EASTERN EUROPE. ON THE CENTENARY OF THE POLITICAL PROJECT

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This article describes the characteristics of Eastern Europe as a political project. The author considers the genesis of Eastern Europe as a political region and identifies several periods in its history. The author analyses key features of sovereignization — desovereignization of the region and examines geopolitical projects of Intermarium. It is shown that Eastern Europe as such is an objective reality, whose history has not ended. At the same time, the author advances and proves the thesis that various 'Baltic/Black Sea' cooperation models aimed at isolating Russia act against the interests of all participants of the political process. A number of methods, including the historical and structural functional analyses and the system approach are used in the study. The central hypothesis is that, as a political project, Intermarium reflects an important part of the systemic features of Eastern Europe as a political region. However, it is not identical to the region in terms of its geography or political regionalism. The anti-Russian sentiment of the Intermarium project is dominant. Yet, it is not immanent in this group of concepts. Reformatting the Intermarium concept in line with the new Moscow-Warsaw-Berlin cooperation model can be considered a feasible political task, which requires an adequate scientific solution. Moreover, Eastern Europe has reached the point of bifurcation. The region may become another new source of instability in Europe. Intermarium projects — a traditional object of research — have to be re-evaluated in the new political and economic conditions. This article is a step in this direction.

Key words: Eastern Europe, Russia, Poland, European Union, periphery, limitrophe states, identity, sovereignty, Intermarium

Different concepts developed in the theory of international relations can serve as a theoretical framework for analysing problems of regional identity and sovereignty in Eastern Europe.

Such theoretical concepts include those formulated within the transnationalist approach. In the theory of international relations, the transnationalist approach is not homogeneous and, as a rule, falls into three major trends:

1) the blurring of border between domestic and foreign policies, international activities of regions and other objects of federal states, immediate effect of international affairs on domestic processes;

2) democratisation of international relations and domestic politics based on the achievements of post-industrial revolution and information dissemination;

3) modification of traditional approaches to sovereignty.

In their classical work *Transnational Relations and World Politics* [1], Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye stressed a sharp qualitative increase in the dependence between individual countries, regions, and non-traditional actors in economy, politics, and social interactions. While this conclusion sparkled a big discussion in the 1970s, today the discussion has shifted to the concrete repercussions of the growing transnationalisation of international relations rather than the possibility or validity of such an approach. In the late 20th century, the perception of globalisation started to change. As L. Fawcett notes, the regionalisation of world economy was partly caused by the reaction of states to the devastating consequences of globalisation. [2] Today, this position is shared by a number of Russian and European experts viewing regionalisation as globalisation on a limited scale. Therefore, a consequence of globalisation is its 'reverse side' — regionalisation.

The globalised world of post-Westphalian era is characterised by destruction of the state identity — whose key element is sovereignty. The very problem of identifying 'European identities' gives priority not to the 'European identity' per se but to a sum of geographically distanced, culturally decentralised, and politically unequal identities. [3] However, modern international relations are determined by regionalism. The elites' subjective understanding of basic interests, which are influenced by not only the economy but also the cultural code, is replacing the traditional geopolitical combination of history, culture, and tradition and the classical interpretation of sovereignty as the basis of modern international relations. However, despite the evident coherence of the so called 'European values', they are interpreted differently in Berlin and Warsaw.

Of course, since the 1990s, the ruling elites of Eastern Europe have been voluntarily sequestering the quality and number of sovereign administrative functions. This process has been especially pronounced in Poland, where the renunciation of sovereignty is interpreted in the public consciousness as an intentional but extremely heavy sacrifice.

Latvia and Estonia, on the other hand, adopted a different model, that of 'disposing of the ballast', i.e. the functions that were unsuitable for the country. It is important to note that the traditions of sovereignty are not as solid in Eastern Europe as in the Western Europe. An obvious exception is Poland — a country of sovereignty, even if its sovereignty is absent *de jure*.

