THE BALTIC-BLACK SEAS DEFENCE BELT AS A KEY FACTOR OF THE NEW EUROPEAN SECURITY SYSTEM

БАЛТО-ЧОРНОМОРСЬКИЙ ОБОРОННИЙ ПОЯС ЯК КЛЮЧОВИЙ ФАКТОР НОВОЇ СИСТЕМИ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОЇ БЕЗПЕКИ

Kostyrev A. G.,
candidate of Political Sciences,
Associate Professor of Law,
Philosophy, and Political Sciences
Department, T. G. Shevchenko
National University 'Chernihiv
Collegium', Ukraine, Chernihiv. Participant of the
'University without Borders' Project of the
European Humanities University
Lithuania, Vilnius
e-mail: akostyrev@ukr.net
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9671-4355

Костирєв А. Г.,
кандидат політичних наук,
доцент кафедри права,
філософії та політології,
Національний університет
«Чернігівський колегіум імені Т. Г.
Шевченка», Україна, Чернігів,
учасник проєкту «Університет без кордонів»
Європейського гуманітарного університету
Литва, Вільнюс
e-mail: akostyrev@ukr.net
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9671-4355

The article deals with the role of the Baltic-Black Seas region in the defence of European security. It reveals the reasons and driving factors for the construction of NATO's shield from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The author emphasizes that Russian aggression against Ukraine finally buried attempts to create a comprehensive European security system 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' based on the Helsinki principeles. The establishment of a new strong system has appeared on the NATO and EU agenda. The Baltic-Black Sea defence belt should become a shield that protects European democratic values. The strength of this construction is determined by geographical, historical, organisational and communication factors. Strategic communications between the nations of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine play a key role in creating this shield of Europe that repels Russian imperialist encroachments. The formation of the Baltic-Black Seas Security and Cooperation Organization should become the main content of the new stage of development of security cooperation in this region.

Keywords: European security system, Helsinki's principles, Baltic-Black Seas region, Russian aggression, strategic communications, support of Ukraine.

У статті розглядається роль Балто-Чорноморського регіону в забезпеченні європейської безпеки. Розкриваються причини та рушійні чинники створення щита НАТО від Балтійського до Чорного моря. Автор наголошує, що російська агресія проти України остаточно поховала спроби створити всеохоплюючу систему європейської безпеки «від Лісабона до Владивостока» за Гельсінкими принципами. На порядку денному НАТО та ЄС постала необхідність створення нової сильної безпекової системи. Балто-Чорноморський пояс оборони має стати щитом, який захищає європейські демократичні цінності. Міцність цієї конструкції визначається географічними, історичними, організаційними та комунікаційними факторами. Стратегічні комунікації між народами Естонії, Латвії, Литви, Польщі та України відіграють ключову роль у створенні цього щита Європи, який відбиває російські імперіалістичні зазіхання. Головним змістом нового етапу розвитку співробітництва у сфері безпеки в цьому регіоні має стати формування Балто-Чорноморської організації безпеки та співробітництва.

Ключові слова: система європейської безпеки, Гельсінкські принципи, Балто-Чорноморський регіон, російська агресія, стратегічні комунікації, підтримка України.

Introduction. Russian aggression against Ukraine revealed to the world the true evil face of the Putin regime and put an end to the prospects of building a universal European security system based on the Helsinki principles of peaceful coexistence. It is clear that the new European security system, which is being created in the context of the bloodiest battle on the continent since the Second World War, must be able to respond firmly to threats from aggressive authoritarian regimes and have a reliable shield to protect against military and hybrid encroachments. **The relevance of this study** is determined by the need to define ways and means of creating such a system.

Issues of ensuring European security, in general, and the countries of the Baltic-Black Seas region, in particular, are the focus of such researchers as Emiliano Alessandri, Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny, Christian Nuenlist, Mark Cancian, Sean Monaghan, Daniel Fata, et al. And Vitaliy Syzov focuses on Ukraine's place in the European Security System. However, analyzing the state of such a system these authors do not reveal the roots nether show the prospects of the development Baltic-Black Seas belt as an original and significant component of NATO's collective defence.

The article aims to reveal the reasons for the necessity to create a new European Security System and justify the key role of the Baltic-Black Seas region's nations to ensure its strength and

reliability.

To achieve the goal of the research, it is necessary to consistently find answers to the following questions: (1) Why security systems are created, and how they are established? (2) What was a former European Security System and why it should be changed? (3) Why exactly the Baltic-Black Sea region is a key link in the new European Security System? (4) How do strategic communications organize interaction between the nations of this region during a war to repel Russian aggression and what is the prospect of its development?

