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## **A study of the problem of loneliness in the times of war**

### **SUMMARY**

The article summarizes a view on the problem of loneliness faced by displaced persons and refugees on the European continent in the past century. The emergence of refugees was caused by military conflicts of various origins, from the two world wars to a number of local armed confrontations. The contemporary reality poses serious challenges in this respect: the war launched by Russia against Ukraine has caused another wave of refugees and displaced persons. Since the beginning of the war, the authorities of the European Union have been facing a “migration crisis”. The historical retrospective of the phenomenon presented in the article shows that the problem is global and difficult to solve.

**Key words:** refugees, internally displaced persons, Europe, war, loneliness, “migration crisis”.

### **Introduction**

The Russia-Ukraine war has caused Ukrainian people’s sense of danger to increase a thousandfold. Ukrainians are increasingly experiencing anxiety and fears, including the fear of loneliness. Its emergence is due to the fact that a considerable number of people are no longer able to remain physically close to their relatives and loved ones. In the challenging present-day conditions, the problem of loneliness is becoming particularly acute. The increase in the number of people experiencing loneliness is directly associated with migration. There are about 5 million internal migrants in Ukraine. According to UN data, as of December 2022, 7.8 million people, mostly women and children, fled their country to find refuge abroad.

Over the past century, the European continent has been one of the world’s hotbeds of tensions that have led to the emergence of refugees and displaced persons.

One hundred years had elapsed after the Great War of 1914–1918 when the Russia-Ukraine War broke out. In the period between these major conflicts, there occurred a number of local confrontations, which gave rise to waves of refugees and caused international communities to make attempts to cope with the problem. In fact, the new conflict characterized by a cynicism the European countries had not known before shook Europe on the anniversary of the beginning of the First World War.

Given that the number of literary sources dedicated to the topic of refugees is enormous, we will single out several key works. One of these is *The Era of Migration. International Population Movement in the Modern World* by Stephen Castles (Australia), Hein de Haas (Great Britain) and Mark J. Miller (USA)<sup>1</sup>, which has survived five editions (1993, 1998, 2003, 2009, 2014). The book focuses on forced population movements after the Second World War. Another attempt to summarize the history of European refugees of the 20th century from the first Balkan wars to the disintegration of Yugoslavia was made by the Polish historian J. M. Piskorski<sup>2</sup>. We also found the collective work titled *Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great War* (co-edited by P. Getrell and L. Zhvanko)<sup>3</sup> to be of great importance to our research. The book presents a broad picture of the mass population displacement in Europe caused by the First World War. The main studies that we have used in our research are the works by L. Zhvanko, which cover the issues of displaced persons in the context of the war in Ukraine<sup>4</sup>.

For instance, in the article *Forcibly Displaced Persons and Europe: a Retrospective View of the Issue (1914–2015)*, L. Zhvanko points out: “During the XX–XXI centuries, according to our rather conditional assumption, there have been nine waves of refugees in Europe. They emerged due to the military conflicts of various nature. At the same time, it is necessary to identify two peaks of refugee movement caused by the classic cause — the world wars with the epicenter precisely on the European continent.

The major refugee waves in Europe and their causes are as follows:

- 1st wave: refugee migration caused by the First World War (1914–1918);
- 2nd wave: refugee migration caused by interwar upheavals (1919–1939);
- 3rd wave: refugee migration caused by the Second World War and the first years after it ended (1939–1956);
- 4th wave: refugee migration from Hungary (1956) and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1968) as a result of the Soviet imperialist policy;

