

# **Center for Strategic and International Studies**

## **Conference Call**

### **“The 2017 G20 Hamburg Summit”**

**Featuring:**

**Jeffrey Rathke,  
Senior Fellow and Deputy Director, Europe Program,  
CSIS**

**Matthew P. Goodman,  
William E. Simon Chair in Political Economy and Senior Adviser for Asian  
Economics, CSIS**

**Sarah Ladislaw,  
Director and Senior Fellow, Energy and National Security Program,  
CSIS**

**Moderator:  
Colm Quinn,  
Deputy Director, Strategic Communications,  
CSIS**

**Time: 9:15 a.m. EDT  
Date: Thursday, June 29, 2017**

*Transcript By  
Superior Transcriptions LLC  
www.superiortranscriptions.com*

COLM QUINN: OK. Thank you, Cynthia (sp).

Hi there. Welcome to this call. Thanks, everyone, for joining us. I know it's a very busy week, going into the holiday as well.

Just brief introduction. I'm Colm Quinn. I'm the deputy director for strategic communications here.

I will be handing over to my colleagues who are with me here: Jeff Rathke, who's our deputy director of our Europe Program; Matthew Goodman, who is the Simon Chair in Political Economy; and Sarah Ladislaw, who's the director of our Energy Program here.

We're going to begin with Jeff Rathke, who will provide brief remarks. Following everyone's remarks, we will go into the Q&A. Jeff?

JEFFREY RATHKE: All right. Thanks. Colm. It's great to be here with everyone this morning, and I'm happy to give a bit of an overview.

The president is embarking on his second overseas trip. And I think one of the big questions on the minds of our friends, allies and adversaries around the world is how – whether it will mirror his first trip, which, as you will recall, was marked by a contrast between the stop in Saudi Arabia and the stop in Israel, that appeared successful initially – at least in the Saudi Arabia case – and the friction with NATO allies, the European Union, and leaders of the G7 advanced industrial democracies.

I think the challenge for the administration remains to articulate a positive vision of its foreign policy that is able to mobilize international support across the economic, political and security realms. And I think people will have paid attention to the report by the Pew Global colleagues this week which gives us a glimpse of declining global confidence in the U.S. and in President Trump personally, which makes it difficult for – at least for some democratically elected leaders to take political risks in aligning with the U.S. And at this point, it's – you know, the administration hasn't articulated a full range of the concrete achievements it seeks, but I think some of the outlines may be apparent.

The president begins in Poland, so I'll start there, on July 6<sup>th</sup>. And his visit coincides with what is called the Three Seas – that's S-E-A-S, not the letter C – the Three Seas Summit, which brings together a dozen Central and Eastern European countries between the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea. This is a Polish-Croatian initiative that dates back some years. And the president's stop there will probably consist of three elements, mainly: a bilateral portion, a speech, and an interaction with the Three Seas leaders.

Poland is, in some ways, a poster child for some of the issues that the Trump administration has been stressing. If you look at defense and security, Poland has – you know, is one of the NATO allies that spends 2 percent of its GDP on defense. They are committed to raising that level over the coming years up to 2.5 percent of their GDP. They've been buying a lot of U.S. military equipment, including likely sales of air and missile defense – that is, Patriot – systems, long-range strike – (audio break). They're interested in fifth-generation fighters. So there is a positive agenda there on the bilateral defense cooperation. Of course, there are about a thousand U.S. forces now – (audio break) – through Poland, which is an important signal of U.S. defense solidarity with Poland as well. And for Poland, I think the important part of any future announcements which might come out will be industrial

participation. The Poles are very interested in strengthening their own defense industry, not in just buying U.S. equipment off the shelf.

The larger context for Poland, though, is they're betting that this relationship with the United States on defense will balance their concerns about the possible directions of U.S.-Russia policy. So, you know, being located and sharing, indeed, a border with the Russian Kaliningrad region is of the highest concern for Poland.

