



# The trilateral initiative: Rekindling relations between Britain, Poland and Ukraine

By *Przemysław Biskup, James Rogers and Hanna Shelest*

Early in 2022, reports began to circulate that the foreign ministers and secretaries of Poland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom (UK) – Zbigniew Rau, Dmytro Kuleba and Liz Truss – were contemplating the establishment of a new ‘plurilateral’ grouping to enhance their cooperation and coordinate their geopolitical objectives. On 18th January 2022, Poland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the first to highlight the significance of cooperation between the three countries, although no specific format was mentioned.<sup>1</sup> This was followed three days later when Truss announced in a speech to the Lowy Institute in Australia that ‘new trilateral ties with Poland and Ukraine’ were being explored.<sup>2</sup> A number of speculative press reports followed, leading Kuleba to issue a

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Poland), Tweet, 18/01/2022, <https://bit.ly/3QRdoXP> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Foreign Secretary Liz Truss’ speech to the Lowy Institute’, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 21/01/2022, <http://bit.ly/3GYCrSy> (checked: 31/01/2023).



statement on Facebook to explain what the trilateral was designed to do and why Ukraine, in particular, supported it.<sup>3</sup> He described the group as a ‘mini-alliance’ to triangulate between the Atlantic Ocean and the Baltic and Black seas and draw together three countries with a more realistic perspective of the threat posed by Russia to Euro-Atlantic security.<sup>4</sup>

The trilateral was officially launched with a ‘Joint Statement’ on 17th February when Truss visited Kyiv for strategic consultations, with Rau participating virtually. Together, they pledged to ‘develop a Trilateral Memorandum of Cooperation’ to demonstrate their ‘commitment to further strengthening the[ir] strategic cooperation and engagement’, ‘on the highest priority issues in support of Ukraine.’<sup>5</sup> Initial areas of cooperation were outlined, including: support for the International Crimea Platform and its agenda; collaboration on cyber and energy security; and boosting strategic communications to counter disinformation.<sup>6</sup> With British and American intelligence pointing towards the threat of renewed Russian aggression towards Ukraine, the three countries also took the opportunity to reaffirm that ‘each European State is free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, and no State can consider any part of Europe as its sphere of influence.’<sup>7</sup>

A week later, Russia stepped up offensive operations against Ukraine with a lunge towards Kyiv in an attempt to change the Ukrainian Government and oust Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine. In response, Ukraine mobilised for war to resist the Russian aggressor, while Britain, Poland and other countries stepped up the provision of political, economic and military assistance. While this support was initially bilateral, a Joint Commission was established between Poland and the UK on 7th April to coordinate the transfer of arms.<sup>8</sup> It was soon superseded when the UK, Poland, the United States (US), and the Baltic and Nordic states mobilised the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU) to sanction Russian aggression and provide Ukraine with coordinated financial and military aid, the latter under the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG). Since then, less has been heard about the trilateral initiative, though the three foreign ministers and secretaries – with Truss being replaced with James Cleverly when she became prime minister on 6th September

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<sup>3</sup> Dmytro Kuleba, Facebook, 01/02/2022, <https://bit.ly/3Hj9dzt> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> ‘United Kingdom, Poland and Ukraine foreign ministers’ joint statement, February 2022’, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 17/01/2022, <http://bit.ly/3wjMHjs> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> ‘Joint leaders statement by the PM and President Duda: 7 April 2022’, 10 Downing Street, 07/04/2022, <http://bit.ly/3kxOC1v> (checked: 31/01/2023).

– met at the fringe of the United Nations General Assembly for consultations on 21st September 2022.<sup>9</sup>

If Britain, Poland and Ukraine had similar geopolitical interests prior to the initiation of the trilateral Joint Statement, wartime experience confirms that they may have even stronger shared interests in the years ahead. Albeit in a different guise, deep cooperation between Kyiv, London and Warsaw has proven remarkably effective in driving a common Euro-Atlantic agenda to empower Ukraine to at first resist Russia on the battlefield and now liberate territories under Russian occupation. It has also helped facilitate Ukraine's progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration – chosen by Ukrainians during the Revolution of Dignity – of which the latest movement was the EU granting Ukraine candidate status in June 2022.<sup>10</sup> Beyond that, longer-term options for the trilateral initiative's need fleshing out.

