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Józef M. Fiszer
ORCID: 0000-0003-2461-4341
(Polska Akademia Nauk)

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the prospects for its accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures

Annotation: As the title suggests, the article aims to analyse Russia's aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and its causes, as well as to show the prospects for Ukraine's membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures, i.e. the European Union and NATO. The undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine has been fought *de facto* since 2014, i.e. since the Russian Federation illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula. Since then, or actually even since 2008, i.e. since Russia's aggression against Georgia, the West led by the USA has been promising Ukraine membership in NATO and the European Union; however, formal negotiations to achieve this goal have not been opened yet. In the article, the author tries to answer the questions why this is happening and whether Russia's aggression against Ukraine will become an accelerator of its membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures. The main thesis is that Russia's aggression against Ukraine will have only limited impact on its accession to NATO and the European Union. However, the process will certainly speed up after the war ends, especially when Ukraine wins the war and Russia suffers a defeat.

Keywords: aggression, Ukraine, Russia, accession, European Union, NATO.

Agresja Rosji na Ukrainę i perspektywy jej akcesji do struktur euroatlantyckich

Streszczenie: Jak pokazuje tytuł, celem artykułu jest agresja Rosji na Ukrainę w dniu 24 lutego 2022 roku oraz analiza jej przyczyn i ukazanie perspektyw dla członkostwa Ukrainy w strukturach euroatlantyckich, czyli w Unii Europejskiej i NATO. Niewypowiedziana wojna Rosji z Ukrainą trwa *de facto* od 2014 roku, czyli od bezprawnego przyłączenia (aneksji) Półwyspu Krymskiego do Federacji Rosyjskiej. Od tego momentu, a faktycznie już od 2008 roku, tzn. od agresji Rosji na Gruzję, Zachód na czele z USA obiecują Ukrainie członkostwo w NATO i Unii Europejskiej, ale do dziś nie rozpoczęto formalnych negocjacji w tym celu. Autor w artykule tym próbuje odpowiedzieć na pytania, dlaczego tak się dzieje i czy agresja Rosji na Ukrainę stanie się akceleratorem jej członkostwa w strukturach euroatlantyckich? Tezą główną jest tutaj konstatacja, że agresja Rosji na Ukrainę tylko w ograniczonym stopniu wpłynie na proces jej akcesji do NATO i Unii Europejskiej. Nato-

miast proces ten z pewnością przyspieszy dopiero zakończenie wojny, zwłaszcza zwycięstwo Ukrainy i klęska Rosji.

Słowa kluczowe: Agresja, Ukraina, Rosja, akcesja, Unia Europejska, NATO.

Introduction

The full-scale war in Ukraine has been fought for over a year and a half and there is still no end in sight to it. According to Vladimir Putin and his generals' plans, it was to take Russian soldiers three to seven days at most to enter Kiev and be welcomed with flowers, bread and salt, as befits victorious 'liberators'. However, this did not happen, and the 'liberators' turned out to be Russian war criminals, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, commonly called 'Putin's cook'¹. Contrary to Russia's expectations, Kiev was not captured, and the Ukrainian army supported by NATO and the European Union (EU) countries launched a counteroffensive in the summer of 2023, which is intended to force Russia to withdraw from Ukraine. Let this happen; although it is not going to be easy, because Ukraine still needs enormous support from all democratic countries in Europe and the whole world so that it can defeat Russia, which is still a great power and has an advantage over Ukraine in every respect. Russia still occupies almost 1/3 of Ukraine's territory. Unlike Ukraine, Russia has huge reserves of people and military equipment. It has NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) weapons, which can be used at any time to defeat Ukraine. By the way, modern wars tend to drag on because defeating a state is a difficult and costly undertaking, and even weaker parties have a good chance to at least draw with their enemies in asymmetric conflicts. After Russia's current, i.e. in July 2023, actions and Ukraine's *de facto* limited counteroffensive, it is clear that there is no immediate end to the largest conventional war in Europe since 1945².

Planning the attack on Ukraine, the Russian political and military elites probably did not assume such consolidation and resistance of the Ukrainians and such solidarity and assistance of NATO and the European Union countries for Ukraine's resistance. Moreover, they certainly counted on passivity, ambivalence and inaction with which the West looked at the illegal annexation of Crimea and the 2014 civil war in Donbas triggered by Russia. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was almost bloodless, driven by propaganda, cyber attacks and subversion, as well as military forces (hybrid warfare), but it is of great importance for better understanding of modern warfare and the most recent history of Russia. Ironically, this skilful Russian success and the West's passivity led to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February

¹ For more on the so-called Wagner Group, its genesis and role in Russia's foreign policy and military (criminal) activities in Ukraine, see, inter alia: F. Bryjka, *Grupa - Wagnera - paramilitarne narzędzie rosyjskich operacji hybrydowych*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 2022, vol. 75, no. 2, pp. 66-91; M. Gabidullin, *Wagnerowiec, Spowiedź byłego dowódcy tajnej armii Putina*, Kraków 2022; K. Marten, *Russia's use of semi-state security forces: the case of the Wagner Group*, "Post-Soviet Affairs" 2019, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 123-146.

² M. Galeotti, *Putin Takes Crimea 2014: Grey-zone warfare opens the Russia-Ukraine conflict*, London 2023; M. Kucharczyk, *Otrzeźwiający wnioski z wizyty na froncie. Nie będzie szybkich sukcesów Ukraińców*, https://_www.msn.com, 22.07.2023; *Co z ukraińską kontrofensywą?* Gen. Skrzypczak for „Wprost”: *Niestety, moje prognozy się potwierdzają*, <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/11270488/co-z-ukrainska-kontrofensywa-gen-skrzypczak-dla-wprost>, 19.06.2023.

2022, which also endangered the European democracy and global security. It is the most dangerous crisis in international relations since the mid-twentieth century³.

