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LITHUANIAN POLES AS AN ELEMENT OF THE HYBRID WAR

Summary:

The article concerns the possibility of using Lithuanian Poles and their political representation: Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance (AWPL-ZChR) as a potential element in Russian aggression against Lithuania. The author cites previous media reports and expert opinions suggesting such an opportunity, and analyzes the activities of the AWPL-ZChR. The author focuses on such aspects as: cooperation of the AWPL-ZChR with the Russian Alliance - the party of the Russian minority in Lithuania - or alleged pro-Russian statements of the leaders of the Polish minority. The author tries to embed these aspects not only in the geopolitical space, but discuss them in the context of the AWPL-ZChR' position on the Lithuanian political scene.

Keywords:

hybrid war, Lithuanian Poles, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance, Waldemar Tomaszewski

As the experience of not only the recent years but the whole of the twentieth century shows, one of the instruments used in armed conflict may be national minorities residing in the country against which aggression is directed. The example of the continuing Ukrainian conflict, but also of many previous wars, shows that there are some possibilities for using the minority – from classical diversionary activity to political and diplomatic activity. The Russian occupation of Crimea and quasi-democratic attempt to legitimize the authority of Moscow over the Peninsula has its origins in the practices of the USSR and the Third Reich in the recent past ¹.

Lithuania in the fire of the hybrid war

Recently, the problem of using national minorities in aggression against another country has appeared in the media and expert analyses most often in the

¹ See more: €. Магда, *Гібридна війна: вижити і перемогти!*, Харків 2015.

context of possible Russian actions against the Baltic states². Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia most often are mentioned – alongside Moldova – as a potential area of Russian activity in Eastern Europe. Due to the conditions of international law and the presence of the Baltic countries in the structures of NATO and the EU, the activities of the Russian Federation have a nature of targeted asymmetric operations, for example, in cyberspace as well as in the field of politics and diplomacy³. National minorities may become exceptionally valuable instruments in the Russian operations in the area of "Pribaltica". In Estonia about 24% of all inhabitants are Russians (82% in the Narva border region), in Latvia – about 27%, and in Lithuania – less than 6%⁴. Taking into account all the differences between the Crimea and the Baltic states, it is difficult to underestimate the potential of a Russian minority in the Kremlin's aggressive policy.

But media and analysts list not only the Russian minority as Putin's potential allies. Starting in 2015, the suggestion of using the aggressive Kremlin plans of the Polish minority in Lithuania began to appear in various enunciations. It has been argued that the Russians in their actions may exploit the difficult situation of Poles in Lithuania (continuous disputes with the Lithuanian authorities for spelling names or Polish education) as well as complicated Polish-Lithuanian relations in the 20th century. As an example of possible actions in the "information war" conducted by the Russians, they point at portal "Wileńska Republika Ludowa" ("Vilnius People's Republic") on Facebook, containing controversial and even provocative content of nationalist, anti-Ukrainian (primarily) and anti-Lithuanian⁵. Without prejudice to the inspirers of the rise of the portal (which is not very popular - just over 3,500 at the time of writing), it seems rather an initiative to influence the representatives of the far right in Poland than the Polish minority in Lithuania⁶.

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² A. Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics. Threats and Potential Responses*, RAND Corporation, 2017.

³ R. Thornton, Turning strengths into vulnerabilities: the art of asymmetric warfare as applied by the Russian military in its hybrid warfare concept, [in:] Russia and hybrid warfare – going beyond the label, ed. B. Renz, H. Smith, Helsinki 2016, pp. 52-59; M. Antonowicz, Litwa przygotowuje się do wojny,

http://www.eastbook.eu/2016/10/28/litwa-przygotowuje-sie-do-wojny/, (30.06.2017).

⁴ A. Grigas, Russia's motives in the Baltic states,

http://www.fpri.org/article/2015/12/russias-motives-in-the-baltic-states/ (30.06.2017).

