

З.С. | Зовнішні справи

*Заснований у 1991 році
Випускається 6 разів на рік*

**Том 33, № 6
2023**

ISSN: 2663-2675
E-ISSN: 2663-2683

**Свідоцтво про державну реєстрацію
друкованого засобу масової інформації**
Серія: KB № 24816-14756 ПР від 31.03.2021 р.

Журнал включено до
Переліку наукових фахових видань України (Категорія «Б»)
з історичних наук (Наказ Міністерства освіти і науки України № 1188
від 24 вересня 2020 р.)

Журнал представлено
у таких наукометричних базах:
Google Scholar, НБУ ім. В. І. Вернадського,
Фахові видання України, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)

Зовнішні справи / Ред. кол.: Т. В. Сидорук та ін. – Київ: Громадська спілка «Редакція журналу «Зовнішні справи», 2023. – Том 33, № 6. – 64 с.

Засновник і видавець:
Громадська спілка «Редакція журналу «Зовнішні справи»
01001, пров. Рильський, 6, м. Київ, Україна
E-mail: info@uaforeignaffairs.com
<https://uaforeignaffairs.com/uk>

F.A. | **Foreign Affairs**

*Founded in 1991
Published six times per year*

**Volume 33, No. 6
2023**

ISSN: 2663-2675
E-ISSN: 2663-2683

**Certificate of state registration
of the print media**

Series: KV No. 24816-14756 PR dated 31.03.2021

Journal included in List of scientific professional publications of Ukraine (Category “B”)
in Historical Sciences (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 1188
of September 24, 2020)

**Journal is presented
in the following scientometric databases:**

Google Scholar, VNLU, Professional publications
of Ukraine, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)

Foreign Affairs / Ed. col.: T. V. Sydoruk et al. – Kyiv: Public Union Editorial Board of the Journal
“Foreign Affairs”, 2023. – Volume 33, No. 6. – 64 p.

Founder and publisher:

Public Union Editorial Board of the Journal “Foreign Affairs”
01001, 6 Rylskyi Ln., Kyiv, Ukraine
E-mail: info@uaforeignaffairs.com
<https://uaforeignaffairs.com/en>

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DOI: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.8-12

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Bloody Christmas tree. Ten years later

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Кривава «йолка». 10 років потому

Emotions are erased, facts remain

Perhaps every person has moments of truth in their life that influence their life choices. Such a catalyst in my life was the bloody night from November 29 to 30, 2013 on Independence Square in Kyiv, which outraged the whole world. The events of that night determined my civic position on all further socio-political changes in Ukraine and my position as the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN.

2013 was a very difficult year for Ukraine. The bloody November night was preceded by a series of chain events known in political theory as the butterfly effect. This includes the growing tension in the country due to the government's hesitation to sign an agreement with the EU, and Moscow's fierce information pressure on the government to prevent Ukraine from retreating from the Kremlin's Eurasian integration plans, which initially sparked peaceful protests across Ukraine, which the authoritarian Kyiv regime used force to suppress. This and more are described in some notes from my diary for 2013.

Association with the EU: to sign cannot be postponed

The whole of 2013 was spent in Ukraine in a political grammar competition between the government and the opposition over the comma in the text, which was presented

as a subtitle. During his presidency from February 2010 to February 2014, Viktor Yanukovich repeatedly changed his decision on association with the European Union. Until the end of September 2013, Ukrainians heard assurances from the Pechersk hills that the course of integration with the EU was irreversible. However...

At the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN, we rejoiced at every step towards rapprochement with the EU, which we informed the UN leadership and the world community about. I was invited to comment by leading international media outlets, American think tanks, and universities.

In my diary, I keep records that on December 19, 2011, at the EU – Ukraine summit, the completion of negotiations on the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was announced. Several of my fellow EU ambassadors to the UN told me at the time: "You know, Yuriy, in our estimation, this Agreement is more ambitious than similar agreements concluded by the EU with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe".

On 2 April 2012, I informed the UN Secretary-General that on 30 March, the heads of the negotiating delegations initiated the Association Agreement. In late July, at a meeting with EU ambassadors to the UN, we discussed the good news that a week ago (19 July) the section of

Received: 18.08.2023, Revised: 01.11.2023, Accepted: 21.11.2023

Suggested Citation:

Sergeyev, Yu. (2023). Bloody Christmas tree. Ten years later. *Foreign Affairs*, 33(6), 8-12. doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.8-12.

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the Agreement on the establishment of a free trade area was initialed, a significant step towards further distancing ourselves from the Kremlin's integration plans. From late 2012 to mid-2013, the draft agreement was officially translated into Ukrainian and the languages of the EU member states. Our friends, the EU ambassadors, informed us about the progress of the work in their capitals. And finally, the famous event that I hasten to inform Ban Ki-moon and fellow ambassadors about: On 15 May 2013, the Board of the European Commission decided to recommend that the Council of the EU sign the Agreement and allow its provisional application until the ratification procedures are completed by the EU Member States. On 9 August 2013, the draft Agreement was published on the website of the Government of Ukraine. We were pleased to extend to the ambassadors of the EU member states to the UN the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on September 18, 2013 "On Preparations for the Signing of the Draft Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part".

There was nothing to suggest that Ukraine would deviate from this path. Moreover, on September 24, President Viktor Yanukovich said from the rostrum of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly: "I firmly believe that the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union in November this year, including the creation of a comprehensive and deep free trade area, will become an important tool for improving the well-being of Ukrainian citizens and, accordingly, will contribute to our country's achievement of the Millennium Development Goals" (Solonyna, 2013). On the same day, Yanukovich met with the NATO Secretary General. Anders Fogh Rasmussen was pleased (as can be seen in Fig. 1) to receive Viktor Yanukovich's information that Ukraine is steadily moving towards Euro-Atlantic integration.



Figure 1. Viktor Yanukovich during a meeting with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen
Source: Ukrinform (2013)

Everything changed after Viktor Yanukovich met with President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso. I did not attend the meeting (I stayed in the General

Assembly hall, where the high-level debate continued), but I heard about the change in the President's views when I accompanied him in the car from the UN headquarters to the hotel. "What kind of democrats are they? What kind of rule of law is there in the European Union? How can they demand that I release a criminal and put this as a prerequisite for signing the Association Agreement? Why do we need such partners?" the president said angrily.

I have heard that at his previous meetings with EU leaders, the demand to release Yulia Tymoshenko was quite strong, but I did not expect such a reaction from Viktor Yanukovich. The day before, in my car, he had been gently singing a lullaby about bears to his grandson, and it seemed that he was happy with everything in his life, but now I was with a completely different person – furious and unrestrained in his anger.

After this last conversation with the president, I was no longer surprised by the next development of events. The experts subsequently explained that Viktor Yanukovich changed his mind to sign an Association Agreement with the EU after a face-to-face meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on November 9, 2013, at a military airport near Moscow, but for me personally, it became clear that Yanukovich had not made this decision in November 2013, but had been planning it for some time. And he actually voiced it in my car on September 24. At the time, I was uncomfortable with what I heard and ashamed of how much effort Ukrainian diplomats had put into preparing the Agreement, how many meetings we had held at the UN to convince our colleagues and the UN leadership that Ukraine was steadily moving towards reintegration (in such terms) into the European family of nations, where it had been before it fell into the "arms" of the Muscovites.

In the second half of autumn, the Kremlin began to intensify disinformation about the dangers of Ukraine's agreement with the EU. Sergey Glazyev, adviser to the president of Russia on regional economic integration, was the most active in lying. He predicted the split of Ukrainian society after the Association, the economic collapse of our state, and stated that Kyiv's European integration contradicts the requirements of the basic treaty with the Russian Federation. His statements were spread not only by Russian, but also by pro-Russian Ukrainian media. There was no reaction to Glazyev's rantings from the Ukrainian government at the time. The only person who publicly stated that "we are surprised by his (Glazyev's) persistent attempts to impose on the citizens of our countries some catastrophic and, probably, his own scenarios for the development of Ukrainian-Russian relations" was the speaker of the Ministry of foreign affairs of Ukraine – Yevhen Perebiynis (Ukraine does not violate..., 2013).

Unfortunately, pro-Russian forces in the Ukrainian government succeeded in getting the Cabinet of Ministers to adopt a decision on 21 November, No. 905-r, to suspend the process of "preparing for the conclusion of the Association Agreement between Ukraine, of the one part, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the other part" (2013), and to revoke the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 18 September 2013 On preparations for the signing of

the “Draft Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part” (The Government has adopted..., 2013). The preamble of this decision directly quotes word for word Glazyev’s postulates on the need to suspend the conclusion of the agreement with the EU in order to “take measures to ensure the national security of Ukraine, to study and elaborate in more detail the set of measures to be taken to restore the lost production volumes and directions of trade and economic relations with the Russian Federation and other member states of the Union of Independent States, to form an appropriate level of the internal market that would ensure parity relations between Ukraine and the member states of the European Union, which is the basic principle of international law and the basis of economic security of the state” (Regulation of the Cabinet of ministers era, 2013). I was ashamed to look into the eyes of my fellow ambassadors of EU member states, whom I and my colleagues had been convincing for many months of Ukraine’s determination to integrate into the European democratic space.

This decision of the Cabinet of Ministers increased protest moods in Ukraine. On November 23, 2013, well-known figures in Ukraine – politicians, dissidents, scientists, writers, many of whom I knew personally – made a powerful appeal to the Ukrainian people. Here is the text of the statement signed by Dmytro Pavlychko, Yuriy Shcherbak, Yuriy Mushketik and others: “On November 21, 2013, the government of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, following the order of President Viktor Yanukovich, suspended the process of preparations for the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. V. Yanukovich despised the European choice supported by the majority of the Ukrainian people and grossly violated the legislation of Ukraine. President V. Yanukovich has once again shown the world his anti-Ukrainian, pro-Moscow essence. Ukrainian people, compatriots, our brothers and sisters! The moment of truth has come! Let us unite against the coup d’etat! Our categorical demand to the President of Ukraine is to sign the Association Agreement at the Eastern Partnership meeting in Vilnius on November 28-29. We call on all citizens of Ukraine, people of different nationalities and different faiths to unite around this demand. Only our unity can force the traitors to leave, and we must return Ukraine to the European path. Away from the Kremlin’s yoke! Glory to European Ukraine!” (A call to the Ukrainian people..., 2013).

During the week of November 21-29, peaceful, mostly student-run, EuroMaidans were held in Kyiv and the regions, without political demands, politicians, or political symbols. Several hundred thousand Ukrainians came out with the only demand for President Viktor Yanukovich – to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. Such demonstrations were also held in front of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN. Closer to the EU summit in Vilnius, they became more widespread (Fig. 2). On November 29, at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit, President Viktor Yanukovich finally dashed activists’ hopes that this document would be signed. The protest as such, according to observers, lost its meaning.



Figure 2. Demonstrators in front of the House of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN (November 2013)
Source: author’s archive

But President Yanukovich, without signing the Agreement, returned from Vilnius to Kyiv and disappeared for several days, without explaining anything to the nation, which had been fed the prospect of association with the EU for several years. In an interview later given by the first President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk to the NewsOne programme *Batsman LIVE*, we learn about the details of Yanukovich’s disappearance. It turned out that the ex-president on his return immediately went hunting with the guests to the Mezhyhirya residence. Leonid Kravchuk was one of the guests of Yanukovich (Kravchuk: On the night..., 2017). In one of his interviews at that time, MP Serhiy Leshchenko said that Yanukovich was simply afraid to meet with protesters. I found out about this cowardice of Yanukovich and his running off to hunt instead of explaining to the people what he had done in Vilnius before Leonid Kravchuk’s interview, namely, on the evening of November 1 from my university friend, General Mykola Malomuzh. My wife Natalka and I became disgusted.

I am with you

We at the Permanent Mission are so accustomed to demonstrations in front of our diplomatic mission in November that it was no surprise to me that on Friday, November 29, the district police informed the Permanent Mission that on Sunday, December 1, at the initiative of the Ukrainian Student Association of America (USAA), another demonstration would take place at the Permanent Mission in New York, but this time to protest the government’s refusal to sign the agreement with the EU. On this occasion, in the evening of the same day, the chairman of the Ukrainian Congressional Committee of America Tamara Gallo Olexiy called me and asked me to receive representatives of the protesters with their petition on Sunday. I agreed. I asked the entire staff of our Permanent Mission to be at their workplaces on this day. Saturday morning on November 30 in Kyiv changed everything – both the scenario of the Sunday demonstration and my intentions.

On the night of November 29-30, several hundred students remained on the Maidan Nezalezhnosti Square. As in all the previous days, my wife Natalka and I did not leave the TV and also followed what was happening on the Internet. From the reports of correspondents of Espresso TV,

the BBC, Reuters, and others, we learn that in the morning of November 30 (in New York it was still 10 pm on November 29), the authorities committed an unheard-of crime: a bloody dispersal of Maidan activists by special forces. The authorities' motive for clearing Independence Square was a Christmas tree, which, suddenly, began to be installed on the Maidan under the screams of young people, beaten by Berkut soldiers with batons. Natalka's and my hearts, both former lecturers at Kyiv universities, were in pain as we watched live as hefty riot police beat up the youth sitting under the Independence Statue. It was this bloodbath that actually triggered the real Revolution, and this horrific massacre has forever left a mark on our memory. Meanwhile, Viktor Yanukovich, after the hunt, according to Leonid Kravchuk, sang karaoke (Kravchuk: On the night..., 2017).

The internet exploded with comments: on the morning of November 30, the whole of Ukraine woke up from lethargic sleep, disappointment, and indifference. The patience has run out! At one point, the whole of Ukraine rose up... On December 1, the entire block in front of the Permanent Mission was flooded with protesters. The slogans of the demonstrators changed, and it was no longer about "Ukraine chooses EU" and "Ukraine is Europe", but about the crime committed by the authorities, the violation of human rights: "We are not cattle, we are the people", "No to dictatorship" (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Slogans of protesters after November 30, 2013
Source: author's archive

I decided to go out to the protesting community. In front of my eyes were the youth from the Maidan. I did not have a prepared text for my speech. Everything happened quickly – someone immediately gave me a loudspeaker and then followed my emotional impromptu. The Ukrainian-American journal "Time and Events" in the article by L. Korsun (2013) "Ukraine has risen. New York Supports..." my speech is reproduced verbatim:

"I am speaking as a citizen of Ukraine. You can fool people for a while, but you cannot fool them all the time. What is happening today in Ukraine, not only in Kyiv but all over the world, is the response of people who want freedom and dignity. I am outraged by the attempt against the constitutional rights of our citizens, on the right to express their will, the right to free assembly. I am outraged that an attempt has been made against international law, against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which we are a part.

Together with you, I demand an investigation of what happened. And not just what happened. But why did it happen? Why are students intimidated by scholarships and dismissals? Why does the Christmas tree win on the balance of national interests and the Christmas tree? ...I am with you".

Someone of the protesters distributed this speech on social media. Reportedly, it was shown on EuroMaidan screens in many Ukrainian cities. I should have expected that my diplomatic career would end there. I do not know why, but at that moment I frankly did not care. Moreover, when I returned to the Permanent Mission building, I felt the full support of my colleagues. And most importantly, my family supported me.



Figure 4. Me with a loudspeaker among the protesters
Source: author's archive

I learned from press reports that the First Secretary of the Consulate General of Ukraine in Ottawa (Canada) Natalia Golub announced her resignation in protest. The Consul General in Istanbul, Bohdan Yaremenko, was dismissed after a harsh assessment of the government's actions on "Bloody Saturday". It was strange to hear that Minister Kozhara accused Bohdan of violating the oath of a civil servant and recalled him from office. Where did a lawyer by profession Kozhara find anything in the text of the oath that gave him the right to such an accusation?

Ban Ki-moon: "Listen to your people"

I also thought about resigning, realising that logically the Kozhara could recall me, but the hesitation was short-lived – I did not violate anything that is written in the oath of a civil servant, so I decided to continue working. And then it will be as it goes. My conscience told me to use my established connections at the UN and my trusting relations with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in order to try to involve the UN to stop the dangerous development of the situation in Ukraine after the "Bloody Saturday". This has become my principled civic position.

I found an entry in my diary that already on December 2, after my conversation with Ban-Ki-Moon, his press secretary made a statement that "the Secretary-General is closely following the events in Ukraine. He called on all parties to act with restraint, to avoid any further violence and to uphold the democratic principles of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The Secretary-General encourages meaningful dialogue among all parties in the pursuit of a prosperous future for Ukraine and mutual

agreement between Ukrainians on the country's future path" (Euronews, 2013).

During December 1-3, my mobile phone and email received messages of support for my Sunday speech from my colleagues-ambassadors to the UN, ordinary citizens of Ukraine. A significant conviction in the correctness of my position was the statement of the former presidents of Ukraine on December 4 (Kravchuk *et al.*, 2013). The former leaders of the state called on the authorities not to resort to any actions involving the use of force against civilians and to adequately assess the significance of events unfolding in the country, objectively investigate every case of violence, and not to resort to criminal prosecution of those who protested peacefully. The statement stressed that any options for radicalisation, violence, and totalitarian forms of government, as a response to the position of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, should be categorically denied. On the same day, I informally submitted the translation of the text of the statement of the former presidents to the Office of the UN Secretary-General, sent it to fellow EU ambassadors to the UN, the leadership of the Ukrainian community of the United States.

The situation in Ukraine was becoming increasingly tense. I found in my diary notes of the first days of December: on December 2, 2013, a column consisting of 5-6 thousand participants of the rally in the centre of Kyiv left Independence Square for the Cabinet of Ministers, the action was peaceful, the protesters planned to remind about their demand – the resignation of the government and the president. The protesters blocked the entrances to the Cabinet of Ministers.

Three western regions have gone on strike, the EU no longer believed in the "association" under Yanukovich, sessions of regional councils were being held, two Crimean deputies asked Putin to send troops, Ukrainians around the world were joining the March of a Million announced in Ukraine on December 8, the diaspora in 20 cities of the world

supported Kyiv, rallies were taking place near our Permanent Mission in New York – all this against the background of the OSCE Ministerial Forum (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe), which took place in Kyiv on December 5-6. Among other things, human rights issues were discussed, and the Ukrainian authorities tried to convince that there were no problems with the protection of human rights. Subsequently, the chairman of this forum, Minister Kozhara, during questioning as a witness in the Sviatoshynskyi District Court of Kyiv, tried to refute the beating of students by Berkut soldiers on Independence Square on the night of November 30 to December 1, 2013. Disgrace!

I informed the UN Secretary-General and his deputy for Political Affairs, Geoffrey Feltman, about the course of events in Ukraine almost daily. On December 8, Ban Ki-moon had a telephone conversation with Viktor Yanukovich, during which he "expressed serious concern about the situation in Ukraine and stressed that violence should not be resorted to, and called for a peaceful dialogue between all interested parties". Ban Ki-moon then told me that the purpose of this call was to tell the Ukrainian authorities what he basically advises all heads of state and government – "listen to your people and try to hear them". At his press conference on December 16, the UN Secretary-General said: "I call on all parties in Ukraine to act with restraint and support the principles of freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. I spoke again with Ukrainian President Yanukovich last weekend to encourage dialogue on the country's future path".

Thus, 2013 came to an end. Very dramatic finale of the year. At the beginning of the year, many experts predicted that it would bring unexpected turns and changes in people's lives, causing instability and volatility. That is what happened to Ukraine.

Perhaps I did something rash in 2013, but I am not ashamed of what I did.

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UDC 327.5
DOI: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.13-21

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The Baltic-Black Sea Axis: Historical background and implementation factors

Abstract. In the context of current geopolitical challenges and reorganisation of the world order, the study of the Baltic-Black Sea axis is of great strategic importance for understanding the processes and interconnections in the region that affect its stability and development. The purpose of this study was to retrospectively analyse the historical development of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis and identify the main factors that will contribute to its implementation. The study uses a set of methods, including the historical method, the method of geopolitical analysis, and the method of forecasting the development of further cooperation between the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region. The study thoroughly analysed the stages of the emergence and development of the idea of creating a superpower association, considering different historical periods. It was determined that in the initial stages, this idea was mainly economic and cultural, promoting the exchange and development of trade routes. In its further development, specifically during the growing political instability in the region, the project of creating a geopolitical association acquired important military significance, creating a basis for joint defence in the future. An essential element of this study is the analysis of current geopolitical and economic trends that affect the further development of the axis. Furthermore, the study found the potential for further expanding cooperation in the fields of culture, education, and science. In general, this analysis shows the importance and prospects of cooperation between the participants of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis, which can become a crucial factor in the geopolitical and economic development of the region. The practical significance of this study is that its findings will contribute to a better understanding of the historical background and potential of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, which may open new opportunities for cooperation and development in the region, and will also serve as a basis for further research in the field of international relations and geopolitics

Keywords: geopolitical cooperation; strategic alliances; economy; integration; military aspects; potential

Introduction

In today's world, where geopolitical shifts and economic dependencies are becoming key factors in determining international relations, the study of the history and development of regional strategic alliances is becoming extremely relevant. Specifically, the Baltic-Black Sea axis is an important one, as it is one of the possible international associations of economic, cultural, and geopolitical interests in Central and Eastern Europe. The Baltic-Black Sea axis is becoming an object of growing interest for analysis and study, as it aims to unite countries and regions of prominent geostrategic importance (Sinovets & Maksymenko, 2020).

The problem of this study is that so far there has been no exhaustive analysis of the historical background and factors of the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis in the complex. Existing studies, while containing important

findings, mostly focus on separate aspects, without fully covering the evolution of the idea of creating this association from the beginning to the present. The lack of a comprehensive approach to this topic in terms of understanding its historical background and current challenges hinders a more profound understanding of its essence.

Specifically, in the article by A. Djakona & K. Kikste (2023), the authors analyse the potential of the Baltic and Black Sea region's unification. They study the factors that facilitate or hinder the development of such an alliance and predict the prospects for its development. The authors argue that there are substantial economic ties between the countries of both regions, which can serve as a basis for further geopolitical cooperation. Researchers also address the potential for joint military defence in the event of a

Received: 23.07.2023, Revised: 28.10.2023, Accepted: 21.11.2023

Suggested Citation:

Sidletska, O. (2023). The Baltic-Black Sea Axis: Historical background and implementation factors. *Foreign Affairs*, 33(6), 13-21. doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.13-21.

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threat to both regions. However, researchers focus mainly on the aspects of economic and military cooperation, with insufficient attention paid to the analysis of cultural and political aspects, which are also important for the successful functioning of such an association.

R. Panchuk (2020) analyses scientific research on the concepts of geopolitical integration of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The study assesses the views and concepts of various scholars on the possibilities and prospects of this association. The author shows that there are different approaches to understanding and implementing the idea of geopolitical integration of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The author emphasises that it is important to find a balance between different aspects of integration to achieve a successful functioning of the union. However, the analysis focuses mainly on an overview of different opinions on geopolitical integration, without providing a detailed analysis of concrete methods and instruments that can be used to achieve this goal. Additional study of concrete practical aspects of integration could broaden the understanding of the opportunities and challenges that arise in the context of the Baltic-Black Sea axis.

