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The Three Seas Initiative in the Foreign Affairs Policy of Hungary

Dominik Héjj^{ab}

^a Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie

^b Instytut Europy Środkowej

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Dominik Héjj*

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and Institute of Central Europe (Poland)

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Summary: The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) constitutes a project involving the cooperation of twelve European countries. Poland and Croatia, the founders of the TSI, are especially active in this respect. Even though Hungary seems the closest political ally of Poland, the state rarely participates in TSI actions. In addition, when pursuing its politics, Hungary remains in contradiction to the principles of the TSI – chiefly regarding energy policies. The paper aims to offer answers to questions concerning the significance of the TSI in Hungary's foreign affairs policies and the state's perception of such a form of cooperation in Europe.

Keywords: Three Seas Initiative, foreign affairs, Hungary, Russia, Orbán

Introduction

The Three Seas Initiative (Hun. *Három Tenger Kezdeményezés*) constitutes a forum of international collaboration established in 2016 during a summit in Dubrovnik. Presidents Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović (Croatia) and Andrzej Duda (Poland) were the chief architects of the initiative. The cooperation of twelve states highlights the development and consolidation of collaboration on the north-south axis, mainly in relation to the infrastructure and energy domains. According to the webpage of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 'the most significant added value of the initiative is the provision of political support, originating at the highest level of national authorities, for investments

* Dominik Héjj, PhD, is political scientist specializing in Hungary-related issues. Doctor in humanities in the field of political science. Assistant Professor at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (Institute of Political Science and Public Administration). Senior Analyst, Department of the Visegrad Group in Institute of Central Europe. Editor-in-chief of www.kropka.hu, a website devoted to Hungarian politics. Author of expert's reports, scientific papers and pieces of journalism pertaining to Hungary. Research interests: political and party systems, Hungarian political history and politics of memory. ORCID: 0000-0002-3159-8936. E-mail: dominik@hejj.hu.

which have been neglected as far as the cooperation of Central European countries is concerned¹.

The objective of the present paper is to establish answers to questions concerning the perception of the TSI in Hungary. Is Hungary interested in pursuing the TSI? Is the country an active player in the initiative? What is the place of the TSI in Hungarian foreign affairs? The main premise of the paper is the thesis that Hungary is not actively engaged in the TSI, and that Hungarian diplomacy feigns certain actions and is not open about its anxiety and reluctance. At the same time, the remaining TSI partners are blamed by Hungary for the lack of the country's involvement in the cooperation, mainly in the energy sector.

The paper exploits government documents as well as e.g. the addresses of politicians representing the Fidesz-KNDP coalition. A limited availability of studies discussing the TSI in Hungary constitutes an impediment in the current discussion of the issue.

Two publications compiled in 2017 and 2018 by a government-established body, the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Hun. *Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet, IFAT*), are available. In 2017, the IFAT argued the TSI emerged directly from the *Intermarium* project of the first half of the 20th century, where Poland held a dominant position². A year later, when commenting on the provisions of the Three Seas Initiative Bucharest Summit (September 2018), J. T. Barabás, an IFAT analyst, highlighted the necessity for a clear definition of the TSI's objectives by Poland. The definition was to clarify any doubts pertaining to the initiative's connection with the *Intermarium* project. Moreover, the analyst observed that the Polish government had already undertaken measures to that effect and indicated that, except being exclusively pragmatic, the TSI project has no geopolitical significance³. However, in both cases, the anti-Russian character of the initiative, at least on the Polish part, is stressed. In addition, mentions of the situation

1 MFA of Poland, 'Trójmorze', *Obszary polityki zagranicznej*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/trójmorze> [2019-09-10].

2 B. Tölgyesi, 'A Három tenger kezdeményezés és az Intermarium koncepció háttere és kilátásai, The Background and Perspectives of the Three Seas Initiative and the Intermarium Concept', *KKI-elemzések*, E-2017/30.

3 J.T. Barabás, 'A Három Tenger Kezdeményezés a 2018. szeptemberi bukaresti értekezlet után, The Three Seas Initiative After the Bucharest Summit of September 2018', *KKI-elemzések*, E-2018/34.

which occurred during the meeting of Putin with Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, the President of Croatia, also surfaced. Madam President assured Russia's leader that the TSI is not an 'American Trojan horse' and is not directed against Russia⁴.