<sup>1</sup> St. Castles, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, [Electronic Resource] / St. Castles, H. de Haas, M. Miller. – New York: The Guilford Press, 2014, Mode of Access: <http://www.age-of-migration.com/> (Last Access: 22.02.2024). – Title from the Screen.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Piskorski, *Wygnancy. Przesiedlenia i uchodźcy w dwudziestowiecznej Europie*, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>3</sup> P. Gatrell, L. Zhvanko, *Europe on the move: the Great War and its refugees*, Manchester 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Л. Жванко, *Україна и проблема беженцев: реалии современности*. «Перекрестки» 2014, no 1–2, Вильнюс, с. 236–255; idem, *Біженство на європейському континенті: соціогуманітарні виклики. Безпековий, політичний, економічний та гуманітарний виміри сучасного етапу європейської та євроатлантичної інтеграції України: матеріали міжнародної науково-практичної конференції, присвяченої 70-ій річниці створення ДВНЗ, «Ужгородський національний університет»* 2015 (м. Ужгород, 5 грудня 2015 р.), Ужгород, с. 181–184; idem, *Біженці Першої світової війни: український вимір (1914–1918 рр.)*, Харків: Віровець А. П. «Апостроф», 2012, 568 с.; idem, *Внутрішньо переміщені особи в Україні: гендерні виклики. Гендерна політика міст: історія і сучасність = Gender policy of cities: History and Modern Times: матеріали IV міжнародної науково-практичної конференції* (м. Харків, 6–7 жовтня 2015 р.), Харків 2015, вип. 5, с. 85–90.

- 5th wave: refugee migration caused by decolonization processes on the African continent in the 1960s;
- 6th wave: migration of an unexpectedly large number of refugees caused by the breakup of Yugoslavia (1992–1997);
- 7th wave: mass displacements of population, including forced displacement, after the collapse of the USSR (early 1990s);
- 8th wave: refugee migration caused by the war in Ukraine (beginning 2014);
- 9th wave: “European migration crisis” (beginning 2015)<sup>5</sup>.

We can also add another refugee migration wave that began at the time of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In the period under analysis, an entire system of international organizations and roles was created: the League of Nations, the Nansen International Office for Refugees, the High Commission for Refugees Coming from Germany, the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations, and the European Parliament. Their activity, however, was not always effective and depended on many factors, while the refugee problem acquired a global character.

Studying the history of refugees, we should emphasize that the first impetus for the emergence of several million refugees and displaced persons in Europe was the Great War of 1914–1918, although the warring parties made attempts to organize aid for refugees, and created the first relevant legal framework and hierarchies of relevant bodies<sup>6</sup>.

The next major wave of refugees was provoked by the Second World War. It was the time when the necessity arose to create special humanitarian international organizations<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, the International Organization for Migration was founded in 1946 under the auspices of the United Nations, and the year 1951 saw the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, whose branches currently operate in 119 countries around the globe. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol are still the basic regulatory acts for states facing the refugee problem.

In the 21st century, the problem of forcibly displaced persons has become so global that in 2002 the United Nations established the World Day of Migrants and Refugees<sup>8</sup>. In the year of its introduction, UN Secretary General K. Annan urged people to always remember that one day each of us may knock on someone’s door, asking for help.

Thus, throughout the century, the European continent has been one of the hotbeds of the emergence of refugees and displaced persons. Even now, the flow of refugees is a constant humanitarian challenge for the European community<sup>9</sup>. One of the most serious challenges faced by refugees and displaced persons is the feeling of loneliness.

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<sup>5</sup> Жванко Л., *Вимушено переміщені особи та Європа: ретроспективний погляд на проблему (1914 – 2015)*, «European Historical Studies» 2020, no 15, с. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Л. М. Жванко, *Біженці Першої світової війни: український вимір (1914 –1918 рр)*, с. 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Світова статистика. Крізь кордони. Інформаційний бюлетень УВКБ ООН в Україні*, 2003, no 1, с. 14–15.

<sup>8</sup> *Всесвітній день біженців у 2018 році*. [Електронний ресурс] – Режим доступу: <http://www.unhcr.org/ua/12570>. (Дата звернення: 23.02.2024). – Назва з екрану.

