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STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF JOINT COMMITTEES FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THREE SEAS INITIATIVE'S COUNTRIES AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

INTRODUCTION

The selected topic is significant for international relations researchers and practitioners due to its innovative nature. The subject is the countries of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) relations with the United Arab Emirates. 3SI, initiated in 2015 and launched in 2016 by 12 states, is a new platform of strategic cooperation between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas. The countries of the Three Seas Initiative are members of the European Union. 3SI has a geopolitical location between Russia, Turkey, and the Mediterranean region and is near the Middle East. Moreover, having the US and China as active actors, the Tree Seas Initiative has global significance. Ensuring stability in the 3SI area is crucial for international relations in the Eurasian space. By combining this initiative with projects in the Middle East, they should be analysed in a broader geopolitical dimension.

This research paper is the first to analyse the UAE's economic relations with all 3SI states from a geostrategic perspective, examining the influence of two joint government cooperation committees on the interaction between those countries. One of them is the Joint Economic Committee (JEC), led by ministries of economy, and the other is the Joint Committee (JC), led by ministries of foreign affairs.

The research goal is to find an answer to the research question what is the Joint (Economic) Committees' role and significance for relations between the United Arab Emirates and Three Seas Initiative countries? The adopted hypothesis indicates that the JEC leads to deeper cooperation within the JC, which may lead to a higher level of cooperation within the strategic partnership. This paper is based on empirical research and combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The results are largely derived from 13 years of direct observation, as well as the author's participation in many initiatives concerning cooperation between the countries of the Three Seas Initiative and the United Arab Emirates. Among others, as an ambassador and senior advisor to Dubai Expo 2020, responsible for the strategies for upgrading the relations between 3SI countries and the UAE.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The end of the 20th century is a period of dynamic changes in the post-Cold War world, requiring states to adapt and undertake new roles, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the area of today's Three Seas Initiative, and the Middle East. Therefore, the theory of adaptation and role helps in finding the answer to the research question. As emphasized by Rosenau (1981), because of adaptation to the changes taking place in the international environment, the state undertakes a certain role. The UAE has taken many initiatives in adopting certain types of international roles. One of them is the role of a promoter, actively looking for opportunities to recruit new cooperation partners. Consequently, their place and role in international relations is the result of, as Keohane (2012: 19) emphasizes, interaction, mutual influence, and influence on each other. The international situation after 11 September 2001 and then the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, had a fundamental impact on international relations at the political, economic, and military levels. The adapting countries had to consider the different levels of tension at various levels because every political decision affects many aspects of political relations. In such a situation, there can be three adaptive attitudes, passive, yielding, and creative. The foreign policy of the UAE is an example of creative adaptation, actively influencing the shaping of international relations following the national interest and taking the appropriate role in relations with other actors (Conway, Feigert, 1987: 136–139). For instance, the establishment of UAE with about seventy countries of the Joint Economic Committee, overseen by the Ministry of Economy, and the Joint Committee, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

The theory of international roles makes it possible to combine various methods, which increases the research quality on the discussed problem. Consequently, it not only enriches the descriptive or explanatory dimension but also the predictive one. Identification of the international roles of states allows for an accurate analysis of foreign policy (Walker, 1987: 43, 224). The theoretical framework for foreign policy analysis (FPA) was provided by, among others, Breuning (2007), Hudson (2007), and Smith (1983). However, Snyder, Bruck, and Supin (1962) deepened the study of this area. Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is on the line between theoretical knowledge about international relations and its practice. It helps to organize, select information, and then find correlations. As a result of the development of the FPA, the International Practice Theory was created and understood as a concept based on the analysis of practitioners. According to Turner (1994: 43), it is becoming part of the theory of international relations. International Practice Theory, despite not being a classical theory, creates a creative space for discussion among international relations researchers (Bueger, Gadinger, 2014: 6).

The application of the above-mentioned theories and approaches is valuable for the research process in question, making the presented article innovative. There is a lack of extensive literature in the discussed research area. So far, only the author of the presented scientific study has published several articles on the UAE and the Three Seas Initiative countries. Some researchers, such as Mandaci and Karacalarli (2017: 495), address the issue of cooperation between Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle

East in a different aspect. The authors point to the growing interest in closer economic cooperation with the countries of the Persian (Arab) Gulf. In the context of the foreign policy of the Baltic states, Rostoks (2020) notes that Latvia has limited possibilities to influence relations with the Middle East. However, due to being affected by them, Latvia should be active in this region. In addition, as Broka (2021) points out, the normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE added an impulse. On the other hand, Nekrašas (2011) points out that the priority of Lithuania's foreign and security policy is its transatlantic relations. However, Hyndle-Hussein (2020) emphasizes that Lithuania will be increasingly active in the Middle East. Raik (2020) presents a similar analysis of Estonia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. As part of the first method, numerical parameters were adopted as the selection of the sample, which shows the examined objects and processes. The study covered 12 founder countries of the Three Seas Initiative and the United Arab Emirates. As the ability to adapt affects international relations, the quantitative potential of the strength of these countries has been presented. Then, the number of J(E)Cs and top-level visits carried out was examined, considering heads of state, government, and ministers responsible for foreign and economic affairs. These parameters were confronted with the trade figures. The data collected for the study had to be processed due to their raw nature. They concern these thirteen countries in terms of their interactions, regarding the period 2010, just before the start of the so-called Arab Spring to 2022, excluding trade for the current year due to a lack of data. Therefore, the study shows the broader dynamics of the phenomenon by determining the nature and intensity of links between processes. Statistical analysis based on the processing of collected data showed interesting information about the study area. To enrich them, qualitative research methods were also applied, which contributed to an in-depth analysis of the examined processes, including documents and initiatives. At the same time, it was supported by the empirical case study and the comparative method. The selection of samples was chosen based on categories such as 1. typical situations – regular J(E)C sessions, 2. extreme – no J(E)C sessions, 3. maximum variability – regular J(E)C sessions followed by no continuation of them.

Each of the 12 countries has been tested in relations with the United Arab Emirates. Due to the novelty of the presented project, the collected research material is based mainly on information from government institutions of the surveyed countries. The main reason for conducting this research based on this type of information source is the lack of publications on the relationship between the 3SI countries and the UAE in the literature. The collected research material was analysed, critically assessed, and compared. As a result of this process, findings were developed. In addition, the author of the presented article had the opportunity to verify the results based on personal participant observation of the phenomena taking place in the United Arab Emirates relations with the countries belonging to the Three Seas Initiative. Therefore, the adopted research methods in combination with the author's experience and direct participation

in the analysed processes resulted in the research in question, contributing to the development of this science area.

