

The Podkarpackie Voivodeship and the war in Ukraine – internal security challenges in the border region

Dominik Boratyn¹, Mikołaj Sadlej¹ and Mariusz Kuliński²

¹University of Rzeszów,
Poland

²Bielsko-Biala University of Applied Sciences
Poland

Abstract— The aim of this article is to present the new challenges and threats faced by public administration and internal security services in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship following the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022. It analyzes both cross-border and criminal threats, as well as the social tensions associated with the mass migration of refugees. The article discusses the actions of the police and public administration in ensuring public order, humanitarian support, and the integration of arriving refugees. It also highlights the importance of coordinating the activities of various institutions to maintain the safety of the region's residents and the adaptation of refugees. The lessons learned from the analyzed cases can provide a basis for improving regional and national security procedures in crisis situations.

Keywords— internal security, Podkarpackie Voivodeship, public administration, cross-border threats, critical infrastructure, war in Ukraine

I. INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, led to one of the most significant changes to the security environment in Europe since the end of the Cold War. This conflict has had consequences not only military and geopolitical, but also social, economic, and institutional, with particularly acute impacts on countries bordering Ukraine. As a key transit, logistics, and reception state, Poland has found itself at the center of processes related to the influx of war refugees, the reorganization of supply chains, the protection of critical infrastructure, and the rise of hybrid threats.

The Podkarpackie Voivodeship gained particular importance in this context. Due to its geographical location, it became a

strategic area at the intersection of national, regional, and international security. This region served as a major humanitarian, transport, and logistical corridor, while simultaneously remaining a space of heightened migratory, operational, and informational pressure. Consequently, local public administration structures and services responsible for public order were forced to quickly adapt to the crisis.

To date, research on regional security has focused mainly on the international dimension of war, migration policy, and military security (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde, 1998; Buzan, Wæver, 2003; Ciekankowski, Brązkiewicz, Nowicka, 2022; Trojanowska, 2023; Klin, 2024; Miszczuk, 2025). The impact of armed conflict on the internal security of border regions and the ability of local institutions to respond to emergency situations have been analyzed relatively less frequently, while local security issues and the efficiency of local government administration in the "shock of war" are still areas that require fresh empirical analyses.

The aim of the article is to analyze the impact of the war in Ukraine on the internal security of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, with particular emphasis on cross-border threats, migration pressure, protection of critical infrastructure and actions taken by public administration and security services.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

This article focuses on determining how the full-scale war in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, impacted the threat structure and functioning of the internal security system in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship as a border region. Of



particular importance is the analysis of changes occurring at the regional level, where the effects of the armed conflict were directly manifested through migration pressure, the increased importance of critical infrastructure, the need to reorganize public administration activities, and the increased burden on services responsible for maintaining public order. Due to its geographical location, the Podkarpackie Voivodeship has become an area of particular concentration of processes related to state security, making it a valuable case study for research on the resilience of regional security systems.

In connection with the above, the following research questions were formulated: what new threats to the internal security of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship emerged after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, how the conflict affected the functioning of public administration and security services, whether the regional security system demonstrated the ability to adapt to crisis conditions, and what experiences of the region can be used in future crisis planning.

The main hypothesis of the article is that the war in Ukraine led to a lasting transformation of the internal security system of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship through the increased importance of border, logistical, humanitarian, and security functions, while simultaneously revealing the high adaptability of regional institutions. It is also assumed that the scale and dynamics of crisis events accelerated the process of interinstitutional cooperation and increased the importance of the regional security dimension in the state's security structure.

This article uses a qualitative approach, typical of research conducted in the field of social sciences. The basic research method was case analysis (case study), covering the Podkarpackie Voivodeship as a border region particularly vulnerable to the direct consequences of the war in Ukraine. The choice of this case is justified by the voivodeship's strategic location on the Polish-Ukrainian border, its transit and logistics role, and its importance in the state security system.

The research process utilized document analysis and critical analysis of secondary sources. The study included legal acts, government and local government documents, public safety announcements, institutional reports, statistical data, and domestic academic literature addressing regional security, crisis management, and the effects of the war in Ukraine.

The research period covers 2022–2025, with particular emphasis on the first phase of the war, when migration flows were at their peak and the region's security environment saw the most dramatic changes. The research scope includes cross-border threats, migration pressures, the functioning of public order services, public administration activities, and the protection of critical infrastructure.

