

Original article

The Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade's development potential in the context of regional security

Mariusz Fryc 

National Security Bureau, Warszawa, Poland,

e-mail: mfryc@bbn.gov.pl

INFORMATIONS

Article history:

Submitted: 20 March 2019

Accepted: 15 January 2020

Published: 16 March 2020

ABSTRACT

Since January 2017 the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG) is fully operational to influence and shape not only regional security but also international peace out of Europe. Its development potential can contribute to support Ukraine in its current military reform as well as in an accession process to NATO. It can positively impact military competencies, capabilities, and capacities of all founding nations and contribute to a stronger regional identity based on common values, interests, experiences and threats perceptions either. Now is the time for the founding nations to decide whether to keep a status quo of the brigade or to further build its "trademark" upon its strengths and competencies. If they choose the second option, the Brigade has to become more visible and active in the security sphere which leads to the necessity to demonstrate its effectiveness and utility in practice.

The purpose of this article is to answer the questions: where is the development potential of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade and how it can be used in the context of strengthening both tripartite cooperation and security in the region. In the introduction, the author collides different perspectives on the future of LITPOLUKRBRIG. In the first part, he argues that the brigade can help Ukraine to join the Euro-Atlantic family. In the second part, he justifies that the brigade can have a positive impact on military capabilities development and the interoperability of the armed forces of all founding states. In the third part, he justifies that the brigade has the potential to shape regional security. In the fourth part, he argues that LITPOLUKRBRIG can contribute to building a stronger regional identity and tripartite cooperation based on common values, interests, experiences and common threat's perception.

KEYWORDS

Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade, LITPOLUKRBRIG, military cooperation, military potential, NATO, peacekeeping mission, regional security



© 2020 by Author(s). This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Introduction

When we start to dig some expertise, opinions on the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade's (LITPOLUKRBRIG) future, we will find incoherent perspectives. To the question, what is or might be the future of this trilateral project the answers are ranging from one extreme position to the other. There are a number of people saying that this project has run out, that it is not worth spending money on, and that it has neither political nor military perspectives, especially since 2014 when Russian resurgence has started and the security situation level has dropped significantly in Europe.

Due to new security circumstances, antagonists want rather an orient domestic military effort on self-defense as well as in NATO on strengthening armed presence on the Eastern flank of the Allies. They want robust mechanisms, tools, procedures, as well as new command structures that will serve primarily for collective defense. That's why they are not so eager to concentrate military potential on fulfilling peacekeeping missions far from the Euro-Atlantic sphere.

On the other hand, protagonists are voicing that this trilateral project has a real future in the present security context. As long as Russia continues its military hybrid campaign against Ukraine and threatens the West, in their opinion LITPOLUKRBRIG, can serve as an integration platform uniting politically and militarily the three founding nations against a common enemy. Advocating for the Brigade's further development they want to leverage it up even to the corps size level. Proponents rise also the point that the Brigade is historically rooted in the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They underline, that by selecting the Grand Hetman Ostrogski for the Brigade's patron, the three nations' hero who successfully led campaigns against the Tatars and Muscovians, authorities in Vilnius, Warsaw, and Kiev want to integrate Eastern Europe also on its historical strengths against all odds from their difficult past.

Having in mind all the pros and cons concerning the LITPOLUKRBRIG's future, as well as the fact that it depends on the unanimous decisions of the three framework nations, this project has significant development potential. At the present security context, it can be spotted in four main areas. Firstly, the brigade has the potential to support Ukraine to join the Euro-Atlantic family. Secondly, it has the potential to positively impact military competencies, capabilities, and capacities of all founding nations. Thirdly, it has a strength to demonstrate its effectiveness and utility in a security context. And fourthly, LITPOLUKRBRIG has the potential to contribute to building a stronger regional identity and trilateral cooperation based on common values, interests, experiences and threats perceptions.

1. The Brigade has the potential to support Ukrainians' efforts to join the Euro-Atlantic family

Joining NATO is Kiev's priority now. In the summer of 2017, the Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko signed a special law that defined accession to NATO as the priority goal of the foreign policy of his administration. Recently, president Poroshenko informed also that Ukraine plans to become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance in the next ten years' perspective [1]. To reach this goal Ukraine is going to obtain the Membership Action Plan (MAP) by the end of 2019 [2]. This Alliance program launched in 1999 has become an effective tool for a number of aspiring countries like Poland to finally join the Euro-Atlantic family [3]. Aimed at

advising, assisting and providing practical support tailored to the countries' individual needs, it can help Ukraine to reach its long term goal [2].

