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Defence diplomacy of the Bucharest Nine (B9) countries during the war in Ukraine. The balance of the first year of the war

Dyplomacja obronna państw Bukaresztańskiej Dziewiątki (B9) w czasie wojny w Ukrainie. Bilans pierwszego roku wojny

Abstract: The article concerns the cooperation of NATO's eastern flank countries in support of war-torn Ukraine. The aim of the discussion is to show the actions of the B9 countries, implementing the ideas and tasks of defence diplomacy, undertaken during the first year of the war (24 February 2022 – 24 February 2023). This support took place in several key areas: political, diplomatic, military, and humanitarian. It was of fundamental importance for maintaining the functioning and stability of Ukraine and its fighting capabilities, especially in the early period after the Russian Federation's invasion. The author tried to verify the following: How was Ukraine supported in practice? Did all B9 countries equally and with the same level of commitment provide assistance in all the identified areas? What factors could potentially strengthen or weaken the B9 countries' involvement in implementing the ideas of defence diplomacy in Ukraine? The analysis was based on current data and materials made available over the past year in the media and on the Internet.

Keywords: defence diplomacy, Bucharest Nine (B9), war in Ukraine, Russian invasion of Ukraine 2022, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria

Streszczenie: Artykuł dotyczy współpracy państw wschodniej flanki NATO na rzecz pogrążonej w wojnie Ukrainy. Celem rozważań jest ukazanie działań krajów B9, realizujących idee i zadania dyplomacji obronnej, podejmowanych w pierwszym roku trwania wojny (24 lutego 2022 – 24 lutego 2023). Wsparcie to przebiegało w kilku zasadniczych obszarach: politycznym, dyplomatycznym, wojskowym oraz humanitarnym. Miało ono fundamentalne znaczenie dla podtrzymywania funkcjonowania i stabilności Ukrainy oraz jej możliwości bojowych, szczególnie w pierwszym okresie po inwazji Federacji Rosyjskiej. Autorka starała się sprawdzić: w jaki sposób w praktyce wspierano Ukrainę?, czy wszystkie kraje B9 w jednakowym stopniu i z takim samym zaangażowaniem

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udzielały pomocy we wszystkich wskazanych obszarach?, jakie czynniki mogły ewentualnie wzmacniać lub osłabiać zaangażowanie państw B9 w realizację idei dyplomacji obronnej w Ukrainie? Analizę przeprowadzono w oparciu o bieżące dane i materiały, udostępniane przez ostatni rok, w mediach oraz w sieci internetowej.

Słowa kluczowe: dyplomacja obronna, Bukaresztańska Dziewiątka (B9), wojna w Ukrainie, inwazja Rosji na Ukrainę 2022 r., Polska, Republika Czeska, Słowacja, Węgry, Litwa, Łotwa, Estonia, Rumunia, Bułgaria

Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022 was preceded by Russian demands to exclude the possibility of further NATO enlargement and reduce the Alliance's military potential in Central and Eastern Europe. The political goal was to prevent Ukraine's further integration with the West, including the structures of the EU and NATO. Although anticipated by observers and intelligence services of various countries, the invasion caused considerable shock and disbelief among the authorities and societies of many countries around the world, especially those in the immediate vicinity of the conflict. The attack on Ukraine, as one of the so-called "geopolitical pivots"¹, destabilized the security situation in Central and Eastern Europe and could ultimately weaken the future architecture of global security. The countries of NATO's eastern flank², which were once part of the Eastern Bloc and for which Ukraine served as a protective shield, expressed particular concern about the situation. These were the countries of the Bucharest Nine (B9)³, which include Visegrad Group countries – Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary; Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia; and Black Sea coun-

- 1 Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*, New York 1997, pp. 40-41.
- 2 "The Eastern Flank of NATO" is a term used to describe a group of countries located along the eastern wing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It includes northern countries situated in the region of the Baltic Sea (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), central countries (Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary), and southern countries (Bulgaria, Romania). S. Olszyk, *Wschodnia flanką NATO*, [in:] O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta (eds.), *Encyklopedia bezpieczeństwa*, vol. 5, Cracow 2022, pp. 966-972.
- 3 The term "Bucharest Nine (B9)" refers to an informal platform for consultation and political dialogue in the field of stability and security of Central and Eastern European NATO member states. It represents a diplomatic initiative of nine Central European countries located on the eastern border of the Alliance. The cooperation of states in the Bucharest format was initiated in 2014 by the Presidents of Poland – Andrzej Duda, and Romania – Klaus Iohannis. S. Olszyk, *Bukaresztańska Dziewiątka (B9)*, [in:] *Encyklopedia bezpieczeństwa*, vol. 5..., pp. 104-114.

tries – Bulgaria and Romania. After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the Bucharest Nine quickly gained momentum as the voice of countries whose security had been most weakened by Russia's increasingly provocative rhetoric and expansionist posture⁴. The Bucharest format became a symbol of unity and cooperation in the Central European region. Most B9 countries were at the forefront of providing political, humanitarian, or military support to Ukraine. These actions were part of the concept of broadly understood defence diplomacy⁵, defined as diverse international peaceful cooperation based on dialogue and collaboration, conducted by the political sector, the national defence sector, and its subordinate institutions and armed forces, to support foreign policy and national security⁶. In essence, defence diplomacy, focusing on defensive actions understood as prevention and crisis management, takes action to minimize hostility and peacefully resolve conflicts, rejecting direct military involvement of the armed forces⁷. Such activity is undertaken from the perspective of a state not directly involved in the conflict, through broadly understood political, diplomatic, military, and humanitarian aid, but without official participation in the war. We could observe such activity by the international community in Ukraine over the past year. Many Western countries supported this state in its pursuit of independence, doing so independently or within international organizations and various cooperation formats. The Bucharest Nine, being one such platform, despite certain differences and varied interests of individual countries, undertook a series of actions to support Ukraine.

4 M. Terlikowski et al., *The Bucharest 9: Delivering on the promise to become the voice of the eastern flank*, "PISM Policy Paper" 2018, no. 4, pp. 1-8, www.pism.pl/upload/images/artykuly/legacy/files/24501.pdf [24.04.2023].