1. Determinants of the Hungarian foreign affairs doctrine

Before the role of the TSI in Hungarian foreign affairs is discussed, the Hungarian foreign affairs doctrine ought to be defined. One of the most vital aspects of the Hungarian National Assembly election campaign, which occurred in the spring of 2010, was the repurchase of Hungarian companies which had been sold to Russian oligarchs. Politicians representing Fidesz accused the leftist liberal MSZP-SzDSz government coalition (Hun. *Magyar Szocialista Párt*/ Eng. *Hungarian Socialist Party*, and Hun. *Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége – a Magyar Liberális Párt* / Eng. *The Alliance of Free Democrats – Hungarian Liberal Party*) of selling national property and supporting Russian influence in Hungary⁵. The main line of conflict pertained to two entities: Hungarian oil and gas operator, MOL (Hun, *MOL Magyar Olaj- és Gázipari Nyrt.*/ Eng. *The Hungarian Oil & Gas Company Plc*), and Malév (Hun. *Magyar Légiközlekedési Vállalat*/ Eng. *Malév Hungarian Airlines*), a flag flight carrier. One of the first decisions made by the new, victorious Fidesz-KNDP (Hun. *Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt* / Eng. *Christian Democratic People's Party*) was the repurchase of the shares of the two companies. In the case of MOL, affairs went according to the government's intention. However, the repurchase and recapitalization of Malév was deemed illegal state aid by the European Commission. Due to the inability to return the aid, as well as to secure financing for further operation, the company suspended its business on 3 February 2012⁶. It ought to be noted that according to the investigation made by 'Direkt36', an investigative online journal,

4 Ibidem, p. 8.

5 MTI, 'Orbán: a miniszterelnök-csere a megoldás a forintválságra', *Dokumentum*, 21 October 2008, <http://archiv1988tol.mti.hu/Pages/HirSearch.aspx?Pmd=1> [2019-01-10], MTI, 'Semjén: ha a helyzet úgy alakul, benyújtjuk az Országgyűlés feloszlására vonatkozó javaslatot', *Dokumentum*, 9 June 2009, <http://archiv1988tol.mti.hu/Pages/HirSearch.aspx?Pmd=1> [2019-10-10].

6 *A Malév Zrt. sajtóközleménye*, 3 February 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120205065245/http://www.malev.hu/> [2019-09-10].

informal meetings between Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin had been ongoing since 2009, i.e. during the election campaign where Orbán was said to pursue the anti-Russian narration.

As a consequence, the public expected that the politics pursued by the new PM (Viktor Orbán) in the second term would be Russo-sceptic. In addition, one cannot disregard the strong memory of suffering experienced by Hungarians in 1956 during the Hungarian Revolution at the hands of Russian soldiers. Viktor Orbán himself repeatedly highlighted this fact in his public addresses, including the most popular one given on 23 October 2006⁷. During Viktor Orbán's second term, János Martonyi became the Minister of Foreign Affairs⁸. He was the PM's trusted man who has already cooperated with Orbán during his first term in 1998-2002. The effort of Hungarian foreign affairs focused upon EU member states, and although mildly, the U.S. A strong relationship with the V4 was also emphasized. However, in the aftermath of the post-2010 Hungarian ethnic minority policy (Hungarian citizenship being granted to those residing in the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary, i.e. within the borders of the pre-1920 monarchy), Budapest's relations with neighboring countries, primarily with Slovakia and Romania, were strained⁹. On the other hand, among the V4 states, only Poland's relations with the Russian Federation are tense. The remaining partners undertake stronger or looser cooperation with the country.

The opening discussion of the determinants ought to mention another fact exerting a strong impact upon Hungarian foreign affairs. The country had been experiencing a deep political and economic crisis since 2006. On 1 March 2008, Ferenc Gyurcsány, the discredited PM, resigned¹⁰. Three weeks later, the National Assembly passed the constructive vote of no confidence and appointed Gordon Bajnai as

7 At the time of the address, Hungary was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. Fidesz organized an alternative commemorative event. Several thousand people gathered in Astoria Square. They listened to the patriotic speech of the leader of Fidesz who requested a proper commemoration of the heroes of the 1956.

8 Viktor Orbán's first government was in power between 1998-2002.

9 D. Héjj, 'Węgierska diaspora i polityka narodowościowa jako element rywalizacji politycznej na Węgrzech', in: H. Chałupczak, M. Lesińska, E. Pogorzała & T. Browarek (eds), *Polityka migracyjna w obliczu współczesnych wyzwań*, Lublin: Wyd. UMCS, 2018, pp. 229-235.

10 At that time, Hungary still remembered the scandal which broke out in September 2006 when recordings from a secret meeting of Socialists at Lake Balaton were made public. On the tapes,

the new PM in the technocratic government. Bajnai was a nonpartisan economist, the previous Minister of National Development and Economy. His government prioritized the management of the increasingly severe impact of the financial crisis. Between 2006-2008, the national debt grew by 7.3 p.p. to reach 73%. In addition, in the next two years, it increased by further 9.2 p.p. to 82.2% in 2010. The unemployment rate between 2007-2010 increased by 4 p.p. to 11.8%. On the other hand, the highest coupon rate for government bonds amounted to 12.72%, and in the peak moment, the stock market collapsed. Between 2008-2009, the economy shrank by 7.80% and the GDP per capita dropped by 6.5% (11749.25\$ do 10997.04\$)¹¹. The index returned to the value marked in 2008 only in 2014. The situation of the country was dramatic and Hungary faced bankruptcy. The elections to the European Parliament in 2009 were organized against such a background. The result of the elections gave confirmation to stipulations that the right-wing coalition of Fidesz-KNDP would win the parliamentary elections in the spring of 2010. However, despite obvious superiority over the remaining parties, the achievement of supermajority in the parliamentary elections seemed highly improbable.

