

Navigating New Realities: Five Lessons for CEE States from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine



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The 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine has left an indelible mark on the geopolitical landscape of Europe, triggering significant and lasting changes.

The invasion shattered the long-standing post-Cold War notion of a stable and peaceful Europe. It has led to a reevaluation of security strategies, alliances in the region, and position of many countries. Moreover, the war's repercussions have underscored the importance of collective defense and cooperation among European nations in the face of emerging security threats, thus reshaping the dynamics of international relations on the continent.

The invasion of Ukraine has not only shifted the European center of gravity to the east, but also thrust the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) into the spotlight, demanding increased attention from the international community. This development changes their situation significantly. There were opportunities, but also threats. Western states had been wrong about Russia's intentions. After 2022, however, they stopped accusing their CEE partners of prejudice against Moscow and began to listen to them more carefully. This moment should be used wisely by the CEE countries to make the most of the challenges faced. Additionally, contrary to skeptics, both NATO and the European Union have been successful in their actions. They actively responded to all threats related to the ongoing war¹.

Furthermore, the war also brought to light two significant but less analyzed situations. While analyses, journalistic texts, and politicians' statements often emphasize the role

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of countries in conflicts², the war highlighted the crucial role played by local governments – regions and cities. The outbreak of war spurred European countries to swiftly bolster their armed forces. And then, South Korea showed up as an important source of non-European support for Ukraine and a significant East Asian partner for Europe. Poland, but also NATO as a whole, played a vital role in transforming the nature of cooperation between the CEE region and South Korea, elevating it beyond mere economic considerations.

¹ <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-is-blurring-the-lines-between-nato-and-the-eu-on-defence-policy-200849>

² See: <https://lgiu.org/publication/local-government-and-the-impact-of-the-ukrainian-invasion/>; <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/think-tank-reports-on-the-invasion-of-ukraine/>



IT TOOK A FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE FOR SOME COUNTRIES TO REALIZE THAT THEIR APPROACH TOWARDS RUSSIA WAS A MISTAKE, AND THAT THEIR CEE PARTNERS WERE RIGHT

Over the course of more than a year of full-scale warfare in Eastern Europe, five crucial lessons have emerged from the conflict. The prolonged duration and intensity of the war have provided a unique opportunity to glean invaluable insights. These lessons hold particular significance for the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, they should be carefully analyzed by CEE, as they can shape the future trajectory of the region.

LESSON 1: THEY WERE RIGHT, SO WHAT...?

For many years, CEE countries (mostly Poland and the Baltics) have been warning against Russia's aggressive policy, openly informing their EU and NATO allies that Russia *will* use various methods to pur-

sue expansion. However, the countries of Western Europe did not take these words into account, believing that the countries of the former Eastern Bloc are prejudiced against Russia, accusing them of Russophobia. Their efforts to strengthen NATO's presence on the eastern flank, drawing attention to cyberattacks by Russia (like, e.g., in 2007), or criticizing German-Russian energy projects remained unanswered³. Even after the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, EU member states disagreed over how to deal with Russia in the future⁴. Time has shown that the CEE countries were right, and now a large-scale war in Europe is no longer fiction, but a reality for millions of people.

It took a full-scale invasion of Ukraine for some countries to realize that their approach towards Russia was a mistake, and that their CEE partners were right. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were the most proactive in convincing their allies to increase their involvement and support for Kyiv⁵. They pushed for more extensive sanctions against Russia and were the first to announce the abandonment of Russian oil and gas. They have repeatedly called for the provision of more and faster military assistance for Ukraine, which initially resulted in objections and reluctance from Western Europe as it was considered an

³ Lau, S. (2022) "We Told You So! How the West Didn't Listen to the Countries That Know Russia Best", [in:] *Politico*, March 9. Available [online]: <https://www.politico.eu/article/western-europe-listen-to-the-baltic-countries-that-know-russia-best-ukraine-poland/>

⁴ Meister, S. (2022) "A Paradigm Shift: EU-Russia Relations After the War in Ukraine", [in:] *Carnegie Europe*, November 29. Available [online]: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/11/29/paradigm-shift-eu-russia-relations-after-war-in-ukraine-pub-88476>

⁵ Sytas, A. and A. Prentice (2022) "Visiting Kyiv, Leaders of Poland and Baltic States Condemn Russia", [in:] *Reuters*, April 13. Available [online]: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/leaders-poland-baltic-states-head-kyiv-2022-04-13/>



POLAND EMERGED AS A CRUCIAL HUB OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE AND GENEROUSLY ACCOMMODATED MILLIONS OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

'escalation'⁶. However, as time passed, their stance evolved, and now only a few Western politicians remain opposed to offering military support to Ukraine⁷.

