

# INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY

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## Topics:

- Ukraine – European Union
- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war

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(15.04 – 30.04.2023)

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### ■ *THEME ANALYSIS: Ukrainian grain export as a challenge to EU solidarity*



*Photo: Atlantic Council*

In April, a number of neighboring countries of Ukraine decided to temporarily ban the import of grain and dozens of other food products from Ukraine. These countries include Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. Romania also actively discussed the possibility of introducing similar restrictions. The process of banning Ukrainian agricultural exports outlined the prospects for the destruction of the so-called "Solidarity Lanes" established to help the Ukrainian economy against the background of Russian aggression.

Before the full-scale Russian invasion, Ukraine exported most of its agricultural products through ports. Thanks to the implementation of the Black Sea grain initiative, it became possible to resume export by sea in wartime conditions. Both the Ukrainian economy and the final consumers of Ukrainian products benefited from this initiative. At the same time, the state still cannot ensure the transportation of all exports by sea at the pre-war level. The ports of Mykolaiv are still not included in the "Grain Initiative", in addition, Russia prevents freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. Because of this, a significant amount of agricultural products is transported by rail and trucks through neighboring countries. The main country for the transit of Ukrainian grain is Poland.

In June 2022, the EU abolished all tariffs and quotas on Ukrainian products for 12 months. However, contrary to the decision of the European Union, a number of member states, namely Poland, Slovakia and Bulgaria, have banned the import of Ukrainian

agricultural products. Romania also expressed its intention to introduce restrictions on imports.

The claims of the partner countries were focused on the quality of Ukrainian food, as well as the protection of domestic producers, which was probably the main reason for the protests and the subsequent ban. In Poland, protests took place for weeks. **Local farmers could not stand the competition with Ukrainian producers, whose grain is cheaper.** Therefore, the Polish government intervened and settled the issue of competition in favor of Polish farmers. After that, other states introduced similar measures. Elections will soon be held in Slovakia and Poland. So, the governments of the countries introduced restrictions in order to preserve their own internal political positions, taking into account the role that farmers can play in the elections. For example, in Poland, according to Polish statistics, 17% of jobs depend on the agricultural sector, which is a significant share of the electorate.

Also, in a number of Ukrainian grain samples, Slovakia found the pesticide chlorpyrifos, to which the EU has zero tolerance.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Ukraine is still not a member of the EU, and the countries of Central Europe received significant subsidies before and after joining the bloc in order to achieve the level of grain quality that is currently considered a standard. That is why it is more difficult for Ukrainian agro-industrialists to compete in terms of product quality. However, this should not be an excuse for Ukrainian suppliers, who should approach the standards of the European Union.

However, the problem was not only grain, because countries also banned the import of honey, a number of meat products, cereals, etc. *The protectionist measures of the EU states actually violated the Association Agreement, and also called into question the unity of the policy of the EU countries.* The EU immediately reacted negatively to the actions of Poland and other states and made efforts to solve the problem at the bloc level, because EU member states do not have the right to make such decisions without the consent of all 27 member states. The European Commission asked for evidence in the form of statistical data to substantiate the countries' claims and allow the EC to consider them.

In the end, the European Commission allocated 100 million euros for the farmers of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania to settle the situation and agreed to ban the import of wheat, corn, rape and sunflower from Ukraine. This is a small amount compared to the 10 billion zloty (\$2.4 billion) aid program for farmers approved by the Polish government.

The ban on Ukrainian exports hits the Ukrainian economy, which is heavily dependent on the export of agricultural products in the conditions of the Russian war. At the same time, it is worth noting that Ukrainian exports not only created threats for neighboring states, but also economic prospects. Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia together imported 4 million tons of maize and 1.3 million tons of wheat from Ukraine in 2022, compared to just 23,000 tons and 3,000 tons respectively in 2021. In percentage terms, these

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<sup>1</sup> Пестициди у зерні і «чорнобильське борошно». Європейці прискіпуються чи насправді все так погано з якістю зерна? 27.04.2023,  
URL: <https://latifundist.com/interview/678-pestitsidi-u-zerni-i-chornobilske-boroshno-yevropejsi-priskipuyutsya-chi-naspravdi-vse-tak-pogano-z-yakistyu-zerna>