The Ukrainian government's aim and efforts seem to have full national support. The majority of Ukrainians are in favor of joining NATO. In 2017, a sociological survey has shown that around 60-percent of the population was supporting the idea of joining the Alliance.

The LITPOLUKRBRIG might be of much help for Ukrainians too on its way for accession. This form of trilateral cooperation definitely supports Ukrainians' goals especially in terms of military preparedness. This concept of cooperation has worked perfectly for Poland also, and it was one of the ways in which Poland approaches NATO. Over twenty years ago, in 1998, when Poland was not a member of NATO yet, Ministers of Defence of Denmark, Germany, and Poland signed the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC-NE) Convention. For Poles the Corps was treated as the platform to become a reliable ally, especially to leverage its military interoperability and hardware compatibility. Since that time MNC-NE has developed itself significantly. In 2007, the Corps staff was assigned to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and officially took over their duties. In 2016, MNC-NE has become operationally capable to assume command of the NATO most technologically advanced, multinational Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, made up of land, air, maritime and Special Operations Forces (SOF) units, orchestrated to rapidly deploy and respond to any emerging threats to Allies members [4]. Now, during the time of the NATO command structure's reorganization plans, MNC-NE is considered to expand its operational functions and assume its duties as a NATO Land Component Command (LCC) able to conduct multi-corps operations on the northern-eastern flank of the Alliance.

Creating joint, multilateral commands, forces, structures is a permanent trend observed in the operational domain. For over 20 years, Germans and the Dutch, in the most visible way in Europe, integrate the potential of their armed forces. They have formed the command and staff of the 1st German-Dutch Corps [5]. Similar cooperation between Germany and France resulted in the formation of the Franco-German brigade. This mechanized formation, operating since 1987, is subordinated to the European Corps (Eurocorps) – another form of multinational military cooperation.

What's more, changes in the security sphere in Europe due to Russian malign activities resulted in the creation of other combined command e.g. the Multinational Division North East (MND-NE) in Poland and the Multi-national Divisional Headquarters South East (HQ MND-SE) in Romania. Both are going to be fully operational this year.

By recalling the history of raising the MNC-NE and its development process, as well as presenting the current operational trends in international military structures, the LITPOLUKRBRIG should be perceived as a long-term project and an example of multilateral military integration concept based on NATO values, interests, standards and strategies. The reason why it shouldn't be excluded is that in the long run, the brigade would follow the MNC-NE's development path as a part of NATO's extending reach.

2. The Brigade has the potential to positively impact military competencies of all founding nations

This trilateral cooperation has not only political but foremost military and operational importance. It is obvious, but worth to reiterate, that the brigade can appropriately – in the tactical

and operational sense – impact military competencies of all founding nations. It can benefit all militarily in terms of training, exercises, procedures, and staff work. Apart from reinforcing their interoperability and hardware compatibilities that are crucial for joint action too, this trilateral formation is able to create a common security perception and military culture.

Also, this concept should not be perceived as a stovepipe idea that the only gaining nation is Ukraine by obtaining NATO's military standards. All nations are beneficiaries, however, not all possible ways of cooperation have been exploited so far. In terms of gaining and sharing knowledge and experience, it should be done much more. The brigade to some extent should work as a fusion cell to collect and share Ukrainians' experience and lessons derived directly from the eastern Ukraine battlefield where an antiterrorist operation is currently being led against proxy forces supported by the Russian Federation. The experience and knowledge gained from the ongoing for four years now anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in Donbas, would help the other nations to understand better how the Russian theory of "New Generation Warfare" is being implemented in practice. It would substantially contribute to force development in terms of structure, organization, tactics, techniques, and procedures. It might be valuable lessons for all founding nations as well as for the brigade itself having in mind its possible future deployments.

3. The Brigade has the potential to demonstrate its effectiveness and utility

At present, the brigade is fully operational and ready to do its tasks in operations other than war. It means that it has the potential to demonstrate its effectiveness and utility. During the "Common Challenge-16" Exercise, the brigade has been certified according to NATO standards. Its practical skill in planning, organizing and conducting mandated activities has been tested in the context of combat readiness [6]. It means that since 2017, the LITPOLUKRBRIG that is made up of international staff, three maneuver battalions (the Lithuanian Army Land Forces Grand Duchess Birute Uhlan Battalion, the Polish 5 Podhale Rifleman Battalion and 1 Airmobile Battalion of the 80 Airborne Brigade) and some battle support and logistic units with the total strength of about 4.5 thousand soldiers, is ready to conduct peacekeeping missions. It means that in order to build a real trademark of the unit, the brigade needs to be more visible, more operationally active and finally, it has to be tested in practice, in real peacekeeping operations.

