



WOJCIECH JAKÓBIK

**THE ENERGY POLICY OF
VISEGRAD GROUP AND
THREE SEAS INITIATIVE
AS A SUPPLEMENT
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Wojciech Jakóbiak

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The subject of this paper is the energy cooperation of the Visegrad Group and Three Seas Initiative from the point of view of Polish foreign policy. The aim is to analyze its potential in relation to the institutional and financial structure. This analysis shows that both of these organizations play a complementary role to the energy and climate policy of the European Union and therefore remain a useful tool of Polish foreign policy.

Energy industry in the Visegrad Group on its 30th anniversary

The Visegrad Group is an informal, regional form of cooperation between four countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, symbolically established on February 15, 1991 by their presidents and prime ministers in the Hungarian city of Vysehrad¹. At that time, a joint declaration was adopted, defining the goals and conditions of cooperation between these entities. Since 2004 the Visegrad Group (V4) consists of European Union member states. Since then, it has become an arena for coordinating positions in negotiations within the European institutions. One of priority projects areas of cooperation of V4 countries is strengthening the energy security. The only fully institutionalized form of the Group's cooperation is International Visegrad Fund (IVF), established in 2000 as an organization with an annual budget of around EUR 8 million allocated to grants, internships and other forms of support to stimulate cooperation between member states. The main decision-making body of the IVF is the Conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers which convenes at least once a year in the country holding the presidency that changes every six months. They then define the annual contribution of each V4 member, the rules of the group secretariat and set the IVF budget. The Council of Ambassadors accepts projects submitted for financing from the Fund. It consists of diplomats representing Visegrad states in the country of the presidency. Ambassadors also draft documents and programs for ministerial conferences, and monitor, control and evaluate the work of the IVF. The Secretariat is the administrative staff that supports the V4².

Energy security appeared as an important element of the Visegrad Group declaration from Bratislava, known as the Bratislava Declaration, of February 15, 2011. At the time Prime Ministers of the V4 countries met on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of this organization. In the document, they emphasized the need to strengthen Europe's energy security by extending and deepening the integration of the internal energy market in the European Union through enhanced cooperation of the V4 within the European Union. The goal of this policy is the diversification of routes, sources and suppliers of energy resources, as well as the development of energy infrastructure, in particular through the implementation of the digital North-South Gas Corridor and the modernization of the existing oil and electricity networks³. As a side note, it should be emphasized that the Corridor is a network of cross-border gas pipelines to connect Eastern European countries from Świnoujście in Poland to the island of Krk in Croatia. Their goal is to create a meridional supply system with gas entry points for the needs of imports from various directions, such as LNG from the Middle East, North Africa or the USA, as well as gas pipeline supplies from Norway. The Corridor's projects were financed from EU funds through the "Connecting Europe" tool, which allowed for financing up to 50% of their value, provided that they were on the Projects of Common Interest list, which the V4 countries⁴ were applying for each time.

¹ Declaration on Cooperation between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary in Striving for European Integration, 15 February 1991, https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2004/2/9/6e592602-5431-42fd-8e65-2274e294ad89/publishable_pl.pdf




² Visegrad Fund, *About Us*, <https://www.visegradfund.org/about-us/> (access: 3/11/2021).

³ Visegrad Group, *The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Group*, 15 February 2011, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/the-bratislava> (access: 3/11/2021).

⁴ Gaz-System, *North-South Gas Corridor*, <https://en.gaz-system.pl/our-investments/integration-with-european-gas-transmission-system/north-south-gas-corridor/> (access: 3/11/2021).

