

The conflict in the east of Ukraine has highlighted new similarities and differences in the policies of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe regarding foreign affairs and, in particular, their eastern policies. The divisions we have been used to, now no longer seem valid. Poland's most natural allies, who represent a similar view on Russia and the eastern policy of the European Union, appear to be Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the same time, knowledge about the similarities and differences in the public perception of the international situation (the conflict in Ukraine, the sanctions against Russia, refugee crisis), as well as the awareness of how Poland is perceived in the Baltic region and how the Baltic states are perceived in Poland, seems to be limited. With this study we intend to provide some empirical data to fill this gap.

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BALTIC GROUP POLAND, LITHUANIA LATVIA AND ESTONIA

IN SEARCH OF COMMON INTERESTS

Aleksander Fuksiewicz

Agnieszka Łada

BALTIC GROUP

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The conflict in the east of Ukraine has highlighted new similarities and differences in the policies of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe regarding foreign affairs and, in particular, their eastern policies. The divisions we have been used to, now no longer seem valid. In the Visegrad Group, we can find various approaches to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the policies of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia differ substantially from the proposals of Poland. Poland's most natural allies, who represent a similar view on Russia and the eastern policy of the European Union, appear to be Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the same time, knowledge about the similarities and differences in the public perception of the international situation (the conflict in Ukraine, the sanctions against Russia, the EU's eastern policy), as well as the awareness of how Poland is perceived in the Baltic region and how the Baltic states are perceived in Poland, seems to be limited. With this study, we intend to provide some empirical data to fill this gap.

In the first part of the study, surveys carried out in four countries: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia on a representative sample of respondents have been described. As the current international situation is strongly tied to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, some questions were asked about responsibility for the conflict, the sense of threat from Russia, the position in relation to the sanctions imposed on Russia and the preferred methods of supporting Ukraine. In addition, we compare the opinions of Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians concerning the refugee crisis, prospects of placing NATO bases in the region, an assessment of the effects of European integration and adoption of the euro (in Poland – acceptance for adoption of the euro), opinions about relations between the countries under analysis and the similarities of their interests. The results show a number of similarities in the perception of the international situation by Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, but they also show that this perception is completely different among representatives of the Russian minority in the Baltic states. It is generally the size of this minority that determines the average results

for individual states regarding the questions concerning Russia and its aggression towards Ukraine.

The second part of the study provides an opportunity to compare an assessment of public opinion with the views of experts. This is based on interviews with people dealing with foreign affairs from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In this section we try to answer questions about these countries' assessment of cooperation with Poland, the views on the recent political changes in Poland and their impact on foreign policy. It seems that many experts from the region expect Poland to be more active in the Baltic Sea Region, therefore public announcements in this vein meet with positive reception. However, an attractive partner for the Baltic states would be a pro-European Poland with powerful influence in Brussels and good contacts with Western European countries. In addition, tense Polish-Lithuanian relations still remain an obstacle to building harmonious cooperation in the region.

With this publication, the Institute of Public Affairs seeks to help stimulate the public debate in Poland and the Baltic states about the commonality of these countries' foreign and European policy interests. We hope that this paper will have an impact on the development of cooperation between these countries. We believe that it will help raise interest and gain understanding for the Polish perspective in the foreign and European policies of the Baltic countries – and vice versa.



Opinions of the citizens of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia on the most important international issues

Introduction

The aim of the survey has been to see how close the opinions of the societies of Poland and the Baltic states are with regard to the international issues of key importance for the region. As the current situation in the region is strongly tied to what is happening in Ukraine and to the activities of Russia, we have devoted an entire set of questions to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The respondents have assessed who is responsible for starting the conflict and what, in their view, Europe and the respondents' countries should do in this respect: should they strengthen the sanctions or ease them, should they build NATO bases in the territory of their countries and should they, and if so how, support Ukraine, e.g. economically or by sending their troops there. In this context, the respondents have also expressed opinions about the activities of their governments and assessed to what extent their country has common interests with the other countries under analysis with respect to the policy towards Russia.

The questions have also addressed bilateral issues. Respondents from the Baltic states have been asked about their opinions on the European policy of Poland, whereas Poles have been asked whether the Polish army should support its Baltic neighbours in case of Russian aggression. Indication has also been given as to which countries are the most important foreign partners for a given state.

As the relations between Poland and the Baltic states are mainly shaped in the context of the common membership in the European Union, we have also asked about the attitude towards European integration – whether, in the opinion of the respondents, it brings more benefits than losses. In addition, we have compared the opinions of Poles about the prospects for adoption of the euro with a post-factum view of Lithuanians,

Latvians and Estonians on whether the adoption of this currency has been beneficial for them. We have also asked for an opinion about the possible receiving of refugees from the Middle East and Africa as well as from a country closer to the respondents – Ukraine.

The survey was conducted by TNS Polska on a representative sample of 1,000 Poles, 1,000 Lithuanians, 1,000 Latvians and 1,000 Estonians¹ aged 18-60, by way of Internet interviews. The survey took place between 3rd and 17th of August 2015.

In the following description, each section begins with some general conclusions, pointing to the similarities and differences between the analysed societies, followed by a detailed presentation of the results together with diagrams illustrating them. Each section concludes with a brief comment.

Division of opinions in the region

Apart from a number of facts that the survey confirmed or highlighted, the responses to practically all the questions reveal a division of opinions within the societies of two Baltic states – Latvia and Estonia, based on nationality. People of Russian nationality² (in the sample of the residents of Estonia under analysis, they accounted for 30%, among the surveyed residents of Latvia – 40% of respondents³), had different opinions than the respondents declaring Latvian or Estonian nationality. At the same time, in both countries these divisions are very similar – the differences in percentages of individual responses between the group of ethnic Estonians and Latvians and the Russians living in these countries are almost identical. These divisions are very strong and affect the overall results in a given country. When only the responses of the residents of Estonian or Latvian nationality are analysed, it can be seen that their answers are, in many cases, closer to the responses of all Poles and Lithuanians than to those of the entire population of Estonia or Latvia. People of Russian origin have views that are much more pro-Russian

1 A sample of 1,000 respondents is considered – in spite of the differences in the size of population between countries – also in Poland, as a representative sample of the whole population.

2 In the survey, persons of Russian nationality are persons who declare that Russian is the language they mainly use at home.

3 In Lithuania, 3% of respondents declared that Russian is the main language they use at home. For 1% of respondents, Polish is such language, which constitutes too small a sample to draw any conclusions based on this category.

and anti-Ukrainian. Only after this fact is taken into consideration can the full picture of the divisions of opinions in the region be seen.⁴ In countries where the Russian minority is not numerous – that is, in Poland or in the countries of Western Europe – people are not aware that such a phenomenon exists.

In order to highlight these tendencies, in the description of the results we make a distinction between respondents of Russian nationality (Russians, Russian minority) and those of Estonian/Latvian nationality. When referring to the entire population of the country we use terms such as the inhabitants of Estonia/Latvia. The most interesting divisions connected with the distinction based on nationality are illustrated with additional diagrams.

Assessment of the situation concerning the Russian-Ukrainian crisis

- ▶ People in the region share the view that Russia is the one responsible for starting the conflict with Ukraine, although the percentage of those who hold this opinion is different in different countries. While two out of three Poles (69%) and Lithuanians (64%) believe the latter, only four out of ten Latvians surveyed (40%) are of the same view. The percentage of respondents pointing to the responsibility of both countries of the conflict – Russia and Ukraine – ranges from 17% in Estonia to 23% in Lithuania and Latvia.
- ▶ At the same time, in three of the four countries under analysis, the majority of respondents (Poland – 80%, Lithuania – 60%, Estonia – 59%) think that Russia poses a military threat to their countries, however, the differences in the prevalence of this opinion between Poles and the other two societies are relatively high (20 percentage points). In Latvia, the majority of the public (55%) are not afraid of such a threat.
- ▶ On the other hand, a division into two groups is visible regarding the opinion about the potential placement of permanent NATO bases in the territory of the respondents' country. There is unanimity among Poles and Lithuanians, who support such action (62% and 63%, respectively) and among the people of Latvia and Estonia, where the majority oppose it (supporting the placement: 37% and 40%).

4 Therefore, in the Annexe, detailed tables are presented to show the divisions described here.

- ▶ The majority of the residents of the Baltic states are of the opinion that their country has interests similar to Poland regarding the policy towards Russia (the “yes” answers range from 61% to 64%). A similar percentage of Polish respondents (59%) are also convinced that these interests are common. Regarding the sanctions against Russia, the commonality of interests is particularly evident between Poland and Lithuania, where public support for strengthening the sanctions against Russia is the highest (59% and 53%), whereas the group of those who wish for the sanctions to be eased is the biggest in Latvia (44%).

Perception of the responsibility for the conflict

In the EU, the opinions about the responsibility for the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict were strongly divided. Among the member states, there were those who categorically pointed to the aggressive policy of Russia, but there were also those who supported an argument that it had been the unreasonable policy of Ukraine and the radical right-wing trends in that country that contributed to the escalation of the conflict. Different experience of EU countries with Russia itself and with the propaganda it has been spreading had an impact on such mixed views. The divisions also ran across individual EU member states and depended on the moment in which a question was posed. The annexation of Crimea and shooting down of a civilian aircraft over the territory of Ukraine tipped the balance towards negative opinions about the Russian policy.

Poles and the inhabitants of the Baltic states – especially compared to voices coming from Southern Europe, more favourably inclined towards Russia – agree in pointing to Russia as the main actor responsible for starting the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Those most strongly convinced about Russia’s responsibility are Poles (69%) and Lithuanians (64%). In addition, more than half of the residents of Estonia (57%) point to Russia, whereas in Latvia this view is shared by 40% of respondents.

In Poland, Lithuania and Latvia the percentage of people who consider both sides of the conflict to be responsible is also similar (21%, 23% and 23%, respectively), while in Latvia, the group pointing to Ukraine’s responsibility is relatively large (31%). In the latter country, especially the respondents

from the Russian minority put the blame on the authorities in Kyiv (67%), while they practically do not acknowledge the responsibility of Moscow (4%). In the case of inhabitants of Latvian nationality, the pattern is quite opposite (66% of respondents from this group blame Russia, 6% blame Ukraine). The divisions are very similar in Estonia, where the local residents of Russian origin point to Ukraine as responsible (68%), and not to Russia (6%), whereas the Estonian majority points to Russia (78%), and not to Ukraine (2%).

Poles and the inhabitants of the Baltic states agree in pointing to Russia as the main actor responsible for starting the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

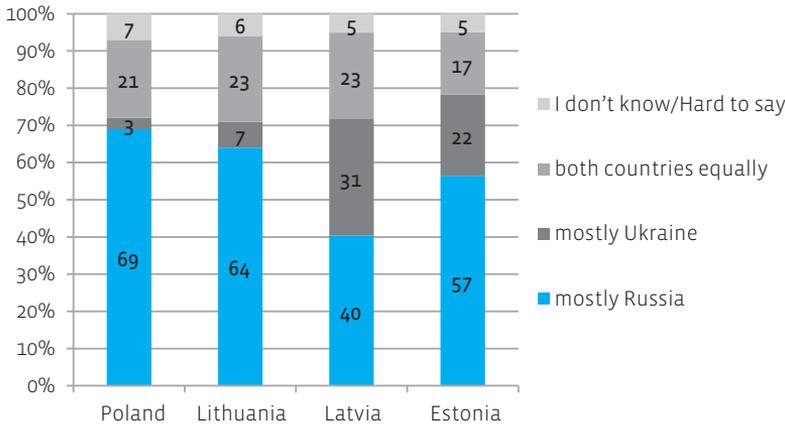


Figure 1: Who bears the most responsibility for the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

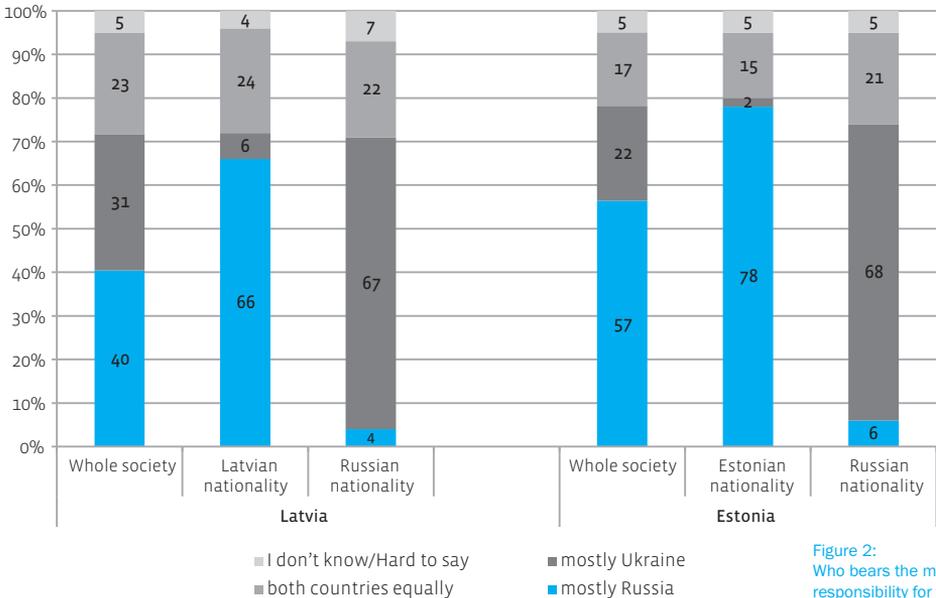


Figure 2: Who bears the most responsibility for the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Perceived threat from Russia

The Russian aggression against Ukraine, especially regarding the background of the historical experience of the region, may have an impact on the sense of threat from Russia in the area under analysis. The inhabitants of the Baltic states, which, according to many scenarios, because of their small territory, location and limited defence capability may be a potential target of attack, could be particularly concerned.

Currently, the majority of Poles and the inhabitants of the Baltic states believe that Russia represents a military threat to their countries, although there are big differences among respondents from individual states. While 80% of Poles express concern, 60% of Lithuanians, 59% of respondents from Estonia and 43% from Latvia admit that they have such concerns. In the latter case, this group is smaller than the group of those who do not see such a threat – 55%.

In the case of Latvia and Estonia, the impact of ethnic divisions on the survey results is clearly visible. Among the people of Estonian nationality, the sense of military threat from Russia is almost identical as that among Poles (80%), and among the inhabitants of Latvia who are of Latvian nationality it is only slightly less frequent (69%). Whereas, very few Estonian (7%) and Latvian (5%) Russians point to such threat.

The military threat from Russia is most frequently felt by Poles.

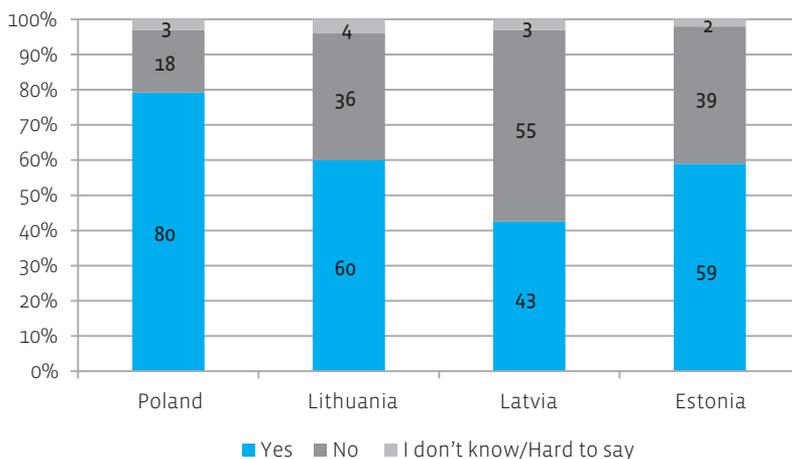


Figure 3: Does Russia present a military threat to your country?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

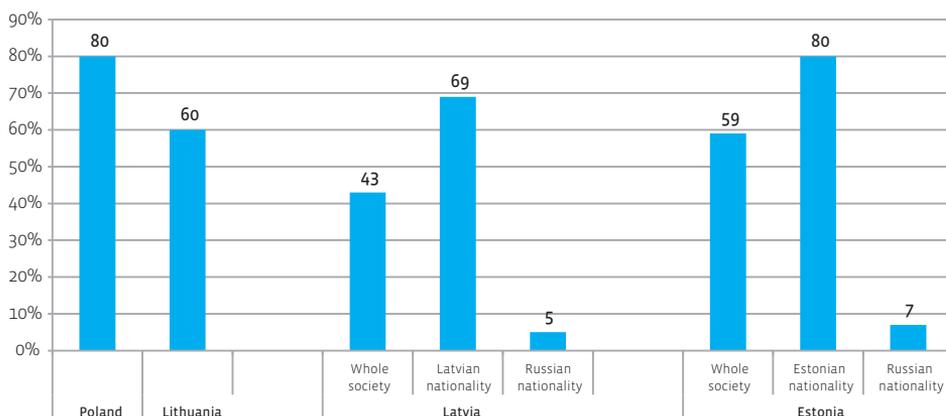


Figure 4:
Does Russia present a military threat to your country? (positive answers)

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Poles have perceived the threat from their eastern neighbour for many years. As has been shown by the regular surveys of the Institute of Public Affairs, the sense of threat was particularly high at the time when the conflicts in the region escalated; for instance, immediately after the Russian invasion of Georgia. The group of people who see the threat stays stable (approximately 80%) since the beginning of the war in Eastern Ukraine.

