

The April 2026 Three Seas Initiative Summit: A Strategic Opportunity for America's Commercial Diplomacy

Jordan Embree and Anthony B. Kim

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is tailor-made to foster large-scale investment agreements with American energy, infrastructure, and technology companies.

The U.S. should craft a comprehensive road map to advance its interest in economic prosperity through private-sector engagement and regional connectivity.

Opportunities abound for U.S. facilitation of private-sector energy engagement at the 3SI summit in Dubrovnik on April 28 and 29, 2026.

The second Trump Administration has pursued a practical diplomatic strategy that places investment-based commercial engagements at the heart of its approach. From peace deals in Africa unlocking investment opportunities for American and allied companies in critical minerals to reviving manufacturing alongside defense allies like Japan, South Korea, and the Gulf kingdoms, President Donald Trump is reversing economic trends that have enriched China and other adversaries while impoverishing and weakening the West.

Similar commercial instincts were displayed in liquefied natural gas (LNG) deals with European partners, such as a recent agreement with Greece,¹ and the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is tailor-made to foster large-scale investment agreements with American energy, infrastructure, and technology companies.

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As the 3SI enters its 11th year, its 13 member states between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas have a momentous opportunity to leverage this commercially based platform into economic dynamism. Enabled by the Trump Administration's unprecedented commercial diplomacy, this economic vitality could then serve as a bulwark against endemic Russian aggression. To realize this historic opportunity, its members must draw in private-sector capital investments through economic policies that will attract them. Further, with The Hague Summit's 1.5 percent of gross domestic product spending target for dual-use infrastructure, there is an additional impetus to develop infrastructure between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas. The 3SI summit in Dubrovnik, Croatia, on April 28 and 29, 2026, will be a critical occasion for these Central and Eastern European states to seize or forfeit a chance for renewed transatlantic prosperity and stability.

Why the Three Seas Initiative Matters to the United States

Growing from its joint Croatian–Polish founding, 3SI now includes 13 member states between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas, with four associated participating states and several strategic partners (including the United States).² 3SI is a forum for building north–south linkages to remedy the lingering impact of the USSR's exclusive preference for connections to Moscow during the Cold War. The USSR's approach ensured that rail and pipeline networks passed through Russian control.³

America's strategic partnership with the 3SI has endured over the past decade in pursuit of American interests. High points include President Trump's speech at the 2017 summit in Warsaw and U.S. Energy Secretary Perry's participation at the 2018 and 2019 summits.⁴ Congress has also supported 3SI, including House Resolution 672's support for 3SI work on energy independence and infrastructure connectivity,⁵ and the Senate-version 2024 National Defense Authorization Act's affirmation of policy "to encourage the initiative undertaken by central and eastern European states to advance the Three Seas Initiative to strengthen transport, energy, and digital infrastructure connectivity in the region between the Adriatic Sea, Baltic Sea and Black Sea."⁶ U.S. rhetorical support became practical with the U.S. Development Finance Corporation's \$300 million investment into the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF).⁷

Expanding Allied Energy Networks

Over the past several decades, America has emerged as an energy superpower, with growing exports of fossil fuels reshaping global energy markets. This economic trend is reflected in the 2025 National Security Strategy's desire to support energy as "one of America's leading export industries in its own right."⁸ Such a vision is precisely aligned with the 3SI, which has backed infrastructure, such as Lithuania's Klaipėda LNG terminal, and expanding interconnections with installations like Croatia's Krk LNG terminal.⁹

Opportunities abound for U.S. facilitation of private-sector energy engagement at the 2026 3SI Summit in Dubrovnik. Expanding interconnections and bolstering pipeline networks for oil and gas is the central task for reducing dependence on Russian energy. Existing pipelines, such as Croatia's Adria oil pipeline, have an immediate role,¹⁰ but 3SI member countries should pursue the opportunity to lay a new pipeline network to reduce Balkan dependence on Russian LNG.¹¹ Possibilities also exist to enhance Greece's Atlantic SEE LNG Trade partnership with the United States by strengthening the Vertical Gas Corridor's provision to Greece's northern neighbors.¹² Finally, in a similar spirit, the 3SI summit would present an excellent opportunity for U.S. authorities to approve the Carlyle Group's purchase of Russia's Lukoil Oil Company assets, including significant investments in Black Sea oil and gas.¹³

Leveraging Commercial Partners to Expand Dual-Use Infrastructure

An enduring commercial and military hurdle for Baltic 3SI members has been the differing rail gauges between the European standard gauge and the former Soviet gauge, inhibiting movement of forces *en masse* in case of need.¹⁴ As a symptom of the broader Soviet insistence on connections east to Moscow, 3SI has been instrumental in developing a solution to this problem with Rail Baltica.¹⁵ As NATO allies who make up the bulk of 3SI members expand their militaries and engage in joint planning with the broader Alliance, it is important to put their 1.5 percent funds to best use by constructing similar dual-use projects across Central and Eastern Europe. Work on Corridor 8, an ongoing project to construct a unified transport corridor from Italy to Bulgaria on the Black Sea,¹⁶ demonstrates how American companies can contribute, with Bechtel recently completing construction of a highway corridor in North Macedonia.¹⁷

