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DEFENSE AND PROTECTION OF THE BORDER IN RELATION TO STATE SYSTEMS IN TIMES OF WAR AND PEACE

Abstract

The authors aim to characterise the challenges related to securing the state border during both peace and war times. First, they concentrate on the individual formations of uniformed services at work. These formations are responsible for defending the civilian population and the state institutions in the area of Poland's eastern border. The authors outline the legal framework that defines and constrains the functioning of entities responsible for border protection and defence in both countries. The cooperation between various uniformed formations in response to the challenges on Poland's eastern border is described and analysed. Additionally, through an examination of the current legal status and the practical responses to these challenges, they suggest solutions for enhancing the protection and defence of Poland in peace and war.

Keywords

border, defence, security, uniformed formations

Introduction

Ensuring public safety and maintaining stability at the national border are among the most important tasks carried out by the armed forces stationed at the country's borders. The safety of civilians living in border areas depends on how well the armed forces organise their work. It should be noted that the measures taken must be supported by good technical assistance to aid the armed forces' efforts. The current situation on the eastern border, with the proximity of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the issue of illegal migration, and the terrain of the border, presents very serious logistical and defence challenges for law enforcement.

However, to consider the role of representatives from individual law enforcement agencies, it is first necessary to define the concept of security and the protection of national borders. According to the basic definition, 'security' is a situation in which a person, as an individual or an entire social group, as well as an organisation or a state, does not feel any threat to their existence and can clearly pursue their goals and interests. Ensuring security involves both the absence of an objectively perceived threat and the subjective perception of a dangerous situation¹. The state of security directly influences people living in a given area and, from a cultural perspective, helps shape the state. Legally, the concept of the state as a functioning structure is complemented by cultural and ethnic elements related to the characteristics of a nation with a rich tradition. The population residing in a given area, communicating in the same language and striving to achieve shared social goals, begins to form the foundation of a community called society. The functioning of society in a specific area is determined by the use of a common language, shared culture, as well as by common experiences—both good and bad—, the possession of the same or similar national consciousness (also known as national identity), and a unified, organised legal framework. This includes a structured social hierarchy with representatives performing specific functions aimed at maintaining the proper operation of social structures². Furthermore, it should be emphasised that a nation is a single political entity or, in other words, a community consisting of different peoples, nationalities, a political community of all inhabitants living in a given territory, operating under a uniform law and forming a civil society. Thus, a nation is not only a specific component of the state institution but also an entity that contributes to its security³. Generally, the state as a unified social entity is not the sole defining factor for the existence of the state itself. This relates to the fundamental determinant of the state's functioning and existence—its inhabitants, i.e., the population. It is the society permanently residing within and represented by its authorities that creates a unified

1 Sójka W., Gąsiorek K., *Ochrona, obrona i bezpieczeństwo granicy państwowej w warunkach zewnętrznego zagrożenia państwa i w czasie wojny*, Warszawa 2021.

2 Leszczyńska K., *Poza granicami. Pleć społeczno-kulturowa w katolickich organizacjach migracyjnych*, Wydawnictwo Nomos, Kraków 2020.

3 Lubiewski P., *Granice Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej jako wyzwanie dla bezpieczeństwa państwa*, Przegląd Policyjny (nr specjalny), Warszawa 2019.

state institution under the rule of law. Additionally, the state can be recognised as a fully functioning entity when diplomatic, consular, political, economic, commercial, and cultural relations are established with neighbouring countries. However, this definition is not entirely precise, as neighbourly contacts and relations can also be established between states that do not share a border. In practice, however, the role of neighbouring entities is most often taken up by directly bordering countries, which create specific ties in the fields of economy, politics, and cooperation⁴. From an organisational and institutional perspective, it is essential to mention the basis—or even the obligation—to ensure security within a given state for its citizens. For this purpose, organised structures of the state, local government, public administration, services, inspectorates, and guards, as well as armed forces organised hierarchically into an integrated national security system, are established. Since the state operates in many different areas, these bodies and institutions must be aware of the multitude of objectives arising from the interests and policies of the state. Therefore, when formulating the directions of state action, authorities aim to coordinate both the efforts of various services and the available resources, minimising losses⁵.

