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Title:	<i>THE IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON EUROPEAN SECURITY AND BORDER RELATIONS. STUDY CASE: ROMANIA-UKRAINE BORDER</i>
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**THE IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON EUROPEAN
SECURITY AND
BORDER RELATIONS.
STUDY CASE: ROMANIA-UKRAINE BORDER**

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ABSTRACT:

THIS PAPER CRITICALLY EXAMINES THE MULTIFACETED IMPLICATIONS OF RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION TOWARDS UKRAINE POST-FEBRUARY 2, 2022, ON EUROPEAN BORDER DYNAMICS. THE PAPER BRINGS TO OUR ATTENTION THE ROMANIA-UKRAINE BORDER INTERACTIONS. BEGINNING WITH A HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION, THE STUDY EXPLORES UKRAINE'S EVOLVING TIES WITH EUROPEAN ENTITIES IN LIGHT OF RUSSIA'S ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA. FOCUSING ON THE ROMANIA-UKRAINE FRONTIER, AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE EU'S EASTERN BORDER, THIS PAPER HIGHLIGHTS ITS SHIFT FROM A RESTRICTIVE BOUNDARY TO A BUSY TRADE HUB, FACILITATED BY EUROPEAN LEGISLATION AND UKRAINE'S GROWING ECONOMY. FURTHERMORE, IT ASSESSES THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ADJUSTMENT OF BORDER SECURITY MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CRISIS, PRIORITIZING HUMANITARIAN AID OVER STRICT CONTROLS. THE PAPER ALSO POINTS OUT THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETIES IN AIDING REFUGEES. IN CONCLUSION, WHILE ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES CAUSED BY RUSSIAN ACTIONS, THE PAPER IDENTIFIES A POSITIVE OUTCOME: ENHANCED COOPERATION BETWEEN ROMANIA AND UKRAINE. THE ARTICLE ADVOCATES FOR ONGOING SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN AMBITIONS AND PROMOTES INCREASED CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATIONS TO FOSTER REGIONAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY.

KEY WORDS: RUSSIA-UKRAINE AGGRESSION, BORDER DYNAMICS, EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, REFUGEE CRISIS.

INTRODUCTION

The study of borders between neighbourhood countries and the accompanying implications on the evolution of the actors involved became an intensively researched topic especially after the development of the first form of European cooperation between France and Germany. Since then, researchers of this field have adopted various methods of border

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analysis, which have different approaches depending on the researched topic. Even so, in most studies related to state borders, the geopolitical context plays a defining role in the research, this factor having a strong influence on the behaviour of the actors involved.

With the increasing globalization and interconnectedness of states, borders aren't just physical barriers but are also symbolic representations of the relationships, trust and cooperation between countries. Furthermore, the significance of a state's geopolitical strategy is highlighted when its borders with neighbouring countries become arenas of power dynamics, negotiations and, at times, confrontations. In this context, the Romania-Ukraine border serves as an important case study, especially with the recent developments in Ukraine and its effects that can be felt across the whole Europe. The evolution of this border offers a lens through which the broader European security architecture, influenced by the actions and reactions of major actors like Russia, can be analysed. The intertwining of political events, security concerns and border policies elucidates the multi-dimensional nature of border studies and showcases why it remains an ever-relevant field of research.

Considering this, it is important to analyse how the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, which began on February 2, 2022, influenced the common border between Romania and Ukraine, the cross-border cooperation and also if the conflict in Ukraine affected the Eastern border of the European Union. The aggressive actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine have not only reshaped diplomatic and political relationships but also have cast a significant spotlight on the border dynamics, prompting a scholarly attention.

To this end, the purpose of this research is to pinpoint the primary changes concerning both the common border between Romania and Ukraine and the Eastern border of the European Union. To achieve our objective, we will first examine how the Romania-Ukraine border transitioned from a 'closed border,' which separated the EU space from the non-EU space, to one accessible to all Ukrainian citizens. The paper aims to determine if this openness has the ability to be preserved even after the end of the war, therefore focusing on its sustainability. Subsequently, we will assess the effects of Ukraine's conflict on the EU's border security policy, exploring the potential ramifications that this geopolitical event may have on the Union's Eastern frontier. To conclude this article, we will highlight the measures that can be maintained and provide suggestions on measures that can be implemented in order to bring Ukraine closer to the European Union in the upcoming period.

Before researching the mentioned aspects, it is important to understand the geopolitical context before and after the February 24, 2022. To this end, we will provide a brief background on the aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine.

