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Lublin Triangle – the potential of regionalism

Edited by Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik
and Jakub Olchowski



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Résumé

The Lublin Triangle initiative, which is one of many emerging regional cooperation formats (reflecting the ever-progressing process of the regionalization of international relations), has both symbolic and practical significance. Individual accents, however, are distributed differently in the case of the three states that make up the Triangle – and, additionally, completely different from the perspective of Belarus. The essential symbolic value of this format stems from the shared historical and cultural heritage. In practical terms, an important factor determining the creation of the Triangle is the common awareness of the threat from Russia (this threat is also part of the historical heritage of the region) as well as common interests.

The purpose of creating regional institutions is not only to facilitate cooperation and increase trust between partners in the region but also to build the international position of both the region and the states that make it up – this is also the case with the Lublin Triangle. The international situation (Russian aggression) has increased interest in the

region of Central Europe and objectively increased its importance in international relations. The emerging regional cooperation initiatives are supposed to, by complementing each other and creating a synergy effect, strengthen this subjectivity of the region; it is not only about the Triangle but also about B9 or the Three Seas Initiative, also in the institutional dimension.

The correctness of such a strategy is confirmed to some extent by the decidedly negative stance of Russia, which since the beginning of the existence of the Lublin Triangle has been trying to simultaneously depreciate it as an irrelevant and marginal formula and present it as a dangerous, neo-imperial project through which Poland intends to rebuild its influence in the region. Paradoxically, it is Russia, with its aggressive policy, that has significantly contributed to the fact that Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, despite having many prejudices against each other and a long history of conflicts and mutual grievances, constantly look to strengthen cooperation and refer to common tradition and history, and not to dislike each other.

The countries of the Triangle, counting on the cooperation and benefits derived from it (also of a political and international nature), emphasize a common heritage and closeness, but they are guided by diverse motives and expectations. While strengthening its position in the region through active participation in regional initiatives, Poland strives to use this as an instrument to strengthen its position on the international scene, also within the EU and NATO. For Ukraine, the Triangle is an important element of the “small alliances strategy”, which consists in creating a network of alliances to stabilize Ukraine’s security environment.

Security issues are now crucial for Ukraine, so participation in the Triangle is important from the point of view of military support in the fight against Russian aggression, but also in the context of post-war assistance – reconstruction, infrastructure projects, etc. – and as a vehicle for integration with “large alliances”. From Lithuania’s perspective, the Triangle is a useful platform for regulating relations with its neighbours and an important element of the regional security architecture.

With regard to Belarus, there is a consensus that it should become part of the Quadrangle in the future, although at present, this is a purely hypothetical scenario taking into account the level of dependence Alexander Lukashenko has on Russia, his hostile attitude towards his western neighbours, and the ongoing *de facto* process of the “creeping annexation” of Belarus by Russia. However, support for the Belarusian opposition is postulated, and it is emphasized that Belarus is also part of the common historical and cultural heritage of the Triangle. Importantly, the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is an important element of the national identity for a significant number of Belarusians (up to 40%), so it should be borne in mind that this may be a source of tensions between Belarusians and Lithuanians in the future. The Ukrainian’s consistent ignoring of the Belarusian opposition (with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya at the forefront) is also problematic.

The common heritage of the states and nations that form the foundation of the Triangle can help to bind them, but it can also be manipulated by taking advantage of numerous historical conflicts and contradictions. Opponents of Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian cooperation will take advantage

of this – both radical political forces within these states and the Russian disinformation and propaganda machine will try to fuel mutual prejudices and play on emotions, referring to, for example, the idea that the Triangle is an instrument of Polish neo-imperial ambitions. Other external actors may also have a different attitude towards the Triangle: for example, from the point of view of some Western European states, this initiative may be unfavourable (because it increases the importance and political potential of Central Europe), while the United States will support it, as this format is in line with the American strategy for strengthening NATO's eastern flank.



Introduction

The aim of this Policy Paper is to present the idea of the Lublin Triangle from different perspectives – however, to a large extent, they are at the same time similar, and this is one of the specific features of this tripartite Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuania initiative. The Lublin Triangle is founded mainly on a long historical and common heritage as well as common traditions among the states and nations that create this format of cooperation. It is this that brings about a similar approach by Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine towards their cooperation (despite multiple claims and grievances, common between these neighbours, especially in a region hit so hard by history). Also, the threat from Russia, also historical in its nature, is an important factor that enhances a similarity of approaches and foreign and security policies among the Triangle states.

In a broader sense, the Lublin Triangle, its emergence and existence, reflects not only changes in Europe's security architecture but also one of the growing trends in

international relations – regionalization of relations in different dimensions (including security).

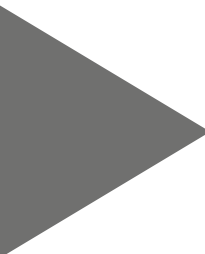
The publication contains four texts. Three of them refer to the Triangle member states' perspectives. The fourth is about Belarus, not a member of the Triangle, and it is now highly unlikely that it could be under the current political circumstances. Nevertheless, Belarus is undoubtedly a part of the same historical heritage as Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. In fact, originally, Belarus was considered as part of this project, but in the summer of 2020 Belarus experienced dramatic changes and its prospects are now very unclear. However, it cannot be ruled out that in the future, Belarusians will be able to, and they will want to, join this regional initiative.

In the first chapter, Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik and Jakub Olchowski present a Polish perspective and outline the historical background. In the second part, Sergiy Gerasymchuk and Mykhailo Drapak describe a view from Ukraine, focusing mainly on security issues, which is not surprising in the face of Russian aggression. The next part, written by Andrzej Pukszto and Robertas Eismontas, is dedicated to Lithuania and emphasizes an evolution from bilateral to multilateral cooperation in the region. Finally, in the last chapter, Piotr Rudkouski provides a very interesting analysis of the situation regarding Belarus, both the external and internal conditions.

We would also like to emphasise that the Lublin Triangle is actually a new initiative, which is still being formed and shaped. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Russia's aggressive policy, ironically, has sped up the process of strengthening cooperation in Central Europe considerably

and revived the historical traditions of this cooperation. It is impossible today to say unequivocally that the Lublin Triangle will play a crucial role in regional cooperation in our part of Europe. But there is a good chance of it.

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik
Jakub Olchowski



Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik
Jakub Olchowski

The Polish perspective

On 11 January 2023, the presidents of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland signed the Joint Declaration following the Second Summit of the Lublin Triangle in Lviv. It clearly confirmed that intensification of the tripartite dialogue would be essential in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, especially in the areas of defence and security in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Simultaneously, the Joint Declaration confirms the centuries-old historical ties between Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland. To properly understand the specificity of the Lublin Triangle and its cultural context as well as Poland's attitude to this initiative, it is impossible not to refer to the aforementioned historical ties.

