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Cooperation of the Lublin Triangle in the context of security threats in the region of Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to outline the new multidimensional format of cooperation between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. The Lublin Triangle is a trilateral regional alliance between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine established in Lublin on 28 July 2020. The initiative relates to cooperation across the power, infrastructure, security and cultural sectors with an aim to strengthen dialogue between the states and reinforce efforts to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity and support its integration into the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Some of the factors driving this new format of cooperation include the growing migrant crisis; increasing importance of the internal and external security in the EU states; Ukraine's pursuit of EU integration, especially after the Ukraine war outbreak; and strengthening of national states within the EU. The states concerned have turned back to their legacy capital which is and has been the same regional affiliation and, thus, the geographical proximity, shared past, culture, and common interests.*

Key words: Lublin Triangle, Threats, Border, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine

Introduction

For centuries, Central and Eastern Europe has been a playground of competition between major powers. Located at the intersection of the East and the West, it has been faced with a number of threats and challenges ranging beyond geopolitical, economic,

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cultural and military concerns.¹ The region's weakness lies in the multitude of states, languages, and religious denominations, but the ability to cooperate under specific arrangements and agreements can be its strength. The regional integration concepts may be derived from the Union of Lublin, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Constitution of 3 May 1791.

Notably, the Constitution of 3 May 1791 contained the Mutual Pledge of the Two Nations (Polish: *Zaręczenie Wzajemne Obojga Narodów*) comprising a set of detailed regulations enacted on 20 October 1791 by the Four-Year Sejm. Those regulations referred to the union between the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In Lithuanian historiography and policies, that historically momentous point has been given more prominence than the signing of the Constitution itself. Importantly, it was the Union of Lublin of 1569 that laid the foundations for the future Constitution by bringing together the nations, i.e. the Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian peoples, into a politically, socially and culturally diverse Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.² Although the Polish and Lithuanian nations both hold different views on the contribution of the Union of Lublin, and the Constitution of 3 May 1791, while important to Poles as an ethos, is only presently beginning to be understood and recognised for what it was among Lithuanians, that legacy may be somewhat of a testament to independence for the later generations. That achievement restored faith in the value of the Polish political heritage among the Polish public and gave the strength to live through the times of foreign rule. The Lublin Triangle (L3) is a format of cooperation between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine established in Lublin on 28 July 2020.³ The cooperation within the L3 is founded on the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the former Union of Lublin as well as the Constitution of 3 May 1791.

This article aims to provide a review of the cooperation arrangement between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine known as the Lublin Triangle. The main research hypothesis is as follows: As a new cross-border cooperation format, the Lublin Triangle provides an opportunity for the Central and Eastern Europe region in terms of security, power infrastructure development, and culture. The accompanying research questions to complement the analysis are the following: what is the historical and legal background of the Lublin Triangle? How do the theories of political integration apply to the Lublin Triangle? What is the current status of cooperation within the Lublin Triangle? What are the prospects for cooperation within the Lublin Triangle?

¹ Marshall, 2017.

² As a proper name, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Polish: *Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*) was first used in an official document only in 1791. The two nations differ in their perspectives on the heritage of the Union of Lublin. Poles look back to that period with fondness, perceiving the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a strong state. By contrast, for Lithuanians, it was a poorly governed country that acted to their detriment; Tatarenko, 2019: 37, 42-43.

³ Joint Declaration of Foreign Ministers, 28 July 2020.

The deliberations comprise four parts: the historical background; the concepts of integration; the legal background; and a discussion of the progress of and prospects for cooperation within the Lublin Triangle. This article is highly interdisciplinary as the research methods of the political and administrative sciences and legal science are employed. The analysis uses the desk research methodologies. These include a review of written sources, which is a consequence of a qualitative content analysis. The above have yielded the necessary data accumulated in the relevant literature, mass media published articles, and think tank commentaries to address the research problem.