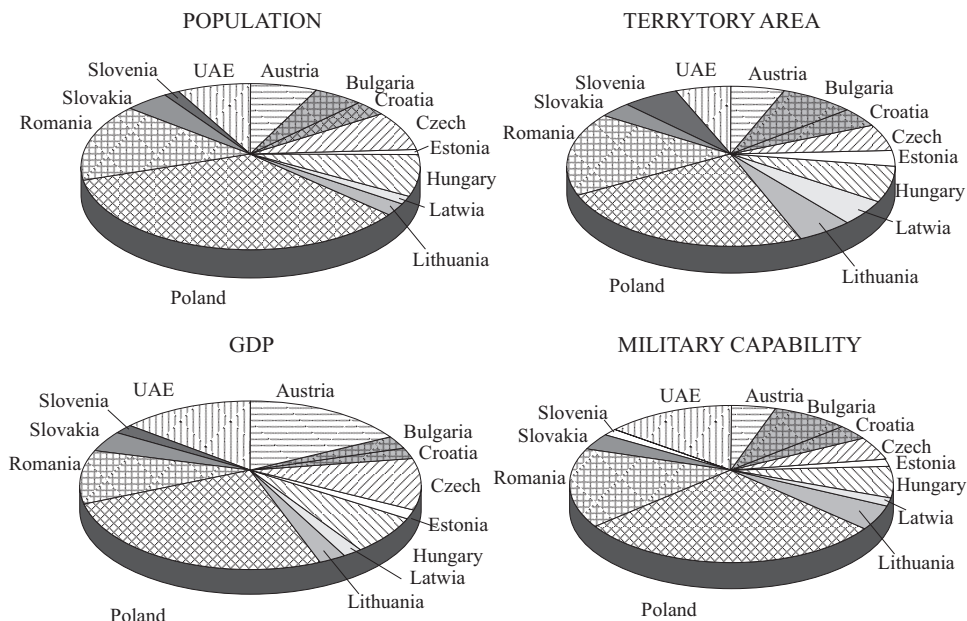
Along with the development of the Three Seas Initiative, there are more and more scientific studies and analyses on this issue. However, so far there is no 3SI study in the context of 'relations between the member states of this initiative and the United Arab Emirates-based on J(E)C. Therefore, the presented article is an innovative study and a contribution to the development of research on both the Three Seas Initiative, Central and Eastern Europe, and the United Arab Emirates.

THREE SEAS INITIATIVE COUNTRIES, UAE, AND ITS PERCEIVED POWER

The Three Seas Initiative formally launched in 2016 on the initiative of Croatia and Poland is an adaptation process to a new opportunity for Central Eastern Europe. It is a space for closer economic cooperation, especially in energy and transportation in the axis North-South (Górka, 2018) between 12 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary, being more integrated as independent countries (Kurečić, 2018: 99–100). The participating countries, except for Austria, have a history of communism. The United Arab Emirates, on the other hand, is an active actor in international relations that adapts to new challenges, undertaking an appropriate international role and looking for new cooperation partners, including as part of the diversification of alliances.

When examining the adaptation processes of the countries of the Three Seas Initiative and the United Arab Emirates, it is necessary to determine the potential of individual countries, which determines their adaptability and shaping future roles, because of mutual interaction. Therefore, Figure 1 shows the perceived power (Pp) based on the critical mass, consisting of population and territory. In addition, GDP was considered as economic capability (E), and the number of soldiers on duty as military capability (M). Thus, the power strength of the individual countries studied can be determined based on the formula $Pp = C + E + M$.

Its result shows that Poland has the largest power state in all its elements. Romania, on the other hand, ranks second in terms of critical mass. The next strongest in this category are the UAE and Austria, being on a similar level, as well as Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria. In terms of GDP size, Poland is followed by Austria, UAE, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. In terms of the size of the armed forces, Poland is followed by Romania, the UAE, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Austria. The result shows that the UAE, Poland, Romania, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria have the greatest potential for cooperation, but with a low GDP. Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have low independent potential. However, to obtain a more complete picture of perceived power, the strategic purpose (S) expressed in their implementation as a will to pursue national strategy (W) should also be examined, which extends the adopted formula, giving the form $Pp = (C + E + M) \times (S + IN)$. Avoiding the subjective assessment of intangible factors S and W, it was assumed that

Figure 1. States Power

Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.

within these categories the intensity of visits at the highest political level and JEC and JC sessions were considered, as shown in the next part of this article.

RELATIONS BASED ON THE JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, AND JC SESSIONS

The will to implement strategies determines the possibility, level, and effectiveness of using states' power. However, only Austria could sovereignly establish diplomatic relations with the UAE less than 3 years after its founding. Other countries of the Three Seas Initiative could express such a will and adopt appropriate strategies only at the end of the 20th century when these countries became independent from the Soviet Union (Table 1). In addition, apart from Romania, Poland, and the Czech Republic, which opened embassies in Abu Dhabi, other countries did so in the 21st century, and Croatia has not yet. In most cases of 3SI countries, the UAE has only opened embassies in recent years. Moreover, in the case of Croatia and Slovenia, as well as Lithuania, Estonia, and Slovakia, they are still missing. This is of great importance for the process and intensity of relations with the United Arab Emirates. All countries except Estonia signed economic cooperation agreements with the United Arab Emirates, establishing the JEC, in most cases during or after the adoption of the Three Seas Initiative. In addition, the countries with the greatest potential, i.e., Poland, Austria, Romania, and Hungary, signed the MoU on the creation of the JC and had at least 3 J(E)C sessions.

Table 1

Relations between 3SI countries and UAE

Country	Diplomatic relations established	The Embassy opened in UAE	UAE Embassy opened abroad	Agreement on Econ. Cooperation	JEC	MoU on JC	JC
Austria	1974	2003	1976	1976	11	1976	9
Romania	1989	1990	2004	1993	1	2018	2
Poland	1989	1991	2009	2012	3	2014	0
Hungary	1990	2006	2018	2015	3	2016	0
Bulgaria	1991	2018	2019	2016	0	lack	0
Slovenia	1992	2019	Austria	2015	1	lack	0
Lithuania	1992	2020	Poland	2017	0	lack	0
Croatia	1992	Egypt	Germany	1994	0	lack	0
Czechia	1993(1988)	1989	2014	2022	0	lack	0
Slovakia	1993(1988)	2013	Austria	2015	1	lack	0
Latvia	1995	2014	2017	2016	2	lack	0
Estonia	2006	2019	Sweden	lack	0	lack	0

Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.

