a result of the gradual expansion of the ethnic boundaries of a more mobile and viable people. The frontier territories settled in this way can eventually be integrated with the states of these people’s origin. It is quite obvious that similar processes are taking place in our time. An excellent example of this can be the lease by China of about 2 million hectares of the Tungiro-Olekminsky District in Transbaikalia, Russian Federation (‘Vlasty’, 2015; ‘Polovynu’, 2015). In practice, this means not only the integration of this territory into China’s economy but also the widening of its ethnic boundaries. On the other hand, this is a clear indication of the complete loss of Russia’s potential and opportunities to develop the Siberian frontier.

A typical example of a frontier in Europe is the Ukrainian steppe, which in ancient times was referred to as a Wild Field (*Dyke Pole*). It was stretched across the Don, Dnieper and Dniester rivers. In terms of nature, it almost completely lacks forests and is sometimes a hilly plain, where there is woody vegetation in the lowlands washed by watercourses. The Ukrainian steppe has been home to many peoples in a very short period of history. It was the keystone that decelerated the formation and development of feudal society here in subsequent periods, prevented the dependence on the central authorities, and ensured the relative autonomy of the steppe settlements (Karácsonyi, Pidgrushniy & Kovály, 2016). The vacuum of

power in the frontier was a key factor in attracting the enslaved population in its search for their own freedom and independence, as well as opportunities for a decent life. Thus, the ability to live autonomously in the steppe was not an added advantage, but a major ruining force in conquering the frontier.

The Ukrainian steppe as a frontier territory had a unique position, as it formed an area where not two, but three societies (civilizations) converged and interacted: European (Kievan Rus, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and The Crown of the Kingdom of Poland), Islamic (Ottoman Empire and Crimean Khanate) and Muscovite (Moscow Empire and the Russian Empire). This allowed it to play a significant role not only in the history of individual countries, but also on the entire continent.

The beginning of the large-scale conquest of the Ukrainian steppe dates back to the 16th century (Vermenych, 2014). During this period, profound social changes took place in Europe. After the discovery of America, there was a consistently high demand for grain, and flows of gold as well as silver from the New World caused an explosion in food prices (Beluszki, 2001, p. 70; Subtelny, 2000, p. 87). In Eastern Europe, the demand for peasant labour was growing, and social oppression was intensifying. Taking advantage of this, some Ukrainian and Polish magnates attracted groups of peasants, offering them more favourable living and working conditions on the fertile, not yet conquered lands of the forest-steppe and steppe, where the system of serfdom was not yet widespread (Szokolay, 1997, p. 46; Rącz, 1943, p. 73). In this period the modern specialization of the economy of Ukraine in commodity production of grain was formed, and its image as the "Granary of Europe" was established (Chutkyi, 2015).

The further development of the frontier territories of the Ukrainian steppe is linked to the Cossacks. At the initial stage of their existence – much like the classic frontier communities – the Cossacks were steppe hunters, "adventurers" (Subtelny, 2000, p. 109). Later, in the lower reaches of the Dnieper River, they built fortified fortresses – *Siches*. From the 16th century, the Cossacks were transformed into a powerful military force, whose activities were not only defensive but also offensive. During the period from the end of the 15th century to the second half of the 18th century in the frontier territories of the Ukrainian steppe, Cossacks founded seven *Siches* (Khortytsia, Tomakivska, Mikitynska, Nova, Bazavlutska, Kamianska and Oleshkivska) and a whole system of fortified towns and villages. Within the boundaries of Slobozhanshchyna in the second half of the 17th century, the Cossacks founded cities like Sumy, Kharkiv, Bohodukhiv, Izyum, Vovchansk, Bakhmut, Ostrogozhsk, and others. Under the protection of these fortifications, mainly in the river valleys, a wide system of agricultural settlements was formed.

From the first half of the 18th century, the active invasion of the Russian Empire on the frontier lands of the Ukrainian steppe began. After the capture of Crimea in 1783, the Russian Empire pushed its borders to the Black Sea. Practically the entire frontier from the Dniester to the Don rivers came under its rule. The Ukrainian steppe began to be extensively colonized by the Russian Empire.