Now, among the Western countries, there is finally a willingness to listen to countries with a far deeper knowledge of Russia and the tragic historical experiences of the violence from the Kremlin. The CEE countries should seize this opportunity wisely. However, it is not enough to be right. They have to be effective in their actions. The influence that the CEE countries have achieved in recent months must be leveraged pur-

posefully. Yet, there are certain practices and behaviors within the CEE that could hinder the region's efforts to strengthen its position within the European Union, potentially undermining their intentions.

... Because They Could Lose a Lot Poland's reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine was remarkable. The country provided substantial military aid, including more than 300 tanks, numerous howitzers, and fighter aircrafts. Moreover, Poland emerged as a crucial hub of military support for Ukraine and generously accommodated millions of Ukrainian refugees. As a result, Poland's global image has significantly improved, and its potential has been highlighted to other nations⁸. At the same time, the government in Warsaw spends too much of its political energy on disputes with the institution of European Union. The issue of the rule of law remains unresolved, which hampers the country's overall strength and position, despite its current potential.

Hungary is an extreme example of a threat to the rule of law. Additionally, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban's anti-Ukrainian stance is evident as he opposes sending military aid and has intentionally obstructed EU funding for Ukraine⁹. Generally speaking, this attitude has caused Hungary to lose credibility in the eyes of its Western partners for an extended period. What is more, such behavior could also have adverse consequences on the image of the entire CEE, particularly for those countries

⁶ Politico (2022) "Scholz Says Germany Won't Provide Fighter Jets to Ukraine", [in:] *Politico*, March 9. Available [online]: <https://www.dw.com/en/scholz-sending-polish-jets-to-ukraine-via-us-base-in-germany-certainly-not-an-option/a-61060929>.

⁷ Among them, figures like the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy Matteo Salvini, the leader of Spanish Podemos Ione Belarra, as well as politicians linked with parties like Die Linke (Germany), the Republican Party (US), or the Five Star Movement (Italy) can be mentioned.

⁸ Buras, P. (2023) "East Side Story: Poland's New Role in the European Union", [in:] *ECFR*, February 16. Available [online]: <https://ecfr.eu/article/east-side-story-polands-new-role-in-the-european-union/>

⁹ Gyori, B. (2023) "Hungary to Block EU Military Aid Fund for Ukraine Unless Kyiv Takes OTP Bank Off Blacklist", [in:] *Reuters*, May 17. Available [online]: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-block-eu-military-aid-fund-ukraine-unless-kyiv-takes-otp-bank-off-2023-05-17/>

that collaborate closely with Budapest.

Meanwhile, Slovakia, being a neighboring country to Ukraine, has actively assisted Ukraine by not only accepting refugees and humanitarian aid, but also by donating significant military equipment, including infantry fighting vehicles, howitzers, and fighter aircrafts¹⁰. Undoubtedly, its position has increased. However, the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for September 2023 could potentially undo all the progress. The polls suggest that the national populist party, Smer, openly advocating anti-Western and pro-Russian views, is likely to secure a victory. Its leader, Robert Fico, even went as far as comparing the arrival of NATO soldiers in Slovakia to a 'welcoming of the Wehrmacht' in 2022, and the party has been known to disseminate Russian propaganda¹¹. If Smer takes power, it is determined to pursue a pro-Kremlin foreign policy, which not only threatens to weaken Slovakia's image but also risks creating disputes and tensions between Slovakia and other countries, including those within the CEE region.

