

# LIMEN

Journal of the International Network for Immigration Research

7–8 (2023/1–2)



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MIGRATION  
RESEARCH  
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for Immigration Research  
published by the Hungarian Migration Research Institute

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## **Frontispiece:**

Warning sign near the US-Mexico border, Arizona. Photo: shutterstock.com

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## Lectori Salutem!

When we launched Limen as the journal of the Migration Research Institute (MRI) in 2020, our main goal was to increase the number of our English-language publications to support the internationalization of the institute. In the past four years, we met and collaborated with numerous leading scholars of immigration studies and its related disciplines. Their contributions not only increased the relevance and academic merit of Limen, but also helped us to build a network which can give a new impetus to our activities.

In November 2023, MRI and four other research centers established the International Network for Immigration Research (INIR). The members of INIR consider immigration a topic that should be assessed with a multifaceted approach that takes into account both the benefits and the challenges. The members of the network share the principle that host countries are sovereign nation states with the right to pursue and enforce their chosen immigration policies that reflect the perspectives of their societies. Instead of merely making normative declarations based on an ideologically driven approach dominated by a strong humanitarian agenda, member organizations address the political, social, economic, and security considerations of immigration in order to develop realistic, long-lasting and responsible policy on this crucial issue.

To further their aims, the members of INIR decided to form an international advisory board for Limen that will serve as a publishing platform for multidisciplinary research and scholarship on migration and its related phenomena. In this double issue, the experts of INIR are elaborating on topics that were raised at the first joint workshop held by the network in Budapest in 2023. The timely issues covered include a rethinking of the international asylum system, the instrumentalization of migration, the shifts in the political preferences of the Hispanic population of the United States, and the challenges posed by immigration and integration in France.

Budapest, 28. 06. 2024

**Viktor MARSAI** PhD  
Executive Director  
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# The Instrumentalization of Migration in the Arctic Circle: The Re-emergence of the Northern Migration Route and its Significance in the Russian Hybrid Military Toolbox

**Róbert Gönczi**

## Abstract

The year 2023 emerged as a critical point in the intricate web of Finnish-Russian relations, opening a new era that will increase the importance of border management, migration dynamics and geopolitical strategies in the Northern European region. This study seeks to provide an in-depth account of the complex issues that culminated in the Finnish government's unprecedented decision at the end of 2023 to temporarily close all its border crossings with Russia.<sup>1</sup> As the events unfolded, a crisis emerged, characterised not only by the seemingly unusual patterns of the northern migration route, but also by the sudden strain in the previously pragmatic diplomatic relations between Moscow and Helsinki. The significance of the (re-)emergence of the Northern migration route goes beyond the tensions between Moscow and Helsinki, and it could have a serious impact on the overall diplomatic dynamics in Northern Europe.

**Keywords:** Finland, Russia, Norway, Instrumentalization of Migration, Border security

## The Finnish Decision and its Background

On 28 November 2023, the Finnish government took the historic decision to close its entire eastern border with Russia due to concerns about growing migratory pressures. The seemingly unexpected but in fact strategically planned decision affecting nine border crossing points was implemented in a surprisingly short period of just 24 hours.<sup>2</sup> Finnish authorities initially declared that full border closure would last until 13 December, but the border crossing points remain closed as of February 2024.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MOSHES 2023.

<sup>2</sup> VOCK 2023.

<sup>3</sup> NILSEN 2023.

The Finnish government set up facilities at airports and seaports for asylum seekers arriving from Russia who would be unable to submit applications at the closed land border crossing points.<sup>4</sup> On 13 December, a review period was launched with the reopening of border crossing points, but they were closed again within 24 hours.<sup>5</sup> The planned 14 January reopening of another two points was also abandoned eventually.<sup>6</sup> The compelling reason behind the re-closures was the consistent presence of migratory pressure.

In contrast to the usual migration patterns where Finland appears as a destination country, the crisis at the end of 2023 showed a completely different trend. Most migrants from Russia – typically Syrian, Somali, and Yemeni nationals – did not intend to stay in Finland permanently.<sup>7</sup> Rather, they planned to go on to another Western European, Schengen and EU Member State (e.g. Germany, The Netherlands or Belgium).

