



European
Institute
of Romania

Anticipating the 2023 Three Seas Initiative Bucharest Summit. Advancing the common agenda

Bucharest, April 2023
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) represents a regional effort by 12 European Union (EU) member states of fostering improved connectivity between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas. Launched in 2015 as a flexible political platform, 3SI has generated funding and promoted deeper cooperation among its participating countries. By aiming to create a North-South corridor in the region, the Initiative contributes also to projects targeting economic development and the reduction of regional disparities. Designed as a complementary format to the EU, the pillars of the 3SI cooperation are supporting economic development, strengthening European cohesion and consolidating transatlantic ties.

Throughout its 8 years of existence, the 3SI has expanded from a presidential platform for political engagement and strategic vision for regional connectivity, to a framework encompassing a Business Forum, proposed in 2017 and firstly organised by Romania on the margins of the 2018 Bucharest Summit. Following the Letter of Intent signed by several 3SI member states, the 3SI Investment Fund became fully operational on 27 February 2020, thus further supporting the implementation of concrete projects. Additionally, new formats have been launched in the past years on the sidelines of the Summit and Business Forum, proposing their own specific policy recommendations: a Parliamentary Forum (launched by Estonia in 2021), and a Civil Society Forum (launched on the margins of the 2022 Riga Summit).

In September 2023, Romania will be the first member state to host again a 3SI summit, assuming a leading role in taking the cooperation to the next stage. In this context, the collective report “*Anticipating the 2023 Three Seas Initiative Bucharest Summit. Advancing the common agenda*” was designed as a comprehensive platform for experts from the 3SI member countries, partners and potential future participants to present their views on the future of the framework, and their expectations regarding the 2023 Bucharest Summit. The views expressed in this report converge on the usefulness of such a regional coordination effort, while proposing concrete steps to further increase the national commitments.

To conduct this study, we gathered the contributions of 14 experts from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia. Additionally, we included the views of 5 experts from partner and potential future member states: Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. All the contributors provide their personal perspectives based on their experience in think tanks, academia, consultancy or public offices.

We invited the analysts to evaluate their country’s contribution to the enhancement of the cooperation, while considering the potential impact of the envisioned expansion, and the complementarity with the European Union membership. The ideas presented by the experts in this collective report paint a complex image of the context and challenges for the implementation of specific infrastructure projects in transportation, energy and digital connectivity, while providing insightful recommendations for their completion. We present below a

graphic representation of the main ideas included in the sections of the collective report.

Promote regional security and stability

- In the new geopolitical reality, the security-economy nexus should be strengthened. In this sense, consolidate the ties with the United States, and bring closer to the 3SI European partners, such as Germany and France.

Consolidate the engagement with the EU

- Develop the 3SI into a regional dimension of EU integration, supporting Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia on their accession paths, while also consolidating the Black Sea security, and assisting Ukraine in its post-conflict reconstruction process.

Take the 3SI connectivity to the next stage

- Make full use of the 3SI Investment Fund for accelerating the development of North - South energy and transportation routes, with the possibility of further expanding it to the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, the creation of a scientific panel would provide support for evidence-based policy within the 3SI.

Increase the national commitment to the 3SI

- With a series of elections in the upcoming period, the 3SI member states should strive for more institutionalisation, increased financial contribution, and better communication.

The collective report also includes 4 analyses signed by Romanian experts presenting their views on the national commitment to the advancement of the 3SI, the Romanian-backed projects, as well as the goals set for the 2023 Bucharest Summit.

FOREWORD

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) draws its origins on the Intermarium proposal of the late 19th century, [having undergone various transformations in terms of scope and goals](#). Nowadays gathering 12 European Union member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), the 3SI represents a regional effort of fostering improved connectivity in energy, transportation and digital infrastructures between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas.

As a flexible and informal political platform, the [pace of the 3SI cooperation has often been questioned](#), with [its potential to compete with the EU also highlighted](#). Nevertheless, the [growing involvement of the United States and Germany](#) in the creation of a North-South corridor in the region can further foster the economic development and the reduction of regional disparities among the participating countries. The recent global challenges, such as the disruption of the global value chains, the competition in new technologies, climate change and most recently the Russian unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, have created new opportunities for enhancing the cooperation within the 3SI and for raising the regional profile of the North-South corridor between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas.

As a founding member of the Three Seas Initiative, Romania has been a constant promoter of enhanced interconnections in the region, boosting security and economic development among the participating states. As proof of its commitment, Romania will host [its second 3SI summit on 6 - 7 September 2023](#), back-to-back with the 3SI Business Forum. As the first country to welcome again the heads of the 3SI partners, Romania aims to set the scene for a new chapter in the regional cooperation format, by capitalising upon the potential of the 3SI Investment Fund, and responding to the geopolitical evolutions determined by the Russian illegal aggression against Ukraine.

In this context, we were interested to explore the national perspectives of the participating states for enhancing the synergies between the Three Seas Initiative with the broader EU's connectivity agenda, as well as the prospects of expanding the cooperation with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, while also considering the interest expressed by Greece and North Macedonia to join the format.

We gathered contributions from 14 experts from the current 3SI countries, with the exception of Estonia and Slovenia, with extensive experience as researchers, think tankers, consultants or public officials, presenting various perspectives on consolidating the Initiative from the overarching political vision to the specific details of implementing sectoral projects on connectivity. Their views were complemented with 5 contributions from neighbouring countries aiming to foster further connections with the 3SI, namely Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Greece. The particular case of Romania's interest in the development

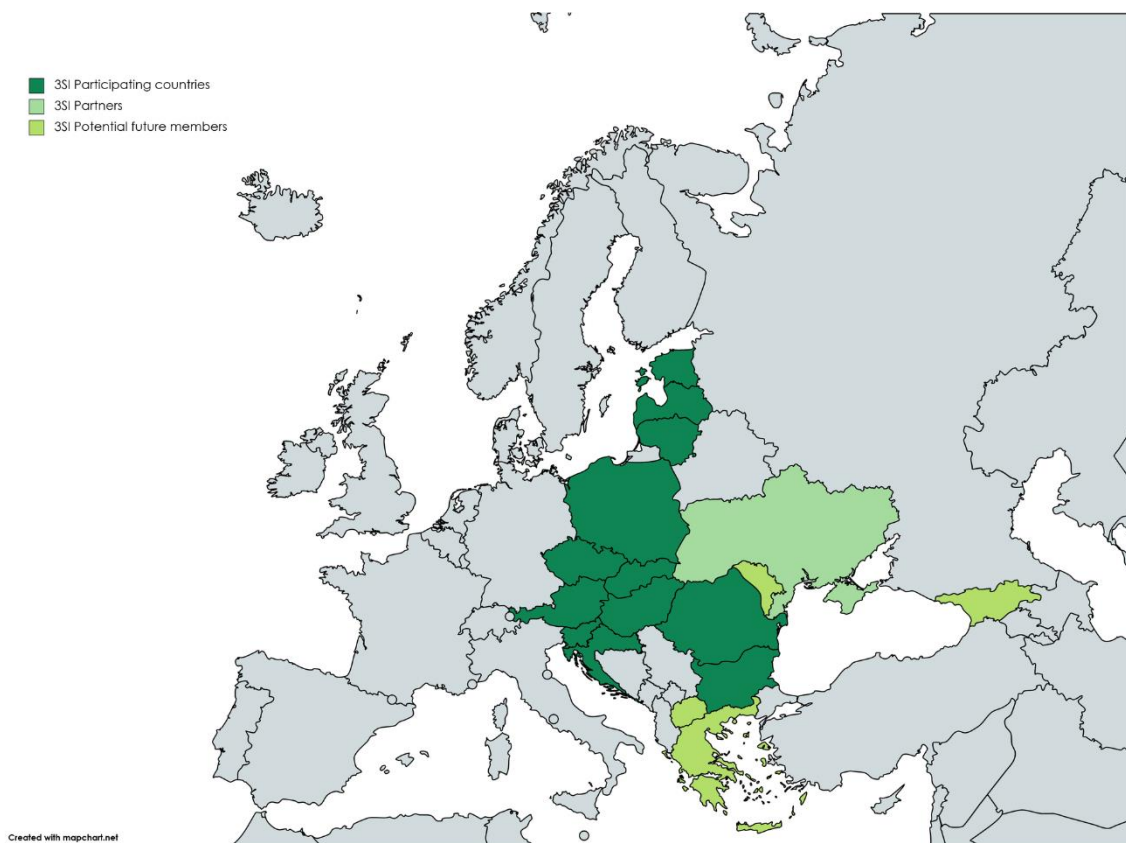
of the Three Seas Initiative is explored through 4 analyses focusing on the national participation, specific projects, as well as the envisioned goals of furthering the cooperation in view of 2023 Bucharest Summit.

The present document follows our previous collaborative reports focusing on relevant topics on the European agenda. In 2021, the [report](#) centred on the expectations regarding the future of Europe from the EU's neighbouring regions (candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas members). In 2022, the [invited experts](#) presented various perspectives on consolidating the EU - African Union partnership, from African and Romanian points of view.

These reports were met with positive reactions from the community gathered around the European Institute of Romania, providing highly relevant perspectives for understanding the local perceptions of the EU both in its immediate neighbourhood, as well as within one of its most important partners.

I would like to express my gratitude to the experts from the Three Seas Initiative countries, as well as current and potential partners for participating in this academic endeavour and sharing with us their views. We hope that the present paper is relevant both to the academics and practitioners, as they work towards fostering comprehensive connectivity within our region.

Oana-Mihaela Mocanu
Director General of the European Institute of Romania





Views from the 3SI member states

Maximise output instead of minilateralism

Sebastian SCHÄFFER

Sebastian Schäffer is Managing Director of the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM), a regional think tank based in Vienna. He is also Secretary General of the Danube Rectors' Conference, a network of 65 universities, as well as Associate Fellow at the Centre for Global Europe at GLOBSEC. Sebastian Schäffer holds an Honor's Master's degree in East European studies (major: legal studies, minor: history) from the University of Regensburg and an M.A. degree from LMU, where he studied political science, European law, and Slavonic studies.




The amount of minilateral formats - in short informal and targeted initiatives with a limited number of participating countries - has grown exponentially globally, but also especially within the EU and/or with the participation of its member states. In an increasingly complex decision-making process at the European level, coordination in smaller groups makes sense. Minilateralisms such as Benelux or the Visegrad Four certainly contributed to fostering European integration. But they also existed before their participants became EU members and were respectively created among others for this purpose.

