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# SWOT analysis to assess the threat of illegal arms trafficking on the Ukrainian border with the European Union countries in the context of the war

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## Abstract

The problem of combating threats of illegal trafficking of arms, ammunition and explosives at the border points of Ukraine with the countries of the European Union EU has become urgent under martial law. The aim of the study was to develop an optimal strategy for the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (hereinafter referred to as “SBGSU”) to combat threats of illegal arms trafficking at border points with EU countries under martial law. A comprehensive methodological approach combining the following scientific methods was used: comparative method, systems analysis method, structural-functional method, survey and group expert evaluation method, classification method and determination of numerical characteristics. A model was developed to assess the threat of illegal arms trafficking on the border of Ukraine with the EU countries under martial law based on SWOT-analysis. As a result, the factors of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which exist in the Ukrainian border guard agency, were identified. It is concluded that

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the results of this study cannot be applied to the border areas of Ukraine with such countries as the Russian Federation, Belarus and Moldova.

**Keywords:** SWOT analysis; arms and ammunition; border security in Europe; combating threats; illegal arms trafficking.

## El análisis FODA para evaluar la amenaza del tráfico ilegal de armas en la frontera de Ucrania con los países de la Unión Europea en el contexto de la guerra

### Resumen

El problema de combatir las amenazas del tráfico ilegal de armas, municiones y explosivos en los puntos fronterizos de Ucrania con los países de la Unión Europea UE se ha vuelto urgente bajo la ley marcial. El objetivo del estudio fue desarrollar una estrategia óptima para el Servicio Estatal de Guardia de Fronteras de Ucrania (en lo sucesivo, «SBGSU») para combatir las amenazas del tráfico ilegal de armas en los puntos fronterizos con países de la UE bajo la ley marcial. Se utilizó un enfoque metodológico integral que combinó los siguientes métodos científicos: método comparativo, método de análisis de sistemas, método estructural-funcional, encuesta y método de evaluación de expertos grupales, método de clasificación y determinación de características numéricas. Se desarrolló un modelo para evaluar la amenaza del tráfico ilegal de armas en la frontera de Ucrania con los países de la UE bajo la ley marcial basado en el análisis FODA. En consecuencia, se identificaron los factores de fortalezas y debilidades, oportunidades y amenazas, que existen en la agencia de guardia fronteriza de Ucrania. Se concluye que los resultados de este estudio no pueden aplicarse a las zonas fronterizas de Ucrania con países como la Federación Rusa, Bielorrusia y Moldavia.

**Palabras clave:** análisis FODA; armas y municiones; seguridad fronteriza en Europa; combate a amenazas; tráfico ilegal de armas.

### Introduction

On February 24, 2022, with the beginning of the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation (hereinafter - RF) against Ukraine, our state was forced to counteract a number of security risks and threats on the state border, the impact of which has significantly increased. In particular, such

threats include potential attempts to smuggle weapons, ammunition and explosives (hereinafter - WAE) to the European Union (hereinafter - EU) at border crossing points, which currently continue to operate on the western area of the border after the introduction of martial law on the territory of Ukraine.

The conduct of combat operations in the southeaster part of Ukraine has caused the intensification of the traffic of WAE through its territory. In general, the entire amount of WAE that are currently on the territory of Ukraine can be divided into two categories: 1) WAE that had been on the territory of Ukraine before the war with RF began; 2) WAE that Ukraine had received from partner countries (EU, USA, etc.) during the war.

Today, there is a high probability of intensification of illegal elements' attempts to smuggle WAE at border crossing points on the western border of Ukraine (to the following EU countries: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania) using caches, hiding places, the structural features of vehicles of foreign destination and by attempts to involve border guards in illegal activities at border crossing points.

Taking into account the aforesaid, it is reasonable to find new effective ways to combat illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points, to take appropriate measures to improve the effectiveness of control at border crossing points over the trafficking in prohibited items and materials that threaten the security of the state.

