



Japan as a New Strategic Partner in the Three Seas Initiative: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Sayuri Romei, Beata Bochorodycz, Bart Gaens, Anthony B. Kim, Mirna Galic, Akio Miyajima

INTRODUCTION

By Sayuri Romei

In April 2024, Japan joined the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) as a new strategic partner alongside the United States and the European Union. The 3SI was established in 2015 with the objective of strengthening connectivity and reducing the disparities in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Baltic states. The initiative promotes the development of infrastructure in the energy, transport, and digital sectors in the region surrounded by the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Adriatic Sea. The war in Ukraine has highlighted the relevance of this initiative and has underscored the frail infrastructure in the region and CEE's economic dependence on Russia. As it becomes increasingly clear that the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific regions are inseparable, Japan is compelled to serve as an active partner in the 3SI as its role is also closely connected to the quality of assistance and support to Ukraine.

As Japan embarks on this new partnership with CEE and Baltic countries, however, moving beyond the rhetoric about the importance of this initiative and taking concrete action is a challenge that all the countries involved will have to grapple with. Japan's dialogue with CEE, and in particular with the Visegrad-4 (V4) group, i.e., Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, officially started in the early 2000s. For the past twenty years, the relationship has mostly been smooth and without major problems. However, Japan's engagement with those countries has lacked dynamism, as Japanese foreign policy has mainly been focused on the United States and China. Japan's investments in CEE have been limited and cautious, and visits from high-ranking Japanese officials have been sporadic. In fact, the visits to Japan by the heads of the states of the V4 and CEE countries have always outnumbered those by their Japanese counterparts. Twenty years later, as CEE countries are realizing that the economic benefit from China is not as great as they had expected, Japan is in a good position to rekindle this relationship. In a January 2022 interview with Nikkei, Akio Miyajima, Ambassador of Japan to Poland, argued that it is crucial for Japan to strengthen relations with these countries. At the time of the interview, Russia had not yet invaded Ukraine, and the Ambassador lamented that Japan remained disinterested in the Ukraine issue. Since the invasion a month later, however, Japan has not only taken a clear stance in condemning Russia's aggression, it has also taken a leadership role in investing in the reconstruction of Ukraine.

One of the main concerns about the 3SI is that it currently lacks cohesiveness, as the twelve participating nations are too divided to agree on major joint investments. Another issue is that the initiative mainly takes place on the political level, and cooperation on other levels and dimensions are presently non-existent. How can Japan, in coordination with the United States and Europe, contribute to creating a more systematic approach to non-political partnerships and effective financial support for the participating nations of the 3SI? The topic is still under-researched and as Japan's strategic partnership was formalized just last year, now is an ideal time for experts from Japan, the United States, and the EU to identify opportunities and common challenges, and discuss ways to jointly implement a roadmap as strategic partners in the 3SI framework.

As 2025 marks the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the 3SI, it is critical for Japan and the other strategic partners to start contributing concretely to the initiative and to deepen their engagement with the participating

nations. The tenth summit of the 3SI was held in Warsaw on April 28-29, 2025, and GMF Indo-Pacific partnered with the Embassy of Japan in Washington, DC, to publish this volume, which gathers the findings and perspectives of five authors from Japan, Europe, and the United States. Prof. Beata Bochorodycz of Adam Mickiewicz University and Dr. Bart Gaens of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs offer a European perspective on Japan's potential role in the 3SI. Bochorodycz argues that Japan's engagement will contribute greatly to regional infrastructure development while counterbalancing Russian and Chinese influences in the region. Gaens asserts that Japan's interest in 3SI is multifold and covers several different areas: business and economics, development and connectivity, and geopolitics. However, he argues that there are also several challenges that impede Tokyo's stronger involvement, and offers recommendations on its future engagement with the CEE countries. Anthony Kim of the Heritage Foundation and Mirna Galic, formerly with the United States Institute of Peace, contribute to this volume from American perspectives. Kim emphasizes the importance of the 3SI as a platform for attracting private sector investors and encourages Japan to go beyond its political partnership, while Galic reflects on how the 3SI may benefit Japan's interests and analyzes concrete ways in which Tokyo can support the initiative. Finally, Ambassador Akio Miyajima, who served as Japanese Ambassador to Poland from 2020-2024, leans on his direct experience to recount the strategic evolution of Japan's engagement with the CEE countries. He examines the Japanese government's perspective from its first concerns about the expansion of Chinese influence in Europe to the major strategic recalibration that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Ambassador Miyajima concludes by analyzing the current global uncertainty stemming from the second Trump administration and offers recommendations on ways to strengthen Japan's position as a strategic partner to the 3SI.

Unlocking Potential: Japan's Strategic Opportunities in the Three Seas Initiative

By Beata Bochorodycz

In April 2024, Japan became the fourth strategic partner of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), joining the European Commission (EC), the United States, and Germany. Spain and Turkey joined the group one year later. Established in 2015, the 3SI aims to enhance cooperation in energy, transportation, and digital infrastructure to boost economic growth, regional connectivity, and security among Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries that are EU member states. Initially, 12 nations located between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black seas were part of the initiative, with Greece becoming the 13th state in 2023. Non-EU countries Ukraine and Moldova were invited to join as associated participating members in 2022, followed by Albania and Montenegro in 2025. This extensive region offers Japan, and other potential partners, significant untapped opportunities for business, diplomacy, and security. To address the key issues of this project focused on 3SI's opportunities and challenges for Japan, it is crucial to understand the initiative's evolving nature and grasp its institutions and mechanisms.

Overview

A key characteristic of the 3SI is the diversity of its participating states, 13 small to medium-sized countries, each with distinct languages and political cultures. This grouping can be categorized into four regions: the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the north; Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Austria, and Hungary in Central Europe; Slovenia, Croatia, and Greece along the Adriatic Sea; and Bulgaria and Romania, often referred to collectively as the Balkan states, in the Black Sea area. Notably, all these countries, except for Austria and Greece, joined the EU following the end of the Cold War, leading to a strong perception of the region as "New Europe" in contrast to "Old Europe".

The second important feature of the 3SI is its relatively underdeveloped infrastructure compared to the Western EU members and the poor connectivity among the states along a north-south route. This disparity prompted 3SI's establishment and a goal of linking the "Central and Eastern European economies and infrastructure from North to South, in order to complete the single European market".¹ More specifically, the initiative seeks "to contribute to the economic development through better connectivity in the transport, energy and digital fields, especially on the North-South axis but not only, thus boosting economic relations, energy security, trade and investment flows in the region and with other partners from the Euro-Atlantic community".²

The third attribute of the 3SI is its evolution from a concept into an institutionalized practice, although it has not yet developed into a fully operational regional institution due to the absence of a permanent secretariat. Launched by Polish President Andrzej Duda and Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, the 3SI serves as a "flexible Presidential Forum which provides political support to foster a more effective cooperation of governments, business

entities and non-governmental organizations”.³ Since its inception, the 3SI has focused on the economic dimensions and promoted itself as a significant business opportunity. The initiative has been described as “a politically inspired, but economically and commercially driven platform”,⁴ and, earlier this year, its focus was seen as “politically inspired but business driven, and it is the business cooperation that is the core of its framework.”⁵

It is nevertheless crucial to recognize that the 3SI has evolved into a more intricate project, as it has also become “a significant instrument of foreign policy with a strategic dimension”. This is particularly true for countries such as Poland, Croatia, and Romania, which strive to bolster their standing individually in their region and together within the EU and NATO.⁶ Acting as a regional collective voice, the 3SI enables small and middle-sized nations to enhance their lobbying power vis-à-vis the EU and non-EU partners to attract strategic investment from traditional and emerging funding sources.

Additionally, due to political polarization and differing policies toward Russia’s war against Ukraine, the 3SI has become a substitute for other formats, such as the Visegrad Four, which Hungary’s and Slovakia’s pro-Kremlin Russian positions has hindered.⁷ The Russian issue poses a significant challenge for the 3SI. It prompted Hungary to issue a first-ever stand-alone statement alongside the usual joint statement at the 2025 Warsaw Summit. Hungary outlined its position on the war in Ukraine in that adjunct document.⁸ Given that the 3SI format has a low level of institutionalization and that individual projects can involve any number of participating countries, such initiatives may proceed.

The 3SI gained greater geopolitical and security importance when Ukraine and Moldova joined as associated participating members after Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The expansion strengthened the transatlantic relationship between the CEE nations in the initiative and the United States, and it served as a tool to mitigate Russian influence in the area.⁹ In addition, although the 3SI was not initially designed to be viewed as a counterweight to Chinese influence in the region, it has come to be seen as that. This is particularly reflected in the China-CEE cooperation mechanism known as 14+1 (formerly 16+1 or 17+1), which largely overlaps with the 3SI in terms of membership and focus on infrastructure development.¹⁰ The substantial American backing for the 3SI since its start has bolstered its perception as a counterbalance to Russian and Chinese influence. The second Donald Trump administration, especially its stance on Russia, however, may prompt 3SI states to seek a broader range of strategic partners, creating opportunities for countries such as Japan and South Korea.

Why Should Japan Engage in the Region?

For Japan, involvement in the 3SI offers a way to tap into the region’s unexploited business potential and gain entry to postwar Ukrainian reconstruction initiatives.¹¹ Besides the economic prospects, participating in this initiative also strengthens Japan’s diplomatic ties with CEE countries and the EU.

The CEE region in brief:

- territory: one-third of the EU’s
- population: one-third of the EU’s

- one of the world's fastest growing regions with forecast GDP growth of 35% by 2030, a "growth path similar to Asian tigers"¹²
- significant institutional stability
- infrastructure investment needs of €270 billion to €1.15 trillion until 2030¹³
- average GDP per capita in 2018: 78% of the EU's
- economic growth in 2015-2019: 3.5% compared to the EU's 2.1% (forecast 3.1% compared to the EU's 1.4% in 2025)¹⁴
- total trade turnover €225.6 billion¹⁵
- higher returns on assets from FDI than in Western Europe¹⁶
- educated human resources
- access to the Western European markets
- gateway to Ukraine's post-war reconstruction

Institutions and Mechanisms

Over time, the 3SI has established various mechanisms and institutions through which it functions. Initially designed as a presidential forum aimed at fostering cooperation on infrastructure projects, the political and business mechanisms have been the most prominent and highlighted. However, it is important to recognize that, firstly, the geopolitical dimension became more significant following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and, secondly, regionalization has commenced as other players and forms of cooperation and activities have surfaced at multiple arenas: local (subnational), the epistemic community (including academia and think tanks), the mass media, and civil society.

Political Level

Annual summits of state leaders have become the primary venue for diplomatic discussions, establishing priorities and outlining future directions. Since 3SI's launch, there have been 10 summits in eight countries. The inaugural summit took place in Dubrovnik in August 2016, followed by the Warsaw summit in July 2017. Subsequent meetings were held in Bucharest in September 2018; Ljubljana in June 2019; Tallinn in October 2020; Sofia, in July 2021; Riga in June 2022; Bucharest in September 2023; Vilnius, in April 2024; and Warsaw in April 2025. Each summit concludes with the adoption of joint declarations that serve as a foundational roadmap for future action.

The organization of the summits has highlighted two fundamental issues. First, there is a noticeable disparity in the engagement and attitudes of the participating states, which is symbolically reflected in the summits' hosts.¹⁷ While Poland and Romania have each hosted two summits, Austria, Czechia, and Slovakia have yet to host one.¹⁸ A similar variation in attitude can be seen among strategic partners. Germany, for instance, has not been particularly active or supportive, in contrast to the United States, which has expressed strong backing from the outset. Trump even attended the 2017 Warsaw summit.

The second issue concerns the nature of presidential systems and the dynamics between presidents and their respective executive branches. Since presidential powers across all participating states are limited compared to those of cabinets led by prime ministers, the success of 3SI initiatives heavily depends on the strength of relationships between the two entities. For instance, in Poland, following the victory of the opposition parties in October 2023, the new government headed by Donald Tusk adopted a passive stance toward the 3SI, likely to avoid bolstering President Andrzej Duda's standing, which is tied to the previous conservative administration. This trend has grown more pronounced in the lead-up to the presidential election in May. Consequently, this year's Warsaw summit, while organized by Duda, did not receive active support from the government, and the accompanying Business Forum was organized by a private entity rather than by the government.¹⁹

Since June 2020, the 3SI's political dimension has been enhanced by the inaugural Foreign Ministers Meeting, which is aimed at promoting increased intergovernmental collaboration to fulfill the region's infrastructure development objectives. However, the forum has not yet emerged as a significant platform for dialogue.²⁰ Parliamentary collaboration was established through the Parliamentary Forum of the Three Seas Initiative, which includes participation from member and partner states.²¹ As stated in Riga in 2022, "Parliamentary diplomacy and cooperation significantly impact and provide political support for cooperation between governments, businesses, and non-governmental organisations in strengthening regional ties, fostering public debate and shaping new communication channels."²²

A significant political deliverable from the summits was the endorsement of a list of priority projects at the 2018 Bucharest gathering. These projects align with the initiative's objectives and concentrate on the areas of energy, digital technology, and transportation, reflecting the needs and priorities of the participating nations. Additionally, they make a substantial contribution toward the overarching aim of enhancing interconnectivity within the region and between the region and the wider European continent. It is essential to highlight that these priority projects are economic and political initiatives, setting them apart from those funded by the 3SI Investment Fund. Another major political achievement, from the 2020 Tallinn summit, was the creation of permanent visual identity and communication channels, which included the development of a logo, social media presence, and a new website. The website, designed by Estonia, features a comprehensive database of all 3SI priority projects in the energy, transport, and digital sectors, allowing investors to explore them online.²³ This database is regularly updated with the annual status report of the projects and serves as a valuable resource for public and private investors, as each project includes contact information.