There are multiple ways to ensure the secure functioning of the state. These include methods of maintaining civil security in terms of the stable operation of government bodies and organisations during peacetime, as well as the proper functioning of the executive and legislative branches. The main entities of the state's organised defence system are: the armed forces, civil public administration, diplomatic units, businesses, special services units, and all other non-governmental organisations. These entities are responsible for maintaining security and the proper operation of state organisations during periods of stability and peace⁶. Security also refers to a state or system of statehood designed to address challenges, reduce risks, and counteract external and internal threats of a civil (non-military) nature. This group of activities encompasses specific operational (interventional) elements developed to protect the state as a political (sovereign), territorial, legal, and coercive institution, and above all, as a social institution. Regarding security, it is essential to consider the full protection of the state and the constitutional order—not only safeguarding its structures but also each citizen as a social entity, along with their physical and intangible assets, and their surroundings, such as infrastructure and the natural environment, against all threats that could significantly hinder the functioning of both the state and individuals⁷. The potential protective bodies of the state include: the judiciary, special services, guards and inspections specialising in the protection

4 Kuśmirek, K. *Information activities during the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border as a threat to society's resilience*. *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka*, 48(3), (2022) 311–321.

5 Blicharz, J. *Znaczenie ekonomii społecznej jako narzędzie rozwoju społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w kontekście dostarczania usług publicznych*. W: L. Zacharko (red.), *Nauka administracji. Paradygmaty współczesnego zarządzania w administracji publicznej* (2016). (s. 51–64). Racibórz: Wydawnictwo PWSZ w Raciborzu.

6 Kitler, W. *System ochrony państwa i jego porządku konstytucyjnego*. *Wiedza Obronna*, Tom 268, Nr 3. (2019).

7 Zamiar, Z., & Zamiar, P. *Pozamilitarne ogniwa w systemie bezpieczeństwa militarnego państwa*. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Oficerskiej Wojsk Łądowych im. gen. T. Kościuszki*, (4/162), (2011). 91–98.

of security and public order, rescue and civil protection services, elements of crisis management, the Border Guard, the Customs and Tax Service (National Revenue Administration), private sector entities (personal and property security companies), and non-governmental organisations. These units operate during peacetime and are capable of functioning within the Polish state without conflict.

However, in certain circumstances, changes may occur, and in fact, security measures may be mobilised during conflicts in neighbouring countries, dangerous situations at the national border, as well as during times of war in neighbouring territories. Other executive subsystems established to support national security are systems designed to protect critical infrastructure. These include facilities and services essential for the functioning of the state and the security of its citizens. This covers areas such as energy, communications, transport, healthcare, water and food supply, strategic reserves, national border protection, flood defence, personal data protection, and classified information security. Within the framework of state action, support for national (state) security is enabled by the state's potential in the following subsystems: social, economic, energy, and transport⁸. In the authors' view, it is crucial to highlight individual specialised executive subsystems, emphasising their vital role in achieving the desired state of national security. Nevertheless, the core message of this article remains to underscore the role of individual armed services in ensuring security at various stages of the nation's operation, with a particular focus on the functioning of armed services in border regions.

Armed forces in border protection and security

The following armed forces are responsible for the proper functioning of state institutions, i.e., ensuring security during both war and peace, especially for civilians living and operating in border areas: the Border Guard, Armed Forces, and Military Police. These units may be supplemented by the Police and the Forest Guard. Additional reinforcement and deployment of armed forces beyond those permanently assigned to border protection can occur in response to a threat to border security, such as during armed conflicts involving military operations beyond the eastern border. After World War II, the army was the main military body responsible for safeguarding the security and operation of the Polish border. In September 1945, a border defence force was established—the Border Protection Forces (WOP). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, significant political and social changes took place in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. The Border Guard Act of 12 October 1990 led to the creation of the Border Guard (SG), which took over the duties of border protection and traffic control from the Border Protection Forces⁹. Issues such

8 Gąska, M., & Trubalska, J. (Red.). *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe i międzynarodowe Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: wybrane problemy*. Lublin: Innovatio Press, (2015). WSEI.

9 Barszczewski W., Ciekanowski Z., Witkiewicz S., *Specyfika działań Nadbużańskiego Oddziału Straży Granicznej dla zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa wschodniej granicy Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2025.

as illegal immigration and threats along Poland's eastern border compelled armed forces to boost their combat readiness. As a result, the Polish Armed Forces, Police, and Forest Guard have all been involved in border security efforts¹⁰.

