

CONCEPTUALIZING CROSS-BORDER CRISES: THE SPECIFICITY OF UKRAINIAN-POLISH CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Crises of a cross-border nature are positioned as a critically important domain not only of national but also of international politics. Threats not recognizing national borders constitute the main challenge in cross-border crises and require not only administrative coordination but also efficient information exchange, unity of positions, trust in official sources, and the countering of disinformation in a multinational environment. Cross-border dynamics disrupt established governance frameworks, emphasizing the need for network-based models of interaction and a communicative dimension grounded in consensus, responsibility as well as trust. International cooperation requires open and two-way communication. However, specific communication methods for cross-border crises and criteria for assessing their effectiveness remain insufficiently studied. The development of a theoretical framework for analyzing communication in cross-border crises, identifying problem areas, and determining appropriate tools contributes to coordinated action through reducing uncertainty and the preservation of public trust. This can be facilitated by the study of cross-border terminology, the systematization of communication problems by crisis types, and the development of practical evaluation indicators. A cross-border crisis is strategically dependent on communication, as it determines interstate coordination and the population's readiness to follow recommendations. Key communication challenges include fragmentation of responsibility, asynchrony in decision-making, language barriers, and the spread of misinformation. Tools for addressing these challenges include joint information-sharing protocols, early warning systems, and unified communication algorithms. Bilateral communication reduces the gap between institutional logic and public expectations. Empirical analysis through case studies allows for assessing the speed of initial communication, consistency between actors, and the availability of practical guidance.

163

¹ Doctor of Political Sciences, International Relations Department, Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, E-mail: yevgenia.tykhomyrova@vnu.edu.ua; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5017-5875>.

Keywords: *crisis communication, cross-border nature, cross-border risks/crises, Ukrainian-Polish cross-border crises.*

Концептуалізація транскордонних криз: особливості українсько-польських кризових комунікацій

Кризи транскордонного характеру позиціонуються як критично важлива сфера не лише національної, але й міжнародної політики. Загрози, що не визнають національних кордонів, є головною проблемою у транскордонних кризах та потребують не лише адміністративного узгодження, але й оперативності обміну інформацією, єдності позицій, довіри до офіційних джерел та боротьби з дезінформацією в мультинаціональному середовищі. Транскордонність руйнує усталені схеми управління, акцентуючи потребу у мережевих моделях взаємодії та комунікаційному вимірі згоди, відповідальності та довіри. Міжнародна взаємодія потребує відкритої та двобічної комунікації. Проте залишаються слабо вивченими специфічні методи комунікації для транскордонних криз та критерії оцінки їх результативності.

164

— Формування теоретичної бази для аналізу комунікацій у транскордонних кризах, визначення проблемних зон та інструментів сприяють злагодженості дій, зменшенню невизначеності та збереженню довіри громадськості. Цьому сприятиме дослідження транскордонної термінології, упорядкування комунікаційних проблем за типами криз та розробка практичних показників їхньої оцінки. Транскордонна криза стратегічно залежить від комунікації, оскільки вона визначає міждержавну координацію та готовність населення виконувати рекомендації. Основними комунікаційними викликами може бути фрагментація відповідальності, асинхронність рішень, мовні бар'єри та поширення неправдивої інформації. Інструментами їх подолання є спільні протоколи обміну інформацією, системи раннього попередження та єдині алгоритми інформування. Двостороння комунікація скорочує розрив між інституційною логікою та очікуваннями населення. Емпіричний аналіз через кейс-стаді дозволить оцінити швидкість первинного повідомлення, узгодженість між сторонами та наявність практичних інструкцій.

Ключові слова: *кризова комунікація, транскордонність, транскордонні ризики/кризи, українсько-польські транскордонні кризи.*

The research problem statement. In the context of current crises, fewer and fewer of them remain confined within a single territory as they rapidly spread beyond national borders. “Over the past few decades, much has been done to prepare modern society for all kinds of crises and disasters. It can be said that many societies have never been as prepared for crises and disasters as they are today.” However, according to the Dutch researcher, “modern societies are woefully unprepared to deal with the type of threat that is on the rise. This is what is known as a cross-border crisis” (Boin, 2019).

Thus, cross-border crises should be understood not merely as incidents affecting several geographical areas, but as multidimensional and complex processes in which the consequences of a single risk factor unfold simultaneously across different jurisdictions, sectors, and communication channels. Within such crises, there is not only a lack of administrative coordination or resource allocation but also a deficit in communication: timely information exchange, unity of governmental messaging, trust in official communications, countering misinformation, and the ability to establish two-way communication with citizens in a multilingual and multicultural environment where various languages and cultures are spread. Therefore, it is crucial to study which communication challenges influence the development of cross-border crises and which mechanisms facilitate effective cooperation among governmental bodies, international institutions, media, and citizens.

Analysis of research and publications. In academic literature, the concept of a crisis without clear boundaries has been explored in the works of authors such as (Ansel et al. (2010). They demonstrated that the intensification of “cross-border” dynamics undermines established crisis management frameworks; as such events extend beyond the boundaries of a single administrative unit and require the implementation of new, effective response mechanisms. We see a further development of this concept in the works of (Boin A. et al. 2014), where it is argued that individual countries are often unable to cope independently with crises spanning different territories and therefore require networked or hybrid models of cooperation at a level higher than the national one.

The aspect of communication during cross-border crises is most thoroughly explored in studies devoted to international crisis communication. In these works, crisis communication is viewed not merely as a means for the rapid transmission of information, but as an integral part

of public administration. This perspective is particularly valuable when studying cross-border crises, where the communication process involves a diverse array of target groups, institutions, and government systems for disseminating information (Schwarz et al. 2016; Klein, 2022).

Thus, the academic tradition has established a solid theoretical foundation for analyzing cross-border crises; however, the issue of communication challenges in such crises requires further in-depth study. This is what makes the study of cross-border crises from a communication perspective particularly relevant.

