

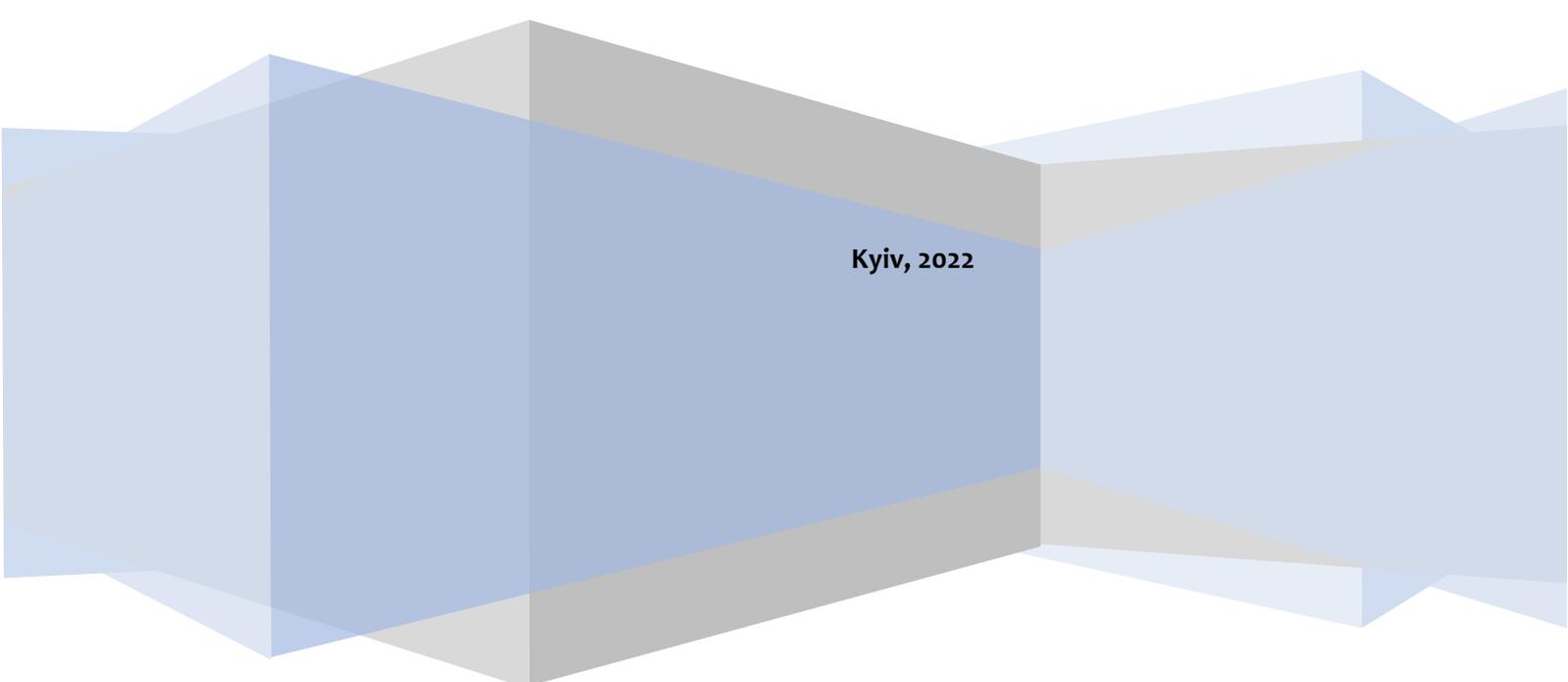
Experts for Security and Global Affairs

**The Prospects of Cooperation between Ukraine and Romania
within 3 Seas Initiative**

Policy brief

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The Prospects of cooperation between Ukraine and Romania within 3 Seas Initiative

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The Three Seas Initiative (3SI)² was launched in 2015 by Polish President Andrzej Duda and Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. The Initiative went through a significant process of evolution and institutionalization. Now the format includes Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The idea behind the Initiative was to fill the gap between the Western and Central and Eastern Europe developed in the latter half of the 20th century and to ensure North-South connection alongside with the well-established East-West ties. The shortfall in investments in the infrastructure, energy and digital fields is estimated to have grown over the years. The founders of the initiative believe that eliminating this deficit would give an enormous boost to development in the region and make Europe stronger and more united as a whole.³ The expectations of the founding countries are not vain due to the high potential of the region which by area represents almost a third of the European Union and is home to 111 million people.

