Coercive Engineered Migrations as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare: A Binary Comparison of Two Cases on the External EU Border

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Summary

In the first part of the paper the author gives an overview of the terminology, definition and theory of hybrid warfare, a concept simultaneously disputed in the academic community and firmly established among the decision-making elites of NATO and the EU. The second part is dedicated to a specific aspect or tool of hybrid warfare – coercive engineered migrations. Through a binary comparison of different cases with a similar outcome on the EU's external border – Greece-Turkey in 2020 and Poland-Belarus in 2021 – the author determines the internal and external requirements for a successful defense against migrations weaponized by a hostile neighboring state.

Keywords: Hybrid Warfare, Coercive Engineered Migrations, European Union, Greece, Poland

Introduction

The artificially created migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in October/November 2021, involving the attempted illegal (and sometimes forceful) crossing of thousands of migrants to European Union territory, was unequivocally condemned as a form of hybrid warfare not only by Poland and its neighboring Baltic countries, but by the entire EU. A year earlier, very similar activities on the Greek-Turkish border have been met with an equally stark response by the 27-nation bloc – an obvious departure from the mixed securitarian-humanitarian narrative which dominated the early years of the European migrant crisis.

Since 2015 there has been a lively debate whether illegal migrations constituted a hybrid threat for the EU and – if so – who were the state and/or non-state

actors behind it. This paper will approach the topic from a securitarian perspective, meaning that the author comprehends illegal migrations toward Europe as a manifestation of controlled chaos, i.e. a mass movement of people from war-torn and impoverished zones of Asia and Africa which is supervised and deliberately guided toward the intended targets.

The actors involved in these operations are both state and non-state entities, acting independently or as proxies for behind-the-scenes operators who wish to avoid attribution. Although the impact of non-state actors (smuggling rings, terrorist groups and non-governmental organizations) has been rising steadily, this paper will focus on states, more precisely – states bordering the EU, as the main architects and benefiters of illegal migrations.

The purpose of this paper is to examine coercive engineered migrations as a tool of hybrid warfare. However, the ongoing academic debate concerning hybrid warfare itself requires an in-depth introductory chapter that will acquaint the reader with the historical development of the term and with the controversies regarding the originality and utility of the concept. Another point of contention – the lack of a universally accepted definition of the observed phenomenon – will be addressed as well. A comprehensive theory of hybrid warfare has been developed only recently and will be presented in the introductory chapter too. Last but not least, the methodology used in this paper will also be elaborated in the introduction.

Terminology

Twenty years ago, Major William J. Nemeth of the U.S. Marine Corps submitted his M.A. thesis *Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare* at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. This was the first documented use of the term hybrid warfare. The term emerged from an intuition that warfare in the post-Cold War era was experiencing a drastic change, perhaps even a paradigm shift, with non-state actors successfully challenging established powers and terrorist attacks triggering (for the first time) the invocation of NATO's Article 5.[1]

There were even earlier attempts at capturing and explaining the spirit of warfare in the (approaching) 21st century. In 1999, two colonels of the People's Liberation Army, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, wrote *Unrestricted Warfare* – a groundbreaking study that explored the effects of globalization on warfare. Liang and Xiangsui reached the conclusion that "the great fusion of technologies" leads to an

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[1] In 1996 Chechen rebels defeated the militarily far superior Russian Federation on Russian territory, and in September 2001 the terrorist group al-Qaeda carried out a series of air-borne suicide attacks against New York City and Washington D.C. with the death toll surpassing the number of casualties of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

overlapping of societal domains and this, in turn, results in the expansion of warfare beyond its original military sphere. In their words:

> As the arena of war has expanded, encompassing the political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and psychological spheres, in addition to the land, sea, air, space, and electronics spheres, the interactions among all factors have made it difficult for the military sphere to serve as the automatic dominant sphere in every war. War will be conducted in non-war spheres. This notion sounds strange and is difficult to accept, but more and more signs indicate that this is the trend (Liang and Xiangsui, 2015, p. 144).

The Chinese colonels' concept of unrestricted warfare, also translated as war beyond limits, can be described as a precursor to our contemporary understanding of the hybrid phenomenon. Their prediction that warfare will no longer be confined to the military domain, thus giving actors with lesser conventional capabilities a fighting chance against superior conventional forces, has stood the test of time. Therefore, unrestricted warfare should be viewed as a prototype upon which the concept of hybrid warfare was later developed in more detail.

In 2002, almost synchronously with Nemeth's above-mentioned M.A. thesis, military historian Thomas M. Huber edited *Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot*. In his introductory chapter Huber explains that compound warfare denotes "the simultaneous use of a regular or main force and an irregular or guerrilla force against an enemy". He adds that "compound warfare most often occurs when all or part of a minor power's territory is occupied by an intervening power" (Huber, 2002, p. 1). In other words, he sees it primarily as an insurgent or defensive strategy:

> Once the greater power's forces are distributed over the lesser power's territory, the lesser power is then in a position to conduct compound warfare. The great advantage of resorting to compound warfare is that it pressures the enemy to both mass and disperse at the same time... Facing a double challenge may in itself make the enemy irresolute and keep him off balance (*ibid*., pp. 1-2).

The most famous cases of compound warfare in history, according to Huber, are those of Major General Nathanael Greene during the American War of Independence (1775-1783), the Duke of Wellington during the Peninsular War (1807-1814), Mao Zedong in the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949) and Ho Chi-Minh in the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Interestingly, Huber points out that compound warfare occurs in cases when regular and irregular forces closely coordinate their operations, when they act independently of each other, and also when they are completely oblivious of each other's actions but share the same enemy – as was the case during the American Civil War when Indian tribes attacked Confederate forces in Texas, thus inadvertently becoming "allies" of Union forces (*ibid*., p. 6).

Huber's concept of compound warfare should not be viewed as a rival to hybrid warfare. Quite the contrary, it can help dispute those critics of hybrid warfare who claim that hybridity in armed conflict is nothing new and can be traced back to Antiquity. What they have in mind is compound or combined warfare which is – at best – one of the many facets of hybrid warfare. In addition, as we shall see later, hybrid warfare presupposes not only close coordination between regular and irregular forces but their merging to the point of becoming indistinguishable from one another.

Coming back to Major Nemeth, it should be noted that he interprets hybrid warfare as a specific approach to war by hybrid societies, i.e. societies (like the Chechen one) which "operate within a gray zone between modernity and pre-state":

> War and a high level of inter-personal violence are accepted as normal in most hybrid societies. This is a direct link to the pre-state roots of these societies and helps explain the apparent willingness of hybrid societies to set few, if any, boundaries to military activities. Hybrid societies practice a form of pre-state warfare... For example, little distinction between combatants and non-combatants is made, kidnapping is commonplace, and massacres are common in the period following a victory. Similarly, the concept of law or international conventions regulating war, when even acknowledged by the hybrid society, is either couched in terms that tend to justify their actions, or dismisses (sic) these conventions as not applicable because they are Western or Christian in origin (Nemeth, 2002, p. 72).

