

The Intermarium as the Polish-Ukrainian Linchpin of Baltic- Black Sea Cooperation

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Edited by

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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Cooperation

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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-2712-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2712-6

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ATO—Anti-Terrorist Operation (*Anty-Terorystyczna Operatsiia*)
BBSA—Baltic to Black Sea Alliance
BSEC—Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
BSU—Black Sea Union (*Al'yans Chornomors'kyh Derzhav*)
CAP—Comprehensive Assistance Package
CEF—Connecting Europe Facility
CIS—Community of Independent States
CSCE—Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
DCAF—Democratic Control of Armed Forces
ECHR—European Court for Human Rights
ENP—European Neighbourhood Policy
ESIF—European Structural and Investment Funds
EU—European Union
FDI—Foreign direct investment
FDIBAP—Foreign Direct Investment Benefits Absorption Path
FIS—Foreign Intelligence Service (of Ukraine)
FRONTEX—European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GCS—Government Centre for Security (*Rzqdowe Centrum
Bezpieczeństwa*)
GDP—Gross domestic product
GUAM—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova
GUUAM—Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova
ISA—Internal Security Agency (*Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrzznego*)
KFOR—Kosovo Force (NATO mission)
LITPOLUKRBRIG—Lithuanian–Polish–Ukrainian Brigade
NATO—North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO—Non-governmental organization
NGU—National Guard of Ukraine (*Natsional'na Hvardiia Ukrainy*)
NSB—National Security Bureau (*Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego*)
NSDCU—National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (*Rada
Natsional'noyi Bezpeky ta Oborony Ukrainy*)
NSZZ (*Solidarność*)—Independent Self-governing Labour Union
(*Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy*)
ODED-GUAM—Organization for Democracy and Economic
Development GUAM

- OSCE—Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OUN—Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (*Orhanizatsiia Ukrayin's'kyh Natsionalistiv*)
PiS—Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Spraweliwość*)
PLN—Polish Złoty (currency)
POLUKRBAT—Polish-Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion
PPS—Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*)
SLD—Alliance of the Democratic Left (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*)
SSU—Security Service of Ukraine
TRADOC—The United States Army Training and Doctrine Command
TTFP—Trade and Transport Facilitation Project
UAF—Ukrainian Armed Forces (*Zbroyni Syly Ukrayiny*)
UAV—Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UK—United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
ULB—Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus (Polish foreign policy doctrine)
UN—United Nations Organisation
UNCTAD—United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UPA—Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrayin's'ka Povstan's'ka Armiia*)
UPR—Ukrainian People's Republic (*Ukrayin's'ka Narodna Respublika*)
US—United States (of America)
USD—United States' Dollar
USSR—Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VC/IIMS—Virtual Centre (for combating terrorism) within the Interstate Information Management System
WW1—First World War
WW2—Second World War

INTRODUCTION

It all started with the conference, *Intermarium in the 21st Century: Visions, Architectures, Feasibilities*, which took place on July 6-7 2017 at Lazarski University in Warsaw. Or, to be more precise, with a range of events accompanying it. Organizers understood, on the eve of the conference, that it would collide with the Global Forum, which had unexpectedly been moved from Wrocław to Warsaw. This move had been made as a courtesy to the newly elected US President, Donald Trump, so that he could arrive in Poland's capital, participate in the Global Forum on July 7, and discuss, among other issues, the Intermarium affairs. The presence of the US President in the city, along with his delivering a public speech, distracted several participants and contributors from the Lazarski conference. However, all this confusion unequivocally highlighted one fact; global leaders pay significant attention today to regional politics, in particular, to the issues of good governance, security, and prosperity.

Notwithstanding the imperfect timing, the Lazarski conference on the Intermarium was a success. It gathered dozens of contributors from five countries and thirteen research institutions. Like the Global Forum, it served as further proof that interest in the Intermarium—in all of its diversity—is gaining momentum in the contemporary regional, public, political, and academic discourse.

This book constitutes a modest attempt to shed more light on the concept of the Intermarium to the Western reader. Obviously, it is not the only book existing on the topic, and it is far from being an exhaustive one. However, its uniqueness resides in taking a multi-disciplinary approach to assessing the contemporary potential of regional governance, as the latter was enshrined in daring ideas from the beginning of the 20th century.

The majority of contributors to this book are participants in the Intermarium conference at Lazarski, who decided to structuralize their findings in chapters and bring them to a wider audience. These are specialists in European and regional history, economics, security, geopolitics, and cultural studies. As an academic phenomenon, the book amalgamates numerous perspectives on the Intermarium into a multi-layered, yet comprehensive, narrative.

To make the book methodologically credible, its research focus was limited to the assessment of the efficiency of the Polish-Ukrainian linchpin

in conceptualisations of the Intermarium, both historical and contemporary. Poland and Ukraine, as two major sovereign entities and two neighbouring states, are regarded as a hypothetical engine for regional cooperation, in the same way as France and Germany can be regarded as such an engine for the EU. The contribution of other regional actors, specifically Baltic and Black Sea states, was presented in the light of the overall probability and profitability of the Polish-Ukrainian linchpin.

The book's six chapters are predominantly grounded on regional primary and secondary sources. Unfortunately, not much original information can be extracted from Western academic literature on the Intermarium today. Moreover, some regional research and discoveries merit an introduction into a broadly understood English-language segment of social sciences.

The book starts with a chapter by Daria Nałęcz in which she unveils the key features of the Intermarium project and concept, as they were coined at the beginning of the 20th century. Nałęcz also outlines the evolution of the topic in Polish political thought, from the early 1920s to the fall of communism. Major Polish intellectuals and their theoretical contributions to the Intermarium are presented in this chapter.

Volodymyr Poltorak assesses the nature and features of the Intermarium concept from the perspective of Ukrainian academic discourse and historiography. He outlines the most notable differences between Polish and Ukrainian leaders' perception of good governance over the region in various times, from the early Middle Ages to the end of the Cold War.

