

Why Greece should follow the Three Seas Initiative?

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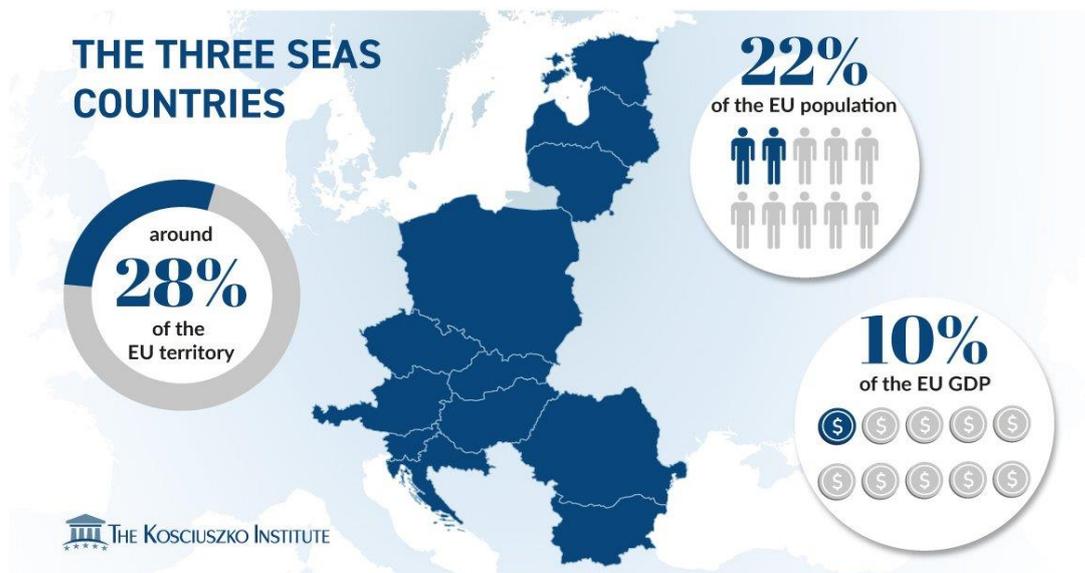
The Three Seas Initiative and its purposes

The Three Seas Initiative (or 3SI) is a newborn regional platform of cooperation. Poland and Croatia were the main builders of that platform, with the support and blessings of the USA. The Three Seas Initiative was funded in 2016 and its goal is to promote cooperation among 12 European States. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria seek integration and growth among them. The geopolitical value behind the cooperation is obvious. To cut the long story short, the main reason of the cooperation among the 12 states is to connect the Baltic Sea with the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea. Most of them are post-Communist regimes that followed the Euro-Atlantic pillars after the collapse of the USSR. The Chinese economic expansion combined with the European financial crisis and the renaissance of Russian influence in Moscow's backyard (Eastern Europe & The Balkans) raised the need of the poor states to boost their economic growth by deterring the Russian influence.



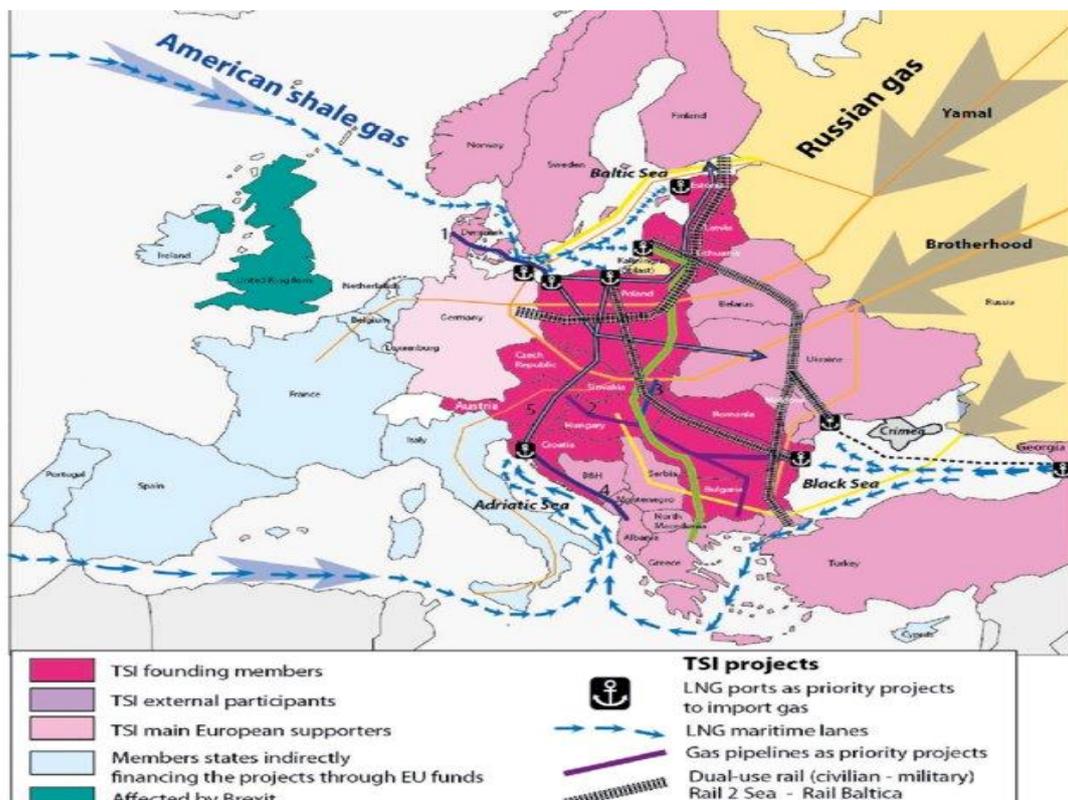
Source: Baltic Security Foundation.