Historical background

1569 is considered to be the traditional starting point of close Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian relations, although the political union of the nations in Central and Eastern Europe began earlier. In that year, the Polish and Lithuanian nobility established their Commonwealth by an agreement known

as the Lublin Union. Timothy Snyder started his well-known book by describing the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the largest realm of early modern Europe. The nation of this Commonwealth was its nobility, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. United by common political and civil rights, nobles of Polish, Lithuanian, and East Slavic origin alike described themselves, in Latin or Polish, as “of the Polish nation”¹. Lithuanian and Polish nobles were together represented in a single parliament, elected their monarchs jointly, and increasingly shared a common civilization. The Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania did, however, retain separate codes of law and administration, and an internal border.

The impulse to enhance Polish-Lithuanian federal relations was the Constitution of 3 May [1791] which was Europe’s first codified constitution as well as the second oldest constitution in the world. This Constitution abolished the former union of Poland and Lithuania in favour of a unitary state. Further, to extend the Commonwealth’s integration and security, the Mutual Pledge of 20 October 1791 was announced. Both Acts were important in the context of the fundamental rights of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as they confirmed the strength of a multinational community built on republican foundations. The Mutual Pledge has significance particularly for Lithuania, as it introduced proportional participation of Lithuanians and Poles in the governing structures of the future unitary state, and thus unequivocally confirmed the historical subjectivity of the society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

¹ T. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, Yale University Press, 2003.

The Lublin Union, the adoption of the Constitution of 3 May and the Mutual Pledge became the basis of the political identity of the citizens of those countries – heirs of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the 19th century, during the emergence and shaping of nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe, the Polish and Lithuanian nations sought support from the traditions of the Republic of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in order to build their own statehood. Then, the shared heritage of the Commonwealth inspired the independence movements of Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, including the uprisings of 1830 and 1863, fought in common against despotic Russia. Further, at the end of the 20th century, when the core lands of the old Commonwealth were divided among the states; Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus, it stimulated the Solidarity movement in Poland, the Reform Movement in Lithuania, the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, and the struggle of Belarusians for democracy.

Currently, all of the abovementioned nation-states have been using their past to create and build their national identity.

Often, this generates tensions and conflicts. For example, the phrase “Polonisation/colonisation”, meaning the perception of the Polish and Catholic dominance over the Ruthenian and Lithuanian elites after the Union of Lublin, was used by the opponents of the joint community. Sometimes, this rhetoric is still used in Ukraine and Lithuania. Further, various painful historical experiences of the 20th century triggered negative emotions and conflicts; for example, Lithuanians and Poles were divided over the historical discourses regarding what happened when Polish

troops seized Vilnius in 1920, just as Ukrainians and Poles presented different experiences of Volhynia in 1943.

On the other hand, the history of modern Ukraine has embodied the heritage of the Lublin Union and the Commonwealth, and the common history in general, recalling in particular military aspects, e.g., the battles of Orsha (1514) and Khotyn (1621), or prominent figures such as Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachny, Hetman of the Ukrainian Zaporozhian Cossacks, or Konstantin Ivanovich Ostrozhsky – a Ruthenian prince (knyaz) and magnate, and the Grand Hetman of Lithuania, who commanded the Commonwealth armies in many successful campaigns against the Tatars, Muscovy, and Turkey. Additionally, in the 16th century, there was also the Union of Brest in 1596 which led to the establishment of the Uniate Church (now the Greek Catholic Church), which played a significant role in the formation of modern Ukrainian national consciousness in the 19th and 20th centuries. Currently, among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it is Ukraine that faces the greatest challenges regarding the policy of memory. Even more than Poland or the Baltic states, Ukraine has not dealt with the legacy of World War II, which is important for Ukraine from the point of view of its rapprochement with the West. Perhaps the strategy of historical confrontation towards Russia, which is implemented, among others, by Lithuania, could serve as valuable experience for Ukraine.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth shaped the modern nation of Belarus as well. We must not forget that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a Lithuanian-Ruthenian state and after the Union of Lublin in 1569, when Volhynia, the Kyiv region, and Eastern Podolia were incorporated into

the Kingdom of Poland – a Lithuanian-Belarusian state. Contemporary Belarusian historiography considers the functioning of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to be one of the two most important factors in the ethnogenesis of the Belarusian nation, next to the process of Balto-Slavic contacts. The main historical Belarusian districts were already merged into the same state body (the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) in the 14th century.

No wonder that in the contemporary collective memory of Belarus, there are state-building myths referring to the idea of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which can not only unite but also divide nations. During the protests after the presidential elections in 2020 in Belarus, next to the white-red-white flag, the *Pogoń* (*Pahonia*) coat of arms appeared, to which both the Belarusian People's Republic and modern Belarus in 1991-1995 referred. And the *Pogoń* is also a symbol of Lithuanian statehood as it was a symbol of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. For some in Lithuania, this is reason enough to be concerned about attempts to “appropriate” heritage. However, there are many opinions in Belarus, according to which it was Lithuania that “appropriated” the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

While the cultural heritage of the Lublin Union, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Mutual Pledge of 20 October 1791 is assessed differently by Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, referring to the historical context in order to shape contemporary international dialogue has more and more supporters². It is becoming more and

² J. Olchowski, *Trójkąt Lubelski – perspektywy współpracy*, [in:] W. Baluk, J. Makar, M. Doroszko (eds.), *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość partnerstwa Polski i Ukrainy*, Lublin 2021.

more common to believe that interpretations of national histories can be the basis for dialogue, and the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – a common heritage. An important step for this was an open letter in 1989 to Lithuanians and Poles in Lithuania by Tomas Venclova, in which the author writes: “The influence of Polish culture, especially after the Union of Lublin, was enormous; I think it’s generally positive, although probably not a single Lithuanian will agree with me. Without Poland, we wouldn’t have many things, probably not even the notion of political rights”. In this regard, it is also worth referring to the ideas of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski on the sovereignty of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus (ULB) as a factor conducive to the independence of the Republic of Poland and preventing enslavement by Russia³.

Difficulties between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are the result of painful experiences and uncomfortable history. National symbols and founding myths sometimes become the basis of ideological disputes and polarize societies and nations. They are often used by groups representing various, often radical, political options. However, contemporary building of the Central European community and national identities does not necessarily mean breaking ties with the past but requires mutual understanding, tolerance, and cooperation. This was expressed in 2021 by the president of Poland, Andrzej Duda and president of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda. As they declared, only on the foundation of a common history can we build our prosperous

³ A. Nikžentaitis, M. Kopczyński (eds.), *Dialog kultur pamięci w regionie ULB*, Warszawa 2014.

future, and “today’s Poland and Lithuania are firmly rooted in the Euro-Atlantic community, being members of NATO and the EU, together they build prosperity in our part of Europe”. This refers to the entire idea of the Lublin Triangle.

The Polish approach and expectations

The reference in the idea of the Lublin Triangle to the heritage of the Union of Lublin and the Commonwealth of Both Nations has a significant symbolic meaning, constituting an important factor in consolidating this initiative, in accordance with the motto “Free with the Free and Equal with the Equal”. Nevertheless, from Poland’s point of view, the concept of strengthening regional cooperation within the Triangle has an important practical meaning.