In short, Nemeth sees hybrid warfare as primitive warfare whose combatants are capable of using modern weapons and technology, including the "use of the modern media as a means of command and control and spreading disinformation or propaganda" (*ibid*., p. 74). Nemeth's conclusion that future conflict will predominantly occur between state and non-state or transnational actors who employ hybrid tactics, as well as his recommendation that Western states should adapt their military doctrines accordingly, is emblematic for early 21st century military thinking which focused heavily on opponents such as Chechen rebels or the al-Qaeda terrorist network. Russian military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine, China's aggressive posturing in the South China Sea and the Himalayas, as well as the increasing implementation of hybrid tactics by state actors, have rendered Nemeth's concept of hybrid warfare obsolete. However, he will always be credited for introducing the term to academic analysis.

The mature stage of hybrid warfare as a concept starts with Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Frank G. Hoffman and his 2007 treatise *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. Writing under the impression of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War, during which the Iranian proxy operating from southern Lebanon demonstrated remarkable battlefield skills combining guerrilla tactics with state-like military

capabilities, including short and intermediate range rockets and missiles, Hoffman reached the following conclusion:

> Tomorrow's conflicts will not be easily categorized into simple classifications of conventional or irregular. Numerous security analysts have acknowledged the blurring of lines between modes of war. Conventional and irregular forces, combatants and noncombatants, and even the physical/kinetic and virtual dimensions of conflict are blurring (Hoffman, 2007, p. 33).

Based on this assessment, Hoffman offered the first available definition of hybrid warfare: "*Hybrid Wars can be waged by states or political groups, and incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder*" (*ibid*., p. 58). Hoffman was the first scholar to recognize the utility of hybrid warfare for state and non-state actors alike, and to perceive the blending of conventional, irregular, terrorist and criminal activities into a new amalgamated threat faced by contemporary Western societies. In that sense, his definition is still applicable today. In addition, Hoffman made a clear distinction between his own concept and that of compound warfare, discussed earlier in this paper. Examining the historical cases of the militia in the American Revolutionary War, Thomas E. Lawrence's role as an advisor to the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, and the irregular tactics of the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War, Hoffman maintained that these were all examples of operationally separate forces.[2] Hence, Huber's compound concept did not capture the merger or blurring modes of war identified by Hoffman in more recent case studies (*ibid*., pp. 20-22).

Another insightful essay on the subject was written in 2008 by Colonel (Retired) John J. McCuen, titled simply *Hybrid Wars*. McCuen focused on the counterinsurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq, and took a somewhat different approach from Hoffman. In McCuen's view, hybrid wars are fought simultaneously on three battlegrounds: the conventional battleground, the conflict zone's indigenous population battleground, and the home front and international community battleground. While it is necessary to defeat the enemy's military forces, it is decisive to secure and stabilize the indigenous population by restoring security, essential services, local government, self-defense forces and essential elements of the economy. Only by "winning hearts and minds" of the local populace (McCuen does not use this popular phrase) can the intervening state achieve success on the third battleground – the public opinion at home and internationally (McCuen, 2008, pp. 107-108).

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[2] The militia operating separately from the Continental Army; the Arab forces separately from the British Army; and the Viet Cong separately from the North Vietnamese Army.

A superior conventional force should have no difficulty in overwhelming inferior military opponents. However, stay-behind forces will quickly morph into a resistance movement embedded within the population and protract the war, thus alienating both the local populace and the public at home and abroad. To prevent this from happening, the intervening actor needs to adopt a "clear, control and counter-organize the population" approach:

> Counter-organization requires us to seize and maintain the initiative within the population battleground just as surely as we do on the conventional battleground. We must aggressively protect and care for the population. That means we have to "out-guerrilla" the guerrillas and "out-organize" the enemy within the population... Clearing, controlling, and counter-organizing the population is the only way to seize the initiative in the human terrain (*ibid*., p. 111).

McCuen's contribution is significant for two reasons. First, it explains the United States' failure in Afghanistan: In 2001 – with the assistance of the Northern Alliance (compound warfare) – it defeated the Taliban within 38 days. However, in the ensuing 20 years the U.S. and its vast coalition of allies have proven themselves incapable of clearing, controlling and counter-organizing the Afghan population which remained a safe haven for the Taliban. Just like McCuen had predicted in 2008, this has led to a decline of support for the war effort at home and internationally, eventually leading to a dramatic pull-out of American and allied forces and their local "collaborators" in August 2021, with the Taliban returning to power. The second reason McCuen's essay is of importance is the fact that he is one of very few Western scholars who openly call for the adoption of a hybrid strategy by the U.S. and its allies: "Considering the expected strategy of virtually all our potential enemies, we will have to be prepared to fight a hybrid war every time we deploy" (*ibid*., p. 111). And here: "We must strategize, plan, and conduct war under a new paradigm – hybrid war... If we do not have the political and military will to fight the hybrid war with the right strategy and resources to support it, we had better not fight it" (*ibid*., p. 113). Interestingly, as the following (and last) sample of hybrid and related terminology will show, other actors have suspected the U.S. of using these methods all along.

Motivated by the startling events of the "Arab Spring" – a series of anti-government protests, armed rebellions and civil wars that swept across the Arab world in 2011 and 2012 – Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov wrote an essay for the Russian Military-Industrial Kurier (*Военно-промышленный курьер*). The 2013 article, soon to be nicknamed the "Gerasimov Doctrine" by Western pundits, quickly gained notoriety in the U.S. and the EU and was widely regarded as a blueprint for Moscow's hybrid operations. In fact, Gerasimov – without naming specific countries – accused outside actors of fo-

menting unrest in North Africa and the Middle East with the goal of regime change and the imposition of Western values; a scenario that, in Russia's view, was all too reminiscent of the "Color revolutions" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005):

> In the twenty-first century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template... A perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war... These events are typical of warfare in the twenty-first century (Gerasimov, 2016, p. 24).

Gerasimov further explains that the very rules of war have changed, with the role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals growing and – in many cases – exceeding the force of weapons in their effectiveness. According to his analysis, the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other nonmilitary measures is applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population. All this is supplemented by "military means of a concealed character" and usually ends in the open use of force, "often under the guise of peacekeeping" (*ibid.*). In other words, the Russian general has indirectly accused the West of conducting hybrid warfare (although he eschews using this term) in the post-Soviet space, and – more recently – in the MENA region. By doing so, Gerasimov completely reversed the argumentation of American scholars analyzed earlier in this paper and set the stage for Russian "countermeasures" as they were to be seen only a year later in Crimea and Donbass, and from 2015 in Syria and Libya as well.