The novelty of the presented paper is in the focus on the regularities of relationships strategic communication and organisational factors to create the security system and improve its efficiency.

The research methodology is based on a systematic approach to considering the problems of security systems' establishment and functioning. This approach involves studying the communication and structural elements of security systems in their interrelation and interaction with the environment. Their effectiveness is assessed using the structural-functional method. Historical and comparative methods were used to show the role of the Helsinki system and to conduct a comparative analysis of its functioning. Statistical analysis and content analysis are used to assess the intensity and content of strategic communications in the Baltic-Black Seas defence belt after the start of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of this communication in terms of the practical results of interaction in supporting Ukraine. The modeling method was needed to show the prospect of security cooperation in the Baltic-Black Seas region.

The Security Systems Formation Drivers

Life, freedom, and property are basic human values. Security systems are the structures of social interaction that are created to ensure the safety of these values. And states, particularly ancient polities, were established as primary security systems. Back in those times, Aristotle proved that communication determines the processes of state-constructing [2]. Subsequently, these separate systems were consolidated into alliances of states. Their binding power was not interpersonal political communication only but international, or strategic communication. Three factors make such political communications strategic. Strategic communications (1) are conducted by powerful and/or influential political actors (2) in the geopolitical area and (3) have a long-term purpose of interaction.

System-founding processes take place in two stages. In the first stage of ensuring security, strategic communications create rules and structures of security systems in the process of negotiations and agreements between leaders and elites of nations. In the second stage, these rules and structures provide strategic communications, functioning as deliberation panels, coordination platforms,

and decision-making bodies to maintain cooperation in political and military spheres. Therefore, communication, normative and structural aspects of security systems' functioning should be studied in a complex.

Communication occurs in the area of intersection of participants' values, interests and purposes [13, p. 84]. The degree of these axiological, praxeological and teleological indicators' achievement by accomplices determines the effectiveness of the security system. But the communication act is based not only on rational dimensions, because it is determined by a powerful emotional driver too. As a rule, security systems are created as a result of bloody wars in order to avoid them in the future. Therefore, the sources of motivation lie in emotions of fear and hope or enthusiasm, which, according to Castells, are the determining factors of communication [6, p. 146]. Therefore, security systems are transformed depending on changes in these factors both rational and emotional.

In this way, five security systems were established in Europe throughout history, starting from the New Age, and gradually replaced each other: (1) Westphalian system – 1648-1792, Vienna system – 1815-1914, Versailles system – 1918-1939, Yalta-Potsdam system – 1945-1991, and Helsinki system – 1975-2022. The peculiarity is that Potsdam and Helsinki systems combine with each other in the period 1975-1991 and any war did not separate them. This may be why many international relations scholars do not single out the Helsinki system as a separate system. However, in terms of strategic communications and organisation structure signs, these two security systems are significantly different. As well as the new security system, which rises from the ruins of the Helsinki system destroyed by Russian aggression against Ukraine, is building by the brand-new model of strategic communications based on fundamentally different organisational principles. According to the laws of dialectics, in order to understand the properties of this new phenomenon, we have to research not only the reasons for its emergence and its current state, but also its origins.

The Helsinki Security System: The Rise and Fall of Illusions

The Helsinki Security System was created by the strategic communications between the Western Bloc, Eastern Bloc, and non-aligned countries. They were motivated by (1) a fear of a nuclear apocalypse where there would be no winners, (2) enthusiasm for economic cooperation and (3) hope for democratic development based on human rights. This international system has differed from the Potsdam system, which was established after the Second World War, in many respects. As Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny, and Christian Nuenlist note:

The early Helsinki process introduced innovative confidence-building measures, and made human rights a requirement of a legitimate and well-functioning international system, thus providing

the framework for disarmament in Europe in the mid-1980s, as well as the inspiration for the later demise of Communism in Europe [28, p. 5].

This new stage of international strategic communications has been crowned by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (3 July 1973 – 1 August 1975) that took place in Helsinki. Representatives of the 33 European countries, as well as the USA and Canada, communicated at this Conference. The 10 principles adopted by the CSCE were intended to guide relationships between participating nations. These principles became the valuable foundation of the so-called Helsinki Decalogue – that form of strategic communications that is considered as "origins of the European Security System" and outlined their contours to the current time. Even in spite of the fact that after the collapse of the USSR and the demise of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the block security system in Europe collapsed and the balance of power was disrupted.