Origins of the Lublin Triangle

When taking a deep dive into the relations between the three states: Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, reference should be made to the historical considerations. Among the examples of the close cooperation between the nations was the establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under the Union of Lublin of 1569 (i.e. an agreement between the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) or the Intermarium concept of the interwar period. Further, some of the journalists of *Bunt Młodych* (a pre-WWII magazine renamed to *Polityka* in 1931) supported a Polish-Ukrainian agreement, including the likes of Count Jan Stanisław Łoś (1890-1974),⁴ a politician and diplomat, and a professor of modern history. He promoted the idea of a federation and granting broad autonomy to the Ukrainian people. The journalists called for a shift of Poland's policy towards Ukrainians. Authorities were to encourage Ukrainians to cooperate loyally by eliminating any discrimination based on nationality. A colleague of Stanisław Łoś, Aleksander Bocheński, argued that the most common reason for animosity towards Poland among Ukrainians was that they were denied access to public debate or any references to "Ukrainian" in the Polish legislation, the name Ukrainians demanded. He cited numerous examples from statutes and reviewed the language of certain laws, e.g. the National and Official Language Act of 31 July 1924, in which the word "Ukrainian" was replaced with "Ruthenian".⁵

Stanisław Łoś maintained that there was not a single Pole in the then Poland who would consider Red Ruthenia to be some sort of a colony or annex. After regaining independence in 1918, Poland had to face many odds stacked against it across multiple facets of public life. At that point, the war for Eastern Galicia and the conflict with Germany over the liberation of the Poznań Province, and with Czechoslovakia over Cieszyn Silesia, and with Lithuanians over the Suwałki Region all started almost at the same time, and the Bolsheviki set out on their march to the West. On top of that,

⁴ Łoś, 2012: 10.

⁵ Bocheński, 1938: 18.

Poland was unwelcome by the world's most mighty superpower of the day and simultaneously attacked by the influential elites leading public opinion.⁶

For many years, there were attempts to push a narrative of religious and ethnic homogeneity in Poland, which was far from the state's social and cultural realities. Besides, isolating attitudes and critical views of cultural differences tended to prevail, denying a possibility to reconcile two or more cultures. No consideration was given to what now seems to be the key to the formation of a type of human with scattered cultural identity (borderland man), who is a product of the processes and workings of mutual penetration, overlapping, and diverse clashes of cultures. Pluralism is what makes a culture a treasury. Isolationism and prejudices lead to simplifications and easy criticism and do not encourage any cognitive effort, dialogue, or collaboration.⁷

Jerzy Nikitorowicz said that tolerance is inherent to borderlands as a mechanism of social regulation to enable interaction with culturally different others.⁸ Tolerant behaviour requires such effort from a person that those who step into borderlands can undertake. This goes beyond mere restraining from displays of intolerance to include positive interpersonal bonding despite differences and divergences. He argued that the lack of dialogue and negotiations within the confines of the existing closed borders ushered in anomie, loss of faith, breakdown of social relations, and destruction of meanings and symbols, leaving indifference, disengagement, helplessness, and aversion to leaving the centre and the demarcated borders.⁹ The current landscape of economic tensions and threats and political volatility seems to narrow the fields of perception of different others and the values they stand for. Thus, questions about the culture of existence and interpersonal relations and tolerance should be raised more often as it is impossible to understand the cultural achievements of societies without first learning about their practices and customs, language, historical traditions, and religious beliefs.

The Lublin Triangle is a trilateral regional alliance between three states bound together by shared history and culture. The initiative relates to cooperation across the power, infrastructure, security, and cultural sectors with an aim to strengthen dialogue between the states and reinforce efforts to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity and support its integration into the EU and NATO. The last L3 meeting at the highest level with all parties to the agreement personally attending before the outbreak of the Ukraine war was held in Kyiv on 23 February 2022. Andrzej Duda, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and Gitanas Nausėda took part. The meeting resulted in a joint declaration by the Presidents of Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania condemning Russia's decision to recognise the independence of the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas.

⁶ Łoś, 2012: 160-161.

⁷ Błuszkowski, 2003: 135; 2005: 37-48.

⁸ Nikitorowicz, 1995: 10.

⁹ Nikitorowicz, 1995: 15.

