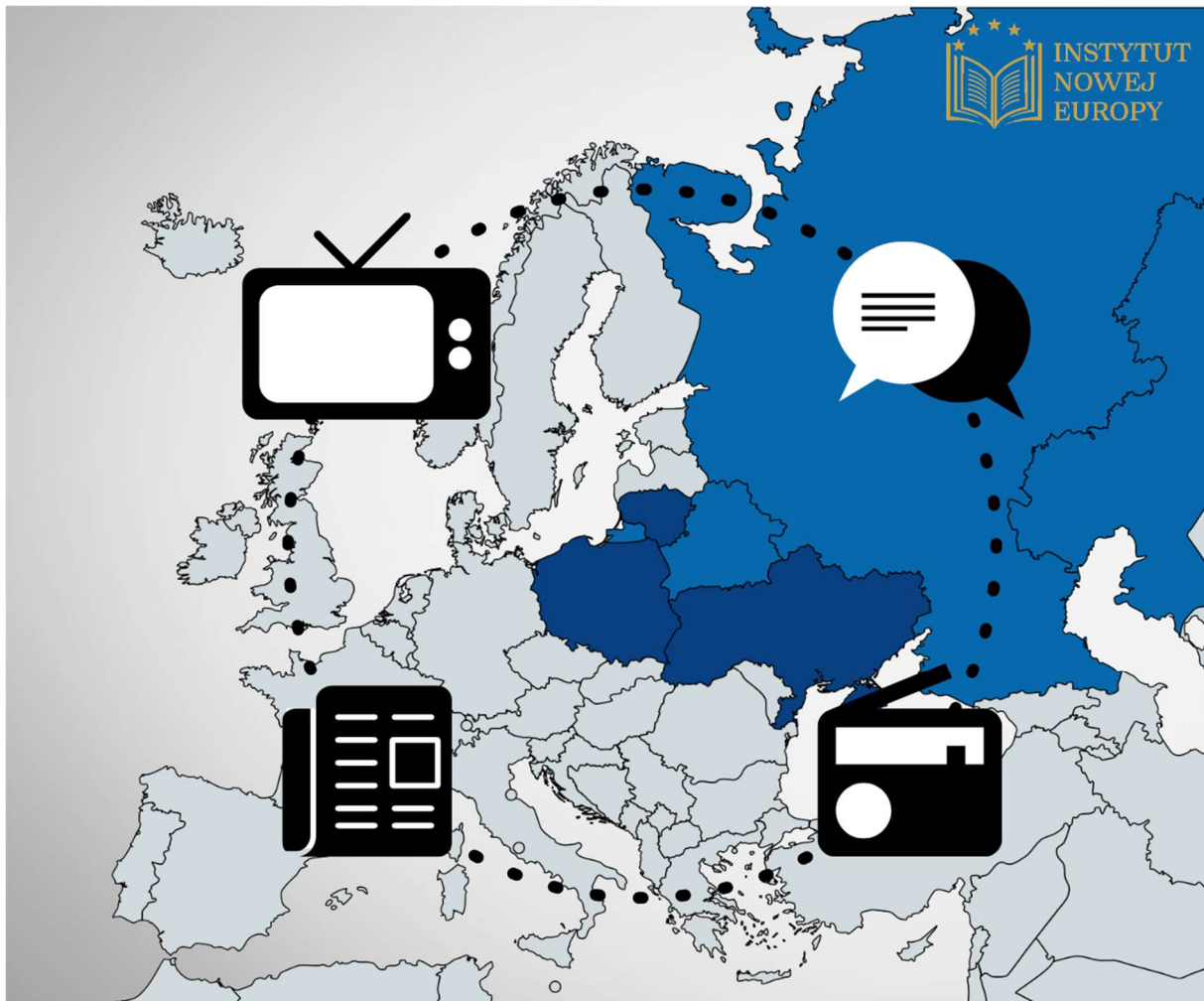


DR ALEKSANDER OLECH

# THE LUBLIN TRIANGLE

## MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS





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## Introduction

Information about the Lublin Triangle, which was established on July 28, 2020 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, was not the main subject of consideration in the global media, leading think tanks did not lay out the possible changes in the security environment, and independent experts did not herald that it would be an initiative comparable, for instance, to the Visegrad Group. Nevertheless, the Lublin Triangle may be of a particular importance if its complementary political, economic and military potential is used, even as an eastern shield for NATO and the EU. It is also a chance for the three founders to initiate their own projects on the international arena, having the support of two other states already at the beginning. In view of the above, it seems reasonable to verify how the trilateral agreement is approached by journalists and experts in the countries for which the joining of forces of the three actors is important. In the course of this study, the media discourse in Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, member states of the trilateral agreement, Russia and Belarus, which are not members of the alliance but have a strong influence on the situation in the Central and Eastern Europe region, and Kazakhstan, which is pursuing a two-track policy, on the one hand opposing the Russian Federation and moving closer to the EU, and on the other maintaining pro-Kremlin rhetoric, was taken into account. It was adopted that the most appropriate form would be to examine the narrative on the Lublin Triangle by pro-state media (including national media), leading think tanks, which are organizational state entities, and non-governmental institutions supporting the current authorities in these countries.

Information made available in the public sphere has a different format, character and very often contains an emotional charge, imposed by the author, who at the beginning defines the described news as positive or negative. It is related to the whole structure of the presented text, from the title, through the main thesis, to the photographs. Many providers of publicly accessible studies fall into this trap because they wish to gather interest in their content to the greatest extent possible and they want to entice the reader to their material only, and thus they report either in a very aggressive and uncompromising way, or they choose a completely different direction, entirely pro-state, giving an uncritical and flattering commentary. Therefore, by deciding on one information provider, the recipient closes oneself to other services, portraying certain events in a completely different light. Simultaneously, a symptomatic element of the modern world of information is the dilemma of choosing sources, as thousands of websites are available and it is difficult to verify what is true and what is false. Moreover, many newspapers, television stations, think tanks, and NGOs create their own image of

particular events, conveying to the recipient a deformed vision of reality and, moreover, interjecting considerations that distort the original character of the news. Such a perspective results in the fact that, in order to receive a specific dose of reliable articles, it is necessary to diversify sources - by also reading portals with which these one may disagree with. Preferably, if these are different information transmitters (including foreign ones), which will enable a multifaceted analysis of the event and a look at the problem from different angles, one would take into account contrasting arguments.

Nowadays, the European media space is dominated by media coverage from the United States, Great Britain, France and Germany. The content prepared in Central and Eastern Europe is not treated equally to that from the West and, in particular, cooperation within the European Union with information relays from Russia, Ukraine and even Poland is approached with a great deal of caution. Therefore, a dissonance appears in the form of gaining knowledge on topics strictly related to a particular region or event. Undoubtedly, the organization of the Lublin Triangle, involving Warsaw, Vilnius and Kiev, is a project of particular importance for the region of Central and Eastern Europe. For this reason, opinions of the media and experts from countries which have been influencing each other for decades may prove to be a valuable source of knowledge. Providing a multifaceted and multiregional view of the trilateral initiative, especially in the era of disinformation, is a chance to define the actual approach to the formed alliance by the state media included in the inquiry. Moreover, it enables the determination of the sentiments in the international environment towards Poland and its foreign policy. It should be emphasised that each individual analysis of news from different services (e.g. French, Polish and Russian) would provide different conclusions and assessments. Therefore, it was crucial to present different assessments of an international initiative which may have a significant impact on the cooperation between Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine. Multidirectional analysis of the Lublin Triangle concept is intended to serve the public, which deserves to receive content as close to the truth as possible. Moreover, it is an attempt to combat disinformation and international tensions, as states accuse each other of disseminating false information.

## Lithuania

While analyzing Lithuanian media discourse with regard to commentaries concerning the Lublin Triangle, articles published in the following websites were taken into consideration: *Lrytas*<sup>1</sup>, *Respublika*<sup>2</sup> and *Delfi*<sup>3</sup>, as well as the comments of Arunas Spraunius, expert from the Lithuanian think tank *Voras*<sup>4</sup> were analyzed. Essentially, the Lithuanian media emphasizes the geopolitical nature of the Lublin Triangle initiative and indicate that the Russian threat is one of the main impulses behind the establishment of this cooperation format. Whereas, commentaries emerging from think tanks assess this project ambiguously, detailing challenges and adversities to the jointly implemented agenda.

The article published by *Lrytas* service identifies three primary levels of cooperation among the countries in the Lublin Triangle Initiative: countering Russian aggression, supporting Ukraine, and joint efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the first level, the scale of Russian activities bearing the character of a common security threat to the countries of the Central and Eastern European region is emphasized. In terms of assistance to Ukraine, the service draws attention to Lithuania's commitment to coordinate efforts to respect international law and to oppose the operations undertaken by the Russian Federation, i.e. the illegal occupation of Crimea and violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity by supporting pro-Russian separatists. It also distinguishes the need to continue cooperation aimed at assisting Ukraine in the process of integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutional area and providing support in attempts to implement political and economic reforms. In the field of combating the pandemic, the commitment to conduct joint activities aimed at providing mutual assistance in crisis situations is emphasized<sup>5</sup>.

Linus Linkevičius, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister at that time, points to the geopolitical nature of the Lublin Triangle initiative in his statement for the *Respublika* internet portal<sup>6</sup>. The minister highlights that the experience gained during the political transformation

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<sup>1</sup> Lrytas, *Lietuva, Lenkija ir Ukraina sutarė dėl paramos kovoje prieš Rusijos agresiją, koronavirusą*, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2020/07/28/news/lietuva-lenkija-ir-ukraina-kuria-liublino-trikampi--15766245/>, accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>2</sup> P. Levickytė, *L. Linkevičius apie „Liublino trikampį“: tai ne dirbtinis formatas (11)*, [https://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/lietuva/kitos\\_lietuvos\\_zinios/linkevicius\\_apie\\_liublino\\_trikampi\\_tai\\_ne\\_dirbtinis\\_formatas](https://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/lietuva/kitos_lietuvos_zinios/linkevicius_apie_liublino_trikampi_tai_ne_dirbtinis_formatas), accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>3</sup> Delfi, *Intelektualai buria Lietuvai, Lenkijai, Ukrainai ir baltarusių tautos „Liublino ketvertą“ (67)*, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/intelektualai-buria-lietuvai-lenkijai-ukrainai-ir-baltarusiu-tautos-liublino-ketverta.d?id=85318205>, accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>4</sup> A. Spraunius, *Kas tai ir kam tai?*, <https://www.voras.online/produkt/obsestvo/Kas-tai-ir-kam-tai/>, accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>5</sup> Lrytas, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> P. Levickytė, *op. cit.*

and the developed solutions, both on the Lithuanian and the Polish side, should be applied in Ukraine. L. Linkevičius also emphasizes the significant role of Lithuania and Poland in the process of integrating Ukraine into the European Union and NATO, which is one of the key postulates in the implemented agenda. In the political agenda of the Lublin Triangle the Minister foregrounds the matters related to the promotion of strengthening cooperation in the field of security, deepening of trilateral military and defence ties with the use of the full range of instruments within the EU and NATO, development of economic cooperation, as well as support for Ukraine in its pro-European aspirations.