Investment-driven initiatives like the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) certainly offer useful possibilities to include additional countries into minilateral formats with EU members, in this case especially the US and Ukraine. The pandemic, coupled with the unprovoked Russian war against Ukraine, make investment in infrastructure, as well as economic recovery especially necessary in the region, and the 3SI has the potential to positively contribute. However, what Central and Eastern Europe needs is fewer new initiatives and more results. At the very least, a duplication of efforts should be avoided.

This would also more or less capture the Austrian position towards the Three Seas Initiative, which signalled a positive contribution aiming to promote interconnectivity and cooperation among the countries located between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas. Vienna is keen on continuing to boost economic growth and strengthen infrastructure connections in the region. Especially with regards to the need to alleviate the still high dependence on Russian gas, even a year after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the 3SI could be a useful format.

Nevertheless, here the Austrian government seems to prefer an EU-centred approach, which should be guiding the funding instruments and also include its participation. Therefore, a clear strategy for engaging with the Three Seas countries should be developed, including defining priorities and areas of interest. In addition,



it would be desirable to strengthen its partnerships with other EU member states and international organisations to maximise the impact of its efforts. Last but not least, initiatives aimed at improving the business and investment environment should be supported, including by facilitating the flow of capital and technology transfer.

The importance, but at the same time the volatility of the region covered by the 3SI, will be crucial for the overall development of the European Union. Austria sees itself in the traditional role of serving as a bridge builder to that region. Therefore, strengthening cooperation among the countries located between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas, with a particular focus on enhancing economic growth and improving infrastructure connections is, so to speak, ingrained in the DNA of its foreign policy. This will be especially challenging to apply with regards to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and to a lesser extent Georgia, in the context of Austria's relationship with the Russian Federation. Discussing opportunities for increased energy security and reducing dependence on single suppliers will be key here.

In any case, I would like to emphasise the importance of regional cooperation and integration in promoting stability and prosperity. If the 3SI can contribute to achieving this goal, then I gladly admit that my scepticism towards more unilateralism was unfounded. Until then, I welcome any maximisation of output and results.

Building geopolitical bridges to success: Austria's case

Velina TCHAKAROVA

Velina Tchakarova is geopolitical strategist and founder of the geopolitical consulting company FACE. She is also an instructor at the Real-World Risk Institute under the direction of best-selling author Nassim Taleb, and a member of the Strategic and Security Policy Advisory Board of the Science Commission at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence.

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The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is one of the boldest and most ambitious geopolitical projects of modern times, aimed at radically changing the destiny of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) following Russia's war against Ukraine. The Initiative is geostrategic in nature because it promises to further integrate and connect this region to Europe's major energy, transportation, and communications networks. Austria occupies a geostrategic position not only in Europe, but also within the 3SI. Furthermore, Vienna is a major multiplier due to its hosting of multilateral forums and international organisations, which may turn out to be beneficial to the 3SI in terms of cooperation with third partners.

As far as multiplier effects are concerned, the Alpine republic also pursues a geopolitical agenda. If there is a geopolitical role that fits Austria's ambitions in Europe to a great extent, it is the role of 'bridge-builder,' which Vienna has been eagerly exercising since the EU enlargement waves of 2004 and 2007. The EU accession of the CEE countries moved Austria from the periphery to the centre of the EU's borders, combined with a great potential to benefit economically from the new markets in the East. Austria is a strong supporter of EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans, and plays a positive role in promoting the importance of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine among the more sceptical EU members, as well as in Brussels. In addition, Austria expects the 3SI to raise political awareness of this regional dimension of the European integration. Thus, Vienna will continue to support the 3SI as a framework for the definition, development, and implementation of common objectives of the CEE countries, which is of utmost strategic importance for its geopolitical and geoeconomic interests.

First, Austria should contribute financially to the [Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund \(3SIIF\)](#) and upgrade its political profile within the format. A total of 600 billion EUR needs to be invested in 3SI infrastructure by 2030 to address the



imbalance between CEE and Western Europe. The total value of trade of all 3SI countries exceeds 225 billion EUR, generating about 20% of the GDP of the entire EU. The 3SIIF aims to support the region in catching up with Western European countries, but also to keep up with their pace in the long run. Against this backdrop, it is in Austria's interest to engage with investors within the Initiative.

Second, Austria should continue the diversification of its gas supply away from Russia by using existing and potential projects under the 3SI, as its share of Russian gas supply is currently around 70%. The 3SI can play a vital role in facilitating the much-needed cooperation in energy and connectivity, independent of Russia's influence. This should be enhanced accordingly, with America becoming a more proactive anchor investor in the Initiative.

Finally, an urgent recommendation for Austria would be to change its general stance on the Initiative in geopolitical as well as geoeconomic terms. Obviously, Austria was not convincing with its bridge-building function between West and East while actively engaging with Russia. However, Vienna could develop a new formula to connect the 3SI countries with Ukraine and the rest of Europe in Brussels and the West. The Alpine republic should not miss this opportunity to diversify its 'bridge-building' role towards the North-South connectivity corridors, instead of sticking to its outdated East-West approach following Russia's war in Ukraine. To maintain the Three Seas-Ukraine alliance, the 3SI should become not only the main advocate of Ukraine's accession to the EU, but also a reliable guide in this process. The 3SI can share regulatory best practices with Ukraine, implement cross-border infrastructure projects, and help Ukraine on its way towards EU membership. Eventually, this format could be opened up to other states aspiring to join the EU, particularly the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkans, which would clearly be in Austria's interest.

Bulgaria and the Three Seas Initiative - All (almost) quiet on the 3SI front

Yasen GEORGIEV

Yasen Georgiev is Executive Director of the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) - a Sofia-based think-tank with 25+ years of track record in investigating, analysing and explaining economic and socio-economic trends in Bulgaria and South-Eastern Europe. His focus on the intersection between economy, public policy and international relations was sharpened during his academic and extracurricular studies at the University of National and World Economy (Sofia), Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Ludwig-Maximilians University (Munich) and Hertie School of Governance (Berlin). His experience includes various positions at the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology of Germany and Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria.




As one of the twelve countries participating in the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), Bulgaria has regarded it as a platform for increasing regional cooperation and improving connectivity in its energy, transport and digital dimensions. In fact, these aspects are perceived as the current bottlenecks in regional cooperation and are recognised as potential growth enhancers.

Although Bulgaria continues to participate in all formats and summits since the 3SI inception, against the backdrop of five parliamentary elections between April 2021 and April 2023 and several caretaker governments in between, it comes as no surprise that the Three Seas Initiative could hardly make it to the priority list of decision makers in Bulgaria. To a certain extent, this could explain the absence of a more active contribution at the political level after hosting the Sofia Summit in July 2021. Thus, the longer the domestic unpredictability continues, the fewer are the chances that there will be a more proactive role on behalf of decision-makers in Bulgaria.

On a par with other 3SI countries, Bulgaria is further among the equity holders in the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF), having committed 20 million EUR in 2020. In terms of priority projects submitted, there has been no change since the 2018 Bucharest Summit - their number remains 3 in total, which is rather modest in comparison to the majority of other member countries. These projects have a clear focus on transport infrastructure (2 projects) and energy diversification (1 project), although Bulgaria has a lot to offer in the digital field as well. Given the generally insufficient level of energy, transport and digital connectivity in this part of Europe, the limited number of projects submitted and the constrained availability of potential projects to be proposed has raised eyebrows among experts, to say the least.

In contrast, in the summer of 2022, [3SIIF acquired a significant share in the major operator of the port of Burgas in Bulgaria](#). The latter is perceived as an



important infrastructure asset connecting the Three Seas Region with Central Asia and the Middle East, being strategically located on the Black Sea coast, and is the closest European Union port to the Bosphorus. It remains to be seen how this investment will materialise in the near future.

In the mid-term perspective, there are developments in Bulgaria's close neighbourhood that can intensify, or rather put on hold, its ambitions for a more vivid contribution to the Three Seas Initiative. Firstly, it is the decision of Greece to join 3SI, since both countries have been working on and/or planning several energy diversification projects in South-East Europe. Secondly, it is Russia's war against Ukraine - provided that the conflict remains confined to the territory of Ukraine. As a direct consequence, North-South connectivity can gain momentum, and the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine could add a new branch to it.

Overall, the Three Seas Initiative bears a significant potential for a country like Bulgaria, but because of the interplay of a series of domestic, regional and international factors, the country has not yet fully benefited from it to the extent it should.

Croatia - Towards new energy supply routes

Visnja SAMARDZIJA

Visnja Samardzija is Emeritus Researcher at the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO) Zagreb, where she was the Head of the European Integration Department until 2017. She obtained her PhD at the Faculty of Economics, University of Zagreb. She is the author of numerous articles and the editor of several books in area of EU enlargement, EU public policies and industrial relations. She is member of Centre for Democracy and Law Miko Tripalo in Zagreb. She lectured at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, Libertas University Zagreb and University of Osijek. She was assistant minister in the Ministry for European Integration of the RC (2000-2004) and a Board member of the Trans European Policy Studies Association - TEPSA, Brussels (2010-2016).




Croatia contributed to the 3SI already at the early beginning, being one of the co-founding states together with Poland. In spite of a low level of political commitment to the Initiative in the first years, the centre-right government today supports its strategic goals, and the 3SI is seen as one of the most important external policy initiatives launched by Croatia. After Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the new geopolitical circumstances, the potential of the 3SI for increasing energy security and strengthening the country's relevance in the regional context has been recognised.¹

Active participation in interconnection priority projects, which are the core of the 3SI, is one of Croatia's main contributions to the Initiative. Out of 91 projects presented in the [3SI Status Report for 2022](#), Croatia participates in 17 and thus, together with Hungary, the country is involved in the largest number of 3SI projects. Most of them focus on sustainable and inclusive connectivity, as well as energy diversification and independence. Croatia takes part in only a few digitalisation projects, although there is potential for stronger involvement.