Modern interpretations of sovereignty are very different. The legal rules and understanding of sovereignty dating back to the Yalta-Potsdam system

are becoming obsolete. The UN law declaring that all states are equal in law, enjoy all the rights inherent in their sovereignty, that territorial integrity and political independence of states must be respected, and that the existence of sovereign states is guaranteed by current international law and international organisations [4], has become a debatable issue for some experts. Others do not consider it valid anymore.

We assume that there is a group of committed supporters of state sovereignty. D. Lloyd stresses that abiding by the rules of international law does not translate into the dissolution of a state's sovereignty. In his opinion, restrictions are imposed on only international but not domestic activities. [5] Michael Walzer, an American political scientist, believes that sovereignty follows from the right of peoples to self-determination. Therefore, sovereignty is an embodiment of the people's history, culture, and social patterns. Sovereignty is not an inherent property of state, but rather something that has a certain national formalisation. [6]

On the other hand, the idea of erosion of sovereignty is supported by not only most lawyers and political scientists but also such ideologist and propagandists as F. Fukuyama. [7] S. Huntington [8], A. Toffler. [9] Z. Brzezinski [10], and K. Ohmae. [11]

A question arises as to why these researchers defending different positions on almost all problems agree on this one issue. We believe that, attracting public attention to formal disagreements over insignificant questions, they serve the same major concept of modern Euro-Atlantic law, which was granted the status of international due to historical reasons. This resulted in the introduction of the notion of 'perforated sovereignty', which has a direct connection to the term 'perforated democracy'. [12] In this context, Russia's political innovation, 'sovereign democracy' [13—19], does not read as a tautology. It merely suggests actual sovereignty and a model of democracy that is concrete and rooted in history and geography. In the case of Eastern European countries, the discussion about sovereignty is both extremely politicised and strongly affected by the practices of economic development.

The loss of sovereignty in CEE does not require special studies. Obviously, the processes of national sovereignty transformation are different in the countries of '"old' and 'new' Europe'. This thesis can hardly be challenged. However, the author continues, 'This is explained by the fact that Central and Eastern European states achieved political independence rather recently, which makes it difficult for them to renounce their hard-gained sovereignty. [20] An analysis of political processes in Eastern Europe shows that some of the states attained certain economic success. However, their sovereignty was irreversibly lost. The recent attempts of Hungary and Poland to regain some elements of their sovereignty have proven unsuccessful. For instance, Camp of Great Poland (OW), a Polish nationalist organisation, and the Slavic Union (ZS) organised a series of rallies in Warsaw in 2014 to oppose the policies of Polish authorities. The rallies used not nationalistic, but anti-Ukrainian and anti-American slogans calling for the regaining of sovereignty. [21] Poland revealed itself to be a country that has the right not only to declare but also to champion its national interests. The Republic of

Poland is claiming the role of a regional leader in Central and Eastern Europe. The events of winter 2016 are further prove that. While the Poles do not want to sever all ties with the EU, they do not wish to blindly follow all recommendations from Berlin and Brussels either. Poland's position is of consequence not only for Hungary but also for Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which are absolutely loyal to European practices. The refugee crisis creates a window of opportunities for a Central European Union of a new type. However, this requires reaching a balance in relations with Russia.

The Baltics — as part of the Intermarium and Eastern Europe — are a special case. [22] The loss of sovereignty was presented there as a geopolitical achievement, a civilizational breakthrough. Yes, Prague, Budapest and Warsaw willingly passed a significant part of their sovereignty to Brussels, but in their case it was only in the Baltics that the loss of sovereignty was not accompanied by even a pretence of a real political or economic bargain with the European Union.

