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**THE THREE SEAS INITIATIVE –
AN ASPECT OF CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL
COMPETITION FOR DOMINANCE IN EUROPE**

Abstract:

Today, Europe is a very dynamic area in which various processes of political, economic, military, and socio-cultural nature occur. One of these processes concerns the establishment in 2015 of the Three Seas Initiative, integrating the area of the countries that joined the European Community after 2004 with one exception, which is Austria, which belongs to the group of the so-called ‘Old Union’. The emergence of a new structure within the European Union has been negated from the very beginning by the most important entities in Europe and beyond because the Russian Federation also did not approve the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative, perceiving it as a direct threat to the implementation of its neo-imperial policy in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Three Seas initiative was dictated by many factors of historical, political, economic, and military nature. This article presents the issues related to the process of shaping the subjectivity of Central and Eastern European countries in the context of contemporary challenges caused by the economic crisis and the potential danger of the Russian Federation, which aims is to destabilize this region and pull it back into its sphere of influence. The role which played the Three Seas Initiative within the European Union is an issue that requires constructive analysis. This is possible by indicating the main reasons for establishing this structure and international processes that are implications of its functioning.

Keywords:

The Three Seas Initiative, geopolitics, international relations, European integration, imperial politics, political pragmatism, international security.

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Introduction

In 2015, the presidents of Poland Andrzej Duda and Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović announced an initiative to integrate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and parts of the Balkans under the broadly understood concept of the Three Seas. The context of reconciliation in one structure of such countries as: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary boils down to the needs in the field of economy, communication infrastructure, technological development and security, especially energy, which are the priority development areas of these countries. The common denominator that connects all these countries, in some respects, all except Austria, is their belonging to the socialist bloc, which resulted in significant asymmetry in economic development in relation to the so-called 'Old Union'.

The Three Seas concept is directed primarily at ensuring economic and political stability in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In this context, it is also worth pointing out its geopolitical significance, because this structure includes the area of so-called 'buffer states'. According to the theoretical assumptions of geopolitics, which go back to the roots of the concept of Rimland by Nicholas Spykman, the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans is a coastal band of the 'world island' on which, according to the assumptions of this American researcher, there will be a confrontation between the superpowers, because the one who will exercise control over this area will occupy a leading position in the competition for world domination². The importance of this region in the concepts of policies implemented by the then powers, which were the United States on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other, is demonstrated by the permanent state of struggle, having the ideological, economic and military nature. If in 1968 there were strikes initiated in the Paris Sorbonne and having an ideological basis, because they were directed against Gaullist rule identified with capitalism, imperialism and traditionalism³, that in the same year in Czechoslovakia teaches to the so-called 'Prague Spring', when social protests aimed at liberalizing the economy and obtaining civil liberties, met with a brutal reaction from the Soviet Union, which, implementing the assumptions of Operation Danube, introduced the armies of Warsaw Pact countries and brutally suppressed the actions of protesters⁴. The competition for domination over the area of 'buffer states', which in geographical terms coincides with the area of the Three Seas Initiative, continues to this day. However, today the strategic assumptions of the major players have been redefined. This is mainly

² N. J. Spykman, *American's Strategy in World Politics. The United States and The Balance of Power*, New Brunswick 2007, pp. XXVII-XXIX.

³ D. Singer, *Prelude de Revolution. France in May 1968*, Madison 1970, pp. 34-45.

⁴ R. Kwapis, *Praska Wiosna*, Toruń 2004, pp. 142-148.

due to the presence of the Three Seas Initiative countries in the structures of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Nevertheless, control over the area of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans is a strategic goal of the most important global players. This results, for example, from the theoretical assumptions of the concept of foreign policies of the United States and Russia. In 1997, Alexander Dugin published the book *Fundamentals of Geopolitics*⁵, in which he presented the most important postulates of modern Russian geopolitics based on antagonistic foundations arising from imperial policy, which was implemented by the Soviet Union and is currently being continued by the Russian Federation. In turn, the American vision of world order was presented by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his fundamental work *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*⁶. Published in 1997, it was at the same time a response to the Russian concept of the balance of power on the world stage, as well as the American version of foreign policy implemented by successive American governments.

