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East Shield – a mechanism for strengthening the security and resilience of Central and Eastern European countries using the example of Poland’s eastern border

Tarcza wschód – mechanizm wzmacniania bezpieczeństwa i odporności państw Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej na przykładzie wschodniej granicy Polski

Abstract: Security, in both the national and international dimensions, evolves rapidly, with constant emerging threats and challenges. A noteworthy aspect gaining significance in the realm of international security architecture is the increasing necessity for states to enhance their resilience. This involves developing conditions, resources, and strategies to adapt to new, varied, and unexpected conditions in both physical and cyberspace realities. A new quality of the security environment and the threats it generates obliges us to look for solutions that increase the security of the state. One of the ways to strengthen Polish security relates to border protection, so the concept of strengthening the Polish eastern border has become an impetus for scientific reflection on the national deterrence and defence program Tarcza Wschód. The Central and Eastern European region and individual countries within it are focusing efforts to increase resilience and security, therefore, this article is an attempt to analyse the role and tasks of the new mechanism in increasing the military security of the state.

Keywords: security, Russian-Ukrainian conflict, geopolitics, east flank

Streszczenie: Bezpieczeństwo, zarówno w wymiarze krajowym, jak i międzynarodowym, ewoluje szybko wraz z pojawiającymi się zagrożeniami i wyzwaniami. Godnym uwagi aspektem zyskującym na znaczeniu w obszarze

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architektury bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego jest rosnąca konieczność wzmocnienia przez państwa swojej odporności. Wiąże się to z opracowaniem warunków, zasobów i strategii umożliwiających dostosowanie się do nowych, różnorodnych i nieoczekiwanych warunków, zarówno w rzeczywistości fizycznej, jak i cyberprzestrzeni. Nowa jakość środowiska bezpieczeństwa i zagrożenia, jakie ono generuje, zmuszają do poszukiwania rozwiązań zwiększających bezpieczeństwo państwa. Jednym ze sposobów wzmocnienia polskiego bezpieczeństwa są te związane z ochroną granic, dlatego koncepcje wzmocnienia polskiej granicy wschodniej stały się impulsem do refleksji naukowej nad narodowym programem odstraszenia i obrony Tarcza Wschód. Region Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej oraz poszczególne w nim państwa skupiają wysiłki na zwiększaniu odporności i bezpieczeństwa. Niniejszy artykuł jest zatem próbą analizy roli i zadań nowego mechanizmu w zwiększaniu bezpieczeństwa militarnego państwa.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo, konflikt rosyjsko-ukraiński, geopolityka, wschodnia flanka

Introduction

The evolving security landscape, marked by volatility, dynamism, and uncertainty, necessitates the search for solutions to bolster national security. One key aspect of enhancing Poland's security revolves around border protection. This has prompted academic discourse on the National Deterrence and Defence Programme, known as Shield East, which focuses on strengthening Poland's eastern border. The purpose of this analysis is to explore the role and underlying principles of the National Security Plan, announced by Prime Minister Donald Tusk during a ceremony in Kraków on 18 May 2024.

In the current security context of Central and Eastern Europe, where the ongoing crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border continues to escalate, it is essential to examine and clarify the plan's assumptions, while also identifying potential challenges and threats associated with its implementation. Securing national borders and ensuring their effective protection is fundamental to maintaining state sovereignty and is a primary responsibility of the government. Poland's national security policy is shaped by its geopolitical position, historical experiences, and current security environment, particularly given the length of its borders and its proximity to neighbouring states.

Situated at the heart of Europe, Poland has, since 1989, unequivocally articulated its security policy, transitioning from a post-imperial state to a member of the Euro-Atlantic structures. Upon regaining full sovereignty, the foremost goal became the formulation of a robust national security strategy, coupled with the accurate identification

of existing threats. Today's security challenges demand an exploration of the core question, which also serves as the principal research issue: What are the roles and responsibilities of the Shield East national security programme in the face of contemporary threats? This article addresses an issue of utmost relevance, focusing on the fortification of NATO's eastern flank, an area that is increasingly fraught with uncertainty. The authors of this article aim to conduct an in-depth analysis of the security situation along Poland's eastern border as well as the assumptions underpinning the Shield East programme.