Catherine Ashton, the head of the EU diplomacy in 2009-2014, is now trying to justify the passive behaviour of the European countries at that time, especially those belonging to NATO and the EU, which only emboldened Vladimir Putin, because he interpreted that as a weakness of the West. She emphasises that: "When I spoke to Russian leaders 10 years ago, the situation was different. We experienced an attack on Ukraine, Russia's takeover of Crimea and Donbas, but we tried to solve the problem and that is how we approached the talks with Putin. In other words, we wanted to check whether it would be possible for Ukraine to regain its territories without the use of military means, through dialogue. Today, we are in a completely different place. Putin has always believed that Ukraine is uniquely connected to Russia. But now he shows that he is not ready to accept its existence as a free state. Putin is determined; he is in control of his environment. He makes it clear that Russian interests are absolutely his top priority"⁴. And Ashton directly admits: "It seems to me that [...] in some matters Europe has remained passive. It should do more to help Ukraine. However, 10 years ago people did not expect that things would go in such a bad direction. I know that many people in Poland will say that all this could have been predicted. Maybe we should really see it more broadly [...]"⁵.

In 2022, the West finally woke up and, after some hesitation, provided the fighting Ukraine with enormous assistance in every respect, especially diplomatic, humanitarian, financial and military, thanks to which Ukraine defends its sovereignty and independence, and the aggressor suffers huge losses in equipment and soldiers. In total, since 24 February 2022, according to various sources, Russia has already lost over two hundred thousand soldiers and almost four thousand tanks in the war in Ukraine, which is discussed in detail later in the article.

Observing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, one can already say that in the future it will be perceived as one of the irrational wars in the recent history of Europe and the world. It was caused by an absurd, even sick vision of an overly ambitious man short on gravitas, i.e. Vladimir Putin, a former officer of the Soviet KGB and a chauvinist, who became the President of the Russian Federation in 2000, and of his closest associates, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, and the Minister of Defence, Sergey Shoigu. Its goal is to bring back the Russian empire and find a new stronger legitimacy of Putin's rule for life as the new Tsar of Russia⁶.

The main aim of the article is to show the reasons for Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the prospects for its membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO). I try to answer some questions, inter alia, why Russia attacked

³ M. Galeotti, *Putin Takes Crimea 2014: Grey-zone warfare opens the Russia-Ukraine conflict...*, pp. 11-13; N. Kapitonenko, *Kein schnelles Ende*, "IPG-Journal" ipg-journal@fes.de, 12.05.2023.

⁴ M. Obremski, *Decyzja należy do Ukrainy*. Interview with Catherine Ashton, "Dziennik Gazeta Prawna", 30.03.2023, p. A12.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J.M. Fiszer, *Włodzimierz Putin – dlaczego zaufała mu cała Rosja? Specyficzne formy przywództwa politycznego*, [in:] *Przywództwo i elity polityczne w krajach WNP*, ed. T. Bodio, W. Jakubowski, Warszawa 2010, pp. 39-62; *ibid.*: *Why did the Soviet Union collapse? The reasons and effects for Poland, Europe, and the World*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2022, no. 1(72), pp. 11-37.

Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and whether this aggression will accelerate Ukraine's membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures. I put forward theses and research hypotheses adequate to the subject matter of the article; inter alia, I conclude that the road to Ukraine's victory and Russia's defeat is very long. With the support of China, Russia strives to destroy Ukraine completely and weaken the role of its supporters: the United States, the EU and NATO, which China used to fight with for hegemony in the world⁷. In addition, I state that Russia's aggression against Ukraine will not become an accelerator of its membership in NATO and the European Union, but will cause a positive change in the attitude of many Member States towards Ukraine's accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures, in particular Germany and France, which have hampered the process so far. We can already see a great turnaround of the French President, Emmanuel Macron, who is in favour of Ukraine's rapid accession to NATO and the European Union⁸. The stance of the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is evolving in a similar direction as he has stated recently that Russia will not win the war with Ukraine and when it ends, the country will join the Euro-Atlantic structures⁹.

The present analysis shows that Russia's aggression against Ukraine has had a positive impact on the attitude of the West towards the Russian aggressor and its attitude towards Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine fighting for its independence and sovereignty. Contrary to Putin's expectations, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has consolidated the West, but, in my opinion, Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO will not take place as quickly as Ukraine would like it to be. This opinion is confirmed by, e.g. the results of the NATO Summit in Vilnius on 11-12 July 2023, which, contrary to Ukraine's expectations, did not in fact take any binding decisions on this issue, apart from establishing the NATO-Ukraine Council and emphasising in the Summit Communiqué that "Ukraine's future is in NATO"¹⁰. According to many experts, this can only be accelerated by the defeat and disintegration of Russia, as well as the removal of Vladimir Putin from the political scene. The moment he came to power in Russia, he set himself a goal to liquidate sovereign Ukraine and assigned it an important, even strategic, role in the construction of a new Russian Empire under the veiled slogan of *russkij mir* and in the process of creating a new international order in Europe and the world, if not under the aegis of Russia, then with its active participation.

The Russian forces' invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 from the north, south and east, with the initial goal to capture Kiev, has changed our region and even Europe and the entire world forever. Moreover, it has discredited Putin and Russia, and has eliminated it from the civilised, democratic world for decades. On the other hand, it has

⁷ J.M. Fiszer, *Czy Chiny przejmą kontrolę nad światem w połowie XXI wieku?*, „Biuletyn Analiz i Opinii” 2021 (44), no. 3, pp. 2-17; G. Allison, *Skazani na wojnę? Czy Ameryka i Chiny unikną Putapki Tukidydesa?*, Wydawnictwo Bielsko-Biała 2018; R.J. Kruszyński, *USA-CHRL: konflikt konieczny?*, „Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego” 2020, vol. 12, no. 23, pp. 48-68; W. Bieliaszyn, *Putin przyjmuje w Moskwie Xi Jinpinga*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 21.03.2023, p 10.

