

PEACE AND SECURITY

# GRAND STRATEGY OF SMALL ALLIANCES OF UKRAINE: USE OF POTENTIAL AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES

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Adjusting to a world of shifting alliances, the Grand Strategy of Small Alliances remains a relevant and effective approach for the future of international relations, provided alliances' activities are adapted to meet new challenges.



The dynamic development of the Lublin Triangle calls for prioritizing security cooperation and logistics infrastructure and increasing the Triangle's visibility.



The success of tripartite formats such as the Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova, Ukraine-Poland-Great Britain, and the Associated Trio depends on initiating expert and political discussions, identifying common denominators, and focusing on shared priorities of partner states.



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## INTRODUCTION

In August 2021, the new Strategy of Ukraine’s foreign policy activity entered into force.<sup>1</sup> The document stipulates that “in order to improve the international security environment, foreign policy efforts will be directed to the maximum use of existing regional formats (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Bucharest Nine, Visegrad Group, Lublin Triangle, Organization for Democracy and Economic Development - GUAM, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), the Weimar Triangle, etc.) to stabilize the security situation in the region through Ukraine’s participation in joint security and defence initiatives”. Prospective vectors were defined as follows: the development of tripartite cooperation between Ukraine, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Lithuania in the formats of the Lublin Triangle, the Ukraine-Poland-Lithuania Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the military component (the joint Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG); establishment of a strategic partnership with Romania given the role of this state in the EU, NATO and its strong position in the system of regional security of the Black Sea region, in particular, its energy component; the initiation of close cooperation in the formats of “triangles” Ukraine - the Republic of Poland - Romania, Ukraine - Romania - the Republic of Moldova to form a common agenda with topical issues in the spheres of foreign policy, security, defence, economy, regional cooperation. Türkiye was also mentioned among the priorities, in particular, it was said that “maintaining political dialogue on outside the heads of state, in particular in the format of the high-level Strategic Council between Ukraine and the Republic of Türkiye, as well as the development of a new mechanism of political and security consultations at the level of foreign ministers and ministers of defence (“Quadriga” format).

The document also separately mentioned the need for further development of “relations with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland” and “Strategic partnership with the Republic of Poland in European, Euro-Atlantic, regional and bilateral dimensions.” Subsequently, at the beginning of February, these priorities were embodied in the formation of a new triangle of Ukraine, Poland and Great Britain. Commenting on the launch of the format, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, noted that this format is part of the strategy of small alli-

ances as a proactive foreign policy of Ukraine, mentioned in the Strategy of Foreign Policy of Ukraine. The minister also noted: “Ukraine cannot expect security and prosperity somewhere in the future when it becomes a member of the EU and NATO. Therefore, in this way, today it is already trying to achieve practical strengthening, grouping friendly and close in spirit countries into small alliances.”<sup>2</sup>

The experts polled by “Ukrainian Prism” generally agree with this statement<sup>3</sup>. They agree that the key to the success of small alliances, like any other multilateral project, is the presence of common interests and a common vision for their implementation. The magnitude and adequacy of the set goals are decisive for the success or failure of each specific project.

On February 24, 2022, the international political situation changed significantly. The Russian invasion of Ukraine became a trigger for adjusting priorities. On February 28, 2022, Ukraine submitted an application to join the European Union, and on June 23, the leaders of 27 EU member states decided to grant Ukraine the status of a candidate for EU membership. On September 30, 2022, Ukraine submitted an application to join NATO. These decisions meet the expectations of Ukrainian citizens. According to the survey<sup>4</sup> organised by the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” in partnership with the representative office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Ukraine, in October 2022 (CAWI method, sample in Ukraine – 1,213 people, maximum error within 2.8%) 91% of Ukrainians believe that Ukraine should become a member of the EU. At the same time, 60% believe that this should happen within 1 year. 90% of Ukrainians believe that Ukraine should become a member of NATO, and 63% of them believe that this should happen within 1 year.

At the same time, the “Grand Strategy of Small Alliances” also remains relevant, and regional formats continue to show activity. Therefore, it is now necessary to assess their effectiveness under new circumstances, define priority alliances and fill their activities with content that meets cur-

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4482021-40017>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-kuleba-novyj-format-spiivpratsi-polshcha-velyka-brytaniia/31681513.html>

<sup>3</sup> In December 2022, the Foreign Policy Council «Ukrainian Prism» conducted 5 in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts from Great Britain, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic.