With this in mind, this Primer explains why trilateral cooperation between Poland, Ukraine and the UK should be deepened, despite the geopolitical changes resulting from Russia's renewed aggression. It marks the beginning of a broader project involving the Council on Geostrategy, the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the Foreign Policy Council 'Ukrainian Prism', which will form a high-level Expert Commission over the spring of 2023 to conceptualise trilateral cooperation under the new geopolitical circumstances, explore how the initiative might be taken forward, and provide recommendations for a future trilateral Memorandum of Understanding. Thus, this Primer provides an overview of the trilateral initiative to date and asks a number of questions about how the three governments might not only embrace the format to speed-up Ukraine's victory, reconstruction, and Euro-Atlantic integration, but also generate, to their mutual advantage, a deep, durable and detailed partnership in service of their common interests.

## The Ukrainian standpoint

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For several years, Ukraine has developed, in keeping with its Foreign Policy Strategy, the idea of so-called 'mini-alliances', with the Lublin Triangle of

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<sup>9</sup> 'Foreign Secretary's trilateral meeting with Poland and Ukraine foreign ministers, September 2022', Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 21/09/2022, <http://bit.ly/3Wp3JHM> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>10</sup> See: 'European Council conclusions, 23-24 June 2022', European Council, 24/06/2022, <https://bit.ly/3kWpUIh> (checked: 31/01/2023) and 'Enlargement Policy: Ukraine, European Council', European Council, <https://bit.ly/3DnUpgs> (checked: 31/01/2023).

Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania being the most efficient and active.<sup>11</sup> These ‘alliances’ are not seen as competitors to Ukraine’s NATO or EU aspirations, but serve to supplement its efforts to build a coalition of like-minded countries which share similar threat perceptions and hold a common vision for the future. With this in mind, in October 2021, Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated the creation of the Ukraine-Poland-UK format.<sup>12</sup> Although the three countries have no shared borders, history, and are not all members of either NATO or the EU, the announcement of the trilateral was greeted positively and with an element of curiosity given its strategic novelty.

While Poland is a long-standing partner of Ukraine and a locomotive for its European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the UK, despite some prerequisites – such as being a signatory of the Budapest Memorandum – was considered for most of the post-Cold War era as a supportive but largely inactive friend. The situation began to change in 2015 as the UK established Operation ORBITAL to help train Ukrainian troops, and even more so in 2018, when London took a proactive role in helping to modernise the Ukrainian military, especially in the maritime sphere,<sup>13</sup> culminating in 2020 with the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between the two nations.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, both countries were named among Ukraine’s strategic partners in the Ukrainian National Security and Foreign Policy strategies.<sup>15</sup> While some states from that list did not fulfil the basic criteria for such a status, Poland and the UK checked most of the boxes, such as a shared foreign policy vision, intense trade, military and diplomatic support, joining anti-Russian sanctions, and high-level bilateral relations. Indeed, until 2022, Russian aggression and even the Covid-19 pandemic had not affected trade between Ukraine and Poland or Ukraine and the UK, nor new initiatives of cooperation.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the trilateral initiative was embraced by Ukraine. The initial vision was based not on a geographical approach but on shared principles and potential, including in such spheres as support for the Crimea Platform, cyber and energy

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Стратегія зовнішньої політики України’ [‘Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine’], Рада національної безпеки і оборони України [National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine], 26/08/2021, <https://bit.ly/3zz4vdm> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Новий альянс Україна-Польща-Британія: Кулеба розповів деталі’ [‘The new Ukraine-Poland-Britain alliance: Kuleba told the details’], *Європейська правда* [European Pravda], 01/02/2022, <http://bit.ly/3H6ZVVU> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>13</sup> ‘US, Britain Vow To Support Ukraine’s Navy After November Kerch Strait Attack’, *Radio Free Europe*, 22/12/2018, <http://bit.ly/3kVzzif> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>14</sup> ‘Political, Free Trade and Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Ukraine’, 08/10/2022, <http://bit.ly/3HFCC03> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>15</sup> See: Hanna Shelest, ‘Strategic Partnership Without A Strategy’, Foreign Policy Council ‘Ukrainian Prism’, 29/11/2021, <http://bit.ly/3XRh9ou> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>16</sup> See the respective chapters in: Foreign Policy Scorecards, Foreign Policy Council ‘Ukrainian Prism’, <http://bit.ly/405WPdA> (checked: 31/01/2023).



security, and countering disinformation. The latter encompassed countering Russia's aggressive intentions and 'grey zone' warfare. The Ukrainian Government also had an additional interest in enhancing investment and transport communications. A shared understanding of threats and opportunities, where the three countries have much in common, is the driving force for such trilateral cooperation. Undoubtedly, after almost a year of Russia's fully-fledged war of aggression, Poland and the UK proved to be the most reliable and consistent Ukrainian partners. In many cases, these countries were the locomotive behind the leap in other NATO allies' behaviour and attitudes towards supporting Ukraine.