Business Level

The 3SI has created a diverse array of instruments, such as the annual Business Forum held alongside the summits, the 3SI Investment Fund (3SIIF), and the 3SI Innovation Fund, along with a joint stock market index known as CEEplus.

The establishment of a new 3SI Investment Fund is under consideration. The inaugural Business Forum took place during the 2018 Bucharest summit, following the decision announced in the Warsaw Joint Declaration of 2017. The event drew over 600 officials and business leaders from the 3SI countries and representatives from other EU nations, the United States, and various international organizations, including the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the World Bank Group.²⁴ By the 2024 Business Forum in Vilnius, the number of participants rose to the nearly 1,000 organizations and companies, including the EBRD, the EIB, the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB), the OECD, the International Transport Forum, the International Telecommunications Union, the Export-Import Bank of the United States, and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). To support the future endeavors of the 3SI Business Forum and to enhance connections among the business communities in the region, the 3SI Network of Chambers of Commerce was established at the 2018 Business Forum held in Bucharest.

Another key result of that forum was the founding of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF) in June 2019, which started with a commitment of €520 million from development banks in Poland and Romania.²⁵ Since then, the fund has attracted contributions from nine participating countries, backed by their national and private banks, along with international financial institutions and strategic partners such as the United States, the EU, and Germany. By May 2022, nine countries within the 3SI had committed a total of approximately €1.3 billion, with the aim of reaching €3 to €5 billion.²⁶ While the fund was initially intended to serve as a financial tool for participating states, it has gradually transformed into an independent legal entity registered under Luxembourg law, operating with the intent to generate profits for investors on a commercial basis.²⁷ Essentially, the 3SIIF functions as a private entity that does not give direct authority over project decisions or management to participating-state governments. Although the 3SIIF aligns with the broader objectives of the 3SI, it is not the primary funding mechanism for the initiative. That is a common misconception. From the 143 projects proposed under the 3SI framework, only five have received financing from the 3SIIF, while the majority are state-led public infrastructure projects coordinated by the relevant ministries.²⁸ Funding for these initiatives comes from various public and private sources and is not solely focused on commercial outcomes.²⁹ Similarly, the 3SI Innovation Fund, which was established in 2024 and is co-managed by the 3SIIF and the European Investment Fund, operates as a private business entity concentrating on commercial objectives. This fund primarily targets sectors such as information technology, energy, and clean tech.³⁰

Subnational Level

A lesser-known and recent aspect of the 3SI is the collaboration among local governments at the subnational level. Duda launched the Three Seas Initiative Forum of Regions in July 2018 in Rzeszów, Poland, to promote the goals of the 3SI within the lower echelons of participating-state governments. Following its inception, the Lubelskie Voivodeship in Eastern Poland took the lead, hosting the first and subsequent events in Lublin, the capital of the Voivodeship, under the honorary patronage of the Polish president. The inaugural Three Seas Local Government Congress officially commenced in 2021 and has since been held annually. The 3SI Local Government Congress has positioned itself as a “regular international economic” gathering that unites representatives from national and local governments, academia, business sectors, and nongovernmental organizations from participating states, along with strategic partners and associated regions from Ukraine and Moldova.³¹ Thus, while the 3SI summit represents the highest political event and is closed to the public, the Congress remains open and inclusive to a wider array of public, private, and civic participants.

Regional cooperation was strengthened and further formalized in 2023 during the third convening of the Three Seas Local Government Congress in Lublin, where the Agreement on the Economic Network of the Three Seas Regions (known as the Network of 3Seas Regions) was signed, building on the declaration for its establishment mentioned in the Lublin Declaration of 2021.³² This initiative was spearheaded by the Lubelskie Voivodeship and features a permanent secretariat located in Lublin, facilitating direct collaboration among local governments of the 3SI states. The network initially comprised 15 regions in five nations: Poland (five voivodeships: Lubelskie, Mazowieckie, Podkarpackie, Podlaskie and Świętokrzyskie), Lithuania (three regions of Alytus, Marjampole and Panevėžys), Slovakia (the Prešov Self-Governing Region), Hungary (Hajdú-Bihar County), and Romania (five counties: Călărași, Caraș Severin, Dolj, Maramureș and Timiș).³³ By 2025, the network expanded to include 28 regions from eight CEE countries, six of which are EU members (Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia) along with two non-EU members, Ukraine and Moldova.³⁴ Since 2022, the network has been releasing reports that provide guiding policy documents.³⁵

The network's primary goals align with the 3SI's overarching objectives, including addressing the disparities in CEE countries regarding infrastructure, transportation, digitalization, and innovation. It serves as a mechanism for optimizing the allocation of EU funds, national funds, and the 3SIIF, while also fostering entrepreneurship, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses and enhancing international trade.³⁶ In addition, the network aims to build "the local and regional government component" of the 3SI and to promote "the growth and cultural exchange in areas such as culture, art, and tourism", expanding its focus beyond political and economic concerns. In this framework, infrastructure projects associated with the 3SI, such as Via Carpathia, Rail Baltica, Via Baltica, Rail-2-Sea, and Rail Carpatia, are viewed as essential lifelines for the region.

The Local Government Congress and the Network of 3Seas Regions have become prominent aspects of the 3SI, although the project until now has primarily been Poland-led, particularly under the leadership of the Lubelskie Voivodeship. It is important to note that the Polish regions involved in the network are situated in eastern and southern Poland, areas that are relatively less developed than western Poland. As a result, there is strong motivation for these regions to pursue this initiative. The effectiveness of the congress and the network will hinge on the political leadership of the Lubelskie Voivodeship and the involvement of other local governments.

Epistemic Community and Media

Since the early 2020s, academia and the wider epistemic community—including universities, think tanks, research institutions, and various experts—have been an integral component of 3SI summits. There is a diverse range of participants and initiatives. Following the 2023 Bucharest summit, the 2024 Vilnius summit, and the 2025 Warsaw summit, scientific conferences were established as official side events of the summits and as a part of the Business Forum.³⁷ The 2023 conference at the Business Forum was hosted by The Three Seas Initiative Research Center at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (ISP PAN), in collaboration with the Romanian New Strategy Center and funded by the Polish Ministry of Science and Education.³⁸ The 2024 Vilnius conference was a joint effort by the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, ISP PAN, and the University of Lodz. The 2025 Business Forum in Warsaw saw collaboration among ISP PAN, the University of Lodz, the Three Seas Business Council (TSBC), alongside partnerships with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW), the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, and Mykolas Romeris University in Lithuania.³⁹ Additionally, since 2022, the Three Seas One Opportunity

Conference (3S10) has been organized by The Opportunity–Institute for Foreign Affairs, a private Polish think tank, as part of the official side events at the Presidential Three Seas Summit, bringing together representatives from think tanks, academia, government agencies, business, the military, and NGOs.⁴⁰ Clearly, academic institutions from Poland, Lithuania, and Romania lead in this type of collaboration.

During the 2023 Local Government Congress, representatives from 13 universities signed the memorandum to establish The Three Seas University Network (3SUN). This group includes the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Trakia University (Bulgaria), Catholic University of Croatia, Tallinn University (Estonia), Vytautas the Great University (Lithuania), Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Baltic International Academy (Latvia), Babeş-Bolyai University (Romania), University of Trnava (Slovakia), Catholic University of Ružomberok (Slovakia), Alma Mater Europea (Slovenia), University of Water and Environmental Engineering and Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine).⁴¹ The initiative for the Three Seas Universities Network was launched by the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, with backing from the Polish Ministry of Education and Science. The 3SUN aims to enhance collaboration in scientific research, joint projects, and investment initiatives to elevate the standards of education and research within the 3SI region. The network is focused on working together on innovative solutions, fostering information exchange, and sharing university and research institution achievements across areas such as science, culture, and technology. Additionally, the network has expressed its commitment to supporting the commercialization of research outcomes and engaging in activities that benefit local and regional communities while fostering partnerships with the business sector.⁴²

The epistemic community plays a vital role in advancing the 3SI through various means, including offering policy advice and assessing business and other regional cooperation opportunities. Moreover, the experts are involved in shaping ideas and regional identities, which aids in building and strengthening a regional community. With events being covered by traditional and new media, and research outcomes being disseminated, the 3SI increasingly transforms itself from a mere concept into a tangible project.

Recommendations for Japan

Engage in Multiple-Level Activities

With the deepening, expansion, and diversification of the 3SI cooperation, Japan should engage in activities at multiple levels. This includes diplomatic, economic, local, expert, media, and people-to-people exchanges. By doing so, Japan can collaborate effectively with the United States and the EU within the 3SI framework while empowering the participating states politically, economically, and in other aspects of the ongoing regional integration process. Each of these levels offers unique and valuable opportunities.

At the business level, often considered the most significant, Japan can use its expertise in energy (nuclear and green), transportation, and digital technologies. It is important to recognize that opportunities exist at the inter-state level (the 3SI Business Forum) and the local inter-regional level (the 3SI Forum of Regions). Moreover, participation in other areas, such as academia, NGOs, and people-to-people exchanges, is also crucial, as it fosters a supportive environment for Japanese business ventures and diplomatic efforts. This includes promoting Japanese soft-power elements (such as manga, anime, J-pop, and other traditional and contemporary arts) as well as supporting

diplomatic initiatives that align with Japan's priorities, such as reforming the UN Security Council and aiding in postwar reconstruction efforts in Ukraine.

Leverage Existing 3SI Mechanisms and Institutions

Since the 3SI lacks a permanent secretariat, it faces challenges in fully coordinating its efforts. However, Japan could align its financing strategy for the 3SI with that of the United States and the EU to prevent overlaps and omissions by using the existing 3SI mechanisms and institutions:

- o political mechanisms: annual summits, foreign ministers' meetings, Parliamentary Forum
- o economic mechanisms: Business Forum, Economic Forum at the 3SI Local Government Congress, 3SI Network of Chambers of Commerce
- o financial mechanisms: 3SI Investment Fund, 3SI Innovation Fund, 3SI Investment Fund 2.0
- o local level: Forum of Regions/Network of 3Seas Regions
- o experts and academia: Tree Seas One Opportunity conference, conference at the Business Forum, The Three Seas University Network
- o people-to-people: scholarships, exchange programs, events

Encourage Establishment of a Permanent Secretariat

Japan should actively urge the political leaders of 3SI nations to create a permanent secretariat, which would facilitate more effective coordination. Various experts and stakeholders have highlighted the issues arising from the absence of a secretariat.⁴³ Some experts proposed its establishment in Brussels or Berlin to align it with Europe's financial hubs.⁴⁴ Yet this might lead to the perception that the influence of regional actors is being moved outside the CEE region. A more suitable option may be to set up the secretariat in Poland or Romania, the 3SI's two largest states, or to adopt a rotating system similar to the EU presidency. Furthermore, a representative office could be established in Brussels, where the region-based secretariat would handle all coordination while other personnel focus on fundraising and financial issues.

