

IEŚ

9/2023

POLICY  
PAPERS

# The Three Seas Initiative before the Bucharest Summit 2023: The perspective of selected participating countries

Edited by  
Łukasz Lewkowicz

2023





**Publishing series** IEŚ Policy Papers

**Number** 9/2023

**Series editors** Beata Surmacz and Tomasz Stępniewski



# **The Three Seas Initiative before the Bucharest Summit 2023: The perspective of selected participating countries**

Edited by  
Łukasz Lewkowicz

Lublin 2023

## **Reviewer**

Dr hab. Łukasz Jureńczyk,  
prof. Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz

**Copyright** Instytut Europy Środkowej | Institute of Central Europe

**ISBN** 978-83-67678-15-5

## **Published and edited**

Instytut Europy Środkowej | Institute of Central Europe

ul. Niecała 5

20-080 Lublin, Poland

[www.ies.lublin.pl](http://www.ies.lublin.pl)

**Cover design and typesetting** [www.targonski.pl](http://www.targonski.pl)

**Cover photo** © Mihai Andritoiu | shutterstock.com

**Print** [www.drukarniaakapit.pl](http://www.drukarniaakapit.pl)



## Table of contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	7
Łukasz Lewkowicz	
<b>Introduction – The essence and challenges     of the Three Seas Initiative before the Bucharest Summit</b> ...	9
Dénes András Nagy	
<b>Hungary towards the Three Seas Initiative</b> .....	13
Andrzej Pukszto, Robertas Eismontas	
<b>Lithuania towards the Three Seas Initiative</b> .....	37
Piotr Wójcik	
<b>Western Balkans – An area adjacent     to the Three Seas Initiative</b> .....	49
<b>About the Authors</b> .....	67





## Executive Summary

- The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is still an *in statu nascendi* project, which during 2016-2023 has evolved from conceptual activities towards implementation activities. The last 3SI Summit in Riga in 2022 highlighted the format's intra-EU (special status for Ukraine) and transatlantic dimension (financial support from the US). The next, eighth, 3SI Summit will take place in 2023 in Bucharest. The Romanian vision of the Three Seas Cooperation is based on strengthening transatlantic ties and the security of NATO's eastern flank.
- 3SI is an important element of Hungary's foreign and economic policy in Central Europe. Budapest wants to be actively involved in the activities of this format. The Hungarian side supports the process of institutionalization of 3SI. In this regard, the proposal to create a "permanent 3SI secretariat" in Budapest is particularly important.
- Since it acceded to the EU and NATO in 2004, Lithuania has been actively involved in regional policy and



participates in many cooperation formats. In the last 4 years, Vilnius has been particularly actively involved in the activities of 3SI. The Three Seas cooperation is an important element of European policy for this country. The Lithuanian authorities have shown their commitment to this format by announcing the organization of the next 3SI Summit in Vilnius in 2024.

- The Western Balkans is one of the neighbouring areas of the 3SI. The potential cooperation is realized by the common infrastructure projects in transport, energy, and digitalization. Every West-Balkan state has different priorities for developing the national infrastructure and linking it with the adjoining countries, not only from the region but also within the Three Seas area.



Łukasz Lewkowicz

## **Introduction – The essence and challenges of the Three Seas Initiative before the Bucharest Summit**

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is a relatively new format of regional cooperation in Central Europe. It was established at the Dubrovnik summit in 2016 and consists of 12 countries of the region, which are also members of the European Union: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. It is an area with significant political, demographic, and economic potential. The territory of the 3SI covers almost 30% of the territory of the EU. 112 million people (25% of the EU population) live in the countries of the Three Seas Initiative and produce about 20% of the EU's GDP, measured by purchasing power parity (PPP). The initiators of the new format were the President of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, and the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda. From the beginning, Poland has been the main promoter of the development of the Three Seas cooperation.

Croatia, the Baltic States, and Romania were initially equally involved in the activities of the 3SI. The purpose of the format is primarily economic cooperation in the areas of energy, transport, and digital in Central Europe. The 3SI is still an *in statu nascendi* project, which in 2016-2023 evolved from conceptual activities towards implementation activities. A breakthrough in the functioning of the Initiative took place at the Bucharest summit in 2018, when a list of priority projects was submitted and the intention to establish the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF) was announced. During this period, the European Commission and Germany began to show greater interest in the project. In addition, in recent years, the Three Seas cooperation has developed more widely at the intergovernmental, parliamentary, social, and scientific levels.

On 20-21 June 2022, Latvia organized the 7<sup>th</sup> summit of the 3SI in Riga. In the declaration summarizing the summit, the economic nature of the Initiative was upheld. The Latvian side declared support for the activities of the chambers of commerce, whose meeting was held as part of the Business Forum. The 3SI countries in Riga also reaffirmed their support for Ukraine's bid for EU membership and granted the country the status of a participating partner in the Initiative. Ultimately, this will enable Ukraine's participation in the Three Seas infrastructure and its energy projects, and help rebuild this country after the end of the war. The status of a participating partner in the 3SI is also an opportunity for the Western Balkan countries currently applying for EU membership. During the summit in Latvia, the Americans, who have observer status in this format, also recalled their involvement in the 3SI. At the Business Forum, the

American development agency DFC confirmed its contribution to the 3SIIF worth USD 300 million. The next, eighth 3SI Summit will take place in 2023 in Bucharest; Romania will host it for the second time. The Romanian vision of the Three Seas cooperation is based on strengthening transatlantic ties and the security of NATO's eastern flank. During this year, a special focus on the economic and military importance of the Black Sea can be expected. Undoubtedly, the issue of ending the Russian-Ukrainian war and rebuilding Ukraine will also be important elements of the agenda at the next 3SI summit.

The main purpose of this publication is to analyse the functioning of the Three Seas Initiative from the perspective of selected participating countries, the relationship between the 3SI and the Western Balkan countries is also examined. The chronological scope of the research covered the years 2016-2022. The initial turning point was marked by the establishment of the 3SI at the Dubrovnik summit, while the final turning point was the last Initiative summit in Riga in June 2022. The text also presents the perspectives of the Three Seas cooperation in the context of the upcoming second 3SI summit in Bucharest. The publication includes two analyses by foreign experts – from Hungary and Lithuania – presenting the approaches of both countries to the Three Seas Initiative. The third analysis prepared by an analyst from Poland presents the approach of the Western Balkan countries to the 3SI. The three texts present the conditions of regional policy, an overview of events, and the most important projects related to the Three Seas Initiative as well as the prospects for Three Seas cooperation in the context of the upcoming summit in Bucharest. The work was based

on the statements of politicians, press articles, and expert analyses. The following research methods and techniques were used in the publication: genetic method, document analysis, and qualitative content analysis.

Łukasz Lewkowicz  
August 2023



Dénes András Nagy

## **Hungary towards the Three Seas Initiative**

### **Summary:**

- Hungary has played an active, engaged, positive, and constructive role as a co-founding Member State of the Three Seas Initiative from the outset.
- Hungarian support has contributed to the institutionalisation of the Three Seas Initiative via the creation of a Business Forum, a Network of Chambers of Commerce, an Investment Fund, and a Parliamentary Forum, and Hungarian decision-makers have welcomed the launch of the Collegium Intermarium University.
- The Hungarian government's proposal to create a "permanent secretariat for the Three Seas Initiative" – headquartered in Budapest – should be seriously considered.

## 1. Conditions of regional cooperation

In order to understand the “Hungarian way of strategy”<sup>1</sup> concerning the conditions for regional cooperation in relation to the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), we must first consider the geopolitical environment of Hungary: a landlocked nation-state based at the centre of the Carpathian Basin. Since time immemorial and the existence of the most recent iteration of the Hungarian state – founded by Saint Stephen in 1000 A.D. – all polities based upon the Pannonian plain have been surrounded by the Carpathian mountain range as a protective barrier, and have had to take into account the regional balance of power in the geographic space between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas: the so-called *Tengerköz* region in Hungarian, literally meaning “between seas”, or as it is referred to in Latin, *Intermarium*. Traditionally, foreign policy strategists in Hungary have continuously sought to ensure that the central position of the Hungarian polity is used to its utmost as an advantage over all other powers existing in this *Intermarium* space. Therefore, the baseline condition of Hungarian engagement in any form of regional cooperation is to preserve the central, coordinative, and connective nature of the Hungarian state as the geographic, and thus geoeconomic and geopolitical, centre of the region demarcated by the three seas. Historically, the creation of frameworks of regional cooperation in order to further this aim to centralise the role of Hungary as a middling power in Central Europe can be dated back to at least the Middle Ages. Consider, for example, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Congress of

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Orbán, *Hungarian Way of Strategy*, Budapest 2023.

Visegrád of 1335<sup>2</sup> which laid the foundations of the modern-day Visegrád Group<sup>3</sup>.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hungary is a country in Central Europe which is a Member State of two key intergovernmental institutions: the European Union (EU) and NATO. Since 2010, the sovereigntist coalition government of two governing political parties, KDNP – the Christian Democratic People’s Party – and Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance – have followed a eurorealist approach to European integration and have advocated for a connectivity-based approach to transatlantic relations<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, in order to ensure that Hungarian national interests are effectively represented within the EU and NATO arenas, Hungary seeks to form regional cooperation alliances with countries that pragmatically share the same fundamental worldview. Via this principled sovereigntist approach that rejects the authority of top-down supranational institutions and favours bottom-up decision-making from subsidiarity respecting alliances among sovereign nations, Hungary seeks to preserve its hard-fought independence that has been defended over the past millennium against colonial powers ranging from the Mongols to the Ottomans, and from the Nazis to the Soviets.

<sup>2</sup> G. Rác, *The Congress of Visegrád*, Visegrád Group, 2009, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/congress-of-visegrad/gyorgy-racz-the-congress> [03.08.2023].

<sup>3</sup> *The History of the Visegrád Group*, Visegrád Group, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/history> [03.08.2023].

<sup>4</sup> B. Orbán, *Connectivity: A Hungarian Globalisation Strategy*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 6 March 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/article/connectivity-a-hungarian-globalisation-strategy/> [03.08.2023].



### **1.1. Central European Initiative**

In line with the Central European approach of Hungarian foreign policy decision makers, Hungary has been an active initiator in fostering closer cooperation in the region. This is underlined by the fact that a regional intergovernmental cooperation organisation, the Central European Initiative (CEI) was co-founded in 1989 by Hungary in Budapest. Currently, the CEI unites 17 Central European Member States and is headquartered in Trieste, Italy. Among the 3SI Member States, only Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are not members.