Border Guard

Since Poland's eastern border also serves as the border of the European Union, basic defence activities in this area are closely linked to international security. It should be emphasised that the most important formation, and the first in its operations, is the Border Guard and its significant contribution to defending the European Union's border. Naturally, Poland's accession to the European Union required all authorities and services in Poland to adapt their activities to meet EU standards. However, the activities of the Border Guard are the most vital and foundational. The country's security is ensured by a common foreign policy established by the member states of the European Community. At the time of Poland joining the European Union, the structure and operations of the Polish Border Guard had to be adjusted accordingly. As a result, this organisation was transformed from a typical military unit into a service with police-like functions and powers. In 2006, the uniformed force was fully professionalised.

This effect was achieved by transforming the candidate service system, which was part of basic military service, into professional employment. At the start of 2001, Article 4 of the Border Guard Act, stating that the Border Guard would, by law, become part of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in the event of mobilisation or armed conflict—forces entirely subordinate to the Ministry of National Defence—was completely repealed. Based on this change, the supervisory authority for the Border Guard, during times of national security threats and wartime, was also shifted to the Ministry of the Interior. Currently, the Border Guard's task is to carry out statutory and defence activities as specified within the ministry by the Minister of the Interior¹¹.

However, this was not the end of the structural and operational changes within the Border Guard. In 2002, further amendments were made to the Border Guard Act, which stipulated that, in the event of mobilisation and during wartime, the formation would undergo militarisation. The Act also included a clause stating that officers remaining in service during mobilisation or war would automatically become officers serving during the conflict, continuing in service until their discharge. Presently, the Border Guard collaborates directly with the army according to agreements between the Commander-in-Chief of the Border Guard, the Commander-in-Chief of

10 Szczurek, T. Ministry of National Defense in the Crisis Management System. *Roczniki Nauk Społecznych*, 15(51)(2), (2023). 7–18.

11 Celiński W., *Rola Straży Granicznej w systemie bezpieczeństwa narodowego*. Siedlce 2018.

the Armed Forces, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Military Police¹². The Act on the Functioning and Tasks of the Border Guard outlines the full range of duties assigned to this armed entity, primarily comprising the protection of Poland's land and sea borders and the oversight of border traffic. The goal is to ensure national security. Based on this, Border Guard officers involved in safeguarding the Polish state border have the right to:

- Carry out direct and indirect border controls;
- Conduct personal checks on individuals at the national border, as well as inspect luggage contents, including checking cargo at ports and stations and in air, road, rail, and water transport. This aims to completely eliminate the possibility of committing crimes or offences, especially those directed against the sanctity of the state border or security in international transport;
- Conduct security checks at designated and other border crossings, as well as in all forms of air, road, rail, and water transport. This aims to prevent the possibility of crimes or offences being committed, particularly those targeting the inviolability of the state border or security in international transport;
- Conduct security supervision directly on board aircraft and have the authority to use all necessary measures, including direct coercive measures and service weapons, to remove persons who pose an immediate threat to flight safety, as well as to the health or life of passengers or crew members;
- Issue visas and other permits permitting citizens to cross the state border according to separate legal provisions;
- Verify the identity of persons crossing the national border or establishing their identity by other means, as well as detaining persons in the manner and in the cases specified in the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure and other separate legal regulations, and bring them to the competent Border Guard authority, court or prosecutor's office;
- Search persons, items, premises, and means of transport as specified in the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, other laws, and legal regulations;
- Detain and return dangerous radioactive, nuclear (fissile), chemical, and biological materials, along with waste derived from them, from the national border to the sender¹³.

To ensure the effective operation of the Border Guard, which is responsible for protecting Poland's border, a fundamental element supporting human activity was established. Consequently, a border road strip and a border zone were created, with specific areas (zones) clearly defined. The first and most immediate zone is the border strip. This zone extends 15 metres inland from the state border line, whether on land or from the shore of border waters or the sea coast. According to regulations, movement within the border strip is generally unrestricted, but to prevent violations,

12 Błażejczak, K. Miejsce Straży Granicznej w systemie bezpieczeństwa państwa a typologia grup dyspozycyjnych. *Spółeczeństwo i Polityka*, 3(68), (2021). 95–116.