Attitude towards the proposal to establish NATO bases

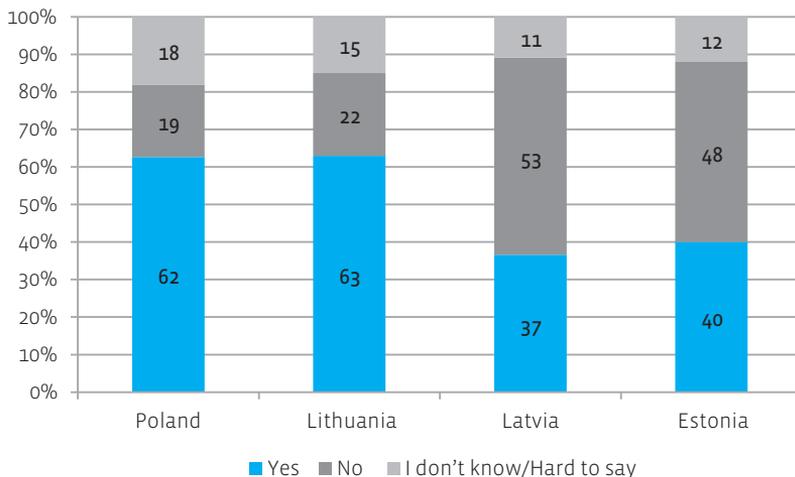
A way to enhance the security – and, first of all, to raise the sense of security – could be, in the opinion of some, permanent NATO bases established in the region, where soldiers from other NATO member states would be stationed. However, there was no consensus within NATO itself whether such action would indeed deter Russia or rather be treated by Russia as a provocation, which would deteriorate security even further.

Lithuanians (63%) and Poles (62%) agree in their positive attitude towards the establishment of permanent NATO bases in the territory of their countries. Half of the inhabitants of Latvia (53%) and Estonia (48%) are against it. The two latter results are affected by the negative attitude of the Russian minority in those two countries. In Latvia, 85% of respondents from this group are against such bases, in Estonia 88% are against. People of Latvian and Estonian nationalities

The majority of Poles and Lithuanians support the establishment of permanent NATO bases in the territory of their countries. Half of the inhabitants of Latvia and Estonia are against such a proposal

more frequently support the presence of NATO bases in the territory of their countries (58% and 54%, respectively) and are much closer in their opinions to the views of Poles and Lithuanians.

Figure 5:
Should NATO establish army bases on your country's territory where soldiers from other NATO member states would be stationed?



Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

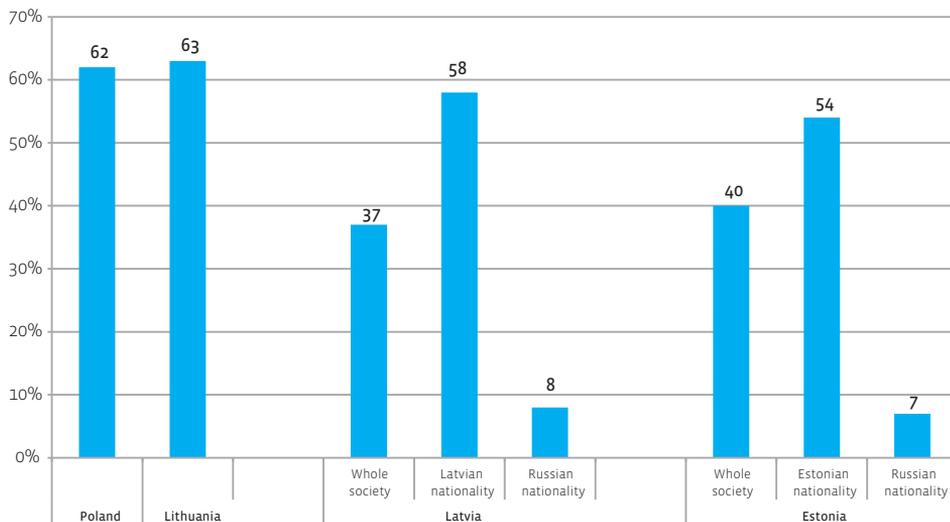


Figure 6:
Should NATO establish army bases on your country's territory where soldiers from other NATO member states would be stationed? (positive answers)

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Regardless of the establishment of permanent army bases, a factor of key importance for the Baltic states is the readiness of other members of NATO to come to their assistance if, indeed, a threat appeared and it was

necessary to invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and defend the allies. Most Poles believe that in the case of a Russian attack on any of the Baltic states, Polish soldiers should defend its territory as part of NATO operations (62%).

Poles are of the opinion that Polish soldiers should defend the Baltic states if they became the subject of a military attack by Russia

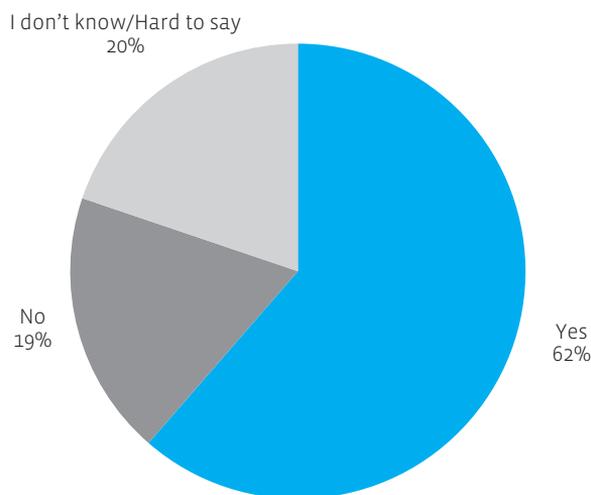


Figure 7:
If Russia attacks Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia militarily, should Polish troops defend these countries as part of NATO operations? (Answers of Poles)

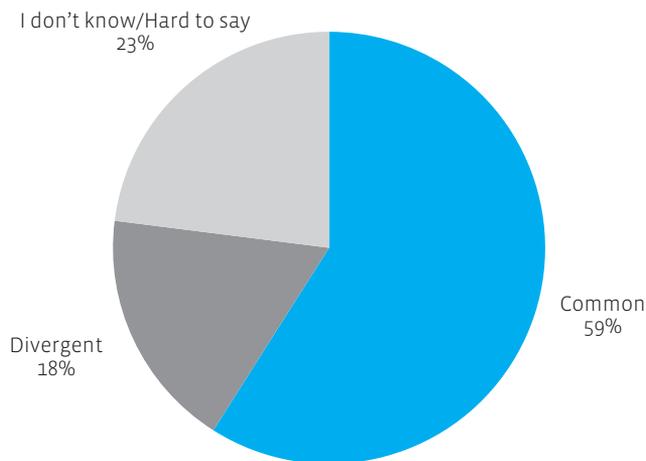
Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Perception of the commonality of interests in the policy towards Russia

The shared history and the territorial proximity with Russia often make Poland and the Baltic states speak with one voice on issues related to the eastern policy of the EU. The societies of these countries are also convinced that such commonality of interests exists. More than half of the surveyed Poles (59%) acknowledge that the region has common interests in the policy towards Russia. More than three times fewer respondents (18%) believe that these interests are divergent. However, every fourth Pole is not able to make such assessment.

Figure 8:
In the case of the policy towards Russia, do Poland and the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) have common or divergent interests? (Answers of Poles)

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

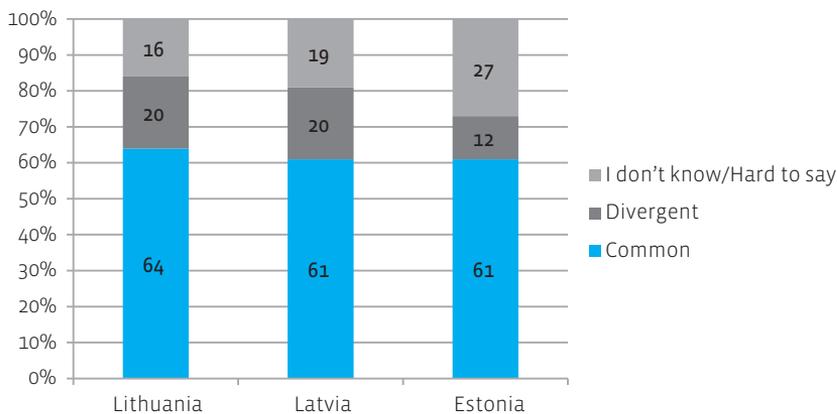


People from the Baltic states agree in their perception of the common interests of their countries and Poland regarding the policy towards Russia

Similarly, people from the Baltic states believe that there is such a commonality of interests between their country and Poland. In this case, the level of consensus is high, as 61% of the inhabitants of both Latvia and Estonia share this view (it is also noted by the majority of respondents from the Russian minorities in these countries – 55% and 53%) as well as 64% of Lithuanians.

Figure 9:
In the case of the policy towards Russia, do your country and Poland have common or divergent interests?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015



Position on the sanctions against Russia

The commonality of interests, perceived by the societies of the region under analysis, was evident during the negotiations within the EU concerning the introduction and then strengthening and sustaining the sanctions against Russia. In response to the Russian annexation of Ukraine, the United States and the EU decided to impose economic and political sanctions on Russia. When in 2015 discussions were in progress about the future of the sanctions, the countries of the analysed region – unlike the southern EU member states – together supported a firm policy towards Moscow, even though they could potentially be affected by the consequences of the sanctions as countries with relatively strong economic ties with Russia.

However, the inhabitants of Poland and the Baltic states are not unanimous in their approach to the future of the sanctions. The greatest number of those supporting the strengthening of the sanctions against Russia can be found in Poland (59%) and in Lithuania (53%). Similarly, the residents of these countries very rarely favour relaxation of the sanctions (8% and 9%). In Estonia, slightly less than half of the respondents (44%) support strengthening of the sanctions, whereas in Latvia those who favour the relaxation of the policy towards Russia in this respect are more numerous (44%), and less than every third respondent (30%) supports strengthening of the sanctions. Again, a very strong divide can be seen between the Russian minority and the majority of the inhabitants of the latter two countries. The Russians in Estonia and Latvia reject the idea of strengthening the sanctions (4% and 3%) and support their relaxation (81% and 84%), while the rest of the society oppose this idea (84% and 75%), choosing the option to strengthen the sanctions (61% and 48%) more often than Poles and Lithuanians.

Inhabitants of Poland and the Baltic states are not unanimous in their approach to the future of the sanctions against Russia. The greatest number of those supporting the strengthening of the sanctions can be found in Poland and Lithuania

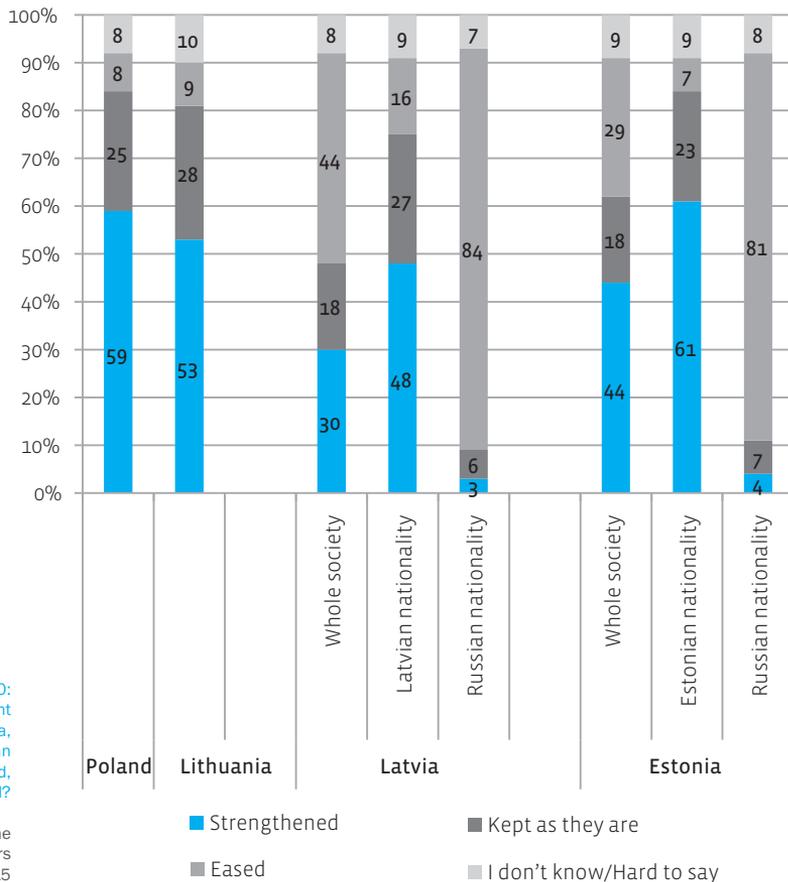


Figure 10: Should the current sanctions against Russia, imposed by the European Union, be strengthened, kept as they are or eased?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Compared to the opinions of Poles from the February 2015 survey, the percentage of people who support strengthening sanctions has increased significantly (from 41% to 59%), while the group of those who wish for sanctions to be kept in their current form decreased (from 35% to 25%). This may only partly be explained by the difference in the respondents' age (the survey described here was carried out among respondents of up to 60 years of age, whereas the February survey also covered older respondents), because in February the only particularly distinct group was the group of the youngest, who relatively more frequently did not have a view on the future of sanctions, while regarding other issues the respondents did not differ in their responses.

Summary

The solidarity of Poland and the Baltic states on the international scene with respect to Russia, its conflict with Ukraine and the consequences of the crisis for their nearest neighbourhood is also visible in the views of the societies of the region. If one does not include the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia, the inhabitants of the four countries are almost unanimous in their opinions about the conflict and support similar measures towards Russia – strengthening the sanctions and the presence of permanent NATO bases. At the same time, the evident differences in opinions of the Russians who live in these areas as compared to the opinions of the rest of the citizens, clearly indicate the challenge connected with pursuing eastern and security policies in the region. The survey shows that the concerns that Moscow may use parts of the society with pro-Russian sympathies are justified, because this group, indeed, represents a different way of thinking and has different expectations.

Suggested methods of supporting Ukraine

- ▶ Most of the societies under analysis advocate supporting Ukraine on its path to NATO and the EU. This support is particularly strong in Lithuania, where both developments are supported by three-quarters of respondents. The same views, also positive, unite the Polish and Estonian societies (more than half of the respondents support such action).
- ▶ The population in the region much more rarely favours the idea of sending troops to Ukraine (67% to 85% of those surveyed oppose it). The people are also united in their reluctance towards sending military equipment to Ukraine and training Ukrainian troops, as well as in their lack of enthusiasm for economic assistance. Lithuanians are the only ones who are hesitant about these issues and they are more often prepared to help Ukraine.

Opinions concerning support for Ukraine's membership in NATO and the European Union

Apart from the measures aimed at discouraging Russia from aggressive activities in Ukraine, such as the sanctions, it is also necessary

to undertake steps to strengthen Ukraine. The necessary measures can be divided into those that will bring quick results and noticeable improvement of the situation in the near future and those whose effects will be visible only in the long-term perspective but that will ensure long-term stability and strengthening of the Ukrainian state. One such prospective action is the accession of Ukraine to NATO, which would give Ukraine the certainty that in the case of an attack on its territory, the other member states would be obliged to respond in compliance with Article Five of the Treaty. However, there has never been consensus among NATO countries about the enlargement of the Alliance.

The majority of Poles and people of the Baltic states are in favour of supporting Ukraine on its path to NATO, although differences can be seen in the strength of this support among the four societies. Poles and the inhabitants of Estonia have similar attitudes towards this issue, with half of them in favour of such support (58% and 57%, respectively). Lithuanians advocate such support even more frequently (72%). In Latvia, the groups of respondents in favour and against such support are similar in size (44% and 41%, respectively).

Again, in Latvia and Estonia, the division of responses is affected by the attitude of the Russian minorities, three-quarters of which (77%) in both

The majority of Lithuanians, Poles and Estonia are of the opinion that their countries should support Ukraine on its path to the membership in NATO and the EU.

cases are against such support. If one looked only at the people of Estonian and Latvian nationality, in the case of Estonians, the percentage of voices in favour would exceed the Lithuanian result (77%), and in the case of Latvians it would be almost equal to it (67%).

