

The Construction of Walls/Fences around the Polish Border

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Introduction

Mariusz Błaszczak, the Polish Minister of National Defense announced the construction of a wall on the border with Russia November 2, 2022. The Polish defense minister ordered the construction of a dam along the border with Russia in the Kaliningrad District. This wall is supposed to be like the one which exists on the border between Poland and Belarus, which was erected in 2022 as a response to Minsk's hybrid actions towards Poland.

The Kaliningrad District is located on the Baltic Sea. It is the region which is the most at the west of Russia. The area of the district is separated from the rest of the country by areas of independent states and has no land connection with the main part of the Russian state. It borders Lithuania and Poland. The district includes a 147 km long section of the Baltic Sea coast. The length of the Polish border with the Russian Federation is 232 km (the land section - 209.83 km and the section separating the territorial sea of the Republic of Poland and the Russian Federation - 22.21 km).

The movement comes as Warsaw suspects that Russia is planning to facilitate illegal border crossing by migrants from third countries. Russian aviation authorities recently authorized to start flights from the Middle East and North Africa to Kaliningrad (Новый Калининград: 02.11.2022).

This dam will be temporary and will be erected along the 210-kilometer border between Poland and Russia. The construction shall be completed by the end of 2023. The barrier will consist of an electric fence. There is currently no barrier at the border between Poland and Russia, at least from the Polish side, but it is regularly patrolled by border security forces.

The relations between Poland and Russia are already tensed due to the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces. Polish authorities recently cancelled simplified procedures regarding the recruitment of Russian citizens who would like to be employed in Poland (Новый Калининград: 28.10.2022).

Russia is committing war crimes and various types of international crimes within the context of the invasion of Ukraine which began on February 24, 2022. It is therefore very likely that it will also want to destabilize the situation in the region and among the countries that support Ukraine. It may either create another immigration crisis or intent some ground military operations. This paper will discuss the context of this decision made by the Polish Ministry of Defense. The paper will also provide technical information related to the construction of this fence. Findings will demonstrate that similar decisions were made by other countries which are neighbors of Russia.

The context of the decision of the Polish government.

Before the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the Polish border with Belarus became the site of a major migration crisis last year, with large numbers of people crossing illegally. The case of the Polish-Belarusian border is related to an uncontrolled mass and undocumented attempt migration of people from countries in the Middle East, especially Iraq and Afghanistan. There was a sudden influx of immigrants appearing on the border who came from distant locations in Asia and Africa from Iraq and Kurdistan and especially at the border checkpoint between Poland and Belarus located in Bobrowniki and in the Podlachia Region (Wicha 2021: 43).

Migration pressure was increased by the Belarusian authorities, which in retaliation for the imposition by the European Union of sanctions toward the Belarusian regime. The Belarusian government as an answer, wants to destabilize the borderlands with it of the Member States (Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia) and thus destabilizing the European Union as an organization (Olbrycht 2022: 143; Wawrzusiszyn 2022; 48). The crisis on the border between Poland and Belarus began in 2021 and the events were simultaneously a security problem on the border between Belarus and the European Union.

For these reasons, in 2021, Poland and other EU leaders accused the Belarusian government, which is allied with Russian President Vladimir Putin, of spreading chaos and divisions in the EU.

That is why Polish authorities took a controversial decision to build a steel wall along the northern side of the border with Belarus. This steel wall was completed in June 2022. This decision appeared to be controversial as it costs high amounts of money and did not follow clear public tender offers. The construction of the wall cost over USD 350 million. This is the result of government estimates entered in the Regulatory Impact Assessment of the project, thanks to which the construction of the wall is to be possible. The new investment consumed USD 315 million for the construction of a physical barrier and USD 35 million for technical equipment (Money.pl: 12.06.2021).

It appears that the wall on the border with Belarus is already an effective barrier to a large extent. In 2021, there were almost 800 daily attempts to illegally get to Poland, now it is a maximum of 120 daily. For example, in October 2021 there were 17,454 attempts to illegally cross the border. During the first three weeks of October 2022 there were 10 times fewer attempts. In turn, comparing September 2021 with September 2022, this number dropped from 7,667 to 1,370 (Wójcicka, Żółciak, T.: 2022).

The construction of the fence between the border of Poland and Russia: technical aspects.