Choose Among Priority Projects

Since the 2018 Bucharest summit, the 3SI has released a list of priority projects that support its primary objectives of enhancing infrastructure in the areas of energy, digital technology, and transportation, with the overarching aim of stimulating economic growth, developing a north-south infrastructure corridor, addressing regional disparities within the EU, and promoting cohesion and unity in Europe.⁴⁵ Following the 2020 Tallinn summit and the launch of the 3SI website, all projects are now cataloged and regularly updated on the platform. The number of projects has nearly tripled from 48 in 2018 to 143 by 2025, with an estimated total investment value of €111 billion.⁴⁶ Of these projects, 51% pertain to transportation, 39% to energy, and 10% to digital initiatives.⁴⁷ The priority projects are revised each year and showcased during the Three Seas summits, with annual status reports issued to evaluate progress from the previous year. The projects are organized by country and type and include details on funding and contact information. Here is the list of databases with direct links:

- o Database of the 3S Priority Projects by Projects with detailed information: Link to [Projects](#).
- o Database of 3SI Priority Projects by country: Link to [Priority Projects](#)
- o Databases of Status Reports of the 3S Interconnection Priority Projects: Link to [Status Report](#)

Japan could choose from among those projects or propose its own initiatives following several important criteria:

- o develop a profile for each participating state to understand the internal political dynamics and their dedication to the 3SI. This will help distinguish among the proactive states (Poland, Croatia, Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine), the passive states (Austria, Czechia), and a pro-Russian state (Hungary).
- o adhere to the 3SI goals of fostering cooperation in transport, energy and digital infrastructure of the 3SI states to strengthen their economic growth, regional connectivity, and security within the EU framework.
- o maintain synergy with the EU goals and initiatives, including the Global Gateway, the Trans-Caspian corridor, and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).
- o choose projects that involve multiple states
- o choose projects that involve Ukraine
- o engage in projects that are purely commercial (3SI Fund) and public infrastructure-oriented (state-led)
- o choose or propose projects that leverage completed public infrastructure projects (railways, roads)

Support Transport Infrastructure Development

The 3SI aims to bridge the infrastructure gap that exists between Western and Central-Eastern Europe. Given Japan's strong background in high-quality infrastructure development, it can assist with achieving this objective by offering financial backing or establishing public-private partnerships for specific infrastructure endeavors within the Three Seas region, including projects related to railways, highways, ports, and digital connectivity. This support could be channeled through the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and other development organizations. Japan could also invest in logistics and transportation systems to enhance connectivity among 3SI states and between the 3SI region and Asia. By focusing on the development of critical infrastructure points such as ports and rail hubs, the initiative would improve regional trade dynamics and facilitate the movement of people, thereby boosting also regional tourism.

Foster Energy Security and Green Energy Transition

Energy diversification and sustainability are another key 3SI goal. Japan has significant experience in renewable energy technologies, such as hydrogen, solar, and nuclear energy. Tokyo could help CEE countries transition to greener energy sources by sharing its advanced technologies and knowledge on nuclear energy, renewable energy, and energy storage solutions. Collaborating on building infrastructure for energy interconnectivity would also help the region increase its energy security.

Promote Technological and Digital Cooperation

Japan could contribute to another key 3SI goal of enhancing digital connectivity by fostering digital transformation within CEE countries, facilitating cooperation in emerging technologies such as 5G, cybersecurity, artificial

intelligence (AI), and cybersecurity. This could involve setting up joint research programs, offering technical assistance, and encouraging private-sector investments.

Support Educational and Cultural Exchanges

Among the various aspects of 3SI cooperation, the people-to-people dimension is underdeveloped. Establishing stronger connections and fostering mutual understanding among individuals is crucial for effective collaboration. Japan could leverage its soft power to enhance educational and cultural exchanges by supporting academic partnerships, scholarships, and cultural programs. This approach would not only strengthen intra-regional relationships but also reinforce Japan's long-term engagements with the CEE countries in the 3SI. Japan has prior experience with such efforts through the Visegrad Four format, facilitated by the Japan Foundation's Budapest office. Its activities could be expanded into the 3SI region or a new office could be opened.

Conclusion

The 3SI has achieved a notable level of success since its establishment in 2015 as evidenced by the increase in participating states, associated participating states, strategic partners, and projects. Still, the engagement and political commitment of participants vary—ranging from enthusiastic endorsement to cautious skepticism—as does each country's progress and development pace. Nevertheless, there is a strong consensus on the necessity for regional infrastructure improvement, and the 3SI is widely seen as a means to facilitate that development. The belief that the 3SI serves the national interests of its participating countries is likely a key factor in its continued existence. Japan stands to gain from its role as a 3SI strategic partner by tapping into the region's economic potential, which offers much higher returns compared to much of "Old Europe". Japan's participation could also provide political and diplomatic advantages, enhancing its relationships with CEE states and, subsequently, with the EU.

Japan and the Three Seas Initiative: Navigating diplomacy while bridging expectations

By Bart Gaens

Japan joined the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) as strategic partner in 2024. This was the result of Japan's interest in and ambitions for the grouping starting in 2021, as well as explicit expectations on the part of countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). For example, the Visegrad Four (V4, Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia) Plus Japan foreign ministers' meeting of May 2021 strongly pushed the 3SI as a key tool to strengthen connectivity along a north-south axis stretching from the Baltic countries to the southern Balkans. At the same time, 3SI was seen as key to helping close the infrastructure development gap between Eastern and Western Europe. Business interest was certainly also a driver for Japan. From Tokyo's perspective, Japanese companies have a lot to contribute to the 3SI, as they have a high degree of expertise in the main foci of the forum, namely transport infrastructure, energy, and the digital field.⁴⁸

Russia's invasion of Ukraine added a strong geopolitical and geoeconomic dimension to the 3SI. In terms of geopolitics, Russia's aggression exemplified the inseparable nature of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security from Japan's perspective. As Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba remarked at the latest summit, marking the forum's tenth anniversary and held in Warsaw in April 2025, the 3SI is a forum for diplomacy and cooperation to work toward a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. In terms of geoeconomics, economic growth in the region is crucial for enhancing regional connectivity, which itself underlies the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. As a tangible sign of Japan's ambitions to be deeply involved in Ukraine's recovery as well as engaged with CEE, Ishiba referred to the commitment of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), including through a representative office in Warsaw that is currently in preparation.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Japan, as a close ally of the United States, hopes that the initiative will contribute to stronger transatlantic relations, while at the same time counterbalancing Russian and Chinese influences in CEE.⁵⁰

Japan's interest in the 3SI, therefore, is multifold, covering business and economics, development and connectivity, and geopolitics. This policy brief first sketches how Japan's interest in the 3SI is situated within the general context of Japan's approach to connectivity in third countries and regions—in particular, Europe. It then examines some of the challenges that impede a stronger Japanese involvement. Expectations for Japanese investments in the 3SI were high⁵¹, but thus far, concrete financial commitments are lacking. Finally, the brief provides policy recommendations for Japan's future engagement as a strategic partner with the 3SI.

Japan's Overall Connectivity Policy and the 3SI

Japan's engagement with the 3SI is well embedded in national policies and corresponding strategy documents. This is manifest in the principles underlying the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision; in priority fields in connectivity; and in strategic partnership policy in other regions including Europe.

First, as of 2016, Japan has framed its connectivity strategy for the region and beyond within the FOIP vision. Concretely, FOIP seeks to promote three sets of principles: rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade; economic prosperity, including through improvement of connectivity; and peace and stability through maritime security, such as through maritime law-enforcement capacity-building. In this effort, Japan has actively sought to enhance cooperation with European countries and the EU to uphold common values and principles and to promote connectivity (both physical and digital).⁵² Engagement with 3SI should also be seen in this light. Furthermore, FOIP has an implicit geopolitical agenda. As former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida remarked in a policy speech⁵³:

In order to achieve growth, countries need to stay connected in various aspects. However, the kind of connection that relies solely on one country could be a breeding ground for political vulnerability. By connecting, we aim for increasing each country's options, help[ing] them overcome their vulnerabilities and pursu[ing] economic growth.

Kishida was referring to developing countries in the "Global South", but Japan's engagement with 3SI countries was equally founded on the idea of offering wider options to countries as alternatives to China and Russia.

Second, the priority fields of the 3SI (transport, energy, digital) align well with Japan's policy foci. In the field of transport, Japan seeks to promote global strategic infrastructure development, operation, and maintenance. This includes infrastructure that can contribute to improvement of regional connectivity (ports, airports, railways, roads, bridges, and the like), and of facilities and equipment for the facilitation and safety improvement of the distribution of goods and the flow of people.⁵⁴ In terms of energy, Japan is seeking to lead the creation of clean markets and to contribute to the realization of the Green Transformation (GX). Tokyo highlights the need for energy security and practical decarbonization efforts, including liquefied natural gas (LNG) cooperation. This is in line with the 3SI's shift toward renewables and connectivity grounded in energy security, in particular the move away from Russian energy imports, as well as with climate needs and trends.⁵⁵ It also chimes with a shared need with the wider EU to implement innovation in renewable energy and sustainable energy solutions, including carbon neutrality, zero emissions, and Green Growth. Finally, in the digital field, Japan has evinced strong ambitions for digital transformation (DX) in various areas, including digital infrastructure, standard-setting, regulation, cybersecurity, and Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT). The recent summit in Warsaw reaffirmed cooperation in digital connectivity as a priority for the 3SI.⁵⁶

Third, engagement in the 3SI can be seen as part of Japan's strategic partnership policy in general, and the EU-Japan strategic partnership in particular. Especially during the past decade, Japan has been very active in creating international security partnerships. As the most recent FOIP policy paper shows, these include mutually complementary efforts with countries as well as regional organizations also in Europe, private sector cooperation including through public-private partnerships, and cooperation with think tanks, such as track 1.5 gatherings of official and non-governmental actors. Through the 3SI, Japan aims to connect with like-minded partners to promote the liberal international rules-based order; preserve security of supply; find complementarities and synergies in transport, energy, and digital connectivity to the benefit of both Japan and local countries; and tackle the digital and the green transformations. Forming a connectivity alliance with a group of countries from CEE allows all partners involved to exploit complementary strengths in technologies, market intelligence, financing, or infrastructures.

For Japan, one driver to engage with the 3SI was the idea that the initiative could enhance European integration, and so contribute to furthering cooperation between Japan and the EU in the field of connectivity. This is especially

salient in light of the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure between the EU and Japan, signed in Brussels in September 2019. The partnership was a landmark initiative designed to strengthen and deepen the multifaceted relationship between the EU and Japan, building in particular on the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), a legally binding document signed in July 2018. According to the EU-Japan Connectivity Partnership foundational document, coordinated action with partner countries in regions such as Eastern Europe was an explicit goal.

Challenges for Japan's Involvement in the 3SI

Japan's involvement in the 3SI has so far remained at the political level. For now, the 3SI is a vehicle for global outreach for Japan, as well as a catalyst for bilateral cooperation with individual countries from the region.⁵⁷ But what are the possibilities for enhanced cooperation with the 3SI as an institution? First of all, looking at precedents, a discrepancy between political engagement and on-the-ground commitment is common.⁵⁸ In general, cooperation on connectivity between Japan and other partners in third regions often remains more in the realm of political declarations and summitry, rather than concrete, on-the-ground cooperation. For example, while Japanese companies have a wide presence in Europe, the EU-Japan connectivity partnership agreement of 2019 has thus far not led to any tangible projects. In another example, Japan launched diplomatic initiatives, such as the 2017 Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), with India—a traditional recipient of large amounts of Japanese ODA and Japanese connectivity investments. However, collaborative projects are nascent at best and remain based on a business-to-business (B2B) approach, which is considered easier and more useful in the short term compared to business-to-government (B2G) or government-to-government (G2G) engagement.

The reasons why G2G approaches are a challenge are linked to bureaucratic procedures, pertaining to the length of internal funding application procedures, or the individual capacities of national agencies involved. The latter, such as development agencies and investment banks, have different requirements and specific ways of working, and not all are equipped to deal with external parties. National branding also plays an important role, with agencies naturally oriented toward national self-interest. At the diplomatic level, differences related to standards and working methods, or risk-aversion and pragmatism, for example, can come into play.

When it comes to the 3SI, one factor underlying the lack of tangible progress might be the absence of a permanent institutional structure as a point of contact to enable Japanese investments. While the 3SI has an investment fund, it does not have a secretariat for mediation, deliberation, harmonization, or investment promotion. A secretariat would also be beneficial in tackling the increasing need for coordination and management of a substantially growing institution. It could serve as institutional memory and promote efficient coordination among the participating countries, associated participating states, and strategic partners. It could also greatly increase visibility and public awareness.

Another explanation for the lack of progress is that, at the G2G level, Japan has its own integrated approach to connectivity. This is especially true in the case of development cooperation. The model driven by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is characterized by the following key features:

- o a strategic linking of aid, economic cooperation, security, foreign policy, and national interests

- o a focus on infrastructure development and capacity-building
- o the use of low-interest, long-term loans instead of grants
- o a sectoral focus on transport, public works, and utilities
- o linkage with security, including through Official Security Assistance (OSA)
- o a key role for public-private partnerships

Within this context, Japan often prefers to act alone. There is a strong emphasis on sharing Japan's development experience in recipient countries, or on promoting "Japanese-style" approaches such as the kaizen method (enhancement of product quality and efficiency).

