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Commending the Three Seas Initiative as a Model Example of European Integration

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Preamble

For four decades, the infrastructure of Central Europe was built to serve an empire rather than a continent. Roads, railways and pipelines ran east to west because that was the direction in which power flowed, and the nations between the Adriatic, the Baltic and the Black Seas were connected to Moscow more reliably than to one another. The fall of communism restored their political sovereignty, but it did not, by itself, rebuild the physical geography that a modern European sovereignty requires. That work remains unfinished, and it is the work the Three Seas Initiative exists to complete.

It began as an argument, set out in November 2014 in the report *Completing Europe: From the North-South Corridor to Energy, Transportation, and Telecommunications Union*, which warned that the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace was under pressure from within and beyond its frontiers, and that the European Union faced multiple external threats including a resurgent Russia.[1],[2] That phrase, first spoken in Mainz in May 1989, was, and remains, a task. The Initiative was launched in 2015 by the Presidents of Croatia and Poland to carry part of it out, and the first summit was held in Dubrovnik in 2016.[3]

A decade later, in the same city, thirteen Heads of State and Government recorded how far the argument had travelled. The Dubrovnik Declaration of 28 and 29 April 2026 states that the corridors connecting the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas no longer serve only economic interests and are pillars of European security, and that connectivity along the North-South axis is now a strategic necessity for Europe's security, resilience and competitiveness.[4]

The European People's Party has always understood that European unity is built from concrete things. A market requires a currency; a currency requires trust; and trust between nations requires that they are able to reach one another. Because our Union exists in a state where half of the continent moves goods, energy and data at half the speed of the other, it is a visible fact that it has not finished its enlargement. The Three Seas Initiative is in this context not an alternative to European integration, nor a caucus within it, but the instrument by which a region that joined the Union on paper is being joined to it in fact.

We see this resolution as a commendation and recognition of its work. The Initiative belongs to its sovereign participating states, and what YEPP can do is say plainly that this is what good regional cooperation looks like: voluntary, results-oriented, complementary to the Union rather than competing with it, and built by governments that understood their region's needs before Brussels did. It is a model worth commending, worth defending, and worth learning from.

Recognising that:

- the Three Seas region is one of the largest and fastest-growing economic spaces in Europe, comprising thirteen European Union Member States with over 120 million citizens and a combined GDP exceeding EUR 3.5 trillion in 2025,[4] consistently growing faster than the Union average, and that all thirteen are members of the European Union while all but one are allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization;[5]
- the infrastructure deficit the Initiative was created to address is real and quantified, the International Monetary Fund having estimated it in 2020 at as much as EUR 1.15 trillion, and the European Commission having found that road and rail journeys in Central Europe take between two and four times longer than comparable journeys elsewhere in the Union, a delay that constrains economic growth and restricts the movement of forces along the Alliance's eastern frontier alike;[6]
- dependence on Russian crude oil and natural gas was for decades markedly higher among these states than among other Member States, so the diversification of supply pursued through the Initiative was always a matter of security rather than of commerce alone;[2]
- the Initiative has delivered, the Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania, which connects the Polish and Lithuanian transmission systems and thereby integrates the gas markets of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the wider European network, being recorded as completed, while the Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria pipeline, the Baltic-Adriatic Trans-European Transport Network and Rail Baltica are recorded as having made substantial progress;[5]
- Estonia has carried a share of the northern axis out of proportion to its size, having submitted both Rail Baltica, the greenfield project integrating the Baltic States into the European rail network together with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and Via Baltica, alongside the regional liquefied natural gas terminal at Paldiski and a 500 megawatt pumped-hydro storage project,[7] while Latvia has advanced the digital pillar through a cross-border network of data centres involving eleven participating states and hosted at Riga the summit that granted Ukraine the status of participating partner;[8]
- Czechia is the junction of the region's land corridors and a contributor to its financial architecture as well, participating in the Baltic-Adriatic core network corridor and the regional high-performance computing ecosystem, proposing with Poland and Slovakia the Danube-Oder-Elbe water corridor intended to connect the Baltic, Black and North Seas, and its National Development Investment,[7] a subsidiary of the Czech National Development Bank, has joined Poland's BGK as the two anchoring investors in the Three Seas Initiative Innovation Fund led by the European Investment Fund, where each has committed 20 million EUR to be matched by the Fund;[8],[9]
- Slovakia has advanced both the energy and the transport dimensions of the axis, having submitted the Eastring pipeline, included in the third list of Projects of Common Interest,[7] together with the modernisation of the railway line from Devinska Nova Ves to the Czech

border and the D3 motorway carrying long-distance traffic between Poland, Hungary and Austria, and Romania anchors the Black Sea end, having submitted Rail2Sea, the modernisation of the railway from Gdansk to Constanta expressly designated for civil and military dual use, and having joined Poland as one of the two founding shareholders of the Investment Fund;[8]