Poland and the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) had already expressed their serious concerns about the Russian aggression before the 3SI launched. The sectors of cooperation according to the 3SI website are: *"The Three Seas Initiative aims to promote, first and foremost, for the development of infrastructure in the energy, transport, and digital sectors. It targets new investments, economic growth, and energy security."* The recent Summit was held in Bulgaria and it also hosted the President of the Hellenic Republic. Why Greece should join the board of the 3SI? Why is it a win-win situation for Greece, the USA, and for the 3SI itself?



US effort to deter Russia and China in Eastern Europe

The core of the endeavor that sharing the members of the 3SI is to restore the infrastructures that comprise the pillar of economic growth. After the Fall of the Iron Curtain, the USSR left their European satellites with infrastructures that connect the West with the East and not the North with the South. According to Andreas Kluth, "Travel by road and rail takes two of four times longer on the average than in the rest of the EU". Thus, transnational connectivity is the principal object of the 12 countries. The gas terminals in Croatia and Poland that could allocate via pipelines the natural liquified gas (exported from the USA) is another geo-economic factor that boosts the cooperation between the 3SI with the USA. (1). The American investments in the Port of Alexandroupolis could be the missing piece of the puzzle for the 3SI integrity in terms of infrastructures. (Speaking in terms of energy, the elephant in the room is Russia. The Baltic States do not desire to depend on Russian natural gas because Russia has invested a lot in the so-called "weaponization of energy". In terms of infrastructure, whether are highways, railways, ports, 5G telecom networks, is not Russia that spreads the panic, but China.



Source: Research Gate.

The USA has spent 300 billion \$ to boost the financing of the 3SI. Many politicians in the USA have already stressed out that it is necessary for President Biden to continue to finance the 3SI and to end up the delays in infrastructures because China and Russia could easily interfere, by expanding their own infrastructures. China's strategy after the announcing of the Belt and Road Initiative is to invest its huge surplus in infrastructures overseas. In this way, Chinese state-owned companies multiply their economic and political influence in favor of the Chinese Communist Party. China has already made its move to Eastern Europe by funding the "China 17+1", exploiting the need for capital that Eastern Europe lacks. The so-called "China's Debt Trap". Beijing uses this pivot to Eastern Europe as leverage to negotiate with its own stipulations trade agreements with states of Western Europe, like Germany.

It is not clear yet if Germany and France will join the 3SI. Berlin was full of skepticism about the 3SI. Germany is the most influential state in the E.U and if Berlin will decide to join the newborn project, E.U will probably follow providing more financial aid. On the other hand, Paris focuses on the rebirth of its Mediterranean influence. Maybe all these explain the reason The Heritage Foundation republished the article of Anthony Kim, who describes the US support towards the 3SI as "smart" and "strategic" and encourages the US to continue the financing of the 3SI under the Biden Administration. (2). Speaking loud and sound, the US-German relations are not at their highs and Washington is trying to allocate its strategic interests in the E.U, augmenting its presence in Poland, Romania, and other states of the E.U. Poland is a key state because it is between Germany and Russia. The 3SI is the mirror of "China 17+1". Many of the states of the 3SI are also members in the "China 17+1". Asserting the goals of American support to the 3SI we can conclude to a) to balance the Chinese economic influence in Eastern Europe and Central Europe, b) to deter Russian influence in Moscow's backyard (Eastern Europe, The Balkans, The Baltic Sea, The Black Sea) c) to use the 3SI as American leverage to negotiate with Germany and the E.U (especially on issues as it is the energy dependence of the E.U to Russian hydrocarbons and the special relationships between Berlin and Beijing). Lord Ismay's explanation about the necessity of NATO back to the 1950s was "to keep the US in, USSR out, and Germany down" has many similarities with the present American strategy.

