

The Three Seas Initiative from the Perspective of Its Participants

This monograph shows the results of research on the Three Seas Initiative conducted at the Department of Central and Eastern Europe and Post-Soviet Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The project, which has resulted in this publication, was implemented in two stages: the first involved interviews with the ambassadors of the Three Seas Initiative's states and the Chief of Cabinet to the President of Poland, and the second included the development of the monograph.

The Three Seas Initiative was formally inaugurated at the summit in Dubrovnik in 2016. It connects twelve European Union (EU) countries located in the area between the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. This initiative does not fit into the definition of an international organisation. It is referred to as an informal presidential platform, a flexible presidential forum or a format of cooperation. Our main research question is: what is the Three Seas Initiative from the perspective of the participating countries? This involves questions about: firstly, its conceptualisation, origins and objectives; secondly, its role in European and transatlantic context; and thirdly, opportunities and threats affecting its functioning and development.

The monograph consists of three chapters, appendices and the bibliography. The first chapter explains the theoretical and methodological foundations of the work. Much attention is paid to the technique of collecting data through interviews, as well as

the function of ambassadors in diplomatic law, which is crucial for assessing the significance of the collected material. The second chapter presents the characteristics of the Three Seas Initiative. It outlines its objectives, functioning and the results of four summits. The chapter also shows the potential of the twelve countries in a comparative perspective. The third chapter presents the conclusions from the interviews according to thematic areas. The final part of the monograph contains appendices which include, firstly, interviews constituting the original source material, and secondly, declarations adopted at the summits in Dubrovnik, Warsaw, Bucharest and Ljubljana.

As stated in these declarations, cooperation under the Three Seas Initiative focuses on infrastructure development in the region in the energy, transport and digital areas, which is to strengthen the cohesion of the EU and of the transatlantic relations. Against the backdrop of the Three Seas Initiative, two countries stand out in terms of their potential – Poland and Austria. Their positions are important for understanding the policies of the other countries regarding the Initiative. To some extent, they set the framework for the debate on the Three Seas Initiative. For example, in the attached interview, minister Krzysztof Szczerski draws a bold vision of the Polish project of Central European regional policy, which is to strengthen the position of all Central Europe by building a block of Central European countries based on the infrastructure development on the north-south line. Emphasising the intra-EU economic dimension, he mentions the role of the United States, military security, the Bucharest Nine built under NATO in parallel with the creation of the Three Seas Initiative within the EU, and the fact that transport infrastructure is key for military mobility. These elements also appeared, although in a less expressive way, in the statements of representatives of several other countries involved in the Three Seas Initiative.

Austria is not a member of NATO and is not – like Slovenia and Croatia – part of the Bucharest Nine. The Austrian ambassador succinctly emphasised that the main goal of the Three Seas

Initiative is to improve connections between the economies of Central and Eastern Europe along the north-south line. While some countries share the view that this cooperation should be limited to this dimension, Poland and several other countries treat the Three Seas Initiative as a foundation for the implementation of a more ambitious, yet still not clearly specified project.

Representatives of the Three Seas countries agree that the Initiative should not be transformed into an international organisation. Further institutionalisation is not necessary, yet there were voices that a Secretariat of the Three Seas would be useful. As we can see, it was created in March 2020. There is quite a common agreement that the Initiative should not be expanded to include further states.

Common and national interests are strongly intertwined in Europe. The research described in this monograph confirms the thesis that, from the perspective of participating countries, the Three Seas Initiative is a form of cooperation that is primarily intended to implement their national interests in a broad sense, and that the degree of their convergence determines its further functioning and development. At present, in many areas the interests converge, forming the foundation of Central European cooperation. The further significance of the Three Seas Initiative depends on the ability to translate ambitious projects into measurable results.

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Inicjatywa Trójmorza z perspektywy jej uczestników

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East of the West
Wschód Zachodu

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**Wywiad z ambasadorem Estonii w Polsce,
JE Martinem Rogerem, przeprowadzony w Ambasadzie
Republiki Estońskiej w Warszawie 22 maja 2019 roku
przez prof. Agnieszkę Orzelską-Stączek i dr Marzenę Czernicką⁷**

Why was the Three Seas Initiative established?

Estonia was invited to join the Three Seas Initiative (3SI). It was not a part of the initial nucleus forming the 3SI, as the initiative came from Poland and Croatia. We understand that the 3SI was established to enhance cooperation, and develop energy and transport infrastructure in the region. Currently, and for understandable reasons, infrastructure in Western Europe remains better developed than in Eastern Europe. The 3SI could give impetus to the development and improvement of north-south connectivity. That is the primary reason.

