KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

From Small Alliances to Network Diplomacy: Promising Formats for Ukraine's Engagement with Partners in 2026-2030

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Introduction

The dynamics of recent years have demonstrated the weakening of the mechanisms of international law and of the effectiveness of the international formats and organizations called upon to ensure its observance. Although international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) remain viable platforms for political declarations, for publicizing evidence of violations of international law, and for drawing attention to Russian crimes against Ukraine and its citizens, the effectiveness of their response is increasingly minimal and largely verbal. While such international structures preserve the general framework of international legal mechanisms, they are incapable of preventing violations.

Among the reasons (alongside Russian influence, cumbersome mechanisms for adopting and implementing decisions, and "veto" players) is the emergence of parallel structures reflecting the desire of states beyond North America and Europe to assert their agency. In some cases this takes place in formats that broaden the geographic scope of existing structures (such as the Group of Twenty (G20) as an alternative to the Group of Seven (G7)), and in others – in formats that compete with liberally oriented structures and undermine their universality (for example, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – BRICS). The emergence of such structures is usually driven by major players, notably the People's Republic of China, to advance their own agenda and demonstrate a claim to a bipolar world system.

At the same time, small and medium-sized states are increasingly resorting to the formation of small alliances. The nature of such alliances varies: they may be geared toward achieving specific security, economic, energy, or logistical goals; serve as an instrument for balancing amid the confrontation of major players; or perform applied and strategic functions simultaneously, thereby expanding the room for political maneuver under the constrained capacities of global associations.

In a number of such formats Ukraine is an observer, partner, or associated member. In some cases it has acted as an initiator and co-founder. Assessing the effectiveness of existing regional groupings and the potential of new ones is the task of this analytical paper. The paper identifies the factors that give regional alliances impetus for development or, conversely, undermine the effectiveness of regional cooperation. The assessment relies on the following criteria:

- political viability, understood as a combination of long-term shared political interests, a weak domestic political opposition and the absence of "veto" players, and a stable governmental foreign policy course;
- security potential – the added value of security and defense cooperation and of defense-industry interaction;
- economic potential – the existence of formats of cooperation that will outweigh competition and generate added economic value;
- the realistic prospect of growing momentum of cooperation within the format in the period up to 2030.

Audit of Existing Formats

A format worth attention in view of its rich history of interaction with Ukraine is the ***Visegrád Four (V4)***. It is a format of regional coordination in Central Europe, established in 1991 to support the democratic transformation of the countries of the region and their integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. The V4 comprises Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. The format's main goals are political coordination, the development of economic cooperation, support for regional stability, and the alignment of member states' positions within the European Union.

Ukraine is not a member of the V4, but its cooperation with the format's states has a long history. It encompasses political dialogue, support for Ukraine's European integration, joint educational and research programs implemented through the International Visegrad Fund, and the coordination of individual regional projects.

After the start of Russia's full-scale aggression in 2022, the V4 went through a period of internal political transformation. Poland and the Czech Republic were from the outset among Ukraine's key military and political partners, whereas Hungary took a far more restrained position, blocking certain decisions of the EU and NATO on support for Ukraine. Slovakia, following its change of government in 2023, likewise shifted to a more skeptical policy on military assistance to Kyiv, as did the Czech Republic after its change of government in 2025.

The most recent top-level political contact between the leaders of the "Four" was the V4 prime ministers' summit in Gödöllő (Hungary) on June 23, 2026, which became the first full-fledged meeting of the leaders after a lengthy period of political crisis within the format.

Economically, the Visegrád Four remains a strong regional bloc. The combined GDP of the V4 states is around $1.8 trillion. Poland accounts for the largest share of the bloc's economic potential, at around 56% of its combined GDP. Thanks to the membership of all V4 states in the European Union, their economies are deeply integrated into the single European market and production chains, creating considerable potential for Ukraine's participation in joint logistics, energy, and infrastructure projects, as well as in postwar reconstruction.

In the military dimension, the V4 possesses considerable capabilities, although their distribution is uneven. The total active military personnel of the format's states is approximately 252,000 service members. More than two-thirds of this potential falls to Poland, which has 173,400 troops. In 2025, the V4's combined military spending amounted to almost $59 billion, of which Poland spent around $44 billion. All V4 states meet or exceed the NATO minimum benchmark for defense funding. Poland spent around 4.7% of GDP in 2025, the highest figure among all members. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia stand at 2-2.1% of GDP.

The V4's geographic position is one of the key factors of its strategic value. The format's states occupy a central position between Western Europe and NATO's eastern flank, controlling the main overland transport routes between Ukraine and the European Union. Should the format develop further, Ukraine could become its eastern security component.

Among the main avenues for the development of cooperation in the V4+Ukraine format are: the development of transport corridors between Ukraine and the EU; the participation of V4 countries in Ukraine's postwar reconstruction; and Ukraine's integration into the European space.

Arguments in favor of strengthening cooperation with the grouping include factors such as Ukraine's geographic proximity; Poland's historically key role as an advocate of Ukrainian integration; and the existence of established cooperation mechanisms through the International Visegrad Fund.