It should be noted that under the martial law, this problem is especially relevant on the borders of Ukraine with EU countries. The Strategic Risk Analysis 2022, developed by the FRONTEX Agency (2022), emphasizes the crucial role of risk profiling in the field of illegal trafficking in weapons across the border, including from Ukraine. The GRIP report (Seniora and Poitevin, 2010) emphasizes the importance of interaction at different levels and joint risk analysis to combat illicit trafficking in small arms. The information about the illicit trafficking in firearms and the possible threat of weapons supplying from Ukraine to the European Union is provided in UNODC (2020) and Savona and Mancuso (2017).

The results of the analysis of the views of Ukrainian and foreign scientists have shown that a number of researchers have studied the application of risk analysis and threat assessment in the field of border and national security in their works. For example, Prezelj and Gaber (2005) considered the problem of cross-border trafficking in Slovenia and measures to combat illegal trafficking in weapons, including the use of a risk analysis system.

Horii (2016) devoted his article to the role of FRONTEX in risk analysis, in particular how information is collected and analysed, what is considered a "risk" to external borders of EU and how such analysis is subsequently used, while Paul (2018) discusses the growing significance of FRONTEX

risk analysis in the field of migration management. Csaba (2012) in his article considers the problem of risk profiles at different levels and focuses on advanced information systems and their role in risk reduction and trade facilitation through their positive impact on the border crossing point capacity.

Ackleson (2005) studied several technology-oriented border control systems: screening, biometrics and information technology. The dissertation research of Thoreson (2011) is devoted to technical aspects of detecting materials for nuclear weapons. Peterka-Benton (2012) studied the issue of Transnistria as a security threat, including illegal weapons trading. Mackenzie (2020) speaks about the consequential effects of arms trafficking.

Makhnyuk and Kyrychenko (2012) studied approaches to conduct monitoring of threats and their classification. In their article, the authors considered certain issues of information and analytical support of integrated border management, in particular the development and creation of a database of border security threat passports, suggested the form and structure of the threat passport. Scientists Mosov, Salii and Chukanov (2020) considered the issue of different approaches to the methodology for identification and assessment of challenges, dangers and threats to border security of the Republic of Kazakhstan based on risk analysis.

In his study, Farion (2021) researched issues related to the strategic criminal analysis of threats to border security based on the tools used in the SOCTA methodology. In the article “The Use of SWOT Analysis in the Field of National Security Planning” (Bratko *et al.*, 2021), the team of authors investigated the methodology of planning of operational and service activities based on defense planning in the national security system based on opportunities, using SWOT analysis. Reznikova (2022) studied the state of the security environment of Ukraine, formed on the eve of a full-scale war launched by RF against Ukraine in February 2022, as well as the changes that took place after these events; predicted the tendencies of the Ukrainian security environment development in the post-war period.

The author has identified the sources of the main threats to the national security of Ukraine, as well as vulnerabilities, advantages and opportunities for the development of the state and society in the new conditions (Reznikova *et al.*, 2020).

Braga *et al.* (2002) investigated the problem of illegal supply of firearms in America from the juridical point of view, as well as Buhaichuk (2021) studied the current state of legal regulation of civilian firearms circulation in Ukraine. Shevchuk and Kotiuk (2020) explored the methods of smuggling of firearms and ammunition in the structure of criminalistic characteristics. Feinstein and Holden (2014) studied legal mechanisms of reduction in

arms trafficking. Bastien Olvera's (2014) investigation deals with the ways of combatting illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons (SALW) to non-state actors, in particularly by means of arms embargoes sponsored by the United Nations Security Council.

Beznogykh (2021) in his article analyses the potential of the illegal arms market in Ukraine and possible risks of weapons smuggling into European countries taking into account the characteristics of the local market for illegal weapons and ammunition.

A comprehensive assessment of the situation in Ukraine related to illegal trafficking in weapons from the war zone to European countries is represented by Buscemi et al. (2018) and Martyniuk (2017). The problem of trafficking in ammunition from Ukraine to Europe is studied in the work of Schroeder and Shumska (2021) and Dziundziuk et al. (2020).