Apart from the care for the Hungarian diaspora in the neighboring countries, the necessity of introducing a plan for moral, political and social revival in Hungary, as well as the restoration of sovereignty in international relations (especially with the EU), became chief subjects mentioned by Orbán. This 'new deal' and special focus upon the right for self-determination became arguments supporting the introduction of deep changes in Hungarian foreign affairs. In one of his addresses, Orbán described foreign affairs between 2010-2014 under Martonyi as 'adaptive and continuance politics'¹².

The reason behind the pro-Russian revision of Hungarian foreign affairs was the search for an alternative to the relations with the EU. It was motivated by the desire to prove to Western partners how in-

Gyurcsány is heard to say that in order to win the spring election of 2006 he repeatedly lied. The following infamous words were recorded: 'We lied during the day, we lied during the night'.

- 11 Trading Economics, 'Hungary GDP per capita', <https://tradingeconomics.com/hungary/gdp-per-capita> [2019-09-10].
- 12 Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister of Hungary, 'Rendkívüli nagyköveti értekezletet tart Orbán Viktor hétfőn', *Hírek*, 8 March 2015, <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek/rendkivuli-nagykoveti-ertekezletet-tart-orban-viktor-hetfon> [2019-09-10].

dependent Hungary was in international relations, and by the pursuit of new markets in order to overcome the economic crisis. The foreign affairs policy was revised in 2014 when Hungary experienced a historic economic success, and when the new doctrine of foreign affairs argued that Hungary would show initiative more frequently. ‘We threw the young, the talented and ambitious into the deep end of the pool’¹³. Péter Szijjártó, who became the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the spring of 2014, was 36 years old when he took the position. The average age in the minister’s entourage also dropped significantly.

The motivation behind the new foreign affairs policy, the doctrine of the ‘opening to the East’ (Hun. *keleti nyitás*) and the ‘opening to the South’ (Hun. *déli nyitás*) was illustrated by Orbán’s statement in March 2015. During a special meeting with ambassadors, Orbán argued that Hungarian foreign affairs must adapt to the emerging new world order. However, Hungary itself has no significant part in the development of the order due to the fact that the country is neither an economic nor military power. Orbán further observed: ‘We Hungarians are inclined to perceive our actions as shrewd. However, instead of being foxes, we are suckers’¹⁴. This statement was a direct reference to double standards in the perception of foreign affairs policies of individual member states in the sense that some are permitted more.

The ‘opening to the East’ (Hun. *keleti nyitás*). It is noteworthy that the MSZP-SzDSz coalition also pursued the improvement of relations with Hungary’s eastern partners. This claim can be supported by the aforementioned MOL and Malév transactions. The East was an attractive partner because the financial crisis was not as severe in that region. New markets were to boost trade, spark new life into the production and investment activity of Hungarian companies, and to attract investors to the country. In addition, the achievement of 30% export outside the EU was to safeguard Hungary against a next possible economic crisis. Those in power believed that this type of foreign affairs policy was not something extraordinary due to the fact that other EU member states acted in a similar fashion. Germany was al-

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister of Hungary, ‘Orbán Viktor beszéde a misszióvezetői munkaértekezleten’, *Hírek*, 10 March 2015, <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszede-kublikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-a-missziovezetoi-munkaertekezleten> [2019-09-10].

ways presented as an example. The eastern course of Hungarian foreign affairs included e.g. the Balkans, China, South Korea, Russia, Turkey, the Arab states, Iran, India, Singapore, Vietnam, Hong-Kong, and Malaysia. Since the beginning, this policy has been chiefly focused upon the cooperation with China. Collaboration with Russia was hampered and subsequently made virtually impossible due to sanctions imposed against the country in the aftermath of the aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The development and consolidation of relations was conducted primarily in the course of high-profile visits made by the Hungarian PM and Minister Szijjártó (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade). In the framework of this action, Hungary developed a dedicated credit line in Exim-Bank which subsidized companies interested in undertaking cooperation with businesses originating from the countries included in the 'opening to the East' doctrine.

The 'opening to the South' (Hun. *déli nyitás*). Since 2015, Hungary has been interested in collaborating with the countries of South America and Africa¹⁵. However, there exist serious problems in evaluating the impact of both doctrines. There is no up-to-date knowledge as to the economy-related effectiveness of the government's actions. The 'opening to the South' is non-existent save for official visits. On the other hand, the 'opening to the East' is benchmarked against the collaboration with China and Russia. Relations with the Russian Federation are significant in the context of the present paper. For that reason, the issue of China will not be discussed. According to Minister Szijjártó's statement in September 2018 for Rossija24 channel, i.e. directly after the visit of Viktor Orbán and his delegation to Moscow, Hungarian companies were believed to have lost \$8 billion due to EU sanctions against Russia. Furthermore, Russia was degraded from 2nd to 12th position among importers¹⁶. It is noteworthy that in the interview with the Polish Radio in 2019, the minister offered the same

15 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 'Szijjártó Péter meghirdette a déli nyitás stratégiáját', *Hírek*, 5 March, 2015, <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulgaszdasagi-es-kulugyminiszterium/hirek/szijjarto-peter-meghirdette-a-deli-nyitas-strategiajat> [2019-09-10].