However, **standing in the way of such cooperation** are the absence of a unified political position on Russia and Ukraine; trade and agricultural disputes between Ukraine and individual V4 states; the format's sensitivity to changes of government and domestic political conjuncture; and the generally negative perception of the grouping within the European Union (V4 states are marked by a growing trend toward sovereigntism and by violations of EU law that in some cases have even led to the threat of suspension of voting rights in the European Council).

Hence **the format's political prospects are average**. After several years of internal political crisis, dialogue among the Visegrád Four states has only recently begun to recover. At the same time, the question of support for Ukraine remains one of the main sources of disagreement among the format's participants.

Security prospects are assessed as low. Although Poland is one of Europe's most powerful military states and one of Ukraine's key security partners, the other V4 countries have far smaller military potential and do not demonstrate the same level of readiness to provide military support to Ukraine.

Economic prospects, however, are high. The combined GDP of the Visegrád Four countries exceeds $1.8 trillion, and the integration of their economies into the EU single market creates considerable potential for drawing Ukraine into production chains, the development of transport corridors, joint investment projects, and postwar reconstruction.

The situation looks more promising with the format ***Bucharest Nine (B9) + Ukraine (Poland – Romania – Lithuania – Latvia – Estonia – the Czech Republic – Slovakia – Hungary – Bulgaria).*** The Bucharest Nine (B9) is a format of regional security coordination among the states of NATO's eastern flank, established in 2015 at the initiative of the presidents of Poland and Romania. The format's main purpose at its creation was to strengthen political interaction among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, as well as to align positions on reinforcing the Alliance's eastern flank.

Ukraine is not a formal member of the format, but after 2022 it became one of the B9's key partners owing to the shared interest in countering Russian aggression, developing the system of collective defense, and strengthening the security of NATO's eastern border.

After the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the importance of the Bucharest Nine grew substantially. The format's states became some of the leading advocates of a stronger NATO military presence on the eastern flank, higher defense budgets, and support for Ukraine. Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states have been among Ukraine's most active allies.

The Bucharest Nine has considerable economic potential. The combined GDP of the B9 countries is approximately $2.52 trillion. The largest shares of economic potential are formed by Poland (≈40% of the B9's combined GDP), Romania (≈17%), and the Czech Republic (≈15%). The economic potential of Poland and Romania is of particular importance. Poland can act as the main logistics hub for supporting Ukraine, while Romania has a strategic role in developing the Black Sea direction, including port infrastructure and alternative trade routes.

In the military dimension, the Bucharest Nine is one of the most important formats for Ukraine, since all its participants are NATO members and are involved in the system of deterring Russia. The total active military personnel of the B9 states is approximately 397,800 service members. The largest military potential belongs to Poland (≈44% of the B9's total military potential), Romania (≈18%), and Bulgaria (≈11%). The B9's combined defense spending in 2025 amounted to approximately $72.7 billion. The largest defense investor is Poland (≈61% of all B9 defense spending). All B9 states meet, or are approaching, the NATO standard on defense spending. The highest levels of funding are demonstrated by Poland (around 4.7% of GDP) and Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (each around 3% of GDP).

Geographically, the B9 covers almost the entire eastern belt of NATO – from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea: the Baltic direction (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia); the Central European direction (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary); and the Black Sea direction (Romania, Bulgaria).

Among the grouping's priorities: air defense and early warning; countering hybrid threats; maritime security of the Black Sea; Ukraine's integration into the security system of the eastern flank; and support for Ukraine's accession to NATO.

Drivers: the common threat from Russia; the membership of all participants in NATO; and Ukraine's strategic importance for the eastern flank.

Until recently, deeper cooperation was hampered by the differing positions of individual governments on Russia (above all Hungary under Viktor Orbán) and by the absence of the format's own military structures (it depends on NATO).

Despite this, **the format's political prospects are above average**. The B9 is one of the most favorable formats for deepening political cooperation, since most of its participants share a common view of the Russian threat. The main obstacle remains the need to align positions with the states that take a more cautious approach, above all Hungary. Today, however, a new window of opportunity is opening in this direction.

Security prospects are high. Among all regional formats, the B9 offers one of the highest levels of practical value for Ukraine. The format brings together NATO states that are located in the immediate vicinity of Russia and Belarus and share a common strategic vision of the nature of the threat and of the need to strengthen defense capabilities. In recent years, virtually all B9 states have substantially increased defense spending and taken practical steps to strengthen regional security. Poland is actively procuring modern weapons systems and developing its own defense industry, the Baltic states are concentrating on countering hybrid threats and on cybersecurity, and Romania plays a key role in ensuring the security of the Black Sea.

Economic prospects are high. The B9's combined GDP of more than $2.5 trillion, its integration into the EU, and its considerable infrastructure potential create opportunities for drawing Ukraine into regional production chains, transport networks, and reconstruction projects.