The study by A. Doroshko & I. Tsyra (2021) investigates the concept of the Baltic-Black Sea region as a geopolitical reality. They analyse whether this alliance exists as an independent geopolitical entity and what factors influence its formation. The authors conclude that the concept of the Baltic-Black Sea region is important and justified in the context of current geopolitical and economic realities. They emphasise the existing cultural, economic, and political ties between the countries of the two regions, which can serve as a basis for further geopolitical cooperation. However, the study does not provide a detailed analysis of the possible obstacles and challenges facing the creation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union. An additional review of the possible obstacles, including political, economic, and other aspects, could broaden the understanding and identify ways to overcome these difficulties on the way to implementing the idea of a Baltic-Black Sea association [4].

In the article by M. Gladyshev *et al.* (2022), the authors examine the political and security aspects of the Baltic-Black Sea region. They explore the possibility of increasing the region's resilience in the face of geopolitical challenges. The authors identify the key aspects that contribute to the resilience of the Baltic-Black Sea region, focusing specifically on political cooperation and security mechanisms. The researchers recommend intensifying cooperation between the countries of the region to strengthen its stability. However, this study is limited to approaches to the political and security aspects of the region and does not provide a complete overview of other key aspects, such as the economy, socio-cultural interaction, and geopolitical perspectives. Additional research into these aspects could broaden the overall understanding of the potential and challenges associated with the Baltic-Black Sea region.

The study by M. Khylo (2023) reinterprets the Black Sea security factor. The author analyses the current situation in the region and highlights the key aspects affecting its security. Khylo concludes that crisis management and conflict prevention in the Black Sea requires strengthening

joint efforts and more effective mechanisms of cooperation between the countries of the region. However, the study did not consider the full impact of economic factors on the security of the region and the ability of economic instruments to ensure stability.

The study by O. Brusylovska *et al.* (2022) focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region. The study examines the response of countries to the pandemic and its impact on various sectors of society. Specifically, the report highlighted the decline in economic activity, rising unemployment and other economic challenges faced by the countries of the region, as well as analysed international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic and the level of solidarity between countries.

Analysing the above, it can be argued that most studies in this area have focused on certain aspects, such as economic cooperation or political interaction, but this is insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of the establishment and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to thoroughly analyse the historical background of the establishment and development of the axis, identify the key factors that contributed to the idea of creating this superpower association and its implementation in the context of current geopolitical realities, and to substantiate possible ways to further develop cooperation between the participants of this strategic alliance.

Materials and Methods

To fulfil the purpose of this study, various methods of scientific cognition were employed, such as the historical method, the method of geopolitical analysis, and the method of forecasting the development of further cooperation between the countries of the region. The historical method is one of the key components of this study, as it helped to carefully examine the development of the axis over different historical periods and identify key events and factors that influenced the project's emergence. This method also helped to identify the cultural, economic, and political ties between the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea regions throughout different eras. The study helped to consider the impact of global and regional events, such as wars, geopolitical conflicts, and economic crises, on the implementation of the idea of creating a geopolitical association and the relations of the member states with other regions.

Geopolitical analysis is an important method of studying relations between countries and regions in the context of their geographical location, political interests, economic resources, and strategic goals. In this study, the examination of geopolitical conflicts and common interests helped to understand what factors contributed to the development of the axis and what may hinder the cooperation in the future. The geopolitical analysis helped to identify opportunities for strategic cooperation between the countries, as well as geopolitical factors that could affect the stability and security of the region.

The method of forecasting the development of further cooperation between the countries of the region includes various aspects that allow analysing and predicting

the future development of cooperation. This forecasting method is based on the analysis of current trends, historical events, and the current state of relations between countries. A careful analysis of past events helped to identify which factors facilitated or hindered cooperation. The identification of key trends helped to anticipate future opportunities and challenges for cooperation. The analysis of current relations between the countries, considering political, economic, social, and other aspects, helped to identify and track key events in the region. This clarifies what factors may affect further development.

To fulfil the purpose, the study analysed statistical data on economic development, which indicate the state of the economies of the countries of the region and their economic cooperation (Latvia, n.d.; GDP per capita..., n.d.; Belarus, n.d.). Furthermore, the study analysed such regulations as the Charter of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (1999), official documents of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (Council of the Baltic Sea States..., 2020; Joint Statement of the 28th..., 2023). A separate group of sources includes the texts of international agreements and declarations between the states of the region (Lublin Voivodeship Marshal's Office in Lublin, 2014; Final document of the VIII session..., 2017; Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs..., 2020). These documents describe the legal context and official commitments of the countries within the framework of cooperation.

The use of a comprehensive approach made it possible to examine the historical background and current factors influencing the development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. This approach helps to provide a reasonable estimation of the prospects of the alliance and develop strategies for its further development in the context of current global challenges and opportunities.

Results

The Baltic-Black Sea Axis is a concept of geopolitical and economic unification of countries located along the coasts of the Baltic and Black Seas. This idea emerged as a strategic way to strengthen cooperation and interaction among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The Baltic-Black Sea Axis serves as a platform for the countries of the region to work together in many aspects, with the purpose of promoting the development and increasing the importance of this geopolitical space in the modern world.

The first attempt to create a Baltic-Black Sea axis took place in the early 20th century. The IV Buldur Conference, held in August 1920 at the Buldur Palace near Riga, is a historically significant event that paved the way for the formation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union. The main purpose of the conference was to discuss and resolve issues of security and stability in the region between the Baltic and Black Seas, as well as to establish friendship and cooperation between the countries of this space. The conference was attended by representatives of countries bordering the Baltic and Black Seas, including Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. The main topics of the conference were territorial integrity, security, and the development of economic relations between the countries. The conference considered the programme developed by

the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Sigfrids Anna Meyerovics (Volovych, 2016), which called for peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the countries of the region. The programme was aimed at integrating the economic, financial, and political systems of the Baltic-Black Sea region. It also envisaged a political convention on mutual recognition and support (Golovchenko, 2011). However, despite the ambitious plans, the negotiations proved difficult due to differences in political views and strategic interests of the participants. These differences proved insurmountable, preventing the formation of a full-fledged military and political alliance. This indicates that while the countries of the region shared common security and cooperation goals, they also had their own interests and views on how to achieve these goals. It is important to bear in mind that the formation of an alliance requires solving complex issues and finding compromises between the participants. Thus, although the convention contained ambitious plans for regional cooperation, the reality of the political and economic landscape turned out to be more complex than planned. Still, the Buldur Conference was a major step towards the formation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union. It laid the foundations for further cooperation and friendship between the countries of the region (Lepparanta & Myrberg, 2009).

After the disintegration of the USSR and the collapse of the "socialist camp", the idea of creating an association or alliance based on the Baltic-Black Sea axis received a new impetus. Officials of the independent states that emerged from the collapse of the former Soviet Union expressed a positive attitude towards the possibility of joint association. They noted the potential benefits of such a union in the areas of economy, politics, security, and other aspects. These statements reflected the general mood of the period of political transition when many countries in the post-Soviet space were rethinking their geopolitical status and looking for new forms of cooperation and interaction. This period of intense debate and discussion has contributed to the emergence of new forms of cooperation in the region and the formation of various initiatives for joint development and security in the Baltic-Black Sea area (Derevianko & Halabala, 2016).

The next stage in the development of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis is characterised by the intensive development of cooperation between the countries of the region and a shift in emphasis from post-crisis recovery to the implementation of joint strategic projects. An important aspect was the consolidation of participants and the coordination of their positions. The focus was on developing trade, investment, and joint economic projects. In 1992, two economic regional organisations were established in the Black and Baltic Seas: the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) (Charter of the Organisation of the Black Sea..., 1999) and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (Council of the Baltic Sea States..., 2020). Efforts were also made to improve transport links in the region. The project, which envisages the establishment of railway links between Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, is called Vikings. It was initiated in 2003, which indicates the strategic focus of these countries on the development of railway connections in the

region (Volovych, 2016). At this stage, attention was paid to the development of the energy sector, specifically, joint projects in the field of energy production and transportation. In other words, this stage determined the strategic course for in-depth cooperation and joint development of the countries within the Baltic-Black Sea axis. During this period, the foundations for further successful steps in the development of the alliance were laid (Rudnytska, 2015).

The analysis suggested that 2010-2020 were important for the development and consolidation of the position of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis countries in the international arena. The countries of the region have identified key geopolitical challenges and interests, which has become the basis for further cooperation. Another major step was taken in 2020 with the launch of an initiative known as the Lublin Triangle. This idea brings together the three countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region – Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine – to develop economic and political cooperation. This cooperation was the result of a trilateral meeting held on 28 August in Lublin. The foundation of this form of cooperation is the common historical heritage, specifically the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which at one time achieved significant economic and political success (Bornio, 2020). This stage reflected the successful implementation of geopolitical goals and the establishment of the Baltic-Black Sea axis as an important player in international relations (Maisaia, 2021).

Today, the term Baltic-Black Sea Axis refers to the creation of a supranational association of the following states: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. The development of the alliance is marked by considerable achievements and the strengthening of the alliance's position as a prominent geopolitical player. At this stage, the focus is on developing effective tools for managing and coordinating joint initiatives. Work continued on key projects, such as the E40 project (Shemaev, 2019) and the Three Seas Initiative (Golub & Tomenchuk, 2020), aimed at joint development and implementation of strategic objectives. Furthermore, strategies for the joint use of energy resources (Lublin Voivodeship Marshal's Office..., 2014) and environmental protection measures continue to be developed and implemented, as well as the improvement of military-technical cooperation.

The study identified the factors that had the greatest impact on the development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. These factors include geographic location, economic opportunities, energy security, cultural, and educational exchange.

Geographical location. Geographical location plays a key role in the establishment and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. First of all, the Black Sea is a natural central object that unites the countries of the region. It is a route for maritime traffic and trade. The countries of the Baltic-Black Sea axis are located at strategic points between Europe and Asia. This creates opportunities for efficient transport links and the exchange of goods. Direct access to the Black and Baltic Seas provides countries with the opportunity to develop maritime trade, which is important for the economy and energy needs. The location of some countries along energy flow routes (e.g.,

gas pipelines) gives them a significant role in the region's energy security. The geographical location determines the interests and activities of countries in international affairs, especially in the context of interaction with the leading countries of the European Union (France and Germany). In general, geographical location is an essential factor that facilitates cooperation and mutual understanding between the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea axis (Lepparanta & Myrberg, 2009).

The increased use of the common borders between Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania is caused by the new challenges posed by the Russian-Ukrainian war. Experts believe that the constant diversion of considerable volumes of Ukrainian goods to the west, mainly through the land border with Poland and the river ports on the Danube on the border with Romania, will become a sustainable trend (Bykova, 2023a). As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, cooperation in the defence sector is intensifying, and the need to strengthen cooperation in this area is declared in the Joint Statement of the 28th Baltic Council Summit (2023). The importance of such cooperation has also been emphasised by the Interparliamentary Assembly of Lithuania and Ukraine (Joint statement by the Seimas..., 2022). It can be noted that Russia's expansion to the West has only strengthened integration in the region. Almost every new format of interaction between the states of Central and Eastern Europe today emphasises the need for joint efforts to defend against aggression and overcome the consequences already caused by Russia's aggression since 2014 (Kuleba, 2021).

Economic opportunities. Economic opportunities play an important role in the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis. To fully understand the economic possibilities of implementing the idea of creating a union, it is necessary to analyse the economies of the leading countries in the region. Specifically, Latvia has a strong economic potential. The economy grew rapidly in 2000 as a result of the progress of the Baltic Tigers. As of 2023, Latvia's gross domestic product is \$32,733 USD per capita. In turn, Estonia's economy is one of the most promising of the Baltic states. Estonia has the highest GDP per capita among them, at \$32,826 USD. The main export partners are Finland, Sweden, and Latvia. Imports are mainly represented by such countries as Germany and Finland. Imports include mineral fuels, electrical equipment, and vehicles (GDP per capita..., n.d.). Considering the Polish economy, the GDP of the Republic of Poland is \$36,798 USD. Poland's main export and import partners are mainly European countries. The top three countries to which Poland exports are Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic. Poland's imports are estimated at \$278 billion USD (Poland. OEC, n.d.). Belarus' exports are estimated at \$33.2 billion USD. Similar to Ukraine, Belarus imports more than it exports. Imports are estimated at \$35.2 billion USD. Belarus is the only country without access to the sea border. However, it performs a transit function, on which the trade turnover in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine depends. Lithuania's exports are valued at \$32.7 billion USD and are concentrated in piles, electronic devices, nuclear boilers, furniture, plastics, etc.

Oil and fuel account for a large share of imports, which is typical for all countries in the region (Belarus. OEC, n.d.).

Analysing the above data, we can conclude that in their general statistics, the countries of the region are interested in exporting and importing similar products and goods. The region is characterised by cooperation with both Europe and the Eurasian vector. Therefore, the economic potential of the countries of the region is a key element in the successful implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis (Lithuania. OEC, n.d.). A prominent factor in the implementation of this cooperation will be the implementation of the Via Baltica and Rail Baltica projects, as noted by the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland in 2017 (Final document of the VIII session..., 2017).

Energy security. Energy security in the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis is a critical aspect for the stability and development of the region. Diversity of energy sources (coal, natural gas, alternative sources, etc.) and different suppliers reduce the risk of energy crises and dependence on a particular supplier. Investing in renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and hydro power, also contributes to the creation of sustainable and environmentally friendly energy sources. The development and modernisation of transport infrastructure for energy transit (gas pipelines, oil pipelines, power grids) ensures reliable energy supply and distribution. In the south of the Baltic-Black Sea region, important infrastructure projects have been implemented, mainly aimed at ensuring energy supplies from Azerbaijan to Europe. Specifically, the former Baku-Batumi oil pipelines were restored and expanded, enabling the Baku-Supsa (in the 1990s) and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (in the 2000s) to operate today. There is also the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway route. The energy sector also offers a project that dates to the 1990s – the Euro-Asian Oil Transportation Corridor (EAOTC). This project can be implemented based on the existing Odesa-Brody oil pipeline. According to this option, the pipeline would connect Gdansk in the north with Baku in the south, connecting the Caspian and Baltic Seas. With the signing of the “nuclear deal” between Iran and six leading world powers in 2015, Iran was able to increase its energy exports, specifically to Europe, in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions. This opened the possibility of returning to the idea of building a Persian pipeline through the Black Sea and Eastern Europe. According to the State Oil and Gas Company of Ukraine and Ukrimpex, several projects for the construction of gas transmission corridors along this route were considered in the 1990s, the most promising of which was the Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Black Sea-Ukraine-Poland route (Derevianko & Halabala, 2016). Energy security is a crucial factor in ensuring the stability and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, and its provision requires joint efforts and a comprehensive approach of all member states (Skvorchevsky, 2021).

Cultural and educational exchange. Cultural and educational exchanges play a vital role in the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis, contributing to the strengthening of mutual understanding, common values, and the development of civil society. The exchange of

cultural traditions, art, and other aspects of culture promotes understanding and tolerance between the peoples of the region. Joint training programmes, conferences, and projects facilitate the exchange of knowledge and research experience between universities and research institutions of the member states. For instance, the Erasmus+ project “Rethinking Regional Studies: The Baltic-Black Sea Connection” (Erasmus+ Key Action..., n.d.). Opportunities to study at universities and take part in student exchange programmes promote mutual understanding and shape the international practices of the younger generation. Interaction in the cultural and educational spheres contributes to the improvement of diplomatic relations between the member states (Ewert, 2011).

Geopolitical analysis suggests that the idea of creating a Baltic-Black Sea Union is conditioned by a complex of geopolitical, economic, strategic, and other factors. The creation of such an alliance will be a response to changes in the global political and economic picture, as well as a choice to jointly achieve strategic goals and protect common interests.

Analysing the above, it can be argued that the Baltic-Black Sea axis can develop in various directions, combining economic growth, political stability, cultural exchange, environmental protection, and social progress. The region’s potential is rich, and developing the idea of a union could lead to a viable and influential association. As for the possible political realities of such an association, current trends indicate that Poland may well play a leading role in it. Poland is the country with the greatest economic potential among the hypothetical member states (Poland, n.d.). Furthermore, the country’s active trade relations with its neighbours have resulted in a positive trade balance, which is particularly evident in relations with Ukraine. A large decline in Ukraine’s GNP in 2022 and its recovery in 2023 by only two per cent will only mean a low level of exports to Poland and an increase in the already traditional (Lublin Voivodeship Marshal’s Office in Lublin, 2014) dependence on imports from this country (Bykova, 2023b). Poland already has the potential to become a logistics hub for the region, where trade routes from various destinations, including Ukraine, intersect. The shift in European policy attention to Central Europe and Warsaw is already reflected in official EU documents and strategies (Bykova, 2023a). Given Poland’s economic strength against the background of other countries in the Baltic-Black Sea region and its transit role between the south of the hypothetical union and the north, we can predict its future role as the leader of the Baltic-Black Sea axis, provided it is institutionalised. This perspective is evidenced by a comparison of integration processes in Central and Eastern Europe with those in Western Europe. Thus, for many years, Germany has been the informal leader of the European Union and has been ranked 1st in the world in terms of exports 10 times (Hutsal, 2012). Countries with a deficit trade balance tend to be more economically and politically dependent on their neighbours with a surplus. Therewith, one should not forget that such a distribution of forces in a hypothetical union has historical preconditions, as Poland was the leader of the

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Another factor that may contribute to Poland's leading role in the region is the European integration aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Their European integration aspirations will largely depend on their relations with Poland, which plays a key role in the Eastern Partnership Policy (Karolewski & Wilga, 2018), as emphasised, specifically, in the establishment of the Lublin Triangle (Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs..., 2020), which Ukrainians trust more than the UN and the OSCE (Among all international organisations and associations..., 2023).

Depending on the specific objectives and priorities, the selected scenarios can be combined or adapted to achieve maximum benefits for the region. It is important to consider the unique characteristics of each member state and common aspirations to achieve sustainable and harmonious development of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis idea.

Discussion

The Baltic-Black Sea Axis is a conceptual notion that describes the idea of creating a potential strategic alliance between the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. This idea has great potential in the context of current geopolitical challenges and could affect the balance of power in the region. The Baltic-Black Sea Axis opens the way for cooperation and development of the countries of this region to jointly confront global challenges and make beneficial use of their geopolitical potential.

Comparison of the results of this study with the scientific works of other authors makes it possible to identify consensus points, common aspects, as well as differences in approaches and interpretations. In addition, given the broad international context of the study, a comparison with the works of foreign scholars provides an opportunity to assess the uniqueness and relevance of the topic in the international academic community.

The study by K. Kikste (2022) focuses on the necessary preconditions for the creation of a regional security system within the Baltic-Black Sea Union. The study thoroughly examines the geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural factors that may influence the creation of an effective security mechanism in the region. The author examines the main aspects of political stability and internal security, namely, considers the role of joint military and political alliances in the formation of collective defence. Kikste also emphasises the need for effective economic cooperation and resource sharing among the members of the alliance to stabilise the region and ensure its security. The paper also analyses cultural and historical aspects that may affect the implementation of the idea of unification and its ability to provide security and stability. Specifically, when comparing the paper with the present study, it should be emphasised that both studies address key aspects of security formation and provision in the Baltic-Black Sea region (Kikste, 2022).

Considering the study by E. Zakaradze & M. Muradishvili (2023), it is necessary to consider the details of its content and main conclusions. The authors thoroughly examine the importance of the Black Sea region as a strategic "catalyst". They analyse aspects such as its impact on geopolitical dynamics, conflicts, and cooperation in the region. The authors

also examine the relationship between different countries and actors in the Black Sea region. A prominent aspect of the study is the focus on security and stability in the Black Sea region. Analysing possible threats and challenges, the authors propose strategies to ensure stability and security. The paper has a similar focus to the present study, specifically, both focus on the importance of regional cooperation for stability and security in the European context. They also emphasise the geopolitical importance of the region but discuss different regions (Black Sea and Baltic) and the factors that influence their dynamics.

F. Tassinari (2005) examines the politics of the Baltic States and its importance for security and cooperation in the European Neighbourhood. The author analyses various aspects of security cooperation, economic relations, and regional governance in the Baltic region. The research conducted in this paper, as well as the present study, emphasises the importance of regional cooperation for ensuring stability and security in the European context. However, they look at different regions (the Baltic and Black Sea regions) and identify different factors and aspects that influence the dynamics of cooperation between the countries.

J. Hwang & H.K. Yoo (2022) explore the role of environmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. The authors analyse the activities of various actors in the context of climate change and environmental issues in the region. However, the authors' study focuses on environmental issues and the role of cooperation in this context, while the present study comprehensively examines its geopolitical aspects.

One of the key notable aspects is the correlation between the historical background and modern factors influencing the development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis. M. Chihaiia (2015) analyses the security challenges and vulnerabilities that have emerged in the Baltic and Black Sea regions since the end of the Cold War. The author analyses key issues related to geopolitical changes and the dynamics of relations between states in these regions. This paper, unlike the present study, is aimed at analysing the current aspects that affect relations between the countries. Nevertheless, both studies are important for understanding the geopolitical and security challenges facing the regions of Europe.

The study by O. Brusylovska *et al.* (2022) analyses the Black Sea region in the context of world politics. The authors examine the key actors, influential factors that affect the policies of the countries and consider possible future scenarios for the region. Special attention is paid to geopolitical and geoeconomic aspects. The analysis of the findings of this study suggests that both studies aim to analyse regional aspects of international relations. However, the authors' study focuses on the Black Sea region as a whole, including its political and economic aspects, while the present study addresses the prospects for implementing the idea of creating a superstate association.

T. Melchiorre (2009) analyses the geopolitical and economic relations between the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The author highlights the similarities and interdependence of these regions in geopolitical and economic terms, pointing to their common interests and potential

for cooperation. Comparing this study with the one conducted, it can be noted that both studies focus on the analysis of cooperation between the countries of the Baltic-Black Sea region. Although both studies deal with similar topics, they have different emphases and provide different perspectives on the issue of international cooperation in regional contexts.

The paper by J. Alley (2021) highlights the topical issue of public goods theory in the context of alliances. The article provides a detailed analysis of the main concepts and principles of public goods theory and its application to the analysis of international alliances. The author points out the need to reinterpret this theory and proposes novel approaches to understanding the interaction of countries within alliances. Compared to the present study, J. Alley's (2021) article aims to analyse theoretical approaches in the context of international alliances and use empirical data to support its conclusions. The present study is a comprehensive investigation that focuses on the historical background and factors of the union's implementation.

In conclusion, the analysis of the findings confirms the need for further investigation and development of the Baltic-Black Sea axis as an important geopolitical format. Considering the identified differences and shortcomings of previous studies, the conclusions and recommendations proposed in this paper can contribute to the formation of a strategic alliance that meets modern challenges and tasks.

Conclusions

The present study analysed the historical background of the project, as well as the factors that would contribute to the implementation of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis as a potential strategic alliance. The study provided an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the establishment and development of various areas of cooperation between the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The main findings of this study pointed to key factors that would contribute to the formation and implementation of the union in the future, such as political will, economic opportunities, energy security, and cultural exchange.

A study of the historical background of the idea of creating a supranational union found that this project had been in existence for 100 years. The first attempts at such an association failed for a variety of reasons, including geopolitical risks and the lack of clear strategies. The study was also aimed at identifying factors that would facilitate the implementation of the project of creating a geopolitical association. The geographical location of the region, specifically its coastal location along the Baltic and Black Seas, creates a strategic potential for cooperation. Economic opportunities, including market potential and infrastructure, are also important for the development of a future alliance. Energy security is becoming a topical issue considering Europe's search for alternative energy transit routes. All this demonstrates the importance and relevance of developing and implementing the idea of creating a Baltic-Black Sea Axis to ensure stability, security, and common prosperity of the countries of the region.