<sup>4</sup> The survey was conducted in Ukraine in October 2022 using the CAWI method, covered a sample of 1213 people, the maximum error is within 2.8%.

rent challenges, to calibrate goals and plans for their implementation following the current international situation.

As noted by the experts interviewed by “Ukrainian Prism”, another key to the success of small alliances is their potential as lobbyists and the ability to use soft power. “The effectiveness of small alliances does not

depend on their size, but on the quality of their content, diplomatic and lobbying capabilities. Abilities play a key role here. Another important factor is the cohesion of alliances - to what extent the values of the members coincide, how cohesive are the coordination mechanisms, whether there is a friendly political will to cooperate and promote common goals.”

## 1

## THE ACTIVITY OF SMALL ALLIANCES AND ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE

The most active format during the last year was the Lublin Triangle, which, in addition to Ukraine, also includes Lithuania and Poland. On November 26, 2022, the Prime Ministers of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki, and Ingrida Šimonite, Prime Ministers of Lithuania, signed a joint statement with their Ukrainian counterpart, Denys Shmyhal, during their visit to Kyiv<sup>5</sup>, in which they called on the world to recognize the common goal of liberating the entire territory of Ukraine. On January 11, 2023, the summit of the Lublin Triangle took place in Lviv. The President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi, the President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda and the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda signed a joint declaration<sup>6</sup>, which confirms the centuries-old historical ties between Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland and defines the priority areas of cooperation of the Lublin Triangle, in particular within the strategic course of the Ukrainian state to acquire full membership in the EU and NATO, notes the intention of Lithuania and Poland to continue providing powerful military, technical, defence, humanitarian and other support to Ukraine and supports the convening of the Global Peace Formula Summit to consolidate international support for the peace plan presented by President Volodymyr Zelenskyi.

The Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova “triangle” was also activated last year. On September 15, 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, together with the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, Nicolae Popescu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Bogdan Aurescu, and several other officials from the three countries, met in Odesa at the first informal ministerial meeting in this format. During the meeting, the ministers agreed to conclude a tripartite agreement to strengthen the interconnection of energy supply between the three countries and to start working with the European Commission for its immediate implementation, including financing; agreed to increase bilateral commercial electricity supplies under short-, medium- and long-term contracts between companies of the countries; expressed readiness to hold regular meetings and agreed to dedicate the next

meeting to building the transit potential of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Romania; confirmed their readiness to work on further liberalization and simplification of the entry regime for citizens of Ukraine during the war-time period; pledged to improve coordination on countering disinformation and other forms of hybrid warfare.<sup>7</sup> Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu announced the organization of a new meeting at the level of the heads of foreign affairs of Romania, Ukraine and Moldova in February 2023.<sup>8</sup> However, this summit has not yet taken place. The presidents of Moldova and Romania also visited Ukraine during the year.

Activity in the formats of the “Quadrige” with Türkiye and the “triangle” Ukraine - Poland - Great Britain was less noticeable. At the same time, the leaders of the countries that are part of these associations met on a bilateral level. The President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Ukraine on August 18, 2022, and the meetings of President Zelenskyi with the President of Poland and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain generally took place permanently, although not in a tripartite format.

Much lower dynamics were noticed in the “Associated Trio” format. Among the objective reasons for this is the fact that, unlike Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia did not receive the status of a candidate state for membership in the European Union, and the aggravation of relations between Kyiv and Tbilisi. In particular, Ukraine blames Georgia for not providing Ukraine with military aid and even refusing to hand over the Buk anti-aircraft missile systems that Ukraine provided to Tbilisi during the Russian attack in 2008.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Iraklii Garibashvili, said that the Ukrainian authorities are doing everything to prevent the war with Russia from spilling over into the territory of his country.<sup>10</sup> Such circumstances make the intensification of contacts and cooperation within the framework of the “trio” unlikely.