Between the closure of the border and January 2024, a reported 150-170 migrants disappeared on Finnish territory.<sup>8</sup> Until the end of 2023, the increase in migratory pressure was slow but steady, especially in the month of November.<sup>9</sup> Most migrants registered at border crossing points were men aged between 20 and 30,<sup>10</sup> and most of them reported that they had tried but failed to enter the Schengen area before, typically from Belarus into Poland, Lithuania or Latvia.<sup>11</sup>

According to Finnish data, the migrants affected by the crisis held 31 different nationalities, with Syrians, Somalis, and Yemenis the most common.<sup>12</sup> The rapid diffusion of both real information (e.g. about easier access to the Finnish border) and speculation (e.g. about the opening of the border) among them was facilitated by social media networks as contributors to the complex dynamics of the crisis.<sup>13</sup>

The Finnish position is that Russia is responsible for the significant increase in migration.<sup>14</sup> Finland, like Poland and the Baltic States, sees the migration crisis

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<sup>4</sup> Personal interview with Finnish officials, Helsinki, 17/01/2024.

<sup>5</sup> LEMOLA – BUBOLA 2023.

<sup>6</sup> GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR IN FINLAND 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview with Finnish officials, Helsinki, 17/01/2024.

<sup>8</sup> INFO MIGRANTS 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Personal interview with Finnish officials, Helsinki, 17/01/2024.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> VAN RIJ 2024.

on the eastern (Belarusian) and the northern (Arctic) migration route as a hybrid threat, rather than a humanitarian crisis.<sup>15</sup> Social media and their misleading advertisements, especially when targeting Middle Eastern and North African migrants in Belarus, have contributed significantly to the reassertion of the importance of the northern migration route.

Interestingly, the crisis did not extend to the green border, it was limited to the area of the official border crossing points.<sup>16</sup> The main reason for this is the geographical nature of the Finnish-Russian border region, with its frozen, waterlogged, swampy terrain that is difficult and dangerous to cross, especially in the late autumn and winter months. But another reason is the organised nature of this migratory pressure. The unfolding crisis on the Finnish-Russian border at the end of 2023 gives a broad picture of the changing nature of northern European relations, especially since the accession of the traditionally neutral Finland to NATO in 2022. The crisis could have serious implications for European perceptions and policies on migration, as well as for geopolitical dynamics and stability in the region.

## **The Russian Instrumentalization of Migration**

The instrumentalization of migration, often referred to in the media as the ‘weaponisation of migration’, is a complex phenomenon that involves the deliberate creation or manipulation of migration flows for political, military and/or economic ends, such as gaining influence in or potentially destabilising the targeted country.<sup>17</sup> This strategy is characterised by hidden motives, plausible deniability, and the use of migration as a means of coercion. It has profound global implications, but it can also be broken down into specific local cases like the events at the Finnish-Russian border.

Other cases were noted in a wide variety of geopolitical contexts, with a documented history going back to the early 1950s.<sup>18</sup> According to the available data, this specific hybrid instrument was deployed in at least 77 instances worldwide between 1951 and 2023, with a 65% success rate. Initially used by weaker states such as Haiti (1979–1988), Austria (1981–1982) or Albania (1990–1991), its usefulness was eventually realised by larger regional powers such as Russia, Iran, or Pakistan. Since then, the larger powers have implemented the instrumentalization of migration in

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<sup>15</sup> GÖNCZI 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Personal interview with INGO officials, Helsinki, 17/01/2024.

<sup>17</sup> GREENHILL 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



their hybrid toolbox, combining military and non-military capabilities to achieve their goals.

However, the instrumentalization of migration is a double-edged weapon, capable of exacerbating tense inter-state relations, creating an environment conducive to the development of smuggling networks, promoting facts that contradict the narrative of the organiser of the pressure, and it can even have unintended consequences.<sup>19</sup> Historical examples, such as the construction of the Berlin Wall in the 1960s or the unintended strategic weakening of South Vietnam by the arrival of North Vietnamese refugees, highlight the potential risks of this strategy.

The phenomenon poses a moral dilemma for the targeted country whose decision-makers must resolve the tension between respect for the human rights instruments of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the national interest of border protection.<sup>20</sup> This is precisely one of the main objectives of the instrumentalization of migration. Others are to generate social dissatisfaction with the political elite, to erode the leadership's sense of security, to strategically weaken and destabilise the target country, and to discourage the use of conventional military force to achieve plausible deniability while reaching its goals at the same time.