At the same time there is an urgent need to increase the effectiveness of counteraction by officials of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (hereinafter - SBGSU) to threats at border crossing points, in particular on the illegal trafficking in weapons and ammunition, so **the purpose of the article** is to determine the optimal strategy of the SBGSU to combat the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points with EU countries under the martial law.

In accordance with the set purpose, the following **main tasks of the study have been identified:**

1. To develop a model for assessing the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE on the border of Ukraine with EU countries under the martial law.
2. To identify the factors of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats that exist in the border guard agency of Ukraine, to assess the level of their potential impact on the process of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points of Ukraine with EU countries under the martial law.
3. To develop practical recommendations for SBGSU officials to improve the efficiency of border guard units in order to combat the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points with EU countries under the martial law.

## **1. Research methodology**

In order to solve the tasks of the study, a comprehensive methodological approach has been used, which involved the use of a number of techniques and methods, the combination of which made it possible to achieve the

purpose of this study. The basis of the approach was the idea of synthetic theorizing, which led to the use of various scientific approaches not as oppositional, but as complementary to each other.

*The comparative method* has enabled to determine the degree of influence of each strategic factor from four categories (strengths/weaknesses, opportunities/threats) on the problem studied. *The method of system analysis* made it possible to determine the relationship of each element in a complex system structure. *The structural-functional method* has been used to develop a model for assessing the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE on the border of Ukraine with EU countries under the martial law.

In addition, the study has been conducted using the following scientific methods:

*theoretical* – analysis, generalization, systematization and interpretation of a number of scientific sources and materials;

*empirical* – surveys – to identify the factors that affect the process of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points of Ukraine with EU countries under the martial law; the method of group expert assessments – to determine the correlation of strengths/weaknesses, opportunities/threats that exist in the border guard agency of Ukraine;

*mathematical and statistical methods* - the method of ranking and determining numerical characteristics - to systematize, analyze and process the data obtained and establish relationships between the problems studied.

In order to choose the optimal strategy of SBGSU activity on combating the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points with EU countries under the martial law, we have applied *SWOT analysis*. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Ukrainian border guard agency and to assess their potential impact.

It should be noted that in the process of applying *SWOT analysis*, we considered strengths and weaknesses as the subjective factors on which SBGSU has a planned and managerial influence, and opportunities and threats as the objective factors on which the border guard agency has no direct influence.

If we interpret the strengths and weaknesses as the internal factors of the border guard agency, and the opportunities and threats as the external ones, as a result, they can be attributed to one of the following strategies: aggressive, conservative, competitive or defensive one. In our opinion, it is the determination of the optimal strategy of SBGSU activity that will be able to increase the effectiveness of combating the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points with EU countries under the martial law.

To conduct this study, a group of 10 experts had been selected and formed. The total number of candidates was 58 representatives of the scientific and pedagogical staff. The category of persons who had been included in the group of experts was determined on the basis of the following criteria: more than 20 years of general experience in SBGSU units; more than 15 years of practical experience of service at border crossing points; more than 10 years of experience in teaching cadets of the specialized disciplines (experience in working with personnel); scientific degree; knowledge in the field of risk analysis and threat assessment that affect the quality of border checks (as confirmed by a certificate of completion of appropriate advanced training courses).