13 Celiński W., *Rola Straży Granicznej w systemie bezpieczeństwa narodowego*. Siedlce 2018.

it must be precisely marked and described. Clearly visible signs displaying 'National border – crossing prohibited' are placed in conspicuous locations. In certain urgent cases, when immediate border protection is required, the provincial governor of the area may temporarily impose a complete ban on unauthorised persons entering specific sections of the border road. This is enacted through a special request, usually supported by an opinion from the relevant state border protection authority. Additional, equally clear markings are also prepared, using signs bearing the inscription: 'Border road strip – no entry'. It is important to note that this prohibition does not apply to landowners or users within the border zone, nor to those on marked tourist routes, the seashore or bathing areas. The second key component in safeguarding Poland's borders and maintaining security is the border zone. This area encompasses the municipalities directly adjoining the national border and, in the maritime section, the seacoast. The zone extends another 15 km inland. If the border zone is less than 15 km wide, it also includes areas within municipalities that indirectly neighbour those bordering the border or coast. The responsibility for determining the boundary of the border zone and marking it with signs inscribed 'Border zone' lies with the Chief Commander of the Border Guard¹⁴.

In the face of current threats caused by illegal immigration, it is the Border Guard officers who are responsible for countering illegal migration. All actions in this regard are directly based on Article 470 of the Act on Foreigners. These tasks involve monitoring strict compliance with regulations related to the movement of people in the border zone, such as the entry and residence of foreigners on Polish territory. Border Guard officers are tasked with identifying and analysing all migration threats, as well as combating them, particularly those that directly or indirectly lead to crimes related to illegal migration. The inclusion of the prevention and combating of illegal migration in the list of strategic, legislative tasks of the Border Guard stems from the implementation of the Assumptions of the long-term concept for the functioning of the Border Guard developed for the years 2009-2015, under which the Border Guard is to become the leading migration service¹⁵.

Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland

Between 2022 and 2025, the Polish-Belarusian border became a hotspot for intense hybrid activities, posing a serious challenge to Poland's national security and the European Union. This issue is linked to Belarus' aggressive policies and the so-called 'illegal immigration'. The phenomenon intensified notably after Belarus' highly controversial presidential elections, which triggered mass protests and repression of opposition activists. Alexander Lukashenko's dictatorial rule, combined with the country's international 'isolation', has resulted in measures such as using illegal

14 Konieczny M., *Status, rola i zadania Straży Granicznej w Polsce*, Kraków 2021.

15 Elak L., Oskierko M., Żurawski S., *Ochrona granicy polsko-białoruskiej w obliczu wojny hybrydowej*, Warszawa 2024.

migration as a tool to pressure neighbouring countries, especially Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. The main strategy involved systematically bringing migrants from the Middle East and Africa to Belarus and then deploying them en masse to the border with Poland.

The primary aim is to destabilise Poland internally and exert political ‘blackmail’ by pressuring EU authorities. Another motive behind Lukashenko’s actions is to distract from Belarus’ internal issues. In response, Poland has implemented various measures to bolster border protection, including constructing physical barriers and increasing security personnel presence. As previously mentioned, the Border Guard remains the principal armed force responsible for eastern border security. However, in light of the illegal immigration threat and attempts to disrupt normal order, the Polish Armed Forces were deployed to support the Border Guard. Polish law provides several regulations permitting military involvement in border protection activities during such threats. According to Article 26(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997, the army’s primary duties are to defend the state’s independence, territorial integrity, and ensure border security. Nonetheless, the Constitution does not specify how these tasks should be executed. During heightened demand, Border Guard officers can receive direct assistance from soldiers.

