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The position of Eastern European countries towards the Three Seas Initiative (TSI)**

Stanowisko państw Europy Wschodniej wobec Inicjatywy Trójmorza (TSI)***

Summary: The creation of the Three Seas Initiative (TSI), the political and economic format for 12 EU countries, is accompanied by a growing interest on the part of world powers and non-EU countries in the region. The aim of the research is to analyse the involvement of three Eastern European countries, namely Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova in projects developed under TSI. The research used a neorealistic approach. These countries belong to the post-Soviet area and, apart from Belarus, show a willingness to cooperate with Western institutions, which arouses a strong reaction from the Russian Federation. The research will result in determining their participation in projects implemented by TSI, including energy, transport, and digital infrastructure. These countries are on the way to working more closely with the Initiative, possibly under the new TSI plus format. The United States supports the expansion of the Three Seas Initiative.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, geopolitics, the Three Seas Initiative, regional cooperation

Streszczenie: Powstaniu Inicjatywy Trójmorza, formatu polityczno-ekonomicznego 12 państw UE, towarzyszy wzrost zainteresowania ze strony światowych mocarstw i państw regionu nienależących do UE. Celem badań jest analiza dotycząca zaangażowania trzech państw Europy Wschodniej: Białorusi, Ukrainy i Mołdawii, w projekty powstające w ramach TSI. W badaniach wykorzystano podejście neorealistyczne. Państwa te należą do obszaru postradzieckiego i poza Białorusią wykazują chęć współpracy z instytucjami zachodnimi, co budzi ostrą reakcję ze strony Federacji Rosyjskiej. Rezultatem badań będzie określenie ich partycypacji w realizowane przez TSI projekty, obejmujące infrastrukturę energetyczną, transportową i cyfrową. Państwa te są na drodze do bliższej współpracy z Inicjatywą, być może w ramach nowego

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formatu TSI plus. Za rozszerzeniem Inicjatywy Trójmorza opowiadają się Stany Zjednoczone. Obawy budzi jednak negatywne stanowisko Rosji, co może doprowadzić do konfliktu w regionie.

Słowa kluczowe: Europa Wschodnia, geopolityka, Inicjatywa Trójmorza, współpraca regionalna

Introduction

Moscow's contemporary politics has shaken the geopolitical system that emerged after the end of the Cold War. The Russians have been redefining their security policy, trying to control the so-called "near abroad" areas and return to the situation before the collapse of the Soviet Union (Putin's doctrine)¹. Russia's actions were perceived as a threat to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. A particular threat was Russia's military actions in Ukraine in 2014 (the annexation of Crimea and supporting separatists in Donbas) and the strengthening of the energy dependence of European countries on Russian gas².

In the report of the Atlantic Council' on the future direction of the EU's development, in the case of Central European countries, support was expressed for the construction of the North-South Corridor – an energy, transport, and digital connection extending from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea³. The authors of the report assumed that this was a necessary step on the way to broader European integration and security⁴.

The international situation that arose in 2014 resulted in a diplomatic revival on the part of Central European countries. The establish-

- 1 M. Menkiszak, *Doktryna Putina: Tworzenie koncepcyjnych podstaw rosyjskiej dominacji na obszarze postradzieckim*, "Komentarze OSW", 27 March 2014, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2014-03-27/doktryna-putina-tworzenie-koncepcyjnych-podstaw-rosyjskiej> [11.01.2022]; D. Sviridenko, M. Orzechowski, *Biało-ruskij mir. Reaktywacja reintegracyjna w relacjach rosyjsko-białoruskich*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2021, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 74-77.
- 2 I. Brzeziński, D. Fried, G. Mosbacher, *Czym jest Inicjatywa Trójmorza? Od wizji do działania*, Trimarium.pl, 6 July 2021, <https://trimarium.pl/czym-jest-inicjatywa-trojmorza-od-wizji-do-dzialania> [2.01.2022].
- 3 *Wywiad z szefem Gabinetu Prezydenta RP, ministrem Krzysztofem Szczerskim przeprowadzony w Kancelarii Prezydenta RP w Warszawie 17 lipca 2019 roku przez prof. Agnieszkę Orzelską-Stączek i dr Marzenę Czernicką*, [in:] A. Orzelska-Stączek, P. Ukielski, *Inicjatywa Trójmorza z perspektywy jej uczestników*, Warszawa 2020, p. 143; A. Chojan, *The United States on the Three Seas Initiative*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2019, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 82-84.
- 4 *Completing Europe: From the North-South Corridor to Energy, Transportation, and Telecommunications Union*, report by Atlantic Council and CEEP, 21 November 2014, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org> [2.01.2022].