The LNG terminal project on the island of Krk seems to be one of Croatia's most promising contributions to the 3SI. The project aims to cover the national energy needs and increase the security of gas supply through the provision of a new supply route for the Central and South-Eastern European countries. It enables gas supply flexibility and contributes to energy diversification, primarily by providing opportunities for using new sources as well as new routes, and reduces dependence on Russian supplies. Thus, the LNG terminal on Krk clearly shows the benefits of participating in the Initiative, as it enables the transition from power-dependence, while also playing an important role in the new European energy order. Thanks to

¹ For more details see: Boromisa, A.M. and Samardzija, V. (2022). "Croatia: in search for visibility and stronger support." In: *Three Seas Initiative: Mapping National Perspectives*. Eds: Sprūds and Vargulis. Riga, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2022. pp. 42-57.



the LNG terminal, Croatia could become a regional energy hub. Therefore, LNG capacities will be expanded to open up gas procurement opportunities for several other countries in the region.

Croatia faces two main challenges to its goal of becoming a more active player in the 3SI: the need to strengthen institutional structure for implementing the Initiative, and increasing the visibility of 3SI in the country.

The national institutional structure of 3SI needs to be further developed and better equipped with human resources. Secondly, promoting the Initiative in Croatia will be crucial in the coming years, as communication with the general public on these issues is poor. There is still a lack of knowledge, understanding and commitment to the 3SI goals and activities at the level of the general public in Croatia. Joint projects are not perceived as 3SI outcomes, so the experience of LNG Krk terminal should be communicated as one of the clear benefits. Additionally, there is a need for further academic and policy debate, with researches and analyses on the potential outcomes and benefits, including with stronger involvement of the civil security institutions. Communication with the general public needs to be intensified to raise awareness among citizens, civil society, academia and political actors about 3SI issues. Finally, the visibility of 3SI should be improved by disseminating information on the websites of key institutions.

To be or not to be: Czech Republic's ambiguous attitude towards the 3SI


Jana JUZOVA

Jana Juzová is a Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Global Europe Programme at EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. Her previous working experience involves Central European think tanks and EULEX EU's Rule of Law Mission to Kosovo. She was a Visiting Scholar in the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Brussels and a ReThink.CEE Fellow in the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Her research focuses on European integration, EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy, and regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe.



The Czech Republic has so far been one of the least active members of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI). It did not join the Investment Fund, it never offered to host a 3SI summit, and the new Czech government cancelled the only project that had been submitted - the domestically controversial Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor. The country's scepticism towards the Initiative has its roots in the perceived Polish dominance of the platform and initial doubts regarding the 3SI's purpose in the context of Warsaw's conflict with Brussels. However, with the changed geopolitical reality caused by Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the ever-strong need for enhanced connectivity of neighbouring countries with the EU, the Czech approach to 3SI is also being reassessed in an attempt for a more conceptual and constructive involvement.

The Czech Republic would benefit significantly from improving its connectivity with other countries in the region, but what seems to be the persuasive aspect for the Czech involvement is the connection between the 3SI and third countries. The Initiative offers a way to increase the U.S. presence in Central and Eastern Europe, but it can also help enhance connectivity with Ukraine and other countries in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Weak infrastructure connections between the EU and its neighbouring regions are targeted by several EU-led programmes and initiatives - the TEN-T Transport Network, macro-regional strategies (Strategy for the Adriatic & Ionian Region and the Danube Region Strategy) or some twinning projects. Further development of this dimension under the 3SI framework, started by the inclusion of Ukraine as a 3SI partner country in 2022, could create more synergies with the EU's goals towards its neighbourhood. Convergence with EU initiatives in this regard would certainly have a positive impact on Czechia, which considers essential the alignment of the 3SI with the EU's objectives. Simultaneously, apart from the practical results of the cooperation between the 3SI and countries with European aspirations, their involvement would further create additional space for the socialisation of different actors with their EU



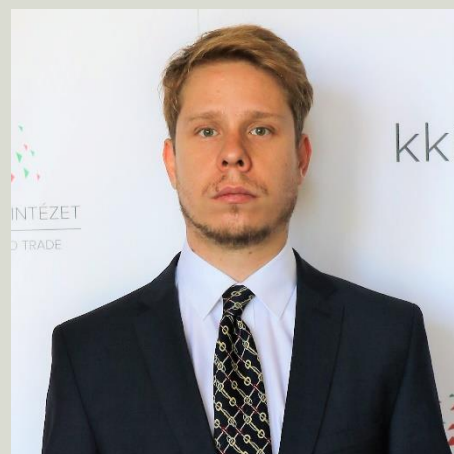
counterparts, allowing for an exchange of know-how and joint discussions about the future of the CEE region.

In light of the growing relevance of the 3SI, the Czech Republic now finds itself at a crossroads where it has to redefine its approach to the Initiative, the perceived benefits of its involvement, and the concrete infrastructure projects that could replace the dismissed Danube-Oder-Elbe canal. The outcome of the recent presidential elections can also have an impact on Czechia's activity in the 3SI. The new President, former NATO general Petr Pavel, can potentially demonstrate a more positive approach to the platform in terms of its regional and geopolitical dimensions. Despite the renewed interest among Czech stakeholders, whether or not Czechia will join the Fund and be more proactive in using the 3SI's potential for infrastructure development will depend on the Initiative's ability to mobilise the necessary additional funds, either from strategic partners such as the U.S. or from the private sector.

The (geo)momentum for development - connecting the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Sea regions

Péter STEPPER


Péter Stepper has received his MA degree in International Relations at the Corvinus University of Budapest in 2012. From 2013 he has worked as the editorial head of Security Policy Review, then from 2014 and 2016 as a lecturer of ELTE TÁTK. He also worked as lecturer for the International Business School from 2016 to 2018. He defended his PhD thesis in 2018 at the Multidisciplinary Doctoral School of Corvinus University about forced migration as security challenges in the Visegrad region. From 2016 to 2021, he was a research fellow at the Antall József Knowledge Centre. From 2019 he is Adjunct Professor of the Department of International Security Studies at the National University of Public Service. From August 2021 he is a Program Manager and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade. His research area is the Visegrad cooperation, security policy, transatlantic relations and NATO.



The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is a joint representation of 12 European Union member states situated between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas. The Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF) was created to offset the differences in the development of individual regions of the EU, as an investment vehicle to finance key infrastructure projects, primarily through investments in the transport, energy and digital infrastructure sectors. The Fund is supported by the national development finance institutions of the Three Seas countries. The majority of these core sponsors have committed to the Fund, taking the total financial support to 913 million EUR.

The region constitutes a considerable part of the EU and has well-developed commercial links between countries, generating almost 14% of GDP in the entire European Union, and covering 30% of the Community's territory. Every fourth resident of the EU lives precisely in this region. State development banks that help combine public and private funding play a crucial role in achieving this objective. The 3SIIF is a commercial project - apart from strengthening cooperation between countries and improving infrastructure in the region, the Fund aims to provide profit to its investors. The region has a lot of advantages that are crucial from the investors' perspective: rapid economic development, political stability, well-educated society and also favourable geographical location. The pandemic-induced crisis can influence the changes in global supply chains and allow for a better position on the world markets.

Hungary urges fellow stakeholders in the 3SI countries to make more serious commitments regarding national financial contributions to the fund, and awaits potential further developments following the very generous pledge of 1 000 million USD by the US. As financial capabilities of Hungary are not as limitless as those of the US and the international financial institutions such as the IMF or the EBRD,



Budapest also wants to make its fair contribution to delivering results. Hence, the Hungarian government decided [to join the 3SIIF and support it with 20 million EUR](#) via the Hungarian Export-Import Bank (EXIM). They also [recommended Budapest](#) as the location for a Permanent Secretariat for the Three Seas Initiative, which is an offer yet to be considered by the other members. Budapest fully supports further development of the fund, not just because we deeply believe in global and regional connectivity, but also because it strengthens both transatlantic relations, and our regional security.

Besides the EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans region, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova have also become EU candidate countries, both of them being in dire need of infrastructure development. Coordinating the European efforts for Ukrainian reconstruction projects by using all available platforms, including 3SI, represents a logical step in this context. There is still a lot of untapped potential within the 3SI. Due to the changing political climate and the increased significance of the Eastern flank of Europe, now we can really move on into a next phase of cooperation.

One of the major prerequisites is the generous financial and diplomatic contribution of the US government, which has also provided unwavering support to Ukraine since the unprovoked and illegal aggression of Russia in 2022. The historic challenges in Eastern Europe will definitely help maintain bipartisan agreement on the importance of 3SI. The other perhaps more important task is to convince as many of the participating states as possible to continue increasing their national contributions to the common budget. Even more importantly, the Initiative can finally attract other private investors, whose contribution will definitely be more significant than the public funding, which was only the starting point for new projects.

The Three Seas Initiative and Latvia: a post-summit loyalty test looms

Māris ANDŽĀNS

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With the hosting of 2022 Riga Three Seas Initiative (3SI) Summit, Latvia's role was not only central to the 3SI, but the Initiative was a notable part of Latvia's foreign policy in 2022. As it often happens, following peaks like hosting summits, the drive on the respective Initiative tends to plummet. This is likely to be the case for Latvia and 3SI as well. Nevertheless, Latvia will remain committed to 3SI, but the question is to what extent. Russia's war in Ukraine has added a significant argument to steadily improve the connectivity between the Baltic and the Black Sea.

The 2022 3SI Riga Summit

Riga hosted the 3SI Summit in June 2022. On the sidelines of the summit, the Business Forum and the first 3SI Civil Society Forum were also held. The summit took place at a geopolitically turbulent time. Despite the numerous negative consequences, Russia's war in Ukraine underscored the need to develop the North-South Baltic and Black Sea connectivity. That has also made the 3SI more viable on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Regarding Ukraine, not only did its president deliver a video message at the summit, but his country was also granted 3SI partner status.

In addition to Ukraine, the summit and the accompanying business forum were well attended, with a fair representation of like-minded external players, including systemically important international financial institutions, representatives of the private sector, and the virtual participation of the foreign affairs ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan.

Perhaps the most notable announcement during the summit came from the US International Development Finance Corporation regarding the contribution of up to 300 million USD to the 3SI Investment Fund. Separately, the Fund's investment in a major port operator in the Port of Burgas was announced (it was only the Fund's fourth such investment). [Google committed 5 million USD](#) to non-profit projects related to digital connectivity. These were small but bold steps in transforming the 3SI into an initiative that has practical impact.

The 3SI and the like-minded countries to the East

Latvia has long supported Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, and Georgia in their democratisation and Westernisation efforts. These instincts run deep in Latvia's foreign policy and are, in fact, more enduring than the commitment to the 3SI.