The aim of the methodology used was not only to describe the observed phenomena, but also to identify the adaptation mechanisms of the regional security system and to assess the ability of public institutions to respond in conditions of a dynamic crisis.

III. CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO THE INTERNAL SECURITY OF THE PODKARPACKIE VOIVODESHIP

The Podkarpackie Voivodeship, due to its location on the eastern border of the country, was particularly affected by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which resulted in the emergence of new and intensified challenges and threats to internal security. Among the most significant were the smuggling of weapons, explosives, and drugs, as well as the circulation of counterfeit currency and the use of forged documents. Illegal border crossings outside designated border crossings and the possibility of increased criminal activity in border regions also remained a potential threat (Zalewski, 2022).

The mass influx of refugees risked increasing social tensions and the emergence of xenophobic attitudes among football fans and nationalist groups. These phenomena could be accompanied by hate speech and discriminatory incidents, posing a potential threat to the region's social stability. In such circumstances, it was crucial to monitor the social situation and prevent potential conflicts that could undermine public order and the safety of residents (Skiba, 2024).

In the context of public security, threats related to the possibility of terrorist attacks in places with large population centers were also significant (see European Union Terrorism, 2022), as well as crimes such as kidnapping and human trafficking (Gębska, 2022). The logistical situation also required special attention, which, due to the increased intensity of passenger transport and humanitarian aid, became extraordinary in nature (Boratyn et al., 2024).

Along with the mass migration of Ukrainian citizens to Poland, there was also a noticeable increase in the number of crimes involving them, and it should be emphasized that these individuals acted both as perpetrators and victims (Delong, Kiszka, Zalewski, Chowaniec, 2025). This phenomenon resulted largely from difficult adaptation conditions, language barriers, and susceptibility to exploitation by organized crime groups.

The threats required a coordinated and adequate response from services and institutions to ensure the safety of residents and maintain public order in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship.

IV. SITUATION AT BORDER CROSSINGS

In the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, which shares a 239-kilometer border with Ukraine, at the outbreak of the war there were four road crossings: Medyka–Szeginie, Korczowa–Krakowiec, Budomierz–Hruszów, and Krościenko–Smolnica, as well as one railway crossing: Przemyśl–Mościska. From the first days of the conflict, these crossings were intensively used by refugees fleeing the war.

During the first week of the war, over a million people fled Ukraine, fleeing the aggression of the Russian Federation. Most sought refuge and assistance in neighboring countries, and due to its proximity, a significant portion of this group used border crossings in the Subcarpathian region, underscoring the region's

strategic importance as a major transit point (Zalewski, 2022). Poland served as both a destination and transit country at the time, offering refugees humanitarian support, shelter, and access to basic services.

The situation at the border posed a significant organizational and logistical challenge. One of the key measures was to simplify border crossing procedures as much as possible, which in practice meant completely opening the border to people leaving Ukraine. Already on the second day of the war, the Polish government decided to allow refugees to enter Poland without the need for identification documents. Furthermore, these individuals were exempted from quarantine requirements related to the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly accelerating the refugee admission process (Żołędowski, 2025).

Widely open borders, while necessary for humanitarian reasons, also created opportunities for criminals and organized crime groups to exploit the chaos and plight of those fleeing war. In this situation, border guards were forced to simultaneously ensure border security and coordinate humanitarian aid, monitoring refugee flows and responding to any attempted abuses.

V. THE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN ENSURING PUBLIC SAFETY AND ORDER

The Russian aggression against Ukraine and its direct consequences for the Podkarpackie Voivodeship have significantly increased the role of the Police as the primary force responsible for protecting internal security. Under normal circumstances, the Police's duties focus on maintaining public order, preventing crime, responding to violations of the law, and protecting the lives and health of citizens (Journal of Laws 2025.0.636). However, after February 24, 2022, the scope of these responsibilities was significantly expanded. Officers were required to simultaneously perform existing statutory duties and respond to an extraordinary situation resulting from the mass influx of civilians, the region's growing importance in the country's transportation system, and the emergence of new cross-border threats.

