



EU Holds 3rd Annual “Three Seas Initiative” Summit in Bucharest

OE Watch Commentary: The European Union’s (EU) annual “Three Seas Initiative” summit, held in Bucharest, Romania on 17-18 September, has drawn a wide range of political reaction from European press. The Initiative aims to unify presidential-level support to 12 EU countries between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas for interconnection projects involving energy, transport, and digitalization. Poland led Croatia in launching the first two summits in Dubrovnik (2016) and Warsaw (2017). September press statements about this year’s summit reflect three primary positions across Europe: 1) the Initiative is principally an effort by Poland to become a more central, regional power; 2) the Initiative is divisive and can inherently weaken the EU; and 3) the projects will strengthen political, economic, and geographic connections between eastern and western EU states, and decrease dependencies on Russia.

The Initiative’s projects are largely infrastructure-focused, and will be financed with a 100 billion Euro investment fund started by the Polish National Development Bank. Key proposals include “Via Carpathia,” a project intended to build a motorway linking Lithuania’s port of Klaipeda to Thessaloniki, with passage through Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Another key project addresses the transportation of liquefied natural gas from Poland to Croatia, with distribution pipelines linking member countries. In the field of digitalization, the Initiative includes the development of digital platforms that would monitor regional river basins for pollution, improve regional logistical capabilities related to trade, and facilitate development of a sustainable energy sector together with energy storage.

The accompanying excerpted articles from sources in the region reflect only but a few of the numerous European perspectives on either the projects themselves or Poland’s leadership of the Initiative. The first article is from the EU policy-focused *Euractiv* media site and implies that the Three Seas Initiative is simply a manifestation of Poland’s international agenda. It compares Poland’s leadership of the Initiative to its failed, post-World War I effort to establish the Intermarium -- a proposed Central and Eastern European federation perceived by many as Warsaw’s attempt to emulate the 16th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This negative perception of Poland is concurrent with a broader rift between the EU leadership and Warsaw over the latter’s questionable adherence to democratic checks and balances.

The second article, from Russia’s *Sputnik*, likewise compares Poland’s leadership of the Initiative to the Intermarium, but also suggests that its true intent may be to thwart both Russian and German influence in the region. The article’s portrayal of the Initiative as a tool to weaken European unity is consistent with a growing concern over Russian media efforts to create and exacerbate divisions within the EU.

The third article, from Slovakia’s *Bratislava TASR*, shares a positive outlook regarding the Initiative’s projects, as they will help that country reduce its reliance on Russia for energy. Many EU states hold this perspective, as it relates to an extensive political and economic endeavor to diversify and integrate alternative energy sources throughout Europe. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kurz)**

“Our goal is to build a gas supply system that won’t enable blackmail against us.”

Source: Georgi Gotev and Alexandra Brzozowski, “The Brief – Three Seas, Two Leaders,” *Euractiv.com*, 17 September 2018. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/the-brief-three-seas-two-leaders/>

“... Let’s not beat about the bush. The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) is a Poland-promoted anti-Russian and pro-US project. And it kicks off today... TSI is quite similar to another Polish project, meant to build a Polish bloc in Central and Eastern Europe after World War I, a sort of power centre between Germany and Russia.”

Source: Andrew Korybko, “The Three Seas Initiative: Has Poland’s Moment Finally Arrived?” *Sputnik*, 15 September 2018. https://sputniknews.com/radio_trendstorm/201809151067999865-the-three-seas-initiative-has-polands-moment-finally-arrived/

“... the Three Seas Initiative that Poland launched together with Croatia in 2016 is thought by some to be its resurrected 21st century manifestation [of the Intermarium] because it includes many of the same countries... and the same geopolitical goal... [including]... countering Russian interests in the region. It’s not just Russia, though, but also Germany that the Three Seas might be trying to thwart too... Many of the countries within this region recently voted for EuroRealist governments that are loudly advocating for national sovereignty and traditional values, both of which challenge the EuroLiberal model that Berlin has been trying to force upon the rest of the EU.”

Source: “Kiska: Objective is To Become Less Dependent on Russian Gas,” *Bratislava TASR*, 18 September 2018. <http://newsnow.tasr.sk/economy/kiska-objective-is-to-become-less-dependent-on-russian-gas/>

“... Slovak President Andrej Kiska, who took part in the summit, stated after the negotiations that the objective is to create such a diversification of natural gas so that Slovakia isn’t dependent on Russia in this area. ‘Our goal is to build a gas supply system that won’t enable blackmail against us. We know that when it comes to Russia’s strategic interests, Russia doesn’t observe its own agreements, and letting Slovakia be blackmailed with energy is the worst thing that can happen to us...’”