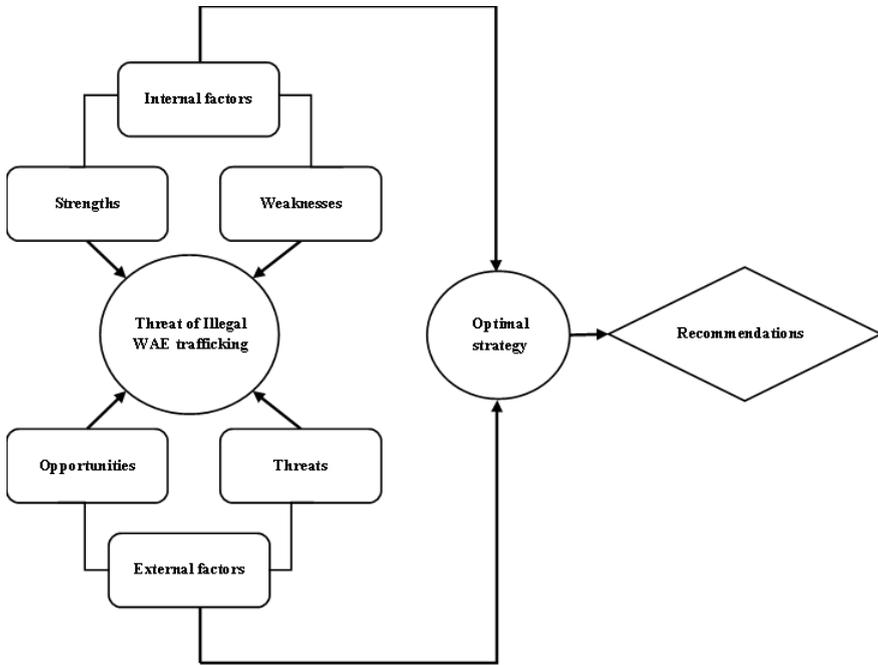
The group of experts brainstormed the factors for each of the 4 criteria (S, W, O, T) that could potentially affect illegal trafficking in weapons and ammunition across the state border. 7 factors per each criterion, which, in the experts` opinion have the greatest impact on the threat, were chosen, and the weight of the impact of each of these factors was determined on a seven-point scale from 0 (lowest level of impact) to 7 (highest level of impact).

## 2. Research results

The study has been conducted in three stages.

At the first stage, in order to effectively assess the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points on the western border of Ukraine with EU countries under the martial law (from February 24, 2022 to the present), a corresponding model was developed (Figure 1).

The model reflects schematically the relationship between the internal and the external factors. The internal factors include: **strengths** and **weaknesses** that exist in the border guard agency and may have a potential impact on the process of illegal trafficking in weapons and ammunition at border crossing points on the western border; the external factors include **opportunities** and **threats** that exist in the state and may have an impact on the intensification of the trafficking in weapons and ammunition.



**Figure 1: The Model of Assessment of Threat of Illegal WAE Trafficking on the Border of Ukraine with EU Countries under the Martial Law.**

The result of *the study at the second stage* was the identification of factors for each of the 4 criteria (S, W, O, T).

The *strengths* included:

1. level of training (professional competencies on vehicle inspection by different categories of military personnel performing the tasks at border crossing points);
2. border checks technical aids provision (hereinafter – BCTA) (a large quantity of BCTA for vehicles inspection, which increases the efficiency of WAE detection in persons and vehicles crossing the state border);
3. personnel experience (a significant period of tasks performance at border crossing points, which is confirmed by multiple facts of WAE detection during the vehicles inspection);
4. databases use (check of persons and vehicles crossing the state border using available information databases, which increases the effective risk analysis);

5. personnel motivation (correlation of desire to perception of importance and responsibility for border checks at border crossing points);
6. risk profiles application (national, regional, local, based on the identification of risk indicators at border crossing points during the tasks performance);
7. efficient interaction with the other subjects of integrated border management (the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Customs Service, the Security Service of Ukraine, the National Police, the National Guard, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, local authorities, etc.).

***The weaknesses*** identified by the experts were:

1. personnel overwork (increased involvement of personnel in the practical tasks at border crossing points, which leads to a decrease in the efficiency of service due to physical fatigue and reduced concentration);
2. insufficient capacity of the border crossing point (leads to long queues near land border crossing points, which negatively affects the possibility of compliance with the regime in the places of border checks);
3. insufficient number of service dog instructors specializing in weapons detection (the level of staffing of border guard units with service dog instructors used to search for WAE is not optimal, which reduces the probability of detecting WAE in persons and vehicles crossing the state border);
4. stress (unstable mental and emotional state of personnel due to nervous concerns for relatives and friends because of the war);
5. the necessity of personnel rotation for participation in combat operations (constant changes of personnel of border guard units, which negatively influences the level of coherence and interaction during the border checks at border crossing points);
6. personnel corruption (unlawful activities of military personnel performing border checks, which involves ineffective performance of their official responsibilities due to unlawful benefits from criminals and offenders at border crossing points);
7. impossibility of advanced training under the martial law (due to restrictions on the right to relocate personnel, except in extraordinary cases).

