

Measuring Central and Eastern European Countries' Responses to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which started in February 2022, led to various (often confrontational) reactions of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to Russia. The article measures the variety of responsive foreign and defence policies of CEE countries in the first twelve months of the invasion. Three main domains of activities are examined: first, direct relations with Russia; second, relations with and support for Ukraine; and third, national defence policies and position in NATO. By considering these domains, the paper offers a comprehensive analysis of CEE countries' positions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, indicates differences among these countries and categorises their attitudes from near-to-neutral to highly confrontational towards Russia. Along with primary intuition, Hungary adopted an attitude closer to neutrality, whereas Lithuania and Poland turned out to be the most confrontational. The analysis reveals minor differences among the Baltic states' approaches towards Russia. Contrary to expectations, the positions of Bulgaria and Romania differed widely, with the former following a more confrontational stance than the latter.

Keywords: Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, Ukraine, foreign policy, defence policy, NATO

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Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 resulted in a dramatic political and discursive shift in the foreign policies of CEE countries. The most notable were cases of volte-face of pro-Russian heads of state, such as Czech President Miloš Zeman who called president Vladimir Putin a 'madman' and clearly encouraged for counterbalancing: 'Lunatics need to be isolated, and we must protect against them not only by words but by concrete measures' (quoted in Hutt 2022). Likewise, Bulgaria's head of state Rumen Radev called Russia's attack 'absolutely unacceptable' (The Sofia Globe 2022). Although he warned against confrontational policies, Croatian President Zoran Milanović said that Russia belongs among big states that are 'potential monsters' (Hina 2023). Condemnations were expressed by numerous high-level policymakers. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki compared Vladimir Putin with Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot. Croatia's minister of foreign and European affairs Gordan Grlić Radman called Putin a 'war criminal' and expressed hope for the collapse of his regime (Hina 2022). Confrontation with Russia was not only conducted in words. As Estonia's prime minister Kaja Kallas stated, the ultimate goal was to 'help Ukraine win' (Bathke 2022).

However, not all the leaders responded equally to the invasion. Some remained silent, while others, especially Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, hedged by using morally neutral expressions such as 'military action'. Croatian President Milanović criticised transfers of heavy weapons to Ukraine. As expected after discrepancies among CEE countries before the invasion, in 2022 the discourse was not entirely homogeneous.

Aside from discursive changes, CEE countries took various confrontational steps towards Russia. Most actions were conducted via EU institutions, nevertheless, CEE countries used some opportunities to express unilateral sanctions against Russia. For instance, Lithuania imposed unilateral sanctions on Russian energy and food (Dudzińska 2022). Bulgaria, along with Montenegro and North Macedonia, blocked access for Russian Minister Sergey Lavrov's airplane, as a result of which his visit in Belgrade was called off (Kokot 2022). All the countries agreed on the EU's multiple harsh sanctions on Russia. Regarding their trade relations these countries (Hungary included) were also formally labelled 'unfriendly states' by Russia. Some CEE countries publicly called for further EU sanctions. However, no CEE country decided to terminate diplomatic¹ or trade relations with Russia.

The ambition of this article is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of differences among CEE countries. Political discourses in some countries, such as the

¹ The closest to this stage was certainly Estonia, whose diplomatic relations were downgraded to the charges d'affaires level, but the initiator was Russia (Al Jazeera 2023).

Baltics, Poland and Romania, raised confrontational attitudes towards Russia or highlighted loyalty to NATO to show their moral superiority in international as well as in domestic arenas. It must be understood that Russia's invasion took place under specific circumstances. Ukraine was directly attacked, but Western countries have been indirectly challenged. As most of the CEE countries border either Russia or Ukraine, their threat perception of Russia has risen and CEE faced the invasion in this condition. As such, the article divides the overall context and CEE's positions into segmented and quantifiable reactions and develops a scale of CEE responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To uncover the CEE countries' policies and showcase their attitudes and differences among them, this paper operationalises three main domains of activities: first, direct relations with Russia; second, relations with and support for Ukraine; and third, national defence policies and activities in NATO. Together, these three domains indicate positions of CEE countries on the scale measuring their responses to Russia's invasion.

