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**THE THREE SEAS INITIATIVE AS AN ELEMENT OF A STABILIZATION SYSTEM IN EASTERN AND MIDDLE EUROPE. BETWEEN THE POLITICAL CONCEPTION ITSELF AND THE POLITICAL PRACTICE**

**ІНІЦІАТИВА "ТРИМОР'Я" ЯК ЕЛЕМЕНТ СТАБІЛІЗАЦІЙНОЇ СИСТЕМИ У СХІДНІЙ ТА СЕРЕДНІЙ ЄВРОПІ. МІЖ ПОЛІТИЧНОЮ КОНЦЕПЦІЄЮ ТА ПОЛІТИЧНОЮ ПРАКТИКОЮ**

**"ИНИЦИАТИВА ТРИМОРЬЯ" КАК ЧАСТЬ СИСТЕМЫ СТАБИЛИЗАЦИИ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ И ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЕВРОПЕ. МЕЖДУ КОНЦЕПЦИЕЙ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ПРАКТИКОЙ**

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**Abstract.** *The purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate the conception of the cooperation in Eastern-Middle Europe which took into effect with the considerable participation of Poland, with the conception in question being referred to as "Three Seas Initiative". The said Initiative aims at expanding the infrastructural, economic, energy-related as well as scientific and cultural cooperation among 12 states. The development of the abovementioned initiative seems to be vitally important for Ukraine as well as for the countries that are neighbors of the EU in terms of provisioning of their political and economic independence. Moreover, the strengthening of bilateral cooperation within the ranks of this initiative inevitably increases chances for the admission of Ukraine to the EU. The further cooperation "Three Seas Initiative" shall be considered the connecting link between the states and be regarded as a key direction for the political efforts of a respected governmental bodies of participating counties.*

**Key words:** *Three Seas Initiative, energy sector, digital communication, Middle-Eastern Europe, geopolitics Poland.*

**Анотація.** *Метою статті є висвітлення концепції співробітництва у Центральній і Східній Європі, що впроваджується в життя за великої участі Польщі під назвою "Ініціатива трьох морів". Ініціатива спрямована на розширення інфраструктурної, економічної, енергетичної та наукової і культурної співпраці між 12 державами. Концепцію ініціювали Польща і Хорватія в 2015 році. Розвиток вищезгаданої ініціативи є надзвичайно важливим для України, а також для країн, які є сусідами ЄС, особливо в сфері забезпечення їх політичної та економічної незалежності. Більше того, посилення двостороннього співробітництва в рамках цієї ініціативи неминуче збільшує шанси на вступ України до ЄС. Подальша співпраця в форматі «Ініціатива трьох морів»*

має сприйматися як сполучний елемент між державами і оцінювати дану ініціативу потрібно як ключовий напрям для політичних зусиль урядів країн-учасниць

**Ключові слова:** *Ініціатива трьох морів, геополітика Польща, енергетичний сектор, Центральній і Східній Європа.*

**Аннотація.** *Целью статьи является показать концепцию сотрудничества в Центральной и Восточной Европе, реализованную с большой долей Польши под названием «Три морских инициативы». Инициатива по расширению инфраструктуры, экономики, энергетики, а также научного и культурного сотрудничества между 12 странами. Развитие вышеупомянутой инициативы является чрезвычайно важным для Украины, а также для стран, которые являются соседями ЕС, в сфере обеспечения их политической и экономической независимости. Более того, усиление двустороннего сотрудничества в рамках этой инициативы неизбежно увеличивает шансы на вступление Украины в ЕС. Дальнейшее сотрудничество в формате «Инициатива трех морей» следует рассматривать как связующее звено между государствами и оценивать в качестве ключевого направления для политических усилий правительственных органов участвующих стран.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Три морских инициативы, геополитика Польша, энергетический сектор, Ближневосточная Европа*

**The current problem.** The Three Seas Initiative as a political conception was formulated by the presidents of Poland and Croatia (by Andrzej Duda and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, respectively) in 2015 during their meeting in Cracow (8 September). However, the Initiative is said to have been adopted during the first Summit of the Three Seas Initiative in Dubrovnik 25-26 August 2016. “The Three Seas Initiative is a platform for cooperation of the presidents of twelve countries situated between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas. Its aim is to boost cooperation in the region in such areas as infrastructure, energy, transport and digitization”, as reported at the official site of the president of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda [*Szczyt Inicjatywy*].