And this visit by the president comes at a time when Poland is at odds with some of its European partners, especially allegations of democratic backsliding, Poland's reluctance to resettle migrants from other parts of Europe as had been previously agreed. And so there is some tension Poland has within its European relationships.

The president's speech is likely to focus on security. Now, on the defense side, it is an opportunity for the president, in a way, to correct the record and talk about the U.S. commitment to the Article 5 pledge in the – in the North Atlantic Treaty, an omission that drew lots of attention during his stop in Brussels at the end of May. And it also comes against the backdrop of NATO allies – European NATO allies and Canada spending more on defense. The NATO secretary-general announced just a couple of days ago that those allies are spending \$12 billion more in 2017 than they had the year before. And so the question, in a way, is: Can the president take yes for an answer? And will he welcome that, or will he, you know, double down and call for more?

The other question, I think, about his speech is whether he will wade into these European – divisive European issues. Is he going to step into the migration issue, against the backdrop of the Supreme Court decision here? Will he try to back up the Poles and other countries that don't want to resettle migrants, or will he stay away from that? So the big question is whether he will repair some of the damage from the stops in Europe in May, or will they be compounded? And the story of how the speech in Brussels remained in flux until the last minute means that people will be biting their nails, perhaps, until the very end.

The last point on Poland, I think, the – you know, this is a collection of largely sympathetic leaders and countries with favorable views of the United States generally. But Poland wants to avoid an old Europe versus new Europe divide, like happened in the 2000s and the disagreements over the Iraq War. That's not in Poland's interest, and so they don't want to be the ground on which that battle – that battle is fought again.

The president then goes to Hamburg for the G20 summit. My colleagues will talk much more about the details of that agenda. I'll mention about Chancellor Merkel and Germany, which is hosting the G20 in their chairmanship capacity. You know, the – Chancellor Merkel's frustration with the outcome of the G7, and especially the – especially but also the EU and the NATO meetings in May, bubbled over into the public with her so-called beer tent speech, and a recognition that Germany couldn't rely, as she put it, solely on the U.S.

I think we put this in a domestic elections context. She faces elections in September 24<sup>th</sup>. Her top priority is to get reelected. Germany's prosperity and its security are directly linked to international institutions – the EU, NATO, the WTO, et cetera. So, you know, Chancellor Merkel, one of her top priorities is to present herself as a defender of those – of those institutions, and that's where she has come into disagreement with the president on occasion.

I think the interactions between the president and the chancellor will be – they'll be proper and respectful. But in a country where only 11 percent of the population has confidence that President Trump will do the right thing, according to the Pew Global poll, Chancellor Merkel is going to be careful. She will stress Germany's commitment to a bilateral partnership, but – and cooperation on security, defense, fighting against terrorism. But she is unlikely to walk back on key German issues like trade and climate, about which Matt and Sarah will talk more.

The other big question mark about the stop in Hamburg is Russia. What sort of encounter will there be between President Trump and Vladimir Putin? Will those just be informal discussions on the sidelines of the G20, or will there be a more formal bilateral meeting? There's been no announcement yet, so that remains a question mark. That happens against the backdrop of the Senate's passage of an Iran and Russia sanctions bill just recently by an overwhelming 98-2 margin. Also, it comes against the backdrop of a House resolution this week that passed 423-4 expressing U.S. commitment to its – to its NATO obligations, while also calling on NATO allies to meet their own resource commitments.

And then there's a whole list of issues: Ukraine; Syria; INF Treaty violations by Russia; election interference in the 2016 campaign, which is under congressional and FBI special counsel investigation. All of those continue to form the constraints on setting any kind of new course in the U.S.-Russia relationship. And the big question is, in exchange for what? What would Russia be able or even willing to offer? And any significant change could spark House action on that Iran-Russia sanctions bill if it went outside the outlines of kind of bipartisan policy consensus toward Russia.

With that, I will stop and welcome questions once we get to that stage.

