

## ENSURING ECONOMIC SECURITY AS A COMPONENT OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL POLICE WITHIN UKRAINE'S UNIFIED SECURITY SPACE

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**Abstract.** The article examines the role of the National Police of Ukraine in shaping the state's unified security space, with a particular focus on ensuring economic security under wartime conditions. The document meticulously delineates the legal status and authorities wielded by police forces, constituting a pivotal component within the national security apparatus. It further underscores their role in fostering collaboration with other entities within the security sector, as well as with local hromadas. It is vital to note that particular emphasis is placed on the novel tasks of the police force during a full-scale war. These include the documentation of war crimes, the combatting of organised crime, and the maintenance of public order in de-occupied territories. The article identifies the main threats to economic security during wartime, such as corruption, the shadow economy, money laundering, financing terrorism, fraud and cybercrime, and analyses the activities of the police in combatting economic crimes, in collaboration with the Ukrainian Bureau of Economic Security and international partners. It presents examples of international co-operation in countering cross-border crimes, confirming the Ukrainian police's ability to operate within the European security framework. The importance of combining a rapid operational response with preventive mechanisms is emphasised, particularly in terms of interaction with businesses, civil society institutions and the media, in order to prevent economic offences. The subject of this research is the activities of the National Police of Ukraine in the field of ensuring economic security as an integral component of its role within the unified security space of the state. The methodological basis of the study is formed by a combination of general scientific and special legal methods. The dialectical method was utilised to analyse the dynamics of the transformation of the police's tasks under wartime conditions. The formal-legal method was employed to analyse the legal framework governing police operations within the domains of national and economic security. The system-structural method enabled the consideration of the police as a component of the security sector within the state's unified security space. The statistical method was employed to generalise official data on crime trends during the war, as well as to identify tendencies in economic offences. A sociological approach was adopted in order to account for public trust in the police and its perception as a security institution. The objective of the present article is to undertake a comprehensive study of the role of the National Police of Ukraine in shaping the unified security space of the state, with particular emphasis on ensuring economic security in the face of wartime threats, identifying the main directions of its activity in countering economic crimes, and developing recommendations for strengthening the institutional capacity of the police in the post-war period. *Results.* The significance of the findings lies in substantiating the institutional role of the National Police of Ukraine as a guarantor not only of public but also of economic security within the unified security space of the state. The results of the study allow for the refinement of directions for improving legal regulation, the determination of practical mechanisms for countering economic crimes during and after the war, and the provision of recommendations for the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the police in co-operation with the Bureau of Economic Security and international partners. The practical value of the conclusions lies in their potential application in the activities of security sector bodies, in developing state policy strategies aimed at countering economic threats and in designing Ukraine's post-war recovery programmes. *Conclusions.* The research enables several generalisations to be formulated. Firstly,

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the National Police of Ukraine is a fundamental institution within the security sector. It ensures law and order, as well as public safety, throughout the country, while also being integrated into the broader context of the unified security space. Secondly, during full-scale warfare, the police undertook unusual tasks such as documenting war crimes, safeguarding critical infrastructure, joining defence forces and maintaining order in liberated territories, thereby demonstrating their adaptability and ability to overcome extraordinary challenges. Thirdly, economic security has become an essential component of national resilience. The police play a key role in preventing and combatting economic crimes such as fraud, corruption, money laundering, the shadow economy and terrorism financing. Fourthly, the National Police's effectiveness in this area largely depends on coordination with the Bureau of Economic Security, other state institutions and international partners. Fifthly, the experience of post-conflict states confirms that democratisation, professionalisation and police accountability are prerequisites for ensuring public and economic security. Ensuring economic security within the unified security space is imperative for achieving victory in the war and for Ukraine's subsequent recovery. The strategic prospects for establishing a comprehensive security framework in Ukraine are determined by the further strengthening of the police's institutional capacity, the improvement of legal mechanisms, and the development of international co-operation.

**Keywords:** National Police of Ukraine, unified security space, economic security, wartime threats, economic crimes, corruption, shadow economy.

