

POLAND-LITHUANIA BINOMINAL AND THE EVOLUTION PROSPECTS OF THE LUBLIN TRIANGLE

Andreea-Amalia STĂNICĂ

Ph.D. Student, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA)

andreea.stanica.21@drd.snspa.ro

***Abstract:** In the context of the annexation of Crimea, the need to counterbalance the political influence of the Russian Federation in the extreme central-eastern region, severely affected by the manipulation of the euro-atlantic base by the Soviet reminiscences, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine laid the foundations of a military brigade and the Lublin Triangle. The strategic importance of cooperation formats is gaining new value in the context of the current aggression by the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine. The Lublin Triangle is based on historical congruences, in the first part of the research being studied this dimension, namely the Polish-Lithuanian relations and the way in which the regional binomial evolved in order to form the current cooperation platform. Subsequently, taking into account the presentation of the foundations that led to the development of the trilateral, the study will focus on analyzing the cooperation format "Lublin Triangle" from 2020 to the present, respectively the evolutionary perspectives of the partnership in the current geopolitical context. Also, in order to achieve a comprehensive approach, the emphasis will be on the trajectory of the common military formation and its role in consolidating the eastern flank. An important role in the research will be played by the quantitative and qualitative methodology, intertwined, for a better understanding of the subject under study.*

***Keywords:** Poland; Lithuania; Ukraine; Lublin Triangle; Cooperation; East Flank; Litpolukrbrig.*

Introduction

With the central objective of countering the threat of the Russian Federation in Central and Eastern Europe, in 2014, marked by the invasion of the Crimean Peninsula, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine formulated the initiative to develop a joint military brigade. Subsequently, in 2020, in order to deepen multidimensional cooperation, the three states laid the foundations for a broad-based cooperation platform, the Lublin Triangle. Through these regional cooperation arrangements, the partner states have a significant strategic position in strengthening the eastern flank.

1. Polish-Lithuanian relations – the foundation of the Lublin Triangle format

Rather than aligning with the current Euro-Atlantic goals, Poland and Lithuania have built a stable regional binomial over the centuries, a position generated by the relations based on the period in which they formed a single state.

However, it is important to note that the cooperative relationship between the two states experienced a significant decline in the interwar period and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Zajaczkowski n.d.). Even if after 1990 the two states sought to identify unitary initiatives to solve common problems affecting the political, economic and social dimensions of the state, the differences regarding the interpretation of the historical course did not take long to appear (Zajaczkowski n.d.). The destabilization of Polish-Lithuanian relations was based on the issue of the significant discrepancy of the share of the minority of each nation on the territory of the other.

Therefore, the problems were raised by the Polish minority population in Lithuania, which is about seven times larger than that of the neighboring state, and by the scenario that there was a hidden goal of Poland to expand culturally and then territorially (Zajaczkowski

n.d.). Mutual relations were deeply affected during the period when the Lithuanian state, in its desire for independence (1989-1991), faced the neutrality of the Polish minority on its territory, the Polish population not intending to support Lithuania (Zajaczkowski n.d.). However, the Polish authorities stated that Warsaw's foreign policy had among its objectives the achievement of the status of an independent state of Lithuania (Zajaczkowski n.d.). In the period that followed, relations were hampered by the continuation of minority issues, the differences being indisputable in the context of the postponement of the steps to sign an interstate agreement between the two neighboring countries.

With the only basis for cooperation, the “*Declaration of Friendship and Good Neighborhood Cooperation*” (1992), the two states have chosen to strengthen a partnership with Ukraine by 2020. Thus, on 28 July 2020, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, through the Foreign Ministers meeting in Poland in Lublin, decided to cooperate in the multilateral format, the Lublin Triangle (Obszarski 2021). Both the location of this first meeting and the name of the group have historical connotations, Lublin being the city where the union of the Kingdom of Poland with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was established in 1569 (Jakub 2020). It should be noted that the Lublin Union (active federation until 1795) it was entirely in the territories of present-day Poland, Lithuania and Belarus, and fragmented into the territorial segments of Ukraine, Latvia and the Russian Federation (Snyder 2003).



Figure no 1. Lublin Triangle- Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine

Source: (University Maria Curie-Sklodowska 2021)

In essence, the current form of cooperation between the three states is aimed at both supporting Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic path and deepening multidimensional cooperation, including regional security, defense, economic and reform (Popescu 2020). According to the document signed by the officials of Warsaw, Vilnius and Kiev, the three actors involved undertake to meet regularly, most likely to address the various issues that have arisen in the dynamic regional and international security environment (Popescu 2020).

It is important to note that the recent initiative of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine is a continuation of the military cooperation efforts formulated in 2014, thus extending the cooperation area “*through bilateral and trilateral activities and by exploiting all possibilities created by NATO*”.

In the incipient context of the aggression carried out by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, respectively in December 2021, the presidents of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine participated in the first Summit of the Lublin Triangle format. The meeting of the three officials was a confirmation of support for Ukraine's integration into NATO, with the Ukrainian president saying it was a "*show of solidarity and support*", as well as guarantees for "*deepening the strategic partnership*" between the three states (DefenceRomania 2021).

