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## THE PROBLEM OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WIDENED MEANING OF SECURITY

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**Abstract:** *THIS PAPER IS DEDICATED TO AN ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE OF THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CRISIS, AS A RESULT OF THE INVASION LAUNCHED BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ON FEBRUARY 24, 2024. THE REFUGEE CRISIS FROM UKRAINE REPRESENTS THE LARGEST CRISIS OF ITS KIND SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR. THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT. STARTING FROM THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL, WHICH GIVES AN EXTENDED MEANING TO SECURITY, AIMING AT FIVE LEVELS (MILITARY, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIETAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL), THIS WORK STARTS FROM THE QUESTION THAT REFERS TO THE POTENTIAL THREAT OF THE PRESENCE OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES, FROM A SECURITY POINT OF VIEW, IN THE HOST STATES. FOLLOWING ANALYSIS, THIS PAPER ASSERTS THAT THE PRESENCE OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN HOST SOCIETIES DID NOT OR DOES NOT POSE A SECURITY THREAT.*

**Keywords:** *COPENHAGEN SCHOOL, REFUGEES, SECURITY, UKRAINE WAR*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The war in Ukraine represents the biggest geopolitical crisis in Europe since the Second World War. It is the largest armed confrontation between two state actors on the European continent, having from the beginning the potential to turn into a larger conflict, but also into a global crisis manifested on several sides - from the military, political, economic, societal or environmental. The war in Ukraine is a kinetic one, involving an armed confrontation between two sovereign states, but its



reverberations can also be seen in other security sectors. A direct effect of the Russian-Ukrainian war considers the refugee crisis from Ukraine with the start of the Russian invasion on the morning of February 24, 2024. Considering that enough time has passed to subject this phenomenon to analysis, this paper is dedicated to an analysis of the Ukrainian refugee crisis from several points of view. In this sense, this study is intended to be an analysis of the Ukrainian refugee crisis starting from the extended meaning of security, in the view of the Copenhagen School, from the perspective of three levels, political, economic and societal, the other two, specific to this orientation, military and environmental, being directly subjected to armed confrontations.

With the influx of waves of Ukrainian refugees into Europe, various problems arose, also fueled by Russian or pro-Russian propaganda, which aimed at the possible threat of these people to the host societies. In this sense, this paper starts from the question of whether Ukrainian refugees have been (or still are) a security threat to host societies. A preliminary answer, which is also the argument of this paper, is that Ukrainian refugees did not present themselves as real threats to host societies. For the purpose of the present approach, this paper is organized as follows. First, I will briefly present the perspective of the Copenhagen School on the extended meaning given to the issue of security. Secondly, I will give a presentation on the Russian-Ukrainian war, with the aim of capturing its main coordinates. Third, there will be a presentation of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Fourthly, the paper will focus on the analysis of the Ukrainian refugee crisis from the perspective of the extended meaning of security from the perspective of the Copenhagen School. The last section is reserved for the conclusions of this paper.

## 2. THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL VIEW ON SECURITY

Traditionally, for the field designated by Security Studies, as part of Political Science, security considered the military and political compartments, in this case the political-military survival of the sovereign state. A clear distinction was thus made between the internal and external environments of the state (Ungureanu, 2006, p. 187). In the classical conception of security, especially from the realist perspective, increasingly questioned after the Cold War, the political-military survival of the state represents a supreme goal, because in its absence there would be no possibility of pursuing other goals (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 31), internal or external, such as economic, cultural, social or other. So, classically viewed, security referred strictly to the military and political protection of the state, by mobilizing a strong army, capable of defending the state and, implicitly, its political leadership, i.e. the relevant individual actors in making crucial decisions for the existence of the state. After the end of the Cold War, this classical conception of security was questioned, the role of the state as the main actor intended to be protected being rethought (Ungureanu, 2006, p. 187). With the end of the bipolar confrontation, which threatened to turn into a destructive nuclear war, the world experienced new forms of threats to state security, which this time came from internal state sources, for example the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, respectively the fall of the communist regimes, facts that determined the need to rethink the way of relating to the meaning of security, by expanding the referential from the systemic and state levels to other directions, with individuals now in the center and not the state (Ungureanu, 2006, p. 188).

The five sectors of security, defining the new expanded meaning of security, were conceptualized by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, as representatives of the Copenhagen School, in the book *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*. The three authors proposed a complex approach to security, expanding the concept beyond the military dimension to include the five major sectors. These sectors are seen as distinct areas in which security threats may



arise, with the aim of better understanding the dynamics of international security. Summarizing, the five sectors present themselves in the following form.

The sector reserved for military security refers to the protection of the territorial and military integrity of states, as the main referents of this level. In the realist tradition, military security is paramount, focusing on external threats and the ability to respond to them through armed forces. In the perspective of the Copenhagen School, military security is influenced by perceptions and discourses, emphasizing the importance of national identities and international relations. Thus, threats are not only objective, but also socially constructed, and military security is interdependent with other sectors (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 49-70).