The aim of the study is to conceptualize the nature of cross-border risks and crises, analyze the typology of cross-border crises, and empirically verify some of them. The empirical component of the study will be based on two case studies of crisis communication: Ukrainian-Polish cross-border crises (the crisis of memory and historical policy and the grain crisis).

The main material presentation. A cross-border crisis differs from a typical emergency in that it disrupts the usual balance between areas of responsibility, institutional competencies, and information channels. It unfolds simultaneously across several dimensions: geographical, political, informational, and social. For this reason, communication in such conditions is strategic rather than merely supportive. It determines not only the public's level of awareness but also the speed of interstate coordination, the degree of trust in decisions, communities' willingness to follow recommendations, and society's resilience to panic and manipulation.

The concept of a crisis that transcends national borders is rooted in the understanding of a classical crisis as a threat to the fundamental foundations or vital functions of any social structure, which inevitably necessitates urgent action amid significant uncertainty.

Within the framework of the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project for the new millennium, a decline in the frequency of international crises is noted, though those that do arise. Furthermore, crises in the new millennium are evolving into a mix of state and non-state actors, with the latter participating in cross-border ethnic tensions and conflicts that often extend beyond national borders and contribute to crises between states (Beardsley et al. 2020).

ICB researchers believe that the process of escalation from conflict to crisis and de-escalation to a more stable state of relations occurs within an international system that has become more complex due to changes in the very nature of conflict, changes caused by new weapons

systems, improvements in information acquisition and transmission, the involvement of non-state actors, and a range of transnational factors such as cross-border terrorism, refugee flows, and climate change (Beardsley et al. 2020).

We will begin our conceptualization of cross-border risks and crises by defining cross-border nature as the inherent ability of risks and crises to extend beyond national borders and encompass several interconnected spheres simultaneously such as political, economic, social, environmental, and others. In other words, the concept of cross-border dynamics should be viewed not merely as the act of crossing a border, but as the capacity of systems (related to the environment, the economy, or emergencies) to function as an indivisible unit, regardless of official barriers.

As Klein (2022: 9) notes, “The Oxford English Dictionary” defines a border as “a line separating two countries or territories”. However, this definition is rather “rigid and limited in its perspective, so broader definitions are proposed in various academic disciplines, encompassing a range of aspects” (cited in: Klein, 2022: 9).

167

Borders are often viewed as some kind of unwanted barrier. In most cases, in real-life situations, border lines coincide with natural landmarks, such as river courses or mountain ranges. Such natural borders, by their very nature, already present certain difficulties to cross, a reality shaped by the course of history. However, even those dividing lines that have arisen as a result of human activity can be designed to function as barriers, creating obstacles to the entry of outsiders. In analyzing the issue of borders, Klein (2022: 9) cites the perspective of scholar T. Nail, who interprets a border as a bilateral phenomenon: “if both sides were in contact with each of the states and, thus, belonged to those states respectively, there would be no difference between the two states”. In this case, according to the researcher, a border would not be necessary. Thus, he concludes that there must be a third element between them, namely the border itself, which borders the states. He presents the border as a blurred zone that is “not a purely territorial, political, legal, or economic phenomenon, yet at the same time not a non-territorial, apolitical, non-legal, or non-economic phenomenon” (cited in: Klein 2022: 9).

According to Klein (2022), such an understanding of borders cannot focus solely on the aspect of separation but must also encompass the intermediate zone over which neither state exercises social authority. The consequence of this distinction between extensive and intensive border

territories is that the border is perceived by some as continuity and by others as a rupture. In this context, the researcher considers the closely related terms – “the terms boundary, border, frontier, and borderlands mean many things to many people” – to be perceived differently by different people. “Boundary,” “border,” “frontier,” and “borderlands” – this is how they are distinguished” (cited in: Klein 2022: 10).

The most general of these terms is “boundary,” which encompasses both types of borders and frontiers based on their differing dynamics (i.e., borders are static, whereas frontiers are fluid). An expanded version of this conceptual model illustrates five main categories of boundaries found in border regions, namely: geographical, political, demographic, cultural, and economic. They are interrelated and change over time (cited in: Klein 2022: 10).

168

—

The complexity of managing cross-border problems is due to the fact that a danger (such as a cyberattack or the spread of a disease) spreads across networks faster than governments can develop a coordinated response. That is, it is not only about crossing a border in a geographical sense, but also about the spread of phenomena between different countries, regions and systems of interaction. That is why cross-border risks and crises are not limited to the territory of one state, but affect wider spaces namely border regions, international associations and global structures. In this sense, cross-border helps to understand the multifaceted nature of crises that go beyond the usual divisions into internal and external, local and global. In English-speaking academic usage, this concept, depending on the context, can be transmitted as cross-border dimension or cross-border nature.

Thus, the concept of cross-border nature provides an analytical basis for why cross-border crises are inherently complex and require an interdisciplinary methodology for both their study and the search for solutions. According to Lara-Valencia (2023), the terminology associated with this concept has gone through a number of development stages – from a purely technical term to a rather complex socio-political doctrine. She believes that the first recorded use of the word “cross-border” was in the Merriam-Webster dictionary in 1897. In its innovative meaning, this term refers to anthropogenic or natural events that cross or spread across a border. However, the researcher believes that the definition is so broad that it “can be easily applied to all types of phenomena that go beyond the border and to all types of borders: internal, linguistic, bodily, organizational

and psychic, among others”. The example of a dictionary originating in the environmental field is indeed very relevant to illustrate the meaning of the word “cross-border”, but it represents only one of the many fields in which the term is currently used (Lara-Valencia 2023).

