

A note from the conference: ‘Three Seas Initiative as a drive motor of the European Union growth’

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04.08.2021



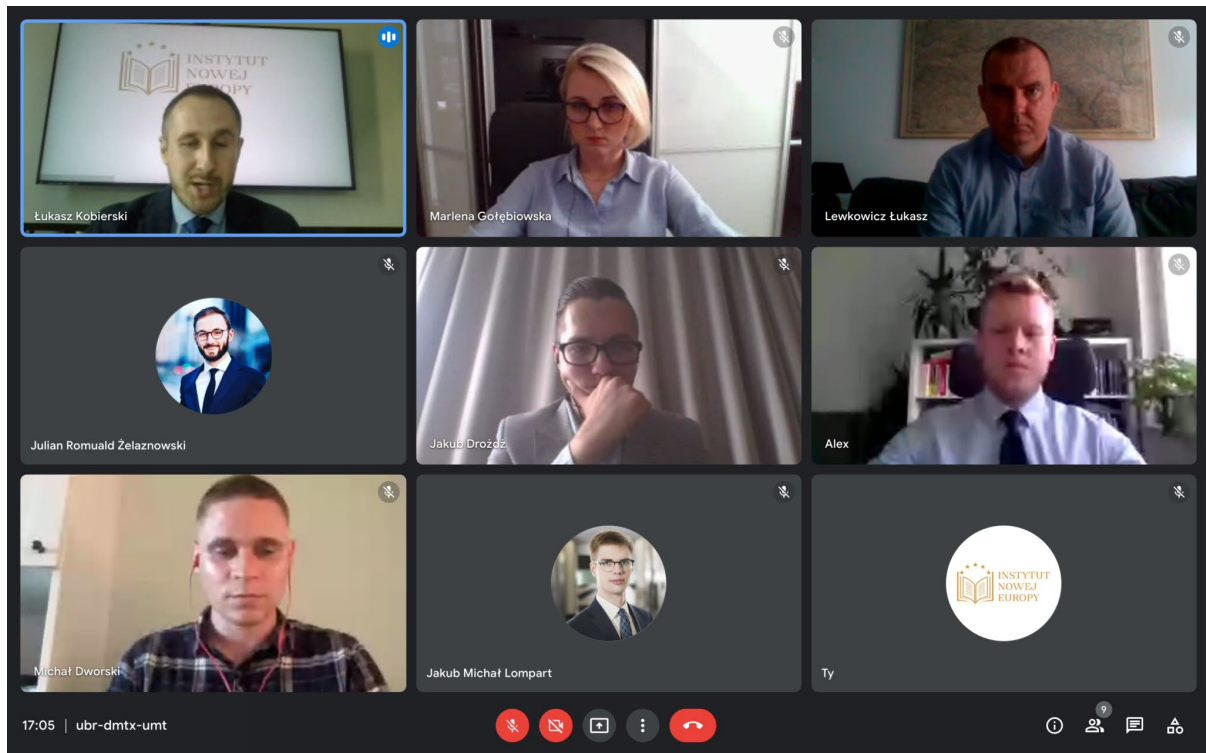
The note outline:

- The cooperation between the countries of the Three Seas Initiative is not only based on the area of infrastructure, transport, and energy but also on, among others, transboundary cooperation.
- The Three Seas Initiative has great potential regarding the development of Central and Eastern region of Europe.
- The organization faces several challenges related to funding and the lack of proper institutions.

The scientific conference ‘Three Seas Initiative as a drive motor of the European Union growth’ was organized by the Institute of the New Europe, within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, a program arranged by the European Union, on July 29th this year, on the virtual platform Google Meet. Five speakers made their speeches:

1. Dr. Łukasz Lewkowicz - Senior Analyst in the Visegrad Group of the Institute of Central Europe in Lublin. Doctor of Humanities in the field of political sciences. Assistant professor in the Institute of Political Sciences and Administration of UMCS in Lublin.
2. Marlena Gołębiowska - Analyst in the Baltic Team of the Institute of Central Europe. Economist and political scientist. Ph.D. student of social sciences in the field of economic sciences at the Faculty of Economics on the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. Author of articles devoted to the economies of Central and Eastern Europe.
3. Michał Dworski - Historian, Lawyer. Coordinator of the Regional Center for International Debate in Lublin, Plenipotentiary of the Lublin Voivode for International Dialogue, and Ph.D. student at the Institute of History of the John Paul’s II Catholic University of Lublin.
4. Dr. Aleksander Olech - Director of the European Security Programme at the Institute of New Europe. Doctor of security studies. Specialist in the field of security and international relations.
5. Jakub Drożdż - Member of the Executive Board of the Institute of Economic Diplomacy. Currently, an employee of the Ministry of Digital Affairs. Earlier worked in, among others, the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Technology. He also sits on the leading bodies of non-governmental organizations, such as the Incubator of the Social Contract association.

The panelists thoroughly analyzed challenges and opportunities facing the Three Seas Initiative, delving into economic, political, and social aspects and the aspects connected with the security of the region.