⁵ J. R. Haines, Lithuania Prepares for Hybrid War,

http://www.fpri.org/article/2015/03/lithuania-prepares-for-hybrid-war/#_ftnref32 (30.06.2017); P. Maciążek, *Moskwa przygotowuje konflikt hybrydowy z Wilnem. Wykorzysta litewskich Polaków*, http://www.defence24.pl/analiza_moskwa-przygotowuje-konflikt-hybrydowy-z-wilnem-wykorzysta-litewskich-polakow (30.06.2017).

⁶ Wileńska Republika Ludowa Facebook profile, https://www.facebook.com/Wileńska-Republika-Ludowa-Виленская-Народная-Республика-1017190118295964/ (30.06.2017).

Lithuanian Poles

The inclusion of the Polish minority as a possible element in the hybrid war is based on several aspects:

- 1. Poles are the largest national minority in Lithuania according to the Housing Census 2011, 200,317 (6.6%) of the citizens of the Republic of Lithuania were of Polish nationality. Poles, importantly, inhabit the compact area of the Vilnius region. In the Vilnius region, Poles constitute the majority 63.5% of the total population, while in Vilnius alone 19.4%. The Polish minority is historically, culturally and natively linked to the birthplace and takes care of cultivating its own identity⁷.
- 2. The relations between the Lithuanian state and the Lithuanian Poles are difficult, and the Republic of Lithuania, despite its membership in the EU, have problems with the legal and institutional settlement of the issue of national minorities. Poles accuse the Lithuanian authorities of: a) not regulating the issue of land return to Poles in Vilnius region as a part of reprivatisation, b) the administrative requirement of spelling Polish names according to Lithuanian orthography, and harassment of local authorities placing road signs with bilingual city names even in those regions where Poles constitute the vast majority of the population c) discrimination of Polish education.
- 3. The Polish minority is relatively cohesive and well organized from the political point of view. The most important party of the Polish minority the centre-right Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie Związek Chrześcijańskich Rodzin (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania Christian Families Alliance, AWPL-ZChR) has increased its representation in the Sejm since 1996. In 2012, the party exceeded 5% of the electoral threshold for the first time, gaining 5.83% of the vote and introducing eight deputies, four years later reiterated good electoral result, gaining 5.72% of the votes and maintaining the parliamentary representation. The party reached even better results in the European Parliament elections. Moreover, AWPL-ZChR is constantly represented in the Vilnius region, and its charismatic leader Waldemar Tomaszewski gained 8.23% of the vote in the presidential elections in Lithuania. Therefore it

⁷ *Population by Ethnicity and Municipality*, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymai (30.06.2017); *Ethnicity, mother tongue and religion*, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/web/guest/informaciniai-pranesimai?articleId=223122 (30.06.2017).

- can be said that the Poles in Lithuania are relatively well organized and have their own significant political representation⁸.
- 4. Since 2008, AWPL-ZChR is consistently cooperating with the largest Russian minority party - the Russian Alliance (Русский альянс). This tactical coordination between the two groups of national minorities is beneficial for both parties - for Poles because the party can win the higher number of votes, allowing crossing the electoral threshold, while the Russians can enter their (Irina Rozova) leaders to the Parliament.
- 5. From time to time the media inform about the pro-Russian gestures and sympathies of influential leaders of the Polish minority in Lithuania. For example, Waldemar Tomaszewski criticized Euromajdan in various interviews, expressed his concern about the prospect of taking over power by the nationalists in Ukraine, and on Victory Day (9th May) he bedighted the Ribbon of Saint George "Георгиевская ленточка", а symbol of pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. Tomaszewski is also accused of various connections with suspicious people and institutions, such as the Kremlin-financed "Baltijskij Mir"⁹. Such allegations were formulated by Andrius Kubilius, former Prime Minister of Lithuania¹⁰. Even more controversy surrounded another leader of the Polish minority, Zbigniew Jedziński, who wrote on the social networking site that after the outbreak of fighting in eastern Ukraine NATO should bomb Kiev, forcing the ceasefire between the sides of the conflict¹¹.
- 6. In the past Lithuanian Poles had aspirations for autonomy or the annexation of Vilnius to Poland. In 1920, during the so-called Żeligowski's rebellion, the "rebellious" Polish troops that occupied Vilnius, were supported by civilians (although it is noted that in 1920 Poles constituted the vast majority of the inhabitants of Vilnius and the Vilnius region). More important than the distant events of the 1920s was the 1990 episode. At a

https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akcja Wyborcza Polak%C3%B3w na Litwie %E2%80% 93 Zwi%C4%85zek Chrze%C5%9Bcija%C5%84skich Rodzin> (30.06.2017).