This study emphasised the importance of developing and implementing the Baltic-Black Sea Axis project in the current geopolitical environment. However, the success of the future alliance will depend on the ability of the participants to avoid past mistakes and adapt to the complex challenges they face. The study showed that the implementation of the idea of the Baltic-Black Sea Axis would require detailed strategies and careful planning to ensure stability and security in the region, and Poland would play a leading role in this association, given its economic and political potential within the region and the EU.

The prospect of future research is to compare the integration processes in Western Europe in the 20th century with the current integration formats in Eastern and Central and Eastern Europe, which will allow for a more accurate prediction of their prospects and development vector.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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Балто-Чорноморська вісь: історичне підґрунтя та чинники реалізації

Анотація. У контексті сучасних геополітичних викликів та реорганізацій світового порядку, дослідження Балто-Чорноморської вісі набуває важливого стратегічного значення для розуміння процесів і взаємозв'язків у регіоні, що впливають на його стабільність та розвиток. Метою даного дослідження є ретроспективний аналіз історичного розвитку Балто-Чорноморської вісі та виявлення основних чинників, що сприятимуть її реалізації. У дослідженні використано комплекс методів, зокрема історичний метод, метод геополітичного аналізу, а також метод прогнозування розвитку подальшого співробітництва між країнами Балто-Чорноморського регіону. Під час дослідження було ретельно проаналізовано етапи зародження та розвитку ідеї створення наддержавного об'єднання, враховуючи різні історичні періоди. Визначено, що на початкових етапах така ідея мала в основному економічну та культурну спрямованість, сприяючи обміну та розвитку торговельних маршрутів. У подальшому розвитку, зокрема під час зростання політичної нестабільності у регіоні, проект створення геополітичного об'єднання набув важливого військового значення, створюючи в перспективі основу для спільної оборони. Значущим елементом дослідження є аналіз сучасних геополітичних та економічних тенденцій, які впливають на подальший розвиток вісі. Крім того, дослідження виявило потенціал для подальшого поглиблення співпраці в сферах культури, освіти та науки. Загалом, даний аналіз вказує на важливість та перспективи співробітництва учасників Балто-Чорноморської вісі, що має потенціал стати важливим фактором у геополітичному та економічному розвитку регіону. Практична значимість даної роботи полягає в тому, що результати даного дослідження сприятимуть кращому розумінню історичного підґрунтя та потенціалу Балто-Чорноморської вісі, що може відкрити нові можливості для співпраці та розвитку в регіоні, а також стане основою для подальших досліджень у сфері міжнародних відносин та геополітики.

Ключові слова: геополітичне співробітництво; стратегічні альянси; економіка; інтеграція; військові аспекти; потенціал

UDC 327.5
DOI: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.22-29

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Features of the current geopolitical situation and foreign policy of independent Ukraine

Abstract. The relevance of the subject under study is conditioned by the fact that in the context of Russian aggression, Ukraine is undergoing a new stage of state development, which primarily concerns its future position on the political map of the world and its role in the system of international relations. The purpose of this study was to analyse the geopolitical situation and foreign policy activities of Ukraine at the present stage of its historical development. General scientific and special research methods, including comparative, historical, and systemic, structural and functional, forecasting, institutional, and other methods, were used to solve the tasks set. The findings of this study can be considered as the identification of the stages of Ukraine's development in the diplomatic space, and the formulation of the state's foreign policy guidelines. The study described Ukraine's geopolitical strategy since independence and the state of its partnership potential at present. The study analysed the principal areas of foreign policy activities of the state authorities and the country's prospects in terms of its advancement on the world stage. The participants also identified the priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy and the problems of asserting the state in the international arena in the context of Russian aggression and the struggle for territorial integrity. The results of this study are important for government officials whose responsibilities include the development of the state's foreign policy course, as well as for scholars whose research interests include foreign policy in the European-Atlantic context and Ukraine's cooperation with foreign countries

Keywords: geopolitical strategy; national security of Ukraine; international relations; European integration; national interests; multipolar model of the world order

Introduction

After gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine proclaimed its right to an independent foreign policy (FP) aimed at ensuring its security and national interests. The state's foreign policy activity determines its successful development in the context of positioning in the international arena and support from the international community in the context of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation (RF). A thorough study of Ukraine's current foreign policy course is important for expanding cooperation with foreign countries and improving the efficiency of public authorities implementing policy at the international level (Sitsinskiy, 2017).

The relevance of the subject under study is conditioned by the fact that in the context of external aggression, Ukraine needs to intensify the integration into international politics, economy, and other areas of interstate cooperation, specifically within the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) (Kvasha & Syniakova,

2019). Therefore, an analysis of the state's foreign policy activities over the past 30 years will help to improve the mechanisms of activity of state bodies and officials vested with powers in the field of international relations and to formulate a consolidated foreign policy course.

Quite a few Ukrainian and European political scientists, historians, and lawyers pay attention to the issues of international relations in a broad sense and the topic of Ukraine's foreign policy in a narrow sense. However, this is the first time that a comprehensive analysis of Ukraine's activities in the field of international relations against the backdrop of Russian armed aggression has been conducted. For example, N. Sitsinskiy (2017) examines the legal content of Ukraine's foreign policy activities. The author argues for the need to improve the legal framework for a greater integration into international politics.

Ye. Yuriichuk & S. Opinko (2021) investigate the activities of Ukraine's foreign policy authorities in the United

Received: 20.07.2023, Revised: 01.11.2023, Accepted: 21.11.2023

Suggested Citation:

Konieczny, M. (2023). Features of the current geopolitical situation and foreign policy of independent Ukraine. *Foreign Affairs*, 33(6), 22-29. doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.22-29.

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Nations (UN) and international courts to counter Russian aggression. The researchers state that the Ukrainian government has a systematic approach to countering hybrid warfare in this area. O. Kondratenko (2020) studies the issues of Ukraine's geopolitical status through the lens of the methodological discourse of Ukrainian and foreign scholars. In his opinion, the state is geographically located at the intersection of the strategic interests of three cultures: Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian, and Islamic. This factor, along with internal problems, has long determined Ukraine's positioning as a buffer country. V. Smolianiuk (2022) focuses on the international institutional and geopolitical consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The researcher concludes that the armed aggression against Ukraine has led to Russia's economic decline, its collapse at the geopolitical level and its transition to a group of third world countries that have no influence on global political processes. In researcher opinion, this armed conflict has also demonstrated the need to form a new system of international relations and create modern security structures.

The theoretical and methodological foundations of Ukraine's foreign policy under P. Poroshenko's presidency are studied by M. Simchera (2019). The author emphasises that the country's foreign policy activities during this period were primarily aimed at safeguarding its national interests by maintaining peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation with international actors. R. Bezsmertnyi (2018) considers the geopolitical context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The scholar believes that the conflict on the territory of Ukraine cannot be perceived as a border or regional one, as it has the characteristics of a geopolitical confrontation. The scholar emphasises the reformatting of international relations on a global scale and states the need to create a new global security system that would meet modern realities. Polish scholar M. Wozniak (2016) holds the same opinion. He argues that the annexation of Ukrainian territories has dramatically changed US policy towards Russia. It is also for this reason that Washington has increased its military presence in Central and Eastern Europe and expressed its readiness to support the democratic aspirations of Ukrainians. The purpose of this study was to cover the content of Ukraine's foreign policy activities from the moment of proclamation of independence to the present period of historical development. The object of this study is the foreign policy of Ukraine.

The scientific originality of this study lies in the fact that, based on the analysis of scientific literature and information sources on the problems of the state policy of ensuring the national security of Ukraine in the foreign policy sphere, the study analysed the relations between Ukraine and the leading centres of power in the modern security environment and substantiated the priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy at the present stage.

Materials and Methods

The methodological framework of this study is a qualitative combination of general scientific and special research methods. Specifically, the following theoretical methods were used: abstraction, analogy, generalisation, and analysis. Using the method of abstraction, the study

identified the characteristic features of Ukraine's foreign policy activities. The analogy helped to consider the common features of the state's foreign policy in the early 1990s and at the present stage. The method of generalisation became the basis for studying Ukraine's place on the modern geopolitical map of the world. The analysis was used to highlight the specific features of Ukraine's geopolitical position.

Special research methods were also used in the study, including historical and systemic, structural and functional, comparative, institutional, political legal analysis, statistical data analysis, and forecasting. The historical and systematic method became the basis for the study of the stages of establishing diplomatic relations between Ukraine and foreign states and international organisations after gaining independence. Particular attention was paid to the recognition of Ukrainian independence by the international community, the characteristic features of the state's foreign policy in the early 1990s and the formation of the foreign policy course under the first President Leonid Kravchuk.

Using the comparative method, the author of this study managed to identify common and distinctive features of Ukraine's foreign policy activities before and after the beginning of Russian aggression, and to formulate the reasons for intensifying cooperation with the international community against the background of a full-scale invasion and threat of occupation of the state by the Russian Federation. The institutional method was used to investigate the development of the institutions of state power of Ukraine, which are vested with the functions of practical implementation and coordination of foreign policy activities. It also highlighted the problems of political institutions functioning in the context of external aggression.

The method of political legal analysis helped to consider the regulations that outline the priorities of the foreign policy of Ukraine and regulate the foreign policy activities of the state. Specifically, attention was paid to the Constitution of Ukraine, the Strategy of Foreign Policy of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada Resolution "On the Main Directions of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine" (1993), the Laws "On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy", and "On National Security of Ukraine" (Draft Law of Ukraine No. 1117-1..., 2008; Law of Ukraine No. 2469-VIII..., 2018).

Using the forecasting method, the author of this study managed to identify the main and most likely ways of Ukraine's development in the context of the transformation of the international security system against the background of Russian aggression, possible bilateral and multilateral partnerships, projects and agreements with the world's leading economies. Assumptions were also made about the state's membership in the EU and accession to NATO in the near future.

The method of statistical data analysis became the basis for assessing the level of support of Ukrainians for the country's integration with the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance. The study used the results of surveys conducted by the Sociological Group "Rating", Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, and the National Democratic Institute in Ukraine (Foreign policy

attitudes..., 2023; NDI, 2022). These data made it possible to analyse trends in the attitudes of citizens in different regions of Ukraine towards EU and NATO membership in various periods of historical development.

Using the structural-functional method, the study examined the impact of the situation in Ukraine on international politics, assessed the international community's reaction to the Russian invasion in February 2022, and outlined the activities of international institutions in the context of resolving the military conflict and bringing the aggressor to justice. Furthermore, this method helped to identify the role of internal factors and external actors in the changes in Ukraine's foreign policy activities under the presidencies of Leonid Kuchma, Viktor Yushchenko, Viktor Yanukovych, Petro Poroshenko, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Results

Ukraine's foreign policy activities in the first years of independence, international recognition, and establishment of diplomatic relations. Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991 increased the influence of international factors on its socio-political and economic development. The solution to the problems faced by the state has moved into the realm of international relations – bilateral and multilateral. While the processes of globalisation that intensified in the 20th century were reflected in the intensification of Ukraine's relations with other states and international organisations.

The main document that defined the foundations of state-building processes, including in the field of foreign policy, was the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine (Decree Verkhovna Rada..., 1991). Based on it, in July 1993, the parliament adopted a resolution "On the Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy" (Resolution on the Main..., 1993). It noted that an indispensable component of state development is its active entry into the global community. The country's national policy is aimed at preserving its territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, integrating into the global economic system, promoting the image of Ukraine as a trusted partner, and renouncing its nuclear status.

The main principles of the foreign policy developed the provisions prescribed in the Act of Independence of Ukraine and other domestic regulations and were in line with international law. According to these documents, Ukraine pursues an open foreign policy and intends to cooperate with all actors in international politics, avoiding dependence on other countries and superpowers.

In its relations with other countries, Ukraine is guided by the principles of mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit, and non-interference in internal affairs. It has no territorial claims against its neighbouring states and does not recognise territorial claims against itself and adheres to internationally recognised human and minority rights standards.

However, before 1991, Ukraine hardly ever conducted foreign policy, although it had a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Therefore, a fundamental problem for the authorities was to create an action plan in the international arena, define national interests and identify geopolitical

priorities. Ukraine's first steps in this area were taken under the presidency of Leonid Kravchuk, and the Foreign Ministry was then headed by A. Zlenko. The main task at that time was to make the state a subject of international law and achieve recognition by the international community (Zavadzka, 2016).

Notably, this process was quite lively. Within three months of regaining independence, more than 100 countries recognised Ukraine as an independent state. Poland was the first to do so, followed by Canada (both on 2 December 1991). Diplomatic relations were established on 8 and 27 January 1992, respectively. After the All-Ukrainian referendum on 3 December 1991, a protocol on the establishment of international relations with Hungary was also signed, and on 6 December, the Agreement on the Basics of Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation (Agreement "On the Foundations...", 1991) was signed. Furthermore, in the first months of the year, Ukraine was recognised by Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Argentina, Bolivia, the United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. By 2000, diplomatic relations were established with more than 150 countries, and Ukraine had 53 embassies at that time (Balabanov & Trofymenko, 2012).

The recognition of Ukraine's independence by the world's most influential states has demonstrated the irreversibility of the state-building process and demonstrated the final turnaround in the world community's position on this issue. Immediately after the declaration of independence, L. Kravchuk chose the path of dissociation from Russia and rapprochement with Western countries, which included integration into the Euro-Atlantic space. Therewith, there were many issues in the foreign policy sphere. One of them is the performance of Ukraine's obligations to renounce its nuclear status. The state of Russian-Ukrainian relations was also alarming, especially regarding the ownership of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea and the succession of the USSR (Zadorozhny & Khmeleva, 2017).

Thus, immediately after declaring independence, Ukraine established diplomatic relations with all European countries and international organisations, defined foreign policy guidelines, established contacts at the highest level and expanded trade and economic relations.

Ukraine's foreign policy guidelines, the principle of multi-vectorism of the foreign policy. At the stage of establishing its statehood and formulating its foreign policy, Ukraine implemented the concept of multi-vectorism. This refers to developing and maintaining equal and mutually beneficial relations with various members of the international community following their own national interests (Aleksieyevets & Seko, 2016). For a long time, Ukrainian politicians have been discussing the choice of integration model: European or Eurasian. The Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea and the Russian invasion in February 2022 finally resolved the debate over Ukraine's European path. Therefore, integration into the EU is currently Ukraine's only foreign policy option as a guarantee of strengthening its position in the international arena, acquiring additional guarantees of territorial integrity, restructuring and preparing the national economy to operate in fierce competition with global powers.

Notably, since Ukraine is in the centre of Europe, its interaction with European structures is quite natural. The course of rapprochement with the EU was set in the first years of independence under the presidency of Leonid Kravchuk. Thus, in 1994, Ukraine signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the organisation (Agreement No. 237/94-BP, 1994). This accelerated the establishment of relations at the highest level, and the Kyiv-Brussels Cooperation Council and Committee began their work. In 1995, Ukraine became a member of the Council of Europe (CoE) and has been involved in European policymaking since then.

In March 2007, Ukraine and the EU began negotiations on a new agreement. The following year, at the Paris Summit, Kyiv and Brussels reached a consensus on the Association Agreement, which is based on the norms of political association and economic integration. In 2009, the Association Agenda was agreed upon, replacing the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, and aiming to serve as a guide for reforms in preparation for the implementation of the future agreement.

At the fifteenth EU-Ukraine Summit in Kyiv in December 2011, negotiations on the Association Agreement were completed, and on 30 March 2012, its text was preliminarily signed by the heads of the negotiating teams (Association Agreement between..., 2014). The political part of the Association Agreement was signed on 21 March 2014, and the economic part on 27 June. On 16 September of the same year, the Verkhovna Rada and the European Parliament simultaneously ratified it. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement entered into full force on 1 September 2017. This is an international legal document that consolidates the transition of relations between Ukraine and the EU from partnership to integration.

And in 2019, the Verkhovna Rada amended the Constitution with 334 votes, which legally consolidated Ukraine's course towards full membership in the EU and NATO (The Rada fixed..., 2019). The explanatory note states that these changes will contribute to the implementation of the European and Euro-Atlantic choice by expanding Ukraine's cooperation with the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance until full membership is achieved. However, the introduction of the corresponding constitutional amendments did not accelerate integration into the Euro-Atlantic space (Ukraine will fix..., 2018).

A major step towards European integration was taken immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Thus, on 28 February 2022, President Zelenskyy, Prime Minister Shmyhal, and Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada R. Stefanchuk jointly signed an application for EU membership. Already in June, the leaders of the 27 EU member states unanimously supported granting Ukraine the status of an EU candidate at a summit in Brussels (The EU finally..., 2022). Further preparation for membership will involve completing reforms in all areas of public life. This will create the conditions for bringing the standard of living and legal protection of Ukrainians closer to that of other countries of the Commonwealth. Therewith, the candidate status opened opportunities for financial aid provided through grants, investments, or technical aid,

and through participation in EU programmes and initiatives (The status of a candidate..., 2022).

Close cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance is an essential element of Ukraine's pro-Western policy. The state has been taking steps to expand cooperation with NATO for three decades. The purpose of this cooperation is to provide guarantees of political independence and sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of state borders (Skachko, 2020). The relationship was officially launched in 1991 when Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). In 1994, the Partnership for Peace programme was signed, and in 1997, a NATO Information Centre was opened in Kyiv and a Charter on a Distinctive Partnership was signed.

Since 2014, due to the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the occupation of certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, cooperation between Ukraine and NATO has expanded in several key areas. It covered a wide scope of areas, including reform of security and defence structures, military cooperation, and peacekeeping operations (Skachko, 2020). Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 gave the idea of joining the North Atlantic Alliance a new sound. Whereas earlier citizens mostly believed that NATO membership could have negative consequences for the state, now, according to a poll conducted in autumn 2022, 79% of citizens would like Ukraine to become a full member of NATO by 2030. In May, 73% of respondents answered this question positively (The majority of Ukrainians..., 2022).

And at the end of September 2022, in response to the annexation of four Ukrainian regions by Russia, V. Zelenskyy announced that the application to join the North Atlantic Alliance under an accelerated procedure. The President is convinced that Ukraine has already proved its compliance with NATO standards. "We trust each other, we help each other, and we protect each other. This is the Alliance. De facto. Today, Ukraine is applying to make it de jure", the Ukrainian leader said (Ukraine submits an..., 2022). Thus, according to most of the population and Ukrainian politicians, NATO membership will guarantee security for the state. Therefore, Ukraine's further movement towards integration with the Alliance is unavoidable in the current security situation. At this stage, Kyiv's relations with the organisation play a vital role in the fight against the Russian aggressor.

The impact of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on the changing geopolitical situation in the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is regarded by the international community as a violation of international law and the principles of world order, which has become a serious challenge to European stability since the end of World War II (Bollfrass & Herzog, 2022). The consequences of Russian aggression are also significant for the system of global security and international order, which the UN must guarantee. That is why the entire civilised world united to help the Ukrainian resistance forces repel the Russian Federation, as there were no other levers of influence on the aggressor.

The current system of international law has failed to prevent the war or find a peaceful solution, and the

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has proven ineffective in the face of an armed conflict of this magnitude. In turn, the UN and the International Red Cross failed to provide the necessary aid and were repeatedly accused of inaction. The war in Ukraine proved that the institutions created after the Second World War were ineffective. The international legal order also proved to be ineffective, as one state cannot invade another and declare it its territory, as Russia is currently doing (Cafruny *et al.*, 2023).

As noted by scholars I. Kotoulas and V. Pusztai, Russia's revisionism in Ukraine is not a separate episode, but a part of its foreign policy and an integral part of Russian statehood and an attempt to use force against post-Soviet states and globally (Kotoulas & Pusztai, 2022). Notably, Russian aggression has further contributed to the division of the world into two camps. Some states support freedom and democracy, while others support authoritarianism. The latter, apart from Russia, was joined by Iran, Syria, Belarus, and North Korea. It is improbable that China will join this coalition. Although Beijing is strengthening its economic ties with Moscow, it is unlikely to dare to side with the aggressor. China's support for the war would be considered as an endorsement of separatism, and such a position would not be beneficial for it due to several territorial claims. Although Beijing refrains from criticising Russia, it declares respect for the territorial integrity of all states.

Predicting the further course of the war, it can be assumed that the Kremlin will not give up on its goal in the question of Ukraine. However, despite the threats, Russia is not ready to challenge the North Atlantic Alliance (Lichterhan, 2022). Russia will focus on particular countries and try to deter their involvement in the armed conflict through subversion, propaganda through pro-government media resources, and energy terror.

At this stage of historical development, the world community is faced with the task of stopping the aggressor as soon as possible and making the war prohibitively expensive for Russia (Ratten, 2022). Given that the most likely scenario for the development of the situation in Ukraine is a "war of attrition", considering the difference in economic resources, as well as the limited effectiveness of sanctions imposed on the Kremlin, it is possible to achieve this goal (Levy & Leaning, 2022). However, only if the international community supports Kyiv at multiple levels: financially, militarily, logistically, technologically, informationally, and diplomatically.

Discussion

The issue of the specific features of Ukraine's foreign policy has been of interest to Ukrainian scholars since the emergence of this phenomenon and has become relevant now, in the period of tectonic shifts in international politics due to Russian aggression. Some American and European scholars are also paying attention to the topic of the Ukrainian foreign policy.

K. Shyrokykh (2018) focuses on the evolution of Ukraine's foreign policy, tracking the influence of external actors and domestic political factors on this process. The

author emphasises that the state's foreign policy has developed in interaction with both the East and the West. But the EU and NATO exerted influence through attractiveness and financial aid, while Russia used brute force, manipulation, and coercion. Proceeding from this, Ukrainian politics has traditionally been divided into two conventional parts. Some supported integration into the European Union and membership in the North Atlantic Alliance. Others advocated multi-vectorism, which would mean balancing between the East and the West. K. Shyrokykh (2018) also notes that after 2014, Russia is no longer considered as a suitable alternative to economic and political integration. This demonstrates the inevitability of reforms to achieve EU membership. Therewith, this research paper does not define Ukraine's prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration.

O. Kvasha & A. Syniakova (2019) focus on the problematic issues of Ukraine's integration into the European economic, social, political, and cultural space at the present stage of historical development. However, the authors consider economic factors as the main obstacle to EU accession. In their opinion, Ukraine needs to implement reforms in this area to improve the living standards of its citizens, ensure the harmonious development of economic institutions, high employment, and currency stability.

Researchers also identify internal factors that hinder Ukraine's progress towards the EU. These include the lack of tangible results of socio-economic reforms, high levels of corruption and economic crime, a shortage of experienced European integration specialists among the elite and civil servants, inconsistencies in legal systems and a gap in the level of economic development between Ukraine and the EU. However, in their study, they do not consider the factor of external aggression, which hinders the country's development and exacerbates the crisis in various spheres of public life. H. Mashtalir & S. Leskiv (2017) considered the issue of Ukraine's integration into the EU as a basis for the development of civil society. Scholars believe that the EU is setting a personal example of the importance of civil society's interaction with the authorities.

Ukraine's accession to the European Union will allow Ukrainian society to move to a qualitatively new level towards establishing European rules for the functioning of civil society. This refers to developing and implementing the rule of law by changing laws, the implementation of which, among other things, should be mandatory for all members of society, protecting violated human and civil rights and freedoms, and fighting corruption at all levels of government. In its foreign policy, the EU promotes relevant values in civil society, which is one of the important tasks on the way towards membership.

