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**Prof. ARKADY RZEGOCKI**

**POLAND'S INVOLVEMENT  
IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP (V4)  
AND THREE SEAS INITIATIVE (3SI)  
INCLUDING COOPERATION  
WITH GREAT BRITAIN**

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Regional cooperation in various formats is an important factor for Poland in strengthening its international potential in the security dimension; it is conducive to accelerating the internal modernization of the country and increasing the importance of the voice of Central Europe in other key forums, such as the EU and NATO.

For implementation of these purposes, Poland has committed a significant amount of resources and funds in order to develop our region. At the same time, the success of ambitious agendas of cooperation promoted by Poland is conditioned on strengthening the awareness of common, strategic interests for our region, as well as the ability to effectively represent them in key processes and decision formats. This requires a diversified approach. Our region is so large and so internally diverse that the functioning of several different cooperation formats within it, focused on a wide range of challenges, is not a burden, but an opportunity to expand the area of real impact.

Therefore, it is even more important for the success of regional policy in our part of the continent, to pursue it in a long-term manner, based on building understanding and support, in a coherent, pragmatic and persistent way, not ignoring interests of the remaining partners.

From the Polish perspective, it is important for the regional cooperation in Central Europe to include:

- broad communication and regional representation – increasing the unity of Eastern and Central Europe and its infrastructural connections with the rest of the continent on the North-South axis, which is pursued by Three Seas Initiative (3SI);
- regional dimension of security policy – here the leading format is the "Bucharest 9", as well as activity in the security field under the Visegrad Group; wider cooperation of Visegrad countries, Nordic and Baltic; Poland-Romania-Turkey tri-

logue; special dialogue formats and cooperation with selected states of the region, e.g. so called mini-quadrangas;

- cooperation for development – sectoral and project-based cooperation under the Visegrad Group (V4) and V4+, Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), Central European Initiative (CEI); monitoring of the activity of EU macroregional strategies operating in our vicinity and contacts with regional structures operating in the Western Balkans, e.g. Regional Cooperation Council.

## The Visegrad Group (V4) – regional cooperation for development

For Poland the Visegrad Group is still the key format of regional cooperation aimed at realizing both interests of Poland and the whole region of Central Europe. It is a recognizable platform for discussion and cooperation on current affairs, mainly concerning the EU and its vicinity. V4 is an integral part of the European pillar of Polish foreign policy and is perceived as an important forum for joint representation of interests of Central Europe – the part of the continent which, due to historical events, was often an object rather than a subject in international politics. The need for active regional policy and strengthening of ties with partners from our region results not only from our geographic location, but also from similar socio-economic challenges. Together, we are looking for synergies in numerous areas of common interest, based on consensus and voluntariness. We are striving for larger investments in the field of transport and energy infrastructure, not only on the East-West axis, but also the North-South.

We also have our own distinctive strengths, such as booming economies and the digital sector with great potential. The common goal of the V4 is to provide a strong Central Europe within EU.

At the same time, V4 tries to face new challenges together, wherever it is possible. An example of this is the fact that during the Polish presidency in the V4 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021), the V4 Center for COVID-19 was established. In the most difficult moments of the pandemic, we also helped each other in a practical way. We focused not only on the improvement of cooperation within the group, but also on solidarity with our closest partners.

Moreover, during Polish Presidency the funds of International Visegrad Fund were used to finance the second edition of the *V4 East Solidarity Programme*, under which we supported Eastern Partnership countries in the fight against the pandemic. Many common declarations and initiatives regarding the Eastern policy were developed (incl. a proposal to develop an economic plan for a democratic Belarus, which was then approved by the European Council), migration policy, cooperation in the field of digital projects, transport and energy infrastructure, climate and environmental policy, defense cooperation, economy or agriculture.

In addition, Polish presidency focused on coordination of positions and V4 actions on a number of specific issues on the EU duties agenda.

The V4 is a platform for coordination of positions in regard to negotiations and the programming of the new financial perspective (**Multiannual Financial Framework**), with particular emphasis on unity policy and the Reconstruction Plan for Europe.

In the *infrastructure* field the V4 submitted key projects for consideration under the revision of Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) such as the Central Communication Port (CPK), Via Carpatia, high-speed rail connecting the capitals of V4 countries, improvement of navigability of the waterways connecting our countries or the development of railway transport. A V4 Non paper for Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia for Multiannual Work Program for the "Connecting Europe" tool was adopted as well as a V4 non paper for Croatia, Romania and Slovenia on technical and administrative support for member states benefiting from unity policy under of the "Connecting Europe" tool.

Also the **issues of climate and environmental protection** are an important element of the V4 agenda. The group emphasizes the need to respect the particular situation and individual circumstances of all EU member states under climate and energy policy (package concerning *Fit for 55*, nuclear energy, assessment of the impact of the EU climate goals by 2030 on individual EU countries).

