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STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GEOPOLITICAL TRIANGLE: BALKANS, SOUTH CAUCASUS, MIDDLE EAST FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IMPLEMENTING THE THREE SEAS INITIATIVE (3SI)

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been an increasing dynamic of changes in the international system, in which war is still a real threat. In such a situation, new alliances are emerging between states to balance power and interests, also in the changing world economy. In this area, both processes of opposition to globalisation and trade wars disrupt global supply chains. The increased competition dynamics between great powers, such as the United States and China, cause these tensions. The Three Seas Initiative, which offers trade routes connecting the world trade of the Rimland. At the ontological level, the research area is the space of activities and interests of the Three Seas Initiative countries, the Balkans, the South Caucasus, and the Middle East, shaping new economic routes. Analysing the Middle East, the author considered Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates. The research goal is to find an answer to the question of the significance of the Balkans, South Caucasus, and Middle East Triangle for the position and power of Central and Eastern Europe, implementing the Three Seas Initiative. The hypothesis is that this geopolitical triangle will provide a dynamic growth of the Three Seas Initiative's states' power in international relations as a global hub for trade and expanding economic and political balance of power. However, the key issue is the identity of Central and Eastern Europe, which shapes interests and power in international relations.

The methodology was adopted to link ontology and epistemology to select research methods properly. Ontological realism was applied, in which states act primarily guided by their self-interest and the desire for survival and maximising security and power without central management. Consequently, a methodology based on historical and

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structural analysis was adopted, in which the international system determines the behaviour of states. Moreover, the case study research method was fundamental in this research process. The case studies analysed are the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia.

The findings confirm that the Three Seas Initiative is a project of realism, without central authority, based on sovereign states, striving to increase power and security, including economic and energy. It is within the framework of the European Union, with an impact on countries that do not belong to this organisation. The article is an original study and fills a gap in the literature on the subject. It contributes to scientific knowledge, new aspects of the identity and interests of Central and Eastern Europe, and the implementation of the Three Seas Initiative in the dimension of global trade routes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Representatives of various research perspectives have conceptualised the concept of Central and Eastern Europe. However, all of them emphasise the element of self-identification. One of the co-creators of the definition of Central and Eastern Europe is Oskar Halecki (1952), who presents this space as located between Sweden, Germany, and Italy, as well as Turkey and Russia, which he identified outside Europe as a separate civilizational organism situated on two continents. Therefore, Central and Eastern Europe, which belong to the “Atlantic civilisation” and are located west of Russia, should be independent of it. In an increasingly discussed topic among researchers (Klag, 2014), Koneczny’s (2021) theory of civilisation demonstrates the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, the largest country in this region, as a Latin civilisation. Russia is based on the Turanian, and Germany on the Byzantine civilisation. The Latin civilisation presents a personalistic approach to man, and politics is subordinated to morality. Moreover, the sovereignty of nations is based on the sovereignty of the human person, which derives from freedom and is characteristic of Central and Eastern Europe.

In the Middle Ages, in the face of the aggression of the Teutonic Knights – Deutscher Orden against Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the rector of the Kraków Academy, Paweł Włodkowic (1968: 13), as the head of the Polish delegation appearing before the Pope at the Council of Constance in 1414, proposed the application of the doctrine of national sovereignty. In another publication, Halecki (1950) underlined the need to rebuild the region and build a transatlantic community. In addition, he drew attention to the historical identity of the region. Historically repeated imperial pressures from the West and the East and the experience of systemic changes also shaped the Central European identity, as indicated by the “Lublin Historical School”, developed within the community gathered around the Institute of Central and Eastern Europe (Gil, 2022). At the same time, it is a crucial institution analysing the Three Seas Initiative (Lewkowicz, Gołębiewska, 2024: 145).