First of all, it is an opportunity to rebuild and give substance to Poland’s Eastern policy, and more broadly, to improve and deepen relations with its neighbours. This is important because the Triangle states, acting together, can strengthen their subjectivity not only in the region of Central and Eastern Europe but also in the NATO or EU forum; it will be easier to push through specific solutions and decisions based on the “common position of the Lublin Triangle” or “interests of the Lublin Triangle” than by playing “alone” based on the interests and potential of individual states.

Such a multilateral format of cooperation also helps to reduce tensions in bilateral relations – with respect to Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, this regularity is confirmed, for example, by cooperation at the parliamentary level, which shows that bilateral tensions recede into the background in a formula in which three entities participate (and not two).

In the context of regionalization processes, it should be noted that regional cooperation initiatives, “small partnerships” – be they bilateral or multilateral, are of key importance for the development of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe – this is evidenced by the reference in the Declaration to the European Union, NATO, UN, and OSCE as well as the EU Eastern Partnership and the Three Seas Initiative.

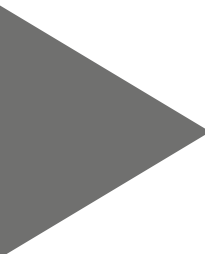
Finally, cooperation within the Triangle is important for improving the security of both Poland and the other two participating countries. In the strategic dimension, however, it is an important pillar of the alliance with the United States, which needs a credible and motivated partner in this part of Europe.

Recommendations

- Taking into account the transformations in the balance of power and the growing position and strengthening international subjectivity of Central Europe, cooperation within regional initiatives (Lublin Triangle, B9, etc.) should be intensified – this is beneficial both for the region and for Poland, which may become a key player in this region (provided, however, that it does not pursue the Promethean policy of unilaterally declaring its own leadership);
- cooperation within the Lublin Triangle requires a well-thought-out strategy of action – in order to avoid the fate of many international platforms and initiatives that have remained ineffective or fictitious entities. There can be many reasons for such a turn of events such as divergence of interests, lack of sufficiently

efficient communication channels (or their obstruction), low levels of trust, historical prejudices, and deficit of legitimacy, also affecting the image of the entire initiative, lack of recognition from the external environment, or actions of third parties;

- it is advisable for Poland to strive to make the Triangle a platform for developing and articulating a common position on important problems and processes taking place in the international environment, especially in the broadly understood region of Central and Eastern Europe;
- in this context, this platform should ensure that issues related to the EU's Eastern neighbourhood are present on the forum of EU institutions, and represent the Eastern flank in the NATO forum (in fact, due to the presence of Ukraine, the "Eastern flank plus") – which is of particular importance in the context of divergent interests of individual NATO member states and their different perceptions of threats;
- the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian society should be consistently supported by the Triangle, operating as a "transmission belt", enabling the Western elites and societies to be informed about the situation in Belarus (and to maintain interest). Such motivations are also visible in the activities of the Triangle states.



Sergiy Gerasymchuk
Mykhailo Drapak

The Ukrainian perspective

According to a recent poll conducted by the Info Sapiens Research Company at the request of the “New Europe” Center¹, among the international organizations and unions that Ukrainians trust, the most trusted are the EU (84%), NATO (76%), and the G7 (71%). The Lublin Triangle follows the top-three organizations, with 65.5% trusting the organization. This is the only regional organization which has gained such a level of support among the Ukrainians.

There are both historical and modern reasons for such a high assessment. Historically, the Lublin Triangle refers to the Union of Lublin, which was created in 1569, with the historical context symbolically similar to the current events in Europe. The Union of Lublin in 1569 created a community that included the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the areas inhabited by Ruthenians, which

¹ *Дипломатія воєнного часу. Що думають українці про рух України до членства в ЄС і не тільки*, January 2023, http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Eurointegration_warptime_ukr.pdf.

covers modern-day Ukraine and Belarus. By that time, Lithuania had been increasingly on the losing side of the Muscovite–Lithuanian Wars and one of the key goals of the Union was, therefore, to deter the Muscovites. The Union became the longest-lasting union of states in European history, lasting for more than several centuries.

The Russian factor

The need to combat and deter Russia, which was threatening Ukraine and other neighbouring countries, became vital again in 2014 and summoned the spirit of the Union. The idea of another Lublin Triangle (L3), rooted in the Union of Lublin heritage, emerged and the announcement of the formation of the Lublin Triangle by Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine in 2020 – condemning “Russian aggression in Ukraine” and supporting Kyiv’s “European choice” – has come amid Russia’s growing assertiveness in Central and Eastern Europe. The Triangle – which aspired to promote political, economic, infrastructure, security, defence, and cultural links – invoked historical linkages among its members. It also put forth an agenda for greater Ukrainian engagement with the EU and NATO, while moving away from Russia².

On 21 December 2021, the leaders of the countries of the Triangle met for their first summit. “To prevent a possible escalation by the Russian Federation and the deteriorating security situation in Europe, the international community must take strong preventive steps, rather than reacting to

² N. Kapoor, *Another step away from Moscow: Ukraine and the Lublin Triangle*, 17 September 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/another-step-away-from-moscow-ukraine-and-the-lublin-triangle/>.

events that have already taken place, as was the case with the migration crisis on the Polish and Lithuanian borders with Belarus,” said Volodymyr Zelenskyi, the host of the summit, which took place in the Ukrainian village of Huta³. The three leaders signed a joint declaration, expressing support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and appealing to the international community for a decisive approach towards Russia.

Although neither the [re]formation of the Triangle nor the joint declarations prevented a Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, it nevertheless became another foundation stone for the ever-stronger solidarity between the countries of the L3, reflecting the special nature of their cooperation and its high potential.

Amid the historical sentiments and common Russian threat, other roots of mutual trust and a thirst for cooperation among the L3 states are behind the common approaches in tackling current challenges as well as impressive amounts of empathy. To check the reality of this, the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” studied public opinion in the countries of the Triangle using CAWI – computer-assisted web interviews. The field element was conducted by LLC Info Sapiens Int. during 3-31 October 2022, and the sample size for Ukraine was 1213 CAWI (max sample error is 2.8%); for Poland 1105 CAWI (max sample error is 2.9%); and for Lithuania 1100 CAWI (max sample error is 3.0%). The data was weighted to represent the population of each country by sex, age, and region. The research findings proved the

³ A. Krzysztożek, *Lublin Triangle meets at its first leaders’ summit*, 21 December 2021, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/lublin-triangle-meets-at-its-first-leaders-summit/.

special nature of the relations between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine.

Ukrainians have the best attitude now towards people in Poland (91% very or rather positive), then Lithuania and Latvia (79% each, very or rather positive). Top-three countries with a very or rather positive attitude towards Ukraine are Lithuania in first place (74% compared to 62% before the full-scale invasion), followed by Poland (61% vs 53% before the full-scale invasion).

Apart from their general empathy, the citizens of L3 countries support a common destiny under the EU and NATO's umbrella. The respondents in Ukraine, and also in Lithuania and Poland, agree that Ukraine should eventually become a full member of the European Union. Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland are in the top-three among the countries of the region by the answers "Yes" (91%, 88%, and 82% answered "Yes"). The same is true for NATO membership; 90% of Ukrainians, 87% of Lithuanians, and 80% of Poles believe that Ukraine should eventually become a NATO member. 63% of Ukrainians, 46% of Lithuanians, and 35% of Poles believe it should happen within a year.