Since 2015 the 3SI has proved its viability and has launched the international business forum, holds regular summits and has launched the investment fund in February 2020. The 3SI has also reached the attention of the third parties. The United States are the Initiative's leading partner, on both congressional and executive levels. Germany, Japan, Greece, and Ukraine are also key external partners.⁴

On 12 January 2021 during Moldova's newly elected President Maia Sandu visit to Kyiv, where she met with the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy both Presidents issued a joint declaration that contains the following statement: "We note the willingness to strengthen cooperation with partner countries in Southeast Europe and the Black Sea region. In this context, we confirm our interest in joining the Three Seas Initiative."⁵

Later on at the Batumi Summit on 19 July 2021, the leaders of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia reconfirmed their interest in 3SI and declared: "We will explore cooperation possibilities with the

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² This policy brief is developed within the project "**Romanian – Ukrainian Civil Society Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation. Third edition**", implemented by the Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association, Romania, in partnership with Strategic and Security Studies Group and Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian PRISM", Ukraine, with the support of Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, a project of the German Marshall Fund. The views expressed in this policy paper are those of the author and do not necessarily coincide with those of ESGA partners.

³ <https://3seas.eu/about/threeseasstory>

⁴ <https://emerging-europe.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Report-on-the-Three-Seas-Initiative.pdf>

⁵ <https://congress.lubelskie.pl/en/will-the-three-seas-initiative-have-new-european-members/>

Three Seas Initiative as a move towards achieving EU connectivity goals and anchoring our states physically with the EU.”⁶

In 2022 the 3SI has enlisted the following objectives⁷:

- Economic growth and resilience of the 3SI region. The primary goal of the Initiative is to boost economic growth and resilience of the region by developing transport, energy and digital infrastructure.
- Geopolitics. In the context of current extremely violent geopolitical situation, it is crucial to have a platform for cooperation with a clear vision and aim to develop practical linkages among the nations located between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas that complement EU goals, reinforce the overall resilience of the region and strengthen the transatlantic link.
- Greater interest among investors. The countries in the Three Seas Initiative have stood out for many years for their above-the-average rates of economic growth. By working together and pursuing similar policies, the Three Seas countries make the region more attractive on the global financial market.
- Energy security and the diversification of routes and sources of energy supply across the region, combined with transition to alternative energy and the creation of sustainable and resilient energy infrastructure is a high priority in the current geopolitical and economic environment.
- Reliable, sustainable and inclusive connectivity. Where new investments are concerned, the aim is to make the most of the region’s experience and its potential for applying digital solutions. This goes beyond the development of digital infrastructure, and encompasses the creation of smart solutions for data exchange and a more efficient and secure use of connectivity networks in the transport, energy and digital sectors.

Bearing in mind the fact these objectives fully correspond with the interests of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine it is fair to expect closer cooperation between these countries and 3SI. Cooperation within 3SI projects between the 3SI countries and their partners is one of the options to enhance economic, logistical and digital ties and to improve the prospects of extending membership in 3SI which is so far the club for the EU members only.

Under such context it makes sense to focus on the 3SI projects that can serve as the engines for enhanced cooperation and also propel the bilateral relations of Ukraine and Romania in certain fields.

Romania at the moment prioritizes 6 projects while the seventh priority project already completed⁸:

1. BRUA
2. Transportation stock exchange in the 3SI region
3. Digital Platform on monitoring hydrographic bases in the 3SI region
4. Via Carpatia

⁶ <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/deklaraciya-batumskogo-samitu-shvalena-glavami-derzhav-asoci-69609>

⁷ <https://3seas.eu/about/objectives>

⁸ <https://3seas.eu/about/progressreport>

5. Rail-2-Sea "Modernization and development of railway line Gdansk(PL) – Constanța (RO)"

6. Interoperability solutions for a digitized and sustainable energy sector in the 3SI area in the field of energy storage

7. FAIRway Danube (completed)

Each of them has added value for Ukraine and for the region and in the current circumstances has to be prioritized, promoted and to be enriched with the details that correspond with the new developments in the region (including the emerging security risks).

BRUA

BRUA is the Project which unites four 3SI countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania and aims to develop the gas transmission capacities in between the interconnections of the Romanian National Gas Transmission System NTS with the similar Bulgarian and Hungarian systems to allow the transport of gas from the Caspian Sea area from the southern border of Romania and further, through the newly created corridor, to the northwestern border of Romania with Hungary. At the same time, through the BRUA Phase 3 project, it is expected to take over additional volumes of gas from the Black Sea coast.⁹

Not only the Project is prioritized by the 3SI and Romania but also since November 2021 it is one of the Projects recognized by the European Commission as Projects of Common Interest in the field of trans-European energy infrastructure.¹⁰