But the trilateral initiative does not stand alone in Ukraine's security vision and perception of victory. Ukraine proved not only to have agency as a security provider in Europe but also demonstrated capabilities and resources in cyber security, logistics, high-tech (including military), and digitalisation that can be of interest to other states. In such conditions, Ukraine refers to the trilateral format of Ukraine, Poland and the UK, as a format of equal and respective partners, rather than an instrument for the two countries to provide short-term support to Ukraine. The lessons which can be learned from the Ukrainian experience are an important contribution, but Kyiv would like to be perceived beyond the war experience.

The primary goal of Ukraine is to win the war against Russia and restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity, so all efforts, domestic and international, are subordinated to this goal. While NATO's acceptance of Ukraine as a member is paused due to the fear and hesitation of some allies, Ukraine is in search of new formats which will help enhance (but not substitute) its defence options and thereby open the door for the ultimate integration with the Euro-Atlantic structures, securing its future development. None of these formats are considered as alternatives to NATO and EU integration, but as additional mechanisms or supplementary efforts which can have a cumulative effect. In such conditions, Ukraine looks not only for a short-term partnership but to coalitions that can have a long-term effect and perspective. A consistent and predictable partnership with London and Warsaw is one of those options, which Ukraine looks to further develop and embrace.

## The Polish perspective

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Poland's interest in the trilateral initiative is a consequence of its long-standing geopolitical and geoeconomic posture based on a broad domestic political

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consensus. After the Cold War, Poland's systemic transformation from the Communist system to a free-market liberal democracy was almost wholly undertaken within the framework of its accession to the two leading Euro-Atlantic structures providing security, order, and economic development – NATO and the EU. Importantly, after completing accessions to both organisations in, respectively, 1999 and 2004, Poland remained a strong advocate of their further enlargement in Eastern Europe. In this context, Polish political leaders from all mainstream political forces since the early 2000s have assisted Ukraine in its efforts to cooperate with NATO and the EU.<sup>17</sup> In this period, Britain was seen as an essential NATO ally and EU partner, whose strategic perspective was very close to the Polish one in many important respects. While Brexit stymied British-Polish coordination within the EU framework from 2016, the geopolitical relationship between Warsaw and London became even more pronounced, as illustrated by the 2017 Treaty on Defence and Security Policy Cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

Russia's renewed offensive against Ukraine only confirmed the need to strengthen Poland's long-term geopolitical and geoeconomic frameworks. It reinforced the importance of transatlantic cooperation and the position of both Ukraine and Britain as Poland's key European partners and allies. The war has also emphasised the leading role of the US, and to a lesser but still significant degree the UK, in NATO, as well as Euro-Atlantic security matters more broadly.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, it has highlighted the need to ensure Ukraine's integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutions; Polish advocacy was instrumental in helping Ukraine secure EU candidate status.<sup>20</sup>

Russia's aggression towards Ukraine has drawn Poland, Ukraine and the UK together; cooperation has reached unprecedented levels. To begin with, a new comprehensive Polish-Ukrainian bilateral cooperation treaty is under development, while practical collaboration in response to the Belarus regime's induced migration crisis on the Polish-Belorussian border in 2021<sup>21</sup> and provision of military assistance to Ukraine has led to the tightening of military-industrial cooperation between Poland and Britain. This is exemplified by the construction

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<sup>17</sup> 'National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland', National Security Bureau, 12/05/2020, <http://bit.ly/4oeoqWU> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>18</sup> 'Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Poland on Defence and Security Cooperation', Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 09/05/2018, <http://bit.ly/3wDFAmi> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>19</sup> 'Joint leaders' statement by Andrzej Duda and Boris Johnson', Polish Embassy in the United Kingdom, 07/04/2022, <http://bit.ly/3WJXCog> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>20</sup> See: 'Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: we want to see Ukraine in the European Union', The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 11/03/2022, <http://bit.ly/3jmg4ij> (checked: 31/01/2023) and 'Declaration of the heads of state Bucharest 9 meeting', National Security Bureau, 10/06/2022, <http://bit.ly/4oglk7B> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>21</sup> 'Polish-British military cooperation strengthens NATO's Eastern flank', Ministry of National Defence, 17/03/2022, <http://bit.ly/3jk9zww> (checked: 31/01/2023).