On a daily basis, the brigade should be engaged in joint trilateral exercises of the funding countries, as well as in joint exercises and training with NATO forces. This type of engagement would definitely capitalize on the Ukrainians' goal to faster reach NATO operational standards and competencies as well as to start building a so-called brigade's trademark. What's more, the command group and staff of the brigade should be involved in exercises when its affiliated forces train with its parent's units. By providing Higher Control (HICON) during these exercises, the brigade's staff might expand its operational engagements.

To deploy the brigade to the mission is up to the three nations' decisions. Now the brigade's competencies allow us to employ it in a wide range of options. It might be used in operations under the auspices of the UN, NATO and the EU as well as within ad hoc coalitions established in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The brigade may also work as a platform for the establishment of the EU Battle Group.

Fortunately, the three nations have an impressive background in running common joint operations. Their joint military experience from the Balkans and Iraq will definitely contribute to the successful end state of any mission.

From the Polish perspective, there is an observed willingness to come back to “blue helmets” operations. The Polish president Andrzej Duda has announced the resumption of Poland’s activity in UN peacekeeping missions during his speech at the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly in 2015. In March 2018, president Duda verbally reiterated this need while taking part in an annual meeting with key armed forces commanders. This statement also goes in line with Poland’s activities on the international scene. Engaging Polish forces in the UN peacekeeping mission would be an expected return to an active role of promoting international order, peace, and cooperation, since December 2009 when the last Polish contingent under the UN flag ended its mission.

Unfortunately, bearing in mind the current security circumstances and Russia’s attitude to the West, it seems challenging to make it possible in practice. Using the brigade in peacekeeping missions under the umbrella of the United Nations needs the approval not only of the trilateral founding nations but also Russia who is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Considering the current state of Russian and Ukrainian relations, lack of cooperation between NATO nations and Moscow, including a divergence of interests, contributing the LITPOLUKRBRIG to a UN mission might be problematic, but would not be excluded in the future.

4. The Brigade has the potential to build a stronger regional identity

Despite the fact that the LITPOLUKRBRIG is a purely military project, it demonstrates the potential to go beyond. It has the power to make a regional identity even stronger. As long as the three nations share the same values, interests, experiences, and threat perceptions, the brigade can contribute solely to building understanding between three nations. Selecting hetman Konstanty Ostrogski for the brigade’s patron, the commander of the combined Polish-Lithuanian army in the war against Russia (also known as The Muscovite–Lithuanian Wars) who in 1514 achieved a significant victory in the Battle of Orsha over an army of Vasili III showed that the nations want to build their future on common heritage. It shows also that building understanding between the nations is crucial to reconcile and face risks from the East, as long as Russia perceives the Western world as its key opponent, the former Soviet bloc as a sphere of its influence, and NATO as the main threat to its security.

Conclusion

The LITPOLUKRBRIG is ready to fulfill its main mission now. Gaining this substantial achievement, the brigade is able to influence and shape not only regional security but also the environment far away from Europe. It can rightly – in the operational sense – impact military competencies of all founding nations and can tie harder the neighboring countries’ relations through military cooperation. Furthermore, it can anchor Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine much more strongly in the Euro-Atlantic sphere. But now its future lies in the hands of the founding nations to decide what to do next? They have to choose whether they want to keep a status quo of the brigade or to start building upon its strengths and competencies. The current security status in Europe e.g. an illegal annexation of the Crimea, ongoing warfare

in Donbas, the militarization of the Kaliningrad Oblast, incline to advise to push this concept forward, to give it some impetus, to make the LITPOLUKRBRIG more visible, and more active in the security sphere.

Acknowledgement

No acknowledgement and potential founding was reported by the author.

Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

ORCID

Mariusz Fryc  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8037-7435>

References

1. Andrusieczko P. *Ukraina przygotowuje plan wejścia w struktury NATO*, [online]. Available at: <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,22077633,ukraina-przygotuje-plan-wejscia-w-struktury-nato.html> [Accessed: 28 April 2018].
2. *Poroszenko: Ukraina chce uzyskać Plan Działań na rzecz Członkostwa w NATO (MAP) przed końcem 2019 roku*, [online]. Available at: <http://studium.uw.edu.pl/poroszenko-ukraina-chce-uzyskac-plan-dzialan-na-rzecz-czlonkostwa-w-nato-map-przed-koncem-2019-roku/> [Accessed: 28 April 2018].
3. *Membership Action Plan (MAP)*, [online]. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_37356.htm [Accessed: 28 April 2018].
4. *NATO Response Force / Very High Readiness Joint Task Force*, [online]. Available at: <https://shape.nato.int/nato-response-force--very-high-readiness-joint-task-force> [Accessed: 28 April 2018].
5. *Holenderska brygada zintegrowana z niemiecką dywizją*, [online]. Available at: <http://dziennikzbrojny.pl/aktualnosci/news,2,9955,aktualnosci-z-europy,holenderska-brygada-zintegrowana-z-niemiecka-dywizja> [Accessed: 28 April 2018].
6. *LITPOLUKRBRIG „w gotowości do działań”*, [online]. Available at: <http://www.defence24.pl/litpolukrbrig-w-gotowosci-do-dzialan#top-carousel> [Accessed: 28 April 2018].

Biographical note

Mariusz Fryc – Colonel, PhD in military science. Currently head of the Military Analysis Branch at the Armed Forces Supervision Department at the National Security Bureau (Warsaw, Poland). Formerly an analyst at the Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre (CCOMC) at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (Mons, Belgium, 2009–2012). Former assistant professor and the Chair of Strategy and Geostrategy of the National Defense University (Warsaw, Poland). He specializes in the theory of war and strategy as well as the

issues of armed conflicts in the 21st century. In 2009, he was awarded the Minister of National Defense award for his doctoral dissertation – “Future Wars”. The author, among others of the monographs: “War – the modern face” as well as “The winning art. The strategy of creating and exploiting asymmetrical advantage”. Participant in a scientific internship at the European Center for Strategic Studies George C. Marshall (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, 2016).

Potencjał rozwojowy Brygady litewsko-polsko-ukraińskiej w kontekście bezpieczeństwa regionalnego

STRESZCZENIE

Od stycznia 2017 r. Brygada litewsko-polsko-ukraińska (LITPOLUKRBRIG) jest w pełni operacyjna, aby wpływać i kształtować nie tylko bezpieczeństwo regionalne, ale także międzynarodowy pokój poza Europą. Jej potencjał rozwojowy może przyczynić się do wsparcia Ukrainy w bieżącej reformie wojskowej, a także w procesie przystąpienia do NATO. Może pozytywnie wpłynąć na kompetencje wojskowe, zdolności i potencjał wszystkich państw założycielskich i przyczynić się do wzmocnienia regionalnej tożsamości opartej na wspólnych wartościach, interesach, doświadczeniach i postrzeganych zagrożeniach. Nadszedł czas, aby państwa założycielskie zdecydowały czy zachować status quo brygady, czy też budować jej „znak towarowy” na podstawie swoich mocnych stron i kompetencji. Jeśli wybiorą drugą opcję, Brygada musi stać się bardziej widoczna i aktywna w sferze bezpieczeństwa, co prowadzi do konieczności wykazania jej skuteczności i użyteczności w praktyce.

Celem tego artykułu jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytania: gdzie leży potencjał rozwojowy Brygady litewsko-polsko-ukraińskiej i jak można go wykorzystać w kontekście wzmocnienia zarówno trójstronnej współpracy, jak i bezpieczeństwa w regionie. We wstępie autor zderza ze sobą różne perspektywy dotyczące przyszłości LITPOLUKRBRIG. W pierwszej części przekonuje, że brygada może pomóc Ukrainie w przystąpieniu do rodziny euroatlantyckiej. W drugiej części uzasadnia, że brygada może pozytywnie wpłynąć na zdolności wojskowe i stopień interoperacyjności sił zbrojnych wszystkich państw założycielskich. W części trzeciej uzasadnia, że brygada dysponuje potencjałem do kształtowania regionalnego bezpieczeństwa. W części czwartej przekonuje, że LITPOLUKRBRIG może przyczynić się do budowania silniejszej tożsamości regionalnej i trójstronnej współpracy opartej na wspólnych wartościach, interesach, doświadczeniach i wspólnym postrzeganiu zagrożeń.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Brygada litewsko-polsko-ukraińska, LITPOLUKRBRIG, współpraca wojskowa, potencjał militarny, NATO, operacja pokojowa, bezpieczeństwo regionalne

How to cite this paper

Fryc M. *The Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade's development potential in the context of regional security*. Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces. 2020;52;1(195): 5-11.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.0247>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>