ment of the Three Seas Initiative (TSI, 3SI, 3 Seas) deepened regional cooperation⁵. In 2016, at the initiative of the president of Poland, Andrzej Duda, and the president of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, representatives of 12 EU countries which, apart from Austria, previously belonged to the sphere of influence of the former Soviet Union or former Yugoslavia, met in Dubrovnik⁶.

The increased threat from Russia resulted in the creation of the Bucharest Nine (B9), and during the NATO summit in Warsaw (2016), a permanent presence of Alliance troops on the eastern flank of NATO was established⁷. The strengthening of NATO's eastern flank and the creation of the TSI aroused the dissatisfaction of the Russian Federation and prompted concerns about the expansion of the influence of Western countries to the East of the continent. In international relations, we saw the application of the neorealist theory⁸; for the Russian Federation, the Three Seas Initiative is an American energy project in Europe, consisting in cutting off Russian suppliers of natural resources from the European market and replacing them with raw materials from other (e.g. American) sources, which is particularly noticeable in the case of the construction of the Baltic Pipe natural gas pipeline and LNG supplies by the USA⁹.

The aim of this article is to present the meaning of the TSI for the countries belonging to this area of Eastern Europe neighbouring the EU and the Russian Federation. The attempts at cooperation between the countries of Eastern Europe and the TSI in the 21st century have been discussed in literature by, e.g.: Bartosz Dziewiałtowski-Gintowt (2021); Ostap Kushnir (2021); Olexandr Shevchenko (2020); To-

5 T. Stępniewski, *Inicjatywa Trójmorza: uwarunkowania geopolityczne i nowy model regionalnej współpracy*, "Studia Europejskie" 2018, no. 2, pp. 34-36.

6 *Wspólna deklaracja w sprawie Inicjatywy Trójmorza*, prezydent.pl, 25 August 2016, <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne/art,105,wspolna-deklaracja-w-sprawie-inicjatywy-trojmorza.html> [8.01.2022]; P. Ukielski, *Inicjatywa Trójmorza w polskiej polityce zagranicznej*, "Studia Europejskie" 2018, no. 2, p. 46.

7 A. Orzelska-Stączek, *New wave of regional cooperation in Central Europe as a response to new threats*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2020, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 85.

8 J. Czapotowicz, *Mapa współczesnego realizmu: realizm klasyczny, neorealizm, realizm neoklasyczny*, [in:] *Teoria realizmu w nauce o stosunkach międzynarodowych. Założenia i zastosowania badawcze*, J. Czapotowicz, E. Haliżak (eds.), Warsaw 2015, p. 28.

9 *Neoimperskoye gosudarstvo s ambitsiyami k liderstvu i zakhvatu. I rech' vovse ne o Rossii*, Baltnews, 24 May 2020, <https://baltnews.lt/nato/20200524/101995321/Neoimperskoe-gosudarstvo-s-ambitsiyami-k-liderstvu-i-zakhvatu-l-rech-vovse-ne-o-Rossii.html> [20.01.2022].

masz Stępniewski (2018); Andrzej Szeptycki (2020), Oksana Voytyuk (2019), and others¹⁰.

The author attempts to find answers to questions concerning the influence of historical integration ideas on contemporary initiatives in the region; changes in the assessment of the role of the TSI after Volodymyr Zelensky became the president of Ukraine; the importance of the TSI initiatives as an opportunity to implement deeper cooperation with Eastern European countries; and the role of the Initiative on their path to EU membership.

