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THE CONCEPT OF INTERMARIUM FROM THE RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE. OUTLINE OF THE TOPIC

Abstract: The Intermarium concept is constantly employed in political and media discourse concerning Poland. Despite its active use, there has been several different definition since its introduction by J. Piłsudski. In this study, a brief analysis of the Intermarium concepts was presented, as seen in different historical periods from different perspectives. In addition, newly formed narratives in connection with the Russian-Ukrainian war, Russian-American changed relations and the Russia-NATO confrontation placed this concept in the centre of Russian political propaganda. As research material, Russian media and political scholars reflecting on the consequences of possible implementation of the Intermarium concept were considered. The work was conducted applying contextual analysis and the theory of political realism.

Keywords: The Intermarium concept, NATO, Russia, Poland, international relations

Introduction

The geopolitical location of the Republic of Poland between Russia and Germany has determined its fate for centuries. Poland was a victim to the imperialist aspirations of both great neighbours, who pursued their expansionist interests at its expense. It was therefore natural that the Polish ruling elites sought geopolitical solutions that would actually reduce the existing threat. The Intermarium Concept (Jurkowska 2018) proposed by J. Piłsudski was such a response. This idea has evolved over decades, but has consistently aroused and continues to provoke opposition from Russian scholars and politicians. The concept is often discussed in debates as aimed at weakening Russia and its importance in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the last decade, it has also been seen as an instrument that actually serves to strengthen the importance of America in this region of the world. The purpose of this article is to characterize the Russian view of the almost century-old Intermarium Concept, including its importance in Polish foreign policy. To explain the Russian approach to the mentioned concept, the author analysed the texts of Russian political scholars and analysts, therefore the study contains numerous direct references to source texts, with appropriate comments.

1. The Concept of Intermarium throughout the Centuries

The restoration of Poland's independence after the collapse of the Russian Empire coincided with the birth of the concept of uniting the Baltic and Black Sea states into a close union under the leadership of Warsaw. J. Piłsudski's intention was to create a federation and a system of alliances of nations that were part of the Russian Empire, without the territory of the so-called Greater Russia. Poland was to play a leading role in this initiative. The supporters of this solution went even further, arguing that Russia should be deprived of the status of a great power and an international political and economic protectorate should be established over it. In this way, it would not threaten the nations, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian, who would not need to seek support in Poland. Later, this concept was developed, and according to it, an alliance of Central and Eastern European countries and the Balkans was to be created. Such an alliance, with the support of Great Britain, could effectively contain Germany. Moreover, the alliance could become an independent entity, attractive to any country willing to oppose both Germany and Russia. The form of this alliance structure would, of course, be determined by Poland (Kuvaldin 2024, 98ff).

Views on the evolution of the Intermarium concept, very close to the Russian ones, were presented by two American authors M. Laruelle and E. Rivera in their book *Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe: The Concept of Intermarium* (Laruelle | Rivera 2019a), in the Russian version: *The Concept of Intermarium. From Piłsudski to Trump* (Laruelle | Rivera 2019b). The authors analysed this concept and emphasized that its significance increased over the centuries, and its 'rebirth' is due to the current historical and political context. The researchers presented several versions of the Intermarium concept.

The first one, called I n t e r m a r i u m I, concerns the period following the end of World War I and the fall of the imperialist power: Russia, Austria-Hungary and Prussia. In their discussion, Laruelle and Rivera emphasized that the most famous proponent and propagator of the Intermarium concept was the Polish head of state, Piłsudski (1867-1935). When Poland regained its independence in 1918 after 123 years of foreign rule, Piłsudski's actions were aimed at repelling threats from two neighbours: Germany, humiliated by the loss of part of East Prussia, and the growing power of Soviet Russia. However, the attempt to create the Eastern European Federation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which would have included a monetary and customs union with Belarus, Latvia and Estonia, ended in failure. The plan was not implemented, since none of the new states wanted to be under Polish rule. The second attempt to create Intermarium was made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Colonel J. Beck, in the years 1932-1939; Piłsudski tasked him with developing new solutions to ensure Poland's security. After signing the non-aggression pact with Germany and the Soviet Union, Beck decided to distance

himself from Germany and the USSR. In this situation, Intermarium would become an element of the balance policy and a third force: the Third Europe. He showed great diplomatic initiative in the field of rapprochement with potential partners of the federation. Estonia, Latvia and Hungary expressed interest in the concept, while the remaining countries ignored it (Laruelle | Rivera 2019b, 14f). Attempts to unite the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s ended in failure.