Even before the full-scale invasion launched by Russia against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 it was clear that Kyiv had an interest in the Project. Russia was pushing Kyiv for additional gas import options, such as the Trans-Balkan Pipeline or BRUA and Eastwing pipelines.¹¹ However, now the interest is even higher. Also, the chances for the implementation of the Project have increased. The pipeline will be crucial to transport natural gas from Azerbaijan as well as US and Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the ports of Greece to Europe.¹² The launching of the Greek-Bulgarian interconnector and the Romania's willingness to accelerate its first deepwater natural gas prospect (Neptun Deep Project) amid a shortage of the fossil fuel in Europe provide the Project with the additional impetus. The prospect holds an estimated 100 billion cubic meters of gas, roughly equal to Norway's annual output.¹³ After a long-delayed change of offshore exploration rules finally passed into law this month, Romgaz and Petrom, the country's largest oil and gas company, are due to make their final investment decision on Neptun Deep by the end of 2022.¹⁴

⁹ [https://projects.3seas.eu/projects/brua-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-national-gas-transmission-system-along-the-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-\(brua-phase-1-and-2\)-and-enhancement-of-the-bidirectional-gas-transmission-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-\(brua-phase-3\)-and-the-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-southern-gas-transmission-corridor-for-taking-over-gas-from-the-black-sea-shore-\(black-sea-podisor\)](https://projects.3seas.eu/projects/brua-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-national-gas-transmission-system-along-the-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-(brua-phase-1-and-2)-and-enhancement-of-the-bidirectional-gas-transmission-corridor-bulgaria-romania-hungary-austria-(brua-phase-3)-and-the-development-on-the-territory-of-romania-of-the-southern-gas-transmission-corridor-for-taking-over-gas-from-the-black-sea-shore-(black-sea-podisor))

¹⁰ https://adevarul.ro/economie/stiri-economice/gazoductul-brua-avizat-comisia-europeana-aceeasi-lista-afla-mai-multe-proiecte-romaniei-1_6197a00d5163ec4271b8a4a1/index.html?mc_cid=50cd92688f&mc_eid=607bd7d763

¹¹ <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/ukraine-gas/>

¹² <https://ceenergynews.com/oil-gas/brua-pipeline-to-face-difficulties-due-to-stalled-black-sea-gas-project/>

¹³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-25/romania-mulls-accelerating-deepwater-gas-project-as-prices-surge>

¹⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-25/romania-mulls-accelerating-deepwater-gas-project-as-prices-surge>

Eventually, the Project may also contribute into diversification of the sources of energy supply to the Republic of Moldova which is among the priority interests of both Ukraine and Romania which are the only countries directly bordering Moldova, interested in its European path and eager to contribute to Moldova's energy security by different means (supplying different types of energy, ensuring energy resources storage etc.)

Transportation stock exchange in the 3SI region

The Project proposed by Romania unites Austria, Czechia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. Albania, Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia are the Project partners. The idea of the Project is creating an intelligent digital platform with possibilities to transpose transport services and international expansions, real time transport of goods for the optimization of transport services, the evidence of provisions and accessing information about the tariffs, special services, incident evidence, and transport journal. Besides, it foresees the constructions of buildings for the monitoring and management centre for international transportation and expenditure in the 3SI Region. Personalized digital journal and intelligent communications will be available for members. Modern transport technologies, energy efficiency and enhancement of the utilization of clean transport systems, environmentally friendly will be promoted.¹⁵ Due to the volume and speed of processing of data generated by the sector, said platform will allow for monitoring traffic, sending documents, and tracking payments, thus enabling efficient transaction of transport and logistics in the region, while cutting the overall costs of transportation and production.¹⁶

The Project is topical not only due to its contribution into "green transition" prioritized by the European Union and tackles the issue of the development of smart roads which is another trendy process in the EU, but also due to the necessity to build up new logistical chains for the North-West routes and to fix vulnerabilities highlighted by COVID-19 pandemics and by the Russian war against Ukraine. Further development of the Project will contribute into the enhanced imports and exports of Ukraine and will be helpful for elaborating the alternative trade routes while some of the traditional routes (e.g. Sea routes temporarily blocked by the Russian aggressors).

Ukraine's participation in the Project already opens a few windows of opportunities and may be further expanded when Ukraine is granted an EU candidate status and/or gets further engaged in the development of the TEN-T.

Digital Platform on monitoring hydrographic bases in the 3SI region

The Project initiated by Romania assembles Austria, Czechia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. Albania, Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova, and Serbia are Project partners.

The platform will be a contribution into the analysis of flood risks, droughts and water shortages as well as impact of water abstraction in the region of the 3SI, taking into account the effects of the climate changes. Bearing in mind the cross-border impact of the environmental problems and the growing risks of the climate change the Project has relatively high chances for the further developments and follow-ups. The synergetic effect can be reached by combining the activities coordinated under 3SI umbrella and by the Central Eastern European office of the Global Water Partnership Program which has been implementing a regional Integrated Drought Management Program (IDMP) and has invigorated Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine to developing joint drought management

¹⁵ <https://projects.3seas.eu/projects/transportation-stock-exchange-in-the-3si-region>

¹⁶ <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Paving-the-Digital-Path-in-CEE-report.pdf>

policies and plans. Apart from limiting droughts and floods, better water management may also prevent massive forest fires and contribute to improved biodiversity and nutrient mitigation from agricultural soils.