Ostap Kushnir scrutinizes the geopolitical ambiguity of the term 'Intermarium', as it circulates in the regional discourse today. He also enumerates and assesses attempts of selected political actors in Ukraine and Poland to build the Intermarium framework after the 1990s. Finally, Kushnir assesses the hypothetical efficiency of the cognominal intergovernmental organization as it emerged in the contemporary environment.

Kateryna Pryshchepa presents the dynamics of post-Cold War Polish-Ukrainian relations in the light of the evolving political objectives of both states. She refers to the findings and theorizing of Jerzy Giedroyc, one of the most notable Polish diasporic intellectuals, who outlined the 'new' strategy for regional cooperation in the 1970s. She also assesses historical traumas which prevent Ukrainian and Polish people from finding a common language on identity issues.

Maksym Bugriy provides an overview of the perspectives and potential of the Polish-Ukrainian linchpin in military and security domains. He assesses the most notable recent bilateral and multilateral projects, both successful and not, defining the factors which either facilitate or hamper

cooperation. He also looks at the history of the Polish-Ukrainian military and security cooperation in the aftermath of the Cold War.

Finally, Tomasz M. Napiórkowski calculates the economic potential, and outlines the structure of the markets of the Intermarium states, with a particular emphasis on Ukraine. To accomplish this task, he traces the post-1990s dynamics of international trade between regional actors, and analyses the nature of their FDI. He attempts to point out whether the construction of a 'rigid' and comparatively 'isolated' regional economic system will suffice to propel the welfare of the Intermarium region.

In its six chapters, the book aims to answer the following research questions : What should be understood by the term 'Intermarium'? What are its history, and geopolitical meanings? What are its connotations and functionality in political, public, and academic discourses of the region? To what extent does the Intermarium constitute an attractive geopolitical strategy today? Can the Ukrainian-Polish linchpin secure the functioning and flourishing of the Intermarium block of states?

All contributors sincerely hope that the book will meet your expectations.

Ostap Kushnir

CHAPTER ONE

THE EVOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERMARIUM STRATEGY IN POLAND: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

DARIA NAŁĘCZ

Introduction. The original idea of the Intermarium

The Intermarium strategy was developed in Poland as a political doctrine, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The origin of the concept, however, dates back to the mid-19th century, when the Polish exiles started to think about how to reverse the course of history after the defeat of the November Uprising. It was, thus, one of the concepts which they arrived at, in their constant pursuit of a way both to rebuild a sovereign Polish state, divided between its powerful neighbours at the end of the 18th century, and to secure the state's future. Even today, over a hundred years after its creation, one can appreciate the original and innovative nature of that concept, which focused on regaining independence for Poland. Its authors were the first to see the rise of nationalist aspirations and estimate their potential influence on international relations. They wanted to encourage the nations-in-formation to succeed, finally, in their struggle for self-determination.

It was only later that these nationalist aspirations became appreciated and exploited by other world political leaders, who are recognized today as the precursors of political utilization of nationalism. President Wilson is most often mentioned in this regard, as a figure who presented and advocated the concept of nations' self-determination, at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Another famous example is Lenin, who manipulated nationalist sympathies to destroy the power of the Romanov dynasty in Russia, as well as reconstruct their empire. Last but not least, there were the German strategists who hastened to implement their vision of *Mitteleuropa* after the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty of 1918. The major idea

behind *Mitteleuropa* resided in creating national states in Eastern Europe as Berlin's satellites. However, nobody mentions the Poles, who were historically the first to conceptualize a clear masterplan for utilizing regional nationalist aspirations as leverage in international relations.

The Polish masterplan—later called the Intermarium strategy—resided in exploiting nationalistic sympathies to fundamentally transform Eastern Europe. It was created by theoreticians and activists of the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, or PPS), established in 1892. The first on the list is Józef Piłsudski. The Intermarium strategy was a tool the PPS planned to use to achieve its main goal of gaining independence for Poland. The socialists considered Russia the arch-enemy. They wanted to 'mutilate' it, through initiating a wide-scale social and national revolt at a suitable moment, which would lead to the split of Russian territory along national divisions. One of the PPS experts, Leon Wasilewski, had already declared in 1901: "We should never forget that we are not the only prisoners of the Tsarist regime. Many other nations are manacled as well, and they suffer as much as we do. We have common goals, and the same enemy, and we should jointly fight against him."¹

The major points of this masterplan were outlined in July 1904, in Piłsudski's memorandum lodged with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Russian empire was to be annihilated by nationalist aspirations of the peoples conquered earlier by the Tsarist regime. Piłsudski stated in the first sentence that "Russia only seems to be a unified state; in fact, there is no unity. Its lack is the country's weakness, its Achilles' heel, which all Russia's enemies should strike at." Piłsudski continued that, "over the previous century, even the smallest nations came to realize their uniqueness and existence" and, therefore, a force was created, "which, at the first opportune moment may destroy the Tsarist state, tearing away huge parts of its territorial domain." Poland should take the lead in this fight, due to its demographic, economic and cultural potential, as well as its determination and willingness to make sacrifices in opposing Russia. Piłsudski concluded that, "Polish force and its importance in the various parts of Russia emboldens us to set as our goal the splitting of the empire into its constituent parts and the freeing of the subjugated countries." The emancipated nations would not only create their own states, but also provide a guarantee for a secure regional development. "Russia, stripped of its conquered lands, will be so weak as to pose no threat as a neighbour."²

This masterplan included all the elements which Piłsudski—who later became the Polish Chief of State and Supreme Commander—would use to build his Intermarium strategy. The most important of those

elements resided in considering Russia as the biggest threat to the freedom of the nations of Eastern Europe, unification of those nations in the fight against Russian expansion, the key role of Poland in this fight, and the transformation of Poland into a regional leader.