New possibilities for the implementation of the Intermarium concept emerged after the end of World War II: Intermarium II. Declassified documents of American intelligence show that the project was supported by Polish, British and French intelligence agencies. During World War II, the Polish government in exile revived the concept of the Central European Union, which would encompass the area among the Baltic, Black, Adriatic and Aegean Seas. Talks and consultations were held with the potential members of this Union, but the initiative was received with hostility from the USSR and with indifference from other Allies (Laruelle | Rivera 2019b, 17-18).

In its third form, the Intermarium Concept, Intermarium III, was to provide an opportunity to build an anti-communist front in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It was institutionally coordinated by the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN), a forum for cooperation between the emigration groups of nations that were part of the Soviet Union and the vassal states of the Eastern Bloc. The ABN was supported by Western secret services from the moment of its establishment until the fall of communism in the countries of the so-called people's democracy (Laruelle | Rivera 2019b, 17-18).

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, the communist adversary in Europe that had led to the creation of the concepts of Intermarium and Prometheism ceased to exist. It might have seemed that this was an unequivocal end of the concept under discussion. Nothing could be further from the truth: in the late 2000s, Western strategists, mainly American, returned to this idea. Therefore, we can speak of Intermarium IV.

In its fourth edition, the concept essentially aimed at building a pro-American New Europe using Central and Eastern European countries. This approach to resuscitating the Intermarium was proposed by the think tank "Stratfor". The direct inspiration for undertaking this concept was Poland's support for Georgia in the war with Russia in 2008. The founder of the think tank, a Hungarian-born geopolitical analyst G. Friedman, supported the revival of the Intermarium project in his speeches. In his opinion, Poland should distance itself from the EU and form a bloc with the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, located between Germany and Russia (Laruelle | Rivera 2019b, 17f).

The idea of cooperation and economic integration of the countries covered by the Intermarium Concept is referred to as its fifth edition: Intermarium V.

The driving force behind this dimension was Poland. A. Duda, elected president in 2015, returned to the idea of the Baltic-Black Sea Alliance. The idea of this regional cooperation was reflected in the "Complete unification of European energy, transport and telecommunications through the North-South corridor". The North--South corridor was to stretch from the Baltic to the Adriatic and the Black Seas. Pro-Russian researchers noted that the co-authors of the document were General J. Jones, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, head of the Polish oil, and gas giant Grupa Lotos (Mezhdunarodnyy… 2016).

Another embodiment of the concept, Intermarium VI, is the use of this concept by ultra-right Ukrainian organizations. The return of Intermarium to Ukraine is closely connected with a large-scale campaign to rehabilitate the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), as well as their hero Stepan Bandera (Mezhdunarodnyy… 2016, 44). In the context of the rehabilitation of the heroes of the interwar period, the aggravation of relations with Russia and the disappointment with Europe, which allegedly does not provide Ukraine with sufficient support against Moscow, the geopolitical concept of Intermarium is doomed to flourish in this country. It found its most active supporters in the extreme right sector of the political spectrum, among the command of the Azov battalion (Laruelle | Rivera 2019b, 45). Referring to the different versions of the Intermarium Concept presented above, in the contemporary Russian discussion on this subject there are references primarily to the fourth concept. Therefore, it determined further considerations.

2. Intermarium and the Growing Presence of the USA and NATO in Central and Eastern Europe

The Intermarium concept has gradually gained recognition among some American political experts and politicians who support increasing NATO's presence in Central and Eastern Europe. NATO's expansion in this part of Europe is a fundamental point of contention in the East-West relations. Russian leaders accuse the US of not fulfilling the verbal promises made to M. Gorbachev by J. Baker that NATO would not approach Russia's borders. NATO has not kept its word and has expanded many times, and a number of other actions have been taken to strengthen the Alliance's presence. As part of the implementation of the decisions made at the NATO summit in Warsaw, four NATO battalions were deployed on a rotational basis on the eastern flank by 2017: in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The battalions were sent to the operational area of responsibility by, among others, the United States, Canada, Germany and Great Britain. A decision was also made in Warsaw to deploy a missile defence base in Romania. The pretext for this step was to counter threats from Iran and North Korea, but in Moscow this decision was considered a clear anti-Russian

move. The status of Georgia and Ukraine was discussed at the Warsaw summit, which was met with indignation from Russia, while Montenegro was offered NATO membership (Sokolsky 2016). The Alliance also initiated the opening of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia (NATO Strategic… 2015) and a training centre in Georgia (NATO Opens… 2015). The earlier mentioned American researchers stated that the Intermarium concept fits perfectly into the current geostrategic and military context, allowing the United States to justify its policy towards Central and Eastern Europe ideologically and historically. It seems, however, that the term itself has not been formally adopted by the North Atlantic Alliance (Laruelle | Rivera 2019b, 34).

