POLAND'S RESPONSE TO THE MIGRATION CRISIS ON THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER IN THE LIGHT OF EUROPEAN UNION LAW*

REAKCJA POLSKI NA KRYZYS MIGRACYJNY NA POGRANICZU POLSKO-BIAŁORUSKIM W ŚWIETLE PRAWA UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ

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—— **ABSTRACT** ——

While the crises of 2015 and 2022, albeit with different burdens and responsibilities, were pan-European, the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Lithuanian borders can be considered as a regional crisis in which the countries directly affected are involved. For this reason, this crisis is the least studied and recognized outside the country. The aim of the article is to present the genesis, course, and consequences of the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in the context of European law. The Polish government has challenged the basic regulations regarding the right to apply for international protection, citing issues of national security protection, as well as using a sovereign narrative. The research hypothesis assumes that the previously Europeanised migration and asylum policy has been nationalised in Poland in connection with the actions of the

—— **ABSTRAKT** ——

O ile kryzysy z lat 2015 i 2022 – każdy z nich obarczony innym brzemieniem obowiązków i odpowiedzialności – miały charakter ogólno-europejski, o tyle kryzys na pograniczu polsko--białoruskim i polsko-litewskim można uznać za kryzys regionalny, w który zaangażowane są kraje bezpośrednio nim dotknięte. Z tego powodu kryzys ten jest najmniej zbadany i roz-poznany poza granicami kraju. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie genezy, przebiegu i skutków kryzysu na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim w kontekście prawa europejskiego. Polski rząd zakwestionował podstawowe regulacje dotyczące prawa do ubiegania się o udzielenie ochrony mię-dzynarodowej, powołując się na kwestie ochrony bezpieczeństwa narodowego, a także posługując się suwerenistyczną narracją. Hipoteza badawcza zakłada, że zeuropeizowana wcześniej polityka

Polish authorities in response to the crisis. The analysis will be conducted through the prism of the theory of Europeanization, using elements of securitization theory.

migracyjna i azylowa została w Polsce znacjonalizowana w związku z działaniami polskich władz w odpowiedzi na kryzys. Analiza zostanie przeprowadzona przez pryzmat teorii europeizacji, z wykorzystaniem elementów teorii sekurytyzacji.

Keywords: migration crisis; Polish-Belarusian border; Europeanisation; securitization

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys migracyjny; granica polsko-białoruska; europeizacja; sekurytyzacja

INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring and the civil war in Syria have triggered the biggest migration crisis in the history of the European Union (EU). However, not all Member States have been equally affected. The greatest burden of managing the wave of migration fell to the frontline countries in the Mediterranean, including Italy and Greece, and to a lesser extent also Spain. At the height of the crisis in 2015, the EU decided to implement a relocation mechanism. This decision was protested by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Visegrád Group countries. Poland initially agreed to accept a quota of refugees, but after a few weeks it reconsidered this decision. This was related to the change of government in Poland. In 2015, the presidential election was won by the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) candidate Andrzej Duda, followed by parliamentary elections which were won by the populist right with PiS as the main party. Since then, the migration crisis has been presented in public and political discourse as a threat to cultural identity and economic security. Polish government believed that the wave of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East was not a Polish problem, and Poland would not comply with the solidarity clause under Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). This period can be described as the phase of denial of the migration crisis. The second phase of the migration crisis for Poland began in 2021 due to the actions of Alexander Lukashenko's regime in Belarus, supported by Russia, which brought thousands of migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries, promising them transfer to the EU. A new migration crisis erupted on the Polish-Belarusian border. This time, Poland did not want to apply the solidarity clause, and took independent action against migrants thus violating a number of norms of international law. The third wave came sooner than expected. Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, launched on