⁸ Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie – Związek Chrześcijańskich Rodzin,

⁹ Waldemar Tomaszewski: Krym może nie być ostatni, <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-wonecie/waldemar-tomaszewski-krym-moze-nie-byc-ostatni/btj7v> (30.06.2017); Tomaszewski: Gieorgijewska wstażka jest symbolem rycerskości,

http://zw.lt/litwa/tomaszewski-gieorgijewska-wstazka-jest-symbolem-rycerskosci/ (30.06.2017); Rosyjski współpracownik Tomaszewskiego straszy kraje bałtyckie wojną, http://zw.lt/bezpieczenstwo/rosyjski-wspolpracownik-tomaszewskiego-straszy-kraje- baltyckie-wojna/> (30.06.2017).

¹⁰ P. Maciążek, op. cit.

¹¹ E. Samoškaitė, Posel AWPL nawolywał NATO do zbombardowania Kijowa. Teraz się tłumaczy sarkazmem i ironią, http://pl.delfi.lt/aktualia/litwa/posel-awpl-nawolywal-nato- do-zbombardowania-kijowa-teraz-sie-tlumaczy-sarkazmem-i-ironia.d?id=65703034>, (30.06.2017).

time when the Soviet Union was dissolved and Lithuania regained its independence, some of the leaders of the Polish minority, mostly from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, came forward with the project of establishing the Polish National-Territorial District - Polish-speaking autonomous region within the Republic of Lithuania, covering part of Vilnius Region without Vilnius. Because of the reluctance of the Lithuanian elites, the Poles saw the allies of their ideas in Moscow. This attitude was symbolized, among other things, by the activist Czesław Wysocki, who after the collapse of the Yanayev's coup fled to Belarus¹².

The combination of these aspects has allowed some analysts to draw far-reaching conclusions. Especially higly publicised was the article by Piotr Maciążek on the specialist portal Defence24. Maciążek acknowledged that the politicians of the AWPL (among others Waldemar Tomaszewski, Zbigniew Jedziński) in their statements and declarations "favour the Russian vision of the world". Maciążek also pointed to Tomaszewski's collaborators (Dmitry Kondrashov, Viktor Balakin), closely connected with the Kremlin. The Polish analyst as "real" described the scenario in which "green men" from the Kaliningrad region could emerge in Vilnius, referring to the tradition of Żeligowski's Rebellion. The conclusion of the article is that "it is difficult to evaluate the current policy of the AWPL authorities as coinciding with the interests of Poland" 13.

Maciążek's comments were quite widely reproduced. For example, John R. Haines from the American think tank Foreign Policy Research Institute, writing about the "Polish card" in Russian aggression, quoted the Polish author's thesis on the possible use of the Lithuanian Poles by Kremlin, and also mentioned the profile of "Vilnius People's Republic" on Facebook¹⁴. Maciążek's opinion was also noticed in Lithuania, among others it was quoted by the internet portal propatria.lt in the article "Lenkijos publicistas perspėja: hibridiniam karui Rusija pasitelktų Lietuvos lenkus" ("Polish politician warns: in the hybrid war Russia will use Lithuanian Poles")¹⁵.

Also Lithuanian official institutions do not exclude the possibility of playing "Polish card" by the Russians. Gen. Jonas Vytautas Žukas, commander-in-chief of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, acknowledged that the Lithuanian army's leadership was counting on the possibility of using national minorities to provoke

¹² See more: V. Sirutavičius, *O polskiej autonomii narodowo-terytorialnej na Litwie* (wiosna – lato 1991 roku), "Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej", 2017, t. LII, z. 1, s. 201-233.

¹³ P. Maciążek, op. cit.

¹⁴ J. R. Haines, op. cit.