A potentially high-quality umbrella structure for high-level political dialogue is ***Weimar+ (+ Ukraine)*.** The Weimar Triangle was established in 1991 as a format of political cooperation among France, Germany, and Poland. Its initial purpose was to facilitate Poland's European integration after the end of the Cold War, to coordinate foreign policy positions, and to deepen cooperation between Western and Central Europe.

After the start of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022, the format acquired new strategic significance. The Weimar+ concept emerged, envisaging the expansion of the classic Weimar Triangle by bringing Ukraine and other key European states into discussions of security, defense, and the future architecture of European security. Weimar+ includes not only France, Germany, and Poland but also such states as Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom (UK), as well as representatives of the institutions of the European Union.

The first large-scale consultations in the Weimar+ format took place on February 12, 2025, in Paris. The meeting brought together the foreign ministers of France, Germany, Poland, Italy, Spain, and the UK, representatives of the European Union, and Ukraine as a specially invited participant. The main topics were strengthening support for Ukraine, reinforcing European defense, coordinating positions on future negotiations, and the need to provide Ukraine with long-term security guarantees. The format's development continued in London in May 2025.

Weimar+ has **very high economic potential**. The combined GDP of the format's traditional participants (France, Germany, Poland) exceeds $9 trillion.

In the military dimension, Weimar+ likewise has one of the highest potentials among European formats. The total active military personnel of the format's traditional participants is approximately 562,000 service members. The combined defense spending of the three Weimar Triangle states amounted to approximately $217.5 billion in 2025, half of it accounted for by Germany.

Geographically, Weimar+ links three strategic zones: Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. At the same time, its participants, with the exception of Poland, lack direct geographic proximity to Ukraine.

Among the main avenues for the development of Weimar+ cooperation are: shaping long-term security guarantees for Ukraine; coordinating military assistance and developing joint arms production; postwar reconstruction; sanctions pressure on Russia; and support for Ukraine's European integration.

The drivers of cooperation are the political leadership of France and Germany in shaping the European Union's security policy; the recognition of the need to deter Russia; the considerable economic and military potential of the format's states; and Ukraine's practical experience in waging modern war.

High momentum of cooperation may be hindered by differences in countries' foreign policy approaches to the pace of support for Ukraine, and by the absence of a formal institutional structure and permanent decision-making mechanisms in the Weimar+ format.

Weimar+ has limited prospects as a practical format for Ukraine's security interaction with partners. Its main advantage is the participation of the largest European states with considerable economic, military, and political resources. At the same time, the real influence of Weimar+ remains limited by the absence of a permanent institutional structure, mechanisms for joint decision-making, and concrete instruments for implementing agreements. Most practical steps to support Ukraine are carried out through bilateral channels, the EU, or NATO rather than within the format itself. Moreover, differences persist among the participants over the pace of military assistance, the role of the United States (US) in European security, and the possible deployment of European military forces. An additional constraint is the geographic remoteness of most participants from Ukraine's security space and their differing perceptions of the level of the Russian threat.

Lublin Triangle (Ukraine–Lithuania–Poland) is one of the most developed and institutionalized regional formats. The Lithuanian–Polish–Ukrainian Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG) has existed for more than 10 years, and the Interparliamentary Assembly of the three states predated the launch of the format and was integrated into the broader logic of trilateral cooperation.

The jubilee meeting of foreign ministers on July 16, 2025, in Lublin, marking the 5th anniversary of the format, consolidated the rotating chairmanship and the regularity of meetings at least twice a year, launched the Forum of Historians, and confirmed the intention to hold a presidential summit in Kyiv.

On September 11, 2025, the participants promptly adopted a joint statement on the Russian drone incursion into Polish airspace, demonstrating the format's capacity for rapid political coordination.[1]

Political coordination is reinforced by mutual treaty obligations among the states under the bilateral security agreements Ukraine concluded with Poland[2] (July 8, 2024) and Lithuania[3] (June 27, 2024). At the Lviv summit (2023), the leaders of the three states jointly declared support for Ukraine's membership in NATO and for the creation of a special tribunal for the crime of aggression by the Russian Federation – a position later taken up by broader international platforms.

Development priorities include countering hybrid threats (cybersecurity, combating the Russian "shadow fleet"), air defense coordination and early warning, promotion of energy security, military training, and support for Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Among the factors that can catalyze the intensification of cooperation: the shared perception of the Russian threat, the existence of military and parliamentary institutional infrastructure, and support for Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO.

By contrast, **the grouping's weaknesses include** the fact that, despite the existence of trilateral institutions, their coordination is not carried out through a dedicated secretariat, is little reflected in the political activity of the relevant ministers, and is sensitive to electoral cycles and to the instrumentalization of historical memory in Poland's domestic politics.

Another factor that may weaken cooperation within the format is the process of Ukraine's European integration, particularly the negotiations over trade and agricultural disputes.

Hence the format's political prospects are moderately high, given the stable security consensus of the current governments, but sensitive to Poland's 2027 elections and a possible strengthening of right-wing forces. Security prospects are likewise high, given the potential for air defense coordination and countering hybrid threats. Economic potential, by contrast, is moderate and concentrated mainly in logistics and energy. The realistic prospect of growing momentum of cooperation is high, since the format operates on a regular basis and has a ready institutional foundation, but it is contingent on the outcome of Poland's 2027 elections.