### **1.2. Visegrád Group**

A key development from a Hungarian perspective in Central European regional cooperation was the reformation of the Visegrád Cooperation that began in the 14<sup>th</sup> century via the re-establishment of the Visegrád Group in 1991 in the Hungarian city of Visegrád, which hosted the famous Visegrád Congresses of 1335 and 1339. Currently uniting Hungary with Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia, it continues to remain the paramount international alliance to Hungary, and as such, the 3SI is conceptualised as being a complementary initiative that cannot constitute a replacement for it. From a Hungarian perspective, the Visegrád Four (V4) countries form the central geopolitical core of the *Intermarium* region, and thus the success of the Three Seas Initiative depends on the unity of the V4 and their ability to act together.

### **1.3. Central European Defence Cooperation**

In the defence realm, Hungary is a co-founding member organisation of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) launched in 2010. Additional Member States include

Austria, Czechia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In addition, crucially, Poland possesses observer status.

#### **1.4. Europe of the Carpathians**

Hungarian intellectuals and politicians who have an influential role in Hungary's geopolitics are furthermore actively involved in the "Europe of the Carpathians" regional cooperation conference format, initiated by the Head of the Chancellery of the President of the Council of Ministers of Poland, Minister Marek Kuchciński. For example, the Programme Council of the Europe of the Carpathians Clubs includes two key Hungarian parliamentary political leaders: Németh Zsolt, the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, and Richárd Hörcsik, the longtime Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Country Assembly.

## **2. The Hungarian approach and expectations regarding the Three Seas Initiative**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Hungarian approach to the Three Seas Initiative is defined by the fact that Hungary is in the geographical centre of the triangular region between the Adriatic-, Baltic- and Black Seas. Thus, Hungary approaches the *Intermarium* region from a geographically deterministic geopolitical angle. Consequently, Hungary positions itself as a middling power in the centre of the region. Indeed, one of the key aims of the Hungarian government is to remain demographically, economically, and militarily the strongest nation-state in the Carpathian Basin. Hungary, therefore, acts as the gateway bastion in the triangular region formed by the Three Seas Initiative. By utilising this geopolitical advantage, the Hungarian government seeks to take

up a constructive, connective, and coordinative role in the initiative from the outset. In line with this approach, Hungarian leaders are driven by a pragmatic approach, aimed at securing the highest possible standard of living and quality of life for citizens of Hungary via finding a common *modus vivendi* with the peoples with whom the Hungarians share the Carpathian Basin and the wider *Intermarium* region. In this task, the Three Seas Initiative offers a useful regional cooperative platform to further the aim of placing Hungary in the middle of a collaborative network that is connected via Hungary.

### **2.1. Prelude (2015)**

Prior to the official launch of the Three Seas Initiative, one of the initiating co-founders, the then President of the Republic of Croatia – Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović – first presented in Hungary the idea to create this new form of regional cooperation during a lecture<sup>5</sup> held at the Corvinus University of Budapest on 7 October 2015. Indeed, it is quite telling that the title of her lecture was “It’s Time to Strengthen the Central European Flank of the EU and NATO”. In consideration of the invasion of Ukraine that followed, her warning was prescient. For a Hungarian audience made up of key decision makers in the realm of international relations, the Three Seas Initiative was presented as a regional cooperation format among Central European countries in order to represent common interests in the institutions of the EU more effectively. Simultaneously, the 3SI was presented as

<sup>5</sup> Nemzetközi Kör, Even Post in Facebook Official Account, 7 October 2015, [https://www.facebook.com/events/1692910884288149?locale=de\\_DE](https://www.facebook.com/events/1692910884288149?locale=de_DE) [03.08.2023].

a cooperation platform for Central European NATO Member States concerned about the deteriorating regional security situation following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War that had begun in 2014.

## 2.2. Dubrovnik Summit (2016)

At the outset, Hungary was a co-founding member of the Three Seas Initiative: the President of the Republic of Hungary, János Áder was in attendance at the 2016 Dubrovnik Forum held on 25 August and initiated by President Grabar-Kitarović. President Áder endorsed on behalf of Hungary, as one of the 12 co-founding EU Member States, the joint “Dubrovnik Statement” on the so-called “Three Seas Initiative”<sup>6</sup>. At the time, the Hungarian Embassy in Zagreb characterised this new regional cooperation format as an alliance “(...) which aims at deepening political, economic, security, and infrastructural cooperation among the countries of the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Sea region (...)”<sup>7</sup>.

Due to the fact that the central theme of President Áder’s term in office was the topic of sustainability, during his intervention<sup>8</sup> at the Summit, the Hungarian president placed a special emphasis on the importance of utilising the Three Seas Initiative to push forward a shift towards renewable energy resources and further the realisation of environmental protection objectives. Since then, Hungarian decision

<sup>6</sup> *The Joint Statement on the Three Seas Initiative (Dubrovnik Statement)*, Three Seas Initiative, Dubrovnik, 25 August 2016, [https://media.voog.com/0000/0046/4166/files/DUBROVNIK\\_deklaratsioon\\_2016.pdf](https://media.voog.com/0000/0046/4166/files/DUBROVNIK_deklaratsioon_2016.pdf) [03.08.2023].

<sup>7</sup> *The Dubrovnik Forum of 2016*, Embassy of Hungary in Zagreb, 25 August 2016, <https://zagrab.mfa.gov.hu/eng/news/a-2016-os-dubrovnik-forum> [03.08.2023].

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

makers have looked to the Three Seas Initiative as a platform through which the agenda of diversifying energy sources can be furthered in Central Europe. Indeed, the Hungarian President highlighted in his speech that Hungary “fulfilled its commitments to the development of transport and energy infrastructure networks”<sup>9</sup>. A key element in the Hungarian approach to the Three Seas Initiative, therefore, lies within the assumption that this platform will help strengthen regional energy links.

Another key element within the Hungarian approach to the Three Seas Initiative was revealed on the second day of the Dubrovnik Summit, August 26<sup>th</sup>, when Péter Szijjártó – the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade – addressed a panel discussion. Minister Szijjártó highlighted that “a strong Europe needs strong Member States with democratically elected leaders providing legitimate guidance”<sup>10</sup>. In essence, this was a restatement of the eurorealist position of the Hungarian government, which saw in the creation of this new regional cooperation platform a network with which an EU reform agenda could be jointly advocated.

### **2.3. Warsaw Summit (2017)**

In 2017, the Second Summit of the Three Seas Initiative took place on July 6 in Warsaw, with the role of the host this time played by the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda. Although two Member States decided not to participate at the Head of State level – and sent high representatives instead

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

– President Áder personally<sup>11</sup> took part in the meeting. Indeed, as certain analysts noted<sup>12</sup>, “*In the first years, Hungary tried to play the role of an active actor in the Three Seas Initiative*”. The presence of the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, was welcomed by the Hungarian government, considering the fact that the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was the first EU Member State Head of Government who had already endorsed Trump during the Presidential campaign. Hungary signed the Joint Declaration of the Summit<sup>13</sup> which was organised under the title “Connectivity, Commerciality, Complementarity”, three key phrases that are fully in line with the pragmatic foreign policy of the Hungarian government. Crucially, the latter phrase, complementarity, in the Hungarian context should be understood as underlining a conceptualisation that the Three Seas Initiative is an extension of the Visegrád Group format, therefore, it is seen as a way to strengthen relations with countries outside the core Visegrád Four in Central Europe; in essence, an enlarged form of V4+ cooperation that cannot substitute or replace Visegrád.

#### **2.4. Bucharest Summit (2018)**

In the following year, 2018, the Three Seas Initiative Summit was held in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Although

<sup>11</sup> *Warsaw Summit 2017*, Three Seas Initiative, 6 July 2017, <https://www.3seas.eu/about/past-summits/warsaw-summit-2017> [03.08.2023].

<sup>12</sup> P. Bajda, *Three Seas Initiative ad. 2022 – Challenges for Poland*, Warsaw Institute, 26 August 2017, <https://warsawinstitute.org/three-seas-initiative-ad-2022-challenges-for-poland/> [03.08.2023].

<sup>13</sup> *The Second Summit of the Three Seas Initiative: Joint Declaration*, Three Seas Initiative, Warsaw, 6 July 2017, <https://media.voog.com/0000/0046/4166/files/WARSAW-joint-declaration-2017.pdf> [03.08.2023].

President Áder was expected to attend the Summit, unfortunately, due to an unforeseen event – a technical malfunction that prevented the presidential aeroplane from taking off from Budapest – the Hungarian President was not able to attend the Summit<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, as a last minute solution, Hungary was represented in his stead by the Hungarian Ambassador in Bucharest, H.E. Botond Zákonyi.

Nevertheless, at the economic level, an important positive development occurred with regard to the development of the Three Seas Initiative: for the first time, a Business Forum of the Three Seas Initiative was held, accompanying the Summit, the creation of which had been supported by Hungary the preceding year in the Joint Declaration of the Warsaw Summit<sup>15</sup>.

In a proactive move, the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry – alongside its Bulgarian, Croatian, Lithuanian, Polish, Slovenian, and Romanian counterparts – adopted a joint statement on the creation of a new Network of the Chambers of Commerce of the Three Seas Initiative<sup>16</sup>. On this occasion, Hungary was represented by László Bódi, the Vice President of the International Committee of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry<sup>17</sup>. It is

<sup>14</sup> D. Héjj, *The Three Seas Initiative in the Foreign Affairs Policy of Hungary*, "Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe" 2019, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> *The Second Summit of the Three Seas Initiative: Joint Declaration*, Three Seas Initiative, Warsaw, 6 July 2017, <https://media.voog.com/0000/0046/4166/files/WARSAW-joint-declaration-2017.pdf> [03.08.2023].

<sup>16</sup> *Joint Statement for the Creation of the Network of the Chamber of Commerce of the "Three Seas Initiative"*, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania, Bucharest, 17 September 2018, <https://ccir.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Joint-Statement-1-3.pdf> [03.08.2023].

<sup>17</sup> *Joint Statement and Projects of the Chambers of Commerce Network of the Three Seas Region*, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania, 17 September 2018, <https://ccir.ro/joint-statement-projects-chambers-commerce-network-3-seas-region/> [03.08.2023].

important to note here that not all Member States signed up to this development, consequently, the Hungarian side again showcased its active engagement by being a co-founder of this new network uniting the Chambers of Commerce of the region.

### **2.5. Ljubljana Summit (2019)**

During the 2019 Three Seas Initiative Summit held between the 5-6<sup>th</sup> of June in the capital of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Hungary was represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó. The reason for this was that President Áder had already committed to a previous engagement and had thus decided to send a high-level representative in the form of Minister Szijjártó in his stead. Although certain commentators have characterised this as being a “reluctant partner”<sup>18</sup> attitude, it may be argued that sending a high-level executive representative signalled the opposite: Hungary aims to execute the envisioned and agreed plans. Indeed, in this context, an important development that occurred during the Ljubljana Summit was the creation of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund<sup>19</sup>.