of UK-designed ‘Miecznik’ multirole frigates for the Polish Navy and the ‘Mała Narew’ air-defence system for the Polish Army.<sup>22</sup> The three countries also remain important partners, albeit in different ways, in various infrastructure projects undertaken in Poland through the Three Seas Initiative. For example, Poland’s flagship project of the ‘Central Communication Port’ (CPK) combined airport, railway and motorway transportation hub includes Ukrainian and British components; the high-speed rail network is to be extended to Kyiv,<sup>23</sup> while UK companies remain key to designing the mega-airport.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, the trilateral format offers Poland an opportunity to deepen cooperation with the two European countries it considers critical to Polish interests. The initiative’s unique value reflects the fact that discussions with Britain and Ukraine are hard to conduct in other forums, such as NATO or the EU. For Poland, it is anticipated that the trilateral will help deepen Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration. The historical experience of Poland, which teamed up with France and Germany in the Weimar format in 1991, serves as an indication that plurilateralism can be of great value in assisting countries move closer to NATO and the EU. Meanwhile, the trilateral initiative also helps secure the UK’s ongoing political and military engagement along NATO’s eastern flank, as well as its assistance to Ukraine’s war effort and future reconstruction. Poland also hopes trilateral cooperation might contribute to developing the UK-EU relationship in the post-Brexit environment.

To sum up, from the Polish perspective, a Russian victory or a new so-called ‘frozen conflict’ risks turning Ukraine into a breeding ground for political, economic, and social instability to spread across Europe. Poland’s immediate interest in the trilateral concerns addressing questions – understood to be shared by the other two partners – which relate to: first, how to make sure not only that Russia loses in Ukraine, but is also permanently weakened, and, secondly, how to establish the foundations for a new European security architecture which includes and helps stabilise Ukraine, both economically and geopolitically. Beyond that, Poland’s interest in the trilateral relates to how Ukraine’s reconstruction can be organised and financed and in a way which

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<sup>22</sup> ‘NAREW wzmocni obronę polskiego nieba już w tym roku’ [‘NAREW will strengthen the defense of the Polish sky already this year’], Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej [Ministry of National Defence], 14/04/2022, <http://bit.ly/3JskLlt> (checked: 31/01/2023) and ‘Program Miecznik. Babcock podpisał kolejne kontrakty na realizację budowy fregat Miecznik’ [‘Swordfish program. Babcock has signed further contracts for the construction of Miecznik frigates’], *Gospodarka Morska* [Maritime Economy], 07/09/2022, <http://bit.ly/3kXtq55> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>23</sup> ‘CPK and Ukrainian Railways have signed a cooperation agreement. The goal is to build a high-speed railway line from Poland to Ukraine’, Central Communication Port, 19/01/2023, <https://bit.ly/3HnOKtE> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>24</sup> ‘Centralny Port Komunikacyjny Awards Foster + Partners with Game-Changing Master Architect Contract for the New Polish Airport’, Central Communication Port, 10/11/2022, <https://bit.ly/3HoSvNM> (checked: 31/01/2023).

enhances its convergence with EU technical, legal, organisational, and other standards (as already demonstrated by the changes to the Ukrainian electricity grid in 2022), while shoring up Britain's involvement in both the economic reconstruction of Ukraine and security of the eastern flank.