¹⁵ Lenkijos publicistas perspėja: hibridiniam karui Rusija pasitelktų Lietuvos lenkus, http://www.propatria.lt/2015/02/lenkijos-publicistas-perspeja.html, (30.06.2017).

riots in the country¹⁶. Particularly active in emphasizing the danger of the disloyalty of Lithuanian Poles are the politicians of the Lithuanian right. For example, the member of the parliament Laurynas Kasčiūnas, in an open letter to Jarosław Kaczyński, described AWPL-ZChR as an artificial wedge rigged between Poland and Lithuania. The Lithuanian politician has called on the leader of the ruling party in Poland to revise relations with the Waldemar Tomaszewski's group, defining the AWPL-ZChR as a party which geopolitical program is fundamentally in conflict with the interests of Poland as well as Lithuania¹⁷.

Analysis

The opinions expressed by the leaders and structures of the Polish minority in Lithuania of the Russian instrument of asymmetric actions constitute a bold thesis. It is all the more important to look at it without emotion. Please note the following:

1. In the Polish foreign policy since the post-Soviet political transformation, the so-called Giedroyć doctrine is invariably present (name of the doctrine comes from the surname of Jerzy Giedroyć, a leading intellectual of the Polish post-war independence emigration in the West). To put it simply, it assumes support for the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus (ULB area), and thus the resignation (which was extremely important at the time when Giedroyć formulated his thoughts) from the pre-war Eastern Borderlands with Vilnius and Lviv. This doctrine was accepted without exception by all Polish governments after 1989, regardless of political colours. Except for the far right and circles of the former inhabitants of the Eastern Borderlands (and their descendants), there are no serious political forces in Poland that would question the Polish-Ukrainian or Polish-Lithuanian borders, and it is difficult to imagine the conditions changing that. Hence, it is well known that any action by Lithuanian Poles seeking to disintegrate the Lithuanian state, let alone cooperate with the Russians or attempt to detach a part of Lithuania and join it to Poland, would not meet either with understanding or with the support of Poland. Therefore, the speculation on the use of the Lithuanian Poles by the Russians must be supplemented with the consideration that this would be an act which would have to be met with a clearly negative attitude of the Polish government.

¹⁶ Czy Kreml może wykorzystać Polaków do wojny hybrydowej na Litwie? "Może dojść do próby wzniecenia rozruchów", http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/czy-kreml-moze-wykorzystac-polakow-do-wojny-hybrydowej-na-litwie-moze-dojsc-do-proby/qd2c6p, (30.06.2017).

¹⁷ LLRA-KŠS: TS-LKD lyderis Gabrielius Landsbergis yra nekrikščioniškų pažiūrų, remia LGBT pažiūras, http://komentaras.lt/llra-kss-ts-lkd-lyderis-gabrielius-landsbergis-yra-nekrikscionisku-paziuru-remia-lgbt-paziuras/comment-page-1/ (30.06.2017).

- 2. The recognition of the Polish minority as a possible element in the hybrid war must assume the universality of certain views and attitudes. Meanwhile, there are no indications that the Polish minority could assume such a role as the Russian minority in Crimea or Donbas. Apart from some pro-Russian statements or gestures made by some Polish Diaspora leaders, there are no grounds for pro-Russian views or questioning the strategic interests of Lithuania to extend to the broader circles of the Polish community in Lithuania. Many politicians of the AWPL-ZChR have unambiguously declared their sympathy and support for Ukraine against Russian aggression¹⁸. Admittedly, the Lithuanian Poles have many objections to the Lithuanian authorities, and Lithuania is quite ambiguous about the rights of national minorities. These are issues known for years Lithuanian Poles and the government in Warsaw have been opposing this policy of Lithuanian authorities for a long time. Nonetheless, the lawful dunning of rights in the field of education or spelling names r is a long way off treason.
- 3. Controversies in the context of the current foreign policy of the Russian Federation are related to the cooperation of the AWPL-ZChR with the Russian Alliance. However, the agreement of the two parties should be looked at through the prism of the electoral system of the Republic of Lithuania. According to the electoral law, 141 deputies to the Sejm (Lithuanian parliament) are elected by universal, equal, secret and direct elections. The division of seats into the parliament occurs in such a way that 71 parliamentarians are elected in single-candidate districts (majority system), and 70 are elected in one multi-candidate district (proportional system). In addition, the distribution of seats in multi-candidate district involved only those parties that exceeded the 5% electoral threshold (electoral coalitions 7%)¹⁹.