The first opportunity to turn this masterplan into reality appeared with the outbreak of the war between Russia and Japan in 1904. But the Japanese did not take Piłsudski's proposal seriously.

The second opportunity to proceed with the Intermarium strategy came in 1918. By that time, Piłsudski had left the PPS, though his core ideas on Poland's future remained unchanged. He believed that a reborn Poland should not waste the chance to turn the historical tide and permanently secure itself against the Russian threat. The situation was indeed very favourable. The First World War left all Poland's partitioners—Germany, Austria, and Russia—defeated. Russia was additionally destabilized by the Bolsheviks' takeover of power, and the subsequent civil war, which paralyzed the country's ability to act on an international level. At the same time, the chain of cataclysms that overturned Europe's old status quo brought a breath of fresh air to the nationalist aspirations of hitherto imprisoned nations.

The Poles were the first among them to build their own state, which needed only months to become actively engaged in international relations. Piłsudski took power, and promptly began implementing his multi-layered geopolitical vision, which included the Intermarium strategy. The name of the strategy itself was never used; Piłsudski and his counterparts called it 'the federation concept', as a ruse to confuse opponents.

In fact, creating a Polish federation was never part of Piłsudski's geopolitical vision. He wanted to create a confederation of sovereign nation-states, which would include, for instance, a Lithuanian-Polish-Belarusian state, with the heir to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in its 18th century borders. He also hoped for an alliance with Ukraine. His boldest expectations were that Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and countries in the Caucasus, might also join the confederation. Poland was supposed to be its major power.

This vision alluded to the concept of the *Rzeczpospolita* of the Jagiellonian dynasty; however, it was not its copy. It involved the recognition of sovereignties of the nation-states created between the Baltic and the Black Seas. Working together, they were supposed to transform Eastern Europe and introduce a new strategic balance, not only in the region, but in Europe as a whole. To fulfil this objective, the states of the Intermarium were to become parts of a military alliance, with numerous

other connections considered afterwards. No specific details were ever put forward; Piłsudski valued general vision and believed that its development would directly depend on the logic of the international situation.

The cooperation of the freed, or newly established, nations would block the resurrection of Russian power and influence. Russia would be pushed out of Europe and forced to focus on its Asian politics and expansion. Piłsudski always considered Russia as the greatest enemy. He perceived its Asian despotism as a mortal threat to Polish sovereignty and national identity. The Intermarium strategy was drawn up to become a shield against Russian aggression. It was also supposed to become a tool to introduce democracy and the rule of law to this part of the continent. In other words, Piłsudski wanted to 'civilize' Poland's neighbours, and protect them from both types of despotism; the 'old' Tsarist, and the 'new' Bolshevik. Cooperation between Intermarium states would also fill the void of power in Eastern Europe, created by the fall of Austria-Hungary.

However, such a profound change in international relations was very hard to implement. It required at least two preconditions. The first resided in mutilating Russia's military capabilities, which could be achieved only by a joint effort of the freed nations. The latter was the second precondition.

The Intermarium strategy failed because neither of the preconditions was fulfilled. Russia's military defeat in WW1 was not complete, and the following revolution kept the state incapacitated for a relatively short time. Already, by the late autumn of 1919, Bolsheviks had gained the upper hand, and were entrenched in power. Piłsudski was partly responsible for this, as he had refused to support the major offensive of Denikin's 'White' army. There was a fair amount of logic in such a move. Piłsudski was afraid that the victory of 'White Russia', and the following restoration, would pose a mortal threat to Poland. Under this scenario, Russia would become a valuable ally of Western powers, especially France, which would leave Russia free to organize Eastern Europe according to its visions. Poland's borders would probably become limited to those of the Duchy of Warsaw era. Ukraine would not exist at all. That scenario was perceived by Piłsudski as the end of Intermarium cooperation. Instead, Piłsudski preferred to go to war against the Bolshevik Russia, where he could count on the support of the Entente, including France. However, he underestimated the Bolsheviks' ability to rebuild Russia's military power. They had already moved west, in the spring of 1920. Conquering Poland was not their most important goal; they wanted to establish communist rule all over Europe.

The war with Russia and the failure of the Intermarium

Poland fared surprisingly well in its war with Bolshevik Russia. Even though the state was in its infancy, it managed to succeed in the mammoth task of raising an army of several hundred thousand soldiers. In February-March 1919, it managed to halt the Bolsheviks' first advance to the west, and mounted a counteroffensive, reaching the famous Napoleonic battle site on the Berezina river by August 1919. In the north, Bolsheviks were pushed back across the rivers Daugava and Drissa, which allowed the Polish and Latvian forces to join. The Bolsheviks were also forced out of the Polesie and Volhynia regions. Consistently defeated, they were in a state of systematic retreat.³

Poland's military victories were not matched by success in the field of establishing mutual beneficial and cooperative relations with the Intermarium nations. Poland's most important partners were the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians. Already, on November 1 1918, unrest in Galicia, a region taken back from Austria, led to casualties in fights between the Poles and the Ukrainians. Both nations envisioned Eastern Galicia as part of their rebuilt states, which led to several months of a bloody war. By the summer of 1919, the Polish crushed the Ukrainians and took over the whole contested region. It was a bittersweet victory though. Two nations, living side by side for centuries, were now waging war against one another, instead of jointly fighting Russia. In December 1918, the war also broke out in another former Russian partition, the so-called 'taken lands' east of the Bug River, which the Ukrainian People's Republic, with its seat in Kyiv, claimed as its own. Dark clouds continued to hover over the Intermarium region.