NORTH-SOUTH NATURAL GAS CORRIDOR



-  EXISTING OR PLANNED ELEMENTS OF THE NORTH-SOUTH CORRIDOR
-  EXISTING OR PLANNED LNG TERMINALS AND THEIR REGASIFICATION CAPABILITIES
-  EXISTING OR PLANNED INTERCONNECTIONS AND THEIR CAPACITY

The Bratislava Declaration was adopted after the V4+ energy summit on February 24, 2010. It was attended by representatives of Visegrad and Central and Eastern European countries: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and Romania. The document adopted at the time is an appeal to strengthen the cooperation in order to achieve the goals of the V4 with the participation of countries from outside the group. These goals include closer cooperation with the countries of the Energy Community, such as Ukraine or Moldova, which are integrating with the European Union in the electricity and gas sectors. The document also calls for the introduction of new EU regulations in regard to the security of gas supply, which later took the form of an SOS regulation, and for more funds from the European Union to be allocated to investments in the energy sector. Interestingly, there was also a declaration of support for new nuclear energy project in the Visegrad Group, that was not signed by Austria, which did not recognize this energy source as safe⁵. Subsequent declarations of ministers from 2011, 2015 and 2017 aim to obtain additional EU funds for energy infrastructure projects in the Visegrad Group, as well as to continue the efforts to achieve diversity mentioned in the objectives in Bratislava Declaration. The declaration of the ministers of seven EU countries from March 19, 2021 regarding the role of nuclear energy in the EU's climate and energy policy is a novelty. Countries of the Visegrad Group as well as France, Romania and Slovenia sent a letter to the European Commission demanding recognition of energy which uses nuclear reactors, as an active climate policy instrument of the European Union⁶.

Documents adopted by the Visegrad Group show that in relation to energy this organization mainly serves as a coordinator of the policy of member states within the European Union in order to maximize the use of EU funds and direct the energy and climate policy of the community as the V4

countries wish. One can observe years of consensual policy in relation to funds, understandable from the point of view of Visegrad countries' policy, striving to eliminate the underdevelopment of the energy infrastructure and achieve independence from the main supplier of energy resources – the Russian Federation. However, it is in vain to look for direct references to this country in V4 documents, due to different policies of individual member states towards Moscow. This policy takes into account the skeptical attitude of Poland on one hand and the more optimistic attitude of other V4 countries on the other. One can notice a gradual change in the priorities of the common energy policy of Visegrad Group states, adapted to the changing realities within the European Union. Initially, the issues concerning security of raw material supplies were the most important, which may be symbolized by efforts to build a new transmission infrastructure or regulations strengthening this security on the EU level. The reason for this policy was the successive gas crises involving the Russian Federation in 2006 and 2009, which caused gas shortages in Eastern European countries, as well as problematic relations between Russia's Gazprom and recipients of its gas in this region. With time – with the progress of the North-South Corridor, which was completed at the time of commissioning this paper – the V4 energy agenda began to gravitate towards climate policy and the construction of new energy capacities. This was due to the shift in the priorities of the European Commission, which on December 11, 2019 presented the program of the European Green Deal, aimed at achieving climate neutrality of EU by 2050, understood as net zero emissions of carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas affecting climate change. To this end, a package of legislative solutions was created to accelerate climate policy and increase the costs of CO₂ emissions related to the work of the economy, mainly for the energy sector. At the same time, there was an opportunity to use the EU Next Generation fund worth EUR 1.8 tril-

⁵ Visegrad Group, *Declaration of the Budapest V4+ Energy Security Summit*, 24 February 2010, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/2010/declaration-of-the> (access: 3/11/2021).

⁶ Visegrad Group, *Joint Letter by Seven State Leaders to EU Commission on the Role of the Nuclear Power in the EU Climate and Energy Policy*, 19 March 2021, <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/joint-letter-by-seven> (access: 3/11/2021).

lion, one third of which was to finance the objectives of the European Green Deal⁷. For this reason, among other things, a declaration of V4 countries was published, supported by other advocates of nuclear energy in the European Union, to consider it a climate policy instrument. Among V4 countries, only the Republic of Poland has not yet developed nuclear energy. Other countries inherited it from the times of the Warsaw Pact, when the Soviet Union financed the construction of nuclear reactors in selected satellite states of this bloc. However, all the V4 states want to build or expand nuclear energy capacity, often benefiting from cooperation with the US and France, which bring new opportunities for the Visegrad Group to influence energy and climate policy of the European Union.