### **2.6. Tallinn Summit (2020)**

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tallinn Summit that was to take place in the capital of Estonia became

<sup>18</sup> V. Dostál, T. Strážay, Z. Végh, *The Perspective of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia on the Three Seas Initiative*, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, June 2021, [https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AMO\\_The\\_Perspective\\_on\\_the\\_3SI.pdf](https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AMO_The_Perspective_on_the_3SI.pdf), p. 14 [03.08.2023].

<sup>19</sup> *Joint Declaration of the Fourth Summit of the Three Seas Initiative*, Three Seas Initiative, Ljubljana, 5-6 June 2019, <https://media.voog.com/0000/0046/4166/files/LJUBLJANA-Joint%20Declaration%202019.pdf> [03.08.2023].



the first high-level meeting to be held in a hybrid format<sup>20</sup>. The host, the President of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid, also welcomed in person the President of the country next in line to host the Summit after Tallinn – Rumen Radev of Bulgaria – who was joined by a co-initiator of the Three Seas Initiative, Polish president Andrzej Duda, whilst all other participants, including President Áder of Hungary, attended the Summit virtually.

For the first time, a formal meeting among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States preceded the presidential Summit, which was held as a virtual meeting on the June 30. This “Three Seas Foreign Ministers’ Video Conference Meeting” was attended by the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó. As a positive development, in a constructive manner – via a letter<sup>21</sup> sent by Minister Szijjártó to the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Urmas Reinsalu – the Hungarian government announced its decision to become one of the first five Member States to join the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund with a contribution of 20 million euros via the Hungarian Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank).

During the Summit, the Hungarian President called<sup>22</sup> for greater cooperation in the field of water pollution prevention in line with the sustainability-focused priorities of his

<sup>20</sup> *Tallinn Summit 2020*, Three Seas Initiative, Tallinn, 19 October 2020, <https://3seas.eu/about/past-summits/tallinn-summit-2020> [03.08.2023].

<sup>21</sup> *Hungary also to Join Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund*, Three Seas Initiative, 2 December 2020, <https://3seas.eu/media/news/hungary-also-to-join-three-seas-initiative-investment-fund?lang=en> [03.08.2023].

<sup>22</sup> *President Áder Calls for Greater Cooperation Within the Region to Prevent Water Pollution*, About Hungary, 20 October 2020, <https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/president-ader-calls-for-greater-cooperation-within-the-region-to-prevent-water-pollution> [03.08.2023].

Presidency. Indeed, consider that beyond the eponymous three seas of the region, there are several major rivers connecting the countries of the region, such as the Danube, Drava, and Tisza rivers which flow through Hungary. Thus, the idea to address cross-border pollution and solve the issue of agricultural, industrial, and solid waste pollutants damaging the region's water is a common sense proposal that widens the realm for cooperation in the field of quality water supply provision. Therefore, President Áder suggested that beyond the focus on man-made infrastructure, the same level of attention should be devoted to preserving the quality of water supplies in the region, warning that *"The goal should not be pollution but rather cooperation to prevent pollution"*<sup>23</sup>.

A highly significant development with regards to the Hungarian approach to the Three Seas Initiative occurred during this year: in 2020 the Hungarian government announced that it had proposed to host a "Permanent Three Seas Initiative Secretariat" in Budapest. According to the argumentation of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *"Launching an international secretariat will increase the visibility and capacities of the Initiative and enhance continuity, coordination and information sharing among stakeholders"*<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, if adopted, this proposal would be a major milestone in the institutionalisation of the Three Seas Initiative. Sadly, hitherto this constructive formalisation

<sup>23</sup> *President Áder Urges Greater Regional Cooperation to Reverse Water Pollution*, Hungary Today, 20 October 2020, <https://hungarytoday.hu/ader-water-pollution-three-sees-initiative/> [03.08.2023].

<sup>24</sup> *Hungary Remains Committed to the Success of the Three Seas Initiative*, Embassy of Hungary in Washington, 3 June 2020, <https://washington.mfa.gov.hu/eng/news/hungary-remains-committed-to-the-success-of-the-three-seas-initiative> [03.08.2023].

proposal from the Hungarian side has not been appropriately addressed and the issue has been sidestepped by the Member States who seek to preserve the informal nature of the Three Seas Initiative.

### **2.7. Sofia Summit (2021)**

Following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, the 2021 Summit in the capital of Bulgaria – Sofia – proceeded as intended, with the in-person participation of the Hungarian President. In his last Summit as the President of Hungary (his second Presidential mandate was ending in 2022), Áder highlighted the importance of transparency in decision-making. Worryingly from a Hungarian perspective, the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund had decided<sup>25</sup> upon the realisation of three projects which were not among the proposals of the Member States; an unacceptable step from the point of view of the sovereigntist Hungarian government. Calling for more accountability in the investment decision-making processes, Áder warned that as long as such opaque procedures existed, the sum of monies donated by Member States will remain low. Indeed, from the Hungarian perspective, in line with the Hungarian government's principled emphasis on intergovernmental solutions to regional cooperation, and its eurorealist approach taken with regard to European integration, until the final say is definitively with the democratically elected representatives of the Member States, no

<sup>25</sup> *President Áder Highlights Importance of Transparency at Three Seas Summit*, Hungary Today, 9 July 2021, <https://hungarytoday.hu/hungary-president-ader-importance-transparency-three-seas-Summit-initiative/> [03.08.2023].

supranational decision-making authority will be accepted by the Hungarian side as a matter of principle.

At the same time, Áder noted that among those infrastructure projects that the Hungarian government greenlit, Hungary had delivered upon six new interconnector gas pipelines with neighbouring countries – a significant feat considering Hungary has seven neighbours altogether – and had finished constructing the Hungarian stretch of the Via Carpathia highway network – connecting the Baltic seaport of Klaipėda in Lithuania with the Black Sea port of Constanta in Romania via the city of Debrecen in Hungary as a central hub connecting the two halfway<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, a new bridge connecting Hungary and Slovakia had been built.

2021 was also a significant year from a Hungarian perspective with regard to the parliamentary dimension of the 3SI. On May 12 May, the Hungarian Country Assembly (*Országgyűlés*, the Parliament of Hungary) held a debate in its Committee on Foreign Affairs about Hungary's participation in the 3SI, wherein, in the view of the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs – Zsolt Németh – “*The Three Seas Initiative is fully in keeping with Hungary's regional policy as it aims to boost economic prosperity, which is needed for the long-term stability of central Europe*”<sup>27</sup>. Significantly, Chairman Németh noted that this format complements rather than contradicts the highly important Visegrád Group, which is considered by Hungarian foreign policy making

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Govt Official: *Three Seas Initiative in Keeping with Hungary's Regional Policy*, Hungary Today, 12 May 2021, <https://hungarytoday.hu/official-three-seas-initiative-in-keeping-hungary-regional-policy/> [03.08.2023].

leaders as the paramount, central, and irreplaceable regional cooperation format in Central Europe.

Additionally, during the Estonian Presidency, the first Three Seas Parliamentary Forum<sup>28</sup> was held, and while not all member states took part – Hungary did, and at the highest level, having been represented by the Speaker of the Country Assembly, László Kövér. During his speech, Speaker Kövér stated<sup>29</sup> that “*Hungary is a committed advocate of the Three Seas Initiative (...)*”, adding that it would be important to intensify cooperation with the eastern and southern neighbours of the Three Seas Initiative as well. Speaker Kövér underlined that it is Hungary’s hope that “*(...) Europe’s reunification will be complete sooner or later*”, opening the door for possible enlargement of the initiative towards the Adriatic element of the Western Balkans countries and the Black Sea coastline countries to the East.

Another significant development from a Hungarian viewpoint that occurred in 2021 was the creation of a new university focused on educating the future leaders of the Three Seas Initiative region: the launch of the Collegium Intermarium, based in Warsaw, Poland. The inauguration of the university was addressed by Gergely Gulyás, the Minister responsible for the Prime Minister’s Office of Hungary, via a video address, in addition to the in-person attendance of Tamás Sulyok, the president of Hungary’s Constitutional

<sup>28</sup> 2021 3SI Parliamentary Forum, Tallinn Estonia, Three Seas Initiative, 3 June 2021, <https://www.3seas.eu/event/3si-parliamentary-forum?lang=en> [03.08.2023].

<sup>29</sup> House Speaker: Hungary Committed Advocate of Three Seas Initiative, Hungary Today, 4 June 2021, <https://hungarytoday.hu/house-speaker-hungary-committed-advocate-of-three-seas-initiative/> [03.08.2023].

Court. In his speech<sup>30</sup>, Minister Gulyás stated his belief that the Collegium Intermarium could “*create a forum for protecting Christian, conservative values that are close to the nations of the Three Seas Initiative area*”. Thus, from the perspective of the institutionalisation of the initiative, the Hungarian government welcomed the addition of this academic pillar to regional cooperation in the *Intermarium* region.

### **2.8. Riga Summit (2022)**

The Riga Summit, hosted in the capital city of the Republic of Latvia, was overshadowed by the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine and the full-scale Russian invasion which escalated a war that had in reality begun in 2014. In preparation for the Summit, within the parliamentary dimension of the 3SI, the Chairs of the Committees on Foreign Affairs of the Member State parliaments – including the Hungarian Chairman, Zsolt Németh – issued a joint declaration<sup>31</sup> on March 29<sup>th</sup>, condemning the Kremlin’s aggression against an independent Ukraine and at the same time suggested that Ukraine could become a partner of the 3SI. The Riga Summit itself, taking place on June 20-21, centred on the issue of war and peace. From a Hungarian point of view, the Summit offered a chance to showcase a new approach to the 3SI, considering that Hungary had just recently elected a new President, Katalin Novák, in 2022. The

<sup>30</sup> *PMO Head Welcomes Warsaw’s New Collegium Intermarium Law University for CEE*, Hungary Today, 28 May 2021, <https://hungarytoday.hu/pmo-head-welcomes-warsaws-new-collegium-intermarium-law-university-for-cee/> [03.08.2023].

<sup>31</sup> *Hungary Signs Document Stating All Countries Have a ‘Moral Obligation’ to Support Ukraine*, Hungary Today, 30 March 2022, <https://hungarytoday.hu/ukraine-support-moral-obligation-hungary-nemeth/> [03.08.2023].

election of Novák, a principled transatlanticist stateswoman, who speaks four languages fluently, ushered in a new era in the international realm of Head of State relations within Hungary. Indeed, prior to her Summit debut, President Novák highlighted three new key priorities for Hungary within the 3SI:

*“1. Peace must be established in Ukraine as soon as possible. The Hungarian people are for peace”*. In essence, a call for a ceasefire and peace negotiations at the earliest possible date, a Hungarian government policy aimed at ensuring that the peaceful conditions that are necessary for the 3SI region to prosper are attained as soon as possible.