The political security layer considers the stability of political regimes and protection against internal threats such as terrorism, insurgencies or regime changes. Within this dimension, the Copenhagen School emphasizes the role of democratic norms and values, as well as the importance of the legitimacy of governments. It reflects how political identities are formed and how they can influence national security. For example, a society with a strong and cohesive political identity is better equipped to deal with internal threats (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 141-162).

The sector dedicated to economic security focuses on securing the resources necessary for the survival and prosperity of a state. This includes economic stability, access to natural resources, trade and population well-being. In the view of the Copenhagen School, economic security is closely related to the other dimensions, as economic instability can lead to social and political tensions. Likewise, economic security is based on international partnerships and global economic norms, emphasizing the interdependence of states (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 95-117).

Societal security refers to the ability of a society to maintain its cultural, social and ethnic identity. This involves protecting the values, norms and traditions of the community. Within this dimension, collective identities play a crucial role, and threats to societal security can come from migration, extremism or conflict between social groups. The Copenhagen school emphasizes the importance of social cohesion and intercultural dialogue to prevent conflicts and ensure stability (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 119-140).

Finally, environmental security is an increasingly relevant sector dealing with the impact of environmental issues on human and national security. This includes climate change, environmental degradation and limited natural resources, which can cause forced population migration, resource conflicts and social instability. From the perspective of the Copenhagen School, environmental security is not only a problem for the sector itself, but has profound implications for the identity and stability of societies (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 71-93).

In conclusion, the Copenhagen School offers a comprehensive approach to security, emphasizing the interconnections between the five sectors. This expanded vision allows for a deeper understanding of contemporary challenges, recognizing that security cannot be approached from a single perspective, but requires an integrated approach that takes into account social identities, norms and interdependencies between different levels of security.

### 3. THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

The Russian-Ukrainian war began with the invasion of Ukraine by the armies of the Russian Federation on the morning of February 24, 2022, being officially labeled by the Russian side as a "special military operation" (President of Russia, 2022). This, according to Vladimir Putin's speech broadcast on the morning of the invasion, was aimed at the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine (President of Russia, 2022). In this section, we will not insist in detail on the military



operations, but we will point out some relevant elements of this war which, until the date of writing these lines, is still ongoing, with an outcome that is still uncertain. What is relevant to mention is that this represents a war in the classical sense of the term, i.e. a political activity and a violent exchange between the armed forces of two symmetrical i.e. sovereign political entities (Levy, 1983, p. 51; Levy and Thompson, 2010, p. 5). Despite some modern means of waging war, such as drones or other weapons of newer generations, the war in Ukraine remains, in the terms mentioned above, a war waged in a classical style (Preda, 2024, p. 150).

Even though it actually started on February 24, 2022, the prelude to this war is represented by the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 by Russia, following a takeover operation without a fight (Galeotti, 2022, pp. 166-179). Arguably, the political-military leadership in the Kremlin believed at the time of the full-scale invasion that Ukraine would capitulate quickly and could be taken over in a similar fashion to eight years earlier. According to some sources, Vladimir Putin was erroneously informed by the Russian secret services operating in Ukraine at the time that this state would capitulate immediately, the Ukrainian population would welcome the Russian army with open arms (Kozovoi, 2023, pp. 217-226). As events have shown, the Russian invasion met with fierce resistance from the Ukrainian military, society and political leaders, causing an operation planned to last only a few days to drag on to the present day, some 1,000 days after military confrontations.

#### 4. THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

The war in Ukraine has generated waves of millions of Ukrainian refugees who have left the country heading for neighboring states or others in Europe. An article written weeks after the outbreak of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the fastest of its kind since World War II, said it was different from other recent refugee crises in Europe. In the first three weeks after the invasion began, more than three million Ukrainians sought refuge in neighboring states, most of them women and children, while the men remained in the country to fight. As elements different from other refugee crises, such as the one in 2015, this one consisted both in the speed, as well as in the proximity, territorial, cultural and social of the refugees, they are no longer from another continent (Garcés Mascareñas, 2022). According to The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the latest estimate puts forward a total of 6,191,800 Ukrainian refugees in Europe and 560,200 outside the European continent, resulting in a total of 6,752,000 refugees globally (UNHCR, 2024).

To date, most refugees have remained in Germany (1.1 million) and Poland (970,000 remaining out of 1.6 million who received temporary protection), but also in Russia (1.2 million). From the influx that was at the beginning of the crisis, there are currently around 160,000 Ukrainian refugees in Romania. Moreover, these refugees maintain ties with Ukraine, through periodic departures and returns, while other millions have returned to their native country, even if not to their places of origin (Andrle, 2024a). This means that the refuge of Ukrainians is intended to be a temporary one, as they want to return to Ukraine, even though that country is still at war. Ukrainian refugees do not aim to remain in large numbers permanently in the societies that have received them. On the other hand, the number of refugees inside Ukraine is estimated between 3.7 and 4.9 million people (Migration Awareness, 2024).