In conclusion, the Visegrad Group should be considered an instrument of energy policy limited by the possibilities of the institutional system of the European Union. The Visegrad Countries are able to effectively influence EU policy in this area, firstly in relation to financing of the strategic projects, security and diversification of supply, and now more and more often also climate policy. The limitation of the possibilities of this organization is the lack of an alternative institutional structure that can replace the EU one. The strength of Visegrad policy still lies in the effective use of the European Union tools, the best example of which is the success of the North-South Corridor programme. It should be expected that this formula of cooperation will continue if common interests of V4 countries, such as the defense of the nuclear energy are present. The differences of opinion in relation to foreign policy, especially in relation to the Russian Federation, limit the possibility of further integration of the Energy Community countries with the V4 as a whole, which does not exclude bilateral integration of its member states such as Poland or Slovakia bordering with Ukraine and Moldova.

From this point of view, the V4 remains an attractive arena for the implementation of Polish foreign policy interests, which Poland can use to partly impact the maximization of the use of EU funds for projects important from the point of view of its energy security. This was the case with the President Lech Kaczyński LNG terminal in Świnoujście or the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline project running from Norway through Denmark to Poland, which became the key source of supply for the North-South Corridor and thus could count on an uninterrupted stream of EU funding. Visegrad Group was also used to integrate with Energy Community countries such as Moldova and Ukraine. It can continue to be used for this purpose, taking into account the aforementioned differences between Polish foreign policy and foreign policy of member states in regard to Russian Federation. The group was and can be successfully used to raise funds for the EU's Eastern Partnership⁸ projects. In the reality of the European Green Deal, the driving force behind the V4's energy cooperation may be the adaptation of detailed legal acts of the European Union to the common needs of the countries of this organization. An example is the so-called EU taxonomy, i.e. sustainable financing described in the Regulation on the taxonomy of the European Parliament and of the Council the European Union⁹. It is a classification of economic activities considered sustainable from the climate perspective, which deserves the bank financing necessary to implement important energy projects, such as the construction of nuclear power plants. At the time of the submission of this paper, talks on taxonomy were still ongoing, and political decisions in relation to the regulation on this matter were scheduled for December 2021. The Visegrad Group, along with other supporters of nuclear energy in European Union, sought to include the atom in the taxonomy¹⁰.

⁷ EU Council *European Green Deal*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/green-deal/> (access: 3/11/2021).

⁸ W. Jakóbiak, P. Jakóbiak W., Kowal P., *Polityka energetyczna UE wobec państw Partnerstwa Wschodniego (2008-2014)*, [in:] *Partnerstwo Wschodnie Unii Europejskiej*, M. Grela, Z. Rapacki (red.), Akademia Finansów i Biznesu, Warsaw 2016, p. 139.

⁹ Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, *Zrównoważone finansowanie*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rozwoj-technologie/zrownowazone-finansowanie> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹⁰ W. Jakóbiak W., *Podziały każą Unii odłożyć odpowiedź na kryzys energetyczny. Wiemy, co proponowała Polska*, BiznesAlert.pl, 27 October 2021, <https://biznesalert.pl/podzialy-kaza-unii-odlozyc-odpowiedz-na-kryzys-energetyczny-wiemy-co-proponowala-polska/> (access: 3/11/2021).

Energy in the Three Seas Initiative on its 5th anniversary

The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) was created as a cooperation forum of twelve countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. Its priority is to build a unified and integrated infrastructure in Central Europe, making it possible to make up for the developmental backwardness resulting from historical events. The Three Seas Initiative is to be complementary to existing cooperation formats of regional cooperation and to ensure political support of strategic projects. The first Initiative summit was held on August 25, 2016 in Dubrovnik. Its result was the declaration concerning the will to revive regional cooperation with an "informal platform" that will support the sectors of energy, transport and digitization¹¹. A significant element of the declaration is the embedding of TSI cooperation within the EU and transatlantic context. The authors of the declaration called for strengthening integration within the European Union¹², as well as for actions in accordance with fundamental principles and values of the European Union. The second Initiative summit took place in Warsaw on July 6, 2017 and brought US involvement in the Three Seas activities at the time of Donald Trump's administration and the expansion of the Initiative agenda with a transatlantic perspective. It was then agreed that the Three Seas Initiative is in fact a "flexible presidential forum", providing "political support for more effective cooperation between governments, businesses and non-governmental organizations interested in strengthening ties" through the development of the TEN-T transport network within the European Union and implementation of the objectives of the European Union in full synergy with the political programs of the Community. Three Seas has also declared openness to the involvement of

