

RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S THREATS TO THE BALTIC STATES

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Abstract: *This study focuses on the identification and explanation of the threats that the Russian Federation is creating against the Baltic States and their security implications. The research process established that the Russian Federation will destabilize the Baltic States and the regional security environment. Threats to the security of the Baltic States are a consequence of Russian strategic thinking on the offensive use of military force. Serious military challenges to the Baltic States are posed by the Russian Federation's A2/AD multi-domain capabilities located in the Kaliningrad Oblast. The Russian Federation will also try to regain its influence by influencing below the measure short of war through political, economic and informational instruments.*

Keywords: threats, Russia Federation, armed forces, anti-access and area denial, measure short of war.

1. Introduction – strategic considerations

Vladimir Putin's main foreign policy goal is to recognize the Russian Federation as a superpower while assigning it the role of the main center for overseeing the international order in a multipolar world (Bugajski & Assenova, 2016, p. 6). The aspirations for the Russian Federation's dominance in the international arena are based on Yevgeny Primakov's doctrine, formulated in 1996. According to its tenets, Russia should gain primacy in the post-Soviet space and seek close integration of the former republics into the Russian Federation. At the same time, the Russian Federation opposes any attempt to expand NATO (Rumer, 2019, p. 4).

In Russia, it is believed that the state should be a supra-regional leader and therefore seeks to be recognized as one of the world's major powers (Trenin, 2011, p. 81). The dominant

feature of modern Russian politics is precisely the pursuit of great-power status (Reshetnikov, 2018). Russia wants to influence all matters of global importance and be taken seriously as a truly independent player on the international stage with its own veto power. To strengthen its influence, prestige and autonomy, Russia can also use the wide arsenal of hostile influence instruments it possesses (Cohen & Radin, 2019, p.8), targeting Central and Eastern European states, especially the Baltic states treated as renegade.

Russia exerts its influence on states in its immediate and distant neighborhood. This is probably due to a sense of self-importance as a great power, deeply rooted in Russian society. Other factors include history, economic priorities and concerns about its own security (Oliker et al., p. 2015, p.2). The eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union is seen by Russia's leadership as a harbinger of the loss of spheres of influence and a potential threat to national security (Lavrov, 2005). The West is seen as a creator of color revolutions and a catalyst for the integration of Russia's neighbors into Euro-Atlantic institutions. It can bring the culture of the Western world and its values and NATO's military capabilities and infrastructure closer to Russia's borders (Putin, 2018). To oppose this, the Federation aims to weaken the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union and discredit the United States of America on the international stage (Banasik, 2019, p. 173).

Moscow is creating itself as a patron of security for Russian citizens wherever they may be. This is especially true for the states of the former Soviet republics. The priority of Russian foreign policy remains the protection of citizens of the Russian Federation. Russia is also prepared to protect the interests of the Russian business community abroad and to respond to any aggressive actions taken against the interests of the Russian Federation, including the use of military force (Interview, 2008).

As part of the integration of the post-Soviet space and the expansion of influence (Bugayov, 2021, p. 47), V. Putin has chosen the path of slow integration with Belarus rather than overt absorption. By supporting Alexander Lukashenko, Russia is pursuing its own interests in Belarus and seeking to gain an advantage over NATO. The military leadership of the Russian Federation is well aware of the geopolitical importance of Belarusian territory (Brauss et. al., 2020, p. 3). The threat of an armed confrontation from Belarusian territory offers the possibility

of directly striking Poland and capturing the Suwałki Corridor (Hodges et al., p. 3 and 4), in order to link up with troops deployed in the Kaliningrad Oblast. Consequently, this could cut off the Baltic States from the other allied countries and prevent the movement of NATO personnel and equipment (Stoicescu & Praks, 2016, p. 21). Thus, the Russian Federation could easily conduct a simultaneous operation against Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which seems very feasible under the conditions of its anti-access/area-denial A2/AD capability (Dalsjö et al., 2019). Indeed, V. Putin seeks to give the impression to NATO countries that defending the Baltic States is risky and costly, and that the Russian Federation can dominate them, even without waging war (Kagan, 2020).

Volodymyr Zelensky's attempts to integrate Ukraine into the European Union and gain full NATO membership starting in 2019 have raised serious concerns in the Kremlin. V. Putin recognized that the implementation of the Minsk agreements would not stop Ukraine from its chosen course, which he considered a threat to the integrity of the state. In this situation, he began a dangerous game with the West using the tools of pressure and threatening aggression, which was expressed mainly in demonstrations of force along the western and southern borders with Ukraine¹. At the same time, he made impossible demands to the West for security guarantees (Koziej, 2022) consisting of NATO's withdrawal from the territory of countries admitted to the Alliance after 1999 and demanded guarantees of non-expansion of the organization to Georgia and Ukraine. Accusing the Alliance of escalating international tensions, Russia wanted to create the impression that the West's failure to engage in dialogue on proposals to change the Euro-Atlantic security system would lead to the "preemptive" use of military force.

As a result of rejecting the Kremlin's proposal, V. Putin issued an order to invade the sovereign state justifying it by the need to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine. According to Russian propaganda, the attack on Ukraine is a peacekeeping mission or rescue operation, during which Russian soldiers liberate Ukrainian society from the Nazi regime (Stawarz, 2022). In reality, Russian aggression against Ukraine was an attempt to realize the Kremlin's imperialist

¹ According to analysts' calculations, Russia is likely to have amassed around 130,000 troops at various locations along the border with Ukraine. This means that it is probably the largest accumulation of military forces that has taken place in Europe in the last 40 years. The Russian military on the border with Ukraine consisted of so-called battalion tactical groups, or combat formations of 600 to 1,000 soldiers, equipped with their own artillery, air defense and logistics (How, 2022).

ambitions. By seizing Ukrainian territory with military action, V. Putin denied Ukrainians the right to self-determination and refused to accept that Ukraine no longer wanted to be part of a post-Soviet creation under Moscow's influence (Stawarz, 2022).

The Russian Federation is relentless in its intentions to dismantle the European security system and the international order established after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It seeks by all possible means to establish dominance in the post-Soviet space. The Russian Federation will never give up its establishment of influence over the Baltic States and its efforts to disintegrate NATO and exclude the Baltic States from membership in the Alliance. Therefore, this attitude of the Russian Federation will be the main threat to the Baltic States at least in the perspective of the next decade.

Due to the Russian Federation's war with Ukraine, a military attack on the Baltics is considered unlikely, but in the medium to long term, Russia's aggressiveness and foreign policy ambitions could significantly increase security risks. Russia considers the Baltics to be the most annexation-prone part of NATO, making them subject to high military pressure in the event of a NATO-Russia conflict (Sytas, 2023).

The Baltic States have always occupied a special place in the security policy of the Russian Federation due to their location, ethnic ties, culture, religion and language (Galeotti, 2019). The available knowledge about the Russian Federation's threats in the military sphere focuses on the aspect of seizing the territory of the Baltic States and the consequences for NATO security (Boston, 2018; Gilmour 2019; Withmail 2016;). There is a lack of knowledge about the sources of threats created by the Russian Federation. The Kaliningrad region is evaluated from the perspective of carrying out offensive actions against NATO as a whole, not just selected states (Andžāns and Vargulis, 2020; Dynier 2018; Antczak and Śliwa, 2018). There is a lack of studies explaining the nature of capabilities centered around the so-called A2/AD bastions and their significance for seizing the territory of the Baltic states and cutting them off from the main treaty territory (Sprūds. at al., 2022, Lasconjarias, 2019, Radomyski 2021). There also appears to be limited knowledge regarding hybrid threats used against the Baltic States. The available studies focus mainly on information-based threats (Brauss and Rącz, 2021; Andžāns and

Vargulis, 2020; Sprūds. at al., 2022). In the context of the Russian Federation's ongoing war with Ukraine, threats materializing in the gray zone should not be underestimated (Kols, 2022).

The problematic situation thus identified leads to the formulation of the main research problem: What threats to the Baltic States are created by the Russian Federation? The main research problem was fragmented and the following specific problems were identified: 1) In what are the threats expressed and what are the sources of the Russian Federation's military threats to international security? 2) What threats are the consequences of the Russian Federation's possession of the Anti-Access/Area Denial in the Kaliningrad Oblast? 3) What are the threats to the Baltic States as a consequence of the Russian Federation's pursuit of influence below the threshold of warfare?

The purpose of the research, the results of which are presented in this article, was to identify the threats that the Russian Federation creates against the Baltic States and to explain their security implications.

The research hypothesis for the probable solution of the specific problems and the main problem is expressed in the form of the following conjecture. The Russian Federation will make efforts to regain spheres of influence in the Baltic States and create kinetic and non-kinetic threats using military and non-military instruments of influence and synchronize lethal and non-lethal capabilities, which will lead to the degradation of the international security environment.