**JEL Classification:** H56, D74, K42, E26

## 1. Introduction

Ukraine is currently facing unprecedented security challenges as a result of the full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation. In the context of war, threats to national security have increased dramatically, necessitating novel approaches to the formulation and implementation of state security policy. The state has declared its intention to establish a unified security space, defined as an environment in which all components of the security sector operate in a coordinated manner to guarantee an equal level of protection for citizens across the entire territory of the country. Within such an integrated framework, the issue of economic security assumes particular importance, given that the resilience of the state to military and hybrid threats is contingent on the protection of its economic interests and the efficacy of countering economic crime.

In the field of scholarly literature, the concept of a "unified security space" of the state is interpreted as an integrated system that combines legal norms, organisational and institutional mechanisms, and social factors. The purpose of this integrated system is to ensure equal and sustainable access of citizens to basic security services throughout the country. The concept under discussion here is one which extends beyond the mere territorial distribution of law enforcement personnel; rather, it presupposes the creation of conditions under which security becomes a universal element of the daily functioning of society, regardless of geographical location, remoteness, or socio-economic status of the population.

O. Skoryk emphasises that extant literature on the subject of both domestic and foreign economics presents numerous approaches to defining the notions of "security" and "economic security". In Western

Europe, the concept of security emerged at the end of the twelfth century, where it was interpreted as a condition characterised by the absence or neutralisation of threats and risk factors, as well as a process of establishing appropriate conditions and social institutions aimed at its provision (Skoryk, 2016).

K. Utenkova observes that the concept of 'economic security' emerged in the aftermath of the Great Depression, a period that saw an economic crisis from 1929 to 1933. The evolution of this economic category is closely associated with the legacy of U.S. President F. Roosevelt, who articulated the notion that "true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence" (Utenkova, 2019). According to Mochernyi (2008), the term "economic security" is defined as the state of independence of a country in shaping and developing its economic system, as well as a set of measures aimed at its protection.

At the present stage, the issue of national and economic security has acquired exceptional significance, as its resolution will determine Ukraine's future, the level of socio-economic well-being of its citizens, the formation of their national self-identification, and the development of respect for their own state.

## 2. The Formation of a Unified Security Space in Ukraine: Tasks and Challenges for the National Police

The notion of a unified security space necessitates the integration of all actors within the security sector, including the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, special services, civil protection forces, and other relevant entities, into a cohesive and coordinated

system. This unified system is predicated on the harmonisation of legal frameworks and the alignment of strategic objectives. In Ukraine, the principle of interaction among security institutions is enshrined at the constitutional level. Article 17 of the Constitution (1996) stipulates that ensuring state security and defence is the responsibility of the respective military formations and law enforcement bodies, thereby implying the joint responsibility of the various components of the security sector for the protection of sovereignty and public order. Scholars emphasise that national security is multidimensional. In particular, S. Baranov interprets national security in the narrow sense of state security. Without this, other forms of security – economic, environmental, informational and so on – cannot be achieved (Baranov, 2023). Consequently, economic security is regarded as an integral component of national security and the broader security landscape.

Modern Ukrainian legislation clearly defines the status, tasks and powers of the National Police, which is the central executive body responsible for internal security and public order. The National Police are organised and directed by the Cabinet of Ministers through the Minister of Internal Affairs. Notably, the legal framework outlines how the police should operate in exceptional circumstances, such as under martial law or a state of emergency. In these situations, the police may be involved in defence tasks as determined by the relevant authorities. Although the term "unified security space" is not explicitly used in legislation, the concept is implemented through the decentralisation of policing and co-operation with local hromadas. Thus, legislation provides the necessary legal tools for police forces to function together within the national security system, and recent reforms have aimed to make this happen in practice.

The National Police of Ukraine plays a leading role in ensuring public safety, establishing it as a pivotal player in the development of the country's unified security landscape. Its uniqueness lies in its combination of a wide range of functions and its comprehensive territorial presence.