The *Delfi* portal presents the result of a four-party format debate among analysts from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, organized by the Lithuanian President's Office. The discussion focused primarily on the future vision of expanding the Lublin Triangle to Belarus, thus transforming it into the “Lublin Quartet”<sup>7</sup>. Belarusian analyst Francišak Viačorka referred to the ongoing political impasse by pointing to the birth of a civil society in Belarus. According to his predictions, after a change of power in Minsk, there will be no other way but to join the Triangle to establish a genuine alliance between states with similar interests. Meanwhile Sławomir Dębski, director of the *Polish Institute of International Affairs* (Polish: *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych - PISM*), proposed the concept of the “empty chair”. It would be based on leaving a symbolic, empty seat during all Lublin Triangle meetings, which would demonstrate the willingness of the alliance countries to allow a free Belarus to join this format in the future. Moreover, he also proposed to include the voice of Russian civil society in this initiative, but without indicating specific mechanisms of who and how it would be represented. Ukrainian expert Volodymyr Fesenko named preventing Russian aggression as the first priority of the Lublin Triangle, and described regional cooperation as the optimal instrument for containing the Russian Federation. Lithuanian expert Alvydas Nikžentaitis, who was present at the meeting, drew attention to the increase of regional awareness and expressed hope for the successful implementation of all postulates of the Lublin Triangle agenda.

Arūnas Spraunius, an expert from the Lithuanian think-tank *Voras*, points to the origins of the Lublin Triangle. The initiative began with the efforts of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz, which led to a reset of relations between Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania, and thus “brought them out of a deep crisis”<sup>8</sup>. The Lithuanian analyst devotes considerable attention to the actions taken by Zbigniew Rau, Czaputowicz's successor as head

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<sup>7</sup> Delfi, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> A. Spraunius, *op. cit.*

of the Polish diplomacy, who continues the hitherto existing policy of strengthening relations with the countries of the region, an example of which was the establishment of a new date for a meeting of the Polish-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation during a telephone conversation with Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba<sup>9</sup>. The role of the Lublin Triangle as a strengthening element of the significance of the Central and Eastern Europe region is also indicated, and this would be achieved through the development and harmonization of relations with the remaining states of the area - Moldova and Belarus. A. Spraunius points to the change in the stance of the Triangle states towards Belarus - before the presidential elections of August 2020, the political narrative of the formation oscillated around emphasizing the importance of good neighborly relations with the Belarusian state, while with the post-election political crisis it was transformed into a more firm and critical stance towards the ruling regime, denying Lukashenko further legitimacy. A drawback of the initiative is the pointed lack of a common strategy for the Lublin Triangle's actions towards the situation in Belarus. A. Spraunius emphasizes the positive aspects of the member states' actions at the level of internal declarations and providing assistance to Belarusian refugees, while the lack of coordinated actions within the framework of the Triangle definitely does not help to strengthen its significance in the international arena. Moreover, the analyst also mentions examples of unsuccessful regional ventures - the Three Seas Initiative concept initiated by Warsaw has been labeled as frozen, while GUAM (*Organization for Democracy and Development*), which brings together Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova, has not displayed any activity for quite some time. Considering the nature of the trilateral initiative, A. Spraunius expresses his concern about the marginalization of the Lublin Triangle on the international arena, which would prove the inability of the member states to develop a responsible regional policy.

## Conclusions

The media coverage regarding the establishment of the Lublin Triangle initiative primarily points out to Moscow's aggressive actions towards Vilnius as well as other NATO and EU member states. Lithuanian commentators draw attention to Russia's actions in Ukraine and indicate on the need to intensify actions aimed at supporting Kiev's pro-European

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<sup>9</sup> Міністерство закордонних справ України, Дмитро Кулеба: *Україна та Польща використовуватимуть всі можливості для поживлення торгівлі в умовах пандемії COVID*, <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-ukrayina-ta-polshcha-vikoristovuvatimut-vsi-mozhливosti-dlya-pozhavlennya-torgivli-v-umovah-pandemiyi-covid>, accessed: 18.06.2021.

ambitions, which, according to experts, would increase the level of regional security. Importantly, the ongoing crisis in Belarus is also a priority issue in the media discourse, but the lack of a common strategy within the Lublin Triangle has been identified as one of the major weaknesses of this international cooperation format.

The Lithuanian media discourse is characterized by a realistic approach to the concept of the trilateral agreement, as the authors pay attention both to the opportunities offered by such a format and to the threats resulting from the immaturity of this regional venture. Considering the sparse tools Lithuania has or is capable of having at its disposal, the development of the Lublin Triangle initiative may become an impulse for Lithuania to strengthen its position in the region. What is also worth noting is Lithuania's effort to develop a common stance on the Lublin Triangle forum towards the Russian Federation. These actions may be seen as a response to the increasingly aggressive foreign policy of Russia towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In Russian doctrine, the Baltic States are still regarded as the "near abroad" or the "sphere of vital interests", and NATO activities, including those in Lithuania, are regarded as a fundamental threat to the security of the Russian Federation.

It seems that from Lithuania's perspective the establishment of the Lublin Triangle is a platform for security, even though Lithuania itself does not aspire to attain a leadership role in this format. This is due, for example, to the lack of military capabilities. Simultaneously, this initiative may have a positive impact on the development of the political agenda of the Lithuanian state at the EU and NATO forums, as well as contribute to the strengthening of the role of Lithuania as a pro-Western partner that is actively involved in the issues relevant to the region.



While studying the pro-governmental part of the Polish media discourse on the Lublin Triangle, both journalistic articles and analytical papers published by think tanks were used. In the category of articles, information originating from the following news portals was analyzed: *TVP Info*<sup>10</sup> and *Radio Maryja*<sup>11</sup> as well as *Do Rzeczy*<sup>12</sup> and *wPolityce*<sup>13</sup> journals. The analysis also includes publications by Polish think tanks – *Polish Institute of International Affairs*<sup>14</sup> and *Centre for Eastern Studies* (Polish: *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich - OSW*)<sup>15</sup>.

The traditional media emphasizes the importance of Poland's role in the establishment of this cooperation format and, moreover, positively assess the prospects for political development of the venture. On the other hand, think tanks recognize specific benefits of the trilateral agreement, while pointing out certain challenges that may arise in the process of implementation of particular postulates.

Jacek Czaputowicz, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the initiators of the Lublin Triangle project, in his interview for *TVP Info* emphasized the substantial significance of the energy sector as one of the key dimensions of trilateral cooperation aimed at diversifying the sources and supply routes of energy resources, as well as the intention of progressive energy independence from the Russian Federation in order to protect itself against energy blackmail<sup>16</sup>. Poland's role was emphasized in the context of the attempts to establish closer cooperation with Ukraine and its support in the process of gaining the status of a “fully-fledged actor, co-developing the agenda” rather than being merely a subject of disputes and discussions in already existing forums.<sup>17</sup>. Apart from the above, Minister Czaputowicz draws attention to the unifying

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<sup>10</sup> TVP Info, *Czaputowicz: Celem Trójkąta Lubelskiego m.in. współpraca w zakresie dostępu do źródeł energii*, <https://www.tvp.info/49180542/jacek-czaputowicz-celem-trojkat-lubelskiego-min-wspolpraca-w-zakresie-dostepu-do-zrodel-energii-wieszwiecej>, accessed: 08.06.2021.

<sup>11</sup> Radio Maryja, *Trójkąt Lubelski – sposób Polski na polepszenie stosunków ze wschodnimi sąsiadami*, <https://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/trojkat-lubelski-sposob-polski-na-polepszenie-stosunkow-ze-wschodnimi-sasiadami/>, accessed: 08.06.2021.

<sup>12</sup> *Do Rzeczy*, *Rosyjskie media krytykują polską inicjatywę zagraniczną. Piszą o „trójkacie nienawiści”*, <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/148944/rosyjskie-media-krytykuja-polska-inicjatywe-zagraniczna-pisza-o-trojkanie-nienawisci.html>, accessed: 10.06.2021.

<sup>13</sup> *wPolityce*, *Duże wzmocnienie roli Europy Środkowej. Polska, Litwa i Ukraina powołały do życia Trójkąt Lubelski*, <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/511145-polska-litwa-i-ukraina-powolaly-do-zycia-trojkat-lubelski>, accessed: 10.06.2021.

<sup>14</sup> Ł. Jasina, M. Zaniewicz, *Odcinek 234: „Współpraca Polski, Ukrainy i Litwy w kontekście powołania Trójkąta Lubelskiego”*, [https://www.pism.pl/pism\\_w\\_mediach/podcasty/Odcinek\\_234\\_Wspolpraca\\_Polski\\_Ukrainy\\_i\\_Litwy\\_w\\_kontekście\\_powołania\\_Trojkat\\_Lubelskiego](https://www.pism.pl/pism_w_mediach/podcasty/Odcinek_234_Wspolpraca_Polski_Ukrainy_i_Litwy_w_kontekście_powołania_Trojkat_Lubelskiego), accessed: 10.06.2021.

<sup>15</sup> T. Iwański, *Ukraina: zawieszenie stosunków z Białorusią*, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2020-09-02/ukraina-zawieszenie-stosunkow-z-bialorusia>, accessed: 10.06.2021.

<sup>16</sup> TVP Info, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem.*

function of the Lublin Triangle as a format responsible for promoting the “common voice” of Central and Eastern European countries in the forum of Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Professor Mieczysław Ryba in his commentary for *Radio Maryja* emphasizes the importance of Poland as a country striving for regional leadership, which is manifested by the establishment of the Lublin Triangle. The political scientist also points out the pro-American course of this venture, and the main motive behind the establishment of this cooperation format is the increasing threat from the Russian Federation<sup>18</sup>.