At the same time two trends in the transformation of the Helsinki Security System appeared already in the early 1990s as a result of geopolitical changes:

(1) a reformation on the basis of the idealistic (cooperative) paradigm of international relations;

(2) a deformation that resulted from the implementation of the realist (power) paradigm known as 'realpolitik'.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the idealistic paradigm dominated socio-political and academic discourse. It assumed the development of strategic communications to strengthen trust and effective interaction. Interaction processes were embodied in a number of organisational steps to strengthen and expand European cooperation and security structures. The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which was signed in December 1990, started this process. The Helsinki Decalogue was institutionalized. On January 1, 1995, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe was created. This organisation unites 57 states and is the only platform for dialogue between the countries of the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions on security issues (conflict prevention, conventional arms control, security measures and confidence-building), respect for human rights (fundamental freedom, rights of national minorities), as well as on economic issues. The Helsinki Accords were further amended in the 1999 Charter for European Security.

At this historical stage, the process of expanding strategic communications and co-operations for European security was not limited by the framework of the OSCE only. Since 1991, the Council of Europe – the oldest international organisation in Europe and an effective platform for strategic communications – was replenished with new members from among the countries of the former socialist camp and the Soviet re-

publics and it consists of 46 states now. In 1994, the Partnership for Peace project was launched. This is a program of bilateral military cooperation between NATO and Eastern European and post-Soviet states that are not members of the Alliance. In March 2003, the European Union's European Neighborhood Policy program started. It emphasized the importance of EU communication in strengthening relations with neighboring countries. The program participants included the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The process of expansion of NATO and the EU in its value content also fits into the cooperation paradigm, although Putin's leadership now evaluates it differently.

So, the architecture of the European Security System, created on the basis of the Helsinki principles, had a complex landscape. The Helsinki security system structure consisted not of the OSCE only. In the first decade of the 21st century, this system was constructed as a branched network of various forms of strategic communication and cooperation. This network included the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the EU's European Neighborhood Policy, NATO's Partnership for Peace program, as well as even the NATO-Russia Council and other bodies.

The destruction of the Berlin Wall has become a symbol of this new Europe. Illusions of building a joined security space 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok' or at least 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' dominated the socio-political discourse. The content of strategic communications was filled with uplifting moods.

The European Security Strategy, which was adopted in December 2003, declared:

Never before has Europe been as prosperous, safe and free as it is today. A streak of violence in the first half of the 20th century. was replaced by a period of peace and stability unparalleled in European history. European countries have pledged to resolve all controversial issues peacefully and to closely cooperate within the framework of pan-European institutions. The past period has been marked by steady progress in establishing the rule of law and democracy, authoritarian regimes have been transformed into safe, stable, dynamically developing democracies. The successive stages of expansion of the Union are turning the dream of creating a united, peaceful continent into reality [7].

Nothing describes the aspirations of Europeans better than the name of this strategy: 'A secure Europe in a better world' – it was the ultimate goal of the EU actions.

The optimistic part of Zbigniew Brzezinski's predictions, which he had made in his last book "Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Rower" (2012), fits perfectly into the general outline of this concept. Promoting his idea of a larger West as a core of global stability which emerges geopolitical community of interest between the United States, Europe, and Russia, the

great geopolitician wrote:

A larger European framework that involves in varying ways Turkey and Russia would mean that Europe, still allied with America, could become in effect a globally critical player. Since any Westward gravitation by Russia would likely be accompanied (or even preceded) by a similar accommodation with Ukraine, the institutional seat of such a collective consultative organ (or perhaps in the meantime the Council of Europe) could be located in Kyiv [4, pp. 272-274].

Then, I also was an idealistic optimist and in 2013, justifying the geopolitical function of Ukraine as a forum for intercivilization communication, wrote:

The new structure of European security will differ from all previously known ones in its multi-level nature, the presence of many overlapping spheres or, in communicative terms, 'zones of correlation'. Ukraine's prospect is to become a mediator in the process of building a new European security system, through intensive dialogue with the main centers – the EU and Russia, NATO and the CSTO, which take the place where these zones intersect [12, p. 138].

The Baltic countries and Poland, even after joining NATO, also were quite tolerant and continued to provide communications with Russia. Although they were taught by bitter historical experience and therefore took a wary position towards official Moscow. So, unlike its predecessor – the Yalta-Potsdam system with its 'iron curtain' – the communication and organisational structure of the Helsinki system was built on the principle of transparency of the border-line between NATO and the CSTO. The role of such Alliance neophytes as the Baltic States and Poland was assessed as a soft buffer.

In general, the model of the European Security System resembled a plum in its structure. It had a soft integument, which included small and relatively weak neophyte states on the eastern flank of NATO and the EU, as well as a transparent environment of partner states in which Russia retained strong influence. The soft integument covered the 'core' formed by the old NATO and EU member states in Western Europe, which actively cooperated with Russia.