What were the goals of Estonia in joining the Three Seas Initiative?

Estonia joined the 3SI, as it was in line with its foreign policy. In this respect, as regards regional cooperation, we share the approach with the other Baltic States. The broad objective of the 3SI is to foster European Union (EU) unity and cohesion. It is also important that Germany became a partner state and that the European Commission is involved. This step has mitigated or neutralised some concerns.

As a small state, Estonia is interested in enhancing international cooperation and wants to be involved. Still, Estonia is on the periphery of the 3SI. The map defines its position in this initiative. It shows that there are states, e.g. Poland or Romania, that could benefit more and could be more interested in development of the 3SI. The stated 3SI objective is to improve connectivity in the region in the fields of transport, energy, and digitalisation. At present, we do it mainly through the EU, there is always room for improvement.

⁷ Wywiad nie był nagrywany. Został spisany z notatek przez A. Orzelską-Stączek i M. Czernicką.

The main goal of the 3SI is economic development, but there is always a political context. Maybe the goals of the 3SI will be changed, but this depends on the direction in which this initiative will develop in the future.

What are the main challenges that negatively affect the development of the Three Seas Initiative?

Significant challenges are related to the internal coordination of work on the 3SI at the member states' level. For many, the 3SI goals are within the competence of its executive branch, yet it is a forum of the heads of state.

At present, a new government has been formed in Estonia. Its position on the 3SI will be clarified in preparing for the Tallinn summit in 2020. Additionally, Estonia does not have a national financial institution or development bank that could be a natural partner to the 3SI Fund. The second challenge is the importance of understanding what the concrete modalities and outcomes of the initiative will be.

What are the main factors that positively influence the development of the Three Seas Initiative?

The 3SI gives new political impetus to the economic development of the region.

A positive factor is also the political attention of the USA in the region as well as increased cooperation and solidarity with other countries of the 3SI.

What is the impact of the creation and development of the Three Seas Initiative on the European Union (including the process of integration and disintegration of the EU)?

The EU context of the 3SI is of vital importance. Still, some more clarity will be needed in terms of how best to use the complementarity of the 3SI to our common EU membership.

The 3SI is useful in demonstrating the needs of the Central and Eastern European states, which should be addressed.

Initially, there was some incomprehensibility as to the relation between the 3SI and the EU. Now, these doubts have been dispelled, as Germany is a 3SI partner state and the European Commission has manifested its support. To sum up, we want the 3SI to strengthen the EU.

What is your perception of the Three Seas Initiative in the context of transatlantic relations (including relations with the USA)?

The USA is a catalyst for the 3SI and has given further political impetus to the format.

The US administration has been very positive about the 3SI. The USA's increased presence in the region is good for security. In terms of attractiveness for investments, in particular for the private funds that are strongly needed in the region, we will have to see.

Can you indicate a leader in the Three Seas Initiative? Which state plays this role, if any?

Poland is clearly the leading country in the 3SI. To a certain extent, Romania also plays a leading role in this forum. The Bucharest summit increased its activity. Certainly, Croatia has an important role as a co-founder of the 3SI.

Which of the projects do you consider the key to the success of the Three Seas Initiative?

It is yet to be seen. Rail Baltica is of vital importance for the Baltic States. However, it needs to be clarified what the added value of 3SI *priority projects* is to those that are also funded by the EU.

Do the Estonian authorities intend to support the Three Seas Initiative in any concrete manner? If yes, how (political dialogue, financial issues)?

We will take appropriate steps as the 3SI develops. So far, Estonia has, perhaps, not been the most active member of the 3SI. At present, as I mentioned, Estonia does not have a national financial

institution which may be a partner to the 3SI Fund. Estonia is actively taking part in political dialogue and hosting the next summit.

Is there a need for greater formal and legal regulation of Three Seas Initiative, i.e. the institutionalisation of this cooperation?

Estonia does not favour institutionalisation of the 3SI. It should remain a flexible forum. We have a relatively small civil service. We must ask what the added value of the 3SI institutionalisation would be?

What is the best term for defining the area of the Three Seas Initiative? Is it, for example, Central-Eastern Europe, Central Europe or another term?

Estonia belongs to the Nordic Baltic region, and maybe also Central and North-East Europe. I could not name the area that is covered by the 3SI as only Central Europe.