**Potential opportunities**, according to the experts, were:

1. opening of new and modern border crossing points (they will provide better conditions for border checks, vehicles inspection in particular, and increase the probability of WAE detection);
2. strengthening the responsibility for illegal trafficking in weapons across the state border (amendments to the legislation of Ukraine on strengthening criminal liability for illegal trafficking in WAE across the state border may lead to a reduction in the number of persons engaged in this type of illegal activity);
3. providing units with the latest models of BCTA within the framework of international projects, grants (constant improvement and change of tactics of offenders at border crossing points on illegal trafficking in WAE requires systematic updating of BCTA, which will increase the efficiency of vehicles inspection by border details);
4. intensification of personnel training activities with the involvement of national and international experts (the necessity to provide trainings, exchange of experience, etc. despite the difficulties arising under the martial law);
5. systematic joint risk analysis on combating the threat of illicit trafficking in WAE (increasing the effectiveness of combating the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE across the state border through constant joint risk analysis by the working groups of the countries for which this threat is the most relevant one);
6. creation of an effective mechanism to encourage the local residents for the assistance provided to SBGSU (financial motivation of border residents by paying them bonuses or reducing the tax burden);
7. strengthening the effective cooperation with the international agency FRONTEX under the martial law (reorientation of training courses on vehicles inspection at border crossing points to the online format using effective Internet platforms).

The following **threats** were identified:

1. a significant increase in the passenger and transport traffic on the border of Ukraine with EU countries (will lead to the inability to reorient this traffic to other border crossing points, which will negatively affect the level of social tension in the border areas of the countries);
2. an increase in the traffic of weapons and ammunition from Ukraine to EU countries due to the rise in their total number on the controlled

territory (increase in the total number of WAE on the controlled territory due to the assistance from the military coalition countries, increased demand for weapons for self-defence, difficulties in controlling the process of its circulation);

3. an increase in the probability of illegal trafficking in WAE in case of a negative scenario on the frontline (depending on the development of the theater of military operations, there is a risk of an increase in attempts to illegally traffic WAE across the state border of Ukraine with EU countries and in their number);
4. abrupt changes in the socio-political situation in the world, in neighbouring countries (increase in the number of countries directly involved in the war with RF, serious social and political changes in the countries bordering Ukraine, other global turbulence in the world);
5. intensification of cross-border criminal groups in the field of illegal trafficking in WAE across the state border (the emergence of new or intensification of existing cross-border criminal organizations, groups as a result of the increased demand for WAE in the world, in Europe in particular);
6. changes in the legislation of Ukraine on the circulation of weapons (simplification of the sale procedure, storage of weapons and ammunition for self-defence can lead to a weakening of control over their circulation both within the country and during their trafficking across the state border);
7. high probability of missile threat from RF (requires suspension of control procedures and operations at border crossing points across the state border at the time of the “Air raid alarm” signal, removal of persons at border crossing points to safe places, which can be used by illegal elements for illegal trafficking in WAE across the border).

The next stage was to assess the influence of each parameter and their correlation to each other (the results have been presented in Tables 1-4).