Russia's war against Ukraine was the biggest geopolitical shock for Latvia in decades. Latvia is one of the most vocal supporters of Ukraine and among its leading donors as measured by reference to the gross domestic product. Support for Ukraine runs much deeper than official policies, since most of the population strongly supports Ukraine.

As a slightly paradoxical silver lining in the context of 3SI, Russia's war has furthered the thinking of a common space of like-minded countries between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Before the war, Ukraine certainly had Latvia's sympathies and support, but was seen as a rather distant partner when it came to transportation, energy, and communications infrastructure. The war and related sanctions against Russia and Belarus have weighed on the future reckoning of Latvian connectivity. The expansion of the European gauge Rail Baltica project towards Ukraine, as well as the improvement of the energy and electronic communications networks between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea has gained strong favourable arguments.

Latvia has signalled its strong willingness to be part of the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. These prospects also raise chances of linking Republic of Moldova to the post-war Western-centric infrastructure. Some ongoing projects, such as the Black Sea Energy Submarine Cable, already underpin the viability of integrating Georgia into the EU's connectivity networks, as well as the extension of those networks into the Caucasus and towards Central Asia.

The 3SI itself should not necessarily be formally expanded, but rather be used as a driver for both intra-EU and extra-EU connectivity. Given the size of Latvian economy, Latvia will be a facilitator and advocate, rather than a significant donor in extra-EU connectivity. Needless to say, such nonmaterial roles matter as well.

Impotent or with potential? A Latvian view on the Three Seas Initiative

Imants LIEĢIS

Imants Lieģis is a senior researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. Born and educated as a lawyer in the UK, he was a Latvian public servant for 28 years between 1992 and 2020. He was Latvia's Minister of Defence (2009-2010), Member of Latvia's 10th Saeima (Parliament) and a career diplomat with Ambassadorial postings to NATO, France, Spain, Hungary and the Benelux countries. He is on the Advisory Board and is an active member of the European Leadership Network; he is a member of TAG ("The Alphen Group"). He publishes widely on foreign affairs and defence and security matters.




Latvia's hosting of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) Summit and Business Forum held in Riga on 21-22 June 2022 had an air of "Much ado about nothing". The timing was unfortunate because of the international and local agendas. The EU leaders met on 23 - 24 June in Brussels, and the NATO Madrid Summit took place on 29 - 30 June. Both events overshadowed the 3SI Summit in political importance and weight of the decisions taken. As for the local agenda, Latvian hearts and minds were focussed on the annual Midsummer festivities which begin on 23 June and extend for a number of days thereafter.

On the positive side, it was fortunate that the meetings were held in person, post-COVID-19, providing also an opportunity to react to Russia's senseless full-scale war launched 4 months earlier against Ukraine, which is a crucial country adjacent to one of the "three seas" - the Black Sea.

Latvia's hosting therefore offered some modest contributions in advancing the 3SI. What were they?

Firstly, the outreach of 3SI was broadened by engaging the non-governmental sector. A Three Seas Civil Society Forum was hosted by Latvia's President in May - the first official event of its type with presidential engagement. The aim was to provide "democratic security influencers" with a platform for exchanging new ideas and knowledge between civil society actors. It offered [recommendations for the ensuing Summit meetings](#), focussing on issues important to 3SI societies, namely connectivity, digitalisation, security, and governance. The formulation of a common vision is highlighted, to enable 3SI to reach out to its populations. However, the method of "creating multi-stakeholder forums" will need to be elaborated.

Secondly, a second [3SI Parliamentary meeting took place in Riga](#) on 21 June, thereby deepening the links that 3SI is building up with legislators. The Forum will be taken on board at the summit in Bucharest this year.



The 3SI is touted as being “politically inspired, commercially driven”. Advancing these principles produced mixed results for Latvia.

On the political level, the Riga Summit expressed support for Ukraine’s ambitions towards joining the EU and granted Ukraine partner status to the 3SI. Germany’s President Steinmeier, speaking in Riga, sought partnership status for Germany. Nevertheless, the call fell on deaf ears.

Latvia emphasises the geopolitical importance of the 3SI as a potential instrument to attract further American involvement in the region and enhance security. But efforts to obtain high level US Administration attendance (President or Vice-President) in Riga, failed. Instead, Scott Nathan, CEO of the US Development Finance Corporation turned up, mentioned the 300 million USD commitment for 3SI, but without finalising the payment of this sum.

Much “commercially driven” work still needs to be done to improve North - South connectivity through infrastructure projects covering energy security, transport and digital networks. Unless clear added value can be provided, the potential for the 3SI will remain unrealised as the EU will continue to be the dominant actor for the 12 EU member countries of 3SI.

Without commercial drive and with a lack of political inspiration, the 3SI could become impotent. Food for thought as Romania, for the second time, hosts the 3SI summits.

The hope effect of the Three Seas Initiative

Jaroslav DVORAK


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The Three Seas Initiative is not yet widely known in Lithuania, because the governmental leadership is very modest in presenting the Initiative to businesses, communities, and NGOs is very modest. The official communication is basically limited to information about official visits to certain events. Of course, there is a general consensus that this is a values-based Initiative, but at the moment it is mostly known to a narrow circle of foreign policy experts and members of the business community.

Naturally, the involvement of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia in the Three Seas Initiative will provide these countries with another proof that the European Union (EU) is awaiting them, while the emerging economic cooperation opportunities will contribute to closer integration with the EU and to the democratisation and Europeanisation of these countries. At the same time, such a rapprochement poses challenges, as Russia's war against Ukraine slows down the economic prospects of the entire region. The role of Lithuania in this context is particularly important. It is clear that Lithuania will support the fastest possible involvement of all three states at all levels of this Initiative, as this reflects the position of the political, business elite and ordinary citizens.

The US has expressed support for the Three Seas Initiative since its inception. These are not empty words: an agreement has been reached in 2022, according to which the US will allocate 285.3 million EUR to the investment fund of the Three Seas Initiative. This is particularly significant, as it aims to increase the security of energy supply and contribute to the promotion of economic cooperation. The appetite of other financial institutions to get involved will depend on the countries' ambitious projects, but it can be expected that Scandinavian and Nordic financial institutions will also contribute to this Initiative with their financial resources and technical expertise.



In 2022, it was declared that 91 projects were implemented, five of which have already been completed, but the majority of projects (58) have only been registered. On the one hand, this shows that the Initiative is gaining momentum, while, on the other hand, we see that the involvement of some countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic) is symbolic to date. It is noted that the number of priority projects increased by 89.6% compared to 2018, which shows that the pandemic did not stop cooperation. The war in Ukraine marked the launching of new projects, as 38% of all projects focus on energy development.

During the forthcoming Bucharest Summit, it is important to seek an agreement to unite and strengthen cooperation between the Three Seas Initiative countries. This will improve the implementation of key strategic projects and contribute to a faster sustainable growth of the region. It is especially important to continue improving transport connectivity, because the opportunities of the energy infrastructure already created in the Baltic Sea area can contribute to the supply of energy resources to the entire region.

Lithuania and the 3SI: between security and economic cooperation**Dorota SOKOLOVSKA**

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Lithuania's aim of strengthening regional security infrastructure became even sounder in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Despite being designed as a forum promoting economic cooperation, the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) does not shy away from other political objectives. It became especially clear at the Riga Summit when the partner countries opened the doors of the format to Ukraine. Today, there is no doubt that Lithuania expects the Bucharest Summit to pay further attention to Ukraine's integration in the region and 3SI.

When joining the format, Lithuania's primary rationale was energy security. Willing to break free from its dependence on Russian gas, the first liquified natural gas (LNG) terminal - 'Independence', was commissioned in the Lithuanian port city of Klaipėda, enabling the country to meet its energy diversification goal. Instead of Russia, Lithuania now sources its LNG mostly from Norway, the US and Qatar. The regional energy infrastructure is further strengthened: in 2022, Poland and Lithuania launched the Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania (GIPL) pipeline. This will contribute to the integration of the Baltic States and Finland into the European gas market.

Instead of transport infrastructure based on an East-West vector inherited from the Soviet era, Lithuania insists on advancing North-South linkages. All four Lithuanian transport projects submitted as a part of 3SI illustrate this position: Viking Train, Rail Baltica, Via Baltica and the 5G cross-border transport corridors for connected and automated mobility in the Baltics. The aim is first to connect the Baltic States with Poland and eventually with the wider Central European region. This directly complements the 3SI's core objective of improving infrastructure among its member states, and closing the economic gap between Western and Eastern Europe.

Undoubtedly, digital and cyber security is an indispensable element of the security infrastructure to be built among the twelve participating countries. Steps



have already been taken in this direction, for instance, with the establishment of the EU's Cyber Rapid Reaction Team, with Lithuania as a lead nation and several 3SI countries joining as partners. It was created as a cybersecurity rapid response force, on standby and ready to deploy the necessary toolkits. Similarly, Lithuania, together with Ukraine and Georgia, founded the Regional Cyber Defence Centre¹ based in the second-largest Lithuanian city, Kaunas. Given the recurring cyberattacks on European countries coming mainly from the East, it is essential to continue strengthening digital resilience. The Three Seas Initiative can serve as an excellent format for this goal.

To a certain extent, Lithuania views its commitment to 3SI through a comprehensively national security approach in all three 3SI connectivity areas: energy, transport, and digital. Building physical and digital infrastructure is thus crucial for the economy and defence of the region. What Lithuania intends to achieve in the format is precisely this mutually intertwined and complementary linkage, making the region not only more connected but also more secure.

¹ For more information about Regional Cyber Defence Centre, its establishment and structure, see: <https://www.nksc.lt/rkgc/en.html>.

Poland as the driving force of the 3SI. From an ambitious vision to a pragmatic cooperation of 12 EU member states

Agnieszka ORZELSKA-STĄCZEK


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Poland's contribution to the development of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) includes two main elements. First, Poland, together with Croatia, played a key role in the establishment of the 3SI and is its co-founder. Secondly, it has been most actively engaged in promoting this regional cooperation. Apart from political and diplomatic efforts undertaken by the Polish authorities, the Polish state-owned development bank BGK initiated the creation of the 3SI Investment Fund. At present, BGK is its biggest investor, with 750 EUR million committed. It is just an example. In parallel, the development of the 3SI cooperation was accompanied by efforts of Poland and Romania to set up the Bucharest Nine. The two formats, 3SI and Bucharest Nine, are complementary.