The legal basis for this is found in Article 27 of the Act of 4 September 2008 on the protection of shipping and seaports¹⁶, and Articles 11b, 11c, and 11d of the Act of 12 October 1990 on the Border Guard¹⁷. Additionally, the Polish Armed Forces¹⁸ may operate along the Belarus border under Article 11 of the Act of 21 June 2002 regarding states of emergency, to counteract destabilisation. Given the serious threat, fully legal procedures are crucial. After examining relevant legal frameworks, it was concluded that the Border Guard Act forms the foundation for military participation and presence at the border. This legislation permits the deployment of soldiers only in three specific situations, related to Articles 11b, 11c, and 11d. The third, related solely to the Military Police, is excluded since operations at the eastern border involve other branches of the Armed Forces¹⁹. When soldiers are assigned for defensive operations, the Commander-in-Chief of the Border Guard coordinates their activities, especially when multiple units operate in the same area, as specified in Article 11b(8)(227). Based on the above, these regulations serve as the legal basis for all military actions in the border region during actual threats linked to illegal migration. The involvement of Polish Armed Forces soldiers is thus justified to secure the border and uphold national sovereignty. It should also be emphasised that soldiers are only deployed when Border Guard capacity proves insufficient or when

16 Act of 4 September 2008 on the Protection of Shipping and Seaports, consolidated text: *Journal of Laws* 2024, item 597, Art. 27.

17 Act of 12 October 1990 on the Border Guard, consolidated text: *Journal of Laws* 2025, item 914, Arts. 11b–11d.

18 Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 31 August 2023 on cooperation between the Border Guard and units and subunits of the Polish Armed Forces, *Journal of Laws* 2023, item 1767.

19 Koška M., *Ochrona lądowej granicy Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Republiką Białorusi w związku z kryzysem migracyjnym w okresie od lipca 2021 roku do czerwca 2024 roku*, Piotrków Trybunalski 2024

the threat level is elevated. Support operations by soldiers began in July 2021 with the formation of the GRANICA30 Task Force, comprising operational troops and Territorial Defence Forces personnel for auxiliary duties²⁰. These soldiers conducted information campaigns for residents in emergency zones and assisted in building a temporary border barrier, which started near Szudziałowo in late August 2021. About 1,000 soldiers were initially involved, with numbers increasing by 2.5 times in September and reaching 15,000 by year's end²¹. The core activities include stationing at observation posts and patrolling on foot, both independently and alongside Border Guard officers. They also use drones for aerial patrols during day and night, and operate lighting masts at critical border points. Support from the Territorial Defence Force in Operation GRYF reports to border guards. As of August 2023, up to 4,000 soldiers were set to be involved, as decided by the Minister of National Defence²². On 12 August 2023, a separate task force was established during Operation RENGAW, comprising units including the 16th and 18th Mechanised Divisions, 17th Mechanised Brigade, the 6th Airborne Brigade, the 25th Air Cavalry Brigade, UAV bases, and specialised units like the Military Police and Special Forces. These units are equipped with various weaponry and engineering tools, including carbines, armoured vehicles, tanks, missile systems, helicopters, and surveillance equipment. They will also construct engineering barriers, bunkers, and firing positions across the border, under an agreement among Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia²³.

Police

Ensuring security along the Polish-Belarusian border is not only the result of actions by individual armed forces, including the Border Guard and the Polish Armed Forces, but also relies on cooperation with other units, such as the police. Long before the migration crisis on the eastern border, in 2004, the Border Guard and the police signed a cooperation agreement. The document clearly specified and defined the framework for this cooperation. The police, together with representatives of the Border Guard, undertake to:

- cooperate in combating and preventing crime, in particular in identifying terrorist threats, as well as actively participating in the protection of the nation's border;
- police officers will carry out preventive protection and strictly ensure public safety and order on the border;

20 Kukuła, W., *Sily Zbrojne w systemie reagowania na kryzys migracyjny na granicy z Republiką Białorusi – wyzwania i doświadczenia* [Wystąpienie konferencyjne]. Konferencja „Bezpieczeństwo granicy państwowej w kontekście kryzysu migracyjnego”, Warszawa 2023, wrzesień 15.

21 Waniek, P., & Brądkiewicz, D. Kryzys migracyjny na granicy polsko-białoruskiej. W: D. Brądkiewicz, J. Nowicka, Z. Ciekanowski, & L. Elak (red.), *Współczesne wyzwania dla bezpieczeństwa państwa*, 2023, (ss. 47–60). Wydawnictwo im. prof. Leszka J. Krzyżanowskiego.

22 Nowak T., *Wzmacnianie bezpieczeństwa militarnego Polski na ścianie wschodniej*, Piotrków Trybunalski 2023.

23 Ochrya, P., Brądkiewicz, D., Żurawski, S., & Ciekanowski, Z. *Sily Zbrojne RP jako element zarządzania kryzysowego w Polsce* [The Polish Armed Forces as an element of crisis management in Poland]. *Studia Administracji i Bezpieczeństwa*, 16(16), 2024., 291–307.