The day after that meeting, Vladimir Putin announced a “special military operation” in the East of Ukraine, which in practice meant a military invasion of the country.¹⁰

One of the Lublin Triangle meetings took place shortly after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, in March 2022. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and his Lithuanian counterpart Ingrida Šimonytė met at the Royal Castle in Warsaw. The head of the Ukrainian government, Denys Shmyhal, participated in the talks online. Held amid the military aggression of Russia, the meeting was a demonstration of support from Poland and Lithuania to Ukraine. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine was unequivocally condemned by the L3 states. The head of the Ukrainian government, Denys Shmyhal, said that Russia should be considered a terrorist state.¹¹ The issue of sanctions was also raised in the Polish Prime Minister’s speech after the L3 session. Mateusz Morawiecki called for the freezing of the Russian state assets and confiscation of assets held by Russian oligarchs, pointing to the need for a consistent approach to Russia.¹²

The L3 format is about strategy rather than tactics. The L3 strategy focuses on what binds the three states together, that is their shared concerns, e.g. those that have historically connected the states. The L3 partners are open to cooperate with other state actors, including the neighbouring Belarus, with an invitation to the first official meeting of the Lublin Triangle in Kyiv being extended to Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei as an honorary guest. This proves attempts to strategically impact the international landscape and encourage Belarus’s integration into the European Union against Russia’s interests.¹³ Today, there is a common understanding of powerful partners, who are understood not only as leaders but also as strategists. Power is in unity and can be manifest in the uniting of societies that can see and understand where the leaders are strategically heading. The societies in the L3 states support each other and choose to follow the same geopolitical course. Russia’s attack is an attack against the shared values of the aforementioned states. If Ukraine fails to fend off the attack, it can escalate and hit the L3 states with the main blow. It is very important that good strategic relations are maintained within L3. Poland and Lithuania have been the first states to provide support and aid to Ukraine and continue to do so. This partnership and cooperation may put Poland in a position of a lobbyist and a “central state”. Poland and Lithuania have secured military support for Ukraine such as Leopard tanks. Undoubtedly, Poland’s activities in the EU arena have contributed to Ukraine’s becoming a candidate state for EU membership. As much discussed within L3, initiating dialogue will be an important step. This concerns the economy, trade, and cross-border cooperation. Common border and customs control posts are contemplated,

¹⁰ Spotkanie prezydentów Polski, Ukrainy i Litwy, 2022.

¹¹ Piotrowska, 2022.

¹² Piotrowska, 2022.

¹³ Drabczuk & Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2020: 3.

which is bound to have a tangible impact on the relations between the L3 states. All this is crucial and will enhance cooperation. Territorial integrity and security guarantees are essential and Poland is a strong state in this respect.¹⁴

Theory of integration vs. cooperation within the Lublin Triangle

Nowadays, the most discussed example of interstate integration is the European integration.¹⁵ The Lublin Triangle draws on the concept of trilateral cooperation such as the Visegrad Triangle founded by the Presidents of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary on 15 February 1991¹⁶ and the Weimar Triangle launched in Weimar on 28-29 August 1991 by the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland.¹⁷ Both initiatives aimed at political, scientific, cultural, and defence cooperation. A similar trilateral format, but of an informal nature, was the Kaliningrad Triangle created on 21 February 2011 to comprise Germany, Russia, and Poland, with a general aim to forge economic, political, power, and defence cooperation between the member states.¹⁸

The relations within the Lublin Triangle have tightened in the face of a real threat from Russia. One of the key integrating factors is the hostility mechanism, which can be considered as a driver of integration in a social group under both political and social conditions. In the case of the Lublin Triangle, the external enemy is a mobilizing factor for specific actors or groups to cooperate.¹⁹

Like other similar initiatives, the Lublin Triangle is primarily a form of cross-border cooperation. Experience shows that adopting a formula of a regional cooperation platform is one of the most effective approaches to multilateral international cooperation. Its effectiveness derives from a number of factors, including first and foremost the geographical proximity; cultural and social similarity; similar perceptions of the external environment; and political and economic interdependencies. All these criteria are virtually met in the case of L3.²⁰ The Lublin Triangle is also described as an institutional intergovernmental economic cooperation mechanism, or more precisely as a platform of political, economic, and social cooperation between Ukraine, the Republic of Poland, and the Republic of Lithuania.²¹

¹⁴ Wołodymyr Zelenski w TVP, 2023.

¹⁵ At this point, please refer to the extremely ample literature on the topic: Lastawski, 2003: 23-81; 2008: 15-89; Latoszek, 2007: 57-58; Gilbert, 2012; Zaręba, 2015.