<sup>9</sup> Л. М. Жванко, *Внутрішньо переміщені особи в Україні: гендерні виклики. Гендерна політика міст: історія і сучасність = Gender policy of cities: History and Modern Times: матеріали IV міжнародної науково-практичної конференції* (м. Харків, 6–7 жовтня 2015 р.), Харків 2015, вип. 5, с. 85–90.

### On the Phenomenon of Loneliness

Loneliness is a very serious problem, because the feeling of loneliness, along with all the other challenges faced by refugees due to the drama of war, is a predisposing factor for depression. Another reason why loneliness is hard to bear is that “facing threats, sadness, the pain of loss, and especially the fear of losing someone or something exceptionally important is a source of suffering”<sup>10</sup>.

Literature on psychology and philosophy presents a division of loneliness as a phenomenon into different levels: cosmic (the feeling of loneliness of humankind as a species), social (lack of awareness of one’s own role and place in society), interpersonal (lack of contact with other people, or an insufficient degree of such contact), and cultural (alienation from one’s culture, traditions, rituals), etc.

In the period from the 18th to the 21st centuries, attitude towards loneliness changed more than once: first it was seen as a source of bliss and self-knowledge, later as a dangerous pathology, and in recent decades experts in some countries began to talk with alarm about the ongoing “epidemic of loneliness”. To understand the historical background of this social phenomenon, it is necessary to look at it from the cultural and sociological points of view.

The founder of the client-centred trend in psychotherapy Carl Rogers distinguishes two types of loneliness:

- Estrangement of man from himself, from his experiencing organism.
- Evaluation of the quality of relationships with group members as unsatisfactory, or rejection of oneself on a physiological or psychological level<sup>11</sup>.

What is loneliness? How to live with it? There is hardly a person who does not ask themselves these questions at some point in their life. Is loneliness really something bad? How to deal with it? In fact, the feeling of loneliness is about losing connection by a person with someone or something important to them. One of the best books on this topic is *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* by Vivek Murthy, in which the author writes: “Man evolved in a pack. Alone, until a certain moment in history, man had little chance of survival.”<sup>12</sup> It was safer and more efficient to live among people; one could relax a little while someone else was on guard, rather than be constantly on the alert. The feeling of security is born from the feeling that someone else has your back. When such a connection is broken or lost, the alarm system activates an alarm signal. In a healthy interpretation, it tells the person that the connection should be renewed. People do not really understand the signals of their own nervous system, and the common obsessive ideas to renew a friendship, to seek someone’s support or ask someone for love are considered by us as a weakness. It means that people do not meet their own needs; on the contrary, they alienate themselves from their needs. V. Murthy singles out three dimensions of loneliness:

- emotional – often limited to one person – a partner;
- relational – family, a circle of friends, a team;

<sup>10</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwo samotności. Studium psychologiczne*. Difin SA, Warszawa 2020, s. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Н. В. Хамітов, *Самотність у людському бутті. Досвід метаантропології*, Київ: КНТ, 2017, 370 с.

<sup>12</sup> Murthy Vivek H., *The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, New York 2020, 352 p.

• collective – forming our sense of identity in the broadest sense of the word.  
Zofia Dołęga<sup>13</sup>, in turn, distinguishes three aspects of experiencing loneliness (feeling lonely):

1. Existential aspect (existential loneliness) – a feeling of lack of identification with norms, values and life goals, lack of real integration with people.

2. Emotional aspect (emotional loneliness) – most often associated with negative self-esteem in partner relationships, conviction of one's inadequate social competences, experiencing strong distress in social situations.

3. Social aspect (social loneliness) — strongly associated with a feeling of marginalization, poor orientation in the performance of social roles, as well as uncertainty about one's significance for interaction partners.

Since the beginning of the war, millions of people have met with at least one dimension of loneliness<sup>14</sup>. Some people have lost contact with their loved ones, others – with their family and work team, while many have moved to other cities and met with collective loneliness. "I'm home, but I feel out of place"<sup>15</sup>. This occurs due to differences in language, reasoning, beliefs, etc.