5 <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/spilna-zayava-premyer-ministriv-ukrayini-litovskoyi-respubliki-ta-respublika-polshcha-pro-rezultati-zustrichi-lyublinskogo-trikutnika>

6 <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/u-lvovi-prezidenti-ukrayini-litvi-ta-polshi-pidpisali-spilnu-80313>

7 <https://suspilne.media/282278-ukraina-rumunia-ta-moldova-zapocatkuvali-novij-tristoronnij-format-spivpraci/>

8 <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2023/01/25/7154865/>

9 <https://hromadske.ua/posts/gruziya-vidmovilasya-povernuti-zrk-buk-yaki-ukrayina-nadala-pid-chas-vijni-2008-roku-diplomat>

10 [https://lb.ua/world/2023/02/11/545563\\_premier\\_gruzii\\_zayaviv\\_scho\\_ukraina.html](https://lb.ua/world/2023/02/11/545563_premier_gruzii_zayaviv_scho_ukraina.html)

To assess the potential of “small alliances”, it makes sense to also assess the scale of political, military-political, economic and sanctioning support from the states included in these formats, as well as the prospects of using these formats for further integration into the EU and NATO, which is currently a key priority.

According to the estimates of the Kiel Institute of World Economy<sup>11</sup>, the level of assistance provided to Ukraine as of December 2022 is as follows:

Great Britain: Total commitments - €7.082 billion (second in the ranking by total amount), 0.258% of GDP (sixth in the ranking by share of GDP), humanitarian commitments - €0.398 billion (fourth in the ranking by total amount), 0.014 % of GDP (18th in the ranking by the share of GDP), financial liabilities – €2.555 billion (second in the ranking by financial liabilities), 0.093% of GDP (fourth in the ranking by the share of GDP), military liabilities – €4.129 billion (second in the ranking), 0.150% of GDP (eighth in the ranking by share of GDP).

Poland: Total commitments – €3.001 billion (fifth in the ranking by total amount), 0.505% of GDP (third in the ranking by share of GDP), humanitarian commitments – €0.175 billion (ninth in the ranking), 0.029 % of GDP (eighth in the ranking by share of GDP), financial liabilities – €1.003 billion (fifth in the ranking), 0.169% of GDP (first in the ranking by share of GDP), military liabilities – €1.822 billion (fourth in rating), 0.307% of GDP (fourth in the rating by share of GDP).

Lithuania: Total commitments – €0.261 billion (21st in the ranking by total amount), 0.463% of GDP (fourth in the ranking by share of GDP), humanitarian commitments – €0.057 billion (19th in the overall ranking), 0.101% of GDP (second in the rating by share of GDP), financial liabilities – €0.005 billion (18th in the rating), 0.009% of GDP (17th in the rating by share of GDP), military liabilities – €0.199 billion (17th in the rating), 0.353% GDP (third in the rating by share of GDP).

Türkiye: total commitments - €0.064 billion (30th in the ranking by total amount), 0.009% of GDP (33rd in the ranking by share of GDP), humanitarian commitments - €0.000 billion (39th in the ranking by share of GDP; volume information aid is not open) 0.000% of GDP (38 in the rating by share of GDP), financial commitments - none (unrated), military commitments - 0.064 billion € (24 in the rating), 0.009% of GDP (25 in the rating by share GDP).

Romania: total commitments - €0.011 billion (35th in the ranking by total amount), 0.004% of GDP (38th in the ranking by share of GDP), humanitarian commitments - €0.008 billion (24th in the ranking), 0.003% of GDP (31 in the rating by the share of GDP), financial commitments -

none (unrated), military commitments - 0.003 billion € (31 in the overall rating), 0.001% of GDP (29 in the rating by the share of GDP).

However, the Kiel Institute of the World Economy did not measure the amount of aid from Moldova and Georgia.

Most of the states that are part of the “small alliances with Ukraine” also joined the sanctions imposed on Russia. The UK has initiated and is implementing its own sanctions packages<sup>12</sup>. Poland, Lithuania and Romania are part of the pan-European sanctions mechanism.<sup>13</sup>

The situation is somewhat different with Türkiye, which is a member of NATO, has a customs union with the EU and is a strategic partner of Ukraine. However, official Ankara did not join the sanctions against Russia.

Back in April 2022, Moldova also declared its unwillingness to join the sanctions. The corresponding statement was made public by the President of Moldova, Maya Sandu<sup>14</sup>. However, over time this categorical position has changed. Already in June 2022, the Speaker of the Parliament of Moldova admitted the possibility of Moldova joining the European sanctions.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the Moldovan state accepted more than 80,000 Ukrainian refugees, providing them with transport and assistance after crossing the border<sup>16</sup>.