The term refers to the frequency, intensity, directionality and scale of border crossings; the type of material and symbolic exchange; and the social and cultural meanings associated with the interaction. Higher levels of cross-border nature are associated with greater cultural potential and richness, increased complexity in people’s perceptions of the border, and richer conceptions of self-identity. It is often said that “it all depends on the mirror you look in”, but this also depends on the characteristics of the person looking and the place from which they are looking. For this reason, it is important to analyze social conceptions of the border from the perspective of people and places in the different social and cultural environments of the border zone. The main differences are in who crosses the border and who does not, in the reasons for crossing/not crossing, and in the direction in which they occur (Lara-Valencia 2023).

The author notes that, according to existing research, the term “cross-border” became a concept that gained popularity during the 1980s, which was due to the emergence of the sustainable development paradigm. This “paradigm postulated the complex, multidimensional, multi-scale and interdependent nature of ecological systems, calling for the integrated and cooperative management of natural systems that are not limited by national borders but degraded by state-centric policies that prioritize competition for resources and territorial control” (Lara-Valencia, 2023).

She argues that, on a broader scale, the development of this concept is linked to “the processual turn in border studies that unfolded in the late 20th century”. This period saw a profound transformation in the perception of borders within the field of border studies. They have come to be seen as “socially constructed and flexible structures subject to the influence of social practices and discursive processes that regulate socio-territorial differentiation”. Although borders continue to serve their primary function as means of division and demarcation, it is now understood that the complex and fluid scale of inclusion/exclusion and division/union generates a spectrum of phenomena that take shape both within and beyond these borders. This shift in perspective has marked a departure from the established view of borders as inactive lines delineating the sovereign possessions of national entities, and has led to a revitalization of scholarly

studies related to borders, transforming them into a multidimensional and increasingly interdisciplinary object of inquiry (Lara-Valencia, 2023).

In current academic literature, cross-border risks are rightly considered the root cause of cross-border crises. According to the definition provided by the Sustainability Directory, a cross-border risk is viewed as a systemic phenomenon requiring a three-stage response: aspiration (Aspire), adaptation (Adapt), and scaling up efforts (Amplify). “A cross-border risk is a systemic threat whose source, mechanisms of spread, and consequences transcend national, administrative, and sectoral boundaries. Unlike localized threats, cross-border risk is characterized by a cascade effect: a failure in one subsystem (e.g., the environmental one) inevitably triggers a crisis in others (economic, political, security) at the international level”. (Cousins & Zalewski, 2026).

170

—

Cross-border risks are dangers whose essence lies in their ability to originate at a single point and spread, overcoming geographical, political, institutional, or even methodological boundaries, and thus affecting numerous interconnected systems. In their most basic form, these are risks that disregard any divisions – be they national borders, economic sectors, or even the boundaries of scientific disciplines. Their significance lies in the systemic nature they demonstrate and in the potential for chain reactions they can trigger, vividly illustrating the interdependence in this globalized world and the inability to solve problems exclusively at the local level” (Cousins & Zalewski, 2026).

The critical importance of such threats lies in their ability to expose the vulnerabilities of our current structures and underscore the urgent need to strengthen cooperation, proactivity, and adaptability on a global scale. They compel us to look beyond our immediate concerns and take into account the much broader, long-term consequences of both specific actions and inaction. Scholars believe that they are characterized by several key components: systemic interconnectedness, where disruptions in one sector inevitably affect others; cascading effects, where an initial risk event triggers a chain reaction of further consequences across systems and scales; governance gaps that fall under the purview of national governments or international bodies, creating the illusion of “no one’s job” that hinders effective governance; equity and fairness, which are driven by the disproportionate impact of these risks on vulnerable populations and countries, raising critical questions of global justice and accountability (Cousins & Zalewski, 2026).

They escalate rapidly and are constantly changing, creating confusion about causes and possible consequences. A. Boin (2019) calls a cross-border crisis the worst nightmare for crisis managers, marking the moment when they discover that their traditional anti-crisis measures are insufficient. It sheds light on the structural deficit of governance, which poses urgent challenges for policymakers not only in terms of design, but also in terms of management. According to the researcher, cross-border crises have common features that make them difficult to manage: they do not have a clear geographical focus or a single political sector, which leads to different views of the problem by different states; there is a hidden beginning and rapid escalation after a period of slow development, as was the case with the migration crisis; unclear sources of the problem, uncertain consequences and unpredictability of the development of events; crisis actors are fluid; crises do not have universal solutions; established approaches often do not work (Boin, 2019).

The scholar believes that a cross-border crisis complicates the situation, mainly because it challenges the very “platform of the bureaucratic approach (where responsibility is clearly assigned to a specific person, position or institution)”. Such crises can be both interstate and go beyond one or two countries, and are characterized by the following features: it spreads, overcoming state borders, institutional frameworks, information spheres and cultural divisions; the consequences of its manifestation are unevenly distributed, which creates an imbalance between the participants in the situation; in order to resolve it, it is necessary to coordinate the actions of subjects belonging to different legal systems; this phenomenon is inherent in the struggle to determine the dominant interpretation and symbolic space (Boin, 2019).

Concluding the analysis of the problem, it is worth talking about centralized and supranational coordination, networked multilateral governance, bilateral commissions / joint working groups and intermedium, and international mediation. However, when it comes to the cross-border nature of the phenomenon, this definition adds an aspect that researchers characterize through the potential of the threat to overcome three categories of borders: politically defined, functional and temporal. They believe that “we are able to describe the cross-border nature of any crisis or disaster along three dimensions – the higher the crisis score on each dimension, the more cross-border it is” (Ansel et al. 2010).

The first dimension concerns political boundaries. Many crises occur within a geographically limited political jurisdiction, such as a city (a factory explosion) or a country (a political crisis). Some crises cross territorial boundaries and threaten several cities, regions, countries, or even continents. The financial crisis and pandemic are classic examples of crises that do not recognize national borders and cause chaos around the world. Thus, the political dimension of cross-border nature manifests itself either in the horizontal spread of a crisis between different jurisdictions of the same level (say, between neighbouring countries), or in the vertical spread, when local authorities, overwhelmed by the scale, are forced to involve higher echelons of government (Ansel et al. 2010).