⁸ G. Schwung, *Wielka wolta prezydenta Francji*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 24.08.2023, p. 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Prezydent W. Zetenski ostro skrytykował Sojusz, że nie ustalił ram czasowych, ani nie wystosował zaproszenia w sprawie członkostwa Ukrainy w NATO*. See: M. Czarnecki, *Utrzymać jedność Zachodu*. Interview with Ekkenhardem Brose, President of the Federal Academy for Security Policy in Berlin, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 14.07.2023, pp. 12-13; N. Kapitonenko, *Eine Lektion in Realismus*, „IPG-Journal” ipg-journal@fes.de, 13.07.2023.

consolidated the West and opened the path for Ukraine to join the European Union and NATO, although it is not going to be a 'fast track'¹¹.

As far as methodology is concerned, I refer in this article to the leading theories in international relations, in particular the theory of realism, neorealism, the foreign policy theory, the geopolitics theory, and the integration theory. I believe that they are most useful for analysing Ukraine's foreign policy and its efforts to join the Euro-Atlantic structures. On the other hand, the dominating research methods used in the article include the exegesis of documents, the description and analysis of international phenomena and processes, the historical analysis, the descriptive, decision-making, comparative method and, to some limited extent, the statistical method. The analysis is carried out based on the Polish and foreign literature on the subject matter, published documents and data from the press and the Internet.

1. Why did Vladimir Putin attack Ukraine on 24 February 2022?

The main reason for Russia's aggression against Ukraine was the imperial (hegemonic) policy of the Russian Federation under the rule of Vladimir Putin, who called the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 "the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century". By the way, this assessment still determines Russia's international policy, the strategic goal of which is to rebuild at least a substitute for the former evil empire, as President Ronald Reagan defined the USSR on 8 March 1983. As the heir of a great empire, Russia could not come to terms with the loss of the position of a world superpower. Vladimir Putin has been building his and Russia's prestige in the international arena by contesting the post-Cold War world order and disregarding the norms of international law, as exemplified by, inter alia, his aggressive policy towards Georgia and Ukraine. In Putin's opinion, the conflict between the West and Russia caused by the political expansion of NATO countries, mainly the United States, to the East has been growing since 1991. On the other hand, Russia cannot allow itself to be pushed onto the margins of international relations. That is why Putin describes the war for the conquest of Ukraine as a conflict with NATO and the entire West. It has become the goal of the Russian foreign policy not only to regain the position of the Soviet Union in its relations with the West, but also to break up the European Union and weaken the role of NATO. It was reflected in *The concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation* announced in 2016, which outlined the prospects for strengthening Russian-Chinese cooperation and deepening Euro-Asian integration as a kind of offensive alternative to Russia's relations with the West¹². By the way, Russia largely managed to achieve these goals already in the second decade of the 21st century. France, Germany and the United States tightened their cooperation with Russia, which sought to break out of international isolation. At the same time, the Kremlin sought to deepen conflicts between Poland, Germany and Israel and weaken the relations between Warsaw and Washington. Moscow fuelled military con-

¹¹ J.M. Fiszer, *Ukraina między Wschodem a Zachodem. Stanowisko Polski wobec akcesji Ukrainy do NATO i Unii Europejskiej*, „Studia Polityczne” 2020, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 19-38; J. Kiwerska, *Ukraina i stosunki transatlantyckie*, „Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej” 2015, no. 9, pp. 345-363.

¹² *The concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation* of 30 November 2016, <https://poland.mid.ru>, 3.06.2023. W. Radkiewicz, *Straszenie zwrotem ku Azji – nowa Koncepcja polityki zagranicznej Rosji*, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2016-12-07/straszenie-zwrotem-ku-azji-nowa-koncepcja-polityki-zagranicznej-rosji>, 4.06.2023.

flicts in Eastern Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, and supported dictatorial regimes in Syria and Venezuela. However, for geopolitical reasons, the West, especially Germany and France, tolerated Putin's foreign policy. Poland warned against this, however, this voice was ignored. Cooperation with Russia became a priority for Germany and France, which led to freezing bilateral relations with Poland and trilateral relations within the Weimar Triangle¹³. Unlike in Poland, in Germany and France it was emphasised at the time that there was no need to weaken Russia¹⁴.

At this point, I would like to put forward a claim that the West tolerated Putin's imperial policy for too long and did not react to its negative effects on international security. Putin's aggressive policy and the war he unleashed largely resulted from many years of appeasing the Russian dictatorship by Western leaders for whom cooperation with Moscow was beneficial: cheap gas, oil, and other raw materials, as well as a large and absorptive Russian market. The annexation of Crimea and the 2014-2015 war in Donbas, instead of triggering a united defence of Ukraine, ended with Putin's success in Minsk and Ukraine's isolation, which was not provided with real military support. By trading with Russia, the West, in particular the United States, Germany and France, are also to blame for the aggression against Ukraine. In my opinion, what also fuelled Russia's war with Ukraine was its short-sighted domestic policy, i.e. feigned transformation, lack of radical reforms, corruption and the oligarchic system, as well as its foreign policy after 1991, especially the policy of balancing between Russia and the European Union. In the light of the above, another thesis may be put forward, namely that the war between Russia and Ukraine could have been predicted and avoided if only the West had not underestimated its premises and symptoms and had spoken hard with Putin and reacted decisively to his subsequent conquests, starting from the aggression against Georgia in 2008. Apart from that, trusting in the security guarantees given by the United States, Great Britain and Russia (Budapest Memorandum of 5 December 1994), Ukraine abandoned the construction of its modern armed forces and was unprepared to defend its borders, which certainly encouraged Putin to attack it¹⁵.