Apart from the empathetic links, the countries of the L3 share a vision of the necessity to condemn Russia for its atrocities in Ukraine. The majority of the populations in Lithuania and Poland support the joint condemnation of Russia's war crimes in Ukraine (Poland – 79% definitely or rather yes, Lithuania – 78% definitely or rather yes). Solidarity on this issue may drive regional efforts for ensuring Russian responsibility for their war crimes either by launching a special tribunal or by using the existing mechanisms for investigating and bringing war criminals to account.

The citizens of the L3 countries invest their hopes and money into the NATO defence umbrella; Lithuanian defence appropriations in 2022 reached 2.05% of the GDP⁴. The budget for 2023 retains the level of 2.52% of GDP. The Polish Defence Budget reached 2.4% of GDP in 2022 and will skyrocket to 4% of GDP in 2023. Notwithstanding these high figures for Poland and Lithuania, and naturally for Ukraine as the country facing the Russian war, Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland are in the top-three for readiness to endure personal inconveniences or economic difficulties in order to strengthen their country's army (78%, 50%, and 40%, respectively, reported "yes" or "rather yes").

The Triangle not only verbally supports enhanced regional defence capabilities but can also boast of successful military cooperation, which is worth promoting. Besides, both Lithuanians and Poles think not only of their armies; more than half the respondents from Lithuania and Poland (60% in Lithuania and 54% in Poland) tend towards the fact that the Central European and Baltic states should provide even more military support to Ukraine. Also, while answering the question "What prevails in the formation of the foreign policy of your country?", Lithuanians and Poles indicated Central European and Baltic region interests (15% and 12%, respectively). Actually, the notion of military cooperation emerged even prior to the formation of the Triangle in the form of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (LitPolUkrBrig), and such a format of cooperation, at least

⁴ *Lithuania raises defence spending to 2.52 percent of GDP*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1647017/lithuania-raises-defence-spending-to-2-52-percent-of-gdp>.

for organizing the necessary training drills, can be of added value.

Thus, the majority of citizens of these three states have common views on the foreign policy orientation of their countries and are also favourable to the idea of cooperation between them. First of all, this may be a consequence of having the same security challenges and also a manifestation of the deep solidarity of Lithuanians and Poles with Ukraine in its struggle against the Russian aggressor, as well as an expression of the widespread gratitude of Ukrainians for the help from Lithuania and Poland. At the same time, this also reflects the fact that during the last decade, Vilnius and Warsaw were among the key promoters of Kyiv's interests in its European and Euro-Atlantic choices, despite the scepticism of many Western partners. All these variables originate from a common past and a common existential threat (aka Russia) of the three nations.

War cooperation

The political understanding between Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine within the framework of the Lublin Triangle, and the declared intentions of the Presidents of the three states to develop cooperation, could have been the driver of the reactive support of Kyiv from Vilnius and Warsaw since the first months of the Russian invasion, although, of course, this tripartite format was not the only factor in the provision of aid. Rather, it can be perceived as a preliminary way of establishing contacts at the highest level between Vilnius, Warsaw, and Kyiv before the start of a full-scale invasion of Russia. As of December 2022, Poland and Lithuania were in the top 5 countries in terms of the share of their GDP

allocated or assigned as aid to Ukraine within the framework of bilateral cooperation and at the EU level.

Officially, Warsaw became the main supplier of military equipment for Kyiv in Central Europe, allocating more than 1.8 billion euros worth of provisions (the fifth highest among all countries in the world)⁵. It is worth noting that Polish aid in this context was among the most rapid and relevant. In particular, Warsaw was one of the first to provide Kyiv with heavily armoured vehicles, eventually handing over almost its entire reserve of Soviet-style tanks. Also, Poland has become the main hub for collecting and transporting cargo from all over the world into Ukraine. Finally, Polish partners became a key link for the supply of Ukrainian exports to global markets. Lithuania transferred at least 240 million euros of military aid to Ukraine. In particular, the country provided important M113 armoured personnel carriers and Western-style artillery munition. Also, as of the end of January 2023, Lithuania was the leader in terms of the total number of electricity generators and transformers provided to Ukraine within the framework of the European Civil Protection Mechanism⁶.

Today, Lithuania and Poland not only help Ukraine to protect the freedom and sovereignty of its citizens. By providing humanitarian, financial, and military support, these two countries contribute to their own security and regional stability in that the Ukrainian military deters Russian imperialism from encroaching on Central Europe as a zone of

⁵ *Government support to Ukraine: Type of assistance, € billion*, https://app.23degrees.io/view/tAuBi41LxvWwKZex-bar-stacked-horizontal-figure-2_csv_final.

⁶ *ECHO Daily Map of 26 January 2023*, <https://ercportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ECHO-Products/Maps#/maps/4383>.

influence, as declared by the Kremlin last year⁷. It is obvious that previous cooperation within the framework of the Lublin Triangle is not the main reason for such positions from Vilnius and Warsaw. However, this format can be a framework for a joint response of the three states to the current and emerging challenges posed by Russian aggression and increasingly strong global turbulence, primarily manifested in the deepening competition between the United States and China. Central Europe has once again become the frontier of democracy, facing the attack of authoritarianism. Regional actors need cohesion and adequate protection mechanisms under these conditions.

Perspectives

What is the Ukrainian vision of cooperation within the framework of the Lublin Triangle and the development of the format in the context of the described challenges? If we bear in mind the previous intentions of the three parties, and their current declarations, Ukraine was and is the fulcrum of the Warsaw-Vilnius-Kyiv axis. The creation of this format in 2020 was one of the implementations of the so-called “Grand Strategy of Small Alliances” by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. Due to a rapprochement with individual states in the multilateral dimension, officially Kyiv sought to reinforce its defence capabilities and strengthen its position in the context of its aspirations to join the EU and NATO. The declarations of the Presidents of Lithuania,

⁷ Повернення НАТО до позицій 1997 року не буде: відповідь США і перша реакція Росії, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/nato-vidpovid-rosiya-bliven-lavrov/31674567.html>.

Poland, and Ukraine dated 20 December 2021⁸, and 11 January 2023⁹, put the support of the Ukrainian state at the centre of tripartite cooperation. This does not, however, make Kyiv a more important partner within the Lublin triangle, just as it does not indicate that this format is interesting only to the Ukrainian side. These facts prove that the key security processes for the whole of Central Europe are now taking place in Ukraine, while at the same time, the very fact of the existence of the Lublin Triangle and the constant cooperation at the highest level within its framework testify to the stable common interests of Warsaw, Vilnius, and Kyiv.