1. Polish and Ukrainian political thought in the context of federation concepts in Central and Eastern Europe

Integration concepts in this part of Europe have a deep historical origin, going back to the Jagiellonian idea, the development of which resulted in the Union of Lublin of 1569 and the establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The first step towards building a federation of nations was the Treaty of Hadiach of 1658. This unenforceable treaty assumed the division of the Republic of Poland into three theoretically equal parts – the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the Grand Principality of Rus'. Years later, the concept was further developed by Józef Piłsudski (as a federation that was to lead to the creation of a bloc of states located between Russia and Germany), but it ended in failure.

In Polish political thought, the idea of a federation was referred to as the Intermarium initiative, which included the countries lying between the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Black Sea (based on the names of the seas in Polish, and also called ABC)¹¹. It involved

10 B. Dziwiałowski-Gintowt, *Integracja Ukrainy z Unią Europejską w świetle wybranych projektów Trójmorza*, "Wschodoznawstwo" 2021, vol. 15, pp. 11-29; O. Kushnir, *The Intermarium As a Pivotal Geopolitical Buzzword*, "East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies" 2021, vol. VIII, no. 2, pp. 7-27; O. Shevchenko, *Idea Sojuszu Bałtycko-Czarnomorskiego oraz reakcje na utworzenie Trójmorza w ukraińskiej myśli politycznej 2015–2019*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 2020, vol. 73, no. 2, pp. 181-201; T. Stępniewski, op. cit., pp. 33-42; A. Szeptycki, *Europa Wschodnia i Kaukaz Południowy: długa cień Rosji*, [in:] "Rocznik Statystyczny 2019/20" 2020, vol. 25, , pp. 242-257; O. Voytyuk, *Koncepcja Międzymorza we współczesnej myśli politycznej Ukrainy*, "Europa Orientalis. Studia z Dziejów Europy Wschodniej i Państw Bałtyckich" 2019, no. 10, pp. 129-149.

11 The concept of the Intermarium has been described by, e.g., M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Międzymorze*, Warsaw 2021, and O. Halecki, *Historia Europy – jej granice i podziały*, Lublin 2000.

a plan to establish a joint bloc, under the aegis of Poland, turned against the aspirations of the USSR and Germany. The concept ended up being unsuccessful as the countries of the region did not recognise Poland as a sufficient counterweight to Germany and Russia¹², although the idea was revived after Piłsudski's death; Minister Józef Beck presented a diplomatic initiative addressed to Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia ("Third Europe"). Ultimately, however, Beck's initiative did not bring the desired effect¹³. The subject of the Intermarium was brought back during the Second World War, in the concept of the so-called Second Intermarium. The initiator and originator of this was General Władysław Sikorski. The concept assumed that a union of states would be created (after the end of the war) to limit cooperation between Germany and Russia (Central European Federation)¹⁴.

After the Second World War, the Jagiellonian ideas were revived in the emigration circles (Literary Institute in Paris). Juliusz Mieroszewski's idea of the ULB – the area of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus – proved to be of particular importance for Polish eastern thought. The ULB defined the nature of Polish-Russian relations; in the event that the ULB was incorporated into Russia, Poland was to become its satellite. In turn, when Poland dominated the ULB area, Russia lost its imperial status¹⁵. The assumptions developed at that time later became an important element of Polish eastern policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, during the period of the Third Polish Republic. The ideas of the Intermarium were supported by the Polish anti-communist opposition in 1976 (the so-called Third Intermarium), where the main initiator of the return to the concept was the Confederation of Independent Poland¹⁶.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Mykola Mikhnovsky's concept of an independent state emerged in the intellectual circles

12 P. Okulewicz, *Koncepcja Międzymorza w myśli i praktyce politycznej obozu J. Piłsudskiego w latach 1918-1926*, Poznań 2001, pp. 14-17.