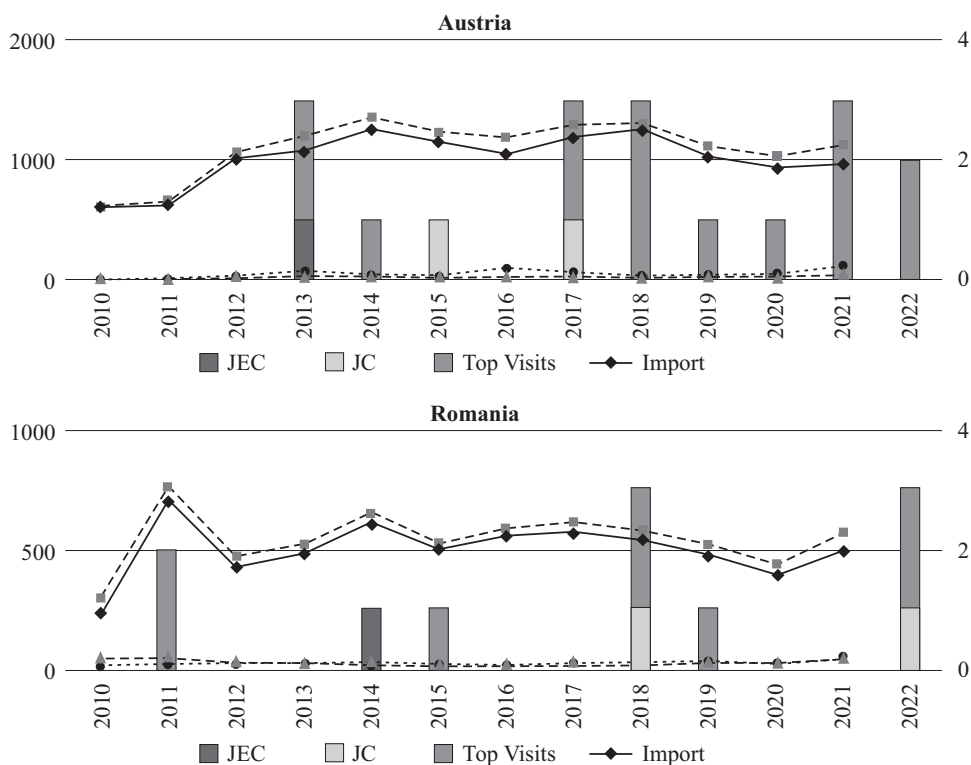
JEC and JC Sessions

Until now, Austria and Romania had sessions of both the Joint Economic Committee and the Joint Committee. Consequently, both countries also announced a strategic partnership. For Austria, in the Persian (Arab) Gulf region, the United Arab Emirates is the largest trading partner. Austria recognises UAE as a business hub for MENA, East Africa, and India. This relationship is accompanied by political will and strategies to broaden and deepen the relationship, as evidenced by regular top-level visits and J(E)C sessions (Figure 2), which fostered a high level of trade and transformed J(E)C into strategic partnership meetings. After the start of the Three Seas Initiative, in May 2017, the Austrian chancellor visited the United Arab Emirates to deepen economic relations. A few months later, in November 2017, the 9th JC meeting was held in Vienna, during which the MoU on industrial cooperation in the field of energy technologies was signed. After less than three months, the UAE's minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation paid an official visit to Austria to strengthen relations. A few months later, in April 2018, the chancellor of Austria came to the United Arab Emirates. At that time, Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and Austrian oil and gas corporation (OMV) concluded a 40-year agreement on 20% interest in concession oil fields offshore concession in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Based on this contract the Austrian company paid USD 1.5 billion. In January 2018, the two countries signed another agreement between the same companies on the acquisition of 15 percent of shares in ADNOC Refining and the creation of a global Trading Joint Venture. In March 2019, the Austrian chancellor came to the United Arab Emirates, during which contracts in petrochemicals were signed. In September 2020, Austria was visited by the UAE's minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation (Krzymowski, 2021a: 85–87). In July 2021, Crow Prince of Abu Dhabi arrived in Austria, where a declaration on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was signed (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Coop-

eration, 2021a). Consequently, the UAE’s minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation came to Austria in September, and the Austrian minister responsible for the economy arrived in the United Arab Emirates in November. In March 2022, the Austrian chancellor visited the UAE, where the leaders of the two countries expressed interest in developing a comprehensive strategic partnership. During the next visit of the head of the Austrian government in October 2022, the Strategic Energy Security, and Industrial Cooperation (SESI) was signed (Saleh, Ibrahim, 2022).

The first years of relations between Romania and the United Arab Emirates were a period of visits to the UAE by Romanian leaders at the highest level, including the president and prime minister. Relations between the two countries reached a deeper dimension in February 2002 when the president of Romania paid another official visit to Abu Dhabi, which contributed to a strategic decision by the UAE company, Dubai Ports World. The cargo logistics and port terminal management company received a long-term license in November 2003 to operate the most important container terminal in the Black Sea, Constanta South Container Terminal (CSCT) SRL. It is significant not only for the needs of Romania but also for a large part of the Three Seas Initiative countries, for which the issue of transport and logistics is one of the priorities. In addition, another strategic value for this terminal is the implementation of the 3SI via the Carpathia road connection project near its infrastructure. The next impulse to strengthen relations was

Figure 2. 3SI Countries – UAE Relations with JEC and JC Sessions



Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.

the visit of the prime minister of Romania in May 2015. Consequently, in April 2018, the first meeting of the Joint Committee took place in Bucharest, during which both sides emphasized the need to further exploit the strategic position of both countries. In response, in October, the prime minister of Romania arrived in the UAE, during which the partners established a Strategic Economic Partnership. In March 2019, the DP World got extended a license till 2049, and in June 2019, the UAE's minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation came to Bucharest (Krzymowski, 2020a: 90–93). In June 2022, the minister of foreign affairs arrived in the UAE to chair the second meeting of the Joint Committee (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). In the same month, the prime minister of Romania also arrived in the UAE (Gudo, 2022). The research results (Figure 2) show that J(E)C supported by top-level visits and with stable trade dynamics led to the intensification of strategic cooperation.