5 There are numerous areas of cooperation in defence diplomacy, including peacekeeping and promoting democratic values in international relations; military and diplomatic cooperation between two or more countries; development of the defence industry, research, and reforms in the field of security and defence. S. Olszyk, *The role of think tanks in actions for defence diplomacy. An example of Poland*, "Polish Political Science Yearbook" 2022, vol. 51, pp. 163-164, https://czasopisma.marszalek.com.pl/images/pliki/ppsy/51/ppsy20221_10.pdf [24.04.2023].

6 L. Drab, *Dyplomacja obronna w procesie kształtowania bezpieczeństwa RP*, Warsaw 2018, p. 31.

7 The assumption is that the armed forces and the associated defence infrastructure can impact international security not only through deterrence and waging wars but also by supporting and promoting the ideas of cooperation and stabilization of the international environment.

1 Political area

Defence diplomacy in the political area is about promoting democratic values and peacekeeping, respecting the right to sovereignty and independence, and human rights as well as combating aggression and terrorism in international relations. The defence diplomacy of the Bucharest Nine in the political area has, therefore, focused on emphasising Ukraine's right to maintain the integrity of its territory, the inviolability of its borders, and the right to self-determination. Therefore, the majority of B9 countries condemned Russian aggression and openly declared their support for Ukraine in its pursuit of democratic sovereignty and political independence. During B9 leaders' meetings, it was noted that these countries, knowing the struggles of fighting for independence from Soviet occupation, repeatedly warned the Western international community of a possible attack by Russia⁸. It was also noted that the war in Ukraine is not only about the security of the region but also the entire Euro-Atlantic security system. During the past year of the war, Russia was regularly urged to immediately stop military attacks and withdraw all forces from Ukraine, acknowledging that this long-planned attack on an independent and democratic country was entirely unprovoked and unjustified. Russia's violation of international law, including the United Nations Charter, and the breach of the principles outlined in the NATO-Russia Founding Act, were pointed out⁹. The Bucharest Nine's joint position has been repeatedly confirmed during numerous meetings and summits.

Visegrad countries

The Visegrád Group (V4)¹⁰ did not demonstrate decisive unity and solidarity with Ukraine after the outbreak of the war. The official stance of the V4 was a strong condemnation of Russia's actions, which un-

8 *Wojna na Ukrainie. Szczyt Bukaresztańskiej Dziewiątki w Warszawie*, 25 February 2022, <https://tiny.pl/wzqsb> [24.04.2023].

9 *Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government on Russia's attack on Ukraine*, 25 February 2022, <https://tiny.pl/wzqs3> [24.04.2023].

10 Visegrád Group (V4) is an organization that includes four Central and Eastern European countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. It was formed on 15 February 1991, during a meeting at Visegrád Castle in Hungary, with three representatives from each country: the presidents of Poland (Lech Wałęsa) and Czechoslovakia (Václav Havel), and the prime minister of Hungary (József Antall). S. Olszyk, *Państwa Grupy Wyszehradzkiej wobec konfliktu na Ukrainie*, [in:] T. Ambroziak et al. (eds.), *Problemy bezpieczeństwa Europy i Azji*, Toruń 2016, p. 163.

precedently violated international law and the territorial integrity of a sovereign state¹¹. However, individual countries presented their position on the invasion in a differentiated manner, based on their economic and energy ties with Russia as well as their internal political situation.

Poland, which is heavily politically polarized on a daily basis, showed surprising unanimity of the authorities and the opposition in condemning the Russian aggression. On the first day of the war, the Polish Sejm, in a statement supported by all political parties, strongly condemned the Russian attack, calling on Russia and Belarus to cease military actions, withdraw their troops from Ukraine and the vicinity of its borders, and fully comply with international humanitarian law¹². From the first days of the war, Poland attracted attention, taking in the largest number of refugees and showing extraordinary levels of activity in seeking political and military support for Ukraine.

The Czech Republic also took a clearly pro-Ukrainian position, demonstrating an unprecedented wave of solidarity, both political and social. As one of the first countries in the EU and NATO, it provided military support to Ukraine and closed its airspace to Russian aircraft. This was possible thanks to an internal political compromise achieved to a large extent by the departure of President Miloš Zeman from his previous sympathies for Russia and support for its influence in the Czech Republic¹³. Slovak authorities were also heavily involved in helping Ukraine and supported its efforts for political and territorial independence, while strongly condemning the Russian side, including advocating for the economic isolation of Russia and supporting EU sanctions, including the exclusion of Russian banks from the SWIFT system. Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová was among eight Central and Eastern European presidents who supported Ukraine's efforts to join the EU. On the one hand, Slovak authorities, who are pro-democratic and pro-Western, were from the beginning among the group

11 *Szczyt Grupy Wyszehradzkiej: Prezydenci V4 omówili kwestie dotyczące wojny w Ukrainie*, 11 October 2022, <https://tiny.pl/wzq6m> [24.04.2023].

12 *Oświadczenie Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 24 lutego 2022 r. w sprawie agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę*, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc9.nsf/uchwaly/2048_u.htm [24.04.2023].

13 Ł. Ogrodnik, *Reakcja Czech na rosyjską agresję zbrojną na Ukrainę*, 3 March 2022, <https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/reakcja-czech-na-rosyjska-agresje-zbrojna-na-ukraine> [24.04.2023].

of countries heavily involved in helping Kyiv. On the other hand, the increasingly popular Slovak opposition declared a policy of neutrality towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and took increasingly anti-Western and pro-Russian positions.

From the very beginning of the invasion, Hungary, among the V4 countries, presented a decidedly different position. It officially condemned Russian aggression and supported the EU's previous sanctions but did not loosen its ties with Russia and openly declared its lack of support for EU measures aimed at the Russian energy sector. The Hungarian authorities did not take any independent steps against Russia such as revoking "golden residency visas" for Russians or closing the headquarters of the International Investment Bank in Hungary, remaining the only member of this organization in the region of Europe¹⁴.