A lot of attention within the V4 is given to international policy issues. This is justified both by the scale of challenges in this area, as well as the difficult historical experiences of the Group member states. That is why during the V4 prime ministers summit in Lublin on September 11, 2020 Poland came out with the initiative of an economic plan for a democratic **Belarus**. Importantly, the Visegrad idea was accepted by the European Council and implemented in May 2021 by EC. Thus, the V4 initiative became an EU initiative.

In relation to **Western Balkans**, V4 offers support for European aspirations of countries of this region, which is extremely important from the perspective

of stability and security of Europeans, also in terms of illegal immigration from other countries. A measurable element of cooperation of the V4 with countries from this part of the continent was the issuance of a common statement by the V4 ministers of foreign affairs on the issue of Western Balkans after the meetings in Poznań and Rogalin (June 28, 2021), as well as adoption of a common non-paper of V4 and Austria in May 2021, on the participation of Western Balkan states in the Conference on the future of Europe.

**Defense cooperation under V4** is an important issue for Poland. In December 2020, the Action Plan for defense cooperation of the V4 was adopted (its content is not public) and preparations for the operationalization of the Visegrad Battle Group by 2023 began. For this purpose the V4 chiefs of staff and defense signed a memorandum in June 2021, creating the legal basis for the creation of the Battle Group and defining the rules of its operation.

Moreover, work is underway under Group on the certification of common leadership of the V4 for the Joint Support Logistics Group under NATO, on the update of the V4 training and exercise strategy or signing the letter of intent of the V4 defense ministers on establishing cooperation between military academies in the field of strategic communication.

The multidimensionality of cooperation of the Visegrad Group can also be seen in the ambitious agenda in the field of family-friendly activities and culture or the increase of the International Visegrad Fund budget by 25% by Prime Ministers of V4 countries, up to EUR 10 million per year in order to strengthen the mechanisms of cooperation of youth of the Visegrad Group under the Generation V4 programme. Member states also collaborate on economic, financial and agricultural issues on the EU forum and initiate joint digital projects.

## Three Seas Initiative (3SI) – better economic integration of countries of the region

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is a political and economic project initiated in 2015 by the presidents of Poland and Croatia, which aims to strengthen the cooperation of 12 countries of Adriatic Sea, Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary). The goal is a better economic integration of the Three Seas region and coordination of actions for the development of infrastructure in three key spheres: transport, energy and digital. 3SI is also an important instrument for strengthening transatlantic ties and increasing Europe's unity and solidarity.

3SI is the most ambitious cooperation platform in the region, which supports the integration of the so-called eastern flank of the EU by building infrastructure connections. It is in line with EU policies and other regional cooperation formats. Projects implemented with 3SI members and partners will contribute to reducing the development gap in our region, which is in line with the EU's goal of increasing economic, social and territorial unity and solidarity under EU. The cooperation under Three Seas Initiative is fully complementary to interaction on the European Union forum, and the Initiative itself is the most geographically representative format integrating members from the Eastern part of the European Union.

Member states of the Three Seas Initiative cover an area of 1,218,869 km<sup>2</sup> (27.8% of the EU territory) and have a population of 12 million (21.8% of the EU population). These are countries that have shown a high economic growth rate in recent years – on average of 3.5% growth of GDP in 2015-2019. (In the same period, the average GDP growth for the entire EU was 1.6%.) In 2018, countries of the Three Seas Initiative accounted for over 19% of the GDP of the entire EU. (At the time of EU enlargement in 2004 it was 15.2%.)

Since the inception of 3SI, six summits of presidents and heads of states were held. It is noteworthy that each of these meetings brought new achievements and generated added value. The Three Sea format aroused the interest of global partners as well as business and expert communities, which resulted in the creation of the Three Seas Initiative Investment fund at the initiative of Poland and Romania during the 4th summit in Ljubljana (2019). Every year, the belief that the cooperation under Three Seas Initiative is getting more and more attractive is becoming more common. On the next summit in Tallinn (2020), members and partners of this initiative declared reinforcement of the Investment Fund. The vision of *The Three Seas Smart Connectivity* was also presented. It lays ground for connecting energy and transport networks in 3SI member states by means of digital platforms.

The **strengths of the Three Seas region** include the high pace of economic growth, the geographic location on the route of trade connections between Europe and Asia, as well as the digital revolution. The creation of **3SI Investment Fund** (Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund, 3SIIF) is also noteworthy. The fund's goal is to enable effective use of the assets and potential of the region. The fund operates on the basis of Luxembourg law, as a commercial entity, which means that the investment decisions of the Fund's authorities are made according to the criterion of the possibility of generating profit for its shareholders. It is an instrument used for funding common projects and attracting private capital, thus strengthening the practical dimension of The Three Seas Initiative. It is designed to support financing of projects creating transport, energy and digital infrastructure in the Three Seas region. Eventually the Fund's resources will amount to **EUR 3-5 billion** with participation from 3SI member states, international institutions and private investors.

Better development of the region requires a well-built infrastructure network. 3SI members submit proposals for infrastructure projects in three main areas: transport, energy and digital. The list of submissions includes 90 priority projects (49% – transport, 37% – energy, 4% – digitization), with some large projects submitted independently by more than one country.