The same point of view is widespread among Russian analysts and politicians. In 2023, the journal "Literaturnaya Gazeta" published an article by Russian political scholar V. Krashennikova entitled: *Polish "Prometheuses", Warsaw and Washington Have United in Intermarium* [*Pol'skiye «Prometei» Varshava i Vashington slilis' v Mezhdumor'ye*] (Krasheninnikova 2019). The main thesis of the article concerns granting Poland the status of a key implementer of American interests in the region. To confirm it, the political scholar pointed out that among European countries there are those that want a 'new', 'young' Europe and are ready to support the Americans. According to V. Krasheninnikova, such a country is, of course, Poland. V. Krashennikova claimed that the changes consisting in 'handing over' the European end of the transatlantic axis to Poland began during the presidency of G.W. Bush, and were completed by D. Trump in his first term. Only in this country (read: Poland MK), with its nationalist government, D. Trump could deliver a militaristic speech during his visit to Warsaw in July 2017 (Krasheninnikova 2019). According to the author, only Poland obsessively provides its territory for the deployment of American military bases. It is ready to pay even several billion dollars for them and encourages others to increase their contributions to NATO. Poland is doing everything to support the USA, through the purchase of American weapons, modernization of the armed forces, and increased defence spending (Ugroza Rossii… 2019). For example, in 2019, the Polish Ministry of Defence approved a $48.9 billion army modernization plan to strengthen the eastern flank of NATO spending (Ugroza Rossii… 2019). There is no doubt that the weapons as part of the modernization will be purchased in the United States, including 32 fifth--generation multi-role aircraft F-35. The United States views Poland and all of Eastern and Central Europe as a potential launch site for ballistic missiles and nuclear-armed cruise missiles. The Patriot missile defence systems are systematically delivered to Poland. An Aegis Ashore missile defence base was opened in Redzikowo, just 160 km from the border with Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast). NATO's military infrastructure in the region is constantly expanding, and the governments of the region are concluding multi-million dollar contracts for the purchase of the latest American weapons.

Poland is demonstrating loyalty to its master (read: the USA – MK) both with money and ideological views.

In addition to her considerations of NATO, the Russian political scholar devoted much attention to what she called a 'reheated' concept of the Intermarium, which she believes is clearly anti-Russian in nature and is a tool used by Washington to weaken Russia. Intermarium is a geostrategic project aimed at uniting countries located among the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas under the leadership of Poland. During the time of dictator J. Piłsudski, the concept of Intermarium was reinforced by the concept of Prometheism. It consisted in destroying the Soviet Union by inciting nationalism and separatism among the nations inhabiting its territory. Just as Prometheus gave people fire, Poland is to bring freedom to the nations enslaved by Moscow. This policy was later adopted by the Third Reich, creating national SS legions, and the United States did the same during the Cold War, inciting nationalism and the overthrow of governments through covert intelligence operations.

For Polish nationalists, the Intermarium has long been the main concept of foreign policy. V. Kareshnikova expressed the view that the geostrategic dream of the Polish authorities is to divide Russia and Germany. This lies in the interest of the oligarch D. Trump, who needs to weaken the German engine of the European economy. The political scholar noted that both world wars began with the fire of local conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe. Here, from Szczecin on the Baltic Sea to Trieste on the Adriatic Sea, the main front of the Cold War passed, at the end of which the 'hostile takeover' of this area by Atlantic structures began. However, there is also an element of optimism. Not all Poles see their country as an American bridgehead created against Russia. Many Germans and French, including politicians, do not want to be drawn into a war with Russia, which is instigated by nationalists and revanchists from Eastern Europe. It is precisely such sensible people who are Russia's allies spending (Ugroza Rossii… 2019).

Of course, statements by Polish government officials are also listened to in Russia and interpreted in accordance with the current geopolitical situation. Attention was drawn to the assessment of the geopolitical situation by D. Tusk, who said in an interview with Polish and foreign media in March 2024 that Europe must mentally get used to a new pre-war era, in which war is no longer a category of the past. According to S. Kuvaldin, an analyst from the Yevgeny Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations, D. Tusk, a former EU Council President and current Prime Minister of Poland, has taken on the role of a politician who, unlike many other European leaders, foresaw the threat from Russia back in 2008-2009. "He expressed these views at various European forums, and allies shuddered, suspecting that he was speaking primarily about Polish Russophobia". S. Kuvaldin took the Polish Prime Minister's statement with great surprise, since in 2007-2014, when D. Tusk first held the post of Prime Minister of the Polish

government, relations with Russia improved, and he took the position that a dialogue with Russia should be conducted, accepting that country as it, de facto, is. In his article, the Russian researcher tried to characterize the factors that, in his opinion, determine the attitude of the Republic of Poland towards Russia, noting at the same time that the factors are unchangeable or difficult to change (Kuvaldin 2024, 98-108).