Greece as a key state for the 3SI

The important issue that should be analyzed is what Greece could offer to the 3SI. Foremost, Greece was officially ended its fiscal adventure in 2018. The Greek economy is as thirsty for investments as the other members of the E.U that finally launched the 3SI. Greece has been strengthening ties with Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt for a decade at least. The economic crisis made it mandatory for Greece to seek allies to deter Turkish aggression and to find economic and security support. Therefore, Greece felt comfortable ameliorating its relations with the USA. Since 2007, Greece has strengthened its

commercial ties with China. Beijing has already purchased the Port of Piraeus, which is vital for the Maritime Belt and Road Initiative. China's footprint is important, and the USA has never hidden its anxiety about the Chinese investments in Greece which many times could be described as strategic because China doesn't keep only on transportation but also is interesting in other sectors (Power Grid, 5G, energy corridors, railways, etc). Greece's answer to its own "guns–butter dilemma" was edgy but rational too. Greece was needy for American security in various issues (Turkish threat, asymmetric threats, maritime piracy, terrorism, etc) but Greece couldn't ignore the Chinese money. After 2016, the Sino-American relations deteriorated rapidly and, as a result, Greece, as a NATO member and a traditional ally of the USA, concentrated to cement the Greek-American relations. On December 18th of 2018, Greece and the USA launched the Strategic Dialogue in which the commercial relations comprise a concrete pillar (one of five pillars).

Greece made its move by strengthening its ties with Israel and Egypt, two states that are included in the US FMF (Foreign Military Financing). The trilateral cooperation among Greece, Israel, and Cyprus has already achieved many goals in the energy and security sector. This trilateral became "3+1" with the US contribution. Greece has also hosted the Forum "Philia" in which Greece is investing diplomatic capital in its relations with the important Gulf States as UAE and Saudi Arabia. Finally, Athens is a founding member of the EU Med Group in which 7 EU member states of South Europe, are trying to achieve integrity and better coordination to face common challenges as migration, climate change, energy security, bridging Southern Europe with Northern Europe et. Greece is at the crossroads of a greater region where many powers (regional and global) have many vital interests at stake. Adding the fact that Greece is both an EU and NATO member, Athens has a lot of reasons to feel confident in this phase of the multipolar world. Meanwhile, Turkey follows a hostile path under Erdogan's presidency. It is a consensus that Ankara believes it is more profitable to depend on Russia (by purchasing the S-400 missile system) than NATO. Erdogan's dream is actually the plan of AKP. To revive the Ottoman Empire by using political Islam as an instrument to achieve its strategic goals. Turkey didn't hesitate to weaponize the refugee crisis targeting to blackmail Greece and the EU. Turkey is an important country but it is clearer than ever before that it is an unreliable partner. All these factors make Greece a key state for the 3SI. Speaking from the aspect of geography, a potential membership of Greece in the 3SI makes the latter, as Four Seas Initiative. The Aegean Sea comprises the sea route, which connects the Black Sea with Eastern Mediterranean. Putting aside the Dardanelles Straits, the Suez Canal is south of Crete. Crete hosts the "Best in the Med"- US military base. But there is more than this. The Ionian Sea is the southern continuity of the Adriatic Sea. Athens is also an energy hub taking part in the TAP pipeline and IGB. The Greek-Bulgarian cooperation in liquified natural gas in Alexandroupolis will launch in 2023. Athens is also

a part of an enormous project. According to an official analysis of Congressional Research Service, in Transportation's sector, the 3SI have already prioritized the TEN-T (Trans-European Transport Network) that includes road and railway corridors that connect the Baltic (Poland) with the Adriatic (Slovenia and Italy) and with Greece via the Western Balkans. (3)

To sum up, Greece and the 3SI have common interests that could drive into a win-win situation for both sides. First, Greece would further strengthen its ties with the US indirectly, by joining regional cooperation as the 3SI is. Especially with Northern Greece, which has become a geopolitical priority for the USA. Secondly, Greek companies could invest in European states and gain important political support within the EU. The geopolitical gains do not stop here. Greece is also a member of the competitive to the 3SI, "China 17+1". For Greece, is crucial to keep its balance when the dilemma appears whether cooperating with the USA and China. Beijing is also the stakeholder of the Port of Piraeus, which is one of the largest ports in Europe. If we examine the two initiatives (the 3SI and the "China 17+1" we conclude that 10 out of 12 states of the 3SI are also members of the "China 17+1".

The 3SI could gain also a lot by accepting Greece as a member. Foremost, European states, as are The Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia could be connected with the Aegean and Ionian Seas and in wider terms, with the Mediterranean Sea. Greece is a close ally with other states that could be partners in the future. The 3SI could also improve the negotiating conditions with Brussels in case of Greece would be a member of the board. The 3SI Investment Fund has as current target to reach the 6 bn \$ in the next years, multiplying six times the current budget. Finally, Greece is also the Balkans powerhouse, and states of Western Balkans could be stabilized by participating in the 3SI in the future. This idea could be beneficial for both the EU and the USA because the malign influence of other powers would be deterred.

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