The main expectations of Ukraine's authorities of cooperation within the framework of the Lublin Triangle are contained in the most recent declaration of the Presidents of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. The key messages from the document are a joint readiness to strengthen the defence capabilities of the Ukrainian state and to facilitate the liberation of the territories occupied by Russia; support for the idea of creating a special tribunal for those guilty of Russian aggression; promoting Kyiv's movement towards the EU and NATO; emphasizing the need for a transparent reconstruction of Ukraine; and creating conditions for Polish and Lithuanian investments in this context. Given the challenges that the Ukrainian state and society are facing

⁸ *Спільна заява Президента України, Президента Литовської Республіки та Президента Республіки Польща*, 20 December 2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-zayava-prezidenta-ukrayini-prezidenta-litovskoyi-resp-72173>.

⁹ *Спільна декларація Президента України Володимира Зеленського, Президента Литовської Республіки Гітанаса Науседи та Президента Республіки Польща Анджея Дуди за результатами другого саміту Люблінського трикутника*, 11 January 2023, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-deklaraciya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-80321>.

today, the specified directions comprehensively cover the most necessary tasks of tripartite cooperation from the point of view of Kyiv. However, their successful completion depends on detailing the steps and creating implementation mechanisms.

Today, for Ukraine, the main dimension of any foreign policy activity is security. The state needs not only to protect its sovereignty and restore territorial integrity. The complete life of Ukrainian citizens and the restoration of the Ukrainian economy is impossible without the establishment of long-term security and stability mechanisms. Without a deep rethinking of its place in the global system, and exhaustive atonement for the crimes committed, the Russian state will remain a danger not only to its neighbours but also to all of Europe. In this context, the Lublin Triangle can become one of the most important temporary formats of Kyiv's official external cooperation. The political and defence centre of Europe is now shifting to the east – and the actions of the Central and Baltic European nations will determine its capacity.

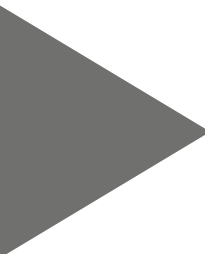
Recommendations

- In view of this, the prospective direction is the strengthening of LitPolUkrBrig as a basis for tripartite military cooperation. Within the framework of this format, the Ukrainian military can acquire important skills in conducting operations and management. At the same time, for the Lithuanian and Polish partners, the defence experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is no less important in the context of the development of their capabilities. In addition, enhancing the

resilience of the three nations requires an integrated approach to intelligence sharing, joint threat monitoring, increased cyber defence in both the public and private sectors, and proactive countering of Russian disinformation. In this dimension, a common vision of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine is also necessary regarding the development of relations with the independent civil society of Belarus and regarding the future of the Belarusian state, free from Russian influence. Guarantees that the democratically elected leaders of Belarus will not become a tool in the hands of the Kremlin are important to Kyiv. In the context of ensuring long-term stability, an important aspect of the Lublin Triangle declaration of January 2023 was that the Presidents of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine expressed their readiness to hold consultations on international security guarantees for Ukraine;

- another priority for Ukraine is the fastest possible integration into the EU and NATO. These steps are important both in view of the political choice of Ukrainian citizens and in the context of ensuring the restoration and security of the Ukrainian state. During the last decades, Vilnius and Warsaw were perceived by Kyiv as “advocates” of their movement towards Western organizations. Perhaps now, when Ukraine has become close to the EU and has begun to take a more practical approach to joining NATO, Lithuania and Poland need to change their focus on transferring their experience of accession to reforming, management challenges, and building representation capabilities within these associations;

- finally, restoring infrastructure and reorienting the economy to new regulatory and logistical realities after the end of the war remains one of the biggest challenges for Ukraine. Central European countries (primarily Poland) have become not only Kyiv's key economic partners but also the only reliable gateway for Ukrainian exports. The reorientation of Ukrainian manufacturers to new routes for transporting their goods abroad will require a fundamental rethinking and restructuring of the country's transport infrastructure. In this context, the joining of Ukraine to the TEN-T corridors and the readiness of the Polish and Lithuanian states to promote the participation of Ukrainian partners in projects within the framework of the Three Seas Initiative are welcomed. A large-scale reconstruction of the transport network requires the implementation of a game-changing idea. Its beginning could be assembly of a railway line of a European gauge to one of the hub Ukrainian cities. Such a project should be a priority in the first stage of Ukraine's recovery.



Andrzej Pukszo
Robertas Eismontas

The Lithuanian perspective

Lithuanian-Polish and Lithuanian-Ukrainian bilateral relations

The development of political relations between the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Poland has not always been positive since the 11th of March 1990, when Lithuania regained its independence. Poland was not among the states that initially recognized Lithuanian independence. Also, the Treaty Between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Lithuania on Friendly Relations and Neighbourly Cooperation was signed only in 1994. However, there was a time of intensification of bilateral relations after 1994, and the two countries cooperated much more in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, which finished successfully in 2004.

It is clear that the political ideas of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the plans of Józef Piłsudski to restart the Intermarium are popular in Poland. We cannot say the same about Lithuania, where the memory of the interwar period and the annexation of Vilnius has bad connotations.

Lithuanian political elites even created a theory thirty years ago that the Lithuania Europeanization process must be connected with Scandinavia, not the countries of East-Central Europe (a view expressed by Audronis Ažubalis, former Minister of Foreign Affairs).

There are also some quite popular ideas from Jerzy Giedroyc at the same time, and Lithuanian intellectuals and politicians like to remind us of the position of the editor-in-chief of “Kultura” about the necessity for Poland to recognize Lviv, Vilnius, and Grodno as neighbours and help them to develop democracy (the famous conception of ULB: Ukraine-Lithuania-Belarus). It is also necessary to recall other optimistic Lithuanian-Polish initiatives and their resonance in the international arena. Two actors were and are active in the support of post-socialist countries on their way to democratization. The best historical example was the visit by two Presidents – Lech Kaczyński and Valdas Adamkus to support Georgians during the intervention of Russia in August 2008.

Lithuania, like Poland, is a very active supporter of the East Partnership Program. Lithuanian political leaders are reminding us regularly in all the institutions of the European Union, how important it is to share and spread democratic values in the Post-soviet area, especially in Ukraine, Belarus, and the South Caucasus. The same interests of both countries are more than clear in NATO; Lithuanian politicians and diplomats are regularly restating, together with their Polish colleagues, their visions of NATO enlargement and asking to enhance, to strengthen, the Eastern flank of the Alliance. These questions were introduced for the first time during the Bucharest Summit in 2008.

We cannot forget that Lithuanian-Polish relations were frozen when Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform) dominated the Polish political scene (the president of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė, first spoke of political freezing). Poland at that time was more orientated towards the Weimar Triangle cooperation than the East-Central region. Lithuania also looked for other political perspectives in the region: the main vector of Lithuanian foreign policy became a Nordic-Baltic direction, and not always with success.

Regarding Lithuanian-Ukrainian relations, it is necessary to underline that Lithuania has consequently developed cooperation with Ukraine regardless of the political conjuncture in Kyiv. As there were no historical conflicts, bilateral relations were intense. So, political dialogue and economic interests connected Kyiv and Vilnius even before 2014, during the Viktor Yanukovich presidency. When Lithuania held the presidency of the Council of the European Union during the autumn of 2013, a Summit of Eastern Partnerships was organized in Vilnius. The leaders of the EU had hoped that President Yanukovich would sign an Association Agreement and open the door for Ukrainian integration into the EU.