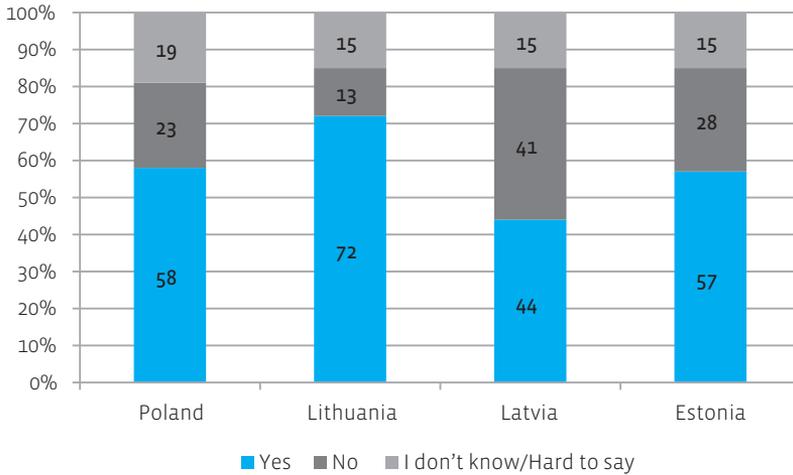


Figure 11:
In the face of the conflict in the east of Ukraine, should your country support Ukraine's efforts to join NATO?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

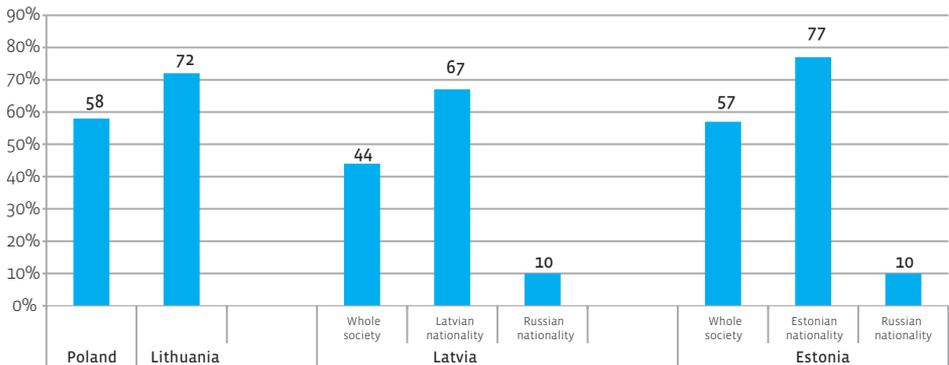


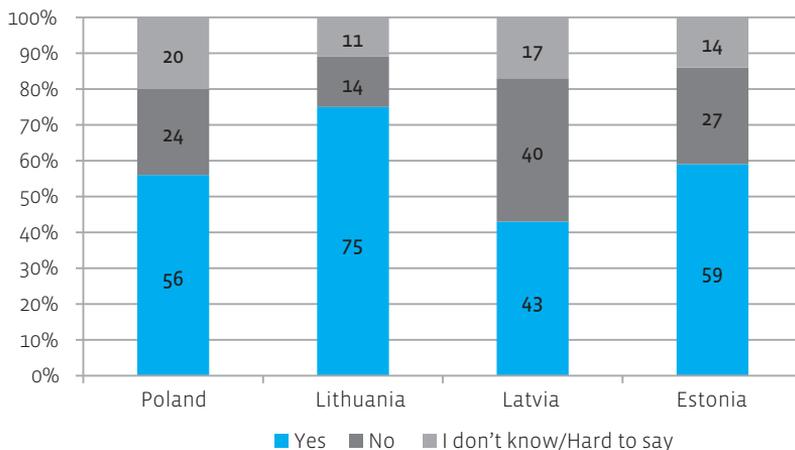
Figure 12:
In the face of the conflict in the east of Ukraine, should your country support Ukraine's efforts to join NATO? (positive answers)

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Similarly to its NATO membership, all four societies are in favour of supporting Ukraine on its path to the EU, but here, too, the frequency of such opinions varies and is almost identical as in the previous question. Lithuanians favour such support particularly strongly (75%), but it is also favoured by more than half of the inhabitants of Estonia (59%) and Poland (56%). The inhabitants of Latvia are more divided, as less than half of the respondents (43%) are in favour of such support, with a group of its opponents that is similar in size (40%). People of Latvian and Estonian nationality are, however, as convinced as Lithuanians (65% and 76%, respectively) that support for Ukraine is necessary.

Figure 13:
In the face of the conflict in the east of Ukraine, should your country support Ukraine's efforts to join the European Union?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015



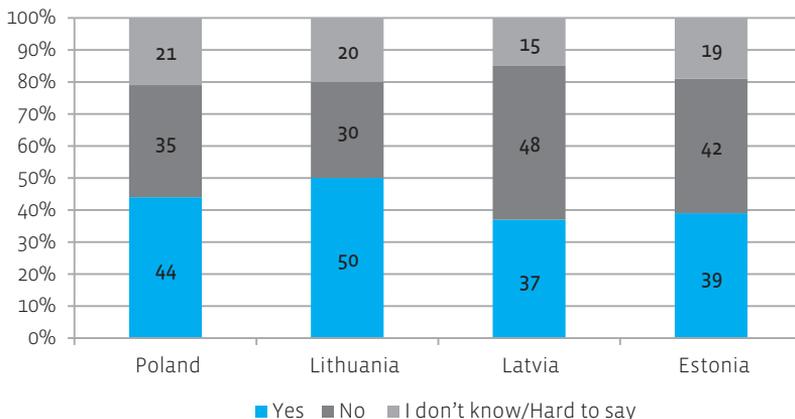
Attitudes towards economic and military support for Ukraine

The support for Ukraine offered by its membership of NATO and the EU has a long-term perspective. In order to improve the current situation in this country, it is necessary to provide economic and military assistance and to provide it immediately.

The inhabitants of the region have split views on providing economic assistance to Ukraine. In Lithuania and Poland, a larger group of people support this idea than reject it (50% of Lithuanians and 44% of Poles), whereas in Estonia and Latvia the groups reluctant towards such assistance are larger (in favour: 39% of inhabitants of Estonia and 37% of inhabitants of Latvia). However, if the views of only parts of these societies were analysed, without the Russian minorities, the results would be close to the opinions of Poles and Lithuanians.

Figure 14:
In the face of the conflict in the east of Ukraine, should your country provide economic support to Ukraine?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015



The societies of the region are even more reluctant to the idea of sending weapons and military equipment to Ukraine. Relatively, the highest number of supporters of such measures is in Lithuania (43%), although the percentage of those in favour is not much different than the percentage of those against (41%). Reluctance towards such measures is also expressed by half of Poles (50%) and Estonians (48%) as well as 61% of Latvians. In the two latter countries, almost nine out of ten representatives of the surveyed Russian minority oppose such action.

The inhabitants of the countries of the region are reluctant to send weapons and military equipment to Ukraine. Such actions have the relatively highest number of supporters in Lithuania

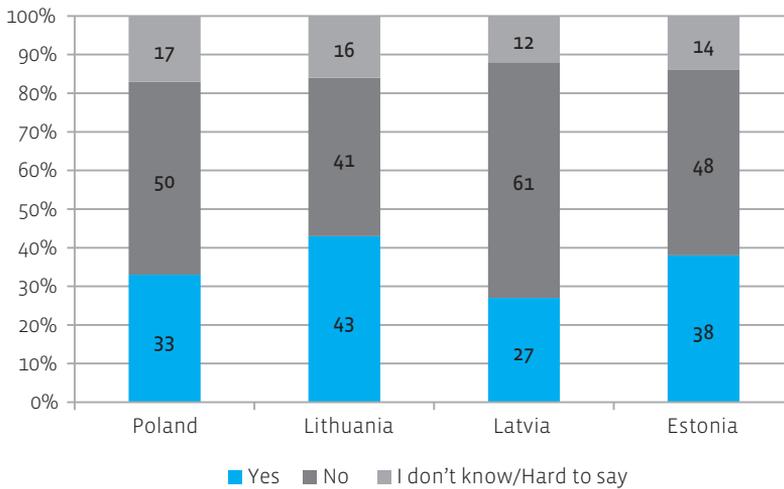


Figure 15: In the context of the conflict in the east of Ukraine, should your country support the Ukrainian army, for example, by sending equipment and weapons, and training soldiers?

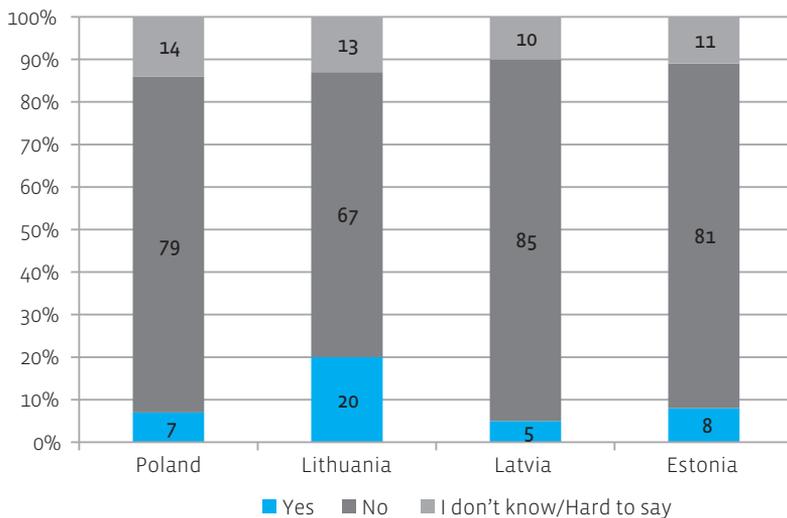
Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

On the other hand, all four societies are definitely against sending their own troops into the conflict area. Overall, 85% of the inhabitants of Latvia, 81% of the inhabitants of Estonia, 79% of those living in Poland and 67% of those living in Lithuania oppose sending their own troops into the conflict area. In this case, too, the most numerous group of supporters of this type of assistance is in Lithuania and includes every fifth respondent. More than 90% of respondents from the Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia are against sending troops to Ukraine.

The societies of the region are against sending their own soldiers to the conflict area

Figure 16:
In the context of the
conflict in the east of
Ukraine, should your
country send soldiers to
Ukraine?

Source: Data of the
Institute of Public Affairs
2015



Summary

Poland and the Baltic states have received support on their path to NATO and to the EU, particularly from Germany – the western country closest to them. The integration of the region with western European structures was not only in the interest of the countries seeking membership but also in the interest of Germany itself. It gave the Germans a guarantee of security (by pushing the NATO and EU borders further away from their country borders), but also economic profit. Similarly, now, Ukraine's membership in NATO and the EU is not only about supporting the stability, security and development of that country, although these aspects are very important. Ukrainians, who, during the Euromaidan, chose a pro-European direction for their country,⁵ expect concrete declarations from the West, reassuring them – as the Poles were reassured in the 1990s – that their work and efforts aimed at reforms have a chance to be crowned with joining both organisations. Therefore, in particular, the societies of Poland and the Baltic states, which have received such concrete signals of support, should understand how

5 As the research by the Institute of Public Affairs and the Bertelsmann Foundation show, Ukrainian society continuously supports the pro-European direction of the integration of their country. Half – 51% – of the respondents are in favour of it. See Jacek Kucharczyk, Agnieszka Łada, Łukasz Wenerski, "Ukrainians look to the West – policy assesment and expectations, Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Stiftung, Warsaw 2015, p.8.

important such assistance may be for the Ukrainians. Including Ukraine in western European structures will also be a chance for strengthening and developing the member states of these organisations located in the region. Therefore, it is probable that a great part of the public in these countries advocating such support for Ukraine is guided not only by their sense of solidarity with the people of Ukraine and sense of duty to repay what they once received from the West, but also by the understanding of what is good for their own countries.

However, even after deducting the responses of the respondents from the Russian minority, in the four countries there is a group of people who are against such support or cannot say whether it should be provided to Ukraine. These doubts can also be explained. Accepting another member into NATO – especially from the territory which Russia considers to be its sphere of interest – may provoke a negative reaction from Russia. Whereas, as research results show, the societies of the region, even in the current situation, feel the military threat from Russia. Another member state in the EU, at a time when the Community already has problems with decision-making and the current crises are weakening it even further, means even more challenges for European unity, something that these societies may fear. In addition, accession of a relatively poor member state means lower support for the countries whose income, compared to that new member, will be higher. The costs and advantages listed here are the matter of some distant future because Ukraine must still undergo a number of reforms.⁶ In the meantime, an assurance of support on the path to that goal may bring some positive influence today. When answering the questions, respondents have probably not carried out such an in-depth analysis of profits and losses, although the arguments presented above – present in the debates in the region and therefore informing public opinion – must have had an impact on the final responses.

A different view should be taken of the declared support for specific economic or military support, which should be provided immediately. The sceptical attitude especially to military support is probably connected with the perceived threat from Russia and the belief that such action

⁶ Thus, for instance, it is pointless to ponder whether the presence of Ukraine in the EU will reduce the funds available for other member states, because after all the years that will pass before Ukraine may potentially obtain EU membership, the financial situation and the shape of the EU budget will be different from what it is now.

may provoke Russia even further to act against the region. The fear of annoying Russia is, however, only one of the reasons why the societies of the region are not willing to provide economic support to Ukraine.⁷ Another argument – raised in public debates concerning this issue – is the conviction that their countries cannot afford to provide such assistance. The attitude of the inhabitants of the region may meet with negative reception in other parts of the EU; because if even Ukraine's neighbours do not support this country firmly and are not prepared to provide such support, then the countries of southern and western Europe will be even more reluctant to do so.

Assessment of governments' policies

- ▶ The opinions of Poles and the Baltic people about the actions of their governments vis-à-vis Russia in the face of the conflict vary significantly. While the biggest group of Poles would wish for a firmer policy towards Moscow (41%), an equally big group of Latvian residents consider the activity of their government to be too anti-Russian (40%). On the other hand, the societies of Lithuania and Estonia are strongly divided internally regarding this issue, with their opinions range from stating that the actions are too anti-Russian (31% and 32%) to the view that they are appropriate (37% and 34%).
- ▶ In the assessment of the Polish European policy, it is the Lithuanians who are most strongly convinced that the activity of Poland in the EU is good for cooperation within the Community – more than half of them hold this view (53%), whereas people in Estonia and Latvia most often state that they are not able to make such an assessment (38%). Similarly, the biggest group of Lithuanians believe that while Poland pursues its own interests, it does not harm other EU member states (43%), whereas people from the other Baltic states are divided in their opinions on that.

⁷ At the same time, this is exactly the type of assistance Ukrainians hope for. Research conducted by IPA indicates that 73% of respondents expect such assistance. See Jacek Kucharczyk, Agnieszka Łada, Łukasz Wenerski, "Ukraińcy patrzą na Zachód – ocena polityki i oczekiwania" [The Ukrainians look West – assessment of the policy and expectations], Institute of Public Affairs/Bertelsmann Foundation, Warsaw 2015, p.20.

Assessment of the policy of respondents' own governments towards the conflict

Governments do not always pursue policies that are supported by the majority of society. It is particularly in foreign policy and in security policy that the interests of the country are often different from the short-term opinions of citizens that are based on the picture of the reality mainly created by the media. In the countries where – as the survey discussed here shows very clearly – the social divisions are extremely large, it is all the more difficult for the authorities to make the majority of the inhabitants satisfied with the government's actions. Even though especially in this area it is the duty of those in power to conduct policies that in their view are appropriate, albeit not always satisfying for the public opinion, the views of society do have an impact on the politicians' readiness to take certain decisions and to set certain directions.

Societies of the countries under analysis are strongly divided internally in their opinions. A similarity can be noticed in the distribution of opinions of the inhabitants of Lithuania and Estonia, where the biggest groups of respondents (although the majority is slight) consider the policy of their country's authorities appropriate (37% and 34%), but at the same time, almost every third respondent accuses the policy of being too anti-Russian (31% and 32%) – and every fifth of not being strict enough towards Moscow (20% and 21%). In Latvia, the predominant opinion is that the government's policy is too anti-Russian.

Against this background, the opinions of Poles, who are critical about their country's policy towards Russia, stand out, with the biggest group considering it not sufficiently strict (41%). Every fourth Polish respondent considers it to be appropriate (25%).

The answers of Poles and the inhabitants of the Baltic states differ in this respect mainly because of the divided opinions in Latvia and Estonia between the majority of the society and the Russian minorities, which charge the governments of their countries with anti-Russian sentiment (79% and 84%, respectively), and very rarely consider the government's policy appropriate (8% and 6%).

The societies of the region differ in their opinions about the policies of their governments towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Poles hold the view that the policy towards Russia is not strict enough, Lithuanians are usually relatively satisfied, the inhabitants of Latvia consider it too anti-Russian, whereas people in Estonia are strongly divided on this issue

The inhabitants of Estonian nationality, on the other hand, are even more satisfied with the policy of their government in this respect than Lithuanians and Poles. The opinions of people of Latvian nationality in Latvia and Poles are comparable.