Among the twelve 3SI participants, Poland and Romania stand out in terms of population, territory and military spending. Asymmetry is an important characteristic of 3SI as a platform, which offers small states a possibility to influence the direction of cooperation to suit their preferences. Poland declares that it wants to make the region stronger by encouraging partners to actively engage in regional cooperation. This is a way to make their voice better heard.

Since the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022, Poland's position in the region has grown sharply. But even before, Poland was perceived as an informal leader in the 3SI. However, when asked which country is the 3SI leader, minister Krzysztof Szczerski replied that "[there is a group of leaders, these are the countries that organised the summits](#)". In this context, it is worth noting that Romania is the first state to host the 3SI summit for the second time. The 2018 Bucharest Summit opened a new chapter for 3SI. New formats were introduced on that occasion, including the first edition of the 3SI Business Forum. The 3SI entered a new phase, from ambitious vision to pragmatic cooperation. Constantly, the priority of the 3SI



has been to boost connectivity within the region, with a focus on transport, energy and digital infrastructure.

The [declaration adopted at the 3SI Summit in Riga in 2022](#) urged for “*further efforts to focus on science, education, technology and innovation in the three pillars of the 3SI*”. This remains valid. At the upcoming 3SI Summit in Bucharest, a new concept could be introduced: a scientific panel gathering scholars and academics, which would be added to the 3SI summit format. The development of the scientific aspect of the 3SI would boost connectivity in new dimensions. The scientific panel’s aim would be to build knowledge on regional cooperation and discuss the current state of research. It is strongly needed in Central Europe to enhance mutual understanding and improve communication. It is important to highlight the role of science diplomacy in strategic communication between states in times of war and peace.

Poland as a new regional security guarantor

Małgorzata Samojedny

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The past year has brought new challenges to maintaining regional peace. Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine revealed the true attitude of the countries of the region towards the new form of balance in the Three Seas Initiative region. Definitely Poland, with its great multidimensional support for Ukraine in areas like - politics, military and humanitarian aid, has noticeably marked its new role as security guarantor in Central-East Europe.

Over the past year, Poland has provided Ukraine with huge military support, amounting to almost 2.4 billion EUR in military equipment, and what is worth mentioning is that it is not a declared amount, but the effective value of the equipment transferred. It could be noted that Ukraine received 368 tanks as international support, and 300 of them were from Poland.

At the same time, [Poland launched military purchases and conducted large-scale army modernisation](#). Poland has already bought 250 Abrams M1A1 tanks, and ordered from South Korea 189 K92 tanks, 212 K9 howitzers, 18 K239 Chunmoo self-propelled missile artillery launchers and 48 FA-50 combat training aircraft. And that's just the beginning, as [Poland wants to increase the military spending to 3% GDP in 2023](#).

And yet, this is not the main support that Ukraine received from Poland. At the beginning of the Russian invasion, more than 2.5 million war refugees, almost 90% of whom were women and children, left Ukraine and fled to Poland. Polish citizens took care of them, and most of the refugees found accommodation and maintenance in Polish houses. There was no need for organising refugee camps or facilities provided by the government, because Poles opened not only their hearts, but also their homes. This great humanitarian and military support shows that Polish involvement in helping the invaded neighbouring state is the attitude of a regional leader and a true guarantor of security.



The recent visit to Warsaw of the President of United States Joe Biden and the participation in this meeting of the President of Republic of Moldova - Maia Sandu, shows that Poland is recognised as a strong ally and guarantor of the security in the region. The Republic of Moldova is also looking to Romania as its close neighbour and supporter considering the threat of Russian invasion.

During this year Thee Seas Initiative Summit in Bucharest, the future situation of Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia will be the main topic, also with regards to the matter of eventual Russian threats and possible security guarantees from the neighbouring states. Poland, with its experience of tremendous support for Ukraine and Ukrainians, could be a crucial adviser to the rest of the Three Seas Initiative member states in managing support for the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

Building Three Seas+ framework to assist our neighbours in the EU accession process

Julita WILCZEK

Julita Wilczek is a researcher at the Institute of New Europe (Warsaw, Poland), with key focus on the influence of the US, Russia, and China on the security and politics within the Three Seas region. She worked for the Sobieski Institute, the Ministry of Economic Development, and the Polish Development Bank. She has written the first detailed study of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (Collegium Interethnicum, 2021) and other publications on the Three Seas Initiative and the region.




The Three Seas states, in general, are known for being key supporters of Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, the Western Balkans, and Georgia and their EU membership. We support those countries because we know what it is like to be in their shoes - wishing to be “reintegrated” with the rest of Europe and to be shielded from Russian influence. Such support also makes geopolitical sense because, with their accession, the EU power centre will shift further to the East, especially regarding foreign policy priorities.

Despite our enthusiasm for further EU enlargement, the Three Seas region still lacks a comprehensive, regional approach to cooperation with our Eastern neighbours. Activities carried out are dispersed and left to the discretion of individual states or smaller makeshift coalitions. This clearly shows a lot of enthusiasm, especially for helping Ukraine and Republic of Moldova, but enthusiasm alone is not a solid basis for future good relationships. What we need instead is a robust framework for Three Seas+ cooperation, built around the community of interest and complementing the existing, though largely forgotten, Eastern Partnership.

Through this framework, the states of the Three Seas Initiative would become the main advocates of continuing the EU enlargement to the East and a dependable guide through the accession process for our neighbours. We are best suited for this role, because the memory of joining European structures is still very much alive in the Three Seas states, and the integration challenges that our neighbours will face are similar to ours. Within the Three Seas+ format, we could share regulatory best practices, implement cross-border infrastructure projects, and coordinate lobbying for new EU memberships.

We can start with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and eventually invite other states aspiring to join the EU, particularly Georgia and the Western Balkans.



The first step towards the creation of Three Seas+ was taken during the Riga summit last year, when Ukraine became a participating partner of the Initiative. We can take this idea a few steps further this year at the Bucharest Summit. If done right, the region will not only be bound by common history, but also by a common future.

Cooperation without commitment: where does Slovakia see the role of 3SI?

Lucia MOKRÁ


Prof. Lucia Mokrá is the Dean of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. She is professor of International and European Law. Her main research interests focus on fundamental rights after the Treaty of Lisbon, the principle of non-discrimination in EU law and the EU institutional system. She served on the TEPSA Board of Directors since November 2016, and was elected *nemine contradicente* by TEPSA General Assembly in June 2019 as TEPSA Chairperson. Prof. Mokrá was re-elected for a second three-year term as TEPSA Chairperson in May 2022.



The [Strategic Foresight for the Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic](#), issued by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic in August 2022, highlights a number of strategic priorities for the country. These certainly include economic commitment, security cooperation and energy security. Unfortunately, the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is not directly addressed, although a number of 3SI priorities as such are presented in detail.

Regarding the sustainability of the energy resources, the disruption of global value chains due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression in Ukraine since February 2022 has reinforced demands for greater self-sufficiency or diversification of resources. As a result of the green and digital transition, a shift in the share of economic sectors from mining and fossil fuels production to renewable energy is highly needed. The 3SI provides the platform for more effective and environmentally sustainable supply chains, in partnership with countries from the Initiative. However, in practice, Slovakia rather relies on regional initiatives or the European Union itself and does not use the potential of the 3SI in coordinating the greening and energy transition effort in the region. Energy security and closer cooperation with 3SI countries in the medium term would be beneficial for all the actors in the region.

The one important priority addressed by the Initiative is digitalisation to enhance economic integration, productivity, and resilience. Although digitalisation, as one of the priorities of Recovery and Resilience Facility approved by the Council of the EU, required an allocation of at least 21% of financial resources, the [Slovak Republic, with 23% allocation](#), did not effectively address the possibility of closer cross-country cooperation in digitalisation, and the consolidation of the infrastructure in 3SI format. The existing financial allocation may be more effectively addressed by sharing experience and using positive examples in different areas of digitalisation of 3SI partners, rather than individual national projects.



The 3SI Bucharest Summit has the potential to address several important issues, particularly related to regional security, energy security and sustainability of green resources, as well as economic cooperation with the U.S. The U.S. under the Biden administration had a different position on the financial and economic support of the 3SI. Through the goals of ensuring the economic stability of the region and addressing the Russian aggression, the 3SI countries became a strategic barrier in the region for both the U.S. and its support, as well as for the coordinated effort of the European Union itself.

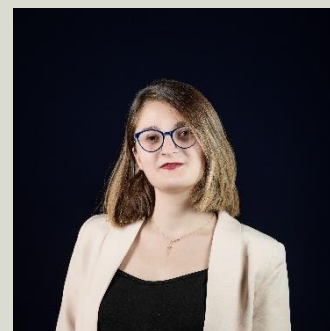
Coordination should be used as a tool of the 3SI countries to discuss and decide on the common approach and towards potential new partners such as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, although these countries are not EU members. The Slovak Republic, with its experience of political and economic transition, may contribute to capacity building and capitalising on the potential of these countries under the Initiative, as well as in their EU accession process, as in the case of the Western Balkan countries.



Views from (potential) 3SI partner states

Three Seas Initiative and Georgia: expectations from the Bucharest Summit**Nino Samkharadze**

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In light of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, the security environment is worsening for Georgia. This shift increased the significance of regional cooperation such as the Three Seas Initiative (3SI).

In terms of opportunities for Georgia, the 3SI can become one of the valuable providers of resilience capability for the member and the partner countries from the Black Sea region. The focus of the EU and NATO on Black Sea security is growing, and the 3SI infrastructural and logistical projects are getting more important. This means that Georgia's potential role as a transit state has also increased. Therefore, accelerating the cooperation (sometimes even proactively) can consolidate the connectivity with Europe, a significant element on the turbulent road of the EU integration that Georgia is currently undergoing.

On the other side, by enhancing cooperation with the non-EU Black Sea countries, new opportunities will emerge for the 3SI as well. Georgia can play a crucial role in increasing Europe's energy independence by upgrading the transit projects from the Caspian Sea. Georgia's strategic partnership with Azerbaijan and Turkey, important actors for supporting the EU's energy diversification, can be an advantage. The 3SI can capitalise on this asset by discussing and investing in the infrastructural projects aiming at enhancing Georgia's transit potential through railways, pipelines and its Black Sea ports.