172

—

The second dimension is what scholars call functional cross-border nature. According to researchers, a crisis can sometimes be quite clearly located within a specific area of government (for example, a prison riot). However, many crises transcend established functional boundaries, jeopardizing multiple systems, functions, or vital infrastructure. Crises with the ability to cross-functionally are burdensome for management, as they usually affect systems, each of which has its own logic and urgent operational requirements. In cases where different systems are subordinate to different structural units, political interests and professional norms tend to diverge. Since systems are often only loosely or haphazardly connected and can be designed to function independently, crises that cross functional boundaries often come as a surprise to their operators and participants (Ansel et al. 2010).

Finally, there is temporal cross-border nature, which emphasizes the blurring of the starting and ending points of an incident; the roots of threats can go back far into the past, and their consequences only become apparent years later, causing long-term chain reactions. Some crisis events are clearly limited in time: they have a definite beginning and end. However, many crises transcend such temporal constraints, when their roots go deep (as in the case of the September 11 crisis) and the consequences are felt for years (financial crisis, global climate change). Or, as scholars have noted, a crisis can have multiple consequences that manifest themselves on different time scales. For example, an oil spill may have immediate consequences for shorebirds and marine mammals, while the consequences for other marine organisms appear later. Crises that cross temporal boundaries are difficult to manage, either because they create uncertainty about when to stop responding. They can also contribute to response fragmentation,

as different functional capabilities must be mobilized at different times (Ansel et al. 2010).

According to Ansel et al. (2010), it is clearly insufficient to characterize cross-border crises solely in terms of three dimensions: political, functional and temporal. Therefore, they raise the issue of four specific political-administrative challenges inherent in the following crises:

1 challenge: dealing with uncertainty: overcoming uncertainty poses a serious challenge for crisis management professional.

2 the researchers attribute this challenge to the need to secure reserve capacity, which requires a significant increase in funding when government agencies enter into mutual support agreements under which one administrative unit commits to providing equipment to another in the event of, for example, a serious disease outbreak, and vice versa.

3 challenge (the most difficult): coordinating an effective response. To counter the threat and minimize its consequences, many organizations must work together to identify, allocate, transport, and deploy the necessary resources.

173

4 challenge posed by a cross-border crisis lies in the difficulty of defining its spatial, temporal, or functional boundaries. The growing number of political and administrative actors involved in the crisis makes it harder to convey a unified, clear message, thereby increasing the risk of contradictions, fear, and obstacles to cooperation (Ansel et al. 2010).

A threat that knows no borders can break through both spatial and functional constraints, spreading from one area to another. Such emergencies have the potential to spread across regions (with corresponding operational implications, of course). In fact, the transboundary nature of a crisis can be amplified in both dimensions; it is the combination of these spatial and operational components that determines its potential for devastating consequences. Scholars note that a particular complication is that addressing such problems often requires the implementation of mutually exclusive strategies. (Boin & Rhinard, 2008).

Ansel et al. (2010) emphasize that “a cross-border crisis is difficult to understand” because its “causes are hidden in the complexity of the system and accumulate when a chain reaction begins, which must be quickly and effectively authorized, analyzed, and shared with the relevant parties” (Ansel et al. 2010). This fact also determines the complexity of the typology of cross-border crises, which affects the actual unsolved nature of this issue in modern scientific research.

Understanding the “nature” of a cross-border crisis provides us with a description and classification that is essential for tracing the various levers that cause and develop crisis situations and accompany crisis communications. In the body of modern scientific thought, there is no unified, generally accepted system for classifying crisis phenomena that arise outside the borders of a single state. For example, (Boin et al. 2013) distinguish three types of crises based on their scale, localization and impact on EU Member States: a national crisis that “exceeds the response capacity of a single Member State”, only “coordinating assistance from other states through the Civil Protection Mechanism”; an external crisis, which concerns crises outside the EU, when the European Union “acts as an actor on the international scene, deploying missions, humanitarian aid or forces within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy”; a cross-border crisis, where a crisis crosses the borders of several Member States and sectors simultaneously. In such a situation, “the EU has the greatest potential for “added value”. The authors consider cross-border crises to be “the most challenging for national governments” (Boin et al. 2013).

174

—

Boin& Rhinard (2008) propose three types of cross-border crises. The first one they call trans-functional: «the ice storms in Canada in 1998 and the electricity blackout in Buenos Aires in 20012002 are examples of trans-functional crises a classic threat agent penetrated and paralyzed a wide variety of critical services». The second one is trans-geographical crises: «the rolling blackouts in the North-eastern United States and Canada in the summer of 2003 and on the European continent during November 2006 are examples of trans-geographical crises clearly with functional repercussions». The third is combined cross-border crises: «in effect, a transboundary crisis can escalate along both dimensions the combination of these geographic and functional dimensions defines its catastrophic potential. A transboundary crisis often begins with a glitch in one system that crosses over to other systems, snowballing and cascading into a compounded disaster». The authors also mention exogenous threats: «transboundary threats can impose themselves from the outside... Good examples include hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes. Hurricane Katrina provides the most recent example» (Boin& Rhinard 2008).

Boin (2019) states that existing cross-border risks occasionally lead to the emergence of various types of crises that cross geographical, political,

cultural, public-private and legal boundaries that usually allow public managers to classify, contain and manage the crisis (Boin, 2019).