## The British stance

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For centuries, His Majesty's (HM) Government's overriding geostrategic objective has been to oppose the emergence of a European hegemon lest it gains control of the maritime approaches to the British Isles and challenges UK sovereignty.<sup>25</sup> This strategy was initially executed through 'offshore balancing'; Britain would intervene to thwart an aggressor once smaller nations came under attack. Due to the industrialisation of Germany and Russia, the mechanisation of warfare, and the advent of airpower in the first half of the 20th century, however, this approach went awry. The speed of the German advance during the Second World War showed that aggressors could not only overrun the continent before the UK could marshal its resources to push them back, but also strike British cities and supply lines directly from the air. Under the new circumstances, offshore balancing gave way to 'onshore control': Britain would have to maintain a forward presence and a collection of alliances and partnerships to *deter* aggressors.<sup>26</sup>

Russian aggression during the mid-2010s renewed British concerns. As the threat from Russia intensified from 2014 – in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review it was described only as 'more aggressive'; by 2021, in the Integrated Review, it was identified as the most 'direct' and 'acute' threat to British interests – UK strategy began to adjust in response.<sup>27</sup> After the Kremlin's initial invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, the UK moved to reinforce NATO where

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<sup>25</sup> As Winston Churchill put it in 1948: 'For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating Power on the Continent...Observe that the policy of England takes no account of which nation it is that seeks the overlordship of Europe. The question is not whether it is Spain, or the French Monarchy, or the French Empire, or the German Empire, or the Hitler regime. It has nothing to do with rulers or nations; it is concerned solely with whoever is the strongest or the potentially dominating tyrant.' See: Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (New York City: Rosetta Books, 2002 [1948]), pp. 186–187.

<sup>26</sup> For more on this transformation, see: John Baylis, *The Diplomacy of Pragmatism: Britain and the Formation of NATO, 1942–1949* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> See: 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015', Cabinet Office, 23/11/2015, <https://bit.ly/3iZNKSy> (checked: 31/01/2023), p. 18 and 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', Cabinet Office, 07/03/2021, <http://bit.ly/3wkTSbo> (checked: 31/01/2023).



it was most vulnerable. At the Annual Summit later that year, the UK pushed for an extended forward presence along the alliance's eastern flank and the establishment of a very high readiness response force to support it. Soon after, British forces were deployed to reassure exposed allies, including Estonia, Lithuania and Romania in support of the Baltic and Black sea air policing missions. After NATO's Annual Summit in Warsaw in 2016, the UK became not only the largest but also the broadest contributor to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. It agreed to act both as the framework nation in Estonia and as a contributor in Poland.<sup>28</sup>

Simultaneously, Britain attempted to align non-NATO states more closely with the alliance. Building on years of deepening ties through the Northern Future Forum, the UK announced at the 2014 NATO Annual Summit that it was establishing a Joint Expeditionary Force with countries in the Baltic and Nordic regions, as well as the Netherlands. This would generate an additional rapid response force to enable Sweden and Finland to underpin, more actively, Euro-Atlantic security. Meanwhile, a year later, Britain established Operation ORBITAL to train Ukrainian troops and shore up Ukraine's resilience.

Although relations with Northern Europe countries were already deepening, withdrawal from the EU stimulated Britain's determination to explore and deepen new formats of cooperation, while Russia's deployment of radiological weapons on British territory in 2018 only served to focus HM Government's perception of the Kremlin as an unruly opponent in need of containment. With their interests aligning, the UK moved to firm up its bilateral relationships with Poland and Ukraine as two of the largest and most resourceful European states in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2017, the government of Theresa May, then British Prime Minister, already initiated a defence and security treaty – with a significant industrial dimension – with Poland which would be the only other European bilateral defence treaty Britain had with a large European country besides France. Shortly afterwards, the UK deepened its bilateral relationship with Ukraine, which culminated in the Strategic Partnership of 2020.<sup>29</sup>

This set the stage for the UK to embrace deeper cooperation with Poland and Ukraine during late 2021 and early 2022. Not only did HM Government want to demonstrate its continued commitment to the defence of Europe, but it also wanted to show, in accordance with the Integrated Review – published in March 2021 – that it would actively shape the European order in new and novel ways in

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<sup>28</sup> The UK positioned over 800 troops in Estonia, supported by Challenger 2 battle tanks and rocket artillery, and approximately 180 troops to Poland, making it the only ally to deploy to more than one country.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the British-Ukrainian strategic partnership, see: Alexander Lanoszka, James Rogers and Hanna Shelest, 'Deepening British-Ukrainian relations in a more competitive era', Council on Geostrategy, 20/07/2022, <https://bit.ly/3D3gmRS> (checked: 31/01/2023).