One of them is geography, or rather historical geography. Regardless of the fate of the Polish state, it has always been and is located between Russia and Germany. Both countries have remained in the memory of Polish society in an extremely negative way, as responsible for the tragic fate of Poland, so the attitude towards them is negative and, despite the decades that have passed, it is difficult to change. The approach to preventing threats from these two countries has varied depending on the historical period and circumstances. Nevertheless, the spectre of Russian or German domination in Central and Eastern Europe has certainly prompted and continues to encourage Poland to take measures to counteract or at least reduce this domination. The instrumentalization of the German threat is present in Polish politics, especially in right-wing circles. The leader of the largest Polish party, Law and Justice, J. Kaczyński, in one of his statements called the Civic Platform not a Polish, but a German party. The potential transformation of Poland into another German federal state was one of the arguments against deeper European integration expressed by the Polish right wing. In its turn, the liberals and left-wing groups that form the current ruling coalition advocate a stronger role for Poland in the EU and its status as a leader that influences the nature and policy of this organization and prevents concerns about the dominance of the western neighbour (Kuvaldin 2024, 98-108). The military operations in Ukraine and Germany's position after February 24, 2022 eliminated the possibility of a close alliance between Russia and Germany. Their potential alliance has always been a cause for serious concern for Warsaw. It could significantly limit Poland's room for manoeuvre in Central and Eastern Europe, and posed an existential threat to it, for example, in the form of Russian-German energy cooperation.

In his analysis, S. Kuvaldin notes that Poland considers membership in political and military organizations as a guarantee of its security. NATO membership and close cooperation with the United States has been and remain a priority for all Polish governments since 1989. He also puts forward the thesis that striving for a close alliance with the United States, a power significantly distant from Polish borders, results not only from the need to provide security guarantees, but also from the ambition to shape policies in Central and Eastern Europe jointly. In this context, S. Kuvalin also refers to the concept of I n t e r m a r i u m or the T h r e e S e a s I n i t i a t i v e, indicating that it is still present in Polish political thought and manifests itself in specific, diverse initiatives (Kuvaldin 2024, 98-108). Contemporary Poland has not moved away from this way of thinking, relying on strong allies and international organizations. Over the years, one of the achievements of Polish

foreign policy was the ability to influence the EU in its relations with post-Soviet countries. The creation of the "Eastern Partnership" and support for the pro-European aspirations of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were the result of Polish diplomacy. One of the main priorities of Polish foreign policy under the PiS government was the Three Seas Initiative, articulated in 2015 and supported by D. Trump during his first presidential term. In other words, Poland, to the best of its ability, tried to create an agreement in Central and Eastern Europe in which it would play a leading role. This means that the countries of the region should not be dependent, especially in terms of energy supplies, on either Russia or Germany.

3. Intermarium in the Context of the War in Ukraine

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has created favourable conditions for the implementation of the above-mentioned goals. The attention of Western political and military structure has significantly focused on Eastern Europe, and NATO has strengthened its eastern flank in order to counter the potential Russian threat. All these actions increase the importance of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and meet Polish expectations about the growth of the strategic subjectivity of the region. The West, indeed, treats Russian influence and the special operation in Ukraine as a serious problem and makes every effort to solve it. The cited view of D. Tusk about the pre-war era, to a large extent, creates a desirable situation for Poland, in which NATO and the EU should pay special attention to the frontline countries, i.e. those bordering Ukraine. Therefore, it can be concluded that Poland needs both Russia and Germany, because the battlefield of these two countries defines the specificity of Central and Eastern Europe.

Warsaw, as always, needs a restrained, but at the same time somewhat threatening Russia, so that the countries of the region need Poland's support. This approach defines certain boundaries of Polish-Russian relations. Warsaw needs a state in which it will constantly fight Russian influence, involving other influential players as much as possible, without entering into direct conflict with Moscow. Such rivalry, as centuries of experience and common sense have shown, rarely entails a long-term, radical rupture in relations. The parties need to interact and create a framework that will determine their actions in the region. The Russian researcher cites A. Duda's statement from an interview for one of the French television channels in February 2024, which he gave during a multilateral meeting of European leaders regarding support for Ukraine after the start of the so-called Russian special operation. The Polish president stated that it would be best if Russia did not exist at all, or at least was not a strong state (Andrzej Duda … 2024). According to him, it is impossible to implement General De Gaulle's postulate of building a common home from the Atlantic to the Urals.