The weekly magazine *Do Rzeczy* presents an opinion of the spokesman of the Ministry of Coordinator of Special Services Stanisław Żaryn, which is a reaction to the media narration of the Russian Federation related to the establishment of the Lublin Triangle. He draws attention to the disinformative and manipulative character of the reports appearing in the Russian media circulation concerning the trilateral initiative. Furthermore, S. Żaryn recalls the expressions describing the Lublin Triangle appearing in the Russian media discourse - the initiative is called “a political Frankenstein” and “a triangle of hatred towards Russia”. S. Żaryn points to the Russian foreign policy doctrine, where the fundamental goal is to replicate the narration regarding the alleged threat from the consolidated West towards the Russian Federation and to ridicule the Triangle countries while pointing out the irrationality and Russophobia of their foreign policies. According to the spokesman, this is an example of how Russian propaganda tools work<sup>19</sup>.

The weekly magazine *wPolityce* quotes the statement of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz on the broad agenda of the matters pursued within the framework of the Lublin Triangle<sup>20</sup>. The significance of this initiative is emphasized in the context of developing trilateral cooperation mechanisms within the framework of combating the coronavirus pandemic, as well as strengthening Ukraine's interdependence with the European Union. Thanks to the creation of such an agreement, which has the nature of minilateralism<sup>21</sup>, Poland will have the opportunity to further actively support the development of the Eastern Partnership as a fundamental foreign policy instrument not only of Poland, but also of the EU<sup>22</sup>. The role of the joint Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian brigade LITPOLUKRBRIG is also highlighted as a successfully implemented instrument of cooperation at the military level, as

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<sup>18</sup> Radio Maryja, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Do Rzeczy, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> wPolityce, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> In regionalism theory, it is a format of cooperation established to address particular challenges faced by subregional actors in international relations.

<sup>22</sup> wPolityce, *op. cit.*

well as a forum for exchanging experience between NATO and Ukrainian armed forces members while the latter has practical proficiency in deterring Russian aggression.

*PISM's* analyst for Ukraine Maciej Zaniewicz signals that the establishment of the Lublin Triangle is a result of the warming of relations between the states parties over the recent years<sup>23</sup>. What is more, it contributed to easing tensions in Lithuanian-Polish relations, as reflected, for example, in resolving the dispute over the railroad of the Polish-Lithuanian Mažeikiai refinery. However, the increasing hostile activity of the Russian Federation is seen as the fundamental factor playing the most important role in the process of marginalizing the internal tensions between the countries of the Triangle. The regional character of the trilateral agreement being perceived as the best possible option leading to regional consolidation in order to counter Russian influence in the Central and Eastern European region was also emphasized. The *PISM's* analyst sees the greatest scope for cooperation in the area of energy, and perceives the diversification of supplies and independence from the Russian Federation as priority tasks for each of the countries of the initiative. Another promising area is international trade. Strengthening economic ties between the countries of the region will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the image of the Lublin Triangle in the eyes of both the EU and the United States. At the same time M. Zaniewicz does not expect much progress at the political level, and a potential accession of Belarus to this alliance and its transformation into the “Lublin Union” (a quadrilateral format of regional cooperation) as he calls it is highly unlikely. In addition, problems of a historical nature may prove to be an obstacle, which must be pushed aside in order to achieve major postulates. It is also emphasized that the technical and practical character of this format is aimed at solving particular problems in the face of increasing tension between the Russian Federation and the members of the trilateral project.

The analyst of the *Centre for Eastern Studies* Tadeusz Iwański emphasizes the significance of the evolution of the Lublin Triangle stance in the context of the events taking place in Belarus since August 2020<sup>24</sup>. The very fact of the joint statement released in the face of a political crisis proves the common interest of the countries of the agreement, as well as it signals the united attitude of these countries towards Alexander Lukashenko, who usurps power. *OSW's* Deputy Director Wojciech Konończuk, in his interview for *Kurier Historyczny*, points to the common interests of the countries of the Triangle and their perception of the threat

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<sup>23</sup> Ł. Jasina, M. Zaniewicz, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> T. Iwański, *op. cit.*

emanating from the East. This is supposed to prove the collective awareness towards the changing challenges in the region of Central and Eastern Europe<sup>25</sup>.

## Conclusions

The leading motive of the pro-government narrative is to emphasize the central role of Poland in the established forum for cooperation. The tendency to portray Warsaw as the leader of the format, as well as the initiator of contact with Vilnius and Kiev, is highly visible. Moreover, intensification of commentaries related to the description of Russia's unfriendly actions towards the Central and Eastern European states was observed in the media, and opposing the Kremlin was recognized as one of the fundamental tasks of the Lublin Triangle. The similarity of interests of the members of the initiative was repeatedly noted, including those with regard to supporting Ukraine in its pro-European ambitions and maintaining a united front in its policy toward the Russian Federation.

The energy sector plays an important role in media coverage, highlighted by both mainstream media and analytical communities. Emphasizing the significance of these issues, along with the undertaking of actions aimed at diversification of supply and gaining independence from the Russian Federation, are identified as key points on the agenda within the framework of the Lublin Triangle.

The opinions regarding the trilateral initiative presented in the Polish media are positive and refer to several areas where opportunities for carrying out structural cooperation in order to meet both Poland's particular interests as well as wider regional interests exist.

It seems that the priority of the media in Poland is to demonstrate to its Western allies that the Republic of Poland is a key actor in Central and Eastern Europe. Polish authorities openly oppose Germany's assertive policy within the European Union, and emphasize the need for permanent reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank through such means as the development of cooperation between Warsaw, Kiev and Vilnius.

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<sup>25</sup> W. Konończuk, *Wojciech Konończuk from OSW: Protesty na Białorusi nie mają charakteru geopolitycznego, ale dla Kremla są zagrożeniem*, <https://kurierhistoryczny.pl/artykul/wojciech-kononczuk-z-osw-protesty-na-bialorusi-nie-maja-charakteru-geopolitycznego-ale-dla-kremla-sa-zagrozeniem,671>, accessed: 10.06.2021.

## Ukraine

When analysing the discourse in the Ukrainian media in terms of comments on the Lublin Triangle, the articles published on websites such as *Ukrinform*, *Hromadske*, *Novynarnia*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, *NV*, *Europejska Pravda*, *Voanews*, *Segodya*, *Vgolos*, as well as by think tanks *UP Foundation*, *Ukrainska Pryzma* and *Razumkov Centre* were taken into consideration. The Ukrainian media assesses the trilateral alliance mostly positively, stressing its importance for Ukraine's European integration and for increasing the sense of security in the region, while repeatedly quoting the head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, Dmytro Kuleba. Research centers and think tanks are less favorable toward the trilateral concept, perceiving a lack of effectiveness and Ukraine's weaknesses at the political and economic levels.

Taking into consideration the specifics of Ukrainian media, three periods when the topic of the Lublin Triangle was actively discussed can be distinguished. The majority of articles were written immediately after the establishment of the initiative (July-August 2020), and were of a general and informative nature at the time. The subsequent intensification of media coverage on the topic of the Lublin Triangle took place after the outbreak of protests in Belarus<sup>26</sup>. The third and still ongoing series of article publications was caused by the increased presence of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine (winter-summer 2021). In addition to the above, over the past year there has been recorded a greater number of texts addressing the historical proximity of the three countries and the joint struggle against Russia over the years<sup>27</sup>.

The largest number of articles in the Ukrainian media space was written on the basis of the statement of the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba, who considers the cooperation of the three countries in the context of the integration of Ukraine into the EU and NATO and improving the standard of living of Ukrainians to be a priority within the activities of the Lublin Triangle. The words of the Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are echoed by the research conducted by *Razumkov Centre*<sup>28</sup> as well as these by *International Republican Institute*, which found that Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic course is gaining more and more support among the public<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Представники парламентів України, Польщі та Литви у спільній заяві засудили агресію Росії, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3232603-predstavniki-parlamentiv-ukraini-litvi-ta-polsi-u-spilnij-zaaviv-zasudili-agresiu-rf.html>, accessed: 10.06.2021.

<sup>27</sup> М. Мірошніченко, *Як українці 100 років тому стали співзасновниками Балто-Чорноморського союзу*, <https://novynarnia.com/2020/08/06/baltic-unr/>, accessed: 10.06.2021.

<sup>28</sup> Разумков центр, „Ставлення громадян до вступу України до Європейського Союзу (березень 2021р.)”, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/stavlennia-gromadian-do-vstupu-ukrainy-do-yevropeiskogo-soiuzu-berezen-2021r>, accessed: 27.05.2021.

<sup>29</sup> 54% українців підтримують вступ до ЄС, за НАТО – 48%, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/05/17/7293845/>, accessed: 14.06.2021.

Kostiantyn Yeliseyev, in his writing for *NV*, describes the agreement as a historical deal between mutually friendly states in the face of a changing international order and the revisionist policy pursued by the Russian Federation<sup>30</sup>. Several articles have also been created on the *NV* website devoted to the assessment of the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's policies, addressing the issue of the trilateral agreement. One of the published articles draws attention to the failure to exploit the potential of the Lublin Triangle. Moreover, it is argued that the situation will not change without adequate involvement of the president. At the same time, the promises of fulfilling the political "minimum must-have" by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, i.e. increased activity within the framework of trilateral cooperation, are criticized<sup>31</sup>.

Minister Kuleba draws attention to the emphasis on Ukraine's position in the Lublin Triangle and to the concept of leaving the sphere of geopolitical games at the Washington-Brussels-Moscow level<sup>32</sup>. *NV* service assesses these issues positively, but with the reservation that Ukrainian foreign policy is conducted in too sensitive a manner<sup>33</sup>.

Journalists Oksana Lihostova and Ruslan Dejnychenko, writing for *Voanews*, also speak positively about the initiative, stressing that it is an opportunity to lobby for Ukrainian interests regarding Donbass and Crimea within the alliance. They also compared the Lublin Triangle with the Weimar Triangle, emphasizing the similarity of the Ukrainian and Polish paths on the way to the European Union and NATO<sup>34</sup>.