Despite the passage of several dozen years since the publication of these significant geopolitical works, the assumptions contained therein are still valid. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe and parts of the Balkans united in the Three Seas Initiative are a significant counterbalance to the interests of global players today. In this context, one should not forget about the pragmatic intentions of such entities as Great Britain, France, or Germany. What's more, the Three Seas area is located directly on the so-called 'New Silk Road' (Belt and Road Initiative), which leads from Asia to Europe. It follows that China is another entity for which this region is important from the point of view of the implementation of strategic assumptions and economic expansion, which in the modern world has become one of the vectors of development of the economies of individual countries around the world. China's growing investment presence in this region is a challenge for the states so-called 'Old Union', and especially for the German government, which significantly changed its rhetoric in relation to the Three Seas Initiative, trying to establish ever closer relations with its members⁷. It is therefore worth analyzing thoroughly the process of shaping the subjectivity of the Three Seas initiative on the international stage. Interesting in this context is also the issue of omitting a country like Ukraine among its members. Therefore, it is justified to pose a number of questions and find the answers to which the purpose of this article is. First of all, it is worth considering the political and economic conditions for the creation of the Three Seas Initiative. Secondly, the importance of creating a new international creation within the European Union should be analyzed. And thirdly, it is reasonable to

⁵ A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolityki*, Moscow 2000, pp. 17-34.

⁶ Z. Brzeziński, *Wielka szachownica*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 12-18.

⁷ Ch. Hasselbach, R. Romaniec, *Trójmorze coraz ważniejsze dla Niemiec*,

<<https://www.dw.com/pl/trójmorze-coraz-ważniejsze-dla-niemiec/a-49086121>> (12.12.2019).

find the answer to the question of why Ukraine or other countries in close proximity to this structure and not belonging to the European Union were not among the members of the Three Seas Initiative. In this context, Ukraine is a special case, because its authorities in 2016 were invited to participate in the first Summit of the Three Seas initiative, which was held in Dubrovnik, but for reasons not explained yet, nobody went to this meeting, which in the long run diminished the chances this country to participate in this structure⁸.

Conditions for establishing the Three Seas initiative

Analyzing the perspective of the Three Seas Initiative in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, should be presented with a broad spectrum of conditions, that have played a significant role in this process. This article will present historical, political, economic, and military aspects initiating the establishment of this international structure.

Historical conditions. It is no accident that one of the initiators of the Three Seas concept was Polish President Andrzej Duda. This idea is deeply rooted in the history of Polish politics in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, whose vectors were not directed only on the East-West line, but primarily North-South. Analogies to the modern initiative of the Three Seas can be traced back to the time of the first Polish-Lithuanian Union, or by placing it in the time perspective – in the 15th and 16th centuries – during the operation of the Jagiellonian bloc, which included the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Hungary and The kingdom of Czech Republic⁹.

Nevertheless, the basis of the current Three Seas Initiative was the 20th-century thought of Polish geopolitics. Identified with the figure of Józef Pilsudski, Intermarium initiative assumed the creation of a multinational and multicultural confederation, which would include Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Finland was also planned to join this structure. Józef Pilsudski believed that the creation of this kind of confederation would affect the balance of power in this region by levelling influence from both Germany and Russia¹⁰. Interesting is the historical fact that all Western countries together with the Soviet Union have protested the idea of establishing a confederation of states in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The only country that supported Józef Pilsudski's initiative was France. The lack of support from the

⁸ V. Trybus, K. Novikova, *Arkhitektory Mizhmorya*, <<https://m.tyzhden.ua/History/173436>> (10.12.2019).

⁹ M. Sienkiewicz, *Koncepcja Trójmorza w polityce zagranicznej Polski po 2015 roku*, „Dyplomacja i Bezpieczeństwo”, No. 1(4)/2016, pp. 140-142.

¹⁰ T. Gajowniczek, *Rosja a „Międzymorze” w polskiej myśli politycznej w XX wieku. Wybrane zagadnienia*, „Zeszyty Wschodnie”, 2004, No. 1, pp. 76-79.

international community and involvement in the process of negation of Józef Stalin's Polish idea became the reason for departing from the idea of Intermarium, which remained at the conceptual stage.