February 24, 2022, resulted in a wave of millions of refugees. This time Poland accepted Ukrainians fleeing the war without restrictions or preconditions and began to manage the crisis in accordance with EU and international law. The three phases of the migration crisis indicated above, which Poland has faced in recent years, show three distinct approaches. While the crises of 2015 and 2022, albeit with different burdens and responsibilities, were pan-European, the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Lithuanian borders can be considered as a regional crisis in which the countries directly affected are involved. For this reason, this crisis is the least studied and recognized outside the country. The aim of the article is to present the genesis, course and consequences of the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in the context of European law. The Polish government has challenged the basic regulations regarding the right to apply for international protection, citing issues of national security protection, as well as using a sovereign narrative[1]. The article will seek answers to the following research questions: Q1: How is the system of migration and asylum law structured in the European Union and what are the correlations between the EU and the national systems?; Q2: What was the background and course of the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border?; What was the reaction of the Polish authorities to the crisis? The research hypothesis assumes that the previously Europeanised migration and asylum policy has been nationalised in Poland in connection with the actions of the Polish authorities in response to the crisis. The analysis will be conducted through the prism of the theory of Europeanization, using elements of securitization theory. By introducing an element of argumentative balance, this procedure will allow for a reliable examination of the hypothesis. The article is based on qualitative methods, primarily content analysis, as well as institutional, legal, and systemic methods. The structure of the article is as follows. At the beginning, a theoretical framework will be presented, indicating the elements of the theory of Europeanization and securitization used. The second part will discuss the general assumptions of the Polish and European migration and asylum policy with particular emphasis on the components of the Common

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[1] Sovereignism is a relatively new concept in political science although its source, i.e., the concept of sovereignty, has been known for centuries and has been comprehensively analysed in literature. Sovereignism is treated as a modern version of nationalism where state interests, including security, are put first. During the crisis caused by the Arab Spring, parties (old and new) became visible throughout Europe, which questioned the solutions proposed by the EU and called for the exercise of full competences in the field of migration policy to be restored to the national level (Molnár & Szente-Varga, 2019).

European Asylum System (CEAS). The next part will present the causes and course of the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border as well as the reaction and actions of the Polish authorities. The summary will include conclusions based on the analysis, and the hypothesis will be assessed.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Like every EU Member State, Poland is obliged to comply with EU law, both primary and secondary. Moreover, all countries that request accession to the Union commit, during the preparation and negotiation phase, to adopting the entire acquis developed by the organization over the decades of its operation. In this way, a process that can be described as the EU-ization of a given country takes place, i.e., legal Europeanization resulting in the adoption of the same standards and procedures for the implementation and management of the individual Community policies (Flockhart, 2010). A concept broader than EU-ization is Europeanization treated as a cultural and identity phenomenon referring to common values emerging from the foundations of the European civilization, which include the system of Judeo-Christian culture and the principles of Roman law. It is worth pointing out that Europeanization understood in this way has no geographical borders and is not limited only to the EU, but can be disseminated to other regions using various instruments, while EU-ization generally refers to EU Member States or those that aspire to membership and have started the adjustment process related to the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* to their legal system. When studying socio-political phenomena, it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between the phenomena presented above. In the case of the issue analysed in the article, it is worth combining both categories of Europeanization. The definition of Europeanization has been presented by Robert Ladrech, who believes that "Europeanization is an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making" (Ladrech, 1994). Further, "Europeanization is […] understood as the change within a member state whose motivating logic is tied to an EU policy or decision-making process. The prime concern of any Europeanization research agenda is therefore establishing the causal link, thereby validating the impact of the EU on domestic change" (Ladrech, 2010). Theoretical considerations can be enriched with James Caporaso's concept according to

which Europeanization implies change, both at the national and the European level, so that top-down or bottom-up Europeanization may take place (Caporaso, 2008). From the set of concepts defining Europeanization presented above, there emerges a picture of a multi-level and multifaceted phenomenon where the common denominator is a close relation between what is European and what is national. The main vector of change is directed from top to bottom, i.e., it is the states that implement and socialize European norms and values, but in special cases the opposite process may take place – the adaptation at the European level of certain rules developed at the national level.

The crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border is also a matter of state security. The question of the scale of the threat remains open. However, when analysing this problem, reference should be made to the theory of securitization. The term itself appeared in the 1990ˢ and was primarily associated with the new balance of power in the post-Cold War international order and new security threats resulting from non-military processes of globalization. This theory draws attention to the intersubjective nature of security where certain issues are presented as threatening the existence of the state or its essence, and therefore political decision-makers have the legitimacy to use all means to counter the threat. The pioneer of the study of security and securitization, Ole Wæver (1995), defines it as a speech act. This means that a threat is something that will be recognized as such and presented as such. The power to consider a threat is vested in political decision-makers – securitizing actors, who additionally define the referent object, which may be, e.g., political or economic sovereignty, or issues related to cultural identity. The next step is to indicate who threatens the previously specified referent object. This cycle is complemented by defining those that the narrative formulated by the decision-makers is intended for. Their audience can be both internal and external entities. However, as securitization is usually used for internal purposes, it will most often be addressed to society as a whole or to specific segments thereof. In addition, securitization is located in a broader context, which may be internal or external. Internally, it will most often be associated with the current political struggle, which is why the greatest intensity of this type of narrative is observed during election campaigns. The external context is usually subsidiary and serves to reinforce the internal message. If a securitization narrative is received and accepted by the target audience, this gives decision-makers the right to take specific actions. However, importantly, a negative or neutral perception of the narrative does not preclude taking action and abandoning the narrative. This is an interesting case because in such a situ-

ation the actions themselves are aimed at authenticating the narrative and over time may convince the target audience of the reality of the threat. Intersubjectivity in defining threats and their scale causes that the state security sector begins to be treated instrumentally. Securitization as an instrument of policy is eagerly used by right-wing parties with a nationalist-populist face. One can even speak of a very close correlation between securitization and sovereignism where both phenomena not only complement each other, but also constitute a driving force to each other.

INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE EU MIGRATION AND ASYLUM POLICY

The situation taking place on the Polish-Belarusian border (since 2021) poses a number of terminological challenges. The first question is whether it is legitimate, due to the scale of the phenomenon, to use the term 'crisis', which, according to dictionary definitions, is "a situation in which a conflict becomes so serious that it threatens to break out into a war, change of the government or another radical solution, [or – A.N.] to shake some system of values or position of something" (*Kryzys*, n.d.). Events on the border do not have such a character or scale, but colloquially they are referred to as a crisis, often with additional terms, e.g., an adjective, as a humanitarian crisis – such definitions are used by non-governmental organizations providing assistance to people who want to get to the Polish side (*Sytuacja na granicy polsko-białoruskiej…*, 2022), or as a security crisis – this terminology is most often used by the authorities.

However, it is much more important to correctly define and demarcate the terms 'migration policy' and 'asylum policy', which are deliberately used together in the article. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gives a simplified, but very illustrative definition: "[…] people entering Europe illegally do so for a number of reasons. In some cases, these are economic migrants trying to escape poverty and unemployment. In some others, they flee persecution, human rights violations or armed conflicts. Very often, illegal entry into the territory of a state is their only way of escape. Refugees and migrants often travel together using the same route and mode of transport. However, their situation with regard to the need for protection is very different: migrants have chosen to change their place of residence, while refugees have had to do so" (*Azyl i migracja w UE*, 2023). It is precisely this issue, i.e., the distinction

between a 'refugee' and a 'migrant', and the related issue of the application of asylum or migration policy regulations that has become one of the main points of contention in the assessment of the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Work on the establishment of the CEAS began at the meeting of the European Council in Tampere in October 1999 during the Finnish Presidency (*Tampere European Council 15 and 16 October 1999*). The CEAS should be seen more as a process than a single decision that would result in the establishment of an institution responsible for the implementation of asylum policy in the EU. Bearing in mind the specificity of asylum policy, EU leaders decided to divide the work on the system into stages so that adjustments and modifications can be made if necessary. The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 created the legal framework for the further development of the CEAS. Asylum policy is governed by Article 78 TFEU which states as follows: "1. The Union shall develop a common policy on asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection with a view to offering appropriate status to any third-country national requiring international protection and ensuring compliance with the principle of non-refoulement. This policy must be in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 and the Protocol of 31 January 1967 relating to the status of refugees, and other relevant treaties" (*The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, 2012). Importantly, paragraph 2 of that article clarifies that the European Parliament and the Council shall adopt measures for a common European asylum system, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure. This paragraph sets out the components of the CEAS, which are: firstly, a uniform status of asylum for nationals of third countries, valid throughout the Union; secondly, a uniform status of subsidiary protection for nationals of third countries who did not obtain European asylum; thirdly, a common system of temporary protection for displaced persons in the event of a mass inflow; fourthly, common procedures for the granting and withdrawing of uniform asylum or subsidiary protection status; fifthly, the criteria and mechanisms for determining which Member State is responsible for considering an application for asylum or subsidiary protection; sixthly, standards concerning the conditions for the reception of applicants for asylum or subsidiary protection; seventhly, partnership and cooperation with third countries for the purpose of managing inflows of people applying for asylum or subsidiary or temporary protection (*The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, 2012).