16 Forsal, 'Szef MSZ: Węgry straciły 8 mld dol. z powodu sankcji UE wobec Rosji', PAP, 28 September 2018, <https://forsal.pl/swiat/rosja/artykuly/1279273,szef-msz-wegry-stracily-8-mld-dol-z-powodu-sankcji-ue-wobec-rosji.html> [2019-09-10].

figure, even though the statement was made almost a year later¹⁷. As a consequence, it seems plausible to infer that, at least potentially, the abolishment of sanctions may boost trade with Russia and facilitate the country's return to the top in the ranking of trade partners.

According to the government, the 'opening to the East' compensates for losses brought about by sanctions. However, according to journalists representing the 'Népszava' newspaper, the doctrine proved to be a complete disaster. Over the course of the past 8 years, the deficit in trade with Asian countries nearly doubled – €4.6 billion to €7.9 billion¹⁸. The situation is so despite significant financial resources being involved in boosting trade relations, including the establishment of chambers of commerce.

2. The potential of the Three Seas Initiative

Prior to discussing Hungary's attitude towards the TSI, I would like to indicate factors which can potentially sway Hungarian interest towards a stronger cooperation in the framework of the TSI. First of all, since 2015 in particular, Viktor Orbán has been drawing attention to the necessity of consolidating cooperation in East-Central Europe, chiefly within the V4. The emphasis has been placed upon the protection of the external border of the EU, as well as the development of investment-related competitiveness in relation to Western countries, by fostering the emergence of favorable conditions for those interested in investing in this part of the continent. A constant economic growth, as well as low unemployment, are not without significance as well. In addition, the emphasis of social stability, lack of ethnicity-based or anti-immigration unrest are also important. However, the V4 is not treated in an autotelic manner in Hungarian politics, but is perceived as one of viable options for collaboration in Europe. The independent foreign affairs policy in Hungary does not bind the state

17 Polskie Radio – Jedyńka, 'Więcej Świata', 6 September 2019, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/7/1696/Artykul/2364914,Genowefa-Grabowska-Frans-Timmermans-nie-bedzie-dalej-zajmowal-sie-praworzadnoscia> [2019-09-10].

18 Zs. Papp, 'Óriási bukta a keleti nyitás', *Népszava*, 17 August 2019, https://nepszava.hu/3046858_oriiasi-bukta-a-keleti-nyitas [2019-09-10].

in any sentimental alliances but offers a fundament based upon pure political and economic calculation.

The group of twelve countries composing the TSI, whose meetings take place at the highest political level, constitutes an interesting initiative, at least at face value. However, when considering the economic factor exclusively, among Hungary's eleven TSI trade partners, there are merely four whose share in the Hungarian import is equal or higher than 5% (according to data for 2018). The countries are the following: Austria (6.1%), Poland (5.8%), the Czech Republic (5.1%) and Slovakia (5.0%). In total, this constitutes 22% and \$24.89 billion. Germany is the largest partner. The share amounts to 26% (30.5 billion USD). Even though the p.p. difference is merely 4, the specific monetary discrepancy is meaningful – it amounts to \$5 billion. As far as export is concerned, only two countries exceed the 5% threshold: Slovakia (5.2%) and Romania (5.1%)¹⁹. The trade factor will not be dominant and determining the decision concerning the engagement in the TSI. The dynamic growth of Chinese capital involvement in the Hungarian economy ought to be considered as well.

The competitiveness will surely be consolidated in the framework of developing new infrastructure which will enhance economic and transit relations, but also offer benefits to the citizens of individual member countries and tourists visiting these. The area of East-Central Europe attracts their growing interest. However, it ought to be noted that the strategic infrastructural initiatives in the framework of the TSI do not engage all the countries. The matter of the Via Carpathia route has been the most popular so far. However, the route engages merely five of the countries. Little is known on the remaining initiatives in the region.

Cooperation in the energy sector aims to improve the energy security of the region by diversifying energy sources. The initiative fits well within the common energy policy of the EU. It also offers opportunities for the development of new transit routes. When Western Europe was developing and modernizing transmission systems, East-Central Europe had no means of doing so. Delays in the matter are difficult

19 Trading Economics, 'Hungary Exports By Country', <https://tradingeconomics.com/hungary/exports-by-country> [2019-09-10].

to be made up independently. The works would progress much more swiftly in cooperation and under joint coordination of projects.

The Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund constitutes a complementary initiative to the TSI. It aims to financially support the strategic investments of the TSI in the field of transportation, energy and digital infrastructure. It is to supplement EU funds and foster the growth of competitiveness of the TSI countries. It is much more beneficial to deliver projects in the framework of the fund than to execute these with funding from special-purpose credits. However, the fact that so far not all the countries expressed interest in joining the fund is troublesome. The Three Seas Initiative Business Forum offers opportunities for cooperation in the framework of the TSI or other commercial collaboration. The forum aspires to an advisory role serving as 'a mechanism for collecting information and forging ideas and solutions which will drive the TSI forward'²⁰.

It ought to be noted that the susceptibility of the TSI to political swings constitutes its considerable disadvantage. It is usually presidents who represent countries in the TSI. When the president and the PM represent the same political circle, the engagement in the TSI is straightforward. However, the matter becomes complicated if politicians represent different political options. In such a case, a revision of foreign affairs priorities may emerge which may diversify the participation in the TSI. As a consequence, the growth of the initiative depends upon election cycles as well as the political situation²¹.

3. Hungarian perception of the Three Seas Initiative

An indirect manner of the presidential appointment by the National Assembly, i.e. the parliamentary majority, decreases the risk concerning the emergence of the aforementioned situation. Since 2010, the National Assembly, and consequently the president and the PM, have represented the same political circle. However, the political relationship between the president and the PM is vital from the TSI per-

²⁰ B. Wiśniewski, 'Trójmorze – nowy element w polskiej polityce zagranicznej', *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, no. 4 (71) 2017, p. 34.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35-36.

spective. In the chancellery system dominating in Hungary, the PM has relatively unlimited competences, including the management of foreign affairs²². The role of the president is virtually limited to representative functions. However, it is President Áder who participates in the TSI meetings. It is noteworthy that even though both represent the same political circle, the provisions emerging from the meetings are meaningless. This is due to the fact that the foreign affairs policy is dictated by Orbán. Such state of affairs was well illustrated by the Paris climate conference in 2015. When President Áder traveled to France, Viktor Orbán, the PM, participated in negotiations in Teheran concerning nuclear energy collaboration. The participation in the conference was not restricted to presidents, thus the PM was eligible to take part as well. However, Orbán decided to pursue a more significant (from the Hungarian perspective) relationship with Iran in the framework of the 'opening to the East' doctrine. It can be concluded that without a true dedication of the PM, and indirectly the cabinet, no initiative in foreign affairs can be successful²³.

So far, four TSI summits were held. President János Áder, the representative of Hungary, attended merely twice – in 2016 in Dubrovnik and in 2017 in Warsaw. President Áder failed to appear in Romania in 2018 due to problems with his airplane²⁴. According to media information, while taxiing, the Hungarian Air Force plane collided with an airport service vehicle. In addition, the president did not participate in the 2019 summit in Slovenia. This absence had been unofficially speculated about well before the summit. In 2018, Hungary was represented in Bucharest by the country's ambassador, and a year later, by Péter Szijjártó, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. At that time, President Áder was visiting Transylvania.

Hungary's attitude towards the TSI is largely determined by relations with Russia. As a consequence, the issue ought to be briefly discussed at this point. It ought to be noted that Russo-Hungarian

22 The situation is completely different in Poland, the TSI's initiator and leader. Foreign affairs policy emerges in the course of an agreement between the president and government.

23 In Poland, the outcomes of the TSI worked out by President Duda are almost instantly translated into policies executed by the government, which represents the same political circle as the president.

24 MTI, 'Áder nem tud részt venni a bukaresti Három Tenger Kezdeményezés találkozóán', *Dokumentum*, 18 September 2018, <http://archiv1988tol.mti.hu/Pages/HirSearch.aspx?Pmd=1> [2019-10-10].

meetings occurring at various levels have accompanied the period the Three Seas Initiative summits have been held in. A day before the Warsaw summit, Minister Szijjártó traveled to Moscow and signed an agreement pertaining to the development of new gas lines in Hungary. This document clearly acknowledged Hungarian engagement in the execution of the TurkStream Gas Pipeline project. A year later, on 19 September 2019, the day after the summit concluded in Bucharest, Viktor Orbán had an official meeting with Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation. The most significant result of the talks was the signature on a new gas agreement in force until 2020. The agreement secured additional 2 billion m³ of gas supplied via Austria. The supply is scheduled for 2020, thus it is likely to be delivered from the Nord Stream gas pipeline. During a joint press conference, Orbán informed that he requested Putin to consider the extension of the TurkStream to reach gas storage facilities located in Hungary, which belong to Russian Gazprom anyway. During Putin's visit in Budapest on 30 October 2019, Russian PM observed that the connection of Hungary to the TurkStream was in the best interest of Budapest. Orbán responded that Hungary would join the TurkStream because the supply of Russian gas exclusively via Ukraine was not favorable to the country. It was also the first time when the desire for an uninterrupted flow of Russian gas was openly communicated. It should also be noted that the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine concerning the signature of the European gas transit agreement were strained.