L. Skachko (2020) investigates the state and prospects of cooperation between Ukraine and the North Atlantic Alliance in the context of the formation of a common security and defence policy. The researcher suggests that it is the aggression and constant pressure from Russia that has led to the need for Ukraine to seek effective guarantees of its independence and territorial integrity. While military and political cooperation with NATO, as the most influential security organisation, is essential for the state. Recent public opinion polls show that Ukrainians have realised the

benefits of collective security after Russia's full-scale invasion. However, the question arises as to how stable citizens' support for NATO membership will be and to what extent it is a conscious choice rather than a temporary reaction to an external threat (The majority of Ukrainians..., 2022).

E. Wolff (2015) studies the topic of NATO expansion against the background of the situation in Ukraine. The author disputes the Russian propaganda narrative that the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a response to the possible eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. In his opinion, NATO's presence in the post-Soviet countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia) creates stability for the entire Europe, and does not pose a threat to Russia. Therewith, the researcher suggests that the prospects of Ukraine and Georgia's membership in NATO will lead to an escalation of the conflict between Russia and the Alliance leaders.

V. Osadchyi (2021) explores the topic of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO in the period from 2014 to 2020. The author emphasises that a sovereign and democratic Ukraine is essential for security on the European continent and constrains Russian expansion to the West. That is why the leadership of the North Atlantic Alliance supports Kyiv's course towards joining the organisation, aiding in strengthening the defence sector and bringing it up to NATO standards. However, internal factors such as ineffective anti-corruption measures and slow defence reforms made it impossible for Ukraine to become a formal NATO member in the near future. But this in no way limits cooperation with the Alliance and bringing it to a qualitatively new level in the wake of Russia's aggression.

A. Haque (2022) examined Ukraine's foreign policy in the context of the Russian invasion. The researcher argues that the Russian Federation, having launched a full-scale war, violated the prohibition of the use of force contained in the UN Charter (UN Office in Ukraine, 1945). And since Ukraine is fighting for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, it can demand aid from the international community in the form of weapons and economic sanctions against Russia. International law, in his opinion, stays one of the main levers in the arsenal of official Kyiv. The author also concludes that the aggressor should pay reparations for all the destruction and casualties. And those officials who unleashed the war in the centre of Europe must be brought to justice in international courts. Therewith, the researcher does not consider the prospects for the formation of a new system of international relations and the creation of security structures that would meet the challenges of modern times and prevent conflicts of this magnitude.

This topic is in the field of research interests of the group of scholars A. Cafruny *et al.* (2023). They consider the armed conflict in Ukraine as a proxy war between Russia and the United States. According to the authors, Russia, having failed to adapt to the post-Cold War capitalist order, adopted a geopolitical programme of confrontation in

response to NATO's advance to the East. The clash of these grand strategies also triggered a struggle for Ukrainian sovereignty. The researchers believe that the international community needs to formulate new security rules that would be in line with the multipolar world order. However, they do not factor in the very real possibility of the West winning the proxy war and the disappearance of Russia as a state that has influence on global political processes.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of Ukraine's foreign policy activities at the current stage of historical development, the following conclusions can be drawn. After regaining its independence in 1991, Ukraine began to formulate its own foreign policy, which was aimed at preserving peace and stability in the world by protecting its own interests and security. During this period, the state pursued a multi-vector policy, which means maintaining mutually beneficial relations with various members of the international community. This was conditioned by the fact that for a long time there was no consensus in Ukrainian society on the choice of integration model: European or Eurasian. At the same time, in the first years after its independence, Ukraine set a course for European integration and distancing itself from Moscow.

The Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea, the unleashing of a hybrid war in eastern Ukraine and the full-scale invasion of Russia have finally eliminated the debate over Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic development choice. However, on the way towards EU and NATO membership, the state must overcome internal problems such as high levels of corruption, completion of reforms in all spheres of public life, and overcoming economic instability.

Therewith, against the backdrop of Russian aggression, Ukraine has considerably expanded its cooperation with the international community in various fields, from military to humanitarian. The war unleashed by Russia is global both in terms of its impact on food and energy security and its consequences for the norms recognised by the international community after the Second World War.

The prospect of further research on this topic is a detailed consideration of the various stages of development of the state's foreign policy strategy. Furthermore, this study can serve as a starting point for assessing Ukraine's prospects in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration in the coming years, as well as for analysing trends in the geopolitical orientations of the country's residents against the background of external aggression.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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Особливості сучасної геополітичної ситуації та зовнішньополітичної діяльності незалежної України

Анотація. Актуальність досліджуваної теми зумовлена тим, що в умовах російської агресії Україна переживає новий етап державного розвитку, який насамперед стосується її майбутнього місця на політичній карті світу та ролі в системі міжнародних відносин. Метою даного дослідження є аналіз геополітичного становища та зовнішньополітичної діяльності України на сучасному етапі її історичного розвитку. Для вирішення поставлених завдань використовувалися загальнонаукові та спеціальні методи дослідження, зокрема порівняльний, історичний, а також системний, структурно-функціональний, прогностичний, інституціональний та інші методи. Результатами дослідження можна вважати визначення етапів розвитку України в дипломатичному просторі та формулювання зовнішньополітичних орієнтирів держави. У дослідженні охарактеризовано геополітичну стратегію України з моменту здобуття незалежності та стан її партнерського потенціалу на сучасному етапі. Проаналізовано основні напрямки зовнішньополітичної діяльності органів державної влади та перспективи країни з точки зору її просування на світовій арені. Учасники також визначили пріоритети зовнішньої політики України та проблеми утвердження держави на міжнародній арені в умовах російської агресії та боротьби за територіальну цілісність. Результати дослідження є важливими для державних службовців, до обов'язків яких входить розробка зовнішньополітичного курсу держави, а також для науковців, до кола наукових інтересів яких входить зовнішня політика в європейсько-атлантичному контексті та співробітництво України із зарубіжними країнами

Ключові слова: геополітична стратегія; національна безпека України; міжнародні відносини; європейська інтеграція; національні інтереси; багатополарна модель світоустрою

UDC 355.48(477+100)
DOI: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.30-39

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The Russian-Ukrainian war 2014-2023: Interference factors of the War

Abstract. At the end of February 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine escalated into a full-scale war. This provoked strong resistance from the Ukrainian state and society, as well as Western anti-Russian sanctions. The Russian-Ukrainian war has gone far beyond the borders of Ukraine and Russia and has acquired regional and global significance. The interim results and outcomes of the war encourage understanding and generalisation of experience for Ukraine, Europe, and the world. The purpose of this study was to analyse the key aspects of the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of their impact on national, regional, and global processes. The methodology of the study is based on the principles of scientificity, historicism, systematicity, generalisation, multifactoriality, combined with the use of methods of analysis and synthesis, historical-comparative and historical-genetic, systemic, and structural-functional analysis. The coverage of aspects of the large-scale stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war is based on the analysis of the current state of the situation at the front, military-technical, and diplomatic efforts to ensure Ukraine's victory. This is necessary to stop Russian aggression and the crimes of the Russian occupiers, restore Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, punish the aggressors, return to international law and order, and ensure lasting and stable peace in Europe and the world. Another generalisation is that Ukraine's allies and partners understand that it opposes militarism and authoritarianism and defends democratic rights and freedoms and universal human values. Ukrainians, through their resilience and struggle, have given new impetus to the North Atlantic partnership and European integration. In the long run, this is of great practical importance for strengthening the democratic priorities of European and global civilisational development. The applied aspect of the study of the aspects of the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war is also important for the establishment of democratic trends in the evolution of modern international relations and the world order

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian war 2014-2023; full-scale aggression; aspects of war; international relations; world order

Introduction

The Russian Federation's hybrid aggression against Ukraine (since 26 February 2014) and its subsequent escalation into a large-scale war (since 24 February 2022) have factually marked the beginning of a major transformation of the post-bipolar system of international relations, which was formed in the main after the collapse of the USSR and the world system of socialism (1991). Russia has

single-handedly endangered not only Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity but has also begun to dismantle the entire international legal structure of the modern world order. Its aggressive steps provoked a response of resistance not only from the Ukrainian state and society, but also led to sanctions pressure from the vast majority of the international community. This is evidenced by the

Received: 15.07.2023, Revised: 26.10.2023, Accepted: 21.11.2023

Suggested Citation:

Kyrydon, A., & Troyan, S. (2023). The Russian-Ukrainian war 2014-2023: Interference factors of the War. *Foreign Affairs*, 33(6), 30-39. doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.30-39.

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individual and sectoral sanctions imposed since 2014 (and especially since the end of February 2022) against Russia, Russian companies, legal entities and individuals, and the support of the UN General Assembly for 14 resolutions (adopted in 2014-2023) on the restoration of Ukraine's full territorial integrity and sovereignty within the internationally recognised borders of 1991 (Sullivan & Bowman, 2023). Understanding the role and significance of the Ukrainian struggle against Russian aggression (and especially at the stage of the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war) brings the issue to the forefront and leads to many important consequences for Ukraine and the world.

Being in the zone of objective response, amid tumultuous and life-changing events for Ukraine, Europe, and the world, it is clear that it is still difficult to make in-depth generalisations. At the same time, the specific features of the perception of war that are relevant to our time need to be properly identified and recorded for further comprehension and theoretical construction. Existing meanings, unlike material artefacts, are fleeting and changeable. Therefore, the "experience of direct observation" during the war appears to be indispensable for the researcher. The sets of meanings associated with the war will continue to be modified and transformed into sustainable narratives (the latter ensure the continuity of collective memory and are aimed at maintaining the identity of communities). Therefore, it is inevitable that the understanding of the meaning of events by those who write history and the perceptions of those who create it will differ. Given these observations, we offer a few reflections.

Due to the incompleteness of the war and the current course of events and their impact on regional and global processes, the declared issues have found only partial or situational reflection in the scientific discourse. This is also evidenced by the historiography of the problem. Dutch political scientist and expert on Eastern European security M.H. Van Herpen (2016) and Ukrainian historian and political scientist Ye. Mahda (2017) considered the factors of Russian President V. Putin's wars in general and specifically the Russian-Ukrainian war only in relation to the initial stage of Russia's hybrid aggression against Ukraine. The well-known American political scientist and journalist F. Zakaria (2021), who devoted his investigation to the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, which chronologically coincided with the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, however, does not directly interconnect these events. At the same time, a comprehensive approach to understanding the impact of global and regional crises, including the Russian-Ukrainian war, on the current world order is of great practical and scientific importance in the future. The analysis of the aspects of the full-scale stage of Russian aggression by Ukrainian and foreign authors is marked by a list of individual lessons, brevity of presentation and argumentation (Korsunskyy, 2022; Sasse, 2022; Volt, 2023). The global and regional dimensions of Russia's war against Ukraine have been partially addressed by foreign and Ukrainian scholars in collective monographs (Bodak *et al.*, 2022; Bocancea, 2023). The authors of the proposed article have also revealed a range of meanings of the Russian-Ukrainian war in their publication in the book

"The Turning Point" (Kyrydon & Troyan, 2023). Thus, while the historiographical base is growing, as noted by T. Sydoruk (2023), a researcher of Eastern European integration and security issues, not all factors of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine have been considered.

The purpose of this study was to systematise and summarise the main factors of the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and to highlight their significance from the Ukrainian, European, and global perspectives. The scientific originality of this study lies in the comprehension and systematisation of the basic factors of the full-scale stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war with the emphasis and analysis of military-historical, state-identity, integration and security, and historical and prospective aspects.

The complexity of the problem under study necessitates the use of a wide range of methodological research tools. The principle of the methodology of understanding (according to M. Weber) was chosen as the basic methodological tool for understanding the experience and nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the main cognitive strategy. To understand the complex and multifaceted processes of Russia's war against Ukraine, the methodology of interpretive research was chosen. Using the method of historiographical analysis, the author examines the vision of the problem of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the modern scientific discourse for 1991-2023. The method of historiographical synthesis is used to systematise the position of different points of view, to identify current trends in the understanding of political scientists, historians, sociologists, and researchers of other scientific fields of the current political situation in Eastern Europe. The use of the historical-comparative method in its two modules (synchronous and asynchronous) made it possible to compare the policies, rhetoric, and peacekeeping initiatives of different countries during the hybrid and full-scale stages of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The historical and genetic method helped to analyse the origins of the modern attitude towards the events of the Ukrainian-Russian war in the world, its development and impact on Ukrainian and European society. To systematise and structure the main aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014-2023 at the national and supranational levels, the author uses the systemic and structural-functional methods.

Military and Historical Factors

The full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war confirms the fact that the era of great wars is not a thing of the past. The official Kremlin's attempts to defeat Ukraine with lightning speed and impose capitulation under the guise of "peace" on Russia's terms have failed completely. The substantial advantage in artillery, armoured vehicles, military aircraft and helicopters, warships and submarines, as well as in manpower, did not give Moscow the desired effect or advantage. The steadfast and heroic resistance of Ukrainians has substantially weakened the military potential/number of Russian troops. As of 2023, the Ukrainian army has virtually destroyed the personnel of the Russian military, which is one and a half times the number of almost 200,000 at the beginning of the full-scale aggression on 24 February 2022. According to the General Staff of the

Armed Forces of Ukraine (hereinafter – the General Staff of the AFU) (as of 20.10.2023), over 292 thousand Russian occupiers were killed, which is almost a third of the personnel that the Russian army had at the beginning of the full-scale aggression. More than 5,000 tanks and 9,500 armoured combat vehicles, over 7,000 artillery systems and almost five and a half hundred air defence systems, nearly 650 combat aircraft and attack helicopters, etc., of the enemy were also destroyed (Smutok, 2023). The Armed Forces of Ukraine are much more powerful in all respects than they were a year ago, thanks specifically to the support of Ukraine's foreign allies and partners. This conclusion is also based on the latest data from the Global Firepower military power rankings: Ukraine rose from 22nd place in 2022 to 15th in 2023 (Global Firepower, 2023).

The war imposed by Russia combines elements of traditional conflicts of the 20th century, but at the same time is completely new due to the use of modern digital technologies that broadcast “war online”. Modern warfare at the stage of hybrid aggression, and then the full-scale phase of hostilities, has all the hallmarks of the so-called fourth generation or network-centric wars. Its characteristics include the use of high precision “smart” weapons, organisation and conduct of hostilities through information and computer networks, psychological operations and cyberattacks, the disappearance of boundaries between the categories of war and peace, front and rear, armed forces and paramilitary formations, etc. Thus, scholars have even defined the Russian-Ukrainian war as “the first world war of the Internet age” (Bocancea, 2023). Russia is waging a war of words against Ukraine to destroy the vital functions of the Ukrainian state and society.

For the first time in history, a large-scale war became available in real time to millions of viewers through television channels and social media (Kuleba, 2019). The American historian T. Snyder (2022) noted that “the provision of the latest Western weapons, ammunition, and constant financial aid from Ukrainian allies and partners became possible because citizens of the free world were well informed about the crimes... committed by Russian terrorist forces on Ukrainian territory”. This has influenced public opinion in many leading countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, and South Korea. That is why Ukraine has been able to receive such unprecedented support from both Western allies and partner states from virtually all parts of the world.

The asymmetry of the potentials (including military) of the parties should be considered a feature of the current Russian-Ukrainian war as a fourth-generation war already at the stage of hybrid warfare and then a full-scale armed conflict. However, such asymmetry does not necessarily mean directly proportional consequences. Economically powerful and militarily stronger international actors do not always win in a war of conquest. In this sense, the “special military operation” organised by the Russian president turned out to be a strategic failure in almost all respects.

Despite the lack of sufficient weapons at the first stage of the war, Ukrainian defenders have demonstrated high morale and professionalism since the first days of the full-scale aggression. Relying exclusively on hard power and

appropriate rhetoric in the information sphere, nuclear blackmail and the use of terrorist methods, unjustified killings of civilians and destruction of civilian infrastructure did not help Russia gain an advantage. The military invasion of Ukraine, which was planned by the Russian state and political leadership and military commanders as a lightning-fast triumphal march, turned into a threat of total defeat for them, especially in the context of the growth of Western military aid to Ukraine. At the same time, only joint further comprehensive (military, political, diplomatic, sanctions) actions by Ukraine and its allies and partners in the anti-Putin coalition can help defeat the Russian aggressor, facilitate the complete de-occupation of Ukrainian territory, and avert the threat of an expanding armed conflict, including its escalation into a nuclear one.

The policy of appeasement of the aggressor, as in previous times (specifically on the eve of the Second World War), is wrong and ineffective. During its confrontation with Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated to the international community its disregard for international law and the laws for the conduct of war. That is why any agreement with the Russian dictatorship is unacceptable: it must be defeated. To establish a just and sustainable peace, it is necessary to ensure Ukraine's victory in the war and the support of the democratic international community aimed at developing comprehensive national, regional, and global security guarantees and preventing the escalation of armed conflicts of varying intensity as those that pose an existential threat to peace.

The Director of the Rafik Hariri Centre, V.F. Veksler (2022), noted in August 2022 that “six months of genocide against the people of Ukraine, years of occupation of Ukrainian lands, and a hybrid war against the West have clearly shown that any agreements with the Putin regime are unviable and counterproductive”. Therewith, Russia's leadership openly disregards the existing norms of international law and agreements at the interstate level. Russia is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine, violating the basic principle of freedom of navigation, weaponizing food and refugees, and pursuing a policy of energy and nuclear blackmail. Thus, the existential threat created by the Putin regime is of an international nature.

The democratic world's response should be to impose harsh, restrictive sanctions. The main point is to take corresponding actions in relation to the entire (without limitation) Russian energy sector, the Russian nuclear agency, transport, logistics, and financial relations with Russia. Ukraine's allies and partners should finally stop contemplating the so-called “red lines” invented by the Kremlin and maximise both the defensive and offensive capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces by supplying more modern air defence systems, long-range weapons systems, F-16 aircraft, etc. This will seriously enhance the prospect of Ukraine regaining control over its temporarily occupied territories much sooner.

State-identity factors

The Russian-Ukrainian war is an expression of the confrontation between the Russian discourse of war and the

Ukrainian discourse of peace, based on the direct analogy of “friend-or-foe”. The Russian war paradigm is based not only on the desire to implement the modern neo-imperial idea of geopolitical spatial expansion and return Russia to the status of the USSR during the Cold War. The strategy of Russian military and political thinking is also based on the ideology of the “Russian world” and the complete subordination of Ukraine, without which any “European” Russia is unthinkable. Considering this, as noted by Ukrainian researchers at the National Institute for Strategic Studies B. Parakhonskyi & G. Yavorska (2022), “since 2004, the ruling elite of the Russian Federation has identified its strategic priorities for restoring dominance in the post-Soviet space and began intensively preparing for war with Ukraine and other states: it has been deploying programmes to rearm and modernise its armed forces, while testing the international community’s reaction to possible aggressive actions against neighbouring states”.

However, within the Ukrainian paradigm of peaceful coexistence in the post-establishment world, the very possibility of any considerable conflict with a neighbouring state was excluded. Even before the outbreak of a full-scale war, Russia was not considered as an existential threat. It was only after 24 February 2022 that a paradigm shift in the Ukrainian peace discourse occurred: the war against Russia acquired the national liberation and existential character of an armed struggle for victory on the battlefield, de-occupation of Ukrainian territories, punishment of the aggressor, and Ukraine’s future within the European and Euro-Atlantic integration and security alliances. Russia’s main strategic goal in this war is the destruction of the Ukrainian ethnos and Ukrainian statehood. The impunity of those who started the war leads to negative consequences both for the direct target of the aggression – Ukraine – and for the entire international legal order of the functioning of the entire system of world politics.

For millions of Ukrainians, the war was a trauma and a collective tragedy. Russian aggression has caused Ukraine enormous losses, as highlighted by Prosecutor General A. Kostin (2023). During the year of armed conflict, over 81,000 civilian objects were damaged and destroyed, including residential buildings (62,000), educational (2,300) and medical (over 450) institutions (2,300); over 4,000 gas and water pipelines and electricity networks were damaged and destroyed. The environmental damage caused by the ongoing war is estimated at 46 billion USD. Since October 2022, Russia has been attacking the energy infrastructure. The war has also affected the private sector of the economy, with a decrease in the number of entrepreneurs in Ukraine (Audretsch *et al.*, 2023). These actions are aimed at deliberately creating unfit living conditions in Ukraine, which is one of the signs of genocide under the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

An essential factor in successfully resisting the Russian invaders is the national unity and consolidation of Ukrainians. This refers to the cohesion of the people, both at the political and psycho-emotional levels (Khraban, 2022), to counteract full-scale aggression and defend state independence and the return of Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

“The latest Ukrainian history – especially its 31st year – will reflect the panorama of cementing the nation and creating a powerful national idea right in the middle of a brutal, bloody war. From Crimea, Ilovaisk, and Donetsk airport to Bucha and Mariupol with unyielding Azovstal, the distance in years appears to be small, but the panorama of confrontation with the enemy is impressive”, as Ukrainian scholars V. Gorbunin & V. Badrak (2022) rightly emphasised.

The influence of information and semantic levers, the power of the “propaganda machine” of authoritarian regimes, should not be underestimated. The war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine and Ukrainians is a permanent war of cynically distorted meanings and contents inherent in Orwellian dystopia. For more than two decades of Putin’s rule, the influence of the Kremlin’s official anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian propaganda has led to dramatic changes in the worldview of the majority of Russian citizens. As a result, it was this that became the decisive moment for Russians to support first a hybrid and then a full-scale war against Ukraine.

One of the important goals of the war unleashed by Russia was to establish comprehensive (total) control over Ukraine, as well as to turn Europe and the entire world into a dystopia. The danger of replacing concepts with contradictory brands and symbols is that this will allow the Russian authoritarian regime to justify its aggressive motives and actions. The Russian leadership has given itself the right to occupy Ukraine, declaring the war a “special military operation”. The Kremlin uses anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western rhetoric to justify its illegal actions in direct violation of international law and interstate treaties. The government claims that the war it unleashed was a legitimate act of preventive self-defence against neighbours who, by seeking to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance, were demonstrating allegedly hostile intentions towards Russia.

Integration and Security Factors

The Russian-Ukrainian war has radically changed the relations between Ukraine and the European Union and NATO, as well as the prospects for Ukraine’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration (Sologoub, 2022; Genschel, 2023). The main content of the transformation is the transition from cooperation under the terms of the Association Agreement without the possibility of Ukraine’s accession to the European Union to the official status of a candidate for EU membership on 23 June 2022. Therewith, on 30 September 2022, Ukraine submitted an official application signed by the country’s top political leadership for accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation under an accelerated procedure (Report on implementation..., 2022; Kyrydon & Troyan, 2023).

As of 2023, 87% of Ukrainian citizens support joining the European Union, and 86% support joining NATO (Barsukova, 2023). Among the Alliance’s real steps in terms of military and political assistance, it is worth noting political support, energy support, funding for medical care for soldiers, rehabilitation of the wounded, etc. In February 2023, at the Ukraine-EU summit in Kyiv, EU leaders confirmed

the irreversibility of Ukraine's European integration. At that time, the Ukrainian authorities announced their main expectations regarding the European integration course, including immediate negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU, strengthening of sanctions against the aggressor state, and provision of urgent military assistance to Ukraine, including modern air defence systems, armoured vehicles, artillery, etc.