*Ukrinform* news agency indicates in its articles that one of the major priorities of the Lublin Triangle is the normalization of relations with Belarus. This would be accomplished by an attempt to formalize the dialogue with unrecognized Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, but at the same time by establishing cooperation with opposition leader Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya. *Ukrinform* presents the chronological development of the trilateral agreement in its articles (publishing articles in September 2020 and then in January 2021), and thus it should be assumed that Ukraine was the first to begin discussions on transforming the Triangle

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<sup>30</sup> Д. Кулеба, „Люблинський трикутник з рівними сторонами”, <https://nv.ua/opinion/lyublinskiy-treugolnik-chego-dobivayutsya-litva-polsha-i-ukraina-novosti-ukrainy-50106029.html>, accessed: 25.05.2021.

<sup>31</sup> К. Єлісєєв, *Плюси та мінуси дипломатії Зеленського у вересні*, [https://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/zelenskiy-novini-yakih-pomilok-pripuskavsya-prezident-novini-ukrajini-50115621.html?utm\\_campaign=langanalytics&utm\\_content=set\\_lang&utm\\_medium=in\\_article](https://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/zelenskiy-novini-yakih-pomilok-pripuskavsya-prezident-novini-ukrajini-50115621.html?utm_campaign=langanalytics&utm_content=set_lang&utm_medium=in_article), accessed: 13.06.2021

<sup>32</sup> Д. Кулеба, „Люблинський трикутник з рівними сторонами”, <https://nv.ua/opinion/lyublinskiy-treugolnik-chego-dobivayutsya-litva-polsha-i-ukraina-novosti-ukrainy-50106029.html>, accessed: 25.05.2021.

<sup>33</sup> Р. Безсмертний, *Головні загрози для України. Що робить Зеленський?*, <https://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/rosiya-viyna-shcho-robit-zelenskiy-chi-gotova-armiya-ukrajini-novini-ukrajini-50155259.html>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>34</sup> О. Лігостова, Р. Дейниченко, *„Люблінський трикутник”: коментарі експертів*, <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/Trykutnyk-eksperty/5522207.html>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

into the Lublin Square<sup>35</sup>. Analyzing the spring events in Belarus, *Ukrinform* published an article on the suspension of the process of Belarus' inclusion into the structures of the Lublin Triangle, due to Lukashenko's adoption of a radical and anti-Western stance<sup>36</sup>. Besides, the portal points out that the President of Belarus is about to completely break off relations with all members of the trilateral agreement accusing the state parties of supporting the protests on the territory of Belarus<sup>37</sup>. What is important, the Ukrainian portal *European Pravda* also takes the view that this alliance is incomplete without Belarus, and the very prospect of its joining the cooperation format and expanding the format from the Triangle to the Square is an intended result of the restoration of friendly relations with Belarus. Currently, the formation of a quadrilateral concept is regarded as unlikely<sup>38</sup>.

Ukrainian analysts point out the groundbreaking, but also negative, nature of the Lublin Triangle initiative. In October 2020, an article presenting an analysis of the Triangle's activities and prospects for each of the allies was published on the *Segodnya* website. Apart from the positive assessment of the project in terms of the development of regional cooperation, the author Vitaly Ryaboshapka included in his article skeptical opinions of analysts from Ukrainian think tanks, including Ilya Kusa from the *Ukrainian Institute of the Future*, Volodymyr Fesenko from the *Center for Political Research "Penta"* and economist Oleksiy Kushch. According to the experts, the Lublin Triangle can be both beneficial and dangerous for Ukraine. The Ukrainian-Polish cooperation is still not developing as well as it was originally expected after the initiative came into force. The thesis has also been put forward that Warsaw, taking the opportunity to promote its national interests, will gain more from this alliance than Ukraine.

Experts in an interview for *Segodnya.ua* claim that the activities of the alliance will contribute to the strengthening of Ukraine's position as a policy making actor rather than a subject of discussion in various European forums, but the initiative will not have a major impact on improving the development of Ukraine's economy<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, the different economic and political potential of the three allied states has been mentioned. There appears to be

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<sup>35</sup> Люблінський трикутник мав бути квадратом із Білоруссю – МЗС Польщі, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3097629-lublinskij-trikutnik-mav-buti-kvadrat-iz-bilorusu-mzs-polsi.html>, accessed: 06.06.2021.

<sup>36</sup> Люблінський трикутник обговорить підтримку демократії в Білорусі, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3174908-lublinskij-trikutnik-obgovorit-pidtrimku-demokratii-v-bilorusi.html>, accessed: 06.06.2021.

<sup>37</sup> „Люблинский треугольник не против присоединения к нему демократической Беларуси – Кулеба”, <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-politics/3180878-lublinskij-treugolnik-ne-protiv-prisoedinenia-k-nemu-demokraticeskoj-belarusi-kuleba.html>, accessed: 25.05.2021.

<sup>38</sup> „Украина, Литва и Польша готовы к разговору с Лукашенко при условии взаимного уважения”, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2021/01/29/7119157/>, accessed: 25.05.2021.

<sup>39</sup> В. Рябошапка, „Речь Посполитая. Перегрузка – зачем Дуда приехал в Киев”, <https://politics.segodnya.ua/politics/otbrasyvaet-rossiyu-v-xvi-vek-perspektivy-i-riski-lyublinskogo-treugolnika-1478312.html>, accessed: 25.05.2021.

reservations concerning economic cooperation, as the economic potential of the two largest states in terms of territory, Ukraine and Poland, differs in favour of the Republic of Poland, which may lead to the exploitation of the Ukrainian market in order to achieve Poland's particular interests. According to experts, Ukraine seems to be an old “Zaporozhets” when compared to the “Mercedes”, i.e. Lithuania and Poland. They also do not see why the other members of the Lublin Triangle should treat Ukraine as a partner, because it is a less developed country<sup>40</sup>.

According to Ruslan Biziaev, an expert of the *UP Foundation*, one of the key postulates, which is an objection to the Nord Stream 2 project, has not been achieved by the Lublin Triangle due to the lack of instruments and an appropriate international position of its members. In his assessment, a potential inclusion of Belarus into the cooperation and an attempt to create a Baltic-Black Sea energy corridor would be perceived by Moscow as a geopolitical catastrophe<sup>41</sup>.

Some analysts point out that it is to the benefit of Ukraine that in the forum of the Lublin Triangle the talks about the newly created Crimean Platform are being held. The media describe this new initiative as aimed at working out a plan for the liberation of Crimea. Therefore, it seems that a trilateral agreement between Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania could be used as a foundation for another multinational support of Kiev in the international arena<sup>42</sup>.

As indicated above, the topic of the Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian initiative is very popular in Ukraine, yet when elaborating on the information provided by Ukrainian internet portals or television programmes, one should bear in mind the context of the published information. A significant part of the Ukrainian media is privately owned by oligarchs who exert influence on mass media outlets, politics and the state's economy. Notable among them are: *Segodnya* (Rinat Akhmetov), *TSN*, *Iplus1*, *Unian* (Igor Kolomoisky), *Korrespondent* (Serhiy Kurchenko), *Svidok*, *Inter* (Dmytro Firtash), *Fakty.ictv* (Viktor Pinchuk). The content presented in articles or television programmes is dependent on the intensity of political, business and private connections between the owners of these media and other entities, including the foreign ones. An expression of rivalry in the sphere of media influence was, for

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> UP Foundation, „Новая политическая геометрия: цель создания Люблинского Треугольника”, <https://uapolicy.org/index.php/2020/08/01/novaya-politicheskaya-geometriya-tsel-sozdaniya-lyublinskogo-treugolnika/>, accessed: 27.05.2021.

<sup>42</sup> «Люблінський трикутник» наближає євроінтеграцію України - голова МЗС Литви, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3199122-lublinskij-trikutnik-nablizae-evrointegraciju-ukraini-golova-mzs-litvi.html>, accessed: 10.06.2021.



example, the blockade of three propaganda TV channels financed by the Russian government: *ZIK, 112* and *NewsOne*, owned by Viktor Medvedchuk<sup>43</sup>.

## Conclusions

Following the narrative of the Ukrainian media, it is clear that the most important goal for Ukraine in participating in the Lublin Triangle is to develop political, economic and social interdependence with NATO and EU countries, as well as to seize the opportunity to strengthen Ukraine's position in the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

The narrative appearing in the Ukrainian media is consistent with the official government message. According to this, the project can strengthen allied regional ties and it is also a step towards the europeanization of Ukraine. Moreover, it was emphasized that countering Russian aggression and disinformation campaigns remains Kiev's priority interest<sup>44</sup>. Despite the initially ambitious goals, think tanks and Ukrainian news portals agree that the alliance is given too much importance by the founding states, with the expectation that it will solve the problem of rivalry with Russia completely.

The criticism in the media sphere focused on the lack of an indication of concrete and specific goals for the functioning of the agreement in both short- and long-term perspective. Another important issue is the way Ukraine's stance towards the partners from the Lublin Triangle is presented. On the one hand, Poland and Lithuania are identified as the most reliable allies for Ukraine, which is due, among others, to their presence in the area of Soviet influence and, later, to their common desire to build a democratic state. On the other hand, the analyzed media discourse has revealed that Ukraine reckons with the weakness of Poland and Lithuania in the context of resolving current international problems at the regional level.

Moreover, it is important to highlight the media opinion in the context of the political crisis in Belarus. Initially, the member countries of the Lublin Triangle showed the ambition to transform the initiative into the Lublin Square as a quadrilateral cooperation format. However, currently this concept has been suspended since August 2020 due to the tense situation in Belarus. Additionally, the role of the pro-government Ukrainian media in the context of

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<sup>43</sup> І.Сітнікова, *Заблокований телеканал ZIK позивається до Зеленського*, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/zablokovanij-telekanal-zik-pozivayetsya-proti-zelenskogo>, accessed: 12.06.2021.

<sup>44</sup> О. Лігостова, Р. Дейниченко, *"Люблінський трикутник": коментарі експертів*, <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/Trykutnyk-eksperty/5522207.html>, accessed: 13.06.2021

replicating the pro-Western narrative, which focuses on presenting a positive image of the other states of the Triangle initiative, must be distinguished.