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION-UKRAINE CONFLICT

During the Cold War, Ukraine played a crucial role as a key component of the Soviet Union, serving as a major adversary to the United States. Ranking second in terms of population and strength among the fifteen Soviet republics, Ukraine held significant importance within the union. It housed a significant portion of the agricultural output, defence industries, and military forces, including the Black Sea Fleet and a portion of the nuclear arsenal. The decision of Ukraine to break away from the Soviet Union in 1991 dealt a fatal blow to the already weakening superpower[1]. But even so, Ukraine remains a buffer zone for the new formed Russian Federation and even Ukraine's attempts to adopt the models of Western institutions and to get closer to the West did not affect the Kremlin leaders, as long as they did not see concrete signs of Ukraine's removal from their sphere of influence.

However, the situation changed in 2007 when the official start of the negotiations on the signing of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the European Union took place. As the Ukrainian citizens began to wish a European future for their country, the Russian Federation began to intervene in the domestic affairs of the Ukrainian state, firstly by convincing former president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich to refuse to sign the association agreement – which led to Euromaidan Revolution – and later, in 2014, by triggering the invasion of the so-called ‘little green men’ who annexed Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Since these events, the relations between Russian Federation - who recognized the annexed territories of Crimea and Sevastopol as a part of its own territory - and Ukraine - who was not willing to cede the territories – were irreconcilable.

Over the subsequent years, numerous efforts were made to address the conflict, with the most significant endeavour being spearheaded by Emmanuel Macron, the President of France and Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany. This initiative, known as the ‘Minsk Peace Conference’ took the form of rounds of negotiations between the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin and the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko and resulted in the signing of two cease-fire agreements. However, despite these formal agreements, the two states were unable to respect the negotiated points and to reach a consensus.

Since 2014 up to February 2022 the conflict between these two states was described by many researchers as a frozen one with small escalation steps, but in February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation decided to launch a full-scale invasion against Ukraine, reaching almost to the outskirts of Kiev. This full-scale invasion carried out by the Russian Federation not only infringed upon Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity but also violated international law. From the outset of this military operation, the intentions of the Russian Federation to annex Ukraine in its entirety disregarding the well-being of Ukrainian citizens and pursuing Vladimir Putin’s long-term objective of establishing ‘Novorossya’ became evident.

Apart from the tragic loss of human lives, the needless aggression resulted in tangible financial and material losses. These losses directly affected Ukraine's external borders. This is especially significant given Ukraine's robust cross-border collaborations with European Union member states over the past decade, as well as the flow of Ukrainian exports through its western borders. In the subsequent discussion, our attention will be directed towards analysing the effects on the Romania-Ukraine border. This examination aims to shed light on the alterations to the prevailing situation brought about by the challenging circumstances in Ukraine.

The ramifications of the Russian Federation-Ukraine conflict extended well beyond the immediate region, reshaping the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe and prompting a global response. Nations worldwide, especially those in the European Union, found themselves compelled to navigate a delicate balance between ensuring their national security, standing firm on principles of international law and addressing the humanitarian crisis. Romania, sharing a border with Ukraine and deeply intertwined through cultural, economic, and historical ties, was inevitably pulled into the vortex of these events. As waves of displaced Ukrainians sought refuge across the border, the Romanian people displayed remarkable solidarity, reflecting their profound empathy and common historical experiences. This cross-border movement also stimulated an urgent reassessment of existing bilateral trade agreements, security protocols, and regional cooperation initiatives. While the conflict pointed out the fragility of international relations, it also showed to the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring bonds of shared history and culture.

CHANGES IN ROMANIA-UKRAINE BORDER

When discussing the shared border between Romania and Ukraine, it is important to consider two factors. Firstly, this border represents one of the Eastern boundaries of the European Union since the enlargement in 2007. As a result, at least on the Romanian side, it is subject to European legislation. Secondly, Ukraine has signed an Association Agreement with the European Union, which granted it a special status, including considerations regarding its borders with EU member states. But even considering these factors, before the war, Romania's border with Ukraine was one of the strictest borders of our country, this could not be compared with the Ukrainian border with Poland, which could be characterized as an open one.

The perception of the border between Romania and Ukraine as a closed one has a lot to do with the general perception of the peoples in both countries, which during the first years after the fall of the communist regime saw each other as enemies, not as good neighbours. This is largely due to the fact that in the 1997 when the 'Treaty on good neighbourly relations and cooperation between Romania and Ukraine' was signed, the political opposition in Romania promote a discourse in which they condemned the signed treaty and even more, having territorial claims over some regions of Ukraine[2]. Due to the strained relationship between the citizens of these two countries, their respective governments lacked the motivation to promptly enhance bilateral relations. As a result, there persisted a certain level of closure along their shared border and because of this Ukraine ranks only 19th place in the list of partner countries in international trade in goods for Romania, in the year 2021[3]. However, the issue of trade in goods between Romania and Ukraine is not a recent development, as there has been limited exchange over the past decade.