The scale of the challenges was unprecedented. According to Border Guard data, in the first months of the war, millions of people fleeing armed conflict crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border, with a significant portion of this movement concentrated at border crossings located in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship (Granary Guard..., 2022). Such a massive influx of people necessitated the simultaneous assurance of security at border crossings, reception points, train stations, temporary accommodation areas, and on the main communication routes leading into the country. The police therefore had to carry out their statutory duties under significantly increased organizational and operational burdens.

On the day the war broke out, on February 24, 2022, in order to protect the life, health and property of the inhabitants of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, as well as to ensure more efficient organization and coordination of the activities of Police units in its territory, in the face of the sudden influx of foreigners from

the eastern border, the Provincial Police Commander in Rzeszów issued a decision to launch a police operation codenamed "BORDER" and to appoint the Operation Commander's Staff, which undertook operations on a continuous basis (24 hours a day, every day of the week).

The operation included six sub-operations, four of which covered border areas, where the police were responsible for securing reception points and border crossings. The fifth sub-operation covered the premises of the Municipal Police Headquarters in Rzeszów, where tasks related to securing Rzeszów-Jasionka Airport were carried out. The sixth sub-operation, "Przejazd," led by the head of the Road Traffic Department of the Provincial Police Headquarters, involved managing road traffic forces and coordinating activities related to securing the routes of foreigners leaving the border crossing areas.

Within the scope of operation "BORDER", the Police conducted activities in the areas of prevention, road traffic safety, criminal service and counter-terrorism activities.

- 1) Police preventive measures included securing reception points and border crossings, including those for refugees. The police's surveillance of sensitive areas aimed to prevent potential actions that could violate the legal order and threaten public safety. These activities also included support in organizing the transport of people and property, as well as conducting information and educational activities regarding applicable Polish law, the emergency notification system, criminal threats, and ways to obtain assistance.
- 2) Road safety tasks were carried out by securing major communication routes, particularly in border crossing areas and refugee gathering areas awaiting transport. This included monitoring road conditions and maintaining readiness to respond immediately in the event of threats. Facilitating the passage of drivers transporting refugees and humanitarian aid was also a key element. The police also participated in escorting humanitarian aid transports, including those organized by the Government Agency for Strategic Reserves, and in securing the journeys of key national officials.
- 3) In the area of criminal intelligence, the Police focused its activities on identifying threats among people and objects crossing the border, as well as those appearing at border crossings. These activities were aimed at countering threats to public safety and order, including crimes such as human trafficking, kidnapping, and smuggling of weapons and explosives. Upon receiving reports of possible crimes, officers took steps to verify the information and, if necessary, secure evidence. The criminal intelligence service also carried out tasks related to identifying threats associated with humanitarian transports and visits by heads of state and representatives of international organizations.

Counterterrorism operations included surveillance of places where large population centers congregate, as well as public buildings that could be potential targets for terrorist attacks. A particular area of interest was the Rzeszów-Jasionka airport, used for transporting military equipment to Ukraine and

handling visits of key politicians traveling to Ukrainian territory (Skiba, 2024).

An analysis of the Police's activities leads to the conclusion that after February 24, 2022, this formation became one of the main pillars of the regional crisis response system. The effectiveness of these actions stemmed from the rapid implementation of emergency procedures, flexible management of staff resources, and close cooperation with other public institutions. The experience of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship demonstrates that in crisis situations, the Police serve not only as a law enforcement service but also as a key stabilizing force at the regional level. It is worth noting, however, that the Police were supported in their operations by, among others, the Territorial Defense Forces as part of Operation "Reliable Aid" (Miernicka, 2022). Furthermore, the scale of the crisis also generated staffing problems, the need to extend duty hours, and increased psychological and physical strain on officers.

VI. ACTIONS TAKEN BY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The scale and pace of events following February 24, 2022, forced public administration in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship to immediately shift from standard operation to crisis mode. This meant simultaneously responding to the humanitarian needs of those fleeing Ukraine, maintaining the continuity of public institutions, and ensuring the safety of the region's residents. A particular challenge was the dynamic influx of people, without the possibility of prior, precise estimation of the scale of the phenomenon, which required flexible decision-making and ongoing adjustments to staffing, facilities, and logistics resources (Zalewski, 2024).