Although more than a year and a half of full-scale war has united the Western world, it has not eliminated the differences that still exist in it. Specifically, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who has actually turned into a kind of Kremlin's fifth column in the EU and NATO, constantly makes statements and strongly supports Russia in its intentions to achieve "peace" on Russia's terms. In fact, this "peace" means not only retaining 20% of the illegally occupied Ukrainian territories, but also providing Russia with further opportunities to manipulate international law in its interests and disregard the territorial integrity and sovereignty of not only Ukraine but also other neighbouring states. However, despite this position of Orban's Hungary, no substantial sanctions have been imposed on it by the European Community and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Kyrydon & Troyan, 2023).

Europe and the world must "mature" to understand the inevitability and necessity of Russia's unconditional defeat in its groundless and treacherous war against Ukraine and abandon the Russia-centric view of Eastern Europe that prevailed until 2022 (Vorburgg & Bluwstein, 2022). The West should be more resolute in its support of the Ukrainian state and make bold strategic decisions in its favour, rather than providing military aid in small increments. Substantial progress in this regard is being made thanks to the activities of the Coalition in Support of Ukraine to Counter Russian Aggression, known as Ramstein Meetings, which currently unites 54 countries. It has become "a true coalition of the free world in support of Ukraine" (Reznikov, 2023).

The powerful security community of more than 140 states that support Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, with a consolidated West at its core, still does not see a clear prospect of a new global security architecture. What scares it the most (given both the statements of the French president and the rhythms of military cooperation with Ukraine) is the future without Russia as an influential actor in international relations, despite its open act of aggression against Ukraine (Kyrydon & Troyan, 2023).

Ukraine's post-war security is guaranteed by its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Despite the development of cooperation with NATO and the conclusion of the Association Agreement with the EU, Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic and European integration prospects were limited (Report on implementation..., 2022). The explanation was that Ukraine had no prospect of EU membership and only general declarative assurances from NATO of such a possibility in the vaguely distant future. This ambiguity in the position of NATO and EU member states finally convinced the Russian president that in case of a military invasion of Ukraine, the collective West would not provide it with the necessary military, technical, and

other assistance. The situation has changed dramatically since Ukraine was granted EU candidate status and applied to join NATO. There is a realistic prospect that after Ukraine's victory in the war, Western countries will continue to pursue an enlargement policy and that Ukraine will be integrated into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and the European integration community as soon as possible. As a result, Ukrainian diplomats made every effort, but without success, to receive an invitation from NATO to the 2023 Vilnius Summit. This is still a vital task for Ukraine in the near future, and the best solution would be a positive decision by the NATO Summit in Washington (2024), which will mark the 75th anniversary of the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

During the Russian-Ukrainian war, some international organisations, including the UN, proved incapable of acting. The preservation of the UN Security Council in its current form, the Kremlin's veto power and even the presidency of the Russian Federation give official Moscow many opportunities to block many steps of the international community aimed at countering Russia's aggression and war crimes. The Russian-Ukrainian war clearly indicates the relevance and necessity of reforming the UN and its structures to transform it into a real and effective guarantor of peace and security in the regional and global dimensions.

A essential factor in a full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war is a clear understanding of the threat and danger of nuclear blackmail. This is the first war where a nuclear power has seized through occupation and is holding nuclear facilities – nuclear power plants – of another state. The international community and international institutions designed to guarantee security, including in the field of nuclear energy – the UN, OSCE, IAEA – were unprepared for Russia's illegal actions. As a result of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine and the Kremlin's threats to use nuclear weapons, it has become clear that nuclear status provokes dictators like Putin to irresponsible steps in the international arena, aggression, and war. This is done both to intimidate other states and to achieve its annexationist goals, specifically with regard to Ukraine. Therefore, the problem of comprehensive control in the nuclear sphere (peaceful and military), denuclearisation of Russia, and possible deprivation of its right to nuclear weapons requires urgent expert, scientific, and theoretical analysis and practical solution.

Historical and Prospective Factors

Effective and efficient military support and consolidation of the Ukrainian society and the Armed Forces of Ukraine is the key to victory in the war against the Russian occupiers. This will play a key role in expelling them from the territory of Ukraine, protecting European values and returning to the current international legal norms. In total, for example, the US military and economic aid to Ukraine during the term of the Joe Biden Administration exceeded 66 billion USD (Sokolenko, 2023), and the EU's total contribution to Ukraine under the European Peace Facility (EPF) increased to 3.6 billion EUR. According to an analysis by the Stockholm International Peace Research

Institute (SIPRI), Ukraine ranked third in arms imports in 2022 (Surge in arms..., 2023). The steady growth of comprehensive military assistance from allies and partners has fundamentally strengthened both Ukraine's defensive positions and its offensive capabilities to fully de-occupy Ukrainian territory. In the long run, this will not only bring Ukraine's victory in the war closer but will also allow it to preserve its invaluable human resources, as well as material objects and cultural values.

To defeat Russian militarism, it is important to consolidate measures in various areas: military, information, sanctions, cultural, diplomatic, legal, and religious (Kolodnyi & Fylypovych, 2022; Kyrydon & Troyan, 2023; Reznikov, 2023). Consolidation of efforts in this regard became particularly effective after the outbreak of a full-scale Russian war against Ukraine. Notably, Ukraine receives support not only from Western countries, primarily EU and NATO members. Countries and peoples from all continents have become Ukraine's partners in organising a comprehensive response to the Russian invasion and restoring full territorial integrity and sovereignty. According to experts, only such a "collective Ramstein" can be the key to Ukraine's victory, de-occupation, punishment of those responsible for the act of Russian aggression against Ukraine and the crimes it caused" (Bunyak, 2023), rebuilding Ukraine, and creating a new international – European and global – security configuration.

Therewith, as noted by V. Fisanov (2022), the European idea and practices of democracy should be inextricably linked in the Ukrainian state. The researcher draws on the opinion of Denis de Rougemont on the role of medium and small states: "The small state exists to provide a green corner in the world where as many inhabitants as possible can enjoy the status of a citizen. The small state has nothing but true and real freedom, which ideally compensates for the power of the great powers." But now, as the Ukrainian historian very appropriately notes, independence and sovereignty must be reliably protected, and "Ukraine and Ukrainians must be a kind of model for their neighbours, abandoning the shackles of neocolonialism and Machiavellianism and paving their own difficult path to European democracy".

The historical perspective of the democratic component for Ukraine, Europe, and the world should be emphasised. This is especially important in terms of the overall liberal-democratic development trend. Ukraine's struggle against Russia at the stage of countering full-scale aggression is becoming crucial for the future pattern in the national (Ukrainian), regional (European), and global dimensions. Ukraine's successes on the battlefield and ultimate victory in the war strengthen democratic forces and their ability to effectively counter the rise of authoritarian manifestations in all spheres of life in the past two decades in both individual countries and regions.

Ukraine's victory on the battlefield also paves the way for peace in both the regional and global dimensions. The Ukrainian victory will not only stop Russian aggression, killings, destruction of infrastructure and civilian objects, but will also lay the foundation for negotiations at all levels. This refers not only to reaching a Russian-Ukrainian

understanding, but also to concluding and signing comprehensive peace and security arrangements and agreements within the framework of establishing a new international and global legal order that would guarantee reliable protection against aggression for all members of the international community. Therewith, the violation of the prohibition of war is still the basis of both the current and future international system. This approach concerns not only Russia and counteracting its aggressive policy towards Ukraine but is also aimed at preventing any other state from pursuing its foreign policy goals through expansion and annexation of foreign territories. It is also intended for any state that plans to follow in Russia's footsteps in the future. This means that a decisive rebuff to Russian aggression in Ukraine and Russia's defeat in the illegal war will force states that would consider a similar invasion of another country in the future not to attempt to implement plans that contradict the norms and principles of the current international legal order.

As Ukrainian scholars rightly point out, "achieving sustainable peace is possible either by destroying the enemy as a capable force or by incorporating it into one's system of power, through its subjugation or enslavement. Then the subject of the action is deprived of identity and free will" (Parakhonskyy & Yavorska, 2022). In other words, Ukraine's victory in the Russian-Ukrainian war will have a direct impact on the expansion of the space of democratic peace and strengthening of regional and global security.

International Consequences of Full-Scale Russian Aggression against Ukraine

In general, Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine was the result of a slow and ineffective response of the guarantor states of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, international institutions, primarily the UN and the OSCE, to Russia's hybrid aggression and annexation of part of Ukrainian territory in February-March 2014. Even then and later, Ukrainian and foreign scholars addressed the Russian Federation's comprehensive violation of international law, including the UN Charter and existing treaties and agreements concluded with Ukraine on a bilateral or multilateral basis in 1991-2013 (Van Herpen, 2016; Mahda, 2017; Felshtinsky & Stanczew, 2022). The sanctions imposed by Western powers were limited and partial and did not affect the main industries and sectors of the Russian economy, primarily the energy and military-technical sectors. Moreover, in the context of military-technical cooperation with Russia, Western states and companies fulfilled their commitments made before February 2014 (Kyrydon & Troyan, 2023).

The negotiation process within the so-called Normandy format involving France, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia also proved to be ineffective. The latter actually took part in it on an equal footing with other states, using it to exert direct pressure on Ukraine. Western partners limited themselves to diplomatic attempts to influence the Kremlin but did not discuss the illegality of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the presence of Russian troops in eastern Ukraine. Moreover, as historians and experts

point out, in parallel to the ineffective negotiation process, which eventually reached a deadlock, large-scale programmes of economic cooperation with Russia were implemented (Gorbulin & Badrak, 2022; Kyrydon & Troyan, 2022; Watling *et al.*, 2023). An example of this is the construction of a new branch of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which was supposed to connect Russia and Germany. Its implementation was completed by early 2022, and only the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine led to the veto of Nord Stream 2.

First the hybrid, and then the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine has grave international legal consequences. Scholars have focused primarily on Russia's destruction of the European architecture of international relations, which emerged after the dismantling of the global socialist system and the collapse of the USSR (Akande, 2022; Bellinger III, 2022; Dib, 2022). At the same time, they point out the strengths and weaknesses of the international legal order that have emerged under the influence of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war. "The modern legal order is based on the prohibition of war, even if it is not always fully respected," emphasises international law judge S. Breyer. "When Putin launched his war, he put this basic principle at risk. But the test of a legal norm, whether national or international, is not only determined by whether it has been violated. It is also determined by the response to its violation... Accordingly, legal consequences are not only aimed at punishing the perpetrator, but also at deterring others from engaging in future violations" (Hathaway, 2023). Therewith, the war unleashed by Russia has also affected a range of other areas, specifically, researchers note the increase in oil prices for the population of not only Europe but also the United States of America (Appiah-Otoo, 2023), the beginning of an artificial food and energy crisis (Behnassi & El Haiba, 2022; Orhan, 2022), a decline in the GDP of EU countries (Liadze, 2023), and the risk of complex vulnerability for the global financial system (Qureshi *et al.*, 2022).

Russia's conventional full-scale war aimed at destroying Ukraine's state independence and destroying the material and value foundations of Ukrainian society has also created a powerful existential threat to Europe and the international order. There was even discussion of the end of the "modern global legal order" (Hathaway, 2023). This resulted in a change in the Western paradigm of countering Russian aggression, especially under the influence of national consolidation and the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people. The consolidated fight against Russian aggression was based on four types of response from the Ukrainian and international community. These should include condemnation of the Kremlin's illegal war, expulsion of Russia from international institutions and sanctions against it, arming Ukraine, and legal and material liability of Russia and its citizens, including the president and other high-ranking officials.

As a result, it was after 24 February 2022 that Ukraine began to receive powerful, comprehensive Western military, technical, humanitarian, financial, and diplomatic support to successfully fight against Russia. It was for this purpose that the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which includes

more than 50 countries, was created. The fundamental outcome of the full-scale phase of Russian aggression against Ukraine was a general understanding of the need for Russia's defeat in the war, as evidenced by the explanation of American historian T. Snyder and the statement of NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg (Snyder, 2023; Stoltenberg, 2023). Specifically, they addressed Ukraine's crucial role at the present stage in the struggle to preserve democratic human values, overcome authoritarian tendencies, prevent genocidal practices, reduce the risk of nuclear war and nuclear proliferation, eliminate the threat of a slide into chaos in international relations, and restore the basic principles and foundations of the international legal order. In this context, T. Snyder (2023) emphasised: "Ukrainians have given us a chance to turn this century around, a chance for freedom and security that we could not have achieved on our own, no matter who we are. All we must do is help them win".

Conclusions

To summarise the analysis of the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, we will highlight four main aspects: military-historical, state-identity, integration, and security, and historical and prospective. In the military-historical dimension, the key conclusion is that it is necessary and possible to successfully counteract aggression by a powerful state, namely Russia, in the context of modern asymmetric network-centric warfare of the fourth generation. The focus of the state-identity dimension is on the fact that national unity and consolidation of Ukrainian society is the key factor in successfully countering Russian aggression to preserve Ukraine's independence and full sovereignty within the 1991 borders. The integration and security aspect determines three basic factors of Ukraine's current situation and future development: comprehensive assistance from Western countries to wage a successful war against Russia, and Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic perspective, i.e., its membership in the EU and NATO. Finally, the fundamental historical perspective of the full-scale phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war is Ukraine's victory and return to the current international legal norms.

The prospective plane of analysing the nature and essence of full-scale Russian aggression from the standpoint of Ukrainian, European, and global development prospects deserves further research. Ukraine's perspective envisages the complete de-occupation of its territory, security guarantees as a result of full membership in NATO and the EU, and Ukraine's transformation into a powerful regional player. The European perspective should be based on the awareness of all European actors of the primacy of security principles and foundations for building vertical and horizontal mutually beneficial relations in the economic, financial, scientific and technical, and other spheres. The global perspective should envisage the development of the world's profound interdependence based on strict adherence to the international legal framework of interstate interactions as the basis for a new architecture of the world order.

Comprehension and generalisation of the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine opens a scientific,

theoretical, and applied perspective for a comprehensive investigation and development of ways and means to minimise the risks of increasing conflict potential in the system of modern international relations at the inter-state, regional, and global levels. Further results of such studies will be based on a broader empirical and theoretical framework but will certainly consider the experience already gained in the field of historical research and

understanding of the key factors of the full-scale stage of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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Російсько-українська війна 2014-2023: інтерференційні чинники війни

Анотація. Російська агресія проти України наприкінці лютого 2022 року переросла у фазу повномасштабної війни. Це викликало потужний опір української держави та суспільства, а також західні антиросійські санкції. Російсько-українська війна вийшла далеко за межі України й Росії, набула регіонального і світового значення. Проміжні підсумки й результати війни спонукають до розуміння та узагальнення досвіду для України, Європи і світу. Мета дослідження спрямована на аналіз ключових аспектів повномасштабної фази російсько-української війни в контексті їхнього впливу на національні, регіональні, глобальні процеси. Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на принципах науковості, історизму, системності, узагальнення, поліфакторності в поєднанні з використанням методів аналізу і синтезу, історико-порівняльного й історико-генетичного, системного і структурно-функціонального аналізу. Висвітлення аспектів широкомасштабного етапу російсько-української війни базуються на аналізі сучасного стану ситуації на фронті, військово-технічних і дипломатичних зусиль для забезпечення перемоги України. Це необхідно для припинення російської агресії та злочинів російських окупантів, відновлення територіальної цілісності та суверенітету України, покарання агресорів, повернення до міжнародного правопорядку та забезпечення тривалого і стабільного миру в Європі та світі. Ще одне узагальнення полягає в усвідомленні союзниками і партнерами України того, що вона протистоїть мілітаризму і авторитаризму, захищає демократичні права і свободи, загальнолюдські цінності. Українці своєю стійкістю та боротьбою дали нові імпульси північноатлантичному партнерству та євроінтеграції. На перспективу це має вагомим практичним значенням для зміцнення демократичних пріоритетів європейського і світового цивілізаційного розвитку. Прикладний аспект дослідження аспектів повномасштабної фази російсько-української війни важливий і для утвердження демократичних тенденцій еволюції сучасних міжнародних відносин і світового порядку.

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна 2014-2023; повномасштабна агресія; аспекти війни; міжнародні відносини; світопорядок

UDC 327.5
DOI: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.40-51

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The role of nuclear weapons in modern global politics

Abstract. The place of nuclear weapons in current world politics remains an important issue due to the threat of nuclear war, strategic relations between countries with nuclear capabilities, and the impact on international stability and security. However, this issue is becoming increasingly relevant in light of the growing confrontation between countries with significant nuclear capabilities, in particular between China and the United States. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of nuclear weapons on international relations, the preservation of peace and security in the modern world, and the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent and/or threat tool. The methodological basis of the study is the analysis of documents and legislation, historical analysis, structural and functional method, and system method. The results of the study highlight the history of the emergence and development of nuclear weapons, and attempts to regulate their volumes. The current state of nuclear arsenals of states, the location of nuclear weapons, their modernisation and role in modern international relations are investigated, and statistics on nuclear warheads of nuclear countries are provided. The role of diplomacy and international agreements in the management of nuclear weapons is also analysed. They recalled the current geopolitical conflicts and tensions between states, and manipulations by nuclear countries that can lead to an increase in the risks of nuclear escalation. As a result of the study, key factors and aspects that determine the role of nuclear weapons in international politics were identified, such as deterrence, threats, proliferation, and international agreements, their impact on international stability, international diplomacy, terrorism, and technological challenges related to nuclear issues. Research on this topic is of practical importance for shaping political strategies, ensuring world peace and security, and raising awareness of possible threats and challenges associated with nuclear weapons

Keywords: Russian war against Ukraine; maintenance of international peace and security; principles of international security; deterrence; manipulation

Introduction

The role of nuclear weapons in modern global politics is one of the most important topics that deserves deep scientific study and analysis. This problem reflects the complex aspects of the impact of the nuclear arsenal on international relations, security, and stability in the modern world. On the one hand, the appropriate arsenal poses a potential threat of large-scale destruction and human

extinction, if used. It creates fear and risk for international stability, as states develop strategies for obtaining, deploying, and using radioactive weapons in accordance with their national interests, which in the 21st century increasingly contradict each other. On the other hand, such weapons determine the geopolitical influence of the states that possess them, and play a key role in shaping

Received: 28.06.2023, Revised: 15.10.2023, Accepted: 21.11.2023

Suggested Citation:

Musin, K., & Zheksekin, A. (2023). The role of nuclear weapons in modern global politics. *Foreign Affairs*, 33(6), 40-51. doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.40-51.

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international strategies and diplomatic relations. Countries with nuclear capabilities use it to protect their interests and provide strong arguments in international negotiations, but today there are many cases when countries with nuclear arsenals begin to manipulate their position, which poses a potential threat to other countries and global security. The importance of radioactive weapons in modern global politics is determined by the presence of a potential nuclear threat, the development of strategic relations between states possessing such weapons, and its impact on international stability and security.

The problems of the study include several complex aspects and problems, such as the constant threat of nuclear war and the non-proliferation of relevant weapons. Research on the role of nuclear weapons includes analysing the risk of nuclear conflicts and identifying strategies for their prevention. Nuclear threats remain relevant and potentially the most destructive for the entire world. One of the main challenges is trying to prevent the spread of radioactive weapons to new countries, especially if they are countries that are often involved in terrorist activities. This applies to the use of diplomacy, control and sanctions. The relevant topic is complex and dynamic due to constant changes in international relations and strategies of countries with nuclear potential. The study requires a comprehensive approach, considering ethical, political, strategic, and geopolitical aspects.

The study by O.M. Sokolovska (2023) explored the understanding of global nuclear security in the context of political accents and points out the importance of this issue in connection with a number of important processes unfolding in the modern world. One of the current factors is the military events in Ukraine, which pose a threat to global stability and security. In addition, the global nuclear order is undergoing changes that are driven by new challenges and threats, such as climate change, volatile oil prices, and energy security challenges. The global nuclear security situation requires intensive efforts to strengthen international organisations and the regulatory framework that underpins the global nuclear governance system. A significant contribution to this issue was made by D.O. Menshakova (2021), who investigated the nuclear status of France in terms of public positioning in the Euro-Atlantic security environment.

It is worth paying attention to the paper by V.O. Perminov & A.E. Valuev (2023), who examine the challenges and threats facing the modern global security architecture and the role of NATO in this context. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the Russian war against Ukraine. The study examines an issue related to the category of “international security”, which the authors understand as “maintaining international peace and security and using effective collective measures to prevent threats to peace and repression”. The researchers examine the following principles of international security, including, in particular, “peaceful coexistence” and “ensuring proportional security for each state”.

In addition, among the newer publications, it is worth noting the scientific contribution of V.V. Myronenko (2022), who studied the main periods of development of

the nuclear missile programmes of the United States of America from their creation to the present, and the paper by A.V. Borodai (2022), which focuses on the processes of globalisation taking place in modern world politics and the impact that the threat of nuclear conflict plays in this context. During 2022–2023, significant changes in the political priorities of European countries became apparent. The reason for these changes was the Russian war against Ukraine.

However, several aspects remain little studied in the field of the impact of nuclear weapons on world politics, namely, the nuclear ambitions of states that do not yet have nuclear weapons and how this may affect international politics in the future.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of the presence of nuclear arsenals on international relations, peace and security, the use of nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence or threat, and to predict the possible consequences of their uncontrolled spread and use.

Materials and Methods

The study used logical and legal method, historical analysis, structural, functional, and system methods. The texts of relevant official documents were studied in detail using the logical and legal method. Key terms, concepts, responsibilities of countries, and international norms related to nuclear weapons are identified. International treaties and agreements governing nuclear weapons were also examined, and how they affect their functioning and role in modern relations. The method of analysing documents and legislation allowed obtaining objective data and carefully investigating various aspects of the role of nuclear weapons in international relations.

Historical analysis has helped to understand how nuclear weapons have become an important element of modern international relations and geopolitical processes. Using this method, the issues of developing nuclear weapons and attempts to regulate their volumes were considered. The paper examined the current state of nuclear arsenals of countries, the deployment of nuclear weapons, modernisation and the role of nuclear weapons in modern international relations. Historical analysis helped to understand how the role of nuclear weapons has evolved and shaped global politics in the past and how this role may change in the future.

The structural and functional method helped to study the role of nuclear weapons in modern global politics, considering their functions and structure in the context of international relations and geopolitical processes. Using the appropriate method, the functions that nuclear weapons perform in modern international relations (deterrence, threat, defence, political influence and manipulation) were determined. The structure of nuclear arsenals in different countries was considered. The paper examined how the presence of nuclear weapons affects geopolitical relations between countries. The threats of misuse and manipulation of nuclear weapons for political purposes in such countries as the Russian Federation, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Pakistan, and India are considered. The application of the structural and functional

method allowed for a deeper understanding of the functions and structure of nuclear weapons in modern global political relations.

To investigate the role of nuclear weapons in contemporary global politics, the texts of international agreements and national legislation were used, namely the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1967), the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (1991), The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (1987), the Law of Ukraine “On the Non-Nuclear Status of Ukraine” (1991), and the Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine’s accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1994). Information on countries’ nuclear arsenals, the number of nuclear warheads, the location of nuclear bases, and other statistics on nuclear weapons (ICAN, 2022; ICAN, 2023; SIPRI, 2022), the Nuclear Threat Index (NTI, n.d.) was used. These different sources provided a comprehensive view of the topic and allowed for a detailed analysis of the role of nuclear weapons in modern global politics.