Firstly, the police perform a range of functions, including crime prevention, protection (through patrolling and maintaining order) and investigation, thereby covering the entire criminal justice cycle. Unlike the Armed Forces, whose focus is on repelling external aggression, the police are solely responsible for maintaining public order and internal security, and interact with the population on a daily basis. Notably, the police are responsible for tackling crime in a variety of areas, including offences against individuals or public order, as well as economic crime, property crime and organised criminality. This underlines the important role they play in ensuring

economic security, a topic that will be analysed in greater detail in the next section.

Secondly, the police have a strong presence throughout the country thanks to an extensive network of main directorates, district units and police stations. This ensures a prompt response to incidents in any area. As part of the 2020–21 reform, 26 regional main departments, 646 territorial divisions and around 500 police stations were set up to provide nationwide police services. The Ministry of Internal Affairs declared the strategic objective of a "police presence in every district" to be the foundation of the unified security space, in which citizens everywhere receive a standard level of protection. Therefore, territorial coverage ensures that all hromadas receive equal security, regardless of distance or socio-economic status.

Thirdly, the police act as the main point of contact between the various security sector organisations, including the Security Service of Ukraine, the National Guard, the State Border Guard Service, the judiciary, local authorities and civic groups. In practice, the National Police of Ukraine often acts as a coordinator "at the intersection" between public and internal state security. International experience highlights the importance of such coordination. In post-conflict states, for example, the police often bridge the gap between the end of military operations and the restoration of peaceful order. Police forces are deeply embedded in society and shaped by social conditions. For example, the war in Croatia had a significant influence on police personnel policy and culture, providing Ukraine with valuable insights into adapting its law enforcement system during transitional periods (Ivkovic, 2004).

The aggression exhibited by Russia, the subsequent declaration of martial law, and the resultant upheavals have presented novel and atypical challenges to the National Police of Ukraine. Since the commencement of the invasion in February 2022, law enforcement agencies have functioned within the confines of their established roles, undertaking both defence-related operations and the preservation of domestic order. In particular, police units have been deployed for patrolling cities during curfews, serving in territorial defence forces, evacuating civilians from frontline areas, and protecting critical infrastructure against sabotage.

Concurrently, the primary objective of police work during wartime has been the documentation of war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by occupying forces. Police investigators, in conjunction with prosecutors, are responsible for the documentation of incidents of murder, torture, looting, destruction of property, sexual violence, and other grave crimes in occupied and frontline territories. As of September 2024, at least 137,000 instances of war crimes committed by Russian forces against Ukraine had

been documented (President of Ukraine, 2024). Consequently, the National Police have been effective in their integration into the process of transitional justice, thereby establishing the foundation for the accountability of perpetrators and the restoration of the rule of law in the aftermath of de-occupation (Cheatham, 2020). This underscores the adaptability of the police and the necessity of their institutional strengthening during post-war reconstruction, so that the law enforcement system can cope with increased demands and prevent surges of crime or impunity during the transitional period.

Statistical data indicate significant changes in crime dynamics under the influence of wartime factors. While 2022 (the first year of the full-scale war) saw a decline in recorded offences, 2023 witnessed a sharp rise in crime. According to the Office of the Prosecutor General, approximately 475,600 crimes were registered in 2023, representing a 31% increase compared to 2022 (approximately 362,600). Concurrently, the number of individuals charged increased by 26% (Khavroniuk, 2025). The steepest increases were observed in fraud (particularly cyber fraud), theft and drug trafficking, as well as wartime crimes such as looting, illicit arms trafficking and domestic violence resulting from stress. These negative trends stem from the general socio-economic pressures of wartime and the reallocation of police resources; much of the force has been redirected towards defence tasks and documenting war crimes, temporarily reducing capacity in other areas. Therefore, the current surge in crime is largely war-induced and does not negate the positive pre-war trend of declining criminality.