One of the first actions was to launch a system of reception points located near border crossings. Initially, eight such points were in operation, later expanded as the number of arrivals increased. They were organized in public facilities, schools, sports halls, community centers, and other buildings enabling the rapid provision of shelter and basic services. The reception points served a significant stabilizing function, helping to regulate the flow of people and providing first aid to refugees immediately after crossing the border. They offered meals, rest areas, medical support, psychological assistance, basic legal information, and organized onward transportation to other parts of the country (Piotrowska- Trybull & Orłowska, 2024).

Another crucial task for the administration was to create an efficient information flow system. People arriving in Poland needed quick information regarding the legalization of their stay, accommodation options, social benefits, access to healthcare, education for children, and employment. In practice, this meant preparing information materials in Ukrainian and Russian, establishing hotlines and advisory points, and ensuring the constant presence of translators and volunteers. Efficient communication was crucial not only for organizational but also for social reasons, as it limited information chaos and reduced the sense of uncertainty among those fleeing the war.

In parallel, efforts were underway to support the long-term

adaptation of refugees to Poland. Over time, it became clear that a significant number of people would not leave the country after a few days or weeks, but would instead require real support in their daily lives. Therefore, vocational activation programs, Polish language courses, and career counseling were launched, coordinated by, among others, the Voivodeship Labor Office. These efforts increased refugees' chances of entering the local labor market, achieving economic independence, and gradually integrating into the region's social life (Pietras- Eichberger & Buczkowski, 2024).

Cooperation between the government administration and local government units was particularly important. Local governments were largely responsible for practical matters, such as organizing accommodations, children's education, social support, healthcare, and the daily administration of new residents. In turn, the government administration ensured coordination of activities at the voivodeship level, liaised with central services, and mobilized additional financial and organizational resources. The cooperation between both levels of management was crucial to the efficiency of the entire response system.

The Podkarpackie Voivode held a central coordinating role, overseeing cooperation with the Police, Border Guard, State Fire Service, medical services, and local governments. Regular exchange of information enabled ongoing identification of the most urgent needs, directing resources and resources to where they were most needed, and quickly responding to emerging difficulties. This included securing reception points, organizing humanitarian transports, and counteracting potential social tensions or logistical problems (see "Voivode on Current Activities...", 2022).

It's worth emphasizing that public administration actions were not limited to ad hoc responses. The refugee crisis demonstrated the importance of the state and local governments' ability to quickly learn and adapt procedures to changing situations. In the following months, more sustainable organizational solutions were developed, encompassing the education system, labor market support, social welfare, and financial planning. This means that the experience of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship became an important example of how public administration functions in conditions of sudden and prolonged crisis.

An analysis of the actions undertaken leads to the conclusion that the effectiveness of public administration stemmed primarily from the speed of response, interinstitutional cooperation, and the ability to combine humanitarian actions with public security tasks. The crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine confirmed that in border regions, efficient administration is one of the fundamental pillars of the country's internal security.

VII. CONCLUSION

The outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022 significantly changed the security situation in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, revealing both new threats and exacerbating existing ones. The

region became an area particularly vulnerable to cross-border risks, crime, and social tensions related to the mass migration of refugees. Public administration took a number of measures to provide humanitarian aid, integrate refugees, and coordinate the work of subordinate services. The establishment of reception points, language and vocational courses, and social support enabled the effective adaptation of arriving individuals and mitigated the negative impact of the migration influx on local communities.

Simultaneously, uniformed services, including the police, conducted activities aimed at maintaining public order, monitoring criminal threats, and preventing road traffic. Operations such as "BORDER" allowed for a rapid response to crisis situations, and cooperation with other services and local governments enabled comprehensive security for both residents and refugees. Protection of critical infrastructure, strengthening administrative, energy, and transportation systems, and advanced preventive procedures reduced the risk of regional destabilization and minimized the potential impact of threats.

The experience gained during this period provides valuable lessons for future actions in the area of regional and national security, emphasizing the importance of inter-institutional cooperation, crisis planning, and a flexible response to dynamically evolving threats. All these activities demonstrate that effective crisis management requires both a rapid response to emergencies and long-term social, integrative, and preventive support.