Baltic states

The Baltic states' position from the first day of the war was unequivocally critical of Russia and unequivocally supportive of Ukraine, both politically and militarily. Russian aggression was unequivocally condemned as a threat to their borders as well as the entire eastern flank of NATO. The Baltic countries strongly called for severe sanctions against the aggressor, while supporting Ukraine's pro-European ambitions, for which, like them, joining the EU and NATO meant a kind of return to the West and rejection of the post-Soviet legacy. Since 2014, these countries have pursued an anti-Russian policy, especially Lithuania, where Russia's actions have caused a particular sense of threat, and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine was an additional warning signal. The other countries – Latvia and Estonia – initially tried to pursue a more pragmatic policy towards Russia and maintain relations at a minimum level. Unresolved national problems, and above all, open political cooperation of some Latvian and Estonian parties with pro-Putin groups in Russia, made the situation in these Baltic states far less unequivocal from the outset. Many Russian-speaking citizens and

14 Ł. Lewkowicz, S. Czarnecki, D. Héjj, *(Nie)jednolitość państw Grupy Wyszehradzkiej wobec agresji rosyjskiej na Ukrainę*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2022, no. 567, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/niejednosci-panstw-grupy-wyszehradzkiej-wobec-agresji-rosyjskiej-na-ukraine/> [24.04.2023].

residents initially openly or secretly supported Vladimir Putin's invasion, especially in Latvia. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine, however, directed their actions entirely towards condemning the aggression and expressing support for broad sanctions against Russia.

Black Sea states

In the face of the Russian invasion, Romania strongly criticized the Russian aggression, co-initiating and condemning the Russian crimes in a resolution of the UN Human Rights Council. Romania also supported the request to the International Criminal Court for the prosecution of those responsible and donated EUR 100,000 for that purpose. It also supported granting Ukraine candidate status for the EU, and President Klaus Iohannis signed a joint letter from regional presidents supporting Ukraine's accession to NATO. The Romanian authorities also supported the imposition of EU sanctions on Russia and closed its airspace to the Russians. They also established cooperation with Poland to better coordinate actions and positions on Ukraine. However, the relatively consistent pro-Ukrainian policy of the Romanian authorities was disrupted by the controversial statement of the Minister of Defence, Vasile Dîncu, who stated that the Kremlin has the means to prolong the conflict and that the only chance for peace in Ukraine is negotiations with Russia. At the same time, he stressed that other international actors such as NATO and the USA should conduct negotiations on behalf of Ukrainians because Kyiv will not be able to accept the loss of part of its territory¹⁵. This statement, widely disseminated by Russian media, provoked a series of negative comments in Ukraine and Romania itself. President Iohannis criticized it, but only after some time, declaring that Ukraine would decide when, what, and how to negotiate¹⁶. Despite unequivocal political support for Kyiv from Bucharest, Romania's policy towards the ongoing conflict can be described as overly cautious.

The second of the Black Sea countries, Bulgaria, took a position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the day the war broke out. The

15 K. Całus, *Nad wyraz ostrożnie. Rumunia wobec rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę*, "Analizy OSW", 14 October 2022, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2022-10-14/nad-wyraz-ostroznie-rumunia-wobec-rosyjskiej-inwazji-na-ukraine> [24.04.2023].

16 Ibid.

Bulgarian authorities condemned the attack, despite the strong pro-Russian attitudes of some political groups and society. The entourage of President Rumen Radev practically pursued nominal membership in NATO and the EU, taking a passive stance towards Russia. On the other hand, Prime Minister Kiril Petkov and his coalition government allies were unambiguously in favour of a pro-Western orientation. Conflicts also arose quickly between the ruling parties, regarding, among other matters, providing military aid to Kyiv and maintaining neutrality towards the war as well as adopting a sceptical attitude towards proposals for EU sanctions, including a ban on the import of Russian energy raw materials. On the other hand, Bulgaria, as one of the first countries to close its airspace to the Russians, showed great courage considering that half a million Russian tourists visited the country annually, and many of them had purchased real estate there.

2. Diplomatic area

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, including in the diplomatic sphere, triggered an immediate response from countries in the region and intensified their diplomatic activity. This activity took place in a multi-dimensional manner, including bilateral and multilateral actions by political actors from various international organizations, cooperation formats, and individuals. The B9 countries have frequently taken significant diplomatic initiatives, becoming ambassadors of Ukraine's interests in Europe and worldwide. Due to their multidimensionality, this article focuses mainly on Poland, which was a decisive leader in this area, becoming a hub not only for millions of refugees but also for diplomats and world leaders involved in helping Ukraine.

The Polish authorities made an effort to organize an international coalition against Russia's actions, mainly within the EU and NATO. Since the outbreak of the war, foreign leaders (heads of state, prime ministers, foreign ministers, or persons holding other important international positions) have frequently visited Poland, especially during the first two months of the invasion, when it was not possible to travel to Kyiv. At that time, Poland was visited by, among others, the heads of many European countries and the United States as well as prime ministers and foreign ministers of many countries worldwide (including Japan, Brazil, Iraq, and Sudan) and the secretaries-gener-

al of the UN, NATO, and the League of Arab States, the President of the European Commission, the President of the World Bank, and the President of the International Olympic Committee. Visitors from the United States played a particular role, represented in Poland by President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and CIA Director Bill Burns¹⁷. During all these meetings, the main topic of discussion was the war in Ukraine and ways to influence Russia through its global isolation.

During this period, the diplomatic activity of Polish decision-makers (i.e., the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Marshals of the Sejm and Senate) also intensified as they undertook numerous foreign trips, becoming the most active advocates of Ukraine's interests in Europe and worldwide. President Andrzej Duda was the last foreign leader to visit Kyiv on the eve of the invasion and one of the first immediately after the outbreak of the war. Polish politicians also undertook joint diplomatic activities in the region (e.g., within the B9, the Visegrad Group, and the Three Seas Initiative), acting as leaders and coordinating the actions of the other countries in the region.