In the framework of geopolitical theory, Nicholas Spykman (2007), in the mid-20th century, defined Central and Eastern Europe as a geopolitically strategic area. It

is located on the eastern flank of the Rimland, an area where the so-called countries on the edge of the world island form a ring separating the Heartland from the seas. The Rimland was divided into three sections. The first is the European coastland, the next is the Arabian-Middle Eastern desertland, and the third is the Asiatic monsoon land (Spykman, 1944). Spykman's theory is referred to by many contemporary authors, including Perrone (2025), regarding the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

At the end of the 20th century, the fall of communism in Europe allowed Central and Eastern Europe to regain its subjectivity. Currently, in the dynamics of geopolitical changes, the importance of Central and Eastern Europe is growing, with the Rimland countries having a strategic advantage over the Heartland countries. Therefore, Central and Eastern Europe must increase cohesion, tighten economic cooperation, and expand infrastructure connecting the Baltic, Black, Adriatic, and Aegean Sea basins (Kacperek, 2016). It is necessary, especially because so-called intermediate "fracture" zones are emerging between geostrategic and geopolitical regions, which gravitate between different power centres. The world is no longer stable, and the dynamics of its changes are constantly growing (Cohen, 2009).

As Orzelska-Stączek (2019) points out, the theory of realism well explains the Three Seas Initiative, which is a project of strengthening cooperation between states to maximise the realisation of their interests. As a result of the choice of the level of analysis, within the epistemology, neorealism, structural realism of Kenneth Waltz (1979) was primarily applied, within which the structure is a key element of the system, determining the relations between states. The international system is characterised by the lack of a central authority, which forces the state to constantly take care of its position and strive to maximise its security. In addition, there are dynamics of power distribution in the system, which also include the potential and possibility of the state, which are positional. In turn, it allows for analysing the systemic limitations of international cooperation (Grieco, 1988). In addition, as Jervis (1982) points out, the perception of how states perceive the actions of other states is also essential. On the other hand, Mearsheimer emphasises that anarchy and the imbalance of power encourage states to compete for power and influence, as shown by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Smith, Dawson, 2022). It shows that war remains a constant threat in the international system (Pose, 2022). In this context, states build alliances to balance the power of those who threaten them most (Walt, 1985). Discussing Kenneth Waltz's balance of power theory and Stephen Walt's balance of threats theory, Schweller (1994) proposed the balance of interests theory. He presents the world order as a global machine based on individual local elements, whose actions interact and affect the entire system. These elements are the self-regulating balance of power systems, the dominant tendency among states. In such a system, great powers should limit their commitments to places where their basic interests are threatened. Schweller (1996), in his polemic with Waltz, indicates that the revisionist states pursuing goals beyond security should also be recognised. The influence of state interests that drive international politics should be analysed in this light. Nevertheless, as Podraza (2019: 170) notes, drawing on various theoretical concepts is appropriate given the complex nature of the changing international order.

FROM COMMONWEALTH TO THE THREE SEAS INITIATIVE

At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the Lithuanian Jagiellonian dynasty ruled Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The expression of the Jagiellonian idea, integrating the nations of this part of Europe, was the Union of Lublin, concluded in 1569 between Poland and Lithuania. On this basis, a state based on Polish-Lithuanian federalism was created, which, for 150 years, was a regional power that protected the nations inhabiting it. Both countries were united by a political agreement, bringing about a vast social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual dynamic. For generations to come, this project became an inspiration for the integration of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This unique political system at that time laid the foundations for uniting Central and Eastern Europe for its security and prosperity. However, at the end of the 18th century, with the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a geopolitical revolution took place in Europe (Black, 1994: 535–536), which destroyed Central and Eastern Europe as an independent international entity. The three partitioning powers dominated and determined international relations for the next hundred years.

The nations of Central and Eastern Europe played a significant role in the First World War, which influenced the European order of international relations and the regaining of independence by the countries of this region, including Poland. Only a few months later, Soviet Russia invaded Poland, trying to spread communism and once again destroy the idea of freedom and self-determination in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the Polish victory on the Vistula in August 1920 saved the new European order, and the battle fought on August 13–25, known as the Miracle on the Vistula, became the 18th breakthrough battle in world history (D'Abernon, 1990). Moreover, it strengthened the political subjectivity of Central and Eastern Europe and stimulated the implementation of the concept of Intermarium (Between Seas). However, the Second World War, started by the aggression of two totalitarian states in the late 1930s, once again destroyed the subjectivity of Central and Eastern Europe. At the end of the last century, Central and Eastern Europe, led by Poland, overthrew communism and the then system of global order, and influenced the geopolitical balance of power in the world.