**Table 1. Correlation of Strengths and Opportunities.**

<i>STRENGTHS</i> <i>OPPORTUNITIES</i>	Level of training	BCTA provision	Personnel experience	Databases use	Personnel motivation	Risk profiles application	Effective interaction with the other subjects of IBM	Weight	Number of relationships	Product of weight and relationships
Opening of new and modern border crossing points	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0.211	3	0.633
Strengthening the responsibility for illegal trafficking in weapons across the state border	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.207	2	0.414
Providing units with the latest models of BCTA within the framework of international projects, grants	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0.154	5	0.77
Intensification of personnel training activities with the involvement of national and international experts	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0.136	5	0.68
Systematic joint risk analysis on counteraction to the threat of illicit trafficking in WAE	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0.15	6	0.75
Creation of an effective mechanism to encourage local residents for the assistance provided by SBGSU	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.039	2	0.078
Strengthening the effective cooperation with the international agency FRONTEX under the martial law	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0.093		
Weight	0.211	0.157	0.196	0.111	0.154	0.064	0.107			
Number of relationships	4	2	3	4	7	4	5			
Product of weight and relationships	0.844	0.314	0.588	0.444	1.078	0.256	0.535			
Sum of relationships	52									
Sum of products										7.384

Source: authors.

**Table 2. Correlation of Strengths and Threats.**

STRENGTHS THREATS	Level of training	BCTA provision	Personnel experience	Databases use	Personnel motivation	Risk profiles application	Effective interaction with the other subjects of IBM	Weight	Number of relationships	Product of weight and relationships
Significant increase in passenger and transport traffic on the border of Ukraine with EU countries	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.079	2	0.158
Increase in the traffic of weapons and ammunition from Ukraine to EU countries due to the rise in their total number on the controlled territory	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.143	2	0.286
Increase in the probability of illegal trafficking in WAE in case of a negative scenario on the frontline	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.146	2	0.292
Abrupt changes in the socio-political situation in the world (in neighboring countries)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.171	2	0.342
Intensification of cross-border criminal groups in the field of illegal trafficking across the border of WAE	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.214	2	0.428
Changes in the legislation of Ukraine on the circulation of weapons	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.061	1	0.061
Missile Threat	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.186	3	0.558
Weight	0.211	0.157	0.196	0.111	0.154	0.064	0.107			
Number of relationships	1	-	1	-	-	5	7			
Product of weight and relationships	0.211	0.157	0.196	0.111	0.154	0.32	0.749			
Sum of relationships									28	
Sum of products										4.023

Source: authors.

**Table 3. Correlation of Weaknesses and Opportunities.**

WEAKNESSES OPPORTUNITIES	Personnel overwork	Insufficient capacity of border crossing points	Insufficient number of service dog instructors specializing in weapons detection	Stress (mental-emotional state)	Necessity of personnel rotation for participation in combat operations	Personnel corruption	Impossibility of advanced training under the martial law	Weight	Number of relationships	Product of weight and relationships
Opening of new and modern border crossing points	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.211	2	0.422
Strengthening the responsibility for illegal trafficking in weapons across the state border	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.207	1	0.207
Providing units with the latest models of BCTA within the framework of international projects, grants	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.154	3	0.462
Intensification of personnel training activities with the involvement of national and international experts	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.136	1	0.136
Systematic joint risk analysis on combating the threat of illicit trafficking in WAE	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.15	1	0.15
Creation of an effective mechanism to encourage the local residents for the assistance provided by SBGSU	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.039	1	0.039
Strengthening the effective cooperation with the international agency FRONTEX under the martial law	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.093	2	0.186
Weight	0.243	0.15	0.172	0.146	0.089	0.146	0.054			
Number of relationships	2	2	1	-	-	3	3			
Product of weight and relationships	0.486	0.3	0.172	0.146	0.089	0.438	0.162			
Sum of relationships	<b>22</b>									
Sum of products										<b>3.395</b>

Source: authors.