An important diplomatic event and a demonstration of neighbourly strength and solidarity was the visit of the prime ministers of three countries – Poland (Mateusz Morawiecki, Jarosław Kaczyński), the Czech Republic (Peter Fiala), and Slovenia (Janez Jansa) – to Kyiv on 15 March 2022. They were the first foreign politicians to arrive in the Ukrainian capital after the start of the Russian invasion. A month later, on 13 April 2022, another visit to Kyiv took place, this time by the presidents of the Baltic countries – Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The speech by the President of Poland before the Ukrainian Supreme Council in Kyiv on 22 May 2022, made a strong impression. A. Duda declared that the face of a free world is Ukraine and thanked those fighting on the front lines for defending Europe against

17 *Mapa tygodnia: Polska dyplomacja w czasie wojny na Ukrainie*, <https://tiny.pl/wzq67> [24.04.2023].

Russian imperialism. At the same time, he called on all members of the EU and NATO to maintain unity around Ukraine¹⁸.

During the first year of the war, President Duda made dozens of official and unofficial trips abroad¹⁹, as did other officials at various levels such as the Prime Minister, Marshals of the Sejm and Senate, Ministers of various ministries, and politicians. A significant highlight of showing solidarity and diplomatic support for Ukraine at the ministerial level was the signing of the “Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland on Deepening Cooperation in the Region”²⁰ during a meeting in Riga on 31 January 2023. The jointly developed initiatives for deterrence and border defence as well as support for Ukraine, have been implemented in various formats and structures, including the EU, NATO, and the UN.

In addition to individual, often less formal meetings between representatives of individual countries, the countries cooperating in the Bucharest format also met at official B9 summits. Three such B9 summits were held last year. The first was organized by the President of Poland a day after the invasion. The key topic of the talks was the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the security situation in Central and Eastern Europe²¹. During the meeting, an appeal was made to Western countries for a unified and solid stance against Russian aggression and real support for fighting Ukraine, primarily through the delivery of weapons. The B9 countries reaffirmed their unwavering support for Ukrainian independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity during the next summit, which took place on 10 June 2022, in Bucharest. The meeting was another demonstration of the unity of the countries and a clear declaration of their support for Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic and European aspirations²². Another Extraordinary Bucharest Nine NATO

18 *Andrzej Duda przed Radą Najwyższą Ukrainy*, 22 May 2022, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne/andrzej-duda-z-wizyta-na-ukrainie,54043> [24.04.2023].

19 *Wizyty zagraniczne prezydenta Andrzeja Dudy*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne> [24.04.2023].

20 *Wspólna deklaracja Przewodniczących Parlamentów Estonii, Litwy, Łotwy i Polski w rok od rozpoczęcia pełnowymiarowej inwazji Rosji na Ukrainę*, <https://tiny.pl/wzqsb> [24.04.2023].

21 *Wojna na Ukrainie. Szczyt Bukaresztańskiej Dziewiątki w Warszawie*, 25 February 2022, <https://tiny.pl/wzqsb> [24.04.2023].

22 B. Bodalska, *Szczyt B9 o wojnie w Ukrainie i wzmocnieniu wschodniej flanki NATO*, 13 June 2022, <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/bezpieczenstwo-i-obrona/news/szczyt-b9-wojna-ukraina-wschodnia-flanka-nato/> [24.04.2023].

Summit was held on 22 February 2023, in Warsaw. In addition to the member states, the President of the United States and the Secretary General of NATO personally participated in the meeting.

An important area of diplomatic support for Ukraine was cooperation within the B9 in international security organizations and alliances, including NATO and the EU. During the past year, three NATO summits were held. The first one was held remotely the day after the invasion on 25 February 2022; the second summit was held in Brussels on 24 March 2022; and the third in Madrid on 29-30 June 2022. During all of these meetings, the key topic was Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its consequences for the Euro-Atlantic community's security. During the talks, a decision was made to strengthen NATO forces on the eastern flank and increase support for Ukraine. There were also summits and meetings organized within the EU, mainly by the European Council. During the discussed period, thirteen such meetings took place²³. During these talks, Russia was called upon to immediately cease its massive attacks on the civilian population and infrastructure and to immediately withdraw all troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. The EU-Ukraine summit, held on 3 February 2023, in Kyiv, was of particular importance. It was the first such meeting since the beginning of the Russian aggression and since Ukraine was granted candidate country status for the EU. Diplomatic support for Ukraine was declared at international forums, calling for strong solidarity with Ukraine and for all countries to comply with EU sanctions²⁴.

3. Military area

Military cooperation is one of the key areas of defence diplomacy. As previously mentioned, this idea excludes the direct use of military force in combat but includes a range of actions to militarily support a given state. The Bucharest Nine, as a format of cooperation that is not a formal international organization, does not have specialized political and military institutions, nor its own budget to finance

²³ *Kalendarz posiedzeń* [24.02.2022–24.02.2023], <https://tiny.pl/wzq65> [24.04.2023].

²⁴ *Szczyt UE-Ukraina, 3 lutego 2023*, <https://tiny.pl/wzq61> [24.04.2023].

aid activities, and so, did not support Ukraine in the military field. However, individual B9 countries did so on their own terms and capabilities. Immediately after the invasion, Ukraine's partners showed some caution in supplying equipment, fearing it would lead to an escalation of the conflict between NATO and Russia. However, with the resistance of the Ukrainian army, no prospects for peace talks, and a stalemate on the front, allies began to give in and support the fighters, more or less openly. In April 2022, the Contact Group for Defence Support to Ukraine (known as the Ramstein format)²⁵ was established to coordinate Western military assistance in terms of plans for the supply of weapons and ammunition. The largest suppliers of military aid were the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Poland, and the Baltic states. Especially in the first months of the invasion, when other Western European countries (Germany and France) did not supply equipment to Ukraine, deliveries of weapons from these countries proved crucial. At that time, it was a matter of deciding whether Ukraine would survive the first phase of the war. The value of military support from B9 countries is presented in Chart 1.

The amounts shown on the chart are based solely on intergovernmental transfers. They do not take into account private donations and aid through non-governmental organizations as well as all kinds of fundraising organised by citizens of individual B9 countries.