LESSON 2: NATO WILL NOT BE BRAIN DEAD

"What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO," French President Emmanuel Macron said in 2019¹². He was criticized for these words by his own allied countries. Additionally, among the CEE countries, there were concerns raised due

¹⁰ Centre for Eastern Studies (2023) "Deliveries of Major Categories of Military Equipment to Ukraine". Available [online]: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/armssdeliveries>

¹¹ Zmušková, B. (2022) "EU Socialists Quiet as Slovak Member Spreads Kremlin Propaganda", [in:] *Euroactiv*, March 8. Available [online]: https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/eu-socialists-quiet-as-slovak-member-spreads-kremlin-propaganda/

¹² France 24 (2019) *NATO is Suffering 'Brain Death', Argues French President Macron*. Available [online]: <https://www.france24.com/en/20191107-macron-claims-nato-is-suffering-brain-death>



AFTER THE END OF THE COLD WAR, NATO LOST ITS PRIMARY GOAL, WHICH HAD BEEN DEFENSE AGAINST THE USSR AND THE EASTERN BLOC

to Macron's criticism of the United States' approach and the perceived lack of coordination in decision-making between Washington and European nations. For the countries of NATO's eastern flank, the US is seen as the primary guarantor of their independence from Russia. Marko Mihkelson, then Vice Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Estonia, even said that "*deliberately destroying the transatlantic alliance (...) that's just moronic*"¹³.

However, words of the French president held some truth. The then US president Donald Trump and his approach posed, diplomatically speaking, a challenge for European NATO members. He questioned the significance of Article 5, criticized his own allies, and planned to reduce the

¹³ Rose, M. (2019) "Macron's Blunt NATO Diagnosis Was Risky But Necessary, French Officials Say", [in:] *Reuters*, November 8. Available [online]: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-nato-france-idUKKBN1X1242>

number of American troops in Europe¹⁴. These actions resulted in tensions within the Alliance.

Moreover, after the end of the Cold War, NATO lost its primary goal, which had been defense against the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. While challenges like terrorism posed threats, they were not considered critical. Thus, consequently, reaching a consensus within the Alliance regarding the prioritization of security threats became difficult. In addition, many NATO members believed that a large-scale armed conflict in Europe was a thing of the past, leading them to neglect the development of their own military capabilities. In 2021, only 8 out of 30 NATO members allocate the required 2% or more of GDP to defense spending¹⁵.

However, February 24, 2022, marked a pivotal moment for NATO. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has showed that the threat from Russia is real, and unified member countries, contrary to what Putin probably assumed. NATO has once again found a clear and strategic purpose. The North Atlantic Alliance has shown that it works efficiently. Within a few weeks, the eastern flank witnessed a significant strengthening, with 40,000 troops placed under direct NATO command¹⁶. Importantly, not only the United States increased its involvement in the CEE region, but the United Kingdom and France also followed suit. This collec-



NATO HAS ONCE AGAIN FOUND A CLEAR AND STRATEGIC PURPOSE

tive action demonstrates their unwavering commitment to upholding the obligations derived from the Alliance treaty. Additionally, the Netherlands and Belgium made the decision to deploy their troops to Romania, further underlining the unity and dedication of NATO member states¹⁷. Since February 2022, a majority of NATO's members have committed to investing more in defense and at a quickening pace¹⁸.

Russian aggression made Finland and Sweden abandon their long-standing policy of neutrality, and in May 2022 they declared their willingness to join NATO. Finland has already become a member of the Alliance, and Sweden will soon join it as well. Their joining the Alliance will bolster NATO's presence in the Baltic Sea region. It will strengthen the security of the CEE countries, and make it easier to defend them in

¹⁴ Sperling, J. and M. Webber (2019) "Trump's Foreign Policy and NATO: Exit and Voice", [in:] *Review of International Studies*, vol. 45(3); RP. (2020) "Trump Uderza w Jedność NATO", [in:] *RP*, June 23. Available [online]: <https://www.rp.pl/opinie-polityczno-spoleczne/art8899761-trump-uderza-w-jednosc-nato> [in Polish]

¹⁵ NATO (2022) *The Secretary General's Annual Report 2021*, Brussels: NATO.