As we now know, the Agreement was never signed, and the Maidan Revolution (Revolution of Dignity) started. The Republic of Lithuania supported democratic change and reform as much as possible, also protesting against Russia's occupation of the Donbas and Crimea in the international arena, reminding the world about the violation of international law by the Russian Federation. Lithuanian-Ukrainian cooperation also developed thanks to the efforts of numerous political and non-government leaders. The symbol of

this unity became Lithuanian economist Aivaras Abromavičius, who was nominated to the post of Minister of Economy and Trade in the second Government of Arseniy Yatsenyuk (2014-2016). Later, he worked as the Director General of *Ukroboronprom*, Ukraine's largest defence industry enterprise (2019-2020).

From bilateral relations to triangle cooperation

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania in 2020, Linas Linkevičius, claims that the signed declaration of the Lublin Triangle between Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine has not only practical but also geopolitical meaning. According to Linkevičius, the Lublin Triangle will provide support to the Ukrainian reform process by transferring the experience gained in Poland and Lithuania.

“This format is definitely not artificial, but very natural. We have had a lot of history-related events lately. I remind you, this was also during the burial of 1863 uprising heroes, when representatives from Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus arrived. It was a spectacular event. We also recently participated in the commemoration of the 610th anniversary of the Battle of Zalgiris. Last year was the 450th anniversary of the Union of Lublin when the largest state in Europe was created. It is also history, so the spirit of cooperation of those centuries is what creates today's projects. They have a very clear practical meaning, and not only a political one but also a geopolitical one. We involve Ukraine in the processes on which its integration into the EU and NATO depends. The Lublin Triangle, I think, sends a clear geopolitical message that we will use what we have built and cooperate with Ukraine, including it in the processes,” said Linkevičius.

“Currently, there is an aggression against Ukraine, a war is going on. (...) Ukraine is undergoing reforms and recently signed an agreement on macroeconomic assistance from the EU. These are current affairs. We try to help and advice Ukrainians wherever possible,” added the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania.

On 2 December 2021, the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda, with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenski, and the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, commemorating the 30 years since Lithuania and Poland recognized the restored independence of Ukraine, reiterated their determination to maintain and develop a close partnership in the format of the Lublin Triangle. In a tripartite statement, the presidents expressed their determination to further develop the strategic partnership of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland, based on common values and common interests, in security and defence, economy, energy, and other areas.

“The declaration and recognition of Ukraine’s independence 30 years ago became an important event on the way to a full-fledged European unification, and today’s current events only bring our countries and the whole of Europe closer together” – the head of the countries said at the meeting. On 23 February 2022, a joint statement by the President of Ukraine, the President of the Republic of Poland, and the President of the Republic of Lithuania on the Russian Federation’s decision to recognize the so-called “DPR” and “LPR” was published. “We, the Presidents of Ukraine, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Lithuania – the Lublin Triangle, gathered in Kyiv on 23 February 2022, express our strongest condemnation of the decision by the Russian

Federation to recognize the quasi-entities in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine – the so-called Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic," read the opening statement.

"We reaffirm our strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters," the Presidents declared. The leaders of the Lublin Triangle also emphasize that, given the significant progress in the implementation of the Association Agreement and internal reforms, as well as the current security challenges, Ukraine deserves EU candidate status, and Lithuania and Poland will support Ukraine in achieving this goal.

The Presidents also urge Russia to de-escalate and withdraw its armed forces deployed around Ukraine's borders and in temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, and to refrain from taking any further military actions.

Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Cooperation Initiatives in the different areas

Interparliamentary Assembly and Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade

The decision to set up the Assembly of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Sejm and the Senate of the Republic of Poland, and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine was made in May 2005 in order to highlight the aspiration to strengthen the inter-parliamentary relations between Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine and address the need for considering topical matters in the area of international relations. In Kyiv, in

June 2008, the first session of the Assembly adopted a joint declaration and approved the Assembly's statute. The Assembly is of a consultative nature and its aim is to support Ukraine's efforts towards European integration, develop cooperation in various spheres, and improve relations between Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania. This initiative was also supposed to refer to the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, however, compared to the classic bilateral formulas of parliamentary diplomacy, it was an original concept because it was tripartite. Of great importance is that such a formula of cooperation makes it easier to highlight common interests.

The Parliamentary Assembly of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine has been a fairly effective mechanism of cooperation so far, e.g., to a large extent bringing Ukraine closer to the European Union; and its activities are a good example of how parliamentary diplomacy works in the states of Central Europe.

The Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (LitPolUkr-Brig) is a multinational brigade of the Lublin Triangle, consisting of units of the Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian armies. The contract for its creation was signed on 16 November 2009. The brigade should have reached operational status in the fall of 2011, but it was delayed; the unit was finally formed on 19 September 2014. In July 2015, the ministers of defence of the three states signed an agreement confirming the operational status of the unit.

The brigade is headquartered and staffed in Lublin, Poland, with the national components deployed in their respective countries, and they only actually assemble for exercises and overseas missions. Only its staff officers are

expected to cooperate on a regular basis. The unit is designed to carry out the tasks assigned to it by NATO, the European Union (EU), and the United Nations. It was agreed that the working language of the brigade would be English. The headquarters was officially opened in Lublin on 25 January 2016, in a ceremony attended by the ministers of defence of the three states.

Lithuania's total assistance to Ukraine is currently estimated at 660 million euros, including 240 million euros in military aid, Defence Minister Arvydas Anušauskas has said. "The estimated cost of Lithuania's nationwide assistance to Ukraine, refugees etc., totals 660 million euros and this amount includes around 240 million euros in military assistance," Anušauskas told reporters. The Defence Ministry's budget for 2023 earmarks around 40 million euros for support to Ukraine, with the necessary items to be purchased from Lithuanian producers, according to the minister.

Forum of Intellectuals of the Lublin Triangle and Youth Lublin Triangle

Lithuanian intellectuals presented an initiative in 2022 to bring together the format of regional cooperation of the Lublin Quartet, in which the states of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine as well as the Belarusian people opposed to the regime of Alexander Lukashenko would participate.

The participants of the discussion held at the Presidency in Vilnius called for the promotion of cultural and human relations, and at the highest political level, for the time being, to leave an "empty chair" for the future leader of Belarus. "Today's meeting is a kind of attempt to expand the circle of foreign policy actors. Only the efforts of politicians and

diplomats are not enough here, but the public must also join the process,” said Alvydas Nikžentaitis, director of the Lithuanian History Institute, the organizer of the event.

The discussants also suggested involving Russia’s democratic civil society in the discussions. Volodymyr Fesenko, an expert on Ukrainian politics, said that regional cooperation is very important to deter Russian aggression. The name Lublin is given to regional cooperation initiatives, remembering the union between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland signed in the city of Lublin in 1569, which established the Republic of Both Nations.