Bravo-Laguna (2021) typifies cross-border crises in two ways: 1. limiting them to the framework of one national legal system, he calls them generic transboundary threats, which can circulate within a certain system (for example, only within the EU member states); 2. the author pays special attention to the so-called external transboundary crises. He introduces this category to describe crises that are characterized by the fact that “the threat arises outside a certain political or integration structure (for example, the EU), and therefore have more complex management dynamics due to the involvement of entities with different legal fields and powers. However, they require a coordinated response from both member states and third parties: “external transboundary crises, namely those cross-border threats whose management requires coordination among EU and non-EU countries” (Bravo-Laguna, 2021).

The empirical component of our study is implemented on the material of two types of cross-border crises of this type such as external cross-border crises (EU and non-EU) namely the Ukrainian-Polish crisis of memory (historical policy) (2015-2020) and the Ukrainian-Polish grain crisis (economic) (2022-2023).

The first case concerns the period 2015–2020, we will interpret it as a crisis of ideas related to history and memory: the dispute was less about the historical realities themselves, and more about who is authorized to determine ‘who are heroes, who are victims, and which actions should be considered crimes’. Kononczuk (2018) believes that “the narrative that Polish-Ukrainian relations are in crisis is too simplistic”. In his opinion, the obvious reason for this “lies in the two countries different perceptions of the tragic past and the politicization of history, but it is less recognized that they are engaged in an unprecedented level of cooperation in other areas”. The scholar is confident that now “there is a need to rebuild the undermined trust and better communication, as well as more goodwill, as the two countries resolve the complex historical issues they have in common. Ultimately, both sides must remember the numerous common interests they share” (Kononczuk 2018).

According to Shevchenko (2025), “it was historical issues that became the decisive theme of Polish-Ukrainian relations” during the period we associate with the first case. According to the author, history displaced security, economics, and regional cooperation from the centre of the

bilateral agenda. The aggravation of this issue was prompted by Ukraine's new strategy in the field of recognition of historical memory, which was formed after 2014. Thus, by the Law of Ukraine of April 9, 2015, the OUN and the UPA were recognized as participants in the struggle for state independence, and any public denial of the legitimacy of this struggle was declared an unlawful act (The law Ukraine, 2015).

Shevchenko (2025) directly indicates that the crisis did not arise suddenly: it was prepared by inflated expectations and the unwillingness to see the limitations of the other side. "The Ukrainian side made gestures of reconciliation, but without real reflection on its own history; instead, there was a belief that Poland should unilaterally accept the Ukrainian nationalist vision of the past". This is how the author formulated the mechanism of the crisis: outwardly, the language of reconciliation, and in essence, the expectation of unilateral recognition.

176 — For its part, Poland, especially after the Law and Justice (PiS) party came to power in 2015, began to pursue its "historical policy" towards Ukraine. In 2016, the Polish Sejm granted the events in Volyn the status of genocide, to which the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine responded with a statement about the "politicization" of the tragic episodes of the past and called for the formation of a common rather than unilateral, concept of commemoration. (Uchwałę Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej 2016).

Tensions between Ukraine and Poland escalated and moved from a normative-symbolic level to an actual one after the dismantling of the UPA monument in the village of Hrushowychy. Ukraine suspended joint Polish search and exhumation works. In 2018, due to an amendment to the Polish law containing a provision on "crimes of Ukrainian nationalists", this effectively froze the historical dialogue (Ustawaz, 2018). In 2019, the Constitutional Tribunal of the Republic of Poland in the case K 1/18 declared unconstitutional certain provisions of Article 2a of the Law on the Institute of National Remembrance (INR), in particular the wording regarding "Ukrainian nationalists" and "Skhinda Malopolszcha (Eastern Lesser Poland)" (Trybunał stycznia 2019).

However, a little later, the presidents of Ukraine and Poland agreed to "resume" the work of a joint working group on history, and then again had to discuss the issues of burials and memorial sites, which indicated a decrease in tension, but not a final resolution of the conflict. So, the following formulas sounded most clearly in this crisis: "historical issues

became a crucial topic”, “the historical dispute was drawn into political relations”, “this led to a de facto freezing of relations” (Shevchenko, 2025).

Features of crisis communications in the current crisis. Communication is mostly symbolic and moral in nature. It was based on such formulations as “genocide”, “heroes”, “truth”, “politicization”, “apology”, “and memories”. That is, the parties argued not only about political aspects, but also about the moral assessment of their own national discourse. Legislative acts, adopted resolutions and designated commemorative dates served not only as tools, but were also messages in themselves. The Ukrainian law of 2015, the resolution of the Polish Sejm of 2016, the amendments to the Law on the National Monument of 2018 all acted as communicative actions aimed at both their own audience and the neighbouring state.

The communicative process was multifaceted and heterogeneous. The voice was heard not only from governments; parliaments, institutions of national remembrance, heads of state, local authorities, as well as religious and memorial communities were involved. As a result, the message often became inconsistent: at the level of presidents, words of reconciliation were heard, while in laws, resolutions or local events related to memory, confrontational language dominated.

177

It was slow, burdened with rituals, and tied to the historical calendar. Outbursts of tension coincided with anniversaries of events, the adoption of resolutions, the opening or dismantling of memorials, and issues of exhumation. This determined the duration of the crisis: it was difficult to resolve it with a one-time agreement, since new dates and symbolic pretexts for returning to the dispute constantly arose. Although expert dialogue was declared a priority, political communication prevailed. The Verkhovna Rada formally invited historians to a professional discussion, but in fact the tone of politics and state institutions responsible for preserving memory were directing. That is why the dispute turned not into an academic discussion, but into a cross-border crisis in the field of historical policy.

During the period of heightened memory (2015–2020), the Russian propaganda trail had an impact, manifested in the reinforcement of already existing historical sore points and the organization of incidents related to places of honor. In Polish public data, this is presented less as an unconditionally proven legally “direct handwriting”, and more as the application of hybrid methods: the use of Volyn themes, issues of restitution of remains, UPA activities and mutual stereotypes to inflame the dispute.