**Table 4. Correlation of Weaknesses and Threats.**

WEAKNESSES	Personnel overwork	Insufficient capacity of border crossing points	Insufficient number of service dog instructors specializing in weapons detection	Stress (mental-emotional state)	Necessity of personnel rotation for participation in combat operations	Personnel corruption	Impossibility of advanced training under the martial law	Weight	Number of relationships	Product of weight and relationships
Significant increase in passenger and transport traffic on the border of Ukraine with EU countries	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.079	5	0.395
Increase in the traffic of weapons and ammunition from Ukraine to EU countries due to the rise in their total number on the controlled territory	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.143	5	0.715
Increase in the probability of illegal trafficking in WAE in case of a negative scenario on the frontline	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.146	5	0.73
Abrupt changes in the socio-political situation in the world (in neighboring countries)	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.171	2	0.342
Intensification of cross-border criminal groups in the field of illegal trafficking across the border of WAE	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.214	3	0.642
Changes in the legislation of Ukraine on the circulation of weapons	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.061	-	0.061
Missile Threat	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.186	2	0.372
Weight	0.243	0.15	0.172	0.146	0.089	0.146	0.054			

Number of relationships	5	3	3	6	-	5	-			
Product of weight and relationships	1.215	0.45	0.516	0.876	0.089	0.73	0.054			
Sum of relationships									44	
Sum of products										7.187

Source: authors.

Table 1 shows the weights and relationships between the factors of strengths (influenced by SBGSU) and opportunities (beyond the control of the border guard agency).

The information presented in Table 2 reveals the relationships between the factors of strengths (influenced by SBGSU) and threats (not directly dependent on the border guard agency), as well as the weight indicators of each factor.

The data presented in Table 3 shows the presence or absence of relationships between the factors of weaknesses (influenced by SBGSU) and opportunities (dependent not only on the border agency) and the level of influence of each of them.

The information given in Table 4 indicates the weight of weaknesses (influenced by SBGSU) and threats (beyond the direct control of the border guard agency) and the relationships between them.

Summarizing the data from Tables 1-4, we created a general summary and reflected the relevant results in it (Table 5).

**Table 5. SWOT – comparison of the results.**

Correlation	Sum of relationships	Sum of products
Strengths / Opportunities (SO)	52	7.384
Strengths / Threats (ST)	28	4.023
Weaknesses/ Opportunities (WO)	22	3.395
Weaknesses / Threats (WT)	44	7.187

Source: authors.

The largest sum of the products of the total summary indicates which strategy we should choose. It follows from the analysis that the optimal strategy to combat illicit trafficking in WAE is an AGGRESSIVE strategy of expansion and development, which effectively uses both the strengths

of SBGSU and the opportunities in the environment around it. It should be noted that the difference in the returns of the aggressive strategy (SO) and the defensive strategy (WT) is not significant. This fact requires processing of specific actions depending on the interaction between the factors and focusing on those factors that are highly dependent on each other or intensively influence each other. For this purpose, our expert team has developed recommendations that could reduce the impact of weaknesses of SBGSU in combating the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points with EU countries and ensure the leadership of the aggressive strategy as the most effective under the martial law, according to the results of our research.

During the **third (final) stage**, practical recommendations have been developed for SBGSU officials to improve the effectiveness of border guard units in order to combat the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE at border crossing points with EU countries under the martial law.

We consider it reasonable to provide the following practical recommendations to reduce the influence of the main factors of weaknesses regarding the threat of illegal trafficking WAE at border crossing points:

1. in order to avoid personnel overwork, **it is necessary** to increase the number of personnel of the border units that carry out border checks on the border with EU countries to 100% or the maximum possible level;
2. in order to compensate for the insufficient capacity of border crossing points, the principle of electronic queuing **should be introduced** at all land border crossing points, which will allow to distribute proportionally the traffic of different categories of vehicles leaving Ukraine;
3. it is necessary to make changes to the training program for service dog instructors specializing in weapons detection to accelerate the timing and optimize the process of their training in special canters (the factor is the insufficient number of service dog instructors specializing in weapons detection);
4. in order to eliminate the causes and conditions that facilitate the emergence of stressful situations, it is **necessary to** intensify the work of staff psychologists at the level of the state border guard agencies; to introduce a position of a psychologist in the staff of border guard units that have border crossing points in their area of responsibility in order to increase the stability of the personnel's psycho-emotional state due to nervousness for relatives and friends because of the war;

5. in order to minimize the impact of such a factor as the necessity of rotation for participation in combat operations (constant changes of personnel of border guard units, which negatively affects the level of coherence and interaction during the fulfilment of border checks tasks at border crossing points), the rotation process **should be** carried out in an organized manner, without reducing the overall capacity to perform border checks tasks in general, and vehicles inspection in particular.

