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WHAT IS INTERMARIUM AND ITS ROLE IN POLISH POLITICAL DISCOURSE?

ABSTRACT This article expands upon Kushnir's (2019) conclusion that the Intermarium remains an elusive and multifaced concept, noting that its interpretation varies widely among scholars. Throughout this article, I demonstrate that the concept is understood and applied differently in various academic works. A comprehensive review of more recent academic literature and the application of the Intermarium concept within it reveals that the term is not used consistently. This study focuses on the contemporary academic use of the Intermarium concept, rather that its historical origins, which have been covered sufficiently in the existing academic literature. The study shows that the term is used inconsistently, reflecting its ambiguous nature and the lack of a universally accepted definition. This fragmentation contributes to a blurred understanding of what the Intermarium truly signifies and its application in the academic analysis. Drawing on more recent academic research that applies the concept of Intermarium, this paper identifies three main interpretations within scholarly discussions: first, as a strategic geopolitical construct focused on regional balance and pragmatic cooperation; second, as an ideological and historical narrative embedded in memory, tradition, and citizenship ideals; and third, as a cultural-political identity maker, incorporated in the current Polish political debate. Intermarium introduces here a specific set of shared values, historical narratives and collective goals that unite a population under a collective identity. Through the reference to Intermarium, political actors influence how people perceive the nation's role, character and aspirations, effectively guiding the formation and evolution of a cohesive national identity in response to internal dynamics and external pressures.

Keywords: Intermarium, Poland, Identity, Discourse, Geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

Alongside the launch of the Three Seas Initiative in around 2016, a Polish old geopolitical concept rooted in history – the Intermarium – became the subject of intense discussion amongst journalists, academics, and politicians worldwide.[1] The origins of the concept stem from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth created in the 16th century. As a result of that union, the Commonwealth became one of the strongest political entities in the region, capable for a time of successfully competing with major powers such as the Kingdom of Sweden, the Holy Roman Empire (and its constituent states such as the Duchy of Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy), the Tsardom of Muscovy, and the Ottoman Empire.[2] The Intermarium geopolitical project was developed by Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), the Polish Chief of State (1918-1920). Its primary goal was to create a federation of Central-Eastern European states that could form a strong regional bloc similar to the earlier Commonwealth. The term 'Intermarium' is the Latin translation of the Polish 'Międzymorze' meaning 'land between seas',[3] referring to nations situated between the Black Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Baltic Sea.[4]

In the late 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was dismantled through partitions by Russia, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire, which divided its territory between themselves. Following a 123-year of political nonexistence, Poland regained independence in 1918. One of Piłsudski's main foreign policy objectives was to secure this sovereignty and counterbalance the growing influence of Bolshevik Russia in Central-Eastern Europe. His vision of the Intermarium sought to establish a coalition or partnership of regional states that could resist external domination and

1 O. Kushnir (ed.), *The Intermarium as the Polish Ukraininan Linchpin of Baltic-Black Sea Cooperation*, Cambridge, 2019, p. 166; J. Daniszewski, "Bio of Polish Statesman Holds Lessons on Today's Ukraine," *The Independent* 18 November 2022, at https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/ap-ukraine-polish-europe-russia-b2227785.html, 23 VII 2023; A. Tycner, "Intermarium in the 21st Century," *The Institute of World Politics*, 23 December 2020, at https://www.iwp.edu/articles/2020/12/23/intermarium-in-the-21st-century/, 25 II 2022; N. Cohen, "Intermarium in the 21st Century. A New Path for Europe?," *European Institute*, 15 November 2019, at https://europe.columbia.edu/news/intermarium-21st-century-new-path-europe-nick-cohen, 23 VII 2023; Wishart A., "How the Ukrainian Far-Right Has Become One of The Biggest Proponents of Intermarium," *New Eastern Europe*, 25 September 2018, at https://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/09/25/ukrainian-far-right-become-one-biggest-proponents-intermarium/, 25 II 2022; M. Laruelle, E. Rivera, "Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe: The Concept of Intermarium," *IERES Occasional Papers*, March 2019, at https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/laruelle-rivera-ieres_papers_march_2019_1.pdf, 23 VII 2023.

2 Prochniak, A. (2022) Populism, Identity Politics and Political Discourse in Europe. *UACES Crossroads Ideas on Europe*. https://crossroads.ideasoneurope.eu/2022/07/20/populism-identity-politicsand-political-discourse-in-europe/.

3 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium: The Land Between the Black and Baltic Seas*, New Brunswick–New Jersey 2012, p. 2; A. Czubiński, *Spory o II Rzeczpospolitą*, Poznań 1988, p. 1, N. Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, Oxford 2001, p. xii–xiii.

4 A. Czubiński, *Spory o II Rzeczpospolitą...*, p. 12; N. Davies, *Heart...*, p. xii–xiii.

maintain their autonomy.[5] However, the historical origins of the concept have already been widely studied.[6] [7] This publication instead focuses on how the Intermarium is used and interpreted in contemporary academic literature.

Several authors argue that the concept has long influenced – and continues to shape – Polish foreign policy.[8] One of the key arguments in Chodakiewicz's book is that the Intermarium is more than just a strategy or a geopolitical design. He opens the book by asserting that *History and collective memories influence a nation, its culture, and institutions and, hence, its domestic politics and foreign policy. That is, of course, also the case in the Intermarium, the lands between the Black and Baltic Seas in Central-Eastern Europe*.[9] For him, the Intermarium embodies a shared cultural and historical heritage of the peoples of Central-Eastern Europe. Chodakiewicz also acknowledges that defining the Intermarium is difficult because its essence lies not merely in political or geographic parameters but in history, collective memory and culture. Thus, Intermarium function as a symbol of common origins and cultural heritage that transcends modern borders. Both Miliou (2014) and Kott (2017) highlight the potential populist use of Intermarium's collective memory; its cultural and historical symbolism can be harnessed for political mobilization.[10] Smyrgała goes further, describing Intermarium as a *socio-political phenomenon still influencing international relations in Central and Eastern Europe*.[11] In his analysis, Intermarium evokes 'specific sense of identity', which continues to inform

5 S. Pelizza, "The Geopolitics of International Reconstruction: Halford Mackinder and Eastern Europe," *The International History Review*, vol. 38, iss. 1 (2016), pp. 174-195.