In order to develop interaction in the 'Big Europe' the idea of a security space 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' had been hatched in the idealistic paradigm of strategic communications since 2007 as a short option of OSCE's larger West model 'from Vancouver eastward to Vladivostok'. Even after the annexation of Crimea and the start of Russian aggression in the Donbas, on 12 February 2015, in the Declaration of the President of the Russian Federation, the President of Ukraine, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in support of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, it was noted that "Leaders remain committed to the vision of a joint humanitarian and economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific based upon full respect for international law and the OSCE principles" [9].

However, the apparently healthy and even developing body of the Helsinki system was already affected by the metastases of 'realpolitik'. The realist paradigm manifested itself in the use of force and bloody solutions to problems. Its apologists use some politic-legal collisions, which the Helsinki set of principles contains. Thus, in political practice the principles of territorial integrity and inviolability of frontiers conflict with the principle of equality and self-determination of peoples, and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs with the principle of protecting human rights and freedoms (2R-Rights Resistance). These collisions opened opportunities for different interpretations of principles by opposite states in their own interests in the processes of communication. Olga Reznikova and Volodymyr Smolianiuk generalize that social uncertainty in the area of national security and defense contains the probability of military-conflict interaction between the parties (states and societies with oppositely oriented national interests) [24, pp. 61-62]. And really, the misinterpretation of these collisions was used as an excuse for the conflicts in Transnistria, Chechnya, Yugoslavia, Georgia and, finally, Ukraine.

The Kremlin, under the pretext of protecting the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, launched the first (1994-1996) and second (1999-2000) war against the national liberation movement in Chechnya (Ichkeria), and the counter-guerrilla war de jure continued until April 16, 2009. Between 24 March and 10 June 1999, NATO, invoking the 2R principle, carried out a military operation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which led to the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops from the territory of the province of Kosovo and Metohija and the transition of the province to the control of NATO forces, and then to the proclamation his independence. Russia adopted this experience in a distorted form and in August 2008 carried out a military invasion of Georgia under the flimsy pretext of ensuring the right of the peoples of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to self-determination. In February-March 2014, under the absurd pretext of the right to self-determination of the "people of Crimea", Russia annexed the Ukrainian Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol. In April 2014, Russia provoked and militarily supported the separatist movement in Donbas igniting the war in eastern Ukraine.

An open and brazen violation of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Principles meant the beginning of the end of the existing European Security System. On February 24, 2024, Russia launched a full-scale aggression against Ukraine, which became the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War II. Thus, the darkest alternative from Brzezinski's predictions came true – "Russia seeks to absorb Ukraine quickly, reawakening its own

imperial ambitions and contributing to greater international disarray" [4, p. 326]. This war finally buried the Helsinki Accords and marked the transition to the construction of a new security system.

The New European Shield: Constructions and Guarantees of Strength

To the new European Security System building strategic communications and cooperation are motivated by (1) a fear of Russian aggression expanding, and (2) hope and enthusiasm for a united democracy victory in Ukraine as a necessary precondition of European values saving. Emiliano Alessandri clearly describes this situation:

Russia's war against Ukraine is system-changing. It has shattered the illusion that decades of East-West engagement had created a security community of sorts from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The post-Cold War 'European security order', an increasingly challenged notion in the wake of the wars in the Balkans, Chechnya, Georgia, and other places, will hardly be patched back together anytime soon. Ukraine's heroic resistance, indissolubly linked to its quest to join the 'European family', will not bring us any closer to the 1989 vision of a 'Europe, whole and free'. The war has put in sharp relief a fault line separating the Euro-Atlantic space from what lies east of it. This has to be accepted as the new international reality, at least until profound changes take place in Russia's political and economic systems and security culture. Left of the line, peace is holding, diplomacy remains the go-to tool to address international tensions, and security is defined mostly cooperatively, despite issues such as migration exposing serious solidarity gaps. Right of the line, a revanchist nationalist Russia that sees itself at war with the 'collective West' is bent on coercing the 'Russian world' under its control, with brutal force if necessary [1].

The new European Security System must respond to aggressive challenges, hybrid and military threats from Russia.

This requirement predetermines the directions of its construction.

(1) This system should significantly limit the possibilities for participation or completely exclude Russia and Belarus from European structures of communication, cooperation and decision-making in the security sphere. After the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, Western countries expelled Russia from the G8 and began to impose sanctions on it. In April 2014, NATO suspended all practical cooperation between the Alliance and Russia. Cooperation under the Partnership for Peace programs was suspended with Russia in 2014 and with Belarus in 2021. On March 16, 2022, Russia was expelled from the Council of Europe. In 2022, Belarus' membership in the European Union's Eastern Partnership program was suspended.