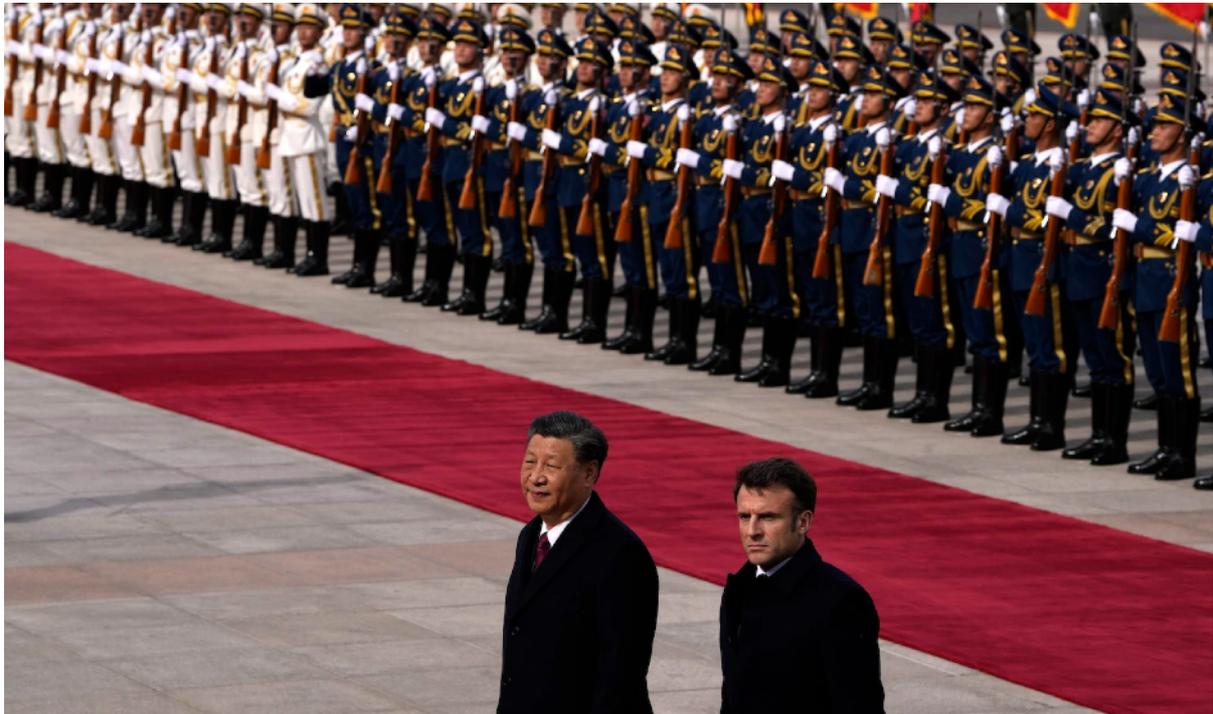
increases are 17,000% and 40,000%. Imports of sunflower and rape seeds increased by 3,800% and 900% compared to last year.<sup>2</sup> Ukrainian products gave impetus to the processing sector of these countries thanks to relatively low prices. This is how a modern economy based on fair competition works: each state develops using its relative advantages. Therefore, Ukraine and the Central European states must ultimately find a balance and make a decision that will meet the interests of all parties. If this model of behavior is common for Hungary and Viktor Orbán's government uses every favorable opportunity to blackmail the EU in order to obtain subsidies and internal political rating, then a consensus must be found with other neighboring states. All these countries have already supported Ukraine's future accession to the European Union, therefore the introduction of unilateral restrictive measures does not correspond to the level and spirit of bilateral relations. The decision to ban the export of Ukrainian agricultural products is important to consider in the context of the start of negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU. The Central European states will probably try to achieve such conditions that would best suit the interests of their domestic farmers.