Visegrad countries

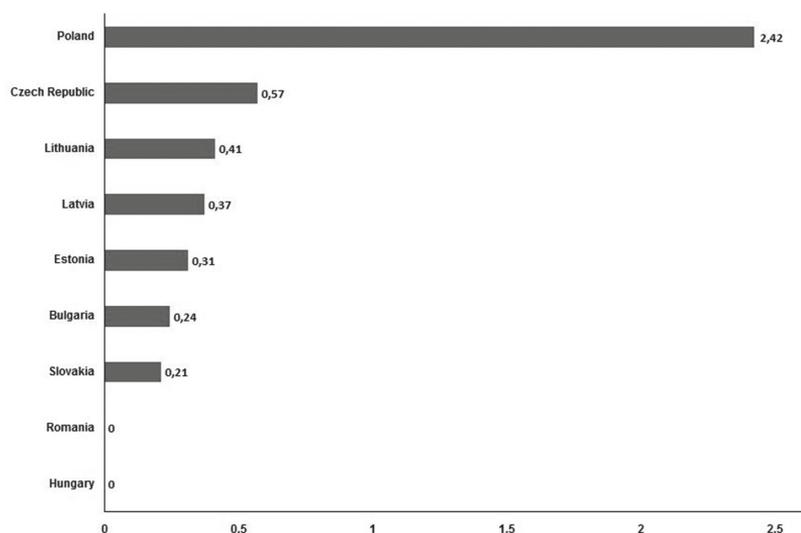
Among the Visegrad Group countries, Poland showed the greatest commitment in this area, declaring military aid worth EUR 2.4 billion (0.5% of GDP). In total, it was calculated that 19.3% of heavy equipment from the Polish army was sent to Ukraine. The military support included, among others²⁶:

- fighter jets (MiG-29 9.12As)
- tanks (T-72, Leopard 2A4, PT-91s)
- infantry fighting vehicle (BWP-1, KTO Rosomak)
- infantry mobility vehicles (AMZ Dzik-2)

25 The format was established on 26 April 2022, in Germany, at the Ramstein Air Base, during an international conference organised by the United States.

26 *List of military aid to Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian War*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_military_aid_to_Ukraine_during_the_Russo-Ukrainian_War#P [24.04.2023].

Chart 1. Declared military support of the B9 governments for Ukraine (in EUR billion) (period from 24 January 2022 to 24 February 2023)



Source: Own elaboration based on: *Ukraine Support Tracker. Government support to Ukraine: Military aid, € billion*, Kiel Institute for The World Economy, https://app.23degrees.io/view/KJpsgWQv1CmxoMr-bar-stacked-horizontal-figure-5_scv [24.04.2023].

- command vehicles (LPG WDSzs)
- self-propelled artillery (2S1 Goździk, AHS Krab)
- multiple rocket launchers (BM-21 Grad)
- anti-aircraft (AA) guns (AZP S-60)
- self-propelled anti-aircraft guns SPAAG (ZSU-23-4 “Szyłka”)
- surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems (S-125 Nawa Scs, 9K33 Osa-AK(M)s, Osa AKM-P1 “Żądło”)
- air-to-air missiles (R-73)
- man-portable air defence systems (Piorun PPZR)
- vehicles (Star 266s, Star 266M2s)
- mortars (LMP-2017)
- small arms (Kbk wz.1988 Tantal, Kbk AKMS, FB MSBS Grot C16A2, UKM-2000P, RGP-40, RPG-76)
- large quantities of mortar ammunition, recoilless guns for artillery.

The equipment support for Ukrainian soldiers also included other resources such as helmets, bulletproof vests, and personal equipment

for soldiers, including medical equipment. In addition, treatment was organized for injured soldiers from Ukraine, and fruitful training co-operation was established. Due to the close geographical proximity, most of the training attended by soldiers from other EU countries took place in southeastern Poland. Military aid for Ukraine was also implemented as part of private initiatives – off-road vehicles were acquired, repaired, and donated to the Ukrainian army, and fundraisers for military equipment were organized. From these funds, the Turkish Bayraktar TB-2 combat drone as well as the Polish-made FlyEye observation drones and the Warmate loitering ammunition (so-called kamikaze drones) were purchased²⁷. Poland's role in providing military support proved crucial due to the provision of territory and transport infrastructure, making it the main hub for military and humanitarian aid. Poland is the country through which a significant portion of aid from countries around the world is transported to Ukraine.

Another country that significantly supported Ukraine during last year's war was the Czech Republic, which provided military assistance worth EUR 0.6 billion (over 1% of GDP)²⁸. The day after the invasion, the Czech government approved the transfer of troops from other NATO countries through its territory, while guaranteeing the necessary logistics services. The Czech authorities also provided weapons and military equipment, with one-third coming directly from the Czech army's resources and the rest purchased from private domestic companies. The provided equipment included²⁹:

- tanks (T-72M1, T-55, T-72 Avenger)
- infantry fighting vehicles (BVP-1, PbV-501)
- heavy mortars (PRAM-L)
- towed artillery (D-20)
- self-propelled artillery (2S1 Goździk, SzKH wz. 77 DANA, DANA M2)
- multiple rocket launchers (RM-70 Grad, BM-21 Grad, RM-70 Vampire)

27 M. Małecki, *W ciągu roku od napaści Polska przekazała Ukrainie uzbrojenie o wartości ponad 2,2 mld euro*, "Dziennik Gazeta Prawna", 24 February 2023, <https://tiny.pl/wzq6n> [24.04.2023].

28 J. Frączek, *Polska pomoc dla Ukrainy przebiła wszystkich. Oto ile poszło z zasobów armii*, 26 February 2023, <https://tiny.pl/wzq68> [24.04.2023].

29 *List of military aid to Ukraine... C.*

- self-propelled air defence systems (9K32 Strieľa-10, MR2 Viktor)
- man-portable air defence systems (9K32 Strieľa-2, MANPADS)
- attack helicopters (Mil Mi-24 V)
- small arms
- ammunition
- vehicles, pontoon bridges, interim bridges
- military medical supplies, radiation, chemical and biological protection material, military clothing and equipment, fuel, spare parts, and transport.