The Border Guard has started the procedure of selecting a perimetry contractor on the border with Russia. The company is to be selected by the end of November 2022. The Perimetry will be installed over about two hundred kilometers. This dam will be like the one on the Polish-Belarusian border being 2.5 meters high and 3 meters wide (Новый Калининград: 02.11.2022). At the same time, works related to the establishment of perimetry, i.e. devices that will allow electronic surveillance of the border with the Kaliningrad Oblast, will be carried out. The construction of a protective fence for animals has also started. The laying of the dam began in Wisztyniec in the Dubeninki commune, where the Polish, Russian and Lithuanian borders meet. The dam will be built in several places at the same time. A little more than a kilometer of barbed wire is laid every day. Over 25 km of a temporary horizontal dam were built. By November 15, offers were received by the Border Guard from companies that have the potential to build an electronic firewall. On November 17, Polish authorities selected Telbud (<https://telbud.pl>), a company based in the city of Poznań that will start work on the construction of an electronic barrier on the entire border with the Kaliningrad District. Telbud is providing solutions in the field of telecommunications, technical protection of facilities, automation as well as supervision and control since 1987. Their electronic firewall will consist of 3,000 day, night, night vision, thermal imaging cameras, motion detectors. These solutions are to enable quick identification of threats at the border and effective reaction of the services.

Maciej Wąsik, deputy head of the Ministry of Interior and Administration, informed that the state budget for next year had "funds in the form of PLN 354 million" secured for the realization of the project (Wprost.pl: 31.10.2022). The completion date is the end of the third quarter of next year, but Polish border guards hope that it will be done sooner.

From a different perspective, it must be noted that according to a spokeswoman for the Polish border guard calms down and says that there was no illegal entry to Poland from Kaliningrad in October. (Dominika Słomska: 2022). It shall be also noted that the Kaliningrad authorities reminded that there was no need to build a fence, since it already exists on the Russian side (Новый Калининград: 07.11.2022).

Findings and prospects

The efficiency of the wall built on a part of the border between Poland and Belarus is considered by some Polish politicians as being inefficient. For instance, Katarzyna Lubnauer considers this wall is only turned out to be a trap for animals. This is not a method and cannot protect the Polish population from an invasion from Russia (Drob: 2022).

For Russia, which uses Belarus, migrants are an instrument of pressure, causing a direct threat to the security of neighboring countries, indicating that it may limit or aggravate the existing situation, increasing the influx of migrants, indirectly threatening the stabilization of the EU. This is directly disadvantageous as it causes political tensions and the financial costs of this migrant crisis. This has not only an impact on Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania, but is also and is an element of Russia's pressure on the EU, striving to normalize relations, especially lifting EU sanctions, or supporting economic projects such as Nord Stream 2. Russian authorities also consider that Poland would like to absorb Ukraine. Therefore, Poland is often discussed and criticized by authorities in Moscow (Новый Калининград: 07.11.2022).

The construction of a fence between Poland and Russia is a topic which is also analyzed by other countries which have a common border with Russia. For instance, the Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin announced on the construction of a fence on the border with Russia. The Finnish-Russian border is 1,340 km long and is the longest border of the European Union. The project of the wall on the Finnish-Russian border includes two sections: one 260 km long and the other 130 km long. (Sanna Marin defends border fence plans: 2022). A similar initiative was realized by Lithuania. Their authorities erected a fence on the border with the Kaliningrad region. The construction of 45 kilometers of a two-meter fence was completed in 2018 (Kgd.ru: 02.11.2022).

Conclusions and Future Expectations

The concept of building walls on the Polish border emerged because of the migration crisis caused by the Belarusian authorities by bringing migrants from the Middle East and Africa to Belarus, and then transferring them to the border with Poland. At the border, there were regular clashes between hundreds of migrants and officers of the Polish services. In mid-October, fears arose in the Polish government that a such scenario could be repeated on the Polish-Russian border.

Building walls on the Polish border with Belarus and Russia is considered by Polish authorities as a security warranty for the eastern side of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The dam which will be erected at the border with the Kaliningrad district is supposed to be temporary, however, it may be noted that even in the case of the end of the War between Russian and Ukraine, Polish authorities will maintain this wall. However, a non-Putin regime in Moscow may change the deal and the opinion of the Polish government. Regarding the structure, which was erected at the border with Belarus, it is considered as

being a fixed long-term solution and may be cash-consuming to remove, even in the case whether a liberal regime would emerge in Minsk, the capital city of Belarus. From a different perspective, history has proven that wall, how they, are, are not supposed to be eternal. The best example is in the Wall of Berlin which divided Berlin from 1961 to 1989 and was destroyed by German people. We may consider that only a joint decision of the Belarussian, Russian and Polish nations would made possible to destroy these walls and dams.

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