Already in 2017, the Polish information space was filled with thoughts that the attack on the consulate in Lutsk and the desecration of memorials were intended to “poison” relations between Poland and Ukraine; the head of the OSW (Center for Eastern Studies) drew attention to the use of Russian words and other signs of external interference, while the Ukrainian ambassador to Poland reported that videos of acts of vandalism first surfaced on Russian servers (Dyrektor OSW 2017).

In 2023, Prime Minister M. Morawiecki directly stated that “The issue of the Volyn genocide and the complex elements of Polish-Ukrainian history are an ideal motive for the Russian disinformation machine” (Premier 2023).

178 — The NASK/PAP analytical report also demonstrates that Moscow propaganda actively refers to Volyn (Wołyń) in the context of Russian propaganda, which uses historical traumas to split Polish-Ukrainian relations. It mentions the “mass murders in Volyn and Eastern Galicia” (masowe mordy na Wołyniu oraz w Galicji Wschodniej), claiming that the Ukrainians have not apologized and do not plan to do so. It mentions that the Kremlin is exploiting the issue of exhumations of victims (blokuje możliwość przeprowadzenia ekshumacji ofiar), linking it to the cult of Bandera. The main narratives for the Polish audience include: “Ukrainians are unworthy of support, because the cult of Bandera is alive among them and there is no apology for Volyn”. Fakes, allegedly President Duda banned the mention of the “Volyn massacre” (rzecz wołyńska), or photo manipulations (for example, children as victims of the UPA). Not a single fragment describes the simultaneous exploitation of the excavation of graves with fabrications about a “hypothetical ban” or distortion of illustrations. The report focuses on the general manipulation of history, but not on these details (Wojna 2024).

So, the memory crisis that lasted from 2015 to 2020 unfolded gradually, had deep symbolism, was filled with moral conflicts and largely did not allow for any concessions. At stake were issues of historical legitimacy, the correct naming of certain actions, determining the status of prominent figures, as well as the right to organize a memorial space. In contrast, the grain crisis of 2022–2023 erupted rapidly, concerned mainly regulatory aspects, was sensitive to electoral sentiment and left more space for the negotiation process. Here, the issues of market functioning, logistical chains, transit routes, the introduction of unilateral restrictions and compliance with EU rules became the subject of disputes. If in the first

dimension the communication battles were similar to a “war of ideological attitudes”, then in the second it was more about a “competition for access to trading platforms”, which only in its most acute moments took on the form of an emotionally colored diplomatic confrontation.

The second case, 2022-2023, concerns the crisis in the field of trade, logistics and grain rules: the conflict unfolded around access to markets, transit issues, payments and compensations, and the distribution of the financial burden caused by the war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Although both conflicts had a cross-border dimension, the ways of their intensification and methods of communication differed.

The cross-border grain/trade crisis (2022–2023) arose in a different context: after Russia’s full-scale invasion of the EU in May 2022, when temporary trade liberalization with Ukraine was introduced, and land routes through neighbouring states became critical for Ukrainian exports.

As for the grain dispute, researchers present it not as an isolated incident, but as a symptom of a deeper crisis. This is evidenced by the fact that after the launch of the new Black Sea corridor, Ukrainian grain again mainly went by sea, and in 2024, almost 80% of grain imports from Ukraine to the EU fell to Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy. That is, the authors correctly interpret the peak “grain crisis” as a temporary outbreak against the background of broader structural problems (Mamonova et al. 2025).

As early as December 2022, the Polish government publicly acknowledged the need for tighter controls on Ukrainian grain imports to minimize risks for Polish producers and consumers. In March 2023, the EU announced financial support for farmers in border countries due to “market imbalances”, and on May 2, 2023, it imposed temporary precautionary measures on four Ukrainian products in five member states due to logistical bottlenecks.

In the summer of 2023, Poland, together with the “five” frontline states, began to demand the extension of the restrictions and directly stated that it would not open the border after September 15, even if the EU did not extend the ban. At the same time, the Polish authorities constantly emphasized that they supported the transit of Ukrainian grain beyond Poland. On September 15, 2023, the EU did not extend the restrictions, but Ukraine agreed to an action plan and an export control/licensing system. Poland, Hungary and Slovakia maintained their own bans, and Ukraine initiated consultations in the WTO (Commission 2023).

Characteristic features of crisis communication during the grain crisis. The communication strategy was purely economic and regulatory in nature. The focus was not on human stories or victims, but rather on concepts such as “market imbalances”, “logistical problems”, “transit”, “compensation systems”, “export restrictions” and “permitting procedures”. Thus, the focus was shifted from issues of identity to the areas of resource management and allocation (Commission 2023).

The communication scheme formed a kind of “triangle”: Kyiv – Warsaw – Brussels, with the mandatory involvement of the WTO. It was no longer a simple dispute between two parties: the European Commission set the framework of restrictions, Poland conducted a parallel dialogue with Kyiv and Brussels, and Ukraine transferred some aspects of the dispute to the legal field of the World Trade Organization. Thus, the crisis had a simultaneous bilateral dimension, a European context and a global trade precedent (Commission 2023).

180 — The unfolding of events took place much more rapidly and with wider media coverage. If the “memory crisis” stretched for years, then the grain crisis had a laconic time span: the decision of the European Commission on September 15, the introduction of unilateral bans, a diplomatic incident, the summoning of the ambassador, public statements about the use of judicial instruments – all this was contained in a matter of days.

The Polish communication strategy had a dual direction: on the one hand, a demonstration of “solidarity with Ukraine”, and on the other – “unwavering protection of the interests of Polish agrarians”. Official representatives of Warsaw steadfastly emphasized that they had no claims to Ukraine as a state and resolutely supported transit routes, but at the same time demonstrated maximum intransigence on the issue of imports directly to Polish territory. This is a classic example of communication aimed simultaneously at two target groups: external partners-allies and the internal electoral base. The electoral race factor directly affected the overall tone of the situation.