In terms of challenges for expanding the cooperation between the 3SI and non-EU Black Sea countries, several factors can be mentioned: the 3SI does not have a clear strategy of properly engaging with the non-EU states. This might limit Georgia's involvement in the important projects ensuring the new Black Sea security architecture. Additionally, alongside the warfare launched by the Kremlin on the territory of Ukraine, Georgia is more vulnerable to hybrid threats from Russia. And lastly, Georgia needs a stable political environment if it wants to launch big-scale cooperation with the 3SI countries and become a trusted partner. But internal



democratic dynamics and the strained strategic relations with Ukraine (which is an obvious leading driver in cooperation with the 3SI) might challenge Tbilisi on the road to strengthening this collaboration.

During the Bucharest Summit, an upgraded vision about expanding the partnerships and even membership should be initiated. The 3SI might also expand the scale of cooperation and strengthen its focus on security issues to maintain the stability of infrastructural projects, particularly in the Black Sea region. During the Bucharest Summit, cross-country sectoral cooperation can also be initiated (such as the Joint Cybersecurity Centre by Lithuania, Ukraine and Georgia). Georgia became a strategic partner of Romania in 2022, which might increase the support from Bucharest in terms of including Tbilisi in stronger cooperation and initiate additional platforms within the 3SI to enhance the Black Sea infrastructural initiations similar to the electricity cable project. On the other hand, Georgia needs to prepare for the summit with a clear plan for how it can enhance its involvement in the infrastructural projects suggested by the 3SI.

Three Seas Initiative and Georgia: win-win partnership potential

Irakli SIRBILADZE


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The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) aims at strengthening cohesion among the 12 EU member states, as well as between these states and the Union more broadly. This is being done by placing a premium on energy security, connectivity and economic development. Since 2016, the 3SI has progressed on some of its initial objectives, including implementing priority projects and demonstrating its geopolitical and geo-economic value to the EU, the United States and Germany. However, [the differences in identifying first-order priorities among the domains of energy, connectivity, economy and geopolitics, as well as the lack of meaningful coordination among the participating states remain among the 3SI challenges.](#)

As a non-EU state, Georgia is not part of the 3SI. As a member of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative and a signatory of the Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement, the country has built expansive bilateral relations with the 3SI states and the EU more broadly. However, 3SI as a platform *per se* is absent from Georgia's official strategic documents, such as the 2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia, the Government Programme 2021-2024: *Towards Building a European State*, and the *Vision 2030: Georgia's Development Strategy*, and hardly figures among Georgia's foreign policy priorities. This is partly explained by the 3SI's limitation of the membership to EU member states, and the prevalent ambiguity within the EU on offering Georgia the European perspective prior to the war in Ukraine. More practically, Georgia prioritises strategic bilateral ties with Black Sea neighbours such as Romania and Bulgaria, and attaches a greater importance to Union-led strategic projects rather than to the sub-EU projects that may offer less continuity and resilience.

As Georgia's European perspective has been acknowledged following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, forging closer cooperation with the 3SI has become possible. 3SI's membership could expand to Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. This can be done initially by offering observer participant status to the three states and inviting them into the 3SI's decision-making frameworks. This fits with the overall EU logic, as the EU Transport Community [has taken](#) a similar



approach vis-à-vis the three states. The 2022 3SI [Summit Declaration](#) has recognised the EU aspirations of Ukraine, Georgia and Republic of Moldova, while the 2023 Bucharest Summit could express the political commitment towards welcoming the three states into the 3SI in the future.

Georgia's membership could advance the 3SI states' energy security and connectivity agenda. In terms of energy security, Georgia's increasing role in energy transit demonstrates its value to the Union and the 3SI states. [The recent agreement](#) between Romania, Hungary, Azerbaijan and Georgia regarding the Black Sea electricity cable stands proof. In terms of connectivity, the EaP has [already envisaged](#) increasing Georgia's physical and digital connectivity with the EU via the Black Sea. Georgia's potential accession to the EU necessitates more initiatives connecting the country to the EU's transport networks, primarily through the TEN-T. Bringing in Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova could also strengthen the geopolitical and geo-economic value of the 3SI, [due to the rising role of the Black Sea region both in terms of trade and geopolitics](#). However, their membership could geopoliticise the 3SI to the frustration of the majority of states that do not find geopolitics as a core priority. Furthermore, bringing in Georgia, Ukraine and Republic of Moldova could add to the existing coordination challenges, as the three states will bring their own perspectives and priorities with them.

Most importantly, the success of the 3SI depends on its ability to co-exist with the EU-led strategic projects, and gain political and economic support from bigger players both within and outside the Union. EU initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership and the newly institutionalised European Political Community (EPC) already cover Georgia, Ukraine and Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, the 3SI should demonstrate how it can be an effective means of communication between the wider Union and the three potential new members. Moreover, the 3SI should aim at securing formal commitments from the US, Germany and France if it is to remain geopolitically and geoeconomically relevant. The 3SI leaders should utilise the changing geopolitical realities to showcase the strategic value of 3SI.

Turning the 3SI into a 4SI: a view from Athens


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The European policy context and the wider geopolitical setting of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) in 2023 is much different than it was in 2015, when the 3SI was launched. The expansion of cross-border energy, transportation, and digital infrastructure between the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Black Sea, which is the key goal of the 3SI, although it remains as pertinent today as ever, has acquired a strong resilience-building and security aspect.

Indicating the increased interest of Greece in the Initiative, Greek President K. Sakellaropoulou participated for the first time in the 6th Sofia Summit of the 3SI in 2021 as a guest. [According to K. Sakellaropoulou, Greece's geographical location, making it a gateway to the Mediterranean - a sea of global importance for international trade and transport -, would add a fourth sea to the Initiative](#), boosting its connectivity potential and geopolitical importance. There is a strong political economy rationale for Greece's interest in 3SI, as the country seeks to finance the development of infrastructure projects following several years of a deep debt crisis that dwindled its public finance. Cross-border connectivity with South-Eastern and Central European economies is vital for intra-regional and inter-regional cohesion and development especially of the northern part of the country. Critical infrastructure inter-connections in road, rail and port transport are certainly insufficient. The extension to the Greek city of Thessaloniki of the of Via Carpathia motorway project, which starts from Lithuania, serves the concept of territorial cohesion and socio-economic development along the Eastern and Central regions of the EU embedded in North-South interconnections. Recent developments have renewed the focus on the 3SI and energy connectivity, in response to the volatility of the energy market and the high energy prices, but also considering the implementation of the European Green Deal and the EU Recovery Plan. The inclusion of Greece in the TAP project and its LNG facilities strengthen a North-South energy corridor and the energy resilience of the South-Eastern and Central and Eastern European countries.



Although the 3SI has placed economic development and connectivity at its core, Russia's war against Ukraine and the cementing of global powers rivalry (US, China, Russia) underscore the Initiative's importance for a more geopolitical EU and for consolidating NATO's Eastern Flank. Today, effective cross-border connectivity and unrestricted transport still remain vital to European security and deterrence, as proved by the need to rapidly move troops across Central Europe in response to Russian military aggression. In this regard, Alexandroupolis port in northern Greece has proven of critical importance to NATO. Smart connectivity is not only important for expanding digital elements across key infrastructures that support new business models, but it is also critical for bolstering cyber security. The extension of 3SI participation to the Associated-Trio countries also attracts renewed interest after the (conditional) candidate status offered to Ukraine and Republic of Moldova, and the European perspective to Georgia.

Despite the retreat of various subregional cooperation initiatives throughout Europe, due to the return of war and great-power competition, the 3SI agenda remains relevant both for achieving cohesion and the connectivity potential of the participating states, as well as for the EU's geopolitical posture.

The Three Seas Initiative - a chance to capitalise on the potential of Republic of Moldova

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The involvement of the Republic of Moldova as a partner in the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is particularly relevant due to its potential to contribute to subjects related to the energy security, infrastructure, food crisis, and digitalisation projects in the region. Currently, one of the main objectives is ensuring the security of Europe, which was seriously challenged by Russia's attack on Ukraine, therefore, one of the goals of the Three Seas Initiative is to strengthen the partnership with Ukraine and offer support to its reconstruction. The war waged by Russia in Ukraine will have long-lasting, negative and serious economic consequences, therefore the Initiative should implement measures such as: supporting the development of clean energy, ensuring the opening of markets for investment on the widest scale, quality investments in sustainable infrastructure and transport. Cooperation between the public and private sectors for the development of projects must also be promoted, but the most important is the need to ensure the energy independence of the 3SI countries alongside Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Republic of Moldova expressed its desire to join the 3SI through the [declaration](#) of the Deputy Prime Minister Nicu Popescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who stressed the relevance of infrastructure for connecting the country to the European Union. The official mentioned the objective of modernising the Chisinau - Ungheni railway section, taking into account its transition to the European gauge as well. Additionally, priority projects for the Republic of Moldova concern road and energy infrastructure, the development of renewable energy, the construction of bridges over the Prut River, and telecommunications infrastructure.

In terms of energy, the Republic of Moldova has the potential to become a significant player in the Three Seas region due to its location on the route of the North-South Gas Corridor, which aims to connect Central and Eastern Europe with




the Southern Gas Corridor. This project could bring diversification to the region's energy sources, reducing dependence on Russia.

In addition, the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the Three Seas Initiative can help increase cooperation in the field of infrastructure, particularly in the development of transport networks. In this regard, in July 2022 the Commission revised the TEN-T (Trans-European Transport Network) maps to facilitate the extension of the European corridors to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and their future incorporation into European transport standards. The country is situated on the TEN-T, and can contribute to the development of regional transport connections, which can increase the efficiency and safety of transport in the region. The [EU support](#) will contribute to the rehabilitation of the North-South rail axis, thus facilitating Ukrainian exports through Moldovan territory to the Danube ports. Bringing the infrastructure in Republic of Moldova and Ukraine up to European technical, regulatory and administrative standards represents [one of the key objectives of TEN-T](#). In the medium term, the European Commission seeks to establish new connecting infrastructures that will help the reconstruction of Ukraine. Regarding trains and railways connectivity, the adoption of a standard gauge in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as in the other European countries, is essential to improve rail interoperability and efficiency.

The involvement of the Republic of Moldova in the 3SI can also help boost digitalisation and innovation in the region. The country has a well-developed IT sector and can contribute to the development of digital infrastructure and technology solutions.