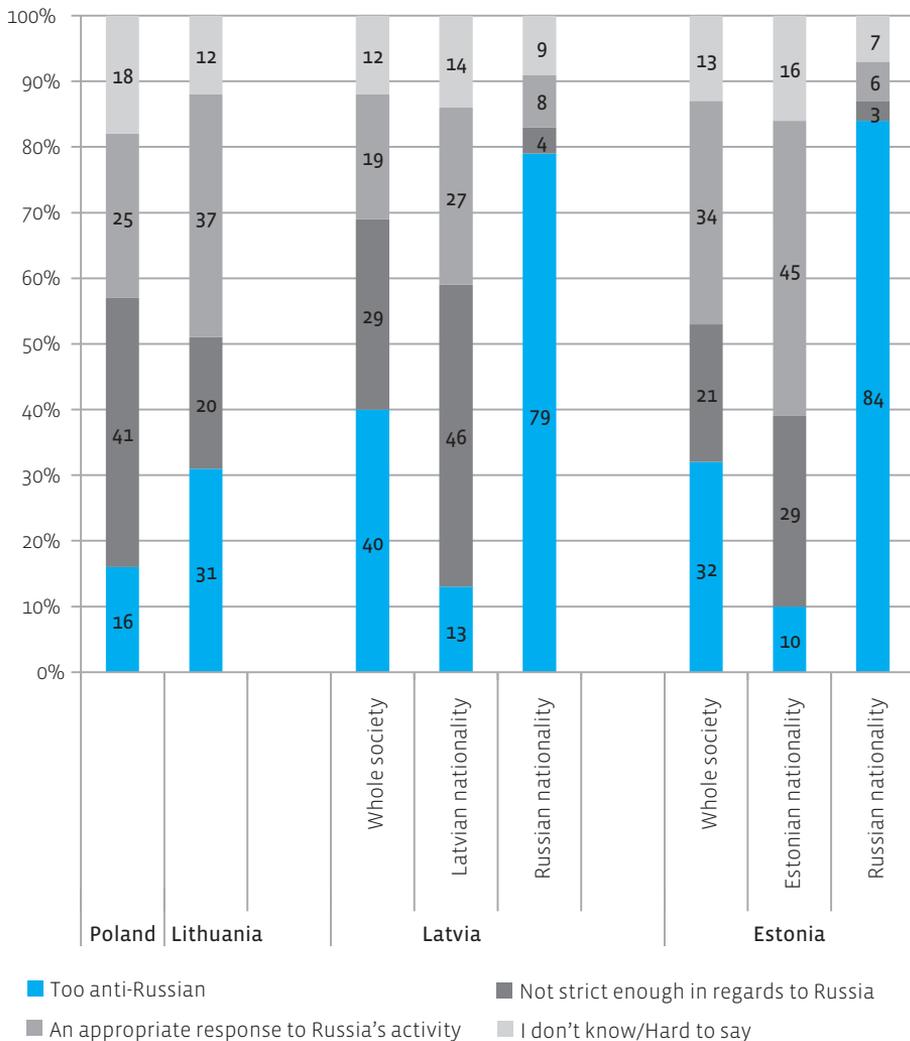


Figure 17: How would you rate the policies of your country's government regarding Russia in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the annexation of Crimea? This policy is:

At the same time, the inhabitants of the Baltic states are not able to give an unequivocal assessment of the Polish policy in the context of the continuing conflict – 34% of the inhabitants of Lithuania are not able to

answer this question, nor are 38% of the inhabitants of Latvia and 41% of those living in Estonia. Groups of respondents that are similar in size say that Polish action is appropriate (24%, 21%, 25%). However, while every third Lithuanian surveyed considers Polish policy not strict enough (33%), in Latvia and Estonia more numerous groups consider it to be too anti-Russian (28% and 20%) than insufficiently strict (13% and 14%).

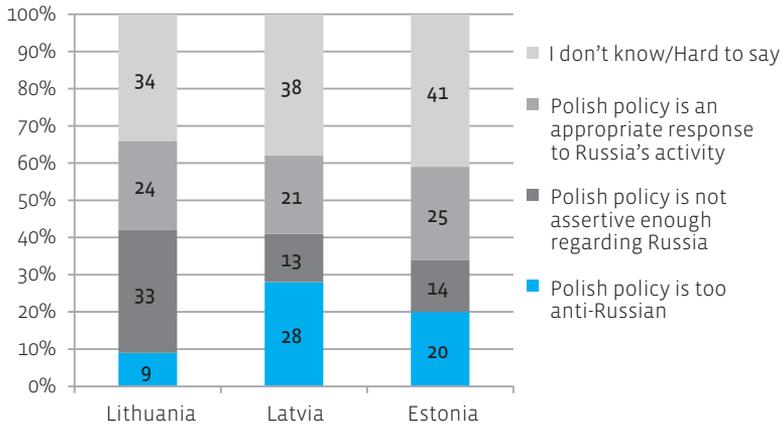


Figure 18: How would you rate the policy of the Polish government regarding Russia in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the annexation of Crimea?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Perception of Polish European policy

The commonality of interests in the eastern policy and joint action with regard to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict unite the analysed countries of the region within the EU. In other areas the unanimity may not be so frequent. The size of Poland, which translates directly into its position in the Community (through the number of votes in the European Union Council and, related to that, seeking Poland's support as an ally in the decision-making process) may be both helpful for the Baltic states – if they see Poland as a partner with common interests – but may also be a burden, when Warsaw uses its power to act against the plans of the Baltic states. It is obvious that actions of any country in the EU are primarily expected to serve that country's interest. However, it is of key importance for other states and for future negotiations within the Community, whether this pursuing of the country's own interests takes place at the expense of the interests of others or with respect for the interests of others. Similarly, activity of any state may be perceived in a positive way – as contributing to better cooperation in Europe – but it may be viewed as negative – as

activity of a country which makes reaching consensus difficult, which acts egotistically.

In the Baltic states, rather positive opinions can be noted about Polish European policy as a policy that contributes to better cooperation in Europe, although it is only in Lithuania that respondents expressing such opinions are in the majority (53%).⁸ In Estonia and Latvia, large groups of respondents are not able to give an answer to this question (38% in each country). Others are more frequently convinced that Poland contributes to better the cooperation (39% and 33%, respectively) than to

The majority of Lithuanians believe that Poland contributes to better cooperation in Europe. This view also prevails over the negative opinion in Latvia and Estonia

exacerbating disputes (23% and 28%), although the Russian minority in each of these countries does not share this view. Half of the respondents from the Russian minority in Estonia and Latvia (53% and 46%, respectively) hold the view that Poland exacerbates disputes in Europe.

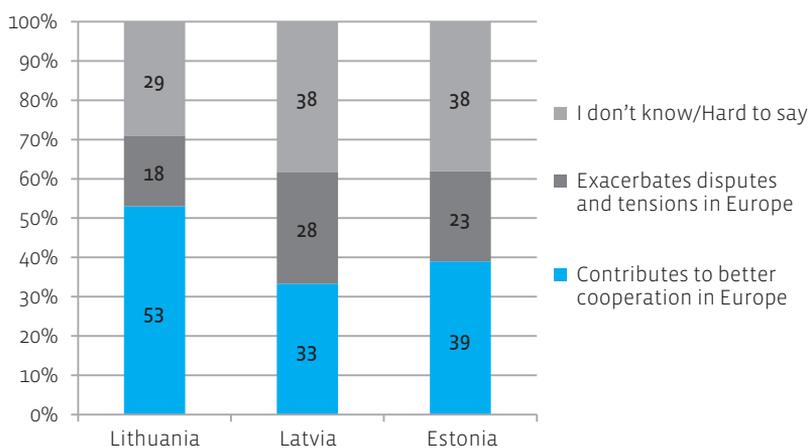


Figure 19:
In your opinion, is Poland
a country that:

Source: Data of the
Institute of Public Affairs
2015

Similarly, when assessing how Poland cares for its own interests in the EU, it is the Lithuanians who more frequently (43%)⁹ than the inhabitants

8 To compare, in 2012, 41% of the surveyed Lithuanians expressed positive opinions. These results, however, are not directly comparable because the 2012 survey was conducted with the use of face-to-face methods and also included people over 60 years of age. See A.Fuksiewicz, J.Kucharczyk, A.Łada, *Obok siebie, Wzajemne postrzeganie się Polaków i Litwinów* [Side by side. How Poles and Lithuanians see one another], Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2012, p. 97.

9 In this case, too, in 2012, 41% of the surveyed Lithuanians expressed positive opinions about this. See A.Fuksiewicz, J.Kucharczyk, A.Łada, *Obok siebie, Wzajemne postrzeganie się Polaków i Litwinów* [Side by side. How Poles and Lithuanians see one another], Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw, 2012, p. 97.

of Latvia (35%) and Estonia (39%) hold the view that while pursuing its own interests within the EU, Poland respects the interests of other countries. In the case of the Latvian society, this view is even more rare than the opinion that Poland does it at the expense of other countries (37%), which results from the negative opinions of the Russian minority (53%). In this case, too, a large percentage of respondents (27% in Lithuania, 28% in Latvia and 35% in Estonia) are not able to make an assessment of Polish policy in Europe.

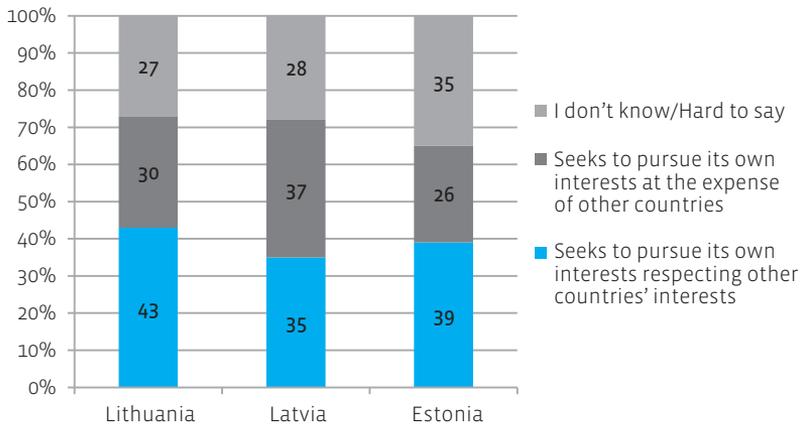


Figure 20:
In your opinion, is Poland
a country that:

Source: Data of the
Institute of Public Affairs
2015

Summary

The societies of the region vary in their assessment of the policies of their own governments regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It is no surprise that there are divisions in Latvia and Estonia, where, again the differences between the majority of society and the Russian minority are typical for most answers. What is interesting, however, is that Lithuanians, based on their answers to many questions, can be described as “hawks” because they most often support firm action regarding Russia (such as supplying weapons to Ukraine or sending Lithuanian soldiers to Ukraine), and they relatively rarely rate the policy of their own government as not assertive enough towards Russia. At the same time, they consider Polish policy to be not sufficiently assertive. On the other hand, Poles, who in principle are sceptical about assistance to Ukraine, demand stricter policy towards Moscow, in spite of the fact that they have the sense of military threat, which could suggest certain cautiousness regarding the

preferred action towards Russia. There is, however, convergence between this position and the support of the surveyed Poles for the establishment of NATO bases in Poland.

Positive opinions about Polish policy are an important signal. The assessment that in the EU Poland acts in a way that respects the interests of other countries and rather contributes to better cooperation in the EU, is, in the context of relatively similar ratings of the eastern policy (in spite of certain differences, indicated in the survey under discussion, they are more similar than when comparison is made between this region and the states of the South or the West of Europe) an important indication showing that the analysed countries can be important partners in the Community, joining forces and setting common directions for action.

Assessment of the relations between the countries of the region

- ▶ Poles and people from the Baltic states are united in their perception of the quality of their mutual relations. The opinions about the bilateral relations with Poland are definitely positive. Both the inhabitants of the Baltic states and Poles believe that the relations are good. This view is shared by eight out of ten people living in Estonia and Latvia. Even in the case of Lithuanians, who are traditionally more reserved in their attitudes to Poland and mutual relations, this assessment is positive (69%).
- ▶ The public in Latvia and Estonia give priority to relations with the other two Baltic states and the Nordic states. Lithuanians, point more frequently to Germany than to the Nordic states, but still list Estonia and Latvia most often. For the people of Lithuania, Poland is the fourth, for Latvia – the fifth, and for Estonia – the seventh most important partner. For Poles, Germany is the most important partner on the international scene.

Opinions about the condition of bilateral relations

Little is heard about the bilateral relations between Poland and individual Baltic states. The ones that stand out are the relations with Lithuania, which, because of the many years of common history and the fact that a sizeable Polish minority lives in the territory of Lithuania, now

and again become a subject of media reports, as a result of disagreements precisely about the situation of Poles in Lithuania. The lack of negative comments is probably the reason why societies' opinions about the mutual relations are positive. The assessment of bilateral relations with Poland is particularly good in Estonia (80%) and Latvia (79%), although the group of Lithuanians who perceive them as good (69%) also seems bigger than expected. In addition, two out of three Poles give good rating to the condition of relations with the Baltic states.

Poles and the people from the Baltic states express positive opinions about mutual bilateral relations

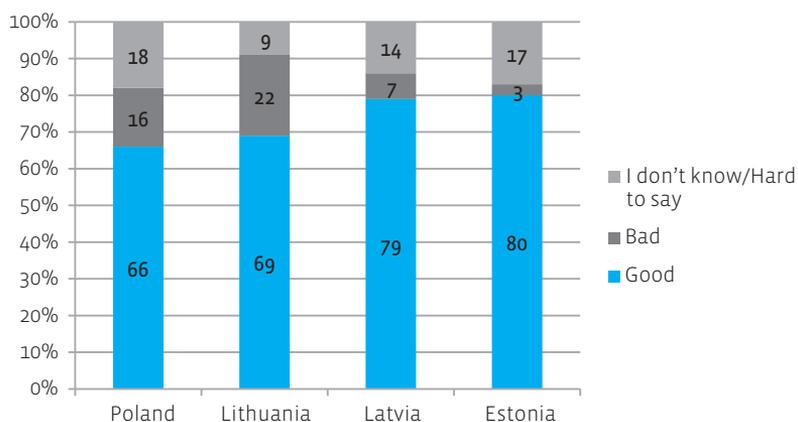


Figure 21:
How would you rate relations between your country and Poland / Poland and the Baltic states?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

The most important partners on the international scene as indicated by respondents

In spite of the good ratings given to the bilateral relations and the Polish European policy, Poland is not, however, the most important partner of the Baltic states. The indication of which country is of key importance in international cooperation is influenced not only by geographical factors but also historical, economic and cultural ones.

The inhabitants of the Baltic states almost unanimously point to the other two countries as their main partners,¹⁰ in addition, in the case of Estonians and Latvians, the following group of states receives almost identical endorsement: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden (1–2 percentage point difference). In Lithuania, these countries are overtaken

¹⁰ For each of the listed countries, the respondents selected one of the answers to the question: "Please assess, how important for your country are the relations with the countries or groups of countries listed below: "Very important, priority", "Important but not a priority", "Not very important".

in the hierarchy by Germany, which, in turn, in Estonia and Latvia takes third place. The order of countries further down the list varies. And so, Russia is indicated as the fourth most important partner in Latvia (where 80% of the Russian minority point to it as the key partner, with 28% endorsement among the Latvian majority of respondents) and in Estonia (indicated by 83% of respondents of Russian origin), but it is only ninth in Lithuania – with not only France or Poland, but also Ukraine before it. However, Ukraine is almost always at the bottom of the list, although the percentage of the Baltic people surveyed who consider relations with this country to be important is not low (from 62% in Latvia, to 77% in Lithuania).

Poland appears as a priority partner in the responses of 61% of Lithuanians, but the same group is only half as big among the inhabitants of Latvia (30%) and Estonia (24%). All in all, Poland is considered a priority or an important country by a similar group of respondents from among Lithuanian (86%) and Latvian (85%) societies, and a not much smaller group among the Estonian public (74%).

In Poland, Germany is considered to be the key partner (91%), ahead of the United States by a few percentage points (87%). In these two cases, the percentage of responses that relations with these countries are a priority exceeds the percentage of responses that they are important but not a priority. Further down the list, France is indicated as the key partner (80%) as well as the following group of states: Denmark, Finland, Norway

The most important partner for Poles is Germany. The Baltic states are ranked behind the Visegrad countries and at the same place as Russia

and Sweden (80%). The Baltic states take seventh place (75%), behind the countries of the Visegrad Group (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) (79%), and jointly with Russia (75%); but it is the relations with Russia that are more often rated as a priority than the relations with the Baltic states.