Russia is also debating the nature of sovereignty. Different opinions are voiced, including those citing integration as an evolutionary step of sovereignty. [23] A nation-state refers to a political apparatus, recognised to have sovereign rights within the borders of a demarcated territorial area, able to back its claims to sovereignty by control of military power, many of whose citizens have positive feelings of commitment to its national identity. [24] Giddens is right to state that a nation state suggests sovereignty but does not guarantee it. This assumption is crucial for our work. We believe that sovereignty is a relative concept, changing in time and adjusting to new situations and new requirements [25].

De facto, Slovakia and even Poland have Western European rather than their own sovereignty. However, what are the limits to borrowing and using sovereignty from the legal and, more important, practical perspective? The CEE version of sovereignty demonstrates the invalidity of the major thesis of Euro-Atlantic political mainstream and its Russian advocates, that a connection between domestic and foreign policy is an attribute of all mature democracies. According to this view, the more developed a state's democratic institutions are, the deeper is the connection. [26] Experience suggests that an extreme interdependence between domestic and foreign policy is characteristic of countries that have never been and will never be democratic in the north-Atlantic understanding of the term. Similarly, in the conditions of increased economic instability holding to the illusion of solving domestic problems through achievements in foreign policy leads to major failures.

There are some who claim that, in Europe and thus Eastern Europe, time has contracted and conflict potential has increased. In principle, this is true. Stressing the scales and rates of changes in world politics and economy is the right thing to do. However, one should also emphasise the extremely rapid transformations taking place in CEE. The region has never seen an 'ordinary' course of political events.

As a political region, Eastern Europe emerged in the framework of the Versailles-Washington system, and it was not an instantaneous occurrence. The region's territorial and political structure was constantly changing until

1939 and it continued to evolve after World War II (the First and Second Vienna Awards). Having halted the advance of the Red Army under the mottos of a unifying national idea, the army of General Żeligowski occupied a part of Lithuania (the Vilnius Region). How did that move fit, exactly, with the major thesis of the Polish opponents of the Russian Empire, "for our freedom and yours"?

Although political radicalism in the countries of Eastern Europe did not transform into Nazism, Trotskyism, and radical interpretations of communism, it was a dominant idea for many decades. Probably, only Czechoslovakia managed to preserve a political regime resembling that of French or British democracies.

Was a different development model possible? We believe it was not. Historically, Vienna, Saint Petersburg, and Berlin had accumulated a lot of experience in managing non-title nations. In times of piece, administrative systems of these governed subjects could boast extremely long lives, provided, among other things, that the capitals of the empires in question would cooperate. Fast forward to the World War I, when most of the countries involved proposed both territorial and political transformations. Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany, however, did not take kindly to the idea of establishing truly sovereign nation states. For example, the 1915 Memorandum of the Baltic Council (established by German emigrants from the Estland and Liefland provinces of the Russian Empire) stressed that the Narva — Lake Peipus line was the border ensuring German military security. This border was believed to threaten Saint Petersburg, and lead to its evacuation, moving the seat of government, and thus to the administrative disintegration of Russia. [27] Another important document of the time, the memorandum of the German army officer and politician E. Ludendorff, *Die Ziele der Deutschen Politik*, talks of German occupation plans for Eastern Europe. In particular, the memorandum stressed that the Entente's 'iron ring' could have been broken only if Russia had been fully dependent on Germany in political, economic, and military aspects and if it had served as a source of Gernamn economic and political power. Thus, Germany could have secured European leadership, build a foundation for a European-Asian bloc, and become a global power capable of opposing the Pan-American and British blocs. According to the Ludendorff's plan, Finland, the Baltics, Poland, Ukraine, and Georgia had to be separated from Russia. The rest of the country's territory — after the overthrow of Bolshevism, of course — had to become a federation with 'close' economic ties with Germany. [28] However, to implement this plan, it was necessary to discuss it with Berlin's allies. The Chancellor of Germany T. von Bethmann-Hollweg wrote to the Ambassador to Vienna, von Tschirschky, that if Germany was to ensure its victory, it would have been necessary to form several buffer states between Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary to push Russia farther East [27]. This approach was formalised in the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

In the days of Austria-Hungary and the Habsburg monarchy, the authors of such plans prioritized its territorial integrity against the backdrop of changes in its administrative and political system — i. e. transforming it into

a federation or confederation, a union of territories or an alliance of peoples. It is sufficient to recall the projects of the second half of the 19th/the first half of the 20th century — Lajos Kossuth's Danubian Confederation, Felix of Szhwarzenberg's and Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*, Richard Nikolaus von Coudenhove-Kalergi's *Pan-Europa*, and other forms of regional cooperation of states [29].