The newly established Lithuanian state was also uninterested in cooperation with Poland. The Lithuanian elites feared that the Poles living in their country would eventually dominate them. Thus, Warsaw was treated rather more as an enemy than an ally. Little changed when the Vilnius region became occupied by the Soviets. To remove this threat, Piłsudski opted for a military offensive and a takeover. This move followed an earlier mission to Kaunas by Michał Romer, who proposed: "to the Lithuanian political agents, supporting the concept of a free historic Lithuania, a joint action at the moment of the Piłsudski-led Polish army's entrance into Vilnius, as an act of restituting the Grand Duchy of Lithuania."⁴

Acting out this scenario, the victorious Piłsudski entered Vilnius on April 22 1919. He issued a proclamation, *'To the Inhabitants of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania'*, and publicly presented the proposal

previously put forward earlier, in secret, by Romer. This only worsened the situation, as the Lithuanians perceived the takeover of Vilnius as an act of aggression. As an act of desperation, Piłsudski attempted to initiate a Polish rebellion in Kaunas and 'legitimise' his Lithuanian policies. The inept *coup d'état* was quickly subdued. Moreover, the casualties suffered by the Lithuanians, as a result of the Poles taking over the Suwałki region, heightened the tension between the two states even further.

Having suffered a defeat in Kaunas, and fearing a similar outcome in Belarus, Piłsudski reconsidered his plans for the latter. Initially, he envisioned the country as part of the restituted Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which became no longer feasible after Kaunas. However, Piłsudski still wanted to retain as many options as possible. The Polish army entered Minsk in August 1919. On arriving in the city, Piłsudski addressed the local elites: "The time will come when you will be able to declare how you want your country to be governed. It will be a great day when the people of this land will have the first ever opportunity to speak for themselves."⁵

Even though the implementation of the Intermarium strategy proved difficult at the very beginning, Piłsudski did not abandon the whole concept. Hopes flared up with the improvement of Polish-Ukrainian relations. The Ukrainian People's Republic, vitally threatened by both the 'White' army of Denikin, and the 'Red' forces of the Soviets, sought support in Poland. On September 1 1919, a Polish-Ukrainian truce was signed, allowing both sides to concentrate on fighting the Russians. At the same time, Warsaw was conducting a broad diplomatic offensive. In the second half of January 1920, a conference was held in Helsinki with the participation of Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Piłsudski hoped it would pave the way for the Intermarium block. However, the parties did not come to an agreement. To make matters worse, the visible conflict between Polish and Lithuanian delegates did not bode well for the future. It was only Latvia who agreed to cooperate, which resulted in the Poles pushing the Soviets out of the city of Dinaburg (Daugavpils).⁶

Another failed initiative was a plan for Poland, Finland, Latvia, Romania, and Ukraine, to seek truce with Soviet Russia jointly. A conference was organized in Warsaw at the beginning of March 1920. By its end, however, all sides concluded that they would gain more by negotiating individually. That was not a good sign for the Intermarium strategy either.

In the aftermath of the conference, Piłsudski decided to 'play' the Ukrainian card. He came to an agreement with Symon Petliura, the President of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and on April 21 1920, a treaty was signed in Warsaw. According to its provisions, Poland

recognized the independence of Ukraine, whilst Ukraine was to give up its claims to Eastern Galicia and Volhynia. The treaty was later accompanied by a secret military convention of April 24, on the cooperation of Polish and Ukrainian armies under the command of Piłsudski. The very next day, a great offensive was launched to push the Soviets out of Ukraine. Its first phase was very successful. On May 7 1920, the Polish army entered Kyiv, where a joint Polish-Ukrainian military parade was held. Piłsudski wanted the Ukrainian state to mature as soon as possible. He knew his plans would ultimately fail if he tried to introduce Polish rule in Kyiv. Of utmost importance was the strengthening of Petliura's small army, which would be crucial in the continuing war for the future of the Intermarium against Russia. However, Petliura's government and its state-building attempts failed to gain support among Ukrainians. This failure exposed one of the biggest flaws of the Intermarium strategy—it lacked understanding and recognition by the common people.

Poland alone would not be able to mutilate Russia, which was an imperative objective in the original masterplan. On the one hand, the successful war of the summer and autumn of 1920 preserved Polish sovereignty and national identity, as well as preventing Poland from becoming yet another Soviet republic. The expansion of communism was also stopped; Poland had effectively shielded Europe. A British diplomat, Lord D'Abernon, was right, when he defined the decisive battle of August 1920 as one of a dozen or so most important battles in the history of the world.⁷ On the other hand, all these efforts were not enough to create the Intermarium as a block of states. Victories of Poland and its allies were not crushing enough. Russia was not forced to cede the whole territories of Ukraine and Belarus. In this light, the Treaty of Riga of March 18 1921, served only Polish goals. Bolshevik Russia recognized Polish sovereignty and accepted its eastern borders, which looked promising for the establishment of normal relations with the Soviets in the future.⁸ Still, the treaty was a disaster for the Intermarium strategy. It sanctioned a *de facto* partition of Ukrainian and Belarusian lands between Russia and Poland, with the former receiving the bigger share. Paradoxical as it may seem, Poland, the original architect of the Intermarium, became one of the gravediggers at its funeral.

It also became clear in the 1920s, that the balance of powers in Eastern Europe would not be substantially transformed. On the one hand, Poland alone would fail to protect the region from Russia. On the other hand, Poland's relations with the three nations which were supposed to become the pillars of the Intermarium block, lay in ruins. Lithuania never came to terms with losing to Poland the territories it had always claimed as

its own. The Lithuanian Constitution placed the country's capital in Vilnius, a city under Polish control, which led Lithuania to maintain a state of war with Poland up to 1938. The League of Nations became the most eloquent arena for a bitter Lithuanian-Polish quarrel. For their part, Ukrainian-Polish and Belarusian-Polish relations were no better. The growth of Polish nationalism, fuelled by the politics of the National Democratic Party, meant there was no room in Poland for the nationalist aspirations of the Ukrainians and Belarusians who resided there. National minorities—most of all the Ukrainian nationalists—became enemies of the Polish statehood.