The first years (2011–2014) of the migration crisis caused by the Arab Spring made it necessary to revise some of the existing legal and institutional solutions

within the CEAS. On June 26, 2013, the Regulation establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person, commonly referred to as the Dublin III Regulation, was adopted, replacing the 2003 (Dublin II) Regulation. The Regulation created new tools for the early detection of problems in national asylum and reception systems. It was also intended to contribute to a more efficient removal of the causes of these problems and thus prevent crisis situations. The management of the EU's external borders was also strengthened through the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard, part of which is the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the former European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex). Following the peak of the migration crisis in 2015, the European Commission proposed further actions aimed at more effective management of migration and asylum policy, also in the context of cooperation between Member States in line with the principle of solidarity expressed in the Treaties. However, due to the growing dispute over this issue, the Commission's plans in this area have not been fully implemented to date (Nitszke, 2019). The political debate on the reform of the CEAS, which would strengthen the protection of EU security on the one hand and meet international standards for the protection of applicants for international protection on the other, is ongoing. In June 2023, a common position was agreed on two regulations, i.e., on the asylum procedure and on the management of asylum and migration (*Polityka migracyjna…*, 2023). Both documents are intended to improve migration management at the external borders, e.g., by establishing mandatory border procedures to assess whether a request is unfounded or inadmissible. However, the biggest controversy was caused by the proposed solidarity mechanism, one of the components of which would be a system of relocation or financial contributions (*Polityka migracyjna…*, 2023). The only countries that protested against these solutions were Poland and Hungary. Both countries invoke the sovereign right to decide whether or not to admit third-country nationals to their territory (Liboreiro, 2023). The arguments presented by the heads of government of both countries fully fit into the sovereignist narrative.

CRISIS ON THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER

The crisis that began in 2021 on the Polish-Belarusian border differed from the previous one with regard to the direction from which migrants came to Europe and the place where they crossed the European border. Although the Eastern European migration route had already been singled out, the number of people crossing the border from this direction was never a challenge for the Union and did not require any specific measures. Poland is responsible for securing the eastern section of the external land border of the European Union with a total length of over 1,163 km (Waściński, 2021)[2]. In 2021, the attention of the Polish authorities, and then national and international public opinion, was drawn to the section of the border between Poland and Belarus. There is no doubt that the crisis, which first affected Lithuania and Latvia, and then Poland, was provoked by the Belarusian authorities, most likely in agreement and with the help of the authorities and services of the Russian Federation. The Belarusian authorities had been preparing for operations on the border for several months. In spring 2021, penalties for staying in the border area were abolished (Dyner, 2022), and already in May the first crossings of the border with Lithuania by migrants took place. Relations between the EU and Belarus had been tense for years and became extremely difficult after the fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus in 2020[3]. One of the most important elements in the management of the crisis that ensued was the suspension in October 2021 by the Lukashenko regime of the readmission agreement with the EU (*Łukaszenka ostatecznie zawiesił umowę o readmisji z Unią Europejską*, 2021) signed on January 8, 2020. In this way, Belarus could start the decisive phase of the prepared operation without the risk of having to take back from EU territory and readmit the migrants that it had brought from Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria. Already in July, the Polish Border Guard began to observe the first attempts by migrants from the Middle East to illegally cross the border from the territory of Belarus. This activity significantly increased in August when there were already over 3,000 such attempts[4]. The Polish authorities

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[2] Length of the border with the Russian Federation (Königsberg Oblast): 209.83 km, with Belarus: 418.24 km; with Ukraine: 535.18 km.