keeping with its strategy to degrade budding hegemony. Since then, the UK has led the way in providing Ukraine with bilateral military, intelligence and financial assistance; it has also established Operation INTEFLEX with several partners to train Ukrainian troops.<sup>30</sup> Despite some concern that Rishi Sunak, the new Prime Minister, would be less committed than his predecessors, Truss and Boris Johnson, in supporting Ukraine, HM Government has continued to provide Ukraine with advanced weapons and coax other allies to do more.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, coordination with Poland reached new heights in January 2023 as the two countries pushed through the Tallinn Pledge to provide heavier and more lethal weapons – including modern main battle tanks and tracked heavy artillery – to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.<sup>32</sup>

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## Towards the future

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The trilateral initiative between Britain, Poland and Ukraine was launched with some fanfare in February 2022. But since then, it has lost momentum. This is understandable; Ukraine's principal objective has been to resist Russia's aggression and Poland and the UK have focused on organising support for the Ukrainian war effort, as well as the diplomatic action required to mobilise allies and partners in NATO and the EU. Moreover, with its EU membership application, and limited available resources, Ukraine has concentrated its political and economic capital on big goals rather than the so-called 'mini-alliances' of the pre-2022 era. Integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures will almost certainly

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<sup>30</sup> 'Government support to Ukraine: Type of assistance, € billion', Kiel Institute, 07/12/2022, <http://bit.ly/3Oi6tmE> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>31</sup> Dan Sabbagh, 'Sunak's review of aid for Ukraine suggests cracks appearing in UK policy', *The Guardian*, 19/12/2022, <http://bit.ly/3j7WGW3> (checked: 31/01/2023).

<sup>32</sup> 'Joint Statement – The Tallinn pledge', Ministry of Defence, 19/01/2023, <http://bit.ly/3H15zFl> (checked: 31/01/2023).

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remain Ukraine's priority, but this does not mean that plurilateral frameworks – especially trilateral cooperation with Poland and the UK – should be disregarded. On the contrary, this format may prove to be instrumental in strengthening all three countries.

In the shorter term, cooperation between the trio could strengthen the scale of military support for Ukraine's war effort, while increasing the interoperability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with NATO. In addition, the trilateral could play an instrumental role in the post-war reconstruction effort and in putting Ukraine firmly on track towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Reconstruction will involve obtaining reparations from Russia, rebuilding Ukraine's infrastructure and improving its connectivity to the EU, reforming Ukraine's legal system in accordance with EU standards (for the sake of Ukraine's future membership in the organisation), and helping Ukraine acquire lasting security guarantees, potentially through NATO membership. To these ends, the heads of state and government of the three countries – Duda, Sunak and Zelenskyy – could meet in Kyiv in Spring 2023 to issue a new joint statement in support of Ukrainian sovereignty, as well as Ukraine's NATO and EU ambitions, alongside fresh measures to challenge other allies and partners to provide more active and dynamic support for Ukrainian resistance (much as Poland and the UK did with the Tallinn Pledge).

In the longer term, the trilateral initiative, if it is to succeed, needs to transition from a vehicle to assist Ukraine to a platform where the three countries are genuine equals working together to secure geoeconomic and geopolitical objectives. These objectives, of course, are too deep and numerous to be determined in this short Primer, though it is possible, based on recent developments, to sketch out some challenges as questions for further exploration:

1. What will be the trilateral initiative's longer-term agenda? To what extent will it differ from the initial Joint Statement of 17th February 2022, which prioritised support for the Crimea Platform, increasing collaboration on cyber and energy security, and boosting strategic communications to counter disinformation?
2. Can Ukraine's vision of a 'mini-alliance', which involves security issues, be reconciled with those of Poland and the UK?
3. How will the trilateral intersect with the existing Euro-Atlantic structures, particularly given Ukraine's aspiration to join both NATO and the EU?
4. What role might the trilateral play in reconnecting the UK, since it ceased to be an EU member, to the geoeconomics of the region between the Baltic



and Black seas? Does the initiative also have a role in enhancing UK-EU cooperation?

5. Could the trilateral be utilised to promote initiatives within the Euro-Atlantic region favourable to Britain, Poland and Ukraine?
6. And, how will the three partners dispel fears from other allies and partners – and other European plurilateral groupings – that they might use their dialogue to counter others' interests?

Addressing these questions will form part of the trilateral research project of the Council on Geostrategy, the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the Foreign Policy Council 'Ukrainian Prism', which we offer as a sequel to the Joint Statement of February 2022. Through our endeavour, we hope to rekindle the three foreign ministers' ambition for a Memorandum of Understanding to make the trilateral initiative a permanent partnership.

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