Intermarium in inter-war times: Oblivion

The degree of change in relations between Poland and other Intermarium nations was perfectly evidenced by Piłsudski himself. In 1921, he felt remorse over leaving Ukrainians to their fate. On May 15 1921, he visited the military camp of the Ukrainian officers. When he entered the club room, decorated with Polish and Ukrainian coats of arms, he saluted the present officers in silence, and the only thing he said was: "I apologize to you, gentlemen, I apologize,"⁹ He received thunderous applause.

It is hard to believe that, in 1930, the same Piłsudski ordered the brutal suppression of unrest in Eastern Małopolska, a region inhabited mostly by Ukrainians. This suppression came as a response to terrorist acts carried out by Ukrainian nationalists. Such a move further alienated the whole Ukrainian community in Poland, as it envisaged a collective responsibility for crimes committed by a small group of people. Nevertheless, Piłsudski opted for this act because he wanted to prove to Polish public opinion that he could be even harsher in persecuting Ukrainians than his political opponents, the National Democratic movement. Apparently, this way of treating Ukrainians could only be ordered by somebody who no longer believed in the Intermarium strategy.

However, many sources from the period reveal Piłsudski's awareness that he had wasted the opportunity to rebuild Eastern Europe in 1918-1921. Russia continued to pose a threat, as the assertive Soviet policy of the 1920s and 1930s demonstrated. Without the shield of the Intermarium, Poland was exposed to ruthless blows of aggression from the East. This understanding of danger, and Piłsudski's sentiments regarding the lost opportunity, were well expressed by the famous poet Czesław Miłosz, who, just like Piłsudski, was born in the eastern reaches of Polish territory at that time:

*Latami będzie chodzić w Belwederze.
Piłsudski nigdy nie uwierzy w trwałość.
I będzie mruczeć: „Oni nas napadną”.
Kto? I wskaże na zachód, na wschód.
„Kolo historii wstrzymałem na chwilę.”¹⁰*

Piłsudski understood the risks which emerged as a result of his failure to create a great bloc of nation-states between Russia and Germany. Such a bloc would neutralize Russia, as it would also become a natural ally of Western countries in preventing Germany from rebuilding its imperial might. Without Intermarium, Polish international politics in Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe was mere tinkering, as Piłsudski himself called it. Limited in choice, Poland had to resort to other tools for providing security for itself. The first on the list was good relations with the West, in particular alliance with France. Relations with Germany and the USSR, which took the guise of the so-called policy of balance, were also important.

Seeking new allies and partners, Polish diplomacy shifted its focus towards the triangle between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas. This became especially clear after Piłsudski's death in 1935, when Józef Beck took the lead. Beck's plan for cooperation between the states of the region was even called 'the Intermarium concept', though it had little in common with Piłsudski's grand vision of 1918. The international situation made the initial vision no longer feasible. However, although not as ambitious, Beck's plan also failed. Marek Kornat, the foremost scholar of the subject, concluded that "not only did this plan fail, it never became the subject of diplomatic negotiations."¹¹

Another offshoot of the Intermarium concept was Polish Prometheism (*Prometeizm*). It stood for the deliberate Polish attempts to support the nationalist aspirations of peoples living in the Soviet empire. These attempts were predominantly conducted by Polish intelligence, and diplomats who aimed to weaken the USSR by supporting local opposition. An extreme version of Prometheism, which envisaged the dismantling of the USSR from the inside, never became a part of official Polish policy.¹²

The Intermarium concept regained its strategic importance after 1939. Falling victim to aggression from Nazi Germany and the USSR, Poland was occupied, and its government sought refuge in exile. First in France, and later in England, Polish elites continued to fight with the support of Western allies. In particular, the government in exile formulated a future strategy of shielding Poland from German and Soviet threats. An alliance with the West was considered of paramount importance; however, it was to be complemented by the Intermarium in Central Europe.

Making this strategy a reality was not easy. The states of Central Europe had such incompatible interests that they fought on opposing sides in the Second World War. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Greece were part of the anti-Nazi coalition. Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria were allied with the Third Reich. The Independent Croatian State and the Slovak Republic also collaborated with the Germans.

The first step towards the Intermarium resided in creating a confederation of Poland and Czechoslovakia. A joint declaration of November 11 1940, stated that: "Poland and Czechoslovakia put old animosities behind them. Considering their common interests, they are determined, once the war has ended, to enter into a closer political and economic relationship, which will become the beginning of a new order for Eastern Europe."¹³ The inter-governmental cooperation which followed the declaration continued in the subsequent years, even though both countries had a different stance towards the USSR. There even existed plans to involve other countries of the Intermarium region in the confederative project. However, all progress was lost when the war ended, and the region became overridden by the USSR. The new Yalta order, agreed upon by the Soviets and the Western powers, 'legitimized' Stalin's direct and indirect influence over the countries of Eastern Europe.

Intermarium in communist and post-communist Polish realities

In communist Poland, no references to the Intermarium were allowed. Thus, the concept became further developed by the Polish exiles, among whom Jerzy Giedroyc, the editor of the Paris-published magazine *Kultura*, should be named above all. Articles published in *Kultura* promoted the geopolitical doctrine succinctly expressed in the following words: "There can be no free Poland without a free Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine". It was believed, just as in the inter-war period, that the implementation of the Intermarium strategy would allow the restitution of Polish sovereignty, and simultaneously empower the states of Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe. Giedroyc modified the visions originally developed by Piłsudski. In particular, he accepted the new Polish borders of 1945—without the so-called eastern reaches—as such was the post-war reality. This automatically meant abandoning the concept of Poland in its historic, Jagiellonian borders. In addition, Giedroyc respected the Eastern European nations' fears of Polish domination and proposed cooperation among partners equal in every respect.¹⁴

The cooperation of free nations from the Intermarium region was a dream of the Polish democratic opposition, which clearly matured in the 1970s. All the opposition fractions shared Giedroyc's conviction that Poland could only regain freedom and sovereignty if other neighbouring nations rejected the Soviet rule. In this light, Polish and Czechoslovakian opposition started very active cooperation in 1978.