¹⁶ Czyż, 2018: 319.

¹⁷ Koszel, 2016: 64-82.

¹⁸ Memches, 2014.

¹⁹ Ziółkowski, 2013: 202.

²⁰ Olchowski, 2021: 341.

²¹ Pietraś, Baluk & Perepelytsya, 2021: 151.

Integration against an enemy occurs on several levels: (i) axiological level; (ii) normative level; (iii) teleological level; (iv) behavioural level; and (v) structural level. The axiological level represents a binding factor for the system at the level of shared values. Specifically, an external enemy drives unification of the shared values in the following three dimensions: declarative, actionable (becomes a reason for action), and the combination of both, i.e. the internalisation dimension. In political terms, this will be ideological unification. Looking at the cooperation between the Lublin Triangle members, the guiding values are the democratic values and opposition to autocratic values.

As for (ii), the enemy integrates the system at the level of shared standards. This aspect is the enemy-induced conformity with the preferred factors governing how specific goals are achieved in the system. This may be combined with control over the rightmindedness of the accentuated principles and standards. The Lublin Triangle members represent the specific standards of civil law and humanitarian law and refer to the heritage of international legislation whereas Russia breaks all principles of the international law.

As for (iii), the teleological aspect concerns system integration at the level of goals. It should be noted that the greater the threat of the enemy, the more the internal life of the group is determined by the communitised goals. The overarching goal may be to fight the enemy to survive and win. The goal of the Lublin Triangle member states is to retain freedom, territorial integrity, and security whereas Russia poses a threat to the Lublin Triangle members and violates the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

As for (iv), the behavioural level refers to the unification of the behaviour patterns within a group. Individuals are induced to take specific, unified, and coordinated action. The consequences of behaviours becoming unified in a group are the most easily observable as they relate to submission or to sanctioned practices.²² Looking at the Lublin Triangle, certain activities of groups across the states that express open disdain for Russia can be seen, taking the form of demonstrations, e.g., at the embassies of the Russian Federation in Poland and in Lithuania, respectively.

Legal basis for cooperation within the Lublin Triangle

The legal basis for L3 is the *Joint Declaration of Foreign Ministers of the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Lithuania and Ukraine on establishing Lublin Triangle of 28 July 2020*.²³ The founding act executed in Lublin is complemented by two further documents signed a year later on 7 July 2021 in Vilnius and these are: the *Declaration of Joint European Heritage and Common Values* and the *Road Map for Cooperation*

²² Ziółkowski, 2013: 204-205.

²³ Joint Declaration of Foreign Ministers, 28 July 2020.

*between the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Lithuania, and Ukraine within the Lublin Triangle.*²⁴ Another document clarifying the L3 goals for the current situation in Ukraine is the *Joint Declaration of the Presidents of the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Poland, and Ukraine* of late 2021.²⁵

The Lublin Triangle was set up by a ministerial declaration more than four years ago. Both in its name and in its signatories, this format of a founding document is similar to the kind of documents that establish other interstate cross-border cooperation initiatives. Compared to the most advanced form of cross-border cooperation, which is the Schengen Area, it should be noted that the Schengen Agreement was conceived as an intergovernmental cooperation between five member states of the then European Communities and signed by “mere” deputy foreign ministers. While back at its inception in 1985 the Central and Eastern European states were not even considered and the Schengen Area of its current size seemed impossible to attain, it has now come to be the most seminal achievement of the European integration and part of the EU law. In this context, there is hope for long-term development of the intergovernmental arrangement establishing L3, however, this requires that the cooperation is strengthened and taken to the next level, and placed on a more institutionalised footing, and backed with funding.