However, 1917 and 1918 marked the end of the three empires as political projects. The region of Eastern Europe became a political and historical reality, bursting with extremely complicated internal problems. The challenges of the *interbellum* — especially of the 1920s — cannot be attributed to the intrigues of Moscow and Berlin alone.

The region of CEE has its internal sources of conflicts. This is *de jure* recognised in the capitals of Eastern Europe, what conclusions are made from this is another question altogether. The years Polish people were the subjects of 'foreign' empires led to the emergence of a surprisingly lasting quasi-imperial complex, which is affecting the policy of the Polish state 100 years after the Treaty of Versailles.

In Poland, the idea of a Third Europe, a union of small states lead by Poland, had been very popular almost until the German invasion of 1939. The British researchers W. P. and Z. K Coates write that, until 1939, Polish governments had been preoccupied with planning and developing different variants of:

1) fragmentation of the USSR,

2) creating a bloc of states that would isolate the USSR from Western Europe. [30]

Here is another quote to illustrate our point about the academic and political discussion in Poland: "Our goal is for the Polish people to unify other peoples living between the Arctic Ocean and the Black Sea, sandwiched between Russia and Hitler's Germany". [31] A Polish military intelligence officer, Edmund Charaszkiewicz wrote, "squeezed between two extremely dynamic colossi, Poland should carefully observe all activities of her neighbours". [32, 33] This was the essence of Prometheism, J. Pilsudski's political concept aimed at weakening Russia (and, later, the USSR) through supporting irredentist movements among the non-Russian peoples. Based, in part, on the classical Jagiellonian idea, Prometheism adapted it to the practices of the *interbellum*.

In 1926, the Prometheus (*Prometeusz*) organisation was established in Paris. It brought together representatives of Azerbaijan, the Don Cossacks, Georgia, the Ideal-Ural state, Ingria, Karelia, Komi, Crimea, Kuban, North Caucasus, Turkestan, and Ukraine. [34] This movement was supported by the Eastern Institute in Warsaw and Research Institute for Eastern Europe in Vilno. An overview of the history of Prometheism was published in February 1940 by the above-mentioned Edmund Charaszkiewicz, who was responsible for coordinating the Prometheus programme from 1927 until the beginning of World War II.

In 1959, this idea became the basis for US Public Law 86—-90 on Captive Nations. The *Nowy Prometeusz* is still published today, still promoting the Charaszkiewicz's cause. An activist of the Confederation of Independent

Poland, Andrzej Izdebski put forward a project of the Federation of Peoples of Central Europe bringing together 17 states. In view of the city's significance for the peoples of Central Europe, Lviv had to become the capital of this federation. [35]

These approaches were considerably modernised by Jerzy Giedroyc[1] and Juliusz Mieroszewski[2]. They argued that the Eastern Dimension (Polish relations with Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania) were the sublimation of relations with the USSR. The existence of socialist Poland and the powerful USSR and the fact that the doctrine was written by émigré intellectuals in Paris were largely disregarded. After 1991, the expert community started paying close attention to the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski concept as a forecast that came true. The 2013—2015 showed the concept's fallacy. Through recognising their responsibility for certain episodes of Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian history in the period when these peoples were subjects of Polish kings, Poles reduced the animosity of Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. [36] However, having accepted Ukrainian nationalism, Poland assumed that it would always be targeted at Russia. However, it has become evident that supporting local nationalist movements can result in an unpredictable conflict with an unpredictable geographical vector.