In this research, a range of general theoretical methods were employed, including analysis, definition, comparison, synthesis, and drawing conclusions. The study involved a critical examination of various sources such as selected literature, legal documents, political decisions, and materials from press conferences and international agreements. Desk research was also conducted, focusing on expert publications in security and strategic studies. The study defines key concepts and terms essential to the topic and analytical materials from both government and non-governmental organisations were utilised, including contributions from Polish research institutions like the Sobieski Institute and the Institute of Central Europe.

1. The situation on Poland's Eastern Border from 2021-2024

Poland's geopolitical location, along with its membership in various alliances, means that it shares borders not only with EU member states but also with non-EU countries, which necessitates special measures to protect its eastern border¹. In recent years, the situation on NATO's eastern flank has become a key issue in ensuring the security of this part of Europe. Poland, through its international obligations arising from its accession to the European Union and the Schengen Agreement, has assumed the responsibility of ensuring the security and inviolability of the Polish eastern border, which is integral to the external border of the European Union and NATO. Security activities

¹ B. Piskorska, *Adaptacja Unii Europejskiej i Polski do nowych uwarunkowań bezpieczeństwa w Europie Wschodniej. Kazus Ukrainy*, [in:] J.M. Fiszer (ed.), *Dziesięć lat członkostwa Polski w Unii Europejskiej. Próba bilansu i nowe otwarcie*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 143–170.

and efforts depend not only on a country's defence system but also on a myriad of factors, including geopolitical, historical, and military circumstances. Recent developments in the region, particularly the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and the war in Ukraine, have added to these security challenges.

According to T. Pawłuszko, many public issues in Poland have been "securitised" in recent years, meaning that previously non-security-related matters such as border protection have now become strategically significant. Poland has faced numerous new threats in recent years, including the global pandemic, an influx of refugees, the war in neighbouring Ukraine, the migration crisis, and the need to accelerate the expansion of the army. These events have tested the efficiency of various state institutions, including ministries not traditionally associated with security policy, such as those responsible for health, energy, climate, the environment, or digitalisation. Today, the Polish state is considerably more experienced than it was a decade ago².

Regardless of the external circumstances, it remains the duty of the state to ensure the safety of its citizens across all dimensions. The government is obliged to cope with ever newer types of threats and circumstances that disrupt its functioning, which can also disrupt the security system. As Waldemar Kitler points out, "National security is the most important value, national need, and priority objective of the state, individuals, and social groups. It is also a process that encompasses various measures to guarantee the continued existence and development of the nation (state), while protecting individuals, society, and the natural environment from threats that could significantly impair their functioning or harm values under special protection"³. The importance of security has grown, particularly in recent years, as we confront a wide array of new threats, including armed conflict. These threats vary in terms of their intensity, scale, complexity, and duration. The line between war and peace is becoming increasingly blurred in the context of modern warfare. Contributing factors to global insecurity include the erosion of disarmament

2 T. Pawłuszko, *Bezpieczeństwo Polski po szczycie NATO*, <https://sobieski.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/20102022-Bezpieczenstwo-Polski.pdf> [18.05.2023].

3 W. Kitler, *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe RP. Podstawowe kategorie, uwarunkowania, system*, Warsaw 2011, p. 31.

treaties and agreements, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the rising threats of terrorism and organised crime. Actions below the threshold of conventional war, including hybrid operations, will continue to serve as key tools for both state and non-state actors to achieve their goals. Looking ahead, further developments in multi-dimensional warfare, including in cyberspace and outer space, are expected⁴. M. Pietras observes that, following the end of the Cold War and the rise of globalisation, the concept of “hybrid war” has emerged as an attempt to define the evolving nature of modern conflicts. The Russian Federation’s involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine has given the notion of hybrid warfare a specific interpretation, aligning actions to fulfil the priorities of its broader strategic agenda⁵.

The ongoing crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, which Poland has grappled with for over three years, is also described as a form of hybrid warfare. K. Chochowski notes that the current situation on the Polish-Belarusian border bears all the hallmarks of a crisis. The term “crisis”, as defined in *Słownik wyrazów obcych (the Dictionary of Foreign Words)*⁶, originates from the Greek word *krisis*, a dispute, preference, separation, deciding, choosing, struggling, fighting, where it is necessary to act under time pressure as well as a turning point, a watershed moment, a decisive stage, or a qualitative change in a situation or system⁷. However, it is essential to distinguish the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border from the migration crisis that affected Europe in the early 21st century when refugees from Africa and the Middle East arrived in large numbers. The crisis Poland is facing has a different origin, scope, and purpose. Andrzej Wawrzuszyński’s thesis that the migration crisis on the Belarusian border with the EU, particularly with Poland, is artificial is well-founded. It was planned by Alexander Lukashenko, with the approval of Vladimir Putin, to create migration pressure aimed at sowing chaos and division within Polish society. This strategy was designed to weaken Poland’s international

4 *National Security Strategy*, 2020, <https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/informacje-o-bbn/publikacje/8808,Strategia-Bezpieczenstwa-Narodowego-Rzeczypospolitej-Polskiej.html> [9.09.2024].