On a practical level, the problem with the export and transit of Ukrainian grain through neighboring countries lies in the insufficiently developed relevant infrastructure in these states. Poland does not have such ports as Mykolaiv, where grain can be stored for a long period. Therefore, one of the possible options for action is the creation of a common infrastructure for storing Ukrainian food. Such projects can be financed from EU funds or the Three Seas Initiative. In addition, the problem of exports can be solved if the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea is restored. The first step should be the expansion of the "Grain Initiative" to the ports of the Mykolaiv region. **The final settlement involves the defeat of Russia in its war against Ukraine and the restoration of Ukraine's ability to export by sea.**

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<sup>2</sup> Charting Ukraine's soaring exports to the EU, 27.04.2023,  
URL: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2023/04/27/charting-ukraines-soaring-exports-to-the-eu>

- *THEME ANALYSIS: The Ukrainian offensive may end in a Pyrrhic victory against the background of Franco-Chinese agreements*



*Photo: Emmanuel Macron and Xi Jinping  
Source: Foreign Policy*

Against the background of the preparation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for a counter-offensive operation, the rhetoric about the need for negotiations between Ukraine and Russia is intensifying. The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, last year already proposed the Peace Formula, a peace plan consisting of 10 steps, the implementation of which should lead to the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine. A number of countries have already expressed their support for this initiative. However, there are still alternative proposals that differ significantly from the principles that were laid down in the Ukrainian initiative and that were supported in the February resolution of the UN General Assembly "Principles of the UN Charter underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine." This resolution was supported by 141 countries.

In recent months, the president of Brazil, Lula da Silva, has become more active. The left-leaning leader of Brazil criticizes the US and the EU for military aid to Ukraine and calls it "fueling the war". In February, Lula denied Chancellor Olaf Scholz the sale of ammunition for the Gepard air defence systems. In his interview for the Spanish El Pais, Lula da Silva even boasted that he did not sell "missiles for German tanks" that could be used against Russia and make Brazil a party to the conflict, avoiding the clarification that it was not about missiles, but ammunition for protection against Russian air attacks.

Lula da Silva actively promotes the idea of creating a "*political Group of 20*", which would consist of countries that are "**not a party to the conflict**". Non-Western countries are expected to be a core of the group: Mexico, the UAE, Nigeria, Indonesia, India and the People's Republic of China. It is China that is at the center of Lula da Silva's initiative, since he considers the Asian state as an alternative center of power to the United States, which should unite the states that did not support Ukraine and would like to change the existing world order. The president of Brazil has already discussed his initiative with the leaders of the People's Republic of China, the UAE, and a number of Latin American countries and plans to discuss this issue with French President Emmanuel Macron in the near future. According to Lula da Silva, Emmanuel Macron "wants peace".

Considering the categorical attitude of the Latin American leader towards EU countries and the USA, this assessment of the views of the French president can hardly be called positive. *Emmanuel Macron has made mixed statements about the confrontation between the United States and China, distancing himself from the North American ally and indicating that Europe should avoid being drawn into the conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan.* It is likely that the Brazilian president is counting on Macron's support in his attempts to bring Ukraine and Russia to the negotiating table. For Brazil, restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine is not a priority. In his interviews, Lula da Silva admitted the possibility of Ukrainian concessions regarding Crimea, and he also repeats Russian narratives about the NATO expansion which allegedly triggered Putin's decision to attack Ukraine. Lula's main goal is to end the war on any terms, if necessary - at the expense of Ukrainian territories. His more broad goal is to change the existing world order, and in this matter, Lula orients Brazil to China.

The People's Republic of China allegedly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of "all countries" in its official communication. However, the interview of the ambassador of the People's Republic of China in France speaks about the position of the Asian state better than the constantly repeated narratives of Chinese high-ranking officials. In his interview, Ambassador Lu Shaye stated that "countries of the former Soviet Union" have no effective status under international law. That is, from the point of view of a diplomat (and the ambassador expresses the official position of his country), *Russia has legitimate claims to the territory of the countries of the former USSR.* This is an excellent demonstration of the worldview of the CCP, which consists in the conviction of the primacy of the interests of great powers over other countries.