*“2. The interests of landlocked countries must be taken into account to the fullest extent when negotiating about energy supply”*. Fundamentally, a call for greater investment in projects that develop not only the sea-to-sea networks – such as interstate highways, high-speed railways, and new canals – but also those improving the state of infrastructure connecting landlocked countries which could then better connect coast-line-based countries in the region.

*“3. We support that Ukraine and the Western Balkan countries should be granted candidate status for EU membership as soon as possible”*. Fundamentally, a call for enlargement. Considering that, in order to become a Member State of the 3SI, a country must be an EU Member State, basically, via taking this position, Hungary hopes to open the door of the 3SI to the Adriatic countries of the Western Balkans and

the Black Sea coastline country of Ukraine on their path to joining the EU<sup>32</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions and prospects

#### 3.1. Conclusions

In conclusion, Hungary has played a positive and constructive role as a co-founder and supporter of the Three Seas Initiative from the beginning. Hungary has participated in all Three Seas Initiative Summits hitherto without exception, and even in the case of emergencies or pre-existing commitments, Hungarian Heads of State have always ensured their personal participation or the delegation of the task to a high-level executive representative via the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and in the case of one emergency, Hungary's representation was deemed so important that the task was entrusted to an Ambassador to ensure that there is always a Hungarian voice at the table. At the economic level, Hungary supported the creation of the Three Seas Initiative Business Forum. Additionally, the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry was a co-founder of the Network of the Chambers of Commerce of the Three Seas Initiative. Further, Hungary was also among the first five Member States to join the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund. Academically, the Hungarian government has welcomed the creation of the Collegium Intermarium as a university focusing on the Three Seas Initiative region. Institutionally, Hungary has proposed creating a Permanent Secretariat for

<sup>32</sup> K. Novák, Post in Facebook Official Account, 20 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/novak.katalin.official/posts/pfbidofx61SSRrtkgHz1QU1cW6UGkfGRKmjwEFxFD6xJISM-RzoNVtc8Jc99vozdvSdZYdyzl> [03.08.2023].



the Three Seas Initiative and has offered to host it in the capital city of Budapest. The Hungarian government has thus showcased the intent to play a more central role in helping to coordinate the initiative.

### **3.2. Prospects**

With regards to the prospects for the borderland *Intermarium* region, the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine has caused a tectonic shift in the intercontinental relations between Europe and Eurasia; on the one hand the EU, and on the other the Eurasian Economic Union. It may be expected that as long as the war is ongoing, international trade routes could shift from West-East transit routes to alternative North-South routes: this could potentially increase the significance of the 3SI as a regional, continental, and planetary trade hub. Consequently, due to the deteriorating security situation, infrastructural investments can be expected to be shifted away from Eastern Europe and Western Eurasia to the more centrally placed region of Central Europe, thus benefiting geographically central countries including Hungary, at the expense of peripheral countries. The changing geopolitical environment of the region has also raised the topic of enlargement towards countries in the Adriatic-, Baltic-, and Black Sea regions within the 3SI framework.

In the Adriatic, Hungary has advocated that enlargement should occur towards the countries of the Western Balkans. From a Hungarian perspective, Serbia could be a prime candidate considering the excellent bilateral relations between the two governments. Similarly, the countries which possess an outlet to the Adriatic Sea – Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Montenegro, and Albania – could also be considered. Macedonia, a key regional player when it comes to security and border protection, could also be a valuable addition in strengthening the southern flank of the region; similar to Hungary, they possess a shared interest in ensuring that infrastructure projects benefit landlocked countries, not just coastline states. All of this depends, however, on EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans, a key priority within Hungary's South-Central European neighbourhood policy. Additionally, as a partly Adriatic country, the involvement of the Republic of Italy could potentially be considered. If we reflect that, in the past, Italy co-founded the Central European Initiative together with Hungary in 1989, a renewed Italian re-engagement with Central and Eastern Europe is a possibility that would be greatly welcomed by Italy's close ally, Hungary.

With regards to the Black Sea region, taking into account the geopolitical realities and the European pathway of Georgia, Turkey, and Ukraine, these countries could potentially be considered in the future as 3SI membership applicants. Ukraine has already received participating partnership status<sup>33</sup>, whilst the Hungarian government has very positive relations with both Georgia and Turkey. Hence, both countries could be offered the participating partnership status that was offered to Ukraine. Furthermore, once all three

<sup>33</sup> M. Gołębiowska, Ł. Lewkowicz, *The Three Seas Initiative after the Riga Summit: a New Status of Cooperation with Ukraine and the support of the United States*, "IES Commentaries" 2022, no. 639, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/the-three-seas-initiative-after-the-riga-summit-a-new-status-of-cooperation-with-ukraine-and-the-support-of-the-united-states/> [03.08.2023].

countries become EU Member States, they could be eligible to become full Member States of the 3SI.

In the Baltic Sea region, further enlargement is also possible. Taking into consideration the importance of the Finno-Ugrian linguistic connection of the Hungarian language and the affinity towards Finland among the Hungarian population, the membership of Finland could be considered; indeed, in 2019, the youth wing of the Finns Party (European Conservatives and Reformists) – currently the second largest political party in Finland and a governing coalition partner – called<sup>34</sup> upon Finland to join the 3SI. In consideration of the changing geopolitical situation due to the war in Ukraine, and Hungary's support for the NATO Membership of Finland – bilateral Finnish-Hungarian relations could be further strengthened via multilateral cooperation within the remit of the 3SI. Indeed, as an EU Member State, Finland would be able to become a Member State, should it so choose and, if such a request were to arise, Hungary could consider it meritoriously.

With regards to the 2023 Bucharest Summit, it remains to be seen how President Novák will perform in her role as a Head of State in the context of the 3SI in comparison to President Áder. At the outset, however, the signals are positive and her track record as an internationally active Hungarian stateswoman forecasts a continuation of the engaged participation of Hungary at the Presidential level, in line with her three key priorities of (1) promoting peace, (2)

<sup>34</sup> *Julkilausuma: Suomen Liityttävä Kolmen Meren Aloitteeseen (3SI)*, Perussuomalaiset Nuoret, 11 December 2019, [https://web.archive.org/web/20200519130710/https://www.ps-nuoret.fi/uutiset/julkilausuma-suomen-liityttava-kolmen-meren-aloitteeseen-3si/\[03.08.2023\]](https://web.archive.org/web/20200519130710/https://www.ps-nuoret.fi/uutiset/julkilausuma-suomen-liityttava-kolmen-meren-aloitteeseen-3si/[03.08.2023]).

advocacy of landlocked states, and (3) enlargement towards the Western Balkans and Ukraine. However, should the 3SI wish to continue to enjoy constructive Hungarian participation in it, the proposal of the Hungarian government to establish a Three Seas Initiative Permanent Secretariat in Budapest – the symbolic centre of the region – should be seriously considered. From the perspective of Hungarian strategic thinking, such a step would honour the historical role of Hungary as a traditional connective force for cooperation in Central Europe and the wider *Tengerköz – Inter-marium* region.





Andrzej Pukszo, Robertas Eismontas

## **Lithuania towards the Three Seas Initiative**

### **Summary:**

- The Republic of Lithuania invested heavily in regional cooperation after accessing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union in 2004. There are various regional organizations where Lithuania is active: the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic-Baltic Eight, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Bucharest Nine, and the Lublin Triangle. Lithuania has developed its participation in the 3SI intensively, especially in the last 4 years.
- Lithuania takes the view that the 3SI has been closed to the politics of the European Union and EU institutions.
- The Republic of Lithuania will assume coordination of the 3SI in 2024 and will organize the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Three Seas Summit in Vilnius.

## **1. Conditions of regional cooperation**

The political view of Lithuania on regional cooperation initiatives which came from Warsaw, usually wasn't optimistic. When the Republic of Lithuania restored its independence in 1990, it became apparent that the Lithuanian path to Euro-Atlantic integration would be related to Scandinavian countries.

Nevertheless, the political reality of the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had changed old visions and projects: Lithuanian-Polish cooperation became the background and one of the vectors as well as the main reason for Lithuania's invitation to be a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union in 2004.

The Common Parliamentary Assembly of Lithuania and Poland, the Lithuanian-Polish Common Committee for Consultations of Presidents, and other joint institutions that followed created a lot of useful initiatives. These projects were and are beneficial in different areas – security, defence, European politics, economy, transport, etc. As a result of this change, the picture of regional cooperation was restarted and became crystal clear: East-Central European integration can be developed together with the Nordic-Baltic dimension (Baltic Assembly and Nordic-Baltic Eight), as additional value, strongly connected but not opposed to each other.

It is necessary to add that the development of Lithuanian foreign and security policy after 2004 had new challenges and took place within the new geopolitical realities, mainly connected with Russian imperialism and the plans of Vladimir Putin to rethink the influence of the Post-soviet area. Lithuania joined the Bucharest Nine optimistically and created the Lublin Triangle together with Poland and

Ukraine. At the same time, the Republic of Lithuania joined the 3SI; looking to adopt the 3SI as a political project inside the European Union, collaborating deeply with European institutions – the European Commission and others.

In addition, the Republic of Lithuania adopted the East-central European cooperation as a bridge for political and economic relations with the US as well as the democratic countries of East Asia (Lithuania has suspended collaboration with China, one of the first countries in the EU to do so, and also cancelled membership of the 17+1 Group).

## **2. The Lithuanian approach and expectations**

### **2.1. The attitude of the President of Lithuania**

In order to find out what Lithuania is aiming for by participating in the 3SI, it is necessary to look at the statements of the country's leaders and important discussions regarding this format. Therefore, when presenting the case of Lithuania, we start with the speeches of the highest leader of the country, Gitanas Nausėda, the President of the Republic of Lithuania.

In the fall of 2020, during a remote meeting, the Lithuanian leader emphasized that the 3SI is a strategic tool that contributes to strengthening relations between the states of the region and the United States as well as regional and national security. *“Lithuania considers the Three Seas Initiative as a unique regional tool that deepens strategic cooperation with the United States. The transatlantic link is the guarantor of our region’s security. This platform is aimed at strengthening the region’s soft powers through the development of infrastructure and technology”* said the President. We can see that, at



the first of his 3SI meetings, the President singled out and emphasized the importance of transatlantic relations and emphasized that they must strengthen relations with the United States of America through this initiative<sup>1</sup>.

At the same meeting, the President emphasized that the progress of the implementation of the Rail Baltica and Via Baltica projects, the acceleration of synchronization with the electricity networks of continental Europe, and the connection of the gas network with Poland are all tasks of strategic importance for Lithuania. According to the head of the country, innovation, digitization, and sustainable development are the engines of competitiveness and economic breakthrough in the Three Seas region.