### 3. Discussion

The authors of the article have conducted a SWOT analysis, identified the factors of strengths, weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats, which, according to the experts, have the greatest impact on the threat of illegal trafficking in WAE on the border of Ukraine with EU countries in war conditions.

The factors of these criteria identified in the study partially correspond to the criteria specified by Bratko *et al.*, (2021), namely, such strengths as ensuring the rhythmic crossing the border by persons and vehicles, the use of databases and risk profiles to identify threats to national security on the state border of Ukraine (obtaining of advanced information), high level of personnel training, the use of the latest equipment and service dogs, clear interaction with other subjects of integrated border management; as well as international crime threats, in particular, in the sphere of illegal WAE trafficking, increase of traffic etc. Similar is the use of the research tools by scientist Farion (2021) in the process of assessing threats to Ukrainian border security related to crime.

Our conclusions on the threat assessment coincide with those of Peterka-Benton (2012), who researched Transnistria from the point of view of the threat to national security, in particular, the illegal trafficking in weapons.

The conclusions on the activation of cross-border criminal groups in the field of illegal WAE trafficking across the border can be opposed to the conclusions of Prezelj and Gaber (2005), who considered the problem of cross-border flows in Slovenia and measures to combat illegal trafficking in weapons. The researchers considered this problem from the point of view of the high demand for weapons and their illegal trade on the black market (economic component), as well as paid great attention to different levels of interaction to combat the illicit WAE trafficking, including the use of a risk analysis system.

The conclusions obtained by the authors in the process of the formation of a model for assessing the threat of illegal WAE trafficking on the border

of Ukraine with EU countries under the martial law are closely connected with the conclusions of Horii (2016) concerning strategic risk analysis by the FRONTEX Agency and Csaba (2012), who analyzed the problems of risk profiling at different levels.

The authors of the article agree with the conclusions of Makhnyuk and Kyrychenko (2012) and Rudyk *et al.*, (2022) on the monitoring and classification of threats, the results of Mosov *et al.* (2020), who during the research identified challenges, dangers and threats to the border security of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Reznikova (2022) on the assessment of the state of the security environment of Ukraine. However, the authors of the article do not agree with Seniora and Poitevin (2010) on the approach to assessing possible threats.

The conclusions reached by the authors of the article do not correlate with the results of the research of these scientists, namely, the relationship between the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and the specifics of the border residents, as well as the determining role of the unsatisfactory level of interaction with local authorities and the threat of corruption among personnel.

## Conclusions

Thus, the research conducted by the authors made it possible to identify a group of factors, the impact of which should be reduced in order to increase the effectiveness of border checks at border crossing points for illegal trafficking in weapons, ammunition and explosives across the state border of Ukraine with EU countries that pose a threat to the security of the state under the martial law.

Existing research works investigate general issues related to the analysis and assessment of the threat of illegal trafficking in prohibited items and materials across the state border and do not take into account the specific factors affecting this type of illegal activity on the state border and the peculiarities and conditions of the martial law in Ukraine.

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis, the optimal strategy has been determined and practical recommendations have been developed for SBGSU officials to improve the effectiveness of border guard units to combat the threat of illegal WAE trafficking at border crossing points with EU countries under the martial law. In order to obtain the results, the group of experts has analyzed all the main factors of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that currently exist in Ukraine in the conditions of war.

The conducted research does not cover all the aspects of this problem. A perspective area of the research is the development of a technology for risk and threats assessment regarding possible attempts to illegally traffic WAE at border crossing points on the western border of Ukraine.

The results of the study are not perfect, due to the fact that most of the factors that were taken into account by the experts in the process of SWOT analysis, are relevant exactly during the martial law in Ukraine. Also, the results of the research cannot be applied to the areas of the Ukrainian border with such countries as RF, Belarus and Moldova.

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