MATTHEW P. GOODMAN: OK. This is Matt Goodman, on the G20 part of the trip.

So this – the G20 summit will be held in Hamburg on July 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. It is the 12<sup>th</sup> G20 leaders summit since the forum was elevated to the leaders level during the global financial crisis in 2008. It's obviously the first G20 meeting that the president, President Trump, will attend. So the G20, to – (audio break) – its original purpose was to promote global growth and financial stability in the face of the then-burning global financial crisis, and pointedly to avoid 1930s-style – a slide in 1930s-style protectionism, something that – you know, an issue that has reemerged, which I'll talk about in a second.

Along the way, in subsequent summits after the crisis stopped – had the same sense of burning urgency, other items were added to the agenda. So you've now got a long list of agenda items in the G20, including tax cooperation, development, energy and climate – which Sarah will talk more about – global health, terrorism, and a bunch of other issues. So it's a long – as usual in these forum, there's a kind of Christmas tree effect, where things get added over time. The Germans, as hosts – as all hosts, will feel a two-part need. One, to be a steward of the agenda that they've carried forward, in this case from China last year. And also, on the other hand, they want to be an innovator. They want to be seen to have added something to the agenda.

They have organized the traditional agenda into three buckets. The first is called building resilience, and that includes the kind of core agenda of global growth, trade and investment, employment, the financial market related issues, improving global economic governance, you know, reform of international financial institutions, and international tax cooperation.

Then there's a second bucket on improving sustainability. This is where climate and energy fall. It's where the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals fall. The Germans have also put an accent on the digital economy, digitalization, and global health, empowering women, and other issues that affect long-term health of the global economy. So that's under the sustainability bucket.

And then the third bucket is assuming responsibility, which is where they will talk about migration, about Africa, and about fighting terrorism, anticorruption, and a – and a grab-bag of other issues.

I think that – in terms of what to expect from all this, I think it would be safe to start with low expectations. The G20's been struggling to restore the kind of impactful results that it had in the 2008-2009 period. But it's been struggling to do that, to get at least sort of headline outcomes from these initiatives – from these meetings. I think that on the core agenda there's some pretty significant differences.

On growth, for example, the Germans are still the – in a sense, the holdouts on the notion of any further stimulus to the global economy to get it going. They may have more justification now because global growth is doing a little bit better, but they've been very resistant to any talk of fiscal policy coordination. They're focused very much on structural reform, which everybody agrees is important but is very difficult to pull off in practice. But that's one core issue.

But then I'd say, you know, obviously the big issues that are going to dominate the agenda, where the possibility for – well, there's always a possibility for breakthroughs, but I'd say the greater likelihood is of some sort of dust-up, is trade on the one hand and then climate change on the other. On trade, I think the big question is whether the U.S. will be coming into this summit having come to some sort of conclusion on these so-called Section 232 national security reviews of steel imports. There's been some talk that that's going to happen, you know, before the summit. We'll see if that does. I think that's going to – and it results in some sort of imposition of new tariffs against imports of steel, that's going to really overshadow the conversation about trade because that's going to hit not just China, which may have been the original impetus for that – those reviews, but the other countries, including many allies, who really supply most of our steel, which are, you know, Canada, Germany, Japan, Korea, and others around that table.

So it's going to be potentially very contentious. And that's even without sort of the broader conversation about globalization and protectionism that – Merkel even overnight made another strong statement about, you know, making a strong stand against protectionism and against isolationism, and that's clearly pointed, I think, at our president.

And then climate, which I'll let Sarah talk more about, is the other area where you could have some substantial difference. So, in terms of headlines, I think those will be the big ones from the G20 itself. And this is just generally what President Trump's posture is going to be in this biggest, after NATO, multilateral meeting that he's been to, and so how he's going to sort of – how he's going to posture himself generally.

The other thing to say about these summits is obviously on the margins of them a lot of the interesting stuff happens in the bilateral meetings. Presumably, there are going to be bilaterals with the big countries. China, Russia in particular are the ones that I think people are going to be watching. So we can talk more about that if you're interested, but I think that's the basic story.