**The aim of the article** is the purpose of the present paper is to illuminate the conception of the cooperation in Middle Europe, with the conception being put into effect due to a considerable contribution of Poland and being referred to as “The Three Seas Initiative”. The research problem that the author poses is the following:

- does the Three Seas Initiative considerably differ from prior geopolitical projects in Poland, in particular: from the idea of Intermarium;
- is the Three Seas Initiative realizable in the forthcoming decade and what sorts of arguments count in its favor, and which ones indicate its short-lasting and apparently ineffective character;
- in what way does the “Three Seas Initiative” relate to Poland’s eastern neighbors lying outside the European Union, such as – most of all – the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine.

The first hypothesis has it that the Three Seas Initiative is not a mere continuation of the idea of Intermarium; the second one has it that all the volatility in the foreign policies pursued by the states situated in Eastern Europe as well as an active policy in this area pursued by the Russian Federation or by the Federal Republic of Germany as well as general policies of the European Union may constitute an obstacle to developing the project in question. The last hypothesis assumes that the Three Seas Initiative disables Ukraine and Belarus to actively participate in it.

**The important research results.** What is to be found in Polish geopolitical code are several interesting conceptions related to Eastern-Middle Europe. First and foremost, what is to be mentioned at this point is the federalist idea. What is more, what is to be underlined is its anti-Russian character and its being based upon the willingness to loosen the bonds holding between Russia and the states which constitute a sort of cordon fencing Poland off to keep out the Eastern empire. The main proponent of the federalist idea was Józef Piłsudski, whereas Leon Wasilewski was the main theoretical thereof. One of the main threads of the said idea was nations’ right to self-governance. The idea was first highlighted in 1882. It explicitly alluded to the Jagiellonian tradition,

that is to establishing union of states under the auspices of Poland. Still, the idea did not assume a unique form and was oftentimes subject to modifications. As already mentioned, its main assumption was to establish a system of independent nation states: Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine; that is such states the nations of which comprised the multi-ethnic Republic before 1772. The states in question were supposed to be differentially related to Poland – either federalized or bound by alliances. This conception was meant to give rise to peaceful co-existence next to one another [Faryś, 1993: 77]. Furthermore, this would engender a bloc of states able to commonly face up to German and Russian imperialism. It is the latter imperialism that was regarded by the Polish Socialist Party – in the environment in which the party emerged – as more dangerous, whereas Russia was recognized as the biggest enemy of Poland. Establishing new states on its territory was supposed to weaken Russia as much as possible (smaller territory and fewer people thereupon as well as distancing Russia from its economically most important part, that is from Ukraine). What Piłsudski deemed necessary and natural was their cooperation [Zaporowski, 2007: 179]. The idea did not come into life for several reasons. First and foremost, not all nations inhabiting the area of the First Republic took interest in it. Most of all, this applied not only to Lithuanians but also to Ukrainians as well as to the very weak Belarusian Nationalist Movement. Apart from this, after Polish-Bolshevik war; or, strictly speaking, after the Treaty of Riga signed on 18 March 1921 (revoking the recognition of the Ukrainian People's Republic) what became clear is that Poland would not contribute to the Ukrainian People's Republic sustaining its independence.

The derivative of the federalist idea was the so-called “Jagiellonian conception”, alluding to federalist postulates. However, it has rather great resonance and was advocated by a circle of Piłsudski-centered right-wing youth, associated with *Myśl Mocarstwowa* (The Imperial Thought) and with the journalists of the weeklies: „*Bunt Młodych*” (Rebellion of Youth), and later „*Polityka*” (Politics). This conception was based upon the strong involvement of Poland in establishing independent – but related to Poland itself – states. This conception was detached from military, economic as well as diplomatic capacities of Poland.

Another, very important conception of foreign policy, was Prometheism, which involved supporting the nations inhabiting Russia in their respective irredentism. Weakening Russia through establishing a series of smaller nation states could not only effectively separate Poland from Russia but also provide a reason to develop cooperation with these states; and what is thereby meant are not only Ukraine or Belarus but also the countries of the South Caucasus. Prometheism was advocated in the Polish circles within the policy pursued in the inter-war period and some actions were endorsed by the Polish intelligence (Oddział II Sztabu Generalnego Wojska Polskiego [Second Department of Polish General Staff]).

