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### The Three Seas Initiative, a New Project at the Heart of European and Global Geopolitical Rivalries

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# The Three Seas Initiative, a New Project at the Heart of European and Global Geopolitical Rivalries

**Summary:** The objective of this paper is to show the geopolitical dimension of the TSI from a French point of view. The author presents the TSI implementation process, characterises Poland's rivalry with Germany and Russia in a historical context, emphasizes the important role of Germany in the entire project, and reviews Russia's attitude towards the region. The article includes numerous maps made by the author.

**Keywords:** TSI, geopolitics, infrastructure

## Introduction

The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) brings together 12 Central and Eastern European countries located between the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Adriatic Sea. Along with the 12 initial participants – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – 15 other participant-countries chose to join specific projects, notably Ukraine. The aim of the initiative is to strengthen connectivity within this geographical

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area through the development of roads, railways, and inland waterways, energy infrastructure such as gas and electricity networks, and digital infrastructure.

The stated overall objectives emphasize strengthening of economic development, cohesion within the European Union (EU) and transatlantic links<sup>1</sup>. The central idea is to develop infrastructure for energy and transport along the main north-south axis because the current infrastructure is oriented in an east-west direction. The inherited infrastructure, built during Cold War times, are perceived as factors of geopolitical dependence on Russia, the main energy provider in the area, and reinforcement of Germany's economic dominance since the EU enlargement to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The participants met for the first time in New York on 29 September 2015<sup>2</sup>. The TSI was inaugurated in 2016 jointly by Poland and Croatia. Formalised at the first summit in Dubrovnik on 25-26 August 2016, a second summit was held in Warsaw on 6-7 July 2017. This project began to attract attention from other members of the EU mainly because of the presence at the summit of U.S. President Donald Trump. The next summit was held in Bucharest in 2018, with the presence and support of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. The most recent summit took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 16-17 June 2019, where a provisional assessment of the project was drawn up<sup>3</sup>.

Although the project has been promoted in political communication, primarily to strengthen the economic development of the region

- 1 'The overarching pillars of the Three Seas Initiative are threefold – economic development, European cohesion and transatlantic ties. The changing nature of the global environment calls for their strengthening in order to be able to face new challenges and overcome dynamic threats. Firstly, the Initiative seeks to contribute to the economic development of Central and Eastern Europe through infrastructure connectivity, mainly, but not only on the north-south axis, in three main fields – transport, energy and digital. The second objective is to increase real convergence among EU member states, thereby contributing to enhanced unity and cohesion within the EU. This allows avoiding artificial east-west divides and further stimulate EU integration. Thirdly, the Initiative is intended to contribute to the strengthening of transatlantic ties. The U.S. economic presence in the region provides a catalyst for an enhanced transatlantic partnership,' TSI Ljubljana Summit, <https://www.three.si/2019-summit> [2019-10-01].
- 2 MFA of Poland, 'Three Seas Initiative summit in Ljubljana', *News*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/three-seas-initiative-summit-in-ljubljana> [2019-10-01].
- 3 TSI, 'Priority Interconnection Projects 2019 Status Report', <https://www.three.si/progress-report> [2019-10-01].

and European integration<sup>4</sup>, it is at the heart of rival geopolitical strategies between regional and global players that collide in Central and Eastern Europe. The project has an explicit economic dimension, but security and defence objectives are more implicit. Priorities vary according to the states participating in the project and those who support them.

To highlight the geopolitical issues of this project, it is necessary to understand it in the global context as well as the competing or converging geopolitical visions on the territory covered by the initiative.

## 1. The degree of progress of the project

On the occasion of the last TSI summit, a report on various projects according to the different components, energy, transport and digital connection, as well as their state of progress was published.

The projects were grouped into the following four categories along with a percentage measure of progress:

- Registered, 48%
- Activity Reported, 28%
- Substantial Progress, 15%
- Completed, 3%

The TSI project is still largely in the phase of project registration and early implementation for some participants. The project as a whole is, therefore, still in the preliminary stage. (Figure 1 illustrates the main projects in energy, road, and rail infrastructure<sup>5</sup>).

The European Commission (EC) has been officially supporting the project since the Bucharest Summit. The Commission has emphasized its objectives in very neutral terms as improving the connectivity of the region but also with the rest of the European Union. The EC identified the projects that will receive funding. The total amount

4 M.J. Zieliński, 'Antirusso perché filoeuropeo: il Trimarium seconda Varsavia', *Limes*, no. 12, 2017, <http://www.limesonline.com/cartaceo/antirusso-perche-filoeuropeo-il-trimarium-secondo-varsavie> [2019-10-01].

5 A detailed description of the projects is published on the website: <https://www.three.si/>.

now foreseen is more than €155 billion from the Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund<sup>6</sup>.

Beyond the figures and ambitions displayed, let us examine the explicit and implicit geopolitical issues that are associated with the project.

The current geopolitical context is characterised by the emergence of a multicentric world, and Europe is no exception to that evolution. In this configuration, each nation, state, or alliance seeks to position itself in the middle of a geopolitically structured configuration to enhance its security and economic development. Human communities are territorial, and every nation or alliance is linked to territory. As Raymond Aron has pointed out, 'Every international order, up to the present day, has been essentially a territorial order'<sup>7</sup>.

Geopolitics is the study of rivalries of power on territory<sup>8</sup>. Territorial control is a factor of power. A geopolitical strategy is a manoeuvre anticipating the space-time of rival states (but also allies). It anticipates political projection on territory in order to modify the balance of power and to facilitate the emergence of a new geopolitical configuration. This manoeuvre is built into the rivalry with other states as a reaction to the projects of competitors or in anticipation of them. Any strategy is a dialectic between two or more actors trying to position themselves one step ahead of the other<sup>9</sup>. Geopolitical strategies are, therefore, the result of dialectical manoeuvres because the positioning of one state will provoke the positioning of its rival, each seeking to anticipate the movement of the opponent in space and time.

Geopolitical projects are also often inherited from historical or ideological representations on the territory. The geopolitical visions, projects, and strategies of nations are often a mixture of reality (such as geographical position) and more subjective perceptions (such as

6 Total funding of more than €155 billion from the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund: to boost connectivity within the region, in particular on energy, transport infrastructure, and digital communication; to stimulate economic development, contributing to East–West and North–South cohesion within the European Union; to facilitate achieving real convergence among EU Member States and strengthening the EU as a whole.

7 A. Raymond, *Paix et Guerre entre les Nations*, Calman-Levy, 1962.

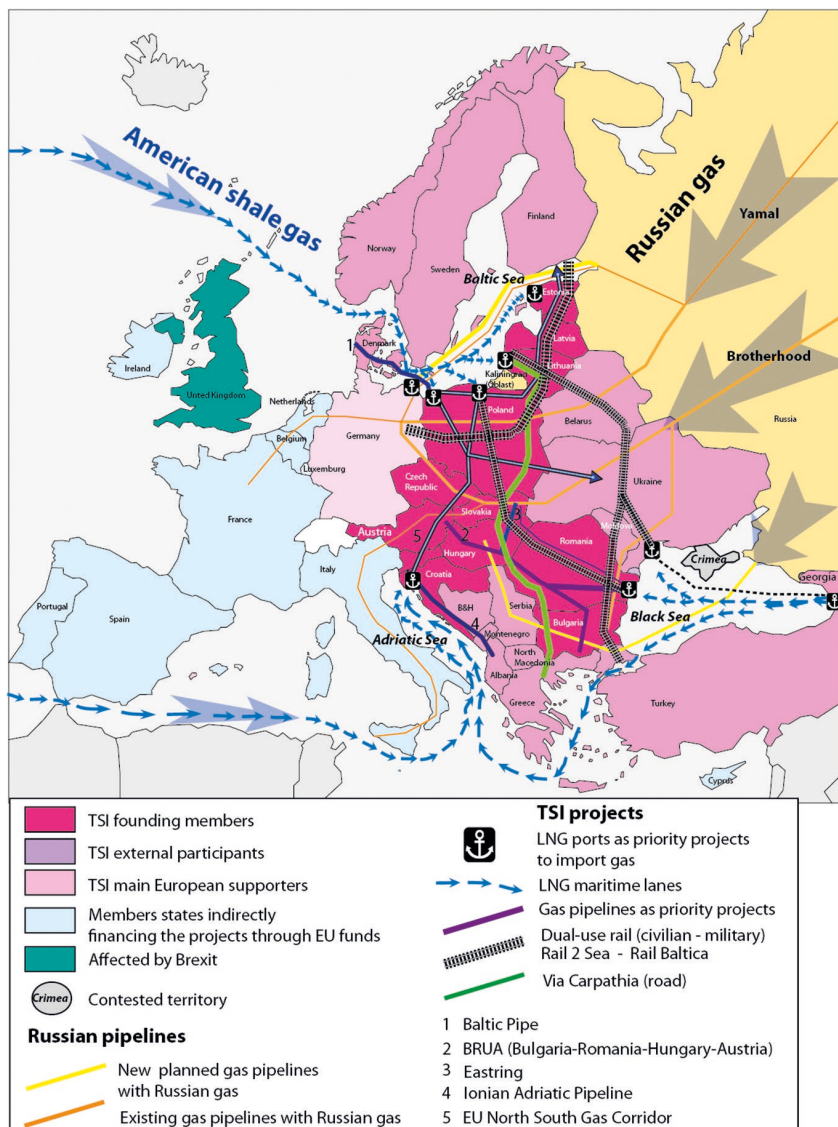
8 Y. Lacoste, *Géopolitique, la longue histoire d'aujourd'hui*, Larousse, 2009.