The reforms of Peter I ensured the modernization of the Tsardom of Russia and its transformation into the Russian Empire. This made it possible to resist the autonomy of the Ukrainian Cossacks and Ottoman expansion on the northern Black Sea coast. In this context, representatives of the Russian academic group „Eurasians” came to some important conceptual conclusions. According to them, the Grand Duchy of Moscow (Moscovia) could become the dominant power of the steppe (and thus the whole of Eurasia) only after forming its social structures on the example of nomadic Mongol conquerors (Siselina & Gazdag, 2014, p. 256). Due to the inertia of these social structures and state institutions, both Moscovia and the Russian Empire, and later the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, became the bearers and producers of the traditions of archaic Eastern despotism.

Another no less important prerequisite was that at the time of the invasion of the Russian Empire, the Ukrainian steppe had long ceased to be a Wild Field and had a fairly high level of melioration. This was the basis of successful military campaigns and the large-scale colonization of the region, which became known as Novorossiia. In turn, conquering the frontier territories of the steppe with its vast natural resources (chernozems/black soil, coal deposits, iron and manganese ores, etc.) was extremely important in the formation and development of capitalism in the Russian Empire and later in the modernization of the Soviet economy (Karácsonyi, Pidgrushnyi & Kovály, 2016). Therefore, the frontier zone, which has acquired the signs of geopolitical fission between European and Muscovite civilizations, shifted to the borders of Central Europe.

Global geopolitical transformations at the end of the 20th century, associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the crash of the entire socialist system in Europe, led to the drift of the frontier territory to the east.

The impulses of European integration have initiated complex and often controversial socio-political processes in the countries of Eastern Europe. The reasons for this lie in the significant differences in the identity of the populations of the former Soviet Union countries, their mentality, and basic values. The commitment of the majority of Ukraine’s population to European liberal-democratic values clashed with authoritarian-conservative traditions that were actively promoted by the Russian ruling elite in the former Soviet Union in the form of the geopolitical project “Russian world/*Russkiy mir*”. The deepening of this contradiction has taken a critical form and led to Russia’s open intervention against Ukraine in 2014.

Promotion and consolidation of the frontier zone in the western direction as part of the project to create the so-called “Novorossiia”, which would include eight regions of Ukraine – Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odessa, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. As a result of military operations in 2014, the Russian Federation annexed Crimea. By volunteer battalions and the Ukrainian army forces, the efforts to occupy six regions of the country have been thwarted, and two-thirds of the territory in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts have been liberated by Ukraine. The so-called Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics (puppet, and not diplomatic recognized states) were formed in the occupied territories.

Consequently, the frontier zone shifted to the eastern edge of Ukraine. The military intervention by the Russian Federation on this territory has caused a humanitarian catastrophe. About 1.7 million refugees (temporarily displaced persons) have moved to Ukrainian-controlled territory from the occupied part of Donbas. The majority of them settled in the eastern and southern regions of the country.

Over the next eight years, the population of Ukraine was convinced of the advantages of the European liberal-democratic socio-political system and the fundamental inability of the totalitarian model of the “Russian world” to ensure an adequate standard of living, rights, and freedoms. This was one of the main factors in the complete failure of the Russian blitzkrieg in February 2022, which presupposed the capture of the entire territory of Ukraine in a few days.

The Russian occupants have encountered massive resistance from the population not only in the north but also in the east. Within a month of relentless shelling of peaceful towns, destruction of social infrastructure, and living conditions, the occupiers have failed to capture Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts within their original administrative boundaries under the previous Ukrainian administration. The defense of Mariupol, Kharkiv, Sumy, Mykolayiv, Chernihiv, Kyiv, and other cities of the country can serve as a symbol of heroism, resilience, and patriotism.

The occupiers’ barbaric behavior with the civilian population discredits the totalitarian model of the “Russian world” they have imposed, and actively promotes the assertion of European identity throughout the country. As a consequence, we can state with confidence that Ukraine today has confirmed its affiliation to European civilization. The Euro-Atlantic community must strive to ensure that the frontier zone between the civilized world and Muscovite despotism does not move back to Central Europe.