The European Union and its inconsistent Eastern policy, in particular its two main components - the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the strategic partnership with Russia - are also to blame, as they did not bring the expected effects, especially the consolidation of liberal democracy in the partner countries and the development of stable free market economy. The Eastern policy encountered resistance from Russia and, contrary to popular belief, it did not enjoy the support of most European Union States¹⁶. In other words, the European Union has neither achieved its goals in terms of promoting "the

¹³ J.M. Fiszer, *Geneza Trójkąta Weimarskiego i jego rola w integracji Europy po zakończeniu zimnej wojny*, „Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej” 2022, no. 16, pp. 75-89; J.M. Fiszer, M. Czasak, *Trójkąt Weimarski. Geneza i działalność na rzecz integracji Europy w latach 1991-2016*, Warszawa 2019.

¹⁴ M. Tampubolon, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and its Impact on Global Geopolitics*, “European Scientific Journal” 2022, vol. 18, pp. 56-59.

¹⁵ J.M. Fiszer, *Ukraine between Russia and the European Union and its Prospect: Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Dilemmas*, [in]: *Political, social and economic conditions of development of contemporary Ukraine and its regions*, ed. A. J. Kukuła, Lublin 2016, pp. 39-69; J.M. Fiszer, T. Stępniewski, *Polska i Ukraina w procesie transformacji, integracji i wyzwań dla bezpieczeństwa Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Warszawa 2017.

¹⁶ J. Tymanowski, *Ukraina między Wschodem a Zachodem*, Warszawa 2014; O. Barbarska, D. Milczarek, *Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej: porażka czy sukces?*, Warszawa 2014; O. Czarny, *Die Ukraine und die Europäische Union: Stand und bilateraler Beziehungen*, Hamburg 2009.

European values” nor “in the sphere of pursuing its pragmatic geostrategic interests”¹⁷. Other shortcomings of the EU Eastern policy included its excessive bureaucracy and lack of determination of prospects for its addressees’ membership in the EU. I agree with Andrzej Podraza, who writes that: “if the European Union does not specify membership as the ultimate goal of its relations with countries such as Ukraine and Moldova, it will not be able to exert significant influence on the stabilisation of the international environment and the creation of the system of collective security”¹⁸.

At 4 a.m. on 24 February 2022 Vladimir Putin issued the order to carry out a “special military operation”, actually invasion of Ukraine, for which ostentatious preparations had been going on for months with no reaction from the West for a long time. Putin called on the Ukrainian soldiers to lay down their arms and return home. He emphasised that “the operation in Donbas” is aimed at “protecting the local population”. He blamed the Ukrainian authorities for the bloodshed and stated that in the event of foreign intervention, Russia would react immediately. According to Interfax citing the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, a day before the invasion, the leaders of the self-proclaimed People’s Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, previously established on Moscow’s orders, had appealed to President Putin for “help in repelling the aggression” of the armed forces of Ukraine “in order to avoid civilian casualties in Donbas”. In a televised speech on 24 February 2022, Putin declared that Russia’s goal was not to occupy Ukraine, but emphasised at the same time that Russian forces would seek “demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine” and would not let it “acquire nuclear weapons”¹⁹. These are typical Russian propaganda lies for internal use intended to justify its unlawful attack on sovereign Ukraine. Putin considers the territory of Ukraine to be historically Russian lands, and the Ukrainians to be “the Russians’ younger brothers”. He denies Ukraine’s right to exist and does not recognise the Ukrainians’ national identity. Therefore, the aggression is aimed at, if not annexation of Ukraine to Russia, then making it a vassal state and subordinating it to Moscow, in the same way as is the case with Belarus. Putin is aware of the fact that to make it happen, Ukraine must first be cut off from the West and prevented from joining NATO and the European Union. He has spoken loudly about that many times since 2000, when he became the president of Russia. He has made no secret of his desire to rebuild the Russian Empire modelled on the Soviet Union. He also knows that it is not possible without Ukraine, its natural resources and geo-economic and geostrategic values. This is reminiscent of Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s words uttered after the Orange Revolution: “Without Ukraine, Russia is a state; with Ukraine, it is an empire”²⁰. Moreover, Putin assumed that prosperous Ukraine belonging to the Euro-Atlantic structures is a great threat to his regime, because at some point Russians will ask a question: If they manage to live differently, why

¹⁷ O. Barbarska, *Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej jako część składowa polityki zagranicznej UE*, Warszawa 2018, pp. 327-328. See also: A. Wilson, *Partners for Life: Europe’s Unanswered ‘Eastern Question’, ‘Policy Brief’, ECFR, October 2017, pp. 2-4.*

¹⁸ A. Podraza, *Promocja demokracji a bezpieczeństwo europejskie: skuteczność i dylematy polityki wschodniej Unii Europejskiej w XXI wieku, „Politeja” 2016, no. 2, p. 178.* See also: B. Piskorska, *Soft power w polityce UE wobec państw Partnerstwa Wschodniego*, Lublin 2017.

¹⁹ *Pilne. Rosja zaatakowała, Putin wypowiedział wojnę Ukrainie. Wybuchy w Kijowie i Charkowie*, Redakcja OKO.press redakcja@oko.press, 24.02.2022.

²⁰ Z. Brzeziński, *Strategiczna wizja. Ameryka a kryzys globalnej potęgi*, Kraków 2013, p. 13.

are we denied this? The whole process of liquidating opposition in Russia and Putin's support for Lukashenko, who liquidates democracy in Belarus, are manifestations of his fear of the Russian people's anger²¹.

In a nutshell, the main purpose of Russia's aggression against Ukraine was to overthrow its government and to occupy, if not all Ukraine, at least part of its territory and stop NATO's expansion eastward, as well as to build a great Russia and strengthen its position of a superpower in the international arena. At the same time, under Putin's rule Russia seeks to weaken the role of the United States, NATO and the European Union in the contemporary world²².