Literature review

The political dimensions of Russia's 2022 military attack on Ukraine attracted the close attention of scholars. The starting point has been the issue of the causes of Russia's assault on Ukraine in 2022 with a special focus on domestic conditions (Götz & Staun 2022; Person & McFaul 2022; Ferraro 2024). More detailed analyses examine the theoretical and strategic background that led to Russia's miscalculation at the early stage of the invasion (Göransson 2024), the invasion within theoretical frameworks of securitisation (Kurnyshova 2024; Lupovici 2024), democratic peace (Tan 2024), the world-systems (Beržiūnas 2023) or gender (Kratochvil & O'Sullivan 2023). Some scholars have emphasised Western countries' misperception of Russia that conditioned Putin to carry out colonial conquest (Oksamytna 2023). Academics have also scrutinised broader contexts such as the 2022 invasion's consequences for the global arena, including reconfiguration of Russia's partners in the UN system (Farzanegan & Gholipour 2023) and selected legal transformations (Brunk & Hakimi 2023).

At the regional level, scholars have investigated EU responses to the war (Bosse 2022; Meissner & Graziani 2023) including a particularly impressive analysis of their domestic and international conditions (Haesebrouck 2024). Further, academics have scrutinised EU countries' and institutions' policies in the context of European integration (Genschel 2022), changes of EU international roles (Friedrichs & Sommer 2024) and perception of EU security systems (Fernández et al. 2023). Economists have considered the effects of EU sanctions on the financial situation of Russia (Clichici & Drăgoi 2023; Pertiwi 2024), and the disturbance of trade relations between Russia and the EU as a direct consequence of the war (Krivko, Kontsevaya & Smutka 2023). Security analysts scrutinised NATO involvement in regional security and its potential strategy for restoration of peace

(Lepskiy & Lepska 2023). The existing literature is rather modest when it comes to CEE foreign and security policies towards Russia. There exist pre-invasion analyses of pro-US vs. pro-European orientations as factors of attitudes towards Russia among the EU including CEE countries (Silva II 2024), attitudes of CEE countries towards Russia's expansion prior to the 2022 invasion (Klin 2023) or attitudes of CEE towards Russia as their energy supplier before the invasion (Ostrowski 2022). Limited literature considers historical conditions of CEE countries' differentiated foreign policy orientations towards the invasion (Zaborowski 2024). Some scholars examine individual CEE countries' policies towards Russia: Czechia with an in-depth scrutiny of its party system (Kaniok & Hloušek 2023), Hungary based on analysis of Orbán's discourse (Lamour 2023), Estonia's and Latvia's multifaceted responses to Russia's 2022 invasion (Veebel 2023; Andžāns 2023). Other countries' policies have been hitherto analysed only superficially, usually by thinktanks and newspaper commentaries, although there exist narrower analyses, such as those of Hungary's opportunist politics within NATO and the EU (Müller & Slominski 2024).

Research objectives and methodology

The article aims at gathering and identifying major differences among the CEE countries towards Russia's invasion. By CEE countries I mean 11 post-communist NATO and EU member states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. This article scrutinises the 12-month period of CEE countries' policies as responses to Russia's invasion. There have already been some academic attempts to capture the essence of this period (e.g. Sasse 2023). One may consider one or two months to be the correct time for responses to the first great interstate war in Europe since 1945; however, one year is long enough for states to gather resources, such as an increase in defence budgets. It is also sufficient for journalists to discover some confidential practices. For instance, Bulgaria initially seemed to avoid providing substantial military aid to Ukraine, but later it turned out to rank among its important arms suppliers. One year might also be preferable for scrutiny because of domestic political crises like in the case of Slovenia, whose officials for a few months publicly blamed the election and post-election party negotiations as the reason for their passiveness towards Ukraine.