In solving the research problems, a systemic, historical and prognostic approach was used. The systemic approach made it possible to study the interactions, interdependencies and relationships between the threats created by the Russian Federation and the security of the Baltic States in relation to the past, present and future. The historical approach made it possible to study the evolution of Russian strategic thinking and related threats, and the predictive approach made it possible to identify trends regarding the adoption of a strategy aimed at realizing the Kremlin's superpower ambitions in the future.

Achieving the intended cognitive objectives and solving research problems due to their interdisciplinary nature required the use of both theoretical and empirical methods. Their use depended on the nature of the specific problems being solved. Critical evaluation of the literature and doctrinal documents of the Russian Federation, analysis (systemic, conceptual, structural

and functional), synthesis, analogy, generalization and abstraction should be considered the most important methods. Objective qualitative data was obtained through the use of non-participant observation and uncategorized interviews. Partial and final conclusions of the study were formulated through the use of inductive and deductive reasoning.

2. The essence of the threats and the sources of the Russian Federation's military threats to international security

In common usage, the term threat has many meanings and expresses the intention to injure, destroy, punish, or intimidate, and indicates the imminent danger of causing specific harm (Merriam-Webster). It can also cause pain, misfortune and trouble (Longman). They also signify the possibility of certain problems or even disaster bringing misfortune to people (Oxford). Threats are also associated with violence used against people or being the consequences of specific hostile behavior, as well as causing specific unwanted material damage (Cambridge), which indicates their intentionality. In general, therefore, threats involve the possibility of something undesirable occurring, which can cause negative consequences.

The designators assigned to the concept of threats, as well as the discernible cause-and-effect relationships, indicate that threats can be treated as a state and a phenomenon. As for the phenomenon, it is complex, so there are certain difficulties in describing and defining it. Emerging threats² in the international security environment always reduce the level of security and usually cause a deficit in it, and create situations in which important values for security actors may be affected. Generalizing the lexical definitions, it should be emphasized once again that threats can be a condition that threatens someone, or in which someone feels threatened (Dictionary, 2008, p. 172), or a situation in which the probability of the emergence of a dangerous condition for the environment appears (Dictionary, 2008, p. 172). As a result of

² Threats in security theory are identified with actions, events and processes that drastically, in a relatively short period of time, can lead to the degradation of the quality of life of the state's population or limit the scope of state policy decisions or other decisions made by non-state actors. They are regarded as negatively valued phenomena that cause the rupture of social, political and economic ties. Their effect is to limit the existence and development of social, political and other areas of state activity (Ullman, 1983, p. 133; Kitler, 2002, p. 234).

threats, there may be a danger, whether realized or unconscious by the subject, of the loss of a particular good or value, or the temporary or relatively permanent loss of the ability to develop in a broad sense (Kalina, 1991, p. 80 and 81). This development can also be hindered or prevented by disparities in resources that cause anxiety and fear (Zieba, 2016, p. 10), which in turn leads to rivalry and conflict.

Special attention to the issue of threats to state security was paid by Plato, who pointed out that the source of threats is the occurrence of conflicts. They can arise as a result of violations of the order established in the world and man, the failure to understand and perceive in life the principles of justice and moral and legal norms, as well as through the natural hostility of tribes originating from separate ethnic trunks, which extended it to interstate relations (Rosa, 1995, p. 12). Plato's articulation of the threats indicates their context related to political security. Political security in the international dimension includes problems related to the functioning of international systems, which can include the state of stability of the system(s), the number and effectiveness of international organizations providing security, dispute settlement mechanisms and threats to international order (Balcerowicz, 2004, p. 15). Political security includes ensuring the stability of the state (Balcerowicz, 2005, p. 83) by protecting its sovereignty, territorial integrity, norms of international law, constitutional order, quality of power and its legitimacy, etc. (Olszewski, 2005, p. 83).

Jacek Czaputowicz pointed out that threats in the international arena can arise, among other things, as a result of the undermining of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the pursuit of hegemony and the creation of spheres of influence or regional domination (Czaputowicz, 2003, p. 22). Based on Lech Chojnowski's definition, it can be assumed that political threats to state security are events, processes and political actions of state and non-state actors, external and internal, intended and accidental, leading to the total or partial loss or reduction of state sovereignty and/or undermining its political system. Political threats in international terms, on the other hand, refer to the destabilization of the international order (Chojnowski, 2012, p. 117). They materialize through the influence of hostile states or non-state actors through instruments of force and political/diplomatic, military, economic and informational, as well as financial, intelligence and legal influence (Voyger, 2021, p. 48).

Military threats, considered in political terms, refer to the capabilities of an opponent's armed forces and the doctrine of their use. Barry Buzan believed that a state's territory can be threatened by its occupation or destruction. Strong states are threatened primarily by military aggression from outside, while weak states are threatened from both outside and inside (Buzan, 1983, p. 57). Military threats are usually linked to the achievement of political objectives, which include seizing territory, changing government or security institutions or reorienting people's policies or attitudes (Buzan, 1983, p. 57), as well as securing access to certain resources. The sources of military threats stem from the fact that (military) force is one of the main instruments of states' international policies. The military instrument is capable of destroying entities that play a key role in the functioning of the state (Szpyra, 2014, p. 66) which makes it a very effective instrument to ensure the achievement of political goals.

According to statements made by General Valery Gerasimov, head of the Russian General Staff in 2019, despite the defensive nature of Russian military doctrine, it is envisaged to proactively neutralize threats to state security, which is expressed in the strategy of active defense. In this context, V. Gerasimov stressed the importance of seizing the initiative through swift and decisive offensive actions, identifying the opponent's weak points and posing threats to them, and inflicting heavy losses. Dominance in a direct armed clash is to be ensured by gaining and maintaining the strategic initiative (Russian, 2019). Russian military officials envision the use of both kinetic and non-kinetic means, ranging from forms of intimidation and threats of coercion to nuclear deterrent strikes inclusive.

Achieving dominance through offensive operations is based on the concept of so-called deep operations, which emphasized the conduct of combined arms operations at the tactical, operational-tactical and strategic levels. The essence of conducting deep operations was to prevent second-strikes and retreats from reaching the front edge of the defense, and to paralyze troops by fire across the depth of the battle grouping. Indirect fire was to create conditions for the execution of maneuver and change of the combat grouping of one's own troops, as well as to conduct deep penetration of the opposing side's combat grouping. The purpose of conducting military operations at the entire depth of the battle grouping was not to achieve victory in a single battle or even operation, but rather in several operations conducted simultaneously, which would

ultimately lead to the strategic defeat of the enemy (Russia, 2007, p. 34). Conducting activity in the deep rear of the enemy, can be considered the basis for the modern reorganization of elite units of the Russian armed forces, and even the creation of the Russian Rapid Reaction Force, which focuses on airborne troops, and is key to the Russian paradigm of conducting offensive non-linear warfare (Kasapoglu, 2015, p. 2). The Russian understanding of nonlinear warfare reflects updated Russian military thought rather than strategy or concept. It combines Soviet theory of conducting deep operations and reflexive control theory to create a so-called masked blitzkrieg strike. To this end, Moscow uses elite troops and employs instruments of non-military influence to conceal its true intentions and influence the process of the opponent's strategic decisions (Kasapoglu, 2015, p. 2).

As for the anti-access/area-denial A2/AD carved out in the Kaliningrad Oblast, they should not be combined with defense operations. It is important to emphasize that Russia's modern, active defense is not based on denying access to a given operational area, nor on restricting an adversary's freedom of action. Nor is it based on the effectiveness of defensive capabilities at the operational level. Rather, it is a way of thinking about exploiting potential weaknesses in U.S. military forces. However, this is not an entirely correct interpretation of Russian art of war. In fact, the terminology of denying access to a specific area and restricting the freedom of maneuver of troops does not appear anywhere in Russian military writing. Activities, as the meaning of the word implies, involve the conduct of offensive operations and maneuver defense. Nor does it rely on the ability to deny access to specific spaces (regions of operational activities). Russian operational concepts are dynamic in nature, and one does not see a clear distinction between the activities that make up offensive and defensive operations. It is also difficult to come to the conclusion that the concept of operations in Western studies referred to as anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) represents a viable theory of victory. The thesis of clearly delineated boundaries between offensive and defensive systems has been largely blurred, and in fact goes way back to the late period of Soviet military thought (Adamsky, 2020).

3. Threats to the Baltic States from the Russian Federation's A2/AD capabilities in the Kaliningrad Oblast.

It is difficult to disagree with the charge that A2/AD is not a new concept. Nor is it a narrow concept because it applies practically to the entirety of issues involving warfare, including new generation warfare, information warfare or disinformation. Secondly, regarding the freedom of access and movement of troops, or the denial of this freedom, competition for access to territory or resources has always been present in different historical contexts and technological advancements, as has the ability to get into the theater of operations and perform maneuver. What may be new is that precision-guided weapons have leveled the playing field over the past two decades. On the other hand, the global freedom of movement of troops is clearly being complicated, with implications for the military-strategic context. In other words, the A2/AD concept is useful because it helps to understand the patterns of competition for access or denial of access to a given area, in a specific historical and technological context, in this case in an environment dominated by precision-guided and especially hypersonic weapons. In addition, it helps to understand the essence of conducting international rivalries, even outside the military sphere, and the essence of dominance in these rivalries (Simon, 2017).