In response to the Russian aggression on 22 February 2022, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the imposition of martial law throughout the country and added that "we are not afraid of anybody and anything". At 10 a.m. Ukraine announced the severance of diplomatic relations with Russia. On this occasion, President V. Zelensky declared: "Ukraine is defending. Ukraine will not give up its freedom; it will not give it to Moscow. For Ukrainians, the right to live on our land is the most important value. Russia used to guarantee our security before, but then attacked us. Just like during the Second World War when the fascists attacked us"²³.

Almost the entire world and its leaders led by Poland immediately reacted to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Inter alia, US President Joe Biden, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg spoke. President J. Biden stated that: "President Putin has deliberately chosen a war that will bring catastrophic loss of life and human suffering. Russia alone is responsible for the death and destruction that this attack will bring. [...] The USA and its allies will respond in a united and decisive manner and the world will hold Russia accountable."²⁴ At a special session of the UN Security Council, Secretary General Antonio Guterres directly appealed to Putin: "President Putin, stop your troops"²⁵. At the same time, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated: "I strongly condemn Russia's reckless attack on Ukraine, which puts civilian lives at risk. This is a serious breach of international law and a serious threat to the Euro-Atlantic security."²⁶ At the same time, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called on Putin to stop the attack and declared Germany's support for the countries neighbouring Ukraine, including Poland, and stated: "This is Putin's war and his terrible mistake for which he will pay bitterly."²⁷

Next day, i.e. on 25 February 2022, an extraordinary summit of NATO heads of state and government was convened, where Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg declared: "We must respond with determination and unity; North America and Europe, together

²¹ C. Belton, *Ludzie Putina. Jak KGB odzyskało Rosję i zwróciło się przeciwko Zachodowi*, Kraków 2023; I. Eidman, *System Putina. Dlaczego Rosjanie się na to godzą?*, Warszawa 2022; A. Politkowska, *Rosja Putina*, Warszawa 2004.

²² J. M. Fiszer, *System euroatlantycki przed i po zakończeniu zimnej wojny. Istota, cele i zadania oraz rola w budowie nowego ładu globalnego*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 64-75.

²³ "The Kyiv Independent", 24.02.2022.

²⁴ Wirtualna Polska, <https://www.dziewiesie.wp.pl>, 24.02.2022.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

with NATO.”²⁸ On the same day, in Poland, on the way to Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated: “We do not know how this war will develop, but we know that sovereign, independent Ukraine will exist much longer than Vladimir Putin on the stage.”²⁹

The war between Russia and Ukraine has been fought for over a year and a half, although it was supposed to be a short-term “special operation”, officially aimed at “demilitarisation and denazification” of Ukraine and ensuring the protection of the Russian minority in Ukraine, allegedly persecuted by the illegal ‘Bandera’ authorities of this country. As we know, the real purpose of the aggression was different. Moreover, it has resulted in a number of far-reaching international consequences that the aggressor had not anticipated and which constitute a serious threat to the security of Europe and peace in the world. The war may at any moment lead to the outbreak of World War III. There are already three undeclared but dangerous wars fought in Ukraine: Russia’s criminal war with Ukraine, Russia’s cold war with the West and a classic proxy war. Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian war must be viewed from a global perspective as a geopolitical and geo-economic situation. It is accompanied by the struggle of great powers, especially the USA and China, for hegemony and a new world order. It is possible that the war between Russia and Ukraine will turn out to be one of the links in the chain of conflicts that will result in a global change in the balance of power in the international arena. That is why it has been fought for so long and is likely to go on even longer. There is no room for compromise in this conflict, because each party is convinced that the continuation of the war is a better solution than negotiations and that the possibilities of victory on the battlefield have not been exhausted yet³⁰.

In my opinion, the war in Ukraine also presents an opportunity to strengthen the European security. Contrary to Putin’s hopes and calculations that the West would not get militarily involved in the defence of Ukraine’s independence, that deep divisions would occur in NATO and the EU, and that they would further weaken their support for Ukraine, the opposite has happened. There has been a far-reaching consolidation of forces and solidarity of Western countries in their efforts to defend Ukraine and its membership in the EU and NATO, as well as the activities to strengthen NATO and the European Union, which constitute the foundations for the security of Europe and the world. However, Professor Timothy Garton Ash is less optimistic when he writes: “I am doubtful that Putin, like the *deus ex machina*, will suddenly unite Europe. We are not so united. The differences between Central and Eastern Europe and Germany, France, Italy or Spain are large and this division may deepen just now. [...] Germany is of key importance again. Germany under Olaf Scholz has no European strategy. The old Ostpolitik has died and there is no new one”³¹. I do not fully agree with the thesis, because the government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz has made a fundamental change of course in the German foreign and security policy. He has reversed several current directions of

²⁸ „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 26.02.2022.

²⁹ R. Wright, *Ukraine is now Americas war too*, “The New Yorker”, 1.05.2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/ukraine-is-now-americas-war-too>, 6.06.2023.

³⁰ N. Kapitanenko, *Kein schnelles Ende*, “IPG-Journal” ipg-iournal@fes.de, 12.05.2023; G. Yudin, *Solange Putin an der Macht ist, wird der Krieg weitergehen*, “IPG-Journal” ipg-journal@fee.de, 1.08.2023.

³¹ *Rosja, Chiny, Zachód. Nie jesteśmy zjednoczeni*. Interview with Timothy Garton Ash, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 26.08.2022, p. 14.

Germany's policy by 180 degrees, including the priority that Berlin had always given to business relations with Russia. Along with the USA, Great Britain and Poland, Germany is today one of the greatest allies of Ukraine, and provides it with economic, financial, humanitarian and military support. In 2022 alone, the German aid to Ukraine amounted to twelve billion euros. I believe that Germany will play a crucial economic, political and military role in Ukraine's victory and next, together with the USA, ensuring the security of Europe. By supporting Ukraine, the German government is trying to prevent the escalation of tensions between Russia and NATO. Its stance is that the unity of the West is the most important thing, because thanks to it Putin cannot win this war and Ukraine cannot lose it³².