(2) The new European Security System will be based on strengthening NATO's defensive capabilities. In July 2023, the NATO summit in Vilnius approved a detailed NATO collective defense plan, ensuring that the Alliance can defend every inch of its territory and all of its current members. It happened for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union – the adoption of a concrete plan for defense against a full-scale attack from Russia. This plan lays out the objectives for each participating country, outlining its specific areas of responsibility, as well as which allies it should engage with and what weapons it should use.

In a significant display of military prowess, NATO conducted Steadfast Defender 2024 from the end of January to May 31, 2024, the largest military exercise in Europe since the Cold War. Approximately 90,000 troops from all 31 NATO Allies, as well as partner Sweden, were participating. Steadfast Defender 2024 has marked a historic moment for NATO, showcasing transatlantic unity, strength, and determination in the face of evolving security challenges. As tensions persist in Eastern Europe, this exercise sends a clear message that NATO is prepared to defend its members, and its values, and uphold collective security in the Euro-Atlantic area [21]. It is important that the most active phase of these exercises took place in the maritime and territorial areas of Poland and the Baltic.

So, since 2014, after the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the 'plum' model of European security began to transform into a 'nut' model. Strengthening NATO's Eastern flank, which was decided at the Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016) Summits and strengthened at the Vilnius Summit (2023), means a transition to the formation of a new configuration of the European Security System. This configuration involves the creation of a strong defensive 'shell' on the frontiers of Europe with Russia. The Baltic-Black Seas defence belt, which includes Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, is becoming a critical factor in the effectiveness of the new European Security System, which is built on the 'nut' principle. On 19 January 2024, in Brussels, at NATO headquarters, a new strategy of the North Atlantic Alliance was presented, which focuses on the accession of Ukraine and strengthening the military power of NATO's Eastern flank to deter the Russian Federation and ensure European security [18].

There are at minimum two reasons that determine the composition of this security system's construction.

(1) Why Poland and Baltic? Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine has transformed the European security environment by dramatically reviving the possibility of cross-border invasion. The Baltic countries are at the forefront of this security shift [5]. Therefore, the Baltic states and Poland are taking strong measures to defend themselves. They are not separate but joint efforts to strengthen the Eastern flank of NATO and EU. This approach fully meets the requirements of the Presi-

dents of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, which they expressed in a letter to the NATO leadership: "We need solidarity and unity to counter all threats in line with the 360-degree principle" [23].

(2) Why Ukraine? The selfless struggle of the Ukrainian people against the Russian invaders confirmed that Ukraine is a key link in the Eastern belt of the new European Security System. With the unprecedented aid of the NATO and EU countries, Ukraine has managed to build significant military power and experience, which in turn helps protect the eastern flank of the EU [25]. Integrating Ukraine into NATO is also an important piece of the puzzle for the Baltic states and Poland [5]. This puzzle is necessary to build the Baltic-Black Seas defence belt as a shield of democratic and international law area.

The statement about the possibility and necessity of the Baltic-Black Seas defence belt creation can be proved by a logical sequence of arguments.

(1) The geographic argument is obvious, just look at the map. In particular, geographical conditions favor the construction of a solid defensive line from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Since 2023, Ukraine began to develop a large-scale defense line, which, according to the plan, is responsible for the failure of the Russian invasion. Similarly, the Baltic countries will build a 'defense line' on the border with Russia, and Poland – a 'wall' on the border with Belarus.

(2) The historical factor is of particular importance. Most of the territory of the Baltic-Black Sea region was once part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – a longtime opponent of Muscovy. All countries in the region suffered to one degree or another from Russian colonial policy. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine were included in the USSR until 1991, and Poland was part of the socialist camp. The historical memory of the struggle against Russian enslavers has been preserved in the ethnic archetypes and largely determines the common mentality. Although the historical contradictions between the countries of the region cannot be ignored. However, EU countries have learned to turn over the tragic pages of history for future peace and prosperity. The germ of the Baltic-Black Seas belt concept is also found in historiography. This concept can be presented as the continuation of the Intermarium concept. Intermarium is the framework of hypothetically beneficial cooperation between all actors in Central and Eastern Europe, which developed in Polish and Ukrainian academic discourses since the 19th century [15, pp. 164-165]. The concept of Intermarium began to acquire a new sense in 2014. The presence of deep historical roots of communication and cooperation as well as the tragic experience of Russian colonization and resistance to enslavement formed a similar mentality of the peoples.

(3) The project of the Baltic-Black Seas defence belt already has an organisational background.