SARAH LADISLAW: OK. I'm Sarah Ladislaw. I direct the Energy Program here at CSIS. And I just wanted to say it's a real pleasure to talk after both of my colleagues – Jeff, who really outlined all of the really pressing issues that are going to be on the president's trip and on his agenda and on his mind; and Matt, who talked a lot about G20 and all of the systemic issues that it – that it takes on and the important work that it does.

I think climate change, from my perspective, falls sort of at the nexus of both of those things. The G20 discussions on climate change will be particularly interesting because it comes on the heels of both the G7 agreement on climate change, which ended up being kind of a G6 agreement where the U.S. had sort of abstained from signing onto the climate language as a first signal to the global community about how it was going to think about its own participation in multilateral climate efforts, followed up not very long after by pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord with a sort of ambiguous commitment to renegotiate its way back in at some point. And so I think that what's interesting for us is that there's a lot of signaling about this very important issue of global climate change, and the strength of the international agreement to reduce emissions and tackle the issue of global climate change.

A couple of things that we're interested in and looking at and think are worthy of paying attention to. The Germans, in their leadership role in the G20, and the Chinese, quite frankly, have worked very hard to try and bolster climate change within the context of the G20, seeing that it needed that sort of support. And so folks that are interested in where global climate leadership is coming from and whether the United States is going to continue to play a leadership role, or if there can be leadership on the international stage absent a U.S. – a strong U.S. role, I think it'll be very interesting to see how China and Germany continue to play that. I think the remarks by Merkel this morning allude to the fact that she is continuing to toe the line on climate change being one of those global issues that many global leaders are willing to sort of stand up for.

And then, second, I think three particular things that we're looking for is, one, how much actual climate language can make it into the leaders statement. I think that's a live sort of negotiating issue. How much will we actually be able to see in the overarching leaders statement versus a sub-agreement that is being sort of worked out? And so that will be a signal as to what the U.S. is willing to agree to. I think we've been able to see the U.S. participate in other multilateral fora like the – like the Arctic Council, where they were actually quite amenable to some language on climate change, and the G7 not as much. And so the question now is, how does that sort of evolution of the U.S. position continue to evolve?

Second is how many other leaders – if there is a(n) effort to get a different agreement or a different statement on climate change, how many of the leaders will sign on to that? Will it be a G19, further isolating the United States' position on climate change, or will we see a more fractured position where there's less agreement or willingness to try and support a broader and more detailed statement on global climate that doesn't include more countries than just the United States?

And then, finally, we'll be looking for new signals and insights on how the Trump administration is thinking about climate change. As many of you know, it's Energy Week here in D.C., and there is – it is pretty devoid of conversation on climate change, save for Secretary Perry calling for a robust discussion of the issues of climate change. But we are having a conversation about energy dominance, and so it will be interesting to see whether those energy dominance themes make their way into some of the energy portions of the dialogue at the G20 as well.

I think overall there's good news, bad news – I'll do – I'll do good news, bad news, good news, because I like to be an optimist, coming out of the G20.

The good news is climate change is clear a tier one issue and a symbol of engagement. It was in the context of a lot of – (audio break) – fora right now. And so whether the U.S. and the global leaders can work together to solve a global common good issue like trade, like terrorism, and like climate change – I think climate change has really shown that it has some staying power in the context of those big global issues, and so that's a good-news story for the global climate agenda.

On bad news, what we – what the international community was looking for on climate was more progress on reducing emissions and global cooperation, and instead they're really sort of forced to hold the line. And so that is, in sort of atmospheric terms, not a good-news story for what many of the folks who care about this agenda are looking to see.

And then, finally, on the good-news story, I think we see with the Bloomberg task force on climate-related risk disclosure that came out this morning, there are new sort of constituencies out there that are actually advancing the ball on climate that are outside the global multilateral framework that have been caused to sort of step up by the shift in sentiment on climate change. It will be interesting to see how they message and play a role in this year's G20 summit.