9 C. von Clausewitz, *De la Guerre*, Editions Payot et rivages, 2006.

Figure 1: TSI: main infrastructure projects

## Three Seas Initiative (TSI): main infrastructure projects (Energy - Rail - Road)

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the perception of one's own geographical space and interpretation of history). These antagonistic or complementary geopolitical projects compete and overlap territory.

The 'geopolitical representations' of actors are an integrated part of the analysis. These representations can be put on a map and they participate in the strategies of actors facing a crisis or those willing to reach an objective, as an implicit or explicit model of reference. The TSI project, the German 'New European Ostpolitik', the American concept of an 'Eastern Frontier'<sup>10</sup> to contain Russia or the 'Indo-Pacific strategy' against China, the Russian project of a 'Greater Eurasia', or the French 'Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok' are all representations forming the basis of geopolitical visions and strategy. These geopolitical visions also must be confronted with reality in order to evaluate their feasibility. Obstacles also must be highlighted before a geopolitical strategy is considered a necessary scenario and adaptations of plans can be proposed.

The use of geopolitical and thematic maps to understand a situation or crisis is also included: cartography is a central tool for analysis, as not only can factors determining a situation be spatially represented on a map but also the territorial strategies of the actors.

Regarding the TSI, let us examine geopolitical projects that are antagonistic or complementary to the main actors who overlap the same territory and, therefore, come into the rivalry.

## 2. The geopolitical origins of the project

The origins of the TSI are to be found in the Polish geopolitical representations that emerged in the 1920s after the First World War, specifically, Josef Pilsudski's *Intermarium* (Latin for the Polish *Międzymorze*). The ideas of this old project have resurfaced in the current geopolitical configuration.

10 U.S. Embassy in Estonia, 'Anchoring the Western Alliance, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Mitchell's Heritage Speech', *News & Events*, 7 June 2018, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/a-s-mitchells-speech/> [2019-20-11].

The central issue of the project is the geopolitical positioning of Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries, whose territory is squeezed between the major powers, especially Germany and Russia. If one looks at the Polish motivations stemming from their own geopolitical and historical representations, this strategic vision originates in the historical trauma of Poland after the five partitions of its territory over 200 years.

As Poland had been dismembered several times in its history for the benefit of the German and Russian empires, Pilsudski sought in the 1920s to preserve Central and Eastern Europe from the geopolitical expansion of its neighbours. His idea was to create a third way under the model of a federation of states between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic seas – the *Intermarium* – to protect itself from the USSR and the German Empire.

This project was abandoned on the eve of the Second World War. We can find parentage of these ideas within the Polish diaspora in the U.S., mixed with American strategists. This has resulted in the preservation of a strong synergy between U.S. and Polish geopolitical visions, from the Cold War until today<sup>11</sup>.

Pilsudski's project focused on geostrategic issues as part of security policy to ensure Poland's survival. Today, the project is promoted according to geoeconomic arguments, such as the need to reduce dependence on Russian gas and reduce German economic and political hegemony in the EU. However, the geostrategic stakes are very real and remain more implicit.

Since the return of the rivalry between European and other world powers – Russia, the U.S., China, and the EU – the historical geopolitical dilemma of Central Europe and its security is regaining centre stage. Central and Eastern European countries and NATO are considered new geopolitical pivots. Although the international configuration is different, the geography and geopolitical similarities remain, as well as historical representations by inertia.

11 M. Laruelle, E. Riviera, 'Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe: The Concept of Intermarium', *IERES Occasional Papers*, March 2019, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle-riviera-ieres\\_papers\\_march\\_2019\\_1.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle-riviera-ieres_papers_march_2019_1.pdf) [2019-10-01].



### 3. Poland and its historical rivalry with Russia and Germany

Poland's geopolitical priorities derive from its perception of security and the associated historical representations that have persisted through successive governments. The geopolitical configuration is, however, different today since Poland and Germany, both members of the Atlantic Alliance, are now allies. There is no desire to build a Central European entity independent of the EU and NATO<sup>12</sup>. The initial geopolitical representations of the *Intermarium* in Poland were aimed at promoting a third way between the Russian and German empires. Mistrust of Russia, however, became a new reality with the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 and pushed Polish politicians to consolidate the security of their country. The Franco-German tandem is not considered as reliable because it is viewed as too accommodating towards Russia, and the EU too divided to assert itself.

The Poles' first objective is to contain Russia, perceived as the main threat with its divide-and-rule policy toward Central European countries<sup>13</sup>. The second objective is to create balance with Germany since disagreements have accumulated between the two states. The TSI is, therefore, a platform for Poland to promote north-south energy and transport infrastructure to reduce dependence on Russia and to maintain the transatlantic link (Figure 2). For Poland and its allies in the TSI, the alliance with the U.S. is considered necessary to contain Russia and expand their room for manoeuvre in the EU. The involvement of the U.S. in the making of the project is consistent with its strategy vis-à-vis Eurasia to contain Russia and China and its ambition to become a global energy exporter for its shale gas.

In the first version of the Polish *Intermarium* project of the 1920s and '30s, between the two world wars, France was seen as a guarantor of Poland's security. In the renewed version of the *Intermarium*, it is the U.S. that is considered the most suitable for this task.

12 The Polish president declared at the Bucharest summit that 'The European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance were and continue to be the keystone of the Three Seas Initiative', President of Poland, 'Speech by the President during the Three Seas Initiative Business Forum', *News*, 17 September 2018, <https://www.president.pl/en/news/art,843,speech-by-the-president-during-the-three-seas-initiative-business-forum.html> [2019-10-01].

13 M.J. Zieliński, op. cit.

The historical trauma of the Poles is real, especially with the vivid memory of the Cold War, during which Poland was a state under Soviet geopolitical domination. The focus on the Russian threat gives Poland the opportunity to position itself as a regional geopolitical pivot point on the Eastern Flank of NATO. Poland can secure support from the U.S. to position itself as a regional leader of the EU and NATO. Poland is involved in many defence projects with the U.S.<sup>14</sup>, and the EU remains secondary in defence issues, despite recent progress. On the other hand, the EU is a useful organisation for financing with its structural and cohesion funds, which can be mobilised for infrastructure funding, together with the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. ‘We need to find new money for Central Europe,’ Krzysztof Szczerski, chief of the office of the Polish President Andrzej Duda, said<sup>15</sup>.

Mistrust of Germany has also crystallised over the Nord Stream project<sup>16</sup>, which was inaugurated in 2001 and supplies Germany with Russian gas directly from Russia via the Baltic Sea. A new project, Nord Stream II, aims to increase these gas imports. The project has been wrongly described as a new Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. With this, old historical perspectives were reactivated, illustrating the permanence of the historical fears of the countries in Central Europe, which have always been dominated by the neighbouring great powers.

## 4. Poland’s partners

The general context on a pan-European scale and within the framework of the EU is crucial to understand the geopolitical motivations of the project. More than a decade since joining the EU and NATO, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are once again worried about Russia, following successive crises with the EU and

14 J.-S. Montgrenier, J. Dubois-Grasset, ‘La Pologne, acteur géostratégique émergent et puissance européenne’, *Note d’actualité*, no. 51, June 2018, Institut Thomas More, <http://institut-thomas-more.org/2018/06/30/la-pologne-acteur-geostrategique-emergent-et-puissance-europeenne/> [2019-10-01].