[3] Following fraudulent elections and a wave of violence against protesters by the Belarusian authorities, the EU imposed sanctions on top representatives of the regime, recognising that the elections were neither free nor fair (*EU Relations with Belarus*, 2022).

[4] The migrants were brought in by travel agencies linked to the Belarusian authorities, which operated in Arab countries, promising transfers to potentially interested parties to the EU. After ar-

took steps to strengthen border security. Anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic sentiments were also revived. Probably for this reason, the government decided to act alone without asking for direct support from the EU. On September 2, 2021, the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, at the request of the Council of Ministers, decided to declare a state of emergency for a period of 30 days, in a territory that covered 183 towns in a three-kilometre strip near the border with Belarus. This meant significant restrictions in this area, such as a ban on the presence of outsiders, including representatives of the media or non-governmental organizations that operated in this territory providing humanitarian aid to those migrants who managed to get to the Polish side, as well as limiting access to public information in connection with the activities of the services at the border (_Bezpieczeństwo Polski na pierwszym miejscu…_, 2021). The state of emergency was extended for another 60 days. After this period, pursuant to the Polish constitution, it was not possible to continue the state of emergency, so another solution was used with the same effect. The Act on the Protection of the State Border was amended, which made it possible to maintain restrictions in the border zone (_Ustawa z dnia 17 listopada 2021 r._; Sobczak, 2022). This decision allowed the government to control the flow of information, but residents of the border area and volunteers operating there illegally informed the public about the events at the border. It turned out that the Border Guard, assisted by the police and the army, carried out pushbacks contrary to EU law, i.e., forcibly sent migrants back to Belarus without the possibility of submitting an application for international protection in Poland. Based on the data contained in the report of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, this led to 16 confirmed cases of loss of life by people trying to cross the border (on the Polish side) and probably a much higher number of victims on the Belarusian side (as of August 2022; Czarnota & Górczyńska, 2022). There were also 187 reports of disappearances while trying to cross the border. Official data of the Border Guard speak of 40,000 people turned away from the border, although this number may be lower because many people were turned away repeatedly during subsequent attempts to cross the border (Czarnota & Górczyńska, 2022). The way the crisis is managed at the border has aroused controversy not only for the reasons described above, but

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riving in Belarus, those people were accommodated in hotels and then transported to the border with Lithuania, Latvia, or Poland where Belarusian services encouraged and in other cases forced migrants to cross the border. Migrants were charged a fee that ranged from a few to several thousand dollars per person. Most of this money went to the budget of the Belarusian state.

also because the Polish side refused to cooperate internationally despite the fact that the case concerns the EU's external border. Poland refused to accept support from the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), even though the agency is based in Warsaw. This was in a way a consequence of the government's actions and decisions from the previous crisis when the Polish authorities did not want to comply with the principle of solidarity arguing then that each country should bear the consequences of its actions and be responsible for security in its territory. In addition, the involvement of Frontex would prevent the use of pushbacks and the need to apply the procedures set out in the Dublin III Regulation obliging the reception and processing of asylum applications by the first contact country, in this case Poland. The issue of the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border has been raised several times in EU institutions. In the conclusions of the European Council meeting of June 24–25, 2021, it was indicated, although very enigmatically at the time, that the Council opposed the instrumental exploitation of migrants (*Posiedzenie Rady Europejskiej 24–25 czerwca 2021 r.*, item 3), but this was a reference to the actions taken by the Lukashenko regime together with the Russian Federation aimed at destabilizing the situation in the EU. This was an element of the Operation 'Lock' which Belarus had been preparing for years, and which was supposed to force EU countries to make concessions to the Lukashenko regime[5]. In the following months of 2021, the EU institutions expressed solidarity with the countries affected by the crisis and at the same time condemned the actions of Belarus. As part of the EU's efforts, an agreement was reached with Iraq, which halted flights from Baghdad to Minsk. In November, the EU provided €700,000 in financial support to address the humanitarian crisis at the border. The International Red Cross and the International Red Crescent received assistance. As part of preventive measures, on October 29, 2021, Poland adopted the Act on the construction of state border security (*Ustawa z dnia 29 października 2021 r.*)[6]. When assessing the behaviour of the Polish government in managing the situation on the border with Belarus, two