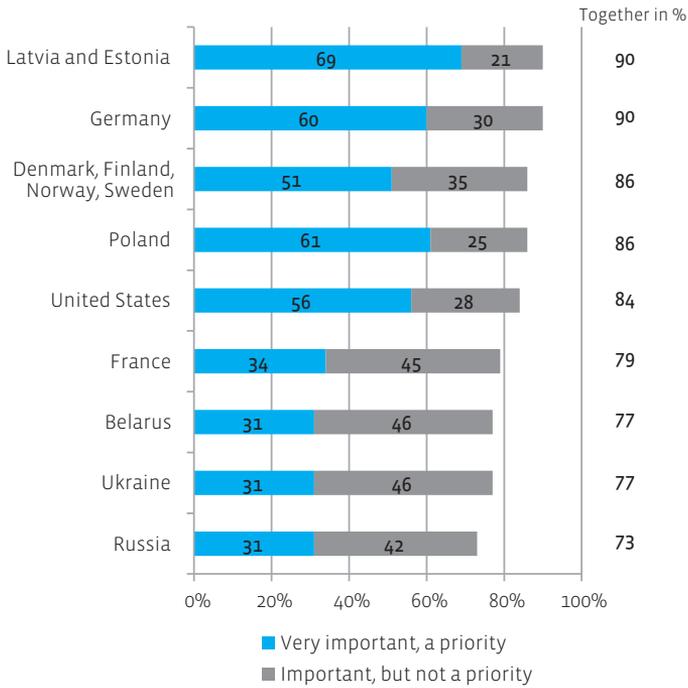


Figure 22: Percentage of Lithuanian citizens that assessed relations with a given country or a group of countries as "very important, priority" or "important, but not a priority" for their country

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

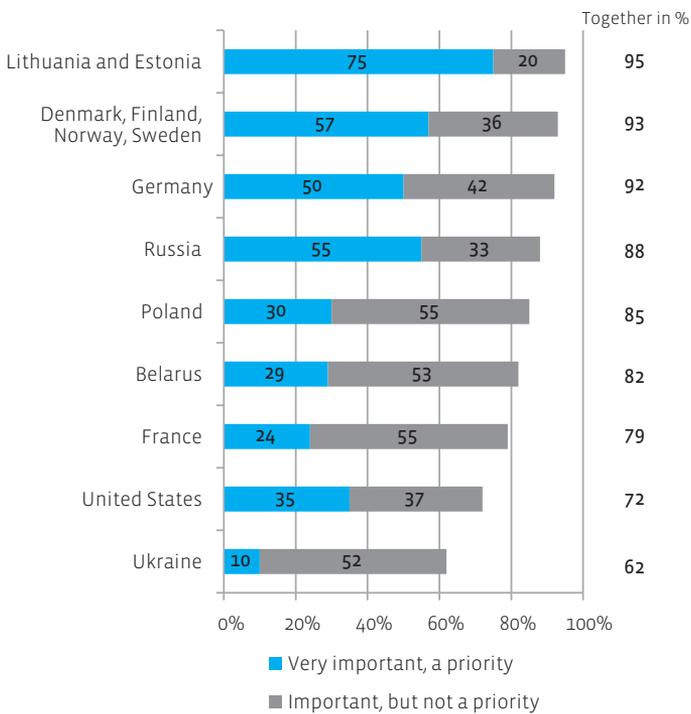


Figure 23: Percentage of Latvian citizens that assessed relations with a given country or a group of countries as "very important, priority" or "important, but not a priority" for their country

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Figure 24:
Percentage of Estonian citizens that assessed relations with a given country or a group of countries as "very important, priority" or "important, but not a priority" for their country

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

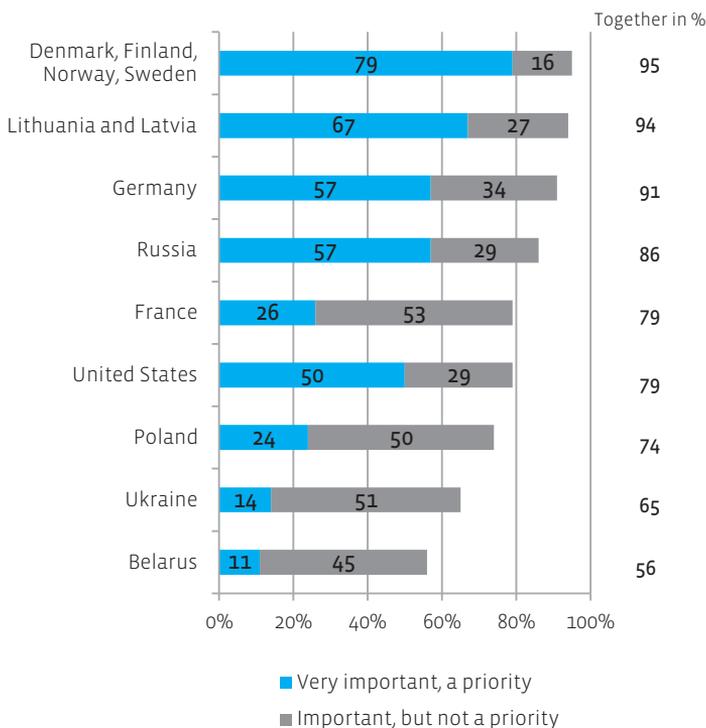
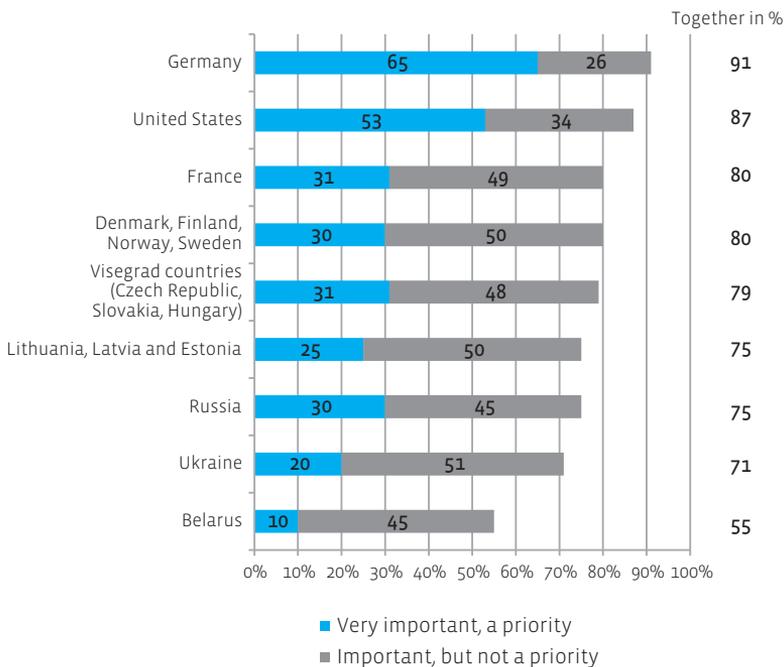


Figure 25:
Percentage of Polish citizens that assessed relations with a given country or a group of countries as "very important, priority" or "important, but not a priority" for their country

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015



Summary

The positive assessment of bilateral relations is an important addition to the good opinions about Polish European policy and the commonality of interests in eastern policy. It shows the great potential for further constructive cooperation. It should not be a surprise that Poland is not one of the most important partners indicated by the Baltic people, as their mutual connections and ties with the Nordic countries are traditionally of key importance. A significant piece of information is the fact that the relations with Germany are considered important – in spite of their greater remoteness from the territory of the Baltic states and greater historical distance. This importance of Berlin indicates that for people from the Baltic states, Poland will be a desired partner inasmuch as it has, at the same time, close and good relations with Germany.

Even though Ukraine is located at the bottom or in the last but one place on the list of the countries based on the importance of the relations with them, most of the societies under analysis consider relations with Ukraine to be a priority or important. Therefore, it may be even more striking that in spite of such opinions these societies are not very willing to provide current support to Ukraine.

Poles list the countries of the Visegrad Group as important partners more frequently than the Baltic states. In the context of the study under discussion, to a great extent devoted to the eastern policy, it is particularly interesting, because it is exactly the policy towards Russia that divides Poland so much from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Nevertheless, these are the countries that Poles most often indicate as the ones with whom relations are important. It is probable that such opinions are influenced by the fact that the Visegrad countries appear relatively frequently in public debate as potential partners and are generally better known in Poland than the neighbours on the Baltic Sea. Therefore, these opinions do not necessarily result from the belief that Poland and these states are united by similar views. Poles are probably not aware, either, of specific similarities and differences of opinion, because the countries of the region are not widely discussed in Poland.

At the same time, Poles point to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as often as they point to Russia. This is definitely not done because of the perceived commonality of interests but because of the ties linking Poland

with the powerful neighbour, which, regardless of how the situation in Ukraine develops, will remain the key player in the region.

Assessment of the effects of integration with the European Union

- ▶ The people living in the region do not have the same opinion on the advantages of European integration. The view that the advantages of the process outweigh the disadvantages is common for Poles and Lithuanians – half of them see the benefits (53% and 50%, respectively). Estonians also see more benefits than disadvantages – although this group is not in the majority (42%), whereas in Latvia negative opinions prevail (only every fourth person sees the benefits).
- ▶ In spite of the perceived advantages resulting from integration with the EU, Lithuanians are not convinced that there are more benefits than advantages resulting from introducing the euro in their country. It is the Estonians, who are usually less enthusiastic about the EU than Lithuanians, but, at the same time, who have been using the euro longer than any other Baltic state, and who recognise the prevalence of the benefits over the advantages.

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of integration

Poland and the Baltic states joined the EU in the same year – 2004. Since then, they have been able to take advantage of the structural funds, free movement of goods and services, and at different times the western labour markets opened for the citizens of these countries. Membership in the Community was also expected to strengthen the sense of security among their inhabitants. All these factors could be perceived as the advantages of membership of the EU. However, the assessment of these advantages is not the same in all four countries.

Poles are the society most satisfied with European integration. They are the ones who most often see the prevalence of the benefits of integration (53%) and least frequently see the disadvantages (8%). Lithuanians have similar views (50% and 12%, respectively). Regarding the inhabitants of Estonia, the opinion that benefits prevail appears more often than the view that disadvantages prevail (42% to 18%), but the difference between these two groups is smaller. The inhabitants of Latvia

are convinced that disadvantages prevail (28%), although the prevalence of benefits is seen by a relatively similar group – 25% of respondents. The Russian minorities are in both cases much less satisfied with the presence in the EU. In Estonia, the benefits are seen by only 16% of respondents from this group, in Latvia – 14%. Those who point to disadvantages constitute 37% of respondents from the Russian minority in Estonia and 46% in Latvia.

Poles and Lithuanians are the most convinced that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages resulting from European integration

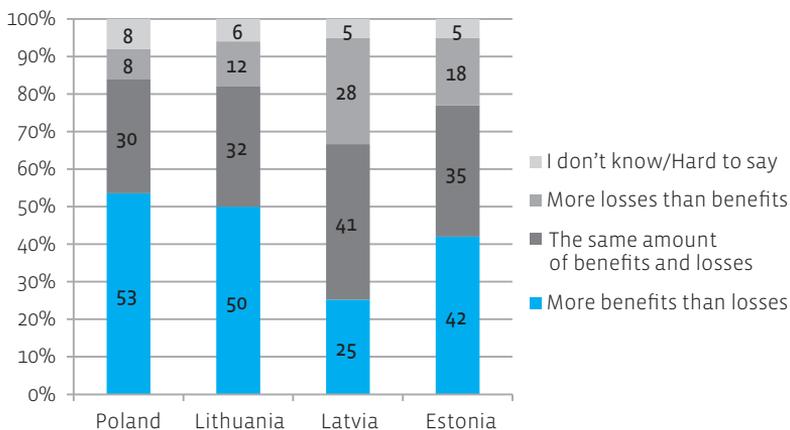


Figure 26: Has your country's integration with the European Union brought your country more benefits or disadvantages?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

In the years 2013 and 2014, the group of respondents in Poland who saw more benefits than disadvantages of integration was 37% and 43%, respectively. These changes in the split of responses compared to the most recent survey may, however, be related to the fact that respondents in the latter survey have been up to 60 years of age. Whereas in the previous surveys it was people over 60 that relatively less frequently than other age groups saw the benefits, and saw disadvantages more often.

Attitudes towards the euro

All three Baltic states have already introduced the euro – Estonia in 2011, Latvia in 2014 and Lithuania in 2015. However, their satisfaction with this fact differs. Those who most often see the benefits outweighing the disadvantages are those who have had the currency for the longest – the inhabitants of Estonia (45%). Whereas every fourth inhabitant is convinced that the disadvantages outweigh the benefits. In Latvia and

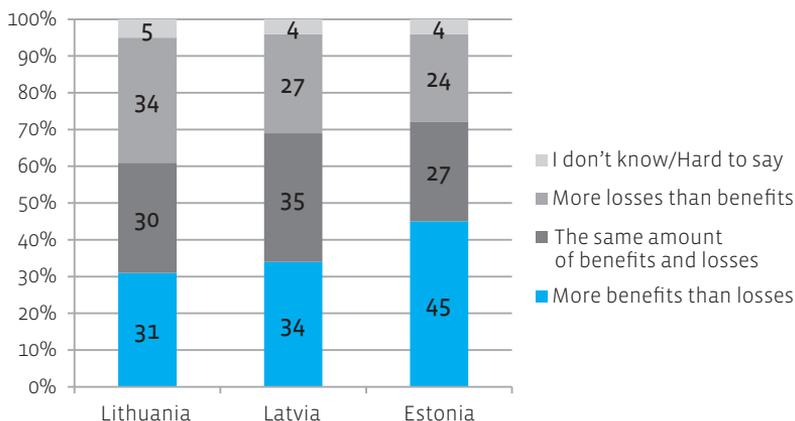
Lithuania, the societies are divided into three groups, not much different in size, which either see more benefits than disadvantages or the other way round, or believe that there is a balance between the two. Both in Latvia and in Estonia the Russian minorities less frequently point to the

The inhabitants of Estonia most often see more benefits than disadvantages resulting from the introduction of the euro

prevalence of benefits (25% and 22%, respectively) and more often say that disadvantages prevail (35% and 45%) than other respondents (21% of respondents of Latvian nationality and 16% of those of Estonian nationality).

Figure 27: Has introduction of the euro brought your country more benefits or disadvantages?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015



Poles, who not only don't have the common currency but who don't even know the date of its introduction (even though Poland is obliged to join the eurozone – similarly to the Baltic states – by the Accession

Poles believe that the introduction of the euro in Poland will bring more disadvantages than benefits to the country

Treaty) are convinced that their country will lose on the adoption of the common currency – this is the view of 60% of respondents. Only 14% believe in the benefits of introducing the euro in Poland, and 17% are of the opinion that there will be balance between benefits and disadvantages.

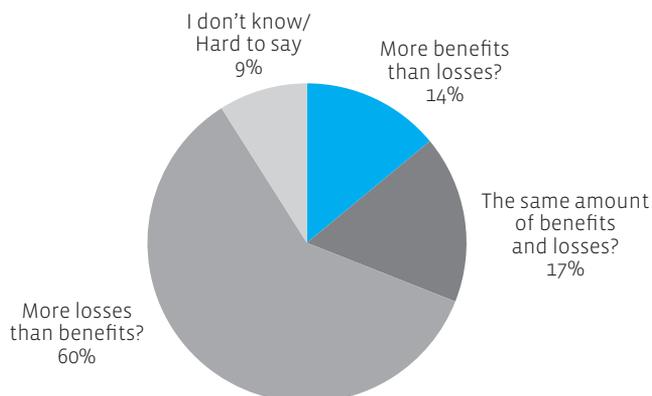


Figure 28:
Do you think that the introduction of the euro would bring Poland more benefits or disadvantages?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Summary

The concerns that the Polish public associate with the introduction of the euro in Poland does not find confirmation in the opinions of the people from the Baltic states, who already experience the consequences of having the common European currency. Although the three societies are internally divided regarding this issue, in none of them do negative opinions prevail. If, on the other hand, the responses stating that the euro brings more benefits or the same amount of benefits and disadvantages are compared, it is evident that the negative effects are perceived by a definite minority of respondents. This should be a clear signal for Poles, who are so sceptical about the common currency.

The satisfaction of Estonian inhabitants from having the euro may come from their pragmatic approach to European integration and also from the fact that recently, the Eurogroup has become an important forum for discussions and decisions concerning the future of the eurozone and the entire EU. Taking part in decision-making gives, especially to a relatively small EU member state – a sense of playing an instrumental role and greater satisfaction with membership. The inhabitants of Estonia have had an opportunity to see these effects the longest, as they are ones that have had membership in the eurozone the longest.

Poles, on the other hand, when considering the costs and benefits of introducing the common currency, think, first of all, about their financial situation and worry about price increases. In addition, in the

public discourse in Poland, an argument often appears that it was its own currency that saved Poland from the consequences of the crisis. As inhabitants of a relatively big member state, which is taken into consideration when decisions are made in the EU, Poles are less inclined to see the potential for the increased role of their country if they join the Eurogroup.