Odesa Triangle (Ukraine–Moldova–Romania) is a relatively young format that emerged in Odesa in 2022 as the trilateral consultation platform "Ukraine–Moldova–Romania" and was officially renamed at the fourth ministerial meeting on August 8, 2025, in Chernivtsi. The parties agreed on further institutionalization, namely the appointment of regional coordinators, a clear agenda, and joint projects.

The main achievement has been the start of a transition from ad hoc consultations to a regular coordination mechanism. In almost four years, five ministerial meetings have been held, and the name and coordination structure have been agreed. The format has begun to coordinate with the Lublin Triangle by involving the ministers of Poland and Lithuania in selected consultations.

Priority areas include the security of the Black Sea and the Danube, protection of port and border infrastructure, energy resilience, countering hybrid threats, development of transport corridors, and coordination of the European integration of Ukraine and Moldova.

The drivers of development are the alignment of approaches on the European integration track of Ukraine and Moldova and on the assessment of the Russian threat in the Black Sea region, as well as transport and energy interdependence.

Dynamic development may be hindered by domestic political turbulence in Romania, Moldova's limited defense capabilities, external financing of political networks and disinformation interference in electoral processes, and the format's incomplete institutionalization. The format's political prospects are therefore moderate, given the dependence on the domestic stability of Moldova and Romania. Security potential is moderate but important in the Black Sea and Danube dimensions. Economic potential is moderately high thanks to logistics, energy, and border infrastructure. At the same time, the prospect of growing momentum of cooperation within the format is increasing, even though the "Odesa Triangle" does not yet have a permanent executive structure.

Three Seas Initiative is a format in which Ukraine's relations show substantial momentum. Ukraine has moved from "a partner of the Initiative beginning the participation process"[4] (June 2022, Riga) to

"an associated participating state"[5] (September 2023, Bucharest). This successive upgrade of status has been the format's key deliverable for Ukraine. Associated partnership has opened the possibility for Ukraine to include its own projects in the agenda and the list of priority infrastructure of the Three Seas Initiative, although a full-fledged mechanism for financing them has yet to be created.

At the most recent summit in April 2026 in Croatia, Prime Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko presented four infrastructure proposals: the extension of Via Carpatia[6] from Rzeszów via Lviv to Kyiv, the extension of Rail2Sea[7] to the port of Odesa, the creation of capacity for reverse gas supplies into Ukrainian underground storage facilities, and a dedicated window for Ukrainian projects in the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund during the upcoming Polish chairmanship.

The priority areas of development are transport connectivity and the extension of the Via Carpatia and Rail2Sea corridors to Ukraine, the diversification of gas supply and the use of Ukrainian underground storage facilities, and digital infrastructure.

The incentives for strengthening cooperation are the need to develop transport, energy, and digital links along the North–South axis, diversification away from Russian resources, the support of the US, the European Commission, Germany, and Japan, and the active role of Poland and Romania.

The spoilers are the heterogeneity of participants' interests, the absence of full membership and of guaranteed access to financing for Ukraine, the Initiative's limited own resources, the long timelines of infrastructure projects, and competition for the funds of European and international institutions.

Thus, the project's political viability is high, though complicated by the heterogeneity of participants' interests. Its security role is moderate since, while not a defense format, the Three Seas Initiative can indirectly strengthen NATO's eastern flank through dual-use infrastructure. Economic potential is high thanks to transport, energy, and digital projects. The realistic prospect of growing momentum in relations through 2030 is moderate, since Ukraine's status is limited and access to financing is not guaranteed.

Quadriga (Ukraine – Türkiye) is a format of strategic political dialogue between Ukraine and Türkiye, launched in 2020 as a mechanism of regular consultations between the two states' ministers of foreign affairs and defense. The format was created to deepen cooperation in Black Sea security and defense.

The military-technological partnership is of particular importance for bilateral relations. The Turkish company Baykar has established production ties with Ukraine in the field of unmanned systems, and Ukrainian enterprises take part in joint defense projects.[8]

Quadriga's economic potential is significant thanks to the scale of the Turkish economy (around $1.6 trillion). Türkiye is one of the region's largest economies and an important industrial center with developed machine building, defense industry, shipbuilding, and energy.

In the military dimension, Quadriga has significant potential thanks to Türkiye's military capability – one of the most powerful among NATO countries. Türkiye spent $32.6 billion on defense in 2025. The Turkish armed forces have extensive experience of military operations, a developed defense-industrial complex, and capacity in the production of strike unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and missile systems. Ukraine, in turn, has unique experience of large-scale war, of the use of modern technologies on the battlefield, and of the development of innovative defense solutions.

Geographically, Quadriga has particular strategic importance owing to control over the Black Sea region. Cooperation between the two states matters for protecting maritime trade routes, deterring the Russian military presence, and developing alternative logistics routes.

The main areas of cooperation: development of joint production of defense products; deeper cooperation in UAVs and military technologies; Black Sea security; and development of Ukraine–Türkiye transport corridors.