Since the fall of communism, there has been a time of integration processes in Central and Eastern Europe (Kuczyńska-Zonik, Olchowski, 2023). As Kacperek (2016) points out, this region can be identified broadly, distinguishing four strategic circles by considering the location of connecting strategic points in the waters of the Baltic, Adriatic, Black, and Mediterranean Seas. The first is Poland, Romania, and Ukraine, the region's core. The lack of any of them prevents the subjectivity of Central and Eastern Europe and is a geopolitical axis from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The second circle is the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria, which allow control over the Baltic-Adriatic route. The third circle is Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Królewiec, and Moldova, which provide control over the two mentioned routes. The fourth circle is Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. These countries will give Central and Eastern Europe almost complete control over the trade route

running from the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, through the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, or the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea, to the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf and over the Baltic-Adriatic route. Central and Eastern Europe can become a global trade hub from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean (Kacperek, 2016).

Eleven of these countries, plus Austria, located between the Adriatic, the Baltic, and the Black Seas, announced the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) in 2015. This project, which was launched at the first summit in Dubrovnik, Croatia, in 2016, is a form of strategic cooperation between Central and Eastern Europe in energy, transport, and digitalisation. The main priority is to open strategic trade routes. In this context, the addition of Greece with key seaports in September 2023 as the thirteenth country of the 3SI deepens and extends the strategic dimension of the project. The joint declaration of the 10th jubilee summit of the Three Seas Initiative, adopted on April 29, 2025, in Warsaw, emphasises the importance of the Balkans and the admission of Albania and Montenegro as new associated countries participating in the 3SI. Moreover, within case studies, this research paper draws attention to the critical role of the Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (President, 2025; Figure 1).

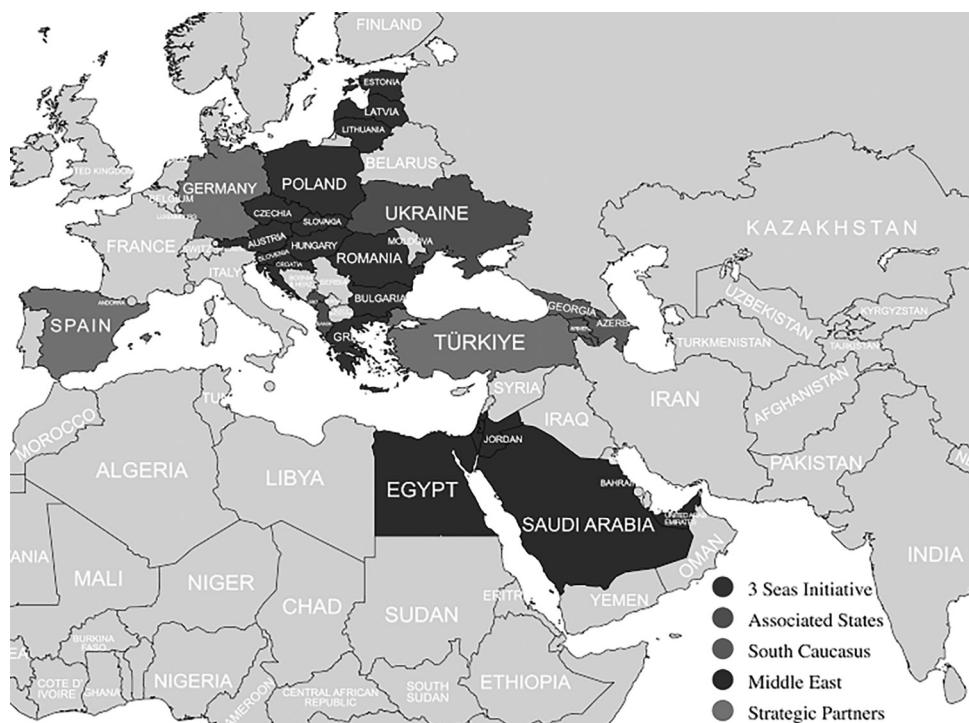


Figure 1. 3SI, South Caucasus and Middle East

Source: Own study based on MamChart (<https://www.mapchart.net/index.html>).