Attitude towards reception of refugees

- ▶ The attitude that unites societies of the region is the reluctance towards receiving refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (the opposition ranges from 66% of respondents in Latvia to 53% in Lithuania). Readiness to take in refugees from Ukraine is higher in the entire region, but there are differences between individual countries. The people of Lithuania and Estonia support this action (69% and 65%, respectively) more eagerly than those living in Latvia (53%) and Poland (45%). Poles differ from the others in that the percentage of respondents who support and those who oppose admission of refugees from Ukraine is almost the same.

Attitude towards refugees from North Africa and Middle East

One of the key principles of European integration is the principle of solidarity. Poland and the Baltic states have experienced its operation when, after joining the Community (and when they were still aspiring to membership), they received significant support from the other members of the EU in the form of structural funds. It is the possibility to use these funds that contributes to the fact that the citizens of these countries point to the benefits of European integration. In the face of the humanitarian crisis in North Africa and the Middle East, and the growing number of immigrants finding their way to Europe, European solidarity must apply to new areas. This time, it is the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that must show solidarity with the countries of the South, which are experiencing an inflow of refugees. The European Commission proposes that each member state should take in a specified number of refugees. In the discussions on this subject during EU summits and other meetings, a division emerged in the EU into the member states

which opted for such a solution and those which opposed it, and it was usually described as a rift between the West and the Central East of the EU. The reluctance towards refugees resulted primarily from the lack of experience with cultural diversity in the former communist bloc, which gave rise to fears of potential new residents. The conviction of the citizens living in this region is that the region's economic condition is not as good as the level of development of the EU member states that were in the EU before the 2004 enlargement – and that, as a result, the region's financial capability to take in the newcomers is smaller, and this has increased the scepticism towards the refugees.

The research results show that the inhabitants of the countries of the region are indeed, in their majority, reluctant towards receiving refugees from North Africa and the Middle East. The biggest group supporting the proposal of the European Commission is among Lithuanians (40%), but opposition still prevails (53%). Those who are against it account for 66% of the inhabitants of Latvia, 63% of inhabitants of Estonia, and 62% of those living in Poland. Representatives of the Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia are even more sceptical than other groups of respondents in those countries (74% and 72%, respectively).

Societies of the region are against accepting refugees from Africa and the Middle East in accordance with the proposal of the European Commission

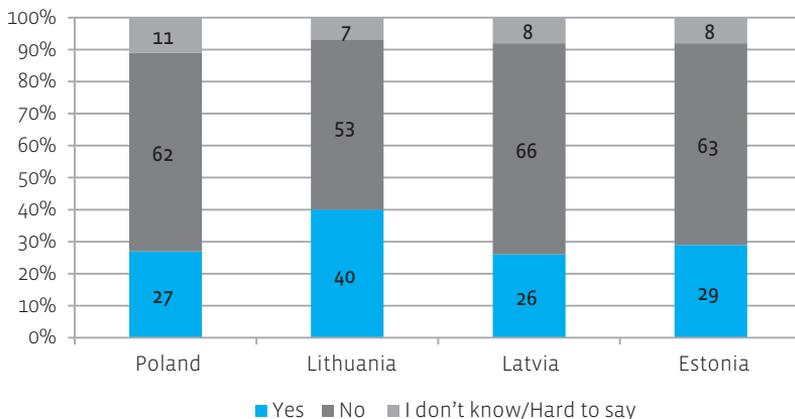


Figure 29: Do you think that your country should accept refugees from Africa and the Middle East, according to the European Commission's proposal?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Readiness to accept refugees from Ukraine

While the scepticism about refugees from Africa and the Middle East is sometimes justified by the lack of knowledge about Arab culture, fear of them being “different” and potential problems with their integration, these arguments should not appear in the considerations concerning acceptance of refugees from Ukraine. Indeed, there is more openness towards them in Poland and the Baltic states than towards the refugees from the Arabic states. The ones relatively most reluctant towards them are Poles. Not many more Poles are in favour of taking Ukrainian refugees in (45%) than they are against it (42%). The ones who are the most open – similarly as in the case of people from Africa and the Middle East – are Lithuanians (69%). Also two-thirds of the inhabitants of Estonia are in favour of accepting Ukrainians (65%), as are more than half of the

Openness towards accepting refugees from Ukraine is higher than those from the Mediterranean region. Poles express the relatively greatest reluctance

respondents from Latvia (53%). The inhabitants of these countries of Estonian or Latvian nationality are more open (in favour: 74% and 65%, respectively) than the people of Russian nationality (42% and 37%), although they, too, prefer to take in Ukrainians, rather than refugees from Arab countries.

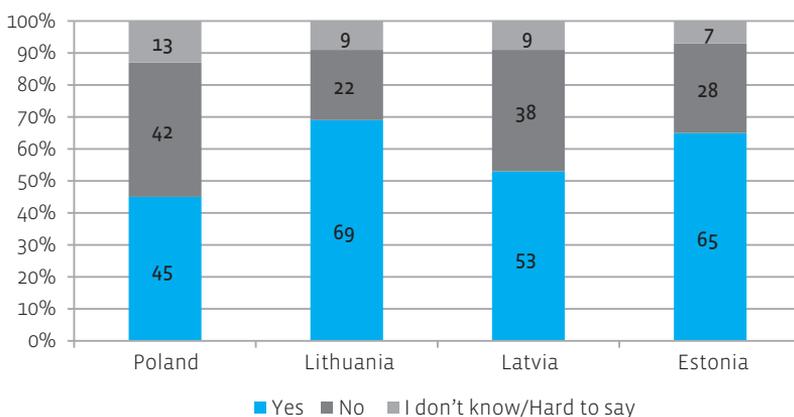


Figure 30: In the case of an upsurge in violence in Eastern Ukraine, do you think that your country should accept refugees from Ukraine?

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Openness towards refugees from Ukraine is greater in all the countries under analysis than towards refugees from Africa and the Middle East. The biggest difference – more than twofold – appears in Estonia.

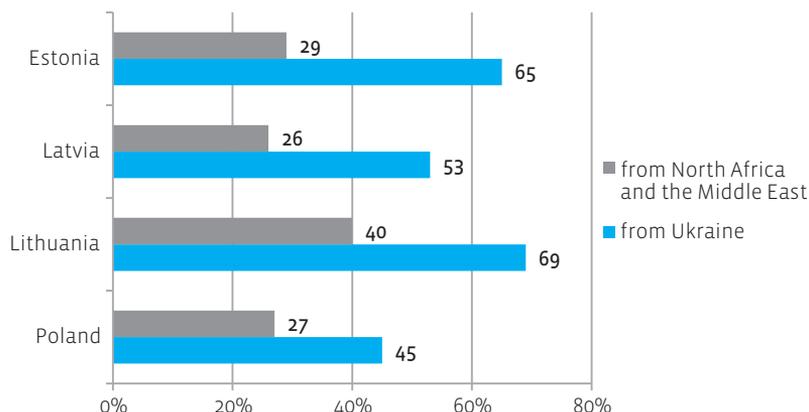


Figure 31: Should your country accept refugees from North Africa and the Middle East, and from Ukraine? Comparison of positive answers

Source: Data of the Institute of Public Affairs 2015

Summary

Societies of the region share opinions about accepting refugees from the South. The consistency of views is not, in this case, a positive signal. This scepticism has a very negative impact on their image in the Western Europe, where an attitude of solidarity is expected. Especially in the context of the expectations of Poland and the Baltic states that the EU will speak with one voice about the eastern policy, the reluctance towards sharing the refugees will lead to further divisions in Europe and a negative attitude of EU partners to the proposals concerning the sanctions against Russia or support for Ukraine. The lack of a clear stance of Poles themselves on the issue of refugees from Ukraine raises even more concerns, as it is evidence of Polish society being generally closed, and completes the picture of general conservatism in the readiness to provide ongoing assistance to Ukraine.



Cooperation between Poland and the Baltic states. Opinions of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian experts

Introduction

“I am thinking about the creation of a partnership bloc, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, to the Adriatic Sea. A state is strong when it is surrounded by allies,” President Andrzej Duda told the Polish Press Agency PAP when he was still the president-elect.¹ The fact that he made his first international visit to Estonia was expected to emphasise his commitment to the affairs of the region.

The president wants to build regional alliance under the Polish leadership. However, the question arises whether the region wants it too. The purpose of this paper is to find an answer to this question. In the light of the differences in foreign policy and in the reaction to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict within the Visegrad Group, whose members (especially Slovakia and Hungary) do not necessarily share the Polish pro-Ukrainian stance, the Baltic states appear to be Poland’s closest allies. As the public opinion surveys described earlier show, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians have similar perception of the international situation, and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in particular.

Good relations with the Baltic states may provide a foundation for building a stronger position of Poland in the region and lead to its greater engagement in the region’s affairs. This paper aims to show how the plans for forming an alliance “from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic Sea” have been perceived by people involved in foreign policy (diplomats, independent experts and journalists) in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.² It begins with

1 Andrzej Duda zaprzysiężony. Sylwetka nowego prezydenta Polski [Andrzej Duda sworn in. The profile of the new President of Poland], Polish Radio, 6.8.2015, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1485722,Andrzej-Duda-zaprzysiezony-Sylwetka-nowego-prezydenta-Polski> [accessed on 1.9.2015].

2 The author wishes to thank the people who agreed to share their views and opinions for the purpose of this paper. They included Vytis Jurkonis, Greta Monika Tučkutė, Jarosław Niewierowicz, Vidmantas Purlys, Marius Laurinavičius, Andis Kudors, Veiko Spolītis, Ilgvars Kļava, Anda Abele,

an assessment of the regional cooperation between Poland and the three Baltic countries as well as bilateral relations between Poland and these countries. Then follows a description of the reaction to the election victory of Andrzej Duda and, broader – the perception of the political changes in Poland and the announcements of a more active Polish policy in the region. Finally, some recommendations regarding the directions in which the regional cooperation should develop are presented.

It will not come as a surprise that the experts from the Baltic states have a completely different opinion about bilateral relations between Poland and Latvia or Estonia (good or very good, although sometimes lacking specific content) and the Polish-Lithuanian relations (bad). At the same time, the conflicts between Warsaw and Vilnius are considered to be one of the main obstacles to the development of cooperation of the four parties: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The real Polish commitment to strengthening cooperation within the region requires this obstacle to be dealt with. The international situation is conducive to strengthening cooperation in the region. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has made it clear how close the foreign policy interests of these countries are and may, therefore, have an integrating effect on them.

Regional cooperation between Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia

The matter on which the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian experts agree most is the similarity of foreign policy interests of Poland and the Baltic states, particularly in view of the current conflict in the east. It is believed that the interests of these four countries are almost identical and the appearing differences in actions are only the result of differing personalities of politicians, different approaches to diplomacy and domestic conditions. This unity of interests, often contrasted with

While the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is disintegrating the Visegrad Group, it is having an integrating effect on Baltic relations

differences within the Visegrad Group, provides great potential for the development of cooperation. Moreover, it seems that while the Russian-Ukrainian conflict rather disintegrates the Visegrad Group, it has an integrating effect on Baltic relations.

The fields in which interests are particularly close and which could integrate the region, as listed by the experts, include security, military cooperation, energy and the fight against Russian propaganda. The experts emphasised the similarities in the perception of the need for increased NATO presence in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. And although it seems that this issue is not so high a priority for the Baltic states' as it is for Poland, they have already joined in an appeal to locate NATO bases in the region.³ Some of the experts point out that locating the bases on the territory of the Baltic states could raise controversy, for instance, among the Russian minority (in Latvia, Russians account for more than one-third of the population). The NATO activities undertaken so far, such as air force exercises and missions have been appreciated.⁴ What Poland and the Baltic states have in common is not only past experiences of relations with Russia but also a similar outlook on today's Russia.

Lithuanian modes of operation in the international arena were clearly singled out. For Lithuanians, their country is either "the most active, it is not afraid to speak loudly about Russian aggression or sanctions. It sometimes feels isolated in these actions", or it is "too aggressive; it steps out of line unnecessarily". Similar critical opinions about Vilnius can be heard from the Latvian and Estonian experts. The aggressive rhetoric of President Grybauskaitė in particular is considered unproductive, and is usually interpreted as resulting from the president's character (less frequently – as willingness to use the position of a member of the UN Security Council, where Lithuania currently holds a place⁵). Both countries are more reticent. The Estonians say that aggressive rhetoric is incompatible with their nature and their style of diplomacy, whereas the Latvians add that they are restrained by their Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which requires neutrality.⁶ Both Estonians and Latvians believe that their countries are equally engaged, only less aggressive in their rhetoric. Moreover, in Lithuania and Estonia, Latvia has a reputation of a country that is too susceptible to Russian influence to be capable of decisive action.

3 *Baltic military chiefs to call for permanent NATO presence*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/14/us-nato-baltic-russia-idUSKBN0NZ0T220150514> [accessed on 5.9.2015].

4 The so-called Baltic Air Policing, a NATO mission, conducted since 2004, extended in response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, provides air defence to the Baltic states, which do not have their own air force. The aircraft are deployed in Siauliai, Lithuania, and Amari, Estonia.

5 In the years 2014–2015.

6 Latvia held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2015.

On the other hand, the experts who are more critical about the quality of the cooperation in the region believe that the similarity of interests is underestimated and cooperation falters because, among other reasons, the Baltic states' strategic orientation in their foreign policies differs. Estonia is said to be too focused on its aspirations to join the Nordic countries and on cooperation with Finland, whereas Lithuania – on Central and Eastern Europe. In this context, Latvia is sometimes jokingly referred to as “the only truly Baltic state”, although some of the experts from Lithuania and Estonia also emphasise its pro-Russian inclinations in its policies. According to some of the Lithuanian and, especially Estonian experts, Latvia is a “weak point in the region”, with regard to Russian influence. The large Russian national minority and the Russian economic influence are believed to be the reason for that.

In spite of having similar interests, for instance, in the area of energy (the need to become independent of supply of resources from Russia), the cooperation is not good enough. The Baltic states are strongly dependent on Russia, mainly because of their lack of interconnections with Central Europe (“The energy sector is very important and here cooperation falters. The Baltic states are an island, not connected with others, dependent on Russia”). What require quick improvement are gas and electricity interconnections between Poland and Lithuania.

Regarding military issues, the differences in defence spending have been emphasised. Arms expenditure of Poland and Estonia amounts to two per cent of GDP, as recommended by NATO, whereas Lithuania and Latvia spend much less. In absolute numbers, arms expenditure of Estonia, the smallest of the Baltic countries, is higher than that of Lithuania and Latvia.⁷ Compulsory military service remains only in Estonia, although in Lithuania and Latvia, Russian aggression against Ukraine has given rise to discussions about restoring compulsory conscription.⁸

The extension of railway and road connections (Rail Baltica, Via Baltica), which were expected to connect the region with Poland and further with Western Europe, has failed

⁷ See Edward Lucas, *The coming storm. Baltic Sea security report*, June 2015, Centre for European Policy Analysis, p. 5.

⁸ See J. Hyndle-Hussein, *Państwa bałtyckie wobec konfliktu na Ukrainie [The Baltic States on the conflict in Ukraine]*, Centre for Eastern Studies, OSW Commentaries, 32.01.2015, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2015-01-23/panstwa-baltyckie-wobec-konfliktu-na-ukrainie> [accessed on 12.8.2015].

The extension of railway and road connections (Rail Baltica, Via Baltica), which were expected to connect the region with Poland and further with Western Europe, has failed.

It has been frequently emphasised that the relations between Poland and the Baltic states will always be asymmetrical because of the difference in size between the countries. “Sometimes we find it difficult to respond to Polish expectations in an appropriate manner, because we simply lack the resources,” one expert said. On the other hand, Poland, because of its size, is an attractive ally for these countries and has a special, more responsible role to play – “In the European Union, it is difficult for such small countries as Latvia to promote their interests, that is why Poland may be of help here. It is our natural partner.”

Plans of the Polish Presidency in the Council of the Baltic States⁹ were given a positive assessment by individual experts. The majority of experts, however, did not venture any assessment, as they believed they did not have sufficient knowledge

Poland could build bridges between the Baltic states or could be the link between the Baltic and Visegrad states

about it. The Council has a reputation of being an organisation that deals rather with technical issues, and its relevance for the cooperation between the states is rather limited. The differences between the member states and the membership of Russia in it¹⁰ make cooperation at the strategic level impossible.

Opinions have emerged that Poland could play a decisive role in integrating the Baltic states, that is to say, it could “build bridges between them”, and thus develop the cooperation in the region. It could also be the link between the Baltic and the Visegrad states or, to go even further, between Central and Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Whereas, in Latvia and Estonia it was emphasised that the Polish-Lithuanian conflict concerning minorities was destructive for regional cooperation. The following views are rather typical: “The condition of Polish-Lithuanian relations is bad for Estonia ... is disastrous for Estonia! The two biggest partners of Estonia cannot agree and do not cooperate”; “Polish-Lithuanian relations are very important for the region. They should be better!” Good multilateral regional cooperation is not possible without

9 See Polish Presidency 2015–2016, Council of the Baltic States, <http://www.cbss.org/cbss-polish-presidency-2015-2016/> [accessed on 12.8.2015].