Among the states of the trilateral agreement, it is Ukraine that ought to care most about the development of cooperation within the framework of the Lublin Triangle due to its cultural proximity, shared history, overlapping economic interests, but also because of the greatest threat coming from Russia. However, doubts regarding the positioning of the alliance as a project of exceptional importance and a regional center for countering Russia are emerging. The European Union's passiveness and ineffectiveness in combating Russian influence results in the entire responsibility for the situation in the region falling on Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania, yet the initiative should not be given too much importance. Nevertheless, the use of the military and technological potential of the three states would certainly be noticed by the Kremlin, and could constitute another obstacle in the further expansion on Ukrainian territory.

## Belarus

The subject of the Lublin Triangle appeared quite regularly in the Belarusian public media, but a significant number of articles were written in the second and third quarters of 2020. Special attention to the trilateral agreement was paid by news services and think tanks such as the largest Belarusian news agency *Belta.by*, the *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* portal, the news service *Baltnews.by* and the analytical portal *Teleskop.media*.

While verifying the narration of the Belarusian media, analytical portals, as well as the experts' opinions, the conviction is that the Lublin Triangle, established in August 2020, is an expression of the Polish attempt to revive the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, of which the unifying axis constitutes a distinctly anti-Russian character<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, *Teleskop*, quoting a statement by political scientist Konstantin Bondarenko for the *Strana.ua* website, points out that the trilateral agreement is seen as an association of U.S. vassals united under the general slogan “I do not allow”, whose task is to oppose Russian actions in the energy sector, especially Nord Stream 2, and a general revision of EU-Russia relations<sup>46</sup>.

According to Alexei Podberezkin, director of the *Center for Military and Political Studies*, the different motivations of the states of the trilateral agreement make the established alliance useless. The expert points out that: “these are only the ambitious interests of the Poles, who dream God knows about what and for whatever reason believe that the United States will support the idea of a Greater Poland from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Lithuanians, who try to be someone indispensable, although no one remembers about them, and Ukraine, which is a solid box of problems, which causes trouble for everyone”<sup>47</sup>.

The alliance is very often compared to the Visegrad Group or to the Three Seas Initiative, while, as journalist Maciej Wiśniewski writes for *Teleskop*, each new proposal is a manifestation of Poland's eastern policy, i.e. “malicious, deeply harmful, irrational, idiotic, uncontrolled and anachronistic”, which has turned paranoid russophobia into its own paradigm, and the only value of the Lublin Triangle initiative is based on U.S. support<sup>48</sup>. M. Wiśniewski also quotes Professor Andrei Walitski, who points out that Poland is simply incapable of

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<sup>45</sup> *Teleskop*, *Втроем Бацьку бить. Для чего Польша, Литва и Украина создают “Люблинский треугольник”*, <https://teleskop.media/2020/07/29/vtroem-batsku-bit-dlya-chego-polsha-litva-i-ukraina-sozdayut-lyublinskij-treugolnik/>, accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> *Baltnews*, *Русофобская бригада. Как страх перед Россией подпитывает “Люблинский треугольник”*, [https://baltnews.lt/Russia\\_West/20201005/1020243190/Rusofobsкая-brigada-Kak-strakh-pered-Rossiey-podpityvaet-Lyublinskij-treugolnik.html](https://baltnews.lt/Russia_West/20201005/1020243190/Rusofobsкая-brigada-Kak-strakh-pered-Rossiey-podpityvaet-Lyublinskij-treugolnik.html), accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>48</sup> М. Вишневецки, *Польский журналист: Польша не способна стать державой в любом масштабе*, <https://teleskop.media/2020/07/31/polskij-zhurnalist-polsha-ne-sposobna-stat-derzhavoj-v-lyubom-masshtabe/>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

playing the role of a regional leader, as this would require conducting a multi-vector and emotionless foreign policy, whereas the Polish political elite has not yet matured.

Vasily Giedroyc on the portal *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* describes Ukraine as controlled by threats and money from the West, asking “what have we done to you (Ukraine) that you are acting against us?”. In his opinion, Ukraine is manipulated by Western countries and has lost its way in relations with Belarus. The author of the text emphasizes the importance of trade between the countries, diplomatic relations maintained over the years and positive perception of President Lukashenko by Ukrainians<sup>49</sup>. According to W. Giedroyc, Lithuanian politicians display incompetence, unlike the Poles who have the ability to influence the Belarusian opposition. Moreover, Warsaw's actions are to be secured by the United States. He also added that the perception of Poland's effectiveness on the international arena is variable depending on the initiatives it currently undertakes.

If it can be said that the Lublin Triangle is able to effectively pursue an active policy in any of the assumed areas, it is in the Belarusian direction. An expert from the *Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences* Alexei Dzermant claims that the inclusion of Belarus into the trilateral agreement is a key element in the implementation of the geopolitical sense of the initiative<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, historical science researcher Elena Sokolova, like other Belarusian experts, is convinced that the countries of the Lublin Triangle, and Poland in particular, are actively supporting opposition movements, thus working on the political destabilization of Belarus<sup>51</sup>. In her article for *Teleskop*, she maintains a narrative pointing to a strong structuring and central management of the Belarusian opposition from Warsaw. An identical opinion is expressed by a pro-Russian political scientist Alexander Sosnowski, quoted by E. Sokolova, who believes that Poland sent its agents to organize the August anti-government protests<sup>52</sup>.

Many articles emphasize the role of Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who is expected to strive for the position of Poland as the main “guardian of the democratic processes” imposed on Belarus, as he is the one who sought to bring up the topic of Belarusian elections during the EU summit on August 19, 2020. Such actions are aimed at supporting

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<sup>49</sup> В. Гедройц, *Зачем украинцам понадобилась бежавшая из Беларуси домохозяйка, возмнившая себя новым белорусским лидером?*, <https://www.sb.by/articles/v-ogorode-buzina-a-v-kieve-chuzhoj-dyadka.html>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>50</sup> Baltnews, *"Польша – основной драйвер". Белоруссию заманивают в русофобский треугольник*, [https://baltnews.lt/vnutri\\_Lithuania\\_politika\\_novosti/20200804/1020100782/Polsha-osnovnoy-drayver-Belorussiyu-zamanivayut-v-rusofobskiy-treugolnik.html](https://baltnews.lt/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20200804/1020100782/Polsha-osnovnoy-drayver-Belorussiyu-zamanivayut-v-rusofobskiy-treugolnik.html), accessed: 12.06.2021.

<sup>51</sup> Е.А.Соколова, *Ключевой вопрос польской повестки дня – Республика Беларусь*, <https://teleskop.media/2020/09/11/klyuchevoj-vopros-polskoj-povestki-dnya-respublika-belarus/>, accessed: 12.06.2021.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem.

opposition leaders and providing technical capabilities for further governance from Warsaw - as Aleksey Avdonin, an analyst at the *Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies*, points out for the *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* portal<sup>53</sup>.

While describing the extensive involvement of the Lublin Triangle in supporting the opposition movements and the internal affairs of Belarus, both journalists and analysts relatively rarely mention the figure of Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, and when they do, they devalue her image as a member of the opposition, portraying her either as a Polish-controlled agent or belittling her importance by reducing her to the role of a housewife<sup>54</sup>.

A hostile stance towards the Lublin Triangle was also expressed by Oleg Gaidukevich, deputy chairman of the *Standing Committee of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly on International Affairs*, who stated that the countries of the Lublin Triangle, being paid by the West, deliberately escalate the socio-political conflict in order to increase destabilization and exert political pressure. O. Gaidukevich believes that the only true ally for Belarus is the Russian Federation, which has never interfered in the country's internal affairs<sup>55</sup>.

The military dimension of the Lublin Triangle is also the subject of commentary. Military expert Aleksander Cichański accuses the states of the trilateral agreement, especially Poland, that by cooperating with the United States they act immorally and dishonestly, building their security at the expense of Belarus. A. Cichański, on the one hand, is concerned about the increase in the number of American troops in Poland, and on the other hand, states that thanks to Washington's support the Polish authorities may use the Lublin Triangle to interfere in Belarus and then in Russia. At the same time, the expert points out that such an action is probably beyond Poland's capabilities. In conclusion, he states that any anti-Belarusian actions on the part of the Triangle, including attempts to pursue an aggressive military policy, may end badly for them<sup>56</sup>.

At the end of 2020, on the *Baltnews* website, journalist Mateusz Piskorski analyzed the Polish-Lithuanian activities undertaken within the framework of the Lublin Triangle. What his statement shows is that without the anti-Russian narrative linking Poland and Lithuania, their cooperation, for instance in the sphere of energy security, would be almost invisible. He adds that this is also the case in the context of technical, economic and infrastructural projects, where

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<sup>53</sup> М. Осипов, *Зачем Польша идет на открытое нарушение норм международного права и мирного добрососедства?*, <https://www.sb.by/articles/za-bugom-i-za-granyu.html>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>54</sup> В. Гедройц, *Зачем украинцам понадобилась бежавшая из Беларуси домохозяйка, возмнившая себя новым белорусским лидером?*, <https://www.sb.by/articles/v-ogorode-buzina-a-v-kieve-chuzhoy-dyadka.html>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>55</sup> М. Осипов, *Эксперты и парламентарии – о военной активности у белорусских границ*, <https://www.sb.by/articles/dulo-iz-okna-v-evropu.html>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

no successes in the Polish-Lithuanian cooperation have been achieved for a long time. Besides, Warsaw remains silent on mutual Polish-Lithuanian problems, such as the controversial violation of the rights of the Polish minority in Lithuania, or delays in the implementation of some investment projects between the countries in the name of the strategic partnership of the Lublin Triangle. The journalist brings the trilateral initiative down to the proclamation of slogans assuring joint actions and praising each other in the public forum<sup>57</sup>.

At the beginning of 2021, the topic of the Lublin Triangle essentially ceased to be discussed. Single references to the project appeared only in March and May due to the meetings held between Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin, during which, as journalist Maxim Osipov writes, Belarusian-Russian relations were discussed, with particular emphasis on cooperation in the military sphere<sup>58</sup>.

Alexander Shapovsky, director of the informational and educational institution *Actual Concept*, member of the scientific-expert group at the *Secretariat of State of the Security Council*, and the aforementioned Alexei Dzermant are of the opinion that, in light of the establishment of the Lublin Triangle as well as numerous exercises of NATO groups near the Belarusian border, the military alliance between Russia and Belarus is one of the priorities for both countries and it is crucial from the security point of view in order to prevent the destabilization of Belarus, where its inclusion in the structures of the Lublin Triangle would de facto create an anti-Russian alliance in Eastern Europe<sup>59</sup>.