The research objective of the article is to assess each CEE country's attitude towards Russia on an axis which shows positions between least and most confrontational. This is conducted by dividing countries' activities into three groups: direct relations with Russia; relations with Ukraine regarding the invasion; and domestic and NATO defence policies. These three groups of activities should address the main issue in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War and a phenomenon of a new cold war between Russia and the West. Direct relations with

Russia reflect the level of confrontational policies to a large extent, but amid the ongoing conventional war, CEE countries have opportunities to confront Russia indirectly by supporting Ukraine and by strengthening their defensive capabilities.

The methodological challenge is to select specific criteria that contribute to our knowledge on levels of confrontation in each of the three groups. As mentioned above, there have been many discursive practices that partially reflect policies. This article is based on the assumption that in cases of conventional war, material activities and materialised political decisions matter most, whereas discourse is secondary but still relevant. An important political issue was certainly negotiations in the EU about sanctions towards Russia or multilateral assistance for Ukraine. However, negotiations are largely confidential, data can be extracted from hardly verifiable media releases and speculations. Hence the selection of issues that are relevant, comparable between CEE countries and available in open sources. Relevance means that on the international agenda when a given issue appeared as a problem, high-level policymakers emphasised its significance. Comparability results from homogeneity of activities, i.e. all the CEE countries had opportunities to act or not act in the same way. The above-outlined criteria lead to the exclusion of media releases that some country insisted on EU sanctions, as there is no certainty if other countries also confidentially insisted, supported or objected, or objected under some conditions. Further, unilateral sanctions imposed by some CEE countries on Russia are not taken into account. This results not only from difficulties in comparability, but also the limited significance in the analysed 12-month period. For instance, Czechia adopted a national sanction list, but initially no entities were enlisted (Doupal, Supak & Hudcovic 2023).

The article uses the quantitative method. Why are quantities equally assigned to each area of scrutinised policies? Politics of CEE countries after the invasion underwent quick changes within the analysed 12-months period. For instance, there were observable moments when expulsions of diplomats were carried out one-by-one by most CEE countries, which shows their relevance. But a few weeks later, CEE leaders focused on moral condemnations of massacres of civilians, released by Ukrainian authorities and media. This example indicates the changing priorities of instruments used against Russia. Since relevance of domains of foreign policy is indistinguishable, it is methodologically correct to assign equal values to each domain – that is, to each of the three groups of criteria. Potential biases are reduced by the richness of variables used in the model. The first group of criteria concerns direct relations with Russia. Among them, the first criterion is bilateral diplomatic relations composed of high-level meetings and expulsions of Russian diplomatic staff. The second criterion is energy policy as addressing the problematic issue of energy dependence. Selection of a specific segment was more difficult because of the tendency for the multilateralisation of sanctions

transmitted through the EU. The most representative was natural gas imports, because of its scale and also because Russia itself decided to coerce its gas buyers into subordinating to ruble payments, which garnered different responses from CEE countries. The third criterion was initially a purely discursive practice – namely, these were condemnations of Russia’s conduct, but soon some CEE countries transmitted these into investigations and prosecutions such as the idea of a special tribunal. The discussion on methods, legal foundations and institutional arrangements for responding to Russia’s international crimes not only expressed moral outrage in CEE, but also reflected discursive competition for the morally superior anti-Russian stance.

As stated above, the second group of criteria for responses contains policies towards Ukraine. The first criterion here is diplomatic relations – that is, high-level meetings with special significance during the initiating 15 March 2022 visit of three CEE country leaders in Kyiv, which Ukrainian officials received as the end of their diplomatic isolation. The second criterion is military assistance for Ukraine.² There have been comparable data released by media and analytical teams. Although some assistance was confidential, a year after the end of the analysed period it is safe to use the given data. The third criterion should reflect CEE leaders’ discursive practices concerning the Russo-Ukrainian War. Specifically, to meet the standard of both relevance and comparability I selected two issues: discourse on Ukraine’s victory in the war, because doubts could lead to discontinuation of military assistance; and EU swift candidacy status for Ukraine which was raised by CEE leaders immediately after Russia’s invasion. Moreover, the debate over EU membership has attracted particular attention due to the pro-Western ambitions of Ukraine and Russia’s opposition to them.