There is a need for a thorough analysis of new and traditional Polish approaches to the Intermarium. Geographically, the Intermarium can have substantially different 'compositions'. However, it is not Estonia or Albania that plays the leading role in the project. Historically, geographically, and politically, the Intermarium project can survive without Ukraine but cannot without the Republic of Poland. One should take into account Polish vision of Eastern European problem and search for forms of cooperation based on common views, which is not impossible. These common views, however, have to be addressed separately in a different article.

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Another important issue is the emergence of Eastern Europe as a political rather than geographical phenomenon. According to Larry Wolff, until the beginning of the 18th century, Europeans divided their continent into the Mediterranean South and the Baltic North. The concept of Eastern Europe was born only in the era of the Enlightenment. [37] It is difficult to argue with such approach. Orientalism as a scientific approach does not suggest recognising Eastern Europe as a political reality.

We believe that geographical reality became political in 1918—1920. The second version of Eastern Europe developed in 1944—1956. The disintegration of the socialist system and the USSR in 1986—1991 marked the third — but not the last — stage of the region's evolution. The eastern enlargement of the EU did not result in the dissolution of CEE as a region. [38; 39]

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[1] Jerzy Giedroyc (1906—2000) was a Polish writer and politician, the founder and editor of the *Kultura* journal.
[2] Juliusz Mieroszewski (1906—1976) was a Polish writer and journalist, a close collaborator of J. Giedroyc.

The fall of the Soviet system did not change the region's identity. Central and Eastern European countries found themselves in the zone of influence of another integration project — the European Union. Later, they acceded to the EU. The EU enlargement had a significant impact on politics and economies of CEE. However, it did not affect the peripheral status of the region and the particularities of its economic development.

This is explained by the fact that the Central and Eastern European identity is not rooted solely in the Communist past. Some scholars and other experts consider the Communist period as crucial for the identity formation, it does not make much sense from the point of view of history. The era of 'world socialism system' is mere 30 years in the centuries-long history of the region. Even in Russia, such interpretations of the CEE phenomenon are not rare, as exemplified by the highly interesting works of I. N. Tarasov. [40] The studies conducted by S. A. Romanenko are a notable exception. As early as 1994, he was writing, "scholars and journalists often consider inter-ethnic conflicts in Eastern and Middle Europe to be the legacy of communism, which halted the process of national self-determination or, on the contrary, as a result of the downfall of the system, once containing ethnic conflicts' [29].

In this context, it is important to stress that the genesis of political Eastern Europe has been studied for a long time. Relevant discussions always attract significant attention. In 2007, a remarkable book entitled *Eastern Europe after the Treaty of Versailles* was published in Moscow [42]. It is of interest that, on the one hand, it was strongly lauded by the journalists of the Svoboda Radio [43]; on the other hand, it did not receive criticism from the part of expert community that would consider a compliment from Svoboda as a cause for concern. Why was there no discussion? Of course, it is important that the work was published in 2007, before the economic and political ordeal of 2008—2016. However, the main reason behind the consensus is that the authors managed to capture the key property of the Eastern European region — its *limitrophe* and peripheral nature; a thesis, which almost everyone agreed with. The existence of problems in the region was not a debatable issue.

Another problem is the geographical borders and internal structure of the Intermarium. According to Prof. Pál Tamás, the Intermarium consists of three zones: 1) the Baltic zone, 2) the Polish zone, and 3) the Southern zone (Black Sea area) [44]. A similar position was adopted by A. V. Malygin, who writes, "Understanding an international political region as a combination of international phenomena observed within certain territorial and temporal coordinates, one can speak of the emergence of a stable phenomenon — 'new Eastern Europe'. [45] This region includes: 1) the three countries of the Eastern European flank of the CIS; 2) the border countries of 'classical' Eastern Europe — Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and their southern neighbours — Romania and, probably, Bulgaria; 3) the Baltics — a remarkable component of the region.