## Conclusions

The narrative present in the media coverage is clearly antagonistic towards the member states of the Lublin Triangle, especially Poland. The authors of publications constantly emphasize Poland's imperial ambitions, which are supposedly expressed through the creation of the initiative. There is hardly any content concerning Lithuania and Ukraine, and these states are portrayed more as implementing entities of Poland's foreign policy in the East, or more broadly, of the United States'.

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<sup>57</sup> М. Пискорский, *Мир, дружба, русофобия: итоги польско-литовских отношений 2020 года*, [https://baltnews.lt/mir\\_novosti\\_/20201227/1020472657/Mir-druzhiba-rusofobiya-itogi-polsko-litovskikh-otnosheniy-2020-goda.html](https://baltnews.lt/mir_novosti_/20201227/1020472657/Mir-druzhiba-rusofobiya-itogi-polsko-litovskikh-otnosheniy-2020-goda.html), accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>58</sup> М. Осипов, *Подробности переговоров с Путиным и фейки о них, совместные с Россией проекты в военной сфере, трансфер власти. Подводим итоги совещания во Дворце Независимости*, <https://www.sb.by/articles/soyuz-dostoynyy-nashikh-narodov.html>, accessed: 12.06.2021.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

Besides the actions undertaken by the Polish authorities, another frequently raised topic is the social, political and military security of Belarus. The published articles emphasize that Minsk could be an important partner in the development of the Lublin Triangle platform.

In general, the Belarusian media convince the audience of the information war conducted against Belarus and of widespread anti-state and destabilization activities. Opposition movements are presented in a negative light, and the figure of Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya is omitted in the media coverage, suggesting that she is entirely dependent on members of the Lublin Triangle and the United States anyways.

## Kazakhstan

While analyzing the media discourse in Kazakhstan, it was made clear that the initiative of the Lublin Triangle did not resonate in the media sphere, both at the time of its formation and currently. All articles and expert statements, if any, depend on the current stance of the Russian Federation and its narrative towards the trilateral agreement. Moreover, Kazakhstan is not perceived as a full-fledged ally in the *Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)* and the *Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)*, but rather as a satellite state. When verifying the sources of websites' registration or looking for the sources of their financing, it turns out that most portals and news agencies derive funds for their activity from the Russian Federation.

In the Kazakh media there are almost no original texts, analyses or statements of local experts. State media such as *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, *Izvestiya Kazakhstan*, *Egemen Kazakhstan* completely ignored the topic of the Triangle in their coverage. Other pro-government entities, for example, *Ivest* and *Zakon.kz*, if they published articles on the topic of the Lublin Triangle, the given content was each time copied from Russian media, especially from portals: *Газета.Ru*<sup>60</sup>, *РТ на русском*<sup>61</sup>, *Izvestia* and *Eurasia Ekspert*, without taking a specific stance.

According to the text published for the *CentrAsia* portal by Ksenia Loginova - originally written for *Izvestia* - the main task of the established trilateral agreement is to revise relations with Moscow and Brussels. Meanwhile, the factor that brought the three countries together, with Poland at the front, is the anti-Russian nature of the alliance. The officially created platform is meant to be a space for cooperation in the political, social and economic spheres, with the participants of the Triangle not hiding their intentions to oppose the construction of Nord Stream 2<sup>62</sup>.

The Lublin Triangle is unequivocally associated with Polish imperialism, which assumes the restoration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the implementation of Józef Piłsudski's vision of a Poland stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, writes Alexei Griaziew for *Gazeta.ru* in an article reprinted by *Ivest*<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Ivest, *Украина, Литва и Польша объявили о создании союза "Люблинский треугольник"*, <http://news.invest.kz/163823814-ukraina-litva-i-polsha-obyavili-o-sozdanii-soyuza-lyublinskiy-treugolnik>, accessed: 24.05.2021.

<sup>61</sup> KazNews, *Политическая геометрия: зачем Польша, Украина и Литва создали „Люблинский треугольник“*, <https://kaznews.kz/news/834738>, accessed: 26.05.2021.

<sup>62</sup> К. Логинова, *„Люблинский треугольник“*. *Сообразили на троих: Польша, Украина и Литва создают новый союз*, <https://centrasia.org/newsA.php?st=1596528420>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>63</sup> Ivest, *Украина, Литва и Польша объявили о создании союза „Люблинский треугольник“*, <http://news.invest.kz/news/view/id/163823814>, accessed: 13.06.2021.



The conducted analysis shows that the original information about the creation of the Lublin Triangle initiative was prepared only by three websites - *Zona.kz*, *QazLive* and *Ykaz.kz*. On the *Zona.kz* portal appeared one of the few original Kazakh texts, which is an interview conducted by Wiktor Shatsky with the Moscow expert Alexander Gushchin. The Russian explained the nature and course of the Belarusian protests during the 2020 presidential elections, comparing their overtones to the 2014 political situation in Ukraine. However, A. Gushchin points out that in contrast to the Euromaidan, Poland and Lithuania actively interfere in the internal affairs of Belarus. Moreover, the expert emphasizes the significance of Belarus for the Lublin Triangle initiative as an important partner, as well as the indirect influence of the USA on the functioning of the agreement<sup>64</sup>.

Furthermore, the role of Belarus for the countries of the Lublin Triangle is also emphasized by the *Ivest* website, which repeats a statement by Alexei Pushkov, the former head of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the State Duma, according to whom Belarus is deliberately being drawn into strongly anti-Russian actions, which could destabilize relations between the two states<sup>65</sup>.

An article published on the Kazakh website *Qazlive* draws attention to the anti-Russian orientation of the parties in the alliance, describing it as the main axis linking the three countries<sup>66</sup>. *Qazlive*, when copying information from a Russian website, did not cite the original source, signing the article with someone else's first and last name.

Stanislav Stremidlovski on the *Ykaz.kz* portal considers the Polish-Lithuanian cooperation to be a project of much greater significance than a simple initiative in the political and economic sphere. The expert states that the Lublin Triangle is an attempt to secure the interests of both countries in the future. Poland and Lithuania are supposed to be inconvenient members of the European Union and if both countries are expelled from this organization or voluntarily leave its structures, then they have an alternative in the form of trilateral cooperation<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> В. Шацких, *На Украине после майдана жизнь ухудшилась. Соседи-белорусы хорошо это знают. Почему же они идут на площадь и кричат "долой Лукашенко"?*, <https://zonakz.net/2020/09/08/na-ukraine-posle-majdana-zhizn-uxudshilas-sosedi-belorusy-xorosho-eto-znayut-pochemu-zhe-oni-idut-na-ploshhad-i-krichat-doloi-lukashenko/>, accessed: 27.05.2021.

<sup>65</sup> Ivest, *Пушков заявил о втягивании Белоруссии в „антироссийские игры”*, <http://news.invest.kz/news/view/id/163923756>, accessed: 13.06.2021.

<sup>66</sup> Р. Тарасов, *Антироссийский фронт: о чём договорились президенты Украины, Польши и стран Прибалтики*, <https://qazlive.kz/antirossiiskii-front-o-chem-dogovorilis-prezidenty-ukrainy-polshi-i-stran-pribaltiki/>, accessed: 24.05.2021.

<sup>67</sup> С. Стремидловский, *Польша готовится к выходу из ЕС вместе с Литвой*, [https://yka.kz/blog/polsha\\_gotovitsja\\_k\\_vykhodu\\_iz\\_es\\_vmeste\\_s\\_litvoj/2020-09-20-11063?fbclid=IwAR2yc8tOTiu\\_JSBSBhXoHulg2woCnY7Fz64bEuZapf8OOInwCKHR2hT6IxQ](https://yka.kz/blog/polsha_gotovitsja_k_vykhodu_iz_es_vmeste_s_litvoj/2020-09-20-11063?fbclid=IwAR2yc8tOTiu_JSBSBhXoHulg2woCnY7Fz64bEuZapf8OOInwCKHR2hT6IxQ), accessed: 13.06.2021.

In 2021, *QazLive* and *Zona.kz* each published an article showing that members of the Lublin Triangle, as well as Latvia and Estonia, signed a declaration to continue the project for “common security” in the face of “modern threats.”<sup>68</sup> The texts once again claim that the countries of the Lublin Triangle do not pose a threat to anyone on their own, but they can and are being used by the United States in order to weaken the position of Brussels and Berlin, and this makes them dangerous<sup>69</sup>. Kazakhstan is unlikely to develop its own stance on the Lublin Triangle, because it emphasizes the cooperation with the countries of the Central Asian region. Such a view is implied by the *Strategy of Kazakhstan 2050*, which also does not specify any special cooperation with individual EU countries, but with the entire EU instead<sup>70</sup>.

## Conclusions

The Kazakh media take a neutral position, duplicating the stance of the Russian media, or completely avoid commenting on the subject of the Lublin Triangle initiative. Given the current situation in the security environment and the fact that the members of the agreement are not key actors in the international arena, news portals prefer not to oppose the agenda set by the authorities and also not contradict the national priorities. Especially since the trilateral alliance itself, from the perspective of a citizen of Kazakhstan, may seem even less important than it actually is.

It is difficult to identify the media coverage regarding the alliance, which is practically inexistent in this discourse. It is significant that the most opinion-forming media such as *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, *Izvestiya Kazakhstan*, *Egemen Kazakhstan* completely disregarded the creation of the Lublin Triangle by not reporting on it. Only smaller portals *Zona.kz*, *QazLive* and *Yka.kz* decided to publish their own materials, but their overtones, although describing the project, were distanced, superficial and did not cover the issues of rivalry with Russia in the context of the established agreement. It seems that, with regard to the Lublin Triangle, Kazakhstan considers the Russian Federation to be its most important ally, so the approach adopted by the national media is not surprising at all.

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<sup>68</sup> Р. Тарасов, *Антироссийский фронт: о чём договорились президенты Украины, Польши и стран Прибалтики*, <https://qazlive.kz/antirossiiskii-front-o-chem-dogovorilis-prezidenty-ukrainy-polshi-i-stran-pribaltiki/>, accessed: 24.05.2021.

<sup>69</sup> В. Шацких, *На Украине после майдана жизнь ухудшилась. Соседи-белорусы хорошо это знают. Почему же они идут на площадь и кричат "долой Лукашенко"?*, <https://zonakz.net/2020/09/08/na-ukraine-posle-majdana-zhizn-uxudshilas-sosedi-belorusy-xoroshho-eto-znayut-pochemu-zhe-oni-idut-na-ploshhad-i-krichat-doloy-lukashenko/>, accessed: 27.05.2021.