Russia is emerging on the global stage as an experienced user of hybrid tools such as disinformation campaigns or migration instrumentalization operations.<sup>21</sup> With seven documented cases of Russian (and Soviet) migration instrumentalization attempts between 1979 and 2023 (involving Belarus as its closest ally), Moscow is an experienced user of this capability in the geopolitical arena.

The 1999 Union State<sup>22</sup> between Russia and Belarus serves as a case study in the instrumentalization of migration to put pressure on NATO and the EU, create

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> FAKHRY – PARKES – RÁCZ 2022.

<sup>22</sup> The Russian-Belarusian Union State of 1999 refers to an agreement between the two states aimed at political and economic integration. This integration treaty was implemented on 8 December 1999. The Treaty establishing the Union State was signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka in Moscow. The aim of the State Union was to enhance cooperation and integration between the two countries in various fields, including politics, defence, economy, and culture. The agreement foresaw the establishment of joint institutions such as a joint parliament and a Council of Ministers. The treaty also aimed to coordinate foreign policy and defence efforts. Despite the existence of the Union State, integration was limited, and the two countries retained a degree of sovereignty. The Union State has faced serious challenges since its establishment, and as a result the unification process has not proceeded as planned. Russia and Belarus continue to maintain their national identities and sovereign political systems. However, the agreement remains in force, opening ever deepening platforms for cooperation in the areas mentioned above. (DEEN – ROGGEVEEN – ZWEERS 2021.)

insecurity, and use migration as a distraction. In 2021 it was used in Belarus primarily as a response to EU sanctions, which also diverted domestic public attention from the economic problems of the Eastern European state.<sup>23</sup>

The objectives of the Union State in Belarus since 2021 have also been characterised by a deliberate strategy to polarise public opinion within the European Union.<sup>24</sup> By exacerbating the fundamentally divisive issue of migration in Europe, the Union State has created room for internal political discord and deepening disagreements between EU member states. At the same time, the two allies have also made efforts to undermine the credibility of border control authorities and armies, and to erode public confidence in these institutions through disinformation operations. Moreover, the Union State is spinning a narrative that harms the image of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia within the EU. Through the clever use of its disinformation platforms, it portrays the three countries as inhuman states where European standards are violated, and human rights are disregarded by border guards who act downright ‘beastly’ in their pushback strategies. Another aspect of this strategic approach is the portrayal of the EU and NATO as a threat to the public in Russia and Belarus, which fuels scepticism about the democratisation process. The Union State also used this opportunity to assess NATO’s interoperability, especially in the critical year of 2021 when the portents of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine had already begun to show on the geopolitical horizon.

With the Belarusian crisis diminishing in importance, Moscow could finally turn its attention to the Finnish-Russian border for a repeat exploitation of its instrumentalization capabilities. As the instrumentalization of migration continues to shape the geopolitical landscape, understanding its historical roots, global spread and concrete applications becomes of paramount importance. The focus on the Finnish-Russian border serves as a timely and illustrative case study that highlights the changing nature of this strategic hybrid instrument and its implications for regional stability and international relations.

## **The 2015–2016 Arctic Migration Crisis**

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Russia’s motivation, its strategy, and the complex web of possible consequences of the Finnish-Russian border crisis can all be traced back to an earlier, 2015–2016 Russian attempt. The year 2015 witnessed the unfolding of the Arctic migration

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<sup>23</sup> FORTI 2023.

<sup>24</sup> GÖNCZI 2023.

crisis, a multifaceted geopolitical phenomenon triggered by the political and economic sanctions imposed on Russia in response to the annexation of Crimea in 2014.<sup>25</sup>

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent imposition of political and economic sanctions by the European Union created a tumultuous geopolitical environment that triggered a surge in migration. Middle Eastern and North African migrants appeared along the northernmost Russian-Schengen border. Amid tightened border restrictions, an unusual solution emerged for crossings: the phenomenon of 'migrants on bicycles'. Taking advantage of a legal loophole that allowed bicycles to be classified as vehicles, migrants hit on this innovative tactic to bypass border restrictions prohibiting pedestrian crossings.<sup>26</sup>

On 22 March 2016, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö met Vladimir Putin in Moscow.<sup>27</sup> The meeting resulted in a solution to the increasing migratory pressure on the Finnish-Russian border: Russia agreed to help Finland reduce immigration numbers in an area where previously there had been no illegal migration pressure at all. The Finnish president's success in diplomatically curbing migration pressure was closely linked to his denunciation of the provision restricting bilateral relations between Helsinki and Moscow, originating from the sanctions due to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This strategic move demonstrates the delicate balance between national interests and wider geopolitical considerations stemming from Russia's 2014 Crimean invasion.