13 M. Kornat, M. Wołos, *Józef Beck. Biografia*, Warsaw 2021, p. 582 et seq.

14 The concept of the Central European Federation was opposed to by the Russians. See J. Łaptos, *Zakres i formy współpracy polityków środkowoeuropejskich na uchodźctwie podczas II wojny światowej*, "Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne" 2017, vol. 25, pp. 77-78.

15 J. Mieroszewski, *Materiały do refleksji i zadumy*, Paris 1976, pp. 110-112.

16 P. Kowal, A. Orzelska-Stączek, *Inicjatywa Trójmorza: geneza, cele i funkcjonowanie*, Warsaw 2019, p. 22 et seq.

of Ukraine. It assumed great territorial development of the future Ukraine, extending from the Carpathians to the Caucasus¹⁷. The first federation concepts were proclaimed by the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius, and then by Mykhailo Tchaikovsky and Mykhailo Drahomanov¹⁸. After World War I, the idea of the Baltic-Black Sea Union was created by Mykhailo Hrushevsky, involving the establishment of a federation of three nations (Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania). Hrushevsky was a supporter of Ukraine's geopolitical shift towards the south (Black Sea)¹⁹. A similar idea – a federation of countries located on the so-called Baltic-Black Sea Bridge, i.e., Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland – was proclaimed by Stepan Rudnytsky²⁰. The most well-known concept (opposed to the Polish concept of the Intermarium) was the idea of the Black Sea Community proposed by Yurii Lypa²¹, which involved Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, and the countries of the Caucasus. It also assumed closer ties between Ukraine and Belarus²². In 1940, Lypa wrote his “Black Sea Doctrine”, supporting the creation of a Baltic-Black Sea federation of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles and Lithuanians, with Ukraine playing the main role²³.

After the Soviet Union collapsed and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe regained their independence, projects to build a security area between Russia and NATO appeared. The first proposal to establish an international buffer entity was made in 1992 by Zenon Poznyak, who proposed the creation of the Baltic-Black Sea Union. Political changes in Belarus and the takeover of power by Alexander Lukashenko's regime, connected with Moscow, changed the situation

17 P. Eberhardt, *Twórcy ukraińskiej geopolityki*, “Przegląd Geograficzny” 2009, vol. 81, no. 2, p. 153.

18 V. Poltorak, *Ukraine and the Intermarium: From the Middle Ages to the Collapse of the USSR*, [in:] *The Intermarium as the Polish-Ukrainian Linchpin of Baltic Black Sea Cooperation*, O. Kushnir (ed.), Cambridge 2019, p. 33.

19 O. Voytyuk, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

20 P. Eberhardt, op. cit., p. 156.

21 A. Zbruch, *Ideya Balto-Chornomors'koho soyuzu (Mizhmor'ya): istoriya taperspektyvy*, pravyysektor.info, 25 May 2017, <https://pravyysektor.info/prosvitnyctvo/oriyentiry/ideya-balto-chornomorskogo-soyuzu-mizhmorya-istoriya-ta-perspektyvy>[12.01.2022].

22 P. Eberhardt, op. cit., p. 167.

23 Y.V. Vasylevych, *Chornomors'ka kontsepsiya Yuriya Lypy u heopolitychniy dumtsi Ukrayiny*, Naukovi pratsi [Chornomors'koho derzhavnoho universytetu imeni Petramohyly], “Politolohiya” 2012, vol. 178, no. 166, pp. 8-11.

in the region. The President of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk (1993), proposed the creation of a stability zone, and the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, spoke about the concept of “NATO-bis”. In 2005, at the initiative of Ukraine, the Community for Democratic Choice was established. The aim of this political and economic initiative was to increase mutual economic contacts and improve security from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and the Caucasus. A clear signal for taking joint actions in the region was the presence of the leaders of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine in Tbilisi during the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, and the call for the EU and NATO to take decisive action against the Russian aggression²⁴.