However, at the beginning of the 1940s, the idea of creating a confederation of states that would occupy the area between the Baltic, Black, Aegean and Adriatic Sea returned thanks to the Polish government in exile led by Władysław Sikorski. The first stage of implementation of these plans was joint negotiations between representatives of Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and the Polish government in exile, which took place in 1942 under the authority of Great Britain. The integration concept was based on the creation of two blocks – Polish-Czechoslovakian and Greek-Yugoslavian. However, these ideas, like the idea of Intermarium by Józef Piłsudski, did not meet with the approval of other emerging countries in the anti-Hitler coalition. On the one hand, France announced its protest because it was afraid that after the war, the newly formed confederation would demand compensation in the form of territorial and financial benefits. In turn, Russia has denied the creation of the Polish-Czechoslovak alliance because of fear of thwarting the plans of Joseph Stalin regarding control over Central and Eastern Europe¹¹.

Another attempt to implement the project integrating the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was the concept of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski. In 1974 an article by the two researchers appeared in the *Paris Culture*, which spoke about the inseparable relationship between the independence of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. This work contained a quasi-law, which was often invoked by Polish political elites, saying that the independence of countries such as Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine conditions the independence of the Polish state. Hence the famous saying that “without independent Ukraine, there will be no independent Poland”, which is very often used in the context of Polish-Ukrainian relations. This thought, which was included in the pages of the *Paris Culture*, played an important role in the process of shaping the political awareness and geopolitical opposition in the Polish Peoples Republic and then governing Poland after 1989¹².

The historical retrospective clearly indicates that the modern concept of the Three Seas has solid theoretical and ideological foundations. The initiative of Andrzej Duda announced in 2015 differs from that proposed by Józef Piłsudski at the beginning of the 20th century. Nevertheless, it was the beginning of the 21st century that became the moment of establishment of the confederation of states in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, which is

¹¹ V. Shevchuk, V. Rozhdayev, *Plan „Mezhdumor'ye” – Britaniya podderzhit, Frantsiya ne protiv, Ukraina i Pol'sha sdelayut*, <<https://surmasite.wordpress.com/2015/12/14/план-междуморье-британия-поддер/>> (10.10.2019).

¹² A. Stepińnik, *Ukraina, Litwa i Białoruś w "Zeszytach Historycznych" (1962-1991)*, [in:] *Jerzy Giedroyc. Redaktor. Polityk. Człowiek*, ed. by K. Pomian, Lublin 2001, pp. 57-62.

systematically moving towards strengthening its subjectivity in the international arena.

Political conditions. The European Union as a significant player in the international arena has been in a serious crisis in the last decade – ideological, economic, and socio-political. There has been a clear decline in confidence in the European community of states, one of the manifestations of which is the issue related to Brexit¹³. The problem is primarily the departure by the Union of the basic ideas on which the integration process was based. Namely, the ideas of sovereignty and equality of states in EU structures. The current practice related to the decision-making process indicates that not all entities participate in it, and the decisions are often dictated by the strongest players belonging to the so-called ‘Old Union’, as a result of which the interests of Member States from Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans are ignored.

For several years, a term such as ‘Two Speed Union’ has been circulating in public space. This tendency is a negative sound of the condition in which the Community is now. However, the reasons for this state of affairs should be seen in the inaccuracies and imperfections of integration processes reaching back several dozen years. Already in 1981, Greece joining the Community gained confidence and was admitted to the group of European countries. On the other hand, the enlargement of the Union, which took place in 2004 and the following years, clearly indicated differences in development resulting primarily from the experience of individual countries. Nevertheless, the assumption of the integration process is to shape stable foundations in economic development and to eliminate all conflict-causing factors that may lead to destabilization of the European Union. This situation fits into the context of the Eurocentric attitude prevailing among some politicians, but it is worth remembering that every actor on the international arena tries to pursue their particular interests, and the Community is often a tool used for this purpose.

One of the problems facing the European Union today, and which implies many negative consequences within the Community, is the migration crisis. Social programs and the revision of legal systems in some countries allowing for easy political asylum or refugee status have become an attractive bait for many thousands of immigrants¹⁴.

The effect of the migration crisis within the Union is the progressing ideological polarization between the political elites of individual members of the Community. If at the beginning of the 21st century there was a liberal-centred political orientation in practically all countries, then the beginning of

¹³ A. Sofuł, J. Ziarno, *Polska na szerokim tle. Rozmowa z Konradem Szymańskim*, „Magazyn Gospodarczy Nowy Przemysł”, No. 1/2017, pp. 16-17.