So those are the things we'll be looking at, and happy to have some discussion.

MR. QUINN: OK. Cynthia (sp), I think it's about time we can open it up for questions.

OPERATOR: (Gives queuing instructions.)

And our first question will come from the line of Margaret Talev with Bloomberg. Your line is open.

Q: Hi, everyone. Thanks very much for doing the call.

I'm wondering if anyone – any of you has any sense about what the White House's considerations have been in trying to figure out if and how to meet with Vladimir Putin, and whether you think there's any risk in this meeting – whether you're hearing from allies, Western allies about how they are looking to this meeting. Thanks.

MR. RATHKE: Hi, this is – this is Jeff Rathke.

So, you know, there are, I think, several considerations. One is the president's often-stated desire for an improved relationship with Russia. Secretary Tillerson has spoken to that as well. He's described the relationship as being at a low point. And so either there is – you know, Russia is a major power, and it's – you know, it can play a constructive or a not constructive role on a whole host of international issues. So there remains that desire for an improved relationship.

But there are, of course, you know, significant downsides. You can go through them issue by issue. But, you know, before touching on that, I think, of course, it all happens in the context of the congressional investigations into Russia's interference in last year's election campaign; Russia's ongoing interference in European elections, on which the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence held extensive hearings yesterday; and the special counsel's investigation.

So, you know, but against that backdrop, then if you go through issue by issue, the question is what is – what is Russia willing to do that would merit the attention of a formal bilateral meeting? And again, I think one of the – if the administration were to – were to move in the direction, perhaps, by giving Russia access back to some of the compounds which were forced closed by the U.S. at the end of last year, you know, you could see the House move to let – to put sanctions into law rather than their being in executive orders as they are now. So I think those are the big – the big considerations.

And I think the Europeans are watching to see what happens. Clearly, you know, the Poles will make their views known when they talk to the president, and I think there's been a surprising – for people in Washington who always fret about Europeans going soft on sanctions, you know, there is no – there is no real sign of that. They just renewed their sanctions again, the Crimea sanctions and the eastern Ukraine sanctions, so there's really no sign of their wobbling now. And so that's going to persist through the end of this year at least.

Q: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you.

Our next question will come from the line of Roberta Rampton with Reuters. Your line is open.

Q: Hi. Thanks.

I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the other bilaterals that you expect to see President Trump have, and maybe touch on a couple of things that you think he might be looking to achieve during those.

Secondly, is it clear what the White House's Russia policy is? And, if not, does that matter as we head into what might be the first face-to-face meeting with President Putin, understanding that it might not be a formal bilateral?

MR. GOODMAN: This is Matt, to talk a little bit about the one that I think most people are expecting – in fact, the Chinese have announced it – the meeting between President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. So this will be their second meeting after the one in Mar-a-Lago back in February or March – sorry, I've forgotten – February or March. And the question that will be looming over this – well, there are a couple of big issues, I'd say, that will be on the table. One will be, obviously, North Korea, and the question of whether China will – or President Xi will show any movement towards President Trump's desire for China to step in with North Korea and try to pressure them to scale back their nuclear and missile programs. I don't think the expectations are high for that, but that's certainly going to be a topic of discussion.

Then you have trade. And so I think that is going to be – the big sort of framing issue behind this is that the two leaders agreed at Mar-a-Lago that they would launch this 100-day plan to address some underlying trade issues. The end of that 100 days is just after the summit, I think the 18<sup>th</sup> of July technically. So the question will be, are they going to, you know, deliver any sort of results that would preview what's going to be in this package at the end of the 100 days.

And, you know, just more broadly, is there going to be a somewhat more post-January 20<sup>th</sup> Trump with respect to trade and China, which is a more conciliatory one of trying to use the possibility



of better trade relations to – you know, to win Chinese support for North Korea and other issues? Or will he be more like in campaign mode, where he was very, you know, critical of China and threatened – you know, threatened various things, like calling them a currency manipulator or putting tariffs on them? And then, of course, as I mentioned before, this 232 steel finding. If that comes down and it involves tariffs on China, that's going to very much sour the conversation.