**In conditions where most non-Western countries have turned a blind eye to Russian aggression and are trying to preserve and develop relations with the Russian Federation and the Putin regime, the unity of partner countries, the USA, the EU, and Asian democracies remains extremely important for Ukraine.** With the lapse of the war, the economic situation in the world remains difficult and slows down general development. This, in turn, **creates fears that the partner states may try to end the Russian war at the expense of Ukrainian territories. In the short term, this could improve economic development, and incumbent governments would have a better chance of being re-elected in the context of domestic political competition.**

However, in the medium term, this would have dire consequences. First of all, Russia would get Ukrainian territories by force. For other authoritarian leaders, this is a signal that their own geopolitical interests can be achieved in this way. First of all, this applies to the People's Republic of China. China, in addition, would keep a weakened Russia as a reliable partner. However, Russia would be weakened to such an extent that it would have the opportunity to remain a threat to European security and Ukraine. Thus, the USA and its partners would not have achieved victory in Ukraine and would once again suffer a geopolitical defeat in recent years. Ukraine, in turn, will not be restored, as the threat of renewed hostilities will remain, which will scare off investors. Thus, ***the Russian Federation would actually emerge victorious in the event of freezing the war: the state occupied new territories and also strategically weakened Ukraine.*** Just as importantly, freezing the war would mean suspending aid to Ukraine. If the partner countries are currently discussing the training of Ukrainian pilots on the F-16, and a group of American congressmen and senators are lobbying for the decision to transfer these fighters to Ukraine, then in the conditions of the feeling of a decrease in the threat from the Russian Federation, Ukraine will not receive neither fighters, nor other equipment capable of sufficiently strengthen the defense potential of the Armed Forces against Russia.

Eastern European countries share this perception of threats. However, Emmanuel Macron's position creates fears that the consensus among Ukraine's partners may be shaken. It is quite possible that in the absence of significant victories by the Ukrainian army by the end of the year, Macron will be one of those who will push Ukraine to make concessions. ***The French president turned out to be a weak point in the unity of the West.*** After his visit to the People's Republic of China, Emmanuel Macron offered Europe to reduce its dependence on the extraterritoriality of the US dollar, and one of the points of the joint French-Chinese declaration contained the narrative of a "multipolar world." This thesis is actively promoted by Russian and Chinese diplomacy. Russia's war against Ukraine has already affected the existing global system, and in the context of France's desire for strategic autonomy, Euro-Atlantic unity faces a serious threat.

The unity of NATO allies and partners of the North Atlantic Alliance is of particular importance in the context of opposition to authoritarian states. After all, **revisionist countries, or those who want to change the existing world order, are gradually uniting, and BRICS can become the main platform for this process.** According to the American publication "Bloomberg", on the eve of the annual summit to be held in South Africa, nineteen countries have expressed interest in joining the BRICS group of countries. Saudi Arabia and Iran have officially requested to join. Other countries that have expressed interest in joining include Argentina, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain and Indonesia, as well as two countries from East Africa and one from West Africa.<sup>1</sup>

The unification of developing countries around the PRC can challenge US leadership in the world. In fact, the narrative of a multipolar world has been around for decades, but

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<sup>1</sup> BRICS Draws Membership Bids From 19 Nations Before Summit, 24.04.2023, URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-24/brics-draws-membership-requests-from-19-nations-before-summit?leadSource=uverify%20wall>

quantitatively, the United States' leadership has seemed unquestionable. The US has the largest network of alliances in the world. The largest economy. The state remains a world leader in innovation and has the largest military budget. However, after the defeat in Afghanistan and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, the unification of developing countries may present a challenge that has not been seen before. In the context of this process, the Biden administration's mistake regarding artificial restrictions on military aid to Ukraine seems obvious. **If Ukraine would had previously received all the necessary means to defeat the occupying country, the US, thanks to the Ukrainian army, would have won a geopolitical victory, confirmed its leadership, and strengthened European security.** There are no guarantees that in such a case the current processes that play into the hands of the PRC would not take place. However, the positions of the USA and liberal democracies in the international arena would look much stronger.