¹⁴ R. Prostack, *Wspólny europejski system azylowy a kryzys imigracyjny w Europie*, [in:] *Nowe wyzwania integracji europejskiej*, ed. by H. Tendera-Właszczuk, W. Bąba, M. Zajączkowska, Warszawa 2016, pp. 168-174.

the second decade of the 21st century brought a re-evaluation of ideological assumptions and a shift of this orientation to the left or right. In France, for example, the National Union has gained in importance, whose main postulate is to restore France to the power it lost because of the loss of national ideas and values. In Poland or Hungary power is exercised by right-wing groups whose ideological basis is the protection of traditional values and support for national development initiatives. In turn, in Greece, the prime minister is a representative of a radical leftist grouping.

In this context, the creation of the Three Seas Initiative in the region of Central and Eastern Europe is an implication of the deteriorating condition within the European Union. The program assumptions that accompanied the establishment of this structure indicate that it will constitute a significant impact on the policy implemented by the Community. The point is not that the Three Seas Initiative is an alternative to the Union, but that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe gain importance in the decision-making process and be able to implement economic, infrastructural and socio-political assumptions to restore intra-Community stability¹⁵. Also, the Three Seas initiative will constitute a coherent ideological buffer between the democratic West and the authoritarian Russian Federation.

Economic conditions. The aspect mentioned in this article about the post-socialist past of Central and Eastern European countries (except Austria) and part of the Balkans is a direct implication of development asymmetry concerning the so-called 'Old Union'. Taking into account economic indicators, there is a clear picture of this disproportion between the countries that joined the Union in 2004 and subsequent years, and the countries that formed the Community up to this moment. It is interesting that at the time of the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, the ratio of GDP per capita of the richest and poorest country within the Community was 7.2. In 2015, this ratio decreased to 5.9¹⁶. The list of economic development indicators for individual EU countries shows that the favourable economic situation existed until 2009 when after the economic crisis in which the Community found itself, this tendency slowed down radically. In this context, the Three Seas Initiative for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and parts of the Balkans has become a real opportunity to overcome economic stagnation. Priority development directions were set at the annual summits held since 2016 (the first took place on August 25-26, 2016 in Dubrovnik). The plans relate

¹⁵ M. Szuldrzyński, *Krzysztof Szczerski: Trójmorze nie jest alternatywą dla UE*, <<https://www.rp.pl/Rzecz-o-polityce/160909481-Krzysztof-Szczerski-Trojmorze-nie-jest-alternatywa-dla-UE.html>> (15.11.2019).

¹⁶ M. Maciejewski, *Zróżnicowanie kondycji gospodarczej państw Unii Europejskiej*, „Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach”, No. 319/2017, pp. 118-119.

primarily to such areas as the economy, logistics, and communication infrastructure and technologies.

The breakthroughs can be considered the summits in Warsaw in 2017 and Bucharest in 2018. The President of the United States Donald Trump was present at the Warsaw meeting of the Three Seas Initiative, who expressed unambiguous support for the idea of this structure and the implementation of projects proposed by participants of the summit. In Bucharest, a joint Development Declaration was adopted, taking into account the most important projects and plans for their implementation¹⁷. The summit in the Romanian capital was also significant for two other reasons. Namely, Germany has gained the status of an observer state, which may mean that Berlin is interested in the Three Seas Initiative and is ready for constructive actions. Also, the Declaration adopted in Bucharest established the Three Seas Investment Fund, the funds from which will be allocated to the implementation of joint projects.

The improving economic conditions in the countries of the initiative testify to the growing competitive capacity of this region within the Union. Also, the investment policy they implement with the China Three Seas Initiative is a significant stimulus affecting the economic development of the region¹⁸. It is also interesting that China is conducting latent economic rivalry in the area with the United States. In this context, the skilful policy of the Three Seas Initiative countries aimed at taking advantage of favourable economic conditions may affect the development of this region in the coming years.