10 Russia held the presidency of the Council in 2012–2013.

proper bilateral relations and that is why we need to take a closer look at them.

Bilateral relations between Poland and the Baltic states

Polish-Estonian relations

Polish-Estonian relations are usually assessed as good or very good, and they have been strengthened even further by President Andrzej Duda and his decision to choose Tallinn as the destination of his first international visit.¹¹ “Polish-Estonian relations were good during Kaczyński’s term, they were good during Tusk’s. Now Duda comes to visit us -- excellent!” To confirm the excellent nature of the political relations, reference has been made, for instance, to the frequent political visits at the highest level (in 2008, Lech Kaczyński was invited to President Toomas Hendrik Ilves’s farm, who stressed that the area in which the farm was located used to be part of the Republic of Poland¹²), to the frequent visits to Poland of the Estonian president,¹³ who gives priority to Poland, or to the fact that the chief foreign policy advisor to Donald Tusk is an Estonian diplomat, Riina Kionka. In Polish-Estonian relations, there are no conflicts such as can be found in the Polish relations with Lithuania. The shared historical experience is often emphasised, something that Estonia does not have in common with, for instance, Finland, the country which is often treated as a reference point in Tallinn’s foreign policy. However, first of all, mention is made to common interests in eastern policy and a similar outlook on Russia and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The areas in which cooperation is perceived as particularly good are defence, NATO, military affairs and the energy sector. During Andrzej Duda’s visit to Tallinn, the President of Estonia said that Poland “is not only an important, but the most important partner for Estonia in the

11 Some of the interviews were carried out before the visit and some after the visit of President A. Duda in Tallinn.

12 *Spotkanie na farmie prezydenta Estonii [Meeting at the farm of the President of Estonia]*, 18.3.2015, <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/125958/Spotkanie-na-farmie-prezydenta-Estonii/> [accessed on 12.8.2015].

13 Indeed, in the years 2007–2015, President Ilves visited Poland 16 times. See the website of the President of Estonia, <https://www.president.ee/en/official-duties/visits/index.html> [accessed on 1.9.2015].

sphere of security”.¹⁴ It is often mentioned that Poland and Estonia are the only countries in the region that spend two per cent of their GDP on defence, following NATO recommendations, which makes Poland an important partner in the sphere of defence and NATO cooperation. Lithuania and Latvia do not meet that target,¹⁵ whereas Finland and Sweden are not NATO members.

In the survey, individual respondents pointed to areas where there are differences of opinion, for example agriculture and climate policy,¹⁶ although they are considered much less important than those in which the cooperation is successful.

Critics emphasised that Poland is not, in fact, particularly visible in Estonian public debate outside expert circles (except for the visit of President Duda). Others pointed out that the lack of conflict does not yet signify good cooperation and said that they expected more concrete joint projects. Cooperation was limited to security issues far too much. But what could improve this cooperation? Firstly, Poland joining the eurozone, which would include Warsaw in the discussions about the future of the integration of the zone itself, which are taking an ever greater part of the EU agenda. In experts' view, there were few personal contacts between Poland and Estonia, little cooperation between non-governmental organisations and schools teaching the Polish language in Estonia and the Estonian language in Poland.

What could improve cooperation between Poland and Estonia? Primarily, Poland joining the eurozone, which would include Poland in the discussions about the future of the integration of the eurozone itself, which are currently taking an ever greater part of the EU agenda

Polish-Latvian relations

The assessment of the Polish-Latvian relations is very similar, and most of the experts perceive them as very good. What is noticed, in particular,

14 President Andrzej Duda began his visit in Estonia. Warsaw and Tallinn wish to see the eastern flank of NATO reinforced, 23.8.2015, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1492241,Prezydent-Andrzej-Duda-rozpoznal-wizyte-w-Estonii-Warszawa-i-Tallin-chca-wzmocnienia-wschodniej-flanki-NATO> [accessed on 25.8.2015].

15 The 2% spending target set by the NATO is currently met only by five NATO members: USA, Greece, the United Kingdom, Estonia and Poland, which joined this group in 2015. The average spending of the European NATO members is 1.5% PKB, Lithuania spends 1.1%, Latvia – 1%. See *NATO press release* 22.06.2015, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_files2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_06/20150622_PR_CP_2015_093-v2.pdf, s. 6 [accessed on 1.9.2015].

16 Estonia, as Poland, is dependent on traditional energy sources, although it does not use coal but oil shale, which, unlike the neighbouring countries, makes it independent from Russia. However, unlike Poland, Estonia supports the EU's climate policy.

is the close similarity of foreign policy interests of both countries, especially in eastern policy. Poland and Latvia have a similar view of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and respond to it in a similar way. The Eastern Partnership, which is considered to be a Polish-Swedish initiative, was also

What is noticed, in particular, is the close similarity of foreign policy interests of both countries, especially in eastern policy. Poland and Latvia have a similar view of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and respond to it in a similar way

an important element of the Latvian Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2015. Poland is a natural partner as it has a similar view of Russia (“not as naive as in the west of Europe”). This is also confirmed by frequent meetings at the highest level (President Komorowski visited Latvia six times during his term in office). Our contribution into the security of Latvia and participation in NATO’s air policing patrols are also appreciated.

Common historical experience and lack of unresolved issues are frequently emphasised, unlike in the Polish-Lithuanian relations. A few Polish schools operate in Latvia, and the small, well integrated Polish minority¹⁷ (with its best known representative Ita Kozakeviča¹⁸) is often invoked as evidence of the good relations. Moreover, after the collapse of the USSR, Polish circles unequivocally supported Latvian independence – unlike Lithuanian independence – which saved them from the reluctant attitude of the Latvian state and the public. The presence of people who know both languages and conditions in both countries is considered very important, for instance, for the development of economic and trade cooperation. Bilateral trade keeps growing, and the presence of Polish companies is noticeable. Poland is also said to be an important point of reference for Latvian Catholics.

Even though President Duda visited Estonia and not Latvia, his visit received a positive assessment in Latvia as an expression of interest in the whole Baltic region. It is believed, however, that Poland is not very visible in the debate on international affairs outside experts’ circles (Radosław Sikorski has recently been the most visible and the best known).

17 According to 2011 data, about 2.2% of the Latvian population (in Latgale 6.8%). The Central Statistical Office of Latvia, <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/statistikas-temas/population-census-30761.html> [accessed on 12.8.2015].

18 A social activist in Latvia, who died in 1990, a deputy to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia, founder and the first president of the Union of Poles in Latvia. She supported Latvian independence, promoted the rights of the minorities. See *20 lat bez Ity Kozakiewicz [20 years without Ita Kozakeviča]*, “Polak na Łotwie” no. 3 (93) 2010, <http://www.polak.lv/93/redakcja.shtml> [accessed on 12.8.2015].

The areas listed as those where cooperation is limited include interpersonal contacts and tourism. Poles are not frequently seen as tourists in Latvia (tourists, e.g., from Germany are much more visible¹⁹); and Latvians only visit Poland when travelling to the West. One of the experts stated that Poland could be more active in transport projects (particularly in those involving Rail Baltica railway connections) and energy interconnections with Lithuania, which are also important for Riga.

Polish-Lithuanian relations and conflicts concerning minorities

Polish-Lithuanian relations are so complex and problematic that they deserve separate research. The Institute of Public Affairs devoted a study to these relations in 2012–2013. The study also included a comparison of the opinions of the Polish and Lithuanian experts.²⁰ In the text's summary we wrote:

There is relative consensus as to what both governments should do. Vilnius should make it possible for Poles to use the Polish spelling of their names or to have street name signs written in both languages. The Polish government should not get offended or indiscriminately accept the demands of the [Polish] minority. And most importantly, all parties to the disputes should talk with one another more.

There are, however, differences or sometimes misconceptions in the way certain issues are perceived. Lithuanian experts often point out that under the Donald Tusk government, Poland has turned its back on smaller countries, including Lithuania, because it is building its international position based on the strongest states – Germany and Russia. It is believed that particularly the attempt to improve relations and contacts between Poland and Russia is taking place at the expense of Lithuania.²¹

One is tempted to say, everything has changed and nothing has changed. Today, no one can claim that Poland is building good relations with Russia at the expense of Lithuania. Relations with Russia are very

19 In 2014, Germans accounted for almost 12% of foreign tourists in Latvia (the second largest group after Russians). There were four times fewer Poles. See, Central Statistical Office of Latvia, <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/notikumi/during-last-ten-years-number-visitors-accommodation-establishments-has-doubled-41857.html> [accessed on 12.8.2015].

20 See A. Fuksiewicz, J. Kucharczyk, A. Łada, *Obok siebie. Wzajemne postrzeganie się Polaków i Litwinów [Side by side. How the Poles and the Lithuanians see one another]*, Warsaw 2013, Institute of Public Affairs, p. 109.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

bad and relations with Lithuania are bad too.²² However, the political changes in Poland and changes in the international arena make some of the experts moderately optimistic.

It seems that Polish-Lithuanian relations are most often assessed as not very good mainly because of the lack of political will at the highest level. According to the Lithuanians, Poles focus too much on the Polish minority in Lithuania and, as a result, Polish-Lithuanian relations, which have great potential for diversified cooperation, remain dependent only on the minority issues. It has been noticed that at lower levels

Polish-Lithuanian relations are perceived as not very good, mainly because of the lack of political will at the highest level. According to Lithuanians, Poles focus too much on the Polish minority in Lithuania

(cross-border cooperation, local governments cooperation), cooperation can be good and may bring positive results. Economic cooperation is also developing well and in foreign policy, particularly vis-a-vis Russia, Poland and Lithuania have the same interests and views. Since the very beginning, Lithuania has supported Polish initiatives of the Eastern Partnership or the Energy Union.

Who is to blame for the bad Polish-Lithuanian relations? The most frequent view is that both governments are to blame. Poland focuses too much on the Polish minority, and, first of all, has indiscriminately adopted the perception of the situation of the minority presented by the leader of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania [AWPL], Waldemar Tomaszewski. In most of the experts' view, the problem of the minority is exaggerated. The relations between the two countries become hostage to "stupid, artificial problems". Whereas, in fact, the situation of the minority is not really so bad. It is bad only in media reports, and politicians, led by Tomaszewski, use this in their political games. At the same time, it is generally believed that the leader of AWPL is a pro-Russian rather than a pro-Polish politician.²³ These same experts also say, with some embarrassment, that for years Lithuania has not been able solve any of the problems of the minority, such as the spelling of surnames

22 The best evidence showing that Polish-Lithuanian relations are still problematic is the fact that the Ambassador of Lithuania in Poland has been the only ambassador of the Baltic states who has refused to be interviewed for the purpose of this study.

23 Tomaszewski has been recently reproached, among others, for appearing at the celebration of the end of the Second World War wearing a St. George ribbon pinned to his jacket, currently used by the separatists in Ukraine. For the explanation given by Tomaszewski, see *Majdany i bolszewizm są największym złem [Maidan and bolshevism are the greatest evil]*, "Rzeczpospolita" Daily, 15.11.2014, <http://archiwum.rp.pl/artyku/1260271-Majdany-i-bolszewizm-sa-najwiekszym-zlem.html> [accessed on 1.9.2015].

in accordance with Polish rules, which makes things much easier for Tomaszewski.

There are also more radical opinions about the dependence of the Polish policy towards Lithuania on Tomaszewski. According to these opinions, Polish policy towards the state of Lithuania (and not towards the minority) is non-existent. It is a policy of a stronger partner that expects subordination (a change in the situation of the minority), and in the case of the lack of response, it ostentatiously ignores the weaker partner, developing relations with others (in this case – with Latvia and Estonia). The villain here is Radosław Sikorski as a representative of the government which has created this policy. One of such opinions is worth quoting:

Poland does not understand the Poles in Lithuania and has no idea how to help them. The result of this policy is the strengthening of Tomaszewski and other radicals and with regard to the minority situation – decline and a very bad perception of Poles in Lithuania. Those who had a positive attitude to cooperation with Poland have been marginalised. Sikorski has promoted Tomaszewski, but has not reached any progress in any of the issues that would be interesting for the Poles. All that he has achieved is that Lithuanians see Poles as fanatics. Complete failure.

At the same time, a view prevails that the interests of Poland and Lithuania in international relations, their policies towards Russia, energy and NATO are very similar, which provides good albeit untapped potential for effective cooperation (“We are natural partners, our interests are absolutely the same. We have similar historical experience. The interests in the EU and NATO are very similar. Yet, we do not use this potential because of lack of political will.” “Generally, after Crimea, our positions are almost the same, we only differ in nuances. Lithuania is firmer in its relations with Russia. The positions are the same. We only differ in rhetoric.”) Conflicts surrounding the minority prevent cooperation, which could and should be based on the common interests.

Some Lithuanians think that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has led to certain rapprochement in the relations between Warsaw and Vilnius. There is allegedly greater readiness in Lithuania to cooperate with Poland, although “a spark is missing that would ignite the relations”. Political post-election changes may serve as such an impulse. The 2014 presidential elections in Lithuania did not become an impulse because

The Polish-Lithuanian conflict concerning minorities is also noticed in Latvia and Estonia. It is often even considered to be the biggest obstacle impairing the development of effective quadrilateral cooperation

Dalia Grybauskaitė again won these elections (“not flexible enough in the relations with Poland”). Some of the experts believe that the elections in Poland may act as the desired impulse. It will be discussed further in the analysis.

What is important, the Polish-Lithuanian conflict concerning minorities is also noticed in Latvia and Estonia. It is often even considered to be the biggest obstacle impairing the development of effective quadrilateral cooperation, “We are observing the problems existing between Poland and Lithuania. To us it looks like a love and hate relationship, but what matters is the fact that it affects the whole region.” The relevance of Polish-Lithuanian cooperation is appreciated, particularly with regard to building transport and energy connections for the whole Baltic region. Those more familiar with the local conditions in Lithuania have said that Poland should keep a distance from the leaders of the Polish minority.

Political changes in Poland and their relevance to Baltic cooperation

The recent political changes in Poland, that is, the election of the Law and Justice candidate Andrzej Duda as president and the growth of support for this party, are perceived differently in Lithuania and differently in Latvia and Estonia. In the latter countries, these developments are perceived with indifference, with some possible risks seen in the background. In Lithuania, on the other hand, the hope seems to prevail that the new president’s policy will be more open towards Lithuania.

Latvia and Estonia

In the Latvian and Estonian media, the political changes in Poland have not received wide coverage, but for the people who know Poland better, the election of Andrzej Duda as president was a surprise. The experts have most often stressed that Latvian-Polish and Estonian-Polish relations will remain good regardless of who is in power in Poland. Some expect Poland to become more involved in regional cooperation, especially after President Duda’s visit to Tallinn; others point out that

Bronisław Komorowski was also engaged in relations with the Baltic states, which he often visited.²⁴ However, most of the experts do not expect any significant changes in the Polish or European foreign policy. In particular, they rather expect continuation in strategic areas.

Latvian-Polish and Estonian-Polish relations will remain good regardless of who is in power in Poland

In Latvia, voices have also appeared that the increasing support for PiS [Law and Justice Party] is consistent with a broader trend of growing support for conservative forces. Politicians of the National Alliance, a member of the ruling coalition in Latvia, whose deputy to the European Parliament belongs to the parliamentary group of the European Conservatives and Reformists, of which PiS is also a member, has reacted enthusiastically to the election of Andrzej Duda. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that in this parliamentary group dominated by the British and Poles, Estonia does not have any deputies and Lithuania only has one – Waldemar Tomaszewski – from the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania.

On the other hand, both in Estonia and Latvia opinions have appeared that the election of Duda, who often invokes the legacy of Lech Kaczyński, also carries some risks. The policy of Lech Kaczyński, who paid attention to the region, was considered to be generally favourable for these countries, and therefore the election of Andrzej Duda has also been perceived as a rather positive development. For small countries, with limited influence in the European Union, which often have to rely on their bigger partners, including Poland, it is also important what the relations of Poland are with Germany and the other larger EU member states and institutions. The negative reactions to Kaczyński's policy in Berlin, Paris and Brussels, according to these interlocutors, have weakened the position of Poland within the Community, which was not good for Tallinn or Riga. "Tusk may have tried to be gentler in his relations with Russia, but his influence in the EU or in the European Parliament was greater, and that was beneficial for Estonia. It will be good if Duda pays attention to the region, but the influence within the EU is of key importance." In this context, one expert has also noted the "Szczerski's ultimatum",²⁵ which is assessed negatively as a sign of possible souring of Polish-German relations.