AWPL-ZChR, although it represents the majority of the population of one region of Lithuania – Vilnius region, does not want to be a regional but nationwide party (obviously, sitting in the parliament could better represent the interests of its constituents). On the other hand, the natural barrier to the development of political potential is the ethnic nature of the AWPL-ZChR and the fact that it is difficult for the party to widen the circle of voters to those of Lithuanian nationality. The existence of an electoral threshold for national minorities (AWPL-ZChR has repeatedly postulated its abolition or

¹⁸ *Tomaszewski mówi "Putinem"*?, https://kresy24.pl/tomaszewski-mowi-putinem/ (30.06.2017).

¹⁹ J. Zieliński, Seimas. Parlament Litwy, Warszawa 2003, s. 19-21.

reduction) for several successive elections has been an effective barrier to the AWPL-ZChR. In the subsequent parliamentary elections: 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, the AWPL-ZChR could count only 1-3 seats in single-candidate districts - where Poles are the majority of voters. The significance of Russian voices has turned out to be of decisive importance - Russian candidates do not win seats in single-candidate districts, while Russian voices allow 2012 to exceed the electoral threshold and significantly increase their parliamentary representation.

Analysis by Gediminas Kazėnas proves that the Russians can constitute a significant percentage of voters of AWPL-ZChR (about 25%) - certainly without the Russian votes AWPL-ZChR could not count on exceeding the electoral threshold²⁰. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the tactical alliances with the Lithuanian Russian organizations have been concluded since 1995, and the AWPL-ZChR, apart from the Russians, is also trying to integrate other national and ethnic minorities (Belarusians, Tatars). Lastly, it should be noted that AWPL-ZChR also tries to cooperate with the Lithuanian parties – for example, in 2012 the candidates of the Lithuanian People's Party (Lietuvos liaudies sąjūdis), founded by the former Prime Minister Kazimira Prunskienė were present on the AWPL-ZChR electoral roll. In light of the above, tactical alliances concluded by the balancing party on the border of the electoral thresholds of the AWPL-ZChR are perhaps one way of preserving subjectivity and avoiding marginalization on the part of large nationwide parties.

4. Electoral cooperation with the Russians requires some declarations and gestures from the leadership of the AWPL-ZChR. I think that in this context one should look at the Saint George ribbon on Waldemar To-maszewski's clothes during the celebration of Victory Day or certain statements of some of the leaders of the AWPL-ZChR interpreted as pro-Russian. It is difficult to expect that the AWPL-ZChR, which is dependent on Russian votes, which has in its parliamentary faction a Russian minority representative, could use the anti-Russian narrative. It is worth pointing out that for example, Tomaszewski's views on

It is worth pointing out that for example, Tomaszewski's views on Ukraine and the danger of revival of Ukrainian nationalism with anti-Polish blades are essentially no different from the views of many politicians of the Polish ruling party Law and Justice, (not to mention the position of other parties present in the Polish parliament, like Kukiz'15 or the National Movement) ²¹. Poles' historical memory of the Volhynia

²⁰ G. Kazenas, Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie w wyborach na Litwie. Jak AWPL udało się przekroczyć 5procentowy próg wyborczy?, "Politeja" 2014, nr 11, s. 269-295.

²¹ Dworczyk: Polityka historyczna Ukraińców jest nie do zaakceptowania dla PiS, https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/22213/Dworczyk-Polityka-historyczna-Ukraincow-jest-nie-do-zaakceptowania-dla-PiS.html? (30.06.2017).