From a strategic point of view, the A2AD concept deserves to be studied not only through a military prism, but also in the broader context of Russia's new generation of war. It is fair to say that there are many problems to be studied before the conflict begins, but one can already clearly see the outline of the Russian Federation's advantage occurring in the so-called "zero" phase, i.e. before the armed clash. Despite the fact that NATO's resources are far greater than those of the Russian Federation, they may prove insufficient to confront Russia's next-generation war strategy. This is because it is extremely difficult to predict the conditions of war, which is always a peculiar situation requiring a distinct logic (Belousov & Kokoshin, 2014). Moreover, the strategic perspective questions the validity of a concept that appears defensive but is operationally offensive. This means that the same tools can be used in both directions, i.e. defensive against a potential adversary/aggressor and offensive against a neighboring state. This also means the possibility of taking the initiative over an adversary and denying him any

advantage. In addition, there is the risk of unjustified escalation of military actions. Let's remember that the Russian Federation possesses nuclear weapons, which it can use to launch pre-emptive strikes at the very beginning of a conflict and thus dominate the international security environment (Lasconjarias & Marrone, 2016, p. 5).

From an operational perspective, one has to wonder what is most important, is gaining permanent access by establishing superiority over the operational area, or dominance at key points (Lasconjarias & Marrone, 2016, p. 5)? Russian operational capabilities, after all, are designed to impede access to conflict zones by eliminating, for example, aviation, land and naval bases, and key points that determine the possibility of armed combat. It will also be difficult to move from the phase of deployment of troops on the operational theatre to the phase of direct armed conflict and the subsequent phases associated with its conduct. In the case of conducting hostilities, the Russian Federation will try to completely isolate the theater of operations from the main forces, as well as cut off from resources those forces already in the area of armed struggle. In this way, the Russian Federation, with its advanced³ A2/AD capabilities, poses real threats and at the same time dominates NATO in selected geographic regions. Finally, from a tactical point of view, the A2/AD concept facilitates the use of asymmetric approaches and the development of asymmetric means of warfare in the face of the assumed superiority of the strategic adversary (Erdogan, 2018).

In the so-called bastions being created by the Russian Federation, both conventional and unconventional capabilities can be integrated. Conventional capabilities are used to delay, inflict losses or completely destroy expeditionary and strike forces, mainly by making strikes against ships, aircraft and forward bases. Unconventional capabilities, typically sit on the border

³ The comprehensive nature of the capability includes, among other things, multi-layered integrated air defense systems, consisting of modern fighter, attack and bomber aircraft, fixed and mobile anti-aircraft and anti-missile sets, coastal defense systems, cruise and ballistic missiles, launched from a variety of air platforms, sea and land, long-range artillery and multi-missile rocket systems (MLRS), conventional and nuclear-powered submarines armed with ballistic missiles, supersonic or hypersonic cruise missiles to combat surface and land targets, and advanced torpedoes and naval mines, kinetic and non-kinetic anti-satellite weapons and supporting space launch and surveillance infrastructure, sophisticated cyber warfare capabilities, information and radio-electronic warfare capabilities, advanced reconnaissance and strike systems including air, ground, surface and underwater dimensions, systems to incapacitate and destroy command systems, as well as special forces operations and biological and chemical weapons, unmanned air and underwater systems and other means of warfare (Tol, 2010, p. 18-21; The Joint, 2012, p. 9 & 10).

between A2/AD capabilities and more general deterrence capabilities. They can be divided into the following categories: 1) Weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological and chemical) capabilities; 2) Terrorist capabilities; 3) Cyber warfare capabilities; 4) Anti-satellite capabilities (Kelly et al., 2016, p. 28).

Currently, the Russian Federation is focusing on certain core capabilities that can serve multiple missions. These include integrated air defense systems, space systems (sensors, means of communication and global GPS navigation) and counter-space systems, technologically advanced fighter and attack aircraft, strategic transport means, medium-range nuclear warhead-carrying capabilities, precision-guided ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, submarines and surface ships, expeditionary forces, irregular subdivisions, special operations forces, proxy operations support and cyberspace operations capabilities (Kelly *et al.*, 2016, p. 49).

Russia has been consistently and systematically strengthening its military potential, through the deployment of heavy military equipment in the countries that make up NATO's eastern flank. In addition, a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of the Russian government also stems from the deployment of elements of the so-called U.S. missile shield in Poland and other countries, including Romania and the Czech Republic (Radomyski, 2021, p. 46). In the event of further militarization of the Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia will be able to create a tight defensive umbrella that will allow it to control the most important operational regions in the immediate vicinity. If necessary, it can also block the freedom of action of Polish armed forces and, in a broader perspective, NATO forces deployed on Polish territory (Żyła, 2018).

In its military strategy, the Russian Federation views A2/AD capabilities as one of the pillars of its comprehensive approach to deterring and neutralizing NATO's military superiority in peacetime, crisis and war, and as an element that perpetuates the belief within NATO that the Russian Federation is dominant. Considering the range of impact of the bastion's firepower deployed near the borders with NATO, and especially in the Kaliningrad Oblast, it can significantly reduce the movement capabilities of Allied troops. The Russian Federation may, through a demonstration of force, deter the Alliance from taking offensive action. Above that, Russia will be able to effectively disrupt the means of reconnaissance and command (Erdogan, 2018). Moreover, the ever-increasing range of firepower makes it difficult to predict Russian

strategic intentions. It puts Russia in a privileged position expressed in terms of spatial and temporal superiority over the Alliance. In a situation of direct armed conflict, the Russian Federation is bound to seek to cut off second-strikes and retreats and hinder the ability to conduct logistical support (Erdogan, 2018).

With its advanced A2/AD capabilities, Russia can attempt to threaten NATO bases near its borders with Russia, prevent the deployment of major forces in the conflict area, disrupt the conduct of allied surface and submarine naval operations and prevent effective operations against Russian forces. In addition, prevent air operations, disintegrate air and missile defense systems, impede the use of space for command and guidance of missile assets, and through cyber strikes effectively disrupt fire, support and logistics systems (Gunzinger et. al., 2010, p. XIII).

Given the military and political costs of full NATO retaliation, Russia's A2/AD capabilities undermine the notion that a local conflict, for example in the Baltic States, will automatically lead to a global conflict involving all available means on the side of the Russian Federation and NATO. Consequently, the notion that Russia may have military dominance in parts of Eastern Europe at the level of conventional means may undermine the political confidence of frontline states in the Alliance, making them more vulnerable to more subtle Russian penetration measures. In other words, building Russian A2/AD bastions may also be a form of psychological and political warfare (Simon, 2017).

There is no doubt that the Kaliningrad Oblast ⁴ has a special importance to the Kremlin. On the other hand, it poses the greatest threat to the European security order. This is compounded by the threat to the Suwałki Corridor and the possibility of isolating the Baltic States from the

⁴ Currently, the Kaliningrad Oblast, located between Poland and Lithuania, is home to, among others, the 336th Marine Infantry Brigade, which is subordinate to the Baltic Fleet Command, and the 79th Independent Guards Motorized Brigade from Gusev, which is subordinate to the Western Military District, as well as the 7th Independent Guards Motorized Infantry Regiment (Kaliningrad). The Baltic Fleet Command also has a strong aviation component. The main units here are the 689th Independent Combat Fighter Aviation Regiment (base in Chkalovsk, Su-27 machines) and the 4th Independent Assault Aviation Regiment (base in Chernyakhovsk, Su-24 machines). High offensive potential in the Kaliningrad Oblast provided by the 152nd Guards Missile Brigade, stationed in Chernyakhovsk, equipped with Tochka-U (range up to 120 km) and Tochka-M (up to 185 km) missile systems. There are up to 12 launchers of these missiles in two squadrons of three batteries each (each battery has two launchers). The 244th Artillery Brigade is also stationed in the region, with towed 2A36 Hyacinth-B 152mm caliber cannons with a range of up to 33 km and BM-21 launchers (Smura, 2016 In addition, 2 S-400 squadrons of the 183rd OPL Regiment of the Baltic Fleet, two S-300PS squadrons and 454th OPL Regiment; 25th Independent Coastal Defense Missile Brigade (Bastion-P); 841st Radio Warfare Center (Gawęda, 2018).

main treaty territory. Radiolocation reconnaissance systems are located here, including the Voronezh-M early warning radar, which can detect objects up to 6,000 km away (Radomyski, 2021, p. 46). In addition, radio-electronic reconnaissance and radio-electronic warfare systems. The Kaliningrad Oblast has three shore-based mobile K-300P Bastion-P anti-ship missile batteries, which are armed with P-800 Oniks supersonic cruise missiles with a range of more than 300 km, flying at a speed of more than 2.5 Ma. In addition, Kaliningrad is home to S-400 Triumf long-range anti-aircraft systems along with Pancyr-S1 short-range anti-aircraft artillery and missile sets, and there is a reconstituted fighter regiment equipped with modern Su-35 and upgraded Su-27 aircraft (Dyner, 2018). The 9K720 Iskander missile launchers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons and Kalibr cruise missiles with a range of up to 2,000 kilometers, are also particularly dangerous (Burton, 2016). In addition, for a correct assessment of the Russian Federation's influence capabilities from Kaliningrad, one would still need to take into account the capabilities of auxiliary systems, such as its infrastructure and general-purpose armed forces, including submarines and naval mines. Second, the synergistic effect of multiple systems and capabilities permanently installed in a relatively small area is not taken into account. Third, the Russian Federation's superiority over the Alliance is a consequence of having a unified national command system that enables rapid decision-making. Consequently, it should be recognized that the bastion's overall capabilities are far superior to the individual weapons systems that comprise them. Likewise, when it comes to resilience and preserving the combat viability of troops (Dalsjö *et al.*, 2019, p. 42).

