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The Three Seas Initiative after the Vilnius Summit: security first

On 11 April 2024, the 9th summit of The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) occurred in Vilnius. The 3SI is a regional cooperation format initiated in 2016 and developed by the heads of Central European countries. A key objective of the initiative is to stimulate the development of energy, transport, and digital infrastructure. There are currently 13 EU Member States participating in 3SI, represented at the summit by the host President of Lithuania – Gitanas Nausėda, and the Presidents of Bulgaria – Rumen Radev, the Czech Republic – Petr Pavel, Estonia – Alar Karis, Latvia – Edgars Rinkēvičs, Poland – Andrzej Duda, Romania – Klaus Iohannis, Hungary – Tamás Sulyok, as well as the Prime Minister of Greece – Kiriakos Mitsotakis, and representatives of the Austrian, Croatian, Slovakian and Slovenian authorities. The summit was also attended by representatives of the 3SI associated countries: the President of Ukraine – Volodymyr Zelenski ([“IEŚ Commentaries”, no. 639](#)), and the Prime Minister of Moldova, Dorin Recean ([„Komentarze IEŚ”, nr 949](#)). President Zelenski played a special role at the summit, stressing the importance of strengthening international support for Ukraine’s armed forces, which is necessary to repel Russian aggression. The speech was an appeal for greater solidarity in the face of a crisis that resonates beyond Ukraine’s borders, affecting the security situation in Europe. Also present at the summit were delegates from 3SI’s strategic partners, including representatives from the European Commission, Germany, and the US. A significant decision that was made at the meeting was the announcement of Japan as a new strategic partner, underlining the growing international profile of this cooperation format. In addition, representatives from Montenegro, Finland, Israel, Spain, and Turkey, among others, attended the summit as guests.

A key theme of the summit was the issue of regional security in the broadest sense. Military mobility was identified as an important element of cooperation ([„Komentarze IEŚ”, nr 966](#)). The participating 3SI states are to continue to implement large infrastructure projects that can be used by the armed forces in a situation such as a potential escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. At the Vilnius summit, the strategic importance of the Via Carpatia international road route to connect Klaipėda in Lithuania with Greek ports and the Rail Baltica rail project was discussed in this context ([„Komentarze IEŚ”, nr 451](#)). The need to continue to enhance energy security was also emphasised. The opening of the Polish-Lithuanian interconnector (GIPL), or the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, was among the most important achievements in this regard. The development of renewable energy sources and the pursuit of climate neutrality in the region were also among the topics addressed by summit participants. Mention was made, among others, of the need for small modular SMRs and wind power plants in the Baltic Sea ([„Komentarze IEŚ”, nr 314](#)). Digital cooperation to increase the resilience of the 3SI countries to various cyber threats was also discussed. Another important topic of the Vilnius summit was the issue of the reconstruction of Ukraine and the European integration of the country (a special Common Interest Group for Ukraine (CIG4U) of the International Transport Forum (ITF) was established). A Business Forum was held alongside the summit, as well as more than 20 scientific and expert side events. From the perspective of the further development of this format of cooperation, the signing of a letter of intent on the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative Innovation Fund was significant.

Comments:

- Lithuania is the third Baltic state, after Estonia and Latvia, to hold a 3SI summit, indicating a particular interest in the region in this cooperation format. The main promoter of 3SI in Lithuania remains President Gitanas Nausėda. The event is part of both Lithuania’s ongoing presidential campaign and the country’s policy of building its international reputation. Vilnius emphasises the development of energy, infrastructure, and digital projects that enhance the region’s security. This potential cooperation can provide Lithuania with an opportunity to fill infrastructure gaps and strengthen its economic competitiveness.

- The Vilnius Summit shows that the 3SI still remains primarily a presidential format. Once again, the 3SI Parliamentary Forum was not held, nor was the Civil Society Forum organised. Nor was the topic of institutionalising 3SI, as advocated by the Hungarian side a few years ago, taken up. Prior to the summit, the idea of inviting Finland as a participating state and Georgia as an associate state to the 3SI emerged, but ultimately, the format was not expanded. At the same time, it was announced that 3SI's strategic partners had expanded to include Japan. In addition, the 3SI Innovation Fund was established alongside the existing 3SI Investment Fund. The summit was traditionally accompanied by the 3SI Business Forum, where politicians, diplomats, experts, and entrepreneurs met.
- Back at last year's summit in Bucharest, the then Hungarian president Katalin Novák declared that Hungary would host the event in 2025. However, a change to this was announced in Vilnius, and Poland will eventually host the 10th anniversary 3SI summit. It was also announced that the 2026 summit would again be organised by Croatia. Intergovernmental cooperation was pursued to a lesser extent during the event.
- In Vilnius on 11 April, an agreement was also signed between Ukraine and Latvia, initiating cooperation towards strengthening regional security. The agreement provides for annual Latvian military support to the Ukrainian side at the level of 0.25 per cent of Latvia's GDP. Latvia pledged to assist Ukraine in areas such as cyber security, demining, and unmanned technologies while supporting the country's aspirations for membership in the European Union and NATO.