The Czechs also conducted training courses for Ukrainian soldiers as well as medical rescuers and military engineers. Czech citizens organized numerous fundraising campaigns, from which funds were donated to purchase weapons and equipment, including field rocket systems, T-72 Avenger “Tomáš” tanks, and Viktor anti-aircraft and anti-drone systems.

Ukraine was also supported militarily by Slovakia with an amount of EUR 0.2 billion. Among the equipment provided were³⁰:

- fighter jets (MiG-29)
- helicopters (Mil Mi-17, Mil Mi-2)
- infantry fighting vehicles (BVP-1)
- air defence systems (S-300PMU, 2K12 Kub)
- Kub radar station
- self-propelled howitzers (SpGH Zuzana 2, ShKH Zuzana 2s)
- anti-tank weapons
- ammunition
- engineering equipment
- Bozena 5 mine clearance systems
- military clothes, petrol, kerosene jet fuel for aircraft, lubricants and spare parts for Mig-29 fighter jets.

The last country from the V4 group to mention is Hungary, which refused to grant permission for arms supplies to Ukraine and also for its transit through Hungarian territory. This would be crucial if Belarusian troops entered Ukraine, trying to disrupt the delivery routes of allied weapons from Poland. Only training of Ukrainian combat medics and assistance in the hospitalisation of wounded soldiers were

30 *List of military aid to Ukraine... S.*

declared. Hungary's sceptical political and diplomatic stance was, therefore, reflected in military cooperation as well.

Baltic states

All Baltic states provided military support to Ukraine – Lithuania and Latvia provided assistance at a level of about EUR 0.4 billion each, while Estonia provided assistance worth EUR 0.3 billion. The Lithuanian government approved draft resolutions on providing assistance to Ukraine in emergency situations and created two aid packages with a total value of EUR 1.8 million, intended for the protection of the population and armament. Among the equipment provided were³¹:

- helicopters (Mi-8)
- man-portable air defence systems(MANPADS)(FIM-92 Stinger)
- anti-aircraft (AA) guns (Bofors L70)
- towed artillery (M101)
- self-propelled mortars (Panzermörser *M113*)
- heavy mortars
- armoured personnel carriers (APCs) (M113, M577)
- small arms (delivered along with ammunition)
- vehicles, drones
- military winter clothing, anti-drone imaging equipment, thermal imagers, and communications equipment.

In Lithuania, the repair of weapons and military equipment was also carried out, and training of Ukrainian soldiers was organized. As part of private initiatives, fundraising campaigns were also organized in Lithuania to support Ukraine, from which ammunition for the Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicle was purchased³².

Latvia's military assistance to Ukraine, a relatively small Baltic country, was surprisingly large (over 1% of GDP) and included not only the provision of weapons but also training for Ukrainian soldiers and rehabilitation of those injured in combat. Latvian military support included³³:

- self-propelled howitzers (M109)

31 *List of military aid to Ukraine...* L.

32 M. Gołębiowska, *Litewska solidarność z Ukrainą*, "Komentarze IES" 2022, no. 712, pp. 1-2, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/litewska-solidarnosc-z-ukraina/> [24.04.2023].

33 *List of military aid to Ukraine...* L.

- helicopters (Mil Mi-8MTV-1, Mil Mi-2, Mi-17)
- air defence systems (Stinger)
- small arms
- vehicles, drones
- soldiers' equipment, medical equipment.

Estonia, as one of the smallest NATO member states with relatively small armed forces, was one of the first countries to send military equipment to Ukraine, including Javelin anti-tank systems (even before the outbreak of the war), which played a crucial role in the defence of Kyiv in the initial phase of the aggression, and D-30 howitzers (after the start of hostilities). The value of Estonian military support for Ukraine in the last year was surprisingly high, amounting to 1.35% of its GDP³⁴. The equipment provided by Estonia included, among others³⁵:

- towed artillery (D-30s, FH-70)
- anti-tank weapons
- small arms, rifles and pistols, grenade launchers, sniper rifles
- ammunition, vehicles, naval vehicles, drones
- protective equipment, winter uniforms, sights, thermal imagers and binoculars, communications equipment, and medical equipment.

Estonia also participated in the organization of three field hospitals in cooperation with Germany and the Netherlands and declared its readiness to train Ukrainian special forces, airborne forces, and ground forces.

Black Sea states

Among the Black Sea countries, Bulgaria showed the greatest commitment. In the past year, it has provided military support to Ukraine worth EUR 0.2 billion. Prime Minister Petkov and Finance Minister Asen Vassilev deserve particular merit in this regard. Already in the first months of the Russian invasion, they initiated the provision of significant military aid to Kyiv. The politicians did this without informing the public and against the will of, among others, President Radev. Thanks to the secret initiative, Bulgaria provided Ukraine with about

34 J. Frączek, *Polska pomoc dla Ukrainy przebiła wszystkich...*

35 *List of military aid to Ukraine...* E.

one-third of its ammunition supplies and about 40% of fuel for tanks for several months, from April to August 2022. In this way, it showed other countries that despite their dependence on Russia and fears of Putin's aggression, there are creative ways to support Ukraine. The equipment provided by Bulgaria included, among others³⁶:

- tanks (T-72M1)
- multiple rocket launchers (BM-21 Grad)
- ammunition, main artillery shells
- diesel fuel, military-technical support, including repairs of Ukrainian vehicles and military equipment. Bulgaria has also pledged to provide training for combat medics.

Romania, as a flanking allied state that recognized the threat from Russia and politically supported Ukraine, showed some reluctance to provide practical military assistance (less than EUR 0.1 billion). Although the Romanian authorities allowed for the transit of weapons from the United States, they only symbolically supported Ukraine militarily by providing small amounts of weapons and military materials, including about two thousand combat helmets and bulletproof vests as well as fuel, ammunition, food, water, and medicine³⁷. The reasons for this restraint may be attributed to fears of Russian aggression. Romania aimed to keep military action away from its coastline, particularly with concerns about Russia seizing Snake Island, located about 40 km from the Danube Delta and adjacent to Romania's gas-rich shelf. Unofficially, Romania also explained its stance by pointing to its own shortages. Ukraine indirectly confirmed this by not insisting on an increase in aid.