If a premise is made that one of the most critical elements of cooperation within the TSI, much like in the energy union of the EU, is the diversification of gas supply, then the Hungarian politics stand completely against these principles. The readiness for the participation in initiatives offering energy-related independence from Moscow is merely rhetorical. Hungarian diplomacy has been emphasizing that the country is, as it were, doomed to rely upon the supply from Russia because the remaining partners fail to meet infrastructural promises concerning the supply. This is valid especially for Croatia (the LNG terminal at KRK island) and Romania. In 2017, Péter Szijjártó mentioned the issue and observed: 'Hungarians have no alternatives for Russian gas because Croatia and Romania have not completed their

investments, which would enable the reversal²⁵. Minister Szijjártó also stated the following for the Polish Press Agency: ‘Croats have done nothing to develop the LNG terminal at Krk island, so what are we talking about?’²⁶. In April 2016, Szijjártó referred to the Croatian investment in the following manner: ‘Plans have been ready for a long time. Intentions are also there. However, so far, the physical progress has been miniscule’²⁷. President Áder followed along the same lines when explaining cooperation with Russia during a joint conference with President Duda in March 2018²⁸. He observed: ‘We are very much hoping for such a terminal to be developed in Croatia. Unfortunately, the works have not commenced there at all. We have already developed technical conditions to receive gas at our border’²⁹. On the other hand, during the aforementioned interview for the Polish Radio in September 2019, the head of diplomacy stated: ‘We Hungarians pursue diversification, but we cannot succeed when our allies have not delivered certain things’³⁰. He further added: ‘Croats have not developed the LNG terminal, Americans and Austrians have not decided upon gas extraction from the Black Sea. We have no alternative but to purchase gas from Russia’³¹.

With regard to Americans and Austrians, this was a reference to their possible engagement in the exploitation of Domino-1 deposit in Romania. This would enable gas import from a TSI member state and consolidate the relationship with the USA. As far as Nord Stream 2 is concerned, the position is inconclusive. Szijjártó observes that it is Hungarian companies and not the Hungarian state which are involved in its development. Officially, Hungary criticized the project merely

25 D. Héjj, ‘Polska i Węgry. Bratanki do szabli, ale nie do gazu’, *Biznes Alert*, 13 July 2017, <http://biznesalert.pl/hejj-polska-i-wegry-bratanki-do-szabli-ale-nie-do-gazu/> [2019-09-10].

26 Forsal, ‘Szef węgierskiego MSZ: Wywiera się na nas presję, ale skąd mamy brać gaz, jak nie z Rosji?’, PAP, 7 July 2017, <https://forsal.pl/artykuly/1056380,szef-wegierskiego-msz-wywiera-sie-na-nas-presje-ale-skad-mamy-brac-gaz-jak-nie-z-rosji.html> [2019-09-10].

27 Forsal, ‘Węgry chcą kupić 25 proc. udziałów w terminalu LNG na chorwackiej wyspie Krk’, PAP, 12 April 2019, <https://forsal.pl/artykuly/1408026,wegry-chca-kupic-25-proc-udzialow-w-terminalu-lng-na-chorwackiej-wyspie-krk.html> [2019-09-10].

28 The press conference accompanied the celebration of the Hungarian-Polish Friendship Day celebrated in March 2018.

29 D. Héjj, ‘Héjj: Węgry nie wspierają Polski w gazie’, *Biznes Alert*, 30 March 2018, <http://biznesalert.pl/hejj-wegry-nie-wspieraja-polski-w-gazie/> [2019-09-10].

30 Polskie Radio – Jedynka’, op. cit.

31 Ibidem.

once when the state signed the protest concerning the investment addressed to the European Commission³². However, in his address in Romania in 2018, Viktor Orbán referred to Nord Stream 2 as ‘the gas pipeline which completes Russia’s promises concerning European gas supply which would bypass Ukraine’³³. In accordance with this view, Nord Stream 2 increases energy security because it protects Europe against any obstruction to gas transfer via Ukraine. In the latest gas agreement, the western direction is secured via Austria.

Suffice to say that even prior to Orbán’s visit to the USA where he met with Donald Trump, the Hungarian PM spoke in his office with Alexey Likhachev, the Director General of Rosatom. The company is the main contractor behind the enlargement of the nuclear power plant in Paks. The message published right after the meeting announced that Hungarian PM assured Likhachev that ‘the enlargement of the Paks plant is not at risk, and the completion of the investment is in the strategic interest of the country’³⁴. This proves that there will be no rapid changes in the energy policy. It also confirmed that, in principle, each major meeting concerning the issue is preceded by consultations either in Moscow or with notable Russian oligarchs or politicians in Budapest. Such an approach can hardly be described as sovereign. Undeniably, cheap gas from Russia enables resources to be shifted from energy expenditures to e.g. the increase of wages. As a consequence, it offers tangible economic benefits. According to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the enlargement of the nuclear plant in Paks by Russians constitutes a good platform for economic cooperation between the East and West (turbines are supplied by e.g. American General Electric). Finally, Hungary aspires to perform as a Russian ambassador in the region and to cultivate mutual relations despite sanctions, which the state calls full of hypocrisy. However, in spite of the general criticism, Hungary still backs these.