5 M. Pietraś, *Hybrydowość zagrożeń bezpieczeństwa w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, [in:] *Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w procesie transformacji i integracji*, Zamość 2016, p. 15.

6 *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, 1980, p. 404.

7 K. Chochowski, *Kryzys na granicy polsko-białoruskiej jako przejaw wojny hybrydowej. Aspekty administracyjnoprawne*, “Roczniki Nauk Społecznych” 2021, vol. 13, no. 4.

standing by portraying it as a destabilising force in Europe due to its strong stance on border security. Accusations against Poland of military escalation at the Belarusian border align with the propaganda from Belarus and Russia, which seeks to portray the EU and NATO as aggressors⁸.

The migratory pressure on Poland's eastern border with Belarus began in 2021 when the Polish Border Guard noticed an increasing number of foreigners gathering near the border. Both Polish and Lithuanian border guards recorded a growing number of attempts to cross the border illegally. Initially, these crossings were carried out by individuals or small, poorly organised groups, particularly in areas patrolled by the Podlaskie Border Guard Unit. The majority of those detained were nationals of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia. As the number of migrants entering Belarus grew, the situation rapidly escalated. On the section of the border with Belarus, the Podlaskie Border Guard Unit recorded 2,877 attempts to illegally cross in 2021, compared to just 246 such attempts the previous year, in 2020. Groups of 60 to 80 individuals began attempting to breach the border defences, often under the watchful eye – and sometimes with the active complicity – of Belarusian authorities. These large groups sought to provoke Polish border services to force their way into the country *en masse*. Despite numerous actions taken by the Polish authorities at the time, the issue of large-scale and uncontrolled migration at the border persisted and has remained unresolved. In response to the escalating situation, the Polish government requested the President of the Republic to declare a state of emergency in certain parts of the Podlaskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships. This emergency decree was published in the Journal of Laws on 2 September 2021⁹ (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1612), and came into effect immediately, i.e., 2 September 2021. While the introduction of a state of emergency had some positive impacts, it failed to fully resolve the crisis, and consequently, it was extended for an additional 60 days under a decree issued by the President on 1 October 2021¹⁰ on the extension of the state of emer-

8 A. Wawrzusiszyn, *Kryzys migracyjny na granicy polsko-białoruskiej i jego wpływ na bezpieczeństwo Polski*, "Nowa Polityka Wschodnia" 2022, vol. 2, no. 33, pp. 45–65.

9 Journal of Laws 2021, item 1612.

10 Journal of Laws 2021, item 1788.

agency introduced in the area of part of the Podlaskie Voivodeship and part of the Lubelskie Voivodeship¹¹. At the same time, the Polish government began developing plans to construct an electronic barrier along the entire length of the border with Belarus. This barrier would feature a system of cameras and sensors to enhance border security. Construction work commenced on 25 January 2022, with the installation of steel poles to create an effective physical deterrent against illegal migration. Although the construction of the barrier led to a reduction in the number of illegal border crossing attempts – falling to 588 in 2022 and 565 in 2023 – the number of incidents at the border did not significantly decrease. The Polish Border Guard continues to report various incidents such as foreigners on the Belarusian side vandalising border markers displaying Polish national symbols. “On the morning of 14 May, within the area under the responsibility of the Border Guard Post in Białowieża, there was yet another attempt to vandalise elements of the border markers. Masked individuals on the Belarusian side, armed with sticks, tried to damage a Polish border sign that displays national symbols, including the Polish colours and emblem. The perpetrators acted aggressively, throwing stones and tree branches at the Polish patrol”. There have also been reports of attacks on Polish patrols guarding the border, including attempts to set fire to border posts and damage official vehicles. In a particularly tragic incident in May 2024, a Polish soldier was brutally attacked and fatally stabbed by a migrant at the border. These ongoing incidents highlight the need for Poland to increase its border protection efforts and allocate more resources to counter attacks on its officers. The artificial nature of the migration crisis, orchestrated by Belarus, underscores the urgency of finding additional and effective solutions to resolve the situation at this critical section of the border.