The Youth Triangle of Lublin is an institutionalized platform for the cooperation of Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian youth. The Lublin triangle of youth, initiated by the diplomacy platform of the youth governmental organization, is no longer supported by the ministries of foreign affairs of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. The initiative is inspired by the study of the potential of youth cooperation in the Lublin Triangle, whose Public Diplomacy Platform was funded by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Recommendations

- Lithuania and Poland must be the main supporters of Ukraine in the institutions of the European Union and NATO;
- development of security and defence as well as economic cooperation must be the main areas of the Lublin Triangle activities;
- representatives of the Belarusian opposition must be included in the Lublin Triangle cooperation;

- Forums of Intellectuals of the Lublin Triangle have to be organized regularly and should create visions for future cooperation.



Piotr Rudkouski

The Belarusian perspective

The “Lublin Triangle” (L3, the Triangle) was established on 28 July 2020, shortly before the presidential elections in Belarus. The Belarusian regime, initially neutral, soon grew expressly negative about the Triangle and, in line with the Kremlin propaganda, would refer to it as one more anti-Russian alliance, orchestrated by the US. The Belarusian post-election 2020 opposition, centred around the office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, welcomed the idea of the alliance, but, as of now, it has not found a way of permanently participating in the Triangle’s activities.

In what follows, I will first describe the hitherto attempts at establishing relations between Belarus and L3. Next, the potential for future relations will be analysed. Finally, I will draw conclusions and present some recommendations.

The peculiar history of Belarus – L3 relations

The Lublin Triangle was established roughly two weeks before the main day of voting in the presidential elections in Belarus. Lukashenka’s campaign contained very strong

anti-Russian accents, which culminated in the arrest of 30 fighters from the infamous Wagner Group, the Kremlin-backed private military company, on 29 July 2020. No wonder the Belarusian state media reported about the launch of L3 with no negative overtones. A couple of days later, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, invited his Belarusian [counterpart], Uladzimir Makei, to a meeting of ministers of the 3L countries, which was to take place in Kyiv¹. As Jan Hofmøkl, Director of the Eastern Department of the Polish Foreign Ministry, says, at the initial stage, Minsk was interested in this political project, but later changed its mind².

What made the regime change its mind is not difficult to guess. In response to gross falsifications of the electoral vote and the brutality of riot police, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians took to the streets. Struggling for his political survival, Lukashenka made a U-turn in his relations with the Kremlin to get its support. At the same time, relations with Western and Central European countries, including Poland and Lithuania, rapidly deteriorated. Consequently, the chances for any cooperation between the L3 and Minsk, initially relatively high, dropped to zero.

The Belarusian regime's media rarely mentioned the L3 initiative, but when they did, they referred to it either as an anti-Russian or anti-Belarusian project, except for the

¹ Кудеба запросив главу МЗС Білорусі на зустріч міністрів Люблінського трикутника, Ukrinform, 1 August 2020, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3074064-kuleba-zaproshiv-glavu-mzs-bilorusi-na-zustric-ministriv-lublinskogo-trikutnika.html>.

² "Люблінський трикутник мав бути квадратом із Білоруссю – МЗС Польщі", Ukrinform, 11 September 2020, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3097629-lublinskij-trikutnik-mav-buti-kvadratom-iz-bilorussu-mzs-polsi.html>.

very first mention on 28 July 2020. In his interview for the newspaper “SB.Belarus Segodnya”, the pro-regime expert Aliaksandr Shpakouski said, “The transformation of the Lublin Triangle into a Quadrangle would allow the United States to complete the encirclement of Russia from the West by satellite-controlled states”³. The chairman of the pro-regime Liberal Democratic Party, Aleh Haudukevich, was more pronounced in his criticism of the L3: “The head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry invited Belarus to the Lublin Triangle. This is what he calls the new alleged union of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. The head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry does this when people in the centre of Kyiv are beaten for coming to the Belarusian embassy with our state flags, beaten on in the eyes of everyone. (...) Is there any limit of arrogance and disrespect?”⁴.

In this situation, the only possibility for the L3 to cooperate with Belarus was to invite representatives of the democratic opposition. On 29 January 2021, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, at the invitation of the Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Dmitry Kuleba, took part in the online L3 summit. In her speech, Tsikhanouskaya proposed that the Lublin Triangle turn into a “Lublin Quadrangle” – with Belarus as a full participant. She also gave assurance that her office was fully prepared to participate in L3 activities. Mr Kuleba, in

³ Шпаковский: общие вызовы подталкивают Минск и Москву к дальнейшему сближению в сфере обороны, 3 March 2021, <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/shpakovskij-obschie-vyzovy-podtalkivajut-minsk-i-moskvu-k-dalnejshemu-sblizheniju-v-sfere-oborony-431032-2021/>.

⁴ Гайдукевич: народы Польши, Литвы, Украины хотят мира и с Беларусью, и с Россией, а не противостояния, 7 July 2021, <https://www.belta.by/politics/view/gajdukevich-narody-polshi-litvy-ukrainy-hotjat-mira-i-s-belarusju-i-s-rossiej-a-ne-protivostojani-ja-449462-2021/>.

his briefing for journalists, having expressed his desire to have Belarus in the “Quadrangle” one day, added, “But the time for this has not yet come.”

The joint Declaration on a common heritage, adopted by the foreign ministers of L3 countries on 7 July 2021, contained a commitment to “ensure that the Belarusian nation and democratic Belarus had a chance of rapprochement with the European Union.” However, the Declaration did not mention Belarus as a co-sharer of the common historical heritage.

Mrs Tsikhanouskaya’s appeal to include Belarus in L3 activities was reiterated by Pavel Latushka, the head of the National Anti-Crisis Management. In December 2022, in his speech at a conference in the Polish Senate, Mr Latushka postulated that the “democratic Belarus” become a full member of the Lublin Triangle, which should become a Quadrangle⁵.

In reality, the process went in the opposite direction. Unlike in 2021, Mrs Tsikhanouskaya was not invited to the Lublin Triangle Summit in 2023. European diplomats anonymously told the online newspaper “Nasha Niva” that Ukraine had allegedly blocked the participation of representatives of the Belarusian opposition in the L3 Summit as well as other joint events with the Europeans. According to the “Nasha Niva” interlocutors, by doing so, Ukraine tries to restrain Lukashenka from deeper involvement in the war⁶.

⁵ Латушко предложил включить демократическую Беларусь в “Люблинскую четверку”, 2 December 2022, <https://reform.by/latushko-predlozhit-vkljuchit-demokraticheskuju-belarus-v-ljublinskuju-chetverku>.

⁶ Дыпламатычныя крыніцы: Украіна блакуе ўдзел Ціханоўскай і беларусаў у сумесных дыпламатычных мерапрыемствах, 25 January 2023, <https://nashaniva.com/308354>.

The potential for Belarus – L3 relations

The attempts at establishing relations between Belarus and the L3 have so far been unsuccessful. There have been two factors at play: the toxicity of the Belarusian regime and the war in Ukraine. Now, let us consider whether there is at least a theoretical possibility for Belarus to become a member of L3/L4.

In assessing the potential for future relations between Belarus and L3, I take it as highly probable that:

The current members of the Triangle will be willing to accept Belarus once it becomes able to function as a state member.