¹⁶ Euronews (2022) "NATO Now Has 40,000 Soldiers on Europe's Border with Russia", [in:] *Euronews*, May 18. Available [online]: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/05/18/nato-now-has-40-000-soldiers-on-europe-s-border-with-russia>

¹⁷ Ministry of Defence of the Netherlands. (2022) "Army Personnel to Romania for NATO", [in:] Ministry of Defence of the Netherlands, April 20. Available [online]: <https://english.defensie.nl/latest/news/2022/04/20/army-personnel-to-romania-for-nato>; NATO Air Command. (2022) "NATO's Eastern Flank: Stronger Defense and Deterrence", [in:] *Twitter*, March 21. Available [online]: https://twitter.com/NATO_AIRCOM/status/1505854454930812928/photo/1

¹⁸ NATO (2023) "Funding NATO", [in:] NATO, July 19. Available [online]: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm



A SERIOUS EXTERNAL THREAT CAN UNITE PEOPLE AND NATIONS BECAUSE IT TRIGGERS A UNITY OF PERCEPTIONS, INTERESTS, AND IDENTITIES. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT CAN TRIGGER DISUNITY AND CONFLICT BY EXPOSING ASYMMETRIES THAT WERE EXISTENT BEFORE THE CRISIS

the event of any potential war. Thus, NATO remains a crucial pillar of security for CEE.

LESSON 3: THE EU IS EFFECTIVE, CONTRARY TO WHAT EUROSCEPTICS SAY

The Russian aggression against Ukraine happened at a time when the EU had already experienced several major crises, including the financial crisis in 2007-09 and the Eurozone crisis, the migration crisis in

2015, and finally Brexit. At the same time, a significant increase in Eurosceptic sentiment was noticeable. Popular support for Eurosceptic parties has increased from almost 20% to 30% between 2007 and 2019¹⁹. A 2021 survey conducted by Kantar on behalf of the European Commission revealed 28% of respondents indicated that their country could better face the future outside the EU²⁰.

In addition, the beginning of 2022 was the moment of recovering from the crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic itself highlighted among the citizens of EU a belief that the EU did not adequately fulfill its responsibilities. Many people felt that the EU was irrelevant in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic²¹. All of those previous crises have led to the emergence of divisions between EU members in many dimensions.

The European Union has been repeatedly criticized for its lack of decisive and timely action. In addition, accusations were made against an opaque, oversized, and costly bureaucracy²². The EU was deemed too slow to ratify agreements and not very flexible when funds and budgets had to be modified as a result of crises. It was said to have limited itself to expressing 'deep concern' and reluctant to take more action

¹⁹ Rooduijn, M. et. al. (2019) "The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe", [in:] *The PopuList*. Available [online]: www.popu-list.org

²⁰ European Commission (2021) *Public Opinion in the European Union, Standard Eurobarometer 95*, Brussels: European Commission

²¹ https://ecfr.eu/publication/europes_pandemic_politics_how_the_virus_has_changed_the_publics_world-view/

²² Bertoincini, Y. and N. Koenig (2014) "Euroscepticism or Europhobia: Voice Vs. Exit?", [in:] *Policy Paper 121*, November 27. Available [online]: <http://www.institut-delors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/euroscepticis-moreurophobia-bertoncini-koenig-ne-jdi-nov14.pdf>



RUSSIAN AGGRESSION HAD A UNIFYING EFFECT ON THE MEMBERS OF THE EU

when, according to some, it should have. Some of these accusations may have merit, which have provided Eurosceptics with ammunition to attack the EU's effectiveness and portray it as inefficient.

A serious external threat can unite people and nations because it triggers a unity of perceptions, interests, and identities. On the other hand, it can trigger disunity and conflict by exposing asymmetries that were existent before the crisis²³. One could assume that Russian aggression against Ukraine would result in the latter scenario. However, that did not happen. As in the case of NATO, Russian aggression had a unifying effect on the members of the EU. The EU's response has been remarkably prompt and unprecedented. The first package of sanctions was already agreed on February 23, 2022, a day before the Russian invasion began. In less than a month of war, three more packages of sanctions were adopted.

As of July 2023, the European Union has adopted a total of 11 sanction packages against Russia²⁴. Remarkably, EU member states have displayed unprecedented unity in their approach to imposing sanctions on Russia, even when it meant sacrificing economic benefits for themselves. Moreover, the EU's response extends beyond sanctions. Under the European Peace Facility, the EU has agreed to support Ukraine by providing equipment to the Ukrainian military²⁵. Additionally, significant humanitarian aid, amounting to billions of euros, has been provided. Furthermore, in less than a year, the European Union has significantly decreased its reliance on Russian fossil fuels²⁶.