Against the background of the counter-offensive operation being prepared by the Defense Forces of Ukraine, the partner countries should take into account the ongoing processes during the Russian-Ukrainian war. Based on its results, the positions of the US and the Allies may improve or, on the contrary, worsen with respect to the PRC. Short-term benefits and the desire to play a greater role in the international arena may prompt the leaders of some states to put pressure on Ukraine to end the war at the expense of Ukrainian territories and by establishing a cease-fire regime. For example, after Ukrainian army reaches the borders as of February 23, 2022, Ukraine may face pressure from partner countries regarding negotiations with the Russian Federation. However, such actions will have medium-term consequences both for Ukraine and for the European security architecture, as well as for the security of Asian countries.

China is watching the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and any end to the war, in which Russia gets a result that can be called positive, will encourage the PRC to seize Taiwan by force. Currently, the PLA is actively conducting operations aimed at working out the blockade of the island. An early end to the war in Ukraine will allow liberal democracies to focus on the Asia-Pacific region, while Ukraine's integration into the European security architecture will only strengthen their capabilities. **In the case of a prolonged war, or concessions to Russia, under the conditions of consolidation of the developing states around China, it will be more difficult for the United States of America to maintain global leadership.**



Source: Army FM

#### ■ *Changes at the front*

**Trend:** *Russian troops are losing their ability to continue offensive actions and are increasingly moving from offensive to positional defense.*

The offensive launched by Russia in the winter was a failure, since the goal of capturing the entire Donetsk and Luhansk regions was not achieved. *Now the aggressor state will try to gain a foothold in the occupied territory, and the best scenario for the Russian Federation would be to establish a ceasefire.*

*In the Kupyansk direction* the enemy did not conduct offensive operations.

*In the Bakhmut direction*, the enemy continues to conduct offensive actions. Fighting continues for the city of Bakhmut. In addition, Russia is conducting unsuccessful offensive actions in the direction of the settlements of Hryhorivka, Ivanivske, and New York.

*In the Avdiivka direction*, the enemy carried out offensive actions in the Avdiivka area, without success.

*In the Mariinka direction*, the Russian Federation continues to attack the positions of the Defense Forces of Ukraine. Battles continue for Mariinka. The occupying forces captured most part of the destroyed settlement.

*In the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson directions* Russian troops are on the defensive positions. The Armed Forces of Ukraine probably began to conduct combat reconnaissance in

order to identify weak points in the enemy's defense. Against the background of a possible offensive of the Armed Forces, the occupation authorities began evacuating collaborators and their families as well as occupation administrations deeper into the captured territory.

#### ■ *Military assistance*

In the second half of April, it became known about the transfer of the following equipment to Ukraine:

**Italy:**

- M109L (Quantity unknown)

**Slovakia:**

- Completed transfer of 13 MiG-29

**FRG:**

- Patriot air defense system
- SAM IRIS-T
- Air defense Skynex

**Netherlands:**

- Patriot air defense system

**Estonia:**

- 155 mm caliber artillery ammunition

**Sweden:**

- Giraffe 75 radar

**Canada:**

- 40 sniper rifles
- 16 radio stations for Leopard tanks

**Spain:**

- 6 Leopard 2A4

**Portugal:**

- APC M113 (5 units)

**Slovenia:**

- 20 Valuk armored personnel carriers

**Pakistan:**

- MANPADS Anza Mark-II

**Lithuania:**

- Land Rover Defender (6 units)

**Czech Republic:**

- MLRS BM-21MT (Quantity unknown)

**Croatia:**

- MLRS RAK-SA-12

**USA:**

- Zuni anti-aircraft missiles

Also, Ukraine has received TAB-71M armored personnel carriers, but the number and the country that transferred this equipment are not specified. Probably, Ukraine received these APCs from Romania. During the “Ramstein” meeting on April 21, it became known that Berlin, Kyiv and Warsaw will create a maintenance center for Leopard 2 tanks of the Ukrainian army in Poland. The agenda of the new meeting of “Ramstein” also included discussion on strengthening the air defense system of Ukraine, as well as the transfer of fighter jets.