- Croatia, which convened the first summit in 2016, has carried a substantial part of the southern burden, with the liquefied natural gas terminal on the island of Krk and its evacuation pipeline from Omišalj to Bosiljevo submitted as a Project of Common Interest within the North-South Gas Interconnections corridor;[4] the terminal has since been expanded, giving Croatia sufficient capacity to supply gas to the wider Central European market, while in Dubrovnik an agreement was signed with Bosnia and Herzegovina on the construction of the necessary gas interconnection, providing an additional route to diversify its gas supply; the pipeline was designed to open a new supply route for Central and South-Eastern Europe with an annual delivery capacity of up to 2.63 billion cubic metres, while Rail Adriatic is named in the Dubrovnik Declaration among the transport initiatives essential to dual-use mobility and the Croatian Presidency has used its term to advance finance as a fourth pillar of the Initiative;[7]
- Greece joined as the thirteenth member at the Bucharest summit in September 2023,[4] adding a fourth sea to a platform named for three and bringing to it the fifth-largest economy of the region, so that the North-South corridors acquired a southern terminus of real weight in Thessaloniki, which anchors Via Carpatia at the end of a highway reaching to Klaipeda,[6] and in the Vertical Gas Corridor running northward from the Greek terminals, and in the port of Alexandroupolis, which is developing as a dual-use facility serving civilian logistics and Allied coordination together;[10]
- Greece stands at the Aegean end of that corridor and has built on it a structure of its own with Romania and Bulgaria, the three governments having signed in Brussels on 3 December 2025, under the auspices of the European Commission, a memorandum establishing the Black Sea-Aegean Sea Corridor Platform to accelerate cross-border rail, road, port and inland waterway connections between the Aegean, the Black Sea and the Danube, with the three transport ministers providing political direction supported by the European Coordinators,[11] and practical work on the platform beginning at the four-party meeting with the Commission held in Sofia in January 2026;[12] a second, technical meeting followed in Bucharest in mid-March 2026, hosted by the Romanian Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure and attended by senior transport and defence officials of the three states together with the European Coordinator and DG MOVE, with dual-use mobility at its centre,[13] and a third meeting in Thessaloniki on 19 June 2026, in the presence of Commissioner Tzitzikostas, which addressed cross-border infrastructure, rail interoperability, resilience, military mobility and the preparation of joint funding proposals, Greece setting as priorities the Thessaloniki–Promachonas rail axis, the Alexandroupoli–Ormenio corridor, rail access to the ports and the roll-out of ERTMS.[14] The three transport ministries are now to apply jointly under the 2026 CEF Transport call, open until 6 October 2026 and covering a Cohesion and a Military Mobility package, with the projects proposed lying mainly along the central and western axes of the BBA corridor;[15] under the Memorandum a Joint Plan for the corridor is to be approved by 30 September 2026, from which the Action Plan and a Joint Project Pipeline will be derived.[11]
- that memorandum describes the Baltic Sea-Black Sea-Aegean Sea and Rhine-Danube corridors as arteries of multimodal mobility and enablers of military mobility,[11] so that dual use is not

an addition to the corridor's purpose but part of its definition, and the corridor carries the Initiative's eastern commitment in the same physical form, its extension across Ukraine towards the Black Sea and Aegean ports being pursued through the construction of 1435 millimetre gauge track, including the Lviv-Chernivtsi-Vadul-Siret section to the state border;[13]

- Slovenia holds the northern Adriatic rail terminus, as the second railway track between Koper and Divača has been submitted as part of the Mediterranean and Baltic-Adriatic core network corridors with letters of support from Austria, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland recognising the Port of Koper as the principal maritime outlet for several landlocked participating states, and that line became passable in March 2026,[7] while SINCRO.GRID, submitted jointly by Slovenia and Croatia, drastically increased the integration of decentralised renewable energy sources;[16]
- the Heads of State and Government have called for the strategic utilisation of the Adriatic Sea to diversify transport, energy and digital routes, especially for landlocked Central European states, so that the Adriatic is no longer a secondary theatre of the Initiative but its designated alternative;[4]
- the financing architecture has been assembled steadily and largely within the region itself, through the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund,[8] its purpose confirmed in the joint declaration of the fourth summit at Ljubljana days later and backed by the national promotional institutions of the participating states, and which was extended at Dubrovnik through the Infrastructure Fund of Funds signed with the European Investment Fund[17] and the promotional institutions of Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovenia, with an objective of unlocking at least EUR 2 billion;[18]
- that architecture has moved from commitment to deployment, the Investment Fund having committed more than EUR 800 million across nine countries in transactions including a Polish rolling stock leasing business, a data centre platform serving the Baltic States,[4] a renewable energy platform operating in Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Romania and Slovakia, and the port of Burgas on the Black Sea, at rates of return that confirm the commercial case for infrastructure investment in the region;[6]
- the Initiative's engagement with Ukraine is a settled element of its purpose, Ukraine having been granted participating partner status at the Riga summit in June 2022,[4] with Ukraine and Moldova subsequently recognised as associated participating states; furthermore it was stated at the Three Seas local government congress in Lublin in June 2022 that there can be no Three Seas without a free and sovereign Ukraine, and the Dubrovnik Declaration reaffirmed that enlargement is a strategic investment in Europe's peace, security and prosperity, applied equally to Ukraine, Moldova, Albania and Montenegro.[8],[19]