Borders of (in)solidarity

Marcin Dębicki, Justyna Kajta, Łukasz Moll, Natalia Niedźwiecka-Iwańczak, Elżbieta Opilowska

For decades, we could observe two parallel but contrary processes – debordering and rebordering – a decreasing and at the same time increasing impact of borders. Whereas the former was linked to the process of political and economic European integration and globalization, the latter was justified by security measures. Borderlands studies have followed these developments and analyzed the changes generated by Europeanization, globalization and the recent revival of nationalism. Increasingly, the migration crises brought to the fore the question of the ethical dimension of the bordering process. By taking into consideration that borders do not only divide physical space but are also used to sort people according to the degree of their belonging, Laine (2021, p. 747) questions the state-centric thinking and emphasizes that “borders carry considerable moral weight in determining ethical responsibilities towards those who are not considered to belong”. However, since people live in networked societies today, and not in isolated national communities, the humanitarian principle is not the sole argument that borders should be made more permeable. Hence, Laine proposes the ethics of unbounded inclusiveness to move away from the nation state-centric form of organization and the rigid borders and to consider alternative forms of belongingness towards more inclusive societies.

Nevertheless, as the optimistic vision of a borderless world has already vanished, and the idea of cosmopolitical citizenship (Balibar, 2010) has not been implemented by nation states yet, we can rather observe border securitization in Europe than debordering policies (cf. Prokkola, 2021; Léonard & Kaunert, 2020). The tightening of borders and the adoption of more restrictive migration policies results in the increase of clandestine journeys and more desperate and risky attempts to enter EU member states. Thus, securitization which leads to violence, injustice and bad treatment of migrants, also provokes humanitarian impulses on the side of public opinion, NGOs, and migrant activists’ groups. In effect, securitization and humanitarianism at the border are two sides of the same coin: the former is supplemented by the latter, and the latter is determined by the former. This double-bind can be described as ‘hostipitable’ (both hostile and hospitable) condition of EU border regimes (Vaughan-Williams, 2015). What migrants face when they approach Europe is the state of indifference between security measures and human rights. The policies which should help to differentiate between unwelcomed invaders and deserving refugees only contribute to arbitrary treatment of people on the move. The role of states in having control over national borders (and their permeability to different categories of people),

but also over boundaries, which relate to social exclusion and inclusion (Donnan & Wilson, 2007) – is strongly evident in current events.

Recent months have brought new examples of this tension of both securitization and humanitarianism of border regimes in the EU, and both of them involved the Polish Eastern border. Firstly, starting in summer 2021, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania faced an increase in the number of people on the move (e.g., from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan) trying to cross the borders from Belarus. The Belarusian government organized an attempt to destabilize European politics by using migrants as ‘living weapons’ on the border. The EU, in its response, appeared to be unprepared for the migration challenge, and its asylum system failed to guarantee the access to verify the legal claims. Both the governments and the EU representatives introduced or supported a variety of tools to prevent migrants coming from Belarus to enter the EU, and, in fact, made them ‘stuck’ in a so-called no-man’s land: from implementation of states of emergency, ‘legalization’ of pushbacks, to building new fences at the border. These policies – stopping of migration by force and construction of fences – were generally supported by Polish society, but at the same time the majority of respondents declared their endorsement for humanitarian activism, helping frozen migrants in the forest or allowing NGOs and journalists at the border with Belarus. It would be hard to find a more instructive example of co-existing of securitization and humanitarianism than these sentiments of Polish society.

Secondly, Russia’s invasion in Ukraine, which started in February 2022, has been followed by the massive increase in the number of Ukrainian refugees entering Poland and other European countries. Over two million Ukrainians fled to Poland during the first four weeks of the war. In that case, EU officials, the Polish government, as well as society present much more open and warm attitudes towards refugees, providing them with support and solidarity. Seemingly, this time securitization lost – at least for now – to humanitarianism. If in the case of Belarus, Polish border guards were unready even to give migrants possibility to start asylum procedure, then in the case of war in Ukraine the government decided to let in people without giving them refugee status.

Our commentary aims to draw attention to this discrepancy and to present some hypothetical interpretations for the borders of (in)solidarity.