After the 2013/2014 Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine returned to the integration concepts of the Baltic-Black Sea Alliance. During the presidency of Petro Poroshenko, there were plans to establish a security alliance – “Intermarium”, which was to include Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary could also join the Intermarium after appropriate political changes were made in these countries²⁵. The idea of cooperation in this part of Europe was supported by the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, who, still as president-elect, called for the creation of a regional organisation²⁶. Contemporary integration activities in this part of Europe take into account solutions accepted by the EU and NATO, and the historical tradition is typically only referenced by name.

24 W. Radziwonowicz, W. Jagielski, *Jesteśmy tu, by podjąć walkę*, Wyborcza.pl, 13 August 2008, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,5583348,jestemy-tu-by-podjac-walke.html> [8.01.2022].

25 A. Umland, *Intermarium: The Case for Security Pact of the Countries between the Baltic and Black Seas*, “IndraStra Global” 2016, no. 2(4), pp. 1-2, <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/48562> [2.01.2022] and O. Honcharenko, *Trymor'ya: chy mozhlyvyy Balto-Chornomors'ky soyuz bez Ukrayiny?*, lb.ua, 18 February 2020, p. 2, https://ukr.lb.ua/blog/aleksey_goncharenko/450239_trimorya_chi_mozhlyviy.html [18.05.2020].

26 This was a clear signal of opposition to the European policy of Germany and France and the failure to recognise the needs of Central European countries. O. Kushnir, op. cit., p. 7.

2. Geopolitical conditions in Eastern Europe and the importance of the TSI

In the foreign policies of world powers, the assumptions of the “power” principle are implemented²⁷, which entail the use of appropriate instruments of soft power, hard power, and smart power. None of the great world powers implements its policies based on only one instrument of action, but they often use them interchangeably²⁸.

Undoubtedly, the actions of the great powers are of key importance for the way the situation is shaping in this part of Europe. The Russians are returning to the gradual restoration of the balance of power before 30 December 1991. Moscow is aware of the importance of the former western Soviet republics for the Russian Federation²⁹. Belarus, under the rule of Lukashenko, is the Kremlin’s most important ally in the region and belongs to the Eurasian Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. Since 2000, Minsk and the Russian Federation have formed the Union State of Belarus and Russia. For strategic and economic reasons, but also for prestige, the Russians are putting more and more pressure on their integration with Belarus. On 4 November 2021, during a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Union State, 28 cooperation programs (road maps) to be implemented by 2023, a new common military doctrine, and a concept of migration policy were adopted. A decree on integration was also signed³⁰.

Unlike Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova do not support the Kremlin’s neo-imperial policy³¹. These countries have signed association agreements with the EU (in 2014, approved by the EU Council in 2017) and are covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): cooperation under the Eastern Partnership, benefiting from the Deep and

27 The concept of power is based on “the ability of a state to use its tangible and intangible resources in a way that influences the behaviours of other states”. J.G. Stoessinger, *The Might of Nation. World Politics in Our Times*, New York 1969, pp. 27-28.

28 J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft power. Jak osiągnąć sukces w polityce międzynarodowej?*, Warsaw 2007, p. 44; M. Sułek, *Parametry potęgi (siły) państwa – stałe czy zmienne*, [in:] *Państwo w teorii i praktyce stosunków międzynarodowych*, M. Sułek, J. Symonides (eds.), Warsaw 2009, p. 72.

29 D. Sviridenko, M. Orzechowski, op. cit., pp. 74-77.

30 K. Kłysiński, P. Żochowski, *Rosja–Białoruś: pozorowane przyspieszenie integracji*, “Analizy OSW”, 5 November 2021, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2021-11-05/rosja-bialorus-pozorowane-przyspieszenie-integracji> [12.12.2021].

31 A. Kamińska, *Wybrane problemy Republiki Mołdawii w świetle zmian w ładzie międzynarodowym*, “Studia Europejskie” 2017, no. 4, pp. 188-189.

Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA-DCFTA) and visa-free travel to EU countries³². Separating from Moscow, they belong to the Organisation for Democracy and Development (ODED GUAM). They also form the Associated Trio, a format that aims to accelerate the integration of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia with the EU³³.