I'd say those are the big ones. I mean, there are other issues like maritime security issues in Asia and cooperative issues on the Middle East, probably China's interest in the Belt and Road Initiative, this big infrastructure push across Eurasia and beyond, will all be topics. But I think those are probably the big ones.

And then, in terms of – then will pass to Jeff on Russia – but in terms of other Asians, it's possible that he'll meet with Japanese Prime Minister Abe. Not sure whether there will be other Asians. Potentially there will. But there's an opportunity to do more Asia summits in the fall in Vietnam, and so they may be saving up some of that for that time.

Over to Jeff.

MR. RATHKE: Thanks, Matt. Yeah, Jeff here.

With regards to bilats, just to pick up on that thread, it's possible in Poland that the president could meet – you know, I mean, the Croatians are kind of co-initiators of this Three Seas Initiative, but there's been no announcement about a meeting with the Croatian president. And it's unclear – I mean, the president's not on the ground for too long there, so it may not work out timing-wise.

With regard to Russia, your question is what is the Russia policy. And, you know, there are lots of Russia issues, but there is not a Russian policy yet. And I don't think that's unusual. Keep in mind we're in – you know, it's June. You know, having a fully elaborated process to develop a policy toward a country like Russia – which, you know, is a nuclear weapons state, it has, you know, a global – is globally active on lots of issues – that takes time.

There's been some reporting lately in the media suggesting that the State Department and Secretary Tillerson have been taking the lead on developing principles of Russia policy. But there's been nothing public on that, and I'm not really in a position to confirm that. But that's certainly – you know, there is that story.

And so the question then, as you asked, is about the risks. What are the risks? There clearly are risks when you've got a foreign policy process as disorganized as it appears to be in this administration. There is a risk of making commitments in one – in one field that could impinge on other interests that haven't yet been fully discussed in an interagency process. And the fact that there is not a fully functioning interagency policy development process is – you know, makes that – makes that risky. And that's why many people outside of government, at least in Congress, have been warning against an early deal, putting "deal" in quotes, with the Russians, because of those downsides. And I think they're – also you have to take the congressional mood into account, in the Senate especially.

Q: Thanks. If I just might follow up quickly, do you anticipate a bilateral with the – with the Saudi representative?

MR. RATHKE: I'm not sure. I haven't heard anything about it, so I don't know.

Q: OK. Thank you very much.

OPERATOR: Thank you.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

Next we will go to the line of Weihua Chen with China Daily. Your line is open.

Q: Hi.

Matt, you talked a little bit about Hamburg summit. I want you – you talked a little bit about what kind of a role you expected China to play at the German – you know, the Hamburg summit, especially when, you know, the U.S. is at least being perceived as retreating from globalization and moving towards protectionism. And, you know, I don't know, and China is being expected to step up as the second-largest economy on the world stage. I mean, how experts like you or maybe U.S. government officials should see this a natural challenge, you know, for China to be a responsible stakeholder like, you know, many other things – the AIIB – rather than seeing everything China does in geopolitical lens? Thank you.

MR. GOODMAN: Sure. Well, it's a good question.

And so, first of all, as you said, China hosted the G20 summit last year. So it had a kind of formal role in the way G20s work these days in the so-called troika process, where it's been working with the German hosts this year and with next year's host – which is Argentina, by the way. So the three of them have been working together to help shape the agenda, so it's been involved on that level.

But the big – (audio break) – is what sort of posture will President Xi assume when he's there and how will people respond to him. And I think, clearly, over the last six months President Xi has been, you know, rather pointedly stepping forward and projecting a sense of China as a—as a responsible global stakeholder, starting with the speech in Davos in January in which he, you know, assumed the mantle of a champion of global trade and against protectionism, and then – and then with this big Belt and Road infrastructure forum in Beijing in March – I'm sorry, in May, where, you know, a number of countries came and, as you know – you know, a White House representative attended as well.