A Reuters journalist directly pointed to the correlation between the increased tension and the parliamentary campaign in Poland, in particular the rivalry between the PiS party and the electorate of farmers and right-wing voters. Because of this, the technical trade dispute quickly acquired a personal color and entered a phase of sharp rhetoric (Charlish 2023).

Despite the emotional explosion in the public sphere, the tools for de-escalation remained purely technical in nature. The EU proposed the

creation of a coordination platform and the definition of an action plan, Ukraine agreed to the introduction of export control mechanisms, and the dispute almost instantly received legal form through WTO mechanisms. That is, even at the stage of public escalation, the parties did not abandon the technical language necessary for settlement (Commission 2023).

In his speech at the general debate of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly on September 19, 2023, President of Ukraine V. Zelensky stated that the main feature characterizing the dispute over the export of Ukrainian grain was that some European partners were turning the issue of solidarity into “political theatre” and thereby actually creating a favourable background for the Russian side; at the same time, Poland was not directly named in the text of the speech (President of Ukraine 2023).

Already on September 20, 2023, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Ukrainian ambassador and in an official communiqué declared a “strong protest”, noting that the interpretation that some EU states were only imitating solidarity and indirectly supporting Russia was “untrue” and “particularly unauthorized” in relation to Poland (Ministerstwo Spraw 2023).

In the Polish public sphere, this statement was perceived as referring to Poland: M. Przydach called Zelensky’s words (“amazing”) “zdumiewające” and (“unfair”) “niesprawiedliwe” (Polskie Radio 2023). At the same time, Polish media recorded that Russian propaganda promptly used the grain conflict and presented it as a sign of cooling in Polish-Ukrainian relations; in particular, Gadawa (2023) recounted how Russian media interpreted the dispute over grain (Gadawa 2023). Bernatowicz (2023) showed that Kremlin propaganda used the topic of the Polish embargo and harsh statements by politicians to promote the narrative of an allegedly inevitable break between Warsaw and Kyiv.

Journalist M. Wróblewski, likes the statement of the Polish scholar, employee of the Center for Eastern Studies W. Kononczuk, who considers the grain crisis not a “purely bilateral quarrel” between Poland and Ukraine. He consistently links it to the Russian blockade of ports, the breakdown of the grain agreement, and the Russian information amplification of Polish-Ukrainian friction, explaining this crisis by the fact that “the Kremlin, aware of the growing disappointment of Western societies due to rising inflation, is clearly playing on this crisis”. “Russia will fuel this and deepen it, assuming that this will not only reduce the West’s willingness to support Ukraine, but will even convince some countries to influence Ukraine to

make certain concessions to Russia,” notes W. Kononczuk (Wróblewski 2022).

Given that the grain crisis (2022-2023) had a different Russian imprint, not a “historical” one, but a socio-economic one, Polish sources show that Moscow and pro-Russian circles tried not to create a problem from scratch, but to use a real market conflict namely tension around imports, transit, prices and farmers’ protests to turn it into an anti-Ukrainian and anti-European wave. It is no coincidence that since 2022, the topic of food security in the Polish media has often been combined with the need to combat Russian disinformation: Russian narratives of war fatigue, the split of NATO and EU states, stories that Ukraine “pays with grain for weapons”, that on the Polish side of the border Ukrainian services “guard grain wagons”, etc. In the grain crisis, the regulatory problem in the disinformation field was transformed into simple and explosive formulas: “Ukraine is using us”, “the Polish state has lost control” and “aid to Ukraine hits the Pole’s pocket”. Unlike the memory crisis, where the main emotion was historical indignation, the grain crisis was dominated by economic fear, a sense of injustice, and sovereignty anxiety.

182

—

Conclusions. Cross-border crises are based on rapidly spreading cross-border risks. Such crises are multidimensional processes that lack not only coordination of actions, but also communication: prompt exchange of interstate information, unity of positions, and trust in messages and communication with citizens in an intercultural environment. Cross-border crises become more complex due to the participation of non-state actors and transnational factors (terrorism, migration, and climate), crossing state borders, in particular: geographical, political, demographic, cultural and economic.

The study empirically analyzes the type of cross-border crisis “EU and non-EU”: between Ukraine and Poland: memory crisis (2015-2020) and grain crisis (2022-2023) and clarifies the specifics of crisis communications of each of them. Thus, the period of memory crisis that lasted from 2015 to 2020 was gradual, deeply symbolic, full of moral battles, and marked by an inability to make significant concessions. Its essence was the issue of historical legitimacy, the definition of crimes, the status of heroic figures, and the right to due commemoration. In contrast, the grain crisis of 2022-2023 unfolded rapidly, concerned mainly regulatory aspects, was sensitive to electoral sentiment, and allowed for more opportunities for agreements. Here, issues related to market functioning, logistical chains, transit

procedures, unilaterally imposed restrictions, and European Union norms came to the fore. In the case of memory, the communication strategy was more like a “battle of ideological scenarios”, while the grain dispute resembled a “competition for market access”, and only at its highest level did it reach an emotional diplomatic phase.