It should be noted that the creation and evolution of L3 have occurred through both joint declarations at various levels and action plans. These are non-binding but very effective instruments and ones that are successfully applied by the EU, in particular in response to current threats, e.g. the Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth or the European Recovery and Resilience Facility, i.e. an EU recovery plan enacted in response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The founding act explicitly identifies L3 as a trilateral platform of political, economic, and social cooperation between the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Lithuania, and Ukraine. In addition, it should be mentioned that it outlines some initial forms of institutionalisation by emphasising the important role of dialogue between the three states in the parliamentary field, especially within the Parliamentary Assembly of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. It is also stressed that the states recognise benefits of their trilateral cooperation, notably the operation of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG). Additionally, to ensure that the L3 goals are achieved, in the founding act, the foreign ministers agree to hold regular meetings of their own, including on the fringe of multilateral meetings and with selected partners attending. Furthermore, they agree to hold consultations of senior foreign ministry officials and appoint liaison officers in their respective foreign ministries.²⁶ The above reveals the evolving institutionalisation of L3, so far on an informal footing, such as regular

²⁴ Declaration of Joint European Heritage, 7 July 2021.

²⁵ Joint Declaration of the President, 2 December 2021.

²⁶ Joint Declaration of Foreign Ministers, 28 July 2020.

meetings or consultations of senior ministry officials, but the already existing formal instruments are also deployed, such as LITPOLUKRBRIG, which is described as a multinational brigade of the L3 states consisting of subunits from the Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian Armed Forces.²⁷

The Lublin Triangle is certainly an initiative to support the enlargement of the European integration to include Ukraine while also to oppose the Russian aggression and its multiple impacts. It is also in line with other forms of cooperation between the states in Central and Eastern Europe such as: the Visegrad Group, Eastern Partnership or, on a wider stage, the Three Seas Initiative. With the ever-growing threat from Russia, Central and Eastern Europe is becoming a strategic direction for Ukraine's foreign policy, security, and stability. One of the key elements of the strategy should be multilateralisation of the partnership between Poland and Ukraine, or incorporation of the dialogue between both states into various forms of multilateral dialogue and cooperation, such as L3.²⁸ States in this part of Europe in particular do not exist in a vacuum as they are dependent on internal and external conditions. Attitudes of not only the EU, but also of Russia play a special role and thus it is important to look at the Russian goals for those states and recognise both tactical and strategic goals and targets. It is considered that since the very onset of the Russian war against Ukraine,²⁹ Russia has been working to destabilise Ukraine. Due to the fact that this is happening in the immediate vicinity of the Visegrad Group and the Three Seas Initiative member states, the security of the latter is indirectly affected and, therefore, preventive action at the EU and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) levels is essential to stabilise Ukraine.³⁰ The role of the Lublin Triangle is to extend cooperation to Belarus in the long term, which may work to weaken Russia's position in the region.

On 29 May 2023, the Academic and Analytical Lublin Triangle Network was initiated based on the Declaration of Foreign Ministers of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine of 28 May 2020, including for the need for regional cohesion and closer contacts and cooperation of researchers and experts. Specifically, the Academic and Analytical Lublin Triangle emerged in the wake of dramatic, complex, and unpredictable changes in the international environment, the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the growing need from political institutions in Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine for the necessary insights and recommendations to facilitate the decision-making and action-taking processes. The purpose of the Network is thus to bring together the intellectual potential and achieve the synergy of the academic and practitioner circles in the societies of the L3 member states.

²⁷ Established in 2009, it is now of key importance for L3.

²⁸ Olchowski, 2021: 18.

²⁹ It is called a hybrid war or a "subliminal" war.

³⁰ Stępniewski, 2016.

Discussion

In response to the threats from the East, Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania have enhanced their cooperation in security and defence and deepened their transatlantic ties, and synchronised their power infrastructure. The military cooperation spans multiple formats, including without limitation joint military exercises; participation in international operations; and purchases of arms for the Armed Forces. Polish aircraft patrol the air space of Lithuania under the Baltic Air Policing mission.³¹ Fighting disinformation has come to be another focus of the arrangement. Disinformation and propaganda exploit the collective historical memory in Polish-Ukrainian relations and the issues of the Polish minority in Lithuania in Polish-Lithuanian relations, respectively.³² Along these lines, TVP Wilno, a Polish-speaking channel of the Polish public broadcaster has been launched in Lithuania.