15 Financial Times, ‘Three Seas seeks to turn tide on east-west divide’, 21 November 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/2e328cba-c8be-11e8-86e6-19f5b7134d1c> [2019-10-01].

16 Financial Times, ‘Eastern Europe to confront Berlin over new Russian gas pipeline’, 29 November 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/eb1ebca8-9514-11e5-ac15-0f7f7945adba> [2019-10-01].

NATO, including the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, and the crisis in Ukraine ongoing since 2014<sup>17</sup>.

These countries have become more critical of the EU because of a perceived lack of determination vis-à-vis Russia. This was aggravated by the mass-migration crisis and these countries' subsequent refusal to accept compulsory EU quotas of migrants, initially proposed by Germany. Disputes over the rule of law, played out in the context of an ideological debate over liberal or illiberal regimes, also plays a growing role. Finally, after more than two decades of economic integration, they are now starting to challenge German economic hegemony. They are, therefore, open to the diversification of alliances, such as those through the TSI, but also other projects, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) promoted by China through the '17+1' (previously '16+1') format.

The countries participating in the '17+1' initiative share the opinion that their interests and geopolitical priorities and their concept of European purposes are insufficiently taken into account. The idea of an alliance to better defend their position is also a sign of mistrust vis-à-vis the domination of the EU by Germany, but also the Franco-German tandem.

However, the motivations vis-à-vis Russia are also different between the participating countries. While Poland, Romania<sup>18</sup>, and the Baltic countries place the greatest emphasis on the Russian threat, other states such as Austria<sup>19</sup>, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic,

17 P. Żurawski vel Grajewski, 'La nuova Europa Longitudinale: Il trimarium visto dalla Polonia', *Limes*, no. 12, 2017, <http://www.limesonline.com/cartaceo/la-nuova-europa-longitudinale-il-trimarium-visto-dalla-polonia> [2019-10-01].

18 'After joining the EU, we were looking primarily to the west in the process of integration. Now we are looking more to each other,' says Ovidiu Dranga, Romania's ambassador to Poland. 'The Three Seas is about creating better connectivity in this north-south direction. Until now it was all east-west,' he says. 'These three areas – transport, digitalisation and energy – are relevant not only for the region but for Europe in general. What we are aiming at is strategic resilience along the eastern frontier of NATO and the EU as part of our contribution to Euro-Atlantic security and a stronger transatlantic link,' *Financial Times*, 'Three Seas seeks to turn tide on east-west divide', op. cit.

19 For Austria, the priority is energy diversification. It supports the BRUA gas pipeline project with Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. The BRUA pipeline is a natural gas pipeline from Podișor, Giurgiu County, to Receaș, Timiș County, and part of the future Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Austria gas interconnector. The pipeline attempts to lessen the country's dependence on Russian energy resources and provides a new export route for future natural gas extracted from the Black Sea.

Hungary, and Slovakia are more interested in developing infrastructure and the diversification of their energy supplies.

Romania is the second pillar of the TSI and defends its own geopolitical priorities, but its government also shares the same strategic orientations as Poland<sup>20</sup>. Romania, as a leading state on the Eastern Frontier facing Russia, seeks to enhance its geographical position for support from the U.S., specifically the installation of anti-missile (shield) infrastructure. The Romanians also participate in a moving front countering Russia in the Black Sea, an important link in the strategy by the U.S., a maritime power, to encircle Eurasia on a global level. The extension of infrastructure to Ukraine and Moldova also will probably become a priority in order to prepare for the long-term enlargement of the EU. Romania also has its own gas fields to exploit and is upgrading its LNG terminal to import gas and diversify its imports from Russia.

## 5. Synergy between the Eastern Partnership, PESCO, and TSI

In Poland's case, there is geopolitical synergy between the various initiatives taken at the European level, such as the Eastern Partnership, but also through PESCO<sup>21</sup>, the new EU defence cooperation programme. The aim is to attract the maximum amount of funding from the EU for Polish priorities. The main programme of PESCO is the 'mobility' project<sup>22</sup>, which aims at upgrading and developing infrastructure to improve the mobility of NATO's armed forces. This priority is also an objective of EC services devoted to infrastructure<sup>23</sup>,

20 M. Mussetti, 'Economia e difesa, il senso della Romania per il Trimarium', *Limes*, 20 September 2018, <http://www.limesonline.com/economia-e-difesa-il-senso-della-romania-per-il-trimarium/108711> [2019-10-01].

21 PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation).

22 European Council, 'Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) first collaborative PESCO projects – Overview', <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32079/pesco-overview-of-first-collaborative-of-projects-for-press.pdf> [2019-10-01].

23 European Commission, 'Action Plan on military mobility: EU takes steps towards a Defence Union', 28 March 2018, [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure/news/2018-03-28-action-plan-military-mobility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure/news/2018-03-28-action-plan-military-mobility_en) [2019-10-01].

and it is emphasized in a joint NATO-EU declaration<sup>24</sup>. The link between the TSI and the interests of the Atlantic Alliance, appear more and more clearly. U.S. Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, the now-retired former commander of military forces in Europe, has declared that the PESCO infrastructure project also reflects the priorities of the TSI, including Rail Baltica and Via Carpatia<sup>25</sup> (see Figure 1) The American general, however, declared himself against the installation of a U.S. military base in Poland because it risked division among the NATO allies<sup>26</sup>.

The Eastern Partnership was also imagined by the Poles and promoted in the EU with the Swedes. The project was inspired by the Sikorski doctrine, whose objective in part is to establish a buffer zone vis-à-vis Russia<sup>27</sup>. The Eastern Partnership, the TSI and PESCO are all contributions to this buffer zone. Another objective of the Polish government is to host a U.S. military base on Polish territory, which is further proof of the coherence of the Polish intentions.

This focus on a regional scale has made it possible to emphasize that Poland, in particular, is relying on the TSI as a tool of influence and economic development at the regional level. It is also an instrument for ensuring its national security with the support of the U.S.

The U.S. is engaged in a tactic at the European level to mainly keep Germany and the EU under its influence, but also on a Eurasian scale with Russia and China. Let's look more closely at these issues.

24 European Council, 'EU-NATO joint declaration', *Press release*, 8 July 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/07/08/eu-nato-joint-declaration/> [2019-10-01].

25 Biznes Alert, 'Gen. Hodges: Centralny Port Komunikacyjny zwiększy mobilność na wschodniej flance NATO', 29 January 2019, <https://biznesalert.pl/hodges-centralny-port-komunikacyjny-mobilnosc-nato/> [2019-10-01].

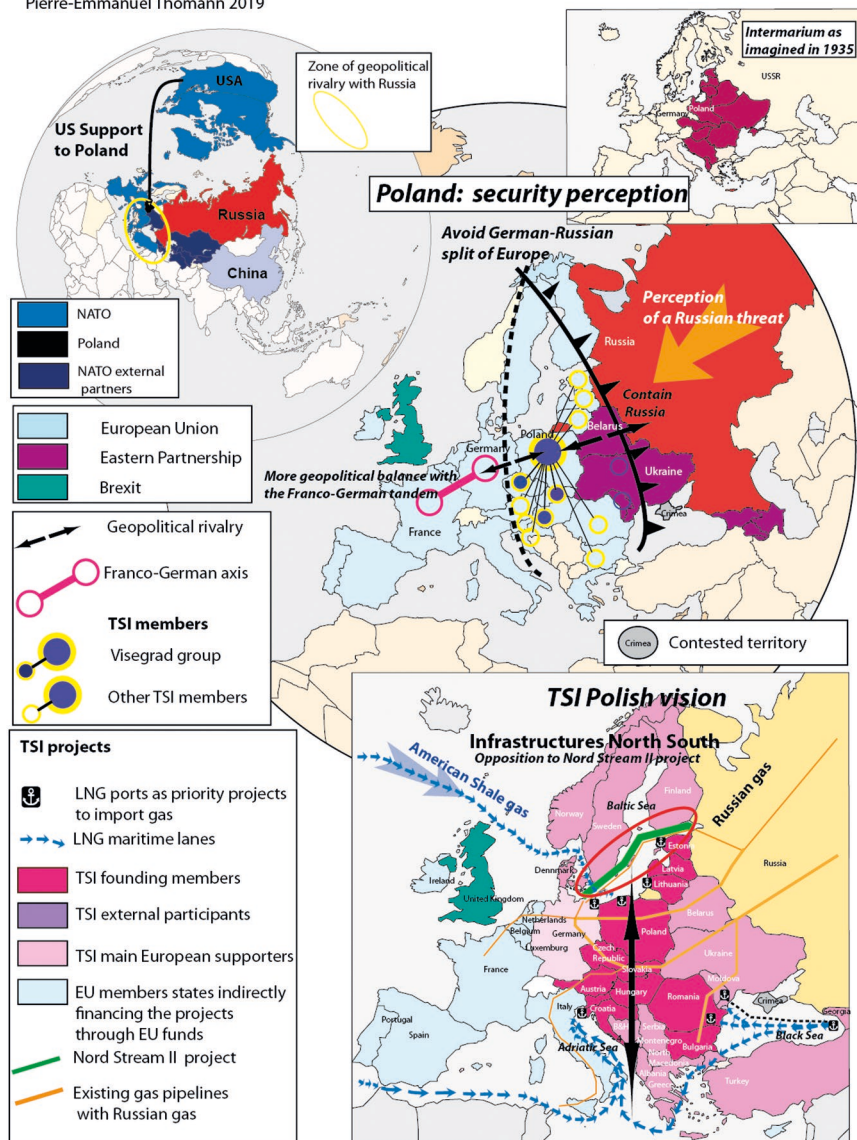
26 B. Hodges, 'Don't put US bases in Poland. NATO can and must do a lot more to deter Russia without dividing allies', *Politico*, 19 April 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/dont-put-us-bases-in-poland/> [2019-10-01].