2. Shield East – a mechanism for strengthening security and resilience

Border protection is a complex and multifaceted endeavour aimed at safeguarding a nation’s sovereignty. It encompasses a comprehensive

11 K. Chochowski, *Kryzys na granicy polsko-białoruskiej jako przejaw wojny hybrydowej. Aspekty administracyjnoprawne*, “Roczniki Nauk Społecznych” 2021, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 81–99.

range of coordinated actions undertaken by the state and its authorities to ensure the integrity and security of its borders. The state safeguards its borders, assets, and goods from threats to prevent, or at the very least hinder, their intentional destruction, and in the case of borders, unauthorised crossings outside designated areas and without proper documentation¹². As Bernard Wisniewski notes, “the sovereignty of state power, the concern for national security, and the protection of its borders are key determinants of state sovereignty and the effectiveness of its authority”¹³. External threats to the state can take various, often unpredictable forms. These may be directed against Poland by entities seeking to undermine its reputation as a stable and secure nation. The forms of pressure from aggressors could potentially impact many areas of the state’s operations. Hence, it is crucial to identify threats accurately and respond to them effectively and efficiently.

The government formed after the autumn 2023 parliamentary elections has based its security policy on three pillars: the strength of the Polish armed forces, alliances, and societal resilience. In May 2024, Prime Minister Donald Tusk unveiled plans to bolster Poland’s eastern border with the national deterrence and defence programme – “Shield East”. According to the announcement, this is to be the largest operation to strengthen Poland’s eastern border, which also serves as NATO’s eastern flank, since 1945. It is, therefore, a strategic initiative for the security of the Republic. The Minister of Defence, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, presenting the main objectives of the programme, stated: “We will be reinforcing the barrier, which in many areas has proven to be leaky and ineffective. This task is being undertaken by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, which is modernising the barrier, but this is distinct from ‘Shield East’, which is a military operation. One will complement the other. This is a multi-year plan covering the period 2024–2028. Poland will collaborate with its NATO and EU partners, particularly the Baltic States, drawing on various experiences and models. The project will be presented at both European and NATO levels as one of the most significant and *trans-*

12 A. Zyguła, *Bezpieczeństwo polskiej granicy wschodniej wobec aktualnych wyzwań i zagrożeń*, “Cybersecurity and Law” 2023, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 338.

13 B. Wiśniewski, R. Jakubczak (eds.), *System ochrony granicy państwowej. Stan obecny i prognozy na przyszłość*, Szcztytno 2016, pp. 10–11.

formative security initiatives in the region"¹⁴. "Shield East" consists of a series of actions aimed at enhancing the capabilities of the Polish Army. This includes improving detection, warning, and tracking systems, preparing forward operating bases and logistics hubs, and creating the necessary infrastructure for anti-drone systems. The programme is part of a broader effort to build comprehensive regional defence infrastructure in cooperation with the Baltic States to counter threats to NATO's eastern flank. According to the assumptions, the primary goal of "Shield East" is to protect the Republic of Poland by hindering the movement of enemy forces, facilitating the mobility of Polish troops, safeguarding the population, and ensuring maximum security for those responsible for the nation's safety. The programme will cover approximately 700 kilometres of the eastern border. According to government officials, it will significantly enhance the country's resilience to military threats from the east, reduce the mobility of enemy troops, and provide greater operational freedom and survivability for Poland's own forces as well as for civilians. "Shield East" is an interdepartmental, multi-phase initiative aimed at securing Poland's eastern frontier and, by extension, NATO's eastern flank. In addition to the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, the Ministry of State Assets, and the Ministry of Infrastructure are all involved in coordinating the programme.

As part of the Shield East initiative, there are plans to fortify the border area with anti-tank barriers, construct bunkers for soldiers and shelters for civilians, and invest in infrastructure to ensure secure military communications, such as masts, electronic surveillance systems, and thermal imaging cameras.