So far, we have dealt with the terminological evolution from unrestricted and compound to hybrid warfare. The twin terms hybrid warfare and hybrid threats are still not fully accepted in academic circles, with some researchers preferring idioms such as new generation warfare, non-linear warfare or sub-threshold warfare. However, in recent years hybrid warfare has firmly established itself as a *fait accompli* in official NATO and EU terminology and will therefore be used without any reservations in the following pages of this paper.

Originality and Utility of the Concept

Every researcher writing on the topic of hybrid warfare should respond to the following questions: 1) does he/she regard hybrid warfare as a new or age-old phenomenon; and 2) does he/she consider the concept useful and relevant or not. In this paper, hybrid warfare will be treated as a new (post-Cold War) phenomenon and as a useful and relevant concept that can help explain the evolving nature of conflict in the 21st century.

If one understands the adjective "hybrid" as merely "combining two different things" (Cambridge Dictionary), then hybrid warfare certainly isn't anything new. The combined use of regular and irregular forces is famously documented in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, which describes the exploits of Greek mercenaries in the service of Persian prince Cyrus the Younger. Privateering (state-commissioned piracy), an important addition to naval warfare between the 16th and 18th century, is colorfully depicted in the memoirs of English privateer William Dampier. The same applies for the dual use of conventional and covert or clandestine operations such as intelligence gathering by agents and spies (e.g. in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*), as well as for the combination of conventional and psychological warfare with psyops intended to undermine the enemy's morale or his ability to fight (e.g. in the classical Chinese essay *The Thirty-Six Stratagems*). However, despite their ingenuity, none of the historical examples showcase the ability of present-day actors to blend conventional and unconventional means in a way that allows them to permanently remain in the "gray zone" and achieve their goals without ever crossing the threshold of war.

The erroneous "discovery" of cases of hybrid warfare in the distant past stems from a reductionist point of view which reduces hybrid warfare to the combined use of regular and irregular forces. From that perspective, it could be argued that the U.S. fought hybrid wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria due to its cooperation with local resistance movements – the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq and the YPG/YPJ militia in Syria, and also because it made use of Blackwater and other private security companies across the Middle East. It could also be claimed that Ukraine counteracted Russian hybrid warfare in Crimea and Donbass with its own hybrid use of regular army units and foreign volunteers (most famously employed in the paramilitary Azov Battalion).[3] Therefore, it is crucial to stress that hybrid warfare transcends the simultaneous employment of regular and irregular troops and that it cannot be reduced to this aspect alone. The same applies to the parallel use of conventional warfare and propaganda. Using these two methods side by side does not suffice for a strategy to be called hybrid.

Hybrid warfare is more than a combination or mixture of different modes of warfare. One of its defining characteristics is the actor's ability to plausibly deny involvement in hostile activities or – *vice versa* – to take credit for actions undertaken by others. For example, Russia has denied its involvement in the 2014 Crimean crisis until the annexation of the peninsula was finalized. On the other side, the Islam-

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[3] According to Vladimir Rauta's very useful typology of irregular forces, the Northern Alliance, Kurdish Peshmerga and YPG/YPJ can be described as proxy or auxiliary forces (depending on the level of U.S. involvement), Blackwater would correspond to his affiliated forces category, whereas Azov clearly belongs in Rauta's surrogate forces box (2020).

ic State has claimed responsibility for terrorist attacks in Paris (November 2015), Brussels (March 2016) and Nice (July 2016), even though it is highly probable that the attackers in France and Belgium operated independently from the IS leadership in Iraq and Syria. This makes it harder for targeted entities to attribute hostile activities to their sources and respond accordingly. In that sense, hybrid warfare fits neatly into the post-truth paradigm of the 21st century.

The concept of hybrid warfare is valuable because no other approach that has appeared since the late 1990s encompasses all the features of postmodern conflict, nor is able to explain the merging of conventional and unconventional, military and nonmilitary, interstate and intrastate, violent and non-violent methods and tactics by state and non-state actors or a combination of the two. A textbook example of hybrid warfare, including all abovementioned categories, is Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine: Russia employed a combined force consisting of regular soldiers (wearing no insignia) and local pro-Russian separatists; it portrayed its war of aggression against a neighboring state as a civil war within that state; it used its government-controlled international media outlets (RT, Voice of Russia, Sputnik etc.) and internet bots to spread disinformation and propaganda; and it did all of this without admitting that it was a party to the conflict, i.e. without a declaration of war. Undoubtedly the most memorable feature of the war in Ukraine are the "little green men" – the unmarked members of Russian Armed Forces who occupied Crimea in February 2014. These troops effectively blurred the line between regular and irregular combatants, nullifying the distinction that exists between them in compound warfare. In other words, they are the very embodiment of hybrid warfare.

Definition

The fact that there is no universally accepted definition of hybrid warfare has been repeated *ad nauseam*, and sometimes used as damning evidence that the concept itself is impractical. Actually, the lack of an undisputed definition fittingly illustrates the elusiveness and constantly changing nature of hybrid warfare. In the words of German political scientist Herfried Münkler:

> It is impossible to precisely define the meaning of the term hybrid war. In principle, hybridity stands for the indefinability of the matter. The term "hybrid war" refers more to what is no longer the case, than it is able to precisely describe the newness of the changed situation (Münkler, 2015, p. 1).

Therefore, the quest for a final definition needs to be abandoned, and every researcher should either develop his own working definition, or choose an already existing one that best fits his research requirements. For the needs of this paper, we will put forth our own working definition, without aspiring to its finality: *Hybrid warfare is a form of low-intensity conflict which can be waged by state and state-*

like actors[4]. *It presupposes that at least one side in the conflict operates within the gray zone between conventional and unconventional warfare, while maintaining plausible deniability. If employed correctly, this approach allows the hybrid actor to achieve strategic goals to the detriment of his adversaries while avoiding attribution and remaining below the threshold of full-scale war.*

It should be stressed that a definition usually refers to an ideal type which is rarely, if ever, reproduced in real life situations. Hence, actual cases of hybrid warfare should not be expected to correspond perfectly to the above definition, although it is possible that they do so. For example, Russia's hybrid campaign against Ukraine in 2014-2015 ticks all the boxes of the proposed definition, making it a model which can be used to measure the level of hybridity of other conflicts.