The reactions of the representatives of the tripartite regional alliance did not take long to appear during the deepening of the illegal aggression orchestrated by the Russian state on the Ukrainian territory, so in March 2022, the prime ministers of the three countries asked the international community in a meeting of much harsher sanctions on Moscow (Teleradio-Moldova 2022).

We must also take into account the energy approach started by Lithuania in May 2022, with the Lithuanian state inaugurating the GIPL (Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania) gas pipeline, which will provide Poland with the necessary resources to achieve the goal of developing energy independence from the Russian Federation (European Commission 2022). This initiative reiterates the sustained support between the two states, which, beyond the support provided to Ukraine in the context of the current invasion, are managing to strengthen their strategic position.

From the point of view of the possibilities of extending the cooperation format, the quadruple version discussed by Polish officials could include Romania (Zhelikhovskiyi 2020). The scenario formulated in 2020 does not raise questions, taking into account Romania's status as a member of the EU and NATO strategically positioned on the Black Sea. However, so far, the three partner states of the Lublin Triangle have not initiated efforts to involve Bucharest or another regional actor, the format remaining trilateral.

2. Litpolukrbrig Brigade

Taking into account the need for regional cooperation to strengthen the eastern flank of the North Atlantic Organization, in September 2014, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine signed the agreement to form the Litpolukrbrig Brigade. The initiative to create a unitary military formation was first proposed by representatives of the three states' defense ministries at a meeting under the auspices of the European Union in 2007 (Litpolukrbrig 2019).

According to the Technical Agreement signed on July 24, 2015, in Ukraine by the three Ministries of Defense, the mission of the brigade is to work together in international peacekeeping missions to strengthen military cooperation at the regional level, in line with the provisions and principles international law (Litpolukrbrig 2018).

Subsequently, in 2017, following the participation in the official inauguration ceremony in 2016, an amendment to the Cooperation Agreement was signed by the defense ministers of the partner states at that time. During the meeting, the representative of Poland said that through the initiative both the brigade and the people will act to counter any threat to regional security (Ukrainian Government 2017).

The military format located in the eastern city of Poland, Lublin, which includes military personnel from the three countries, is, according to the statement of the Polish Minister of Defense, the way in which the three states will be able to fight a possible enemy actor, creating also a binder of mutual assistance (Ukrainian Government 2017). In this regard, the representative of Poland stated at the time of signing the agreement: "*Today we want and we will help Ukraine, which has been attacked by Eastern imperialism, in order to ensure peace, cooperation and a good future for our people*" (Ukrainian Government 2017).

From a structural point of view, the brigade consists of three infantry battalions distributed by Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine and special units (The Baltic Times 2015). In

terms of hierarchy of leadership, the military unit is led by a Polish officer, seconded by a Lithuanian officer, and its members are led by a Ukrainian officer (The Baltic Times 2015).

In order to develop the operational capacity of the soldiers who are part of the brigade, they are subjected to a two-way process of individual and collective training. It is worth mentioning that in the context of training, the US military is present in the National Guard of California, Illinois and Pennsylvania (Litpolukrbrig 2019). The level of applicability and mastery of the training is further verified by participating in international exercises, Litpolukrbrig being part of the exercises Agile Spirit, Maple Arch and Rapid Trident (Litpolukrbrig 2019). The US, Ukraine, Georgia and the allied forces were involved in the organization of the exercises, actors who took an active part in strengthening the brigade's defensive character.

To align the Ukrainian armed forces with Euro-Atlantic military standards, the brigade is involved in the training of Ukrainian personnel who are part of the JMTG-U (US-led multinational task force) (Litpolukrbrig 2019). Thus, through the advice of Ukrainian military instructors, Litpolukrbrig is an important player in strengthening the eastern flank in terms of regional defense and security.

Conclusions

The formats of cooperation developed by the states of Central and Eastern Europe represent a major step, both for the national consolidation of the states and for the stabilization of the climate of peace and security at the regional level.

Aligning the goals of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, which are in line with those of the North Atlantic Alliance, is an awareness of the three states' important role in ensuring regional security. In this sense, given the current intervention in Ukraine, the Lublin Triangle partnership acquires new strategic values, its position on the world stage and the agenda of objectives can be improved through cooperation with other regional formats, the Three Seas Initiative and Bucharest 9.

Given the aggression of the Russian Federation and the pressure on Ukraine contrary to the provisions of public international law, a well-calibrated rhetoric of the Lublin Triangle format, in good coordination with the Litpolukrbrig Brigade, can fuel the growing importance of the trilateral regionally and internationally.

The Lublin Triangle can also contribute to the development of a sustained effort in collaboration with Western partners- the European regional powers, the USA, NATO and the EU. Cooperation through the involvement of stable and relevant partnerships on the international stage can transform the cooperation format from a recent and shy one into a coherent and stable regional platform, a regional shield to deal with threats to the West.

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