It is estimated that the missile systems deployed in the Kaliningrad Oblast can successfully combat ground, surface and air targets deployed far from the border with the Russian Federation. Virtually the entire territory of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the Baltic Sea area remains within the range of the missile. According to some experts, the fact of the deployment of a naval infantry brigade and a motorized brigade for offensive operations threatens the immediate territorial integrity and independence of the Baltic States (Górecki, 2017, p. 104). Generalizing, it can be said that the creation of bastions in the Kaliningrad Oblast, although it provides security for the armed forces deployed in the area and, from a theoretical point of view, has a defensive character, in reality, under their protection, operations of an offensive nature can be prepared (Radomyski, 2021, p. 47).

In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, it may seem that the Russian Federation's threats are greatly overestimated⁵. However, one should not be overly optimistic, as the troops and tactical compounds regrouped from the Kaliningrad region to Ukraine have been partially replenished. This is particularly important for the Russian Federation in the context of the probable accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO (Hedlund, 2022). And one should not forget about the industrial potential, which seems to be able to cope with the problem of replenishing combat equipment sooner or later, since it has been working under a war regime since February 2023 (BOFIT, 2023). In the context of Russia's closeness to China, it also seems that clandestine deliveries of combat equipment to Russia are real (Gale, 2023 & Allen, 2023), the symptoms of which are already observed on Ukrainian territory. Taking these arguments into account, it can be concluded that at present the level of threats against the Baltic States has somewhat decreased, but in the long term it will still remain significant. Although strikes against the Baltic states and the use of the Suwałki corridor seem unlikely, the war in Ukraine confirms that Russia has taken steps to prepare for conflict with NATO in all domains and in every operational direction (Herdt & Zublic 2022, p. 1).

4. Threats to the Baltic States below the threshold of warfare

Threats from the Russian Federation below the threshold of open armed conflict are created against the Baltic State through the deliberate use of instruments of diplomatic, informational, military and economic influence, with the aim of exerting a specific influence on the political system or decisions making. Very often, but not always, this is done covertly and goes beyond the context of traditional war. (Pronk, 2019). The contemporary forms of achieving Russian domination over the Baltic States can be given certain attributes. First, the Russian Federation's range of influence is virtually unlimited. Second, all available elements of national

⁵ A November 2022 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies confirms that military threats in air, sea, land, space and cyber will remain the main threats to the Baltic States. Russia will pose constant threats materializing in the gray zone and using economic coercion, disinformation and propaganda, cyber disruptions and covert military invasions (Herdt & Zublic 2022, p. 1).

power are used. Third, Russia's pre-planned forces and means are not used. Fourth, the information sphere is becoming a key field of competition for Russia, determining the possibility of success or failure. Fifth, the above-mentioned forms of influence Russia can use in different ways. It can obscure the picture of the conflict with the Baltic States, and sometimes induce them to adopt certain attitudes. Sixth, timely detection of hostile influence by the Baltic States requires significant investment and possession of resources, including intelligence. Seventh, Russia uses religious, ethnic ties and other arguments that intensify internal conflicts to achieve dominance. Eighth, Russia's use of threats below the brink of open armed conflict extends rather than replaces traditional forms of conflict, and produces the intended effects at relatively low cost (Robinson *et al.*, 2018, p. XIX).

Russian influence against the Baltic States is conducted in accordance with the theory of the American concept of political warfare (Counter, 2014, p. 29-32). Moreover, it is based on the assumption that the main space of warfare is the human mind, so all activities are dominated by informational and psychological activities. Moreover, it is based on the assumption that the main battle space is the human mind, so all activity is dominated by informational and psychological activities. Russia wants to achieve superiority and domination in both the military and civilian spheres by maintaining control over the society of the Baltic States (Berzins, 2014, p. 5). According to Dmitry Adamsky, the Russian Federation achieves its political goals through a combination of hard and soft power, that is, the skillful and synchronized use of military, diplomatic and economic instruments (Adamsky, 2015, p. 23).

Russia in its rivalry with the Baltic States is also taking advantage of the phenomenon of blurring the boundaries between states of war and peace. After all, instruments of non-military influence are now more effective than military force (Coalson, 2014). The Russian Federation assumes that the use of political, economic, informational and other non-military measures, coordinated with the use of the potential of the population in opposition to the legitimate authorities, will bring tangible political benefits to the Baltic States (Galeotti, 2014). The catalyst, and the complementary factor that enables domination even over the stronger, is the armed forces, used in unconventional ways. The armed forces against the Baltic State conduct special operations under the cover (Galeotti, 2014).

Often in Western publications, the hostile actions of the Russian Federation against the Baltic States are called hybrid warfare. Using the concept of hybrid war, without examining the Russian connotations to the term and isolating it from Russian operational art, can lead to erroneous conclusions. It also seems that using the conceptual framework of hybrid warfare to explain Russia's distinct new-generation warfare concept is a kind of misuse (Adamsky, 2015, p. 21). After all, one cannot impose a Western way of thinking when assessing the Russian way of conducting and resolving modern conflicts. Moscow's approach to new generation warfare differs significantly from the concept of hybrid warfare. New generation warfare is a distinct, indigenously Russian concept of achieving strategic success in competition with a relatively strong adversary, as Ulrich Kühn (2018, p. 15) points out. However, one cannot agree with such a restrictive formulation, as the experience of the conflict with Ukraine shows that it can be successfully applied against weaker ones. U. Kühn maintains that the theory of new generation war was developed to win a conflict with NATO or to force the Alliance to give up the post-Soviet space and stop accepting new members (Kühn, 2018, p. 15). He thinks that under this strategy, Russia will try to avoid direct military conflict with NATO for as long as possible. However, in a hypothetical situation of direct aggression against the Baltic States, Russia will try to paralyze the decision-making process and annihilate plans to implement Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (Kühn, 2018, p. 15). In addition, the theory of hybrid warfare assumes the use of kinetic force at every stage of the conflict, while the new generation of war aims to avoid it. Thus, the conundrum is that hybrid warfare can be part of next-generation warfare, but the terms cannot be used interchangeably (Howard & Czekaj, 2019, p. 158). In other words, the concept of new generation war cannot be equated with the concept of hybrid war.

The Russian Federation is constantly striving to gain an information advantage over the Baltic States, which it intends to achieve through the skillful use of cyberspace, media and social networks (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015, p. 44). It cannot be ruled out that in the future Russia will use unconventional measures involving the deliberate triggering of natural phenomena, such as earthquakes, typhoons or heavy downpours, which in the long term could erode the economy and exacerbate tensions among the population (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015, p. 44). May seek to provoke social tensions and protests against legitimate authorities (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015, p. 45). Fomenting internal problems in the Baltic States using so-called third forces and

indirect influence is undoubtedly a goal of the Russian Federation's influence. Information confrontation using falsification and distortion of information may also be carried out (Kurz, 2017, p. 94). The sense of this kind of information warfare was verified with the occupation of Crimea. In the Russian Federation, it is believed that carrying out indirect actions against the Baltic States will result in lowering morale and cause certain damage without the need for military force. It is also important to maintain political, economic, informational and psychological pressure to confuse political and military leaders (Kurz, 2017, p. 94). Specific benefits in certain convenient situations for Russia may come from illegally rearming opposition groups in the future, or hiring private military companies (Thomas, 2019, p. 90). He predicts that in the future it will be possible to achieve set political goals in the Baltic States through behavioral warfare, at the core of which is the manipulation of behavioral algorithms, habits, activities and stereotypes, as well as interference in the cultural sphere (Thomas, 2019, p. 91).

It seems that vis-à-vis the Baltic States, Russia is conducting not a war, but an information confrontation. The use of the term war is rather a fashion of military semantics in international relations. The word "war" should not be misused and the phenomenon of war should not be confused with its attributes, forms of its conduct and ways of influencing the opposing side. The use of the term "information warfare" may be unauthorized, since war is in its essence a complex socio-political phenomenon. It involves confrontation between political systems, classes, nations and states, with armed violence aimed at achieving specific political goals. It implies the conduct of warfare, including the general mobilization of both people and the economy. To succeed in warfare, one also needs a military strategy (Little, 2016, p. 15).