The President emphasized that the transatlantic connection guarantees regional security and also significantly contributes to solving European energy security issues. US investment potential and energy resource diversification solutions are particularly important elements in strengthening the region's soft power. *“The countries of our region are united by similar geopolitical and economic challenges and the desire to ensure the connectivity of energy and transport infrastructure. Effective development of infrastructure and its inclusion in the common market of the European Union is our strategic goal, which, if implemented, will ensure the economic development and growth of the region as well as increase resistance to external threats”*, said the President.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The President will participate in the remote summit of the Three Seas Initiative*, President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/ziniasklaidos-centras/naujienos/34883> [30.07.2023].

As Lithuania struggled with the crisis of illegal migrants from the territory of Belarus in the summer of 2021, the leader of Lithuania drew attention to the geopolitical, military, and hybrid threats posed by Russia, the deteriorating democratic situation in the EU's neighbourhood, and the desire of some countries to destabilize the international environment. According to the President of Lithuania, the common response to threats to the realization of common goals is very clear – it is necessary to further strengthen the transatlantic partnership with the US. *“3SI provides opportunities to involve the US more closely in regional cooperation and contribute to increasing the security of Europe as a whole”*, said the head of the country<sup>2</sup>.

In the fall of 2021, the leaders of the three states, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, signed the “Baltic Road to Climate Neutrality” declaration – the text of which called for a fight against climate change and environmental pollution. In the declaration, a place is also reserved for the 3SI as a means to solve these problems. The Declaration states: *To work more closely together on the development of the Three Seas Initiative to implement climate-neutral cross-border energy, transport, and digital infrastructure projects and promote reliable and secure digital and green connectivity across the region. “The fight against climate change, attention to the environment, and sustainability are conditions for the prosperity of the Baltic region. I hope this declaration will become a positive*

<sup>2</sup> *President: The Three Seas Initiative must strengthen regional security*, President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/ziniasklaidos-centras/naujienos/34896> [30.07.2023].

*impetus for the green transformation in our states. We have to move from words to deeds”, said President Gitanas Nausėda<sup>3</sup>.*

*In 2022, the President took time to mention the 3SI in his annual report; “The main emphasis of our foreign policy strategy is to ensure that a strong transatlantic influence is felt throughout Europe, and especially in the Baltic region. We have always sought this and will seek it in the future. Therefore, we continue to strengthen military and technological cooperation with the United States, including through the implementation of the Three Seas Initiative”<sup>4</sup>.*

*The same summer, the President underlined, “It is also very important for us that the broken East-West connections or transport corridors from East to West are replaced by highly efficient South-North connections. In this sense, the initiatives of the three seas are exactly that project, and this political direction, a strategy that will allow us to solve this transience or connection issue and to solve it in a truly geopolitically correct way”<sup>5</sup>.*

*With Europe facing a possible food and energy crisis after the sanctions, the President also highlighted at the same meeting that “one gate, food products, grains, which are stored in Ukrainian warehouses, can be transported and brought to the ports of the Baltic Sea through logistic corridors. On the other hand, the possibilities of our already created energy infrastructure (...) provide not only theoretical but also practical*

<sup>3</sup> *Declaration “Baltic Road to Climate Neutrality”, President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/ziniasklaidos-centras/naujienos/deklaracija-baltijos-kelias-link-klimato-neutralumo/36981> [30.07.2023].*

<sup>4</sup> *Annual report of the President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda, President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2022, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/ziniasklaidos-centras/prezidento-kalbos-ir-sveikinimai/38609> [30.07.2023].*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

possibilities, using the Klaipeda liquefied natural gas terminal, to supply gas even to Moldova and Ukraine”<sup>6</sup>.

## **2.2. The approach, aspirations, and statements of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania**

On 8 February 2021, during his first visit to Poland, Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis met with the Marshal of the Polish Sejm, Elżbieta Witek, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zbigniew Rau. One of the most important highlights of this meeting was the agreement to activate cooperation on the issue of the Astravos nuclear power plant, preventing energy produced in unsafe power plants from entering the EU market using the format of the 3SI.

Speaking about the effects and consequences of COVID-19, the Minister of Foreign Affairs highlighted that the 3SI can help deal with these problems. *“The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have highlighted the greater importance of regional cooperation and well-developed infrastructure and its connections. Therefore, it is very important to deepen the political and economic cooperation of the 3SI countries, with the aim that the 3SI format can help promote the economic recovery of the 3SI region and the EU after the outbreak of COVID-19”* – said the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabrielius Landsbergis<sup>7</sup>.

On 20-21 June 2022, the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) Business Forum was held in Riga, Latvia, in which Gediminas Varvuolis, Ambassador of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Three Seas Initiative and the Community, took

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *Lithuania joined the Three Seas Initiative investment fund*, Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis, 2022, <https://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/lietuva-prisijunge-prie-triju-juru-iniciatyvos-investicinio-fondo> [30.07.2023].

part together with a delegation of Lithuanian business representatives and representatives of other institutions. Ambassador G. Varvuolis, speaking at the discussion on strengthening energy security, decarbonization, and resilience in the Three Seas region after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, organized by the Atlantic Council Association of the United States of America, shared Lithuania's contribution and leadership in strengthening the energy independence of the region. At the suggestion of Poland and Lithuania, a round table discussion, "Digital pillar of the Three Seas: regional cyber security and connectivity", was also held during the event, in which InfoBalt's European Union and International Relations Manager, Virgilijus Dirma, and Regional Cyber Defence Centre manager, Romualdas Petkevičius, participated. The panellists discussed ideas for the creation of a cyber platform for the Three Seas region.

Minister of Transport, Marius Skuodis, who met remotely with Czech Minister of Transport, Karel Havlíček, in 2021, discussed the free transportation of goods along green transport corridors in Europe. During the conversation, attention was drawn to the difficult situation at the borders of Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic, where, in order to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus and its mutations, additional security measures have been introduced in recent days and traffic jams are forming. *"The current situation is another, unfortunately, recurring challenge for all EU countries in how to ensure compliance with the fundamental principles and values of the Community in the context of a complex epidemiological situation. It is clear that an urgent, coordinated response is needed at both the EU and regional levels. It is necessary to coordinate the movement of people and goods across the borders more actively*

*because emerging traffic jams only create more problems*", said Minister of Communications, M. Skuodis<sup>8</sup>.

The ministers also discussed cooperation in the field of rail transport. Lithuanian Railways has been using electric trains manufactured by "Škoda Vagonka" for more than 10 years, which run on the electrified sections Vilnius-Kaunas, Vilnius-Trakai and Vilnius-Minsk. The economic cooperation of the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic regions should be accelerated by the development of high-speed rail lines connecting Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. The start of this project is scheduled for 2025. According to Mr Skuodis, the "Rail Baltica" project, which is planned to be completed by 2026, will ensure even better communication between the Baltic and Central European countries, as well as the opportunity to travel and transport goods comfortably, so the work must not be delayed. It is expected that the agreement reached last year in the Council of European Leaders regarding the financing of the "Rail Baltica" project will be maintained and it will be possible to continue the *"ambitious agenda"*. The ministers expressed hope that the railway transport sectors of both countries will find opportunities for cooperation in the future as well. M. Skuodis noted that Lithuania intends to actively participate in the energy, transport infrastructure, and digitization development projects implemented by the Three Seas Initiative.

<sup>8</sup> *The issues of free movement of goods across borders, cooperation in the fields of logistics and freight transportation by rail were discussed with the Czech Minister of Transport, Minister of Communications M. Skuodis, 2021, <https://sumin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/su-ce-kijos-transporto-ministru-aptarti-laisvo-prekiu-judejimo-tarp-sienu-klausimai-bendradarbiavimas-logistikos-ir-kroviniu-gabenimo-gelezinkeliais-srityse> [30.07.2023].*

The development of the Baltic-Black and Aegean Sea transport corridor in a new geopolitical context was discussed at the 3SI Congress and Economic Forum in Lublin (Poland), held on 6-7 June 2022. The development of this corridor into the territory of Lithuania and the cooperation of the countries in transporting Ukrainian products through Poland to the seaports of the Baltic countries were discussed in a bilateral meeting by the Deputy Minister of Transport of Lithuania, Julius Skačkauskas, and the Minister of Infrastructure of Poland, Andrzej Adamczyk. *“The North-South transport corridor connecting the three seas – the Baltic, the Black, and the Aegean – is more important than ever and must be multimodal, connecting both roads and a European standard railway. We support Poland’s proposal to expand this transport corridor to Lithuania. The current geopolitical situation dictates the need to foresee new, additional transport corridors and infrastructure connections between Lithuania and Poland, ensuring alternatives to the priority projects of “Rail Baltica” and “Via Baltica”. One such possibility is the development of the road through Lazdijai, which would allow the creation of two strategic connections across the border between Lithuania and Poland, strengthening logistics chains and military mobility”*, said Deputy Minister of Communications J. Skačkauskas<sup>9</sup>.

According to the vice-minister, an alternative road transport link could go from Białystok through Augustów and Lazdijai, then connect with the branch of the North-Baltic

<sup>9</sup> *Lithuania and Poland are discussing additional transport connections and a corridor for transporting Ukrainian cargo to the ports of the Baltic countries*, Deputy Minister of Communications J. Skačkauskas, 2022, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/eismas/7/1714438/lietuva-ir-lenkija-tariasi-del-papildomu-transporto-jungciu-ir-koridoriaus-ukrainos-kroviniams-vezti-i-baltijos-saliu-uostus> [30.07.2023].

Sea Corridor connecting Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda, and further to the North – Latvia and Estonia. In their pursuit of this road, Lithuania and Poland plan to include it in the trans-European transport network, TEN-T, and adapt it for military mobility.

### **3. Conclusions and prospects**

The main Lithuanian priorities in the 3SI are concentrated on energy and the development of transport, especially on creating new networks of railways and highways.

There is consensus among political institutions that the 3SI is of great importance for the state. Seimas created the Intermarium Parliamentarian Group and elected Laurynas Kasčiūnas as its chief (he is also the chief of the Committee of National Security). Earlier, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a special post of Ambassador for the Three Seas Initiative and nominated Gediminas Varvuolis, a well-known diplomat, to this position.

It is important to add that the Republic of Lithuania has been an active supporter of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine since 2014. Pro-Ukrainian Lithuanian activities grew after Russian aggression in Ukraine in February of 2022. Vilnius became the centre of international diplomatic efforts to suspend the aggression of Russia. The NATO Summit in Vilnius emphasized Lithuania's role very effectively. While at the same time, Lithuania cut economic relations with Belarus, and the Minsk-Vilnius-Klaipėda railway corridor lost its significant role that existed before the conflict. So, Lithuania has to create new possibilities for collaboration with Ukraine outside Belarus and Russia. There are real challenges regarding how to connect the Black and Baltic



Seas regions, however, Lithuania would like to use the opportunity and find new possibilities for Lithuanian Railways and seaports in Klaipėda.