Military conditions. In 1918, the idea of Intermarium by Jozef Pilsudski was mainly directed at ensuring the security of the Rzeczpospolita (Commonwealth). Geopolitical concepts were based on the justification for building a strong alliance of states that would counterbalance Germany on the one hand, and Russia on the other. The military character of Intermarium was a direct result of conceptual assumptions. On the other hand, the Three Seas Initiative proposed by Andrzej Duda and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović does not in its essence assume the military nature of this structure. This is an extremely interesting aspect because there has been a redefinition and a different approach to the issue of threat. Nowadays, the military context does not result directly from the functional and structural assumptions of the initiative. This is one of the main differences between the idea of an alliance of Central and Eastern European countries today and the one that existed at the beginning of the 20th century.

¹⁷ *Joint Declaration of the Third Summit of the Three Seas Initiative,*

<<https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/comunicate-de-presa/joint-declaration-of-the-third-summit-of-the-three-seas-initiative>> (12.11.2019).

¹⁸ W. Jakóbiak, *Trójmorze między Unią a Chinami*, <<https://biznesalert.pl/jakobik-trojmorze-miedzy-unia-a-chinami/>> (14.11.2019).

The experience of the last few years indicates that Russia is returning to the international arena implementing its neo-imperial policy¹⁹. Referring again to the assumptions of geopolitics theory and rivalry of powers mentioned in this article, it can be concluded that the area of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans is the object of interest from both the United States and Russia, and in the current economic conditions – also China.

The contemporary policy of the Russian Federation is primarily directed at destabilizing the situation in individual countries of the region. In this context, it is worth recalling the famous interview conducted by Grzegorz Gorny with Alexander Dugin in 1998. Then the Russian geostrategist said: “Russia in its geopolitical and sacral-geographical development is not interested in the existence of an independent Polish state in any form. It is also not interested in the existence of Ukraine. Not because we don't like Poles or Ukrainians, but because these are the laws of sacred geography and geopolitics”²⁰. This declaration indicates Russia's intentions to take control of these countries. However, it is worth looking at this aspect from a broader perspective. In this context, mention should be made of Russia's involvement in the Balkans, the war waged in eastern Ukraine – a country directly bordering the European Union, or the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria. Not to mention the destabilization in Central and Eastern Europe caused by the information war waged by Russian propaganda structures²¹. The prospect of direct invasion by the Russian Federation is a problem that individual countries are struggling with. In this context, the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative is a necessary instrument to regulate the situation in this region. All initiative countries are members of NATO, which creates a strong structure protecting them against Russian influence.

It is also worth mentioning the direct bilateral relations of the United States with individual members of the Initiative. For example, during the Three Seas Summit in Warsaw, a bilateral agreement was signed between the United States and Poland on the supply of American Patriot systems armed with Lockheed super missiles²². In turn, the Hungarian parliament agreed to the stationing of the American armed forces on the territory of this country²³. Croatia, on the other hand, has signed a bilateral agreement on the delivery by

¹⁹ T. Świąchowiec, *Imperium zła. Reaktywacja*, Łódź 2014, pp. 10-14.

²⁰ G. Gorny, *Rosja nie jest zainteresowana istnieniem niepodległego państwa polskiego*, <<http://www.frona.pl/a/rosja-nie-jest-zainteresowana-istnieniem-niepodleglego-panstwa-polskiego,38493.html>> (16.11.2019).

²¹ A. Soldatow, I. Borogan, *KGB/FSB. Władcy Rosji*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 15-17.

²² Z. Lentowicz, *Umowa na system Patriot podpisana. Dostawa za 4 lata*, <<https://www.rp.pl/Przemysl-Obronny/180329310-Umowa-na-system-Patriot-podpisana-Dostawa-za-4-lata.html>> (21.11.2019).

²³ *Wojska USA będą stacjonować na Węgrzech. Jest zgoda parlamentu*, <<https://www.tvp.info/43314611/wojska-usa-beda-stacjonowac-na-wegrzech-jest-zgoda-parlamentu>> (21.11.2019).

the U.S. army of several dozen Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, which after modernization will be used by the Croatian armed forces²⁴.

Therefore, strengthening the defence potential has become one of the factors conditioning the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative. In the conditions of potential destabilization of the Central and Eastern Europe region, preventive actions of individual countries will undoubtedly play a positive role in the future.