The last grand geopolitical conception dating back to the inter-war period was the idea of Intermarium, also referred to as the concept of Third Europe. This related to the states of Middle Europe situated between the following seas: Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas. The states in question were caught in more or less the same predicament as was Poland; that is, they were threatened by two aggressive empires. The states that were soon excluded (or rather: the states withdrew their participation themselves, which occurred during the second Republic of Poland) from this alliance was Czechoslovakia and Lithuania since the relationship between these two and the republic of Poland was incendiary. Originally, the idea was supposed to be based upon the entities whose interest was at stake, only then to assume the form of politico-military coalition. The factor precluding the actual implementation of this initiative was not so much bad relations between Poland and other states which could be potentially interested in the conception itself as bad relations among the states in question (e.g. a conflict between Romania and Hungary). Moreover, the concept in question did not include Belarus or Ukraine because these states failed to remain independent after 1918. There was a resurgence of the idea of Intermarium in opposition circles, especially in the eighties of XX century developed by *Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej* (Confederation of Independent Poland), whose leader was Leszek Moczulski. Some traces of the idea of Intermarium are also to be found in the political beliefs of the president Lech Kaczyński [Sykulski, 2018: 156].

The last conception was the one articulated in the circles of post-war emigration; or, strictly speaking, the one formulated by Jerzy Giedroyc dating back to the Paris “Kultura” [Culture], also referred to as “Giedroyc’s doctrine” or “ULB doctrine” – that is, “Doctrine of Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus”. In a nutshell, the conception had it that Poles ought to come to terms with then borders of their country and not to make any revisionist claims towards Ukraine, Lithuania or Belarus and Polish authorities ought to broadly support the independence of these three states. This doctrine is recognized by a significant part of specialists as the leading one in Polish foreign policy after 1989 towards the said states (with certain difficulties afflicting the Republic of Belarus and resulting from the presidency of Alexander Lukashenko from 1994) regardless of a party of political coalitions which wielded power over Poland then.

The forum of cooperation labelled as the Three Seas Initiative includes 12 states. Apart from Poland, it encompasses the former Soviet republics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), Czechia, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia. The list of the states comprising the region of Three Seas is specified by “The Joint Declaration on the Three Seas Initiative” of 23 August 2016.

The region to which the Three Seas Initiative applied was characterized by certain common features such as:

- similar history during the period of the Cold War (except for Austria) and belonging to the block of states subjugated to the governance of USSR;
- lower economic and infrastructural level than the one recorded in the states of “the old Union” [Sienkiewicz, 2016: 142].



Source: the Internet site of the president of the republic of Poland:

<https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,653,inicjatywa-trojmorza--three-seas-initiative.html> [10 VIII 2019].

The potential of 12 states situated between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas relative to the remainder of the European Union was determined based upon the data of Eurostat from 2017. The twelve countries constitute 27% of the surface of EU, 22% of its entire population and, unfortunately, merely 10% of its GDP.

At one of the first meetings during the summit of the United Nations in New York of 29 September 2015, the president Andrzej Duda took part in the meeting of the group of “the countries between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic seas”, in which he pointed out that what is of top priority

with the cooperation in question will be such pillars as: political trust as well the strategic planning aimed at – from the union-related financial point of view – coming out as a union, that is a series of states politically, strategically and economically connected [*Prezydent spotkał się*].

While planning the project, there were voices speaking of shifting an axis of cooperation ranging from the East to the West into the involvement in the North-South axis. First and foremost, the axis of cooperation within the Three Seas Initiative was supposed to be pertaining to both economy and infrastructure. The minister in the President's chancellery – professor Krzysztof Szczerski – said that the “the very core of the Three Seas Initiative is to be Via Carpathia”, which is the project of the route – being built in stages and partly consisting of the already existing distances – going through Klaipeda in Lithuania via eastern Poland up to Thessaloniki [*Trójmorze przekonuje*]. This plan demands considerable financial resources but also it raises many questions whether it is profitable or not. What remains disputable is whether transit in this direction is and will remain sufficiently large.

In his turn, the president Andrzej Duda during “Dubrovnik Forum 2016” spoke of energy cooperation: “What merits special attention is the development of energy infrastructure which connects our countries. The challenge to be faced by the Three Seas Region is the dominating position of one supplier of energy resources, something that affects directly most of our countries. This situation gives rise to obvious threats of whose existence we are all aware. Nevertheless, we are in a position to defy them by developing energy interconnectors in order to achieve a genuine diversification of energy supplies. A flagship project in this regard, one whose implementation will change energy sector in the Central Europe, is the North-South gas corridor which connects the LNG terminal already operating in Swinoujście and the terminal on the Croatian island of Krk” [*Trójmorze przekonuje*].

What counted as other pillars apart from economic-infrastructure cooperation was also the cooperation within new technologies and tourism as well as scientific and cultural cooperation.