In the context of enhancing the protection of Poland's eastern border, mention should also be made of the Operations Coordination Centre established at the Podlaskie Border Guard Unit. This centre will facilitate the exchange of information between the Border Guard, the Police, and the Polish Army at an operational level. Although these efforts are national initiatives to strengthen security, they will be closely

14 Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, „Tarcza Wschód” wzmocni bezpieczeństwo Polski i wschodniej flanki NATO, 27 May 2024, <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/tarcza-wschod-wzmocni-bezpieczenstwo-polski-i-wschodniej-flanki-nato> [9.09.2024].

coordinated with NATO allies and neighbouring countries that share similar security priorities.

3. Shield East in the context of state military security and resilience building

According to the authors of the national deterrence and defence programme – “Shield East”, this will be a military operation, as a key function of any well-governed state is to provide military security for its citizens. In many works on security studies, military security is closely associated with the state, which holds a monopoly on security governance. As W. Kitler suggests, security should be viewed as a process consisting of various national security activities. The primary objective is to counter threats that could lead to the potential or actual use of military force in relations between different actors – typically states but also internal actors within the state – by defending against and mitigating such threats and their consequences¹⁵. To maintain the desired level of security, the state is obliged to undertake numerous actions to achieve the expected level of protection. Such actions include the state and size of the armed forces, strategic alliances, and critical documents such as the *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland* or the *Homeland Defence Act*. The purpose of military security is to ensure the integrity of the state’s territory, its sovereignty, and its independence. The armed forces of the Republic remain the primary tool for ensuring military security. As S. Mitkow points out, modern armed forces must be adaptable and capable of responding to increasingly diverse threats¹⁶. The creation of the “Shield East” programme reflects the government’s commitment to bolstering the state’s resilience. According to the National Security Strategy, a resilient nation should be based on a system of universal defence, with the strategy stating, “Increasing the country’s resilience to threats, through the creation of a system of universal defence, based on the efforts of the whole nation and building an understanding of the development of the resilience and defence capabilities of the Republic of Poland”¹⁷. The Gov-

15 W. Kitler, *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe RP...*, p. 47.

16 S. Mitkow, *Bezpieczeństwo militarne Polski w realiach XXI wieku*, Warsaw 2023, p. 149.

17 BBN, *Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego*, Warsaw 2020, p. 15.

ernment Centre for Security website reads that “Building resilience is a direct response to an array of threats, including regional hybrid threats and broader global challenges. Strengthening state resilience is the responsibility and task of every state and is becoming a vital aspect of security within the EU and NATO frameworks. However, while there has long been a focus on strengthening resilience in relation to states’ capacities and the ability to manage their resources, more recently – partly influenced by pandemics – there has also been a recognition of the need to build a resilient society, citizens who are resilient to threats of various types”¹⁸. In the context of enhancing national resilience, Minister of National Defence, W. Kosiniak-Kamysz, shortly after assuming office, stressed the importance of enacting a civil defence law. He regarded the drafting of the Civil Protection and Civil Defence Act as a critical priority. “We all need to be aware and equipped with first aid skills, drawing lessons from the situation in Ukraine,” he emphasised. “We need a law immediately that was not written by our predecessors”, he said, pointing out that with the enactment of the *Homeland Defence Act*, the *Civil Protection and Civil Defence Act* was repealed. He announced, at the time, that the government would swiftly prepare a new bill¹⁹. By August 2024, the Standing Committee of the Council of Ministers had prepared a draft law on civil protection and civil defence. The proposed legislation aims to create a comprehensive civil protection and civil defence system, with no less than 0.3% of GDP allocated to these tasks annually²⁰. The goal of the new regulations is to close the legal gap in civil defence operations caused by the *Homeland Defence Act*, which came into force on 11 March 2022. The previous Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) government had drafted a comprehensive law on civil protection, which sought to address civil defence, crisis management, and the aftermath of emergency events. However, the draft included sev-

18 R. Rey, *Spoleczeństwo odporne na zagrożenia*, „Biuletyn Analityczny”, no. 31, 18 January 2021, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rcb/spoleczenstwo-odporne-na-zagrozenia> [7.09.2024].

19 J. Borowski, *Szef MON: ważne nie tylko liczby, ale i zdolności*, 21 February 2024, <https://defence24.pl/polityka-obronna/szef-mon-wazne-nie-tylko-liczby-ale-i-zdolnosci> [9.09.2024].

20 R. Horbaczewski, *Projekt ustawy o ochronie ludności przyjęty przez Stały Komitet Rady Ministrów*, <https://www.prawo.pl/samorzad/ustawa-o-ochronie-ludnosci-nowe-zalozenia,525482.html> [7.09.2024].

eral controversial provisions, such as new states of emergency, which ultimately prevented it from being passed in the Sejm.