The third group of criteria concerns CEE domestic and NATO defence policies. This derives from the essence of counterbalancing which largely operates by military means. The first criterion is domestic defence policy reflected in available data on changes in defence budgets and military personnel as an auxiliary indicator. The relevance of the defence budgets’ growth as a reaction to the security crisis was observable in the contemporary discourse among NATO officials (e.g. Stoltenberg 2022). Furthermore, building arms is at the core of the strategy of balancing according to the balance of power theory (Schweller 2006: 9; Wohlforth et al. 2007). The second criterion is activities in NATO to counterbalance Russia. What makes this criterion challenging is diversity of security contexts and military capabilities of CEE countries. Some of them are small and almost entirely dependent on external security guarantees. On the

2 I resigned from financial and humanitarian bilateral assistance because financial aid for Ukraine has been delivered mainly via multilateral actors, and humanitarian aid for Ukraine does not contribute to politics and defence, taking into account that even China delivered it.

contrary, some have larger capabilities and thus may use their resources outside on a larger scale. Also, three of the CEE countries – Croatia, Czechia, Slovenia – do not belong to the so-called NATO eastern flank, so they might be focused more on external activities. Despite this diversity of security contexts, a careful analysis can provide this research with some knowledge on confrontational policies towards Russia, which is explicated in the next section.

How exactly are quantitative values assigned to each country? There is a maximum which indicates the most confrontational country in each criterion. For instance, Lithuania and Poland initiated the creation of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) in the EU (Eurojust 2023) and publicly condemned Russia for war crimes, so they receive 1 point for this criterion. For some criteria, time of activity may be taken into account by appreciating initiatives and underappreciating delays. As the minimum, 0 is a logical consequence of the maximum; in the above case, this means a lack of public condemnations or any initiative like JIT. For intermediate cases, 0.25 (or its multiples) is added or subtracted. If an issue is further divided into two sub-criteria, they each receive 0.5 maximum. The idea is to equally assess each of the three domains: direct relations with Russia, relations with Ukraine and defence policies. Therefore each receives the maximum 3. The points of all the criteria are then added up, which results in a final assessment of each country's approach on the axis between near-to-neutral and strongly confrontational.

What is also worth discussing is the problem of intentions. The above-outlined method is based on the assumption that some activities are confrontational regardless of motives. For instance, in the case of diplomatic sanctions towards Russia, regardless of public justifications such as espionage or moral indignation, each decision on sanctions is confrontational. Methodologically, a more challenging criterion is defence policy, because it certainly reflects intentions not only towards Russia and Ukraine but also western partners. Further, some local configurations of power matter like in the case of Croatia, which counterbalances Serbia rather than distant Russia. Still, the criterion can be useful as long as defence efforts are analysed within the period of Russia's invasion. Its application is based on the assumption that decisions reflect each CEE country's approach to Russia as a threat. Moreover, the criterion takes into account changes in defence resources, not their nominal value, which aims to reflect its responsiveness. Last but not least, arms serve as material response to external threats, and no other dangerous phenomenon emerged in 2022 in CEE.³

3 Interestingly, the rise of Hungary's defence budget in 2022–2023 was justified by general statements on the worsening of the 'security environment' or by non-security arguments such as the commitment within NATO (Hungary Today 2023) which confirms the lack of specific threats aside from Russia's aggressiveness.

The scale of CEE countries' responses

This section describes the creation of the axis of confrontational policies. As for diplomatic relations with Russia, available sources inform about each country's conduct. All the CEE countries (except Hungary) ceased high-level meetings and expelled Russian diplomatic personnel. Numerous sources report mass expulsions (e.g. Kiyāgan 2022). The only small controversy is Czechia, which expelled only one diplomat, albeit a significant one. That seemingly limited response clearly resulted from the previous mass expulsions conducted in 2021 as a consequence of the Vrbětice affair.