The adoption of the 2002–2004 Belarusian method of organizing migration pressure has become a powerful hybrid instrument for Russia to exert pressure.<sup>28</sup> By orchestrating and then suspending migration pressure, Russia has demonstrated its ability to weaken the EU's united position against Moscow on Ukraine-related sanctions. This strategy, initially used by Russia against Finland and Norway, has subsequently been successfully used by others, such as Turkey<sup>29</sup> or Morocco.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> SZYMAŃSKI – ŻOCHOWSKI – RODKIEWICZ 2016.

<sup>26</sup> LUHN 2016.

<sup>27</sup> SZYMAŃSKI – ŻOCHOWSKI – RODKIEWICZ 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Belarus used migration instrumentalization on its common border with the EU in 2002 and 2004. This pressure was aimed at gaining diplomatic recognition and financial assistance. The Belarusian state was unsuccessful both times in its attempt to use migration as a tool to exert pressure, but it recognised the tactic's potential, and the Union State added it to its hybrid political toolbox. (GREENHILL 2010.)

<sup>29</sup> MASCAREÑAS 2022.

<sup>30</sup> CASSARINO 2021.

In parallel with the crisis on the Finnish border, a similar situation was unfolding in Norway in 2015 when irregular migrants started arriving from Russia in significantly increased numbers. In September 2015, authorities on this previously quiet and peaceful border counted 1,000 irregular migrants, in October 2,200, and in November 2,800, bringing the total number for 2015 to at least 6,000.<sup>31</sup> The influx created a shockwave in domestic politics in Norway, as authorities faced a loss of control at their land borders for the first time since World War II.<sup>32</sup>

The Arctic migration crisis of 2015–2016 was a pivotal period that revealed the complex interplay between geopolitics, migration dynamics, and diplomatic negotiations. The creative tactics employed by migrants and the orchestrators of these unnatural movements, as well as the strategic diplomatic manoeuvres of Russia and Finland, had a profound impact on regional stability. It also caused a serious ripple effect in neighbouring Norway, creating a sense of vulnerability, and highlighting the wider implications of such crises.

## The Norwegian Border

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The Norwegian-Russian border crossing at Storskog has undergone a remarkable transformation since 2015. Notably, it is the only open land border point where Russians can enter the Schengen area directly.<sup>33</sup> The border crossing point operates according to a specific timetable, adapted to the post-COVID era, with opening hours modified to 8-15:00.<sup>34</sup> Historically, Storskog has been a focal point for crossings between the two countries, with a record 320,000 crossings recorded in 2013. This number fell to 72,173 by 2023.<sup>35</sup>

Cooperation and information sharing between Norway and Finland on border issues is crucial. Despite the crisis that saw a surge in the number of irregular migrants in 2015, the two nations have enjoyed excellent relations. Unlike Finland, Norway did not suspend the Schengen rules, which led to random checks on the Finnish side out of concerns that Russian nationals could cross the open Norwegian border into Finnish territory.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian officials, Kirkenes, 22/01/2024.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian academics, Oslo, 23/01/2024.

<sup>33</sup> KRIVTSOVA 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian officials, Kirkenes, 22/01/2024.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> SZUMSKI 2023.

The authorities in the Pasvik Valley, an area of high importance, imposed a heavy fine of €1,500 on anyone crossing the Norwegian-Russian border illegally via this difficult-to-control green border.<sup>37</sup> While Russia fortifies its side of the border with electric fences equipped with sensors, Norway prefers to rely on the trustworthiness of its citizens. On the border, small signs warn that the Russian Federation's territory lies just two metres from the posts marking the Norwegian border.<sup>38</sup>

On the maritime border, especially after the Nord Stream incident, foreign ships (including Russian vessels) are allowed only into three ports in the Norwegian Barents Sea, highlighting the sensitivity of the oil and gas industry, especially liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers.<sup>39</sup> In the interests of national sovereignty, the army controls the green border as another layer to Norway's border management structure.