The emergence of the Three Seas Initiative gained the attention of other EU countries such as France and Germany, which initially considered the Initiative to be an anti-EU action³⁴. Currently, EU programs are an important source of co-financing for infrastructure projects in the Three Seas Initiative³⁵. Americans are also investing in the TSI. On 15 February 2020, at the Security Conference in Munich, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo came forward with the initiative to co-fund energy projects to support the independence of the TSI from Russia³⁶, furthermore, Washington is in favour of extending TSI membership beyond EU countries. In a resolution of 18 November 2020, the House of Representatives of the US Congress supported the idea of extending the TSI to include Ukraine, Moldova, and countries from the Western Balkans region.

China is also interested in the activities of the TSI; it is involved in the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), creating an infrastructure to connect Beijing with countries on the communication routes from the Far East to Western Europe³⁷. Beijing's actions have aroused negative reactions from the United States and the EU. In fact, the TSI has become the portal for the US and China's economic entry into Central and Eastern Europe as well as a zone of informal

32 In EU policy, we have an example of *ad extra* Europeanisation. J. Ruszkowski, *Ponadnarodowość w systemie politycznym Unii Europejskiej*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 268-270.

33 *Ukraina, Gruzja i Mołdawia utworzyły „stowarzyszone trio” w celu połączenia wysiłków na drodze integracji europejskiej*, jagiellonia.org, 17 May 2021, <https://jagiellonia.org/ukraina-gruzja-i-moldawia-utworzyly-stowarzyszone-trio-w-celu-polaczenia-wysilkow-na-drodze-integracji-europejskiej/> [11.01.2021].

34 Ł. Lewkowicz, *The Three Seas Initiative in the Context of International Challenges*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2019, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 10.

35 *Three Seas, Status Report of 2021*, <https://projects.3seas.eu/report> [23.11.2021].

36 D. Kochis, *US Contributions to 3 Seas Investment Fund Are Smart, Strategic*, Daily Signal, 5 January 2021, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2021/01/05/us-contributions-to-3-seas-investment-fund-are-smart-strategic/> [11.01.2022].

37 Many analysts find this to be an example of the implementation of Halford J. Mackinder's geopolitical concept, which heralded the dominant role of China. See H.J. Mackinder, *Demokratyczne ideały a rzeczywistość*, Warsaw 2019.

competition between the US and Russia during the new Cold War. Many countries belonging to the Three Seas Initiative support the idea of extending the Initiative to other countries by changing the format and creating TSI+³⁸. On 17 December 2021, the Russians presented a “security guarantee” proposal in the form of demands on the United States and NATO. They indirectly outline the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation in the territory of Eastern European states. This also applies to all forms of military cooperation and is intended to hit the aspirations of the countries in the region³⁹.

3. Attractiveness of the TSI for Eastern European countries

The participation of Eastern European countries in the TSI was already considered at the stage of creating the Initiative. Ukraine was invited to the first meeting in Dubrovnik. In Kyiv, however, the proper rank of the TSI was underestimated, and they did not send their delegation to the meeting⁴⁰. It can clearly be seen that after the Law and Justice party came to power in Poland, a policy of opposition to the concept of returning to the geopolitical space of the Russian Federation, preferred by the so-called “old EU states”, was launched and after Volodymyr Zelensky’s victory in the 2019 presidential elections, there was a clear shift in Ukraine’s foreign policy. The amendment to the Constitution of 21 February 2019 defined Ukraine’s strategic course towards membership of the European Union and NATO. Kyiv realised that the concepts of the Intermarium and the Baltic-Black Sea Union were historical ideas that referred to the emergence of a strong agreement between Russia and Germany in the 20th century, while the TSI could be an important step for Eastern European countries on their way into the European Union⁴¹. In January 2021, during a meeting in

38 A. Orzelska-Stączek, P. Ukielski, op. cit., p. 82.

39 *Rosja zapoczątkowała kontakty z USA w sprawie tzw. gwarancji bezpieczeństwa*, pap.pl, 21 December 2021, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1033580%2Crosja-zapoczatkowala-kontakty-z-usa-w-sprawie-tak-zwanej-gwarancji> [12.01.2022].