Cooperation has been stepped up at the head of state, government, and parliamentary levels in recent years, following a period of cold relations between Poland and Lithuania.³³ After a 10-year break, in 2019, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland and the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania was held (according to Polish lawmakers, Lithuania showed no desire to resolve the issues of the Polish minority living in Lithuania; Lithuanians felt that, recently, Poland had taken a more lenient line on that matter); the agenda covered the issues of regional security, economic cooperation, and cooperation in the fields of infrastructure, culture, science, and national heritage preservation. Sensitive topics such as the presence of the Polish language in the public space, return of land, or the national minority law were also addressed. The session concluded with the signing of a declaration which summarised the achievements in bilateral relations and set the directions for action moving forward. In the same year, Lithuania's President Dalia Grybauskaitė met with Poland's President Andrzej Duda to discuss security, including power security, and the economic relations, and the position of the Polish minority in Lithuania. The previous official visit of the Lithuanian President took place in 2009 (although Grybauskaitė visited Warsaw on several occasions after that, including in relation to the 2016 NATO Summit or meetings of the regional leaders with the US Presidents: Barack Obama in 2014, and Donald Trump in 2017, respectively). Then, there was a trilateral meeting of Presidents Dalia Grybauskaitė, Andrzej Duda, and Ukraine's Petro Poroshenko. The three leaders paid a joint visit to the headquarters of the Multi-national Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade, LITPOLUKRBRIG, in Lublin, which

³¹ Rurak, 2017.

³² Burant, 1993.

³³ Pukšto, Karpavičiūtė & Norkevičius, 2014; Musaev, 2022.

has a special role in maintaining security in the region and in future support for Ukraine's European aspirations.³⁴

The current stepped-up dialogue between the states is apparent mainly at the European and transatlantic levels. Poland and Lithuania have convergent interests in the EU and NATO, in particular around the challenges and threats associated with Russia's confrontational policy toward the West (upholding or expanding the EU sanctions against Russia) and toward the Eastern Partnership member states (support for Ukraine on the pathway to EU membership in combating corruption and facilitating economic growth, among other things) and around the implementation of joint power and infrastructural projects to further integrate the region, such as Rail Baltica and Via Carpathia. They share a similar stance on Brexit and the construction of the Nord Stream II gas pipeline. Increased cooperation can also be seen in the cultural or local government context, both in the bilateral format and within international and regional organisations (the Council of the Baltic Sea States; the Three Seas Initiative).

From Lithuania's perspective, the new format is a natural consequence of the history and the trilateral cooperation to date.³⁵ A number of recent historical events of political significance prove the need to forge strong relations with neighbours; these include the celebrations of the 450th anniversary of the Union of Lublin in July 2019 and the state funeral of the remains of twenty January Uprising participants in November 2019 attended by the Presidents of Poland and Lithuania, Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus, and politicians of Ukraine, or the celebrations of the 610th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald (Žalgiris) in July 2020, where the President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda reiterated the call for aid for Ukraine and the necessity to preserve its territorial integrity.

Ukraine is an important direction for Lithuania's foreign policy, both in the bilateral and multilateral formats. From the perspective of Lithuania's security, a stable Ukraine helps build a safer and stronger Europe (the former Defence Minister of Lithuania Juozas Olekas named support for Ukraine as one of the key foreign and security policy tasks for Lithuania) and fosters economic growth for the state (Ukraine is an important market, especially for Lithuanian agricultural and fertilizer producers). The commitment to Ukraine's case is also instrumental for Lithuania to reinforce its own international clout. Multilateral memorial events and diverse cooperation formats are evidence of Lithuania's willingness to engage in dialogue and strategic collaboration. This is a "geopolitical mission" of Lithuania toward Ukraine (or, more broadly, toward the Eastern Partnership member states) centred around the promotion of democratic values and assistance in Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO through sharing lessons learned from own transition process. In addition, this enables international

³⁴ Fryc, 2020.

³⁵ Kłoczowski, 1999; Nikžentaitis, 2018.

interest rationing for Lithuania in connection with the current challenges, especially in the context of the Russian aggression and stabilisation of its social and economic situation.