The Three Seas Initiative has also been criticised from the very beginning by some groups, who portray the project as an attempt to build an alliance against the Euro-

pean Union and Germany. However, this criticism has been reduced over time with the establishment of the 3SI strategic partnership with Germany and the European Commission. Then, when the project began to gain excellent dynamics, the issue of the low institutionalisation of the Three Seas Initiative started to be raised (Musiałek, 2024). However, based on neorealism, this project avoids the centralisation of power, establishing only the necessary institutions at a given stage of development, which are the Three Seas Regions Forum and the Business Forum, the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIIF), a joint stock exchange index associating over 100 of the largest companies, the 3SI Innovation Fund established in cooperation with the European Investment Fund, the Three Seas Local Government Congress, the Three Seas Universities Network (3SUN), and the 3SICCN (Three Seas Initiative Cultural Cooperation Network). Moreover, the Three Seas Initiative is expanding with new members, strategic partners, and associated participating countries, proving this project's attractiveness.

The Three Seas Initiative is becoming the implementation of a new stage in the region's development, aiming to unite the "old" and "new" Europe based on equal partnership (Murzyn, 2023). Most countries in the Three Seas Initiative are small in territory and population. The theory of realism shows that cooperation within the Three Seas Initiative is an instrument for increasing the position and influence on ongoing international processes. Moreover, this project serves to strengthen the entire European Union. Moreover, despite specific differences between the Three Seas countries in defining threats, all countries emphasise the need to maximise security, which raises neorealism (Orzelska-Stączek, 2019: 140). In addition, this takes place primarily within NATO, which, apart from Austria, includes all the Three Seas Initiative countries, strengthening the Euro-Atlantic community and the security of the eastern flank of the North Atlantic Alliance.

BALKAN PENINSULA

Halecki presents the Balkans as belonging to Old Europe, which has a Roman heritage and the experience of centuries of Turkish domination. He emphasises the need to include the Balkans in Central and Eastern Europe, as a process of strengthening and unifying all countries, from Greece to Finland, taking place since the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, a peace treaty signed on March 3, 1918 (Ukielski, 2022: 15). After the collapse of the bloc system, Yugoslavia lost its geopolitical position as a buffer state, providing a neorealist balance of power between NATO and the Warsaw Pact (Orzelska, 2002: 8). A large part of this area in the late 1990s became a space of economic and security destabilisation. At the end of the 20th century, the Balkans demonstrated the dominance of the United States, shaping the leadership of the unipolar security structure while simultaneously pushing Russia out of the region.

Croatia's integration with NATO in 2009 and with the European Union in 2013 was identified by many politicians in this country as "escape from the Balkans" and deepening ties within Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, in the current geopolitical conditions, Croatia and Slovenia, as members of the Three Seas Initiative and

located in the Mediterranean area, are increasingly interested in developing relations with the Middle East (Sadecki, 2013). Bulgaria, a country on the Black Sea, has strategic geopolitical importance regarding economic interests and security, where the routes of Europe, the Caucasus, Asia, and the Middle East intersect. Therefore, this region demonstrates great opportunities for beneficial cooperation with Asia and the Middle East. In September 2023, the first expansion of the 3SI took place with Greece, a Mediterranean country. At the same time, during the G20 summit in New Delhi, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project was adopted, connecting Greece with India via Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Das, 2024). Greece, a Three Seas Initiative country, treats the IMEC to increase its role in global trade connections (Cafiero, 2023).

The following countries are the Western Balkans, including Albania and Montenegro, which in April 2025 at the Warsaw summit became associated participating states, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The Western Balkans has an important geopolitical position due to its role as a North-South transit corridor. In June 2003, these countries were identified as potential candidates for EU membership (Lachert, 2018: 3). The Balkans are strategically crucial due to the future transport routes from the Black Sea to the Adriatic Sea. They will run through Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Albania (Riegert, 2022). This concept is in line with the main goals of the Three Seas Initiative and demonstrates neorealism assumptions. The Western Balkans are again gaining greater geopolitical importance due to the growing rivalry of the global powers in this region as an area connecting the North and the South. Moreover, during the anniversary summit in Warsaw in April 2025, Turkey became a strategic partner of the Three Seas Initiative (President, 2025). This country emphasises that without it, the India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor cannot be implemented.