VIII. REFERENCES

- Boratyn, D., Maniek, M., Kędra, A., Sroślak, G. (2024). Logistics as a key element of crisis management. „ASEJ-Scientific Journal of Bielsko-Biala School of Finance and Law”, Vol. 28, s. 124-127.
- Buzan, B., Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and Powers The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buzan, B., Wæver, O., de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Kolorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Chowaniec, K., Delong, M., Kiszka, J., Zalewski, P. (2025). Zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa i porządku publicznego na terenie województwa podkarpackiego po 24 lutego 2022 r. „Law – Education - Security”, nr 4 (129), s. 409-410.
- Ciekanski, Z., Brązkiewicz, D., Nowicka, J. (2022). Bezpieczeństwo państw Europy Wschodniej w sytuacji wojny na Ukrainie. „Przegląd Geopolityczny”, Nr 42, s. 14-29.
- European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report 2022 (TE-SAT) (2022). <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2022-te-sat>.
- Gębska, M. (2022). Handel ludźmi w Europie jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa państw i organizacji międzynarodowych w latach 2012–2020. „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne i Medioznawcze”, nr (1), s. 27–51.
- Klin, T. (2024). Strategia równoważenia i powstrzymania? Państwa wschodniej fl anki NATO wobec wojny pozycyjnej na froncie ukraińsko-rosyjskim. „Sprawy Międzynarodowe”, Nr 77(1), s. 73-91.
- Miernicka, M. (2022). Rusza operacja „Niezawodna pomoc”. <https://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/Mobile/ArticleShow/36758>.
- Miszczuk, M. (2025). Bezpieczeństwo wschodniej fl anki NATO w kontekście zagrożeń militarnych kreowanych przez federację rosyjską. „Studia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego”, Vol. 35, s. 27-61.
- Pietras-Eichberger, M., Buczkowski, Ł. (2024). Współpraca międzynarodowa Samorządu Województwa Podkarpackiego z partnerami z Ukrainy w świetle przekształceń współdziałania po 24 lutego 2022 roku. „Studia Politologiczne”, Nr 74, s. 304-321.
- Piotrowska-Trybull, M., Orłowska, M. (2024). Perspektywy rozwoju polskich terenów przygranicznych w kontekście wojny na terytorium Ukrainy. „Wiedza Obronna”, T. 286, s. 1-23.
- Skiba, M. (2024). Działania Policji województwa podkarpackiego wobec zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa spowodowanych kryzysem uchodźczym w 2022 r. „Polityka i Społeczeństwo”, Nr 22(4), s. 237-248.
- Straż Graniczna: od początku wojny z Ukrainy do Polski wjechało 5,104 mln osób. (2022). <https://www.wnp.pl/polityka-i-sondaze/straz-graniczna-od-poczatku-wojny-z-ukrainy-do-polski-wjechalo-5-104-mln-osob,607157.html>.
- Trojanowska, D. (2023). Wzmacnianie wschodniej fl anki NATO w kontekście rosyjsko-ukraińskiego konfliktu zbrojnego. „Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Securitate”, Nr 13(1), s. 189-203.
- Ustawa z dnia 6 kwietnia o Policji. (Dz.U.2025.0.636).
- Wojewoda o bieżących działaniach związanych z kryzysem migracyjnym. (2022). <https://www.gov.pl/web/uw-podkarpacki/wojewoda-o-biezacych-dzialaniach-zwiazanych-z-kryzysem-migracyjnym>.
- Zalewski, P. (2022). Działania administracji państwowej w Polsce wobec uchodźców z Ukrainy w pierwszych tygodniach wojny w Ukrainie 2022 roku. Aspekty prawne i securitologiczne. „Studia Politicæ Universitatis Silesiensis”, T. 34, s. 105.
- Zalewski, P. (2022). Wojna w Ukrainie i kryzys uchodźczy. Próba oceny uwarunkowań, przebiegu i skutków z perspektywy zagrożeń bezpieczeństwa województwa podkarpackiego. „Karpacki Przegląd Naukowy”, nr 2(40), s. 50-51.
- Zubrzycki, W., Suchanek, P. (2014). Bezpieczeństwo Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w kontekście zagrożeń terrorystycznych. „Studia Politologiczne”, nr 34, s. 153-165.
- Żołędowski, C. (2025). Migranci wojenni z Ukrainy w Polsce – dynamika i uwarunkowania napływu. „Studia Politologiczne”, vol. 75.