According to Russian experts, one of the features of the war of the future will be information confrontation. It seems that this concept is most reflective of the nature of informational interaction in terms of the international competition conducted by the Russian Federation. The use of the term war is rather a fashion of military semantics in international relations. The word "war" should not be abused and the phenomenon of war should not be confused with its attributes, forms of its conduct and ways of influencing the opposing side. The use of the term "information warfare" may be unauthorized, since war is in its essence a complex socio-political phenomenon. It involves confrontation between political systems, classes, nations

and states, with armed violence aimed at achieving specific political goals. It implies the conduct of warfare, including the general mobilization of both people and the economy. To succeed in warfare, a military strategy is also needed (Fridman, 2016, p. 81).

Thus, it seems that war should not have connotations of information impact. Nevertheless, it can be considered that information impact is a process belonging to the phenomenon of war. In the Russian Federation, it is accepted that both the terms "information warfare" and "information confrontation" are legitimate concepts, as they express the struggle of opposing sides for quantitative, qualitative and speed advantages in acquiring, analyzing and using information (Wojna). It is clear that information confrontation, like other types of confrontation, can be defensive and offensive in nature. The defensive nature involves protecting one's own information from enemy influence. The offensive nature is expressed in the disorganization of the functioning or elimination of the enemy's information infrastructure and the disruption of the processes of exercising operational control over security actors and the capabilities they use. With regard to information confrontation, the term information intervention or information aggression can be used interchangeably. Due to the fact that we are now dealing with a new generation of wars, the role of information confrontation is rapidly increasing. It is expressed in the struggle against control systems, in the imposition of the opponent's own rules for conducting competition, and in the pursuit of military and technical superiority (Wojna). Information confrontation is constantly evolving with the development of modern methods of warfare. It focuses mainly on finding the weakest points in the command, control, communication, information support systems and cognitive processes of the Baltic States is to increase the effectiveness of the impact, in spheres of confrontation other than military. A critical part of command and control systems are its information assets, the disruption or destruction of which will lead to an immediate reduction in operational capabilities. The pinnacle achievement, and the key to conducting an information confrontation, would be for the Russian Federation to have a global information system capable of controlling not only the Baltic States, but also the entire West (Wojna).

5. Conclusions

Based on the research, it was determined that the Russian Federation will continue to destabilize the regional security environment that includes the Baltic States. It will constantly influence neighboring states using available instruments of influence, mainly below the border of armed conflict, in an attempt to regain lost spheres of influence. Aggressively using the information sphere, including social media, it will create a false image of its real intentions and thus influence the attitudes of political leaders of states and the international community. In its efforts to realize its own interests and achieve its political goals, it will seek to use all available means unlimitedly and will not follow the rules of existing international law.

A serious military challenge for the Baltic States is the multi-domain capabilities of the Russian Federation carved out in the so-called Anti-Access/Area Denial, located in the Kaliningrad Oblast. These capabilities will make it virtually impossible for NATO troops to enter the theater of operations and perform maneuver in the eastern flank area. It is estimated that the missile systems deployed in the Kaliningrad Oblast can successfully combat ground, surface and air targets deployed far from the border with the Russian Federation. Virtually the entire territory of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the Baltic Sea area remains within the range of the missile. The concentration of capabilities in a relatively small area, for example, allows Russian naval and air forces to perform strikes and conduct amphibious operations in the rear of Estonia and Latvia, seize Gotland and other strategic islands in the Baltic Sea, and block sea traffic from Stockholm to Riga and Tallinn. There is similar excitement about the Suwałki Corridor. Strikes from Kaliningrad on Polish territory could physically cut off the Baltic States from the Allies and thus make it impossible to provide any support.

Russian strategists against the Baltic States foresee extensive use of non-military instruments and tools. The use of political, economic and informational pressure is intended to discourage further actions and influence the containment of the crisis situation in the initial stage of the conflict, before decisions are made to apply military measures. A special role in this regard is assigned to the conduct of coercive actions in cyberspace, which are intended to lead to the de-escalation of the conflict. Great emphasis is placed on the use of nuclear and non-nuclear

deterrence synchronized with information influence, which is designed to both deter and coerce. This type of conduct has so far not been reflected in the normative documents of the Russian Federation. Conducting uninterrupted information activities, as has been and is being done in Ukraine, reinforces the message about the possible use of nuclear weapons and intensifies the deterrent effect. The main rationale for conducting such integrated campaigns is to deescalate the conflict and force NATO countries to abandon their aggression or impose the will of the Russian Federation with as little violence as possible.

The current focus on next-generation warfare runs the risk of creating the impression that the so-called hybrid impact instrument set is somehow distinct and significantly different from the use of so-called hard power, i.e. armed forces. Such thinking is erroneous. The experience of the past two decades shows the close link between Russian military capabilities and the practice of conducting operations below armed conflict. Indeed, Russia's hard power is a critical and necessary enabler of Russia's next-generation warfare. Without it, next-generation war would not be possible. Next-generation warfare is also a risk management instrument, used when the use of military force should be avoided due to excessive risk or cost, or when the use of military force is otherwise inappropriate. The scale and scope of Russian hybrid operations are increasing as Russian armed forces capabilities grow and improve. Thus, it is the armed forces, or rather the capabilities they possess, that are crucial to the Russian Federation's achievement of its foreign policy goals in the Baltics.

Given the military losses suffered by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, it seems that threats against the Baltic States have weakened. However, this does not change the overall intentions to dominate and gain influence over the post-Soviet space. Given the prospect of Finland and Sweden joining NATO, Moscow will certainly not give up on further militarization of the Kaliningrad region, which means that threats to the Baltic States will weaken. By the time the war ends, however, they will have changed their nature to non-kinetic. Therefore, there is a need for further research into the issue of threats to the Baltic States, which are likely to materialize in the gray zone.

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THE POSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC TOWARDS THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to present the position of the Czech government and the society of this country towards the war in Ukraine. The text is an attempt to conduct a comparative analysis of the position of the Czech government and the part of society that has been opposing the government's policy towards Ukraine for some time. The author presented the main consequences of the Czech government's support for Ukraine, which are related to the post-pandemic crisis. These include, above all, problems with the supply of oil, natural gas and nuclear fuel for Czech nuclear power plants. Social problems include high inflation, rising interest rates and rising prices of basic commodities. In the summary, synthetic conclusions were drawn that confirm the discrepancies between the government's policy and the position of that part of society.

Keywords: government, society, Czech Republic, war in Ukraine

Introduction⁶

The Russian invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022 shocked the whole world. The bombings of Ukrainian cities, including the capital, Kyiv, were particularly appalling. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the European Union, despite the initial sluggishness, made political decisions to isolate Russia and break economic ties. These steps led to hasty

⁶ The article is the result of the author's research visit to the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (Západočeská univerzita v Plzni) in October 2022.

actions in European countries to diversify the supply of energy resources. In the current situation, Europe and the world were plunged into a crisis, which is primarily a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the interruption of supply chains, as well as the war in Ukraine, which deepened this situation.

The paper is an attempt to analyse the causes and consequences of the position taken by the government of the Czech Republic and public opinion towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The analysis reflects a case study of the reactions of various political and social actors in one of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In this way, it makes it possible to determine reasons for the discrepancy between public opinion and the government's position. The scientific hypothesis posed in the paper is the claim that European societies, based on the example of the Czech Republic which is a country that does not directly border either Ukraine or Russia, have a problem with the ability of making long-term hard efforts and do not fully replicate the position of the government which, bearing in mind international obligations, maintains diplomatic abstinence. The following research questions were attached to the hypothesis: what are the main socio-economic and political consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the Czech Republic?; What is the official position of the Czech government towards the war in Ukraine?; Why are public moods flexible towards the war in Ukraine in the period of almost a year since the outbreak of the war?

The article is based on the theory of constructivism, which makes it possible to present social constructs (Fierke 2013, pp.188-189; Zehfuss 2002, pp.1-37; Wendt 2010, pp.1-46). At the beginning, the construct presented by the government gained full acceptance in society. Over time, however, part of society began to reject the unconditional construct due to the growing economic problems. It seems to be a typical social mechanism whereby citizens do not want to suffer for "someone else's cause".

The article uses a comparative method concerning the actions undertaken by the government and the reaction and attitude of society towards the conflict in Ukraine. Also used is a qualitative method, directly related to various kinds of social studies conducted, the results of which are presented in the paper and elements of the statistical method, which allows for the numerical presentation of the analysed phenomena.

The paper fills the research gap in political science in Poland. Currently, which is somewhat understandable, researchers on the war in Ukraine concentrate on Poland and the most significant actors (European Union and NATO) in relation to the ongoing conflict. Socio-political analysis regarding the individual and smaller countries of the European Union occupies a marginal position. Basic information about Czech, Slovak or Hungarian attitudes towards the Ukrainian war is only available in journalistic materials.