The idea of grassroots cooperation between the nations under communism was also supported by the Solidarity movement. The First National Conference of the Delegates of NSZZ, 'Solidarność', held in September 1981, prepared the *Message to the Working People of Eastern Europe*. This message made the communist leaders furious, and the Soviet government extremely disappointed; the latter claimed an unauthorized interference into state affairs. However, this did not prevent the Solidarity movement, in its headquarters and fringes, from running debates on the history, contemporality, and future of the cooperation of the nations of the Intermarium region. The introduction of martial law, and the following prosecutions, only boosted these debates, as evidenced by the 1980s' underground magazines: *ABC*, *Obóz*, *Nowa Koalicja* and *Międzymorze*.¹⁵ Poland's future president, Bronisław Komorowski, was the editor-in-chief of *ABC*.

Because of the social and political processes taking place in exile and at home, the Solidarity elites remembered and valued the importance of the Intermarium concept in 1989, when Poland restored its sovereignty. However, they also understood that venturing an attempt at a federation or confederation of states—as advocated in the original Intermarium strategy of Piłsudski—was a faulty decision at that time. They simply wanted to cooperate as closely as possible with other states in the region. This approach resembled Beck's idea of the 1930s' Intermarium.

It is worth noting that the Solidarity elites suffered divisions in respect to internal policy, although they were unanimous on foreign policy objectives. The strategic goal was to join the Euro-Atlantic community which promised the guarantee of sovereignty, democracy, and modernisation of Polish economy. The post-communists from the newly formed Alliance of the Democratic Left (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* or SLD) shared the same goal. They made it the basis of their foreign policy after winning the parliamentary elections of 1993 and 2001. During their two four-year terms in Parliament and government (1993-1997 and 2001-2005), the SLD succeeded with two important objectives. Primarily, in 1997, during the NATO summit in Madrid, Poland's membership of the organization was confirmed. Two years later, in 1999, Poland became a full-fledged NATO member. Secondly, in December 2002, during the EU summit in

Copenhagen, the final terms of Poland's accession to the EU were agreed upon. Poland joined the EU in 2004.

For all this to become possible, Poland had to make a geopolitical shift from the East to the West. This was achieved by four successive governments, nurtured by the Solidarity movement between 1989 and 1993, and led by the following prime ministers: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, Jan Olszewski and Hanna Suchocka. For his part, Lech Wałęsa, one of the Solidarity leaders, who became the President of Poland in December 1990, played a no-less-important role in this shift. He was regarded all over the world as a symbol of bringing down communism in Central-Eastern Europe.

To complete the shift from the East to the West, the countries of the region needed to gain true independence from the USSR. As in the late 1980s, this would only be possible with the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Moreover, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary had to remove the Soviet troops from their territories. To achieve these objectives, the Presidents of Poland and Czechoslovakia—Lech Wałęsa and Vaclav Havel—along with the Prime Minister of Hungary, József Antall, met in the Hungarian city of Visegrád, in February 1991. The choice of the place was symbolic, as the city had hosted meetings of Polish, Czech and Hungarian rulers in the 14th century. The leaders of the three states decided in 1991 to cooperate closely in foreign policy and created the Visegrád Triangle, an intergovernmental organization aimed at the facilitation and acceleration of common goals. Some analysts speculated that this was the first step in the creation of the Intermarium.¹⁶ The initial anti-Soviet efficiency of the Visegrád Triangle, expressed by achieving the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, provided additional arguments for such speculations. However, they proved utterly unrealistic.

One should keep in mind that the post-Cold War reality was in a state of constant flux. It was a time of intense debates and research, and the Intermarium concept seemed attractive to many analysts. The most outspoken among them were the members of the Centre for International Studies, a body of the Polish Senate.

The efficiency of the Visegrád Triangle in relations with the USSR inspired hope for successful membership negotiations of its member-states with NATO and the EU. All three states were determined in their diplomatic aspirations and all made progress in internal reforms, forging ahead of other post-communist countries.

Eventually, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO and the EU. Although they joined both organizations simultaneously,

it could hardly be defined as their shared success. Numerous differences between the objectives of the three states became evident at the stage of negotiations. To begin with, they lodged separate applications to both NATO and the EU. Moreover, they competed with one another to come first in the race for membership of the Euro-Atlantic community. They cooperated only when it was convenient for them. Most of the time, the three states conducted individual negotiations, hoping for more beneficial outcomes. On top of that, the Czech Republic and Hungary feared Polish domination in the region, and in the Visegrád Triangle.

The weakness of the Intermarium concept was once again laid bare. It resided in the colliding differences in the goals of the supposed allies in the region. Whenever it came to choosing between solidarity and individual benefits, the latter always won. Therefore, the Visegrád Triangle was just a powerful springboard for gaining membership in NATO and the EU, and as such, was the priority of international politics for all of its member-states.