6 P. Okulewicz, *Koncepcja 'Międzymorza' w Myśli i Praktyce Politycznej Obozu Józefa Piłsudskiego w latach 1918–1926*, Poznań 2001.

7 A. Osowska, D. Przybytek, "Thematic Maps in Eugeniusz Romer's Geographical and Statistical Atlas of Poland from 1916 – the Historical and Methodological Perspective (on the 100-year Anniversary of the Publication)," *Polish Cartographical Review*, vol. 48, iss. 2 (2016), pp. 45-58.

8 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium: From the Battle of Varna to the War in Ukraine," *Revista de Historia Actual*, 2014, vol. 34, iss. 1, pp. 29-38; M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 1; D. Pietrzyk Reeves, "The Revivals of the Jagiellonian Idea: Political and Normative Contexts," *Politeja* vol. 14, no. 6(51) (2017), p. 81; A. Starzyk, N. Tomaszewska, "Conception of Intermarium in Polish Foreign Policy in XXI Century," *Torun International Studies*, no. 1(10) (2017), pp. 15-28; M. Bartoszewicz, "Intermarium: A Bid for Polycentric Europe," *Geopolitics*, vol. 28, iss. 2 (2021), pp. 795-819; R. Ištok, T. Koziak, "Międzymorze as a Polish Geopolitical Concept," *Folia Geographica (Prešov)*, no. 14 (2009) at https://www.unipo.sk/public/media/12484/Medzimorie%20anglick%C3%BD%20preklad.pdf, 25 VIII 2018; A. Prochniak, *How Did The Political Myth of Intermarium Emerge and Structure Foreign Policy Debate in Poland? An analysis of official government documents from 2005–2021*, Loughborough 2024, at https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/thesis/How_did_the_political_myth_of_Intermarium_emerge_and_structure_foreign_policy_debate_in_Poland_An_analysis_of_official_government_documents_from_2005-2021/26744494?file=48650011, 20 XI 2024.

9 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 1.

10 M. Kott, "Intermarium: An Empty Signifier?," Review of *The Intermarium as the Polish-Ukrainian Linchpin of Baltic-Black Sea Cooperation* by O. Kushnir (ed.), *New Eastern Europe*, iss. 9 (2019), at https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/11/12/intermarium-an-empty-signifier/, XI 2023.

11 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium...,".

responses to contemporary events such as the annexation of Crimea.[12] The concept also carries distinct meanings within Ukrainian discourse.[13]

Although academics broadly agree that the Intermarium remains significant and influential, a review of the literature reveals a striking lack of a consistent definition. The term's meaning has evolved and diversified, making it a multifaced and ambiguous concept. The diversity underscores the importance of systematically reviewing its interpretations. The paper argues that the Intermarium is a complex term that lacks a clear and conclusive definition.[14] In contemporary scholarship, Intermarium is used in several overlapping ways: as a geopolitical strategy or plan,[15] as a narrative,[16] as a socio-political phenomenon[17] or as a form of collective memory[18] or as a political myth[19] where Intermarium is defined as a *political myth, a structure composed of a system of signs and a set of symbols that sacralize and ritualize meaning*.

The work will also explain that the use and reference to the term is particularly active in the Central-Eastern European region due to the recent experience of the fall of communism.[20] In the political debate references to Intermarium are used to provide a specific idea of the national identity, citizenship, and the image of an ideal leader.[21]

1. INTERMARIUM AS A GEOPOLITICAL CONCEPT

The first section of this publication demonstrates how post-2000 academic literature applies the Intermarium concept in a geopolitical context. Here, the Intermarium is mostly defined in geopolitical terms as a foreign policy strategy. For example, Cieplucha

12 Ibid., pp. 1-2

13 O. Kushnir, *The Intermarium...*

14 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*; T. Napiórkowski, "Cooperation within the Intermarium and Economic Opportunities," in O. Kushnir (ed.) *The Intermarium as the Polish-Ukrainian Linchpin of Baltic-Black Sea Cooperation*, Cambridge 2019.

15 M. Bartoszewicz, "Intermarium..."; R. Riedel, "Tri-Marium as the 'Emancipation' of East-Central Europe: Framing European Counter-Narratives in Poland," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol. 30, iss. 1 (2021), pp. 97-114; A. Starzyk, N. Tomaszewska, "Conception...".

16 R Riedel, "Tri-Marium...".

17 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium...".