business entities from around the world and global partners in the strategic projects of this initiative¹³. The third summit held on September 17–18, 2018 in Bucharest allowed the establishment of Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (TSIIF) to finance key infrastructure projects in the member states. Its main target was to invest in transport, energy and digital infrastructure on the north-south axis in countries of the Initiative in order to overcome developmental differences in respective regions of the European Union. According to the declaration of the TSIIF initiators, it is a commercial and market-based initiative that will guarantee diversified financing and ROI for investors. The banks the Fund consists of are the Polish Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego and the Romanian Exom Bank. Ultimately the Fund is to have up to EUR 5 billion at its disposal, but by the time this paper was handed over, it has accumulated around a billion. Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego estimates that the investment needs of 3SI may reach EUR 600 billion by 2030¹⁴. The summit in Bucharest was also an opportunity for further institutionalization of the Initiative through expanding the business and economic dimension of cooperation and signing declaration on the creation of the Network of Chambers of Commerce of the Three Seas Initiative and adoption of the catalogue of priorities of the Initiative. Among projects submitted for revision by the working groups established under 3SI during the fourth summit in Ljubljana on 26 September 2019, there were those from the digitization, transport and energy sectors. These projects included the North-South Gas Corridor, with particular emphasis on the floating terminal for receiving LNG in Croatia. One of the results of The Three Seas Initiative in this field is an agreement between a Polish and Croatian gas transmission network ope-

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs *Trójmorze*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/trojmorze> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹² Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, *Wspólna Deklaracja w sprawie Inicjatywy Trójmorza*, 25 August 2016, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wizyty-zagraniczne/art,105,wspolna-deklaracja-w-sprawie-inicjatywy-trojmorza.html> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹³ *Joint declaration from the second summit of the Three Seas Initiative*, 6 July 2017, <https://media.voog.com/0000/0046/4166/files/WARSAW-joint-declaration-2017.pdf> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹⁴ J. Stachura J., BGK podsumowuje dwa lata Funduszu Trójmorza. *Miliard euro na transformację to początek*, BiznesAlert.pl, 21 July 2021, <https://biznesalert.pl/bgk-fundusz-trojmorza-finanse-transformacja-energetyka/> (access: 3/11/2021).

rators on the transfer of know-how and specialist cooperation on the aforementioned Hrvatska LNG project which closes the North-South Corridor on the southern flank¹⁵. The list of priority projects of the Three Seas Initiative (currently ninety) includes strategic project of the countries of the region from the energy sector: the BRUA gas pipeline connecting Bulgaria, Romania and Austria, Eastring integrating the gas markets in Southern Europe, the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, Poland–Lithuania, Poland-Slovakia and Poland-Ukraine interconnectors, gas storage in Chiren, synchronization of power grids of the Baltic states by Poland with the help of the Harmony Link project, development of intelligent transmission networks, construction of renewable energy and development of hydrogen economy. Energy-related projects accounted for 37% of all submissions¹⁶. It should be emphasized that the 3SI's list of energy sector projects included the same projects that were already present on EU's list of Projects of Common Interest. The fourth summit of the Initiative in Tallinn, organized in a hybrid formula due to the coronavirus pandemic, was held on October 19, 2020. During it USA declared greater involvement in TSIIF (a promise of up to 30% of the contribution, which is about USD 1 billion). Estonia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Croatia provided similar declarations. Americans declared, inter alia, readiness to support projects related to nuclear energy¹⁷. The sixth Initiative summit took place on 8–9 July, 2021 in Sofia. It concluded with declarations of the political will to deepen cooperation, including in the development of power grids, without any specific decisions in this regard. There were declarations of the will to diversify and provide security of supplies in the region, appended with the postulate of transformation towards climate neutrality, declared as the EU goal of under of the

European Green Deal program¹⁸. The seventh summit in 2022 is to be held in Riga. Latvia declared that the priority of the talks on this occasion would be to raise private capital to develop infrastructure, including energy, as well as a summary of the progress of projects from the priority list.