Using the system method, the main elements that make up the system of “global nuclear policy” were identified, such as nuclear states, international treaties, political conflicts, geostrategic circumstances, etc. The study examined how these components interact with each other, how nuclear weapons affect international relations, political strategies of countries, and the structure and functioning of international organisations. The system method allowed comprehensively assessing the problem, understanding its connection with various aspects and considering the possible consequences of changes in the system.

Results

In modern conditions, it is impossible to deny the importance of investigating issues related to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Recently, in particular, after the events of February 24, 2022, there has been an increase in the threat of using nuclear weapons. The problem of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons has been discussed since its introduction in the second half of the 1940s (Tomz *et al.*, 2022). Although the number of nuclear weapons in the world has decreased compared to the Cold War period, countries with nuclear arsenals are in no hurry to completely abandon them. In addition to the five official members of the nuclear club – the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France, and China, new countries are emerging in the world that have nuclear weapons or are capable of creating them, in particular Israel, Pakistan, India, and North Korea. Some of these countries consider it an important guarantee of their national security and state sovereignty.

The development of nuclear weapons in history has been defined by a number of key events and stages. The first stage is the beginning of the nuclear era, which covers the years 1940–1950. The development of nuclear weapons was initially associated with the Manhattan and Manhattan-2 projects in the United States. As a result of these projects, the first atomic bomb was created, which was tested during the Manhattan test in 1945. In 1941, the United States created a commission to study the possibilities of

creating nuclear weapons, called the Manhattan Project. This project was launched after the United States received information about German research in this area. On July 16, 1945, the historic Manhattan test took place, during which the first atomic bomb was tested in the desert in New Mexico. In August 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, resulting in several hundred thousand deaths and significant destruction. After World War 2, the development of nuclear weapons became an important branch of the defence industry. The United States was the first country to start producing nuclear and subsequent nuclear warheads (Montgomery & Carpenter, 2020). This situation has led to the creation of the “nuclear club” – a group of countries that develop and possess nuclear weapons.

The second stage in the history of nuclear weapons development is the arms race, which has a chronology of events from 1950 to 1960. The arms race that took place in the 1950s and 1960s was a period of intense increase in the number and development of nuclear weapons, and the means of their use. After the end of World War 2, the United States and the Soviet Union made attempts to increase the number of their nuclear warheads and missiles. Both sides developed and tested more powerful and efficient nuclear warheads, including hydrogen warheads. An important aspect of the arms race was the development of missiles and delivery systems for nuclear weapons, which led to the creation of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

The third stage of development was the need for nuclear weapons control and cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union (Egel & Hines, 2021). The arms race has led to a significant increase in the number of nuclear weapons systems and created tensions in international relations. On June 12, 1968, the UN General Assembly adopted the text of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) (1968). On 11 May 1995, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was extended indefinitely. The objectives of this international treaty are to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and their manufacturing technologies, promote cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, end the nuclear arms race and achieve the ultimate goal of comprehensive and complete nuclear disarmament.

As of August 2022, 191 countries have become parties to the treaty (by ratification or accession), including 5 countries recognised as having nuclear weapons under the NPT. Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea are not parties to the Treaty. In 1993, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Meanwhile, the UN secretariat continues to consider North Korea a party to the NPT. Under the NPT, each nuclear member state (the “nuclear state”) believed to have conducted a nuclear test before 1 January 1967 undertakes not to transfer nuclear weapons to any other state or other nuclear explosive devices. According to it, the nuclear state assumes the duty of strict control over such weapons, prevents or encourages any non-nuclear-weapon state not to produce them. In turn, each “nuclear-free state” undertakes not to accept the transfer, control, production or acquisition of nuclear weapons or

nuclear explosive devices from any supplier of such weapons or explosive devices. The Treaty provides the legal basis for instruments of non-proliferation control, such as safeguards and oversight by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In accordance with Article 3 of the Treaty, each state party must sign an agreement on guarantees for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Following this agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency has the right to verify compliance by state parties with the provisions of the NPT. Later, after the discovery of Iraq's implementation of a secret military nuclear programme, the IAEA safeguards instrument was supplemented with an additional protocol. The implementation of this additional protocol has provided IAEA with more effective monitoring measures.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons provides the legal basis for the formulation of national measures for the accounting and control of nuclear materials, and national control over nuclear exports. With the support of many member states of the Treaty and the European Union, the International Atomic Energy Agency actively conducts information and educational work, conducts seminars, working meetings and other events in support of the implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Nuclear Protocol of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Along with this, an important treaty aimed at limiting and controlling nuclear weapons of "superpowers" was concluded in 1987: the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) (1987; Joseph & Nye, 2023). However, in 2019, the United States withdrew from the Treaty, accusing Russia of violating the agreement.

The fourth stage begins with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which led to the creation of new independent nuclear powers, such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and others. To reduce the risk of nuclear conflict and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, treaties and agreements were concluded between the former Soviet republics. For example, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan decided to transfer their nuclear arsenals to Russia and became independent of nuclear weapons. Russia became the sole successor state to the Soviet nuclear arsenal. It continued to develop and modernise its nuclear forces (Smetana *et al.*, 2022).

During this period, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (1991) was concluded between the Soviet Union and the United States and later extended to Russia and other successor states of the Soviet Union. The SNL Treaty aims to limit and reduce strategic nuclear weapons, in particular, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and heavy bombers. Its purpose is to reduce the number and limit the use of such means for conducting nuclear war. The SALT treaty provides for a complex system of checks, information exchange and other monitoring mechanisms that allow states parties to monitor compliance with the agreement, which includes inspections on the territory of other states and other trusted mechanisms.

The SALT treaty was an important step in the development of international law and nuclear weapons control. It has helped reduce the number of strategic nuclear assets and mitigate the threat of nuclear war. The treaty also

played a role in building trust between the Soviet Union and the United States in the post-Cold War period. However, the implementation of the provisions of the SALT also faces challenges, such as the development of new types of strategic weapons, such as hypersonic missiles, which are not included in the restrictions of the agreement. In addition, there are questions about the future of the contract after the expiration of previous versions. In general, the SALT treaty is an important historical document that has contributed to the reduction of nuclear weapons and the reduction of the threat of nuclear war. It requires constant scientific analysis and updating to meet current challenges in the field of international security.

The question of Ukraine's attitude to nuclear weapons located on its territory appeared even before the official declaration of independence of the country, this position is reflected in the Declaration on State Sovereignty of Ukraine (1991) and in the statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine "On the nuclear-free status of Ukraine" (1991), which confirms Ukraine's intention to adhere to three non-nuclear principles: not to own, not to produce, and not to use nuclear weapons. The statement defined Ukraine's policy on nuclear weapons and established its status as a nuclear-free state. It reflected Ukraine's desire to give up nuclear weapons, which it inherited from the former Soviet Union, which was an important step to stabilise the situation in the region and ensure peace.

The result of Ukraine's adoption of nuclear-free status was a Memorandum signed in Budapest on December 5, 1994 (Memorandum on Security..., 1994), during the process of Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The meaning of this Memorandum is that Ukraine, having abandoned the third most powerful nuclear arsenal at that time, and having made the greatest contribution to world peace and security after World War 2, received guarantees from the world's leading military states regarding the inviolability of its security and existing borders.

The signatories of the Memorandum not only reaffirmed their obligations not to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, but also in Paragraph 2 of the Memorandum reaffirmed their obligations to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine; in Paragraph 3 of the memorandum, the states reaffirmed their obligations in accordance with the principles of the final act of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to refrain from economic pressure on Ukraine aimed at subordinating it to their own interests. Based on these provisions of the convention, Ukraine has an obligation, together with its guarantors, the United States and the United Kingdom, to initiate the implementation of the Budapest Memorandum (Treaty between the United States..., 2010; Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi 2020; Kimball, 2022), but in fact, the consultations between the signatories provided for in the Treaty did not take place either after 2014 or after February 24, 2022.

Regarding Russia's annexation of Crimea, the occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014, and the

full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, in accordance with the provisions of Article 48 of UN General Assembly resolution 56/83 on “Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts” (2002), Ukraine, the United States, Great Britain, France and China, as countries guaranteeing Ukraine’s independence, had to take various measures at the international level at the beginning of the occupation of Crimea. In particular: stop Russia’s membership in the UN, similar to the exclusion of the former USSR from the League of Nations; freeze the financial accounts of Russia and its individual citizens in the jurisdictions of the United States, Great Britain, and other countries; apply sanctions on oil and gas exported from Russia; impose sanctions on certain sectors of the Russian economy that finance the Russian military budget; send troops of guarantor countries to the territory of Ukraine to restore sovereignty and fulfil obligations under the Budapest Memorandum; file demands to Russia for compensation for damage caused to Ukraine as a result of Russian aggression and occupation. In the first ten days since the crisis began in February 2014, these guarantor countries had to adopt a series of international sanctions to show Russia a proportional price for its aggressive actions.

Analysis of the Budapest Memorandum on Security..., 1994) shows that security guarantees for Ukraine were violated long before 2014. For example, the border confrontation that took place in 2003 around the island of Tuzla, which almost led to a violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, is one such example. It is also important to note the 2006 gas wars, which represented deliberate economic pressure to subordinate Ukraine to Moscow’s interests. The international community did not respond

to such violations of obligations on the part of one of the signatories of the Memorandum, and the corresponding non-compliance increased over time and led to open military aggression. Ignoring the obligations to Ukraine by the signatories of the memorandum casts doubt on the significance of the signed agreements and promises made by representatives of the guarantor states in the framework of nuclear-free status treaties for any other state in the world. After unsuccessful attempts to capture Ukraine through direct military aggression, Russia has developed and applied new hybrid approaches with higher rates and threats of using tactical nuclear weapons (TNW). In particular, since March 4, when Zaporizhia NPP was seized, Europe and the United States have not seriously considered Russia’s actions against nuclear facilities in Ukraine for a long time (Arceneaux, 2023). The activity of the Russian army around the Zaporizhia NPP suggests that they may try to lead to an accident at the plant with radiation release in order to stop hostilities and start negotiations.

The world has nine nuclear powers: the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea (Table 1). Of these countries, Israel does not officially recognise the presence of nuclear weapons, but some researchers emphasise their existence (Kristensen & Korda, 2022). Below are some countries with significant nuclear capabilities and the possible consequences of this fact: the United States has one of the largest nuclear arsenals of any country and was the first to develop and use nuclear weapons during World War 2. Their nuclear potential means that the United States can influence world politics and can use its nuclear weapons for strategic purposes (SIPRI, 2022).

Table 1. Comparative table on the state of the world’s nuclear arsenals in 2021 and 2022

Country	Deployed warheads	Stored warheads	Total stockpile	Total inventory 2022	Total inventory 2021
United States	1,744	1,964	3,708	5,428	550
Russia	1,588	2,889	4,477	5,977	6,255
United Kingdom	120	60	180	225	225
France	280	10	290	290	290
China	–	350	350	350	350
India	–	160	160	160	156
Pakistan	–	165	165	165	165
Israel	–	90	90	90	90
North Korea	–	20	20	20	40-50
Total	–	5,708	9,440	12,705	13,080

Source: SIPRI (2022)

Russia, as the successor to the Soviet Union, has the greatest nuclear potential. Its arsenal includes a qualitative and quantitative variety of nuclear weapons. Russia plays an important role in international relations and can use its nuclear arsenal to influence the geopolitical situation, especially in its full-scale war against Ukraine. Since Russia’s total invasion in February 2022, the Kremlin has systematically used nuclear threats to deter other countries from providing military assistance to Ukraine (Brusylowska, 2023). This extreme tactic proved

quite effective against risky Western leaders who, fearing a nuclear reaction, deliberately slowed down the supply of weapons to Ukraine. Such a cautious approach could have serious implications for international security in the future. If Western countries do not confront Vladimir Putin’s nuclear blackmail, there is a real threat that he will continue such tactics. This, in turn, may encourage other countries to try to emulate it, which could lead to a new era of international instability, where countries will create their own nuclear deterrents (Yanchik, 2023; Gressel, 2022). Thus, the

more time passes without a strong response from Ukraine's partners, the more likely it is that Russia's aggressive use of nuclear blackmail will become a common element of international relations. Countries around the world can change their own nuclear policies to achieve their expansionist goals or to defend themselves against their neighbours. If Putin is allowed to normalise nuclear blackmail as a foreign policy tool, the existence of long-standing nuclear non-proliferation initiatives could fail, and the world could enter a dangerous new era of nuclear instability.

China has a limited but growing nuclear arsenal. Its nuclear potential means that China can have an impact on stability and security in Southeast Asia and the world at large. India and Pakistan have limited but stable nuclear arsenals. Their nuclear weapons programmes pose geo-strategic challenges in South Asia and affect regional stability. As for Israel and North Korea, these countries have an arsenal of nuclear weapons which is not recognised by the entire international community. Their nuclear programmes pose additional challenges to international security, as they have not officially confirmed the presence of such weapons.

The great nuclear potential of these countries means that they have the ability to use nuclear weapons to protect their national interests and influence the international scene. However, it also puts a lot of pressure on international treaties and agreements on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and on managing nuclear threats and ensuring the security of nuclear arsenals. Scientific analysis of such situations is important for understanding their impact on international security and for developing strategies for international control and disarmament.

At the beginning of 2022, approximately 12,705 nuclear warheads were recorded worldwide, of which 9,440 were in military warehouses and were intended for potential use (Table 1). Of this number, 3,732 warheads were deployed for use in mines and aerospace-based missile systems, and about 2,000 were put on high alert (SIPRI, 2022). It is worth noting that almost all of these nuclear warheads were the possession of the United States and Russia, which together controlled more than 90% of the world's total arsenal of nuclear weapons.

However, experts from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) point out that all other nuclear powers are also actively developing their nuclear capabilities. In particular, China is seeing the construction of at least 300 new missile silos, which indicate an increase in the number of nuclear facilities. In 2021, the UK officially announced its intention to increase the maximum threshold for its total stockpile of nuclear warheads, reversing a decade-long policy of gradual disarmament. Many other countries, such as India, Pakistan, France, Israel, North Korea and others, are also upgrading their nuclear arsenals.

In the event of a nuclear strike on Ukraine, each of these states theoretically has the ability to respond with a nuclear strike against Russia. However, it is important to note that the situation is very complex, and most of these states are pursuing foreign policies aimed at preserving peace and avoiding nuclear escalation. The UK has determined that it reserves the right to respond with a nuclear strike to aggression against Ukraine even without the consent of other NATO members (Rathbun & Stein, 2020). It is worth noting that total spending on the nuclear industry may also vary depending on the country's political priorities and geopolitical circumstances. Spending on nuclear programmes is the subject of regular monitoring and discussion at the international level to ensure global stability and reduce the nuclear threat.

In 2022, Russia spent USD 9.6 billion on upgrading its nuclear arsenal, an increase of 5.74% compared to the previous year (Figure 1). According to a report by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN, 2023), Russia remains among the top three countries that spend the most on developing their nuclear forces in 2022. The first place remains in the United States, which spent USD 43.7 billion on nuclear weapons last year, slightly less than in 2021. China, which is in second place, increased its spending on nuclear weapons by 6%, to USD 11.7 billion. The largest increase in spending on the development of nuclear capabilities was recorded in India, where the figure increased by 21.8% to USD 2.7 million (Fig. 1). These data indicate the continued high global spending on nuclear weapons and confirm the importance of controlling these spending for stability and security.

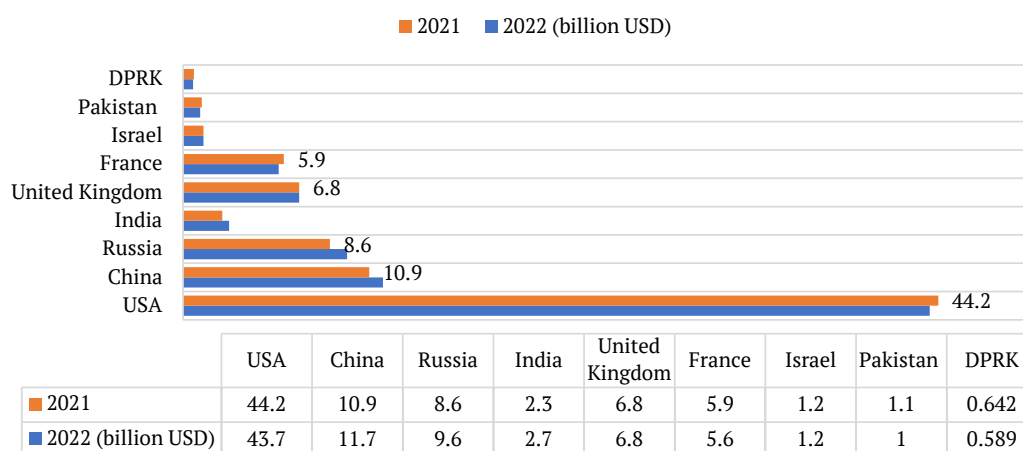


Figure 1. Financial investments in the development of nuclear potential

Source: reports of International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN, 2022; ICAN, 2023)

Russia is not the only state in the world that manipulates nuclear weapons. North Korea has officially used its nuclear programme for political purposes since the 1950s (Dorsey, 2022). North Korea (DPRK) considers nuclear weapons as a means to strengthen its regime and ensure security. North Korean leaders believe that the presence of nuclear weapons prevents external aggression and increases their position in international relations. Conducting nuclear tests and launching missiles mainly serves to demonstrate the technical capabilities and military strength of the DPRK, which allows them to prove themselves as a serious player in the region and in international relations. North Korea uses its nuclear programme to extort agreements, political legitimacy, and humanitarian aid from other countries.

The DPRK has been making threats to use its nuclear weapons against the United States of America (USA) since the development of its nuclear programme, the corresponding threats are included in the general context of geopolitical relations between the two countries and are accompanied by diplomatic tensions. In particular, by resorting to nuclear blackmail, North Korea opposes joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea and other measures that it considers threats to its security (Chengjun, 2020). The United States of America (USA) responds to North Korea's (DPRK) threats against its nuclear weapons in various ways. The United States is applying economic sanctions against the DPRK in order to restrict financial resources and access to foreign goods, which is aimed at depriving the DPRK of funds for the further development of its nuclear programme. In addition, the United States maintains military readiness and conducts joint military exercises with its allies in the region to demonstrate its ability to protect its interests

and those of its allies in the event of such aggression (Yavorska, 2013).

Pakistan has approximately 165-175 nuclear warheads, making it one of the countries with the largest nuclear arsenals in the world. Pakistan has developed nuclear warheads for various types of carriers, including short-, medium-, and long-range ballistic missiles (Rumelili, 2020). India also has a significant nuclear arsenal, which includes approximately 150-160 nuclear warheads. India has developed nuclear warheads for its ballistic missiles and submarines. The nuclear conflict between Pakistan and India is one of the most dangerous geopolitical situations in the world. The conflict between Pakistan and India is rooted in historical, religious, and territorial disputes, in particular, the problem of Kashmir, a region claimed by both countries. Pakistan and India conducted nuclear tests in 1998, declaring their nuclear status. This has led to an increase in the threat of nuclear escalation in the region. Both countries have large nuclear arsenals and are developing nuclear delivery systems. India and Pakistan have ballistic missiles, bombers, and other nuclear warhead carriers (Riqiang, 2022). The conflict in Kashmir and regular terrorist attacks in the region have raised serious concerns about the possibility of access to nuclear materials and weapons by terrorists. International attempts to resolve the conflict, in particular, through the UN and international mediation groups, have not always led to positive results, which only increases the level of nuclear threat. According to the calculations of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) and Economist Impact (EI), the level of nuclear security, due to the fall in the rating of Russia, the United States and France, in 2023 decreased by 4 points compared to 2020. This is the first decrease in the overall index since the beginning of observations (Fig. 2).

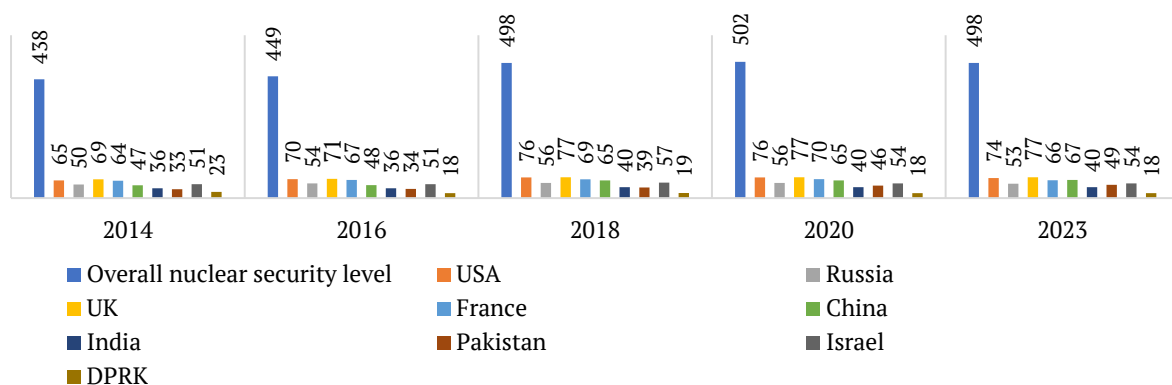


Figure 2. Nuclear Security Index in nuclear-weapon states

Source: developed by the author based on NTI data (n.d.).

Thus, the manipulation of nuclear weapons for political purposes threatens stability and security in the world. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In 2022, it launched a full-scale war against Ukraine and used its nuclear weapons as a means of blackmail and military support for its actions. This situation has created a threat of possible nuclear escalation in the region. North Korea regularly uses nuclear threats to defend its political

demands, which has led to strained relations with neighbouring countries and international NGOs (Mrovlje, 2018). The nuclear conflict between Pakistan and India mentioned earlier is a very relevant example of how political conflicts can have a nuclear aspect and how this affects global stability.

On the other hand, international agreements on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and agreements on

the reduction of strategic weapons regularly become the subject of negotiations that affect the geopolitical landscape. These examples highlight the importance of diplomacy and international efforts on nuclear security issues. The world must have a strict system of control and settlement to prevent unwanted nuclear conflicts and manipulation. Due to the increasing use of nuclear blackmail as a political tool, it seems rational to develop international legislation and a system of sanctions against countries and political actors who use nuclear weapons intimidation. International bodies responsible for nuclear security should record all cases of such manipulations. Since manipulations often manifest themselves in the form of verbal threats, the development of an assessment methodology and direct assessment of the statements of political leaders should take place with the participation of linguists and specialists in international law. Such a body should be accountable to the UN. A ban on such rhetoric should also be established at the level of national legislation of the countries possessing nuclear weapons. Such measures will be a logical step for humanity to abandon the use of nuclear weapons. Along with the abandonment of its actual use, it is necessary to abandon its use for the purpose of conducting politics from a position of strength.

Discussion

In the modern world, the role of nuclear weapons in world politics remains a very important and complex topic. Nuclear weapons create psychological and military stability between states. The ability of each nuclear power to cause extremely great damage to another creates a psychological barrier to direct military conflict. The perception of a threat can carefully influence the resolution of international conflicts. Nuclear weapons affect geostrategic relations between states. Countries with nuclear weapons have a stronger voice in the international arena and can defend their national interests with greater efficiency. However, geostrategic competition can lead to increased tensions. The issue of nuclear proliferation remains an important topic in modern global politics.