The synergy between the Project and the activities of the Multinational Engineer Battalion Tisa (an engineering unit intended to quickly respond to flooding and other natural disasters in the Carpathian Region created on 15 November 2002 after Heads of General Staff of Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Ukrainian Armed Forces signed the Technical Arrangement on Implementation of Intergovernmental Agreement on Multinational Engineer Battalion Tisa) can be of added value.

Via Carpatia

The Project assembles Participating 3SI countries: Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia as well as Partner countries among which there is Ukraine. It is often called a back bone of the whole 3SI initiative. The new road aims to connect Central and Eastern Europe with the ambition of eventually joining to the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) – a network of roads, railway lines, inland waterways, seaports, and airports throughout the European Union.

It is planned to run from the Lithuanian cities of Klaipeda and Kaunas via Poland's Białystok, Lublin and Rzeszów, to Kosice in Slovakia and Debrecen in Hungary and further on to Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. The route will stretch all the way to the Romanian port of Constanța on the Black Sea and the Greek port of Thessaloniki in the Aegean Sea.¹⁷

Except for the immense importance for the trade and logistical connection between the North and South of Europe the Project has also security dimension. On 14 October 2021 Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) signed between Greece and the United States was signed. It explicitly states that the United States and Greece “resolve to defend sovereignty & territorial integrity both against actions threatening peace and armed aggression.”¹⁸ Under this Agreement the port of Alexandroupolis in north-eastern Greece will play a vital role in the military presence of the U.S. in the country. Thanks to “Via Carpatia”, the US, which has conducted a military build-up in Alexandroupolis, will gain geostrategic superiority in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁹

Both civic and military components of “Via Carpatia” are of added value to Ukraine and the efforts to contribute to the project and to reach high connectivity with “Via Carpatia” should be among the priorities of Ukrainian government.

Rail-2-Sea

This Project which engages Poland, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia also is of extreme importance for Ukraine. On the one hand, if expanded to Odesa it will contribute into diversification of exports routes from Ukraine and connect Ukraine to the important ports in Poland and Romania. On the other hand, the railway between the ports of Gdansk and Constanța and the road route “Via Carpatia” will also serve to boost environmentally friendly solutions, coupled with cutting-edge innovations in the telecommunications sector.

¹⁷ <https://www.gtreview.com/news/europe/poland-and-ukraine-to-build-via-carpatia/>

¹⁸ <https://greekreporter.com/2022/05/10/alexandroupolis-military-u-s-greece/>

¹⁹ <https://www.turkishminute.com/2021/12/10/sis-could-turkeys-participation-in-3si-be-a-turning-point-in-turkish-us-relations/>

These projects would also allow moving troops around in a more robust and strategically savvy manner and that may eventually deter Russia which has already turned its ability to swiftly deploy military personnel and equipment into a strategic asset.

Summarizing, there is a space for cooperation between Ukraine and Romania as well as the other 3SI states under umbrella of the already launched and prioritized 3SI projects.

The success of the 3SI initiative depends also on the development of partnership and cooperation areas by Eastern and Central European countries with Central Asian, Eastern Mediterranean and Gulf countries. This can only be possible if Turkey, Greece, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia support the initiative and eventually get a chance for a full-fledged membership.

Although the Initiative is based on infrastructure, issues of security are getting hot and Ukraine should invest into boosting this element of cooperation and into engaging more players (e.g. the US, Turkey, the UK) into the security related projects.

By combining the efforts of the 3SI, its partners from the other countries as well as private investors whose interest in the Initiative is gradually growing, there is a chance to assure sustainable growth of the region and to enhance its security.

Moreover, the important role of Ukraine as a security contributor and the country that may eventually be an important participant in the regional projects clearly points out that it should gain the status of a partner if not the member of the 3SI. An additional argument in this regard is the fact that Ukraine will need lots of investments for reconstruction and adaptation to post-war reality and the 3SI may serve as a hub for the reconstruction projects, connect Ukraine to the security cooperation framework existing within these initiatives and supported not only by the EU and but also by NATO and external for the region. The existence of such hub alongside with providing Ukraine with the candidate status will also open the additional windows of opportunity for Ukraine-Romania security and business cooperation and will contribute into developing energy, transport, and digital infrastructure that will be fully aligned with the goals of the EU in the region.

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