The multitude of colliding interests was the final undoing of the Intermarium concept and the Visegrád Triangle. One of the architects of the latter—minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski—admitted that the national goal of expanding the western mechanisms of security into Eastern Europe should not be sacrificed for “ephemeral ideas such as the Intermarium.”¹⁷ This attitude was shared by many other politicians, which became particularly evident in March 1992, when President Wałęsa proposed to create the so-called NATO-bis. It was one of the infamous ‘wonder drugs’ he wanted to introduce to boost various spheres of social, economic, and political, activity in the region. Enthusiasts of the Intermarium concept perceived Wałęsa’s NATO-bis as a reincarnation of the former. However, that did not save the President’s initiative from harsh criticism, and, eventually, Wałęsa was forced to abandon it. Minister Skubiszewski was the one who convinced him to do so, asking him to return to his role as a “supporter of Poland’s quick accession to NATO”—a role he was very good at.¹⁸

Skubiszewski’s approach was eloquent. He did much to rekindle friendly relations with other Central-Eastern European states. However, he neither perceived them as main guarantors of Polish sovereignty, nor regarded cooperation with them as an alternative to Poland’s integration into Western structures. As he stressed in a speech at the Sejm in 1992: “Poland may be either European or Russian, there is no third option. It is important to remember that this is the only choice we have.”¹⁹

While it was no longer part of official Polish foreign policy, the Intermarium concept still existed on the fringes of Polish politics. In the

1990s, the radical Polish right-wing party, The Confederation of Independent Poland (*Konfederacja Polski Nieodległej*), in cooperation with foreign organizations from Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine, created the League of Parties of the Intermarium Countries.²⁰

Official Polish foreign policy, dominated by a drive towards Euro-Atlantic standards and structures, had to reinvent its relations with Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Russia. The priority of Polish foreign policy in the Eastern dimension was clear: on the one hand, to establish and develop bilateral relations with Russia, on the other hand, to prevent Russia from blocking Polish aspirations for integration with the West. There was also strong will to promote democratization and inclusion of post-Soviet countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures.²¹ The beginnings of such a policy seemed promising. However, with time, two major flaws became apparent: relations with Russia deteriorated, and the Eastern policy did not prove to be very successful, even though the EU Eastern Partnership was launched in 2008. Apart from this, all attempts to create a distinguishable and workable framework for Central-Eastern European cooperation, for instance the Central European Initiative, failed. As a result, the dream of a mighty geopolitical stance for Poland in the East did not pass the reality check, and was replaced by an emphasis on cooperation within the EU.

From this perspective, it is interesting to observe the development of a new Polish-Croatian project, named the Three Seas Initiative, launched in 2015. Its official aims reside in the improvement of infrastructure, energy supplies, communication, and transportation in the region.²² However, looking at the policy of Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Spraweliwość* or *PiS*; in power in Poland since the parliamentary elections of 2015), one could doubt the truthfulness of these declarations. A number of party activities, as well as selected statements of its leaders, demonstrate an overwhelming distrust towards the EU, and especially towards Germany.²³ The party seems to be building local and regional Polish power, disassociated from the European mainstream. Such intentions did not emerge out of nowhere. One may speak here of the parliamentary debates of 2011, when Mariusz Błaszczak lamented the end of the ‘Jagiellonian policy’, and defended a more assertive stance in Eastern politics.²⁴ In the debates of 2013, Witold Waszczykowski stressed the need for “regaining the role of the spokesperson of the region,” as well as the role of a significant and substantive entity within the EU. Waszczykowski also outlined the need for “building the autonomous region, e.g. Carpathian”. A colleague of his, Arkadiusz Mularczyk, added that Poland should become a leader, and a representative, of Eastern and

Central Europe within the EU.²⁵ Most of the countries of the region did not back that idea. Moreover, when the time for the second summit of the Three Seas Initiative, in Warsaw in July 2017, approached, the Czech and Slovak political elites and analysts voiced their objections regarding Polish leadership aspirations, as well as its anti-EU and anti-German rhetoric.²⁶ Even if they were pleased with President Donald Trump's presence at the summit, they hesitated over his unclear policy towards the EU.²⁷ German analysts were also unambiguous. The opinion-forming and influential newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* referred to the activities of the Polish government in respect to the Initiative as a revival of an old geopolitical dream, a tool which aimed at the decomposition of Europe, a tool discovered by authoritarian regimes.²⁸ Such fear is shared by the majority of participants in the Initiative, who do not want to destabilize the EU or jeopardize their own position within the EU.

A significant difference between the Intermarium and the Three Seas Initiative, however, should also be stressed. The latter includes only EU member-states, and leaves behind post-Soviet non-EU states, namely Ukraine, which can be interpreted in two different ways. Either the Initiative is really meant as an intra-EU economic framework, or it is aimed against the EU's stability and integrity. Time will reveal which of these interpretations is correct.

Concluding remarks

Looking at the century-long history of the Intermarium concept, one can clearly outline factors and prerequisites for this framework of cooperation between the Baltic and Black Sea states to succeed.

The most important factor is the approval, or at least neutrality, of the international community. Emergence of a new, strong, and integral bloc of states will lead to a change in the international political order on a much larger scale than merely local. It will inevitably trigger a response from the dominant powers, in particular the developed countries of the West. Their support, or at least, their lenience, appears to be necessary for the Intermarium project to succeed. When Piłsudski attempted to build the Intermarium block, the Entente cared only about Poland becoming a pawn in the fight against the Bolsheviks. Furthermore, the Entente was clearly disappointed that Piłsudski did not reach an agreement with 'White Russia', as it was expected to be an ally for the West. Moreover, 'Whites' were considered a much more attractive ally than the abusive Tsarist regime which the West had had to cooperate with before. For their part, Poles, and other nations in the region, understood that Denikin's victory in

Russia would mean the end of their nationalist aspirations, and the end of the Intermarium concept. Poland's borders would have to be limited in their extent from the Duchy of Warsaw era, which entailed losing the state's eastern reaches. Ukraine would not exist at all as a sovereign entity. Piłsudski's refusal to support Denikin meant falling into disfavour with the Entente. None of the Western powers seriously considered the strengthening of Poland's position in the east.²⁹ It is also worth highlighting that President Wilson, who was well known for supporting nationalist aspirations, including those of the Central European nations, excluded Eastern European nations from his world views. One can only speculate what the West's reaction could have been if Piłsudski had succeeded with his Intermarium strategy. Perhaps only France would have been forced to refrain from a hostile response, for lack of a better option.