The paper's bibliography is based on multilingual sources, mostly in the Czech language and also in Polish and English.

Consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the Czech Republic

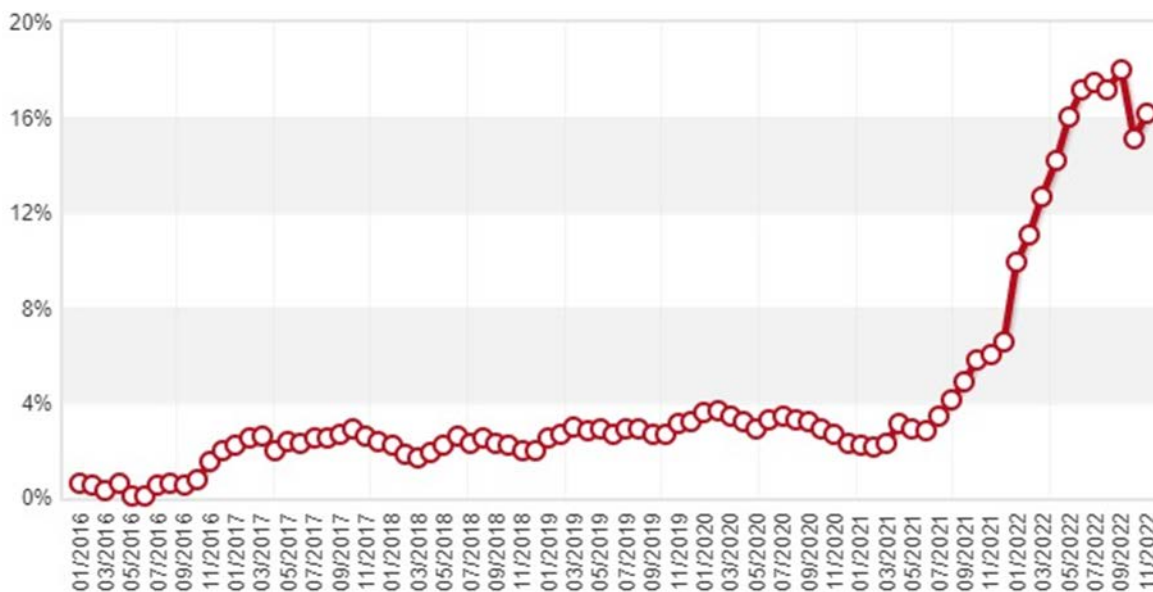
The Czech Republic, like other states in Central-Eastern Europe and all of Europe, was faced with the implications of Russian aggression in Ukraine. In fact, many of these consequences followed the COVID-19 pandemic connected with global disorder and broken chains of supply. Till the post-pandemic crisis and the war in Ukraine, the economy of the Czech Republic intensively evolved and has quickly become recognized as a developed European economy. According to the tradingeconomics.com website, Czech GDP was rated at 282.34 bn USD and nominal GDP per capita was estimated at 20083,81 USD. On the other hand, GDP per capita PPP (purchasing power parity) was 40,740 USD (tradingeconomics.com 2021).

One of the toughest consequences, which is categorized as an economic and social problem, is the high inflation rate. In November 2022 the inflation rate in the Czech Republic expressed by the price index of consumer goods and services was at the rate of 16,2%, compared to the highest rate of 18% in September 2022 (www.czso.cz). Although at the beginning of 2022 the Czech government made efforts to control the growth of inflation by raising interest rates and levelling them at 7%, the problems with inflation are still not appeased. Basically, due to external factors such as global post-pandemic problems and the regional impact of the war in Ukraine, the measures taken by Czech Government have been insufficient. This has been confirmed in the interview with Marko Mora, deputy director of the Czech National Bank (*Česká národní banka* – CNB), in which he pointed out rising interest rates as an unsatisfactory method to reach the aim of a 2% annual inflation rate. Mora was in favour of radical measures to raise

interest rates over the 7% at the level of inflation. He stated that cautious action pursued by the CNB would cause extensive problems with the inflation rate and even he was not sure whether the rising inflation rate would be stemmed in the near future (www.cnb.cz). It showed many worries as a common feature of national banks in Central Eastern Europe.

Taking into consideration predictions in the forthcoming year, dilemmas regarding the inflation rate will be constantly present in the Czech economy. Inflation is stimulated by the high prices of resources (natural gas, oil and electricity) and rising prices of food and there are not premises for the stabilization of their prices. Thus, the Czech government considers also different methods to reduce the rising inflation effect. It has not been confirmed whether the VAT reduction on energy will be implemented. Considering this, inflation might slow down when the Czech economy falls into a recession, and according to many experts, symptoms of the recession are slowly appearing in the economy. Thus, further economic development in the Czech Republic might be connected with improvements in the global market (www.csas.cz).

Figure1. Monthly evolution of the annual price index of consumer goods and services in the Czech Republic



Source: https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/inflace_spotrebitelske_ceny

Another issue of great importance, discussed in the public debate all over Europe was energy security and the capability to secure a sufficient supply of resources such as oil and

natural gas. After the outbreak of the war, supplies of oil from Russia to the Czech Republic were suspended, as were for all states in the Visegrad Group (Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). Due to harsh criticism of the Russian invasion by the Czech government, oil supplies through the southern pipeline Friendship (*Druzhiba*) to the Czech Republic were not restored, unlike Hungary and Slovakia affected only by temporary restrictions in oil supplies. It was also the effect that Slovakian and Hungarian oil companies covered the costs of oil transit through Ukraine at Russia's request. The Czech government did not agree to such a solution and currently, the Czech Republic is devoid of any Russian oil (Rzeczpospolita 2022).

The Czech government quickly took up fundamental and strategic decisions in order to replace the Russian oil supply. Annually, the Czech Republic needs 8 mil tons of oil. Half of this supply was originally from Russia. The second half was acquired from Western Europe, particularly from Germany by the TAL pipeline which starts in Trieste and was driven to the centre of the continent. Thus, in November 2022 Czech government approved the project TAL+ for the pipeline's extension. The Bavarian self-government has already decided about increasing the capacity of the existing pipeline. All these actions will compensate for the loss of Russian oil supply to the Czech Republic. The full capacity of TAL will enable to transport around 8 mil tons of oil to the Czech Republic. Additionally, the matter of great significance is that the MERO (the Czech national company) is the only owner of the oil infrastructure and pipelines on the territory of the Czech Republic. MERO also holds a 5% stake in the TAL consortium. Taking into consideration all circumstances, there are not any legal obstacles to the implementation of the above-mentioned project (Weiss 2022).

The project to increase the capacity of the TAL pipeline started in January 2023 and is expected to take a maximum of 25 months. Then all oil transport through the modernized pipeline will go to two Czech refineries – in Kralupy and Litvínov, which belong to the company controlled by the Polish company PKN Orlen. The cost of the entire investment is estimated at around 50-65 mil Euro and will enable the Czech government to become completely independent of Russian oil (Dębiec 2022).

Oil supplies to the Czech Republic in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine had positive prospects. On the contrary, the country's gas dependence on Russian sources posed a much bigger issue, due to the fact that the Czech Republic was almost entirely dependent on

Russian gas. In the first few weeks of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and in the face of the suspension of gas supplies to Poland, Bulgaria and Finland, it was perceived as a real danger by the political Czech elites. Moreover, all infrastructure was adjusted to the Russian gas and it was seen as a key difficulty to overcome. Currently the Czech Republic imports around 98% of the gas demand. Only 2% of gas is acquired from domestic resources located in Southern Moravia. The Czech economy needs annually around 8-9 bn m³ and the available gas storage tanks have a total capacity of 3 bn m³, which equals the demand of Czech households. Theoretically, filled storage tanks would cover the demand of individual consumers throughout the country. In fact, it is insufficient and requires the government to ensure a sustainable supply of this resource (plyn.cz 2022).

For this reason, the reaction and actions taken by the Czech government to solve problems with gas supplies turned out to be extremely quick and efficient. At the beginning of September 2022, a new floating LNG terminal was opened in Eemshaven, the Netherlands. The total capacity of the terminal, which consists of two vessels, is 8 bn m³. Czech Prime Minister Peter Fiala attended the opening ceremony alongside Dutch politicians, the reason for that being the involvement of the Czech Republic in the project, as the state-owned company ČEZ reserved 3.1 million m³ (over 40% of its capacity) from the terminal. From September to December 2022, the Czech Republic had 8 shipments booked (100 million m³ of gas after regasification of the LNG) (Dębiec 2022a). In accordance with the agreement, the Czech Republic has reserved the contracted capacity for five years until September 2027. Afterwards, Peter Fiala described it as a political and strategic triumph, pointing out that “today our gas storage tanks are 84% full. We are ready for the coming winter. The goal is that we have enough energy in the Czech Republic for households, public institutions and businesses, and that energy is available at affordable prices. Several countries participate in the operation of this terminal and in the fact that we deliver gas to the Czech Republic. Besides the Netherlands, also France and Germany” (www.cez.cz 2022). In turn, the Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, Jozef Síkela, pointed out that this is an important step in gradually getting rid of energy dependence on Russia. Participation in the supplies from the LNG terminal may cover 1/3 of the Czech Republic's demand for natural gas (www.cez.cz 2022).