*Source: Mil.ua*

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

**Trend: *The chairmanship of the Russian Federation in the Security Council as a diagnosis of the impotence and failure of the UN.***

Russia's disgraceful presidency of the UN Security Council came to an end in April. Before the end of its presidency, the aggressor state held a meeting entitled "*Maintenance of international peace and security*". Minister Serhii Lavrov flew to the USA personally, and he was allowed entry to participate in the event, however, with certain restrictions. **First**, the Russian delegation was allowed to enter without Russian propagandists. **Secondly**, the representative of the aggressor state had no right to leave the UN headquarters further than 40 km. This rule applied to Soviet diplomats during the Cold War. The fact of the return of such restrictions indicates not only the deterioration of relations between the United States and its partner countries with Russia, but also the decrease of the latter's international authority. At the meeting, only 4 countries (UAE, Gabon, Ghana and Cuba) were represented at the ministerial level. The rest of the delegations lowered the level of representation to permanent representatives or their deputies.

Lavrov's speech at the UN became a concentration of Russian propaganda. In particular, the minister of the aggressor state mentioned the "Kyiv Nazi regime", the "illegal coup d'état of 2014" and the alleged threat to Russia by NATO, trying to shift responsibility from the Russian Federation for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Despite these attempts, the

general tone of the meeting was directed against the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation and Lavrov's statements." Our hypocritical convener today, Russia, invaded its neighbor Ukraine and struck at the heart of the U.N. Charter," the US representative, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said. "This illegal, unprovoked and unnecessary war runs directly counter to our most sacred principle: that a war of aggression and territorial conquest is never, ever acceptable. Today it's Ukraine, but tomorrow it could be another country, another small nation that is invaded by its larger neighbor"<sup>1</sup>, she added. The Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations also invited the family of Paul Whelan, an American citizen and former marine who was detained on false espionage charges 4 years ago and has not been released, to the meeting.<sup>2</sup> During the speech, she urged the minister to look into the eyes of a sister of the illegally detained American, who at that moment stood up and directed her gaze at Lavrov.

Even UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres this time did not try to take a position of neutrality and condemned the Russian aggression. 27 ambassadors of the European Union, in their turn, also made a joint statement before the meeting, in which they condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine.

The meeting emphasized the decline of Russian authority in the international arena. The current leadership of the aggressor state is no longer perceived among the countries of the Euro-Atlantic space as a government that can be dealt with. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, however, the Russian Federation maintains certain positions and tries to maintain and further develop relations with other states. On the international stage, Russia is trying to criticize the "West" on behalf of the countries of the Global South, which Lavrov tried to do again this time. However, under the conditions of Russia's weakening, the alternative power to the United States can be the People's Republic of China and certainly not the Russian Federation. But even among the states of the Global South, the criminality of the current Russian regime is increasingly understood. This awareness increases in proportion to the increase in Russia's defeats in Ukraine and the weakening of the Russian Federation and Putin's regime.

**However, the very presence of Russia in the United Nations, and even more so in the Security Council, should be reviewed.** Contrary to the UN Charter, the Russian Federation is waging a war of aggression against a neighboring country. All the principles of the organization were neglected by the aggressor country, but Russian diplomats are still able to use this international platform to promote their own narratives. *Any constructive decisions regarding Ukraine at the UN are practically impossible due to Russia's right of veto. The organization, which was created to prevent wars, is not able to fulfill its duty and in order to restore trust, as well as the ability to influence the resolution of international conflicts, Russia should be excluded from the Security Council.*

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<sup>1</sup> Russia's Lavrov receives blistering criticism for the Kremlin's war in Ukraine at UN, 24.04.2023, URL: <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/24/lavrov-receives-criticism-for-war-in-ukraine-at-un.html>

<sup>2</sup> Лаврова принизили на засіданні Радбезу ООН - він не міг залишити залу, 25.04.2023, URL: <https://www.unian.ua/politics/lavrova-prinizili-na-zasidanni-radbezu-oon-video-12232590.html>