Firstly, borders are sacralized, religion matters. While in the case of Ukrainians we do not hear voices pointing to their religion, in the case of refugees trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian border, significance is attributed to their (alleged) connection to Islam. Importantly, the level of Islamophobia in Poland is significant (Bobako, 2017), and fueled by some Polish politicians, especially since the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015. There is a discursive construction of

the cultural otherness of the migrant-Muslim-terrorist-jihadist-rapist (Legut & Pędziwiatr, 2018), which is presented as the antithesis of Europeanness, at the same time confirming the coherence of European identity in tension with its Strange. On the one hand, in the case of Polish history, the confrontation with the oriental invaders fits into the well-entrenched myth of the bulwark of Christianity (*antemurale christianitis*). The Ukrainians, on the other hand, are the Others of Europe rather than the Strangers and because of their pro-European aspirations, now confirmed by their war effort, they find themselves in a kind of waiting room on the road to Europe.

Secondly – although not without a strong link to the previous point – borders are racialized. Syrians, Afghans, Congolese and citizens of many other countries are representatives of cultures and civilizations other than those with which an average Pole is more or less familiar. Even if biological racism may be less acceptable today than it was in the past, there is greater acceptance of the racialization of cultural differences, in which the phenomenon of the ‘racialization of borders’ plays an important role (Tazzioli, 2021). According to a commonly shared statement, the Ukrainians are culturally close to Poles, with whom they have been learning to live in the same country for several years, not without success. It is also worth remembering here the more centuries-old multicultural but also paracolonsing Polish experience with the Ukrainians, including Poles’ sentiments to the *Kresy* (the Eastern area lost by Poland in the aftermath of the World War II). This differentiated attitude towards people on the move is also expressed in the policy of the Polish government towards Ukrainian refugees, framed by the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine (Ustawa, 2022). Support (eligibility for social assistance and benefits) and a number of entitlements are only available to persons with Ukrainian citizenship and their spouses. This divides war refugees into wanted and unwanted.

Thirdly, borders are gendered. While in the case of the refugees on the Belarusian border the high percentage of young men, who are perceived as a threat to security, was highlighted, in the case of Ukraine it is mainly vulnerable women with children who are fleeing the war.

Fourthly, borders are geopoliticized. The Ukrainians are fleeing from an aggressor who, in the Polish experience and projections of the future, occupies a particularly prominent place on the scale of hostility. Today’s assistance is a continuation of the political, material and symbolic support Poland has already given to Kiev. Meanwhile, the oppressor from which Africans and Asians flee is, like these categories, taken from a high (continental) level of generality – as if more undefined, untamed, and above all distant. When dealing with migrants from Belarus, the opponent in the eyes of Polish society is rather the Belarusian regime,

which is criticized on a daily basis for the repression of its own citizens, with whom Poles have also expressed solidarity.

A cursory look at the situation suggests that we are dealing with a combination of historical, political, religious-cultural, gender and psychological factors. This in turn only widens the gap between the two types of people on the move, regardless of the direction in which the „Ukrainian question” will evolve in Poland. What both of these examples suggest is that humane treatment of migrants and hospitality towards newcomers is more probable when it is organized not in abstract terms of ‘human rights’, ‘saving lives’, and/or ‘rescuing these poor things’, but when it is articulated by deeper bonds – of being a neighbour, a sister/brother, an ally, an (assimilated) Other or an aspiring European. The more advanced analysis of these experiences is needed to determine what the limits are of Polish/European in/hospitality and how they are socially constructed.

2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis from the Polish perspective

Ewa Ganowicz, Wojciech Opiola

One of the first and massive consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine was the refugee crisis. As of April 11, 2022, there are 4.6 million people who have left Ukraine since February 24, and about 7 million people who have fled the war-affected areas and are still living within the territory of Ukraine. During the first 60 days of the war, the refugee crisis directly affected 28% of the population. The country that received the most refugees at that time was Poland, who took in over 2.6 million people.

From the Polish perspective, not only the described ‘hostipitability’ paradox is interesting with its double standards of refugee policy, but the way the refugee crisis was managed in the first weeks was also remarkable to witness. Our observations lead us to consider it a good example of the effectiveness of cross-sectoral cooperation and participatory governance. In the first days, humanitarian aid was given by NGOs and private individuals. Local and regional self-government, and government administration needed time to work out optimal mechanisms. It is also interesting from the perspective of Polish internal policy: the third sector, which provides aid to refugees, is discriminated by the right-wing, populist Polish government, deprived of access to public funds, and is also the target of an attack in the information war.