<sup>70</sup> Официальный информационный ресурс Премьер-Министра Республики Казахста, *Стратегия Казахстана 2050*, <https://primeminister.kz/ru/gosprogrammy/strategiya-kazahstan-2050>, accessed: 30.06.2021.

## Russia

In order to assess the Russian media discourse on the Lublin Triangle initiative, press articles published in online journals, as well as commentaries by Russian think tanks specializing in international security issues, were taken into account. By analyzing the Russian media narrative on the trilateral agreement, it can be concluded that due to the different interests of its members and also in their political and economic potential, the activities of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine are much more often described separately than as a consolidated formation. The dominant issues in the Russian media discourse are: the roles of the states in the Lublin Triangle, the relevance of Belarus to the project, the influence of the United States on the members of the agreement, and energy security in the context of the development of trilateral cooperation. A certain discrepancy in the perception of the initiative between the press (*Regnum.ru*, *Gazeta.ru*, *RT*, *Izvestia.ru*, *Kommersant.ru*) and think tanks (*Rubaltic*, *Mir Peremen*, *RIAC*) is also noticeable. The latter much less frequently raises the topic of the Lublin Triangle, clearly recognizing it as a creation that pursues U.S. interests.

Ksenia Loginova in her text for the *Izvestia* portal quotes the statement of the Director General of the *Russian International Affairs Council* Andrei Kortunov. In his opinion, each of the countries of the Triangle, in addition to the clearly anti-Russian course that unites them, participates in the initiative, wanting to pursue individual goals. Poland, driven by its own megalomania and paranoid fear of Russian aggression, of which it has made a paradigm in its foreign policy, has initiated the formation of the Lublin Triangle, as its significance in the region and in the eastern policy of the EU is constantly decreasing. The trilateral agreement would thus be a type of endeavor to prove that Poland still has influence over something<sup>71</sup>. The stance of A. Kortunov is confirmed by a research fellow at the *MEMO National Institute of World Economy and International Relations*, as well as *RIAC* analyst Dmitry Oficerov-Belskiy, who adds that Poland not only has ambitions for regional leadership, but also for being a European leader on the EU's eastern border<sup>72</sup>. An expression of Poland's ambition to act in a separate way from Brussels is to create its own anti-Russian center of political influence, write Nadezhda Alekseyeva and Maksim Lobanov for *RT*, quoting Boris Mezhujev, Associate Professor of Philosophy at *Moscow State University*<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> К. Логинова, *Сообразили на троих: Польша, Украина и Литва создают новый союз*, <https://iz.ru/1042602/kseniia-loginova/soobrazili-na-troikh-polsha-ukraina-i-litva-sozdaiut-novyi-soiuz>, accessed: 19.06.2021.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>73</sup> Н. Алексеева, М. Лобанов, *Политическая геометрия: зачем Польша, Украина и Литва создали „Люблинский треугольник“*, <https://russian.rt.com/world/article/768624-ukraina-polsha-litva-partnyorstvo>, accessed: 19.06.2021.

Thus, the Lublin Triangle is presented as an opportunity to fulfill Warsaw's ambitions of reviving the transnational organizations from the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or Piłsudski's "Poland from Sea to Sea". For this, however, it needs Lithuania and Ukraine. For that reason K. Loginowa emphasizes the fact that the initiative was established in the same place where 452 years earlier the treaty on the Union of Lublin was signed, which was also intended to protect these states from Russia. In this way Poland could again play the role of a regional leader, positioning itself as a conservative center in the European Union<sup>74</sup>

Speaking of the different motivations of the member states of the trilateral agreement, Kortunov adds that Lithuania, due to its location and its lower importance than the previous two states, seeks in the Triangle a rapprochement with the EU and NATO initiatives as well as a strengthening of its presence in the Eastern Partnership<sup>75</sup>. Whereas, Ukraine's involvement in the trilateral cooperation, besides the anti-Russian dimension of the project noted at the beginning, is a manifestation of its constant desire for integration with the EU and NATO countries, as well as for finding support for the so-called Crimean Platform. However, according to B. Mezhuyev, involvement in the Lublin Triangle will not help the Ukrainians in this matter, since the final decision will anyway depend on Washington<sup>76</sup>.

A. Kortunov, director general of *RIAC*, believes that Lithuanians have good relations with both Ukraine and Poland. The Triangle is a natural expansion of the international ambitions of Vilnius, as they have already achieved everything from the format of cooperation with other Baltic states<sup>77</sup>. Russian experts foresee a potential expansion of the project. According to I. Polonska, the next countries that may join the initiative are Latvia (another Baltic state with a strongly anti-Russian attitude), Moldova (a country that strongly aspires to join the European structures), as well as Belarus<sup>78</sup>.

A. Kortunov concludes that if the Lublin Triangle is able to effectively pursue an active policy in any of the intended areas that are crucial for Russia, it is the Belarusian direction. Without the inclusion of Belarus as a fourth partner, the Lublin Triangle remains merely "an

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<sup>74</sup> К. Логинова, *Сообразили на троих: Польша, Украина и Литва создают новый союз*, <https://iz.ru/1042602/kseniia-loginova/soobrazili-na-troikh-polsha-ukraina-i-litva-sozdaiut-novyi-soiuz>, accessed: 19.06.2021.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>76</sup> Н. Алексеева, М. Лобанов, *Политическая геометрия: зачем Польша, Украина и Литва создали „Люблинский треугольник”*, <https://russian.rt.com/world/article/768624-ukraina-polsha-litva-partnyorstvo>, accessed: 19.06.2021.

<sup>77</sup> К. Логинова, *Сообразили на троих: Польша*, op.cit.

<sup>78</sup> Илья Полонский, *Речь Посполитая современного формата: зачем создается «Люблинский треугольник»*, <https://topwar.ru/173886-rech-pospolitaja-sovremennogo-formata-zachem-sozdaetsja-ljublinskij-treugolnik.html>, accessed: 10.06.2021.

intellectual toy and nothing more”<sup>79</sup>. The expert adds that all members of the initiative are countries with relatively low economic potential and have limited significance in the international arena<sup>80</sup>.

According to Marina Kovalenko, the author of an article for the Kommersant portal, the member states of the Lublin Triangle, from the very beginning of its establishment, constantly seek attention of the Belarusian authorities, proposing to reformulate the Lublin Triangle into a quartet - the Lublin Square<sup>81</sup>. Nevertheless, as long as A. Lukashenko maintains real power, any concept linking the Republic of Belarus with the West has very little chance of success, as historical, economic, linguistic and cultural ties between Belarus and Russia are too strong, according to A. Kortunov<sup>82</sup>.

Although Belarusian-Russian cooperation has not always gone the Kremlin's way, unless Russia makes fundamental mistakes, Lukashenko's reorientation towards the West is highly unlikely<sup>83</sup>. The decision of Minsk to refuse to join the initiative and the subsequent outbreak of protests after the presidential election forced Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania to change their policy towards Belarus<sup>84</sup>.

A strong belief exists in the expert community that the main task of the Lublin Triangle is to create a buffer between Russia and Western European states. According to Maxim Borodenko, a research fellow at the *Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, this alliance was intended to allow Poland and the other countries to weaken the regional influence of Russia and Germany by pursuing the U.S. agenda and, more importantly, to build up space for the USA to sell LNG<sup>85</sup>. Alexei Griazew states on the *Gazeta.ru* website that all member states of the Lublin Triangle initiative agree that the Nord Stream 2 project is a threat

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<sup>79</sup> А. Кортунув, *Любая концепция, привязывающая Республику Беларусь не к Востоку, а к Западу, имеет мало шансов*, [https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/lyubaya-kontseptsiya-privyazyvayushchaya-respubliku-belarus-ne-k-vostoku-a-k-zapadu-imeet-malo-shans/?sphrase\\_id=79905297](https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/lyubaya-kontseptsiya-privyazyvayushchaya-respubliku-belarus-ne-k-vostoku-a-k-zapadu-imeet-malo-shans/?sphrase_id=79905297), accessed: 29.05.2021.

<sup>80</sup> К. Логинова, *Сообразили на троих: Польша, Украина и Литва создают новый союз*, <https://iz.ru/1042602/kseniia-loginova/soobrazili-na-troikh-polsha-ukraina-i-litva-sozdaiut-novyiy-soiuz>, accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>81</sup> М. Коваленко, *Украину, Литву и Польшу сплотил российский вопрос*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4434709>, accessed: 11.06.2021.

<sup>82</sup> А. Кортунув, *Любая концепция, привязывающая Республику*. op. cit.

<sup>83</sup> В. Третьяков, *На чём споткнулся Лукашенко? Куда ведёт страну белорусская оппозиция*, [https://aif.ru/politics/world/na\\_chyom\\_spotknulsya\\_lukashenko\\_kuda\\_vedyot\\_stranu\\_belorusskaya\\_oppoziciya](https://aif.ru/politics/world/na_chyom_spotknulsya_lukashenko_kuda_vedyot_stranu_belorusskaya_oppoziciya), accessed: 29.05.2021.

<sup>84</sup> И. Апулеев, *Сами с усами: Польша призвала НАТО не лезть в Белоруссию*, [https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/08/13\\_a\\_13192621.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/08/13_a_13192621.shtml), accessed: 29.05.2021.

<sup>85</sup> М. Бороденко, *“Польское междуморье”: что стоит за созданием Люблинского треугольника у границ Беларуси и России*, <https://eurasia.expert/что-стоит-za-sozdaniem-lyublinskogo-treugolnika-u-granits-belarusi-i-rossii/>, accessed: 20.06.2021.

to energy security in the region<sup>86</sup>. At the same time, the role of the US is emphasized, drawing attention to the instrumental treatment of the other members by them, who are using the agreement to delay the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline<sup>87</sup>.

It is worth noting that neither the media nor experts pay attention to the military dimension, i.e. LITPOLUKRBRIG, because, as quoted by the publicist Marian Sidrov in his text for the news agency *Regnum*, “although it (the brigade) has existed since 2009, it has not shown any special activity except for participation in the Brave-Band exercises, remaining only a symbol of hope for strengthening the role of Central Europe in the EU”<sup>88</sup>. What is more, Alexei Ilyashevich in his text for the analytical portal *Rubaltic.ru* explicitly states that the Lublin Triangle hardly differs from the already functioning inter-parliamentary assembly between Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine, and its activity comes down to making successive anti-Russian declarations<sup>89</sup>.

