

Political and military significance of the Central Transportation Hub project in Poland

In October 2018 based on the Bill dated May 10 2018 on The Central Transport Hub the Special Purpose Vehicle responsible for preparing and implementing the Central Transportation Hub program was established. Located between Warsaw and Łódź the CTH is expected to be one of the biggest transportation intermodal hubs in Central Eastern Europe region combining a hub airport, directly connected to railway and motorway networks. Following the analytical stage, government plenipotentiary for the CTH selected Stanisławów - a settlement in the Baranów administrative district, as a future location of the Hub. Stanisławów is a small rural settlement in the Masovian Voivodship located app. 40 kilometers to the South-East of Warsaw. The prospective airport is slated to become one of the largest transfer airports on the continent, with an annual capacity of 35-45 million passengers following completion of the first construction stage, with a potential to expand up to 100 million passengers per year.ⁱ

The CTH is expected to be one of the biggest transportation hubs in Central Eastern Europe region, combining a hub airport, a railway network and motorways. The rationale of the program is provided first of all by rapidly increasing air traffic at the Warsaw Chopin Airport (between July 2016 and July 2017 there was a 24,7 % increase recorded in the number of passengers) and the fact that Chopin Airport is operating at a near maximum capacity (the limit of 600 air operations imposed by environmental restrictions will be reached in 2019/2020).

The CTH will be located near one of the most important motorways in Poland: the A2 motorway, traversing Poland along the West-East axis (the airport in the future will also be connected to the Warsaw ring road) as well as one of the most popular railway lines in Poland connecting Warsaw and Łódź. According to official estimates, travel time between the Hub and all major cities in Poland will not exceed 2,5 hours (en route to the planned travel time of 2 hours). Furthermore, several investments are to be located around the CTH, including business parks, office spaces as well as exhibition and conference centers catering

to the needs of the entire region. Official plans assume creation of a new airport city connecting Warsaw and Łódź metropolitan areas,ⁱⁱ creating tens of thousands new work places in the process. (similar in terms of numbers Charles de Gaulle airport ensure 195,000 jobs and a contribution of EUR 17 billion to France's GDP – Madrid-Barajas 300,000 jobs and EUR 15,2 billion to the Spanish GDP).ⁱⁱⁱ

The rationale behind the new hub is first and foremost a rapid increase in passenger traffic at the Warsaw Chopin Airport (which posted a 24,7 % traffic growth rate between July 2016 and July 2017), as well as a limited capacity to increase the number of air operations. It is estimated, that the upper limit of 600 air operations dictated by environmental regulations will be reached between 2019 and 2020. Moreover, small acreage of the Warsaw Chopin airport (around 635 ha) combined with dense urban development around effectively preclude any further development of the airport complex, including construction of a new parallel runway.

Meanwhile according to the estimates of Polish Civil Aviation Authority the yearly number of passengers arriving and departing from Polish airports may reach 94 million by 2035 (currently the figure stands at around 34 million, out of which 14 million is handled by the Chopin Airport, as its theoretical – in fact far lower – capacity is 22 million). The Hub will also improve the access and connectivity to the railway network, which is an area where Poland lags behind not only Western Europe, but other Central European states as well.^{iv}

Political significance of the CTH project

It would appear that the significance of the CTH program should not only be considered at the state level but also within the larger context of the entire Central and Eastern Europe. This is because the impact of major infrastructural projects such as the CTH is bound to impact the entire region, enhancing communication and fostering commercial links. The CTH program is meant to cater to the needs of the Three Seas' Initiative, which is a platform for dialogue, as well as political and economic cooperation of 12 CEE states, focusing on bolstering energy and transport infrastructure in the region. Because of historical reasons, this rapidly developing region still suffers from the lack of adequate infrastructure, especially along the North-South axis, which in turn seriously hinders economic cooperation. This is also true as far as transport infrastructure is concerned (as the Polish Council of Ministers' resolution from November 2017 indicates, Poland is especially disadvantaged in this regard,

as its air transportation accessibility index is 77% lower than the average in the “EU-15” and 27% lower than the average in CEE region).^v There is no true hub airport in the region and its inhabitants are forced to use Western European, Russian or Turkish airports (this is true of 90% long-distance flights). Meanwhile, according to IATA estimates, the air transport market in the region will grow from 95 million passengers in 2015 to 175 million in 2025.^{vi}