The Republic of Lithuania will take over coordination of the 3SI in 2024 and will organize the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit in Vilnius. This information will be announced at the Bucharest Summit in September of 2023. So, Lithuania can be presented as a good example of the transformation and activities of a small state, which has moved from a Post-soviet republic to an active political actor in the regions of East Central and North Europe.



Piotr Wójcik

## **Western Balkans – An area adjacent to the Three Seas Initiative**

### **Summary:**

- The Western Balkans is one of the neighbouring areas of the 3SI. The potential cooperation is realized by common infrastructure projects in transport, energy, and digitalization.
- Every West-Balkan state has different priorities for developing the national infrastructure and linking it with the adjoining countries, not only from the region but also within the Three Seas area.
- There are both minor and major convergences and inconveniences in the prioritization of boosting cooperation with the Three Seas region in the Western Balkan countries, in various dimensions; economic, political, and geopolitical.

## 1. Conditions of regional cooperation

After 1989, the annual existing Three Seas states supported enhanced cooperation with the Western Balkans. The main aim of boosting the regional partnership was integration with the European Union (EU). The first and largest form of cooperation between countries in widely interpreted Central Europe was the Central European Initiative (CEI), created in 1989 by Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. Since 1990, other states from the region joined the CEI, and the number of member countries was 17 in 2018. Apart from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria (to 2018), and Italy, it gathers five Western Balkan states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. This format is a platform devoted to dialogue on a political level between member countries and strengthening their cooperation within particular pillars (government, parliament, economic, and local dimensions)<sup>1</sup>. During the conference in Visegrad in northern Hungary on 15 February 1991, a new regional format was set in Central Europe – the Visegrad Group (V4), gathered the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland after the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. The main objective of creating this form of partnership was to increase cooperation between member countries to achieve the fundamental aim of accessing the European Union, which was reached in 2004. Even though they entered the EU, the cooperation within this format has continued, the most important areas of which were focused on discussing issues related to the EU (among others, institutional and

---

<sup>1</sup> *About us, CEI*, <https://www.cei.int/about-us> [27.06.2023].

internal reforms, obtaining European funds, and migration policy) and coordinating the cooperation regarding them<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, the actions were implemented in neighbouring states as well as the Western Balkans. The willingness of the involvement of the Visegrad Group in the Western Balkan region was confirmed in the declaration of the V4 foreign ministers in Budapest in 2009, and the further statements of this format in the following years. In this document, there was expressed the importance of supporting the Euro-Atlantic integration of Central Europe extending to the Western Balkans. The parties to the declaration agreed to give assistance directed at the Western Balkan states in various aspects – local, regional, bilateral, and governmental – and through different tools – particularly EU funds, and instruments, among others Twinning, the Berlin Process, Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). They also agreed to enhance the partnership between V4 and Western Balkan countries through the International Visegrad Fund (IVF)<sup>3</sup>.

A dedicated grant program was developed from this financial resource that concentrates on the cooperation between civil societies and non-governmental organizations from these two mentioned regions (treated as the V4+ projects). Their implementation is based on supporting democracy, good governance, transformation, reconciliation, and

<sup>2</sup> Ł. Ambroziak et al., *The Visegrad Group – 30 Years of Transformation, Integration, and Development*, Polish Economic Institute, Warsaw, February 2021, <https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Wyszechrad-ENG.pdf>, p. 42 [30.06.2023].

<sup>3</sup> *Calendar of selected events*, Visegrad Group, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/calendar-of-selected-180823> [15.07.2023].

regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. The actions within these pillars are realized by transferring the positive experience from Visegrad countries to the Western Balkans. Moreover, there was further established the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) which refers to the IVF model, with support from the IVF experts contributing to developing regional investments and strengthening relations within civil society in the Western Balkans<sup>4</sup>.

In addition to the examples of increased integration between the CEI and V4, there were also some exclusions. The problems with the cooperation within these formats were mainly related to the different attitudes toward creating foreign policy and also realizing the main aim, which was joining the EU. Especially due to this, there was a lack of common interest which could contribute to further regional integration. On the other hand, the 3SI established in recent years could be the stimulus for the development of cooperation in Central Europe. It may enable the countries in the region to reduce the economic differences between them and the Western-European states and allow them – in the perspective of decades, to increase their economic position in Europe and be more competitive in this dimension<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> *V4 countries in the process of EU integration of the WB6 and implementation of the Berlin Process, Visegrad Fund, 2020, <https://warsawinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/V4-countries-in-the-process-of-EU-integration-of-the-WB6.pdf>, p. 9 [30.06.2023].*

<sup>5</sup> *Massive gap in infrastructure investments in Central and Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe, Three Seas, <https://3seas.eu/media/news/imf-study-reveals-1-15-trillion-euro-gap-in-infrastructure-investments-in-central-and-eastern-europe-compared-to-western-europe> [15.07.2023].*

## 2. The Western Balkans approach and expectations

### 2.1. Albania

Geographically connecting the Western countries of the Mediterranean Sea with those of the Balkans, Albania intends mainly to build routes among the neighbouring states, particularly North Macedonia and Kosovo. Even though the Durrës-Kukës-Morinë highway was completed between Albania and Kosovo, which was treated as one of the priority infrastructure investments, the Albanian side contemplates the realization of other projects. The priorities of Albania in the construction of new communication routes are included in the Government Program 2021-2025, whose implementation aims among other things to enable the modernization of the Albanian economy (also in the infrastructural dimension) and make it more resilient to the various challenges<sup>6</sup>. In this document, the necessity to construct the Arbi route linking Tirana with Peshkopia in the eastern part of the country is initially mentioned, then running further to the Albanian-Macedonian border in Dibër County. It is also expected to build the Kardhig-Delvinë road (in Southern Albania and close to the Adriatic coast), Tirana Ring, and the Llogara Tunnel which will shorten the way from Vlora to Saranda, both located on the Albanian Sea coast<sup>7</sup>.

It is also worth noting that, apart from the above-mentioned investments, other flagship projects include the construction of the Tirana-Rinas-Durres railway line (ensuring

<sup>6</sup> *Government Program 2021-2025*, Albanian Government Council of Ministers, <https://kryeministria.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Government-Program-2021-2025.pdf>, p. 3 [09.07.2023].

<sup>7</sup> *New Albanian road tunnel project*, World Highways, <https://www.worldhighways.com/wh10/news/new-albanian-road-tunnel-project> [09.07.2023].

a rail connection from the capital of Albania to the Albanian coast on the Adriatic Sea), building airports in Vlore and Saranda, and the restoration of Durres to increase its touristic potential<sup>8</sup>. Referring to the previously quoted program of the Albanian government, it has also set up – in the context of the extension of the gas infrastructure – the beginning of works related to the conversion of the Vlora CHP plant into an LNG terminal and further gas distribution<sup>9</sup>. The transport of this raw material from the modified power plant is to be carried out mainly in the east and north-east direction, to other Western Balkan countries (North Macedonia<sup>10</sup>, Kosovo<sup>11</sup>, Serbia<sup>12</sup>) and Bulgaria. Concerning the latter country, the supplies of blue fuel would be carried out as part of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC)<sup>13</sup>, leading from gas fields located in eastern Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea to the eastern coast of Italy on the Adriatic Sea. In turn, the transmission of blue fuel from Albania to Bulgaria would run through the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which is part of the SGC. Although the priority for the Albanian side is the development

<sup>8</sup> *Government Program 2021-2025*, Albanian Government Council of Ministers, <https://kryeministria.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Government-Program-2021-2025.pdf>, p. 3 [09.07.2023].

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> I. Todorović, *North Macedonia, Albania sign agreement on joint projects for gas, LNG, renewables*, Balkan Green Energy News, <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/north-macedonia-albania-sign-agreement-on-joint-projects-for-gas-lng-renewables/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>11</sup> I. Todorović, *Kosovo may buy stake in gas-fired power plant project in Albania*, Balkan Green Energy News, <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/kosovo-may-buy-stake-in-gas-fired-power-plant-project-in-albania/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>12</sup> *Albania, Serbia sign memorandum to cooperate in energy, mining sectors*, Balkan Green Energy News, <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/albania-serbia-sign-memorandum-to-cooperate-in-energy-mining-sectors/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>13</sup> *Bulgaria's Overgas to buy regasified LNG from ExceleRate's Vlora terminal in Albania*, LNG Prime, <https://lngprime.com/contracts-and-tenders/bulgarias-overgas-to-buy-regasified-lng-from-excelebrates-vlora-terminal-in-albania/57382/> [09.07.2023].

of gas infrastructure within the SGC, also in this aspect, the construction of the Ionian-Adriatic Gas Pipeline is being considered, which connects to the Southern Gas Corridor<sup>14</sup> in the city of Fieri.

The participation of Albania in the 3SI has not been directly underlined by the government so far but only by Fatmir Mediu, the chairman of the opposition Republican Party of Albania, at the National Conservatism Brussels Conference on 23-24 March 2022. He emphasized that the 3SI format enables the Central and Eastern European states to build stronger economies and create business opportunities there, due to the construction of the North-South axis connections. Moreover, he added that the cooperation within this format allows for a decrease in economic dependency on Russia and China. He also addressed that the 3SI is adjacent to the Balkan region, therefore, other countries in this area should find a way of taking part in this regional form of partnership, as have Slovenia, Croatia, and Bulgaria<sup>15</sup>.

## 2.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

With reference to Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are underlined in the governmental sites promoting countries in which to invest<sup>16</sup>. Despite the existing Bosnian section of

<sup>14</sup> *Interconnecting & regional integration in Southern Balkans. The prospects of gas interconnection pipelines*, Albgaz, [https://www.energycharter.org/fileadmin/DocumentsMedia/Forums/Tirana\\_2019\\_-\\_Arber\\_Avrami\\_\\_Albgaz\\_S.A.pdf](https://www.energycharter.org/fileadmin/DocumentsMedia/Forums/Tirana_2019_-_Arber_Avrami__Albgaz_S.A.pdf), p. 4 [09.07.2023].

<sup>15</sup> *Fatmir Mediu – National Conservatism Conference*, National Conservatism Brussels Conference, <https://nationalconservatism.org/natcon-brussels-2022/presenters/fatmir-mediui/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>16</sup> *Why invest in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Restart, <https://restart.ba/why-invest-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/> [09.07.2023].



the E65 (E66) North-South route (running through Neum<sup>17</sup>) included in the 3SI format, Bosnia and Herzegovina is interested in developing roads crossing the aforementioned corridor and at the same time connecting the country with others in the West-Balkan region. In this respect, the priority transport route to be implemented is Corridor Vc, stretching from Croatian Ploč, further through Sarajevo, Osijek in eastern Croatia, and ending in Budapest in Hungary<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, Bosnia plans to construct the Sarajevo-Belgrade Highway<sup>19</sup>. Other flagship transport investments include the freeways between some cities in the middle of the state on the East-West axis, restorations of national airports, and regional projects to reconstruct railway routes<sup>20</sup>.