The drivers of the format's development could be the shared interest in containing Russian influence in the Black Sea region; Türkiye's strong defense industry; Ukraine's unique combat experience; and the strategic location of the two states.

Türkiye, however, seeks to preserve a balance in its relations with Russia. Hence **the format has a low level of prospects**. Although Ukraine and Türkiye have a long history of strategic partnership and shared interests in the Black Sea region, the Quadriga format itself has not been sufficiently institutionalized. Regular meetings in this format have in practice not become a permanent mechanism of political coordination, and the bulk of interaction between the states continues to run mainly through bilateral contacts. In particular, defense cooperation between Ukraine and Türkiye continues, but according to available official data these projects are developing mainly within the bilateral strategic partnership rather than as a result of the functioning of the Quadriga format itself. An additional constraint is Türkiye's multi-vector foreign policy, which seeks simultaneously to preserve strategic partnership with its NATO allies and to maintain working relations with Russia.

The ***UK–Poland–Ukraine*** format dates back to the trilateral statement proclaimed in February 2022 and focused on cybersecurity, energy security, and countering disinformation.[9] Subsequently, however, it developed mainly as two parallel bilateral tracks. Ukraine and the United Kingdom concluded the One Hundred Year Partnership Agreement on January 16, 2025,[10] and, on March 17, 2026, a declaration on deepening cooperation in security and the defense industry,[11] which envisages the integration of production chains, joint projects, and the development of the LYRA program.[12]

On May 27, 2026, the United Kingdom and Poland concluded a Treaty on partnership in security and defense, covering in particular the joint development of missile systems, air defense, ammunition, cybersecurity, and counter-drone capabilities.[13]

Bilateral relations have created an industrial and treaty basis for relaunching the trilateral initiative, but a permanent coordination mechanism and a common legal "umbrella" are still lacking. The priority areas of development are defense-industrial cooperation, joint production of missiles, ammunition, and unmanned systems, air defense and counter-drone capabilities, supply chain integration, cybersecurity, and military logistics.

Among the factors that could raise the momentum of cooperation in this format: the shared perception of the Russian threat, the ambition of the United Kingdom to retain a leading role in European security, Poland's role as a logistics and production hub, and the complementarity of British technologies, Polish capacities, and Ukrainian combat experience.

Obstacles to dynamic development: the absence of a permanent trilateral mechanism, the dominance of bilateral tracks, competition among defense manufacturers, export and technology restrictions and dependence on long-term financing, as well as a lack of interest on the British side, which prefers the format of broader coalitions.

Hence political prospects are moderately high, given the shared perception of the Russian threat, but sensitive to Poland's 2027 elections and a possible strengthening of right-wing forces. Security potential is high in air defense, missile technologies, cybersecurity, and the defense industry. Economic potential is likewise high in the defense-industrial sector. The realistic prospect of growing momentum in relations is moderate, since the strong bilateral tracks are not yet united by a permanent trilateral mechanism, while multilateral cooperation is concentrated in alternative formats.

Promising Formats

Despite the unsuccessful attempts to launch the ***Ukraine–UK–Poland*** format as a political grouping, its potential should not be underestimated, resting as it does on the functional complementarity of the three states. The United Kingdom has one of the largest defense budgets in Europe[14] – around $102 billion in 2026 – and leading competencies in missile, aerospace, maritime, and electronic systems. At the same time, British industry faces problems in scaling up the serial production of ammunition and land systems. Poland offers an assembly, repair, and logistics base close to Ukraine, access to the EU market, and the potential to expand production through the Polish state-owned defense holding Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa (PGZ) and private enterprises. Ukraine provides combat experience, a rapid cycle of system development and testing, and competencies in drones, electronic warfare (EW), ammunition, and software.

The format already has a bilateral treaty foundation. The declaration between Ukraine and the United Kingdom of March 17, 2026, provides for joint production lines, supply chain integration, and the development of the LYRA program. The treaty between the United Kingdom and Poland of May 27, 2026, covers the joint development of missile systems, ground-based air defense, ammunition, cybersecurity, and counter-drone capabilities.

The Polish–Ukrainian track has also begun to acquire industrial substance: at the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2026 in Gdańsk, TAF Industries and PGZ signed a memorandum on localizing the production of UAVs and counter-drone systems, while Ivchenko-Progress, PZL Defence, and Unimot signed an arrangement on the development and production of small turbojet engines. For now these are framework arrangements rather than serial contracts, but they lay the groundwork for future trilateral production chains.

Promising areas include the joint production of interceptor drones, air defense missiles, ammunition, EW assets, and small aircraft engines, the distribution of production among the three states, joint testing of systems in Ukraine, and the creation of long-term procurement mechanisms.

Drivers: the complementarity of British technologies and financial instruments, the Polish production and logistics base, and Ukrainian combat experience, high demand for missiles, ammunition, and counter-drone systems, and support for localizing Ukrainian production in NATO states.

Spoilers: competition among national manufacturers, dependence on American components, the shortage of long-term contracts and the risk that cooperation remains confined to bilateral projects, and the instrumentalization of historical memory in Poland's domestic politics.