So far, contrary to Putin's expectations, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has failed to divide either the Ukrainian nation or the West and stop NATO's expansion eastward. Putin has not achieved those goals. Quite the opposite, with the membership of Finland and Sweden in NATO, the Alliance has become even stronger and closer to Russia's borders. The criminal war, for which Putin is particularly responsible, has integrated the Ukrainians as a free and sovereign nation and has led to the renaissance of the West, and especially tightening cooperation between NATO and the European Union, which is a *sine qua non* condition not only for Ukraine's victory, but also for ensuring the security of Europe and peace in the world after the war ends.

2. Prospects for Ukraine's accession to the European Union and NATO

The undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine has been fought *de facto* since 2014, i.e. since the Russian Federation illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula. Since then, or actually even since 2008, i.e. since Russia's aggression against Georgia, the West led by the USA has been promising Ukraine membership in NATO and the European Union. However, formal negotiations to achieve this goal have not been opened yet. The situation did not change with other decisions taken at the NATO Summit in Vilnius on 11-12 July 2023 although great hopes were pinned on it especially in Ukraine and Poland. At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, NATO had recognised that "Ukraine will be a member of the Alliance" and 15 years later in Vilnius the leaders of the pact only stated that: "Ukraine's future is in NATO". President Joe Biden emphasised on this occasion that "before Ukraine joins NATO, it will have to carry out reforms in order to meet the standards that apply to every Member State of the Alliance"³³. And NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg added that: "the invitation to join NATO will be issued when Ukraine fulfils the conditions it must meet"³⁴. In the announced communiqué, the allies assured that Ukraine's place is in the Alliance, but they did not provide any time frames or detailed conditions. Not surprisingly, President Zelensky was disappointed that the Alliance did not set any

³² R. Mützenich, *Die Welt im Umbruch. Der russische Krieg gegen die Ukraine ist eine globale Zäsur. Aber die Zeitenwende darf nicht nur militärische Fragen betreffen*, "Newsletter der IPG", ipg-journal.de, 24.02.2023; J. Bielecki, *Scholz uwolnił fałę alianckich czołgów*, "Rzeczpospolita", 26.01.2023, p. A5; *ibid.*: *Scholz musi zagrać sam*, "Rzeczpospolita", 20.01.2023, p. A6.

³³ J. Bielecki, *Ameryka nie zapomni o rządach prawa*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 17.07.2023, p. A6.

³⁴ W. Jurasz, *Ukraina pozostanie w przedpokoju NATO. To także lekcja dla Polski*, <https://www.onet.plk>, 12.07.2023.

time frames or issue an invitation for Ukraine's membership in NATO. Earlier, he repeatedly stressed that Ukraine needs and deserves NATO membership³⁵.

The Vilnius Summit concerned not only Ukraine but also the new realities faced by the Alliance in the struggle for a new international order. The world is heading for a bipolar order and NATO is concerned about the disintegration of its existing security policy, which was revealed by the war in Ukraine. Therefore, not all members of the Alliance want to put their own security at risk for Ukraine's security and that is why they oppose its accession to NATO. The Vilnius Summit clearly showed that the war must end first, and only then may Ukraine be admitted to NATO. This is also a condition for Ukraine's membership in the European Union³⁶.

However, at the end of July, in his address to the nation, President Zelensky announced the start of negotiations on Ukraine's membership in the EU this year: "Ukraine is fully prepared for this; we are doing what is necessary on our part. And we are doing everything that we can to ensure that the EU is also fully prepared. Exactly this year."³⁷ The European Commission proposes 50 billion euro worth of aid to Kiev over the next four years, is sympathetic to Ukraine's application and is not going to criticise it for shortcomings. Everyone is aware that institutional reforms during the war are difficult and appreciates the fact that Ukraine is carrying them out anyway. In order to help Ukraine, Brussels is proposing a revision of the EU's long-term budget, which will be certainly supported by Poland³⁸.

There is no doubt that Ukraine's accession to NATO and the European Union is in the Polish national interest and is not without significance for the security of Poland, Europe and the whole world. Therefore, by supporting Ukraine in the war against the Russian aggressor, Poland at the same time supports Ukraine's efforts to join the European Union and NATO. This is confirmed by opinion polls, according to which 95% of Poles support Ukraine's accession to the European Union and 90% support its accession to NATO. In both cases, 45% of the respondents say that it should take place as soon as possible³⁹. Long ago Poland undertook the role of Ukraine's advocate in the Euro-Atlantic structures and it has been consistently played since then, which I repeatedly wrote about in various scientific journals⁴⁰. Ukraine's authorities appreciate this and on 24 August 2023, on the occasion of Ukraine's Independence Day, President V. Zelensky issued a post on social media, which was also dedicated to Poland and Poles. He recalled that in 1991, immediately after the referendum, Poland recognised the independence of Ukraine. "It

³⁵ M. Czarnecki, *Ukraina czeka na zaproszenie*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 12.07.2023, p. 11; N. Kapitonenko, *Eine Lektion in Realismus*, „IPG-Journal” <ipg-journal@fes.de>, 13.07.2023.

³⁶ N. Kapitonenko, *Eine Lektion in Realismus*, „IPG-Journal” <ipg-journal@fes.de>, 13.07.2023.

³⁷ *Zelenski o Ukrainie w Unii Europejskiej. Podał, kiedy zaczną się negocjacje*, <https://www.msn.com>, 25.07.2023.

³⁸ A. Słojewska, *Kiedy Ukraina będzie w UE*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 21.06.2023, p. 1; A. Słojewska, *Ukraina wymusza zwiększenie budżetu UE*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 21.06.2023, p. A16.