**Poland** has now submitted priority projects in three sectors:

- **transport** – Via Carpatia, TEN-T Baltic-Adriatic Corridor, Rail Baltica Corridor, Amber Rail;

## Regional cooperation with Great Britain (UK)

For Poland the development of relations with the UK is a priority, and dialogue with London only gained importance after the UK left the European Union. Regardless of UK's exit from the EU, Poland was and still is an advocate of including UK in regional cooperation forums.

It should be noted that the dialogue on the **V4+UK** line is already underway. V4+UK cooperation was initiated in Budapest on September 14, 2017 with a meeting of ministers of trade.

The agenda of mutual contacts was extended to new areas relatively quickly. On March 2, 2018, the ministers of foreign affairs of V4 countries and their British counterpart held talks on situation in Ukraine, Western Balkans and the process of UK leaving the EU structures (free trade agreements and EU+UK cooperation on security and defense). This dialogue was continued – at the British initiative – in January 2021, and the discussion concerned the state of relations after Brexit, cooperation with Western Balkans, cooperation on cybersecurity, disinformation issues and eastern affairs, as well as cooperation with the USA.

## Future prospects

*The Green Paper* as an analytical document, on one hand presents the effects of the current cooperation between the countries of the Visegrad Group and the

- **energy** – Gas Interconnection Poland - Lithuania pipeline (GIPL), diversification of gas supply sources and integration of gas infrastructure in the Three Seas region with the implementation of the Baltic Pipe project and cross-border connections between Poland and Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine;
- **digitization** – creation of Central European Drone Demonstrator (CEDD) and The 3 Seas Digital Highway.

As for the Three Seas Initiative it should be noted that the United Kingdom has not yet participated in the affairs of this structure. From the Polish perspective, the possible inclusion of London is worth attention. The areas in which synergy between 3SI and UK is particularly desirable are issues regarding the **climate policy**, including energy transition and the search for climate neutral sources of energy. Emerging new opportunities of common actions in the field of low-carbon energy sources, e.g. in the field of hydrogen or nuclear energy can be extremely attractive to both sides.

Moreover the development of **infrastructure** and new **digital and telecommunications technologies**, with particular emphasis on 5G networks, may be considered prospective areas of involvement of the UK under 3SI. Poland is committed to building coalition of partner countries that use safe technologies. The imminent element of such coalition would be cooperation in the field of **cybersecurity**.

Three Seas Initiative in the political, social, economic, security, innovation and science areas including interests and international position of Poland. On the

other hand, it presents the perspective of cooperation of V4 and 3SI for the coming years in a regional and global dimension.

The cooperation of Eastern Europe and the role of Poland in this respect, as well as the participation of the United Kingdom in the formats described above are important in many dimensions. Initiatives such as V4 and 3SI allow for a better use of potential of its member states and creation of adequate space for the implementation of new solutions. Undoubtedly,

a tighter cooperation in this framework strengthens the member states in external relations and their international position in short and long term alike.

UK participation in the dialogue with the V4 shows the attractiveness of this format for London. The aim of the *Green Paper* is to analyze the possible benefits and costs of a deeper involvement of the UK in the cooperation with Visegrad Group, as well as examination of opportunities of structural cooperation of the UK with a much younger partner – 3SI.





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## Arkady Rzegocki (PhD)

is a political scientist, professor of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, specialising in Polish and English political thought, the concept of national interest (*raison d'État*), as well as the issue of soft power. He studied at the Jagiellonian University and University College Dublin, conducted research in Denver (Colorado, USA), at universities in Oxford, Cambridge, London, and Florence, and was a Visiting Scholar at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge in 2014.

From 1996 to 2010 he was an Associate Professor in the Department of History of Political and Legal Doctrines of the Faculty of Law and Administration of the Jagiellonian University. Since 2010 he has been a Professor at the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University.

As the Ambassador of Poland to the United Kingdom, for many years he was actively promoting knowledge of Poland in the United Kingdom. From 2011 to 2016 he was a Professor of the Polish University Abroad in London (PUNO). He has been the initiator and the first director of the Jagiellonian University Polish Research Centre in London that has been operating since 2011. From 2011 to 2015 he was the leader of the postgraduate course “Polish-British Strategic Partnership in the EU and NATO”, organised jointly by PUNO and the Jagiellonian University. He was a councillor for the City of Krakow from 2014 to 2016 where he headed the Commission of Innovation and European Funds of the City Council.

He was a member of academic and civic organisations: EpsNet, Polish Association of Political Science, Polish Association of Political Thought, The Jagiellonian Club, The Center for Political Thought. Since 2009 he has been a member of the Historical Preservation Committee in Krakow (SKOZK). He is the founder of “Pressje” journal and he was its editor-in-chief from 2002 to 2011.

He speaks English and Russian. His wife Jolanta Rzegocka (PhD) is an English philologist and theatre historian. She knows Lithuanian and Russian and basics of French and Hungarian. The couple have three daughters.





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