The importance of the Three Seas Initiative in the region of Central and Eastern Europe

The emergence of the Three Seas initiative on the political map of the world caused a stormy reaction from both Western countries and institutions, as well as the Russian Federation. For the authorities in the Kremlin, the establishment of an alliance of states in Central and Eastern Europe is a direct obstacle to the implementation of their strategic plans to control the region. Control, which is directed primarily at the market of energy raw materials and transmission infrastructure. Russia sees the hidden interest of the United States in the creation of the Three Seas Initiative, which wants to reduce the energy dependence of the region's countries on the raw materials supplied by Russian companies, thereby entering the European market with much more expensive U.S. liquefied gas. Russian analyst of the European energy market Igor Yushkov said that Americans want to oust Russian raw materials from Europe, thus realizing the assumptions of their superpower policy²⁵.

The energy sector is not the only area that worries the Russian Federation. Your Three Seas initiatives also strengthen their military capabilities by purchasing modern defense systems and conventional weapons. The bilateral agreements between Poland and the United States mentioned in this article on the purchase of American Patriot systems armed with Lockheed super missiles, or the agreements between Zagreb and Washington on the delivery of Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, are an exemplification of the factors causing Russia's fears of strengthening countries in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, Poland is strengthening not only through cooperation with the United States. Then, when Berlin and Paris negated the participation of the Polish state in the Main Ground Combat System (MGCS) project, which aims to construct a new tank, Warsaw began negotiations with the Korean Hyundai Rotem concern about the purchase of 800 tanks and the technologies necessary for their operation. Completing this type of investment will allow Poland to

²⁴ J. Palowski, *Bradleye jadaq do Chorwacji*, <<https://www.defence24.pl/bradleye-jada-dochorwacji>> (12.12.2019).

²⁵ K. Gorshenin, *Energeticheskoye prikrytiye: v kongresse SSHA prizvali pomoch' stranam „Trimor'ya” snizit' „zavisimost” ot Rossii*, <<https://russian.rt.com/world/article/683204-kongress-ssha-iniciativa-tryoh-morei-rossiya>> (2.12.2019).

build military power in the region because it will have more modern tanks than Germany and France put together²⁶.

Fears caused by the creation of the Three Seas Initiative also came from the European Union, as well as from individual members. However, from the very beginning it was declared that this structure would not constitute an alternative to the European Community. Within the European Union, by the time the Three Seas Initiative had been set up, there were already structures associating Member States. It is worth mentioning in this context, for example, the Weimar Triangle or the Visegrad Group. Nevertheless, these structures were created in the early 1990s, when most countries were not yet associated in the European Community. Today, however, the emergence of such a large alliance of member states within the Union could raise concerns, but it is worth remembering the economic, political, and military aspects that determine the creation of the Three Seas Initiative. In this context, it is not only a 'protective umbrella' of the European community against Russia's neo-imperial policy but also an effective mechanism that drives the economic development of the entire European Union. This aspect results from the findings of the Member States agreed at the annual summits of the Three Seas Initiative. During the meeting in Ljubljana, the perspective of implementation of 48 priority projects in the field of economy as well as communication and transmission infrastructure was adopted. These include the modernization of the Croatian port in Rijeka, the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, which is to connect Norway, Denmark, and Poland, and in the longer term also other countries of the region. Also, it was agreed to extend the LNG terminal in Swinoujscie for transshipment and regasification of liquefied gas, as well as the construction of a similar terminal on the Croatian island of Krk. On the other hand, in the area of transport infrastructure, were agreed with the next stages of construction of north-south relationship route of the Via Carpatia linking the Lithuanian Klaipeda with the Greek Thessaloniki and construction of a railway route in Slovenia between the port of Koper located on the Adriatic coast and a significant from the point of view of transport infrastructure railway junction in Divaca²⁷.

The Three Seas Initiative is therefore directed towards ensuring stability in the development of the Central and Eastern Europe region. The implication of this process is also the growth and the improving economic situation of the entire Union. Comments saying that the Three Seas Initiative is an alternative to the European Community are unjustified because the structural cohesion of

²⁶ A. Widzyk, „Die Welt”: Niemcy i Francja wykluczają Polskę z projektów zbrojeniowych, <<https://www.dw.com/pl/die-welt-niemcy-i-francja-wykluczaj%C4%85-polsk%C4%99-z-projekt%C3%B3w-zbrojeniowych/>> (31.12..2019).