40 *Posol rozpoviv, chomu Ukrainu ne zaprosyly na konferentsiyu „Trymor’ya”*, 5.ua, 6 July 2021, <https://www.5.ua/polityka/posol-rozpoviv-chomu-ukrainu-ne-zaprosyly-na-konferentsiyu-trymoria-149650.html> [12.01.2022].

41 B. Dziewiąłowski-Gintowt, op. cit., p. 26.

Kyiv, the presidents of Moldova and Ukraine, Maia Sandu and Volodymyr Zelensky, declared their will to join the TSI⁴².

The Belarusian regime, due to the restrictions imposed by the EU related to the breaking of democracy by President Lukashenko, shows a negative attitude towards the Three Seas Initiative. In response to the creation of the TSI, Belarusians proposed the concept of integration with Russia as part of the Baltic Ruthenia project: "The Minsk-Moscow-Saint Petersburg Triangle should become a model of Eurasian economic, infrastructural, and social integration"⁴³. Like the Russian Federation, the Minsk regime compares the Three Seas Initiative to the pre-war concept of the Intermarium⁴⁴.

Until the presidential elections in 2020, the Republic of Belarus was interested in selected transport projects of the Three Seas Initiative: *Via Carpatia* and the Viking Train. Particularly important for Belarusians was the A2 motorway junction with *Via Carpatia*, facilitating the transit of goods from and to Belarus. In 2021, work began on the construction of the S19 expressway to the border with Belarus, between Kuźnica and Sokółka. In the scope of the improvement of railway connections in Poland, Belarus is interested in a fragment of the investment relating to Corridor 3, the Białystok – Kuźnica Białostocka section, which continues towards Grodno. In terms of TSI projects, Belarus has declared its interest in the construction of a second railway track between Koper (Slovenia) and Divača (Croatia)⁴⁵.

Among the projects that are of interest to Ukraine, the highest priority is the Baltic Pipe natural gas pipeline, which is an element of a wider project – *Diversification of gas supply sources and integration of gas infrastructure in the Three Seas region*, also including the project *Expansion of the LNG Terminal in Świnoujście* and interconnectors for gas interconnections with the Slovak Republic as well as the es-

42 Wizyta prezydent Moldawii na Ukrainie. Kijów i Kiszyniów chcą przystąpić do Inicjatywy Trójmorza, 14 January 2021, <https://studium.uw.edu.pl/wizyta-prezydent-moldawii-na-ukrainie-kijow-i-kiszyniow-chca-przystapic-do-inicjatywy-trojmorza/> [22.01.2022].

43 R. Lasecki, *Ruś Bałtycka – białoruska odpowiedź na Trójmorze*, "Myśl Polska" 2020, no. 37-38, <https://www.mysl-polska.pl/2478> [2.01.2022].

44 In view of the current role of NATO in the region and the absence of Finland, Belarus and Ukraine in the Initiative, such a comparison is unfounded. G. Soroka, T. Stępniewski, *The Three Seas Initiative: Geopolitical Determinants and Polish Interests*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2019, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 25-26.