The statements of other Polish politicians and experts, resolutely and uncompromisingly supporting Ukraine in the war against Russian aggression, have not gone unnoticed by Russian media and researchers. According to the Russian narrative, Poland would not want this conflict to escalate or be resolved without its participation. According to one of the hypotheses circulating in Russia, in the event of significant Russian successes and territorial gains on Ukrainian lands, Poland will decide to occupy and establish control over the part of Western Ukraine that belonged to the Polish state until 1939. Such a scenario was discussed, in particular, by the director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) S. Naryshkin (Volkova 2022). In July 2023, the director of the SVR outlined a probable scenario for the implementation of Polish plans, according to which a Polish-Lithuanian--Ukrainian brigade prepared to conduct international missions will be deployed in the western regions of Ukraine. Naryshkin said the brigade would be constantly replenished with troops and equipment to be ready to carry out other tasks as the military-political situation develops (Naryshkin zayavil… 2023). S. Kuvaldin believes that one should not judge the intelligence findings, implying that the information of such an institution should be treated as certain. However, he drew attention to the information from the Polish Ministry of Defence, which denied the information that a new recruitment was being conducted for this brigade. This false information was allegedly the result of an information intrigue carried out by foreign, i.e. Russian or Belarusian, intelligence services. On the issue of Ukrainian territories, the Russian political scholar refers to V. Putin's speech at the meeting of the Valdai Club in October 2022. According to the Russian president, the western lands of Ukraine were the pre-war territory of Poland, Romania and Hungary, which J. Stalin "took and transferred" to Ukraine. Therefore, from his point of view, only Russia can act as a true guarantor of the territorial integrity of Ukraine (Luk'yanov 2022).

Continuing his thought, V. Putin claims that the potential entry of Polish armed forces into Western Ukraine in the event of Kiev's defeat in the conflict with Moscow would largely meet Russia's interests. Warsaw would once again give reason to speak of itself as a "hyena" that drags away pieces of territory to its lair (Luk'yanov 2022). By creating such a "buffer" between the territories that have fallen into Russia's sphere of influence and the European Union/NATO, Poland would be doomed to complex and, most likely, conflictual relations with the local population, including political forces whose agenda includes the pursuit of establishing a strong Ukrainian state. It can also be assumed that the occupation of part of Ukrainian territory would force Warsaw to conduct open or confidential negotiations on the regulations regarding the movement of people and the organization of social, political and economic life on the annexed territory of Ukraine.

If this were to happen, Poland would lose the opportunity to implement the policy of shaping a favourable security environment in Central and Eastern Europe and building preferential relations with influential Western countries. Poland,

despite its undoubted territorial claims, takes into account the possibility of such a development and, therefore, does not send any signals about Polish control over Ukrainian territories. The lack of territorial claims to Ukraine is clearly articulated by Polish politicians and government officials. However, regardless of the statements of Polish politicians, in Moscow's opinion, such a peaceful position of Poland results from the fact that territorial claims would be unacceptable for influential Western countries, and especially the United States. Poland would certainly like to see Russia's influence in Central and Eastern Europe reduced to a minimum, but this does not mean that it is ready to minimize Russian influence at all costs (Luk'yanov 2022).

Conclusions

The Intermarium concept not only arouses great interest in Russia, but is also seen primarily as a tool for strengthening the US influence. From the Russian perspective, the American anti-Russian policy, provocations against Russia and undermining the unity of the EU, make Poland, the Baltic States, Romania and Ukraine the most loyal allies of the United States, and the Intermarium initiative is financed by Washington. This means that the Americans are openly using and will use the countries of the Central European region in their actions against Russia and Western Europe. In their opinion, the Intermarium may become an effective American wedge driven into the western edge of the Eurasian continent. The implementation of this idea will forever bury the desire to build a common secure and democratic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok (Krasheninnikova 2020, 168-169). Therefore, we must not allow the chimeras of the Intermarium to plunge Europe and the world into the chaos of a new conflict again (Krasheninnikova 2020, 168-169).

It should be noted here that these views were formulated by the Author in 2019--2020. In the face of Russian aggression and the war in Ukraine, the words that blame the construction of Intermarium as the source of a new conflict in Europe sound sarcastic. However, from the Kremlin's perspective, it was probably this concept that led to the decision to attack Ukraine, as this way of thinking can be related to the views of Alexander Dugin, who postulated that the creation of a Moscow-Berlin axis and the pacification of the states and nations located between Russia and Germany would ensure the security of the Russian Federation from the hostile Atlantic world (Eberhart 2010, 221-240).

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