Another issue directly related to the energy security of the Czech Republic in the context of the war in Ukraine is the supply of nuclear fuel to nuclear power plants in Temelin and Dukovany. Currently, nuclear fuel for Czech power plants is still supplied by TVEL, which belongs to the state-owned holding company Rosatom, and both power plants are fully dependent on it. Despite the ongoing war in Eastern Europe, fuel from Russia has already reached the Czech Republic many times. However, the case with the nuclear power plant in Temelin is easier. Firstly, the power plant already has reserves of fuel for two years and therefore does not need any more deliveries from Russia. Secondly, the contract for the supply of Russian fuel to Temelin expires in about two years, so, taking into account the existing stocks, this cooperation has basically ended (www.idnes.cz 2022). Already in April 2022, ČEZ (Czech energy company - *České Energetické Závody*), managing, among others, nuclear power plants, made public the results of the announced tender for the supplier of nuclear fuel to Temelin from 2024. The tender was won by the American company Westinghouse and the French company Framatome. The agreement will run from 2024 for 15 years. It was decided to use two suppliers to implement the diversification assumptions (www.fintag.cz 2022).

The situation with the nuclear power plant in Dukovany is much more difficult. It was built using Soviet/Russian technology and equipped with four VVER-440 blocks that are adapted to Russian nuclear fuel. Hence, in principle, the Russian TVEL has a contract until the end of the operation of the power plant, whose currently operated blocks are intended to function for another 20 years. This issue has been under scrutiny at the government level for a long time. It is emphasized that the current situation of nuclear fuel dependence solely on the Russian supplier is unacceptable. In turn, fuel from another external and non-Russian supplier may have a different efficiency, which is important in nuclear energy. Currently, the power plant in Dukovany has fuel reserves for three years. Therefore, during this period, the issue of nuclear fuel supplies from the Russian TVEL should be clarified. (ct24.ceskatelevize.cz 2022).

The Czech government's position towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The Czech government of Petr Fiala (he became prime minister on December 17, 2021) was one of the first to harshly criticize the Russian invasion of Ukraine and opted for the largest sanctions imposed on Russia. One of the first steps was to close the airspace to Russian aircraft. In addition, the Czech Republic supported the exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT system, which accepts card payments, and at the beginning of the war persuaded Germany to support this sanction. The Czech Republic also demanded the suspension of Schengen visas for Russian citizens (Ogrodnik 2022). Also in the Czech Republic, there were voices that were the first to indicate that President Putin should be brought before the International Criminal Court for starting armed aggression in 2022. Already in the first weeks of the war, this position was expressed by the president of the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic, Pavel Rychetský. In a special interview with Czech radio, he described Putin as a war criminal who laughs at all the sanctions imposed on Russia. (www.irozhlaz.cz 2022a).

Decisions in diplomatic matters were resolved just as quickly. The Czech Republic brought back its ambassadors from Moscow and Minsk for consultations and at the same time withdrew its consent to the operation of Russian consulates in Brno and Karlovy Vary. The Czech Republic also forestalled diplomatic retaliation from Russia and closed its consulates in Yekaterinburg and Saint Petersburg (ct24.ceskatelevize.cz 2022). Just as quickly, the Czech Republic began to limit the interests and activities of Russian companies on its territory. In this regard, e.g. The Czech National Bank (*Česká Národní Banka*) withdrew the license of the Russian Sberbank. This caused a massive withdrawal of funds by customers from this bank (Moravek 2022).

Since the successive expansion of the European Union's sanctions packages, the Czech Republic has started to implement EU recommendations. The European Union began to impose sanctions successively in 2014, i.e. following events on the Maidan, but it was only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 that these sanctions took on a much harsher dimension. Currently, the ninth package of sanctions of December 16, 2022 (as of January 10, 2023) has already been implemented. Generally speaking, the sanctions are of an economic and financial nature (a ban on importing goods and a ban on cooperation with the Russian banking sector and

enterprises), transport sanctions relating to airspace and seaport blockades for Russian units. The sanctions packages also have an individual scope against Russian politicians, oligarchs and people associated with the regime. It relates to the freezing of assets, their confiscation and a ban on travel to European Union countries (finance.ec.europa.eu 2022).

The harsh approach of Petr Fiala's government to Russian actions towards Ukraine has its ideological justification and is also linked to past events. Prime Minister Fiala represents the Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana – ODS), which is a right-wing conservative party and formed a winning coalition with Mayors and Independents (Starostové a nezávislí, STAN) after the 2021 parliamentary elections; the Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party (Křesťanská a demokratická unie - Československá strana lidová - KDU-ČSL); Party - Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita 09 – TOP09); the Czech Pirate Party (Česká pirátská strana - Pirates). Despite the ambiguous position on the approach to European issues, it can be said that the coalition has a conservative-right wing character, just like the ODS itself (with the exception of the Pirates), in contrast to the party of the previous Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (Akce nespokojených občanů - ANO), which is considered a liberal-centre party.

The ideological values of the ODS had an anti-Russian dimension, especially in connection with the events of 2014, when two serious explosions took place in an arms and ammunition warehouse in Vrbětice. The investigation was sluggishly conducted for many years, and it was only towards the end of Andrej Babiš's tenure as prime minister that new facts came to light. It turned out that officials from the office of President Miloš Zeman hid important documents proving the involvement of Russian intelligence agents in the bombings. The case caused a major political storm, as two citizens were killed in the attacks at that time, and the losses amounted to approximately 1 bn CZK. The Czech Republic ordered 18 Russian diplomats to leave the embassy in Prague and return to their country. In addition, the Czech police published arrest warrants for two officers of the Russian GRU military intelligence who were on Czech territory at the time of the attacks. They were also responsible for the 2018 attacks on Sergei Skripal, a former Russian agent in the UK (www.dw.com/pl/ 2022).

After the disclosure of information about the participation of Russian agents in the attacks and diplomatic decisions taken by the Czech government, a crisis broke out in the Czech-Russian

relations. As a form of retaliation, which is practiced in international diplomacy, Russia immediately ordered 20 Czech diplomats to leave its territory. Against this background, far-reaching tensions appeared. It turned out that after this demand from the Russian side, the Czech embassy in Moscow faced the problem of staff shortages because there were only seven diplomats left there. In turn, there still were 27 diplomats at the Russian embassy in Prague. The Czech Republic demanded the withdrawal of the decision of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pointing out that, if necessary, the number of Russian diplomats in Prague may be reduced so as to equalize the personnel composition. Russia did not respond to the demands of the Czech Republic and the crisis continues to this day. The Czech Republic received the support of the diplomacy of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary and the assurance of support from Great Britain in the activities of its own diplomatic post in Moscow, limited in personnel (Paluch 2021).

Against the backdrop of the Czech-Russian diplomatic crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is worth emphasizing the gradual change in the position of President Zeman, who often declared pro-Russian sympathies before the February 2022 invasion. The situation was so socially sensitive that there were even numerous social protests, especially after the events related to the explosions in April 2021. Before the outbreak of the war, Zeman declared that he did not believe in the conduct of hostilities by Russia, but after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Zeman radically changed his position and described Putin as a madman who needs to be isolated. He described the invasion itself as a "crime against peace" (Rzeczpospolita 2022).

From the very beginning of the war, the Czech Republic initiated aid for Ukraine and the Ukrainian community. Prime Minister Fiala expressed his full support and sympathy for the Ukrainians in the difficult period of the war and together with the Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki, the Prime Minister of Slovenia Janez Janša and the Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, chairman of Law and Justice Party Jarosław Kaczyński, travelled together to the besieged Kyiv on March 15, 2022, to meet there with the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and other representatives of the Ukrainian authorities. This was an unprecedented step in European diplomacy at the time. In October 2022, Prime Minister Fiala visited Kyiv again and announced that Ukraine needs a clear perspective of joining NATO and the European Union.

He declared Czech Republic's full support in these plans and was in favour of restoring Ukraine's full territorial integrity (<https://www.idnes.cz> 2022b).