The phenomenon of CEE's dependence on Russia's energy was a lasting and relevant political problem. Contrary to coal and oil imports, ultimately banned by sanctions at the EU level, imports of gas became a significant but chaotic game between each country and Russia due to Russia's decision to require ruble payments. After April 2022 most countries silently accepted ruble payments, besides Bulgaria and Poland, whose public opposition was met with Russia's ban on natural gas exports to both countries (Kakissis 2022). On the other side of the political spectrum, Hungary officially and publicly approved ruble payments; moreover, it signed an important annex to the 2021 gas contract⁴ (Madlovics & Magyar 2023: 35). Although all the Baltic countries initially declared discontinuation of gas imports from Russia (Euractiv 2022), soon it turned out that only Lithuania had prepared its infrastructure and resigned from imports shortly before Russia's insistence on ruble payments (Petkova 2022). Latvia was the least prepared and still had to import natural gas in summer 2022 (Reuters 2022), whereas Estonia imposed unilateral sanctions on natural gas after almost a year of preparations (ERR 2022). Some CEE countries, such as Czechia, declared an objection to ruble payments, but later de facto accepted them (McVicar 2022).

The moral dimension of CEE policies towards Russia was reflected in public condemnations of various delicts such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocidal intent and crimes against peace, and found expressions in diplomatic and legal activities to formalise accusations. Releasing information on the massacres of Ukrainian civilians in April 2022 resulted in the first initiatives. As mentioned earlier, Lithuania and Poland initiated the establishment of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) with the EU. Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia joined them weeks later. Romania became a member of the JIT in October 2022 as the latest member (Eurojust 2023). Czechia expressed scepticism about the legal foundations and practical effectiveness of investigation teams, but publicly called for the establishment of a special tribunal for Russian crimes in Ukraine (Dvořák 2022), whereas Slovenia initiated discussions on a war crime cooperation treaty for EU and non-EU coun-

4 Hungary also continued the process of modernising its nuclear power plant by the Russian company Rosatom.

Table 1: CEE countries' policies towards Russia (assigned quantities in parentheses)

Country	Diplomatic relations	Responses to Russia's gas countersanctions	Policy about war crimes
Bulgaria	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Immediate refusal of ruble payments (1)	Public condemnations (0.5)
Croatia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Public condemnations (0.5)
Czechia	No meetings (0.5); expulsion of deputy ambassador (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments, declarative objections (0.5)	Calling for establishment of a special tribunal (1)
Estonia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Delayed termination of gas imports (0.75)	Member of Joint Investigation Team (0.75)
Hungary	High-level visits (0); no expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0)	Public approval of ruble payments (0)	Restrained discourse: condemnations without indicating Russia as perpetrator (0)
Latvia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments, declarative objections (0.5)	Member of Joint Investigation Team (0.75)
Lithuania	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Termination of gas imports before Russia's requirement of ruble payments (1)	Co-founder of Joint Investigation Team (1)
Poland	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Immediate refusal of ruble payments (1)	Co-founder of Joint Investigation Team (1)
Romania	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Delayed member of Joint Investigation Team (0.5)
Slovakia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Member of Joint Investigation Team (0.75)
Slovenia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Initiative of war crimes cooperation treaty (0.5)

Source: Author

tries regarding war crimes in Ukraine (Maček 2023). The only country that avoided explicit condemnation of Russian crimes and any formal initiatives was Hungary. The analysis of these three domains are summarised in Table 1.

Relations of CEE countries with Ukraine deserve separate analysis. The first criterion is diplomatic relations. All the CEE countries except Hungary paid high-level visits to Kyiv between March and June 2022. The initiating visit was conducted by Czech, Polish and Slovenian heads of governments on 15 March. It made a tremendous impact on Ukraine's diplomatic position. Until that moment, western policymakers had avoided visits due to security concerns. For instance, officials from the Baltic countries fled Kyiv on the day of the invasion (Brennan 2022). The significance of the 15 March visit was later confirmed by the prime minister of Slovakia, Eduard Heger, who publicly regretted not having accompanied Czechia, Poland and Slovenia (Gosling 2022). These three countries are counted in the article as most supportive.