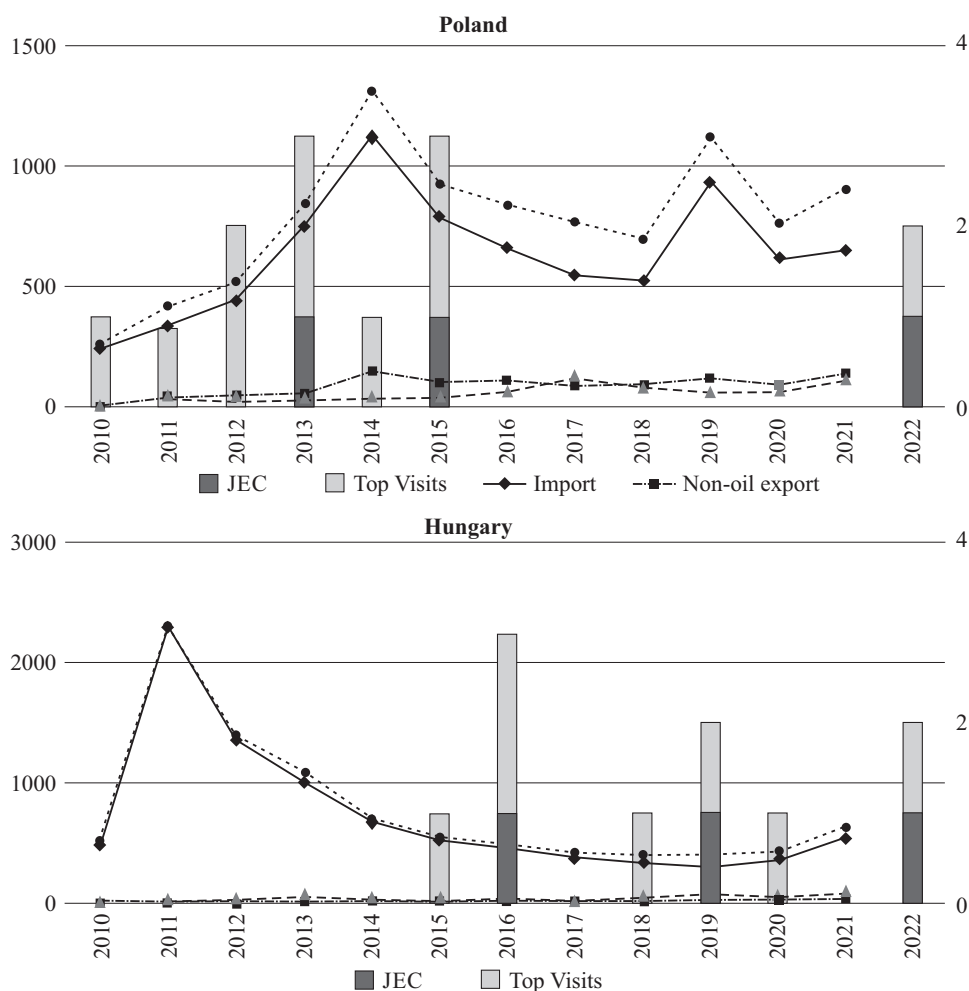
Three JEC Sessions

Out of the Three Seas Initiative countries, only Poland and Hungary held 3 sessions of the Joint Economic Committee. In 2004, the Polish government adopted a strategy towards the Middle East, in which the United Arab Emirates was identified as one of the five priority countries. In the same year, the first visit of the Polish president took place in this country. However, until 2011, relations were not at an advanced level. In May this year, the first visit of the UAE's minister of foreign affairs to Poland took place. In January 2012, the deputy prime minister, responsible for the economy arrived in the UAE. Soon in April, the prime minister visited the UAE, after a break since 1994. In February 2013, the first meeting of the Joint Economic Committee at the level of economy ministers was held in Poland. Consequently, in December 2013 the president came to the UAE, and in June 2014, the UAE foreign minister came to Poland, signing the MoU on the establishment of the Joint Committee. In April 2015, the deputy prime minister and minister of the economy of Poland came to the UAE, chairing the second meeting of the Joint Economic Committee. In June 2015, the first visit to Poland of the vice president, prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, and ruler of Dubai took place. The Emirati side informed that Poland has become a strategic partner of the UAE (Krzymowski, 2021b: 114–116). In the following years, there was no J(E)C visit at the level of heads of state or government, as well as ministers of foreign or economic affairs. It was not until May 2022 that the UAE's minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation visited Poland (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2022a) and in September, after more than 7 years, the 3rd session of the JEC took place (UAE Ministry of Economy, 2022a). The research results (Figure 3) show that after a high dynamic of visits and JECs, there was a sudden stoppage of high-level relations, and trade dropped drastically. Then started to increase in 2018, despite the lack of continuation of visits and JECs.

President of Hungary for the first time came to the United Arab Emirates in 1995. In June 2009, the first visit of the UAE's minister of foreign affairs to Budapest took place. In September 2015, relations began to enter a more dynamic phase when the UAE's minister of economy arrived in Hungary. In March 2016, the first meeting of

the JEC was held in Dubai with the participation of the minister of economy of the UAE and the minister of foreign affairs and trade of Hungary. In July 2016, the UAE’s minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation arrived in Budapest. In November 2018, the Hungarian minister of foreign affairs and trade came to UAE. In March 2019, in Budapest, under the leadership of the minister of foreign affairs and trade of Hungary and the minister of economy of the UAE the second Joint Economic Committee. In September 2020, another visit by the Hungarian minister of foreign affairs and trade took place to the UAE (Krzyszowski, 2021c: 114–115). In February 2022, the third session of the Joint Economic Committee in Dubai was attended by the minister of foreign affairs and trade of Hungary (Gulf Business, 2022). Research results (Figure 3) show that despite high-level visits and JEC meetings, trade has reached a low level despite the country’s potential.

Figure 3. 3SI Countries – UAE Relations with Three JEC Sessions

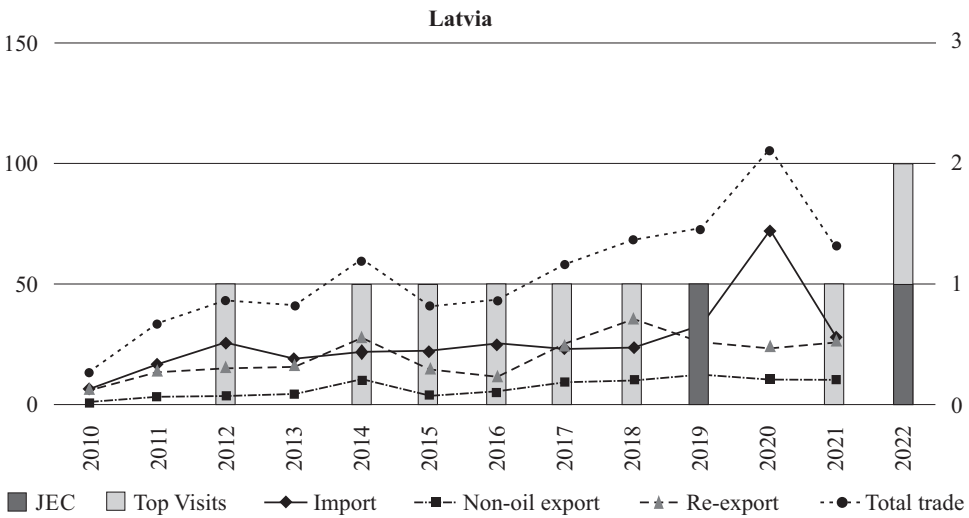


Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.

Two JEC Sessions

The only country so far that has held two JEC sessions is Latvia. With the arrival of the prime minister of Latvia to the UAE in March 2012, relations between the two countries have become dynamic. In March 2014, the UAE’s minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation arrived in Riga. In June 2015, the next stage of cooperation began when the minister of foreign affairs of Latvia came to the United Arab Emirates. In May 2016, the deputy prime minister and minister of the economy came to the UAE, where an agreement on economic and trade cooperation was signed, establishing the JEC. Soon after, in February 2017, the president arrived in the United Arab Emirates. In May 2018, the UAE’s minister of the economy came to Riga. Less than two weeks later, a delegation from the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry came to Latvia to meet the president and prime minister (Krzyszowski, 2021d: 48–49). In November 2021, the president of Latvia arrived in the UAE (AlGhoul, Esmail, 2022), and in March 2022, the minister of economy (Esmail, AlGhoul, 2022). At the same time, the second session of the JEC was held. The study (Figure 4) shows that the consistent will to deepen relations expressed in high-level visits and JEC meetings contributes to the growth of trade and the role and position of Latvia for the UAE.