By the time the time this paper was submitted, only one energy project from this list had been completed – the construction of a gas compression station in Croatia. Financing of projects of the Three Seas Initiative is valued at EUR 180.9 billion, 41% of which are to come from EU funds, mostly from the Connecting Europe instrument, 24% from national funds, 9% – from TSIIF, 8% – from the European Investment Bank, 3% – from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development¹⁹. The US financial commitment has not yet been materialized. This means that the Three Seas Initiative has the potential as long as there is the political will of the Forum of Presidents and financial support of the founders of projects on the strategic list, i.e. European Union and (declaratively) USA. From this perspective 3SI appears to be an initiative supporting Eastern European countries in terms of integration with the EU. Its influence, however, is limited by the fact that a wide group of member states of the Initiative often has contradictory interests when it comes to energy policy. For example the differences in opinions in relation to the speed of energy transformation and climate neutrality goal. Support of the founders: European Union and USA may also be determined by the priorities of these entities. The European Commission can expect the Initiative to support European integration, not to be an alternative to it. USA may expect implementation of projects significant from their foreign and economic policy perspective in return for financial contribution which has been

¹⁵ W. Jakóbk W., *Trójmorze: Polska pomoże Chorwacji zbudować gazoport*, BiznesAlert.pl, 6 August 2017, <https://biznesalert.pl/trojmorze-polska-pomoze-chorwacji-zbudowac-gazoport/> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹⁶ Three Seas Initiative *Priority Projects*, <https://3seas.eu/about/progressreport> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹⁷ Three Seas Initiative, *Undersecretary Keith Krach: U.S. will invest up to \$1 billion in 3SI*, 19 October 2020, <https://3seas.eu/media/news/undersecretary-keith-krach-u-s-will-invest-up-to-eur1-billion-in-3si> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹⁸ Three Seas Initiative, *Joint Declaration of the Sixth Summit of the Three Seas Initiative*, 9 July 2021, <https://3seas.eu/event/joint-declaration-of-the-sixth-summit-of-the-three-seas-initiative> (access: 3/11/2021).

¹⁹ Ł. Lewkowicz, M. Gołębiewska, *Inicjatywa Trójmorza przed szczytem w Rydze: inspirowana politycznie, napędzana komercyjnie*, „Komentarze IEŚ” no. 436, Instytut Europy Środkowej, 31 August 2021, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/inicjatywa-trojmorza-przed-szczytem-w-rydze-inspirowana-politycznie-napedzana-komercyjnie/> (access: 3/11/2021).

declared but still unmaterialized. From this perspective the Three Seas Initiative becomes a tool for building political and financial support for energy projects important from the Polish foreign policy point of view. Therefore, the projects should not be limited to its territory, but also take into account matters of regional importance that will promote the reduction of dependence on gas from Russia and ensure security of supplies of this fuel and energy in the period of energy transformation and implementation of the European Green Deal plan. It is no coincidence that the only successful energy project supported by the Initiative so far is the compression station in Croatia, which distributes US liquefied gas from the terminal on the Croatian island of Krk. The US Support may boost the development of gas cooperation under 3SI via supplementation of the EU projects with additional projects, important from the Washington's foreign policy perspective as well as for individual Three Seas countries. These inc-

lude the project of the Poland-Ukraine gas pipeline, which is on the list of priorities of the Initiative, provided that the US comes into cooperation with the Three Seas Initiative. This gas pipeline would serve, among other things, as a medium of supply to European Union countries. The USA, Poland and Ukraine have signed a memorandum on gas cooperation in the Central and Eastern Europe²⁰, making projects of this type more likely. The vision of the involvement of the European Union and the USA in the construction of nuclear power plants in Poland and other Three Seas Initiative countries should be considered attractive, provided that there is no objection from one of the member states of the Initiative - Austria, which advocates for the withdrawal of the nuclear energy from the Old continent and tried to convince the Visegrad Group to its position – to no avail³. It is worth noting that the Austrians did not declare financial involvement in TSIF.