What is more, the measures taken by the EU since the onset of the war have been of significant importance, and arguably groundbreaking, in the realm of European security and defense cooperation. During the informal European Council Summit in Versailles in March 2022, the EU pledged to 'resolutely invest more and better in defense capabilities and innovative technologies'²⁷. Ten days later the EU's Foreign Affairs Council approved the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense, a document outlining over 50 specific goals with deadlines, most of which were set to be achieved before 2025. It is probably the most concrete and realistic roadmap for the EU as security provider in the whole history of

²³ Genschel, P., Leek, L. and J. Weyns (2023) "War and Integration. The Russian Attack on Ukraine and the Institutional Development of the EU", [in:] *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 45, No. 3.

²⁴ European Council (2023) "Timeline - EU Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine", [in:] *European Council*. Available [online]: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/timeline-eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>

²⁵ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2022/04/05/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-a-turning-point-for-european-integration/>

²⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/impact-of-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine-on-the-markets-eu-response/>

²⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54773/20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf>



DECISIONS MADE IN 2022, PRIMARILY BY POLAND, HAVE POSITIONED SOUTH KOREA AS A KEY PLAYER IN THE DEFENSE SECTOR WITHIN THE CEE REGION

the EU²⁸. All this shows that the reaction of the European Union was not only quick and decisive, but also encompassed a wide range of areas.

LESSON 4: SOUTH KOREA IS NO LONGER JUST AN ECONOMIC PARTNER

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Central and Eastern European countries established official diplomatic relations with Republic of Korea (ROK)²⁹. For years, South Korea was primarily recognized as an economic partner, known for its substantial investments in the region. It is not surprising considering that several hundred South Korean companies operate in the CEE. Every few months, the media reports on a new South Korean investment in the

region³⁰. In Poland alone, there are nearly 550 companies backed by ROK capital³¹. Following Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria are among the countries that have received significant investments from South Korea³². Remarkably, CEE countries contribute approximately 20% to ROK's trade with the European Union, with Poland ranking fourth among South Korea's EU trade partners³³.

Decisions made in 2022, primarily by Poland, have positioned South Korea as a key player in the defense sector within the CEE region. In fact, Poland was a pioneer in establishing cooperation with ROK in this field. The collaboration began in 2013 when both countries signed a defense cooperation agreement, followed by a subsequent agreement the following year for the supply of chassis for self-propelled howitzers, known as the AHS Krab³⁴. This is how the presence of 'made in ROK' military equipment in the CEE region began. Estonia was next, ordering 12 K9 Thunder self-

³⁰ See: <https://www.savills.us/insight-and-opinion/savills-news/289851/savills--south-korean-investment-acquisitions-in-europe-hits-record--6.2bn-in-h1-2019>; <https://koreapro.org/2023/01/the-untapped-potential-for-south-korean-investment-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

³¹ Polish Investment and Trade Agency (2022) "PAIH zorganizowała polsko-koreańskie forum biznesowe", [in:] PAIH, September 23. Available [online]: https://www.paih.gov.pl/20220923/paih_zorganizowala_polsko_koreanskie_forum_biznesowe [in Polish]

³² <https://emerging-europe.com/business/why-poland-is-increasingly-south-koreas-gateway-to-the-eu/>

³³ KOSIS (2023) "Exports and Imports by Nation". Available [online]: https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=360&tblId=DT_1R11006_FRM1101&connPath=12&language=en

³⁴ *Umowa Między Rzeczpospolitą Polską a Republiką Korei o Współpracy w Dziedzinie Obronności* (2013) M.P. 2018 poz. 959. Available [online]: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP20180000959/O/M20180959.pdf> [in Polish]; Wilewski, K. (2014) "Program 'Krab' będzie kontynuowany", [in:] *Polska Zbrojna*, December 17. Available [online]: <https://polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/14517> [in Polish]

²⁸ <https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/publications/detail/publication/putins-war-and-the-strategic-compass-a-quantum-leap-for-the-eus-security-and-defence-policy>

²⁹ Matura, T. (2014) "Central Europe and the Republic of Korea: Politics, Economy, and Perceptions", [in:] *Journal of Contemporary Korean Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

propelled howitzers from Korea in 2018 (and in the following years, Tallinn bought additional K9s)³⁵.