Figure 4. 3SI Countries – UAE Relations with Two JEC Sessions



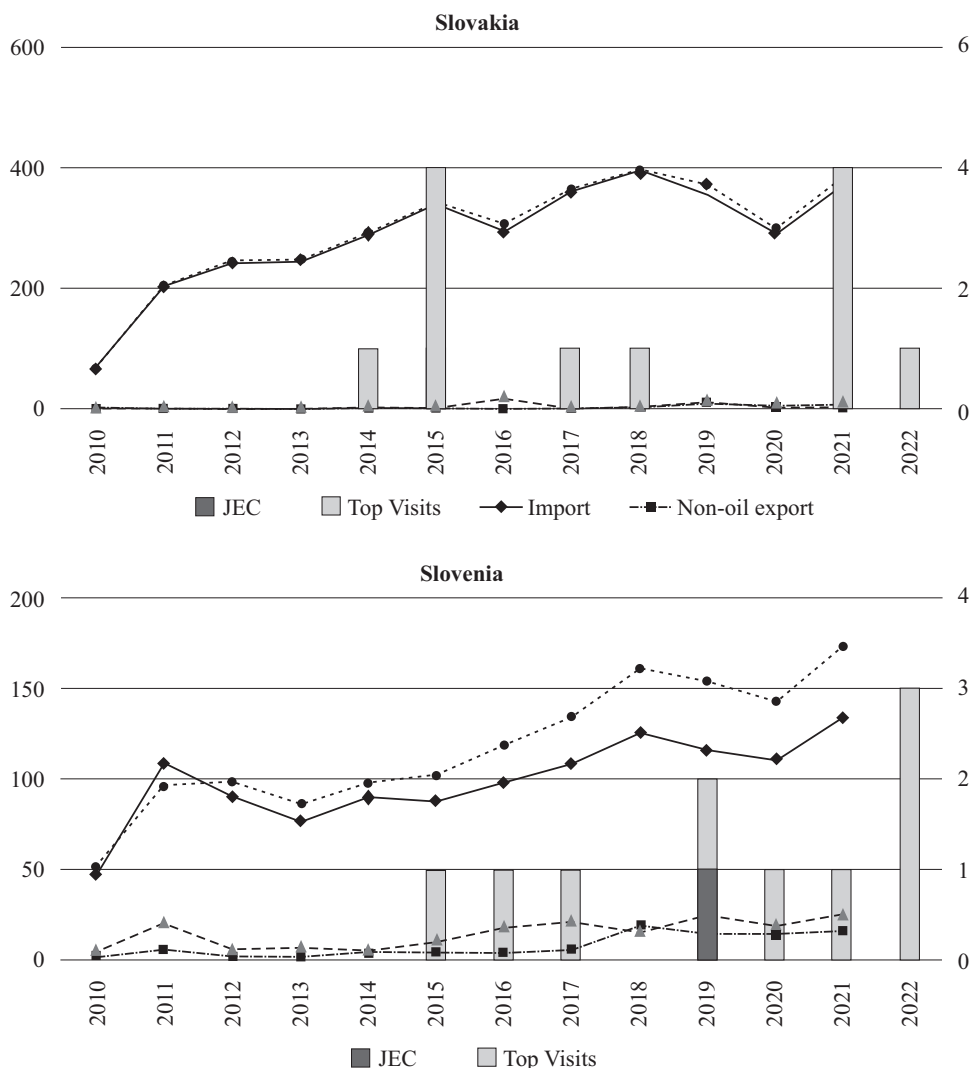
Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.

One J(E)C Session

The research indicates that only Slovakia and Slovenia have recorded one J(E)C meeting. In Slovakia-UAE relations, dynamic cooperation started in June 2014, when the deputy prime minister and minister of foreign and European affairs of Slovakia arrived in the United Arab Emirates. In April 2015, in Bratislava, the ministers

of the economy of both countries signed an agreement on the establishment of the Joint Economic Committee. In November of the same year, the first session of the Joint Economic Committee (JEC) was held in the UAE, chaired by both ministers of the economy. Consequently, in December, the prime minister of Slovakia came to the United Arab Emirates. In July 2017, the UAE’s minister of foreign affairs for the first time visited Slovakia. In April 2018, the deputy prime minister and minister of the interior of the UAE paid an official visit to Bratislava, during which both sides underlined the will to upgrade relations to a strategic partnership (Krzyszowski, 2021c: 117–118). In 2021 there were several more significant visits by Slovak lead-

Figure 5. 3SI Countries – UAE Relations with One J(E)C Session



Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.

ers to the UAE, including the prime minister (Government of Dubai, 2021a), the minister of economy in October (Bashir, 2021), and the minister of foreign affairs in November (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2021b). In 2022, the UAE welcomed the president in January (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2022b). The results (Figure 5) show that the will to deepen relations, including reaching the strategic level by leaders, supports the dynamic development of trade.

Until 2015, relations between Slovenia and the UAE did not record high-level visits. In September, for the first time, the UAE's minister of economy visited Slovenia, where both sides signed an agreement on economic cooperation, establishing the JEC. The UAE delegation emphasised the willingness to share its experience in managing ports and free zones. In September 2016, the Slovenian minister of development and technology visited the UAE. As part of the further development of relations, the Slovenian prime minister arrived in the United Arab Emirates in February 2017. In October 2019, a meeting of the UAE-Slovenia Joint Committee was held in Abu Dhabi with the minister of foreign affairs as the head of the Slovenian delegation. After less than two months, the deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Slovenia returned to the UAE in January 2020. In January 2021, the Slovenian minister of economic affairs arrived in the United Arab Emirates (Krzymowski, 2021a: 87–88). In February 2022, the ministers of economy and foreign affairs came to the UAE. In March, the minister of economy visited again. The results of the study (Figure 5) confirm that in the case of Slovenia-UAE, the political will, combined with the JEC, supported an increase in trade.

RELATIONS WITHOUT J(E)C

So far, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, and Estonia, have not had a J(E)C meeting. The economic relations between Czechia and UAE were very good. However, high-level visits were lacking until March 2014, when the UAE foreign minister arrived in Prague. In February 2015, the Czech president paid his first official visit to the United Arab Emirates. As a result, in April 2015, a government and business delegation headed by the UAE's minister of economy and representatives of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry arrived in Prague. This first economic visit was attended by the 7 most significant Emirati corporations. In response, in November 2015, the minister of industry and trade of the Czech Republic arrived in Dubai. In July 2019, the UAE economic mission visited the Czech Republic (Krzymowski, 2021c: 113–114). In January 2022, the Czech minister of industry and trade came to the UAE, during which an agreement on economic cooperation was signed, establishing the JEC (UAE Ministry of Economy, 2022b). As shown by the research results (Figure 6), despite the lack of JEC sessions and dynamics of high-level visits, trade between the two countries is developing drastically.