Theory

In the twenty years following the first documented use of the term hybrid warfare, little has been done in the way of developing a theory that would aim to explain why hybrid warfare occurs and why it is so successful. An important initial step in this direction was undertaken by Slovenian international relations scholar Brin Najžer. In his 2020 book *The Hybrid Age* Najžer points out that "hybrid warfare is typically used by actors who do not wish to engage in classic overt forms of power politics, but still wish to achieve the goals associated with it". In other words, hybrid warfare is the strategy of choice for ambitious actors who wish to accrue more power without risking a direct confrontation with the hegemon of the day:

> Hybrid warfare is a new phenomenon and not just a new name or a popularly created moniker. As a form of international coercion, it is politically attractive and operationally useful because it is efficient, cost effective and enables actors to achieve goals that they would not be able to achieve using other means. It is primarily employed by actors who wish to challenge the international system's balance of power and influence... Hybrid warfare can be seen as a tool of revisionist powers; that is, powers that seek to challenge the dominant world order in one form or another (Najžer, 2020, p. 4).

Najžer continues by clarifying that the current hegemon – the United States – is challenged by aspiring great powers, most notably China and Russia. However, he underlines that the scenario is not limited to great power rivalry on a global scale, and that it can and does take place in a regional setting as well, a good example being Israel – a sub-regional hegemon facing challenges from a long list of state and non-state adversaries in the Middle East. Whether we are dealing with the U.S., Is-

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[4] State-like actors are non-state actors capable of employing certain elements of conventional warfare. An often-cited example is Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War.

rael or another powerful polity, "since the hegemons of the day tend to be technologically and militarily very strong, the challenges might come in a different form from open war, with hybrid warfare being the most recent and preferred type of challenge" (*ibid*., p. 15). Najžer places his theory of hybrid warfare within the realist tradition of international relations. However, he leaves a window open for other schools of thought, primarily because "the responses to hybrid warfare from individual states are not always based on realist thinking. In Europe and the wider Western world particularly, policymakers often try to avoid realist approaches, which are seen as unethical or amoral by their domestic constituencies" (*ibid*., pp. 17-18).

The Slovenian scholar poses another important question – why and how hybrid warfare succeeds. The simplest answer, according to him, is because states have allowed it to succeed, primarily through the creation of, and strict ideological adherence to a rules-based international order. This creates weak spots that are readily exploited by those who willfully ignore and subvert an order which, in their view, serves only to protect the interests of the current liberal hegemon and his allies in the West (*ibid*., p. 87). The theory developed by Najžer is a welcome addition to the existing scholarship on hybrid warfare. Of particular value is his finding that hybrid methods are most commonly employed by revisionist actors who seek to challenge global or regional hegemons without triggering a conventional response. Considering that this paper will focus on a specific aspect of hybrid warfare by two revisionist states – Russia and Turkey, Najžer's theory presents itself as a logical theoretical foundation for the article.

A second theoretical approach – Kelly M. Greenhill's theory of coercive engineered migrations – will be used as well, given the paper's focus on weaponized migrations as a tool of hybrid warfare. Greenhill's CEM theory will be presented in the central chapter.

Methodology

The research design of this paper is a binary comparison within the most different systems design (MDSD). Greece and Poland are contrasting cases with a similar outcome (dependent variable). Therefore, the goal is to detect the independent variable(s) that can help explain the observed outcome. As always in small-N research designs, the number of independent variables should not exceed the number of cases. Besides the examination of available primary and secondary sources, the author employs the method of content analysis. Content analysis is used to evaluate the statements made by Greek and Polish opposition leaders and the heads of EU institutions and member states on the topic of weaponized migration in order to determine the level of domestic and international support for the Greek and Polish governments' handling of the crises on their borders. Where applicable, code words (e.g. *hybrid attack*) will be emphasized by italic letters.

Coercive Engineered Migrations as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare

In 2010, American political scientist and international relations scholar Kelly M. Greenhill developed a theory of coercive engineered migrations (CEM) – "a very particular nonmilitary method of applying coercive pressure" (Greenhill, 2010, p. 116). She defines CEM as "those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state or states" (*ibid*.). Greenhill explains that the employment of this kind of coercion predates the post-World War II era, but her focus is on the post-1951 period because it was only after the ratification of the Geneva Convention that migration and refugees became a question of high politics. She understands CEM primarily as a strategy of weaker states attempting to coerce stronger nations; a trend that – according to Major Nathan D. Steger of the United States Army – is changing, with CEM now involving conventionally superior challengers as well (Steger, 2017, pp. 11-12). Greenhill recognizes three distinct types of challengers (actors who use migrations to apply pressure) – generators, *agents provocateurs*, and opportunists:

> Generators directly create or threaten to create cross-border population movements unless targets concede to their demands. *Agents provocateurs* by contrast do not create crises directly, but rather deliberately act in ways designed to incite others to generate outflows... Finally, opportunists play no direct role in the creation of migration crises, but simply exploit for their own gain the existence of outflows generated or catalyzed by others (Greenhill, 2010, p. 119).

This typology is highly useful for our research. In 2020 (and earlier) Turkey has been acting as an opportunist, exploiting for its own gain the existence of migratory movements generated by others (primarily by the belligerents of the Syrian Civil War). By contrast, Russia has acted as a typical *agent provocateur* in 2021, when it used Belarus as a proxy to create an artificial migrant crisis on its border with Poland and the EU.

Greenhill points out that the challengers' objectives have varied greatly since the 1950s and included military and financial aid, debt relief, lifting of sanctions and many other demands.[5] The outcomes of their actions can be evaluated as success, partial success or failure, depending on the level of fulfillment of known objectives. In her quantitative study of 56 cases, Greenhill concluded that challengers have been successful or partially successful 73 percent of the time, which makes CEM

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[5] Probably the most (in)famous example of a successful CEM strategy is the 2004 lifting of all remaining sanctions against the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi by the EU. Sanctions were lifted in exchange for Libya's promise to stem the growing flow of African migrants and asylum seekers across the Mediterranean Sea and on to European soil.

a strategy worth pursuing (*ibid.*, pp. 119-123). According to her analysis, a challenger's success or failure depends primarily on the target state's vulnerability to CEM. The factors that contribute to vulnerability are: 1. strong polarization within the target society regarding the issue of (illegal) migration; 2. high "hypocrisy costs", i.e. potential damage to a state's reputation due to a real or perceived disparity between a professed commitment to liberal values and demonstrated actions *vis-à-vis* migrants that contravene such a commitment; 3. participation in relevant international conventions such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Refugee Protocol; and 4. strong criticism by the political opposition within the country regarding the handling of a particular migrant crisis. Greenhill designates entities which manifest all of the abovementioned elements as "most vulnerable", those that tick a number of the boxes as "somewhat vulnerable", and the rare ones which exhibit none of the above (usually autocracies) as "least vulnerable". However, she adds three additional factors to be borne in mind: 1. geographic proximity to the source of migration; 2. size of the migrant contingent in question; and 3. prior experience (positive or negative) with mass migration (*ibid.*, pp. 123-144). From a hybrid warfare perspective, CEM should be considered as part of a larger strategy against a targeted state or group of states. Daniel Fiott and Roderick Parkes emphasize that border tensions can be combined with a threat to critical infrastructure and disinformation campaigns in a horizontal hybrid strategy against the EU (Fiott and Parkes, 2019, p. 42). They specifically single out "revanchist states like Russia or Turkey", along with the non-state actor Daesh (Islamic State), as most likely to carry out a hybrid attack on the EU's external border by "weaponizing" migrations (*ibid.*, pp. 11-16).