Acknowledging that:

- the Initiative has deliberately avoided creating a parallel institutional structure, operating instead through existing European and transatlantic mechanisms, and that this restraint has been a source of its political acceptability;[2]
- its civic and parliamentary dimensions have developed more slowly than its financial one, the Civil Society Forum convened at Riga in 2022 not having been reconvened, and the Parliamentary Forum meeting intermittently;[4],[20] because of this the revival of the parliamentary strand through the Zagreb Parliamentary Summit of March 2026 and the

constitution of a permanent Parliamentary Group in the Polish Sejm in June 2026 are developments of real significance;[21],[22]

- where an academic and youth dimension exists it has proved capable of growth, as the Three Seas University Network has expanded to eighteen member universities by 2025, drawn from across the region and from associated participating states;[21]
- the Heads of State and Government have themselves committed to consultations on a long-term vision, governance, partnerships and financing, and that Italy has been welcomed as a strategic partner while Slovakia has undertaken to host the summit and business forum in 2027.[4]

The Youth of the European People's Party therefore commends:

- the participating states of the Three Seas Initiative for building, over a single decade and without coercion, a platform that has turned a shared historical disadvantage into a common European asset;
- the founding vision of the Initiative, which understood before it was fashionable to say so that infrastructure is security, that energy dependence is a political vulnerability, and that a Union divided by the speed at which its halves can move is not yet whole;
- the decision to build the Initiative through existing European and transatlantic structures rather than in competition with them, which has kept it an instrument of European cohesion rather than a source of division within the Union;
- the design of its financing, which mobilises national promotional institutions and private capital on commercial terms and insulates investment decisions from political direction, and which is an exemplary model of public initiative and private discipline that the European People's Party has long argued for;
- the smaller participating states in particular, whose contribution has been disproportionate to their size and whose experience demonstrates that influence within the Union is earned through delivery rather than conferred by population;
- the participating states for extending partnership to Ukraine and Moldova at a moment when doing so carried real cost, and for treating their integration as infrastructure to be built rather than sympathy to be expressed.

The Youth of the European People's Party affirms that:

- regional cooperation of this kind strengthens the European Union when it is voluntary, complementary and open, and that the Three Seas Initiative should be understood by all Member States as a contribution to European cohesion rather than a caucus within it;
- energy diversification in Central Europe is security policy conducted by commercial means, and that no European state should again be placed in a position where a single supplier can convert dependence into political leverage;
- strategic infrastructure must not create new dependencies on authoritarian states and that Europe should strengthen its resilience in energy, digital infrastructure and critical supply chains in close cooperation with other like-minded partners;
- infrastructure delivered is worth more than infrastructure announced, and that the Initiative's insistence on tangible projects rather than declarations is a standard other European formats would do well to adopt;

- the generation that will inherit this axis has every reason to take an interest in it, and that the growth of the Three Seas University Network and the revival of the parliamentary dimension are the natural foundations on which such engagement can be built.

Calls upon the European Commission, the European Investment Bank Group and the European Investment Fund to:

- ensure that the Connecting Europe Facility and the successor to the current multiannual financial framework treat North-South connectivity, and dual-use and military mobility infrastructure in particular, as a strategic priority in line with the security language adopted at Dubrovnik and that investments in military mobility are developed in close coordination with NATO, strengthening the transatlantic security architecture and the Alliance's ability to rapidly reinforce its eastern flank;
- bring the Three Seas Initiative Infrastructure Fund of Funds into operation and report publicly on its deployment to unlock at least 2 billion EUR of funds to further integrate European countries;
- ensure that cohesion policy, in particular the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and Interreg cross-border programmes, is coordinated with corridor investment under the Connecting Europe Facility, so that North–South connectivity delivers tangible convergence for the regions it crosses and treats lagging and border regions as beneficiaries of the Initiative, not merely as transit space;
- extend corridor and interconnection planning to Ukraine, Moldova and the candidate countries of the Western Balkans in advance of accession rather than after it.

Calls upon the member parties of the European People's Party to:

- sustain support for the Initiative across changes of government, recognising that infrastructure of this scale outlasts electoral cycles and that its value depends on continuity of commitment;
- champion within their national parliaments the parliamentary dimension of the Initiative, following the example of the Parliamentary Summit convened at Zagreb and the group constituted in the Polish Sejm;
- make the case publicly for the Initiative as an achievement of Central European statecraft, at a time when the region is more often discussed as a problem to be managed than as a contributor to European strength.

Calls upon YEPP and its member organisations to:

- engage actively with the academic and civic structures already forming around the Initiative, in particular the Three Seas University Network, and encourage the participation of young people from the participating and associated participating states in its business and civil society strands;
- express YEPP's readiness to contribute to any youth dimension the participating states may choose to develop, and to place the political and organisational capacity of its member organisations at the disposal of such an effort.

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