Japan provides large amounts of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and neighboring countries. The bulk (96%) of Japan's bilateral development aid disbursements in Europe in 2023 went to Ukraine and Moldova, with \$818.12 million going to Ukraine and \$131.98 million to Moldova.⁵⁹ Poland, as the country taking in the largest numbers of refugees from Ukraine, has also received Japanese investments and bond guarantees to tackle the humanitarian crisis, promote renewable energy, and manage the transition to carbon-neutrality. For Japan, Poland is also the most important country in terms of facilitating public-private collaboration in the reconstruction of Ukraine.

However, when it comes to government-driven investments in connectivity projects in the 3SI countries that are not related to development cooperation, the key way forward should be to bolster public-private partnerships (PPP). As mentioned in the Joint declaration of the tenth summit in April 2025, the 3SI's format is "politically inspired but business-driven and it is the business cooperation that is the core of its framework". In addition, as noted in the 3SI Progress Report of 2025,

the future success of the 3SI may rely less on top-down political declarations or EU institutional backing, and more on pragmatic, business-driven cooperation and effective project implementation. The focus may increasingly shift toward leveraging the 3SI framework for specific ventures and actively seeking complementary funding and know-how from partners outside the direct EU structure, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, or Japan, while continuing to engage with relevant EU programs where feasible."⁶⁰

Japanese companies already have a strong presence in the region, with more than 350 companies in Poland and over 110 in Romania, for example. The role of JBIC, a policy-based financial institution entirely owned by the Japanese government, is crucial as a catalyst. JBIC's forthcoming representative office in Warsaw is a promising development, and reveals Tokyo's interest in the CEE region. The automobile industry and electrical and electronics industry have been the focus of Japanese investments so far, but in recent years, software industries and energy diversion are growing fields with opportunities for Japanese companies, including in sectors such as submarine cables for offshore wind farms or the rail connectivity sector.⁶¹

In its connectivity and infrastructure development policies, Japan generally makes wide use of public-private partnerships—primarily with Japanese companies. Japan provides concessionary loans to recipient countries and uses public finance tools to further mobilize the private sector. The amended JBIC law (JBIC Cooperation Act) of April 2023 can thus play a major role. The act, which aims to enhance supply chain resilience, provides assistance to Japanese companies, including startups that are taking risks, and aims to promote participation in international

support for the recovery of Ukraine.⁶² JBIC can now provide loans to foreign companies that have supply-chain ties with a Japanese company and operate in sectors that are important for Japan (resources, equipment, technologies). It can now also acquire bonds and invest in domestic startups and other companies engaging in business overseas. The law also provides more leeway to encourage risk-taking by private sector companies, which is especially needed against the background of DX and GX. Lastly, JBIC is now also allowed to help guarantee loans by international financial institutions in support of the recovery of Ukraine.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For Japan, the opportunities offered by the 3SI are clear in view of shared goals. These include geopolitical drivers (an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative projects and energy diversification from Russia); a focus on trusted quality infrastructure marked by sustainability and the compatibility of development and investment; a shared need to implement innovation in renewable energy and sustainable energy solutions; a focus on digital transformation and cybersecurity; linkages to the connectivity agenda of the wider EU; and opportunities to fill the expected gap left by the US pull-back from connectivity cooperation and investments in the coming years under the second Trump administration, especially in the realm of clean energy, climate, and health. In general, the 3SI can be seen as part of Japan's strategic partnership policy, and as feeding into the EU-Japan strategic partnership.

However, Japan's involvement in the 3SI thus far has been limited to political engagement. What can be done to make progress more tangible? First of all, communication about the 3SI partnership and Japan's involvement in it are important to increase brand awareness. Relevant stakeholders might not even know that the institution exists. A contact point in the form of a secretariat can make a big difference to address this issue.

Second, Japan can invest in individual projects. As Yuichi Yoshida writes,

Japan has the capability to cooperate on a case-by-case basis through channels such as the JBIC or other governmental financial institutions. Considering that the 3SI aligns with the 'Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure' between Japan and the EU, it might be worthwhile for Japan to explore participation in desirable infrastructure projects through equity investments in the 3SI Investment Fund and even contemplate solo or joint investments with other institutions in the future.⁶³

When it comes to joint investments, complementarity is important. Japan has capital to invest, wide expertise in the management of large projects, is looking at emerging markets, and is well-regarded as a partner in third markets. EU companies are already active in CEE and are seeking to expand their business in the region. In this context, there is a need for selected flagship projects that highlight shared quality norms.

A priority area can be digital and data infrastructures and related policy and regulatory frameworks. Cooperation on smart cities could offer potential, as Japan has paid a lot of attention to this area. Furthermore, Japan has a strong interest in the development of ports, aiming to assist Japanese companies developing and operating local ports and expand their business in the port and its hinterland. Tokyo has a particular interest in smart ports, explicitly aiming to implement the digital transformation through digitization of clearance through digital cargo trace systems.

Furthermore, rather than the joint development of a major project, it makes more sense to focus on a commonly

agreed-upon collection of projects, such as one connectivity corridor or one urban development plan, to which the partners involved contribute in a coordinated yet separate fashion. Alternatively, one partner can be in charge of the development of a project through its agencies in cooperation with the private sector, and the other partner can contribute to soft infrastructure (customs facilitation, skill development, or capacity building). Division of labor, based on comparative advantages depending on location, expertise and experience, and existing networks, is easier than co-financing from the standpoint of both the funding countries and third countries, not to mention the private sector actors involved.

Finally, and most importantly, Japan's involvement in the 3SI connectivity partnership must be promoted in the private sector. Private-sector investment is essential for the implementation of the partnership, but private investors often shy away due to unpredictable political, regulatory and economic risks. JBIC has a key role to play as a catalyst to create the right investment environment for Japanese companies with strong connections to local enterprises.

Advancing the Three Seas Initiative

Japan, working with the United States, has a strategic economic diplomacy opportunity

By Anthony B. Kim

Poland hosted the latest Three Seas Summit and Business Forum in late April. These meetings, which marked the Three Seas Initiative's (3SI) 10th anniversary, offered a timely opportunity for the group's partners to reboot, revitalize, and elevate their partnership at a crucial time. Indeed, advancing pragmatic engagement policies matters more than ever since they can enhance economic security and resilience based on shared values of democracy and economic freedom for the 3SI countries and their key partners.

Through his keynote remarks at the Business Forum, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright highlighted the 3SI as "a truly visionary idea from 10 years ago to unite the proud Central [and Eastern] European nations in building infrastructure and investment in pursuit of opportunity and prosperity".⁶⁴

The regional initiative—dismissed by some at the beginning as just talking shop that would have little impact—has become increasingly relevant, albeit slowly. Continuing and elevating support for the 3SI would be smart, timely, and strategic. To that end, Japan's ongoing interest and more direct participation in the initiative would be welcome.

Fundamentally, the 3SI is and should be a practical platform for attracting private-sector investors and developers. The initiative's success would certainly be enhanced and reinforced by Japan's strategic and pragmatic engagement. 3SI partnerships present an opportunity for the country to practice its unique economic statecraft.

The 3SI at 10: Moving Onward with Japan

3SI turns a decade old this year. The initiative was established in 2015 to strengthen connectivity and reduce the divide among Central European, Eastern European, and Baltic states. It has aimed to enhance connectivity through the development of critical infrastructure in the energy, transport, and digital fields in the region surrounded by three seas—the Baltic, the Black, and the Adriatic. The initiative initially brought together 12 EU participating states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

A heightened urgency to make the initiative operational has been injected since Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The 3SI was subsequently enlarged to include Greece. Ukraine and Moldova became associated participating countries in 2023.

From Washington's perspective, the 3SI has been one of the most significant security and economic policy initiatives to emerge in Central and Eastern Europe. The 3SI countries are like-minded and willing partners of critical importance to the United States, politically and economically. While each 3SI country has undergone different phases of transi

tion over the past decades, they have collectively embraced free-market policies that have led to growing prosperity and stability. Having secure, stable, and economically viable strategic partners in the three-seas region is in the United States' security and economic interest.

Central to further advancing economic security and enabling business environments in the region is creating a more inviting playing field for private-sector partners. Fundamentally, Washington's economic relationship with the region is exercised best through the private sector, the catalyst for real and meaningful economic transformation, amplified by political and diplomatic support.

To that end, the current US administration has been a notable supporter of the 3SI. In 2017, Donald Trump became the first US president to attend a 3SI meeting. He remarked at the time:

"On behalf of the American people, let me say that we stand with the Three Seas nations. ...We support your drive for greater prosperity and security. We applaud your initiative to expand infrastructure. We welcome this historic opportunity to deepen our economic partnership with your region."⁶⁵ Trump also noted that "the Three Seas Initiative will transform and rebuild the entire region and ensure that your infrastructure, like your commitment to freedom and rule of law, binds you to all of Europe and, indeed, to the West."⁶⁶

Equally notable has been support from the US Congress. In November 2020, the House of Representatives passed a bipartisan resolution "expressing support of the Three Seas Initiative in its efforts to increase energy independence and infrastructure connectivity thereby strengthening the United States and European national security". In February 2021, members of both parties in Congress urged the Biden administration to continue financial support for the 3SI. They also called on the Development Finance Corporation to finalize an approved \$300 million investment, citing concern over infrastructure deficiencies that make the 3SI region "overly dependent on Russia and China for energy and economic needs".

In that evolving broader foreign policy context, Japan has come along. From a practical commercial diplomacy perspective related to direct foreign investment, Japanese companies' presence in Central and Eastern Europe has been relevant. It is notable that, in 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited five of the 3SI countries—Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria, and Romania—to reinforce and amplify Japan's interest and willingness to work with them.

More recently, during his visit to Japan in July 2021 for the opening ceremonies of the Tokyo Olympics, Polish President Andrzej Duda, a founder of the 3SI, met with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to discuss a range of issues of mutual interest.⁶⁷

Notably, the leaders of the two nations that have been linked through a bilateral strategic partnership framework⁶⁸ since 2015 shared their perspectives on the 3SI and agreed to work more closely to operationalize the initiative. Suga affirmed that Japan is interested in participating in projects related to the initiative, along with other non-member partners such as the United States and Germany. Japan was officially welcomed as a 3SI strategic partner at the 2024 3SI summit and Business Forum in Vilnius.

Delivering a video message as Japan's top representative to that gathering, Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa noted that Tokyo strongly supports the 3SI and recognizes that the security of Euro-Atlantic is inseparable from that of the Indo-Pacific. Kamikawa unambiguously underlined that, in light of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, "Japan intends to reinforce its involvement in the 3SI in collaboration with partners both inside and outside of the region."⁶⁹ She added that "Japan will play an active role in encouraging further participation of Japanese companies under the 3SI."⁷⁰

This milestone development marked the first formal involvement of an Asian country in the network, expanding the 3SI strategic partners to the United States, Japan, the European Commission, and Germany. During the recent 10th 3SI meeting in Warsaw, participants announced that Albania and Montenegro would join the initiative as associated members while Türkiye and Spain would join as strategic partners.

Going forward, realizing the 3SI's potential hinges on the effectiveness of economic collaboration and partnerships. The multidimensional infrastructure and regional connectivity projects envisioned by 3SI countries in the strategic context of evolving partnerships with the United States is a geoeconomic opportunity for Tokyo. The benefits would be more than economic. The United States, the countries in the three seas region, and Japan have a clear interest in working together on navigating the challenges of economic security and transforming the region.

To that end, the 3SI is vital. A more prosperous and better integrated three seas region would yield a stronger Europe, one more economically resilient and better capable of working with the United States and Japan to address regional and global challenges.

Constructive and forward-looking economic engagement is essential for joint engagement. In fact, more than ever before, trade and investment issues meld foreign and economic policy. There are many areas of potential cooperation, but economic interaction cannot flourish without vibrant commercial links and practical entrepreneurial interactions. In addition, strong economies undergird strong national defenses.

The Path Forward for Japan's 3SI Interaction

In crafting a coherent and comprehensive road map that will advance the 3SI region's strategic interest of enhancing economic prosperity through greater private-sector engagement and regional connectivity, the initiative's participating countries and Japan should work together to:

- o **implement greater pro-market, pro-investment policies in the region.** Greater economic freedom means freeing untapped entrepreneurs and unleashing the 3SI countries' economic potential, which is also necessary for sustained growth and development. The countries should be encouraged to adopt more free-market policies that facilitate private-sector-led development because long-term transformative investment will ultimately come from that sector. Tokyo, however, cannot provide countries in the three seas region with the political will that they need to transform their economies according to free-market principles. However, by getting more directly and practically involved in critical policy dialogues, Japan can ensure that its constructive engagement is considered. Tokyo can also engage at the technical and practical levels in a way that enables countries to advance economic development.