The war has also had a significant impact on organised crime. The mass displacement of populations, economic instability and weakened control in some regions have created favourable conditions for criminal groups. According to UN assessments, the armed conflict has led to organised crime evolving in Ukraine, increasing the risk of human trafficking and drug distribution and posing serious challenges for post-war recovery. Contributing factors include heavy losses among local police personnel and the proliferation of illicit arms. Despite these unprecedented challenges, the National Police have taken steps to curb criminal networks. In 2023, they sent 16% more criminal proceedings to court and dismantled 419 organised crime groups (including 26 with corrupt ties), according to the National Police Report. By the first nine months of 2024, they had eliminated 532 groups, which was a 27% increase on the previous year, according to the National Police Report. These figures demonstrate the relative effectiveness of tackling organised crime, even during wartime. However, solving "ordinary" crimes is still hindered by staff shortages, combat losses and overloaded investigators and courts.

The establishment of a genuinely unified security environment in Ukraine, with the participation of the National Police, is confronted with numerous strategic challenges, including the enhancement of public confidence in law enforcement, the maintenance of adequate security during periods of war and reconstruction, the effective coordination with other security entities, the allocation of sufficient resources for police reform, and the continuation of decentralisation and community partnership reforms to ensure that citizens experience the police's presence and assistance in their daily lives.

In order to address these tasks, there is a necessity for firm political will, substantial financial investment, and broad social support. These are indispensable conditions for the creation of a security space in which every citizen feels guaranteed protection regardless of circumstances. In the post-war period, a priority will be integrating police activities into broader national recovery programmes, including participation in the establishment of legal infrastructure in liberated territories, protecting investment projects from criminal threats, and closer co-operation with international partners in the field of security.

As of 2025, the National Police of Ukraine is responsible for maintaining public order on a nationwide scale. The role of these actors in shaping the unified security space is characterised by complexity and constant evolution, shaped both by internal reforms and external factors, particularly military aggression, societal demands, and international experience. The capacity of the police to act as a key guarantor of citizens' daily security and to safeguard state resilience against internal and external threats is enabled by clear legal regulation of powers, functional universality, extensive territorial presence, and the ability to adapt under wartime conditions. It is imperative to emphasise that enhancing the institutional capacity of the police and their proactive engagement in national recovery processes are foundational prerequisites for accomplishing the strategic objective of establishing a genuinely integrated and comprehensive security framework within Ukraine.

### **3. Economic Security: Wartime Threats and the Role of the Police in Combating Economic Crime**

Economic security is a component of national security. It is defined as the protection of the national economy from real and potential threats, and involves ensuring a balance of societal interests, sustainable development, and the fulfilment of citizens' basic needs. In other words, economic security reflects a state's ability to protect its economic sovereignty, ensure the efficient operation of its economic system and guarantee the well-being of its population, even



in the event of internal or external shocks. Within the unified security space, economic security is integrated with other types of security, such as military, informational and humanitarian security, and constitutes an important field of activity for the security sector, including the National Police.

The full-scale war against Ukraine has created extraordinarily difficult conditions for the country's economic system. In addition to the aforementioned direct economic losses (i.e., destruction of infrastructure and industrial facilities, decline in GDP, forced relocation of businesses, and labour migration), a plethora of internal threats to economic security have come to the fore, associated with the rise in criminal activity in the financial and economic sphere. The principal wartime threats are as follows:

The subjects of this study are money laundering and illicit financial flows. The war is accompanied by significant financial flows, including state defence expenditures, international aid, and donations. These financial flows are exploited by criminal actors for the laundering of illicit funds. The risk of "dirty" money entering the financial system has increased, including revenues from smuggling, drug trafficking, or misappropriation of humanitarian aid, due to weakened oversight and urgent economic needs. It is submitted that such funds may also be used for subversive activities against the state, including the financing of terrorism. According to the State Financial Monitoring Service, the volume of suspicious transactions identified in 2022 amounted to 75.7 billion UAH, and in the first nine months of 2023 reached 85.3 billion UAH, with 870 case files transmitted to law enforcement authorities (State Financial Monitoring Service, 2023).