Comparative analysis of the Visegrad Group and Three Seas Initiative potentials in relation to energy

Visegrad Group and Three Seas Initiative are political initiatives with varying degree of institutionalization and unequal financial capabilities. The V4 has a more extensive institutional system, allowing for more effective political influence inside European Union, through coordination of policies of its member states, limited only by differences of opinion on contentious issues, such as the attitude to Russian Federation. Three Seas Initiative does not have such a rich institutional system and still lacks a secretariat in the strict sense, only a technical secretariat set up on March 27, 2021 exists²¹. On the other hand, the financial possibilities of the 3SI are greater than of the Visegrad Group, because of the possibility to

finance infrastructural projects, while V4 focuses on investments in training and grants. From this perspective, 3SI becomes an important complement to the of the Visegrad Group. However, its potential is limited by a wider group of countries involved in the Fund. On the other hand, it may attract the declared commitment of the United States, increasing its financial potential and convincing member states to certain initiatives thanks to Washington's political power in Central and Eastern Europe.

In conclusion, from the perspective of the energy sector, Visegrad Group and Three Seas both support the European integration and sometimes allow

²⁰ Department Energii USA, *Memorandum of Cooperation Among The Republic of Poland, Ukraine and The United States of America On Enhancing Regional Security of Natural Gas Supply*, 31 August 2019, <https://www.energy.gov/ia/articles/memorandum-cooperation-among-republic-poland-ukraine-and-united-states-america-enhancing> (access: 3/11/2021).

²¹ *Austria fails to turn neighbors against nuclear power*, WorldNuclearNews.org, 17 January 2020, <https://world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Austria-fails-to-turn-neighbours-against-nuclear-p> (access: 3/11/2021).

for modification of the direction of political and financial involvement of countries from this region, towards projects important from the perspective of Polish foreign and economy policy. The strength of this influence may increase or decrease depending on the progress towards the institutionalization of these organizations. This applies especially to the Visegrad Group, which has a limited field of political consensus in the area of energy and climate policies. Poland, for instance is below the level of other Visegrad countries due to high dependence on coal.

The impact in question also depends on the availability of funds of the European Union and the United States, because without them, the limitations of the capital raised by TSIF will not be overcome. Meanwhile, the influence of the countries of this initiative on these factors remains limited, while potential energy and economic crises may limit the involvement of Brussels and Washington in supportive projects. Thirty years of development of the Visegrad Group resulted in an organization that remains an attractive forum for the implementation of Polish foreign policy interests because of

the possibility to coordinate political positions. Five years of Three Seas Initiative resulted in formation of a fund that may promote projects important from Polish foreign policy perspective in the coming future. However, there is no chance of Visegrad Group or Three Seas becoming forms of cooperation alternative to European integration. All presented projects concerning the energy sector within these initiatives are EU projects that would not have come to fruition without the dominant involvement of European funds. The best example is the North-South Corridor, one of the largest energy projects in the European Union. It was implemented thanks to the cooperation of the European Union states, while Visegrad Group and Three Seas played only a supporting role. The concept and financing necessary for its implementation were created on the EU level. It should be noted that unexpected political changes in Europe and the world, such as European or transatlantic integration crises, may make the developing institutional systems of the V4 and TSI cooperation forums in times of such problems. For this reason alone, the involvement of the Polish foreign policy in these endeavours should continue.

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Wojciech Jakóbiak

energy sector analyst. Co-founder and editor-in-chief of BiznesAlert.pl and member of the editorial board of the quarterly "Sprawy Międzynarodowe". He is a lecturer at the College of Eastern Europe at the University of Warsaw.



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