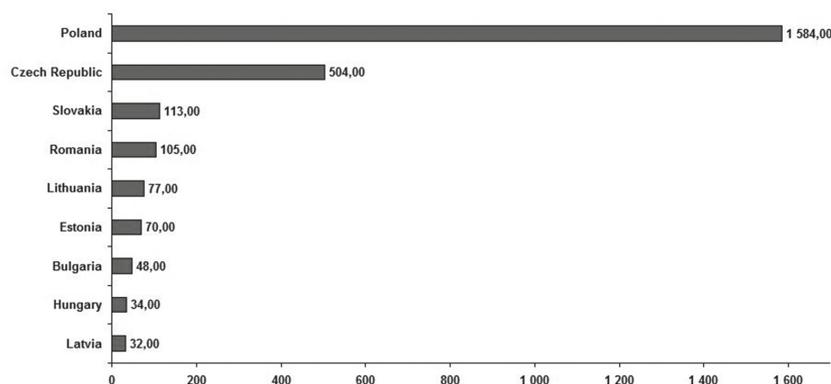
4. Humanitarian area
● The armed attack by Russia on Ukraine prompted many of its citizens to seek safe shelter on EU territory. The mass arrival of refugees was a huge challenge for the reception systems of the countries bordering Ukraine and a test of overall European solidarity. According

³⁶ *List of military aid to Ukraine... B.*

³⁷ *List of military aid to Ukraine... R.*

to UNHCR³⁸ data, there are currently 2,569,000 refugees from Ukraine in wealthier European countries that do not border Ukraine³⁹. However, the highest percentage of them is concentrated in neighbouring countries. Already on the first day of the Russian attack, Poland set up additional reception points at border crossings where arriving individuals could obtain information, basic medical assistance, and material support. In the following days, in the face of the dynamically increasing number of arrivals, the governments of front-line states maximally simplified procedures for accepting refugees. Among the B9 countries, Poland turned out to be the leader both in terms of financial aid for maintaining refugees and the number of Ukrainian citizens admitted. The openness of the other eastern flank NATO countries in this regard is presented in Chart 2.

Chart 2. Refugees from Ukraine in the B9 countries (thousands/millions) (as of the end of February 2023)



Source: Own elaboration based on: *Ukraine refugee situation*, UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> [24.04.2023].

Visegrad countries

A special commitment to humanitarian aid, and above all, the acceptance of refugees, has been shown by the Visegrad Group countries. Since the first day of the invasion, around 11 million Ukrainians, mostly

³⁸ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established on 14 December 1950, as a result of a resolution by the United Nations General Assembly.

³⁹ P. Pacewicz, *Gdzie jest milion uchodźców z Ukrainy? W danych SG widać też lęk przed rocznicą 24 lutego*, 28 February 2023, <https://oko.press/ilu-jest-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy> [24.04.2023].

women and children, have crossed the border with Poland. After some time, some of them returned to their homeland, while others went to other countries. One year after the Russian aggression, about 1 million people are currently benefiting from temporary protection in Poland. In total, up to 1.5 million Ukrainian citizens have important permits to stay in the country. Reception points were established at border crossings and in the largest Polish cities at an express pace, which were the first point of contact for refugees after crossing the Polish border. Translators, the military, the police, and volunteers provided food, medical care, and other necessary supplies on-site. The scale of Polish society's involvement in helping refugees in the last year was perceived as a kind of phenomenon on a global scale. The non-profit sector and many private companies also immediately got involved. The issue of the status of Ukrainian refugees in Poland and the benefits associated with it was resolved on an emergency basis. On 7 March 2022, a draft special law on aid to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in that country was submitted to the Sejm and signed by the president a few days later⁴⁰. Under this law, refugees obtained equal rights to Polish citizens in terms of access to healthcare, the education system, and the labour market. They were also granted temporary protection status for a period of eighteen months. Preparatory classes were organized for students who came from abroad, did not know the Polish language, or knew it insufficiently.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia also provided massive aid to Ukrainians quickly and effectively, providing humanitarian support. Both countries adopted a package of legislative changes called "Lex Ukraine"⁴¹ to regulate their legal status. According to UNHCR data, over 500,000 Ukrainian refugees currently reside in the Czech Republic. An important challenge for the Czech Republic was the budget burden in the health sector as well as the utilization of the potential of incoming people in the labour market. In the case of Slovakia, the

40 *Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 r. o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa*, Dz.U. 2022, issue 583.

41 It was a package of three laws designed to regulate the rules for the stay and employment of refugees, health insurance, access to social benefits, and education, thus promoting the best possible management of the crisis. The amendment provides for stricter payouts of humanitarian benefits for refugees from Ukraine.

refugee crisis ultimately contributed to the improvement of relations between the sector of social organizations and the state. In the early days after the invasion, in addition to volunteers, non-governmental organizations and municipalities were the driving force behind the effective material assistance provided at border crossings and the largest railway stations. Currently, over 113,000 refugees reside in Slovakia.

In contrast to the negligible political-military support, the Hungarian authorities responded relatively quickly and unambiguously to the massive arrival of Ukrainian refugees. Already on the day of the invasion, the government declared its intention to grant them temporary protection status (valid for a year), despite the strict anti-immigration program in the country implemented since the migration crisis in 2015. However, it caused Hungary to almost completely lack the necessary infrastructure and capabilities in the face of the massive arrival of refugees. In practice, it turned out that it was non-governmental and church organizations that provided effective material assistance for several weeks at border crossings and the largest railway stations.