The joint Border Commissariat, established in 1949 by a bilateral treaty, is responsible for controlling the 197.7 km long Russian-Norwegian border. They cooperate with the local Russian FSB and the Norwegian garrison of the Sor-Varanger region (East-Finnmark County).<sup>40</sup> The cooperation also extends to the FSB's units in Karelia (land) and the Western Arctic (maritime), which enables the two nations to work together more effectively in controlling land and maritime borders.

Historical agreements such as the Norwegian-Swedish-Russian treaty of 1826 and the Finnish Corridor in Petsamo<sup>41</sup> between 1920 and 1942 underline the long history and inevitability of cooperation in Norwegian-Russian relations to avoid

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<sup>37</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian officials, Kirkenes, 22/01/2024.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian officials, Kirkenes, 22/01/2024.

<sup>41</sup> The Finnish corridor of Petsamo (also known as Pechenga) refers to the strip of land in the northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula that Finland leased from the Soviet Union between 1920-1942. The corridor gave Finland access to the Barents Sea and was the result of the 1920 Treaty of Tartu. The Treaty of Tartu, signed between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1920, was intended to settle territorial disputes between the two countries following the Finnish War of Independence. As part of the treaty, the Soviet Union ceded to Finland the territory of Petsamo, giving Helsinki an ice-free port on the Arctic Ocean. Petsamo, now in the north of Russia, became strategically important because of the harbour that was accessible all year round. The Finnish Corridor gave Finland access to maritime trade routes and fishing grounds in the Barents Sea. In 1940, during the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland, the Soviets attacked their north-western neighbours who were forced to cede the Petsamo area in the 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty. After the signing of this treaty, Finland lost its only port in the Arctic Ocean. With the loss of the corridor, the importance of the area declined. After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the area became part of the Russian Federation. (KUEHNELT-LEDDIHN 1944.)

conflict.<sup>42</sup> Despite occasional tensions, the joint military exercises between Norway and Russia testify to the success of the conviction that open borders and maintaining communication are preferable to closed borders and no communication.

The Lapland Border Guard, established in 2012 by Finland in cooperation with Frontex, manages an extensive border stretch, 80% of which consists of rivers and lakes.<sup>43</sup> Annual exercises, such as the Kirkenes winter exercise, are becoming more widespread and inviting for the participation of other countries, most recently Germany.

The role of the Border Commissioner's office in Kirkenes illustrates the nuanced approach Norway takes to managing its borders with Russia. The office is mainly concerned with the day-to-day management of the border, such as reindeer migration and ghost ship treaties,<sup>44</sup> rather than with the arming of the border or the erection of physical barriers.<sup>45</sup>

Thanks to the pragmatic relations built since 2016, Norway has managed to ensure that unlike its neighbour Finland that continues to face the hybrid threat of instrumentalized migration, Storskog has a net zero number of irregular border crossers. For the Russians, it is important that the Norwegian border remains open, as it is their only land connection to the Schengen area that remains important for the Federation, even if to a decreasing extent. Of course, in analysing the Russian system, it is essential to note that in political science terms the processes of the federation are irrational.<sup>46</sup> It is not inconceivable that disregarding the Norwegian border in the instrumentalization of migration is the result not of a well-thought-out strategy, but of an ad hoc financial or political decision. In any case, the calm and security of the Norwegian border is conceivably related to its critical importance for the increasingly isolated Russian state and the pragmatic nature of their bilateral relations.

With its historical complexity, cooperation initiatives and changing challenges, the Norwegian-Russian border is a good example of the complex nature of international relations. From migration crises to joint military exercises, the

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<sup>42</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian officials, Kirkenes, 22/01/2024.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> The “ghost ship treaties” are international agreements by the international law of salvage that aim to address the problem of abandoned craft, often called “ghost ships”. These vessels are typically abandoned by their owners, adrift at sea or stranded in ports without proper maintenance or disposal plans. Ghost ships can pose significant environmental, navigational and safety risks, especially on busy shipping routes. (IILSS-INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LAW OF THE SEA STUDIES 2022.)

<sup>45</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian officials, Kirkenes, 22/01/2024.