³⁹ A. Karwowska, *Chcemy Ukrainy w NATO i Unii Europejskiej*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 13.04.2022, p. 10.

⁴⁰ See, inter alia.: J.M. Fiszer, *Ukraina między Wschodem a Zachodem. Stanowisko Polski wobec akcesji Ukrainy do NATO i Unii Europejskiej*, „Studia Polityczne” 2020, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 19-38; *ibid*, *Pozytywne i negatywne doświadczenia Polski podczas wejścia do Unii Europejskiej. Rozwiązania modelowe dla Ukrainy*, „Studia Polityczne” 2021, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 105-151.

was the leader then and is one now. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your support. I am sincerely grateful," he emphasised⁴¹.

As was mentioned earlier, there are many scenarios for the end of the war in Ukraine and its accession to NATO and the European Union. Many experts believe that only Russia's military defeat, its disintegration and the removal of Vladimir Putin can accelerate the end of the war with Ukraine and open the path to NATO and the European Union. I am not so sure about this, although I would love to see this scenario come true. In my opinion, this is wishful thinking. Russia is still strong, and Putin is desperate and impossible to remove for many reasons. Inter alia, he controls the army, has pacified the opposition and surrounds himself with trusted people for whom removing him does not come into play. In addition, he consolidates and tightens control over state-owned media in order to indoctrinate and mould public opinion, as well as to suppress the expressions of dissent. After a year and a half of the war, which, according to some sources, cost Russia over 200 thousand dead, wounded and missing soldiers⁴², support for Putin and the institutions backing him is not decreasing. What Putin is doing is approved by 82% of Russians. He does not have any rivals on the Russian political scene, either. 42% of the respondents trust him. State institutions are also rated highly. It is clear that Russians are consolidating around Putin and the government apparatus. What deserves praise for that is not only the very consistent propaganda but also an effective economic policy, thanks to which, despite the war and sanctions, it is possible to live at a more or less pre-war level. Russians also do not think the war is so terrible, as 61% of the respondents believe that the "special military operation" is "very successful" or "rather successful" for their country. They are also aware that this war will not end quickly: 45% of the respondents believe that it may last longer than a year and are in favour of its continuation⁴³.

Moreover, as various public opinion polls show, the vast majority of Russians have no sense of political responsibility. This means that the government can do absolutely anything and people will not think that they are involved in any way. Therefore, the deputinisation of Russia is unlikely and, thus, the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war is very difficult to predict. Putin will not surrender even if he loses this war. At some point, he will announce a success of the Russian army, order to end the "special operation" and propose peace talks that the West and Ukraine will agree to, and this will allow him to survive on the Russian political scene. To that end Putin has recently adopted a law that allows for the presidential election scheduled for March 2024 to be held under martial law, and it is certain that nobody else but he will win it⁴⁴.

⁴¹ *Zelenski zwrócił się do Polaków. Padły poruszające słowa*, <https://www.wprost.pl>, 25.08.2023.

⁴² In addition, the Russian army lost 3,799 tanks, 7,442 armoured combat vehicles, 3,406 artillery systems, 572 multiple-launch rocket systems, 329 air defence systems, 310 aircraft, 296 helicopters, 2,941 unmanned aerial vehicles, 1,025 cruise missiles, 18 ships and boats, 6,172 vehicles (including tankers), 449 units of special equipment. The war is still being fought, so the data will be changing.

⁴³ W. Radziwinowicz, *Rosjanie trzymają się mocno Putina i wojny*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 5.06.2023, p. 10; *Ukraina szykuje „główne uderzenie” na rosyjskie wojska*, www.msn.com/pl-pl/wiadomosci/polska/sytuacja-się-pogorszyła-Ukraina-przekazała-złe-wieści, 16.07.2023.

⁴⁴ *Świat bez Rosji? To iluzja. Całkowite zwycięstwo nad mocarstwem nuklearnym jest niemożliwe*. Onet, newsletter.info@grupaonet.pl, 25.07.2023.

In my opinion, the Russian-Ukrainian war will be fought for a very long time, because it has already adopted the nature of a classic proxy war, i.e. it is a 'substitution war' or, in other words, a 'war by proxy', i.e. a type of war in which two or more conflicted states resolve the dispute not by means of military clashes conducted directly on their own territory, but by means of the substitution of them for activities on the territory of a third country, thus, on the territory that is beyond the borders of their own states. This was the nature of the USSR's war in Afghanistan and the USA's war against Afghanistan and Iraq. By supporting Ukraine today, the United States is seeking to weaken Russia and China as much as possible and to maintain its hegemony in the world. On the other hand, Russia wants to weaken the position of the United States in the international arena and, as a result, can count on China's support. The war between Russia and Ukraine is also important for China, which also seeks to weaken Russia and the United States, which is to make it easier to make Russia a vassal and take control of the world. Formally, there is a 'strategic alliance' between Russia and China, which was confirmed during President Xi's visit to Moscow on 20-21 March 2023. At the time, China's leader promoted himself as a mediator and called for peace talks and an end to the war in Ukraine. Both the USA and Ukraine rejected the peace plan of China, which, with Russia's support, is increasing its pressure on Taiwan⁴⁵.