Bulgaria-UAE relations record the first visit of the Bulgarian president in November 2003 to the United Arab Emirates. However, until 2016, relations between the two countries were not characterized by many dynamics. In January, the Bulgarian minis-

ter of information technology and communications came to Dubai, and in October, the UAE's minister of the economy came to Bulgaria, where an agreement on economic cooperation was signed, establishing the JEC. In 2017, the Bulgarian minister of the economy and in April 2018, the deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs came to the United Arab Emirates. In October 2018, the prime minister of Bulgaria paid a visit to the UAE, during which the leaders of both countries expressed their willingness to prepare an agreement on strategic cooperation and strengthen political, economic, security, and military relations. In the context of both the Three Seas Initiative and the role of Bulgaria in the Balkans, the importance of transport corridors and the strategic location of Bulgaria, which should be used for mutual benefit, were emphasized. Consequently, many ministerial visits took place. In June 2019, the UAE's minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation visited Bulgaria to identify the scope of the strategic partnership. To deepen economic relations, the deputy prime minister for economic and social policy arrived in the United Arab Emirates in February and April 2020 (Krzyszowski, 2020a: 92–93). In September 2022, the president of Bulgaria visited the UAE, during which a Memorandum of Strategic Partnership was signed (Hatem, Khoder, 2022). Research indicates (Figure 6) that trade peaked in 2016. After that, despite numerous top-level visits, trade began to drop drastically.

The first high-level official visit between Croatia and the United Arab Emirates took place in July 2017, when the UAE's minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation visited Zagreb. The Croatian side emphasized that the natural gas project being developed in Croatia should be an interesting area of cooperation and investment. The following year, in April 2018, the Croatia-UAE Forum was held in Zagreb. In March 2022, the prime minister of Croatia and the minister of the economy paid a visit to the UAE. However, until now, both countries didn't open embassies. Research (Figure 6) shows the high volatility of trade dynamics. However, after the first official visit, there was a dynamic growth, which in 2021 reached the highest level in history (Krzyszowski, 2021a: 86–87).

Relations between Lithuania and the UAE were not very dynamic till May 2012, when the Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs arrived in the United Arab Emirates. Another impulse was the visit of the minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation of the UAE to Lithuania in June 2014. The following year, the Lithuanian minister of the economy came to the United Arab Emirates to propose to be a strategic partner in the UAE's food security strategy. In July 2017, Vilnius welcomed the UAE's minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation. Another important demonstration of the will to strengthen relations was the visit of the president of Lithuania in early November 2017. Both sides signed an agreement on economic cooperation, establishing the JEC. In May 2018, the UAE's minister of economy arrived in Lithuania. In March 2020, the minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania paid a visit to the United Arab Emirates and emphasized that the UAE is a strategic partner in this part of the world (Krzyszowski, 2021d: 49–51). In October 2021, the prime minister of Lithuania came to the UAE (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2021c), and in November 2022, the minister of foreign affairs (Ibrahim, 2022). Research (Figure 6) shows that since 2012 there has been a dynamic of top-level visits that have supported the trade. Although its growth is not stable, the trend is upward.

Till 2015, there were only two visits in Estonia-UAE relations, i.e., in June 2009 by the UAE’s minister of foreign affairs in Tallinn and in April 2011 by his counterpart to the United Arab Emirates. However, 2015 was a breakthrough year for relations. In October, the prime minister of Estonia visited the UAE, where the two sides agreed to establish strategic cooperation in smart cities and IT. At that time, an MoU was signed between the Dubai Smart Government and the Estonian government. In February 2017, the United Arab Emirates welcomed the minister of defence for cooperation in cyber security. In May 2018, the UAE’s minister of economy arrived in Estonia. In December 2018, the minister of entrepreneurship and information technology visited Dubai, and in February 2019, the prime minister came to the United Arab Emirates. Both sides expressed interest in strategic cooperation in AI. In September 2019, the president of

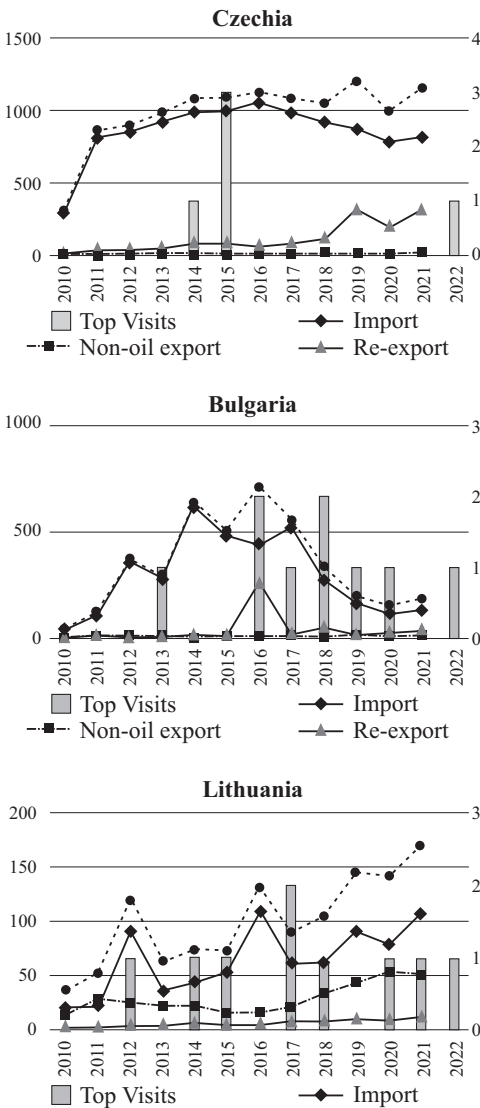
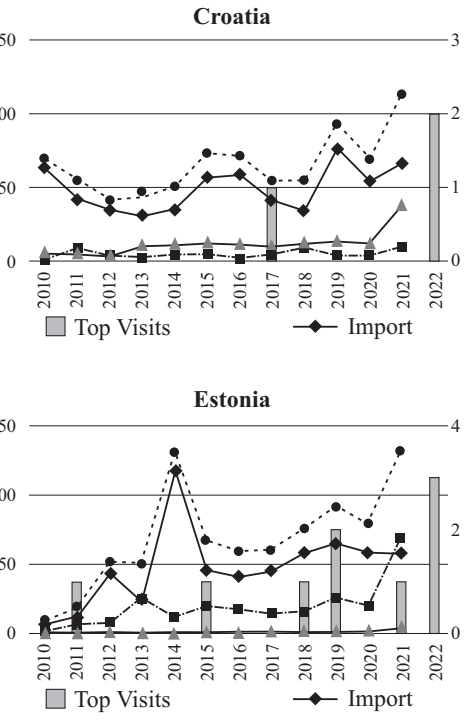


Figure 6. 3SI Countries – UAE Relations without J(E)C

Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.