Regarding the priority energy investments to be realized in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these are primarily new coal and hydropower plants, which are the dominant sources of the country's energy mix<sup>21</sup>. In turn, the most significant gas project to be implemented on the Bosnian side concerns the Southern Interconnection between Bosnia and Croatia which has to link with the Croatian gas network to diversify

<sup>17</sup> *What Consequences will the Peljesac Bridge have on Neum?*, Sarajevo Times, <https://sarajevotimes.com/what-consequences-will-the-peljesac-bridge-have-on-neum/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>18</sup> *Transport infrastructure, preparation and implementation of projects*, Ministry of Communications and Transport of Bosnia and Herzegovina, <http://www.mkt.gov.ba/Content/Read/transport-infrastruktura-priprema-projekti> [09.07.2023].

<sup>19</sup> *Bosnia and Herzegovina – Ground Transportation*, International Trade Administration, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/bosnia-and-herzegovina-ground-transportation> [09.07.2023].

<sup>20</sup> *List of the priority projects*, Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Government, [http://www.fipa.gov.ba/investinbih/index\\_htm\\_files/Priority%20projects,%20Government%20of%20Federation%20of%20BiH.pdf](http://www.fipa.gov.ba/investinbih/index_htm_files/Priority%20projects,%20Government%20of%20Federation%20of%20BiH.pdf), p. 58 [09.07.2023].

<sup>21</sup> *The energy sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, CEE Bankwatch Network, <https://bankwatch.org/beyond-fossil-fuels/the-energy-sector-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina> [09.07.2023].

and increase the supply of blue fuel<sup>22</sup>. So far, Bosnia and Herzegovina have emphasized their interest in involvement in the Three Seas format only once, during the Poland-Western Balkans Business Meeting (gathering the representatives from Poland and the West-Balkan states) on 26 July 2023 in Cracow. Then, the ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Koviljka Spirić, praised the 3SI when she was talking about the development of her country, the economic dependencies in the Western Balkans, and the importance of building international partnerships to tackle current challenges<sup>23</sup>.

### 2.3. Montenegro

Being situated by the Adriatic Sea, and close to the European Union countries, Montenegro is considered a logistics base between the EU, Southeastern Europe, and the Middle East<sup>24</sup>. In the transportation dimension, one of the most significant projects is the Bar-Boljare highway (which has to connect the port in Bar with the Montenegrin-Serbian border in Boljare and run further, to Belgrade). Montenegro also prioritizes finishing the building of the Adriatic Ionian highway going close to the Montenegrin coast of the Adriatic as well as various railways such as the Nikšić-Podgorica section towards Bileća (in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the Pljevlja-Bijelo Polje section running further, to Berane

<sup>22</sup> *Bosnia and Herzegovina – Energy*, International Trade Administration, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/bosnia-and-herzegovina-energy> [09.07.2023].

<sup>23</sup> *The Poland-Western Balkans Business Meeting*, Polish Investment and Trade Agency, [https://www.paih.gov.pl/20230626/poland\\_western\\_balkans\\_business\\_meeting#](https://www.paih.gov.pl/20230626/poland_western_balkans_business_meeting#) [09.07.2023].

<sup>24</sup> *Montenegrin Investments Agency: MIA*, Montenegrin Investment Agency, <https://mia.gov.me/> [09.07.2023].

(in the north-western part of the country) and the border with Kosovo<sup>25</sup>.

Montenegro is also concerned with developing energy investments. Besides the planned projects in wind, solar, and water plants (and the infrastructure to supply electricity across the entire country), the Montenegrin state intends to implement the national section of the Ionian-Adriatic pipeline<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, Montenegro contemplates beginning the import of liquified natural gas (LNG) from the United States through the port in Bar<sup>27</sup>. In the case of the potential participation of Montenegro in the 3SI, there have been several meetings where this topic was mentioned. The first time it was observed was during the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs, on 1 February 2022 in Podgorica, and his meeting with senior officials of Montenegro. Apart from discussing issues like the support of Latvia for the enlargement policy of the Western Balkan states, or the EU and Latvian-Montenegrin relations, the Latvian minister thanked Montenegro for its interest in participating in the 3SI Summit which was organized in Riga that year<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> *Montenegro, Investments in the field of transport that left a mark in 2022*, Montenegro Business, <https://montenegrobusiness.eu/montenegro-investments-in-the-field-of-transport-that-left-a-mark-in-2022/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>26</sup> V. Spasić, *Montenegro declares 13 energy projects as infrastructure priorities*, Balkan Green Energy news, <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/montenegro-declares-13-energy-projects-as-infrastructure-priorities/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>27</sup> *Montenegro – Country Commercial Guide*, International Trade Administration, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/montenegro-energy-o> [09.07.2023].

<sup>28</sup> *Edgars Rinkēvičs: Latvia welcomes Montenegro's participation in the NATO enhanced Forward Presence battle group in Latvia*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/edgars-rinkevics-latvia-welcomes-montenegros-participation-nato-enhanced-forward-presence-battle-group-latvia> [09.07.2023].

## 2.4. North Macedonia

Because of the latitudinal location (at the crossroads of the routes in Southern and Eastern Europe), North Macedonia endeavours to construct roads and railways through the Pan-European Corridors VIII (connecting Durres, Skopje, Sofia, and Warna) and X (linking Budapest, Belgrade, and Thessaloniki throughout Skopje)<sup>29</sup>. In terms of energy, the Macedonian state intends to build gas connections with Greece and Bulgaria, arising from the need to diversify the current sources of natural gas which come from Russia – in the territory of North Macedonia – from the Bulgarian-Macedonian border to Skopje (Gazprom ensures 100% of the capacity of this pipeline)<sup>30</sup>. Constructing the cross-border gas connections will also enable the development of other energy-efficient projects along the gas network such as gas turbines, cogeneration turbines that generate heating and electrical energy, and other power plants<sup>31</sup>.

Having looked at the previous actions related to developing the relations between the Western Balkans and the 3SI, it can be seen, in this context, that the biggest direct and indirect interest is from North Macedonia (from the West-Balkan area) in developing these ties. The willingness of this country to engage in the 3SI was clearly visible in official meetings and declarations from the Macedonian side. Firstly, regarding the potential involvement of North Macedonia in the

<sup>29</sup> *Infrastructure*, Invest North Macedonia, <https://investnorthmacedonia.gov.mk/infrastructure/> [09.07.2023].

<sup>30</sup> *North Macedonia – Country Commercial Guide*, International Trade Administration, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/north-macedonia-energy> [09.07.2023].

<sup>31</sup> S. Adrianov, J. Nikodinovska, *North Macedonia: Transport and Infrastructure – Sector of Expansion*, CEE Legal Matters, <https://ceelegalmatters.com/macedonia/17018-north-macedonia-transport-and-infrastructure-sector-of-expansion> [09.07.2023].

3SI format, attention should be given to the video meeting between Bujar Osmani and Edgars Rinkēvičs (members of the respective governments, responsible for international relations between North Macedonia and Latvia) which took place on 15 October 2020. During this meeting, both Ministers underlined the strong bilateral cooperation between their states. Referring to the speeches of these politicians, they are mainly focused on Latvian support for the EU enlargement policy, including the future membership of North Macedonia in the European Union. Regarding enlargement, they discussed issues connected with the 2020 Communication from the European Commission on EU enlargement policy, which contained an assessment of the conducted reforms in the Western Balkan states and the Economic and Investment Plan for the West-Balkan region, together with preparing negotiation frameworks for the accession to the European Union of North Macedonia and Albania<sup>32</sup>. Osmani mentioned, among other things, that finishing the integration of his country with the EU will be globally beneficial for peace, security, and prosperity in Europe<sup>33</sup>.

Apart from the enlargement policy, there were also consultations regarding Latvian-North Macedonian economic

<sup>32</sup> *The Foreign Ministers of Latvia and North Macedonia discuss bilateral relations and North Macedonia's integration with the EU*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Latvia, [https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-ministers-latvia-and-north-macedonia-discuss-bilateral-relations-and-north-macedonias-integration-eu?utm\\_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.pl%2F](https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-ministers-latvia-and-north-macedonia-discuss-bilateral-relations-and-north-macedonias-integration-eu?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.pl%2F) [02.07.2023].

<sup>33</sup> *Video meeting of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia Bujar Osmani with the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs*, Republic of Macedonia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://mfa.gov.mk/en/page/8/post/2376/video-sredba-na-ministerot-za-nadvoreshni-raboti-na-republika-severna-makedonija-bujar-osmani-so-ministerot-za-nadvoreshni-raboti-na-republika-latvija-edgars-rinkevichs> [02.07.2023].

relations. Rinkēvičs ensured that these ties will be continued in both trade and energy and also in the project and business cooperation within the 3SI<sup>34</sup>. The potential engagement of the Macedonian state in the 3SI partnership was discussed in the bilateral meetings between Polish and Macedonian representatives. During these discussions, politicians from both sides talked about the potential 3SI enlargement, once on the parliamentary level (at the end of June 2023<sup>35</sup>) and twice at the presidential level (at the beginning of February 2020<sup>36</sup>, and the end of October 2022<sup>37</sup>). The forward momentum of the Macedonian side in participating in the 3SI was also emphasized during the Strategic Dialogue about strengthening the bilateral partnership between North Macedonia and the United States, which was held on 2 June 2022 and conducted between Bujar Osmani and Dr Karen Donfried. Concentrating on regional initiatives, both sides confirmed their engagement in the integration of the Western Balkans through political, security, and economic measures. Besides supporting the accession to the EU of Albania and North Macedonia, the United States also stood for the constructive involvement of the Macedonian state in regional stability and security formats such as the VIII and B9 Initiatives

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *Polish support for a quicker EU accession of North Macedonia*, Mia News and Magazine, <https://mia.mk/en/story/polish-support-for-a-quicker-eu-accession-of-north-macedonia> [09.07.2023].

<sup>36</sup> *President: Poland backs NATO and EU aspirations of North Macedonia*, President.pl, <https://www.president.pl/news/president-poland-backs-nato-and-eu-aspirations-of-north-macedonia,37111> [09.07.2023].

<sup>37</sup> *A meeting of the Presidents of Poland and North Macedonia with PAIH and the business community*, Polish Investment and Trade Agency, [https://www.paih.gov.pl/20221025/meeting\\_of\\_the\\_presidents\\_of\\_poland\\_and\\_north\\_macedonia\\_with\\_paih\\_and\\_the\\_business\\_community](https://www.paih.gov.pl/20221025/meeting_of_the_presidents_of_poland_and_north_macedonia_with_paih_and_the_business_community) [09.07.2023].

and the efforts of North Macedonia in the 3SI partnership. These speeches were also accompanied by US declarations of tightening the two-sided relations in transitional and renewable energy, lowering barriers in trade and investments, and boosting the business climate reforms<sup>38</sup>.