Military assistance for Ukraine has been scrutinised by numerous academics and journalists (e.g. Marsh 2023). From Ukraine's perspective, the scale of assistance matters most, therefore Poland has been highly appreciated. However, for the purpose of this article the effort of each country is more accurately measured by using aid as a GDP ratio. The most applicable source from the perspective of relevance and comparability is Ukraine Support Tracker, which gathers commitments on military assistance (Trebesch 2023). Contemporary commitments' effectiveness can be assessed *ex post*.⁵ One controversial case is Romania, which apparently delivered unconfirmed military assistance, which was reported by both Ukrainian authorities (Całus 2022) and Russian officials in the form of accusations (Dumitrescu 2022). This makes a serious difference with Hungary, which repeatedly declared that it would not deliver any military assistance to Ukraine and did not permit military transit across its territory.

The third component of this group of criteria is the discourse regarding Ukraine's geopolitical choices, and to adequately address the year of Russia's invasion it is divided into two specific subcriteria. The first subcriterion regards the sense of Ukraine's defence. Hungarian policymakers raised numerous doubts about Ukraine's chances of victory. Two CEE heads of state, the presidents of Bulgaria and Croatia, publicly expressed doubt about Ukraine's confrontational strategy against Russia and their chances of a final victory. Otherwise, both countries' governmental officials demonstrated opposite discourse expressing belief in Ukraine's ultimate victory. Romania and Slovenia avoided such open declarations, which thus places them as in-between cases. As for the second subcriterion – Ukraine's swift candidacy in the EU – Romanian President Klaus

5 In the first months of the invasion journalists and politicians accused some countries of not delivering declared assistance.

Iohannis did not join the open letter from the CEE heads of state appealing for candidate status for Ukraine, but the following day he guaranteed Romania's full support for Ukraine's integration within the EU (Fodor 2022). Only the Croatian and Hungarian heads of state did not contribute to this particular initiative. How-

Table 2: CEE countries' policies towards Ukraine (assigned quantities in parentheses)

Country	High-level meetings	Commitments on military assistance in % of GDP	Discourse on Ukraine's victory	Swift EU candidacy
Bulgaria	High-level visits (0.75)	0.37% (0.5)	Contradictory discourse of president and government representatives (0.25)	Support (0.5)
Croatia	High-level visits (0.75)	0.22% (0.25)	President's public doubts (0)	PM's support, no president's support (0.25)
Czechia	Initiator of high-level visits (1)	0.25% (0.25)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Estonia	High-level visits (0.75)	1.1% (1)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Hungary	No high-level meetings (0)	0% (0)	Public doubts (0)	No expression of support (0)
Latvia	High-level visits (0.75)	1.19% (1)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Lithuania	High-level visits (0.75)	0.79% (0.75)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Poland	Initiating high-level visits (1)	0.44% (0.5)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Romania	High-level visits (0.75)	0% + confidential assistance (0.25)	Restraint discourse (0.25)	Delayed support (0.25)
Slovakia	High-level visits (0.75)	0.21% (0.25)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Slovenia	Initiating high-level visits (1)	0.12% (0.25)	Restraint discourse (0.25)	Support (0.5)

Source: Author

ever, Croatia's prime minister, Andrej Plenković, supported Ukraine's candidacy (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2022). The criteria about policies towards Ukraine are summarised in Table 2.