18 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*; O. Kushnir, *The Intermarium....*

19 A. Prochniak, *How Did the Political...*

20 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*; B. Pytlas, "Radical-Right Narratives in Slovakia and Hungary: Historical Legacies, Mythic Overlaying and Contemporary Politics," *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2013), pp. 162-183; J. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Ithaca–London, 1991; R. Riedel "Tri-Marium..."; M. Bartoszewicz "Intermarium..."; M. Konarski, „Czy warto wracać do 'Międzymorza'," *Portal Spraw Zagranicznych*, 2005, 12 IV 2023; M. Stolarczyk, *Kontrowersje Wokół Koncepcji i Praktyki Polityki Wschodniej Polski na Przełomie pierwszej i Drugiej Dekady XXI wieku*, Katowice 2013, pp. 295-336; A. Prochniak, *How Did the Political....*

21 L.N. Leustean, „Orthodoxy and Political Myths in Balkan National Identities," *National Identities*, vol. 10, iss. 4 (2008).

defined the Intermarium *as a foreign policy doctrine derived from Polish political thinking and practice based on the voluntary collaboration of Central-Eastern European states arising from their common interests and mutual solidarity in terms of their security protection. [...] Poland should initiate the building of such a coalition.*[22] The concept assumes that Poland, due to its population, territory and political capital, will take a leading role in the Intermarium venture. This assigned function derives from the tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Piłsudski's coordinating role in the struggles against Bolshevik Russia in the 1920s. Russian troops were unable to defeat the united Polish-Ukrainian forces in the war, which ended with a peace treaty signed in Riga in 1921.[23] The Intermarium implies that Poland, as the leader, should seek wider participation and secure support for the project among European countries. It is argued that this Intermarium goal can be achieved by defining common goals and areas of cooperation, but also by ensuring equal status for all parties involved.[24] Similarly, as in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth achieved superpower status in Europe by uniting and increasing its military, economic, political and cultural power, it has been postulated that the ideals of Intermarium provide an opportunity to rebuild Poland's strong position in the region. The implementation of the Intermarium strategy could help to create an effective counterweight to the growing power of Germany and Russia in Central-Eastern Europe today.[25]

The assumed leadership role is thus deeply embedded in the Intermarium concept. Among other things, Ištok and Koziak emphasize the importance of Poland's coordinating role in the project. During the inter-war period, Poland was the largest country in Central-Eastern Europe, and therefore Polish politicians considered it a natural leader in the region. Therefore, it would take the initiative in organizing this region. Such a model represented the creation of a 'wall' between Germany and Russia (later also the Soviet Union), called Międzymorze after its location.[26] Intermarium is also often referred to as Międzymorze, in Latin Intermarium, 'the land between the seas'.[27] Both terms are used interchangeably, as they have the same meaning.[28] Similarly to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Intermarium will not only represent a united bloc of states, but in doing so will become a strong actor on the international stage. The Intermarium will thus not only assume a regional leadership role but will also have the potential to be seen as a significant and prominent partner on a global scale.

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22 P. Cieplucha., "Prometeizm i Koncepcja Międzymorza w Praktyce Polityczno-Prawnej oraz Dyplomacji II RP," *Studia Prawno-Ekonomiczne*, vol. 93 (2014), p. 40.

23 P. Wandycz, "The Treaty of Riga: Its Significance for Intermarium Polish Foreign Policy," *The Polish Review*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1969), pp. 31-36.

24 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*; D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium..."; M. Bartoszewicz, "Intermarium...," pp. 795-819.

25 A. Starzyk, N. Tomaszewska, "Conception...".

26 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium...".

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

As the concept is derived from the tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was ruled by the dynasty of Jagiellonian kings, the idea of federation, alliance, union, or some form of broader, strategic and geopolitical cooperation among Central-Eastern European countries is often referred to as the Jagiellonian orientation in Polish foreign policy.[29] The main goal of the Jagiellonian foreign policy concept and vision is to achieve a balance of power through close and coordinated cooperation, and under unofficial Polish leadership.[30]

In geopolitical terms, thus, the Intermarium is defined by Pietrzyk - Reeves as *a project of the Union of Liberated Nations in Central Europe situated between Russia, Germany and Austria, It seemed to be of vital importance for Poland to attract the new states – from Latvia to Yugoslavia and Greece – to the idea of the union that would protect them against further attacks and territorial claims of the three powers*.[31]

The quotation presents that the main goal of Polish foreign policy is defined in geopolitical terms and is to create a union of Central European nations to counter the influence of Russia, Germany, and Austria, with Poland unofficially leading the alliance. The geopolitical application of the Intermarium concept in academic literature mainly discusses the chances of successful implementation in the current political landscape. Paweł Gotowiecki, in an article entitled the Intermarium Paradox, reflects on the chances of success of the Three Seas Initiative that according to the author is inspired by the Intermarium concept.[32] According to him, current attempts at regional integration have limited chances of success, mainly because none of the countries in the region has a politically dominant position or role in the world economy. Similar views are expressed by Konarski, who also notes that while Intermarium is still seen by many as a panacea for the problem of an unfavorable geopolitical position; all attempts to implement the idea have so far failed.[33]

One of the most relevant papers in this area is the work of Starzyk and Tomaszewska (2017): *Conception of Intermarium in Polish Foreign Policy in the XXI Century*, which traces the significance and influence of the Intermarium concept on current foreign policy in Poland. The authors argue that the Visegrád Group is an example of the implementation of Intermarium in foreign policy. The Visegrád Group is a cultural and political alliance of four Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. In the paper the authors state that *the idea of the Intermarium is in a sense realised through the Eastern Partnership or the Visegrád Group. The main point connecting this political concept is not only the geographical correlation, but first of*

[29] J. Kieniewicz, "The Jagiellonian Idea and the Project for the Future," *Politeja*, vol. 14, no. 6(51) (2017), pp. 5-26.

[30] A. Schmidt, "From Intermarium to the Three Seas Initiative – Regional Integrations in Central and Eastern Europe and the Hungarian Foreign Policy," *Politeja*, vol. 14, no. 6(51) (2017), p. 165-190.

[31] D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, "The Revivals...," p. 86.

[32] P. Gotowiecki, „The Intermarium Paradox," *Ante Portas – Studia nad Bezpieczeństwem*, no. 2(13) (2019).