Conclusion

The Constitution, which outlines the state's most fundamental objectives and priorities, clearly defines the key responsibilities of each authority. These include safeguarding the independence and inviolability of the nation's territory, ensuring the freedoms and rights of individuals, protecting citizens' security, preserving national heritage, and ensuring environmental protection, guided by the principle of sustainable development. The Constitution affirms that state security is an amalgamation of internal and external security. Traditionally, security policy has encompassed the concerns of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and National Defence. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and newer threats such as the migratory pressure along the Belarusian border and the full-scale war in Ukraine, have demonstrated that security must be viewed more broadly. Today, security issues encompass not only military matters but also economics, ecology, energy, food, and technology. The actions taken by the government, formed by the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska), the Third Way (Trzecia Droga), and the Left (Lewica) coalition, show a strong commitment to ensuring state security. The governing coalition in Poland assumed power during a complex and challenging period. Additionally, the ongoing war in Ukraine has elevated Poland's significance in Europe due to its accurate assessment of the Russian threat and strategic geographical position, effectively acting as a shield for the continent. Poland's support for Ukraine's defence against Russian aggression is also noteworthy. Furthermore, Poland's defence interests are aligned with those of the leading Western countries. Consequently, Poland has emerged as a "security hub", gaining support from NATO and the US, providing extensive humanitarian aid to millions of Ukrainian refugees, and offering military assistance and training to Ukrainian soldiers amid the conflict. The position of the Polish state in the international arena is strengthened also by the periodic consensus of Polish political forces around security issues. Prime Minister Tusk, in his exposé, emphasised the importance of strong cooperation with NATO allies and the European Union to ensure Poland's security during turbulent times.

Klaudia Jagusiak notes that in the face of threats from Russia, Poland's limited military resources (personnel and equipment) lead to the conclusion that the country's security cannot rely solely on unilateral efforts. This means that the foundation of Poland's security is provided by guarantees from the allies. The disparity in military capabilities is not just due to Russia's advantage in conventional forces and its position as the world's second-largest nuclear power. The United States, being the primary ally of Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, possesses military capabilities surpassing those of Russia²¹. Given recent decisions at NATO summits, Poland now plays a crucial role in shaping the transatlantic strategy toward Russia. This requires an escalation in diplomatic efforts proportional to Poland's growing military significance in the region. The increased allied military presence following the NATO summits aligns with the strategy of deterrence. However, on a national level, further measures are needed to counter the potential threat from the eastern border. Undoubtedly, military actions, as outlined in the "Shield East" programme, are poised to become a crucial element in strengthening regional security. Designed to be comprehensive and complementary to the initiatives of other ministries, the programme appears to be a holistic approach to bolstering Poland's security. As W. Gizicki notes, the contemporary international landscape necessitates effective global and regional cooperation. The security goals and objectives pursued at the national and international levels are difficult to separate²². In the wake of the Ukraine crisis and Russia's aggressive actions near NATO's borders, the alliance has intensified its activities on its eastern flank with the goal of countering threats from Russia²³. A shared sense of this threat has prompted changes and transformations, including the expansion of military capabilities in countries that joined NATO after 1999. The initiatives undertaken by nations on NATO's eastern flank are altering the region's status quo. Consequently, the continued deep-

21 K. Jagusiak, *Polityka zagraniczna Federacji Rosyjskiej jako źródło zagrożeń dla krajów bałtyckich i wpływ tych zagrożeń na bezpieczeństwo Polski*, "Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego" 2023, vol. 15, no. 28, p. 212; eadem, *Współczesne wyzwania dla bezpieczeństwa Polski w kontekście rosyjskich działań w regionie Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, "Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski" 2023, vol. 2, pp. 231–244.

22 W. Gizicki, *Od układu do paktu...*, p. 37.

23 J. Bornio, *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe Polski w kontekście kryzysu ukraińskiego*, Warsaw 2019, p. 316.

ening of security-enhancing initiatives such as “Shield East” should be seen as unequivocally improving both Poland’s national security and the security of the region. The efforts of individual states to bolster their defence capabilities are especially relevant in the context of hybrid threats and threats that fall below the threshold of war – threats that may complicate the invocation of Article Five of NATO’s charter. Indeed, these are the very threats Poland has been confronting along its border with Belarus for the past three years.

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