Corruption has been identified as a significant threat to Ukraine's economic security, with the risk of corruption intensifying during wartime. The allocation of substantial budgetary resources to defence, logistics and reconstruction creates opportunities for embezzlement and misuse. It is important to note that international assistance and charitable donations are also susceptible to the risk of misappropriation. The consequences of corruption are manifold; they include the undermining of public trust in authorities, the erosion of international support, the weakening of defence capacity, and the reduction of economic resilience. Consequently, anti-corruption efforts acquire a direct security dimension. The National Police of Ukraine has identified the promotion of accountability and the eradication of bribery within its own ranks as a prerequisite for societal trust. Whilst specialised anti-corruption bodies operate at the state level, police units continue to uncover numerous corruption offences, particularly at the local level and in the sphere of petty corruption. The digitalisation of public services and procurement, as exemplified by the "ProZorro" system, has been instrumental in curtailing

opportunities for corruption. Notwithstanding the prevailing wartime conditions in 2023, Ukraine reinstated mandatory electronic asset declarations for officials with a view to ensuring transparency and preventing illicit enrichment. Consequently, the fight against corruption is considered a fundamental aspect of ensuring economic security. The success of military action and the efficacy of economic recovery are contingent on the defeat of this phenomenon.

The deleterious effects of war on legitimate business and logistics have forced a proportion of the economy into a state of illegitimacy. Shortages of certain goods and resources have been a contributing factor to the surge in black-market activity, which has encompassed illegal trade in fuel, medicines, military equipment, and humanitarian aid. Documented cases include the misappropriation or resale of humanitarian cargoes intended for the frontlines or affected civilians, constituting crimes such as looting under martial law. These practices have been shown to have a detrimental effect on the army and the population, undermining morale and damaging the country's international reputation. It is evident that tax evasion, smuggling and illicit production have increased in parallel with the disruption of supply chains and market shifts. Experts have observed that the share of the shadow economy in Ukraine is likely to have increased in 2022-2023, with a concomitant negative effect on financial stability. The EU Advisory Mission has reported that wartime conditions have the potential to exacerbate human trafficking, smuggling, money laundering and cybercrime, all of which require advanced investigative methods, international co-operation and intelligence sharing (EUAM Ukraine, 2023).

The urgency of detecting and blocking channels of terrorist financing has been heightened by wartime conditions. Russian intelligence and associated organisations are attempting to fund anti-Ukrainian activities, separatist movements and disinformation campaigns covertly. Disrupting these networks is a task shared by the Security Service of Ukraine, the intelligence services and the police.

The National Police of Ukraine has traditionally played a significant role in combatting economic crime, though the institutional framework for this work has evolved over time. In 2021, the Economic Security Bureau of Ukraine (ESB) was established as a new central executive body responsible for countering offences that affect the functioning of the state economy. Although ESB attained full operational capacity in 2022, this did not impede the police from participating in anti-economic crime initiatives. Conversely, the police continue to play a pivotal role in the operational detection of offences "on the ground" and in responding expeditiously to economic crime that has a direct impact on citizens. Police units continue

to play a significant role in the exposure of fraudulent schemes, embezzlement of budgetary and charitable funds, smuggling activities, corruption, and the illicit trade in excise goods. The establishment of a close working relationship with the ESB is of paramount importance, as it facilitates the effective sharing of information and the coordination of joint operations. This is particularly salient in cases where there is an overlap in jurisdiction.

The role of the police in combating fraud and cybercrime is of particular importance, as these crimes have surged during the war. Fraudsters exploit public vulnerability by spreading fake advertisements for military supplies, charity collections or evacuations, deceiving citizens online. The Cyber Police and Strategic Investigations Departments of the NPU are working with foreign partners to actively track down and neutralise such schemes. A striking example occurred in 2025 when the police forces of Ukraine and Moldova conducted a joint operation to dismantle a fraud network that had defrauded Ukrainian soldiers of over 1 million UAH under the pretence of supplying vehicles and equipment. The group ran a call centre abroad, laundered the proceeds through 'drop' accounts, and was ultimately exposed through Europol channels. This case highlighted the importance of international co-operation and the Ukrainian police's ability to investigate transnational financial crimes.