And so I think, you know, other countries are looking around and seeing that the U.S. is pulling back from some of its traditional engagement, whether on, you know, trade through the Trans-Pacific Partnership or on climate change, and is seeing China step forward and trying to assess, you know, whether they should be, you know – you know, changing their position vis-à-vis, you know, the leadership of the world economy and the world more generally. I don't think anybody's firmly, you know, changing horses or shifting from one side to the other. But I think everyone's in a sort of hedging mode of trying to, you know, see what – how this sort of great game is going to play out.

You know, I think that, you know, China's offering a lot of stated commitment to providing public goods, as I said, through infrastructure, for example, and people are grateful for that. So I think there will be – there will be a positive reaction to that. On the other hand, China, as a defender of global trade, you know, is going to be questioned by China's own more mercantilist slant in its recent policies and in its own market. And so I think that's going to be viewed with some skepticism, unless

China has something specific to offer that's new and that sort of works for everybody. So I think that's the way I'd sort of look at Xi Jinping.

OPERATOR: Thank you.

Our next question will come from the line of Darlene Superville with the Associated Press. Your line is open.

Q: Hi. Thanks for your time.

I was interested in hearing a little bit more about the Three Seas Initiative. Is this something that is relatively new? I don't remember President Obama going and participating in anything like this. And if you can talk a little bit about why Donald Trump is going and what is the advantage or benefit of him participating, and what will the U.S. – what do you expect the U.S. will get out of it, if there is anything for the U.S. to get out of this meeting.

MR. RATHKE: Yeah, this is Jeff. So the Three Seas Initiative has existed for a while, although it's been, I think, rebranded under this name, if I'm not mistaken. But it's been an attempt by Poland and Croatia to, you know, ensure – and its focus is primarily economic and, you know, under the label of sort of connectivity, whether – you know, both transportation, communication, and infrastructure, which also would include energy in a European context. And it's an – it's an attempt to make sure that the interests of countries in Central and Eastern Europe are also, you know, brought to bear.

I think the U.S. interest is not so much in the Three Seas Initiative per se, although there could be some interests of U.S. – of individual U.S. companies in infrastructure projects and so forth, possibly. But I think the U.S. interest is more to have the opportunity for a bilateral visit in Poland – Poland, a country that has focused on a bipartisan basis, you could say, on a strong relationship with the United States, not only in defense.

And it's also an opportunity for the president, again, to interact with a large number of leaders whom he wouldn't otherwise come into contact with. The Romanian president was here a few weeks ago, but otherwise, you know, these are countries that probably wouldn't get an early visit by the president, but he has a chance, then, to engage with them.

And the Central and Eastern European countries generally have a more favorable view of the United States, and so I think it's an opportunity to try to, you know, shore up a part of – (audio break) – that is – that is more favorably disposed. I think the president's personal popularity ratings are pretty low also in Eastern Europe, but I think the favorable views of the United States – if you look at Poland, for example, there's a 73 percent favorability rating toward the United States according to Pew's report his week, whereas, you know, in Poland confidence in President Trump personally is much lower – it's at about 23 percent. But I think the favorable views of the United States are an important reason for it.

Poland lobbied heavily to – for the president to come. I think it's also a way of balancing the – you know, the trips thus far, which have focused more on Western Europe and on Brussels.

Q: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you.

And at this time I'm showing no further questions in queue. Please continue.

MR. QUINN: OK, folks. I want to thank you all for joining us today. Please take a look at our website and in your inboxes for the transcript, which should be out early afternoon today. If you have any follow up, please get in touch with myself, Colm Quinn, or Andrew Schwartz, our chief communications officer.

Once again, thank you all for joining me. And thank you to Jeff, Matt and Sarah for giving up their time.

(END)