In terms of military assistance, the Czech Republic decided to provide military support to Ukraine in the face of the impending Russian invasion. In January 2022, the Czech government decided to transfer to Ukraine over 4,000 152 mm artillery shells worth a total of 1.7 mil USD. In addition, an agreement was signed at that time on the possibility of treating Ukrainian soldiers in Czech hospitals (Czarnecki 2022). In the initial phase of the war, the Czech Republic was heavily involved in military aid to the struggling Ukraine. Until May 2022, the government transferred military equipment worth 3.5 bn CZK. As part of these deliveries, Ukraine was given, among others, T-72 tanks, BMP-1 combat vehicles and anti-missile systems. During this period, Czech Defense Minister Jana Černochová pointed out that 'what we need to support Ukraine is the continuity of assistance'. For this reason, at that time, another tranche of military aid was announced for approximately 600-700 mil CZK (www.irozhlas.cz 2022). As a result, at the end of September, the scale of military aid to Ukraine was estimated at 3.8 bn CZK. In addition, the Czech Republic received partial compensation from the United States for the military assistance provided to Ukraine in the amount of 106 mil USD (equivalent to 2.7 bn CZK) for the modernization of its armed forces. As part of this, the Czech government has committed to purchase several UH-1Y Venom and AH-1Z Viper multi-role helicopters from the US (www.irozhlas.cz 2022a). Moreover, the Czech society funded the T-72 Avenger tank from the public collection, which was described as a "gift for Putin" (Ulbrichová 2022). In addition, the website of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic provides information on possible donations for Ukrainian soldiers to the appropriate account of the Ukrainian Embassy in Prague. This is guided by the slogan that Ukrainian soldiers also fight for the Czech nation (Ministerstvo obrany ČR 2022).

Another extremely important issue of assistance was the actions taken by the Czech government to help Ukrainian refugees from war zones. In the first month, the Czech Republic took a number of legal steps to regulate the status of refugees from Ukraine on its territory. These activities took place in parallel with spontaneous social actions of Czech citizens who showed help and a positive attitude towards Ukrainians fleeing the war. Provisions covering Ukrainian citizens with social security, payment of benefits and fast-track employment came into force. In

March 2022, a resolution was adopted on the relocation of refugees to an accommodation with the support of local governments and citizens providing shelter to Ukrainians (Wasiuta 2022). Since the beginning of the invasion, several packages of laws concerning Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic have already been adopted. At the end of 2022, the government approved the so-called "Lex Ukraine IV", another aid package. Under this package, the protection of refugees from Ukraine may even be extended until March 2024 (www.mvcr.cz 2022). Currently, in the Czech Republic, there are 473,736 registered refugees from Ukraine who benefit from various forms of assistance. It is four times more than in Slovakia and more than 10 times as in Hungary. This shows that refugees consciously choose the Czech Republic as their destination (www.consilium.europa.eu/pl 2022).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine from the perspective of the opinion and actions of the Czech society

From the very beginning, Czech citizens were strongly appalled by Russia's actions in Ukraine. According to the polls conducted at the beginning of the war, Czechs indicated that the conflict had no rational explanation. Czech citizens were also in favour of accepting refugees from Ukraine. This was supported by over 66% of surveyed people. At the beginning of the war, it was difficult to predict how this conflict would develop, and probably like most citizens in the world, the Czechs believed that the war could be stopped diplomatically. 88% of the surveyed claimed that negotiations were the best way to deal with the existing war (www.irozhlas.cz 2022c). Support for Ukraine was confirmed in numerous social demonstrations. On February 27, 2022, a few days after the invasion, about 80,000 people gathered on Wenceslas Square in Prague (denikn.cz 2022). The demonstration was organized by the well-known Czech non-governmental organization "Million Moments for Democracy" (*Milion chvilek pro demokracii*). On March 4, 2022, this organization again organized a manifestation of support for Ukraine under the slogan "Europe stands for Ukraine". This demonstration took place simultaneously in nine European cities (ct24.ceskatelevize.cz 2022c).

The above-mentioned organization "A Million Moments for Democracy" is an example of a strong civil commitment to Ukraine. On the official website, there is a tab "Together we

stand for Ukraine", with a declaration that one can sign and help in this way (milionchvilek.cz 2022).

Demonstrations of support are held periodically in the Czech Republic in major cities: Prague, Brno and Pilsen. Currently, Czech citizens together with refugees from Ukraine are taking part in demonstrations all over the country like in early October in Prague, when a joint demonstration took place after the heavy bombing of Ukraine. The slogan of this demonstration was a call for the transfer of air defence equipment to Ukraine. In addition, the demonstrators pointed out the need to spread a protective umbrella over Ukraine, which NATO has not taken into account to this day (www.idnes.cz 2022d).

However, according to the latest polls from December 2022, the Czechs have stopped believing in a quick end to the war. 56% of those surveyed said there would be no peace talks in 2023. On the other hand, 36% believed that it is possible to end this conflict this year. A large group of those questioned who believed that the war could end in 2023 are people aged 45-59. On the other hand, a negative opinion on the possibility of ending the war was largely declared by younger people aged 30-44. According to the analysts, the age polarization in terms of responses among the surveyed resulted from the degree of fear. Younger people are more prone to fear various threats (Šelepová 2022).

On this occasion, it should be noted that after many months of the war, a reduction in enthusiasm for helping Ukraine can be noticed in Czech society. This is due to high prices, high inflation and production downtimes in the country. While the war in Ukraine is not the only cause of the socio-economic problems of ordinary citizens, it is perceived by them as such. For this reason, large anti-government demonstrations began to appear. In recent months, demonstrations calling for a change of government and a change in the direction of state policy have usually taken place in Prague. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the demonstrators are against Putin (although there are supporters of Russian policy), but at the same time against the US and the European Union, which are blamed for the development of war events (/prazsky.denik.cz 2022).

This is confirmed by a survey conducted at the beginning of 2023 on further arms deliveries by the Czech Republic to Ukraine, in which almost 75% of those surveyed were against it. The poll follows appeals from some Czech politicians who have begun to question

their strong commitment to Ukraine's military aid. The former Czech foreign minister Jan Kavan or the former leader of the Greens Matěj Stropnický pointed out in a propaganda tone that the Czech nation bears the high costs of its support for Ukraine. This was an element of criticism against the Fiala government and an attempt to influence the social discourse on this matter (Perknerová 2022).

Even in October, surveys showed a more pro-Ukrainian attitude of Czech citizens. The survey of the newspaper Deník was quite authoritative in this respect. According to its survey, 75% of Czech citizens would like Ukraine to win, and only 15% sided with Russia (Komárek 2022).

Another element referring to the criticism of Russia's actions was the satirical concept of the jocular annexation of the Kaliningrad Oblast, which made a "career" in the media in the Czech Republic and abroad. This was a mocking example of Czech humour, treated as a protest against the self-proclaimed annexation of four occupied regions by Russia on Ukrainian territory. Memes appeared on the Internet as maps of the Kaliningrad Oblast with the Czech flag and name. In front of the Russian embassy, demonstrators appeared with banners that Kaliningrad, or Královec, was always Czech (www.idnes.cz 2022e).

Conclusion

The Czech Republic, like other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, experienced numerous consequences of the outbreak of war in Ukraine. High prices linked with rampant inflation, raising interest rates by the central bank and increasing loan instalments have become everyday occurrences. In addition, the severance of cooperation with Russia in the field of oil and natural gas supplies led to an extremely rapid reorientation in Czech foreign policy. In the current situation, the Czech Republic is already independent of oil and natural gas supplies from Russia. New investment projects were implemented, including securing reserves at the newly opened LNG terminal in Eemshaven, in the Netherlands. Another problem was the supply of nuclear fuel to two nuclear power plants. While the power plant in Temelin is already independent, and nuclear fuel stocks will last for two years, until new suppliers fulfil orders, the second power plant in Dukovany is more problematic due to Russian reactors adapted to the

quality of fuel from Russia. It is difficult to predict what will happen to the fuel supplies to this power plant because luckily the stock of nuclear fuel will last for three years and maybe in that time the situation will be resolved.

The attitude of the Czech government does not raise any ambiguities. Prime Minister Peter Fiala and his ministers jointly support Ukraine against Russia's illegal invasion. The government's activities concern the diplomatic sphere and the support given to President Zelenski, as well as the political and practical sphere, in which armaments worth almost 4 bn CZK have been handed over so far. The Czech Republic, as a member of the EU, has been a supporter of harsh sanctions against Russia from the very beginning. They are now an unconditional party to all the sanctions packages imposed by the EU. An important issue was also the immediate adoption of appropriate laws so as to secure the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees who made their way to the Czech Republic. Recently, another package of laws "Lex Ukraine" was adopted, which significantly extends the support of the state and local governments in relation to Ukrainian refugees.

At the beginning, Czech society showed great enthusiasm for helping Ukrainians and Ukraine in the face of the Russian invasion. Throughout the months of the war, pro-Ukrainian demonstrations were regularly organized in the Czech Republic, expressing the opinions of the majority of society. Only after a few months, accompanied by inflation, and rising gas and fuel prices, the society began to feel tired of the situation and a certain percentage of them adopted an anti-government attitude, blaming the Fiala government for unconditionally supporting Ukraine and sending military equipment, and accusing the EU and the U.S. of sustaining the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Anti-government demonstrations were increasingly organized in Prague and other Czech cities. Among those taking part were demonstrators still against Russian aggression, but at the same time they criticized the government for its pro-Ukrainian policy. There were also people who openly declared their support for Russia. Recent polls reflect this, especially the one on the transfer of arms to Ukraine, in which almost 75% of those surveyed expressed their opposition.

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