Thus, the CTH program can become a flagship project of the Three Seas’ Initiative complementing infrastructural projects such as the Via Baltica (express road from Tallinn to Warsaw) and Via Carpathia (over 700-kilometers long road from Klaipeda in Lithuania to Thessaloniki in Greece connecting the transport systems of Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece). Thereby, Poland could apply for co-founding of the program from the Three Seas’ Initiative Fund, which was established at the 2018 Bucharest summit (by having EUR 5 billion at its disposal it could be able to generate EUR 100 billion, thanks to financial mechanisms).^{vii} The CTH could therefore become a flagship program of the Fund as well as the Three Seas’ Initiative itself, thus providing a rationale and a proof of concept for both of these endeavors.

Likewise, the CTH program also complements the European Union initiatives aimed at enhancing ties between the EU and Asian states, including the currently evolving *Connecting Europe and Asia*^{viii} or *EU-China Connectivity Platform*, which – as per the official documents – is expected to ensure synergy between infrastructural projects within the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative and Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) frameworks, and The European Commission's Investment Plan for Europe (so-called “Juncker Plan”). According to the action plan adopted in July 2018 EU and China are expected to “identify and plan the key multimodal hubs along the EU-China corridors, and offer policy guidance so as to ensure their proper functioning”^{ix}. Thus, The CTH could become one of the key hubs connecting EU and China, strengthening the position of Poland in shaping EU policy towards China in the process (as by CTH significant part of the trade exchange with China would flow).

Military significance of CTH in the context of military mobility

The CTH program along with its economic and political meaning has also a high military significance in the context of the so-called military mobility. Since the Warsaw NATO Summit the issue of military mobility has been put high on the Alliance’s agenda. In

response to an illegal annexation of Crimea and Russian actions in the Eastern Ukraine NATO has launched its adaptation process, implementing defense and deterrence measures in the course of two subsequent summits in Newport and Warsaw. Among these measures were the threefold increase in the size of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and creating the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the frameworks of the NRF, as well as establishing the Enhanced Forward Presence or 4 enhanced battalion combat teams deployed on a rotational basis in the Baltic States and Poland. Simultaneously, the discussion on the aspects of collective defense long forgotten since the end of Cold War – such as the issues of the follow-on forces and military mobility has been reignited. On one hand the military mobility relates to the standardization of internal regulations to ensure free movement of troops and equipment to the maximum extent possible, on the other hand it demands proper infrastructure (sea ports, airports, roads, bridges), which allows to host the follow-on forces and ensure their smooth redeployment to a threatened area. Due to significance of the issue a decision was made during the July 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels to establish two additional commands. One of them, located in Norfolk VA, will be responsible for maritime communication and security in the North Atlantic (which will be used for troop transportation to Europe in case of a conflict). The second command center – located in Ulm, Germany – will be responsible for military mobility and logistics in the European theatre. The issue of military mobility is strictly connected to the NATO Readiness Initiative, approved during the Brussels' Summit. It assumes that by 2022 NATO will have at 30 mechanized battalion, 30 air squadrons and 30 combatant ships at its disposal, ready to be deployed in 30 days or less (the so-called 4x30 initiative). Hosting these forces poses significant logistic challenges and demands for creating a necessary infrastructure. The military mobility is also a part of the NATO- European Union cooperation agenda, as the EU itself works on this issue within the newly developed Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework. With this in mind it becomes clear, that the CTH program has a major military significance as – if designed the right way – it can serve as a military mobility hub. It will allow for receiving troops and equipment by air route, via military transport aircraft, including the as C-5 Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster with a long take off roll (the CTH could ultimately boast 4 parallel runways, thus significantly diminishing the threat of enemy airstrikes or ballistic missiles putting it out of operation), as well as by road and rail. Multimodal hub will enable to change the means of transportation (e.g. from road to railway)

if necessary, enabling the fast movement of forces throughout the whole Eastern Flank - from Tallinn in Estonia to Constanta in Romania.