Table 1 The evolution of Romania-Ukraine trade (million USD).

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	2.227	1.709	1.894	1.439	966,9	1.223	1.452	1.610	1.735	1.521	2.031
Exports	1.130	1.073	1.286	826	345	444	546	621	691	587	707
Imports	1.097	636,1	608,2	612	622	779	906	989,4	1044	934	1324
Sold	+33,3	+437,4	+678,	+213,7	-277	-335,3	-360	-368	-353,6	-347	-617

Source: Own representation based on information collected from National Institute of Statistics, Romanian Ministry of Economy[3], Energy and Business Environment[4].

As we can see in Table 1 *The evolution of Romania-Ukraine trade*, throughout the past decade, there has been little change in the overall trade dynamics between Romania and Ukraine. However, the only notable change has been in the balance of the trade, which has shifted in favour of Ukraine since 2015.

Thus, since the Russian Invasion in Ukraine, the European Union thought of a mechanism by which to help Ukraine in the financial support of the state. Therefore, the European Union has implemented a regulation that permits temporary complete trade liberalization and the suspension of trade defence measures (similarly to trade taxes) for a period of one year. These measures came into effect on June 4, 2022 and were extended for another year in February 2023. This decisive action by the European Union serves as

substantial support for Ukraine's economy[5]. In line with its objectives, the European legislation has directly impacted the border between Romania and Ukraine, as evident from the recent data published by the National Institute of Statistics and widely reported in Romania's media. The figures reveal that in 2022, the total trade volume between Romania and Ukraine amounted to nearly 4 billion euros, imports surpassed 2.2 billion euros, while imports from Ukraine accounted for approximately 1.6 billion euros[6], and this numbers do not take into account the goods from Ukraine that only transited Romania. Thus, we can observe a first modification of the border between Romania and Ukraine, caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation, namely the opening of the common border for commercial exchange.

Fortunately, the aforementioned change in commercial exchanges has brought positive outcomes for both countries. However, the illegitimate war initiated by the Russian Federation in Ukraine has resulted in millions of Ukrainians being displaced from their homes because of the fear of the Russian army who is well known for the crimes against civilians. Some of the Ukrainian citizens have been displaced internally, particularly in western Ukraine, while others have sought refuge by crossing the borders with Romania, Poland, or the Republic of Moldova. To this end, our attention will shift towards the Ukrainian border with Romania and the impact it experienced due to the wave of refugees that commenced on February 24, 2022.

If we return to the mentioned reason because of which the border between the two states could be characterized by closure we can understand why the numbers of Ukrainians who crossed the Romanian border was low in the years before the war. Based on data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania, Ukrainian citizens accounted for approximately 16% of the overall foreign visitors who arrived in Romania during 2021[7]. The majority of these Ukrainian visitors are individuals who work in Romania, primarily in cities near the border region. They typically commute between Romania and Ukraine, returning home after their work engagements in Romania.

In addition to the mentioned factor, another noteworthy aspect to consider is the increased border securitization within the European Union. This is due to the fact that member states having encountered numerous waves of refugees over the past decade from Syria, Afghanistan or other Asian countries. Consequently, the Romania-Ukraine border can be characterized by the growing measures implemented by European legislators in response to these challenges. The implementation of these border security measures involved enhanced scrutiny of both individuals and goods at border checkpoints, alongside stricter eligibility requirements for the issuance of residence permits.

Nevertheless, the world witnessed a significant shift in border security policies on February 24, 2022, when the Ukrainian refugee crisis began. It became evident that humanitarian considerations took precedence over strict border security measures during that period[8] when Romanian citizens worked together with state institutions in order to offer better services for Ukrainian refugees. In those moments, the European Commission implemented the Directive on temporary protection, granting member states the authorization to promptly and efficiently aid individuals seeking refuge from the conflict in Ukraine[9].

Furthermore, this directive presented Romania with the chance to simplify the procedures for receiving, documenting, and granting residency permits to refugees from Ukraine. As a result, Romania successfully handled the influx of over 5.729.529 Ukrainian refugee citizens[10] fleeing the war since February 2022 until August 2023. Considering this we could also point out that Romania accepted the entry into the country of Ukrainian citizens who did not have a passport or other available documents, being an exceptional

situation compare to the pre-war period. These actions facilitated the passage of Ukrainian refugees by shortening normal waiting times at border points.