Instead, Georgia refused to apply the restrictions, and the data from the relevant services and structures of Georgia is not enough to convincingly testify that Georgia does not allow the Russians to circumvent the sanctions.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, if Georgia allows the resumption of air traffic with Russia, it risks falling under European sanctions.<sup>18</sup>

Taking into account the above and the dynamics of relations with partners, the attachment of Ukrainians to the Lublin triangle seems logical. According to a survey conducted by the research company InfoSapiens commissioned by the New Europe Center, among the international organizations most trusted by Ukrainians, the Lublin Triangle ranks fourth (65.5%) after the EU (84%), NATO (76%) and the G7 (71%).<sup>19</sup>

11 [https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine-support-tracker/](https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/)

12 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-sanctions-on-russia>

13 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/sanctions-against-russia-explained/>

14 <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/3446165-sandu-explains-moldovas-move-not-to-join-russia-sanctions.html>

15 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3514975-moldova-priednaetsa-do-sankcij-es-proti-rosii-spiker-parlamentu.html>

16 <https://midr.gov.md/ru/novosti/anta-nadaye-transport-dlya-ukrayinskikh-bizhenciv-nizhche-informaciya-pro-transportni-marshruti>

17 [https://idfi.ge/en/georgias\\_implementation\\_of\\_the\\_international\\_sanctions\\_imposed\\_against\\_russia](https://idfi.ge/en/georgias_implementation_of_the_international_sanctions_imposed_against_russia)

18 <https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/georgia-will-face-eu-sanctions-if-it-resumes-air-service-with-russia/>

19 [http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Eurointegration\\_wartime\\_ukr.pdf](http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Eurointegration_wartime_ukr.pdf)

	United Kingdom	Poland	Lithuania	Türkiye	Romania	Moldova	Georgia
Visits of the political leadership to Ukraine	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Providing support	+	+	+	+	+	No data	No data
Implementing sanctions	+	+	+	-	+	+/-	+/-
Inclusion / Membership in the EU, NATO, G7	+	+	+	+	+	-	-

The added value of this association also lies in the fact that its parties - Lithuania and Poland - are also active participants in the promising regional Three Seas Initiative. At the same time, they are already promoting the interests of Ukraine in this Initiative. The Joint Declaration of the leaders of the Lublin Triangle states that the Presidents emphasize the importance of multi-level involvement of Ukraine as a participating state in activities within the framework of the Three Seas initiative. As full members of the Three Seas, Lithuania and Poland will promote Ukraine’s participation in various projects aimed at facilitating post-war recovery, particularly in the fields of energy infrastructure, transport and digitalization.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the events of the last year and the actions of governments have shown the high interest of Vilnius and Warsaw in strengthening regional security mechanisms. In this context, the importance of existing and future military cooperation within the framework of the Lublin Triangle is growing - joint exercises, data exchange, bilateral and trilateral defence production, countering disinformation, and strengthening the comprehensive resilience of societies.

Cooperation in the Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova “triangle” should be considered in the same vein. Cooperation in the fields of energy infrastructure and transport will gain more and more weight within the framework of this initiative, and taking into account that in 2023 Romania will host the Summit of the Three Seas Initiative, this can be used as an additional reason to discuss and agree on projects involving not only of Ukraine but also of Moldova.

The paradoxical situation consists of the “triangle” Ukraine - Poland - Great Britain. The member states of this format provide Ukraine with the largest amounts of aid, the level of political contacts at the highest level is consistently high, and in addition, London and Warsaw are advocates of a strict sanctions’ regime. Moreover, according to the survey organised by the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” in partnership with the representative office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Ukraine, 25% of Ukrainians are aware of the format. However, the format has no real content. During the last year, the leaders of Ukraine, Poland and Great Britain did not meet together even on the sidelines of other international summits. Experts interviewed

during this study suggest that the reason may be that “a ‘big power’ can be part of a ‘small alliance’, but in a situation where a ‘big power’ is not interested in fulfilling its obligations.” within the framework of the alliance, or the “great power” has interests that are wider than those of the “small alliance” or another organization, then the “great power” is not a very reliable partner.