(a) This structure can be built as a needful extension of the Baltic Security Initiative, which was established by US Congress on 29 March 2022, immediately after the start of full-scale Russian aggression, for the purpose of deepening security cooperation with the Baltic countries. This initiative provides continuing to strengthen and update the United States-Baltics security cooperation roadmap is critical to achieving strategic security priorities as the Baltic countries face ongoing belligerence and threats from the Russian Federation, including amid the Russian Federation's illegal and unprovoked war in Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022, and coordination with and security enhancements for Poland, which is a neighboring North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ally [3].

(b) The experience of The Three Seas Initiative can also be useful in the process of creating a structure for the future Baltic-Black Seas security organisation. Since 2016, the Three Seas initiative brings together 12 EU Member States between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic seas. 3SI was born out of a shared interest in developing transport, energy and digital infrastructure connections on the EU's north-south axis, which must be trusted, sustainable and inclusive thus strengthening EU cohesion and enriching transatlantic links. At the seventh summit in Riga on 20 June 2022 Ukraine received the status of a partner-participant of the TSI, de facto becoming a participant in this initiative [26]. As well as the Three Seas Initiative is a component of the EU, the Baltic-Black Seas security belt should also become a sub-Alliance component of the NATO.

(4) The establishment of the Baltic-Black Seas defence belt is carried out thanks to effective strategic communications between the nations of the Baltic-Black Seas region. Because the strategic communications are a system-forming factor of security, it needs a more detailed consideration.

Strategic Communications between the Baltic-Black Sea Region's Nations: Effects and Prospects

To build the Baltic-Black Seas defence belt strategic communications' effectiveness is determined by the following causes:

(a) The success of strategic communications between the nations of the Baltic-Black Seas Region in security sphere is predetermined by the presence of a common interest – the defence against Russian aggression and common vision of their European future.

(b) Strategic communications in the Baltic-Black Sea region are based on the democratic values of freedom, equality, solidarity, justice and the rule of law, ensuring human rights, respect for individual dignity, and lean on cultural, civilizational, historical and mental similarity.

(c) These strategic communications have a horizontal structure, because in the relations between the governments and peoples of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia and Ukraine there is

no vertical hierarchy and tradition of subordination.

(d) They stand out for saturation of the communication field because contacts are carried out not only at the official level but also at the level of civil society and the interpersonal level.

(e) Strategic communications between the nations of the Baltic-Black Seas region are carried out in the conditions of continuous attempts to influence by evil and cunning Russian propaganda. Russia has the goal of destabilizing the security situation, reducing support for NATO and the European Union and encouraging the dissemination of extreme discourses in the region [20, p. 116]. The Baltic States, Poland and Ukraine have much experience in dealing with Russian disinformation, countering misleading narratives and building societal resilience. Aleksandra Kuczynska-Zonik points out that "they use various tools in the modern information space (such as traditional and social media, marketing and branding) and seek to include strategic communication into their activities with the goal to tackle disinformation. And they agreed that a joint response to disinformation campaigns and systemic solutions are needed" [14, p. 123].

(f) The Baltic-Black Seas Region's strategic communications should not be looked at in isolation but together with developments in the whole European Security System and as a part of NATO and EU strategic communications.

(g) Their strategic purpose is to organize a cohesive and reliable protection, contraction and prevention against Russian's threats not only of their territories, but also of Europe as a whole for the long term.

(h) The relevance goal of the Baltic-Black Seas strategic communications is to provide political support and military assistance to Ukraine to defeat the aggressor and restore the territorial integrity of the state, to force Russia to peace on terms that would guarantee the impossibility of repeating aggression in the Western direction.

(i) Ukraine becomes neither a buffer nor a forum in the European Security System. It transforms into a part of European security, economic, political and cultural spaces. Ukraine's geopolitical function is to deal as a shield that protects European democratic values from the Russian invasion. So, Ukrainians are the proactive participants and initiators of strategic communications processes.

Strategic communications in the Baltic-Black Sea security belt became especially intense after the start of the war in Ukraine. The leaders of the Baltic states and Poland understand more clearly than others that assistance to Ukraine is not charity, but protection of their own security. The defeat of Ukraine would give the Russian aggressors a free hand and whet their appetites in the direction of primarily the Baltics, and also Poland. The victory of Ukraine will knock out the teeth of the Russian bear and put him in a den for a long time

to lick his wounds. The need to achieve effective cooperation in organizing a worthy rebuttal to the audacious aggressor was felt by both government officials and the population not as a fulfillment of formal obligations, but as a call of the heart. Therefore, the interpersonal communications of leaders and activists are the hallmark of Baltic-Black Seas Nations' strategic communications to build the new regional structure of defence.