The third group of criteria is defence activities. NATO delivers data and estimates on annual defence budgets and military personnel of its members. As mentioned earlier, expanding arms forms the core of counterbalancing strategies. Defence budgets are acknowledged as primary sources of military power. They are commonly used as variables in IR statistical research. As observed in the NATO countries' defence policies and military assistance for Ukraine, contemporary arms start with budgetary sources. This is further reflected in their political relevance as they emerge in official declarations and discursive practices at the state and interstate level among Western countries. For the purpose of this research, cases of countries whose defence budgets grew by more than 10% in both 2022 and 2023 qualify as substantial growth. However, some countries needed another fiscal year to achieve higher growth. This is the case of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Poland, whose defence budgets grew by less than 10% in 2022 but by over 25% in 2023. This is also qualified as substantial growth. Slovakia's and Slovenia's military spending grew by less than 10% in both 2022 and 2023, which is assessed as limited growth. The defence budgets of Croatia, Czechia and Romania were quite stable or underwent minimal reduction (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2024: 9).

While defence budgets ensure the quality of defence, troops are still required to fulfil military tasks. As the development of the Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrates, full-scale interstate wars entail recruitment of mass armies. In the article it is assumed when applying these data for the scale of CEE countries' confrontational policies that military personnel is less valuable than defence budgets. Thus, the maximum for the change of military personnel between 2022 and 2023 is 0.5. This results from decades of financial limits which led to having underinvested armed forces. Also, the technological modernisation and professionalisation of armies as ongoing processes indicate the significance of financing rather than recruitment which is less changeable. For the purposes of measurement, qualification is simplified: 0 for reduction of military personnel, 0.25 for stability and 0.5 for growth. Data are extracted from NATO sources (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2024: 13). For both military budgets and personnel this research does not consider pre-invasion efforts. This presumption is based on the diagnosis of a significant potential for expansion of both.⁶

The NATO activities of CEE countries require contextual analysis. Numerous sources reported Baltic countries' diplomatic efforts to reinforce NATO military presence on their territories (e.g. Borger 2022), which is sufficient to assess as

6 NATO countries' military budgets and personnel are far from top military powers.

Table 3: CEE countries' responses in defence policy (assigned quantities in parentheses)

Country	National defence policy	International defence activities in NATO
Bulgaria	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); stability of military personnel (0.25)	A new battlegroup on its territory, no presence abroad (1.25)
Croatia	Stability of defence budget (0.25); reduction of military personnel (0)	Limited contribution to battlegroups in Hungary, Latvia and Poland, accepting US air policing (1.25)
Czechia	Stability of defence budget (0.25); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Leading the new battlegroup in Slovakia, contingents in Latvia and Lithuania (1.5)
Estonia	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup (1.5)
Hungary	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	A new battlegroup with limited external contributions on its territory, air policing in Baltic countries (0.75)
Latvia	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup (1.5)
Lithuania	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup (1.5)
Poland	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup and US forces, contingents in Latvia and Romania, air policing in Slovakia (1.5)
Romania	Reduction of defence budget (0); reduction of military personnel (0)	A new battlegroup and US reinforcements on its territory, contingent in Poland (1.5)
Slovakia	Limited growth of defence budget (0.5); stability of military personnel (0.25)	A new battlegroup on its territory, contingent in Latvia (1.5)
Slovenia	Limited growth of defence budget (0.5); stability of military personnel (0.25)	Contribution to a new battlegroup in Slovakia, contingent in Latvia (1.5)

Source: Author

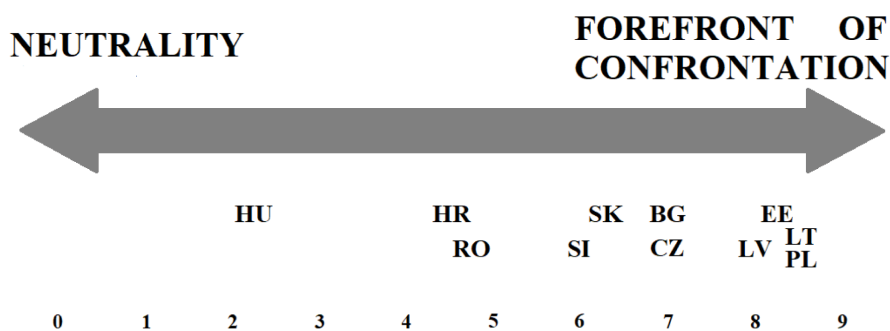
maximum engagement taking into account the Baltics' vulnerability to a potential Russian attack and the small size of their armies.⁷ Four new battlegroups