However, until 2022, these were essentially the only real effects of cooperation between CEE and Korea when it came to military and defense issues. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine elevated the Polish-South Korean defense cooperation to a new level, granting Seoul a strong position in the CEE region. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in July 2022, the Polish authorities surprised the global defense industry by announcing the signing of several framework agreements with South Korea for the purchase of K2 tanks, self-propelled howitzers (K9), and light combat aircraft (FA-50), with a combined value of at least several billion USD³⁶. In addition to that, there is also an agreement for the purchase of K239 Chunmoo MLRS, along with ammunition, and logistical and training packages, totaling over 3 billion USD³⁷. Apart from sales, South Korea also offers the transfer of technology and production to Poland.

The recent collaboration between Poland and ROK has sparked interest in South Korean military equipment among other countries in the CEE. In 2023, Romania signed memorandums of understanding with Hanwha Aerospace and LIG Nex1. The agreements focus on the export of K9, Redback infantry fighting vehicles and portable short-range anti-aircraft missiles

³⁵ <https://news.err.ee/842341/gallery-estonia-south-korea-sign-artillery-purchase-agreement>

³⁶ Song, S. (2022) "Poland Signs Deal to Buy S. Korean-made Fighters, Tanks, Howitzers", [in:] *Yonhap*, July 27. Available [online]: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220727009151325?section=search>

³⁷ Ko, D. (2022), "Korea Inks Record \$3.55 Billion Weapons Export Deal with Poland", [in:] *Korea Times*, November 4. Available [online]: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/06/113_339217.html



THE RECENT COLLABORATION BETWEEN POLAND AND ROK HAS SPARKED INTEREST IN SOUTH KOREAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT AMONG OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE CEE

to Romania³⁸. Several European countries are also considering the adoption of the K2 for their own armed forces. The fact that Koreans are interested in establishing military production facilities in Europe has further encouraged CEE countries to explore cooperation with South Korea, considering their own limited armaments industries.

Moreover, in July 2023, the president of South Korea took part in the NATO Summit for the second time in history. The Alliance and the ROK signed the Individually Tailored Partnership Programme. The agreement covers 11 areas of cooperation, including cyber defense, enhancing interoperability, new technologies, arms control and non-proliferation cooperation,

³⁸ <https://koreapro.org/2023/07/why-south-koreas-outreach-to-nato-could-pose-problems-at-home/>



THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE RECOGNIZES THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATING WITH SEOUL, AND THIS PARTNERSHIP IS EXPECTED TO FLOURISH IN THE FUTURE

and strategic communication³⁹. Thus, the relationship between NATO and South Korea has been elevated to a more significant level. This shows that the North Atlantic Alliance recognizes the vital importance of collaborating with Seoul, and this partnership is expected to flourish in the future. Likewise, the European Union is increasingly recognizing the crucial role of South Korea in matters of security⁴⁰.

The significant contracts and strengthened defense cooperation create a natural

pathway towards joint production of military equipment and potential collaborative projects in the future, such as involvement in producing the KF-21. Notably, CEE, and above all Poland, is becoming a leader in European-Korean defense cooperation. Through this cooperation, Poland can more broadly shape the EU and, to a lesser extent, NATO dialogue with South Korea in the security and defense dimension.

LESSON 5: CITIES AND REGIONS MATTER

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has shown that cities and regions are not only places where crises happen, but they are also active actors, which respond to and address the consequences of the war. Local governments can establish emergency response mechanisms, allocate financial and material resources, and engage local stakeholders to ensure an effective and comprehensive humanitarian response. By taking on the role of an actor, they demonstrate their ability to contribute proactively to the well-being and resilience of their communities, facilitating timely and targeted interventions to alleviate the challenges faced during times of crisis⁴¹.