32 Office of the Prime Minister of Poland, ‘9 krajów podkreśliło sprzeciw wobec projektu Nord Stream II’, *News*, 18 March 2016, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/9-krajow-podkreslilo-sprzeciw-wobec-projektu-nord-stream-ii.html> [2019-09-10].

33 D. Héjj, ‘Po spotkaniu Trump – Orbán więcej wątpliwości aniżeli konkretnych deklaracji’, *Komentarze IEŚ*, no. 24, 2019, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/po-spotkaniu-trump-orban-wiecej-watpliwosci-anizeli-konkretnych-deklaracji-24-24-2019> [2019-09-10].

34 *Ibidem*.

The issue of the TSI is virtually nonexistent in Hungarian academic literature. Even though there are two theoretical works, which have already been mentioned in the present paper, they neither exhaust the subject nor prioritize it. In addition, they emphasize the failure of the initiative in the political dimension and indicate that the completion of the Via Carpathia project by 2026 is practically impossible. It is noteworthy that the responsibility for delays is attributed to the remaining TSI countries³⁵. The TSI is not institutionalized as well. Even though the Association of the Three Seas Initiative Geostrategic Institute (Hun. *A Trimarium Geostratégiai Intézet Egyesület*) has existed since 2018, the organization has not offered any significant contribution. It does not even manage its own webpage except a Facebook profile which has not been updated since 9th January 2019.

It ought to be noted that whenever the term ‘the Three Seas Initiative’ emerges, it is always associated with Poland and its leading role in the initiative. The TSI is said to be a project which aspires to rebuild Poland’s key role in the region. The Hungarian diplomacy is clearly aware of the priority the issue constitutes for the Polish government concerning European relations. As a consequence, during joint meetings, Hungarians usually voice their support for the initiative. Prime Minister Orbán expressed similar views in an interview for the Polish Television in January 2018. Recently, the TSI has been discussed exclusively in relation to the plans of LOT Polish Airlines concerning the development of flight connections from Budapest and establishment of a transfer hub of the airline at the local airport. Such communications have always been presented in a positive light.

Even though Hungarian cooperation in the framework of the energy sector is nonexistent, the state is still declaring support in the field of infrastructure concerning the development of High-Speed Rail from Budapest to Poland or the development of road infrastructure in the framework of Via Carpathia, from Miskolc to the Slovak border within the E71 European road (M30 in Hungary) extending to the Romanian border, which is to be ready by 2022. Significant sections of the highway were completed years ago. The new effort focused upon the sections located in the proximity of the borders. However, the M2 high-

35 J.T. Barabás, op. cit., p. 5.

way from Vác (approx. 45 km north of Budapest), via Hont, up to the border in Parassapuszta in the Gdańsk-Budapest section and further on to Istanbul- route E-77, were excluded from Hungarian infrastructural priorities. The average time required to cover the 90 km section amounts to 1.5h. This means that there is no connection with high-priority routes in the direction of the northern neighbors within 400-500 km from Budapest. The fastest connection to reach Hungary from Warsaw, the capital city of Poland, is via highways running through Slovakia and the Czech Republic (close to 1000 km). This hampers not only tourist traffic but primarily trade. It ought to be noted that Hungary is communicated with Austria via M1 as well as its M15 section towards the border-crossing with Slovakia. This modernized, two-lane highway will be completed at the beginning of 2020.

Hungary treats the TSI, much like the V4, instrumentally- as a tool for securing its interests, not in the least business-related. This pertains primarily to the emphasis of unity in the migration policy, which since 2015 has been a priority for Hungary. During a meeting in Slovenia, Péter Szijjártó chiefly stressed the necessity for protecting the borders, inability to import gas from a direction other than Russian and highlighted that ‘they (Croats, Romanians, Americans and Austrians) failed to do their homework, and that Hungary is doomed to deal with Russia in the long-term perspective to ensure gas supply’³⁶.

When presenting the Hungarian position concerning the TSI, Minister Szijjártó observed: ‘We are deeply interested in the initiative provided that critical actions are undertaken. Words are compelling, speaking about diversification, new infrastructure. All these are attractive. However, when particular effort is required, nothing happens. And I am not speaking about the TSI in general, but about specific issues’³⁷. The quote hints at Hungary’s readiness for a stronger engagement in the TSI. As it is now, due to factors determined by the remaining partners and not Hungary itself, the engagement is impossible. This is due to the fact that, in practice, for Hungarian diplomacy, the TSI constitutes an initiative which offers nothing but declarations.

36 MTI, ‘Szijjártó: Magyarország jövő évi gázellátása biztosított’, *Dokumentum*, 6 June 2019 <http://archiv1988tol.mti.hu/Pages/HirSearch.aspx?Pmd=1> [2019-10-10].