## Conclusions

The Russian media portray the Lublin Triangle project as yet another format aimed against Russia's interests, and the public discourse is dominated by voices disparaging the essence of the trilateral agreement. The most stressed theme is Belarus and the potential impact of this initiative on Russian-Belarusian relations. Initially, the trilateral cooperation format was presented as an opportunity for Alexander Lukashenko to establish relations with the West, whereas once the political crisis arose in Belarus, it became a platform for agreeing joint actions to support opposition politicians and civil society.

In the Russian Federation, they do not attach importance to the military significance of the Triangle, completely disregarding the tri-national brigade. Instead, historical threads of cooperation are highlighted, emphasizing in particular Poland's aspirations to lead the group. Despite this, according to the narrative of Russian publicists, it is the United States that is the leading country reaping political benefits from the formation of this trilateral alliance, and the role of other countries is reduced to the conscious or unconscious fulfilment of U.S. interests.

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<sup>86</sup> А. Грязев, Польская геометрия: в Люблине возрождается Речь Посполитая, [https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/07/29\\_a\\_13169611.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/07/29_a_13169611.shtml), accessed: 10.06.2021.

<sup>87</sup> М. Бороденко, «Польское междуморье»: что стоит за созданием Люблинского треугольника у границ Беларуси и России, <https://eurasia.expert/chto-stoit-za-sozdaniem-lyublinskogo-treugolnika-u-granits-belarusi-i-rossii/>, accessed: 29.05.2021.

<sup>88</sup> М. Сидорив, Украина в «Люблинском треугольнике»: взгляд в прошлое, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3026275.html>, accessed: 29.05.2021.

<sup>89</sup> А. Ильяшевич, Польша и Прибалтика объединились с Украиной в треугольник ненависти к России, [https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20200730-polsha-i-pribaltika-obedinilis-s-ukrainoy-v-treugolnik-nenavisti-k-rossii/?fbclid=IwAR2sRgUWrLZRqkygGQaiJ2An0UveRMeqrwzip1JU2FM1QMeRaV\\_zb-Fny1o](https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20200730-polsha-i-pribaltika-obedinilis-s-ukrainoy-v-treugolnik-nenavisti-k-rossii/?fbclid=IwAR2sRgUWrLZRqkygGQaiJ2An0UveRMeqrwzip1JU2FM1QMeRaV_zb-Fny1o), accessed: 29.05.2021.

In conclusion, the Russian media and experts do not perceive the Lublin Triangle as a real threat to their influence at this point, while considering it a format created to pursue the ambitions of Washington and Warsaw.

It is emphasized in the Russian media discourse that the trilateral agreement has hardly any chance to maintain its priority nature for each of the partners, mainly due to the lack of a long-term strategy, transparent goals to be achieved in the future, and lack of willingness for additional financing of the whole project.

COUNTRY	MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE MEDIA DISCOURSE	ATTITUDE
<b>Lithuania</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increasing the state' influence in the region of Central and Eastern Europe.</li> <li>2. Counteracting Russian aggression.</li> <li>3. Supporting Ukraine in its pro-European and pro-Atlantic aspirations.</li> <li>4. Normalization of the relations with Belarus by initiating joint projects in the framework of the Lublin Triangle.</li> </ol>	<b>Positive</b>
<b>Poland</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emphasizing the importance of the energy sector - diversification of the supply routes of natural resources.</li> <li>2. Taking the informal leadership in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, including through active development of already existing mechanisms of cooperation (e.g. Eastern Partnership) and promotion of the "common voice" of the region on the forum of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.</li> <li>3. Supporting Ukraine's pro-European development path.</li> <li>4. Pointing out the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation and emphasizing the common awareness of the states-parties of the Triangle in the light of the threats in Central and Eastern Europe.</li> </ol>	<b>Positive</b>
<b>Ukraine</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accelerating the process of European integration, with the prospect of joining NATO.</li> <li>2. Creating a coalition of states to combat Russian influence, primarily in Ukraine and the region of Central and Eastern Europe.</li> <li>3. Strengthening trilateral political and economic cooperation in order to improve the standard of living of the Ukrainian people.</li> <li>4. Positive attitude towards the prospect of Belarus' accession, provided that its democratization process begins.</li> </ol>	<b>Positive</b>
<b>Belarus</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reducing dependence on Moscow.</li> <li>2. Striving for border revision and annexation of Belarus by the Triangle member states (mainly Poland).</li> <li>3. Platform to support Belarusian pro-opposition forces.</li> <li>4. Multiplication of US influence in the region.</li> </ol>	<b>Negative</b>
<b>Russia</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Only actions taken towards Belarus are worth monitoring.</li> <li>2. A platform aimed at rebuilding Polish influence from the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.</li> <li>3. The Lublin Triangle is primarily an expression of the implementation of U.S. interests, especially in the energy sector in Europe.</li> <li>4. Disregarding the proficiency of the states members of the Lublin Triangle, due to their low military and economic potential and lack of ability to implement foreign policy.</li> </ol>	<b>Negative</b>
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kazakhstan's low involvement in the Lublin Triangle discussion.</li> <li>2. Supporting the position of Russia with regard to the anti-Russian character of the initiative.</li> <li>3. The purpose of the trilateral initiative is an attempt to stop the construction of Nord Stream 2.</li> <li>4. Treating the Lublin Triangle as a project of limited scope in the international arena, but as an instrument for conducting covert actions by the U.S.</li> </ol>	<b>Neutral</b>



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## Final remarks

A look from the perspective of several states that strongly influence each other in the region allows for the defining of the potential and assessment of the involvement of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine in the joint project by all the discussed actors. This is of a particular importance given the differences in the vision of the agreement. Its original nature, accepted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, concerned the strengthening of economic cooperation, political support and, in addition, military exercises. A year has passed since the establishment of the format, however there are no specific actions distinguishing the trilateral activity of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, which would make it clearly different from the bilateral agreements concluded so far (e.g. Poland-Lithuania) or within the multinational alliances (Ukraine-UE/NATO). Simultaneously, the trilateral project has great potential that can be exploited on many levels, especially in the economic and military spheres, thus significantly enhancing the role of the three states in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, within the framework of the Lublin Triangle an alliance of a kind has been formed, which in regional terms can bring benefits to each of the members: Poland will strengthen NATO's eastern border, Lithuania will receive a tool through which it will be able to increase its agency, while Ukraine will create itself a space to take further actions integrating it into NATO and EU structures. Established cooperation may have a positive impact on economic issues, and the shared vision of a greater involvement in the international arena is in the interest of all three countries.

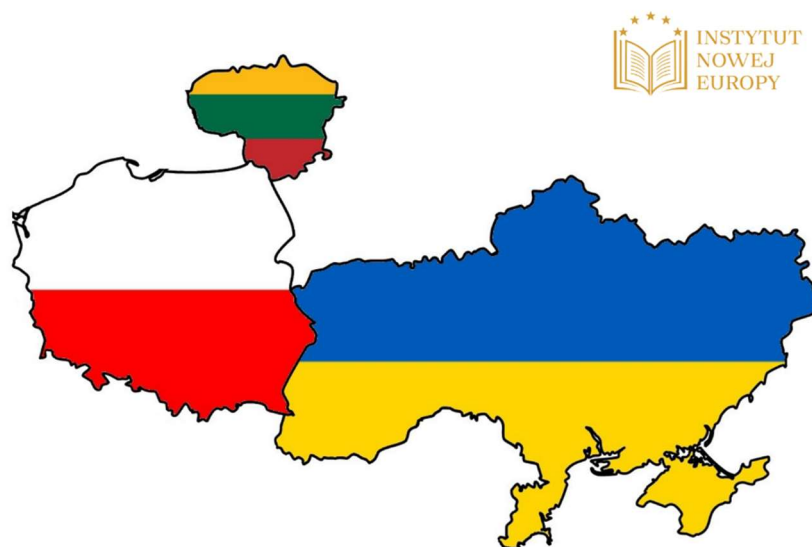
On July 7, 2021, the foreign ministers of the Lublin Triangle signed the Declaration of Joint European Heritage and Common Values, as well as the Roadmap, which is a document presenting the main directions for the development of the trilateral initiative. The member states committed themselves to the intensification of the trilateral political dialogue, taking joint initiatives towards international partners and strengthening their activities in the area of security and defense. In addition to the above, the declaration stresses the need for the democratization of Belarus in order to bring the country closer to the European Union.

The purpose of presenting the Lublin Triangle in either positive or negative terms is to create a specific image of trilateral cooperation in the public consciousness of the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe. The presented examples clearly indicate the emphasis on Poland's imperialistic ideas, the marginalization of Belarus' role, and are directly oriented towards belittling the importance of such agreements.

The media judgment of international politics is an interesting phenomenon, as now practically every single paper includes a long-term assessment of particular initiatives (e.g., the

Lublin Triangle), pointing out that since a new alliance has been formed, it is bound to hit other coalitions or states - in this case, the Russian Federation. Likewise with QUAD, which is supposed to be a counterweight to China, or CSTO to NATO. Describing the Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuanian concept as a threat to any of the entities is too far-fetched a conclusion. Thus, it should not be considered at all, either in the Russian or Belarusian media, whether the Lublin Triangle will be aimed at conducting actions against other actors. Indeed, Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania have withdrawn themselves from close cooperation with the Russian Federation long ago, but this does not mean that in some sectors (e.g., the economy) an opportunity for rapprochement will not arise again. In international diplomacy, each actor is usually closest to the statement: *states have no friendship, just interests*. Each of the members of the Lublin Triangle has already experienced this.

The presented analysis shows each side's assessments, along with their sources and genuine statements. This allows the reader to take a stance for themselves, based on data from the six countries. The procedure of verifying sources from dozens of entities demonstrates how the objectives and ideas of each country differ, and how the media, think-tanks and organizations associated with the government, are used to reinforce the opinions of government authorities. The Lublin Triangle is a new initiative, and there already exist many differences and misrepresentations. A much more demanding news environment is certainly the one concerning NATO, Nord Stream 2 or the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the example of the trilateral project is a perfect confirmation of the media's role in the process of providing information and highlighting what capabilities they do possess, namely publishing tailored, beneficial and subjective information.



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