<sup>46</sup> Personal interview with Norwegian academics, Oslo, 23/01/2024.

border's dynamics reflect the two nations' ongoing efforts to successfully navigate a sea of geopolitical change while maintaining diplomatic relations and open channels of communication.

## Predictions for 2024

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Moving into 2024, migration dynamics will continue to evolve, indicating possible changes in migration patterns and routes. One of the key projections for 2024 is the possibility of a surge in migrants during the summer months. Based on the Belarus crises of 2021, 2022 and 2023 that saw a significant increase in irregular migrants during the summer,<sup>47</sup> serious preparedness is required as those events could foreshadow similar challenges at the Finnish, Estonian or Norwegian-Russian borders.

Following the test run of the Arctic migration route in late 2023, the question arises whether this re- or newly discovered migration route will be actively used during the summer. The Arctic migration route is a potential alternative for migrants, and its viability and attractiveness is likely to be assessed in the coming months.

The closure of the Belarusian border is a challenge for the instrumentalization of migrants on the eastern route. Difficulties in exploiting the routinely travelled routes through Belarus raise the possibility of shifting orchestrated migration northwards. The events of 2023 in Finland could be seen as a test of capabilities that could pave the way for a change in strategies and routes.

Having experienced the complexity of managing migration dynamics, Norway is preparing for the potential challenges of 2024.<sup>48</sup> Lessons from past crises, such as the Arctic migration crisis in 2015-2016, underline the need for proactive measures to anticipate and manage potential surges in irregular migration numbers, especially during the summer months.

Strategically located in the Baltic region, Estonia is also on high alert. As its neighbouring countries experience changing migration patterns, Estonia, although it was not involved in either the Belarusian or Arctic migration crises, has recognised the need to step up its preparedness. Cooperation with international partners, information sharing, and adaptability of border control strategies have become key elements of Estonia's approach to addressing potential challenges. In

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<sup>47</sup> STRAŻ GRANICZNA 2023.

<sup>48</sup> NIELSEN 2023.

this context, Tallinn announced in February 2024 that it would start preparing for the full closure of its border with Russia, following the Finnish example.<sup>49</sup>

Preparing for the evolution of migration dynamics and possible changes in routes in 2024 will require a proactive and collaborative approach from nations such as Norway and Estonia. The challenges posed by the closure of the Belarusian border and the aftermath of the Arctic migration route testing highlight the need for strategic preparedness and international cooperation to effectively address the complex challenge of irregular migration and navigate through the Russian system of hybrid pressure tools.

## Conclusion

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In summary, this study has explored the intersections of geopolitical roaming, migration dynamics, and diplomatic complications, providing a picture of the evolution of Northern European relations. The seismic events of 2023, notably the unprecedented closure of the Finnish-Russian border crossings, are evidence of the multifaceted nature of the challenges facing the countries of the region. The study underlined the effectiveness of the instrumentalization of migration as a tool for geopolitical pressure, demonstrating Russia's adaptive capabilities to achieve its strategic goals.

The analysis of the Arctic migration crisis of 2015-2016 looked at the lasting impact of geopolitical events on migration patterns through historical lenses. Innovative strategies employed by migrants and the organizers of these artificial routes, as well as diplomatic negotiations between Finland and Russia, describe the delicate balance between national interests, broader geopolitical considerations, and human rights responsibilities.

The exploration of the Norwegian-Russian border situation highlighted the dynamic changes and challenges facing nations in Northern Europe since 2015. From the rise in irregular migration to the evolution of border management and cooperation efforts, the study revealed the nuanced nature of bilateral relations, which can serve as an example for addressing a crisis arising from the use of a hybrid instrument.

The study provides insightful projections for 2024, recognizing possible changes in migration patterns and the impact of geopolitical events, drawing parallels with

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<sup>49</sup> TRIL 2024.



the Belarus crisis and the test run of the Arctic migration route at the end of 2023. The preparedness of nations such as Norway and Estonia underlines the need for a proactive approach to addressing the complexities of irregular migration.

Finally, the study demonstrated that weaving together the threads of history, geopolitics, and migration dynamics is necessary for a comprehensive and coherent analysis of recent events. There is a need for persistent vigilance, strategic preparedness, and international cooperation to address the challenges facing the Northern European region. The complex dynamics between national interests, migration flows and geopolitical strategies require adaptive policies and cooperative efforts to promote stability and resilience in this ever-changing landscape.

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