Since the very inception of the initiative, Poland steadfastly held on to the belief that it is an economic (not a political) project and it does not go beyond the opportunities provided by the European Union. What is more, the former was supposed to constitute one of the bridges allowing for the acquisition of money for infrastructural investments in the area of 12 states. The very concept of the Three Seas, however, was subject to transformations. Originally, first and foremost, during the Summit of the Three Seas Initiative in Dubrovnik, what was assumed was endorsing and organizing cross-border and macroregional actions for the sake of energy sector, transport, and digital communication of Middle-Eastern Europe, while expressing the contention that this part of the continent will thus become richer and safer [Kowal, 2019: 59-60]. The next summit was held in Warsaw 6-7 July 2017. During this event, one could clearly see that the interest in Three Seas Initiative was disseminated across the Ocean. It was Donald Trump himself who took part in the said summit, whereas the states of “the old Union” – with Germany in particular – approached it rather coldly. President Trump during his address at Zamek Królewski [Royal Castle] in Warsaw emphasized that the countries of the region due to this Initiative will strengthen their independence and security. The Initiative sped up and it was Poland who assumed the position of an informal leader thereof. The next summit of the Three Seas Initiative took place in Bucharest 17-18 September 2018. During this summit, German diplomacy became an active participant, with Germany declaring the willingness to partake in the Initiative, which was communicated already before Bucharest summit, that is in August 2018 [*Drei-Meere-Gipfel der Osteuropäer in Bukarest*]. During the last summit, what was strongly underlined were transatlantic connections. It was also the European Union high representative – President of the European Commission – Jean-Claude Junckers who then participated in such summits for the first time. He also regarded the Initiative as an important factor contributing to strengthening the internal coherence of EU [Kowal, 2019: 84].

At this point, it is difficult to predict how the cooperation of the twelve countries is going to proceed. First of all, German accessing the project radically changes its profile. Furthermore, it raises fears whether or not it will become an instrument of a new Eastern policy pursued by

Germany – Ostpolitik – especially in the light of the fact that Germans boast a dominating economic status. Undoubtedly, what is going to exert influence on the development of the Three Seas Initiative is bilateral Polish-German relations, Russian involvement in the region (the cooperation with Germans – or with the Hungarians – within energy-related projects) as well as the activity on the part of USA in our part of Europe. It is worthwhile to mention that originally, during the discussions on the Three Seas, there appeared the hints that it might become an element of “New Silk Road”. However, it is hard to imagine the realization of the conception of strengthening transatlantic connections and simultaneously broadening the scope of cooperation with the People’s Republic of China.

Without a doubt however, the experience of (especially) Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, as well as the experience of Ukraine prior thereto and even of Belarus with the deliveries of Russian gas, indicate that tightening the cooperation between 12 states would be strategically beneficial. Furthermore, despite the nowadays emphasis put on the economic character of the whole enterprise, there simultaneously develop other interesting projects that might be compatible with the Three Seas Initiative: first and foremost, within the realm of security measures and within the attempts to solidify the Eastern flank of NATO. The beginning of the cooperation was marked by a mini-summit of NATO, summoned upon the request of Poland and Romania in Bucharest 4-5 November 2015. In consequence, there emerged the Bucharest 9, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria.

One may validly claim that the Initiative is being now realized. The measure of its success are the said summits with the participation of prominent figures, which testifies to the fact that particular states take interest therein. For example, at the summit in Warsaw, Austria was represented by an ambassador, whereas already in Bucharest there was a president of this country.

Certainly, what is an important document is the list of priority investments in the area of Three Seas – “The Three Seas Initiative – Priority Interconnection Projects”, which outlines the vision of the development of the scrutinized area [The Three Seas Initiative]. The major investments therein include the following projects:

- Via Carpatia;
- the North-South gas corridor;
- Rail Baltica
- Via Baltica.

Some of these projects are already partly under realization, as, for example, Via Carpatia or Via Baltica.

Within the energy sector, an important geo-strategic element is the diversification of gas supplies. As rightly noted by Grzegorz Baziur: “A chance to dissociate oneself – to a larger extent – from the supplies of gas flowing from Russia directly or through the reverse service and through gas pipelines from the West is to be the so-called North-South corridor, which is supposed to connect LNG terminal in Świnoujście and the gas pipeline Baltic Pipe with LNG terminal in Croatia. Its route is to go through the territory of Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary Croatia, which shall enable to increase the supply of Norwegian gas to this part of Europe” [Baziur, 2018: 32]. It might be assumed that the countries that take interest in the above project do appreciate the unquestionable weight thereof.