Ensuring economic security requires more than reactive policing; a preventive and systemic approach is essential. The National Police, together with other institutions, implements mechanisms aimed at preventing economic offences, including:

- Legislative reforms enhancing liability for financial crimes and providing effective investigative tools;
- active co-operation with the State Financial Monitoring Service, tax and customs authorities, the National Bank, the Security Service of Ukraine, and ESB for intelligence-sharing on suspicious transactions and illicit schemes;
- strengthening transnational co-operation with Interpol, Europol, and EU partners to investigate cross-border crimes, from cyber fraud to smuggling and money laundering;
- training programmes organised by the EU Advisory Mission to improve investigators' capacity in asset recovery and cross-border financial investigations.

Public support is also critical. The National Police have been known to initiate awareness campaigns with the objective of informing citizens about common fraud schemes and encouraging them to report acts of corruption or scams. Civil oversight has been demonstrated to enhance transparency and to prevent abuse of power within the police force itself.

In summary, ensuring Ukraine's economic security during and after the war requires coordinated efforts

across institutions and is a multidimensional task. The National Police play a vital role in this process, ranging from directly enforcing legislation against economic crime to being involved in preventive mechanisms and rebuilding public trust in state institutions. Within the unified security space, the police do not operate in isolation, but in close co-operation with specialised bodies, hromadas and international partners, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of joint measures.

#### 4. Conclusions

The study enables several conclusions to be drawn about economic security being an integral part of the National Police of Ukraine's activities within the unified security space.

**Institutional status.** The National Police of Ukraine is a fundamental institution of national security, legally mandated to maintain law and order across the entire territory of the country. The legal framework of the aforementioned nation is characterised by an integrative mission, with a clear emphasis on human rights and the rule of law as paramount concerns. This ensures the maintenance of legitimacy and a substantial degree of public support, even during periods of crisis.

**Institutional role.** The police's role in establishing a unified security space is evident through their universal functions and territorial presence. Through decentralisation reforms and restructuring, the police have moved towards providing security services evenly across the country, while also coordinating local efforts with the government and hromadas.

**Wartime adaptation.** Russian aggression and transitional conditions have created new demands for the police. The Ukrainian police have proven capable of adapting to atypical tasks, such as joining defence efforts within legal limits, documenting war crimes and ensuring order in de-occupied territories. This highlights the need to strengthen the police's material, personnel and psychological capacity in the post-war period.

**Economic security.** In the economic sphere, the police fulfil a dual role: they combat crimes that undermine the country's economic potential, such as fraud, corruption, money laundering, illicit trade and terrorism financing, while also integrating into preventive mechanisms. These range from regulatory initiatives to co-operation with the business sector in identifying risks.

**International experience.** A comparative analysis confirms that the democratisation and professionalisation of policing are prerequisites for both public and economic security. Police forces that are accountable and demilitarised are less prone to corruption and abuse, and can therefore protect property and citizens' rights more effectively.

Ensuring the stability of the financial system, safeguarding citizens and businesses from criminal threats and preventing the misappropriation of resources directly affects Ukraine's ability to withstand war and recover successfully afterwards. Building a unified security space where economic, military and societal security are integrated requires the completion of institutional ESB reforms, the enhancement of police financial investigation capacities and the guarantee of accountability for economic crime, regardless of status. Maintaining high levels of public trust in law

enforcement through transparency and encouraging citizens to participate in anti-corruption initiatives is equally important.

The analysis confirms that effective law enforcement, reinforced by reforms and international support, can minimise economic threats, even during a large-scale war. The experience gained and the institutional foundations established provide grounds for optimism regarding the future strengthening of Ukraine's economic security, which is an integral part of its national resilience, the path to victory and long-term prosperity.

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