In this context, it is important to mention a French/Polish historical monograph, *A History of Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. by N. Aleksiun, D. Beauvois et al.. Prof. Romanenko writes of this monograph, "the authors of the book have put in a great deal of effort to give a comprehensive picture

of the history of countries and peoples of the region they call "Central and Eastern Europe". Technically, the tome in question is the history of Poland, the Czech state, and Hungary within historically unstable borders, which used to incorporate the territories of modern Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Slovakia, and some other states. [46] "The historical and geographical region of Middle Europe consists of two subregions — Central Europe and South-Eastern Europe, i. e. the Balkans. Before and after the transformation of this space following World War I, this region was also considered part of Eastern Europe. However, in 1945—1991 the term 'Eastern Europe' (coined in the 17th/18th century) had a very clear military, political, social, and ideological meaning". [47]

Despite all the efforts, the concept of Central and Eastern Europe remains a contested one. It has not gained a wide recognition beyond the narrow circle of its proponents, which can be explained by the artificial nature of the term. [46] Zbigniew Brzezinski thus described the international situation on the territory of the former USSR as "a dozen states, hardly prepared for genuine sovereignty (except for Russia) and ranging in size from the relatively large Ukraine with its 52 million population to Armenia with its 3.5 million. Their viability seemed uncertain, while Moscow's willingness to accommodate permanently to the new reality was similarly unpredictable". [48]

The region's borders are not stable. In the 1920s, German geographers and historians introduced the concept of *Mitteleuropa* (or, sometimes, *Ost-mitteleuropa*), which also included their own country. Of course, German geopoliticians of the 1920-30s would have never extended the notion to the Soviet republics of Ukraine and Belarus. According to S. A. Romanenko, the historical and geographical political region of Middle Europe consists of two subregions, Central Europe and South-Eastern Europe, i. e. the Balkans. [47]

In 1977, the famous German historian K. Zernack considered the terminological problems and suggested interpreting the broad term 'Eastern Europe' as a special territorial and political system. In later works, he did not only revisit the issue but also examined the Polish-Russian relations. [49]

Therefore, in the late 20th century, following the collapse of the USSR, the region 'enlarged' to include Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia. The three countries support this and consider such affiliation as potential ticket to a higher 'league'. Despite all internal differences, common historical, geographical, and economic features bring these states together. The transitional nature of economy is combined there with the evident incompleteness of political transformations. The Baltics — *de facto* members of the Intermarium — do not necessarily like the attribution, with a notable case of Estonia who now self-identifies (thought its elites) as a Nordic country.

Further, the very notion of 'Eastern Europe' suggests not only certain geographical and political features, but also economic particularities. The futility of catching-up development and attempts to fit in the Western civilisation was demonstrated by the course of Russian history in the 1990s: "The "transitional period" was a failure. The world is becoming less democratic and increasingly authoritative, although retaining the market economy features" [50]. At the turn of 2015, the attractiveness of the Western European model is perceived differently than in the beginning of the century.

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What are the significant features of Eastern Europe within the geopolitical Intermarium concept? Special attention should be paid to the political processes manifested in the transformation of the legal status of borders in Eastern Europe. At first, the state borders of the Warsaw Pact and the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance turned into boundaries between competing states. (These states competed in a wide range of areas — from the right to be the first to accede to NATO to fighting for the Western market of frozen vegetables). In this context, it is important to recall the agreement between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Hungarian People's Republic on the construction and joint exploitation of a complex consisting of two interconnected hydropower plants on the Danube near the towns of Gabčíkovo (Czechoslovakia) and Nadymaros (Hungary). The intergovernmental agreement was approved and supported by a decision of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1977. In 1988, under pressure from the environmentalists, the Hungarian authorities suspended their participation in the project. In 1989, Hungary abandoned it. After the disbandment of COMECON, Slovakia unilaterally diverted the Danube and built its part of the HPP in Gabčíkovo, which provoked a conflict. In 1992, Hungary lodged complaints against Slovakia with the International Court of Justice, OSCE, and the UN Security Council. This conflict made a very negative impression on all countries of the region and, what is more important, Western European capitals and Washington.