Baltic states

The Baltic countries have also become a new home for Ukrainians fleeing the war, which has been a significant challenge for them. Lithuania has received the most Ukrainian citizens, with 77,000 refugees currently residing there, which amounts to 2.4% of the country's population. Lithuania has also taken a series of actions to regulate the status of arrivals and provide financial benefits for individuals and companies that have provided shelter to refugees. The second Baltic country that surprised with its humanitarian commitment was Estonia, which has received the most refugees per capita (currently, 70,000 Ukrainians reside there). As the Estonian aid system was overwhelmed, neighbouring Finland – a much larger country in terms of area and population – agreed to partially accept refugees from Estonia. Latvia also faced the challenge and dealt with the refugee crisis (currently, 32,000 Ukrainian citizens reside there). In support of Ukrainian civilians, the Latvian government adopted a law providing for the issuance of visas for one year with the right to work, lowered language requirements, and many social benefits. Latvian non-governmental organizations as well as those from other B9 countries, actively joined

in providing assistance by organizing, among other things, fundraising campaigns for Ukraine.

Black Sea states

Among the Black Sea countries, Romania is a leader in humanitarian aid, currently hosting 105,000 refugees from Ukraine. The country has created a logistics centre in Suceava for foreign humanitarian aid, distributing and coordinating support for Ukraine, and organizing transportation of aid for the neediest. In Romania, refugees have been offered free public transportation, medical services, access to education, and facilitation of legal employment. In parallel, Bucharest has provided material and humanitarian support for Moldova, which is struggling with a significant influx of migrants. Bulgaria has also opened its doors to refugees, accepting 48,000 people. The authorities also evacuated several hundred Bulgarians living in southern Ukraine who declared their intention to leave. Most refugees have been placed in the east of the country, in large cities such as Varna and Burgas as well as in surrounding tourist towns.

Conclusions

The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 solidified the vast majority of NATO's eastern flank countries' perception of Russia as a threat to regional and Euro-Atlantic security. The character of engagement of individual countries in the situation in Ukraine can be best described as mobilization at different speeds⁴². In some countries, countering Moscow's aggressive actions was a consensus issue in the political arena (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Romania), while in others, part of the political elites advocated for a more conciliatory approach to Russia (Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary). Most of the B9 countries provided unequivocal political and diplomatic support to Ukraine and are among the world leaders in terms of the value of military and humanitarian aid provided (along with Poland – the Baltic states, the Czech

42 K. Całus et al., *Wschodnia flanka NATO po roku wojny – mobilizacja różnych prędkości*, "Komentarze OSW" 2023, no. 491, pp. 1-6, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/Komentarze%20OSW%20491.pdf> [24.04.2023].

Republic, and Slovakia). The only country that maintained diplomatic contacts with Russia at a high level over the past year, continued close economic cooperation with it, and did not provide significant military support to Ukraine was Hungary. Nevertheless, Budapest usually supported further EU sanctions packages and signed official documents with the B9, EU, and NATO.

Poland turned out to be the leader in supporting Ukraine in virtually all the analysed areas. It became a spokesperson for Ukraine's interests in many dimensions, also being the creator of many decisions concerning its support in the EU forum, not only in a political and sanctions sense but also in organizing financial and humanitarian aid. Poland's role has increased tremendously since the outbreak of the war, both in the region and on the continent as well as in the EU and NATO forums. Czech Republic and Slovakia have also been among the countries providing the most military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war. This was accompanied by a high involvement of state authorities in supporting Kiev in political, diplomatic, and economic matters. The Baltic states, which provided assistance in all areas of defence diplomacy to the maximum of their abilities, played a particularly important role in supporting Ukraine over the past year. Although their geographic size, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), military capabilities, and, above all, long-standing dependence on Russian raw materials suggested that they did not have the capacity to support Kiev, they acted contrary to these opinions. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are countries that have consistently surprised the international community with their assistance to Ukraine. In turn, the Black Sea countries, faced with internal political crises, openly supported Ukraine politically and diplomatically over the past year but showed some restraint in military support. Particularly Romania, which provided military assistance in a symbolic dimension, however, stood up to the task in terms of hosting refugees. Bulgaria, on the other hand, provided significant military support, but did so secretly, incurring energy consequences from Russia.

The multidimensional support for Ukraine from the B9 countries has also raised numerous concerns. After the initial shock of the invasion and the willingness to accept refugees, voices of protest began to emerge from some political circles and citizens themselves. The

war in Ukraine has affected the economies of individual B9 countries, which were already weakened by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Accepting a multitude of refugees and the need to provide them with shelter, healthcare, education, etc. became a challenge for many countries. In addition, rising food prices, increasing energy prices, tightening financial conditions, and problems related to Ukrainian grain stored in warehouses became a problem for all of Central Europe. In the longer term, this may threaten the sustainability of the support that the B9 countries have offered to Ukraine and show far-reaching political consequences. Some countries are preparing for elections, and the growing crisis phenomena and war fatigue may be used in political struggles.

In seeking an answer to the question of what factors could weaken or strengthen the engagement of the B9 countries in carrying out defensive diplomacy tasks in Ukraine, the first thing to point out is the issue of energy and business dependence on Russia. These could certainly hinder helpful activity for Ukraine. In addition, the desire to maintain a semblance of neutrality (part of Slovak politicians), internal disputes and problems in individual countries, and the pro-Russian orientation of some elites and societies in certain countries (Bulgaria, Latvia) could also be factors. On the other hand, motivations for providing support to Ukraine beyond moral and ideological considerations were seemingly related to security concerns. If Russia were to take over Ukraine, it would open the way further westward, directly threatening the security of NATO countries. That is why Poland and the Baltic states are so strongly committed to supporting Ukraine. This is also why the United States and the United Kingdom are providing such strong support, knowing that a Russian victory would be a step towards destabilizing Europe, and even towards another world war. Aware of these risks, both Poland and the Baltic states are strengthening their security in close alliance with the US and the UK, fearing that in the event of Russia's occupation of Ukraine, countries such as Germany or France would be willing to agree to Russia's proposal for a "new security system" in Europe. This would mean pushing the eastern flank of NATO into a grey zone dominated by Moscow. That is why the B9 countries will continue to support Ukraine in its fight despite the challenges and difficulties because their own security largely depends on the outcome of this war.

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