Regular visits by senior government officials from Baltic states and Poland began on February 23 – the day before the full-scale Russian invasion –and are intensifying. The joint visit of the Allie's highest leaders to Kyiv took place in April 2022. From this time to the end of 2023, the President and Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland visited Ukraine 11 times, the President and Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania had done it 8 times, the highest leaders of Latvia – 5 times, and Estonian highest leaders – 3 times. Besides that taking into account the visits of Deputy Prime Ministers for Security, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ministers of Defense and other government officials, it should be noted that personal communications at a high international level take place several times a month. In general, this is an unprecedented level of interpersonal contact intensity for international strategic communications practice. The significant voyage of the President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelenskyy to the Baltic countries and his negotiation with Polish vis-à-vis in January 2024 as well subsequent visits of Polish and Baltic foreign ministers to Ukraine have demonstrated their common desire to raise interaction in the security sphere to the highest level.

At the same time, strategic communications are carried out by government officials not only at the interpersonal level. Leaders of nations conduct them also through other channels: (1) traditional media, (2) platforms of international organisations, (3) parliament rostrum, (4) communication with representatives of civil society, (5) official websites, as well as social media and online messengers. So, strategic communications in the Baltic-Black Seas region are effectively carried out in the public sphere. Media especially social media are also actively used.

These some of the most vivid examples show that the content of communications reflects the mutual understanding, feeling and purposes of interaction that determine its efficiency.

(1) On 24 August 2022, in an interview at Latvian Radio on Ukraine's Independence Day President of Latvia Egils Levits said:

Russia's war in Ukraine has completely changed the world, especially in Europe, – The world has changed completely over the last half-year – the West has recovered from the original shock, converged, and become united. The task of Latvia, NATO, Europe, and Western countries is to continue helping Ukraine to resist Russian attacks by providing military support and con-

tinuing economic and political pressure on Russia [16].

(2) On 15 May 2023, Prime Minister of Estonia Kaja Kallas at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit 2023 proclaimed wonderful words:

Ukraine's fight for its existence is also a fight for peace and dignity in Europe. But it's also about the right to exist as a country and live free from repressions. Ukraine has proved to the world it can win this war, with the transatlantic family strongly next to it. It all has reminded me of a saying by Estonia's former President Lennart Meri: "Europe is not geography. Europe is a unity of principles and loyalty to these principles. Principles shape geography – geography does not shape principles". For Ukraine's victory we need courage which means also the courage to take risks. "The secret to happiness is freedom… and the secret to freedom is courage" – as said by Thucydides and demonstrated by Ukrainians [10].

(3) On 21 November 2023, President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda on his official website addressed the people of Ukraine on the 10th anniversary of the Maidan Revolution and pointed out:

We must speak loudly and resolutely with one voice about Ukraine. This is a matter that must unite us... Russia's attack on Ukraine is an attack on all of us. We will... loudly and decisively demand the full mobilization of the free world to help Ukraine in this war [27].

(4) On 12 December 2023, during a speech in the Diet with the action program of the new Polish government, the head of the Council of Ministers of Poland Donald Tusk said:

Today, despite Russia's brutal war of aggression, Ukraine is moving ever closer to Europe. The opening of accession negotiations in December is yet another milestone. The people of Lithuania will be waiting for you. We will support you. And we will do everything to help you join the European Union and NATO [22].

(5) On 10 January 2024, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, speaking before representatives of the public of Lithuania and Ukraine in Vilnius, stated:

Now, when Moscow is trying to regain its old empire with the full range of modern weapons, our Ukrainian courage is also a help to you. Our unity with you is also a security guarantee for you. The resilience of our soldiers is also your resilience. And our Ukrainian premonition that Russia will not stand if we continue to beat it is also a confirmation of our right with you. The rights of our common historical choice – the choice to be independent. To be in Europe. To be among equals and therefore peaceful [29].

So, the statistic-quantitative and content-qualitative analyses confirm that construction of Baltic-Black Seas defence belt has a durable communication rod.