In this context, one cannot but agree with Z. Brzezinski. The eminent geopolitician stressed in *The Grand Failure* (surprisingly, 100,000 copies of a chapter from the book were published in the USSR) that Marxism-Leninism had failed to predict and take into account the basic forces behind the international state of affairs and it had underestimated the role of ethnicity and nationalism [51]. This is true. However, in Eastern Europe, Marxism in its concrete administrative form had frozen traditional national conflicts for many decades. A new tradition of tolerance and depoliticisation of historical memory emerged, a development warmly welcomed in the EU. Only 15—17 years later (in 2004), the EU started to build new cooperation mechanisms. Large conflicts did not arise in the region over that period (considering, of course, that Yugoslavia is primarily 'the Balkans' and only then 'Eastern Europe').

The periphery nature of Eastern Europe is not only spatial, but temporal as well. "Different Middle and Eastern European peoples often living on the same territory were an objective obstacle to their political self-determination in accordance with the 19th century classical principle "one land — one nation — one state". In the East of Middle Europe, the Western European model of a multi-ethnic nation-state was replaced by a mono-ethnic state-nationality" [29]. That is why the high cost of European integration paid in political and economic sovereignty was considered justified.

Territorial evolution of the USSR did change the nature of geopolitical projects in Eastern Europe. One should rather speak of a reduction in its territorial scope. G. M. Malenkov, commenting on the foreign policy achievements of the country in 1949, stressed, "Never in the history has our Mother-

land had such just and well-established state borders. Look at the map. In the West, Ukraine has united the Ukrainian people into one family. The historical injustice of the Belarusian and Moldavian borders has been remedied. East Prussia — this longstanding base for attacks against our Motherland — does not exist anymore". [52] This created a new geographical framework for the Intermarium project.

In its turn, the collapse of the USSR returned its former western territories into the realm of geopolitical projects. In the late 1980s-early 1990s, the Belarusian People's Front and the People's Movement of Ukraine actively developed the idea of the Baltic-Black Sea Commonwealth (BBSC). In 1994, an agreement was signed by 15 parties from six countries (Belarus, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Ukraine) to form the League of Parties of the Intermarium States.

In September 1997, a meeting of presidents of CEE countries — Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Finland, and Estonia — took place in Vilnius. The Russian prime minister also attended it. Officially, the summit was organised to discuss the experience of reforms and the concepts of the Baltic-Black Sea transport corridor. However, it is important to stress that most participants in the meeting represented countries striving to accede to NATO and the EU. In Vilnius, they attempted to show that the new borders of the Western community are well protected, on the one hand, and not hostile to Russia — the country left beyond the European structures, on the other.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the need for Baltic-Black Sea cooperation was first stressed at a regional summit in Vilnius by the Lithuanian president, Algirdas Brazauskas.

In November 10—11, 1998, presidents of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Romania met in Warsaw. At official events, it was stressed several times that the capital of Poland had welcomed the heads of the states united by the experience of constitutional reforms, close political economic cooperation, and common goals of acceding to the Euro-Atlantic structures.