Local governments not only act within their own capacities, but foster collaboration and receive support from partners from abroad too, or they can also be a donor of aid for other cities and regions that are currently in crisis. Right after the current war began, cities and regions in the world, and above all in Europe, immediately began to help their Ukrainian cities and partner districts. It was primarily humanitarian and financial aid. However, it is impossible to list and describe all examples. In the first few days of the war, Finnish cities raised

³⁹ Lee, H. (2023) "S. Korea, NATO Establish New Partnership for Cooperation in 11 Areas", [in:] *Yonhap*, July 11. Available [online]: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230711008400315>

⁴⁰ Gracianteparaluceta, D. (2023) "EU-Korea Security Cooperation and the War in Ukraine – A Double-edged Sword for Seoul?", [in:] *EIAS*, May 26. Available [online]: <https://eias.org/publications/eu-korea-security-cooperation-and-the-war-in-ukraine-a-double-edged-sword-for-seoul/>

⁴¹ Roepstorff, K. (2020) "A Call for Critical Reflection on the Localization Agenda in Humanitarian Action", [in:] *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2.



CITIES AND REGIONS ARE NOT ONLY PLACES WHERE CRISES HAPPEN, BUT THEY ARE ALSO ACTIVE ACTORS, WHICH RESPOND TO AND ADDRESS THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

around EUR 1.5 million in humanitarian aid for Ukraine. At the beginning of March, the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship in Poland decided to transfer PLN 200,000 (over EUR 45,000) from the local government budget for material assistance for the partner Rivne Oblast⁴².

Transparent Cities⁴³ conducted research on the aid provided by foreign cities to their 25 Ukrainian partners (the leading cities in the Transparency Ranking) during the initial 50 days of the war. All of those 25 cities received humanitarian aid from their partners from abroad 65 times. To only Lviv alone, 3,400 tons of assistance were delivered,

⁴² Makarewicz, N. (2022) "Jednogłośna decyzja: Warmińsko-mazurskie zrywa współpracę z obwodem kaliningradzkim", [in:] *RMF*, March 3. Available [online]: https://www.rmfm24.pl/regiony/olsztyn/news-jednoglosna-decyzja-warminsko-mazurskie-zrywa-wspol-prace-z-o.nld.5869340#crp_state=1 [in Polish]

⁴³ Transparent Cities is a branch of Transparency International that promotes transparency, local authority control and anti-corruption in Ukraine.

including food, medicines and medical equipment, or clothes⁴⁴.

Although local governments face limitations in this regard due to the nature of countries' systems and competencies related to military equipment procurement, some Ukrainian local governments received equipment intended for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Territorial Defense Forces. The examples of Khmelnytskyi and Chernivtsi, who received such assistance from their Polish partners, namely Ciechanów and Konin, respectively, include the provision of reconnaissance drones, night-vision devices, and soldier equipment such as helmets⁴⁵.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine revealed that numerous cities and regions were willing to offer support to Ukrainian local governments, even in the absence of a specific cooperative framework. For instance, Konotop, with only one partner city in Bulgaria, received assistance from six cities in Poland, including the capital Warsaw, as well as from two cities from the Czech Republic and Lithuania⁴⁶. Fort Wayne and Tyler from the United States organized fundraisers for Ukraine. They then donated over USD 100,000 to their partner cities in Poland, Płock and Jelenia Góra, respectively, who in turn used the funds to help

⁴⁴ Transparent Cities. (2022) "Twin Cities Helping Ukraine: Who and How Supports Our Cities", [in:] *Transparent Cities*, May 22. Available [online]: <https://transparentcities.in.ua/en/articles/dopomoha-mist-pobraty-miv--ukraini-khto-i-yak-pidtrymuie-nashi-mista>

⁴⁵ Oworuszko, J. (2022) "Ciechanów Pomaga Ukrainie. Blisko 90 tys. zł na zakup dronów i noktowizorów", [in:] *Interia*, May 6. Available [online]: <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/raporty/raport-ukraina-rosja/aktualnosci/news-ciechanow-pomaga-ukrainie-blisko-90-tys-zl-na-zakup-dronow-i.nld.6007256> [in Polish]; Smałucha, A. (2022) "Як Міста-побратими Можуть Допомогти у Відновленні України? Приклади та Інструкція", [in:] *Рубрика*, July 4. Available [online]: <https://rubryka.com/article/twin-cities-help-ukraine/> [in Ukrainian]

⁴⁶ Konotop City Official (2023).



CEE COUNTRIES WERE UNDERESTIMATED IN THEIR CONCERNS ON RUSSIAN AGGRESSIVE POLICY

Ukrainian refugees in Poland and to support their own twin cities in Ukraine⁴⁷.