- o **elevate existing economic interaction with more committed outreach.** Japan starts with notable unique advantages, which include ongoing positive engagement with the region, world-class investment and business practices, a global profile, a military alliance with the United States, and various partnerships around the region and beyond. The list of what Japan can offer is long. Yet as America's long-time critical ally and partner, Japan can and should step up its own game in the three seas region. Tokyo's evolving efforts to become more deeply engaged in the region, raise its strategic economic diplomacy profile, and elevate its practical participation in the region deserve more attention and encouragement.
- o **exercise strategic flexibility and incentivize reforms.** Tokyo should proactively work with the three seas countries to facilitate dynamic trade and open investment environments, transparent agreements among nations, and improved connectivity to drive regional ties. That is in the interest of all involved parties. But Japan can be strategically flexible in its approach—not needing formal agreements in every case. Japan and countries in the region have a mutual interest, for instance, in helping small and medium-sized businesses, including those in the financial sector, grow and compete regionally and globally.

In addition to pursuing these opportunities, Japan should recognize that the 3SI's global relevance and significance, especially given Europe's current security framework, has never been clearer and sharper than now. Tokyo, therefore, should consider practicing its pragmatic economic statecraft in the following contexts:

- o **The 3SI's success is dependent on building public-private partnerships.** But fundamentally, the 3SI is and should be more about ensuring a practical platform for attracting private-sector investors, using, for instance the "joint investor and co-developer" approach. Washington and Tokyo should consider developing a forward-looking strategic energy trade initiative to ensure the development of a durable energy supply infrastructure network. The ongoing war in Ukraine has highlighted the 3SI's relevance and underscored the region's frail energy infrastructure and economic dependence on Russia. In the current geopolitical context, intensifying US efforts to secure energy connectivity through the 3SI, facilitated by Japan's capacity to build, is critical and deserves immediate action. Japan can cooperate on a case-by-case basis through channels such as the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation for Transport and Urban Development, and other financial institutions. Considering that the 3SI also aligns with the EU-Japanese Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, Tokyo should more proactively continue exploring participation in desirable infrastructure projects.
- o **Policymakers in Tokyo should also make a stronger case for Japan's readiness, not just willingness, to forge greater interaction with NATO,** which Washington should welcome. The United States already designates Japan as a "major non-NATO ally". Forging greater pragmatic cooperation among willing allies necessitates forward-looking engagement and fine-tuning NATO's trajectory, particularly given that Japan has become a trusted, capable partner for the alliance.
- o **Washington should welcome more practical interaction with Japan and key transatlantic allies.** Tokyo is well positioned to be a critical force multiplier for NATO in terms of boosting forward defense capacities. Furthermore, from a broader strategic foreign policy perspective, Japan would be a uniquely capable business

partner, particularly for the United States and 3SI participating states in launching and operationalizing large scale infrastructure projects, perhaps in collaboration with the International Development Finance Corporation. Such cooperation could be linked to Ukraine's reconstruction.

- o **Japanese plans to assist Ukraine's economic reconstruction and recovery process through postwar strategic infrastructure initiatives are encouraging.** Japan has taken a clear stance in condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine and taken a proactive role in investing in the country's reconstruction. The Japan External Trade Organization opened a Kyiv office in 2024, facilitating Japanese firms' entry into manufacturing, wholesale, information and communication technology, and agriculture. This reflects a significant uptick in commitments to Ukraine.
- o As ceasefire negotiations gain momentum, **Japan has begun examining Ukraine's economic recovery plan.** The aim is to help Kyiv establish a foundation for Japanese corporations to secure large-scale infrastructure projects when reconstruction efforts launch.
- o Japan has a notable track record of effectively providing economic development assistance worldwide. However, **Tokyo can achieve far more with greater focus on and reinforcement of its capacity and know-how, and with its unique economic security diplomacy.** To that end, Tokyo's policy leadership should consider the targets of its official security assistance (OSA), which should include financial aid, equipment, and other forms of pragmatic support. The primary focus of Japan's OSA to the three seas countries should be on strategic infrastructure projects that align with 3SI objectives and priorities. Such projects should be designed to enhance economic and national security capabilities related to transportation, energy, and communication infrastructure that will generate greater economic growth, efficiency, and security.

Japan: America's Capable, Trusted Partner for the 3SI and Beyond

The continuously evolving US–Japan partnership stands as testament to the power of a pragmatically strategic alliance navigating a challenging geopolitical and economic landscape. Yet there are tactical opportunities for the two long-time allies to work together more practically. For more than seven decades, Washington's alliance with Tokyo has played an indispensable role in promoting peace, economic prosperity, and security in the Indo–Pacific and beyond. Japan's relationship with the United States is institutionalized and rooted in shared values, people-to-people ties, and cutting-edge, solution-finding business cooperation.

Now is the time for Tokyo to build on that steadfastness and advance the time-tested alliance to reach new heights under a second Trump administration. Working together to make the 3SI more pragmatically operational would be a step toward realizing that pivotal goal.

Finding Japan's Place as a Strategic Partner in the Three Seas Initiative

By Mirna Galic

Japan's intermittent efforts to engage with US allies in Europe date back to decades before the fanfare surrounding Japan-NATO relations began to build in the late 2010s. In addition to being an official NATO partner nation, Japan is a partner of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, holds observer status in the Council of Europe, and is an economic and strategic partner of the EU. More recently, Japan has joined, as a strategic partner, a relatively obscure European project called the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), adding a new layer of formal connection to that group. There is a clear basis for Japan's interest in lines of communication and cooperation with European partners that explains its institutional connections, including 3SI. Not all groupings are equal, however, in the benefits they offer Japan. This paper examines how 3SI may benefit Japanese interests and the ways in which Tokyo could support the 3SI in response. It concludes with a potential Japan-3SI path of engagement in this time of global change and uncertainty for the United States' European and Indo-Pacific partners.

3SI's Attraction for Japan

Japan's interests in Europe are economic—the EU is one of Japan's largest trading partners and an important source and recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI)—and strategic. From the latter perspective, Japan's focus can be summarized in the now often-referenced idea of security between the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific being “inseparable”.⁷¹ Ukraine is often used as an example to support this since Russia's war has more than a direct effect on European security. It also has an indirect effect on Japanese security through its impact on global rules and norms, signaling to China, benefits to North Korea, and implications for US defense funding and assets. On the flip side, Tokyo believes that Beijing's actions in the Indo-Pacific, such as a change by force to Taiwan's status quo, would have a similarly indirect, negative effect on Europe. Moreover, Japan views China as providing the most serious challenge to its security and is, therefore, sensitive to Beijing's influence in Europe and the impact this may have on European attitudes toward China.⁷²

This same set of imperatives can be applied to the 3SI, which is a grouping of 13 EU member states that border the Adriatic, Baltic and Black seas, and whose focus is the development of cross-border transport, energy, and digital infrastructure to improve connectivity and energy security.⁷³ Economically, the 3SI presents a potential return on investment and opportunity for Japanese businesses in the infrastructure sector. The initiative's participating states are Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Some are relatively strong trading partners for Japan and EU members, and are among the country's top ten exporters and importers.⁷⁴

Strategically, there are three main bases for Japan's engagement in the 3SI: the influence of China, the influence of

Russia, and Ukraine. The 3SI encompasses countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Baltics, which have also been the subject of Chinese interest. Beijing has targeted this subregion for increased economic relations and infrastructure development since the early 2010s, in a format that at some point involved all current 3SI states.⁷⁵ This led to concerns about Chinese influence following on from financial flows. Chinese investment in Hungary and Greece reportedly led those countries to block EU efforts to censor Beijing in 2016 and 2017.⁷⁶ China showed early interest in the 3SI, attending the inaugural summit, signing a declaration of support for the initiative with CEE countries, and reportedly claiming credit for the idea behind the 3SI.⁷⁷ China has since taken a step back from the initiative, however, ostensibly in light of strong US support for the 3SI, but also likely due to increased sensitivity to China's interest by the subregion's countries and their wariness from unmet economic expectations.⁷⁸ Chinese FDI into Europe writ large has been decreasing since the late 2010s, in part due to the adoption by many EU member states of investment screening regulations and in part due to tightening Chinese capital controls.⁷⁹ But Chinese interest in this subregion of Europe remains, as does the specter of Chinese influence.

3SI countries were largely in the communist bloc during the Cold War. As such, their infrastructure development and connectivity with one another pales in comparison to that of their Western European counterparts.⁸⁰ The infrastructure that does exist, particularly in the transport and energy sectors, skews toward Russia on an East-West axis.⁸¹ The 3SI aims to remedy this by improving infrastructure and increasing North-South connectivity. Further diversifying energy supplies and routes beyond Russia is necessary to reduce Moscow's leverage over Europe, as the Kremlin's willingness to use energy as a tool for coercion since the 1990s—and particularly since the start of the Ukraine war—shows.⁸² A number of 3SI countries also comprise NATO's eastern flank, so improving infrastructure in the transport sector would facilitate better military mobility in the area. This effort has become more urgent since 2022.⁸³

Both areas are relevant for Tokyo. Japan could benefit, theoretically, from diversified European energy supplies. The country is the third-largest global importer of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG), making it vulnerable to Russian leverage.⁸⁴ Japan also feels threatened by Russia in its own backyard, where Moscow and Beijing are increasingly conducting joint exercises and where the former is strengthening its armaments on territory it controls but Tokyo claims.⁸⁵ It stands to reason that Japan would see Russia's use of force to achieve objectives, in Europe or elsewhere, as deeply problematic. Tokyo would want to push back against that ability while supporting a more effective NATO to keep Moscow in check.

Similar imperatives undergird Tokyo's support for Ukraine. Moscow's unilateral use of force to change its borders jarred the Japanese public to their core. This is due to the invasion's assault against the rules-based international system on which Japan's security and prosperity relies, and to the precedent it sets for China. As a result, Japan's government was one of only a few outside the Euro-Atlantic to sanction Russia, and Tokyo has provided significant financial aid and other assistance to Kyiv. In a 2024 conference on Ukraine reconstruction hosted by Japan, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida outlined how Tokyo would support Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, including in transportation and energy infrastructure, through the public and private sectors.⁸⁶

At the 2023 3SI summit, Ukraine was granted the status of "associated participating state", and, at the 2024 summit, it was announced that Ukraine's infrastructure projects would be added to the list of 3SI priority projects.⁸⁷ Japan became a strategic partner of the 3SI at the 2024 summit as well, a timing that was likely not coincidental to Ukraine's inclusion. In her summit statement, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa noted that since Russia's attack on

Ukraine “the connectivity between the northern part of the region and the south, which is playing an essential role in assistance and support for Ukraine, is ever more important”. She also highlighted Tokyo’s Ukraine reconstruction conference.⁸⁸ Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba’s statement to the 2025 3SI summit was similarly focused on Ukraine, noting the importance of enhancing regional connectivity and fostering cross-regional partnerships for Ukraine’s reconstruction and recovery.⁸⁹ Japan’s interest in the 3SI thus seems to have increased since the initiative’s inclusion of Ukraine, which is logical as the 3SI could assume a greater role as a platform for Ukraine’s reconstruction.⁹⁰

Japan’s Options for Material Support to 3SI

If it chooses to leverage funding for the 3SI, Japan has two main avenues for doing so. Tokyo can provide funding directly to the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF) through the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and possibly through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). It can provide indirect financial support by encouraging Japanese businesses to seize opportunities in 3SI countries. Additionally, Japan can lend support for relevant 3SI projects through other multilateral groupings of which it is a part, such as the G7 and the Japan-EU Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure.

JBIC funds to 3SIIF could come in the form of either equity investment or loans.⁹¹ 3SI states are generally not developing countries, but JBIC makes allowances for funding for developed countries when projects contribute “to the overseas development and acquisition of resources that are strategically important for Japan” and when projects contribute to Japanese industries associated with the transport, energy, and telecommunications sectors. Both exclusions apply to 3SI focus areas.⁹² The addition of Ukraine projects to 3SIIF’s docket could also open the door to JICA official development assistance (ODA) for 3SIIF since Ukraine was considered a developing country before Russia’s invasion and will certainly be one postwar. JICA has provided ODA to international investment funds in the past,⁹³ and Japan announced a plan to open a JBIC office in Warsaw at the 2025 3SI summit.⁹⁴ Presumably, this office would take over some of the work currently done by the JBIC Paris office, which is responsible for EU countries. The move would allow a greater focus on CEE EU members. But the announcement did not include any specific funding commitments, leaving Tokyo’s options open.