37 Polskie Radio – Jedyńka, op. cit.

The TSI, as a project competitive to Russia, and at times clearly anti-Russian, will never be embraced by Hungary. The country's government will never endanger relations with the Russian partner who performs as a leader in the region. Russo-Hungarian relations are described as 'predictable and balanced'. Russia itself is referred to as a partner Hungary can rely upon. During a joint press conference in 2018, Russian president referred to Hungary as 'the most critical partner in Europe'. Cooperation with Russia in Europe, or within the EU in narrow terms, is nothing extraordinary. Similar relations are maintained by other countries, e.g. Germany, France, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. The representatives of the ruling Fidesz-KNDP alliance supported the reintroduction of Russia into the Council of Europe (they did not take part in the vote, but voiced their support). It ought to be noted as well that Orbán justified the invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea as an execution of Russian security policy to develop a buffer for the country. Apart from the economic aspect, Russia is a significant political partner, which gains importance in light of the criticism the Hungarian government has been facing in the EU.

When analyzing the Three Seas Initiative, it ought to be noted that there are TSI countries whose relations with Hungary are strained and volatile – Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, and recently Slovenia. The regional cooperation is marred by history – the trauma of Trianon, i.e. the division of the Kingdom of Hungary which occurred in 1920, along with the modern political decisions determined by the treaty, e.g. concerning double citizenship, and a specific policy towards the Hungarian diaspora in neighboring countries.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the Three Seas Initiative is a project which includes the economic interests of Hungary but does not correlate with the political objectives of the Hungarian government. Hungarian diplomacy strives to consolidate the role of the country in international relations. The search for partners in foreign affairs is based upon the principle which may be labeled as 'diversification'. It frequently depends upon mutually exclusive alliances and collaboration which aim to make Hungary independent from 'the mainstream politics', i.e. predominantly pro-European option. As a consequence, the anti-

Russian character of the TSI would require Hungary to adopt a position in stark contrast to the one presented by the government and inconsistent with the foreign affairs doctrine defined as the 'opening to the East'. Such direction of expansion concerning the foreign affairs policy, including in the framework of the 'opening to the South' determines the field of major interest of the Hungarian government, which is 'global' in character. The investment potential of the TSI partner states is not competitive in relation to the capital to be attracted from the countries the two doctrines address. None of the TSI countries is capable of becoming a counterweight for economic cooperation with Germany, the most critical trade partner of Hungary, the economic relationship with whom is invaluable. Hungary believes that the slowdown of German economy, which has been forecast, and more importantly, is becoming visible, ought to be balanced by the intensification and consolidation of cooperation with China and South Korea. The declarations of Hungarian government concerning the country's foreign affairs being focused upon three capitals, Berlin, Ankara and Moscow, which symbolize three different alliances – the EU (Berlin), and cooperation with Russia (Moscow) and Turkey (Ankara), also determine Hungary's perception of the TSI.

Hungary's aspirations to perform a vital role in the region cannot be disregarded. These may constitute a barrier in terms of becoming engaged in the already existing initiatives, e.g. the TSI. This conclusion may be presented in the following figure of speech: Hungary does not want to sit at a table which has already been set. The state prefers to go to the forest and choose the wood the table will be built of. This denotes that the focal point of Hungary's foreign affairs is the 'initiative', i.e. development of new projects instead of joining those already in operation.

Hungary believes that the way the collaboration in the framework of the TSI plays out is unsatisfactory and may merely serve for generating new ideas which do not develop novel solutions and do not secure resources for their delivery. At the same time, Hungary has not joined the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund in order to support the delivery of projects. The conclusion of agreements with Russia and China attracts tangible billions of dollars. The outcome of such cooperation entails the enlargement of the nuclear power plant in Paks (Russia) and the development of Budapest-Belgrade railway (China).

János Áder, the President of Hungary, failed to appear at the Three Seas Initiative Summit twice. Even though the 2018 absence resulted from an unfortunate turn of events, the absence in 2019 was clearly scheduled and openly exhibited the country's attitude towards the TSI. When discussing the issue, Hungarian diplomacy justifies its skepticism as a consequence of actions undertaken by the remaining TSI countries (as far as the energy policy is concerned, this applies to Croatia). The narration, at least in terms of the energy sector, will need to be adapted when the LNG terminal at Krk island is (finally) completed. At present, Hungarian energy policy is recognized among the TSI states which accept it due to a lack of alternatives for the supply of gas from Russia. However, the involvement in the TurkStream disrupts the energy solidarity both in the framework of the TSI and the EU. One can hardly blame Hungary's effort to secure cheap gas supply to its citizens. Apart from that, according to Hungarian diplomats, Germany's involvement in the development of Nord Stream 2 also stands in contradiction to the European energy solidarity.

The position of Hungary, a state which remains in the structure of the TSI, contests the initiative. Hungary is an 'external' partner whose policy seems to oppose the TSI. Even though, at face value, Hungary's attitude towards the initiative remains open, the country's actual actions in the TSI forum are insufficient. In addition, this state of affairs is unlikely to change because political pragmatism dominates the solidarity policy and regional cooperation.

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