Political prospects are moderately high, since the parties share a perception of the Russian threat, but the trilateral mechanism still lags behind the bilateral tracks in its development. Security prospects are high thanks to the potential for joint production of missiles, ammunition, unmanned systems, air defense assets, and EW. Economic prospects are likewise high owing to the combination of British technologies and financing, the Polish production and logistics base, and Ukrainian combat experience. The realistic prospect is moderately high: what is needed is the institutionalization of already existing bilateral projects into a joint trilateral format.

On the Baltic track, a promising format is **NB8+Ukraine *(Denmark – Estonia – Finland – Iceland – Latvia – Lithuania – Norway – Sweden).*** The Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) is a format of regional cooperation between the five Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) and the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). The format was established in 1992, after the end of the Cold War, with the aim of developing political dialogue, economic cooperation, and support for democratic transformations in Northern Europe and the Baltic region.

After 2022, the format's importance grew substantially owing to the intensification of the Russian military threat, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, and the need to protect the Alliance's northern and eastern flanks.

Ukraine is not a member of the NB8, but after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion the format began actively developing cooperation with Kyiv. Ukraine became a natural partner of the NB8 through the shared interest in countering Russian aggression, cyber threats, information operations, and other forms of hybrid influence. The most recent large-scale meeting in the NB8 format with the participation of the president of Ukraine took place on June 9, 2026, in Tallinn (Estonia); based on its results, a joint declaration was signed consolidating the deepening of security and defense cooperation.[15]

A distinctive feature of NB8+Ukraine is that this format has its greatest potential precisely in cybersecurity, digital resilience, and countering hybrid threats, since the Nordic and Baltic countries are among the world's most digitally advanced states and have extensive experience in countering Russian cyber operations.

Notably, the NB8's economic potential is also high thanks to the inclusion of the developed economies of Northern Europe. The combined GDP of the NB8 states is approximately $2.18 trillion. The main economic centers: Sweden (≈30% of the NB8's combined GDP), Norway (≈24%), and Denmark (≈21%).

In the military dimension, the NB8 is one of the most promising formats for Ukraine owing to the high defense capability of its participants and their proximity to the Russian military space. The total active military personnel of the NB8 states is approximately 120,000 service members. The NB8's combined defense spending in 2025 amounted to approximately $68.7 billion. The Baltic states have smaller defense budgets but spend a significant share of GDP on defense (around 3% of GDP).

Geographically, the NB8 covers the strategic space from the North Atlantic to the Baltic Sea. After the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the NB8's strategic role has grown considerably, as the format has effectively become an important component of the defense of the Alliance's northern flank. Ukraine complements this space as the state containing Russia in the east.

The promising areas of development and cooperation are as follows: creation of joint cyber defense mechanisms; exchange of experience in countering Russian hybrid operations; protection of critical infrastructure; development of digital security; support for Ukraine's accession to NATO; and development of defense production.

Drivers: a common understanding of the Russian threat; the high level of digital development of the NB8 states; the extensive experience of the Baltic states in countering hybrid attacks; the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO; political support for Ukraine from most of the format's states; and the combination of Ukrainian combat experience with the technological capabilities of Northern Europe.

At the same time, among the reasons that may reduce the intensity of cooperation is the fact that the format has no joint military structures; the geographic remoteness of some NB8 countries from Ukraine; the differing levels of interest of individual states in military support; and the limited resources of the small Baltic states.

That said, the NB8 is one of the most favorable formats for Ukraine from a political standpoint. Most of the format's states hold a clear position on the need to deter Russia and support Ukraine, since they themselves are in the immediate vicinity of the Russian military space. The Baltic states, Finland, and Sweden are especially active in supporting Ukraine.

The security prospects of NB8+Ukraine are very high, especially in cybersecurity, countering hybrid threats, and defense technologies. The format's states have extensive experience in countering Russian cyber operations, information campaigns, and interference in democratic processes. A separate promising area is cooperation in unmanned systems. Ukraine has unique practical experience of the mass use of drones in modern war, while the NB8 countries possess considerable technological, industrial, and innovation capabilities. The exchange of experience and the joint development and production of unmanned systems can become one of the most promising areas of cooperation.

Economic prospects are average, since the NB8's scale is smaller than that of other formats. **The format's main advantage** lies not in the scale of its economies but in the high level of technological development, innovation, and competencies in digitalization and defense technologies.

Ukraine–Poland–Romania Triangle looks promising, considering that Poland and Romania form Ukraine's two complementary logistics arms: a northern one – with access to the Baltic Sea and Central Europe, and a southern one – via the Danube, the Black Sea, and the port of Constanța. Both states are key countries of NATO's eastern flank and are building up their defense capabilities. Poland's total defense spending for 2026 amounts to around $52-53 billion, or 4.8% of GDP,[16] while Romania's defense budget is estimated at approximately $10.7 billion, or 2.4% of GDP.