7 Critics may indicate that Estonia maintained a military contingent in Mali until 2022, which proves that the Baltics have capabilities for foreign military presence. However, NATO eastern flank countries' policy makers did not demand Baltic countries' contingents stay outside their subregion which results from the prioritisation of their defence.

have been formed on the NATO eastern flank: in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Bulgaria allowed Italy to take on the role of framework nation and other NATO countries to contribute to the new battlegroup on Bulgaria's territory. However, Bulgaria has not taken part in any standing presence in other battlegroups. Croatia approved only limited military contingents in Poland and in the new battlegroup in Hungary (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2022); they contributed overall 64 troops which reflects a limited interest in counterbalancing Russia. The government also agreed on limited US air policing of the Croatian airspace (Aviation Defense News 2022). Despite speculations about its disapproval of NATO reinforcements, Hungary quickly agreed on a new multinational battlegroup on its territory. However, the government wanted its own command over NATO foreign troops (of limited size) and stressed their non-eastern basing, far from the border with Ukraine (Révész 2022). Poland invited US reinforcements on its territory and sent additional forces to Romania and Slovakia. Slovenia contributed to the newly established battlegroup in Slovakia and maintained troops in Latvia, which might be interpreted as a proportional counterbalancing effort. The criteria of defence, resulting from this contextual analysis, are summarised in Table 3. In order to achieve the maximum 3 for the whole group of defence criteria, the maximum quantitative value is 1.5 for each: national defence and military activities in NATO. National defence is composed of military budget and military personnel. Unlike with all the other criteria, no country is given 0 for NATO activities, because of the exceptional complexity of the analysis of each country's potential effort.

Tables 1–3 demonstrate the variety of CEE countries' responses to Russia's invasion. As a result of quantitative analysis, the following axis indicating the level of confrontational policies is constructed and presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The variety of CEE countries' responses to Russia's invasion



Source: Author

Conclusion

Russia's invasion repositioned some CEE countries' foreign and defence policies, while some others remained on their already confrontational course. How exactly each country responded is of interest to case studies. However, daily politics impedes efforts of summarising political positions. The article provides academics with a reliable summary of CEE countries' attitudes based on measuring key dimensions of their activities. The article contributes to the growing academic literature on Russia's assault on Ukraine. By indicating the quantitative model of CEE countries' stances towards Russia's invasion, it delivers precision and thus undermines some stereotypes. Comparability within the model sheds light on countries' detailed policies and general approaches. To illustrate that one may reflect on the alleged anti-Russian counterbalancing effort by Romania. The analysis indicates that Bulgaria, among others, clearly demonstrated the more confrontational approach. The de facto reduction of Romania's military budgets in 2022 and 2023, counted as GDP ratio, triggered post factum criticism and public excuses (Necsutu 2024). This proves that declarations are not always implemented. Also Hungary's declarative politics seem to be full of pro-Russian understanding, but careful analysis demonstrates one potential counterbalancing element which is domestic militarisation. Least surprisingly, the analysis reveals minor differences among the Baltic states' positions towards Russia.

Applicability of the article deserves additional attention. Precision of measurement verifies common knowledge, but the quantitative scale might also be useful for further quantitative analyses including serving as a dependent variable. Since the growing number of authors has conducted studies on variables behind EU or CEE countries' positions (Haesebrouck 2024; Klin 2023; Zaborowski 2024), one may use the detailed scale of this article for statistical analysis. It is also reasonable to apply it to comparative methods of foreign policy analysis. The scale might be particularly useful as an auxiliary tool in unison with IR theories for explaining foreign policy of CEE countries. Last but not least, the method of the scale can be creatively implemented for further examinations of CEE countries' attitudes for the whole Russo-Ukrainian War.



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