O. Buryachenko (2023) raises the issue of security in a world where the number of nuclear powers is increasing, which requires an immediate solution, namely, the creation of a new configuration of the global security architecture aimed at controlling and reducing the risk of proliferation of nuclear weapons (including nuclear weapons and nuclear energy) in the international community. In addition, the researcher emphasises that it is necessary to take into account that Ukraine, which found itself in a unique geopolitical position after the aggression of the Russian Federation, has a unique experience and the right to offer a new approach to creating a global security system. This approach should include the creation of new mechanisms and structures to reliably control nuclear weapons and other threats of mass destruction. Awareness of the need to change the security paradigm in the world reflects the importance of solving the problem of proliferation and control of the nuclear component, and Ukraine has the potential and right to initiate this process at the international level. It is worth agreeing with the researcher's opinion,

since the relevant studies proved that treaties and agreements on the control of nuclear weapons cease to work, and are an ineffective way to contain the nuclear policies of states that now very often manipulate their nuclear situation. It is also very important to investigate and develop new conceptual models that could answer the key question of creating a new, effective global security system and help countries get closer to its implementation.

I. Pogorelova (2022) highlights the situation on the Korean Peninsula, which poses a significant challenge to the security interests and strategies of key regional states in Northeast Asia, such as the United States, China, Russia, and Japan. The main problem is the settlement of North Korea's nuclear missile programme, which has an important impact on the level of security at the regional, international, and global levels. The researcher concludes that solving the problem of nuclear weapons in North Korea would lead to an end to the long-standing conflict and an improvement in the situation both in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world as a whole. In the current geopolitical environment, when there is a sharp confrontation between the United States and Russia, and strained relations between the United States and China, it is difficult to achieve a unified position on the issue of nuclear weapons. The lack of consensus and trust between the participating countries makes it difficult to solve this problem. In addition, states are focusing on ensuring their own security and strengthening their influence in the world, which puts the issue of priorities for solving the nuclear problem in the second place. At the moment, North Korea's denuclearisation is unattainable. Therefore, the key challenge in this context is efforts to reduce the threat, reduce tensions, impose a nuclear moratorium and arms control, and prevent further expansion and strengthening of North Korea's nuclear missile capabilities through a combination of pressure, diplomacy, and positive incentives at the appropriate time. This study also analysed the DPRK's attitude to nuclear weapons and how they use them for political purposes, and concluded that it is important to solve this problem, given its impact on geopolitical stability and security in the region and in the world as a whole. The confrontation between the US, Russia, and China really complicates the issue of North Korea's nuclear denuclearisation, and the unattainability of this goal poses a security threat. Therefore, the proposal to focus efforts on threat reduction, arms control, and preventing further growth of North Korea's nuclear potential is appropriate.

G.D. Arceneaux (2023) investigated the manipulation of nuclear weapons by the Russian authorities in their war against Ukraine. The researcher comes to the conclusion that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine violates the usual concepts regarding the role of nuclear policy in modern conflicts and competition. The "nuclear revolution" theory cannot explain that Russia is using the nuclear threat to limit military assistance to Ukraine, nor can it explain the rapid development of Russia's nuclear doctrine and capabilities that support risky behaviour. Instead of deterring conflict and competition, nuclear weapons have contributed to Russian aggression and have been used to deter Western intervention. The researcher notes

that analysts need to carefully analyse changes in Russia's risky behaviour. Many of the threats from Russia were only verbal, but Russian leaders have opportunities to demonstrate their determination more openly. The risk of uncontrolled escalation remains constant, and policymakers should actively analyse the situation throughout the conflict to reduce the likelihood of a nuclear escalation. It is also worth noting that according to the results of the study, the Russian-Ukrainian war presents a serious challenge for politicians, especially given the long-term consequences of this conflict for the future role of nuclear weapons in international conflicts and competition. Russia's use of the nuclear threat to secure control over the occupied territory is a prime example of the difficulties that arise in attempts to resolve conflicts, where the state uses conventional military forces to annex territory, and then uses nuclear weapons to hold that territory. When assessing the potential costs and benefits of responding to Russia's nuclear threat, policymakers must carefully consider the long-term value of curbing Russian ambitions for global security.

T. Zhao (2022) analysed the nuclear potential and manipulation of China's use of nuclear weapons. The researcher noted that China is the only country in the world that adheres to the unconditional no first use (NFU) policy. This Chinese practice and its impact on international security have significant implications for the global NFU debate and inform other countries about possible consideration of such policies. The question of whether NFU policies can achieve the expected benefits of reducing the role of nuclear weapons, curbing competition in this area, and reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation largely depends on other countries' confidence in these policies. The researcher examines a number of internal issues that may affect the level of trust in Chinese NFU policies. Among them, it is necessary to highlight the interest of Chinese military strategists in the possibility of using nuclear weapons in ordinary conflicts under certain conditions, through the so-called "lowering the threshold of nuclear coercion". Other factors include the lack of institutional constraints in China's system to enforce NFU compliance and growing ambiguity about the possibility of applying NFU policies in specific scenarios due to the development of new technologies. Notably, NFU policies can have a significant impact on the international dynamics of nuclear weapons. On the one hand, it can contribute to the containment of conflicts and the risk of the use of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, in the context of growing competition between states, it is important to understand how China will adhere to its NFU policy in the face of growing tensions and threats, and the question arises whether China's policy will serve as an example for someone, for example, for the Russian Federation.

C. Freilich (2022) investigates the situation between Israel and Iran. Israel's national security strategy has made significant strides in its historical context. In the past, Israel has been in a vulnerable state, constantly ready for military intervention when its existence was a significant threat. The main potential threat as of 2023 remains Iran, which has nuclear ambitions, while the Hezbollah organisation poses a serious direct threat to Israel's security.

After analysing the available alternatives and strategies, the researcher suggests that the resumption of the nuclear deal looks like the most effective option. By imposing sanctions, opting for covert sabotage, or resorting to military aggression, Israel is unlikely to benefit significantly in the long run. The final decision is being made because of uncertainty about the possibility of regime change and the lack of clear information about when and how it might happen. The re-conclusion of the agreement gives Israel additional time and an opportunity to consider new prospects if the agreement is extended. But ultimately, Israel may be left with no alternative but to launch a military operation, perhaps to put pressure on the international community and encourage it to take decisive action.

It is worth noting that Israel's nuclear policy is complex and contradictory, since Israel has not officially recognised its status as a nuclear power, and on the one hand, this can be considered as a means of ensuring national security in the face of a persistent threat to the existence of the state. However, on the other hand, implicit positive confirmation of the presence of nuclear weapons, as indicated by this study, can push other countries in the region into an arms race and create additional tension.

Conclusions

In modern global politics, the role of nuclear weapons remains a complex and crucial component of international security. Nuclear weapons continue to be not only a means of national defence, but also an instrument of geostrategic influence. However, its use poses a huge threat to humanity and the whole world.

Efforts to disarm and control nuclear weapons are important for reducing the risk of nuclear weapons use and threats to global security. International agreements play a key role in this context. Some states use nuclear weapons as a tool of influence and pressure on their opponents, which creates additional complexity in geostrategic relations and affects the security and stability of the world order, or disguise the existing arsenal in case of a response to any act of aggression. This policy discourages potential opponents from carrying out aggressive actions. The possession of nuclear weapons allows states to influence international decisions and processes. Competition in the field of nuclear weapons can lead to an arms race, when several states become holders of nuclear weapons in order to increase their influence and security. Such a race could be a source of tension and danger to international stability. The increase in spending on nuclear weapons in 2022 indicates a negative trend towards nuclear security. Other states, on the contrary, can use their nuclear arsenals as motivation for other states to accede to treaties on disarmament or the cessation of nuclear programmes. One of the key problems is the dynamics of the development of the nuclear strategy of states, in particular, the rejection of the policy of unconditional no first use of nuclear weapons (NFU), as indicated in the example of China. This dynamic can affect overall stability and trust between countries and requires careful analysis and diplomatic efforts to maintain peace. In addition, conflicts and strained relations between states, such as the Russian-Ukrainian war, highlight

new challenges for managing the nuclear arsenal and its role. Such situations require careful monitoring and a response from the international community to prevent the possible use of nuclear weapons. The very manipulation and threats of its use should also lead to serious sanctions against states and their leaders.

It is worth noting that there are prospects for further study on this topic, which may include examining the effectiveness of verification instruments and nuclear disarmament treaties, and developing proposals for improving these mechanisms. When studying the issue in the future,

it is necessary to consider the latest developments in nuclear technologies and their impact on international security and politics. In addition, it is necessary to analyse new opportunities for international cooperation to ensure peace and security in the presence of nuclear weapons.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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Роль ядерної зброї у сучасній глобальній політиці

Анотація. Місце ядерної зброї у поточній світовій політиці залишається важливим питанням через загрозу ядерної війни, стратегічні відносини між країнами з ядерним потенціалом та впливом на міжнародну стабільність і безпеку. Разом з цим, все більшої актуальності набуває дане питання у зв'язку з посиленням конфронтації між країнами, які володіють значним ядерним потенціалом, зокрема між Китаєм та Сполученими Штатами. Таким чином, мета цього дослідження полягає в розгляді впливу ядерних озброєнь на міжнародні відносини та на збереження миру та безпеки у сучасному світі, а також використання ядерної зброї як інструмент стримування та/або загрози. Методологічну основу дослідження становлять аналіз документів та законодавства, історичний аналіз, структурно-функціональний метод та системний метод. Результати дослідження висвітлюють історію виникнення та розвитку ядерного озброєння, а також намагання регулювати його обсяги. Вивчено поточний стан ядерних арсеналів держав, розташування ядерної зброї, її модернізацію і роль у сучасних міжнародних відносинах, надана статистика ядерних боеголовок ядерних країн. Також проаналізовано роль дипломатії та міжнародних домовленостей в управлінні ядерною зброєю. Пригадано про сучасні геополітичні конфлікти та напруженість відносин між державами, про маніпуляції з боку ядерних країн, що можуть призвести до підвищення ризиків ядерної ескалації. В результаті дослідження було визначено ключові фактори та аспекти, які визначають роль ядерного озброєння на міжнародну політику, такі як стримування, загрози, розповсюдження і міжнародні домовленості, їх вплив на міжнародну стабільність, міжнародну дипломатію, тероризм, та технологічні виклики, пов'язані з ядерною тематикою. Дослідження цієї теми має практичне значення для формування політичних стратегій, забезпечення світового миру та безпеки, а також підвищення обізнаності та усвідомлення можливих загроз і викликів, пов'язаних з ядерною зброєю

Ключові слова: російська війна проти України; підтримка міжнародного миру та безпеки; принципи міжнародної безпеки; стримування; маніпуляції

UDC 327.8
DOI: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.52-62

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Foreign interference in electoral processes as a factor of international politics: Mechanisms and counteraction

Abstract. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the need to better understand the mechanisms and ways of foreign interference in electoral processes in North America and Europe. This is necessary to develop effective measures to counter attempts to undermine democratic processes and improve them in accordance with the challenges of the digital media era. The purpose of the study is to analyse the current policy of China and the Russian Federation in the sphere of influence on electoral processes in democratic countries, to analyse possible measures to counteract this interference. The following methods were used in the study: heuristic, induction, synthesis, abstract and logical. According to the results of the study, electoral processes in North America and European countries are subject to constant interference from China and Russia, since each of these countries has its own motives for dismantling democracy in these countries. There is an increase in these manipulations due to digitalisation processes. Based on the results of the analysis of manipulation mechanisms, a classification of the types of interference of these states in electoral processes is developed, in particular, three main scenarios of such influence and five types of interference are indicated. It is determined that Russia mostly resorts to manipulating information, implementing the concepts of “post-truth”, and China – to subversive activities in society. There are many measures in both the EU and the US to counter such interference, but most of these measures consist of exposing the interference, spreading such information to the public, and taking technological action. It is concluded that the defence of democracy should be based solely on open and democratic ways of countering foreign interference, and the violation of citizens’ rights will only further undermine faith in democratic values. It is concluded that countering interference in electoral processes, first of all, should be based on informing citizens about the risks of manipulation, media literacy, critical thinking, and readiness for constant political activity. The practical significance of this study is that it will help in developing a strategy for countering foreign interference in democratic processes

Keywords: diplomacy; civil participation; manipulation; vectors of influence; methods of counteraction

Received: 02.07.2023, Revised: 23.10.2023, Accepted: 21.11.2023

Suggested Citation:

Chechelashvili, M., Berikashvili, L., & Malania, E. (2023). Foreign interference in electoral processes as a factor of international politics: Mechanisms and counteraction. *Foreign Affairs*, 33(6), 52-62. doi: 10.46493/2663-2675.33(6).2023.52-62.

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Introduction

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that foreign interference in electoral processes remains a threat to the political stability of countries and democracy around the world. Interference in electoral processes not only poses a threat to national security, but also discredits democratic values. Understanding intervention mechanisms and measures to prevent or counteract them will help ensure the sustainability of electoral systems and protect the democratic values of the states under study.

Elections are an important process for every democratic country. The entire system of representative democracy is based on the idea of delegating power to the people to representatives who should be independently responsible for foreign and domestic policy. Such a system can function successfully only if there is freedom of choice and fair voting (Boryslavska, 2018). However, current trends indicate that the principles of freedom of choice are increasingly being used to deliberately manipulate the political preferences of the electorate. This is especially evident in cases of foreign interference in national elections in states with a high level of democracy development: the United States of America (USA) and the states of the European Union (EU) (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.).

The problem of protecting the information system and countering foreign interference in the electoral process of countries is considered in many studies by Ukrainian researchers. Exploring digital technologies in the electoral process, I.M. Zharovska, & V.B. Kovalchuk (2020) determined that despite the significant superiority of digital technologies in the election process, digitalisation of life increases the risks and opportunities for external interference in electoral processes. Other Ukrainian researchers M.A. Buchyn & M.V. Kitsiak (2020) noted that the mechanisms and forms of foreign interference in the national elections of other states are not just a means of strengthening the influence of manipulators in democratic regions, but are an element of the hybrid war waged by authoritarian states. Investigating the protection of the electoral model of political participation, N. Rotar (2021) determined that a powerful element of such a hybrid war is disinformation of the population, which affects the future of political institutions. Analysing the information security of the 2020 US election, I.O. Chernovol & I.Y. Charskykh (2021) concluded that the main consequence of foreign interference in the US election is not the victory of a particular candidate, but the long-term impact on democratic processes and state institutions. As a result, there is a distrust of citizens towards politicians, the government, and democracy in general. Foreign interference in electoral processes is an element of hybrid manipulative attacks, the so-called “sharp power”, which was investigated by Y. Vaida (2022) on the example of EU states. As a result of the study, the researcher concluded that as of 2022, the problem is so acute that the EU has begun an institutional fight against external interference in electoral processes.

The study of foreign interference in electoral processes consists of at least three aspects: violation of democratic principles, threat to national security, and the role of digital technologies. That is, foreign interference affects

the process of democracy, since the influence of foreign states on the electoral process of the state violates the right of citizens to free choice. Attention should be paid to the problem of threats to the national security of the state that is being interfered with. In addition, this problem is not new, but with the development of digital technologies, such intervention is becoming more accessible and effective. Analysing most of the conducted research, some gaps in the area can be identified. In particular, the mechanisms of foreign interference in the electoral process of another state are considered mainly as an integral part of other forms of interference, such as “sharp power” or hybrid warfare, which does not always allow describing the process of interference in democratic institutions. In addition, studies usually consider the problem and consequences, but do not provide specific recommendations for preventing and countering foreign interference at the cognitive level for citizens. This creates the need for a detailed investigation of intervention mechanisms and prevention measures, and counteraction recommendations for both the USA and EU states.

The purpose of the study is to analyse foreign interference in the USA and EU electoral processes to further identify possible consequences for the democratic system and develop principles on which to base counteraction to such interference.

Materials and Methods

In the course of the study, general scientific and special research methods were used. The genetic method was used to identify the origin of certain patterns and mechanisms of interference in electoral processes and other democratic institutions in Europe and North America. Using the method of synchronous and asynchronous comparison, the difference in the tactics and mechanisms of intervention used by different political agents was revealed, along with this, the use of these methods identified regional features of intervention and tracked how the methods and intensity of influence changed during the 21st century. Using the heuristic method, current views on the nature of interventions were analysed and information was collected about political parties that express support or have a loyal attitude towards countries that interfere in democratic processes. An abstract and logical method was used, which allowed forming conclusions based on the results obtained.

The analysis of the problem was based on analytical reports, statistics and indices that show the level of public confidence in democratic institutions and the executive branch. The analysis of quantitative data identified states that interfere and states that most often interfere in democratic processes, in particular, in electoral processes. The main resource was the “Authoritarian Interference Tracker” developed by the Alliance Securing Democracy (ASD) (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). This tracker is represented by five interrelated asymmetric tools – information manipulation, cyber operations, malicious financing, subversive activities against civil society, and economic coercion. Many of the data records

are cross-tagged with multiple tools, highlighting how the Russian and Chinese governments simultaneously use different tactics to undermine and destabilise democracy. The data provided by ASD is taken from open sources, and therefore, they are usually incomplete and indicate mainly key trends than exact characteristics. Due to the hidden nature of authoritarian interventions, it is quite difficult to determine clear and direct authorship, so the data in the Tracker includes only those incidents for which the initiator country is more or less clearly established. In addition, to determine the specifics and consequences of interference in electoral processes, the indicators of the Democracy Index for the period 2006-2022 and indicators of the level of support for democracy calculated and presented by the Economist Intelligence Unit were used (2023). Quantitative data on citizens' trust in public institutions in Europe and America were used, presented in a number of specialised studies and calculated using various methods (Big Think, 2021; Brennan, 2021). Using an IPU Pirline (n.d.) resource and a heuristic search for information about European political parties, the share of pro-Russian or Russian-loyal parties in the parliaments of European countries was estimated. The database on the Russian presence in Europe was used to assess the sources of influence on EU policy (Texty.org.ua, 2022), created by a number of analysts based on an analysis of 1,300 individuals and 900 organisations.

Results

First of all, foreign interference in elections is motivated interference in which a foreign state interferes with the elections of another state to pursue its interests and improve its own status (Chernovol & Charskykh, 2021). Interference is a component of illegal influence characterised by the use of material, information, and economic resources for cognitive effect to influence the target audience (Berzina & Soula, 2020). Cases of foreign interference in the electoral process of other states are not a new phenomenon in the international political arena. However, the use of influence or interference by one state to change the course of elections by another state is increasingly observed. For the most part, such interference is caused by technological progress, which has positive consequences for the overall development of society in certain areas, but creates negative consequences for democracy in the 21st century (Boryslavska, 2018).

Illegal actions to interfere in the democratic and electoral processes of other states in the international arena are most often carried out by the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). Other states also try to influence democratic and electoral processes, but with much less resources and less success at the international level than Russia and China (Jiangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018). The total number of attacks identified by ASD reaches 643 cases. Of these, 68% (438 attacks) were carried out by Russia, and 32% (208 attacks) were carried out by China (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). It should be emphasised that interference in the electoral process of the Democratic states of the EU and the United States is observed by

states that are characterised by an authoritarian regime. So, as of 2022, Russia has a Democracy Index of 2.28, and China – 1.94 (EIU, 2023), while the average level of the EU Democracy Index is between 9.39 in Sweden and 6.45 in Romania with an average of 7.9, and the US Democracy Index – 7.85 (EIU, 2023). That is, Russia and China have not only failed to form a perfect democratic system in the country, but also worsen it in individual states, interfering in their democratic processes, in particular elections. Due to various reasons, including foreign interference, the level of democracy in the EU has fallen by 0.2 points in recent years (Hungary shows the most negative trend, where the Democracy Index decreased by 0.89) (EIU, 2023). In the USA, the level of democracy fell by 0.37 points. To establish a correlation between foreign interference in electoral processes, there is currently little data, and the methodology and specifics of such calculations have not yet been investigated, but it can be assumed that China and Russia also contribute to the destruction of democracy and trust in Europe, as evidenced by the decline in confidence in national parliaments in Europe (Big Think, 2021).

For the period 2008-2022, the EU and the United States became the targets of the largest number of interventions in democratic processes, of which more than 20% accounted for the United States – 138 attacks according to the Authoritarian Interference Tracker (n.d.), and 505 for Europe (Fig. 1). For comparison, during the period 1946-2000, Russia interfered in every ninth US election (Levin, 2016). Now, with the development of digital technologies, such interference occurs during every US election, as well as in the periods between elections. Analysing the period 2008-2022, it can be argued that the greatest activity on the part of Russia and China was manifested in the period 2013-2022 (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). Long before the election process – in 2014 – Russian disinformation spread among Americans (Berzina & Soula, 2020). In the same year, Chinese hackers engaged in unprecedented cyber espionage. In 2017, American experts determined that the Russian intelligence group APT28 was involved in interference in the 2016 US election (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). Russian intelligence hackers stole the email of the Democratic National Committee, distributing it on social networks (Ross *et al.*, 2022). About USD 100 million was also spent on spreading disinformation on social media, reaching 120 million Americans. The goal was to sabotage the electoral process, undermine the candidates' campaigns, and form a negative public opinion about each candidate (Henschke *et al.*, 2020; Schmitt, 2021). Thus, the consequence of foreign interference was not only the deterioration of international relations (Rato, 2018), but also the undermining of the electoral process and the attitude of citizens to democracy. Thus, according to data calculated on the basis of the Christopher Klassen methodology, the level of support for democracy in the United States, after exposing information about election interference, experienced a rapid decline (EIU, 2023). Never before have so many citizens of the United States viewed democratic institutions so negatively. Thus, this example proves that exposing information about foreign interference in democratic processes leads to a rapid decline in the authority of democracy.

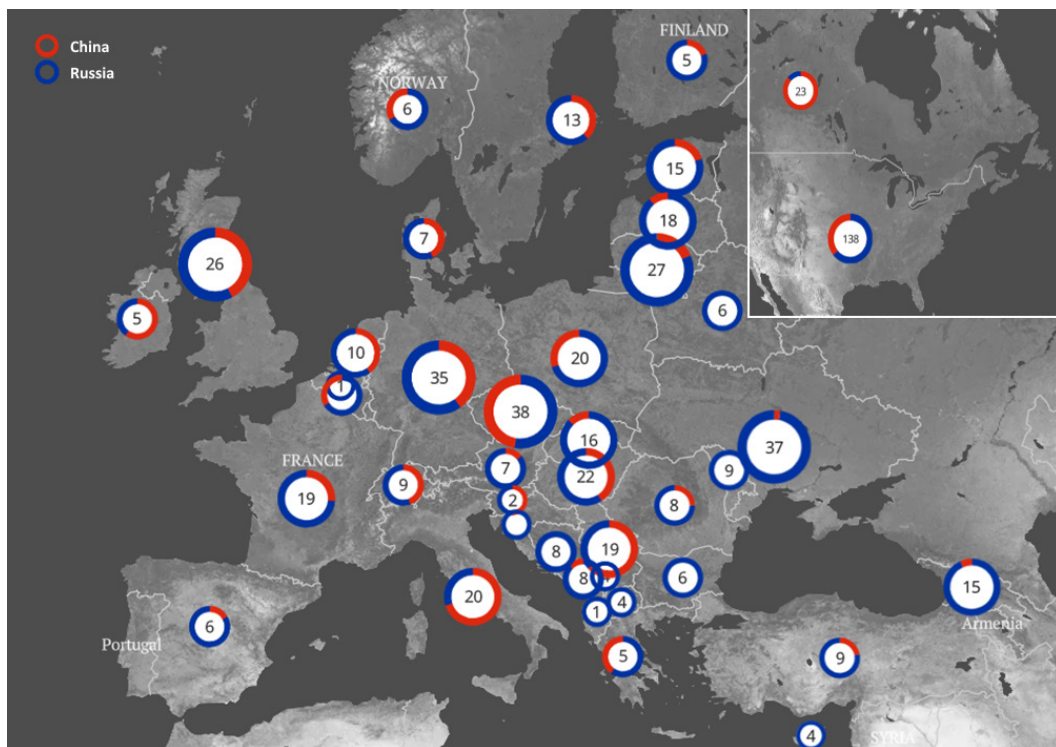


Figure 1. The number of foreign interference in democratic processes at the international level for the period 2008-2022

Source: Authoritarian Interference Tracker (n.d.)