Despite diverging stances between the governments of both states which would sometimes freeze bilateral relations, Poland is a strategic political, social, and economic partner for Ukraine. Lithuania, in its turn, supports Ukraine in the international arena (as a promoter of the Eastern Partnership's development) and assists in reforming the security sector. Both states step up their political, military, and power cooperation. On the other hand, the political and economic volatility in Ukraine determines, to a large extent, the need to integrate with the regional partners, especially in the context of the violated territorial integrity and the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The future of Central and Eastern Europe will depend on shifts in the international balance of power. The *raison d'état* of this part of Europe will be vital, the region being the fastest growing economy in Europe. Further growth requires political stability and support for cooperation of the Central and Eastern European states rather than succumbing to the influences of the superpowers. The conflict in Ukraine is a confrontation between Russia and the West but only because Ukraine is an active partner in international relations. However, the states in Central and Eastern Europe cannot surrender to the pressures of the more powerful states and must build and develop cooperation around common values, traditions, and experience, including the respect for the rights of other nations. The last 30 years have brought a demographic dividend to the Central and Eastern Europe region as well as a productive population flight and a brain drain, most of which has been economically driven. An opposite trajectory has been observable in Poland for 10 years. In the nearest future, human capital will be scarce so structural changes, business scaling, and new technologies as well as the leveraging of the geopolitical factor and the region's potential will be needed.

Conclusions

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had an impact on the attitudes to security, including the attitude to international cooperation formats, first and foremost to NATO, in the majority of European states. Undoubtedly, the collective security system was faced with new challenges upon the outbreak of war in Ukraine. One of the omitted concerns is identity. Recalling the view of Koneczny,³⁶ what can now be seen in Ukraine is a clash of civilisations (the Latin civilisation and the Turan civilisation), or within the framework of Huntington's paradigm,³⁷ a clash of the Orthodox and the Western civilisations (assuming that Ukraine is part of the Western world, contrary

³⁶ Koneczny, 1935.

³⁷ Huntington, 2018.

to Huntington's theory, which classified Ukraine as part of the Orthodox civilisation). The neo-imperial policies pursued by Russia are in conflict with the integrity of the Central and Eastern Europe region. Long-term goals for cooperation between European states must be set and the transatlantic ties must be strengthened. Both systems need to work together: the civilian and military capabilities. European states should seek synergies in science, industry, technology, armed forces, and intelligence services. However, individual European states markedly diverge in their policies, both national and international, hence difficulties to arrive at a common stance on security.

Poland and Lithuania understand the threats from Russia best, which is why they continue to raise the issue of the Russian aggression in the international arena. They both have a clear understanding of the current situation in Ukraine and stress that enhanced cooperation with Ukraine in various formats and promotion of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations are conducive to stabilisation in the region (especially considering neighbouring with Belarus, which gradually integrates with Russia into the Union State).³⁸ Poland and Lithuania are top donors of humanitarian, financial, and military aid to Ukraine in relation to their respective GDP.

Despite numerous declarations and meetings at the ministerial levels, integration within the Lublin Triangle is not continued. A lack of cooperation and the reorientation of the foreign policy to Germany by President Zelenskyy inhibit integration of the three states. The dwindling momentum of the cooperation between the L3 member states results from different approaches to specific policies and the precedence of national interests over the idea of multilateral cooperation. This also has roots in past experiences. Certain symbols and myths ignite ideological disputes and polarise the societies and nations, creating hurdles to develop joint action across multiple areas. They are often used by groups representing various political options. The current processes of creating a Central European community and national identities do not necessarily mean breaking with the past but require mutual understanding, tolerance, and cooperation.³⁹

Focusing on support for Ukraine's integration aspirations provides an opportunity to renew cooperation within the Lublin Triangle. Support from Poland and Lithuania for their Ukrainian partner on the long road to EU membership will certainly bring this regional cooperation format to more prominence and enhance its role in Central and Eastern Europe. The L3's role is to support the democratisation of Belarus and to include Belarus in the regional format and facilitate its integration with the European Union in the long run. This is especially vital in the era of the ongoing war in Ukraine and various Russian hybrid actions to destabilise the closest neighbours of Ukraine and the EU at large. One such example is the increasing instrumentation of migrants

³⁸ Kuczyńska-Zonik & Drabczuk, 2021: 3.

³⁹ See Kuczyńska-Zonik & Olchowski, 2023.

controlled by the Russian and Belarusian regime, first on the borders with Poland and Lithuania, and now extended to the border with Finland. Therefore, joint action of the Lublin Triangle member states is key to counteract the military and hybrid warfare and to support Ukraine's aspirations to integrate into the European Union.

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