Japan can also encourage its business sector to invest in projects in 3SI countries through JBIC. The bank can make capital contributions to Japanese companies with equity stakes in projects in the transport, energy, and telecommunications sectors in 3SI countries, providing financial incentive and backing, and mitigating risk.⁹⁵ JBIC loans for overseas investments are also available to smaller Japanese enterprises for projects in the three sectors.⁹⁶ Similar options are available to Japanese businesses through JICA for infrastructure projects in developing countries.⁹⁷ Another option for the government is to provide credit lines to Japanese businesses investing in 3SI projects through Nippon Export Investment Insurance (NEXI), a government-owned company that can cover the losses of Japanese businesses in foreign countries under certain circumstances.⁹⁸ Although Kyiv’s case is unique, the Ukraine reconstruction conference may serve as instructive for Japanese government offers to businesses to reduce their 3SI investment risk.⁹⁹ Examples of such offers include new NEXI credit lines, a convention eliminating the double taxation of Japanese companies in Ukraine, and the establishment by the Keidanren (Japanese business federation) of a committee on Ukraine.¹⁰⁰

A Path Forward on 3SI

The question Tokyo must answer for itself is whether its interests in the 3SI are strong enough and of sufficient priority relative to funding needs and investment opportunities in its near abroad to warrant financial outlay. Japan's 2024 decision to become a 3SI strategic partner and open a JBIC office in Warsaw suggests that they are. Significant changes have taken place on the global stage since that time, however, most notably in the United States, and an initial \$1 billion pledge has turned into just \$300 million in actual funds to the 3SIIF, the future of which remains unclear under the Trump administration.¹⁰¹ An examination of Japan's 3SI interests in light of these changes may be helpful in understanding how Tokyo must weigh its options.

China may have stepped away from the 3SI and financing for CEE, but it may still see an opportunity to fill the gap if US financial support for 3SIIF continues to underwhelm, and the fund continues to lack the resources for its priority projects. A Japanese investment in the 3SIIF could be seen as an endorsement of the fund from outside the region that helps spur additional private-sector investment or investment from new 3SI strategic partners Türkiye and Spain. The key question would be how much a Japanese investment in the 3SIIF, in the absence of strong US leadership, would keep China at bay and spur other investors.

Russia also continues to pose challenges for Japan's security, and these will become more acute if a deal pushed by US President Donald Trump to end the war results in the Kremlin's retention of any territory seized since 2022, given the precedent this would set. While the importance of NATO military mobility through improvements in transportation infrastructure in 3SI countries remains, any impact on the ability of the alliance to curb Russian adventurism would be counterbalanced by an acceptance of Moscow's use of force. In this regard, how much investment in the 3SI can serve Japan's security aims concerning Russia may need to be evaluated only after a deal to end the Ukraine war is reached.

In terms of Russian leverage from energy, further diversifying Japan's energy supplies certainly continues to be important. But there are ways to do that outside the 3SI framework and Europe as a whole. Japan's energy security strategy calls for increasingly moving away from LNG toward renewables. But where gas is concerned, new projects in North America could offer options that are much closer than any in Europe.¹⁰² Moreover, the Trump administration is calling on Japan to invest more in the United States, including in an expensive LNG pipeline for Alaska. If this occurs, it could lessen interest in 3SI energy investment.¹⁰³ On the other hand, Japanese investment in energy infrastructure would certainly help 3SI countries make good on the EU's determination to end Russian gas imports by 2027, a particularly useful effort if any Russian territorial gains in Ukraine lead it to further destabilize the region.¹⁰⁴

As for Ukraine, reconstruction may be closer now than last year if Trump's promise to bring the war to a close becomes reality. This may increase Japan's attraction to the 3SI given the inclusion of Ukrainian infrastructure projects on its priority list. Tokyo, however, can also invest in Ukraine reconstruction without the 3SI by using bilateral frameworks such as those agreed with Ukraine in 2024. One area in which working through the 3SI for Ukraine reconstruction makes sense is in infrastructure. Connecting Ukraine with 3SI countries would benefit all concerned. It would likely also be important for facilitating Ukraine's reconstruction by increasing its access to materials and equipment. Beyond this, it remains to be seen how important a conduit the 3SI and 3SIIF may become for the reconstruction effort. The 3SI certainly appears to want such a role for itself, as its 2025 summit declaration made clear.¹⁰⁵ Japan may want to

consider this as events unfold.

The information and considerations that go into determining Japan's foreign funding priorities are beyond the scope of this paper, and, as noted, it may yet benefit Japan to delay decisions about direct funding to the 3SIIF. The country has positioned itself well for supporting the 3SI financially when and if it sees fit. In the meantime, it may make sense to begin encouraging and facilitating Japanese businesses to invest in 3SI countries, at least in areas related to connectivity with Ukraine, using JBIC and NEXI resources. Beyond Ukraine-3SI connectivity, Japan can also consider where Japanese businesses have comparative advantages and good opportunities for return on investment in 3SI countries.

Another near-term and no-cost step that may be useful would be encouraging the Keidanren to establish a 3SI committee to explore opportunities. This, along with establishing the JBIC office in Warsaw and consulting with other 3SI strategic partners on next steps, would be an excellent blueprint for Japan's second year of engagement with the 3SI. Such a path would also boost the political and security arguments in favor of Japan's support for the 3SI while Tokyo more carefully navigates financial commitments and takes stock in this time of global change and uncertainty.

Forging a Strategic Nexus: Japan as 3SI's Strategic Partner

By Former Ambassador of Japan to Poland Akio Miyajima

Introduction

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI), launched in 2015 by Poland and Croatia, promotes enhanced North–South infrastructure connectivity among twelve post-communist Central and Eastern European (CEE) EU member states, plus Austria, situated between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas. Built around three pillars—energy, transport, and digital infrastructure—3SI aims to strengthen regional cohesion and transatlantic ties.

Over the past decade, 3SI has grown, both in participation and partnerships. The 2023 Bucharest Summit welcomed Greece as a participating state, and Ukraine and Moldova as associate states. At the 2024 Vilnius Summit, Japan joined as a strategic partner, along with the United States, Germany, and the EU. The 2025 Warsaw Summit saw Montenegro and Albania join as associated states and Türkiye and Spain join as strategic partners.

Japan's Path to the Three Seas Initiatives: A Strategic Evolution

Strategic responses to China's "16+1" and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Japan's Early Engagement

Japan's initial interest in 3SI stemmed from its broader concern about the expanding influence of China in Europe, particularly through the "16+1" cooperation framework and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These mechanisms, often characterized by opaque lending practices and geopolitical leverage, risk undermining EU cohesion and transparency standards in infrastructure development. Tokyo advanced and championed its own foreign policy initiative, the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy launched by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016, emphasizing democratic values, rule-based order, and market-driven development. China's growing presence in the region, particularly through its infrastructure investments and Greece's entry into "17+1" in 2019 raised concerns in both Tokyo and Brussels. The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which became effective in February 2019, marked a turning point. These agreements institutionalized cooperation and created a framework for strategic engagement in third countries, including those in CEE. In September that year, Japan and the EU signed the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, signaling Japan's readiness to collaborate with Europe.

In 2021, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi did active diplomatic outreach to the EU. His online participation in the EU Foreign Minister's meeting in January to make inputs to EU Indo-Pacific strategy formulation, and his trip to Poland in May for the seventh V4 +1 meeting (Visegrád Group—Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary—plus Japan), as well as another trip in July to Baltic states, all underscored shared, free, open, rule-based international order commitments, reflecting convergence with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision.

Against this background, Japan participated in the Sofia Summit in July 2021 as de facto observer. Vice Foreign Minister Takashi Uto delivered a video message.

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine in 2022: A Strategic Recalibration

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally altered Japan's strategic posture. Recognizing the conflict as a global challenge, Tokyo swiftly joined the international sanctions regime, and provided humanitarian and financial assistance to support Ukraine. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida warned at Shangri-la Dialogue June 2022, "Today's Ukraine may be tomorrow's East Asia."

Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi visited Poland and the border with Ukraine in early April 2022. Japan clearly recognized Poland's and other 3SI states' growing strategic role as NATO's eastern frontline and humanitarian corridor.

At the 3SI Riga Summit in June 2022 Foreign Minister Hayashi presented his video message to emphasize this point of indivisibility of security in Europe and East Asia while reaffirming Japan's commitment to strengthen cooperation for the resilience and prosperity of the region. In March 2023, Prime Minister Kishida visited Kyiv and Warsaw and in May hosted the G7 Hiroshima Summit meeting, inviting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. PM Kishida's message at the Bucharest Summit in September 2023 confirmed Japan's support of 3SI's efforts to realize a strong, prosperous, and cohesive Europe and reaffirmed Japan's continued support for assistance to Ukraine and neighboring states and a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

Poland's political shift in 2023 and Renewed Economic Potential

As a result of the October 2023 parliamentary election in Poland, a pro-EU coalition government under Prime Minister Tusk was formed that injected new dynamism into Poland's foreign and economic policy. Poland revived its access to the EU Recovery Fund, with an amount equal to Poland's annual national budget to be used to finance projects in transport, energy security, and energy transition. Japanese companies began reassessing their business opportunities in Poland and the CEE region because Poland accounts for approximately 40% of the 3SI region's GDP, and will continue to play a strategic role as logistical hub for future Ukrainian reconstruction efforts.

Japan Becomes a Strategic Partner in 2024 and the Keidanren mission to Poland

In January 2024 Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa visited Warsaw and met Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski in Warsaw to reconfirm the strategic partnership with Poland. Then, Japan elevated its status officially as strategic partner at the Vilnius Summit meeting in April 2024. Minister Kamikawa made a video message to confirm Japan's support of 3SI and express its hope to play active role in the region, including private-sector engagement for Ukraine reconstruction and economic prosperity.

Viewing this region as the last economic frontier on the European Continent, KEIDANREN, the biggest business association in Japan, dispatched to Poland their top-level mission headed by Chairman Toshiaki Higashihara of Hitachi and Chairman Makoto Takashima of SMBC Bank in October 2024 for the first time in 10 years.

The Tenth 3SI Summit in Warsaw

Despite domestic political tensions in Poland due to the presidential election season, the tenth Warsaw 3SI Summit meeting at the end of April this year successfully preserved momentum in the initiative's second decade. The summit welcomed two new associated states (Albania and Montenegro), and two new strategic partners (Türkiye and Spain), reinforcing 3SI's expanding geographic and political relevance.

Japan's continued engagement was reconfirmed by Prime Minister Ishida's message, delivered by Ambassador Kono, which voiced the indivisibility of Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security. Kono also announced the attendance of President Hayashi of JBIC (Japan Bank for International Cooperation) at the Business Forum. JBIC will soon open their Warsaw office, which can support 3SI projects and Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction.

However, important challenges remain.

The Ukraine Dilemma

Russia's invasion has underscored 3SI's importance in strategic resilience in development of dual-use infrastructure, military mobility, cybersecurity, and protection of critical infrastructure—as Polish President Andrzej Duda mentioned at the opening address of the Warsaw Summit. Yet, Russian aggression against Ukraine and Ukraine's integration remain politically contentious. Internal EU divisions—especially Hungary's dissociation in the Warsaw Declaration from the Ukraine agenda—pose risks to unity.

This poses two dilemmas for 3SI's future.

First, strategic unity vs. political divergence: Can 3SI remain united if Hungary persists in abstaining from Ukraine-related cooperation? Otherwise, the 3SI may need to re-configure its membership and scope of cooperation for future development.

Second, core infrastructure vs. regional recovery: Should 3SI focus narrowly on intraregional connectivity or expand toward postwar Ukraine? If the majority of attention, energy, and financial resources are absorbed in Ukraine-related issues and projects, it may lose sight of the original goals of North-South intraconnectivity and lose support from 3SI states geographically farther away from Ukraine's borders. Of course, huge Ukraine-EU recovery and reconstruction interconnecting projects will be beyond the capacity of 3SIF. Some may argue that improved connectivity within the 3SI region to make delivery to Ukraine quicker and smoother will fit the 3SI agenda to Ukraine than connectivity between Ukraine and bordering 3SI states.

The United States and China Factors

Continued US support is vital, but uncertainty under the Trump administration creates anxiety. President Duda must have strongly hoped that President Donald Trump would visit Warsaw again as he did at the last 2017 Warsaw Summit. In the end, Acting Assistant Secretary Wright of energy resources participated there. The 3SI may be able to remain as an important and unique regional forum where Europe, the United States, and Japan can work together for strategic

resilience and economic security.

However, the Trump 2.0 presidency clouds transatlantic confidence. Secretary Wright's remarks—supporting nuclear energy cooperation but criticizing the EU's Green Deal sharply as unrealistic—highlighted growing divergences.

Simultaneously, China's influence in the region has waned. Many 3SI countries have grown disillusioned with unfulfilled BRI promises and Beijing's support for Russia. Still, geopolitical vacuums do not last. China's attempts to reassert influence in the region could reemerge amid transatlantic rifts. Vigilance is required. A stronger partnership with Japan can provide a credible and stabilizing alternative.