Alongside the policies enacted by public authorities, the warm reception extended by civil society in Romania played a significant role in facilitating the reception and integration of the millions of Ukrainians crossing the Romanian border. The active participation of numerous NGOs, private companies, and ordinary citizens from diverse backgrounds made valuable contributions to effective coordination and bolstered the support provided by public authorities, particularly during the initial days following the onset of the conflict in Ukraine. This period coincided with the Romanian state authorities preparing their response, yet without implementing concrete measures at that time.

The implementation of these practices at the Romanian border with Ukraine has significantly altered the perception of the shared border between the two nations. It has effectively debunked the myth of opposition and demonstrated that, in times of need, both countries are willing to extend support and assistance to one another.

This experience highlighted the importance of flexibility, cooperation, and human compassion in the face of unforeseen crises. The exceptional response from both governmental institutions and civil society in Romania reiterates the country's commitment to upholding European values, particularly the importance of human rights and the dignity of every individual. We now came to a point where it is crucial for policymakers, scholars, and the public to reflect upon these events and extract key learnings. The Ukrainian refugee crisis was a reminder that, beyond political and territorial differences and delimitations, it is the shared human bond that remains the force in fostering cross-border cooperation. This unprecedented collaboration between the Romanian state and its citizens sets an example for other nations on how to address humanitarian crises with both efficiency and empathy.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 15 months, we have witnessed the outbreak of the largest war in Europe after more than 70 years of peace, highlighting how a conflict in one region of the European continent can have far-reaching consequences for all countries whether they are directly part of the conflict or not. Particularly, the aggression initiated by Russia against Ukraine, a formerly peaceful country, has not only affected - in a positive way - the border policies between Ukraine and its neighbouring nations but has also impacted the relationship between Ukraine and the European Union, bringing the two international actors closer than ever.

When we talk about the transformations that occurred at the Romanian border with Ukraine, we can say that they definitely change the way in which Romanian citizens looked to the Ukrainians and vice-versa before the war. Through the widespread mobilization of Romanian civil society at the border to assist refugees fleeing from Ukraine, Romanians demonstrated their willingness to help even a nation that was relatively unfamiliar in Romanian culture and news. This profound shift in perceptions will persist as an enduring truth, significantly enhancing relations between the two countries at both social and political levels. It is important to note that the will of the citizens holds implications for political decisions, further strengthening the potential for positive change in bilateral relations.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the mobilization of Romanian citizens and authorities would not have obtained the desired outcomes without the backing of the European Union. This support encompassed both moral assistances, exemplified by European leaders visiting the border points between Romania and Ukraine, as well as substantial financial aid from the European Commission. Additionally, legislative changes facilitated the "opening" of the

Eastern border of the European Union, thereby easing the responsibilities of local authorities and facilitating the entry of Ukrainian citizens into Romania.

Moreover, the legislative changes in the border security policies implemented by the European Commission made some improvements also in the Ukrainian legislation given the fact that Ukraine needed to adapt its legislation in order to make the passage of Ukrainian citizens in the European Union member states easier. Hence, it can be concluded that Ukraine took a significant stride towards the necessary legislative reforms required to align with the *Acquis Communautaire*, a prerequisite for EU membership candidacy. The whole process of opening the shared borders with Romania and Poland, along with the accompanying legislative changes, represents a significant step forward for Ukraine in its pursuit of the long-term goal of becoming an EU member state. However, becoming an EU member state requires efforts not only from Ukraine but also from the European Union itself. If the EU truly intends to expand eastward after the war, it must maintain Ukraine's special status, ensuring free trade of goods, services, and the free movement of citizens. The only problem is that if doing so, the EU member states will need to address concerns from other candidate states that have been waiting for membership status for an extended period and have not yet received similar concessions.

Another option for further cooperation between the European Union and Ukraine in the new perspective of its external borders can be the implementation of a policy of deepening cross-border cooperation with all the candidate states by creating an in-depth free trade zone, with more benefits than those obtained by signing the Association Agreement. This policy will improve the economies of the EU member states and also of the states involved and will attract, according to the model of the creation of the European Community, through a process of 'spill over' other fields, creating a complete integration over time.

In the end, we can conclude that the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine had direct repercussions on Ukraine's western border. However, these effects, while initially negative, ultimately had positive outcomes as they brought Ukraine closer to the European Union and its neighbouring states. This has played a significant role in fostering the European integration of Ukraine and in the intensification of cross-border cooperation with Romania.

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