Estonia arrived in the United Arab Emirates. In December 2019, the minister of defence came to the UAE to establish closer security cooperation (Krzyszowski, 2021d: 48). In September 2021, the Estonian minister responsible for the economy arrived in the UAE (UAE Ministry of Industry & Advanced Technology, 2021). In 2022, there were several significant visits to the UAE, i.e., in January by the minister of foreign affairs (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2022c) as well as the minister of entrepreneurship and IT (Government of Dubai, 2022). In March, the president of Estonia paid a visit (UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2022d). The results (Figure 6) show that top-level visits promote trade.

BROADER STRATEGIC CONTEXT

As emphasized by Adler and Pouliot (2011: 1), the analysis of events contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of international relations and, consequently, to the discovery of a broader perspective of international politics. In this way, practitioner analysis is implemented in international relations theory (Turner, 1994: 43), and participant observation is based on the “subjectivist” method (Pouliot, 2007). It is related to the process of reflection, which, according to Bourdieu (2004), is the foundation of the theory of practice, which contributes to better policies in international relations (Bueger, Gadinger, 2014: 5).

This reflection based on the presented research results shows that Austria’s role and position qualify for a broader 3SI context as an added value from the strategic partnership perspective with the UAE in the energy field. In addition, the interaction within the Graz Triangle, i.e., Vienna-Ljubljana-Zagreb, should also be considered, where Croatia with an LNG terminal and planned pipeline will connect the Adriatic Sea with the Baltic Sea and an LNG terminal in Poland. Croatia and Slovenia will be increasingly interested in developing relations with MENA, including the United Arab Emirates (Sadecki, 2013).

The role and position of Romania reflect its importance for the UAE, especially in terms of its transport strategy. Bulgaria’s declared strategic relations with the UAE should be interpreted from its geopolitical role and position in terms of cooperation in security and the communication route with the Balkans. Poland, despite the lack of demonstrated will to deepen relations in the last few years, has the greatest potential due to its perceived power, role, and position within the Three Seas Initiative. Moreover, in a broader context, both the most significant transport and energy routes run through Poland. Naturally, Warsaw will support the development of these projects, especially in its immediate vicinity, i.e., the Baltic States and the Visegrad Group. In this way, Poland should play the role and position of an economic hub in 3SI-UAE relations (Figure 7).

In the context of cooperation between the UAE and the Three Seas Initiative, it is significant to recognise its EU context. If the European Union is to be an effective actor in the international arena, it must be coherent and integrated, considering the interests of Central and Eastern Europe. It is what both the Weimar Triangle (Krzyszowski, 2021b: 121) and, in a much broader sense, the Three Seas Initiative should



Figure 7. Tree Seas Initiative Main Projects

Source: Own study based on data from government institutions.

- Pipeline connecting LNG terminals;
- - - - Highway “Via Carpathia”;
- Railway “2 Sea”

serve. All 3SI goals directly correspond to the strategic goals of the European Union. Moreover, Three Seas Initiative projects are co-financed by EU funds, including the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund. Thus, 3SI effectively implements the EU’s Cohesion Policy to meet the needs of European Territorial Cooperation. The Three Seas Initiative enables integration by providing appropriate transport, energy, and digital infrastructure. In recent years, there have been dynamics of cooperation in these areas between the 3SI countries and the United Arab Emirates (Krzymowski, 2022).

Analysing the factors influencing the Three Seas countries and cooperation with the UAE, geopolitical and security issues should also be considered. In the year the Three Seas Initiative was launched, there was a migration crisis resulting mainly from the influx of refugees from Syria. It showed the lack of effective migration and internal security policy in the “old” EU countries. Moreover, the war in Ukraine demonstrates the lack of a coherent and active EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. Considering the geopolitical location and the perception of threats in Central Eastern Europe, the vast majority of 3SI countries emphasize the need to strengthen transatlantic ties. Ukraine, currently having the status of a participating partner of the Three Seas Initiative and the future as a full member, is of strategic importance for 3SI. After the Three Seas Initiative launch, there was a dynamic of top-level meetings between Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates, deepening relations, including in security, energy, and infrastructure. Consequently, at the beginning of 2020, the state-owned company DP World from the UAE acquired a majority stake in the strategic Ukrainian container

terminal near Odesa. At the same time, the United Arab Emirates presented plans to invest in infrastructure in Ukraine (Krzyszowski, 2020b). Due to hostilities, DP World suspended its operations in the port. However, in the future, joint projects of Ukraine and the UAE will contribute to the development of 3SI. Moreover, in the face of the war in Ukraine, the Balkans, where the rivalry between superpowers takes place, are now gaining strategic importance. The presence of the United Arab Emirates is very dynamic in this area. Under these conditions, the Western Balkans should become part of the European Union and the Three Seas Initiative as soon as possible (Krzyszowski, 2023).

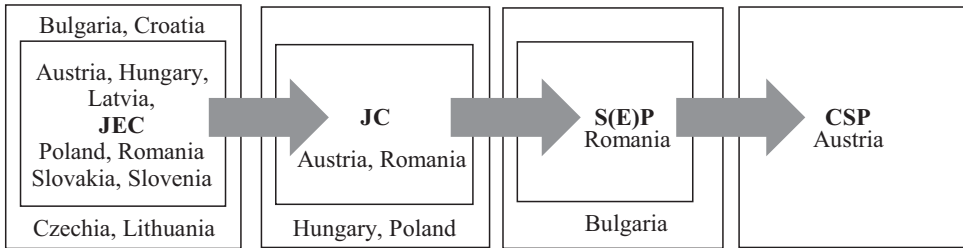
Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Middle East were deeply affected by the end of the bipolar world order. In both geographical areas, the game for a new world order started. After 25 years, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, on the initiative of Croatia and Poland, started a new formula of cooperation under the name of the Three Seas Initiative, which is part of the implementation of the concept of “New Europe”, “a vision of an entire, free and peaceful Europe” (Zbińkowski, 2019). At that time, the United Arab Emirates began drastically increasing relations with 3SI countries. The energy, transport, and economic strategic element of the Three Seas Initiative made it possible to connect Europe from the Baltic Sea with North and Sub-Saharan Africa and the GCC countries. Thus, 3SI combined with the Middle East projects can have a significant role in this area (Repetowicz, 2017).