Lack of Tangible Results and Confusion Between 3SI and 3SIIF

While the Warsaw declaration cited progress, there have been few visible outcomes. The 3SI Investment Fund (3SIIF) is only now starting to generate investments. Differentiating between the broader 3SI strategic vision and the narrower scope of 3SIIF is critical for managing expectations.

Many stakeholders conflate the 3SI with the 3SIIF. The former is a strategic political forum, the latter, a small commercial investment fund with limited reach.

While 3SIIF is beginning to yield results, it cannot finance the bulk of infrastructure or Ukraine recovery projects. Meanwhile, the broader strategic role of 3SI—convening dialogue and aligning priorities—remains essential.

Strengthening the 3SI and Strategic Partnership with Japan: Recommendations

Establish a Permanent Secretariat

The 3SI needs institutionalization. Its rotating presidency model means each summit depends on the host's political will. Except for exceptional figure like Beata Daszyńska-Muzycka, president and CEO of the Three Seas Business Council and former Polish BGK President, there is nobody who has institutional memory since its inception. The absence of a permanent secretary weakens policy continuity, limits institutional memory, and creates uncertainty for strategic partners. Awareness of 3SI remains low in Japan, the United States, and even parts of Europe. Despite web content and Davos outreach, the initiative lacks a coherent public communications strategy.

A permanent secretariat would ensure continuity, coordinate initiatives, support strategic partners, and drive a multi-year strategic plan. It could also spearhead public diplomacy, enhancing 3SI's visibility in Europe, the United States, and Asia.

A 3SI secretariat may well be set up in Poland with the full cooperation and support from 3SI participating states and strategic partners.

Clarify the Role of Strategic Partners

Currently, there is little clarity on the expectations of strategic partners. Japan's strategic partner status currently lacks clear substance. The 3SI should define roles and set up regular consultation mechanisms. Appointing 3SI ambassadors from partner countries and forming a structured dialogue framework would enhance alignment and effectiveness, ensuring two-way engagement and better coordination.

Conclusion: A Strategic Partnership for our Connected Future

The 3SI region is the last economic frontier in Europe. The geopolitical and economic gravity of Europe is shifting eastward.

The 10th 3SI Summit in Warsaw marks a turning point. Japan has now reached the starting line as a strategic partner. It will be appropriate to assess what has been done, examine the way forward, and make a fresh start. I count on leadership by Poland and Croatia, original co-founders of the initiative, in this respect.

The 3SI, still young but ambitious, must evolve into a mature platform with institutional depth, strategic clarity, and a clear value proposition for partners such as Japan.

The 3SI provides a valuable and unique regional platform for collaboration among Europe, the United States, and Japan to build a resilient, rules-based infrastructure corridor—from the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas to the Pacific. The path forward demands institutional commitment, political will, and mutual trust.

Now is the time to move from strategic intent to concrete actions.

Appendix: Examples of Japan's world-class technological expertise that could contribute to 3SI Connectivity:

- o energy transition: nuclear including SMR (Small Module Reactor) and HTGR (High Temperature Gas-Cooled Reactor), hydrogen, offshore wind, CCUS (Carbon dioxide Capture, Utilization and Storage), clean coal technology, grid modernization, LNG FSRU (Floating Storage and Regasification Unit)
- o transport and smart mobility: High-speed railways, rail modernization, signaling systems, logistics optimization, smart mobility, and smart city designs and solutions
- o digital infrastructure and AI: IT infrastructure, cyber resilience, robotics, and gaming
- o disaster risk management: Earthquake and flood mitigation technologies

Endnotes

- 1 ["The Joint Statement On The Three Seas Initiative \(The Dubrovnik Statement\),"](#) 3SI Summit Dubrovnik, August 25, 2016.
- 2 ["Joint Declaration of the Third Summit of the Three Seas Initiative,"](#) 3SI Summit Bucharest, September 17–18, 2018.
- 3 ["The Second Summit Of The 3 Seas Initiative. Joint Declaration,"](#) 3SI Summit Warsaw, July 6, 2017.
- 4 ["Joint Declaration of the Ninth Summit of the Three Seas Initiative,"](#) 3SI Summit Vilnius, April 11, 2024.
- 5 ["Joint Declaration of the 10th Summit of the Three Seas Initiative,"](#) 3SI Summit Warsaw, April 28, 2025
- 6 Jędrzej Błaszczak, ["The Three Seas Initiative: Poland at the Heart of a Central Europe,"](#) Institute of New Europe, March 11, 2025; Piotr Lewandowski, ["Soft power Rzeczypospolitej w Inicjatywie Trójmorza"](#) [Poland's Soft Power in the Three Seas Initiative], *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, Vol. 73, No. 2, 2020, 125–150; Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek, ["Inicjatywa Trójmorza w świetle teorii realizmu"](#) [The Three Seas Initiative in the light of the theory of realism], *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 2019, 131–155.
- 7 Władysław Bartoszewski, ["Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych na temat aktualnego stanu współpracy w ramach Inicjatywy Trójmorza"](#) [Information from the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the current state of cooperation in the framework of the Tree Seas Initiative], Foreign Affairs Committee, Sejm [Poland's Lower House], October 10, 2024.
- 8 ["Statement by Hungary on the Joint Declaration of the 10th Summit of the Three Seas Initiative,"](#) 3SI Summit Warsaw, April 29, 2025.
- 9 Błaszczak, ["The Three Seas Initiative..."](#); Lewandowski, ["Soft power Rzeczypospolitej..."](#); Orzelska-Stączek, ["Inicjatywa Trójmorza w świetle teorii realizmu,"](#) pp. 145–146; Bartoszewski, ["Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych..."](#)
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 ["Three Seas Story,"](#) 3SI website.
- 12 ["Perspectives for infrastructural investments in the Three Seas region,"](#) SpoDdata, 2019, pp. 2, 7.
- 13 Ibid., p. 13.
- 14 ["Regional Economic Outlook, Europe,"](#) International Monetary Fund, October 2024, p. 5.
- 15 ["Regional Potential,"](#) The Three Seas Initiative Fund.
- 16 ["Perspectives for infrastructural investments in the Three Seas region,"](#) p. 10.
- 17 Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek and Paweł Ukielski, [Inicjatywa Trójmorza z perspektywy jej uczestników](#) [The Trilateral Initiative from the perspective of its participants], Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa, 2020, pp. 80–85.
- 18 Marek Górka, ["The Three Seas Initiative as a Political Challenge for the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe"](#), *Politics in Central Europe*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 68–70.
- 19 Interview by the Author with a high-ranking official at Tree Seas Secretariat the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, March 26, 2025.
- 20 ["The first Three Seas foreign ministers meeting was an important step for advancing the initiative,"](#) The 3SI website, June 2020.
- 21 ["Three Seas Initiative 2nd Parliamentary Forum, Recommendation,"](#) The Three Seas Summit and Business Forum, Riga, June 20–21, 2022.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 ["Joint Statement,"](#) Three Seas Virtual Summit, Tallin, Estonia, October 19, 2020.
- 24 ["Joint Declaration of the Third Summit of the Three Seas Initiative".](#)
- 25 Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek, ["Fundusz Inwestycyjny Trójmorza: Geneza i etapy rozwoju](#) [The Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund: Origins and Stages of Development], *Studia Polityczne*, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 140.
- 26 Ibid., p. 146.
- 27 Ibid., p. 133.
- 28 ["Projects,"](#) The 3SI official website.
- 29 Interview by the Author with a high-ranking official at Tree Seas Secretariat the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, March 26, 2025.

- 30 "Central and Eastern Europe's growth-stage companies get boost as Polish and Czech promotional institutions become first contributors to EIF-led Three Seas Initiative Innovation Fund," European Investment Fund, October 30, 2024.
- 31 "3Seas Local Government Congress and Economic Forum," official website, March 2025.
- 32 "About Network," The Network of 3Seas Regions, official website.
- 33 "Agreement on The Economic Network of The Three Seas Regions," Network of 3Seas Regions, May 17, 2023.
- 34 "Network of the Three Seas Regions," official website.
- 35 Regions of the Three Seas Initiative," The Institute of Central Europe, 2022.
- 36 Network of the Three Seas Regions."
- 37 "Upcoming Conference: "The Three Seas Initiative: The Economic Dimension of Intra-EU Cooperation," April 2025.
- 38 "Speech by the Ambassador of Romania to Poland, Theodor Cosmin Onisii, at the scientific seminar "Presidential summits and the role of the host states: lessons from the Three Seas Initiative," 3SI Research Center, March 2023.
- 39 "Upcoming Conference: "The Three Seas Initiative: The Economic Dimension of Intra-EU Cooperation."
- 40 "Three Seas," The Opportunity-Institute for Foreign Affairs, 2025.
- 41 "Three Seas University Network," The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, official website.
- 42 "Powstała Sieć Uniwersytetów Trójmorza" [Three Seas University Network has been established], Forum Akademickie, May 17, 2023.
- 43 Antonia-Laura Pup, "10 Years of the Three Seas Initiative. What's Next?," Casimir Pulaski Foundation, October 21, 2024, p. 16.
- 44 Emma Nix and Ian Brzezinski, "The Three Seas Initiative stands at an inflection point," The Atlantic Council, March 14, 2025.
- 45 "Priority Projects," Tree Seas Summit, April 2025.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Video message by Vice Foreign Minister Uto on the occasion of the 3SI summit, July 9, 2021. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/c_see/page4_005362_00001.html
- 49 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Three Seas Summit 2025. Message by Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru, April, 30, 2025. https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/pageite_000001_00948.html
- 50 Silwia Matusiak and Takashi Masuyama, The Three Seas Initiative: Potential Areas of Cooperation with Japan, Bulletin of the Department of Economics and Management, Josai University, 40(45), 2020. https://libir.josai.ac.jp/il/user_contents/02/G0000284repository/pdf/JOS-03866947-4003.pdf
- 51 For example, in view of the need for at least €500 billion to enhance competitiveness in the region, the 3SI was expecting investments both from institutional and individual investors from Japan. Wojciech Watly, Chū-Tō shokoku de kōsei sareru sankaiyō inishiatibu: Nihon no tōshi e no kitai (The Three Seas Initiative involving countries in Central and Eastern Europe: Expectations for Japanese investments), Japan Institute for Overseas Investment, November 2020. https://www.joi.or.jp/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Mag_202011_11_mfaPOL.pdf
- 52 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, New Plan for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", November 28, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/pc/page3e_001336.html
- 53 Fumio Kishida, The future of the Indo-Pacific, Japan's new plan for a "free and open Indo-Pacific", together with India, as an indispensable partner, March 20, 2023. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100477791.pdf>
- 54 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, New FOIP
- 55 Pawel Czyzak et al., Electrifying the Three Seas: Accelerating renewables and connectivity across 3SI countries, April 24, 2024. <https://ember-energy.org/app/uploads/2024/10/Electrifying-the-Three-Seas.pdf>
- 56 Interview with expert, 6.5.2025.
- 57 Interview with expert 6.5.2025
- 58 Examples of successfully co-funded projects are scarce. Japan has been involved in a few plurilateral platforms between developed countries and emerging economies to facilitate climate finance, such as the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs). Japan has also been involved, together with the US, in the Palau Cable 2 project, constructing a spur submarine cable and linking it to the Echo subsea

cable system between the US and Singapore. The project is driven forward by Australia, with financial contributions by Japan and the US.