However, the effectiveness of strategic communications is measured not by the number of meetings and not even by the brightness of speeches, but by concrete results of interaction. And we can to constant that unprecedented military and humanitarian aid is the real result of strategic communication. The Baltic countries and Poland have become Ukraine's largest supporters amounting to their national GDP. As the Kiel Institute for the World Economy informs, from 24 February 2022 to 31 October 2023 government support to Ukraine by donor GDP, including refugee costs, amounted from Poland 3.1% of GDP (of which bilateral aid is 0.7%) – 1st place, from Estonia – 2.4% (bilateral aid – 1.3%) – 2nd place, from Lithuania – 2.1% (bilateral aid – 1.4%) – 3rd place, and from Latvia – 2.1% (bilateral aid – 1.1%) – 4th place. For comparison, Germany provided aid to Ukraine in the amount of 0.8% of GDP (bilateral aid – 0.5%) – 10th place, and the USA – 0.3% (all is a bilateral aid) ranking 21st place from 41 countries [11]. On January 14, 2024, the Estonian Ministry of Defense presented a plan for Ukraine to achieve victory in the war. This plan is intended for all countries participating in the Rammstein working group, and this is a kind of call to consolidate the efforts of Western countries to contribute to the victory of Ukraine [8]. Based on this document, we can conclude that, following the example of the Baltic countries and Poland in terms of aid volumes, the West will be able to defeat Russia with relatively little effort and remove the threat of aggression.

The defence shield is built by communications and finance but it consists of weapons and modern military equipment with the warriors' capability to use them effectively. The number of tanks that Poland provided to Ukraine is unmatched by any other country – a total of 324 [7]. In this aspect, the statement of the Minister of Defense of Lithuania Arvydas Anušauskas is significant from the point of view of evaluating the interaction of the Baltic countries and Poland with Ukraine:

Lithuania's contribution to the fight for Ukraine's freedom has already amounted to millions of rounds of ammunition and thousands of weapons, and the return has been valuable lessons learnt and strengthened Lithuania's defence [17].

At the beginning of 2024, the leaders of the Baltic states and Ukraine announced the creation of IT defense, drone and demining coalitions.

Both the statements and the facts confirm that the effectiveness of strategic communications between the Baltic countries, Poland and Ukraine has a two-way dimension, which guides they to further close defensive cooperation.

The indicated results convincingly testify that strategic communications in the Baltic-Black Sea region are very fruitful. However, the regularity of the strategic communications development requires a transition to the establishment of certain organisational structures to improve their efficiency. So, it is necessary to move to a new stage of strategic communications – the establishment

of an organisation of the Baltic-Black Seas Security and Cooperation Organisation (BBSSCO) with permanent panel of the Council. Military co-operation have to be a significant component of this defense belt. To increase its effectiveness, it is necessary: (a) to establish a Military Committee within the BBSSCO; (b) to form joint military units following the example of the Polish-Ukrainian brigade; (c) to conduct joint military exercises and trainings in which the Ukrainian soldiers and officers will master the NATO's standards and share combat experience with their colleagues from the Baltic countries and Poland. These steps will help to build the Baltic-Black Seas defence belt, which will be the key factors of the new European Security System's successful development.

Conclusions

The evaluation of security systems should be based on the analysis of the effectiveness of their communication and organisational components, which produce practical results of political inter-action and military co-operation to avoid, prevent and counter external threats. Born in the mid-1970s and reaching its peak in the first decade of the 21st century, the European Security System, which was based on the Helsinki principles of peaceful co-existence, appeared unable to prevent the bloodiest war in the center of Europe since II WW. Helsinki's idealistic illusions were blurred first by Russia's annexation of Crimea and pro-voking separatism in Donbas in 2014. And then the functioning of the Helsinki Security System finally collapsed in February 2022 as a result of the full-scale invasion of Putin's horde on the territory of Ukraine. The fear of the expansion of Russian aggression and the hope of saving European values thanks to the victorious resistance of the Ukrainian people became the motivators for the creation of a new European Security System. The presence of a strong shield on NATO's Eastern flank is the key factor of the reliability of such a system. This shield is being built by the Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine. They come together not only because of the common urgent need to defend against Russian hybrid and open military threats but also thanks to strong preconditions. These prerequisites are based on (1) the geographical factors of the defense belt from the Baltic to the Black Sea; (2) the presence of deep historical roots of cooperation and the tragic experience of Russian colonization, which formed a similar mentality of the peoples; (3) the organisational basis in the form of the Baltic Security Initiative and the Three Seas Initiative; (4) the unprecedented intensity of strategic communica-tion, which is focused on supporting Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invasion and in its desire to become a full member of the EU and NATO. The practical result of this communica-tion on the creation of a defense belt is presented in the highest financial aid to Ukraine in terms of GDP from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Es-tonia, as well as in powerful military-technical and material support. In turn, Ukrainian combat experience is useful for the production of a mod-ern 'army of drones' and the construction of a line of defense structures. Therefore, in the field of defense, strategic communication between the nations of the Baltic-Black Seas region is evalu-ated as highly effective. Per the regularities of the processes of establishing security systems, the in-stitutionalization of interaction in the form of the Baltic-Black Sea Organisation for Security and Cooperation as the organic eastern vanguard of NATO should become a promising next stage of the development of this defence belt.

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