²⁷ Ya. Serhiyenko, *Samit „Tr'okh moriv”*, <<http://www.golos.com.ua/article/318017?>> (23.11.2019).

the Union is guaranteed by EU law and restrictions threatening its non-compliance.

The process of integration of the Three Seas Initiative with countries which are not members of the European Union

In the context of reflections on the future of the Three Seas Initiative, the important question is whether it will ever expand to include non-members of the European Community? Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, or Balkan countries are a priority development direction, however, remaining at this stage in the form of negotiations conducted by individual countries. Given the complexity of the situation that has evolved in Central and Eastern Europe, in this article the author will deal with countries east of the Three Seas Initiative demarcation line.

At this point, the issue of participation in an alliance of a country like Ukraine deserves special attention. If the issue of integration of the Three Seas Initiative with Belarus or Moldova is somewhat clear and boils down to the negation of their participation in the structure of the alliance, which is an implication of their relationship with the Russian Federation, then the problem related to Ukraine is much more complex. It manifests itself primarily in the historical context associated with the integration idea that was formed at the beginning of the 20th century. This article has already discussed the concept of the alliance of Intermarium by Józef Piłsudski and his successors, including Władysław Sikorski and representatives of the Paris Culture Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski. Nevertheless, it was the last two of these researchers who particularly emphasized the importance of joining Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus. In this context, Ukraine is becoming an important component – with its exit to the Black Sea, extensive territory and natural resources – forming, together with the other countries, the Baltic-Black Sea bridge, the creation of which has been negated from the very beginning by many countries with the Russian Federation headed²⁸.

This historical context boils down not only to the issue of the Polish integration concept but also to the assumptions of Ukrainian geopolitics, which on a large scale began to develop in the 19th and early 20th centuries and saw Poland as an enemy of the Ukrainian state. Interestingly, the creators of Polish geopolitics proclaimed the danger of both Germany and Russia. By contrast, Ukrainian geopolitical concepts were directed at opposing Poland and Russia²⁹. Mikolaj Michnowski, Stefan Rudnicki, or Yuriy Lypa are just the tip of the

²⁸ W. Kowalski, *Polska w sojuszach „od morza do morza”? Duda chce wskrzesić idee Piłsudskiego, planuje nowy blok państw*, <<https://natemat.pl/123903,pilsudski-kaczynski-i-duda-co-ich-laczy-stosunek-do-rosji>> (11.12.2019).

²⁹ P. Eberhardt, *Słowiańska geopolityka. Twórcy rosyjskiej, ukraińskiej i czeskosłowackiej geopolityki oraz ich koncepcje ideologiczno-terytorialne*, Kraków 2017, p. 99-103.

ideological mountain of the Ukrainian geopolitical concept. Their postulates regarding integration processes in Central and Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe boiled down to cultivating first and foremost the importance of the Ukrainian state³⁰. At this point, one can hypothesize that the rivalry at the beginning of the 20th century on the Poland-Ukraine line for who would play a leading role in the process of forming the bloc of countries in Central and Eastern Europe led to the failure of all the actions of the then authorities in this direction.

However, in the 21st century, when the countries of Central and Eastern and Eastern Europe had the experience of World War II and the communist regime that lasted in this region until 1989, the perspective of antagonisms arising on the axiological and ideological level became secondary. Realism and pragmatism in international relations count in today's world. Therefore, when the idea of creating the Three Seas Initiative in Ukraine arose, it was widely commented on by specialists and analysts. It was claimed that Ukraine's accession to this alliance would be a strong blow to the Russian Federation. In this context, the issues of both military and energy security were put first.