On August 12, 2015, a press conference on 'Creating a Baltic-Black Sea Alliance' was held in Kyiv. The Baltic-Black Sea Confederation was established in February 2015. Any other approaches, for instance those involving Belarus, received severe criticism. Polish scholars negatively interpreted the choice of close ties with Russia made by the Belarusian society. They expressed regrets about the lost opportunities associated with 'European values'. [41; 53]

The ideas of region-building have gained popularity in Lithuania. The Lithuanian political scientist E. Nekrašas writes, "continuous efforts to become a regional leader separate Lithuania from Europe", and then: "in its development of the concept of regional leadership, Lithuania paid more attention to relations with Eastern rather than Western neighbours — the key EU states — Germany, France, and the UK" [54]. The Ukraine crisis provoked by Lithuania tarnished the European image of the Visegrad Group. Europe was disappointed in the four countries. [55]

Another key issue relates to the assessment of the Russian factor in the development and functioning of the Baltic-Black Sea projects. The analysed sources and literature suggest that these political projects cannot be considered neutral in their attitude towards Russia [56]. The concept of a union of Eastern European states requires self-identification, where 'us' is opposed to 'them' — imperial, Soviet, or modern Russia. Almost all limitrophes of the *interbellum* were the 'double periphery' of Russia and Western Europe. The Little Entente and Baltic Entente projects did not turn into effective forms of cooperation, partly due to unclear relations with Western Europe. Only in the form of Middle Europe, the Intermarium project becomes self-sufficient. Without Germany, any Intermarium structure turns into a buffer or border area, without either economic or political stability. On the other hand, any quasi-union with Germany means the subordinate position of all the other members. This option may be acceptable for the Czech Republic, but not for Poland.

The very concept of Intermarium suggests establishing a bloc of countries and making it possible to be more convincing when negotiating with partners than it could be done by and country from Lithuania to Romania on its own. In practice, no real project of Baltic-Black Sea cooperation has ever been implemented. This is explained by the fact that, at the level of concepts, cooperation between the Intermarium states is always presented as an equal partnership. Such cooperation should rest on an economic and political union with a transitional economy oriented to both the West and the East. However, a complex of historical, ethnographic, geographical, and religious reasons poses an obstacle to mutually beneficial cooperation. It is sufficient to draw one example — the concept of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania translated into the present day can destroy or weaken any Intermarium project.

An actual or hypothetical confrontation with Russia is a significant integrating factor. However, it is not sufficient for making the Baltic-Black Sea partnership a real economic or political union. The 'Eastern Partnership' of such surrogates as the Visegrad Group is a proof that the question of an individual Intermarium project has been rendered obsolete. A different case is the possible project of new Central European integration, probably within the EU. The new Polish and Hungarian migration policy can serve as a unifying platform of a new type.

Social and economic processes observed in Europe suggest that no Eastern European project will be viable by itself. The cases of political and economic construction of regional identity based on the search for a common enemy will often emerge and often disappear. The efficiency of Baltic-Black Sea projects is limited by economic factors. Regional development in the Intermarium was aimed primarily at changing its limitrophe and peripheral status. While relevant mechanisms have not been developed yet, there are a number of projects for developing transport corridors and infrastructure. The economic core of the Intermarium is transport. In February 2014, the Viking multimodal railway project connecting Ilyichevsk and Kalipeda was launched in collaboration with Belarus and Lithuania in the framework of Pan-European corridor IX.

Poland plans to construct motorway S19 as part of the Via Carpathia transit route. This was announced by the Polish Minister of Infrastructure and Development Andrzej Adamzcyk in one of his first interviews in office, "Route S19 should be brought to life. S19 will run in the East of Poland crossing the country from north to south. It will start at the Lithuanian border (Budzisko), run through Suwałki, Białystok, Lublin, Rzeszów, and reach the border of Slovakia (Barwinek)". The Rail Baltica project should be considered in the same context. [57]

It can be concluded that the geopolitical changes that occurred in Eurasia in the late 1980s-early 1990s gave rise to various models of economic and political cooperation. Adapting its forms to current conditions, the Intermarium projects are a factor hindering the development of Eastern Europe as a political and economic region. As a historical and political phenomenon, Eastern Europe is objective reality and it has all prerequisites for independent and self-sufficient development. A non-critical combination of objective characteristics of Eastern Europe as a region interested in cooperation with Russia with the initially anti-Russian concept of Intermarium is especially counterproductive in the current conditions.

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