Dr. Łukasz Lewkowicz presented a new dimension of the Tri-Sea cooperation, which is, among others, expanding the objectivity and subjectivity of the initiative (realized by organizing the first parliamentary forum of the Three Seas Initiative states in June this year, in Tallinn). In order to strengthen the relations within the organization, the so-called Lublin Declaration was signed during the conference in Lublin, in June this year. The declaration is aimed at establishing economic cooperation between sixteen local governments of Three Seas Initiative states. Signing the declaration shows the transfer of cooperation from a central governmental level to a local level. What is more, within the leaders of the Three Seas Initiative states, a tendency to go beyond the initially accepted areas (infrastructure, energetics), and to lead the conversations on the topics of tourism, and cultural or scientific (or expert) cooperation, can be observed. What is also important, the above-mentioned area is being expanded by developing transboundary cooperation. The transboundary cooperation within the framework of the Three Seas Initiative is to concentrate on the borderland regions,

to support the development of these territories, and learn more about the culture of Tri-sea countries.

Mrs. Marlena Gołębiowska asked about the place of the Three Seas Initiative in the European Union, at the same time, reminding the words of the German president about the necessity of embedding the idea of the Three Sea Initiative into the Union policies, to fully use their potential. Mrs. Gołębiowska also provided the data from the International Monetary Fund, which after the regression from 2020, has predicted economic growth of the Three Seas Initiative countries oscillating around 4-5% in 2021. This region is particularly significant for Germany - the main trading partner. It is worth noting that twelve of the Three Seas Initiative countries generate 19% of the Union GDP. During this speech, a subversive question was asked by the panelist, i.e. what specific opportunities do the European Union offer to the Three Seas Initiative states? The main difficulties were also pointed out, which are faced by the countries belonging to the Initiative, i.e. financial issue of the investment, or the perception of the states belonging to the initiative as competitors, not as partners. It is worth noting, that the Three Seas as the initiative has the vision of becoming a real economic project (hence, appointing the Three Seas Initiative Fund, to which belong 9 out of 12 states of the organization). The Three Seas Initiative can also pride itself on three successful investments in the scope of infrastructure, transport, and energetics.

Then, Mr. Jakub Drożdż outlined some challenges facing the Three Seas Initiative, which in case of the lack of a proper reaction, can bury the initiative, as it happened with the idea of the Intermarium in the 20th century. The first challenge remains the structural dimension, while the second one is the institutional dimension, and the third one would be the personnel dimension (the need of educating proper experts). The structural dimension is understood by the panelist as using present structures of the European Union and NATO to realize the aims of the Three Seas Initiative. In the opinion of Mr. Drożdż, the Three Seas Initiative also lacks proper institutions, among others, the ones responsible for trade and attracting investments, or coordinating conducted actions.

During his speech, Dr. Aleksander Olech focused on the security dimension of the concept of the Three Seas Initiative, and he pointed out a crucial matter, which is drawing attention to the possibility of replacing the European Union with the Three Seas Initiative in the relations with Ukraine or developing common, partner relations of countries belonging to the Initiative in the context of border protection and the control of the movements of people. At the same time, this is one of the possibilities, that the Three Seas Initiative has an opportunity to offer to European Union. Dr. Olech also paid attention to the risk connected with the lack of increased activities and cooperation in the discussed region, if the European Union together with the Initiative that is part of it, will not turn to Central Europe, then China will surely seize such opportunity.

Whereas Michał Dworski, the final panelist, added to the list of challenges facing the Three Seas Initiative a few more, including one crucial, which is the Polish centricity of the Initiative. It is mainly Poland, where the possibilities and threats in comparison to other state members are discussed. Moreover, there is a significant communicative problem within the organization, as the interests common for all the partners have not been clarified. Mr. Dworski also highlighted how much there is to be done in the scientific area, mainly in the scope of social studies and humanities. What is interesting, as the speaker pointed out, the topic of the Three Seas Initiative in the Polish communities and media does not enjoy popularity.

Recommendations

1. Increasing the involvement of the Three Seas Initiative countries;
2. An attempt to encourage Asian countries to invest in the region;
3. Creating a structure attracting foreign investments and promoting the Three Seas Initiative, or creating an organization supplementing the present fund, which would be aimed at strengthening trade cooperation and acquiring economic partners;
4. A formation of a term presidency of particular states within the Three Seas Initiative;
5. Appointing a common institution controlling the spending of finances from the European Union;

6. A necessity of changing the political image of the Initiative and focusing on the economic aspects;
7. Advertising successful projects to mobilize other members of the Initiative;
8. Initiating a bigger project attracting active members of the organization by Poland;
9. Increased attention of the European Union to the Three Seas Initiative. A broader campaign informing about the Tri-Sea projects is necessary, also through the EU and its organs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Monika Poprawa. She holds a BA in International Relations at the University of Warsaw, currently a second-year Master's student in the same field with a specialization: Security and Strategic Studies. Her interests are focused on the area of space technologies (mainly issues of militarization and commercialization, as well as rivalry between states in space). She is also interested in cyberterrorism, terrorism, contemporary armed conflicts and energy security.

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