Lonely people are often anxious, always on the alert, and can come across as bad-tempered. This is because anger helps them hide their shame, guilt, and the fear of being alone. Lonely people use all their power to suppress negative emotions and drama, so there is no time or energy left for more appropriate forms of interaction. Today, each of us is fighting not only against the external enemy, but also against the internal one. Even if they seem trifling to us, the problems that we face on a daily basis are as real as our major problems. This is why it is important to treat people with kindness, especially those we don't know or don't understand.

The war waged by Russia on Ukraine has fundamentally changed the life of all Ukrainians. The bombing and constant shelling has destroyed residential buildings, civil and industrial infrastructure, and even entire cities. The war has brought destruction, fear, loneliness, and omnipresent pain. All of this causes irreparable damage to children's mental health. It is impossible to predict what and how will affect the mental and physical health of a child and whether the child will ever be able to totally recover after the horror he or she felt in their childhood. The most vulnerable category of children is Ukrainian orphans. Totally deprived of parental love and care, they do not feel secure even in peacetime, and now, in the time of war, they suffer the most.

Loneliness is a socio-psychological phenomenon, an emotional state of a person, associated with the absence of their nearest and dearest, positive emotional ties with people, and/or the fear of losing them due to forced social isolation or social isolation resulting from psychological factors. A large number of people feel acute loneliness even when they are not physically isolated: a person can feel lonely when surrounded by family or friends due to the fact that multiplication of socio-psychological stereotypes, tastes, evaluations,

<sup>13</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność młodzieży – analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2003; idem, *Poczucie samotności a sposoby radzenia sobie w sytuacjach szkolnych w kontekście autodestrukcyjności* [w:] *Zdrowie psychiczne uczniów – różne konteksty i odniesienia*, red. Z. Dołęga, M. John-Borys, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2009, s. 154–184.

<sup>14</sup> H. Murthy Vivek, *The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, New York 2020, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> H. Murthy Vivek, *The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, New York 2020, p. 35.

perception and behavior patterns destroys individual differentiating features, which leads him or her to personality dissociation. Loneliness affects the possibility of self-fulfillment of an individual, the manifestation of their creative abilities and creative activity.

From a psychological point of view, loneliness is caused by the lack of a suitable social partner who could contribute to the achievement of the individual goals of a person, that is, a person becomes lonely when his or her interpersonal relationships lack the warmth and emotional intimacy necessary for trusting communication.

Loneliness has one more detrimental effect on people: it leads to self-doubt and low self-esteem. Most personal contacts are replaced by virtual communication, for example, communication in social networks, which requires personal interaction, but which does not evoke the fear of self-evaluation, the fear of being rejected, or the fear of looking funny or ridiculous.

Externally, the feeling of loneliness manifests itself in the form of emotional symptoms of depression: sadness, longing, and a gloomy mood, all of which lead to a decrease in activity and work capacity.

Today much attention is paid to the development, analysis, and effectiveness evaluation of social-psychological and psychotherapeutic methods that can be used to help people suffering from acute loneliness. In addition, part of the research on the topic touches upon the general, socio-philosophical aspects of loneliness<sup>16</sup>. Even though there are a variety of ideas regarding the definition of loneliness and approaches to its analysis in contemporary scholarly literature, there is no single coherent idea of the phenomenon as yet. What is more, we have yet to study the peculiar features of loneliness in people, caused by the Russia-Ukraine war.