It is important to underline at this point that weaponized migrations are viewed as a tool of hybrid warfare not only by academics and military experts, but also by political leaders. Already in 2015, the President of the European Council (from Poland) Donald Tusk clearly identified the hybrid aspect of the European migrant crisis:

> For us, refugees are specific people, individuals, who expect our help. There are forces around us however, for whom the wave of refugees is just dirty business or a political bargaining chip. We are slowly becoming witnesses to the birth of a new form of political pressure, and some even call it a kind of a new *hybrid war*, in which migratory waves have become a tool, a weapon against neighbors (European Council, September 23, 2015).

A Binary Comparison of Two Cases on the External EU Border

Having established the theoretical foundations of both hybrid warfare and coercive engineered migrations, the paper now moves on to two examined cases on the external EU border: the migrant crisis on the Greek-Turkish border in 2020 and on the

Polish-Belarusian border in 2021. The research design involves two different cases with a similar outcome. The goal is to determine the independent variables that can explain the said outcome (dependent variable). This will be done in line with Greenhill's theory of CEM and the factors that, according to her analysis, contribute to the level of a target state's vulnerability.

The Greek-Turkish Border, February/March 2020

The story of the migrant crisis on the Kastanies-Pazarkule border crossing and along the river Evros between Greece and Turkey in February and March 2020 begins five years earlier, in the spring of 2015. At that time, the civil war in neighboring Syria was at a tipping point, with the Islamic State advancing in the central Homs Governorate (sacking Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in May) and the Sunni islamist Army of Conquest taking control of the Idlib Governorate in Syria's northwest. According to reports of trustworthy media outlets, e.g. *The Washington Post*, the Army of Conquest was a coalition of several jihadist groups, including the al-Qaeda affiliated Al-Nusra Front, armed and financed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey (Ignatius, May 12, 2015).[6] By September of the same year the situation became so dire for the regime of Bashar al-Assad that he was forced to ask Moscow for military assistance. Russia's intervention, particularly its airstrikes against the Islamic State and other anti-Assad groups – once again – swung the pendulum in the direction of the Syrian regime.

The worsening security situation in Syria in the spring of 2015 led to a mass exodus of people toward neighboring countries, most prominently Turkey – the gateway to Europe. This refugee wave was soon enhanced by migrants from other parts of the Middle East, South Asia, North Africa and the Horn of Africa, who saw an opportunity to blend in with Syrian refugees and possibly acquire asylum in the EU.[7] Faced with such an unprecedented inflow of refugees and migrants, Turkey quickly resorted to the "waving through" approach, directing the newcomers toward Greek islands in the Aegean and Turkey's land borders with Greece and Bulgaria. Thus began the European migrant crisis of 2015.

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[6] Turkey's backing of islamist rebels in Syria makes it at least partially responsible for the outflow of refugees from that country. In later stages of the war, Turkey's armed forces got directly involved in northern Syria, meaning that Turkey fought a compound war – using its own military and local rebel groups.

[7] According to the Pew Research Center, refugees from Syria numbered 378,000 in 2015, accounting for 29% of all of Europe's asylum seekers – the highest share of any nation. An additional quarter of asylum seekers in 2015 were from other relatively new origin countries, including 193,000 from Afghanistan and another 127,000 from Iraq (Pew Research Center, August 2, 2016).

The EU soon realized that Turkey was the key state in stopping the migrant wave, at least on the acute Eastern Mediterranean route. In October 2015, the European Commission presented the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan, intended to step up cooperation to stem the flow of "irregular migrants" crossing the Aegean Sea (Benvenuti, 2017, p. 9). Of course, stepping up cooperation in this context actually meant submitting to Turkey's policy of coercive engineered migrations of the opportunistic kind, as typified by Greenhill.

In March 2016 the two sides reached a deal – the EU-Turkey statement. Its nine "action points" committed Turkey to accept those migrants being returned from Greece who either failed to apply for asylum or whose application has been found inadmissible. Further, Turkey agreed to an exchange plan according to which for every Syrian being returned to Turkey, another Syrian would be resettled to the EU, with a cap on 72 thousand persons. In exchange, Turkey would take all necessary measures to prevent sea or land routes being used for illegal migration. According to the deal, Turkey's efforts would be rewarded by the lifting of the visa requirements for Turkish citizens (action point 5), by the payment of six billion euros to ensure the funding of projects for persons under temporary protection in Turkey (action point 6), and by the "commitment to re-energize the accession process", starting with the opening of Chapter 33 of the *acquis communautaire* (action point 8). All elements would be taken forward in parallel and monitored jointly on a monthly basis (European Council, March 18, 2016).

In accordance with Greenhill's categories of success, partial success and failure of CEM operations, the March 2016 EU-Turkey statement was a complete success for Ankara. It effectively coerced the EU into paying six billion euros and compelled it to promise the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish citizens and commit to the acceleration of Turkey's stalled accession process. However, the ensuing developments in 2016 rendered the EU-Turkey deal moot. On July 15 of the same year, Turkey was shaken by a failed military coup, followed by a massive purge of suspected mutineers, involving military personnel but also politicians, civil servants, journalists, academics etc. August 2016 saw the start of Turkey's direct military intervention in Syria, interpreted by many in the West not only as an operation to remove the Islamic State and Kurdish militias from the Turkish border, and to create so-called "safe zones" for internally displaced people, but also (or primarily) to extirpate any possibility of a Kurdish autonomous region in the north of Syria.[8] President Erdoğan's counter-coup at home and his aggressive policies

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[8] Some observers have claimed that Turkey used its "anti-terrorist operations" in northern Syria as an excuse to ethnically cleanse the local Kurdish population by pushing them towards Greece and the EU (e.g. Fiott and Parkes, 2019, p. 12).

toward Syria estranged Brussels and Ankara to the point where the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish citizens and the acceleration of Turkey's accession process became completely unrealistic (the six billion euros were paid in full by December 2020). In other words, Turkey's success in March 2016 turned into a partial success or even failure.