Another infrastructure category ripe for investment and construction is telecommunications. Though customers interface with telecoms networks as a digital medium connecting to their phones and computers, 5G and other telecommunications networks depend on an extensive hardware backbone¹⁸ with several European states remaining worryingly dependent on China.¹⁹ In its 3SI engagements, Washington should encourage allies to prioritize network security by routing their telecommunications tenders and industry engagement through allied forums like the 3SI and companies like Ericsson and Nokia.²⁰

Facilitating Agreements with U.S. Nuclear Energy Providers

Several 3SI states have bilateral nuclear energy deals underway with the United States, including Romania leading the deployment of small-modular-reactor technology in Europe,²¹ Poland (for three AP-1000 nuclear power units in Choczewo),²² and Bulgaria (for two AP-1000 reactors at the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant).²³ These deals provide models for American engagement with other 3SI member states, such as Slovenia and Croatia, who have indicated interest in building or expanding nuclear power plants since 3SI's 2025 summit.²⁴

Slovenia and Croatia are particularly well-suited as potential partners due to their co-ownership of the Krško nuclear power plant (a Westinghouse design) which provides base-load electricity to both countries in the spirit of the 3SI.²⁵ Additionally, Slovenia's planning work has begun for a reactor addition at Krško with Croatia expressing interest in extending the arrangement to include the possible new reactor.²⁶ Further, Croatia's new nuclear regulation, passed in late 2025, provides impetus for nuclear investments thanks to its target of 30 percent nuclear energy supply to its grid by 2040,²⁷ up from below 10 percent.²⁸ Through proactive efforts by both sides in the 3SI framework, U.S. civilian nuclear energy exports could provide best-in-class nuclear power plants while improving allied energy security.

Recommendations for the Trump Administration

The Three Seas Initiative provides an attractive platform for the second Trump Administration to demonstrate the value of American capital and private-sector engagement in Europe. In crafting a pragmatic, comprehensive road map to advance America's strategic interest of economic prosperity through greater private-sector engagement and regional connectivity in the three-seas region, the Trump Administration should:

- **Encourage pro-market, pro-investment policies in the region.** Washington 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 direct, practical involvement in critical policy dialogues through the upcoming 3SI meetings, the United States can constructively engage to make its case, particularly given the fact that the strategic interplay among economic freedom, energy independence, and national security is more critical than ever. Washington can also engage at the technical and practical level in a way that enables countries to advance their economic development. Fundamentally, America's economic relationship with the region will be exercised best through the private sector: the catalyst for real and meaningful economic transformation, as well-documented in The Heritage Foundation's annual *Index of Economic Freedom*, a cross-country benchmark report.²⁹
- **Expand the LNG pipeline network in the Balkans.** Energy security is national security and the 3SI grouping brings together a critical mass of countries who can together expand and connect their pipeline and terminal networks to supply steady oil and gas from the United States to partners throughout Central and Eastern Europe. This will remove energy as a weapon for Russia and establish a more secure supply for economic growth.
- **Leverage partner commercial solutions in 3SI infrastructure development.** As NATO allies within 3SI tender new infrastructure projects, they should route them to Western partners focused on commercial quality and secure provision and away from the shoddy workmanship and weaponized provision of China and Russia.
- **Facilitate new U.S. nuclear construction agreements.** The U.S. Energy Department should work alongside U.S. embassies in 3SI countries to understand the nuclear requirements country by country and facilitate connections with American nuclear energy companies in the lead-up to the April 2026 3SI Summit in Dubrovnik.

An Economic Partnership Opportunity for America

The 3SI deserves stronger U.S. support and elevated strategic engagement. To its credit, the Trump Administration has been a strong supporter of the 3SI. In 2017, President Donald Trump became the first U.S. President to attend a 3SI meeting. As he stated at the time:

The Three Seas Initiative will not only empower your people to prosper, but it will ensure that your nations remain sovereign, secure, and free from foreign coercion. The Three Seas nations will stand stronger than they ever have stood before. When your nations are strong, all the free nations of Europe are stronger, and the West becomes stronger as well. Together, our Nation and yours can bring greater peace, prosperity, and safety to all of our people.³⁰

Indeed, grasping and capitalizing on all opportunities to further deepen practical economic relations is in the mutual interests of Washington and countries in the three-seas region. The United States and the three-seas countries must remain steadfast in their determination to ensure that the evolving strategic partnership grows stronger as they move forward.

Jordan Embree is Research Associate in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at The Heritage Foundation. Anthony B. Kim is Jay Kingham Research Fellow in International Economic Affairs, Editor of the *Index of Economic Freedom*, and Manager of Global Engagement in the Thatcher Center at The Heritage Foundation.

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