Loneliness was first recognized as a problem of the modern society during the Second World War. In the long period between the Dunkirk operation and the Normandy landings, the rear was considered critical to the defense of the country. For the first time in liberal democracy, the government began to systematically take an interest in how ordinary people felt about their lives. Previously, it was sufficient that they obeyed the laws, adhered to the basic postulates of Christianity, and produced the next generations of disciplined workers; now it was important to have an idea of what they conventionally meant under “morality”. The authorities feared that early military defeats, combined with the bombing of populated areas and the rationing of essential goods, would undermine people’s will

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<sup>16</sup> *Bliskość i samotność: almanach*, red. M. Suchecka, Wrocław 2013; Z. Dołęga, *Samotność młodości – analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2003; *Samotność: rzeczywistość czy fikcja?*, pod red. J. Zimnego, [Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II w Lublinie], Katedra Pedagogiki Katolickiej, Stalowa Wola 2013; А. С. Бугайцова, *Самотність як бар’єр та ресурс самодостатності*. «Вісник Національної академії Державної прикордонної служби України». Електронна версія. Серія: Психологія, 2016. Вип. 1. URL: [http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Vnadrn\\_2016\\_1\\_1](http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Vnadrn_2016_1_1). (Дата звернення: 23.02.2024); В. Б. Бедан, *Схильність до переживання самотності: компонентний склад показників*, «Проблема сучасної психології особистості: зб. мат. наукпракт конф. молодих вчених та студентів» (м. Одеса, 17–18 травня 2018 р.) ПНПУ імені К. Д. Ушинського. Одеса: ВМВ, 2018, с. 204–209; М. О. Кандиба, *Психологічні аспекти відношення жінок до самотності та її вплив на особистість*, «Проблема сучасної психології», Випуск 16, 201, с. 431–439; В. Б. Бедан, *Психологічні характеристики осіб схильних до переживання самотності різного типу*, «Теоретичні і прикладні проблеми психології» 2018, №2 (46), Сєвєродонецьк с. 30–41.



to resist. The governments' special concern was the attitudes of women against the background of social disorganization caused by the war. Their husbands had been conscripted and their children had been evacuated, so there was a serious danger that they would cool to the national struggle, which would reduce their contribution to the wartime economy and undermine discipline in the armed forces<sup>17</sup>.

In general, any emotional reaction to war of both adults and children – fear, sadness, despair – is normal. Tears, aggression, anxiety, panic, desire for isolation are protective mechanisms of the psyche in a situation we have not been prepared for. Often children do not understand their condition, and therefore are unable to control their feelings. For example, they may be angry because their parents took them away from their hometown to keep them safe, and they miss their friends. Or, on the contrary, because their parents refuse to leave the warfare zone and their children are forced to live in constant fear. In many cases, children are annoyed because they are eager to return to their normal life, they want everything to be as it was before, and it is extremely difficult for them to accept the fact that this is impossible. Children perceive this as a tragedy and suffer from it.

War frequently destroys families and tests relationships for strength: it creates a chasm between close and distant relatives due to the difference in their worldviews, shatters former mutual understanding, deprives children of their parents and wives of their husbands, and changes those who have survived. On the other hand, quite the opposite can happen. Two loners can find each other in the vortex of uncertainty and constant stress, and only then can they finally feel the ground under their feet.

Thus the unjustified armed invasion of Ukraine by Russia has led to a terrible humanitarian tragedy that has affected all population groups, in particular women, children, the elderly, and people with limited mobility, which were forced to leave their homes in search of a safer place to live. Despite intensive efforts to provide them with support, protection, means of livelihood to ensure their decent life, war refugees have found themselves in an extremely difficult situation. The necessity to cope with the trauma of war, separation from family, loss of loved ones and life achievements is exacerbated by a number of factors and threats arising in new living environments, including problems relating to the labor market, housing, education, communication, and integration, which inevitably affects people's mental well-being and behavior patterns. Given these challenges, tragic events, and the necessity to make difficult life choices (in particular, the change of the place of permanent residence due to the ongoing war), we have no doubt that the war refugees can develop psychological impairments, starting with the feeling of alienation, severe stress and loneliness, and the inability to cope with them. The conditions described above greatly affect the physical and mental health and behavior of displaced persons and war refugees.