RESULTS INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

The research results indicate that Austria shows the highest dynamics of economic and political relations with the United Arab Emirates. Certainly, establishing official relations more than 20 years earlier than the other 3SI countries was important. In addition, from the very beginning, they are accompanied by regular meetings at the highest level during which a strong will to strengthen relations is demonstrated. This confirms Gerner’s (1991: 123) assumption that the analysis of foreign policy should consider not only international but also domestic conditions. In addition, Austria and the UAE present very similar critical mass and GDP levels. Their relations confirm the hypothesis and can be considered as a model example. In such a case, the Joint Economic Committee is followed by a strengthening of cooperation, the establishment of the Joint Committee, and finally, the setup of a strategic partnership (Figure 8). Romania’s relations also confirm this pattern, showing that J(E)C have become a mutual “influence mechanism” on domestic and foreign policy (Jackson, Sorensen, 2006: 151), and at the same time a factor shaping the process of adaptation to new challenges in international relations.

On the other hand, of the two countries that have had 3 JEC sessions so far, Hungary has had regular top-level visits since 2015. However, they do not contribute to a significant increase in trade or the level of relations. In comparison, Poland had a very high dynamic of meetings at the highest level in 2011–2015, including the first two sessions of the JEC. After that, no high-level visit took place until 2022 when the UAE’s minister of foreign affairs arrived in Poland after 8 years, and the third

Figure 8. From J(E)C to Strategic Partnership



Source: Own study.

session of the JEC took place. In addition, despite the MoU signed in 2014 on the establishment of the JC, no meeting was held. During 2015–2018, there was a drastic decrease. These results show that there has been no willingness to conclude a strategic partnership in recent years. However, due to Poland’s great potential, trade is presently developing despite the lack of dynamic political relations. This case, on the one hand, further confirms the assumption of Smith (1986: 17) and Hudson (2007) about the “comprehensive theory of foreign policy,” which considers the level of analysis of domestic and international policy. At the same time, Hudson points out that a country with a high potential of perceived power can adapt to the international environment without expressed political will. In such a situation, the needs and interests of the nation are articulated directly by active subjects, without the involvement of political power. Nonstate actors set the limits of adaptation.

The case of Latvia demonstrates that two meetings of the Joint Economic Committee and consistent high-level visits accompanied an upward trend in trade. The same phenomenon is shown by countries with one J(E)C, i.e., Slovakia and Slovenia. On the other hand, out of the five countries that have not yet had a JEC session, Lithuania, Estonia, and partly also Croatia is developing regular communications at the highest level with the UAE. At the same time, they are also accompanied by an upward trend in trade. Both phenomena show that in the case of low perceived power, political will matters more.

In contrast, the case of the Czech Republic shows that despite the lack of frequent political visits, a high level of trade remains stable. This can be interpreted as almost identical critical mass and a similar GDP level as the UAE. The case of Bulgaria presents a different phenomenon. Despite the regular dynamics of visits at the highest level in recent years, trade has been falling drastically. Despite this, Bulgaria and the United Arab Emirates signed a strategic partnership. This can be interpreted by a low level of GDP, but a large military potential, counted in the number of soldiers, comparable to the UAE. The security area has become an important element of cooperation. Moreover, Bulgaria’s role in the UAE results from its geopolitical position in the transport dimension. This case highlights the importance of “strategy, intention, and perception” (Sprout, Sprout, 1956).

The presented results of this article should inspire other researchers to further in-depth analyses of the Three Seas Initiative in the context of its role and importance in relations with partners from the Middle East. In addition, an interesting future research direction should be the UAE foreign and security policy in terms of the possibility of

anchoring it within the Euro-Atlantic partnership, considering the enormous dynamics of UAE-Israel cooperation. This area, in the aspect of international relations, their multipolarity, the complexity of the modern world economy, and the emerging new global security architecture, should be the subject of analysis.

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has brought many changes both in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and in the Middle East, where the United Arab Emirates demonstrates its will play the role of a leader in many initiatives in the international arena. In 2016, 12 CEE countries launched the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) for the implementation of strategic economic projects to adapt to new international challenges. This research paper aims to find an answer to the research question of what is the Joint Committees' – J(E)C role and significance for relations between the United Arab Emirates and Three Seas Initiative countries? To achieve the set research goal, both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied, considering the quantitative potential of the analysed countries' power to adapt to the international environment and influence its players. Then, a comparative analysis was used in terms of J(E)C sessions, top-level visits, and trade trends. The research findings show that the most important thing to achieve the strategic level of relations is the political will and the appropriate strategy. However, countries with high potential, and perceived power, do not need J(E)C for the stable development of economic cooperation. The research results indicate that in strategic partnership with the UAE, Austria has a role and position in energy and Romania in transport. On the other hand, Poland connecting both strategic routes appear as an economic hub.

Keywords: UAE economy, Three Seas Initiative, trade exchange, Central Eastern Europe, 3SI

**STRATEGICZNE ZNACZENIE WSPÓLNYCH KOMITETÓW
DLA WSPÓLPRACY MIĘDZY PAŃSTWAMI INICJATYWY TRÓJMORZA
A ZJEDNOCZONYMI EMIRATAMI ARABSKIMI**

STRESZCZENIE

XXI wiek przyniósł duże zmiany zarówno w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej (CEE), jak i na Bliskim Wschodzie, w którym Zjednoczone Emiraty Arabskie demonstrują wolę odgrywania roli lidera wielu inicjatyw na arenie międzynarodowej. Natomiast w 2016 roku 12 państw CEE zainaugurowały Inicjatywę Trójmorza (3SI) służącą realizacji strategicznych gospodarczych projektów w celu adaptacji do nowych wyzwań międzynarodowych. Celem pracy jest znalezienie odpowiedzi na pytanie badawcze jaka jest rola Wspólnych Komitetów i ich znaczenie dla relacji pomiędzy państwami Inicjatywy Trójmorza a Zjednoczonymi Emiratami Arabskimi? Aby zrealizować wyznaczony cel badawczy, zostały zastosowane metody ilościowe, jak i jakościowe, biorąc pod uwagę ilościowy potencjał siły analizowanych państw do adaptacji do środowiska międzynarodowego, jak i oddziaływania na innych aktorów. Następnie, dokonano analizy porównawczej w aspekcie przeprowadzonych sesji J(E)C oraz wizyt najwyższego szczebla, tendencji wymiany handlowej. Wyniki badania ukazują, że do osiągnięcia strategicznego poziomu relacji jest najważniejsza wola polityczna oraz stosowna strategia. Jednak, państwu o dużym potencjale, dla stabilnego rozwoju współpracy gospodarczej nie jest konieczne J(E)C. Rezultat badań wskazuje na rolę i pozycję Austrii w energetycznym strategicznym partnerstwie z ZEA, zaś Rumunię w wymiarze transportowym. Natomiast, w sposób naturalny Polska łącząca oba szlaki strategiczne, jawi się jako gospodarczy hub.

Słowa kluczowe: gospodarka ZEA, Inicjatywa Trójmorza, wymiana handlowa, Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia, 3SI