[33] M. Konarski, "Czy warto...".

all the idea of cooperation and common support in security and energy security.[34] In the publication, the authors also highlight the fact that the subsequent initiatives of the Polish government, such as the Visegrád Group, the Eastern Partnership and the Three Seas Initiative, are all clearly inspired by the Intermarium concept. The paper also links the Intermarium with Giedroyc and Miroszewski's ULB concept (Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus), which, as discussed above, emphasizes the importance of an independent Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus for the survival of an independent Poland. This work provides a comprehensive analysis of Polish foreign policy and shows how the concept of Intermarium is still visible and valid in current political discourse. The main principles of Polish foreign policy were compared with the guidelines set by the Intermarium ideals by means of analysis of the speeches and statements of key state leaders in order to trace the elements of Intermarium. The texts and actions of leaders, such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski, Prime Minister Donald Tusk, President Andrzej Duda, President Lech Kaczynski and Prime Minister Beata Szydło have been evaluated in order to present the extent to which the ideas and actions reflect the fundamental priorities of the Intermarium concept.[35] The article recognizes that political efforts to achieve energy security in Poland can also be seen as influenced by Intermarium logic. The analysis shows Lech Kaczynski's approach to energy security and to an improved model of broader cooperation between Central-Eastern European countries was largely inspired by Intermarium, as follows:

It was especially demonstrated in the area of energy cooperation, as Kaczynski initiated a series of meetings between Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Romania and the Baltic States. He wanted to pursue diversification of energy suppliers and an open European market to the Azeri producers via Odessa-Brody-Gdansk pipeline. Through his visits and assurances of highest estimation, Kaczynski strived to establish a network of contacts between the Polish and Caucasian elites. He also looked further in his ambitions in the hope of using opportunities offered by Kazakh energy resources [...] He put the most significant pressure on energetic security – which now is the core of Andrzej Duda Three Seas conception.[36]

The quotation shows that President Lech Kaczyński (Polish President 2005-2010) initiated extensive cooperation between Central-Eastern European nations inspired by the Intermarium concept, a policy approach continued by President Andrzej Duda since 2015. The authors point out that Polish foreign policy is largely determined by the country's geopolitical situation. Thus, the Three Seas Initiative is set in accordance with the principles of Intermarium and translates them into the realities of the contemporary world in order to balance the region's position.

The literature refers often to the Intermarium as *Piłsudski's theory, strategic plan, in the form of a defensive alliance, to protect foremost Poland but also other allied countries from Russia*.[37] In his plan, Piłsudski sought to strengthen national independence move-

[34] A. Starzyk, N. Tomaszewska, "Conception...", p. 19.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 21.

[37] A. Starzyk, N. Tomaszewska, "Conception...," p. 17.

ments in countries that had become part of the newly formed Soviet Union. Strong support for domestic nationalist and independence movements would in effect break up the Soviet regime from inside.[38] Piłsudski called this tactic Prometheism – assisting nationalist independence movements with the intention of weakening the Russian Empire and its successor governments, the Soviet Union.[39] The fulfilment of this historical quest for independence and the provision of the same guarantee of independence to other Eastern neighbours became the mission of Poland, as inscribed in the history, culture and legacy of Intermarium. Prometheism therefore links the independence and survival of the Polish state to the independence and stability of Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus. Historically, Moscow and Poland have fought for dominance in these areas.[40]

Piłsudski often remarked that *without an independent Ukraine, there can be no independent Poland*, and Ukraine was understood as the first and most important Polish ally that could help provide an effective counterbalance to Russia's imperial ambitions.[41] The development of strategic relations with Ukraine was and remains a priority of the Jagiellonian foreign policy orientation, as a stable and independent Ukraine is a guarantee for an independent Poland.[42] Formerly an integral part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Belarus, Ukraine and modern Moldova have long been the focus of animosity between Poland and Russia.[43] The concept of the Intermarium, which has been present in Polish foreign policy for more than two centuries, therefore establishes a clear link between the survival of the Polish state and an independent and free Ukraine. The well-known quotation of Piłsudski's words still surfaces and resonates in contemporary debate. For example, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the second President of Poland, offered a more modern interpretation of Piłsudski's words when he stated that any great power, presumably the United States, would prefer a Russia without Ukraine to a Russia with Ukraine.[44] In 2015, President Komorowski stated in his address to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine that *there will be no stable, secure Europe if Ukraine does not become a part of it*.[45] The paraphrasing of the words also appears in the media, here in Polish radio, and recalls Jerzy Giedroyc's words *Ukraine's independence as the Polish raison d'état*.[46] Therefore, academics strongly believe that the Intermarium concept continues to have a significant influence on

38 J. Kieniewicz, "The Jagiellonian...".

39 P. Cieplucha, „Prometeizm...," pp. 39-55.

40 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 5.

41 M. Banaś, "The Jagiellonian Idea as Expression of Political Culture: Core Constitutive Values and their Possible Contemporary Implementations," *Politeja*, vol. 14, no. 6(51) (2017), pp. 27-40; J. Kieniewicz, "The Jagiellonian..."; A. Schmidt, "From Intermarium..."; W. Łysek "The Federal Idea in Poland in the Interwar Period: Idealism or Pragmatism?," *Politeja*, vol. 14, no. 6(51) (2017).

42 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium...".

43 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 6.