Additionally, the Republic of Moldova can contribute to the logistical aspects of the food supply chain in the region in several ways. Firstly, it is an agricultural country with fertile land and a long tradition of producing quality fruits, vegetables, cereals and wine. The country's food exports account for a significant portion of its total exports, making it a potentially valuable contributor to the Three Seas region's food supply chains. Secondly, the Republic of Moldova is strategically located between Romania and Ukraine that are also significant agricultural producers. This location can enable it to act as a logistical hub for food transportation and distribution between these countries. The significant progress achieved in recent years in modernising its transportation infrastructure, including roads, rail and ports, has resulted in better connectivity and more efficient transportation, which can further enhance its potential to serve as a logistical hub. Fourthly, the Republic of Moldova is currently implementing a national strategy to modernise and digitalise its agricultural sector, which includes the use of innovative technologies and best practices. This strategy can help improve the quality and efficiency of Moldovan food production, making it more competitive on the regional market. Finally, the participation in the 3SI can facilitate cooperation and coordination between member states in terms of food transportation and distribution. The 3SI can serve as a platform for sharing best practices and improving cross-border logistics, which can



ultimately enhance the efficiency and resilience of the food supply chains in the region.

In conclusion, as an observer state in the Three Seas Initiative, through the cooperation and coordination with its member states, the Republic of Moldova can contribute to the logistical aspects of the food supply chains in the region, by leveraging its agricultural potential, strategic location, modern transportation infrastructure, and national strategy to modernise and digitalise its agricultural sector.

The game-changing 3SI Bucharest Summit: a chance or a failed opportunity for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova?

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The Bucharest Summit of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is expected to bring together leaders from participating countries, as well as representatives from the private sector and international organisations, to discuss and advance the development of key infrastructure projects in the region. It is a great opportunity for the representatives of states leadership, businesses and the expert communities to share their opinions and concerns regarding the future of the region. Obviously, its agenda should include the issue of the Russian war against Ukraine and its impact on priority transport and energy projects, including those that can enhance the resilience of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The Russian war against Ukraine has demonstrated both the weaknesses of the transport chains attacked by Russia and the vulnerabilities of the energy sector in both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Specific projects can be announced in this regard, particularly in light of obtaining the candidate status to the EU accession by both countries, with projects related to green energy and infrastructure development based on “green principles” being especially relevant. Moreover, it can be of interest to promote the idea of producing nuclear fuel in Ukraine in collaboration with Westinghouse, and supplying it to the countries in the 3SI region.

Bringing together the respective representatives of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and private and international investors, already engaged in the discussion of the priorities of the region, can be of added value, and potentially attract investment and spur economic growth. The key obstacle in this regard relates to the war risks, and it may be a promising direction for 3SI to consider its influence on international financial institutions (e.g. the World Bank and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency - MIGA). In addition, the discussion on the feasibility of state guarantees of 3SI states for their businesses and investments in Ukraine should be launched, considering the current situation.

At the same time, bearing in mind Ukraine’s growing need for recovery, the 3SI may also consider launching the incubator for ideas on projects that can be



jointly implemented by the 3SI and Ukrainian actors, and partially funded by the EU, international financial institutions and donors and private investors and co-funded by the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund.

In addition to medium and long-term thinking, there is a need to focus on projects that have an immediate impact. In this regard, bearing in mind the necessity to increase the productivity of new supply chains and the need to transport goods from Ukraine on alternative routes, the Via Carpathia project should gain additional momentum. The emerging initiative to connect Odessa in Ukraine to Dorohusk in Poland by Europe's 1.435-metre gauge (instead of the existing 1.52-metre gauge) can find relevant audience at the Bucharest Summit.



Views from Romania

Challenges, opportunities and expectations of enhanced cooperation within the 3SI towards the Black Sea

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The Three Seas Initiative (3SI), envisaged as a flexible and informal political platform at presidential level, was shaped in 2015 as a forum to contribute to the development of infrastructure in the fields of energy, transport and digital telecommunications in 12 EU Central and Eastern European member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Interconnection with the aim of creating added value and regional development by stimulating cross-border and international cooperation is the central objective of this Initiative. Regional cooperation of the Central and Eastern European states is justified and desirable considering the need to achieve convergence to Western European standards.

The ambitious goals and plans put forth at the seven 3SI summits were achieved to a small extent and, without envisioning a sizeable project, concretely completed. The causes thereof are mainly the institutional framework and limited instruments (especially at the financial level) of the framework of cooperation. Without specific governance, proper means and consistent financial sources, these objectives remain only at the political level. The civil society must be directly and additionally involved in this governance process. The potential of 3SI is huge, given the geographical position, the spatial extent, the number of states involved, the population size and their economy (representing 30% of the EU surface, 25% of the EU population and almost 20% of the EU GDP).

However, the challenges are also consistent with this potential. The common history and geography of these states, associated with the common needs for infrastructure development at the three aforementioned levels, placed in the context of European integration, of the challenges of achieving competitiveness and convergence standards, are also marked by the security challenges of the region. Russia's illegal aggression and war against Ukraine requires enhanced attention to 3SI. This Initiative acquires increased relevance, not only at the regional level, but



also at a much wider level given the geopolitical stake that calls for the cooperation, development and interconnection of the infrastructure of these states, including outwards through the Balkan and Black Sea space. The security of the EU at several levels is now also at stake.

In the context of the war in Ukraine and of the dispute between the EU and the Russian Federation (highly visible and yielding direct consequences), the EU energy security crisis and, in particular, that of the 12 3SI states is posing new challenges. The overall situation and the current crisis can constitute geopolitical elements potentially contributing to the emergence of opportunities that stimulate the implementation of 3SI projects. Important steps have already been taken at the political level, and opportunities have arisen for the involvement of directly interested companies, as well as other actors, such as the EU, the US or Germany as a state directly interested in the development of infrastructure and interconnectivity through the 3SI area that would allow for the diversification of energy sources or new trade routes through the Balkans and the Black Sea.

Romania has a high relevance, perhaps the most important one, in the equation of energy interconnectivity, development of new trade routes (road, rail, river and sea transport) and digital infrastructure, through the integration and interconnection of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia within these 3SI projects. In this context, Romania's position of supporting Ukraine and the other two states is justified at all levels of cooperation and development, precisely since the framework of the Eastern Partnership can respond to current realities only in a very limited way. In general, the 3SI is especially relevant in the context of supporting the democratic world effort provided to Ukraine. Moreover, it must become a platform directly involved in the future process of post-conflict reconstruction of the Ukrainian state. The expectations are to find effective solutions at the public and private level for political and institutional consolidation and the augmenting of financial instruments, in addition to the 3SI Investment Fund, the involvement of other large investment funds or resorting to the direct mechanisms/instruments of the EU, besides the operationalisation of the US support. The interconnectedness of the 3SI infrastructure is now also a NATO issue.

The forthcoming summit to be held in Romania, the first state to organise such an event twice, highlights not only the role, but also the interest of Romania as a key actor, especially at the energy level and of the river-maritime infrastructure. The call for the direct involvement of the EU could be a solution to contribute to security at the three levels of the EU.

The success of 3SI can only be ensured in time, and by allocating additional financial resources primarily by the 12 states.

Enlargement of the 3SI: better connectivity and economic development

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One of the main challenges of the eighth edition of the Summit of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), hosted by Romania in 2023, refers to the enlargement process within this format, considering the recent evolutions of the political relations and security in Eastern Europe. While the founding principles of the Three Seas Initiative refer to *promoting economic development, increasing European cohesion and strengthening transatlantic ties*, the war in Ukraine is showing the relevance of political cooperation at the regional level. And even more, it becomes increasingly important to extend the framework of dialogue and cooperation to all states sharing the same values, especially those from the former Soviet space.

The constant efforts made during the last period by the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia regarding EU accession, can find a symbolic reflection in the acceptance of these states as members with full rights within the 3SI political platform. In addition to confirming the strategic role of the Black Sea, the participation of these three states would expand cooperation outside the European Union, especially relevant given the regional specifics. At the same time, it would bring the Three Seas Initiative closer to the Caspian Sea area, showcasing the strong economic interdependence, opportunities for collaboration, potential joint projects, common interests regarding economic development and transport networks etc.



Extending membership is not a new topic on the 3SI agenda, with various high-level representatives of the member states expressing their interest and even support for the accession of these three countries, such as the Bulgarian, Estonian, and Polish presidents. Even before the illegal Russian war against Ukraine, at the [Batumi Summit of the Association Trio on 19 July 2021](#), the leaders of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia expressed their willingness to “*explore cooperation possibilities with the Three Seas Initiative as a move towards achieving EU connectivity goals and anchoring our states physically with the EU*”.

Furthermore, [the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogdan Aurescu, recently declared](#) that the integration of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia in the projects of the Three Seas Initiative is a priority for Romania, all the more since Romania has constantly expressed its support for the Euro-Atlantic integration of these states. Thus, taking into account the international context, the specific needs identified at the regional level, but also the economic opportunities that such an approach implies, it is expected that the Bucharest Summit will be a decisive step in the full-fledged participation of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia within the Three Seas Initiative.

Bridging the East-West gap in transport inequality

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Within the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), interconnectivity in the transport sector focuses on closing the infrastructure gap between Western and Eastern European countries and alleviating North-South economic disparities, while, at the same time, consolidating the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes, and pursuing EU's green and digital objectives, all this with a hot war at the EU-NATO Eastern borders.

Romania within the 3SI

The West-East inequality of the transport infrastructure is stark: the West features dense cross-border connectivity (highways, roadways, railroads, canals, and pipelines, and a diversity of green transport solutions), while the East has scattered communication lines (a few highways and poor North-South connectivity) resulting from prior economic trade with the Soviet Union, which deteriorated after the fall of communism, and were not reimagined for the new EU-oriented Europe.