- the basis for cooperation between the police and other representatives of the defence forces will be the continuous improvement of the methodology of performing tasks and official duties, as well as active logistical support.

The process of cooperation between the Border Guard and the police will mainly involve information exchange, joint actions—especially when they concern persons or objects of mutual interest—and the provision of specialist support and mutual logistical services²⁴. On behalf of the police, the following are authorised to collaborate with Border Guard units: the Chief Commander of the Police, the Provincial Commander of the Police, the District (Municipal, Regional) Commander of the Police, and the Chief of the Police. As part of the signed agreement, a catalogue of events has been established, which the Border Guard is obliged to report to the police, and vice versa. Furthermore, tasks and parameters have been developed to guide the flow of information between the two cooperating units. For example:

If any incident occurs at the border suggesting the possibility of preparing or attempting to commit a prohibited act, which is nominally the responsibility of the police to prosecute, all related information must be immediately forwarded to the duty officer at the relevant local unit. As a result of this information flow, the Border Guard is obliged to notify the police of the incident. A similar procedure applies when there is suspicion of an illegal gathering or assembly in the cross-border area that disrupts public peace and order. The same applies to the detection of any event in the border zone that poses a collective threat to public safety, transport safety, or environmental safety. In such cases, information is also passed from the Border Guard to the police. However, in incidents involving individuals and criminal groups clearly engaged in smuggling immigrants, smuggling goods, or falsifying documents granting the right to cross the national border, the information is immediately forwarded upon receipt. This information should be relayed to the duty officer at the relevant territorial unit of the Border Guard. Consequently, it is the police that notify the Border Guard²⁵. Police officers perform all duties assigned to them regarding border protection and the preventive safeguarding of public safety and order from the moment Poland joined the Schengen area. Therefore, close cooperation and coordination between the police and other law enforcement agencies present at the border are essential for success. The police and Border Guard collaborate through joint patrols and share various tasks related to border protection in an appropriate manner. An example of such cooperation is roadside checks in the border area, particularly on access routes to the border. Police and Border Guard patrols undertake tasks specified in the agreement on cooperation between the police and the Border Guard. The primary focus of these tasks is to ensure security and uphold public order near border crossings. During their joint operations, police and Border Guard officers work together to apprehend individuals illegally crossing the border. Officers of both

24 Jakubczak, R., *Use of genocide by the Russian Federation in the conduct of hybrid activities and warfare in Ukraine*. Studia Prawnicze KUL, 4, 81–99, 2024.

25 Płaczek, A., *Policja i jej rola w ochronie granicy państwowej*. *Przegląd Policyjny*, 29(nr specjalny), 2019, 87–97.

services also carry out measures to counter illegal migration. It is worth emphasising that, amid the migration crisis on the eastern border, the primary objective of cooperation between the Border Guard and police is to combat organised criminal groups, including international ones, involved in smuggling, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. To achieve this, coordination teams comprising officers from both services are established. According to recent data, over 2,000 officers serve in the Podlasie Border Guard Unit. These forces are supported by both police personnel and the army. The combined efforts of these three armed forces have led to a marked decline in illegal border crossings in the Podlasie Province. According to information from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, 4,276 attempts to illegally cross the border were recorded between 13 June and 20 August 2024. In comparison, before the establishment of the buffer zone, over 13,675 such attempts were detected in a similar period from 5 April to 12 June 2024. Since 13 June 2024, over 1,800 police officers have been engaged in guarding Poland's eastern border with the Republic of Belarus. The officers conduct numerous training courses for Border Guard and military personnel on the operation of specialised units. Currently, approximately 5,500 soldiers from various formations of the Polish Armed Forces are stationed along the border with Belarus. Throughout the entire 'Safe Podlasie' operation, which commenced on 1 August 2024, around 17,000 soldiers will participate on a rotational basis. The core of the operation comprises units of the 18th Mechanised Division, supported by subunits of the General Command of the Armed Forces, the Military Police, the Territorial Defence Forces, and the Armed Forces Support Inspectorate. The army remains prepared to provide any necessary assistance to the Border Guard and Police at any time²⁶.