Strategic significance of CTH was noticed by the former US Army Commander in Europe Gen. Ben Hodges. "This project is exactly what NATO needs and what the EU means when it comes to military mobility. I see CTH through the prism of its military utility for the Europeans " – said Hogdes in a conversation with the Polish Press Agency^x. "Embodiment of this idea could help us to move as fast as the Russian Federation does or faster, what is important in the context of preventing crisis and deterrence" – added.

From the Polish perspective the CTH can be presented as significant contribution of Poland to military mobility. The possibility of receiving financial contribution from the EU funds reserved for military mobility (foreseen dedicated EU financial support for dual use civilian-military infrastructure projects of €6.5 billion in the years 2021-2027 under the Multi-annual Financial Framework)^{xi} is worth analysing as well. One also needs to make sure that this project will be acknowledged in analyzes concerning permanent stationing of NATO forces in Poland (especially in the context of the Department of Defense analyses commissioned by the Congress in *National Defense Authorization Act 2019*).

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The CTH is expected to be one of the biggest transport hubs in Central Eastern Europe region, combining a hub airport, a railway network and motorways. The rationale of the program is provided first of all by rapidly increasing air traffic at the Warsaw Chopin Airport (between July 2016 and July 2017 there was a 24,7 % increase recorded in the number of passengers) and the fact that Chopin Airport is operating at a near maximum capacity (the limit of 600 air operations imposed by environmental restrictions will be reached in 2019/2020). The Hub is also to facilitate a better and broader accessibility to the railway system – an area where Poland is trailing far behind not only the Western European EU states, but other countries in the Central and Eastern Europe, as well.

2. As it seems the significance of the CTH program should be considered not only at a state level but also in a broader context of the entire Central-Eastern Europe region. Thus, the CTH program can become a flagship project of the Three Seas' Initiative complementing infrastructural projects such as the Via Baltica and Via Carpathia transnational highways.

Thereby, Poland could seek co-founding of the program from the Three Seas' Initiative Fund established at the 2018 TSI Summit in Bucharest. Successful implementation of a major program such as the CTH would provide a rationale for the existence of Fund as well as the Three Seas' Initiative itself.

3. The CTH program also fits into the European Union initiatives aimed at enhancing ties between the EU and Asian countries, including the currently developed *Connecting Europe and Asia* or *EU-China Connectivity Platform*, which – according to the official documents – is expected to ensure synergy between infrastructural projects within the of One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative and Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) frameworks, and the European Commission's Investment Plan for Europe (the so-called "Juncker Plan"). The CTH could become one of key hubs connecting EU and China, bolstering the role of Poland in shaping the EU policy towards China.

4. CTH program also offers a military significance as a major military mobility hub. It will allow for receiving troops and equipment airlifted by military transport aircraft or transported via roads and railways. Likewise, the multimodal hub will enable to switch the modes of transportation if necessary, simplifying fast movement of forces throughout the whole Eastern Flank, from Estonian capital of Tallinn to Constanța in Romania.

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The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is an independent, non-partisan think-tank specializing in foreign policy and international security. The Pulaski Foundation provides analyses that describe and explain international developments, identify trends in international environment, and contain possible recommendations and solutions for government decision makers and private sector managers to implement.

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iii *Uchwała*

iv *Uchwała*

v *Uchwała*

vi *Uchwała*

vii *Prezes BGK o powstaniu Funduszu Trójmorza: to praktyczny wymiar tej inicjatywy*, WNP.pl z 18 września 2018 r., https://finanse.wnp.pl/prezes-bgk-o-powstaniu-funduszu-trojmorza-to-praktyczny-wymiar-tej-inicjatywy,330731_1_0_0.html

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xi *Defending Europe: Improving Military Mobility within and beyond the European Union*,

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