45 As per: Three Seas, *Status Report of 2021*.

establishment of the Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Gdańsk. Second in importance is the North-South Gas Corridor, connecting the liquefied gas (LNG) terminals of Poland and Croatia (Świnoujście-Krk). This project offers an opportunity to obtain liquefied gas supplied to Poland and Croatia, and to connect Ukraine with gas sources under the Balkan Stream and from the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan). Kyiv is also interested in participating in the implementation of the Black Sea Motorway project, submitted by Bulgaria, which is to enable quick transport connections between the countries in the Black Sea region. Ukraine has declared its interest in the implementation of the FAIRway Danube project, involving the regulation of navigation on the Danube. In the field of digitisation, Kyiv has become interested in the creation of a Digital Platform for monitoring hydrographic bases in the 3SI region, and the so-called digital Via Carpatia, an integral part of which is the construction of high-speed fibre-optic networks along the expressway and barrier-free border crossings for goods exchange and tourist traffic⁴⁶. Ukraine is fully interested in the development of the Via Carpatia transport project, mainly the transport junction connecting the Via Carpatia route and the A4 motorway. The connection from the border crossing in Korczowa to Lviv was expanded on the Ukrainian side, and then the expressway to Odesa. Kyiv has also expressed its interest in the implementation of the Corridor 5 railway investment from Warsaw to Hrebenne and Dorohusk, and from Trawniki to Dorohusk. Ukrainians and Belarusians support the regional initiative established in Poland, financed by the EU's neighbourhood partnership program, that is the project of inland water connection – MVS E40, passing through three countries; Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine connecting the Baltic Sea with the Black Sea (Gdańsk and Kherson)⁴⁷. The list of projects of interest to the Kyiv authorities is supplemented by energy initiatives: *Unconventional gas extraction* – an investment in Hungary, offering an opportunity

46 B. Dziewiałowski-Gintowt, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

47 This project entails many drawbacks and may lead to the natural devastation of the Polesie region. *Studium wykonalności drogi wodnej E40 w Polsce: Opublikowanie niepokojących wstępnych wyników*, Save Polesia, 4 March 2020, <https://savepolesia.org/e40-waterway-feasibility-study-in-poland-worrying-initial-results-published/> [5.01.2022]; *Mizhnarodnyy vodnyy shlyakh E40*, Natsional'nyy ekolohichnyy tsentr Ukrainy (2020), <http://necu.org.ua/e40ukraine> [12.01.2022].

for an additional source of gas, which could reduce the Russian dominance of gas supplies, and *ROHU* – a project to increase the gas flow capacity from Romania to Central Europe; transport initiatives such as the construction of a new road bridge over the Tisza in the Záhony area, and the construction of a second railway track between Koper and Divača; also the digital initiative of Transport exchange in the TSI region. The Ukrainians themselves do not submit ideas or proposals for cooperation under the TSI. Such an initiative could be an energy investment consisting of the construction of the Odesa – Grody – Gdańsk gas pipeline.

The Republic of Moldova is also interested in selected TSI projects, i.e., the Viking Train transport project and the Central European Drone Demonstrator (CEDD) digital project as well as participation in the creation of the Transport Exchange in the TSI region⁴⁸.

Conclusion

The task of the TSI is to increase the development potential of the 12 member countries by expanding the infrastructure of the so-called North-South Corridor. The implementation of these goals will increase the possibilities of economic development and energy security for the countries belonging to the Three Seas Initiative as well as their neighbours. The attitude of Eastern European countries to the Initiative depends on many factors. Currently, there is a struggle for the political identity of the post-Soviet states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet empire. This area is largely controlled by the Russian Federation, and the Russians use all instruments of influence (mostly hard power) to rebuild their geopolitical position from the period before the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, this does not mean that the countries belonging to this region unequivocally support cooperation with Moscow. The country with the largest dependence on the Kremlin is Belarus, which was subordinated to the Russian Federation by the ruling regime of Alexander Lukashenko, who tightened the country's relations with Moscow as part of the Union State, out of fear of the public demand for democratisation.

48 As per: Three Seas, *Status Report of 2021*.

With Ukraine and Moldova, we can see attempts to leave the Kremlin's sphere of influence. Despite the constant threat posed by Moscow, we are witnessing attempts at joint actions to join the EU and NATO. As part of regional cooperation, the Three Seas Initiative becomes an opportunity for a number of European countries. Its large-scale transport, energy, and digital initiatives are a development opportunity not only for the TSI countries but also for their neighbours, who declare their interest in individual projects. Eastern European countries (Ukraine and Moldova) are involved in numerous TSI projects, hoping for it to significantly facilitate their consolidation with Western Europe in the future. The Three Seas Initiative is treated as a bridge on their way to EU membership. The process of extending the TSI to new countries may take on the TSI+ formula, which is likely to be of interest to Ukraine and Moldova.

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