44 D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, "The Revivals...," p. 155.

45 "Polish President, In Rada, Pledges Support For Ukraine." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 9, 2015. https://www.rferl.org/a/komorowski-support-ukraine-verkhovna-rada/26946495.html

46 "Jerzy Giedroyc. Niepodległość Ukrainy Jako Polska Racja Stanu," *Polskie Radio*, 21 March 2022, at

the international relations of Central and Eastern Europe. Intermarium is also crucial for understanding the current situation in Ukraine.[47]

It is significant to remember that Poland and Ukraine have different understandings of Intermarium. In post-2014 Ukraine, the concept of Intermarium has gained popularity due to perceived abandonment by the Western Allies and exposure to Russian aggression, with far-right groups such as the National Corps seeking to integrate it into the country's political mainstream.[48] The development of 'ethnofuturism' by far-right groups, particularly in the Baltic states, seeks to provide a philosophical backbone to Intermarium, emphasizing cooperation between nationalist groups and promoting a unique Slavic identity and heritage, using social media platforms for dissemination. The Ukrainian far-right, particularly the National Corps, actively supports Intermarium, using English-language platforms to promote it and criticise the post-Cold War global security order.[49] There is no agreement between the authors about the form of cooperation among the Eastern European states as proposed by Intermarium. The original Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth existed in the form of a rather closely unified federal state. The continuator of the Intermarium concept, Josef Piłsudski initially envisioned Intermarium in a form of a federation.[50] However, as the original idea of a federation met with opposition from domestic and foreign partners, it was replaced by a proposal for a looser union or closer cooperation between Eastern European states.[51]

The heirs to the Promethean ideals,[52] Giedroyc and Miroszewski, developed the ULB (Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus) concept in the 1970s. The basis of the ULB approach is the same assertion that Poland's ultimate, long-term interest lies in the preservation of the independence of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. The geopolitical application of the Intermarium concept, its history and development, shows that the idea preserves the perception of Russia as the primary opponent on a regional and global scale. People associated with the development and evolution of the Intermarium idea, such as Piłsudski, Giedroyc or Mickiewicz, become heroes and traditional leaders of the nation, founding fathers of the free Polish state. Their legacy and memory are employed in the nation and state building process.

In the conclusion of *The Intermarium as the Polish-Ukrainian Linchpin of Baltic-Black Sea Cooperation*, Kushnir (2019) warned that due to the complex nature of the Intermarium, the concept can have several different meanings. This article follows up on this thesis

https://www.polskieradio.pl/8/8879/artykul/2924519,jerzy-giedroyc-niepodleglosc-ukrainy-jako-polska-racja-stanu, XI 2023.

47 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium..."; M.J. Chodakiewcz, *Intermarium...*

48 A. Wishart, "How the Ukrainian...".

49 Ibid.

50 M. Bartoszewicz, "Intermarium...".

51 Ibid.; J. Kieniewicz, "The Jagiellonian...".

52 Strong support for domestic nationalist and independence movements that would in effect break up the Soviet regime from inside (J. Kieniewicz, "The Jagiellonian...".). Piłsudski called this tactic Prometheism – assisting nationalist independence movements with the intention of weakening the Russian Empire and its successor governments, the Soviet Union.

to show that scholars indeed understand and apply the concept differently in their academic work. The authors concluded that *one of the key findings of the book is that the term Intermarium should be avoided in contemporary public, academic and political discourse. He argues that the term evokes confusion and miscommunication between all parties involved, rather than securing a middle ground for multilateral beneficial cooperation, as many expect*.[53] The main problem with the concept of Intermarium is that the term has no clear definition, moreover, as Kushnir (2019) notes, *Intermarium has become everything*. The Intermarium consists of geopolitical aspects and additionally contains historical memories, ideological, 'over-romanticised' elements and references to selected events in history and culture.[54] Other scholars have also identified a similar problem with the use of the term Intermarium. Ideological, cultural elements such as collective memory and spiritual aspects of the Intermarium will be discussed in detail in the next section.

The scholars suggest that the recent geopolitical challenges in the region related to Russian foreign policy, energy issues and Ukraine may partly explain the sudden reappearance of the concept in the political debate.[55] Many academics, think tanks and journalists see the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative as an application of the Intermarium to current foreign policy. However, the next section will examine how Intermarium appears in a more politicized and ideological context.

2. INTERMARIUM AS A COLLECTIVE MEMORY

So far, we have discussed how the concept has been applied to research by scholars who consider the Intermarium to be a geopolitical or historical concept. However, not all studies define the Intermarium in accordance with the geopolitical characterization. This section examines another branch of academic literature that focuses on specific ideological, sometimes spiritual and cultural elements of the Intermarium, with associated values, codes of conduct and important national symbols, such as the founding fathers of nations.

One of the most influential works in this category of literature is *Intermarium: The Land Between the Black and Baltic Seas*. In his account, Chodakiweicz (2012) for example describes Intermarium as an entity characterized by a multitude of cultures, religions and ethnicities.[56] Drawing on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth traditions and heritage Intermarium is thus a region built on a tradition of freedom.[57] Situated between different geopolitical zones and civilizations (Western democracy and Eastern oppression) the Intermarium region, led by Poland is represented as a defender of

[53] O. Kushnir, *The Intermarium...*

[54] Ibid., p. 167.

[55] M. Bartoszewicz "Intermarium..."; M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*; D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium...".

[56] M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 61.

[57] A. Prusin, Review of: *Intermarium: The Land Between the Black and Baltic Seas* by M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Slavic Review*, vol. 73, iss. 1 (2014), pp. 163-164.