From January to March 2023, I conducted surveys in Ukrainian cities with over 50,000 inhabitants⁴⁸. Out of the 39 cities that responded, 26 of them signed at least one new partnership agreement with a foreign city after February 24, 2022. In total, they concluded 62 new partnerships, with 22 more planned. The new partner cities of Ukrainian are from 21 countries. Among these, 53 cities, accounting for 85% of the total, are located within Europe, with 50 cities representing member states of the European Union.

One very significant change has taken place in terms of establishing partnerships between cities. Prior to the Russian full-scale invasion, the inclination for coop-

⁴⁷ Matiaszczyk, N. (2022) "Paradyplomacja w warunkach wojennych – wsparcie dla Ukrainy na poziomie miast i regionów", [in:] *Instytut Nowej Europy*, October 14. Available [online]: <https://ine.org.pl/paradyplomacja-w-warunkach-wojennych-wsparcie-dla-ukrainy-na-poziomie-miast-i-regionow/> [in Polish]

⁴⁸ The research survey was undertaken within Ukrainian cities, which were under the full control of the Ukrainian authorities as of January 1, 2023. There were 56 such cities. The questionnaire was sent to city offices via e-mails. The comprehensive findings of the research will be made available in an academic journal publication.

eration between Ukrainian cities and those in Western countries primarily originated from the Ukrainian side⁴⁹. Out of 26, only four cities indicated that they acted solely as initiators in establishing new partnerships. According to the survey results, 16 Ukrainian cities acquired at least one new partnership due to the proactive engagement of foreign cities. An interesting example is Zhytomyr – the city received six new partnerships, and all of them were initiated by foreign cities⁵⁰. This clearly shows that there is an increasing interest of Western cities in cooperation with Ukrainian counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shifted the European center of gravity to the east, giving more attention to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It has completely changed the situation in the region, providing both opportunities and challenges.

CEE countries were underestimated in their concerns on Russian aggressive policy. However, they are now being listened to much more closely by politicians and decision makers in Western capitals. Early recognition of security threats and prompt action were the reason for the increase in importance and improvement of their image in the world. It is essential for them to capitalize on the acknowledgment of their significance by states in Western Europe and avoid self-destructive actions fueled by internal populist sentiments.

NATO has proven to be a vital pillar of security for CEE states. The Alliance's ability

⁴⁹ Teise, E. 2022. "Десятки Німецьких Міст Шукають Партнерів в Україні", [in:] *DW*, June 28. Available [online]: <https://www.dw.com/uk/solidarnist-hromad-desiatky-nimetskykh-mist-shukaiut-partneriv-v-ukraini/a-622-71469> [in Ukrainian]

⁵⁰ Zhytomyr City Official (2023).

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to act quickly and decisively in response to Russian aggression on Ukraine demonstrated its critical role in safeguarding the region. The decision to enlarge NATO was driven by the necessity to bolster collective defense efforts, thus it will lead to enhanced regional security.

The European Union showcased its effectiveness in addressing security concerns and fostering unity among its member states during the crisis of war. Despite the challenges posed by the Russian invasion, the EU displayed resilience and cohesion, acting collectively to keep the security and

stability of its members. The war has served as a rallying point, highlighting the EU's ability to overcome internal divisions and present a united front against external threats.

Meanwhile, the evolving role of South Korea as a strategic player in the CEE region opens up promising avenues for enhanced security and military cooperation – not only through military contracts, but also through ROK partnerships with NATO. Beyond economic ties, defense partnerships with South Korea hold the potential to strengthen the region's stability and security dynamics.

Lastly, the war exposed the crucial role local governments play in enhancing resilience and international cooperation. The conflict became a catalyst for establishing new international collaborations at the sub-state level, emphasizing the importance of local entities in promoting stability and fostering ties in the region.

Finally, the war's lessons underscore the need for continuous vigilance and collaboration among CEE countries, within the NATO and the European Union, as well as with external partners. Acknowledging the significance of collective defense, unity, and cooperation across all levels will enable the CEE region to adeptly navigate the changing geopolitical landscape and effectively address forthcoming challenges. The war in Ukraine has thus become a wake-up call, illuminating the region's importance and potential for strategic partnerships, thereby paving the path towards a more secure and stable future in the CEE.



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NATALIA
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