If representatives of the Belarusian democratic opposition come to power, they will remain at least open to the perspective of Belarus's joining the L3.

There is, however, a third factor that will interplay with the first two: the attitudes and preferences of Belarusian society. There are no direct data on Belarusian attitudes to the Lublin Triangle, but even if they were they might not be of much help for our purposes. Given that the alliance is very young, and most citizens of Belarus have just rudimentary, if any, knowledge about it, the results of a survey today would be rather unreliable for drawing conclusions about their future attitudes.

In this situation, it makes sense to approach the issue in another way: Is there a sense of closeness with the L3 countries, or are there at least prerequisites for such a sense among Belarusians?

Despite the ubiquitous propaganda of Belarus – Russia brotherhood and Soviet-era symbols, Belarusians have become much attached to the heritage of the Grand Duchy of

Lithuania (GDL). In Table 1 we can see that GDL was the unquestionable leader in the respondents' opinion about the "sources of Belarusian statehood" both in 2009 and 2018.

Table 1. Sources of Belarusian statehood according to the opinion of the people of Belarus

	2009*	2018**
Polotsk and Turov Principality	17.7%	15.9%
Grand Duchy of Lithuania	38.1%	30.4%
BNR (Belarusian People's Republic	5.0%	7%
BSSR (Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic)	12.4%	21.8%
RB (Republic of Belarus)	9.2%	9.3%
DK/NA	17.7%	15.7%

* Survey by NovAK⁷, ** Survey by BAW⁸

Now, let us look at the results of a survey that was conducted shortly after the 2020 elections by the Centre for Eastern Studies (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich – OSW) in Warsaw⁹. The survey was conducted only among urban internet users, so we have to allow that the rural population or internet non-users might have somewhat different views, but it is unlikely it would heavily affect the overall picture. In answering the question, "What historical tradition should Belarus primarily draw upon?", the option "GDL" was chosen by almost 40% of respondents, while all the other options ranged between 1.5% and 28%, see Table 2.

⁷ BISS Archive.

⁸ BISS Archive.

⁹ *Białorusini o Polsce, Rosji i sobie. Analiza badania opinii publicznej przeprowadzonego na zlecenie Ośrodka Studiów Wschodnich, "Komentarze OSW" 2021, no. 373, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/komentarze_373_o.pdf.*

Table 2. What historical tradition should Belarus primarily draw upon?

	2020
Polotsk and Turov Principality	8.8%
Grand Duchy of Lithuania	39.7%
BNR (Belarusian People's Republic)	16.2%
BSSR (Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic)	28%
The Commonwealth of Both Nations	6.3%
DK/NA	14.5%

Source: OSW

The above data testify to the following:

GDL is highly important in Belarusian thinking about their national or state heritage.

This state of affairs is deeply rooted and durable: it has lasted since at least 2009 and persists to this day.

Of course, the Lublin Triangle builds not only on the GDL heritage but also, and even to a greater extent, on the heritage of the Polish–GDL Commonwealth. As we see in Table 2, the Commonwealth epoch is the least popular among Belarusians: just 6.3% of urban internet users considered its tradition of particular importance. Since the question was about *primary* importance, the poor results for some options do *not* mean that respondents perceived them negatively. Respondents might believe that the Commonwealth tradition was also important, but not primarily.

As of the end of 2020, in terms of national security, Belarusians trusted the L3 countries much more than Russia. In the same OSW survey (among urban internet users) the vast majority, 67–75%, said they did not think the policies of any L3 country threatened the territorial integrity of Belarus. Just 45% thought there was no threat from Russia.

The war in Ukraine, which is accompanied by heavy anti-Ukrainian propaganda from both the Kremlin and the Lukashenka regime, might affect the perception of the L3 countries, especially Ukraine. Even if it did so, it is unlikely that propaganda-inspired attitudes would be lasting.

Conclusions and recommendations

In their July 2021 Declaration, the foreign ministers of the L3 countries stated that the alliance built upon the “common heritage of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe”. Indeed, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Commonwealth of Two Nations were among the most successful and long-lasting integration projects in Europe, though, of course, having their own flaws. The memory of that common past, though hazy due to the long time passed, is still alive among the peoples of that region.

The ancestors of modern Belarusians co-shaped both the GDL and the Commonwealth, and the whole territory of modern Belarus was part of the two entities. In the early 1990s, the idea of a Baltic–Black Sea Union, which was a direct predecessor of the idea of a Lublin Quadrangle, was the focus of lively discussion among Belarusian politicians and intellectuals. Despite the state-promoted ideology of Russia – Belarus brotherhood, the ubiquity of Soviet symbols, and vehement Russification, Belarusians revived the memory of GDL and made it a core element of their national identity. For these reasons, Belarus is a natural partner of the Lublin Triangle and a candidate for becoming a full member of this alliance. The Triangle, in its turn, is incomplete and deficient without Belarus.

The toxicity of the Belarusian regime and its involvement in Russian aggression against Ukraine made it impossible to establish durable relations between the L3 and the officials in Minsk, let alone have Belarus in the alliance. Apart from the regime, which could collapse at any moment, there is Belarusian society and the democratic opposition, a society that is potentially ready for supporting the idea of joining the alliance, both because of how attached it is to the GDL heritage and its trust in the L3 countries. The opposition has univocally expressed its willingness and readiness to participate in L3 activities. So far, however, relations between Belarus and the L3 have not only failed to develop but have withered away almost completely.

In this connection, three recommendations can be worth considering:

- keep Belarus on the agenda. It is advisable that Belarus is mentioned and discussed during meetings of L3 representatives in any format—not only in terms of the “threat” (coming from the regime), but also, and primarily, in terms of being an “ally”;
- L3 first, EU later. Belarusians are quite sceptical about joining the EU, but there are reasons to believe that they would welcome regional integration with countries that are close in terms of mentality and common past. Thus, it makes more sense for the L3 to emphasize their willingness to have Belarus in the alliance than to speak of “ensuring a chance” for Belarus’s rapprochement with the EU;
- support rationality, not emotions. One probable reason for reducing to a minimum the cooperation with the democratic opposition is that Ukraine needs to

be careful in its dealing with the autocratic ruler of Belarus. The war against such a dangerous aggressor requires much sophistication, which may include compromises even with the ally of the enemy. As long as Ukraine's policies towards Belarusian opposition are guided by rational calculation, they deserve understanding. It may happen, however, that Ukrainian officials act out anger, and punishing Belarusian oppositionists for Lukashenka's treachery becomes the main motive of a decision. Such decisions can be harmful both for Ukraine and the L3. So, Ukraine's partners are well-advised not to support irrational emotions but rather to help them get back on the path of rational action and respect for genuine allies.



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The Lublin Triangle, its emergence and existence, reflects not only changes in Europe's security architecture but also one of the growing trends in international relations – regionalization of relations in different dimensions (including security). The Lublin Triangle is actually a new initiative, which is still being formed and shaped. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Russia's aggressive policy, ironically, has sped up the process of strengthening cooperation in Central Europe considerably and revived the historical traditions of this cooperation.

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