Western Civilization, with Poland as God's nation with its special mission and calling.[58] Intermarium also has a spiritual component, and this dimension is found in the historical mission of the country, which involves fighting for freedom against totalitarian regimes. The memory and awareness of this mission is therefore an element of the restoration of the former greatness not only of Poland but of the entire region. Chodakiewicz wrote *The spiritual extermination affected the common people, who were subjected to continuously perverse indoctrination to extirpate traditional reflexes from their subconscious and to create a new breed of humans by implanting a false consciousness in them*.[59] Intermarium is thus seen as a spiritual journey to the origins of a nation that has always been at the forefront of the struggle for freedom. One can cite the examples of Sobieski's victory at Vienna over the Ottoman Empire, 1683 and the Polish struggle against Nazism and communism in 20th century.[60] This mission was outlined centuries ago through a series of historical events and battles between the Slavs, Russian and German tribes and which Poland ought to fulfill today.[61] The main objective is to protect Western Europe and Eastern European nations from Russian aggression, communism or any other form of a totalitarian regime. From the Commonwealth's battles with the Ottoman Empire and Piłsudski's fight against the Bolsheviks in 1920 to the more current Solidarity movement of 1980 up to the recent struggles for energy security in Europe, Poland has been at the forefront of leading nations to freedom and independence. In Chodakiewicz's book, Intermarium thus refers to a specific model of citizenship and national identity that is linked to the values and culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[62]

Any inquiry into Intermarium thus requires a good knowledge of the history of the region. Intermarium is portrayed in Chodakiewicz's work as something that has been lost and has to be recovered and restored. In this line of thinking, and in order to withstand current pressures, the nations of Eastern Europe have to unite once again and create a common entity along the lines of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth model. They need to go back to their roots and redefine their national interest. This will help them to create a strong entity that can guarantee the security and survival of the states. The Eastern European nations under Polish leadership can once again fight its battles to prevent Russia from renewing its expansionist ambitions and policies. In order to be successful and maintain their independence, the 'people of the Intermarium' need to renew their identity, and the memory of the past in order to be able to build once again a strong counterbalance in Central Europe.[63] In Chodakiewicz's book, therefore, the

[58] J. Esch, "Legitimizing the 'War on Terror': Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric," *Political Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2010), pp. 357-391.

[59] M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 5.

[60] Ibid., p. 7.

[61] A. Starzyk, N. Tomaszewska, "Conception...," p. 2.

[62] Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 570.

[63] A. Prusin, Review of *Intermarium...*; P. Stachura, Review of *Intermarium: The Land between the Black and Baltic Seas* by M.J. Chodakiewicz, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 91, no. 3 (2013), pp. 662-664.

Intermarium remains the last bastion of Western civilization in the East and functions as an important passage and gateway to both the East and the West, the autonomous and independent area that is located at the point of confluence of different cultures. The political and economic success of the Intermarium's countries and the stability of the region provided by American support is important because they can weaken the totalitarian enemies of freedom in this part of the world.[64] The validity of this statement is confirmed by the history of the struggles and historic battles fought by the nations of the Intermarium under Polish leadership. As an heir to the freedoms and rights derived from the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (the Constitution of 3rd May 1791, the second constitution in the world and first in Europe[65]) the Intermarium is culturally and ideologically aligned with American national interests. In summary, Chodakiewicz argues here that Intermarium is not just a geopolitical concept but also refers to a specific idea of collective identities, common memory of the region with its cultural and historical heritage rooted in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The mission of the people of the Intermarium is a united, common fight against the threat from the East and the West under the assumed Polish leadership regionally and globally (the role of Poland in the II World War and in the Cold War). In Chodakiewicz's understanding the Intermarium is a *comprehensive narrative of a millennial panorama*.[66] A narrative that selects specific events from history to construct a productive version of 'cooperative nationalism'.[67] Intermarium here is thus the sum of selected historical events that emerged from the tradition of freedom and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In order to build a post-communist Poland, free from foreign influences, the lost form of national identity and heritage must be recovered.[68] In Chodakiewicz's book Intermarium appears in a form of narrative hijacking, redirection and manipulation of concept meaning to serve a political purpose. Intermarium refers here to an authentic Polish identity, values, culture and symbols.

A similar approach to the Intermarium is also present in the *Intermarium: A Bid for Polycentric Europe* by Bartoszewicz.[69] Because the Intermarium is largely understood as a geopolitical concept, Bartoszewicz[70] used critical geopolitics to shift the focus away from a traditional analysis anchored in great power politics. According to her work, the implementation of the Intermarium concept is an attempt to integrate Central and Eastern Europe into the recent international order, and therefore has an ideological aspect. Her analysis confirms that in the recent case of Intermarium, implementation

64 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*

65 European Commission, "The May 3, 1791 Constitution, Warsaw, Poland." *Culture and Creativity*. Last updated January 21, 2022. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/initiatives-and-success-stories/european-heritage-label/european-heritage-label-sites/the-may-3-1791-constitution-warsaw-poland

66 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 4.

67 Ibid., p. 3.

68 Ibid., pp. 6-8.

69 M. Bartoszewicz, "Intermarium...," pp. 795-819.

70 Ibid., p. 801.

could be seen in the Three Seas Initiative.[71] She uses critical geopolitics to portray the region as an independent entity in contemporary international affairs. Bartoszewicz defines Intermarium as *a bloc of countries that cooperate closely on many levels without violating the sovereignty and subjectivity of individual members, similar to the multi-vocal, multi-order, and multi-layer modus operandi of other regional networks, such as the Baltic Sea Region*.[72] However, her work also shows that studies on the Intermarium concept should not exclude the role of values or culture. She highlights the importance of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which acts as an ideologically unifying element for the Intermarium countries.[73] In her argument the description of the Intermarium as a strictly geopolitical concept is hence reductive and does not include all the important elements and aspects of the concept.