During the Bulgarian presidency within this format (up to the Sofia Summit in 2021), Bulgaria tried to spread the importance of cooperation with some non-3SI states. Especially, the Bulgarian side promoted the construction of new investments in the North-South Corridor which will link the ports of the Aegean Sea with other infrastructure on this route. The emphasized vision of Bulgaria toward the Three Seas format was also the creation of a strategic link between the North-South Corridor and Corridor VIII going throughout, among others, North Macedonia<sup>39</sup>.

## 2.5. Serbia

Taking into consideration the location of three pan-European transport corridors in Serbia: VII (the Danube River), and X (connecting in one of the routes Budapest, Belgrade, Niš, and with branches to Igoumenitsa and Thessaloniki in Greece, and also to Sofia), this country is situated in the heart of Southeast Europe. It also potentially ensures great connections with Western Europe and the Middle East<sup>40</sup>. By the end of 2019, the president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić,

<sup>38</sup> *Joint Statement on the North Macedonia – U.S. Strategic Dialogue*, Republic of Macedonia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://mfa.gov.mk/en/page/523/post/2994/joint-statement-on-the-north-macedonia-us-strategic-dialogue> [02.07.2023].

<sup>39</sup> *Bulgaria's Vision, Three Seas*, <https://3seas.eu/about/bulgaria-s-vision> [02.07.2023].

<sup>40</sup> *Serbia – Country Commercial Guide*, International Trade Administration, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/serbia-infrastructure> [09.07.2023].

and the Serbian prime minister, Ana Brnabić, introduced the National Investment Plan “Serbia 2025”, which assumes, among other things, the development of new highways and railroads, with the announcement by Vučić to spend more than five billion euros on road infrastructure and 3 billion and 33 million on railway one, within the Plan. The highest priority road and rail connections to construct are along Pan-European Corridor X and on the route from Bar (the Montenegrin port on the coast of the Adriatic) through Serbia to Timisoara in Romania, the Sumadija Corridor (between Lazarevac and Bor), the railway modernization between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, reconstruction of tunnels and bridges, and the restoration of the port in Smederevo<sup>41</sup>.

Within the Plan, there are mainly concrete proposals for railway projects, without roads. But other sources point out that among the possible new roads, there is a planned build, within the Pan-European Corridor X, of the Fruskogorski Corridor (Novi Sad-Ruma section) in northern Serbia, and along the route from Bar to Timisoara (crossing through Belgrade), the Pozarevac-Veliko Grdiste-Donji Milanovac highway in the eastern part of the country<sup>42</sup>. Turning to the railways, one of the most important of them is the new Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway. Within this route, it is planned to modernize and increase two-track traffic via the Novi Sad-Subotica-Kelebia line, which crosses through the northern part of the country. There is also envisaged the

<sup>41</sup> *Presentation of the programme Serbia 2025*, The President of the Republic of Serbia, <https://www.predsednik.rs/en/press-center/news/presentation-of-the-programme-serbia-2025> [05.07.2023].

<sup>42</sup> *Serbia – Country Commercial Guide*, International Trade Administration, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/serbia-infrastructure> [09.07.2023].



restoration of the railway junctions in Novi Sad, Subotica, and Vrbas as well as the construction of a viaduct of over 1.5 km in the aforementioned city. The modernization of Belgrad-Niš, including the branches from the latter city to Prešev and Dimitrovgrad (located in the south and south-east of Serbia, respectively) is also planned. A crucial project in the implementation of the railway dimension of the new infrastructure program is also the restoration of the Belgrade-Bar line linking the capital of Serbia with the main port of Montenegro (located on the Adriatic Sea), and as part of this, also the renewal of the Valjevo-Vrbnica section<sup>43</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions and prospects

In conclusion, there is a lack of an elaborated framework of cooperation between the 3SI and the Western Balkan countries. There are observed only the seeds of these relations, especially regarding the inclusion of the Western Balkan states in some 3SI projects (in various configurations), and in meetings between Western Balkan and 3SI politicians. It also emphasizes mainly the future deepening of the Three Seas-Western Balkan cooperation by politicians from the 3SI states (mainly Poland, also Latvia). According to some meetings (and also their quantity) and declarations covering the infrastructural priorities of the Western Balkan countries with the 3SI format, there is noticeably more interest from North Macedonia in potential cooperation with the 3SI, while further concerns are observed in Montenegro and

<sup>43</sup> M. van Leijen, *Serbia invests billions in railway lines to rest of Europe*, RailFreight, <https://www.railfreight.com/railfreight/2020/01/28/serbia-invests-billions-in-railway-lines-to-rest-of-europe/?gdpr=accept> [05.07.2023].

Albania, and the least willingness to boost this partnership is seen in Serbia, which prefers to develop infrastructural cooperation with China. In the next few years, the most probable extension of the 3SI partnership and enhancement of cooperation with it will most likely be taken by North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania. This scenario is the most certain not only because of the political meetings, declarations, and actions but also the willingness to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic structures where these three countries are most advanced in the region. Additionally, because of the lack of integrity in other states in the region (especially Bosnia and Herzegovina), and proportionally less orientation toward authoritarian countries like China and Russia, the three abovementioned states have a greater chance to cooperate with, and even join, the 3SI. In particular, with Russia, they maintain a more negative stance towards its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

However, there should also be the perception that some Three Seas projects (and proposals to realize further) overlap with the infrastructural priorities to be implemented by the Western Balkan countries, like the Amber Rail Freight Corridor situated on the Pan-European Route X, and the routes within the Trans-European Route VIII. The mentioned increased infrastructure partnership is in the interest of not only the 3SI states but also the Western Balkans. Most of the flagship investments realized in the Western Balkans could be synchronized with the Three Seas projects such as, among others, the Black Sea Highway in Bulgaria with the national sections of roads in North Macedonia and Albania (which are also part of the Pan-European Corridor VIII), and also the Ionian Adriatic Pipeline with the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, and

some interconnectors crossing these gas mains (a priority for the Western Balkan states). The Three Seas-Western Balkans connectivity partnership should be developed by the more effective usage of the EU instruments and funds directed to the transregional infrastructure; among others TEN-T, ENI, and the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. Including some of the flagship investments for the Western Balkan states into the 3SI priority projects (having the cross-border and over-regional aspect, linking the Three Seas area with the West-Balkan region) may help in boosting the analysed relations likewise. In implementing these investments, the possible involvement of the 3SI Fund which supports the regional and transregional (referring to the Three Seas) capital expenditures should also be considered.

Representing attitudes and common discussions on further 3SI-Western Balkan cooperation would be facilitated if the Western Balkan representatives could participate in the annual Three Seas Business Forum, which enables prospects for boosting this partnership to be worked out. It will also be crucial to set some platforms for multilateral dialogue, and strengthen existing ones, to realize common interests in the considered aspects. Regarding the approaching Three Seas Summit in Bucharest, and the potential willingness of enhancing the cooperation with the 3SI, the Western Balkan countries should emphasize their interests in the partnership with this format. Especially, they ought to underline the synergy of their flagship investments with the Three Seas and propose new potential joint projects for realization which could make their cooperation with the 3SI format more effective, increasing the significance of its transregional dimension.



## About the Authors

**Robertas Eismontas**, an Alumnus of the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and a graduate of the MA program Contemporary European Politics. His research interests are related to Central and Eastern European politics, energy security, and Lithuanian foreign policy.

**Łukasz Lewkowicz**, Doctor of Political Science. Senior analyst in the Visegrad Department at the Institute of Central Europe in Lublin and Assistant Professor at the Institute of Political Science and Administration at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. His research interests mainly concern Polish-Slovak relations, Slovakia's internal and foreign policy, the functioning of the Visegrad Group and the Three Seas Initiative, and cross-border cooperation in Central Europe. He was an intern at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Bratislava. He completed numerous scientific internships in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania. Several times, he has received the award of the Rector of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University for outstanding organizational and scientific activity.

**Dénes András Nagy**, Bachelor of Arts in History, Politics, and Economics from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) at University College London (UCL). He is currently in the process of finishing his MA in History: Politics, Culture, National Identities, 1789 to the Present programme studies at Leiden University. He currently serves as an International Analyst focusing on the Three Seas Initiative region at the International Directorate of the Centre for Fundamental Rights (Alapjogokért Központ), a Budapest-based think tank. Additionally, he serves as the Programme Coordinator of the College of Visegrád+ at the Institute for Strategic Studies of the National University of Public Service – Ludovika in Hungary. His research interests include the geopolitics of the Visegrád Group, the Three Seas Initiative and the Central European Initiative region, in addition to the future of the European Union.

**Andrzej Pukszto**, PhD, has worked at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas since 2005 as an Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Political Science (2008-2020). His research and lectures relate to areas of East and Central European politics, politics of the European Union, and relations between the EU and Russia. He is also editor-in-chief of the “Baltic Journal of Law and Politics”. He has taught as a visiting lecturer in various universities – Reichman University in Herzliya, Catholic University of Vandee, University of the Basque Country in Bilbao, University of Sarajevo, and Georgia Gwinnett College in Atlanta.

**Piotr Wójcik**, Master’s Degree in International Relations from the University of Warsaw. He is a diplomatic trainee. He has been cooperating with several think tanks by creating analyses and articles. He also has experience supporting the scientific project The

Three Seas Initiative Research Centre of the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Science. His research interests are focused mainly on the various aspects of the Three Seas Initiative. He is also keen on the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, particularly the economic dimension of cooperation and the involvement of third entities in these regions.





IEŚ

9/2023

POLICY  
PAPERS

IEŚ  
POLICY  
PAPERS

The main purpose of this publication is to analyse the functioning of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) from the perspective of selected participating countries, the relationship between the 3SI and the Western Balkan countries is also examined. The chronological scope of the research covered the years 2016–2022. The initial turning point was marked by the establishment of the 3SI at the Dubrovnik summit, while the final turning point was the last Initiative summit in Riga in June 2022. The text also presents the perspectives of the Three Seas cooperation in the context of the upcoming second 3SI summit in Bucharest. The publication includes two analyses by foreign experts – from Hungary and Lithuania – presenting the approaches of both countries to the 3SI. The third analysis prepared by an analyst from Poland presents the approach of the Western Balkan countries to the 3SI. The three texts present the conditions of regional policy, an overview of events, and the most important projects related to the 3SI as well as the prospects for Three Seas cooperation in the context of the upcoming summit in Bucharest.

ISBN 978-83-67678-15-5



www.ies.lublin.pl