



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Lithuania external relations briefing:  
Lithuania is joining Poland to celebrate an anniversary of the  
historical union and reinforce the relations**

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## **Lithuania is joining Poland to celebrate an anniversary of the historical union and reinforce the relations**

The start of the summer brought the Lithuanian-Polish relationships to a new height with the Lithuanian state officials joining the Polish counterparts at the celebrations of the 450th anniversary of the Union of Lublin to celebrate the historical event which merged the early modern states (the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland) into the joint Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth. On 1 July the Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament Viktoras Pranckietis was awarded a Grand Cross of Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. At the ceremony held at the Polish Parliament, the head of the Lithuanian legislation addressed the Polish legislators in Polish with the following words: "Today I am addressing you, dear members of the Sejm and all people of Poland, thanking you for the friendship. The friendship which is being cherished by the efforts of both sides, looking into the prospect of close cooperation."

When presenting the award his Polish counterpart Speaker of the Polish Sejm Marek Tadeusz Kuchciński acknowledged the role Pranckietis has played in reviving the two countries' interparliamentary relations. "It has brought us closer not only like Sejm deputies and senators but also as Poles and Lithuanians," said Kuchciński. The Lithuanian-Polish interparliamentary assembly resumed its work on 14 February this year with the declaration expressing the solidarity with Ukraine and supporting its sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders, and it's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Below is a brief discussion about the major turn-around in the Polish-Lithuanian relations, outlining some of the major drivers for closer cooperation between Warsaw and Vilnius which has resulted in a series of initiatives and events sending out strong signals to the countries in the region about this alliance in making.

Lithuania's relations with Poland are unique due to the fact that both countries had shared a historical destiny for almost 450 years from the crowning of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jogaila as the King of Poland Władysław II Jagiełło in 1348 through the unification of both countries according to the Union of Lublin (1569) until the third and final partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 between Prussia, Russia and Austria. To make things more complicated during the interwar period the destinies of two countries once again interlinked

due to the fact that Poland controlled part of today's Lithuania (the Vilnius region) in 1919-1939. The countries went their own ways only after World War II when the Iron Curtain fell separating Poland continuing its existence as the Polish People's Republic and Lithuania being subdued and incorporated into the Soviet Union.

After the restoration of independent Lithuania and the establishment of the Third Republic of Poland (since 1989), both countries entered a turbulent period of transition and identity building resulting in tensions as related to the language and cultural policies affecting the Polish and Lithuanian speakers on both sides of the newly established borders between two countries. Though attempts were made to forge closer ties between the political establishments of each country, the unease in the bilateral relations over the rights of minorities regarding various administrative arrangements (such as the right to have a person's name officially registered according to the variant of the name in a vernacular language which has been denied by both sides) persisted.

The main impetus to the relations was given by the external factors, of which the security and defense concerns in relation to Russia were of prime importance. Both countries started collaboration from the defense. The Lithuanian-Polish Peace Force Battalion (LITPOLBAT) was formed as early as 1997 (located in Orzysz in Poland, near the border with Lithuania) and took in the peacekeeping missions of the United Nations, NATO in Kosovo, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. After the unit was disbanded in 2007 a new unit bringing in Lithuanian, Polish and the Ukrainian armed forces under a trilateral agreement was established in 2009 as the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG) which was finally formed in 2014.

As of 2016 the headquarters for this multinational brigade are symbolically located in Lublin, the place where the Union of Lublin had been signed 450 years ago. To bring even more parallels with the historical Polish-Lithuanian state, on 5 October 2017 the Brigade received the name of the historical military leader, the Great Hetman of the Great Duchy of Lithuania Konstanty Ostrogski (ca. 1460 – 1530). He went in the history books as the leader who led the joint Lithuanian and Polish troops in successful campaigns against the Tatars and the Grand Duchy of Moscow in the quest to seize the control of the region which largely corresponds to present-day Belarus and Ukraine. The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Poland has provided the following explanation of the symbolical relevance of the patron of the Brigade: "The Grand Hetman Ostrogski successfully led his forces against the aggression of Tatars and Muscovians. He fought 33 battles of which 31 were victorious. The most significant victory was achieved in 1514 in the battle of Orsha. During this battle, the joint military forces of the

Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland defeated the Muscovy Army which was significantly larger. Kostiantyn Ostrogski was a talented and successful military leader. He was and has remained a symbol of unity among the nations of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine.”

The military cooperation between three countries has echoed the political developments in the region where both Poland and Lithuania have been engaged since the times of the so-called Orange Revolution in 2004-2005 and especially after the failure to get Ukraine’s government signature on the association agreement with the European Union which triggered a wave of demonstrations and a civil unrest on 21 November 2013.

The cooperation on the security issues in response to the destabilized situation in eastern Ukraine and after the annexation of Crimea by Russia led to the establishment of a closer political dialogue which intensified over the recent years not only because of the situation in eastern Ukrainian (which has remained frozen after the Minsk II agreements in 2015 were not honored) but also by the changing situation within the EU.

The pending exit of the United Kingdom, the key country in the NATO alliance and a close ally of Poland as well as the Baltic countries, providing with the US the security support in the region especially as regarding the defense of the Suwałki corridor connecting Poland and Lithuania, and the European integration processes led by Paris and Berlin have created a need for Warsaw to seek a deeper and more political engagement with Lithuania and other neighboring countries in Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, Lithuania has been pursuing a closer integration of electricity transmission networks as well as other infrastructure projects which involved Poland’s cooperation and required support to keep these strategic projects going as planned.

The new political reality in the bilateral relations has been formally expressed in the political talks which were held by the Lithuanian and Polish Presidents (President Dalia Grybauskaitė and President Andrzej Duda) during the visit of the Polish President to Vilnius to celebrate the centenary of Lithuania’s independence on 16 February last year reaching an agreement and a consensus on a number of important issues related to the cooperation within the EU, NATO and bilaterally.

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Union of Lublin, both presidents issued a joint statement which reinforced the political agreements made to-date. The statement emphasized the European dimension of the role of the union. More specifically, the Presidents commended

the foresightedness of the predecessors to create the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or the Commonwealth of Two Nations as it was called based on equal partnership and joint responsibility which was an inspiration for the whole of Europe to integrate and build closer cooperation between states as the best answer to respond to internal and external threats.

“Today we are just as ready to stand together against any challenges and to protect the ideals of independence, unity, and solidarity”, said the Presidents in their joint statement. Further, the statement mentioned that “both countries contribute to security and prosperity of entire Europe by building a joint future in the European and transatlantic communities, implementing strategic energy and transportation projects and developing intense cultural and academic cooperation”, thus reflecting the main issues that have brought the two countries together at such an intense level of political and diplomatic exchanges.

A new page of the relations between the two countries will be further opened by the President-elect Gitanas Nausėda who already announced that his first foreign visit will be to Poland. The visit has been already under preparations and will take place just four days after the inauguration of the new president on 12 July. The new president has already carefully indicated his sympathetic position in Warsaw’s relations with Brussels and has emphasized that “there are more common things between Poland and Lithuania than differences”. The decision to go to Poland was informed by the advice given by the former President Valdas Adamkus who publicly endorsed the expressed preferences of the new President to make the first visit to Warsaw. President-elect Nausėda in turn has acknowledged the statesmanship pursued by President Adamkus during his two terms in office (in the periods of 1998-2003 and 2004-2009) which can signal that during the new presidency the more emphasis will be placed on bilateral and inter-personal relations with the key strategic countries, of which Poland has become for Lithuania the number one.

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