SOUTH CAUCASUS

The South Caucasus region includes Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan (Ter-Matysyan, 2024). The countries are linked to some Balkan Peninsula countries and can be included in the Black Sea region. As Stępniewski (2021: 10–11) points out, defining this area goes beyond geography and concerns geopolitical, geoeconomic, cultural, social, and security elements. Therefore, it is assumed that the Black Sea region includes Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Greece. Although the last four countries do not have a coastline on the Black Sea, they have historical, cultural, and civilizational ties and proximity to their geographical location. In addition, they are linked by projects and trade routes.

After the collapse of the bloc system, the United States did not want Russia to regain exclusive geopolitical dominance in the South Caucasus, which explains neorealism. Moreover, the vast energy resources of the Caspian Sea region provided opportunities for large profits for oil corporations and new trade routes. However, conflicts and instability in this region resulted in Russian military intervention, including in August 2008 in Georgia, and contributed to the revival of Russian imperialism. The

competition for control over these resources significantly impacted the geopolitical landscape and the evolution of domestic and foreign policies of countries such as Russia, China, Turkey, and Iran. In the dynamics of power distribution and the systemic limitation of international cooperation (Grieco, 1988), the dynamism of trade routes is crucial for the countries of the South Caucasus. One of the most critical logistics projects of the Three Seas Initiative, combining the importance of the Balkans and the South Caucasus in the context of the Black Sea basin, is the port of Burgas in Bulgaria. It is a dynamically developing seaport implementing an ambitious development plan, as part of which the construction of a deep-water container quay began in 2023 (BMF Port Burgas, 2025). This investment is of geopolitical and economic importance for the Three Seas Initiative and increases transport and infrastructure links in the CEE region. Its role as a transport chain is growing significantly due to the opening of the intermodal terminal near Sofia in February 2023.

The case study is a crucial strategic route, the Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia (Figure 2), through the Balkans and the Caucasus, faster and cheaper than the alternatives by about 30 per cent. However, the key issue is constructing the Anaklia deep-water port, the second-largest port on the Black Sea, which will contribute to the dynamism of trade between the Three Seas Initiative countries and the South Caucasus and Asia. This project is supported by Azerbaijan, which sees an opportunity to increase the export of energy resources to the 3SI countries and Kazakhstan (Pastucha, Wojtasiewicz, 2024). In this context, attention should be paid to the Black Sea Submarine Cable (BSSC) and the Trans-Caspian Submarine Cable, increasing the energy security of the Three Seas Initiative countries. The BSSC project has become an opportunity to engage EU diplomacy, including at COP29 in Baku, to improve relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia to support green transformation and energy market reforms (Pastucha, 2024). Azerbaijan is particularly keen to reduce its economic dependence on fossil fuels (Górecki, 2024). Resolving the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan creates a new geostrategic situation (Machowicz, Tabaszewski, 2021).



Figure 2. Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia

Source: Own study based on MamChart (<https://www.mapchart.net/index.html>).

MIDDLE EAST

At the end of the bipolar world order, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East, especially in the Persian (Arabian) Gulf region, were deeply affected. There was a game for a new world order in both geographical areas. Today, new trade routes can contribute to economic integration and increasing interdependence, building lasting peace in the Middle East, and shaping a new global order. On the other hand, they can increase the risk of trade, geopolitical, and military wars. Therefore, rejecting armed conflict in favour of economic integration is becoming a priority (Wdzięczak, 2023). The Three Seas Initiative is such a proposal. Cooperation projects with Egypt, Israel, and the Gulf Cooperation Council within the Visegrad Group plus should be deepened, made more dynamic, and transferred to the level of the entire 3SI.

The case study is the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor – IMEC (Figure 3), one of the most significant economic projects currently underway in the Middle East, to be adopted in New Delhi in November 2023. It will enable faster and more efficient transport of goods between India, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and through a developed rail network with the remaining GCC countries, Jordan, and Israel, providing direct access to Europe, Greece, and the Three Seas Initiative countries. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are trying to secure their key trade and energy corridors from potential disruptions. The Middle East could become an essential global trade hub if it manages to overcome political and security challenges, including those



Figure 3. India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

Source: Own study based on MapChart (<https://www.mapchart.net/index.html>).

related to Gaza, Yemen, and Lebanon (Krzymowski, 2024). Referring to neorealism, the Three Seas Initiative, supported by the United States with IMEC, can be identified as a balance of power towards Russia and China (Orzelska-Stączek, 2019: 140).