On February 27, 2020, during Russian and Syrian regime airstrikes against rebel positions in the Idlib Governorate, a Turkish army convoy was hit near the village of Balyun, resulting in the deaths of (at least) 34 Turkish servicemen – the Turkish military's single biggest loss of life on foreign soil since the 1974 military operation in northern Cyprus (Kemal, November 5, 2021). Two days later, on February 29, the Turkish president announced his country had opened its borders towards the EU and was no longer able to handle the number of refugees fleeing from Syria. What followed was "an unprecedented event of state-sponsored mass movement of illegal migrants" with tens of thousands of them gathering on the land border between Turkey and Greece in Thrace, along the route of the Evros river (Kotoulas and Pusztai, 2020, p. 6). Numerous groups of migrants attempted to enter Greek territory violently, by attacking Greek policemen, border guards and military personnel. The Turkish army, gendarmerie and police participated in this unlawful behavior – their implication being verified by the findings of the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND). Turkish policemen even used tear gas against Greek security forces, and the Turkish army attempted to bring down a portion of the Greek border fence using a vehicle and electric saw. Turkish soldiers have also been deployed on the border in order to prevent migrants from returning to Turkish territory (*ibid*., pp. 6-7).

Starting with March 1, Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu tweeted daily updates on the alleged number of migrants who have crossed into Greece, reaching the final number of 142,175 on March 6. Greek officials disputed the numbers, calling them "entirely false and misleading", and accused Ankara of waging a "disinformation campaign" (Gürsel, March 19, 2020). On March 2, Athens introduced an emergency legislative decree which suspended the right to seek asylum in Greece for a period of one month, a move decried by the Turkish side as a breach of the principle of *non-refoulement* (Ergin, September 30, 2020).

The increase of illegal migrants on the border between Turkey and Greece was sudden, however, judging by the events on the ground, the operation had been prepared meticulously. Unlike in 2015, the Greek side was obviously prepared as well, alarmed by repeated threats from President Erdoğan about "opening the gates" (Gürsel, March 19, 2020).

The unmasked nature of Turkey's CEM operation in 2020 reveals its dual purpose: it was simultaneously used to put pressure on the EU regarding the unfulfilled

promises of the 2016 EU-Turkey statement, but also to divert the attention of the Turkish public, furious after the killing of 34 Turkish soldiers in Syria. Even though most migrants on the land border between Turkey and Greece did not originate from Syria – as reported by Greek authorities and journalists on the ground – the Turkish leadership wanted to create the impression that it was finally doing something about the drawn-out presence of Syrians in Turkey.

Ultimately, Turkey's CEM operation in 2020 failed. Only few migrants made it across the well protected Greek border and no further concessions from the EU have been gained. The reason for this outcome is twofold: first of all, the Greek government, led by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of the center-right New Democracy party, enjoyed strong support among the Greek population for its strict handling of the migrant crisis. A poll published on March 8 showed 90% in favor of the closure of the Greek-Turkish border, and a further 81% agreed with the toughening of the migration policy followed by Mitsotakis' government (Keep Talking Greece, March 8, 2020).[9] Within the ruling party, the influential ex-Prime Minister Antonis Samaras called for even harsher measures against "illegal intruders" in December 2019, summarizing his own policy with the words "closed camps and back to their countries" (Stamouli, December 10, 2019). Furthermore, the leader of the opposition – Alexis Tsipras of the left-wing Syriza party – generally supported the government's stance, saying that Greece was facing a "geopolitical threat" from Turkey which was "using refugees as a political tool". He added that Turkey "has been threatening [to open the borders] for a long time", and that the government "was right in closing the border" (Ekathimerini, March 3, 2020).

The second reason for Turkey's failure is the unwavering support of EU institutions and member states for Greece. On March 3, a top EU delegation visited the Greek-Turkish border and commented the situation during a press conference in the Greek border town of Kastanies. The President of the European Council Charles Michel said:

> These last days, there is a strong, important point: the Greek borders are the European borders and what you are doing is important for Greece, it's crucial as well for the future of the European Union. And our presence... is a very strong message that we would like to send to the Greek people, to the European citizens, to the rest of the world: We are together because we consider that the *borders' protection* is essential (Office of the Prime Minister of Greece, March 3, 2020).

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[9] In August 2017 Gallup published the Migrant Acceptance Index, a survey covering 139 states and territories across the globe. Greece ranked 114th and finished up among the 30 countries that were found to be least accepting of migrants – not surprising considering that Greece was on the frontline since the beginning of the European migrant crisis in 2015.

The President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen spoke in similar terms:

> This border is not only a Greek border but it is also a European border and I stand here today, as a European, at your side. I also want to express my compassion for the migrants that have been lured through false promises into this desperate situation. We have come here today to send a very clear statement of European solidarity and support to Greece. Our first priority is making sure that order is maintained at the Greek external border, which is also a European border... Those who seek to test Europe's unity will be disappointed. We will hold the line and our unity will prevail... I thank Greece for being our European *aspida* (shield) in these times (*ibid*.).

Andrej Plenković, the Prime Minister of Croatia, at that time holding the rotating Presidency of the Council, concurred:

> We came here today to first of all express our solidarity and support to the Greek government, but also to demonstrate our common European determination to help Greece and to find a European response to this new migratory situation, or potential crisis. I would like to commend Kyriakos for having altered the policy of Greece when it comes to protecting its borders and not to allow *illegal migration* on its territory, because, as Ursula has said, Greece is now the shield, the real external border of the European Union and the guarantor of stability for the entire European continent (*ibid*.).

All three speeches are marked by a strong sentiment of solidarity with Greece, and place a clear emphasis on the *border's protection* and the prevention of *illegal migration*. A distinctly powerful moment was von der Leyen's equation of Greece with an *aspida*, the Greek word for shield. A shield is a piece of armor that symbolizes protection, not only for the individual carrying it, but for the community at large. Its invocation in the context of weaponized migration on the EU's border with Turkey can be interpreted as a call to arms against invasion. It is also reminiscent of the Latin phrase *Antemurale Christianitatis* (Bulwark of Christendom), used as a label for a country defending the frontiers of Christian Europe from the Ottoman Empire.

The Polish-Belarusian Border, October/November 2021

To fully understand the artificially created migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in the autumn of 2021, one needs to take a step back and recall the developments in Belarus regarding the controversial presidential election of August 9, 2020. Official results credited the country's authoritarian ruler Alexander Lukashenko with 80% of the votes, guaranteeing him a sixth term in office. Local election observers disputed the results, citing numerous irregularities, violations and inci-

dents of vote-rigging (Manenkov and Litvinova, September 1, 2020). The opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya claimed to have won with at least 60% of the votes. Immediately after the announcement of official results on state-run TV, clashes between protestors and riot-police erupted in the capital Minsk.