Poland is building a multilayered air defense system under the Wisła, Narew, and Pilica+ programs, combining Patriot, Common Anti-Air Modular Missile (CAMM)/CAMM-ER, and short-range systems. Romania operates Patriot systems and F-16 fighters,[17] has acquired 18 Dutch and 32 Norwegian aircraft, and has signed an agreement to purchase F-35As with first deliveries in 2030-2031. The Aegis Ashore facility at Deveselu strengthens NATO missile defense but does not substitute for air defense systems against cruise missiles and mass UAV attacks.

The format's complementarity lies in the possibility of combining Polish air defense systems and northern supply routes, Romanian aviation, Danube, and Black Sea infrastructure, and Ukrainian combat experience in countering missiles and drones. Practical areas could include the exchange of radar information, regional early warning, joint procurement of counter-UAV assets, coordination of the protection of logistics hubs, and the development of alternative transport routes between the Baltic and the Black Sea.

The format's potential added value could be reinforced by the shared perception of the Russian threat, growing defense budgets, NATO's need to strengthen the eastern flank, and Ukrainian combat experience.

Among the spoilers: Romania's domestic political crisis, legal restrictions on Ukraine's interaction with NATO's integrated air defense system, dependence on American technologies and ammunition, trade and agricultural disputes, and the instrumentalization of historical memory in Poland's domestic politics.

Thus, political prospects are moderately high thanks to the shared interests of the eastern flank, although they are lowered by political fluctuations in Romania and disputes with Poland. Security potential is high owing to air defense, early warning, and military mobility. Economic potential is moderate, owing to considerable logistics capabilities but also to infrastructure and personnel constraints (above all – a shortage of specialized personnel, technical specialists, and air defense operators). At the same time, building on the existing bilateral agreements and practical interaction, the format could well demonstrate high momentum in the development of cooperation.

Another promising format appears to be the ***Türkiye–Bulgaria–Romania–Ukraine*** grouping. At present, Ukraine already has a large cooperation format that includes these three countries, known

as the ***Maritime Capability Coalition***, which was established in 2023 and concentrates mostly on strengthening the Ukrainian Navy.

At the same time, a more independent format without Ukraine's direct participation also exists. Since January 2024, Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria have been part of the ***Black Sea Mine Countermeasures Task Group (MCM Black Sea TG)***, which works jointly to ensure the uninterrupted movement of maritime commercial and civilian traffic along the Black Sea coast of these three countries, as well as on the preparation and training of mine clearance crews. Partly thanks to the existence of this coalition, Ukraine has been able to improve the trade situation in our southern ports. It is also preliminarily known that Ukraine is set to be admitted to the coalition immediately after the end of the war; until then, cooperation is mostly limited to information exchange and joint maritime training (such as Breeze 2026). Joining such a coalition will facilitate the demining of the Ukrainian part of the Black Sea by allied forces.

Over the period of its existence, the coalition has activated its mine countermeasures capabilities 11 times (three times in 2024, four times in 2025, and as many in 2026). Every six months, starting from July 2024, command of the coalition rotates from one country to another (Türkiye–Bulgaria–Romania). As of July 2026, command is in the hands of the Bulgarian side. On the eve of the handover of command, the defense ministers of the three countries expanded the coalition's mandate, which now also includes assistance with the protection and surveillance of critical underwater infrastructure. The mine countermeasures fleet of the three states numbers around 30 vessels, and Bulgaria expects the arrival of 7 more from Belgium and the Netherlands.

The factors conducive to cooperation in the format are: the shared perception of the Russian threat and of the consequences of Russian aggression for the security of the entire Black Sea region, the existence of national military modernization priorities, and the possibility of obtaining EU funding.

Obstacles, by contrast, may include: the instability of Bulgaria's foreign policy position, the financial crisis in Bulgaria, the unstable government in Romania, and the duration and cost of implementing infrastructure projects.

Under such conditions, the prospects for political momentum are moderate, given the political uncertainty in Bulgaria's political arena and the unstable government situation in Romania. Security prospects are high, given the existence of a real threat from the Russian Federation and the awareness of this threat among the partners from the grouping's states. They are working on modernizing their defense capabilities and have access to EU funding mechanisms. Economic prospects are moderately high and depend mostly on convincing the other parties of the long-term benefit of implementing the proposed projects. Overall realism is moderately high, because some of the proposed initiatives can be implemented within individual modernization budgets or do not require excessive funding. At the same time, infrastructure projects represent serious commitments and will require proactive action on the Ukrainian side to succeed.

An interesting area in which a window of opportunity is opening is the Black Sea–Caspian region. Cooperation among the states of the region is largely fragmented and rests mainly on bilateral formats of interaction. At the same time, Azerbaijan, at the very least, is interested in the security of the Black Sea no less than in that of the Caspian Sea, given the existing transport routes running through the country.

After the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, **Azerbaijan** turned into a notable trading partner of the EU, especially in the energy sphere, where the Southern Gas Corridor project is actively developing with the aim of boosting gas exports to the EU; green energy is also being developed jointly with the EU (to give just one example, 2025 saw the creation of the joint company Green Energy Corridor Power Company (GECO), responsible for preparing and implementing the laying of a high-voltage direct-current submarine cable between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary).