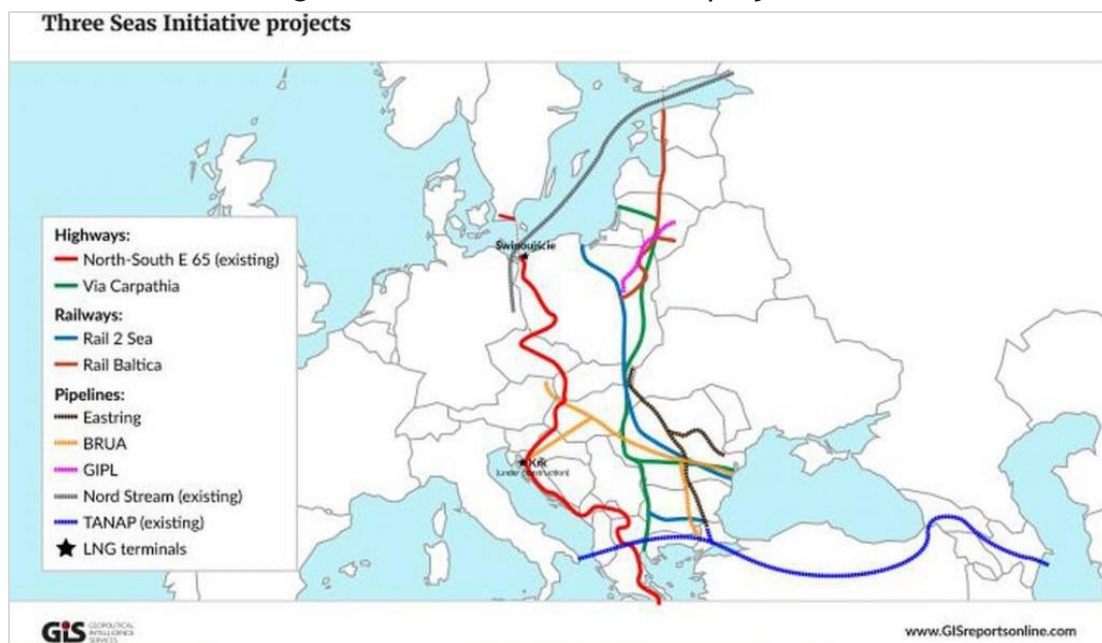
The transportation sector in Romania ranks among the least developed in the EU with 1 000 days delay of the trains operated in the first six months of 2019¹ an average speed of 15 km/h for freight train (whereas in some European rail freight corridors the average speed is around 50 km/h), and one of the shortest motorway networks in the EU - little more than 900 km long.

¹ European Investment Bank, *Romanian transport infrastructure: A roller coaster ride*, available here: <https://www.eib.org/en/products/advisory-services/passa/romanian-transport-infrastructure-roller-coaster-ride.html>.

Since the railway is considered the greenest transport modality and is meant to replace a large proportion of the road transport, Romania’s core interest in transport within the 3SI is the development of **Rail2Sea railway** and **Via Carpathia highway**.

The Rail2Sea project connects Constanța (Romania) to Gdansk (Poland), through Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland (fig. 1). The Romanian leg of the project² is funded from the EU Cohesion Fund through the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, the Transport Operational Program, the Connecting Europe Facility, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and the state budget of Romania. The trans-European road route Via Carpathia, connects the northern part of Europe to the south, through cooperation between seven 3SI countries: Poland, Lithuania, Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and four non-3SI countries: Belarus, Greece, Turkey, and Ukraine (fig. 1). Via Carpathia is basically the first regional trade route between the Baltic, Black, Aegean, and Adriatic seas.

Figure 1. Three Seas Initiative projects



Source: <https://www.gisreportonline.com/>

Romania’s priorities for transport within the EU green and digital agenda focus on railway and road transport, both in line with the 3SI ambitions. For road transport, Romania has important milestones to achieve (e.g. greening its medium- and heavy-duty vehicle fleet, since 99% of it is now operating on diesel, and 30% of trucks have to be zero-emissions by 2035). Romanian railways have a promising potential, if the authorities follow the agreed timeline within the Resilience and

² Read the program description available here: [https://projects.3seas.eu/projects/rail-2-sea-modernization-and-development-of-railway-line-gdansk\(pl\)-constanta-\(ro\)](https://projects.3seas.eu/projects/rail-2-sea-modernization-and-development-of-railway-line-gdansk(pl)-constanta-(ro)).

Recovery Facility, and do not resist the adoption of certain mandatory reforms that Romania has committed to.³

Recommendations

Several geopolitical and economic challenges lay ahead for 2023 - 2025, requiring further consideration in the context of consolidating the Three Seas Initiative:

- *Romania must pay special attention to regional connectivity on the road and rail segment in the context of “EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes” aiming to improve the capacity of alternative logistics lanes connecting Romania, Poland, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova.* We have seen the limits of the railway and road infrastructure in Romania with the setup of the Solidarity Lanes in 2022, essential corridors for Ukraine’s agricultural exports, and export and import of other goods. Romania’s transport infrastructure was overwhelmed by the spike in volumes, and speed of demand, and struggled to keep up.
- *The 2023-2024 European elections can impact the 3SI, with 16 European countries having scheduled presidential and/or parliamentary elections in 2023, and the ones for the European Parliament set in 2024.* The 3SI is a political platform first and foremost, and political change can affect the priority given and the funding allocated to the development of the 3SI projects. Although a recent Eurobarometer shows large consensus among EU citizens in favour of the EU’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, one in three Romanians surveyed are against the provision of humanitarian aid to war-affected Ukrainians.⁴ This mindset might be exploited by some political candidates in the 2024 Romanian elections and can undermine Romanian efforts within the 3SI for projects involving cooperation with Ukraine. The 3SI governments should therefore keep the focus on developing the hard infrastructure while at the same time engage in open and honest communication with their citizens on the reasons for prioritising some projects over others.
- *The global economy risks falling into recession this year, according to World Bank officials.*⁵ Since some of the 3SI interconnectivity projects are funded also from state funds (e.g. Rail2Sea), the participating countries need to

³ For an in-depth analysis of the status of the transport sector in the European Union and more specifically in Romania, see Daniela Staicu, Eugenia Guşilov, *Interconnectivity in the European Union - challenges for the future of transport policies in 2030*, Strategy and Policy Studies 2022, European Institute of Romania, available here (in Romanian): http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Studiul-2_SPOS-2022_Interconectivitatea_Final.pdf.

⁴ European Commission, *Flash Eurobarometer 506 - EU’s response to the war in Ukraine - Country Factsheet Romania*, available here: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=81747>.

⁵ J. Wheatley, *World Bank warns global economy on ‘razor’s edge’ of recession*, Financial Times, available here: <https://www.ft.com/content/0012b878-cdcd-446e-8c0c-c008709a11c1>.

consider the impact of a recession on the development of 3SI projects and must design contingency plans and identify alternative funding solutions.

Since Romania will host in autumn the 3SI summit, for the second time, it should suggest that projects funded through the 3SIIF meet two additional criteria: the respective country's active involvement in the 3SI cooperation format, and its state of infrastructure (for a needs-based awarding criteria). At the 2021 Sofia summit,⁶ while discussing the need to build new road-rail bridges over the Danube, the existing infrastructure differences was underlined. For instance, the average distance between the Danube bridges⁷ spans from 5-to-18 km on some segments to over 300 km on others (e.g. between the two bridges connecting Bulgaria and Romania).

Although the 3SI has no military or defence focus, certain flagship projects such as Rail Baltica, Via Carpathia, or the Polish Solidarity Transport Hub can have dual use - civil and military, even more important in the current context. Cooperation with Ukraine on transport infrastructure will feature high on the European agenda and within the 3SI, as Ukraine moves ahead as an EU candidate country. In any of the two possible scenarios for the war in Ukraine, the outcome is strongly dependent also on interconnectivity. In case the war continues, a strong interconnected regional infrastructure is required to support Ukraine by supplying military and humanitarian aid. In case of a post-war reconstruction effort, the road, railway and air infrastructure will prove equally critical for moving equipment, materials and human resources. Both scenarios require a deep and iterative reflection process on what constitute essential 3SI projects for supporting simultaneously regional interconnectivity and the EU - Ukraine partnership.

⁶ The Three Seas Initiative, *Sofia Summit 2021 factsheet*, available here: <https://3seas.eu/about/past-summits/sofia-summit-2021?lang=en>.

⁷ Via Donau, *List of Danube Bridges*, available here: http://www.via-donau.org/fileadmin/content/viadonau/05Wirtschaft/Dokumente/2020/20200116_Danube_Bridges_int_eng_final.pdf.

The Three Seas Initiative - one year after the Riga Summit: full steam ahead?

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We are witnessing an increased political concreteness of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) as the September 2023 Summit in Bucharest is approaching. First of all, we should look at the goals of this Initiative. As mentioned in several other papers, this is first and foremost a regional Initiative established based on the shared sense of identity, interdependence and cooperation. [Romania](#) joined the platform without reservations from its beginning, organising in Bucharest in 2018 the third summit of this Initiative.


In 2022, in a first, [Romania](#) announced that it would host the high-level meeting again. This was meant to bring closer to the Black Sea the decision-centre of the 3SI, adapting it to the new realities of the security environment. It was also the year when the Initiative focused more on Ukraine and the possible common interconnectivity project, while Romania raised the question of expanding the membership to the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Besides the current *Rail2Sea* and *Via Carpathia* projects, an [agreement](#) between Transgaz and the 3SI Investment Fund was also signed, aimed at developing Romania's natural gas infrastructure and connectivity, by integrating hydrogen transport as well, with a total estimated value of 626 million EUR.

In view of the 2023 summit, Romania intends to reconfirm the Initiative as a [mature political platform](#), which generates investment and strategic interconnection on the North-South axis and connectivity with the partners of the 3SI.

In an [official response](#), the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs clearly states that Romania would focus on bringing Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia closer to the Initiative. Moreover, it continues supporting the invitation of Germany to join the 3SI, while also taking into consideration the intentions of Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia of becoming members.

Having in mind that economy is a dominant sector for the 3SI cooperation, Romania intends to attract financial institutions in providing support to the 3SI Investment Fund, while also exploring the possibility to have a complementary Innovation Fund attached to it, based on purpose-driven innovation principle.



Additionally, the digital infrastructure and cybersecurity remain priorities on the agenda.

Romania also envisages the full reactivation of the Three Seas Initiative Commerce Chambers created during the 2018 Bucharest Summit as a support framework for the Business Forum, by organising a new meeting of the format on 7 September 2023.

With regards to the participants, a special attention is given to inviting relevant states and business companies to attend the Bucharest Summit, like [Japan](#), [United Arab Emirates](#) or [Singapore](#).

At the moment of the writing, the situation is still fluid, yet it seems that the Initiative is going from its infancy phase to that of a full maturity and the prospects look better than ever.

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Bucharest

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