However, the IMEC could dent Egypt's revenues from the Suez Canal, which accounts for a significant portion of its budget. Additionally, Israel has returned after nearly 70 years to the Ben-Gurion Canal project, which would provide an alternative to the Suez Canal, which currently handles 12 per cent of world trade and generates more than USD 1 billion in revenue. The Ben-Gurion Canal project, connecting Eilat on the Red Sea with Ashkelon on the Mediterranean, has both an economic and strategic imperative. It contemplates extending the Abraham Accords to Saudi Arabia with NEOM, a futuristic new city on the shores of the Red Sea. The countries seek to secure their key trade and energy corridors from potential disruptions. These projects would change the global dynamics of maritime transport and affect the region's geopolitics. The IMEC and the Ben-Gurion Canal would significantly strengthen Israel's position as a key player in international maritime trade and influence further regional geopolitical relations and economic strategies (Dasiewicz, 2023).

They are therefore the subject of various international and neighbouring entities and new initiatives. One of these is the multimodal Arab Trade Line, a transport route connecting the port of Aqaba in Jordan with the port of Nuweiba in Egypt, extending overland to the port of Alexandria, and providing a link between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean (Northern Africa News, 2023). The project is expected to eliminate the need for some Jordanian exporters to use Israeli seaports. In addition, Egypt's plan to build a port in Taba, a southern Sinai city that overlooks the Gulf of Aqaba, would transform Sinai into a central logistics hub and a significant trade flow between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, providing an alternative to the Ben Gurion Canal plan. This Taba, once expanded, would be located about five nautical miles from Eilat, Israel's only seaport on the Gulf of Aqaba, on the Red Sea. It could be a link to the Suez Canal, the shortest route between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea through the port of Arish in northern Sinai (Figure 4), if Egypt builds a railway between Taba



Figure 4. Sea Ports

Source: Own study based on MapChart (<https://www.mapchart.net/index.html>).

and Arish, about 260 kilometres (Shafaq News, 2024). The project could become an essential element of Egypt's economic development. The development and population of Sinai will be a necessary guarantee of security in this Egyptian territory.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study results from the perspective of neorealism demonstrate that the state's identity is primarily concerned with national interests and conditions. For this reason, the historical aspect of shaping national interests and understanding sovereignty should be noted (Finnemore, 1996). Therefore, the identity and interests of states are endogenous to the system of international relations based on regional, interconnected elements that shape a world order without centralised authority. The essence of their functioning is self-regulation based on the balance of power and interests of states (Schweller, 1994). One such element is the Three Seas Initiative, which, in the face of the imbalance of power, the states belonging to it strive to strengthen their position and maximise their own security (Waltz, 1979). It is within the framework of the alliance (Walt, 1985), which is 3SI. The increased sense of threat (Pose, 2022) from Russia has led to the dynamism of the Three Seas Initiative countries' actions aimed at reducing the imbalance of power and increasing power and influence in the international system (Smith, Dawson, 2022). In this light, the geopolitical significance of the Balkans, South Caucasus, and Middle East countries for the Three Seas Initiative should be recognised. As strategic circles, Central and Eastern Europe will become a global trade securing North-South supply chains and influencing international processes between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. In the operational dimension, this is to be served by, among others, the discussed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and the Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia.

Understanding the historical issues, geopolitical conditions, and identity of Central and Eastern Europe will allow for the proper identification of contemporary political processes in this region. This concept refers to the geopolitical idea of Intermarium, a federation of independent nations of Central and Eastern Europe. The Three Seas Initiative has been identified as implementing the "New Europe" concept, from Estonia to Croatia, and as a geopolitical alliance based on national interests. Except for Austria, the countries participating in this initiative have a history of communism and are NATO member states. Moreover 2015, in Bucharest, Poland, and Romania initiated cooperation between nine countries on NATO's eastern flank (B9) for deeper security cooperation. All of them are members of the Three Seas Initiative. It is also vital to balance Europe's interests and security, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union. There are still live conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as competition for strategic energy projects and domination. The Balkans and the South Caucasus are areas of rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, Turkey, and the European Union, with mutual influence on the Middle East.