As in Chodakiewicz's account, Bartoszewicz's understanding of the Intermarium as a geopolitical concept is largely based on the West vs the East dichotomy. In the past, the Intermarium was described as the land in between the East and West, between two strong regional powers such as Russia and Germany. Intermarium has been translated into a contemporary setting relating to the polycentric world of the West and the East distinction as represented by the United States of America and China. Intermarium, therefore, provides an opportunity to build a strong position for the region based on the dynamic of the West and the East, according to the author.[74]

A uniform approach that considers cultural and historical aspects of the Intermarium also appears in Jan Kieniewicz's (2017) research entitled *The Jagiellonian Idea and the Project for the Future.* He argues that the Jagiellonian vision of foreign policy anchored in the Intermarium is not based on facts, but rather on an 'imagined picture' of Poland. The revival and persistence of the concept is associated with the cultural character of the concept. In his view, the current implementation, the three Seas Initiative, suffers from similar shortcomings as Intermarium encountered in the past. The participating countries often have different political objectives, and their geopolitical situation is not uniform. Another obstacle may be the lack of resources to carry out this type of project. According to the Kosciuszko Institute (2019),[75] the countries of the Three Seas Initiative cover about 28 per cent of the EU territory and have 22 per cent of the EU's population, but account for only 10 per cent of the EU's GDP. The analysis presented by the author sees better prospects for Poland as part of the European Union project: namely, a continuation of the path Poland started in 1989.

In this work, the author recognizes the strong links between the Intermarium concept and a specific form of Polish national tradition and culture. The reappearance of the Intermarium idea can be understood in connection with the search for a new

[71] M. Bartoszewicz, "Intermarium...," p. 2.

[72] Ibid., p. 4.

[73] Ibid., p. 19.

[74] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[75] The Kosciuszko Institute, "The Digital 3 Seas Initiative: A Call for a Cyber Upgrade of Regional Cooperation, *The Kosciuszko Institute Policy Brief*, June 2018, at https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/WHITE_PAPER_The-Digital-3-Seas-Initiative_GLOBSEC.pdf, XII 2019.

national identification and sense of belonging after regaining independence from the Soviet Union and breaking away from the communist bloc. The author defines identity as a cross-section between culture, religion and language.[76]

Similarly, Smyrgała (2014) addresses this issue and emphasises that the region has its own specific sense of identity.[77] During Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, the Polish President Lech Kaczyński, explicitly mentioned and referred to a common regional heritage in his speech in Tbilisi:

Ladies and Gentlemen!

We are here to express complete solidarity. We are here, leaders of five countries: Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. We are here to take up the fight. For the first time in a long time, our neighbors to the north, for us too, to the east, have shown the face we have known for hundreds of years. These neighbors believe that the *nations around them should be subject to them. We say no! This country is Russia.*[78]

Although the term 'Intermarium' was not directly mentioned in the speech, its legacy and heritage are clearly present. The President referred to the collective memory of the shared experience of communist totalitarianism and Russian domination. Moreover, the five presidents featured came from nations whose histories are deeply intertwined with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.[79] Thus, for Smyrgała, the Intermarium is also a specific form of 'cultural and geopolitical entity' that emerged from similar historical experiences of Eastern European countries.[80]

Matthew Kott's paper claims that the Intermarium has been harnessed to legitimate a particular ideology. In his commentary, *A far right hijack of Intermarium*, Kott (2017) argues that the popularity of the Intermarium could be also analyzed in terms of the state of current political affairs in Europe. Intermarium appears in the form of what he sees as the 'third way', the alternative between the Putinist authoritarian regime and the neoliberal agenda of the multicultural, secular, and feminist European agenda, as he sees it. The geopolitical vision, an idea formulated by Józef Piłsudski and based mainly on a heroic and romantic narrative of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and as seen above, reappears again after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The countries of Eastern Europe are considering alternative forms of cooperation in the context of collective regional security.

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76 J. Kieniewicz, "The Jagiellonian...," p. 6.

77 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium...," p. 30.

78 Original Polish version: Szanowni Państwo! Jesteśmy tutaj po to, żeby wyrazić całkowitą solidarność. Jesteśmy tutaj, przywódcy pięciu państw: Polski, Ukrainy, Estonii, Łotwy i Litwy. Jesteśmy po to, żeby podjąć walkę. Po raz pierwszy od dłuższego czasu nasi sąsiedzi z północy, dla nas także ze wschodu, pokazali twarz, którą znamy od setek lat. Ci sąsiedzi uważają, że narody wokół nich powinny im podlegać. My mówimy nie! Ten kraj to Rosja. Available at https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/aktualnosci/rok-2008/wizyta-prezydenta-rp-w-gruzji,26753,archive, 10 VIII 2026.

79 D. Smyrgała, "Intermarium...," p. 35.

80 Ibid., pp. 36-37

Kott similarly notes that the issue of tradition and culture emerges as an integral part of the Intermarium concept.[81] In the current political landscape, after the annexation of Crimea, the EU's inclusivity agenda and the refugee crisis, the region of Intermarium materializes as the remaining bastion, the heartland of true European values and Christian civilization. This uniform ideological aspect is equally captured by Rafal Riedel's research.[82] His constructivist analysis of Polish foreign policy presents Intermarium as the emancipatory narrative that emerged in East-Central Europe to provide a counter-interpretation to the European narrative. Riedel, on the other hand, sees the Intermarium as a *clearly articulated counter-narrative to the mainstream European integration-project* (Riedel 2021, 1). Drawing on critical theory, Riedel examines the narratives of various political actors in contemporary discourse. The analysis revealed not only that the narrative represents the counterweight to the European narrative, but also that it is constructed to challenge Western domination and serve the ideological ambitions of the 'narrative entrepreneurs' in Poland who aim to establish Poland as a regional power.[83]