Today, there are signs of detente and bellicose grunts in the USA-China relations. The above-mentioned NATO Summit in Vilnius also demonstrated it in the final communiqué, which states that:

The People's Republic of China's stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values. The PRC employs a broad range of political, economic, and military tools to increase global footprint and project power, while remaining opaque about its strategy, intentions and military build-up. [...] It strives to subvert the international order based on rules, including those in the space, cyber and maritime domains."⁴⁶ This was met with sharp reaction from China. Inter alia, Fu Cong, spokesman for China's mission to the EU, said: "We firmly oppose to and reject this accusation. [...] NATO, as a product of the Cold War, has a bad history. [...] Against the background of the deteriorating international security landscape, NATO, instead of considering its own responsibility as a regional military bloc, makes groundless accusations, interferes in matters beyond its borders and leads to confrontation. This fully exposes the hypocrisy of NATO and its ambitions and striving for expansion and hegemony."⁴⁷

Washington and Beijing will not quickly deviate from the path of rivalry and confrontation. Drawing on the United States and NATO's involvement in Ukraine, China can make use of it and attack Taiwan. The trade war between the US and China is still fought. Jake Sullivan, Joe Biden's security adviser, has recently said that the US must

⁴⁵ J.M. Fiszer, *Will China Take over the World by the Middle of the 21 st Century?*, "Studia Polityczne" 2022, no. 1, vol. 50, pp. 11-35; A. Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, Cambridge 2018; P. Khanna, *Unsere Asiatische Zukunft*, Berlin 2019.

⁴⁶ M. Czmiel, *Ostra reakcja Chin na komunikat NATO*, <https://www.wiadomości.wp.pl>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

maintain a large advantage in certain technologies, including artificial intelligence and military technologies⁴⁸.

Summing up the above analysis, I believe that the war in Ukraine will end when the United States and Russia reach an agreement on the matter with the active support of China. Only far-reaching concessions from the United States to Russia and vice versa may result in the start of talks and the conclusion of a peace treaty between Ukraine and Russia. These concessions include, inter alia: lifting the sanctions imposed on Russia, guaranteeing Russia that Crimea will not be returned to Ukraine, guaranteeing Ukraine reparations from Russia, as well as impunity for Putin and his closest associates; in addition, the creation of a demilitarised zone under the UN control along the Russian-Ukrainian border. Then, Russia will probably agree to Ukraine's membership in the European Union and NATO, but also under certain conditions, for example, that the Alliance will not place missiles with nuclear warheads in Ukraine. According to various sources, unofficial talks on the issue are underway between the United States and Russia. High-ranking representatives of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and the CIA are conducting them⁴⁹.

On the other hand, the war in Ukraine may turn into a long-term conflict frozen for many years. Moreover, desperate Putin may start a war with the West. The West, in particular NATO, the European Union and the United States, must be aware of this and prepare accordingly, and must not let Putin surprise them. Dynamic changes taking place today in the international environment and in the multilateral and bilateral relations under the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war necessitate revision and adjustment of the directions of Poland's foreign and security policies in such a way that its position is strengthened in both the European and the world arena. Poland should strive to consolidate the structures of the Weimar Triangle, NATO and the European Union with its own security architecture. It should support efforts to increase Europe's defence independence, but at the same time firmly oppose setting it against NATO⁵⁰.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine caused the collapse of the cooperative security model based on Russia's membership in the normative European community, which has become more and more feigned year by year. Today, nobody knows what might replace it and what role post-war Ukraine and Russia could play in it. As far as Ukraine is concerned, there must be something that it can rely on and that will guarantee its security and independence. On the other hand, Russia, provided it does not fall apart, must become a democratic state, and atone for its sins it committed under V. Putin's rule⁵¹. Therefore, it is necessary to look for new concepts for the security of Europe and peace in the world today; and Poland should also actively participate in this search.

⁴⁸ H. Koziel, *Waszyngton i Pekin szybko nie zejdą ze ścieżki konfrontacji*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 17.07.2023, p. A22.

⁴⁹ CIA ma rozmawiać z rosyjskimi służbami. *Negocjacje dotyczą władzy na Kremlu*, <https://www.wprost.pl/>, 3.07.2023.

⁵⁰ For more on the issue see: J. Bartosiak, A. Świedziński, M. Budzisz, *Decyzje strategiczne, które Polską będzie musiała podjąć do końca 2023 roku*, Warszawa 2023.

⁵¹ A. Kortunow, *Restoration, reformation, or revolution? Blueprints for the world order after the Russia-Ukraine conflict*, “China International Strategy Review” 2022, no. 4, pp. 183-208.

Conclusions

The above analysis of the available source materials confirms the claims and research hypotheses formulated in the article and allows for answering the questions asked. The aggression against Ukraine was planned almost from the very beginning of Vladimir Putin's takeover of power in Russia and resulted from his utopian concepts of the revival of the Russian superpower comparable to the former Soviet Union, where vassal Ukraine was to play an important role. In my opinion, the war with Ukraine unleashed by Putin could have been avoided if the West, especially the United States, Germany and France, had not conducted such a passive, even pro-Russian, policy but a decisive, coordinated policy of holding Putin back from implementing his sick visions. It is not difficult to put Ukraine to blame as well, because, for too long (as long as until 2013-2014), it had followed a policy of balancing (a two-track one) between Russia, which is historically, culturally and socially close to it, and the foreign and rich West, which it was afraid of more than of Russia for both geopolitical and geo-economic reasons. In addition, the European Union and NATO did not see a place for Ukraine in their ranks for many reasons, especially formal ones, and to this day they have not presented it a clear perspective, apart from vague promises that it will be admitted to the Euro-Atlantic structures maybe one day after the war and when it meets accession criteria. This did not have motivating power to introduce necessary systemic reforms in Ukraine. *Summa summarum*, in my opinion, it will not happen quickly, because the war will be fought for a long time and its outcome is difficult to predict today. By the way, the West should have provided Ukraine with more weapons that its government had asked for more quickly. If it had been the case, today the war would be at a totally different stage, but the West had feared to cross the "red line" and provoke Putin to use tactical nuclear weapons, which would have changed the nature of the war and turned it into World War III. Russia under Putin's rule will not give up on Ukraine. If Russia wins the war, it will dictate peace conditions, and one of them will be the lack of its consent for Ukraine's membership in the Euro-Atlantic system, and certainly in NATO. Thus, only the removal of Russia's political elites led by Putin from power, and its democratisation (deputinisation) may change Moscow's attitude to Ukraine and accelerate its accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures.

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