Referring to the criticism of the Three Seas Initiative that it lacks institutionalisation, one should agree with Orzelska-Stączek (2029: 148) that the 3SI, deprived of too much power by EU institutions, is its asset. The nature of intergovernmental

cooperation of the Three Seas Initiative makes it an interesting cooperation platform. Given that 3SI is presented as a project aimed at competing with Germany and undermining the European Union, it should be emphasised that the Three Seas Initiative is implemented within the EU, and Germany and the European Commission are strategic partners. In addition, many projects are co-financed from the EU budget. By reducing the economic and transport differences between Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe, the Three Seas Initiative makes the European Union a more coherent organism, while at the same time allowing for a balance of power. The transport and economic strategic element of the Three Seas Initiative has made it possible to connect the countries of Europe from the Baltic Sea, the Middle East, North Africa, and India. In this way, 3SI can be an essential element of the European political-economic and security system and have an important role and position in the global dimension for balancing forces and interests. It will be possible with the inclusion in the orbit of interests of the 3SI countries of the Balkans, South Caucasus, and Middle East, and their operationalisation within the framework of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and the Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the research work is the countries of the Three Seas Initiative, the Balkans, the South Caucasus, and the Middle East, which are creating new trade routes with a global dimension. The adopted research question is: What is the significance of the Balkans, South Caucasus, and Middle East Triangle for the role and position of Central and Eastern Europe implementing the Three Seas Initiative? To obtain an answer to the research question, proper methods were applied, which include historical and structural analysis, as well as case studies based on neorealism. They contributed to the thesis, claiming that this geopolitical triangle will provide a dynamic growth of the Three Seas Initiative's states' power in international relations as a global hub for trade and expanding economic and political balance of power. However, the key issue is the identity of Central and Eastern Europe, which shapes interests and the position

in international relations. The results show the significance and importance of answering the research question because they help explain the process of shaping the new world order, in which supply chains and trade routes are key elements.

Keywords: Balkans, South Caucasus, Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, Three Seas Initiative (3SI)

STRATEGICZNE ZNACZENIE TRÓJKĄTA GEOPOLITYCZNEGO: BAŁKANY, POŁUDNIOWY KAUKAZ, BLISKI WSCHÓD DLA EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ REALIZUJĄCEJ INICJATYWĘ TRÓJMORZE (3SI)

STRESZCZENIE

Przedmiotem pracy badawczej są państwa obszaru Inicjatywy Trójmorza, Bałkanów, Południowego Kaukazu i Bliskiego Wschodu, które tworzą nowe szlaki handlowe o wymiarze globalnym. Przyjętym pytaniem badawczym jest jakie jest znaczenie Trójkąta Bałkany, Południowy Kaukaz, Bliski Wschód dla roli i pozycji Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej realizującej Inicjatywę Trójmorza? Aby uzyskać odpowiedź na pytanie badawcze, zastosowano odpowiednie metody, do których zaliczono analizę historyczną i strukturalną, a także studia przypadków bazujące na neorealizmie. Przyczyniły się one do tezy, którą jest twierdzenie, że ten trójkąt geopolityczny zapewni dynamiczny wzrost znaczenia państw Inicjatywy Trójmorza w stosunkach międzynarodowych jako globalne centrum handlu oraz dostarczy równowagę sił gospodarczych i politycznych. Jednak kluczową kwestią jest tożsamość Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, która kształtuje interesy oraz pozycję w stosunkach międzynarodowych. Uzyskane wyniki ukazują duże znaczenie i ważność odpowiedzi na pytanie badawcze, ponieważ pomagają one wyjaśnić proces kształtowania nowego porządku świata, w którym łańcuchy dostaw i szlaki handlowe stanowią kluczowy element.

Slowa kluczowe: Bałkany, Południowy Kaukaz, Bliski Wschód, Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia, Inicjatywa Trójmorza (3SI)