27 WikiLeaks, 'Poland: a Natural U.S. Ally on Eastern Policy', 12 December 2008, [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/o8WARSAW1409\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/o8WARSAW1409_a.html) [2019-10-01].

Figure 2: The TSI, a U.S.–Polish revival of the Intermarium

## Poland: geopolitical positioning and Three Seas Initiative (TSI)

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The U.S. is reinvesting in Central and Eastern Europe again in their dealings with Eurasia. Their objective is to provoke the geopolitical fragmentation of the continent, to slow down the emergence of multipolarity and preserve their leadership in the context of the great power rivalry (See Figure 2).

It is in this context that the TSI has indeed been supported by U.S. President Donald Trump<sup>28</sup>, visible with his participation at the initiative's Warsaw Summit in 2017. This stance must be understood in relation to the geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and Russia. The dual objective is to counter Russia in Central and Eastern Europe but also to sell American shale gas. Gas exports have become a geopolitical weapon for the U.S.<sup>29</sup>

This support can also be understood in the framework of the rivalry that has become explicit between the U.S. and Germany. The 'America first' doctrine promoted by Trump is a formerly implicit goal, now just more explicit with the new president. Trump believes that Germany, the more efficient export nation of the two, aggravates the U.S. trade deficit. The Trump administration has initiated a policy of sanctions to renegotiate trade balances and a form of geopolitical pressure is being exerted in the name of burden-sharing. Thus, President Trump began to follow a policy of pressure on Germany, giving more weight to Poland's criticism of its neighbour. By making a link between energy

28 He stated: '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. The Three Seas Initiative will not only empower your people to prosper but also it will ensure that your nations remain sovereign, secure, and free from foreign coercion. The free nations of Europe are stronger, and the West becomes stronger as well. The United States is proud to see that we are already helping the Three Seas nations achieve much-needed energy diversification. America will be a reliable and reliable partner in the production of high-quality and low-cost energy resources and technologies.', D. Trump, 'Remarks at the Three Seas Initiative Summit in Poland', 6 July 2017, full transcript at <https://time.com/4846780/read-donald-trump-speech-warsaw-poland-transcript/> [2019-10-01].

29 The financial times has pointed out that: 'Donald Trump is engineering a sharp shift in U.S. energy policy by using natural gas exports as an instrument of trade policy, championing sales to China and other parts of Asia in an effort to create jobs and reduce U.S. trade deficits. In an attempt to unleash U.S. energy resources, Mr Trump is trying to promote more liquefied natural gas exports and not just use LNG as a geopolitical weapon aimed at nations such as Russia, as was the stance of his predecessor Barack Obama', Financial Times, 'Trump looks to lift LNG exports in US trade shift', 22 June 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/c5c1958c-5761-11e7-80b6-9bfa4c1f83d2> [2019-10-01].

Figure 3: TSI and U.S. geopolitical objectives: the rivalry with Russia and Germany

## Three Seas initiative (TSI) and the global geopolitical context

### An instrument of US foreign policy

Pierre-Emmanuel Thomann-2019

#### US geostrategic vision in Eurasia and Europe

- Nuclear powers feeling threatened by the US/NATO missile shield
- Other nuclear powers
- Nuclear proliferators designated by USA
- NATO/US bases
- NATO/US missile shield Infrastructures

#### Encirclement strategy of Eurasia

- Indo-Pacific front
- Military conflicts

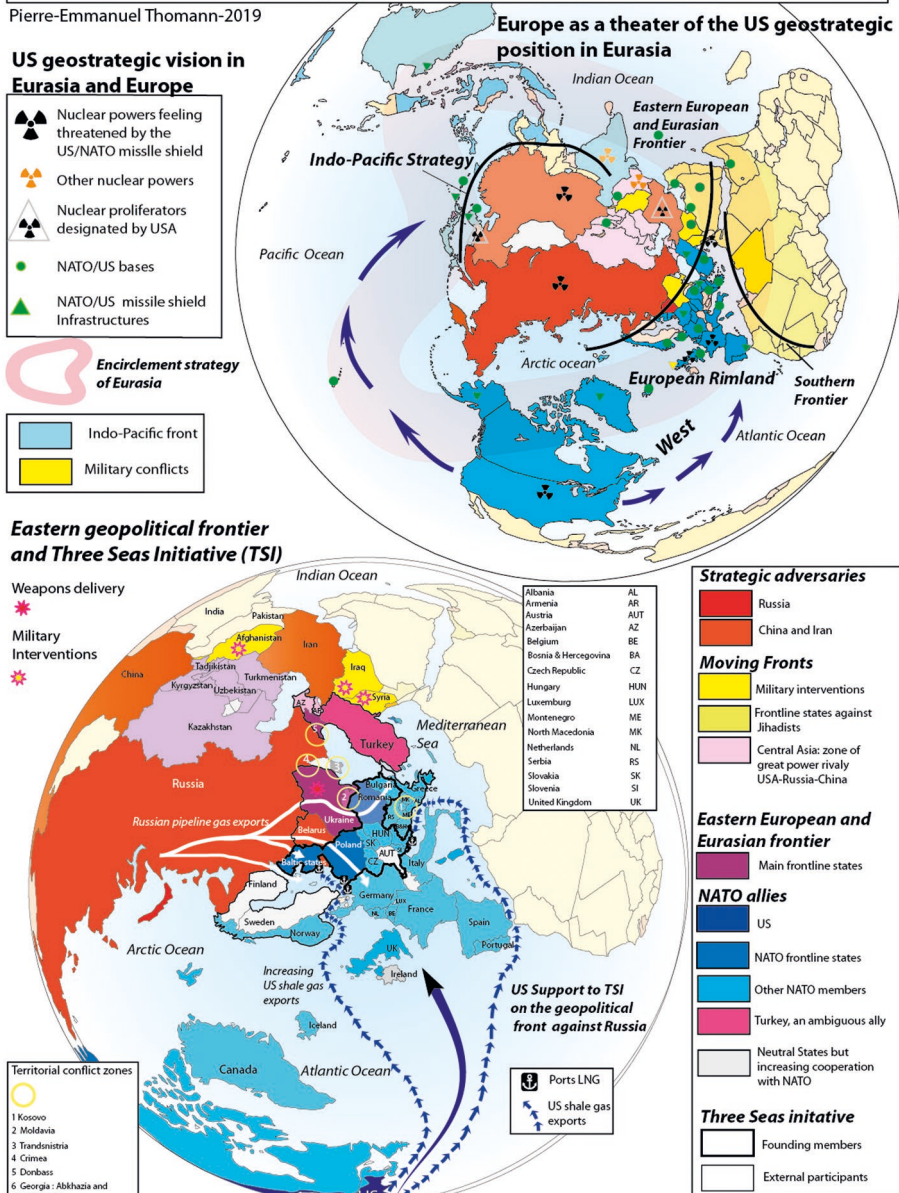
#### Eastern geopolitical frontier and Three Seas Initiative (TSI)

##### Weapons delivery

- Military Interventions

##### Territorial conflict zones

- 1 Kosovo
- 2 Moldavia
- 3 Transnistria
- 4 Crimea
- 5 Donbass
- 6 Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia





and security issues<sup>30</sup>, the U.S. president accused Germany of importing Russian gas but not contributing enough to NATO, putting too much burden on the U.S. to protect German security. This pressure resulted in Germany's decision to import American shale gas and to open an LNG port in northern Germany. However, Germany continues to firmly defend the Nord Stream II pipeline project despite the opinion of the U.S. and Poland.