However, there are cases of positive experiences involving the involvement of influential players in alliances, which was also emphasized by the interviewed experts. Let’s say “for the Eastern Partnership, it was very important to join the initiative of Germany, which was manifested in the visit of the German Chancellor to Prague in 2009 [for the inaugural summit of the initiative]. Having a larger partner or sponsor, even if it indirectly supports the coalition, is extremely important.” Therefore, taking into account the added value that Great Britain’s membership in the UN Security Council, G7 and NATO could provide to the format, we can talk about the prerequisites for forming the unification agenda. Its development deserves additional impulses and resources.

The “Quadriga” with Türkiye and the “Associated Trio”, as the above data indicates, have lost their dynamics, and in the case of Türkiye, it can be justified by strengthening communications at the level of the president, then in the case of the “Associated Trio», the format is frankly stagnating. Its development is hindered by both the fact that Georgia did not receive the status of a candidate for the EU and the friction between the governments of Ukraine and Georgia. In such conditions, the meaning of the format’s existence can only be to maintain contacts at the level of civil society, as the main driver of the European integration of the three states. Instead, the “Associated Trio” as a platform for intergovernmental cooperation is increasingly losing its meaning and is worth less and less effort and resources and may be mothballed until the change of power in Georgia. The argument in favour of the Trio is that, as noted by the experts interviewed by “Ukrainian Prism”, “the process of integration into the EU usually takes place in the format of alliances, states do not integrate one by one. At least it’s easier to do for a few countries.”

20 <https://armyinform.com.ua/2023/01/11/spilna-deklaracija-prezydentiv-lyublinskogo-trykutnyka-za-rezultatamy-drugogosamitu/>



## 2

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the Strategy of Foreign Policy of Ukraine needs adjustment on the part of small alliances.

1. The dynamic development of the Lublin Triangle allows this association to set new ambitious goals. Security cooperation and work on the construction of new logistics chains with the formation of the corresponding infrastructure should remain a priority. In this context, it is worth mentioning the intention of Ukraine and Poland to build a Eurorail that would connect the capitals of both states. In addition, one should also remember Ukraine's accession to the Trans-European transport network and the corresponding inclusion of the state in the EU logistics corridors, some of which cross the Ukrainian-Polish border. Military-political and military-technical cooperation and the creation of relevant consortia, including for the launch or development of enterprises for the production of weapons and ammunition, will also remain a promising direction.
2. Increasing the visibility of the Lublin triangle also seems appropriate. In this context, it will be appropriate to hold side events/summits on the sidelines of the summits of larger associations, such as the Bucharest Nine, the Three Seas Initiative, the EU and NATO, as well as deepening the cooperation of civil society and the expert community of the three states.
3. The Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova format should become not only a platform for the formation of effective tripartite cooperation, but also a platform for promoting the European integration agenda of Ukraine and Moldova, in which Romania can act as one of the advocates of the "Associated Duet" at the EU level, and also transfer to Ukraine and Moldova own know-how based on the Romanian experience of European integration.
4. To ensure the effective development of the "triangle" format of Ukraine, Poland and Great Britain, it is necessary to initiate and develop an expert and political discussion regarding the goals and priorities of the participating states, which may differ depending on the degree of geopolitical ambitions of the partner states, identify common denominators, and specifically to concentrate the main attention of the association on them. The potential of the "triangle" remains significant and requires the formation of a "Road Map" for its development.
5. Taking into account that the "Associated Trio" format seems to have exhausted itself and may be preserved until the political changes in Georgia, the decision on the "conservation" of the format can be supplemented by an appropriate diplomatic démarche and substantiated by assessments of the regime in Georgia provided by European institutions.



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Adjusting to a world of shifting alliances, the Grand Strategy of Small Alliances remains a relevant and effective approach for the future of international relations, provided alliances' activities are adapted to meet new challenges.



The dynamic development of the Lublin Triangle calls for prioritizing security cooperation and logistics infrastructure and increasing the Triangle's visibility.



The success of tripartite formats such as the Ukraine-Romania-Republic of Moldova, Ukraine-Poland-Great Britain, and the Associated Trio depends on initiating expert and political discussions, identifying common denominators, and focusing on shared priorities of partner states.