The EU refused to recognize the results, instead introducing sanctions against Lukashenko's regime, targeting key Belarusian exports as well as individuals and businesses with ties to the president (Mathers, 2021). Neighboring EU member states Poland and Lithuania were particularly vocal in their support for the pro-democracy movement in Belarus, e.g. by making comparisons between Belarusian protestors and the "Solidarity" movement of the 1980's (Fried, Baranowski and Judah, 2021). A day after the disputed election, and following a seven-hour detention, Belarusian authorities escorted Tsikhanouskaya to the Lithuanian border where she was granted sanctuary (BBC News, August 12, 2020). On August 20, Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis invited Tsikhanouskaya to his office and publicly referred to her as the "national leader of Belarus" (Bendarzsevszkij, 2021, p. 633).[10]

The mass protests against Lukashenko continued for months. A prominent feature among the protestors was the white-red-white tricolor of the short-lived Belarusian People's Republic from 1918/19, often emblazoned with the "Pahonia" – a coat of arms originating from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (of which Belarus had been part between the 14th and 18th century). The historical symbolism clearly demonstrated a disdain for the post-Soviet autocrat and Russian ally Lukashenko, but also a pro-Western orientation of the protestors. Closely following the events, the Kremlin announced on August 16 that Russian President Putin had spoken to his Belarusian counterpart, taking note of "external pressure" on Belarus, and offering to provide assistance "if necessary" through a collective defense security pact of former Soviet states (Shotter and Peel, August 16, 2020). Once again, Moscow made abundantly clear it would not tolerate Western "meddling" and regime change in its so-called near abroad. On May 23, 2021, as part of the crackdown against protestors and dissenters, Lukashenko ordered a fighter jet of the Belarusian Air Force to divert Ryanair Flight 4978 from Athens to Vilnius, while in Belarusian air space, and force it to land in Minsk, using a false bomb threat as justification for the plane's interception. The operation's objective: to arrest Belarusian dissident journalist Roman Protasevich (Dzehtsiarou

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[10] Diametrically opposed to the EU and its members, Turkish president Erdoğan congratulated Lukashenko on his "victory", hereby reciprocating Belarus' support of Turkey after the failed coup in 2016 (Wasilewski, 2021, p. 1). Thus, Erdoğan joined a worldwide club of authoritarian leaders who publicly supported Lukashenko: Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Xi Jinping of China, Kim Jong-un of North Korea, Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela and – of course – Vladimir Putin of Russia (Wikipedia, accessed on January 20, 2022).

and Sarvarian, 2021). Four days later, EU foreign ministers convened to discuss further economic measures against Lukashenko's regime. The castigated Belarusian leader responded by saying: "We stopped drugs and migrants. Now you will eat them and catch them yourselves" (Evans, May 28, 2021).

In the following months, a complex operation – involving diplomatic missions, travel agencies and airlines – ensued with the objective of flying Middle Eastern migrants to Minsk and taking them to the border with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, thereby creating an artificial migrant crisis on the EU's external border. The details of the operation have been extensively covered by international media and there is no need of repeating them here. However, one element deserves special attention: Istanbul was one of the main transfer hubs for migrants heading to Belarus. This is plausible, considering that Istanbul was also the starting point of the 2020 crisis on the Greek-Turkish border, and bearing in mind the cordial rapport between Erdoğan and Lukashenko who visited each other in 2016 and 2019 (Wasilewski, 2021, p. 1).

The crisis that began in the summer of 2021, and reached its zenith in October and November, was most severe on the border between Belarus and Poland. There are two obvious reasons for this: 1. the route to Germany – the preferred destination for most migrants – is shortest through Polish territory, and 2. of the three EU members that Belarus shares a border with, Poland has the most strained relationship with Brussels, making it the likeliest target of criticism due to an (anticipated) rigid approach in preventing illegal migratory movements.

Lukashenko's goal was twofold: 1. coercing the EU, and especially Poland and Lithuania, to relinquish their support for the pro-democracy movement in Belarus, and 2. compelling the Union to lift the sanctions that have been imposed on his regime since the fraudulent presidential election in August 2020. A third goal – EU funding of Belarusian efforts to stop illegal migrations (similar to the 2016 deal with Turkey) – was suggested by Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, finally exposing the mastermind behind the operation (Fried, Baranowski and Judah, 2021).[11]

There is a general consensus among experts on Russia that since the disputed presidential election in 2020 Moscow is in full control of Belarus, with some even talking about a "soft annexation" (Whitmore, 2021). Accordingly, Lukashenko would not wage such a complex and potentially dangerous undertaking without explicit Russian approval and operational support (de Bendern, 2021; Pavlakis,

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[11] Russia already manipulated migratory movements in 2015, when it helped several thousand Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis to cross Russia's Arctic border with Finland and Norway. Although no official requests were made at that time, European officials suspected Russia might be facilitating the migrant flows in response to sanctions for Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Bachmann, 2021; Pavlakis, 2021).

2021). It is important to keep in mind that Russia views Belarus as an extension of itself and that it could never accept a Ukrainian scenario in the country. Therefore, Moscow will do whatever it takes to ensure the regime's survival, and coercive engineered migrations are a tested tool when it comes to intimidating Europe.

The Polish reaction to Belarusian machinations was tough. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of the national-conservative Law and Justice party said that allowing migrants to enter Poland would be giving in to "blackmail" from Lukashenko (Roache, 2021). On September 2, Warsaw declared a state of emergency covering a three-kilometer strip along the border with Belarus. Restrictions included a ban on staying in the area, the prohibition of recording and photographing, and limited access to information on activities carried out in the security perimeter (ACAPS, December 2, 2021). The Polish government deployed thousands of troops to fortify its border. In October it passed legislation allowing border guards to immediately expel migrants who cross the border illegally and to reject asylum requests. From a strictly legal perspective, this was a breach of international law and a violation of the principle of *non-refoulement* (Bachmann, 2021; Roache, 2021).[12]

As in the Greek case, the Polish government enjoyed solid domestic support for its handling of the crisis. In a poll conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in December 2021, 58% of respondents opposed giving migrants the opportunity to apply for asylum in Poland, with 33% approving it. Further 66% supported the building of a barrier on the border with Belarus, while only 26% opposed such a measure (CBOS, December 2021).[13] The opposition leader Donald Tusk endorsed the securing of the border, while taking a jab at Morawiecki's government for its laxity in the past:

> Polish borders need to be secure and well protected. Those that question this do not understand what a state is. Security is not anti-humanitarian propaganda, but proper action. During the PiS rule the Polish border was crossed by a record number of *illegal migrants* (Rzeczpospolita, August 21, 2021).

The bigger issue would be the response of EU institutions, given the long history of disputes between Warsaw and Brussels on matters ranging from judicial independence and media freedom to the protection of minorities. However, the sup-

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[12] Migrants were assisted by Belarusian security forces who provided wire cutters to breach the fences and provoked Polish border guards by detonating stun grenades, firing blanks and dazzling their eyes with lasers (Bachmann, 2021; Lorenz, 2021).