However, what is of utmost importance is the differential involvement of particular countries in the realization of the project. What is important – if not the most important – is the financial involvement in the project, which is to be aided by establishing Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF). It was established with the participation of the national Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego [BGK] 29 May 2019 in Luxemburg, when the Polish bank with the Romanian EximBank signed the founding act of the Fund. The Fund shall operate on the commercial basis, engaging the projects which are expected to bring profits to the shareholders. The purpose of Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund is aligned with the purpose of the Three Seas Initiative itself – it assumes building transport and digital connections in the region situated between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas [*Fundusz Inwestycyjny Inicjatywy*].

From the inception of the Three Seas Initiative, first and foremost, one stressed its predominantly economic nature. One dissociated oneself from political conceptions of the whole project. However, in Middle-Eastern Europe, there are well-known Polish geopolitical conceptions which undoubtedly contribute to the partners' cautious approach to the Initiative itself. What should be, most of all, borne in mind is the idea of Intermarium, the role of which was – to a large extent – to strengthen the position of Poland in the area of Middle Europe. Middle Europe, in its turn, within this project was supposed to play a role of a sort of “*primus inter pares*” due to its human-resource, territorial as well as cultural and historical potential. Without a doubt, the negative associations are mitigated due to the serious involvement of Croatia.

However, a weak side of the Three Seas Initiative is its lack of a leader, with the role of a leader being inapplicable to Poland for, at the very least, historical reasons. Another factor is, for example, the very perception of the Russian Federation (e.g. by Hungary or the reception of Bulgaria and “the old Union” states, as perceived by, for instance, Austria). Different priorities and the assessment of an international situation might hamper the development of the Three Seas Initiative. Between 12 states there are also historical disputes which have a bearing on both internal and international policies of the states in question. What is thereby meant are – among others – the animosities between Hungary and Romania (which is an aftermath of the Treaty of Triaton of 1920), sub-optimal relationship between Hungary and Slovakia for the same reason as the one above; or, rather cold (apart from, for example, the times of the presidency of Lech Kaczyński and of Valdas Adamkus in Lithuania) relationship holding between Poland and Lithuania.

Apart from the lack of the state which would be a strong leader of the Initiative, what might materialize is the possibility that the project is not approved by successive governments in at least one of the twelve member states. The elections might bring about the changes in the priorities of a foreign policy pursued by each partner, and the Three Seas Initiative might become an unpopular project, the fate that the Polish-Swedish project *soft power* – initiated in 2009 – in the form of an “Eastern Partnership” met.

Furthermore, large investments take considerable financial resources and the equal distribution of the investment cost among particular partners being determined to work on their realization.

Without a doubt, the exclusion from the Three Seas Initiative – treated as the initiative within the European Union – of the Eastern neighbors, and Ukraine in particular, may contribute to a certain cooling of the relationship with the Eastern partner, with simultaneously leaving Ukraine away from the mainstream of geopolitical conceptions pertaining to this region. From the perspective of Poland, it is also an element of the departure from, as already mentioned, the policy pursued throughout the period from the moment of the recognition of Ukraine's independence by Poland 2 December 1991. A part of analysts perceive the Three Seas Initiative as a departure not only from the above-mentioned “Giedroyc's doctrine”, but also from the policy pursued by, say, Lech Kaczyński.

### **Conclusion**

At this point, it is difficult to predict with confidence what shape the Three Seas Initiative will assume: whether or not the new strong partners – such as Germany – will join it, with Germany being able to change the character of the very project. The other unknown is with what determination particular states are going to approach the Initiative. However, many economic issues which the states within the common projects are to deal with would affect the economic and civilizational development of that region. There seems to be a hint of the common approach – within, for example, the Visegrad group – to migrants. What is more, it may be the case that tighter economic cooperation will generate in the future other political initiatives on the part of 12 states. However, fears are raised that the Three Seas Initiative without a strong leader may turn into the project of relatively small significance. Instead, it may amount to an element of *soft power* such as Central European Initiative, or already-mentioned “Eastern Partnership”.

What is certain is that it will be easiest to realize cultural, tourism-related and scientific projects in the region, having a proper common policy pursued by 12 states.

While attempting to answer the research problem and the hypotheses formulated by the author of the present paper, it is to be stated that the Three Seas Initiative is not a simple continuation of the idea of Intermarium, with the latter having a much more coherent politico-military character. The obstacles that the development of the Initiative might face were already enumerated and both bilateral and multi-lateral relations especially with such countries as Germany, Russia and USA will play a crucial role in the further development of the Initiative. Unfortunately, it seems that this project leaves both Ukraine and Belarus unable to exploit the possibility of cooperation since what was assumed was the form of strengthening infrastructural and telecommunication potential as well as fostering trade among the European Union member states.

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