References:

1. Ansell, C., Boin, A., & Keller, A. (2010). Managing transboundary crises: Identifying the building blocks of an effective response system. *Journal of contingencies and crisis management*, 18(4), 195-207. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/48327974_Managing_Transboundary_Crises_Identifying_the_Building_Blocks_of_an_Effective_Response_System#read.
2. Beardsley Kyle et. al. (2020). The International Crisis Behavior Project. URL: <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1638>.
3. Bernatowicz Robert. (2023). Rosyjska propaganda znów o Polsce: Wykorzystuje spór o zboże z Ukrainy. URL: <https://geekweek.interia.pl/militaria/news-rosyjska-propaganda-znow-o-polsce-wykorzystuje-spor-o-zboze%2CnId%2C6944008>
4. Boin, A. (2019). The transboundary crisis: Why we are unprepared and the road ahead. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 27(1), 94-99. URL: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40476974/>
5. Boin, A., & Rhinard, M. (2008). Managing transboundary crises: What role for the European Union?. *International studies review*, 10(1), 1-26. URL: ocietalsecurity.eu/uploads/Articles/2008_Boin%20and%20Rhinard_Managing%20Transboundary%20Threats_%20ISR.pdf.
6. Boin, A., Busuioc, M., & Groenleer, M. (2014). Building European Union capacity to manage transboundary crises: Network or lead-agency model?. *Regulation & governance*, 8(4), 418-436. URL: <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/52544/>
7. Boin, A., Ekengren, M., & Rhinard, M. (2013). *The European Union as crisis manager: Patterns and prospects*. Cambridge University Press. URL: https://assets.cambridge.org/97811070/35799/excerpt/9781107035799_excerpt.pdf.
8. Bravo-Laguna, C. (2021). Transboundary crisis management under the volcano: The case of the Icelandic ash cloud. *Journal of Contingencies*

and Crisis Management, 29(1), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12303>

9. Bravo-Laguna, C. (2024). Crisis management from a relational perspective: an analysis of interorganizational transboundary crisis networks. *Journal of Public Policy*, 44(4), 720-746. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X24000187>

10. Cousins, L. M., & Zalewski, P. P. (2026). Transboundary Risk. In *Sustainability Directory*. [Online]. Available at: <https://sustainability-directory.com/term/transboundary-risk/>

11. Gwozdowska A. et al. (2023). Wojna informacyjna 2022–2023. Przebieg i wnioski. URL: https://www.nask.pl/media/2024/10/Raport__wojna_informacyjna.pdf

12. Dyrektor OSW: atak na konsulat miał zatruć relacje polsko-ukraińskie. (2017). URL: <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/dyrektor-osw-atak-na-konsulat-mial-zatruc-relacje-polsko-ukrainskie>.

184 — 13. Gadawa Malwina. (2023). Farma rosyjskich trolli dostała pożywkę. Dla Putina to «łakomy kasek» URL: <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/farma-rosyjskich-trolli-dostala-pozywke-dla-putina-to-lakomy-kasek-6943894600833760a.html>

14. Klein, M. I. (2022). *Cross-Border Collaboration in Disaster Management* (Vol. 41). KIT Scientific Publishing. URL: <https://www.ksp.kit.edu/books/2375/files/8d64019a-24c5-4761-ac1e-f336d8b6d485.pdf>.

15. Kononczuk Wojciech, (2018). The Paradoxes of Polish-Ukrainian Relations. URL: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/person/wojciech-kononczuk>.

16. Kononczuk Wojciech, Jak słoń w składzie porcelany. (2023). URL: <https://echokatolickie.pl/blog/2023/10/04/jak-slone-w-skladzie-porcelany/>

17. Lara-Valencia, F. (2023). Development, Borders, and Transborderisms: Concepts and Processes. *Frontera norte*, 35. URL: <https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?>

18. Mamonova, N. et al.. (2025). Seeds of Discord or Lanes of Solidarity?: Understanding farmers' protests in Central and Eastern Europe within the context of increasing Ukrainian grain flows. URL: https://www.tni.org/files/2025-11/WEB_Seeds_of_Discord.pdf

19. Polskie Radio, Ukraina odpycha ręce, które jej pomagają. Marcin Przydacz komentuje słowa Wołodymyra Zełenskiego,” September 20, 2023 URL: <https://www.polskieradio.pl/399/7975/artukul/3245462,ukraina->

odpycha-rece-ktore-jej-pomagaja-marcin%C2%A0przydac%C2%A0ko
mentuje-slowa-wolodymyra-zelenskigo

20. Premier: pamiętajmy o zbrodni wołyńskiej, nie dajmy się skłócić z Ukraińcami. (2023). URL: <https://dzieje.pl/wiadomosci/premier-pamietajmy-o-zbrodni-wozynskiej-nie-dajmy-sie-sklocic-z-ukraincami>.

21. Schwarz, A., Seeger, M. W., & Auer, C. (Eds.). (2016). The handbook of international crisis communication research. Wiley Blackwell. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118516812>.

22. Shevchenko, O. (2025). Polsko-ukraińskie spory historyczne w latach 2015-2019 z perspektywy ukraińskiej myśli politycznej. Political Science Studies/Studia Politologiczne, 77. URL: <https://www.studiapolitologiczne.pl/pdf-211115-128822?filename=Polsko-ukrainskie-spor-y-h.pdf>.

23. The law «On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for's Independence in the Twentieth Century». (02.03.2020), URL: https://https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ltLq3sHuO_17KUN9KBWv2QTKVsTOI65AEsAnHA2Zkkg/edit?tab=t.0.

185

24. Trybunał Konstytucyjny, wyrok z 17 stycznia 2019 r., sygn. akt K 1/18. URL: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20190000131/O/D20190131.pdf>

25. Uchwałasejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiejz dnia 22 lipca 2016 r.w sprawie oddania hołdu ofiarom ludobójstwa dokonanego przez nacjonalistów ukraińskichna obywatelach II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1943–1945. URL: <https://eli.gov.pl/api/acts/MP/2016/726/text/I/M20160726.pdf>.

26. Wojna informacyjna 2022–2023 przebieg i wnioski. URL: https://www.nask.pl/media/2024/10/Raport__wojna_informacyjna.pdf

26. Wróblewski Michał. (2022). Putin chce zagłodzić świat. «Kryzys żywnościowy wpisał w pakiet negocjacyjny z Zachodem. I żąda ustępstw» URL: <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/putin-chce-zaglodzic-swiat-kryzys-zywnosciowy-wpisal-w-pakiet-negocjacyjny-z-zachodem-i-zada-ustepstw-6773410146404960a>.