## Conclusions

This article does not offer an exhaustive solution to the problem. It is an attempt to draw attention to the phenomenon of loneliness in the context of wars, in particular, the long-term Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is having a catastrophic effect on the lives of millions of people. Ukrainian society is faced with difficult choices and challenges in a situation that

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<sup>17</sup> V. David, *A History of Solitude*, Cambridge 2020, 304 p.

has been steadily worsening for more than two years: war trauma, separation from family, loss of loved ones and life achievements, emergence of threats in new living environments. All of this undoubtedly affects their psychosocial functioning and can cause the feeling of alienation, severe stress and loneliness – interconnected phenomena that constitute a major problem of the 21st century. However, it is difficult to assess the degree of loneliness and the methods that displaced persons and war refugees prefer to use in order to deal with stress, since the available publications on this topic do not present any research on the psychosocial functioning of displaced persons and war refugees, their plight, the way they cope with numerous problems, including severe stress and loneliness, which are signs of wartime refugeeism.

To fill the gap in the scope of topics covered, in 2023 Collegium Witelona State Educational Institution (Collegium Witelona Uczelnia Państwowa), Legnica, Poland, launched the Face of Stress and Loneliness in the Context of Military Migration project, the funding for which was allocated by the Minister of Science and Higher Education of Poland from the state budget under the Science for Society II program. The project envisages conducting a comparative study of groups of refugees currently residing in the cities of Legnica and Kraków in Poland, Drohobych and Rivne in Ukraine.

The project aims to gain knowledge about the feeling of loneliness experienced by war refugees, and the strategies they use to cope with stress. To this end, the project team is using the Loneliness Survey Scale (Skala do Badania Samotności, SBS) developed by Z. Dołęga and the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations Questionnaire (CISS) developed by Norman S. Endler and James D. A. Parker, translated into Polish and adapted by P. Szczepanik, J. Strelau, and K. Wrześniewski, as well as the author's questionnaire, which will make it possible to collect detailed information about individual factors – socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The findings of the research on loneliness and stress coping strategies will be a ground for future studies to be carried out in other countries. In addition, the research findings can be used in the development of appropriate policies aimed to meet the needs of war refugees in various areas of life. The research report titled *Loneliness and Stress Coping Strategies in the Context of Multiculturalism: Comparative Studies among Ukrainian Migrants in Poland and Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine* will be published in the third quarter of 2024.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine and other parts of the world, as well as the growing threat of the military conflict spreading to the territories of other countries, interest in the issue of loneliness as a serious problem that has so far been insufficiently explored is increasing<sup>18</sup>. According to Z. Dołęga, the problem reveals its dramatic side “in connection with tragic life events, issues related to loss, mourning, and trauma [...], it arises from sadness [...] and disappointment [...], it is the result of hostility, other people's contempt and hatred”<sup>19</sup>. All of this affects the mental well-being of refugees (internally displaced persons), the behavior of both individual people and groups, including families.

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<sup>18</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwo samotności...*, op. cit., s. 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 17.



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#### STRESZCZENIE

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#### Studium problemu samotności w czasach wojny

W artykule podsumowano spojrzenie na problem samotności, z jaką borykali się przesiedleńcy i uchodźcy na kontynencie europejskim w minionym stuleciu. Pojawienie się uchodźców było spowodowane konfliktami zbrojnymi różnego pochodzenia, od obu wojen światowych po szereg lokalnych konfrontacji zbrojnych. Współczesna rzeczywistość stawia pod tym względem poważne wyzwania: wojna rozpoczęta przez Rosję przeciwko Ukrainie spowodowała kolejną falę uchodźców i przesiedleńców. Od początku wojny władze Unii Europejskiej borykają się z „kryzysem migracyjnym”. Historyczna retrospektywa zjawiska przedstawiona w artykule pokazuje, że problem ten ma charakter globalny i trudny do rozwiązania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uchodźcy, osoby wewnętrznie przesiedlone, Europa, wojna, samotność, „kryzys migracyjny”.

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