After the election of D. Trump as president, the spread of Russian disinformation continued for a long time. For example, for the period 2015-2017, Russians posing as Americans organised about 130 events aimed at clashes between groups of US citizens (Berzina & Soula, 2020). After the 2016 presidential election, the United States government took a more active stance on countering foreign interference in the electoral process: public warnings were issued, sanctions were imposed, and social media accounts were removed. However, such actions did not cause foreign interference on the part of Russia to discredit the figure of D. Biden, and China – D. Trump (Luther *et al.*, 2021). In addition, in order to undermine US democratic institutions, Iran became more active in 2020, whose influence in the 2016 elections was not noticeable (Eichensehr, 2021; Pylypiuk, 2022).

In 2018, on the eve of the US presidential election in 2020, China's manipulation and subversive actions in American society were again recorded. The mechanisms of Chinese intervention were somewhat different from those of Russia. China did not act directly by falsifying election data, as Russia did. But it showed mechanisms of influence through trade: using tariff policies for political gain and specifically targeting industries and states that played an important role in the elections and were less supportive of D. Trump. For example, goods produced in the districts of P. Ryan and Senate leader M. McConnell were most affected (Brutger *et al.*, 2023). This period represents a sharp decline in American confidence in the federal government, as demonstrated by M. Brennan (2021).

For the period 2016-2022, experts estimate that China spent about USD 280 billion on actions to influence US policy. Unlike Russia, which mainly focused its influence on undermining democracy in general, China has made attempts to change the views of the United States in a broader sense (Che *et al.*, 2021). "Russian intelligence services are creating bad weather, and China is changing the climate" – this is how the Director General of the British Intelligence Agency, C. McCallum, described China's foreign interference in the UK (Kurlantzick, 2022).

In 2022, China introduced mechanisms of influence through print and online media (hereinafter – mass media) and propaganda through radio, thus trying to influence the course of the upcoming US elections in 2024. Thus, China is trying to harm possible candidates who do not cooperate with the PRC. This happens through bots and fake social media profiles (Kurlantzick, 2022). Researchers note that China controls 4.5 thousand television channels, more than 2 thousand radio stations, about 2 thousand newspapers, 10 thousand magazines, and 3 million websites where it criticises the countries of Western Europe and the United States (Jiangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018). In other words, China is increasingly copying Russian mechanisms of influence (Kurlantzick, 2022). The interference of Russia and China in the democratic processes in the EU countries is observed in a smaller volume compared to the United States.

Analysing the data in Figure 1, it can be concluded that Germany, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Lithuania, Great Britain, Italy, Hungary, Serbia, Ukraine, France, and the Baltic states experienced the greatest interference in

democratic processes by the Russian Federation (Fig. 1). However, the interventions shown in Figure 2, in addition to interference in electoral processes, also characterise other types of interventions to undermine democracy in states (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.).

The largest number of interventions by China and Russia was experienced by five countries: Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands. There is a tendency to increase the number of pro-Russian lobbyists in Western European countries (Table 1).

Table 1. Russian influence in Europe

Country	Number of Russian organisations in Europe	Number of pro-Russian politicians and lobbyists
Germany	196	216
France	62	200
Italy	86	162
United Kingdom	70	81
Serbia	67	79
Bulgaria	43	61
Czech Republic	43	60
Spain	43	43
Greece	22	59
Austria	22	54
Poland	21	51
Hungary	41	28
Belgium	35	27
Sweden	27	27
Netherlands	20	16
Romania	18	31
Slovakia	16	28
Ireland	15	16
Denmark	13	11

Source: compiled by the authors based on Texty.org.ua (2022)

China has been less influential in the EU than in the USA. In particular, back in 2013-2014, the Chinese strategy “One Belt, One Road” was announced with the aim of developing infrastructure in 70 countries, including the EU, improving political trust and joint development. In its foreign policy strategy towards Europe, China relies primarily on strengthening its global influence in the economic, political, and cultural spheres (Akdemir, 2020). In 2013-2014, in anticipation of political overtones in such a strategy, EU countries only resorted to preventive actions in 2015 and strengthened the protection of the market and their own political interests. Researchers note that this strategy of China contributes not only to the development of interests, but also acts as a counteraction to the influence of external media (Jiangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018).

Both in terms of the number of interventions in democratic processes and the number of lobbyists in Russia, Germany is the “leader” among EU countries. Russia’s interference in Germany’s democratic processes was noticeable in 2014, right after the sanctions were imposed on Russia, because of its military invasion of Ukraine, as the sanctions were supported by German Chancellor Merkel at the time (Shekhovtsov, 2018). Since the EU imposed sanctions on Russia in 2014, German concerns have suffered significant economic losses. According to experts, such losses amounted to about EUR 13 billion. Therefore, the mechanism of Russian interference in the German electoral process

was as follows: strengthening Russia’s interaction with the heads of leading German corporations (Martynov, 2017). In addition, hacker attacks were carried out on the Bundestag, the Christian Democratic Union party. Merkel, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs blamed the Russian intelligence unit APT28 for this (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018; Baezner & Robin, 2017). China in 2017 acted mainly indirectly through some political parties in the election campaign. For example, the “Solidarity Civil Movement” Party argued that “The future of Germany is the Silk Road” (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.).

In 2017, national elections were held in France. According to experts, Russia’s attempts to interfere in the electoral process in France were the most brazen that year. The main target was the party of E. Macron. Therefore, all mechanisms of intervention were carried out through cyber-attacks on this party. First, this included attempts to hack the headquarters website. Second, it was confirmed that Russian agents created twelve accounts on the social network Facebook (now Meta Platforms) under the guise of close acquaintances of E. Macron in order to get secret information about him. In addition, targeted fraudulent emails disguised as a fake Microsoft repository website attempted to obtain passwords and login details from employees (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). In addition, stolen files and emails of election candidates were distributed (Berzina & Soula, 2020). A large number of fraudulent

attacks were carried out, in which the APT28 division was accused (Baezner & Robin, 2017). Two months before the start of voting for Russia's assistance, propaganda news and false reports were distributed. False information about candidates was spread in "Twitter" (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). In addition, the second candidate in the election is M. Le Pen – received direct financial assistance

to participate in the electoral process from a banking institution associated with Russia (Shekhovtsov, 2018). The high volume of capital investment in right- and left-wing populist movements in France is evidenced by the fact that as of 2023, the country is one of the leaders in the number of pro-Russian or relatively loyal forces in the national parliament (Table 2).

Table 2. Share of pro-Russian and loyal forces in the parliaments of European countries

Country	%
Serbia	49
France	34
Hungary	29
Slovakia	24
Italy	23.5
Germany	22
Romania	20
Lithuania	19.9
Austria	16.2
Bulgaria	14.4
Czech Republic	11
Poland	7.7
Greece	7
Latvia	5
Portugal	4.3

Source: developed by the authors using the IPU Pirline (n.d.)

In 2017, elections were held in the Netherlands. The main mechanism of interference in the conduct of these elections by Russia was the dissemination of false information during public debates. Researchers suggest that this "weak" influence compared to other EU countries can be caused by two aspects: the Netherlands is a major trading partner of Russia, fears of further inflaming public opinion in a country where almost 200 Dutch citizens were killed by Russian-backed militants, as a result of the downing of Flight MH17 in Ukraine (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018).

Russian interference in the electoral process in 2017 was also observed in the UK. The mechanisms of intervention were mainly in the form of cyber-attacks. 188 cyber-attacks were carried out, but not with the aim of harming the vote of a certain candidate, but to cause distrust of democracy in the state. In addition, disinformation was actively carried out on social networks (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). China also conducted propaganda through Confucius Institutes, which hide political interference and the imposition of an authoritarian regime under cultural ideas. The UK has the largest number of them – 29 in higher education institutions and 148 classes in schools (Vaida, 2022).

In 2018, Sweden held national elections. As of 2018, Sweden was a member of the EU, but was not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), but co-operated with the alliance in many programmes. This was the reason for Russia's active interference in the state's electoral processes (Shekhovtsov, 2018). The mechanisms of Russia's interference in Sweden's electoral processes

included: hacking operations, spreading information, undermining stability, spreading false news, daily cyber-attacks, and creation of fake political accounts on social networks. All these actions were carried out with the aim of polarising Swedish society. Simultaneously with the national elections in the country, Sweden, along with other NATO countries and the United States, conducted military exercises. Russia took advantage of the moment to spread a false picture of the purpose of the exercises and presented them as provocative and aggressive in nature with an emphasis on nuclear weapons in order to incite fear and distrust among the Swedish public (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). While law enforcement agencies informed the public about Russian interference, the response was the growing intra-European distrust. That is, counteractions indicate insufficient protection against interference (Silvestre, 2022).

In 2022, China actively pursued actions to steal and share information about European officials and political aspects (Kurlantzick, 2022). China continues to use the following mechanisms: penetration into EU organisations, such as the Council of Europe, manipulation of Chinese diasporas in the EU, manipulation of European statesmen who push China's interests, payment of funds to the EU population for distributing the news app in the largest EU newspapers. Democratic governments have used a wide range of approaches to counter and deter information operations, ranging from the exchange of information between states to the fight against disinformation (Jeangène Vilmer *et al.*, 2018).

Summarising the analysed data, it can be understood that Russia and China operate on the principle of three main scenarios: interference in the electoral process itself, direct or indirect interference in election campaigns, and measures even before the start of the electoral process (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). Mechanisms of influence can be divided into five types (Table 3): economic coercion, subversive activities aimed at the public, cyber operations, information manipulation, and illegal financing. Economic coercion should be understood as the use of

financial resources to create the dependence of individuals. Subversive activities aimed at the public should be understood as influencing individual target groups of the population in order to separate their opinions and views. Cyber operations should be understood as illegal actions aimed at information in the online space. Information manipulation should be understood as the coordinated use of the media to intentionally spread false information. Illegal financing refers to the financing of parties and individual candidates in order to influence public opinion.

Table 3. Regional features of mechanisms of interference in democratic processes

Region	Subversive activities	Economic coercion	Cyber operations	Information manipulation	Illegal financing
North America	19%	7%	33%	31%	10%
Western Europe	28%	12%	18%	32%	9%
Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans	23%	21%	14%	29%	12%

Source: developed by authors based on the Authoritarian Interference Tracker (n.d.)

Analysing the recorded cases of interference, it can be determined that China most resorts to subversive activities aimed at the public, and least of all – to illegal financing. Russia uses information manipulation the most, and economic coercion the least. At the same time, subversive activities were more successful in Western Europe. Cyber operations were directed mainly against the United States and Canada, and to a lesser extent against the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, which may be due to their relatively lower digitalisation. These countries are least protected from illegal, harmful financing and economic coercion by Russia and China.

Countering foreign interference in electoral processes is extremely important for ensuring the integrity and independence of electoral processes in any country. The analysis of the mechanisms of such influence allows forming a number of principles on which the policy of countering such a phenomenon should be built.

Awareness of information security: citizens should be aware of the possibility of disinformation and electoral interference. Ensuring information security and teaching citizens critical thinking are key aspects of this principle. Information protection: Improving the level of cybersecurity and protecting citizens' personal data from unauthorised access by third-party forces is critical. Inter-country cooperation: International cooperation and information exchange between countries can help identify and prevent interference. Legislative measures: Adoption and strengthening of laws related to electoral processes and cybersecurity can provide legal protection against foreign interference. Checking information sources: Governments, political parties, and citizens should check information sources before using or distributing it, especially during election campaigns. Training and professional development: Political leaders, election commission officials, and citizens should be trained to recognise possible threats of foreign interference and effectively protect electoral processes. First of all, attention should be paid to the introduction of a mandatory media education course

in educational institutions that teach recognition of disinformation and the importance of checking information sources. Campaigns should be carried out to raise public awareness of foreign interference and its impact on democracy. Transparency and openness: Openness in electoral processes, including the financing of political campaigns, can reduce opportunities for external influence. Support for journalists and researchers: Support for journalists and independent researchers studying foreign interference can lead to the detection and disclosure of misconduct. International support: Attracting support from international organisations that specialise in democracy and electoral processes can strengthen a country's ability to resist foreign interference.

Discussion

After investigating the scale and mechanisms of influence of Russia and China on the electoral processes of the United States and EU countries, researchers are increasingly discussing various measures to prevent and counteract such influences. Analysing the impact of Russia and China on EU countries, Y. Vaida (2022) points out that as of 2022, the EU member states have only begun to combat interference, as prevention has not been introduced in all EU states, and at the institutional level, there is only a formalisation of countermeasures without punishment. The researcher notes that the most important measure is the development of a strategy to protect the population from information manipulation.

Analysing opposition to foreign interference for liberal democracies, A. Henschke *et al.* (2020) noted that in modern conditions, both in the EU and in the US, there are five vulnerabilities that, without protection, can lead to the degradation of the democratic system in the state: democratic institutions, electoral infrastructure, individuals, industry, and ideas. The researchers point to weak opposition from the United States against Russia and China regarding data from five key elements of the 2018 election results, which was a striking example of the feasibility of

developing measures to prevent such interference from happening again in the next election. The authors of this study fully agree with this statement, since according to the results of this study, it became clear that Russia's influence on political processes in the United States is not limited only to the direct results of the election race. The disclosure of information about election interference, which leads to a decrease in the level of confidence in democracy in the United States, has much deeper consequences.

Investigating the interference of some states in the national elections of others, D.H. Levin (2016) noted that the activation of intervention recently is caused by two factors: motive and opportunity. The motives of China and Russia are mostly different, while the opportunities are equal both from the side of funding and from the side of technological development, which is fully consistent with the results of this study, because China is gradually increasing the number of subversive activities.

Investigating measures against foreign interference, M. Rahman *et al.* (2020), note that legislation is one of the important parts of counteraction, but should be applied strategically in an integrated approach. That is, it should consider not only intelligence activities to expose interference, the development of new technologies for the possibility of exposing interference, the use of mass media and the dissemination of information, but also public support, public education in the field of media literacy, and critical thinking. If only the aspect of already exposed acts of foreign interference is communicated to the public, such actions can be perceived as an attack and accusation against opponents in the electoral process.

Describing the threat of information warfare using cybersecurity, H. Lin (2019) noted that the impact on electoral processes and the undermining of democracy is increasingly caused by the criminal use of digital technologies, which is confirmed, in particular, by data provided by the ASD (Authoritarian Interference Tracker, n.d.). The researcher draws attention to the problem of limited cognitive resources of people, which can be "spent" in conditions of mental stress. Emotions and motivations affect cognition. It is these aspects that are mostly the basis for foreign interference in the electoral processes of other states. Disinformation has always been an effective mechanism for influencing a large number of people. But today, people are more vulnerable to information warfare than at any time in human history. Countering such a mechanism of influence in the United States is poorly developed and ineffective, given the course of the 2018 elections.

The impact of digital technologies was also noticed by A. Bendiek & M. Schulze (2019) in a study of disinformation in EU elections. The advantage of digital disinformation is that it has low costs and at the same time has a great impact: with a small amount of resources, it is possible to reach a global audience through individual disinformation. Digital disinformation uses legitimate advertising industry tools to target users based on their individual behaviour profiles. Therefore, it is difficult to counteract such mechanisms of influence at the legal level. L. Lonardo (2021) came to a similar conclusion while investigating EU legislation against hybrid threats. The

researcher noted that all actions that characterise foreign interference in the democratic processes of EU countries cover such a wide range of issues that the adoption of a single law is impractical and probably undesirable. It is worth noting that the existing legal and regulatory instruments allow the EU to resist only some mechanisms of influence. For example, the EU has the EU Cyber Security Act, the EU Data Protection and Online Services Act, etc., but it is necessary to develop comprehensive legislation that will incorporate and harmonise the regulation of certain areas related to the protection of democracy from foreign influence.

N. Rotar (2021), investigating the protection of the electoral model of political participation in the EU, notes that the European approach to countering disinformation consists of five main comparable parts: a transparent online system (creating open and transparent mechanisms for the dissemination of information and communication); safe electoral processes (ensuring the security of elections to avoid the impact of disinformation on election results); the development of media literacy (teaching citizens to critically evaluate the information they consume and recognise disinformation); the maintenance of high-quality journalism (ensuring the independence and professionalism of journalists to ensure reliable information); strategic communications (developing effective communication strategies for the authorities and other institutions to prevent the influence of disinformation). But these measures have long been known to the interfering states, so in modern conditions, the gap for the EU is to expose non-transparent financing of political activities by foreign states. Addressing this approach requires Europe-wide action. Exploring the European approach to online disinformation, A. Casero-Ripollés *et al.* (2023) concluded that the EU's disinformation policy is based on two opposing logics. On the one hand, disinformation through the online space is perceived as a threat to democracy. Digital platforms, on the other hand, are self-regulating with clear rights and minimal interference in their policies. Despite the adoption of a new law on digital services, internal disputes in the EU regarding countering disinformation in the online space are unresolved.

However, analysing the studies that have already been conducted, it becomes clear that EU states are deeply concerned about Russia's influence on elections as the election process approaches, although their actions are not always effective (Brattberg & Maurer, 2018). This is due to the fact that states can only counteract on the basis of international law, and the mechanisms of the foreign interference in question are in the so-called "grey zone" (Berzina & Soula, 2020). Therefore, relying on international law as guiding principles for regulating these activities would not be sufficient, and national governments should pursue targeted policies to protect the democratic values on which the existing political system in Europe and the USA is based.

Conclusions

Consequently, states with a low Democracy Index interfere most actively in the electoral processes of states in the modern world. By doing so, they plan to undermine the

trust not only of individual political leaders or parties, but also of the general trust of the people of Europe and North America in the institutions of democracy. The main modern political actors who use such mechanisms of influence in the political arena are Russia and China, whose official representatives often show an open disregard for democratic values. In turn, the countries where the most active interference in electoral processes takes place are mainly countries with a high level of the Democracy Development Index, which may indicate that Russia and China are waging a global hybrid war against the leaders of the liberal world. The motives of this war among its initiators are different. In the case of Russia, this is mainly an attempt to weaken the impact of sanctions, which is manifested in the high number of pro-Russian forces in the legislative power in Europe, manipulating the population with Eurosceptic views. The results of the study show that the number of recorded Russian interference in electoral processes in key Western European countries has a strong connection with the share of these forces in parliament, the number of Russian lobbyists in society. In the case of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the high level of support for Russia can be explained by historical factors and long-term propaganda. In the case of China, the main motives for intervention are to protect its economic and geopolitical interests. The opportunities of these countries are relatively equal and only increase in the era of digital transformation.

The method of identifying and classifying interference mechanisms requires further improvement, but it can be

argued beforehand that the division into subversive activities, cyber-attacks, information manipulation, economic manipulation and coercion, and harmful financing allows investigating and identifying the specifics of the policy of interference in the democratic processes of various political actors. At the same time, it allows analysing specific features of intervention in different countries and regions. In particular, it was found that Russia most often resorts to manipulating information, while China to subversive activities and cyber operations. Certain regional features of intervention have been identified, in particular, North America is more vulnerable to cyber operations, Western Europe is more likely than other regions to be subjected to subversion, and Central-Eastern Europe and the Balkans – to economic coercion and illegal financing.

The relevance of this topic and problem encourages further analysis. Therefore, the prospect for further study is the issue of more detailed research and development of strategies and measures to protect democracy and electoral processes. Further research should be based on more data to establish a correlation between electoral interference, economic cooperation between countries, declining democracy indices, and public confidence in governments and democratic institutions.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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Іноземне втручання в виборчі процеси як фактор міжнародної політики: механізми та протидія

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження обумовлена потребою більш чітко розуміти механізми та напрямки іноземного втручання в виборчі процеси в країнах Північної Америки та Європи. Це необхідно для розробки ефективних заходів протидії спробам підриву демократичних процесів та водночас їх вдосконалення відповідно до викликів епохи цифрових медіа. Метою проведення дослідження є аналіз сучасної політики Китаю та РФ в сфері впливу на виборчі процеси в демократичних країнах, аналіз можливих заходів протидії цьому втручання. У дослідженні використовувалися такі методи: евристичний, індукції, синтезу, абстрактно-логічний. За результатами дослідження виявлено, що виборчі процеси в Північній Америці та державах Європи піддаються постійному втручання з боку Китаю та Росії, оскільки кожна з цих країн має власні мотиви для демонтажу демократії в цих країнах регіонах. При цьому, простежено збільшення цих маніпуляцій внаслідок процесів цифровізації. За результатами аналізу механізмів маніпуляції розроблено класифікацію типів втручання цих держав в виборчі процеси, зокрема вказано про три головних сценарії такого впливу та п'ять видів втручання. Визначено, що Росія найбільше вдається до маніпулювання інформацією, втілюючи в життя концепції «постправди», а Китай – до підривної діяльності в суспільстві. Як в ЄС, так і в США є багато заходів щодо протидії такому втручання, але більшість із таких заходів складаються із викриття втручання, розповсюдження такої інформації серед громадськості та технологічних дій. Зроблено висновок, що захист демократії має спиратись виключно на відкриті та демократичні способи протидії іноземному втручання, а порушення прав громадян задля буде лише ще більше підривати віру в демократичні цінності. Зроблено висновок, що протидія втручанням в виборчі процеси, перш за все, має спиратись бути на інформування громадян про ризики маніпуляції, медіаграмотність, критичне мислення та готовність до постійної політичної активності. Практичне значення цього дослідження полягає в тому, що воно допоможе в формуванні стратегії протидії іноземним втручанням в демократичні процеси

Ключові слова: дипломатія; громадянська участь; маніпуляція; вектори впливу; методи боротьби

**Журнал
«ЗОВНІШНІ СПРАВИ»**

**Том 33, № 6
2023**

Відповідальний редактор:
О. Короткий, О. Таукач

Редагування англomовних текстів:
К. Касьянов

Комп'ютерна верстка:
М. Кришталь

Підписано до друку з оригінал-макета 15.12.2023
Ум. друк. арк. 7,5
Наклад 300 примірників

Видавництво: Громадська спілка «Редакція журналу «Зовнішні справи»
01001, пров. Рильський, 6, м. Київ, Україна
E-mail: officeua.foreign.affairs@gmail.com
<https://uaforeignaffairs.com/uk>

**Journal
“FOREIGN AFFAIRS”**

**Volume 33, No. 6
2023**

Managing Editors:
O. Korotkyi, O. Taukach

Editing English-language texts:
K. Kasianov

Desktop publishing:
M. Kryshthal

Signed to the print with the original layout 15.12.2023
Conventional Printed Sheet 7.5
Circulation 300 copies

Publisher: Public Union Editorial Board of the Journal “Foreign Affairs”
01001, 6 Rylskyi Ln., Kyiv, Ukraine
E-mail: officeua.foreign.affairs@gmail.com
<https://uaforeignaffairs.com/en>