24 During his term in office he visited Lithuania and Latvia six times and Estonia three times.

25 Statement made by Krzysztof Szczerski, currently the minister in the President's Chancellery responsible for foreign affairs, who, in an interview for *Rzeczpospolita* daily, talked about four

Lithuania

On the other hand, in Lithuania, the election of Andrzej Duda has not only given rise to a number of comments but also to positive reaction and

What raises hope is the fact that President Duda invokes the legacy of Lech Kaczyński, who is considered to have been friendly towards Lithuania

hope for restoration of Polish-Lithuanian relations. What raises hopes is the fact that Duda invokes the legacy of Lech Kaczyński, who is considered to have been friendly towards Lithuania (often in opposition to the unfriendly Radosław Sikorski), and that he talks about the need to build a regional alliance.

Some of the experts have emphasised that the enthusiasm is premature and that Lithuania also has a lot to do with regard to the Polish minority. Even those “distancing themselves” have said, “I do not expect big changes in the Polish foreign policy, but a new opening is possible. It would be definitely welcome in Lithuania”. Another typical quotation, “I know that Poland is no Belarus. The president cannot change the whole foreign policy. The parliamentary elections will also be important. But if Duda had the support of the parliament, something positive could happen.”

It is pointed out that the public would expect such a “new opening”, but Lithuanian politicians may also pose a problem, particularly President Dalia Grybauskaitė, who “is not very flexible”. In this context it is worth remembering that Lech Kaczyński did not manage to bring about a breakthrough in Polish-Lithuanian relations, either, nor did he manage to change the situation of the Polish minority.²⁶

An assessment of Poland’s potential to be the region’s leader

The experts generally agree that Poland is not the leader of the region, because it does not behave like a leader or simply does not want to be one. However, most of the experts believe that Poland has the potential to be a medium-size regional leader, especially for countries of the Visegrad Group and the Baltic states.

“partnership” conditions in the relations between Poland and Germany. See: <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1208347.html> [accessed on 12.9.2015].

²⁶ The Lithuanian Seimas even rejected the bill on the spelling of Polish surnames on the very day of the president’s visit to Vilnius in 2010.

The Lithuanians have pointed out, in particular, that in order to be a leader one must listen to what the partners have to say and what they expect. In their view, Poland has not been doing that so far; it has rather tried to impose its own position and ideas on the smaller countries. The current Polish government is often perceived as one that is more interested in cooperation with the biggest EU member states, especially Germany (earlier also with Russia), or in joining the club of the biggest and most influential countries of the EU, rather than in regional cooperation. “Sikorski and the Civic Platform government were much more willing to cooperate with Germany and Russia than with Central and Eastern Europe. The political elite in Lithuania would welcome more active policy of Poland in the region, but Poland does not seem to be interested in that.”

In order to be a leader, one must listen to what partners have to say and what they expect. So far, Poland has not been doing this. It has rather tried to impose its own position and ideas on the smaller countries

The Latvians' and Estonians' have assessed the role played by Poland with greater detachment. They also believe that Poland has potential to be the regional leader, and apart from its size, economic and military potential, they also appreciate Poland's good relations with the United States and its influence within the EU. The Estonians also mention the growing level of military spending. Generally, the slogan “Poland as the leader of the region” is more positively received in these two countries with less ambivalence than in Lithuania.

In all three countries, attention has been paid to sensitivity as a necessary feature of every leader in international relations. “Poland has the potential, but it must remember that smaller countries are always concerned about the predomination of the bigger ones. The leader must also bear greater responsibility” – is a view from Latvia. In the light of the announcements made by President Duda, warnings could be heard that leadership is not the question of rhetoric but real action, cooperating with partners and building alliances, “Poland has now a long way to go to achieve that. To be the leader you must have good ideas, something to offer to everyone”; “Poland must show its interest and commitment [to matters of the other countries of the region]”; “If you compare how often Polish politicians visit Estonia and how often German ones come here, the difference is huge [to the advantage of the latter]. [Prime Minister Ewa] Kopacz has not been to Tallinn, yet”.

To be the leader of Central and Eastern Europe one cannot neglect EU matters, because it is the impact Poland has on EU policies that is important for the smaller countries

It has been also pointed out that to be the leader of Central and Eastern Europe one cannot neglect EU matters, because it is the impact Poland has on EU policies that is important for the smaller countries, “the impact of domestic politics can be destructive. You must separate it from foreign policy. You must take into account the European context, seek European unity, no matter how difficult it may be. Poland must remain pro-European and show solidarity with others.”

A Poland that rejects European values or is in conflict with western European countries will never be the leader. This role can be played by a pro-European Poland, pursuing not only its own interests but being able to see the broader European context, nurturing European solidarity and taking account of the sensitivities of the smaller states. “Poland has the potential to be the leader now, but if it becomes solely the defender of conservative values, it will cause tension in the relations with western states. The European project is not about conservative values. If you want to be the leader, you must care for the European project as such and not just about yourself.”

In this context, again, the suggestion has appeared that Polish-Lithuanian conflicts have a destructive influence on cooperation in the region and that they make building more stable multilateral alliances impossible.

Methods to develop cooperation in the region – suggestions

In spite of the fact that the relations between Poland, Estonia and Latvia have been described by the experts as good, they generally agreed that a lot could be improved in the regional cooperation between Poland and the Baltic states. First of all, emphasis has been placed on the need to improve Polish-Lithuanian relations. The Lithuanian experts expect Lithuania to be more open but also Poland to show more understanding to Lithuanian fears. In addition, Poland is expected to dissociate or at least distance itself from the actions and demands of Waldemar Tomaszewski and to make some positive gestures addressed to Vilnius. They expect Lithuania, on the other hand, to resolve the most urgent issues of the minority “so that we can go on to deal with the really important matters”.

A lot of opinions have mentioned the insufficient interpersonal contacts in both bilateral and multilateral dimension. This applied to tourism but also to cooperation between non-governmental organisations. The states of our region should support cooperation of civil society and its initiatives focused on building contacts between our societies (such as the Jerzy Giedroyc Polish-Lithuanian Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation), as well as school, university and journalist exchanges. They should support the cooperation between local authorities (not only from the border areas). The growth of cooperation between civil society is difficult because the contacts between the organisations are not as well developed as is the case among the Visegrad states, where the seed from which the cooperation could grow was sown by cooperation of the democratic opposition before 1989.

Traditionally, as is often the case in this type of research, a lot of criticism has been addressed at the media, which give far too little information about other countries, about neighbouring countries and about international matters in general. As a result, the public in these four countries know very little about one another. There is also a common point raised concerning the easy access to the attractive Russian-language media in all Baltic states, which does not meet with an appropriate response from the local media (“we are a community, we are together members of the EU, of the NATO alliance, and yet, Russia seems closer to a lot of people because of the media”). The Russian-language media, such as the First Baltic Channel broadcasting from Latvia, are very influential because they are widely accessible, well-funded and knowledge of the Russian language in the Baltic states (not only among the Russian minority) is common. In this context, a recommendation is often made for Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to work together and fight Russian propaganda, for instance, by creating a Russian language information channel.

“We are a community, we are together members of the EU, of the NATO alliance, and yet, Russia seems closer to a lot of people because of the media”

It is a common view that knowledge of the Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian public about the other three countries is limited, which is why initiatives should be supported to increase such knowledge. Each country should promote itself effectively in the other countries. Tourism also helps to get to know one another better and therefore should be

developed more. It is believed that for tourists from the Baltic states, Poland is only a transit country on their way to the West. It is also often said that the states in question have the potential to receive more tourists from Poland.

It has been frequently stressed how important infrastructure projects, especially Rail Baltica and Via Baltica, are for developing contacts between the states and between people. A similar importance for the security of these states is attributed to energy interconnections, especially between Poland and Lithuania.

Most of the experts have been of the opinion that there is no need for creating new international institutions for regional cooperation, "The Baltic Sea region is the most institutionalised region in Europe. And still, nothing comes of it all." They have criticised the inconsistent approach of the states of the region to membership in various organisations, that is, the fact that Finland and Sweden are not members of NATO, or that Poland and Sweden are not members of the eurozone. A suggestion was made that rather than create new institutions, Poland should join the cooperation platforms that already exist, for instance as an observer at the Baltic Assembly,²⁷ or should cooperate within the NB8²⁸ format, or that it should invite the Baltic states into the Visegrad Group.

Some of the experts have held the view that a new institution would be desirable and it could follow the model of the Visegrad Group, that is, a loose structure which, however, has the potential for political coordination at the highest level. It could be a good platform for multilateral cooperation and coordination. More cooperation in sector policies is expected: in energy, transport and recently – immigration. The need to work together on the preparations for the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw has been frequently mentioned.

It seems, however, that in the light of the universal criticism of the insufficient interpersonal, non-governmental or local authorities contact, what could help in the integration of the region would be not so much a "Baltic Visegrad Group" but one of its elements, the International Visegrad Fund. The Fund supports cooperation of non-governmental organisations, universities and cultural institutions, that is, the type of cooperation that is definitely lacking in the region. The "Baltic" fund

27 An organisation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

28 A forum for the cooperation of the eight Nordic and Baltic countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

would not only be a tool for bringing people in the region closer together, but also a tool for Polish public diplomacy, especially as, considering the difference in potential between Poland and the three Baltic states, Warsaw would have to take on most of the burden connected with financing an organisation of such a venture.

A tool for bringing the people of the region closer together could be a Baltic equivalent of the International Visegrad Fund. However, Warsaw would have to take on most of the burden connected with financing an organisation of such a venture

In all the suggested recommendations, a lot of responsibility is placed on Poland. It must be remembered that its relations with the Baltic states are clearly asymmetrical, which is why Poland is expected to show initiative and openness. Moreover, it has been frequently emphasised that Poland should engage more in cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, including cooperation with Nordic countries, attention has been drawn to the lack of “Baltic self-identification” of Poland and to the fact that it focuses more on the Central and Eastern European region. Poland could be the link between these two regions. Poland should cooperate closely with Germany and Brussels, because a Poland that has a strong position within the EU is a much more attractive partner; it should also pay more attention to the smaller partners who may be the source of support required in multilateral negotiations.

Summary

President Andrzej Duda has announced the construction of a regional alliance. He did not mention the Baltic states in his inauguration speech. He did mention the reconstruction of the Visegrad Group, but in the light of the international situation and the completely different views of the situation in Warsaw, Budapest and Bratislava, it does not seem very likely. The refugee crisis, which, as it seemed at the beginning could unite the Group, has only deepened the rift. The Polish and Baltic interests and opinions are currently much closer, which has been confirmed by interviews carried out for the purpose of this study. The similarity of views on the international situation is also shown by the public opinion surveys discussed above.

However, it is also clear that Poland’s relations with Lithuania will be of key importance for regional cooperation between Poland and the Baltic

states. It is the restoration of these relations and not the reconstruction of the Visegrad Group that could be the first task for the new president. An argument in favour of this could be the reference to the policy of Lech Kaczyński, who devoted a lot of his attention to Lithuania. The current Polish government is not considered to be friendly in Lithuania. Regardless of the radicalism of some critical assessments of the Polish policy towards Lithuania in recent years, it is difficult to deny that Polish policy towards Lithuania has not resulted in a change in the situation of the Polish minority, while at the same time the tensions in the bilateral relations are constantly present. Political changes are always a chance for a new opening.

However, this task will be very difficult for President Duda, not only because it is the government rather than the president that runs foreign policy and the shape of this policy in the coming years will depend, first of all, on the shape of the government established after the autumn 2015 elections. It will be difficult because to improve the relations with Lithuania, Poland will have to distance itself from the Polish leaders in Lithuania, especially from Waldemar Tomaszewski, who, in the European Parliament, was a member of the same political group as MEP Andrzej Duda, as well as the fact that President Andrzej Duda has stated that assisting Poles living abroad is going to be his priority.²⁹ It is important that this assistance responds to the real needs of the Polish minority and is provided in the spirit of amicable cooperation with the Lithuanians.

29 An Office for Contact with Poles Living Abroad has been established within the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland. See *Zarządzenie Prezydenta z dn. 7.08.2015 w sprawie nadania statutu Kancelarii Prezydenta RP* [Ordinance of the President dated 7 August 2015 on granting the Statute to the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, <http://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/status-prawny-kancelarii/> [accessed on 12.9.2015].



Poland has been recently perceived as not very active in the Baltic Sea region and not very visible in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It seems that today, it is the right moment to intensify Polish-Baltic cooperation: politically, in the area of energy and security, and in public diplomacy. Favourable conditions for cooperation have been created by declarations announcing greater activity of Poland in the region, coming, for example, from President Andrzej Duda, which have been received with interest in the individual states. However, for the development of cooperation, it is crucial that Poland remains a pro-European country with good contacts in Brussels and the key European capitals, because it is only this kind of Poland that is an attractive partner for the smaller EU member states. It is paradoxical, in a way, because, for example, in public debate, good relations between Poland and Germany are indicated as a factor that reduces the motivation both of Poland and the Baltic states for regional integration. A similar way of thinking has been revealed in the interviews with experts, who criticised Poland for being interested in the biggest EU member states but not in the region. However, good relations with the biggest states of the EU are not so much an obstacle in shaping an effective regional policy, as a condition for such policy.

Polish policy towards the region is closely related to the Polish European policy. In this context, the issue of Poland joining the eurozone is not insignificant, either. The experts have suggested that membership in the Eurogroup is a necessary condition for Poland not to remain at the margins of European integration but to have a voice that counts in the EU's inner centre of decision-making. There is no doubt that in Poland, strong public resistance is the main non-economic reason for remaining outside the eurozone. As our research shows, in Poland a firm belief persists about the large costs connected with the potential adoption of the common currency, whereas in all of the Baltic states, which have adopted the euro, the opinions are much more positive. It may be the case that the survey results suggest a "the devil is not so black..." trend, and after the adoption of the common currency, the acceptance for it will

increase. Membership in the eurozone is something that divides the four countries, although the study points to many more issues that unite them.

The international situation, although difficult, acts as an integrating factor for the relations between Poland and the Baltic states. The public opinion survey shows that our societies (with the exclusion of the Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia) have similar views on Russian aggression against Ukraine and about the necessary response to this aggression, which may be important in EU negotiations concerning the maintenance of the sanctions imposed on Russia. This overlaps with the consensus of the experts and the societies that in the policy towards Russia, the interests of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are the same. These four countries are, therefore, natural allies in the eastern policy and in the process of shaping the measures to be applied by the European Union in this respect.

Poland and the Baltic states may also cooperate on other security-related matters. Warsaw can rely on the support of Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn in its efforts seeking an increase in the military presence of the North Atlantic Alliance in Central and Eastern Europe, although it will not be as important for them as it is for Poland. In addition, it must be remembered that in Estonia and Latvia these issues are much more controversial than in Poland because of the large Russian national minority, which is generally averse to the idea of establishing NATO bases in their countries and to NATO itself. This ambivalence is confirmed in the conducted public opinion surveys, although not only ethnic factors and divisions are important here but also the condition of public debate in each of the countries as well as the declarations of the key politicians. No less important is the cooperation in the area of energy security, which has been confirmed by the signing, in October, of an agreement on the construction of a gas interconnector between Poland and Lithuania, co-funded by the EU to the amount of 300 million euros. It is expected to help end the dependence of the Baltic states on supplies from Russia. At the same time, the governments of Poland, Lithuania and Estonia have criticised the extension of the gas pipeline along the Baltic seabed, the so called Nord Stream 2. The topic of insufficient energy and transport infrastructure has come back in the interviews with experts.

Development of political cooperation should be supported by the actions of public diplomacy. The interviewed experts have often indicated

that Poland is not a country that is well known by the societies of the Baltic states, and that there is a need for more intensive promotional and information activities, which also need to be effective. This has been, to a certain extent, confirmed by the public opinion surveys, because in the questions about the direct assessment of Polish policy, a significant part of the respondents were not able to give an answer, which was probably caused by a lack of knowledge. The capital that would be worth utilising is the fact that the relations with Poland, in all the analysed countries, are considered important or a priority by at least three-quarters of the inhabitants, and that the relations with Poland are usually perceived as good or very good, especially in Latvia and Estonia. A surprisingly good rating has also been given to the relations with Poland by Lithuanians, which, however, is not consistent with the assessment of experts, for whom the disputes between Warsaw and Vilnius are exactly the biggest obstacle to building harmonious regional cooperation. Poles, on the other hand, firmly support the proposition of military defence of the Baltic states by Polish soldiers as part of NATO operations in case of Russian aggression. As international surveys show, this support is not so obvious in western European societies – in Germany, France and Italy.³⁰

Even though this study has been inspired by the Polish Presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States, not much space has been devoted to the Council in this paper. The reason for this is primarily the very poor recognisability of this cooperation platform among the people not involved in its work. The study does not provide a basis for assessing the importance of this institution for cooperation between Poland and the Baltic states, but it may be a signal that some steps must be taken to strengthen it, to introduce some changes in its operation or simply to promote it in a more effective manner.

30 See K. Simmons, B. Stokes, J. Poushter, *NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid*, Pew Research Center 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/nato-publics-blame-russia-for-ukrainian-crisis-but-reluctant-to-provide-military-aid/> (3.11.2015).



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