

Proposal for CEE-wide cooperation for reinforcement of the digital pillar and signing of a Three Seas Initiative's digital charter

As the leaders of the digital industry of Central Eastern Europe, gathering around the initiative of CEE Digital Coalition, continue our efforts to build a competitive and innovative digital economy and prosperous, safe modern civil society in our region. 2022 has been a special year for our region. It has really brought to the forefront what Central and Eastern European leaders have to say about Europe's future as the world turned its eyes towards CEE uniting in response to the war raging in Ukraine. Meeting towards the end of 2022 we believe that coming together and speaking with one voice is all the more important for CEE governments and businesses alike. In this spirit, we wish to reflect on:

- > Directions of cooperation set out for the Three Seas Initiative at the very first Three Seas Summit of 2016, covering energy, transport, **digital** and economic growth,
- > Approval of interconnection projects in said key areas of transport, energy, and **digital** during the Initiative's third Summit in Bucharest in 2018,
- > Revisiting these areas' significance while founding the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund,
- > The strong presence of the issues of **digitalisation and innovation** in the agenda of Three Seas Summit and Business Forums in Sofia and Riga in recent years,
- > Making Europe fit for the digital age one of the European Commission's priorities for 2019-2024.

Digitalization is the backbone of our region's growth, now more than ever. Prosperity of our societies, growth of our economies and providing advanced cybersecurity to both depends on our ability to exploit its potential to the fullest. To make it possible, we believe it is necessary to set a well-defined, structured set of **guidelines for CEE's further digital growth**. This needs to be complemented by a clearly-stated intent by **governments** of the Three Seas to make joint, cooperative and multi-national efforts to embrace digital transformation.

Thus, we propose for our national leaders to use the strong fundamentals of the Three Seas Initiative and develop **a CEE Digital Charter, a precise set of digital priorities**. The Charter should ideally be complemented by specific and measurable goals for Central Eastern European countries in the digital domain. We believe such action is possible. Visegrad Group Joint Declaration on Mutual Cooperation in Digital Projects of 2021, signed by Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries serves as an example.

The CEE Digital Coalition hereby offers its expertise and insights to develop this Charter. In this spirit, we offer the below list of areas that we believe should be considered, when initiating such a document. These include:

- 1 **Ensuring advanced cybersecurity** for the Three Seas Initiative's countries' critical infrastructure, citizens, businesses and the public sector.

Digital tools and solutions are now common in all aspects of social life, state affairs and the economy. They are unfortunately subject to a rising number of cybersecurity incidents. . Dire need to address cyberthreats is particularly clear today, when the Russian Federation continues its aggression against Ukraine, shedding a new light on the EU's vulnerabilities and shortcomings in terms of digital resilience. Priority must be given to joint bi- and multilateral cybersecurity investments and projects in the Tree Seas region, to exchanging and implementing best practices and sharing critical information related to security.

- 2 **Increasing the share of Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund's resources** directed towards investments in digital infrastructure, solutions and far-reaching transformation as well as promoting more submissions of digital projects to the Fund and raising awareness of Fund's activity amongst entrepreneurs, start-ups and innovators.

The digital pillar must receive enough policy-making attention, but it should also be supported by funding opportunities, means of attracting investment and involvement of the region's digital challengers in its growth. Capabilities of the 3SIIF have been proven in other fields. Work must now be done to increase the share of digital projects completed thanks to its support and social awareness of the availability of funds.

- 3 **Pursuing opportunities for attracting resources from the European Union funds** and programmes dedicated to digital transformation by promoting such projects amongst digitally innovative businesses of the 3Seas countries.

- 4 **Strengthening the transatlantic relationship** that has served as an enduring foundation for the geopolitical and economic development of the Central and Eastern European region for the past three decades, and which partnership continues to be a critical element in addressing our global and regional challenges.

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Maintaining comprehensive dialogue and consultations with the business community in the field of digital transformation and aligning our region's digital policy with the best interest of citizens and economy of the Three Seas Initiative.

Means for consultation and close cooperation in regard to local and European legislation of relevance to the digital pillar should be developed and maintained between the Three Seas Initiative's countries.

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Identifying and promoting research, investments, education and adoption of digital technologies that bear the most benefit for our societies and economies, including:

- a. **Cloud computing**, recognised as one of the digital priorities for the entire EU, allowing for transformation of businesses as well as central and local administration resulting in the emergence of novel services for citizens across the Three Seas.
- b. **5G and 6G networks**, development of which is a necessary condition for achieving our regional and individual goals of providing universal connectivity, fighting digital exclusion, and embracing Industry 4.0 with all of its revolutionary potential.
- c. **Artificial Intelligence** and IoT solutions, invaluable across societies and economies as the drivers behind groundbreaking research, innovative services of informational society, growth of every single sector of the economy as well as tools helping us meet the environmental goals.

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Addressing the fundamental value of data storage, management and processing by striving for necessary infrastructure, regulatory environment and sharing best practice for utilising data.

8

Measuring the level of and constantly improving the digital skills and competences of the citizens of the Three Seas.

Digital transformation and widespread adoption of innovative technologies across the society must be accompanied by training of highly skilled digital professionals and retaining them in the region. The shortage of specialists today is already a limiting factor in the digital growth of CEE. At the same time citizens must also be provided with basic digital knowledge, skills, awareness and competences to prevent digital exclusion. Therefore, diagnosing the level of digital competences, encouraging careers in the ICT sector and undertaking relevant educational activity both amongst the youth and adults should go hand in hand.

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Closely monitoring the ever-shifting digital landscape and technological progress in order to update Three Seas Initiative's digital priorities accurately, drawing insight from our region's experts and shapers of the digital environment.

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Establishing a permanent secretariat, working group or digital office making possible for CEE-wide consultation and coordination of the above-mentioned activities to bring our Initiative closer to achieving its digital goals: boosting our competitiveness and ensure the wellbeing of citizens in the digital age.

The stage of digital development and opportunities granted by the innovative economy as well as needs in the digital aspects are indeed distinct and unique for our region of Europe. We express our hope that this digitally progressive, unique CEE identity will be recognised by our national leaders and reflected not only in the potential charter but also in their decisions making on national, regional, and EU levels. It is our sincere wish to see the pursuit of the above goals by close regional cooperation based on a dedicated political incentive aligned with the Three Seas Initiative's pillars.