- genocide in the Second World War and the exceptionally negative image of Ukrainian nationalism are completely foreign to Lithuanians who do not have such experiences with the Ukrainian nationalists.
- 5. The media reports on the personal relations of the politicians AWPL with the people of the Kremlin should be treated with caution. The search for such links may have a sense of journalistic sensation. For example, a book by Tomasz Piątek, a journalist of Gazeta Wyborcza (one of the largest and most influential Polish newspaper), has been published recently in Poland, in which the author accuses Antoni Macierewicz, the current national defence minister, of maintaining suspicious contacts with the Kremlin and GRU people²². Needless to say, the book, properly advertised by opposition parties, sells very well.
- 6. It is worth noting, however, that the AWPL-ZChR criticism comes most often from people connected with the right-wing party of the Lithuanian political scene. The AWPL-ZChR declares itself a nationwide party and its political profile can be described as a classic Christian democracy. Thus the Lithuanian Poles' party is competing for other Lithuanian parties, especially the centre-right ones, referring to similar values. The parliamentary fraction of the 8-member AWPL-ZChR in the 141-odd, quite fragmented parliament is quite a lot, and the party has entered the government in the past and may be the proverbial "tip the balance". Despite the program basis, which accentuates traditional values and the appeal to Christian roots, the natural allies of the Lithuanian Poles are the Lithuanian center-left groups, rejecting the nationalist narrative. The attempt to discredit the AWPL-ZChR as a pro-Russian party posing a threat to the integrity of the Republic of Lithuania may also be considered as part of the political struggle for voters.

Conclusions

The threat of a hybrid war that Russia can take (has already taken?) against Lithuania is not only theoretical. The course of events in Ukraine suggests that a similar scenario is possible in Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia. The presence of these states in the NATO and EU structures simultaneously forces the potential future aggressor a much more finesse and precision of measures. The actions of national minorities controlled by the Kremlin's trusted people are certainly in the arsenal of weapons that Russia can use without risking an open conflict with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

²² T. Piątek, *Macierewicz i jego tajemnice*, Warszawa 2017.

But I would adhere to writing ready-made scenarios of events in the Baltic states and the early selection of actors. The sequence of events in Ukraine has often surprised not only the state that has become the subject of aggression but also the clumsy West and analysts. Likewise, in the case of the Baltic States, nothing is certain.

Of course, it cannot be ruled out that the Kremlin is trying to influence the political elites of the Polish minority in Lithuania. But it cannot be ruled out that these most obvious actions are merely a smoke screen for real action. In my recent article titled "The Russian Party in Poland - Between Myth and Reality" I made the assumption that the Russians do not care so much about creating their party in Poland (and the activities of marginal groups, the pro-Russian party "Change" is merely a cover), but on stimulation of changes in Polish eastern policy, especially in the Ukrainian and Lithuanian sections, in the direction of neutralizing Poland's existing activity in the area of Eastern Europe²³. In this context, Russian activism (for instance, the "Vilnius People's Republic" on Facebook) has the potential to hit the already tense relations between Poland and Lithuania.

Of course, in the light of the facts that happened in recent years, it is possible to discuss whether the AWPL-ZChR's political strategy and the "incorrect political" statements of its leaders are appropriate. But at the same time political activity of Lithuanian Poles cannot be treated in geopolitical terms, omitting the specifics of the Lithuanian political scene and the presence of AWPL-ZChR on this scene. I tried to pay special attention on these issues. It is not unreasonable to believe that Lithuanian Poles are mating with Russians, without explaining what this agreement is aimed to serve and why it is necessary in the present circumstances.

At the end it should be noted that the "Polish card" is not today in Moscow or Warsaw but invariably this card is in hand the Lithuanian government. The government in Vilnius has consistently failed to meet the expectations of Lithuanian Poles, despite the fact that it violates the principle of reciprocity in relations with the Republic of Poland as well as EU standards. This is particularly incomprehensible, as the postulates of Lithuanian Poles are not political in nature, but mostly concern the protection of one's own identity. In light of the threat from Russia, Lithuania should be particularly keen on building a stronger agreement with Poland. It will be difficult to achieve without the problem of Lithuanian Poles. At the moment, instead of being an advocate for a close alliance of both states, the AWPL is considered an element in the hybrid war.

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