59 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Kaihatsu kyōryoku hakusho 2024 (White Paper on Development Cooperation 2024), March 2025, p. 123.

https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/press/shiryō/pagew_000001_00300.html

60 The Opportunity Institute for Foreign Affairs, Three Seas Initiative at a Crossroads. Geopolitics, Infrastructure, and a Defining Moment, April 27, 2025, p. 12.

https://www.3s1o.org/images/raport-2025/3s1o_report_threeseasinitiative.pdf

61 Japan Bank for International Cooperation, JBIC Today, Central and Eastern Europe Today, November 2023. https://www.jbic.go.jp/en/information/today/today_202310/image/jtd_202311.pdf

62 Japan Bank for International Cooperation, JBIC Today, 2023 Amendment to the JBIC Act. JBIC is Pushing Forward for the Future of Japan and the World, Special Issue 2023.

https://www.jbic.go.jp/en/information/today/today_2023sp/image/jtd_2023sp.pdf

63 Yuichi Yoshida, The Three Seas Initiative 2023 Summit: Evaluation and Prospects, Japan Institute of International Affairs, Strategic Comments (2023-09), September 2023.

https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic_comment/2023/09/2023-09.html

64 U.S. Department of Energy, “Energy Secretary Chris Wright Delivers Keynote Remarks at the Three Seas Business Forum in Warsaw, Poland”, April 28, 2025. <https://www.energy.gov/articles/energy-secretary-chris-wright-delivers-keynote-remarks-three-seas-business-forum-warsaw>

65 Donald J. Trump, “Remarks at the Three Seas Initiative Summit in Warsaw, Poland, July 6, 2017”, Government Publishing Office, July 6, 2017. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-201700452/pdf/DCPD-201700452.pdf>

66 Ibid.

67 Polskie Radio, “Polish president meets with world leaders in Tokyo”, July 25, 2021. <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7785/artykul/2778445,polish-president-meets-with-world-leaders-in-tokyo>

68 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Joint Statement between Japan and Poland ‘Building Framework for Strategic Partnership for Freedom, Growth and Solidarity’”, February 27, 2015. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000069329.pdf>

69 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Video Message from Ms. Kamikawa Yoko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Three Seas Summit 2024, Vilnius, Lithuania”. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100652872.pdf>

70 Ibid.

71 See, for example: Hirotaka Kuriyama and Yomiuri Shimbun, “Kishida Boosts European Awareness of Asia Through Talks, But Domestic Issues Still Threaten His Administration”, July 15, 2024. <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/politics-government/20240715-198678/>

72 National Security Strategy of Japan, December 2022. <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryō/221216anzenhoshō/nss-e.pdf>

73 Anil Ari, et al., “Infrastructure in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe Benchmarking, Macroeconomic Impact, and Policy Issues”, International Monetary Fund, September 28, 2020. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Departmental-Papers-Policy-Papers/Issues/2020/09/25/Infrastructure-in-Central-Eastern-and-Southeastern-Europe-Benchmarking-Macroeconomic-Impact-49580>; The Three Seas Summit Warsaw 2025. <https://3seas.eu/>

74 Beatrice Vannicola and Emma Wulten, “Trade of Goods and Services Between the EU Member States and Japan 2023”, EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation, April 2024. <https://cdnw8.eu-japan.eu/sites/default/files/eubij/2024-04-EU-JP-Trade-Report-2023.pdf>

75 Currently 14+1. Austria has been only an observer, not a member, of the n+1 formats with China. See: Stuart Lau, “Down to 14 + 1: Estonia and Latvia quit China’s club in Eastern Europe”, Politico, August 11, 2022. <https://www.politico.eu/article/down-to-14-1-estonia-and-latvia-quit-chinas-club-in-eastern-europe/>; Gisela Grieger, “China, the 16+1 format and the EU”, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2018. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625173/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)625173_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625173/EPRS_BRI(2018)625173_EN.pdf)

76 See, for example: Julianne Smith and Torrey Taussig, “The Old World and the Middle Kingdom: Europe Wakes Up to China’s Rise”, Foreign Affairs, 98(5), August 12, 2019. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-08-12/old-world-and-middle-kingdom>

- 77 Joseph Bebel, "Three Seas Initiative' for Eastern Europe 8/2", The European Institute at the University of Maryland, July 2017. <https://europeaninstitute.org/index.php/archive/208-blog/305-july-2017/2233-three-seas-initiative-for-eastern-europe-8-2>; Sylwia Matusiak and Takashi Masuyama, "The Three Seas Initiative: Potential Areas of Cooperation with Japan", Josai University. https://libir.josai.ac.jp/il/user_contents/02/G0000284repository/pdf/JOS-03866947-4003.pdf
- 78 Matusiak and Masuyama, The Three Seas Initiative; Ivana Karaskova, "How China Lost Central and Eastern Europe", Mercator Institute for China Studies, April 22, 2022. <https://merics.org/en/comment/how-china-lost-central-and-eastern-europe>; Lau, "Down to 14+1".
- 79 Gisela Grieger, "Foreign Direct Investment Screening: a Debate in Light of China-EU FDI Flows", European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2017. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/603941/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)603941_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/603941/EPRS_BRI(2017)603941_EN.pdf); Agatha Kratz, et al., "Dwindling Investments Become More Concentrated: Chinese FDI in Europe - 2023 Update", Rhodium Group and Mercator Institute for China Studies, June 2024. <https://rhg.com/research/chinese-fdi-in-europe-2023-update/>
- 80 See, for example: Emma Nix and Ian Brzezinski, "The Three Seas Initiative Stands at an Inflection Point", Atlantic Council, March 14, 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-three-seas-initiative-stands-at-an-inflection-point/>
- 81 Yuichi Yoshida, "The Three Seas Initiative 2023 Summit: Evaluation and Prospects", Japan Institute of International Affairs, September 14, 2023. https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/strategic_comment/2023/09/2023-09.html; Nix and Brzezinski, "The Three Seas Initiative Stands at an Inflection Point".
- 82 See, for example: Veronika Slakaityte and Izabela Surwillo, "Energy as a Weapon: Decoding Blackmail Tactics in Europe", Danish Institute for International Studies, January 9, 2024. <https://www.dii.dk/en/research/energy-as-a-weapon-decoding-blackmail-tactics-in-europe>
- 83 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance", updated March 6, 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm#:~:text=At%20the%20extraordinary%20NATO%20Summit,of%20troops%20on%20the%20ground
- 84 Petras Katinas, "June 2024—Monthly analysis of Russian fossil fuel exports and sanctions", Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, July 12, 2024. <https://energyandcleanair.org/june-2024-monthly-analysis-of-russian-fossil-fuel-exports-and-sanctions/>
- 85 National Security Strategy of Japan, December 2022. <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>
- 86 Business Wire, "Japan Hosted a Conference to Boost Ukraine's Economic Growth and Recovery", February 29, 2024. <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20240229458562/en/Japan-Hosted-a-Conference-to-Boost-Ukraines-Economic-Growth-and-Recovery>
- 87 Three Seas Summit, Bucharest Summit 2023. <https://3seas.eu/about/past-summits/bucharest-summit-2023>; Vilnius Summit 2024. <https://3seas.eu/about/past-summits/vilnius-summit-2024>
- 88 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Video Message by Ms. KAMIKAWA Yoko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Three Seas Summit, 2024, Vilnius, Lithuania", April 11, 2024. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100652872.pdf>
- 89 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Three Seas Summit 2025 Message by Japanese Prime Minister ISHIBA Shigeru", April 29, 2025. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100838180.pdf>
- 90 See, for example: Nix and Brzezinski, "The Three Seas Initiative Stands at an Inflection Point"; Yoshida, "The Three Seas Initiative 2023 Summit".
- 91 Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Equity Investment. <https://www.jbic.go.jp/en/support-menu/capital.html>; Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Overseas Investment Loans. <https://www.jbic.go.jp/en/support-menu/investment.html>
- 92 Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Equity Investment. <https://www.jbic.go.jp/en/support-menu/capital.html>; Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Overseas Investment Loans. <https://www.jbic.go.jp/en/support-menu/investment.html>
- 93 Such as the Asian Development Bank's Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund for infrastructure in Asia. See: Asian Development Bank, Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund. <https://www.adb.org/what-we-do/funds/leap>
- 94 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Three Seas Summit 2025 Message by Japanese Prime Minister ISHIBA Shigeru".
- 95 Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Equity Investment.
- 96 Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Overseas Investment Loans.
- 97 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "White Paper on Development Cooperation 2020: Japan's International Cooperation". <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2020/html/honbun/b4/s1.1.html>
- 98 Prime Minister's Office of Japan, "Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction", February 19,

2024. https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/actions/202402/19ukraine_kaigi.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Nippon Export Investment Insurance (NEXI)". <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100544873.pdf>

99 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Joint Communiqué on Deepening of the Japanese-Ukrainian Cooperation for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction of Ukraine", February 19, 2024. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100622718.pdf>

100 Business Wire, "Japan Hosted a Conference to Boost Ukraine's Economic Growth and Recovery"; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Joint Communiqué on Deepening of the Japanese-Ukrainian Cooperation for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction of Ukraine."

101 Sarah Garding and Derek Mix, "The Three Seas Initiative", Congressional Research Service, March 19, 2025. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11547>; see also: Three Seas Summit, "\$300 million for the Three Seas Fund by DFC". <https://3seas.eu/media/news/usd300-million-for-the-three-seas-fund-by-dfc>

102 Katya Golubkova and Yuka Obayashi, "Rival LNG supplies, Sakhalin's depleting fields give Japan an exit from Russian gas", Reuters, December 10, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/rival-lng-supplies-sakhalins-depleting-fields-give-japan-an-exit-russian-gas-2024-12-11/>

103 Spencer Kimball, "Trump tariffs push Asian trade partners to weigh investing in massive Alaska energy project", CNBC, April 20, 2025. <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/04/20/trump-tariffs-push-asian-partners-to-weigh-investing-in-alaska-lng-project.html>; Ben Lefebvre and Zack Colman, "Alaska agency pitches strong-arming Japan to finance LNG project", E&E News by Politico, March 12, 2025. <https://www.eenews.net/articles/alaska-agency-pitches-strong-arming-japan-to-finance-lng-project/>

104 Anna Lamche, "EU plans to end Russian gas imports by end of 2027", BBC News, May 6, 2025. <http://bbc.com/news/articles/c04547pr9vqo>

105 The declaration states: "We also underscore the supporting role the 3SI may have in the reconstruction process of Ukraine." See: Three Seas Initiative, "Joint Declaration of the 10th Summit of the Three Seas Initiative", April 29, 2025. https://media.voog.com/0000/0046/4166/files/Joint%20Declaration_2025.pdf

Disclaimer

The views expressed in GMF publications and commentary are the views of the authors alone.

About the Authors

Dr. Sayuri Romei is a Washington, DC-based senior fellow in GMF's Indo-Pacific program. She leads work on Japan and heads the Japan Trilateral Forum. Her research focuses on US-Japan relations and security issues in the Indo-Pacific.

Romei was previously an associate director of programs at the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, where she was responsible for the Next Generation of US-Japan Nuclear Experts program and the Mansfield Forum on Energy and Climate Change, among other initiatives.

Dr. Beata Bochorodycz is the director of the Institute of Oriental Studies and the Head of the Japanese Studies Department of Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU) in Poznan, Poland.

She has been a visiting researcher at Yokohama National University, Sigur Center for Asian Studies at George Washington University in Washington D.C., School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, and National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) and Sophia University in Tokyo.

Dr. Bart Gaens works as Senior Research Fellow at the Global Security and Governance Research Program at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) in Helsinki, Finland. He is also Japan Chair at the International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS)

in Tallinn, Estonia, and holds the title of Docent at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki.

Mr. Anthony B. Kim is the Jay Kingham Research Fellow in International Economic Affairs, Editor of the Index of Economic Freedom, and Manager of Global Engagement, Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom. Previously, Kim had served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Dr. Edwin J. Feulner, founder of the Heritage Foundation.

Focusing on policies related to economic freedom, entrepreneurship, and investment in various countries around the world, Kim researches international economic issues. As an editor, Kim also manages the production of The Heritage Foundation's annual Index of Economic Freedom.

Mirna Galic is an American foreign policy and national security analyst who most recently served as Senior Expert on East Asia at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Her areas of expertise include relations between U.S. partners in Asia and Europe and how such relations enable these partners to address regional and international security issues. Prior to joining USIP, Galic lived and worked in Tokyo as a Council on Foreign Relations-Hitachi International Affairs fellow at the **Japan Institute of International Affairs**.

Akio Miyajima is Japanese diplomat with a distinguished career spanning four decades. He was the Japanese ambassador to Poland from November 2020 to October 2024 and the Japanese ambassador to Turkey from August 2017 to October 2020. Ambassador Miyajima joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in 1981. Prior to being appointed ambassador, he served in several prominent positions

Ankara • Belgrade • Berlin • Brussels • Bucharest

Paris • Warsaw • Washington, DC

both at home and abroad, including at key postings in London, Seoul, and at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations in New York. Apart from his work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Miyajima also assumed the position of Director-General at the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, Cabinet Office from 2016 to 2017.

About GMF

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is a nonpartisan policy organization committed to the idea that the United States and Europe are stronger together. GMF champions the principles of democracy, human rights, and international cooperation that have served as the bedrock of peace and prosperity since the end of World War II, but are under increasing strain. GMF works on issues critical to transatlantic interests in the 21st century, including the future of democracy, security and defense, geopolitics and the rise of China, and technology and innovation. By drawing on and fostering a community of people with diverse life experiences and political perspectives, GMF pursues its mission by driving the policy debate through cutting-edge analysis and convening, fortifying civil society, and cultivating the next generation of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a tribute to the Marshall Plan, GMF is headquartered in Washington, DC, with offices in Berlin, Brussels, Ankara, Belgrade, Bucharest, Paris, and Warsaw.

Ankara • Belgrade • Berlin • Brussels • Bucharest

Paris • Warsaw • Washington, DC

gmfus.org