And this comes against the backdrop of continued pragmatic cooperation with Ukraine and a cooling in relations between Baku and Moscow, particularly after the crash of Azerbaijan Airlines flight 8243.

With Nikol Pashinyan's victory in the recent parliamentary elections and the return of **Armenia** to a pro-European course, engagement with this Caucasus state is also promising, as it gradually restores ties with Azerbaijan and Türkiye following the achievement of peace in Nagorno-Karabakh. Given the changed geopolitical situation, a window of opportunity is also opening in Armenia's relations both with Ukraine and with its other neighbors.

The format of **Black Sea–Caspian cooperation** involving these states has the potential to coordinate general Black Sea security issues and can help develop systems of maritime and air surveillance, protection of critical and energy infrastructure, the fight against the Russian shadow fleet, and countering hybrid threats and cyberattacks, **without thereby turning into a full-fledged military alliance, while shaping an agenda alternative to the broader, universalist but low-capacity Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)**. For the format to succeed, however, it must concentrate on institutionalizing a regular dialogue of the six parties (Türkiye–Bulgaria–Romania–Ukraine–Azerbaijan–Armenia), guided first and foremost by pragmatic rather than idealistic principles of cooperation.

The formation of such structures is promising in trade and economic terms and would be able to facilitate the development of electricity interconnectors between the Caucasus and the Black Sea region, expand the supply of energy resources from Asia to Europe, and help integrate the energy systems of the format's participating countries into the common architecture of European energy security. No less important is the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Route, which in the future could also include Armenia.

Drivers: the shared perception of the Russian threat, the shared interest in diversifying energy and transport routes, the desire to reduce dependence on the Russian Federation, the normalization of Armenia's relations with its neighbors, and the possibility of attracting funding from the EU and international financial institutions.

Spoilers: the desire of Türkiye, Armenia, and Azerbaijan to preserve a balance in relations with the Russian Federation, the instability of Bulgaria's foreign policy position, and the duration and cost of implementing infrastructure and energy projects.

The political prospects of this track are moderately low, owing to the persistence of the problems of the Türkiye–Bulgaria–Romania–Ukraine format and the addition to them of the no less problematic Azerbaijan and Armenia. At the same time, the prospects may improve in the event of further normalization of relations among Türkiye, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Security prospects are high thanks to the combination of the Black Sea and South Caucasus security dimensions, though one must recognize the defense limitations, the absence of joint allied mechanisms, and the risks of renewed escalations in Azerbaijani–Armenian relations. Economic prospects are high, because the format combines Caspian and Black Sea trade routes and opens opportunities for deepening energy cooperation between Asia and Europe. Overall realism is moderate, because the format has considerable value in the security and economic dimensions but will depend on the political will of all participating states and on political progress in the South Caucasus.

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2 https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ugoda-pro-spivrobitnictvo-u-sferi-bezpeki-mizh-ukrayinoyu-ta-92009

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4 https://www.president.pl/storage/file/core_files/2022/6/20/bd0f94a718425ff2a959577c1ec8c728/Joint Declaration_Three Seas Summit_ Ryga.pdf

5 https://me.gov.ua/News/Detail/ebc93f82-32fa-4bf7-8fc6-1a6c6d3d184a?lang=en-GB&title=UkraineBecomesAssociateMemberOfTheThreeSeasInitiative

6 An international North–South road corridor from the Baltic Sea to the Aegean Sea through Central and South-Eastern Europe. The proposed extension via Rzeszów–Lviv–Kyiv is meant to integrate Ukraine into this corridor and provide an alternative road route to Central and South-Eastern Europe.

7 A Gdańsk–Constanța railway corridor intended to develop freight traffic and military mobility between the Baltic and Black Seas. Extending the corridor to Odesa would mean connecting Ukrainian Black Sea ports to the Baltic – Black Sea railway axis, but it will require the modernization of border crossings and a solution to the problem of the differing track gauge.

8 https://baykartech.com/en/press/turkeys-drone-maker-baykar-begins-to-build-plant-in-ukraine/

9 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-the-united-kingdom-poland-and-ukraine-17-february-2022

10 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-ukraine-sign-landmark-100-year-partnership-to-deepen-security-ties-and-strengthen-partnership-for-future-generations

11 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-ukraine-joint-statement-enhanced-security-and-defence-industrial-collaboration-declaration

12 A British–Ukrainian program for the joint development and production of defense technologies, including drones, air defense assets, long-range systems, and electronic warfare technologies. It provides for technology exchange and the scaling-up of joint production.

13 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/security-and-defence-partnership-treaty-the-projects-the-uk-and-poland-will-deliver-together

14 https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003778974/military-balance-2026-international-institute-strategic-studies-iiss

15 https://valitsus.ee/en/news/joint-statement-nordic-baltic-prime-ministers

16 https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003778974/military-balance-2026-international-institute-strategic-studies-iiss

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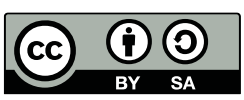
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