The position on the validity of Ukraine's accession to the Three Seas Initiative was propagated only by expert circles. In contrast, Ukrainian decision-makers adopted a different position on this issue, because the then President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko was invited to the first summit of the alliance, which took place in 2016 in Dubrovnik. However, for unexplained reasons, he did not go to this meeting³¹. Ukrainian experts explained the fact that Kyiv did not want to oppose the interests of Berlin and Paris. The Three Seas Initiative was seen as a potential threat to French, German, and British interests. From the very beginning of the conclusion of the agreement on the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative, the European Union, as well as its members, referred to the alliance of countries of Central and Eastern Europe with some distance. The attitude of EU structures in this context has changed very quickly, because at the summit in Warsaw in 2017, together with representatives of the Three Seas Member States, the President of the United States and high EU officials participated. Ukraine has also changed its rhetoric, but this did not help in obtaining the invitation to participate in the Warsaw summit. By its actions and disregarding signals sent to it by individual members of the Three Seas Initiative, Kyiv has missed the opportunity to participate in this structure, thus losing the opportunity to increase its economic, infrastructural and military potential³². In the current situation of

³⁰ M. Siudak, *Ukraińska geopolityka. Wybór tekstów źródłowych*, Częstochowa 2017, pp. 14-20.

³¹ A. Bondarenko, *Intermarium: kryza hlobalizatsiyi v zhe v Yevropi?*,

<<https://commons.com.ua/ru/intermarium-kryza-globalizatsiyi-vzhe-v-yevropi/>> (13.12.2019).

³² V. Semkiv, *Ilyuziya Mizhmor'ya*, <<https://zbruc.eu/node/>> (13.12.2019).

Ukraine, participation in this alliance would be a significant factor by which the Ukrainian state could improve its position in the international arena.

Conclusions

In 2015, on the initiative of Polish President Andrzej Duda and a President from Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, an alliance of 12 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, known as the Three Seas Initiative, was established. There were many reservations about the creation of a new integration structure within the European Union. Disapproval was reported in the same way individual countries belonging to the so-called 'Old Union' as well as representatives of EU institutions. Nevertheless, from the very beginning, the Three Seas Initiative did not assume the idea of being an alternative to the European Union.

At that time, many conditions were indicating the need to establish a structure in the Central and Eastern Europe region that would be a platform for achieving the goals of EU countries that were admitted to the Community after 2004 (excluding Austria, which joined the European Union in 1995). These countries occupy an area which in theoretical concepts of classical geopolitics occupy the so-called 'buffer area', between the West and the Russian Federation. For this reason, the obvious reason for the emergence of an alliance of countries in this region is to take care of security on both the military and energy levels. Opposition to the neo-imperial policy of the Kremlin, which seeks dominance in Central and Eastern Europe, is one of the key strategic elements of the Three Seas concept.

It is believed that the constructive idea of the Three Seas Initiative goes back to the beginning of the 20th century and refers to the concept of Intermarium by Jozef Pilsudski. However, it is worth noting that the two concepts are fundamentally different, because the Three Seas concept proposed by the presidents of Poland and Croatia bases its assumptions on the idea of economic and technological development, while the concept of Intermarium was more military aimed at balancing forces in Central Europe Eastern Europe. Also, today's Three Sea Initiative geographically covers a different area than what was assumed by Jozef Pilsudski. It is also worth paying attention to the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century the creation of a confederation of states was assumed, while the Three Seas Initiative is only an alliance consisting of the economic and infrastructural cooperation of Central and Eastern European countries. In this context, the military aspect should not be overlooked. It is not the main goal of cooperation, but it significantly strengthens the position of this structure in the international arena.

United States support is of particular importance for the functioning of the Three Seas Initiative. Washington skilfully uses the situation, because on the one hand it develops economic relations with this region, on the other hand it

uses this area as a platform of competition not only with Russia, but also with China, which dramatically increases its presence in this region through direct financial investments.

The multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon described means that the Three Seas Initiative is becoming increasingly the subject of political debate in many countries around the world. There is no doubt that the alliance of countries in the region of Central and Eastern Europe is an effective tool used by individual Member States, thereby strengthening its subjectivity on the world stage. The implementation of strategic economic and infrastructure projects contributes to the increase of the investment attractiveness of a given region. How it will look and at what pace it will develop in the future remains an open question. Whether it joins the Three Seas Initiative, Ukraine, or maybe Belarus, Moldova, or Serbia and Albania is a fundamental question for the shape of contemporary international relations and geopolitical theory. Ukraine, which has missed its chance to participate in this structure, has today changed its rhetoric and wants to join the group of Three Seas countries. Thus, what the future of the Three Seas Initiative will look like is an excellent research platform, which implies the need for further research and analysis.

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