Inter-sectoral cooperation is one of the principles of the participatory governance idea, which allows for the use of resources of different sectors: public (government, self-government), private (business), and non-government (charities, NGOs). The practice of modern liberal democracies assumes cooperation of the

first, second, and third sectors in the implementation of public policies. In this cooperation, the market sector has to propose, first of all, a management model based on efficiency and effectiveness. Non-governmental organizations, on the other hand, have better knowledge of social problems than the administration and have the ability to quickly adapt to the implementation of non-standard activities. The reason for the inclusion of market and social actors was the „dysfunctionality of the state, related to the knowledge deficit, increasing as the complexity of the social order deepens” (Hausner, 2008, p. 19). Below, based on the example of actions taken in the city of Opole during the first three weeks of the war, the logic of action under the so-called participatory governance was presented. The analysis is based on our observations and interviews with people involved in helping refugees in Opole, Medyka, Przemyśl (Poland), and Mościska (Ukraine).

Although the Opole Province is located far from the Polish-Ukrainian border, like other regions of Poland, it has permanent and strong contact with Ukrainian cities and regions (mainly Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv). According to estimations of Voivodship Office, there are about a dozen thousand refugees in the province, of which 7-10 thousand in Opole city (as of April 11, 2022). The first aid operations took place on the second and third days of the war. On the initiative of private individuals and associations, a fundraiser was established, and food and medicine were collected. Very quickly, on February 24, the Polish Scouts Organization was organized. In Opole, scouts coordinated, among others, transport of medicines to Ukraine, the operation of the municipal refugee aid point, and organized an aid point directly on the border in Medyka. The HumanDoc Foundation also started its operations on the first day. On February 25 and 26, the first, mainly privately organized transports of gifts to the border were carried out by private cars and buses, and refugees were picked up on the way back. Ukrainian students living in Opole and entrepreneurs who employed Ukrainians, including the Adecco company, organized transport, accommodation, and a Ukrainian-speaking call center. This first phase, lasting several days, was a spontaneous, mass, grassroots, and uncoordinated initiative. With the arrival of more and more refugees, it was necessary to coordinate activities and involve local governments and uniformed services on a large scale.

Efforts to coordinate aid to refugees began on Monday, the fifth day of the war. At that time, the first coordination meeting of city authorities, associations and foundations, police, fire brigades, border guards, and a social welfare center, took place in the town hall. At the meeting, contact persons from each of the institutions involved were designated, through which information was to flow, and specific tasks were delegated. On the part of the public sector, not only was the city involved in the aid, but also the Voivodship Office, which organized an information point at the station. The Self-government of the Opolskie

Voivodeship, for example, coordinated the activities of the fire brigade. In the first days of each public institution, efforts were made to identify what actions could be taken based on the available resources: financial, material, and human. In our view, in the first days, the cooperation between the local government – business and the third sector looked much better than the cooperation between the local government (municipality, self-government of the Province) and the government administration (provincial government office), which often initiated the same actions without informing or coordinating theirs. Information chaos was also widespread, intensified by the fact that in the first days of the war, there were no legal regulations concerning, for instance, the legal status of people arriving from Ukraine. Nevertheless, the transition from the spontaneous help phase to the organized help phase has been quite smooth.

In the second and third weeks of the war, the scheme was as follows: transports of food, drugs, and other basic goods were sent to the border based on the demand provided by the cooperating Ukrainian institutions (e.g. Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk local governments, Ukrainian scouts, Polish minority organizations, private persons). Buses and coaches for refugees were sent there too. Transport was financed from various sources, partly by the entrepreneurs, and partly by public collections. Scouts from Opole were constantly present at the border. Assistance points for refugees at the border were organized on both sides of the border. In the case of the Medyka-Szeginie border crossing, the point was located in Mosciska, Ukraine (about 10 km from the border), where refugees could receive, among others, accommodation, food, and beverages, and on the Polish side in Medyka (directly on the border) and Przemyśl (10 km from the border). Humanitarian help supplies were sorted at the logistics centers in Przemyśl and Mościska and then sent to the final destinations. In turn, refugees coming from the border to Opole were directed to one of the help points, where they could obtain basic information, eat a meal, and then – if they had no one to stay with – were sent to one of the accommodation facilities organized in cooperation with universities (the University of Technology and University of Opole dormitories) and the former Praktiker market hall. In the following days, refugees could count on help, such as Polish language lessons (organized by, among others, Ukrainian students), childcare, or formalities.