As for recent developments, one can be almost certain that, without the backing, or at least 'permission' of the West, no Intermarium block will be constructed. The change in the balance of powers initiated by a small or even middle-sized country, for instance Poland, is very unlikely to be agreed on. The stability of international order is valued by most Europeans. Thus, it is easier to be condemned as an irresponsible member of the international community, and face punishment, than it is to reach success through a resonant unilateral action.

Another important international factor resides in Russia's strength. Only a weak Russia, stripped of its role as an important player in international relations, would accept the loss of its influence over Eastern Europe. Piłsudski understood this in his time. He wanted to exploit the civil war in Russia by supporting the Bolsheviks against the 'Whites' in the decisive moment of the conflict, hoping that the first would be weaker, and thus easier to defeat in an open fight. In addition, the Bolsheviks, unlike the 'Whites', received no assistance from international powers and, thus, would require more time to build a strong state. Piłsudski knew he had to implement his geopolitical plans quickly, before Russia could recover. Nevertheless, he failed. After the last military victory in the Polish-Bolshevik war, at the battle of the Neman River, Russia was far from a crushing defeat. The Riga Peace Treaty was despised by the Bolsheviks, along with the Versailles Treaty. Russia very quickly managed to find a common language with Germany in the 1920s. This change in the international environment meant the slow death of the Intermarium strategy.

One may raise the question if there ever existed a time when Russia was weak enough for the Intermarium strategy to become a success. In theory, such a moment came with the fall of the USSR and the

economic crisis which raged in Russia. However, at that time the West was not prepared to agree to a profound transformation of the region. European powers and the US were afraid of political chaos and an uncontrolled spread of nuclear weaponry. Those fears were stronger than the sentiment in favour of local democratic changes and nationalist aspirations. Therefore, the West supported Presidents Gorbachev and Yeltsin as key decision-makers. As for today, the West has only just started to show restraint in relations with Putin, which does not mean, however, that it has finally become ready for a significant geopolitical shift in Central-Eastern Europe. A relatively mild Western reaction to open aggression against Ukraine is a good illustration of this. If forced to choose between Russia and Ukraine, or any other country in the region, the West would, perhaps, always support Russia. Moreover, a global security debate has recently started, in which serious hesitation appeared about article five of the NATO Pact. It is unclear whether it should be automatically applied if a collective response provokes a nuclear war.³⁰

From another perspective, it is hard to imagine a situation in which Russia is forced to accept any arrangement unfavourable to itself. The countries of Central-Eastern Europe alone are not strong enough to evoke such a situation. Moreover, the geopolitical balance in the region is additionally jeopardized by the pro-Russian attitude of some of the countries.

The chance for the Intermarium block to emerge is also greatly dependent on the Intermarium countries themselves. In Piłsudski's times, they were not prepared to cooperate. They all had their own interests, and they all feared Polish domination. They did not want to switch one suzerain for another. It is hard to say to what extent the situation has changed today. Old animosities with Poland still exist in some regional countries, for instance, Lithuania. For their part, Czech and Slovak Republics oppose Polish aspirations for leadership, especially when they are linked with anti-German and anti-EU rhetoric. On top of that, the countries of the region reveal no clear desire to cooperate with Poland in establishing joint policies and implementing joint programs. They still act individually in international relations, sometimes to the detriment of their neighbours.³¹

For the rivalry to give way to cooperation, black-and-white nationalist thinking should be constrained across the whole region. This seems unlikely, especially in the light of certain governments allowing the spread of nationalist populism. It does not bode well for the dialogue and moderation of tensions in regional politics. It often happens that the propaganda utilized for internal consumption influences relations with

other countries. The ghosts of old wrongs are revived, and geopolitical superiority becomes easily claimed, while no understanding exists that neighbours may have a completely different view on 'rights and wrongs' of the past.

Further research is needed to determine the contemporary view of the citizens of the Intermarium countries on constructing an integral regional community. In Piłsudski's times, Poles were divided on this issue, as were Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Belarusians. The majority of people from the region were lured into the sweet trap of nationalist egoism in the 1920s. However, before any research is conducted today, one must remember that the geopolitical empowerment of Central-Eastern Europe would not be readily accepted by the West. Instead, a desire to punish the ungrateful and somehow 'rebellious' countries is more likely to take shape. In our turbulent times, when the relations between the EU and the US are not flawless, and Russia is playing as many countries against one another as possible, no responsible politician would allow the destruction of a delicate and tentative balance in international relations. This destabilization would probably come at a great cost, especially for the Central European countries which joined the Western world and do not want to be pushed back.

Notes

¹ Wasilewski, Leon. *We wspólnym jarzmie. O narodowościach przez carat uciskanych*. London: PPS Publishing, 1901, 9.

² Piłsudski, Józef. *Pisma Zbiorowe*, vol 2. Warsaw: Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego, 1937, 249-253.

³ Czubiński, Antoni. *Walka o granice wschodnie Polski w latach 1918-1921*. Opole: Instytut Śląski w Opolu, 1993, 85-135.

⁴ Zygmunt, Jundziłł. "Niepodległość," 67. in *Nieudana Wyprowa Kowieńska*, ed. By T.V. London, 1955.

⁵ Piłsudski, Józef. *Pisma Zbiorowe*, vol 5. Warsaw: Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego, 1937, 107.

⁶ Łossowski, Piotr. *Historia Dyplomacji Polskiej*, vol. 4 (1918-1939). Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995, 138.

⁷ D'Abernon, Edgar Vincent. *Osiemnasta decydująca bitwa w dziejach świata pod Warszawą 1920r*. Warsaw: LTW, 1932, 10.

⁸ Nałęcz, Daria. "Pokój ryski—epizod w stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich," 97-129. in *Zapomniany pokój. Traktat ryski. Interpretacje i kontrowersje 90 lat później*, ed. by Sławomir Dębski, Warsaw: Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia.

⁹ Torzecki, Ryszard. "Piłsudski i Petliura w latach 1919-1923," 197-98. in *Międzymorze: Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX-XX wiek. Studia*