[13] Poland ranked 115th among the 139 surveyed states and territories in the 2017 Migrant Acceptance Index. This shows a rather inhospitable attitude toward migrants in Poland that precedes the crisis on the border with Belarus.

port for Poland's guardianship of the EU external border turned out to be even more ardent than it was in the case of Greece. After his meeting with Morawiecki in Warsaw, the President of the European Council said:

> The reason I am here with you today is to express my solidarity and the solidarity of the European Union with Poland, which is facing a major crisis. It is a crisis which we are taking seriously, and which calls for both solidarity and unity across the entire European Union. In the face of this disgraceful, brutal and violent *hybrid attack*, the only response is to remain strong and united... That is why the European Council has been unequivocal in not only condemning this unacceptable attitude, but also tasking the European Commission with proposing all possible means so that we can respond in a manner commensurate with the scale of the challenge we now face (European Council, November 10, 2021).

On November 23, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen addressed the European Parliament regarding the situation on the EU's border with Belarus:

> A particularly cruel form of *hybrid threat* has emerged with the state-sponsored instrumentalization of people for political ends. This is not a bilateral issue of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania with Belarus. It is the EU as a whole that is being challenged. This has been initiated and organized by the Lukashenko regime and its supporters, luring people to the border, with the cooperation of migrant smugglers... The whole of Europe stands united in solidarity with Lithuania, Poland and Latvia on this issue. And Europe is acting on four tracks: humanitarian support; diplomatic outreach to countries of origin; sanctions against people and entities in Belarus and sanctions against transport operators facilitating human trafficking and smuggling; *protection of the border*... Recent actions by the Lukashenko regime and its supporters are a determined attempt to create a continuing and protracted crisis... Their actions are part of a concerted effort to destabilize the European Union and our neighborhood. This includes Ukraine and Moldova... These actions go beyond Belarus. They are testing our resolve and unity. But the European Union has the will, the unity and the resolve to face this and future crises (European Commission, November 23, 2021).[14]

The rhetoric used by Michel and von der Leyen regarding the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border is even tougher than it was in the case of Greece. Both leaders explicitly use hybrid-related terminology – *hybrid attack* and *hybrid threat* – to denounce the weaponization of migrants. Also, von der Leyen openly chastises

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[14] The latter section of von der Leyen's speech clearly implicates Russia. By saying "these actions go beyond Belarus", the President of the Commission points in the direction of Moscow, the concealed operator of the migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Belarus and Lukashenko personally – something she has avoided in the case of Turkey and Erdoğan. Not being a NATO member state and/or EU candidate country, Belarus was considered "fair game" by EU authorities.

The crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border began to recede in November, when several major airlines – faced with EU sanctions – barred the citizens of Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan from travelling to Minsk, and Middle Eastern countries started repatriating their citizens from Belarus (ACAPS, December 2, 2021). The end result of Russia's CEM operation through its Belarusian proxy is undoubtedly failure. Lukashenko's regime is still treated as a pariah by the EU, sanctions haven't been lifted and no payments (at least not officially) have been made in exchange for Belarusian cooperation. As in the case of Greece, the explanation lies in strong domestic and EU support for border closures and a draconian policy toward illegal migrations in general. If the cases on the Greek-Turkish and Polish-Belarusian borders teach us anything – it is that the EU of 2020 and 2021 is not the EU of 2015.

A Binary Comparison of the Greek and Polish Cases

According to Greenhill's indicators of vulnerability to CEM operations, Greece and Poland are different cases: both countries had low levels of societal polarization and a rather cooperative rapport between the government and the opposition on the migration issue in 2020/21. Also, both countries are parties to the relevant international agreements – the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Refugee Protocol. However, Poland faced much lower "hypocrisy costs" compared to Greece, due to a widespread perception of Poland as an "illiberal democracy", or worse (e.g. Friedman, 2016; Pogany, 2018; Rohac, 2018; Krakovsky, 2019; Görlach, 2019; Drinóczi and Bień-Kacała, 2021). Equally important, Poland is geographically distant from the main sources of illegal migration – the Middle East and North Africa – whereas Greece is a true frontline state, sharing both a sea and land border with Turkey – the gateway to Europe for migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Poland's geographic distance also means that it is facing a much smaller contingent of potential migrants, who need to be flown in to Belarus, whereas Greece is located on a natural crossing point between Asia Minor and Europe. All of this means that Greece was much more vulnerable to CEM operations than Poland. Nevertheless, the outcome in the two examined cases was very similar, i.e. the CEM operations against both Greece and Poland failed.[15] There are two independent variables that can explain the observed outcome – one internal, and one external: the governments in both states enjoyed strong domestic support for strict migration policies

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[15] Greece and Poland were the primary targets, in the sense that they had to bear the brunt of the hybrid attack. The secondary target in both cases was the EU, since it was the Union that was supposed to make concessions.

(internal), and both Athens and Warsaw could count on the political, financial and operational support of EU institutions (external). From this it can be reasoned that to defend oneself effectively from CEM operations, one needs internal cohesion on both the societal and political levels, as well as external support from allied countries and – in the case of EU membership – from the European Council and the European Commission. This might not be enough to fend off a hybrid attack in the form of illegal migrations, but it is a necessary prerequisite.

Conclusion

The disarray on the EU's external borders and the deep division among its member states concerning the proper management of illegal migrations in 2015 created a vulnerability that was readily exploited by hostile actors. Especially Russia and Turkey, two revisionist powers on the peripheries of Europe, sought to instrumentalize migrations in order to coerce the EU into making political and financial concessions for themselves or – in the case of Belarus – for their proxies. Their actions fit neatly within Greenhill's theory of CEM, with two caveats: they were not actions undertaken by inferior opponents and, ultimately, they failed. Also, it is important to underline that the artificially created migrant crises on the Greek-Turkish and Polish-Belarusian borders in 2020 and 2021 were not stand-alone actions (as Greenhill would have it), but rather episodes in a larger hybrid strategy against the EU as a regional hegemon (as Najžer explains in his theory of hybrid warfare). Russia used CEM in combination with disinformation/propaganda, cyber attacks and the weaponization of gas exports, and Turkey used it together with coercive diplomacy and long-standing territorial disputes with EU member states Greece and Cyprus that include serious incidents in the aerial and maritime domain and have the potential for far-reaching military escalation.

The relatively recent convergence of attitudes in the EU regarding large-scale illegal migration is not the result of a cultural paradigm shift – old and new member states still have vastly diverging opinions on immigration and multiculturalism – but rather the result of an understanding that migrations can be weaponized and used as a tool of political coercion. When viewed through a hybrid lens, which reveals CEM as one of many potential strategies, the full range of threats becomes apparent. This is why the concept of hybrid warfare should stop being treated with suspicion and should instead be embraced as a way of thinking and operating in a security environment no longer dominated by purely conventional threats.

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