Clearly, these refugees needed support. It came from both the host states and the European Union. The mobilization of the population of Romania, for example, was exemplary at the beginning of the war, and other states offered their help in turn. A total of 3.5 million Ukrainians entered Romania, who either transited the territory or stayed in the country. Authorities, NGOs and the population mobilized at an unprecedented level. In the first months of the crisis, Ukrainian refugees



were accommodated in various specially designed establishments, such as public places, or in the private homes of people who received help from the government. However, starting from April 2023, the conditions regarding aid to refugees have been tightened, with the amounts granted decreasing substantially. Moreover, the refugees had to look for a job and enroll their children in Romanian schools (Preda, 2024, pp. 133-134). Romania was not the only country that reduced its aid, other states such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ireland or Norway reducing the level of amounts granted in this case (Andrle, 2024b). At the Community level, the European Union organized and coordinated a sustained effort to help Ukrainian refugees. In addition to the direct aid given to refugees, who have benefited from the temporary protection mechanism, extended until 2026, which consists of residence and access to housing, access to the labor market, social protection or medical assistance, the European Union has offered constant assistance to states that have made efforts in this regard, identifying funds of up to 17 billion euros (European Council, 2024).

## 5. ANALYSIS

From the point of view of military or environmental security levels, the Ukrainian refugee crisis cannot be an object of analysis. From the point of view of military security, a possible threat could not have been discussed, since the waves of Ukrainian refugees did not represent a fighting force, especially since they consisted mainly of women and children. From the point of view of environmental security, again, Ukrainian refugees could not be the subject of such a discussion, because such a phenomenon does not involve a high level of pollution or environmental destruction, with the potential to threaten the environment. Thus, the political, economic and societal levels remain, which could have been the subject of threats from the Ukrainian refugees.

From a political point of view, the Ukrainian refugees did not threaten the internal political stability of the states in which they took refuge. They did not attack the internal political order of the host societies. Or, at least, they didn't intend it. As expected, the presence of Ukrainian refugees in the host countries gave rise to discussions, potentiated by propaganda, which could have generated some political cleavages, polarizing forces in society. On the other hand, indirectly, the image of the presence of Ukrainian refugees in the host societies was exploited by Russian propaganda, which tried to portray them as unwanted in Europe, disease-bringing Nazis who abuse social services, aiming to create effects that they were about manufacturing a negative image of them. Moreover, Ukraine was portrayed as a Nazi state that persecutes civilians fleeing the regime, but who are treated preferentially in the West over other refugees, while Russia cares for refugees or that they are in danger by collecting data intended to create disinformation networks (Preda, 2024, pp. 147-148). Thus, their presence in the host societies did not represent a threat to political stability.

On the economic level, indeed, assistance to refugees represented an effort for host states and societies, especially as it entailed government expenditure. On the other hand, many refugees were in transit, some came with their own financial resources, and the host states received special funds from the European Union. Also, as I have shown, some of the states that have received refugees have reduced their aid to refugees.

At the societal level, again, it cannot be a threat. Societal security refers to threats to cultural, social and ethnic identity. As mentioned, Ukrainian refugees show a cultural affinity with their host societies. They also come from the European continent, being from a country neighboring or close to many of the host states. On the other hand, many refugees did not stay long enough in the host states to be able to generate a relevant impact. On the other hand, refugees share, for example, the same Christian religion, even Christian-Orthodox in the case of Romania, for example, which can come





together with similar traditions. Thus, being European, Ukrainian refugees are not so different from their host societies as to pose a significant threat to cultural, social and ethnic identity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper was related to an analysis of the Ukrainian refugee crisis from the perspective of the theoretical perspective offered by the Copenhagen School. This approach has an expanded sense of security in mind. In the new context generated by the end of the Cold War, security seen in the classical sense, of threats to the military and political levels, could no longer cope with the new realities. Thus, representatives of the Copenhagen School expanded the range of security threats with three more levels, namely economic, societal and environmental. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine generated waves of refugees that poured into neighboring states. From the point of view of environmental and military security, a threat from these points of view could not be counted from the Ukrainian refugees. On the other hand, Ukrainian refugees could pose a political, economic and societal threat. From a political point of view, the Ukrainian refugees did not threaten the internal political stability of the host states, they only sought help and shelter. From an economic point of view, even if the refugees benefited from certain allocated amounts, the member states were helped by the European Union, and many refugees aimed to return to Ukraine. From a societal point of view, given the geographical and cultural proximity, the presence of refugees represented a low potential threat to the identity and culture of the host societies. In this sense, starting from the theoretical precepts of the Copenhagen School, it can be stated and maintained that the Ukrainian refugees did not represent a security risk to the host societies.



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