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[5]   In the initial phase of the crisis, Belarus was counting on the 'Turkish variant', i.e., an agreement with the EU modelled on Turkey. Lukashenka expected an easing of sanctions imposed on Belarus as well as financial gratification in exchange for stopping bringing migrants to the EU border.

[6]   The decision to build a fence on the Polish-Belarusian border caused a number of controversies. Non-governmental organizations dealing with humanitarian aid protested, pointing to the threat to life and health of people who may try to force their way through the fence, as well as organizations dealing with environmental protection. The fence runs through one of the most environmentally valuable areas in Europe, the last relic of the primary forest – the Białowieża Forest, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

issues should be distinguished: the humanitarian aspect and compliance with EU law, and international policy related to the context of provocative Belarusian-Russian actions. For this reason, in the part of the analyses devoted to this topic, it is suggested that the term 'hybrid attack' be used instead of 'migration crisis'. It seems that the first of these terms is not entirely appropriate. Humanitarian reasons speak against it because it is difficult to call people seeking security a 'hybrid attack' (Fraszka, 2021), even if they are instrumentally used by authoritarian governments. On the other hand, when using the term 'crisis', it should be made clear that it is about the uniqueness of the situation, and not necessarily its scale. The reaction of the Polish authorities to the events on the border with Belarus is a manifestation of a political agenda in which the sovereignty and security of its own citizens are at the centre, including responsibility for securing the border. The Polish government wants to prove that only taking a tough line on migrants can be effective regardless of EU law and international obligations to help refugees.

SUMMARY

The research hypothesis assumed that in connection with the actions of the Polish authorities in response to the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, the previously Europeanized migration and asylum policy was nationalized in Poland. As described, since the late 1990s, the EU has been taking action to create a common framework for migration and asylum policy as well as some related policies, primarily on border protection and visas. As part of this process, the pillars of this system have been created, with the Dublin III Regulation at the forefront. Moreover, since the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), these policies have been Community-specific, which means, e.g., that legal acts governing these matters are adopted by the Council by qualified majority. This has a significant impact on the level of EU-ization of these policies, setting common standards, rules and procedures that apply to all countries even if one of them voted against. This is an element of building the identity of Europeanization based on a community of values on the basis of the EU-ization. The CEAS, which was created in this way, is not free from flaws, as shown by the peak of the migration crisis in 2015. An analysis of weaknesses allowed the European Commission to develop a plan to reform this system, which the EU institutions have been implementing since 2016, seeking ways to reconcile European security and the humane treat-

ment of asylum seekers as required by international law. Poland was not directly affected by the effects of the 2015 crisis, mainly due to its geographical location, and yet it marked the beginning of the nationalization of this policy. This was due to the inclusion of this issue in the current political agenda during the ongoing election campaigns. The Europeanized policy was replaced with a sovereignist narrative indicating migrants as an existential threat to the state and society. In the following years, this narrative was strengthened, and the response to the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border was its practical application. The measures taken, including the construction of a border wall, were inadequate to the scale of the threat, but were in line with the adopted securitization model.

After the outbreak of a full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022, the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border ceased to absorb the attention of political decision-makers and public opinion, which does not mean that the crisis itself has been resolved. The wave of refugees from Ukraine meant that the Polish authorities had to adopt a new narrative, in which there was a division into 'real refugees', i.e., those from Ukraine, and 'illegal migrants', i.e., those who wanted to enter the Polish territory through the border with Belarus. At the same time, the origin of the migrants and the resulting cultural differences were clearly indicated. Migrants from the Middle East, Africa, or Afghanistan continue to be portrayed as a threat – culturally, as well as socially and economically, while Ukrainians are treated as 'guests' whom we support in the face of unjustified Russian aggression.

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