On the occasion of the Bucharest summit in 2018, the Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen stressed that the TSI largely sprung from American think tanks<sup>31</sup>. The Atlantic Council has been supporting the project since the beginning, and Zbigniew Brzezinski's son, Ian, has written many articles to support the initiative<sup>32</sup>. A publication by the Atlantic Council<sup>33</sup> also conceived very precisely of the TSI in 2014, during the Obama presidency. The report promotes a north-south transport corridor, in line with the geopolitical interests of the U.S. and for the promotion of the resilience of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe against Russia.

## 6. Consistency with the U.S. geopolitical project

Indeed, if we refer to geopolitical issues on a global scale, the TSI is a project that falls within the geopolitical priorities of the U.S., being faced against Russia and China and in synergy with American economic interests.

30 G. Gotev, 'Kremlin accuses Trump of trying to bully Europe into buying US LNG', *Euroactiv*, 13 July 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/kremlin-accuses-trump-of-trying-to-bully-europe-into-buying-us-lng/> [2019-10-01].

31 Bundespraesident, 'Alexander Van der Bellen: »Drei-Meere-Initiative ist eine willkommene Plattform der EU«', *Aktuelles*, 17 September 2018, <https://www.bundespraesident.at/aktuelles/detail/news/drei-meere-initiative-2018/> [2019-10-01].

32 The project has been logically supported by Atlanticist think tanks such as the Atlantic Council. Ian Brzezinski, the son of Zbigniew Brzezinski, is actively supporting the Three Seas Initiative as a member of the Strategic Advisors Group at the Atlantic Council. I. Brzezinski, D. Koranyi, 'The Three Seas Summit: A Step Toward Realizing the Vision of a Europe Whole, Free, and at Peace?', *Atlantic Council*, 5 July 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-three-seas-summit-a-step-toward-realizing-the-vision-of-a-europe-whole-free-and-at-peace> [2019-10-01].

33 I. Brzezinski, D. Koranyi, 'Completing Europe: The North South Corridor', *Atlantic Council*, 20 April 2015, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/completing-europe-the-north-south-corridor/> [2019-11-27].

The U.S. has as the primary objective the control of Eurasia on the map of the world (Figure 3). With remarkable continuity, the U.S. has sought for nearly two centuries to prevent the emergence of a power that can defy its status as a world power on the Eurasian continent. This geopolitical constant since the First World War had been put back on the agenda since the end of the Cold War with the Wolfowitz Doctrine<sup>34</sup> in 1992. He had stressed that America's mission in the era after the Cold War would be to ensure that no rival superpower would be allowed to emerge in Western Europe, Asia, or on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Zbigniew Brzezinski's strategic representation<sup>35</sup>, which envisioned the geopolitical fragmentation of the Eurasian continent and integration of European countries from Western Europe to Ukraine, the main challenge of the United States, has also exerted certain influence<sup>36</sup> within the U.S. administration. This objective was explicitly put back on the table by Wess Mitchell<sup>37</sup>, the Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia at the State Department from late 2017 to early 2019 under President Trump. Mitchell's vision is the continued encirclement of the Eurasian continent by the U.S. to prevent a geopolitical rival from emerging again and reducing the Americans' own world power status.

Although Mitchell left the Trump administration in February 2019, his geopolitical representations are particularly enlightening and provide more information about the U.S. strategy under the Trump presidency, despite the feeling of uncertainty over U.S. doctrine.

34 P.E. Tyler, 'U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop', *The New York Times*, 9 March 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/us-strategy-plan-calls-for-insuring-no-rivals-develop.html> [2019-10-01].

35 Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, 1997.

36 J. Vaisse, *Zbigniew Brzezinski: stratège de l'empire*, Odile Jacob, 2016.

37 According to Mitchell, the goal of the U.S. is to avoid the domination of the Eurasian masses by hostile powers. This goal remains one of the key national security interests of the United States. Hence, in it we find the long-term geopolitical objectives of the United States. Thus, he stated that 'during three world wars, two hot and one cold, we helped unify the democratic West to prevent our brutal opponents from dominating Europe and the rimland in Western Eurasia'. Thus, unsurprisingly, Russia and China are designated as strategic opponents of the U.S. even though the Cold War has been over for more than a quarter of a century, as they 'challenge U.S. supremacy and leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. There is, therefore, a consistent U.S. objective to control Eurasia to prevent a geopolitical rival from emerging again and relativising its own world power status. U.S. Embassy in Estonia, op. cit.

## 7. Geopolitical ideas persist through inertia

● This U.S. posture is one with a long-term perspective and has emerged again explicitly. The ambition is to preserve the global leadership of the U.S. and slow the emergence of a multipolar world<sup>38</sup>. Though we cannot rule out a major crisis that upsets the paradigm, which would be interesting to examine, this is beyond the scope of our analysis.

The U.S. objective is to stand up to Russia and expand the European rimland. The TSI fits perfectly into this vision, and the role of Ukraine in the project will surely increase in the future if it goes as planned. In fact, Ukraine is already integrated into this project, and this confirms the very geopolitical character of the project<sup>39</sup>. The U.S. also has the ambition to promote exports of its own shale-gas resources through LNG technology, to the detriment of European energy companies involved in resource exploration in Siberia and via the Nord Stream II pipeline.

Poland is, therefore, voluntarily playing the role of a geopolitical pivot point for the United States, which should strengthen Poland's weight in the EU, maintain as much as possible the influence of the U.S. on the European project, counter Russia, and rebalance Germany's power in the EU. Poland is also seeking to balance the Franco-German tandem, as it does not agree with the current geopolitical hierarchy within the European project.

Trump is also playing with the divisions within the EU. The Union is the target of sanctions by the U.S. administration but also pressure on the issues of Iran and Russia. Lacking a strong response, the EU is aligning itself by gravity with the American posture. With Trump's election, Europeans have become divided between pro- or anti-Trump, but the U.S. remains the compass for most European governments.

The EU is thus reduced to the status of a buffer zone, a theatre of the American strategy in Eurasia, and a periphery more and more divided and instrumentalised by external powers. The attempt to reorient north-south energy infrastructure, if implemented effectively, would

38 M. Foucher, *La bataille des cartes, Analyse critique des visions du monde*, François Bourin Editeur, 2011.

39 The infrastructure projects are supposed to extend to Ukraine, according to an initiative progress report: TSI, 'Priority Interconnection Projects 2019 Status Report', op. cit.

weaken the link between Germany and Russia, fragment Europe, and increase the sale of American shale gas to Europe at a higher price.

## 8. The rivalry with Russia in Eurasia

As early as 2016, Russia developed its Greater Eurasia project<sup>40</sup>, a continent-wide geopolitical vision promoting political and economic cooperation between states and nations from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific (Figure 5).

In Central and Eastern Europe, NATO enlargement preceded the EU expansion. As the Union worked more and more synergistically with NATO, it reinforced the Russian perception that the EU and NATO were acting together to enlarge the Euro-Atlantic space to the east at the cost of Russian security and economic interests. To this, Russia reacted according to its own geopolitical representations. The continuous enlargement of NATO, the support for regime change in former Soviet Union countries, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the ABM treaty<sup>41</sup>, and the continuous installation of military infrastructure as part of the U.S./NATO anti-missile system reinforced the Russian perception of encirclement (Figure 2).

The crisis in Ukraine in 2014, subsequent to the Russia-Georgia war of 2008, EU and the U.S. sanctions on Russia, coupled with the acceleration of the Eastern Partnership programme in Ukraine led the Russians to believe they could never acquire equal status within an EU/NATO-centric Europe. It was proof for Russia that the EU was merely a sub-geopolitical element of the Western, unipolar hegemony aimed at reducing Russia's power and influence. The crises in Georgia and Ukraine are indeed directly linked to the issue of NATO's future enlargements<sup>42</sup>.