The above-described observations are rather sketchy, but our intention was not a delivery of a detailed description of the help, but to rather point out how important non-governmental associations are for increasing the level of civic engagement and strengthening the bridging of social capital.

Uncertainty, borders and Ukraine's tragedy

Bartosz Czepil

The tragedy of Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought to the fore the issue of state borders and demonstrated, once again, its direct connection with the collective feeling of security among European nations. For a long time, people in Europe have not been as concerned about their future as they are now because of what is happening with and around the borders. After 24th of February 2022, borders have spoken aloud recalling about their multidimensional nature and intangible, nearly forgotten importance. The invasion on Ukraine is accompanied by multiple examples of crossing borders and the construction of new ones - the process causing uncertainty and collective fear mixed with transnational, however limited, solidarity towards the Ukrainian nation. According to the public opinion poll conducted in Poland between 8-10th of March, 54% of respondents believed that Russia could attack Poland in the coming years, while 42% did not agree with such scenario. But 72% declared that they were afraid "more than ever" about the future of their own and their closest ones (Pacewicz, 2022). This is data for the country close the front line of the war and with historical experience of being under the tsarist-soviet yoke. Therefore, we might assume that responses to the survey would have been different moving westward. Nevertheless, it seems that the European countries were still shocked when something being anticipated many months before has proven to be an/the unavoidable reality of Russian bombs destroying Ukrainian cities.

If we follow David Neman's postulate to approach border "beyond its traditional territorial sense to include the many other notions of border which encloses groups and identities" (Newman, 2003), we can say that the aggression on Ukraine stepped on many borders. The territorial ones are of crucial importance, and it was clearly articulated in the speech given by the US president Joe Biden in Warsaw on March 26th. During his passionate message, he referred openly to borders several times, distinguishing the two of them. The first one is the Ukrainian-Russian border addressed when Biden recalled that the USA had warned saying "they are going to cross the border" after it was clear that the Russian side was not interested in diplomatic solutions. Ukraine was also supported economically by the USA "before they crossed the border". In this speech violating Ukrainian borders (actually the next step against territorial integrity of Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea in 2014) appears not only as a physical act of territorial expansion, but as an opening of the new era in the global political landscape. The second border referred to by the American president is NATO's eastern border, where "Russia wanted less of a NATO presence on its border, but now he has [we have] a stronger presence, a larger presence, with over a hundred thousand

American troops here (...)” (Biden, 2022). In this case we see the reinforcement of NATO’s eastern frontiers as a reaction to a violent stepping across Ukrainian borders. Unfortunately for Ukraine, it is now in between these two fundamentally different types of borders – the western one getting stronger and tougher, while the eastern one being in the making where demarcation lines are drawn by blood.

There is also another point worth mentioning – the importance of invisible borders hailed by Joe Biden when framing the war in Ukraine as something much bigger, because the “battle for democracy did not conclude” with the end of the Cold War. Right in front of our eyes this battle is still being fought on Ukrainian territory by the nation which clearly has chosen to be included into axiological and institutional boundaries of the Western world. In terms of territorial borders, Ukraine is still located between the two worlds embodying contradictory political order, but in axiological terms its act of collective resistance and self-determination has already made Ukraine cross the borders towards the Western axiological community. It reminds me of a seminal essay by Milan Kundera published in 1984 *Tragedy of Central Europe*, where he makes the point that although Central Europe was politically “kidnapped”² by the Soviet Union, culturally it still belonged to the West (Kundera, 1984). I believe that some similarities might be discerned when discussing the current tragedy of Ukraine as a country stuck in between, trying to resist imposition of the Kremlin’s demarcated political borders, and at the same time having its cultural identity already embedded in the realm of Western borders. Let us hope that this cultural capital will not be squandered, and the West, including Poland as a future advocate of the Ukraine’s EU ambitions, will spare no efforts in incorporating Ukraine into its political borders. It should be emphasized once again that this is also in interest of preserving secured political and cultural borders of the West.

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