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Lithuanian solidarity with Ukraine

Lithuania has remained one of the leading countries in terms of support for Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian invasion. It is measurable, counted in hundreds of millions of euros, military, humanitarian, and financial aid given to a war-torn state and the refugees fleeing from it. There is also a Lithuanian voice in the international arena against the aggressor, expressed in the reduction of diplomatic, trade, and energy ties with Russia.

Support for Ukraine. According to a study by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW), which tracks the support given to Ukraine by individual countries[1], Lithuania is at the forefront in this respect in relation to its economic potential. So far, it has provided Ukraine with aid worth 0.4% of its GDP; EUR 244 million. Thus, it took fourth place in this respect among the countries analyzed by the IfW: after Latvia – 0.9%, Estonia – 0.8%, and Poland – 0.5%. Lithuania's support was largely based on military aid – EUR 187 million, then humanitarian aid – EUR 52 million, and financial aid – EUR 5 million. Lithuania has provided Ukraine with, inter alia, Stinger air defense systems, anti-tank weapons, 120 mm mortars and other small arms, ammunition, drones, observation radars, M113 and M577 armored personnel carriers, vests, and helmets.

At the same time, Lithuania clearly declares its continued military support. On October 12, 2022, after a meeting of the Contact Group for the Defense of Ukraine, coordinating Western assistance in this area (the so-called Ramstein Group – from the name of the city in which it was established on April 26, 2022), the Minister of National Defense of Lithuania, Arvydas Anušauskas, informed about further deliveries (this applies to further military support, including mortars, armored vehicles, and thermal imaging cameras as well as winter clothing and equipment). Lithuania also offered to organize a wide range of military training for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In addition, it declared willingness to assist in the repair of Panzerhaubitze 2000 self-propelled artillery units.

It should also be noted that the amounts indicated by the IfW are based solely on intergovernmental transfers. Therefore, they do not take into account private donations and

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[1] The IfW database "The Ukraine Support Tracker" quantifies the aid provided to Ukraine by governments from January 24, 2022 to October 3, 2022 (the period includes one month before the Russian invasion, due to the fact that some countries sent such support before it). The database covers 40 countries, including EU member states and G7 members as well as Australia, South Korea, Turkey, Norway, New Zealand, Switzerland, China, Taiwan, and India.

aid through non-governmental organizations, or any kind of collections for humanitarian aid organized by Lithuanians. They do not include, for example, funds collected by the "Blue / Yellow" organization established in Lithuania (EUR 35 million until mid-September 2022), or the transfer to Ukraine of the Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicle with ammunition purchased using money collected by Lithuanian citizens (in total nearly EUR 6 million). Another 51 million EUR transferred to Ukraine by Lithuania as part of EU funds should also be mentioned.

Lithuania has also become a new home for Ukrainians fleeing the war. According to the IfW, Lithuania adopted 67 thousand war refugees, which means 2.4% of the total population of 2.8 million (in relation to the number of inhabitants, only Estonia adopted more – 58 thousand, i.e., 4.4%, and Poland – 1 million 422 thousand, i.e., 3.8%). Lithuania has also taken a number of actions in this regard, e.g., the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare provided cash benefits for people and companies that gave shelter to refugees from Ukraine (EUR 6.3 million was allocated for this purpose), and the Ministry of Education took care of admitting students from this country (the latest data say about 13,000 Ukrainian students are studying in schools in Lithuania).

Opposition to Russia. Lithuania also expressly opposes the aggressor. It was the first country in Europe to lower the level of diplomatic relations with Russia. In response to the mass killings in Bucza, which came to light in April 2022, Russian ambassador Alexei Isakov was expelled from Lithuania and the Lithuanian ambassador to Moscow, Eitvydas Bajarūnas, was recalled. Since then, the Russian Embassy in Vilnius has been headed by chargé d'affaires Sergei Riabokon. However, on October 3, 2022, he too lost his position. The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised in a press release that the decision was made in connection with his statements and actions that were inconsistent with the diplomatic status. In retaliation, on October 5, Russia dismissed chargé d'affaires to the Lithuanian institution – Virginia Umbrasien.

The Russian embassy in Vilnius has become a kind of symbol of protest against the aggressor. It was in front of her building that social protests were held, calling on Russia to end the war. There is also a pond nearby that was colored red, which was an expression of opposition to the crimes committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. Another symbolic gesture was the announcement by the mayor of Vilnius to change the name of the street where the Russian Embassy is located to "Heroes of Ukraine". Thus – as the mayor Remigijus Šimašius emphasized – each embassy employee will honor these heroes on their business cards.

Lithuania also consistently supports the most severe sanctions against Russia in connection with its attack on Ukraine. For example, it was the first European country to announce that it would completely abandon Russian gas and maintain a firm stance on the EU forum in restricting Russia's trade with the Kaliningrad Oblast, and it was among the few European countries that suspended issuing visas to Russian citizens for tourist purposes. Lithuania also actively supports the integration of Ukraine with the EU and NATO.

Conclusions. In the international arena, Lithuania ensures the prominence of the issue of Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity. When the Lublin Triangle was established in Lublin in the summer of 2020 – a new platform for cooperation between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine – its main goal was to intensify cooperation in the field of security. Taking into account the current conditions, this goal further strengthens the cooperation between the countries of the region.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the greatest security crisis for the transatlantic and European communities in several decades. It particularly affects Lithuania, where this war directly creates a sense of danger. As Prof. Dovilė Budrytė, who studies the phenomenon of trauma and memory in international relations, says, in the case of Lithuania, there are still strong collective memories of the Soviet past.

Since the beginning of the Russian aggression, Lithuania has expressed solidarity with Ukraine and readiness to help it. Such a message was also heard during the meeting of heads of government as part of the Lublin Triangle held in March 2022. At that time, Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė remarked that Ukraine "defends the freedom of the whole of Europe, fights for all of us". These words have been constantly confirmed in subsequent actions for almost eight months. Lithuania is a strong voice in Europe supporting Ukraine and advocating tougher Western sanctions against Russia.