The U.S. considers the European rimland a coastal area under its control, which blocks the orientation of the EU towards the Eura-

40 S. Karaganov, 'From East to West or greater Eurasia, Russia in global affairs', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 25 October 2016, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/From-East-to-West-or-Greater-Eurasia-18440> [2019-10-01].

41 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), 1972-2002.

42 P.-E. Thomann, 'Guerre Russie Géorgie: première guerre du monde multipolaire', *Revue Défense Nationale*, no. 10, October 2008. Version available here: <http://www.ieri.be/fr/node/329> [2019-10-01].

sian space, and, therefore, towards Russia, but also China. Europe is, therefore, a sub-theatre for U.S. geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis Eurasia. This strategy is bidirectional with the encirclement by the Eastern European and Indo-Pacific frontiers and the positioning of U.S. bases in NATO states, as well as missile-defence infrastructure around the Eurasian continent (Map 3).

The new Russian pivot to the east and the Greater Eurasia geopolitical vision is, therefore, a reaction to the overall Western strategy (Figure 5). However, in this new projected geopolitical configuration, Russia opens up the possibility for the EU to participate in the project, anticipating the convergence of common geopolitical interests.

The TSI, which favours North-South relations, contradicts the east-west vision that Russia is promoting. There is also an exaggeration of the Russian threat<sup>43</sup>. The policy of a balance of power involving European states according to their own geography and rapprochement with Russia is thus made very difficult. The exclusive orientation towards the Euro-Atlantist scenario therefore implies that the Europeans must position themselves within the limits imposed by the geopolitical priorities of the U.S., and weakens the option of a Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

## 9. Germany's support for the TSI, and the pivot to *Ostmitteleuropa* and the New European Ostpolitik

After a period of mistrust and indifference, the Germans changed their stance and supported the TSI beginning with the Bucharest summit in 2018. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas stressed that this decision was motivated by Germany's concern for the centrifugal tendencies in the EU, and to position Germany as a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe<sup>44</sup>. The president of the European Commission,

<sup>43</sup> No NATO member state protected by Article V, however, has had a military conflict with Russia.

<sup>44</sup> The German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas declared on 10 January 2019: 'By participating in the Three Seas Initiative launched by (Germany's) Central and Eastern European partners, we want to play our part in helping Central Europe to grow closer together at the heart of the European Union. The position was different a few months ago, because we in Germany could not make up our minds to join such an Initiative because there was felt to be a danger that Eastern European states would join forces in order to carry divisive tendencies over into the European Union. I reached the view relatively quickly that the best way to prevent that from happening, and to

Jean-Claude Juncker, also participated for the first in a TSI summit, in Bucharest<sup>45</sup>, underlying the close synergy of the German government and the EU.

Maas associated Germany's support for the project with the inauguration of the German New European Ostpolitik<sup>46</sup>. This concept is the third of its kind since the first Ostpolitik in the 1970s and the second, Neue Ostpolitik<sup>47</sup>, of the first coalition of Angela Merkel (2005-2009).

Germany's position is ambiguous because the Germans convey several geopolitical representations, sometimes complementary but also competing, which influence the decisions of the governments. There is an apparent double play at work, with the Germans pursuing Eastern economic expansion by keeping strong ties with Russia on energy issues, while, at the same time, increasing the rivalry with Russia in synergy with the U.S. The Germans are supporting the strengthening of NATO in the east and the EU's Eastern Partnership. They are building a buffer zone to contain Russia. The containment of Russia has become the explicit objective of the German government, according to comments by Secretary of State Andreas Michaelis<sup>48</sup> at the Bucharest TSI summit. We can, therefore, interpret Germany's decision accord-

turn it into a positive agenda, is to sit at the same table and offer Germany's services as a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe. I believe we are well suited to such a role. Finally, it is above all a signal to our Eastern European neighbours that we take their concerns seriously, that we are prepared to involve them in our decision-making processes,' German Federal Foreign Office, 'Speech by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the New Year reception of the German Eastern Business Association (OAOEV)', *Newsroom*, 10 January 2019, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/new-year-reception-german-eastern-business-association/2177446> [2019-10-01].

- 45 Jean-Claude Juncker stressed his support for the initiative: 'Because this is not something being directed against the European Union but it is adding to our efforts to make sure that the interconnectivity in this part of Europe is developing in the right direction.' The EC's objective is also to push for more diversification and Juncker stressed that 'we agreed today to strengthen our strategic cooperation with respect to energy. The European Union wants to import more liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States to diversify its energy supply,' European Commission, 'Discours du Président Jean-Claude Juncker au sommet de l'Initiative des Trois Mers', 18 September 2018, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-18-5825\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-18-5825_fr.htm) [2019-10-01].
- 46 Industrie Magazin, 'Hintergrund: Plötzlich will auch Berlin bei Drei-Meere-Initiative mitmachen', 19 September 2018, <https://industriemagazin.at/a/hintergrund-ploetzlich-will-auch-berlin-bei-drei-meere-initiative-mitmachen> [2019-10-01].

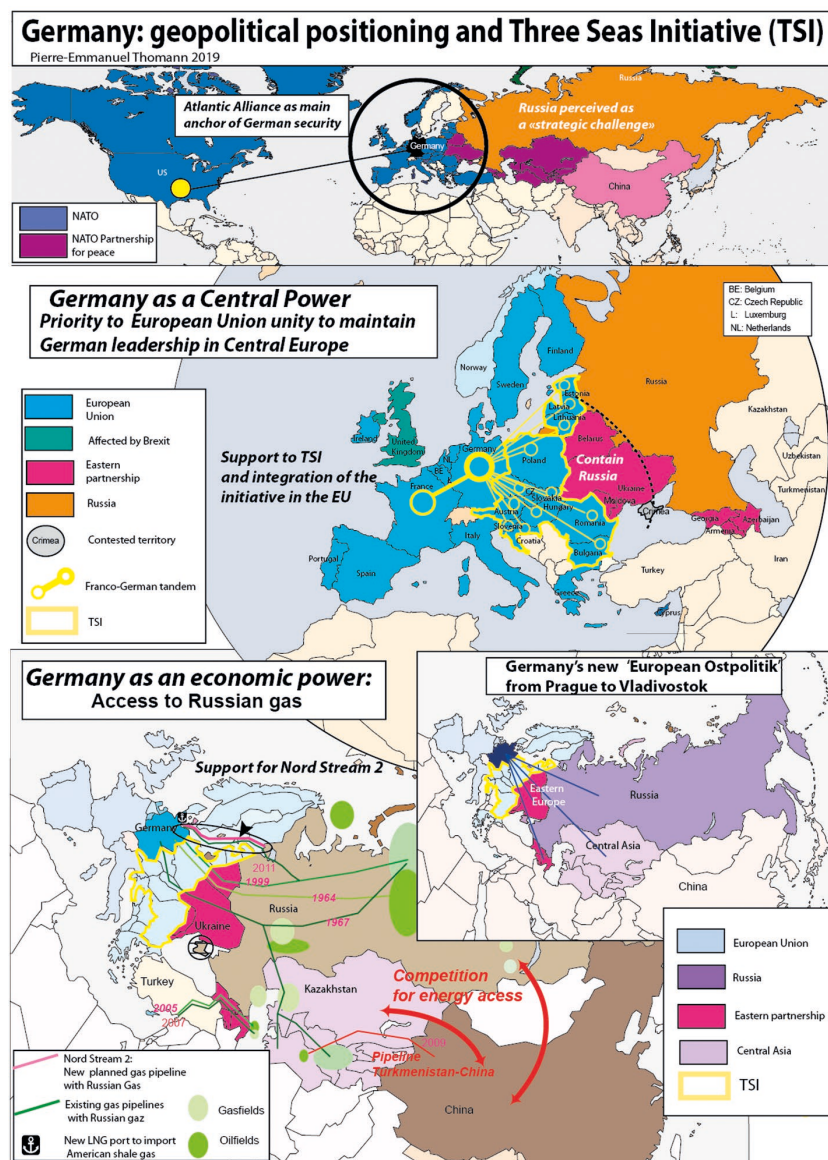
- 47 The second Ostpolitik focused on the 'soft' Westernisation of Ostmitteleuropa and Russia. It failed because it was anchored in the illusion of Westernisation through trade, and it obviously does not work with Russia.