Forest Guard

It is also worth mentioning other groups and formations that can help temporarily secure the eastern border, especially amid the migration crisis. One such formation is the Forest Guard. The presence of its officers on patrols and close cooperation with the already discussed units of the Border Guard, the Polish Armed Forces, and the Police aims to ensure even greater effectiveness in maintaining security in this challenging region of our country. As part of close cooperation in the border area, it should be remembered that not only people (permanent residents, migrants) appear there, but also animals and plants. Therefore, all matters related to the protection of flora and fauna in the municipalities and counties along the borders must be properly managed. Since the Polish-Belarusian border area is mainly forested, these areas remain under the jurisdiction of the Forest Guard, the National Park Guard, and the State Hunting Guard. The tasks of the first of these formations include, in particular: managing forests run by the State Forests, forest

26 Końska M., *Ochrona lądowej granicy Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z Republiką Białorusi w związku z kryzysem migracyjnym w okresie od lipca 2021 roku do czerwca 2024 roku*, Piotrków Trybunalski 2024

management and protection, combating crimes and offences related to forest damage and nature conservation, and performing other tasks related to property protection. Although during times of peace and stability at the border, Forest Guard and National Park Guard officers mainly perform educational activities for the public and are involved in protecting plants and animals, in times of heightened threat, such as the migration crisis, these services are tasked with actively supporting other uniformed services involved in border defence and regional security²⁷. In 2021, the State Forests announced that Forest Guard officers would be deployed to the Belarus border to support the Border Guard, Police, and Polish Army in defence operations. The designated Forest Guard officers were sent to border units. According to the State Forests' statement, Forest Service officers possess the relevant experience, vehicles, and equipment necessary to fully support other law enforcement agencies during crises. The advantage of local Forest Guard officers is their excellent knowledge of the terrain, especially inaccessible forest areas, which has helped increase the effectiveness of security services in defending Poland's eastern border²⁸.

To ensure the continuity and stability of state border protection, especially during a migration crisis, it is essential to identify the main directions for enhancing cooperation among the various law enforcement agencies operating at the border to secure and defend it. These measures should include the comprehensive integration of the national security management system, as well as increasing the resilience of the state, including the protection of the population and civilians, and developing a universal defence system. It is very important to strengthen collaboration between the Ministry of National Defence and various pro-defence organisations to support the training of human reserves and to enhance the capabilities of the Border Guard. Additionally, it is necessary to focus on upgrading and expanding existing infrastructure, including barrier systems, and improving the ability to respond to threats such as cyberattacks and hybrid activities emerging from the eastern aggressor. Providing Polish Army soldiers with adequate logistical equipment and training support is vital for more effective border patrols and threat countermeasures, as well as ensuring smooth cooperation with existing pro-defence organisations in areas such as reserve training, logistical support, and defence activities. This might involve regular military and defence exercises that include not only pro-defence organisations but also the civilian population to improve border defence procedures and skills. Furthermore, conducting numerous information campaigns to raise public awareness about the threats and the importance of defending the eastern border is crucial.

27 Kobus, I., *Straż Leśna w systemie bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego* [Forest Guard in the internal security system]. *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka*, 8(2), 2014., 51–61

28 Stec, R., *Komentarz do art. 53 [w:] B. Rakoczy, A. Woźniak, & R. Stec (red.), Prawo łowieckie. Komentarz. LEX (SIP LEX)*, 2014.

Conclusions

Ensuring public safety and maintaining stability at the national border is among the most vital tasks undertaken by the armed forces stationed there. Law enforcement agencies established specifically for this purpose are involved in maintaining order and security on Poland's eastern border. This remains true both in times of peace and during threats of war or other crises in these areas. The primary unit tasked with defending the border is the Border Guard. Its activities are a priority in preserving peace and supporting the proper functioning of the population in this region, thereby ensuring the stability of the Polish state. However, in periods of unrest or an intensified migration crisis, the Border Guard may be supported by other armed forces. As demonstrated in this study, officers from the Polish Armed Forces, the Police, as well as local representatives of the Forest Service or the National Park Guard, may be delegated to assist in these efforts. Working together under legal agreements, officers from these formations are responsible for supporting each other to ensure security at the Polish border during both wartime and peacetime.

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