- 48 German Federal Foreign Office, 'Speech by State Secretary Andreas Michaelis at the Summit of the Three Seas Initiative', *Newsroom*, 6 July 2019, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/michaelis-3-seas-initiative/2227006> [2019-10-01].



ing to the German geopolitical representations. Germany as a central power and Germany as an economic power are the two main German representations<sup>49</sup> (Figure 4):

**Figure 4: TSI and Germany geopolitical objectives**



<sup>49</sup> P.-E. Thomann, *Le couple franco-allemand et le projet européen, représentations géopolitiques, unité et rivalités*, L'Harmattan, 2015.

The central issues for Germany are the following:

- Maintaining itself as the central power in the EU and avoid fragmentation of the Union
- Conserve its status as an economic power and therefore position itself at the centre of energy and commercial flows,
- Acting as a sub-element of the Euro-Atlantic area while retaining a minimum margin of manoeuvre and refraining from projects that do not correspond to the German interests.

From a geopolitical point of view, the main worry for Germany is the fragmentation of the EU into its western and eastern parts. Germany became the centre of the EU since reunification and with the enlargement of the Union eastward, attaching acute significance to the old German geopolitical representation as a central power.

Including the Central and Eastern European countries within the Euro-Atlantic space positions Germany at the centre of this geopolitical configuration. The support of the U.S. for the TSI in the context of the growing disagreements with Trump no doubt prompted Germany to participate in the project. The objective is to counter the anti-German orientation of the project vis-à-vis the geopolitical rivalry with the United States<sup>50</sup> (From Phase 1 to Phase 2 in Figure 5). The German worry is that Trump will enact bilateral policy with Poland.

The representation of Germany as a central power is largely determined by its historical trauma of a war on two fronts (both the First and Second World Wars), and its perception of encirclement in the centre of Europe by hostile alliances (France/England; U.S./Russia then the Soviet Union). In order to solve the geopolitical difficulty of being in the centre of Europe, Germany anchored itself to the West after the Second World War. Germany is seeking greater strategic depth, it has been promoting the Westernisation doctrine ever further east towards Eurasian space since the fall of the USSR, according to its security and economic interests and normative and ideological vision.

50 Maas declared at the TSI summit in Bucharest in 2018 that a 'United Europe' must be the response to 'America First'. Die Bundesregierung, 'Rede des Bundesministers des Auswärtigen, Heiko Maas, bei der rumänischen Botschafterkonferenz am 27. August 2018 in Bukarest', *Bulletin*, 85-2, 28 August 2018, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/rede-des-bundesministers-des-auswaertigen-heiko-maas-1527072> [2019-10-01].



Today, Germany is a central power expanding towards Ostmitteleuropa (formerly controlled by the USSR), Eurasia, and the Balkans. The ideology underlying this expansion is different from the pan-German ideology on the eve of the First World War. Germany is expanding today in the name of the Westernisation and Europeanisation of its eastern flank, reinforcing the increasing geopolitical rivalry with Russia. The ideology changes but the geographical tropism and priorities remains.

Successive German governments have been implicitly pursuing the construction of a buffer zone in the east vis-à-vis Russia with the European Union through the Eastern Partnership policy, which is now complemented by the TSI.

Germany as an economic and normative power is also anticipating the opening of markets in the Eastern Partnership countries. Ukraine is an important element because of its pivotal geopolitical role. Ukraine is again torn between Germany and Russia, with the support of the U.S. and NATO's most Atlanticist countries and the EU. Germany considers itself responsible for the geopolitical trajectory of Ukraine, using the Euro-Atlantic narrative to achieve its own geopolitical objectives.

Germany, however, needs Russian gas and oil to maintain its status as an economic power, while remaining under the U.S. military nuclear umbrella, the ultimate guarantee of German security. The support for the TSI and the acceptance of American shale gas imports is undoubtedly considered by the German government as the price to be paid to preserve the Nord Stream II pipeline and its central power position in the EU to contain the U.S. offensive.

German sanctions against Russia are calibrated in a way that they do not endanger too much the fundamental interests of its economic power base, satisfying the U.S. but also the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, suspicious of Russia. This is a policy of balance with the interests of Germany's partners, combined with a policy of reassurance and containment vis-à-vis Russia at the geostrategic level.

The pledge given to Poland by Germany's support for the TSI did not, however, decrease Poland's mistrust<sup>51</sup> of German support within

51 Tygodnik Solidarność, 'Najnowszy numer „Tygodnika Solidarność”: Po co Niemcom Trójmorze?', 9 September 2018, <https://www.tysol.pl/a23593-Najnowszy-numer-%E2%80%9ETygodnika-Solidarnosc%E2%80%9D-Po-co-Niemcom-Trojmorze-> [2019-10-01].

conservative and pro-American circles in Poland nor among the Polish diaspora<sup>52</sup> in the U.S. Poland is facing a difficult dilemma: how to keep a grip on the TSI while also attracting funding for its success, which can only come from the EU with support from Germany.

## Conclusion and perspectives

The Three Seas Initiative is entangled in interlocking issues and competing geopolitical visions, not only in Central Eastern Europe but also at the Eurasian and global geographical scale (Figure 5).

The project is still in its initial phase and its implementation is not yet guaranteed, even if the project is moving forward<sup>53</sup>. Uncertainties hang over the project, such as the difficulty of obtaining EU financing with the likelihood of fewer resources post-Brexit. A scenario involving effective implementation requires two difficult conditions: gathering the necessary funding within the EU, and therefore finding unity among the 27.

This cannot be done without the participation of Germany, which will not allow infrastructure projects perceived as moving in the opposite direction of its interests. This is why north-south infrastructure will not replace east-west infrastructure, and the Nord Stream II gas pipeline will probably be completed.

The unity of the countries participating in the TSI will be difficult to maintain. The question of Polish hegemony will always be present. Hungary, for one, will not allow a policy of isolation of Russia because it maintains political-military links with that country. For example, Hungary permitted the transit of Russian military equipment to Serbia in June 2019 after Romania and Bulgaria refused to allow the use of their airspace<sup>54</sup>.

52 M.J. Chodakiewicz, 'Ruchy Berlina', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 11 September 2018, <https://tysol.pl/a23656--tylko-u-nas-Marek-Jan-Chodakiewicz-Ruchy-Berlina> [2019-10-01].

53 Polish and Romanian banks (Poland's Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego [BGK] and EximBank Romania) announced the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund. C. Patricolo, 'Polish and Romanian banks establish Three Seas investment fund', *Emerging Europe*, 11 June 2019, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/polish-and-romanian-banks-establish-three-seas-investment-fund/> [2019-10-01].

54 D. Istrate, 'Hungary helps Russia deliver military vehicles to Serbia', *Emerging Europe*, 30 July 2019, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/hungary-helps-russia-deliver-military-vehicles-to-serbia/> [2019-10-01].

The TSI will not eliminate closer relations or attempts at a political reset between Germany or France and Russia. The EU economies need not only Russian gas but also other minerals from Russia<sup>55</sup>. In addition, cooperation in BRI projects between Balkan and Central and Eastern European countries and China in the '16+1' format<sup>56</sup> are also likely to limit the TSI's effects.

The most likely scenario is, therefore, mutual neutralisation of rival geopolitical projects. However, a scenario of a strategic partnership between the EU and Russia after a political reset becomes more difficult in this configuration. The influence of the U.S. and its objective of the geopolitical break between the EU and Eurasia through the TSI is a major obstacle.

Germany's participation in the project reduces the risk that the project will be used against its interests because of excessive U.S. influence, and the strong anti-Russia orientation. While Germany seeks to regain more influence with Central and Eastern Europe<sup>57</sup> by participating in the TSI, it can also play a moderating role when it comes to highly aggressive objectives regarding Russia, and *de facto* supports also the weakening of the link with Russia.

This scenario maintains the EU as a sub-grouping of the Euro-Atlantic area, a rimland that cannot become a more independent geopolitical alliance. This goes against the principle of strategic autonomy of the EU because the European project cannot acquire sufficient geopolitical weight on a global scale without Russia.

55 Ch.-A. Paillard, 'L'Initiative des trois mers, un nouveau terrain d'affrontement majeur russo-américain', *Areion 24 News*, 9 September 2018, <https://www.areion24.news/2018/09/09/linitiative-des-trois-mers-un-nouveau-terrain-daffrontement-majeur-russo-americain/4/> [2019-10-01].

56 'The 16+1 format is an initiative by the People's Republic of China aimed at intensifying and expanding cooperation with 11 EU Member States and 5 Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia) in the fields of investments, transport, finance, science, education, and culture. In the framework of the initiative, China has defined three potential priority areas for economic cooperation: infrastructure, high technologies, and green technologies; China-CEEC Cooperation, "16+1" Summit has concluded', 10 November 2016, [http://www.china-ceed.org/eng/ldrhw\\_1/2016lj/hdxw4/t1414327.htm](http://www.china-ceed.org/eng/ldrhw_1/2016lj/hdxw4/t1414327.htm) [2019-11-27].

57 U. Speck, 'Toward a 'New Ostpolitik'?', *Berlin Observer*, 7 October 2018, <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/toward-a-new-ostpolitik/> [2019-10-01].

## A shift in the EU's centre of gravity

If the TSI increasingly attracts investment from the EU and Germany, the geopolitical centre of gravity of the EU will move towards the east, strengthening Germany's position as a central power. The perpetuation and aggravation of a geopolitical fissure in Europe between Russia and an EU dominated by German and Polish priorities with the support of the U.S. will reinforce the geopolitical imbalance within the European Union. Since the German reunification and EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, a new geopolitical rivalry between Germany and France has also emerged with the shift of the centre of geopolitical gravity towards the east<sup>58</sup>.

Germany's consolidation of its status as a central power contradicts the Franco-German avant-garde project France is promoting in order to rebalance German power. It also goes against the French attempts to promote the EU's greater geographical orientation towards the Mediterranean to counter the shift of the geopolitical centre of gravity to the east. These attempts in the past have provoked geopolitical initiatives by Poland and Central and Eastern European countries, such as the Eastern Partnership<sup>59</sup>.

The implementation of the TSI might provoke France and other Southern European countries to pursue a policy of geopolitical compensation, in the same line as what took place after the German reunification. These developments are strengthening the new geopolitical phase of the European project, replacing the integrationist phase. France and Southern European countries, such as Italy, will seek closer ties with Russia to promote a new balance more favourable to their interests. French President Emmanuel Macron has already pro-

58 P.-E. Thomann, *Le couple franco-allemand et le projet européen*, op. cit.

59 The Eastern Partnership had been promoted by Poland and Sweden to counter France's Euro-Mediterranean proposal in the context of the crisis in the EU caused by then President of France Nicolas Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union project in 2007/2008. Germany has always supported the Eastern Partnership but by acting behind the scenes of the EU. Germany first blocked France's Mediterranean Union project to avoid a division of the EU and counter the emergence of France as the leader of the Mediterranean countries – as a counterbalance to a German Europe – in order to avoid the fragmentation of Europe into various alliances, and keep France and the South in the fold of the EU. The Eastern Partnership was then strongly supported by Germany while the Mediterranean Union is never put forward in the German priorities.

posed a new European architecture that includes Russia<sup>60</sup>. However, the conditions proposed for a reset with Russia are still too restrictive to move forward, but this idea will remain a long-term objective, especially in the context of the uncertainty coming from the U.S. and the Brexit. All opposition parties in France favour a reset with Russia to compensate for the European project's German-U.S. geopolitical centre of gravity.

As the project ramps up, controversies will inevitably accumulate. To reach a geopolitical critical mass, the European project cannot break through without the inclusion of Russia. EU member states have neither sufficient energy resources of gas or oil, nor sufficient quantities of rare minerals, nor immense territory. Moreover, with Russia, the European project would extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific. One implicit geopolitical objective of the TSI is to avoid this scenario and maintain the U.S. presence in Europe as a counter to Russia, and thus to keep the EU under the influence of a Euro-Atlantist geopolitical representation.

This configuration constitutes an obstacle to a Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Transforming EU member states into frontline states against Russia via an extreme version of the TSI will not achieve European stability and security. According to this scenario, as during the Cold War, Europeans would be cut off from their eastern part. EU member states would be prevented from exercising a policy of a balance of power based on the promotion of their own priorities and their own geography.

It is in the interest of the European countries participating in the initiative to strengthen connectivity between them, and this corresponds also to EU interests as a whole in its prosperity. This could be achieved without deepening the divide with Eastern Europe, and especially with Russia. The TSI could be constructed instead as a bridge between Western Europe and Russia, not as a geopolitical front, but in the same way that Germany positions itself as a bridge between Central Europe and the rest of the EU.

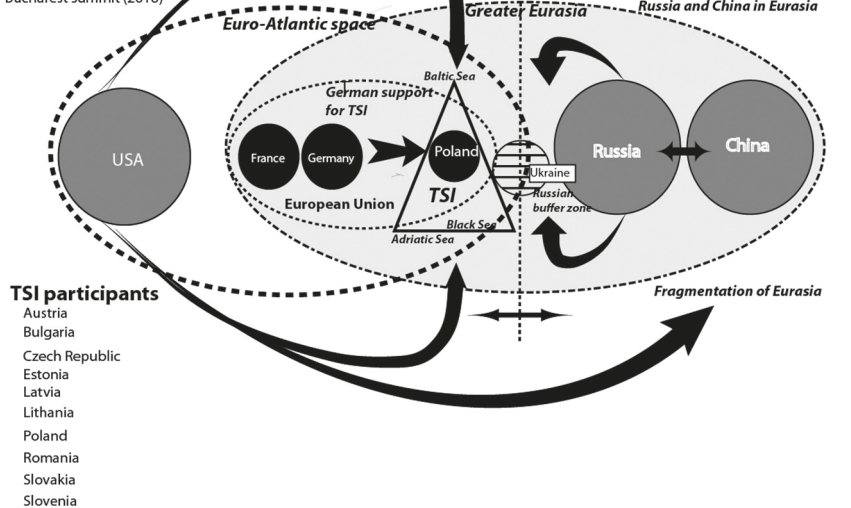
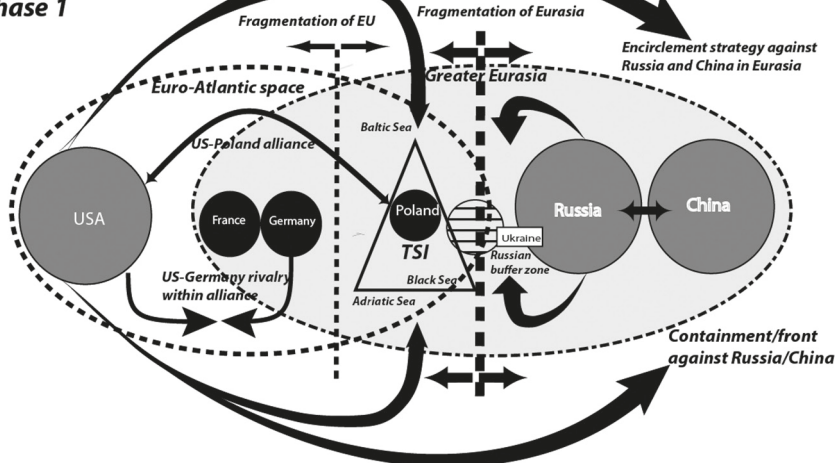
60 Elysée, 'Discours du Président de la République à la Conférence des Ambassadeurs', 27 August 2018, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs> [2019-10-01].

**Figure 5: The return of geopolitical strategies in Europe and in the world****Three Seas initiative (TSI) and the New Great Power Rivalry****Interlocking geopolitical issues: multiscalar and multidimensional problematics**

Pierre-Emmanuel Thomann-2019

**Phase 2**

With support from Germany and the EU since the Bucharest summit (2018)

**Phase 1**

The European project would benefit from a better equilibrium between the Euro-Atlantic and Greater Eurasia visions, according to its own geographical potential. For the European project as a whole to benefit from the TSI and contribute to its evolution as a provider of sovereignty and independence on the global level, the project would need to be conceived in synergy with a European pivot to Russia and its Greater Eurasia project, and not as a project reinforcing an exclusive Euro-Atlantist bloc.

Everything will also depend on the ability of France and Germany to work again in synergy, but also on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, especially Poland, and their ability to renew relations with Russia and engage in a more comprehensive negotiation on a new European security architecture. The scenario of a worsening of the crisis with Russia will also increase the risk of fragmentation in the EU, as Russia will be increasingly perceived as a necessary, useful counterweight to a German-Polish-American Europe, especially for France, Italy, and Hungary.

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