Foreign policy scholars are well aware that national identity is particularly important in the process of shaping a nation's foreign policy. Furthermore, identity is largely shaped by the collective memory of the nation.[84] Scholars have long argued that identity is closely linked to the formulation of foreign policy. National interests are not fixed by a country's geopolitical circumstances. Instead, they vary, depending on which identity of that country is considered.[85] Tsygankov (2014) argues that identity is just one of the variables in the constantly evolving interaction between ideas and political practices. These dynamics are usually deeply rooted in history and domestic politics. According to Pritzel, the modern Polish nationalism that emerged in the 2000s is largely based on the national myth of restoring an independent Poland within the borders of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[86]

The Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) and Józef Piłsudski were two of the main proponents of this romantic nationalism, publicly discussing and calling for the restoration of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth to its former glory.[87] On the contrary, Giedroyc took a different approach, arguing that Poland should accept the loss of territory on behalf of Ukraine after the Yalta Conference and abandon the idea of recovering the lost lands, known in Polish as *Kresy*. Instead, he focused on

81 M. Kott, "Intermarium...".

82 R. Riedel, "Tri-Marium...," p. 97-99.

83 Ibid., p. 1.

84 I. Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland*, Cambridge1998, p. 41; D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, "The Revivals...".

85 J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, The State and Foreign Policy," in J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, The State and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge 2009; A. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Maryland 2006.

86 D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, "The Revivals...," p. 144.

87 Ibid., p. 145.

the Promethean idea of supporting the independence of the newly created states of Belarus and Ukraine by all possible means. Reeves (2017) reasons that the romantic vision of foreign policy, which draws on the Intermarium and Jagiellonian, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, continues to have a significant influence on Polish foreign policy today. The idealist and romantic vision attempt to re-establish form of influence over the former eastern territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – *Kresy*. Reeves thus shows that the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was largely influenced by the Intermarium and the Jagiellonian idea (Reeves 2017, 148-149). The idea of the Intermarium carries within it the notion of 'great-power missionaryism', a special civilizing mission to Eastern Europe. This missionary character is deeply rooted in the symbolism and mentality of the Intermarium and has recently manifested itself in a form of democracy promotion in Central-Eastern Europe.[88] In this sense, the study of the Intermarium is analogous to the study of decolonization, as Poland itself acted as a colonial power in the region during the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This is also often the reason why today's Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians distance themselves from the history, traditions and heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and instead establish their distinctiveness from the Poles and the Intermarium concept.[89] Reeves also agrees that Intermarium and the Jagiellonian vision of foreign policy continue to have a visible influence on Polish foreign policy making. This influence can be seen mainly in the eastern dimension of foreign policy and the continuation of the mission that Poland assumes towards its eastern neighbors.[90]

The above examples show us that scholarship on the concept of the Intermarium is not systematized. The current scope of literature does not provide a clear indication of what the Intermarium is: an idea, a tradition, a culture, or a geopolitical project? Moreover, the idealized and romantic vision of Poland represented in the Intermarium evokes the historical memory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the symbol of unity, resilience, and shared cultural identity in the region. The commonwealth once represented a powerful federation that panned what is now Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania and embodied values of cooperation, religious tolerance and mutual defence against external powers. In this context, Intermarium mythologizes this legacy as a golden age of regional unity that could counterbalance the influence of larger powers such as Russia and Germany. This mythical dimension emphasizes ideals of sovereignty, shared history and cultural revival and presents Intermarium as a means of reviving a harmonious and independent 'civilizational space' that once existed. In particular, this vision appeals to those who see *Kresy* as a cultural heartland and imbues Intermarium with sense of destiny, nostalgia and historical continuity. The mythical dimension of Intermarium as it functions in the Polish political discourse will be discussed in the following section.

88 D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, "The Revivals...," p. 149.

89 Ibid., p. 152.

90 Ibid., p. 143.

3. THE INTERMARIUM AND ITS MYTHICAL DIMENSION

Jarosław Ławski (2016), in *Polskie Mitologie Odessy,* provides an in-depth exploration of the cultural and historical associations embedded within the Intermarium concept and its place in contemporary political discourse. His study offers a rich analysis of Polish representations of the Eastern Borderlands (*Kresy*), focusing in particular on Odesa, a Ukrainian city that holds a special place in Polish history and culture. Ławski employs the imagology of a place, a branch of comparative literature that examines cross-national representations and perceptions in literary discourse. He argues that such perception may be expressed through common understanding, specialized and scientific but also stereotypical. From a constructivist standpoint, public consciousness is composed of overlapping national stereotypes,[91] often expressed through historiographical symbolism or myth.[92] Thus, a single concept can be viewed differently by politicians, citizens, journalists, or clergy. Ławski examines how the Eastern Borderlands – a key element of Intermarium, influence Polish approaches to politics and foreign policy.

In case of Odesa, he finds that the city occupies a distinct and mythologized position in the Polish imagination. He observes that *all cities have their own mythologies*, yet Ukraine and Odesa form a particularly mythicized geographic-cultural and political imagination.[93] The etymology of Intermarium - the lands between the three seas – is central here.[94] Since the late eighteenth century, Odesa has been one of the largest ports on the Black Sea, symbolizing naval power and access to empire. Troebst also notes the symbolic role of the sea in Polish culture. It represents both lost empire and continuity with the Sarmatian myth, rooted in the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[95] A notion that has regained prominence in Polish discourse since 2015.[96]

Odesa's significance is further reinforced through the work of Adam Mickiewicz, Poland's most celebrated Romantic poet. Writing in exile during the partition, Mickiewicz sought to inspire national resistance through his verse. His *Crimean Sonnets* and *Odesan Sonnets* (1826)[97] link the city to the broader landscape of Polish patriotic imagination.

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91 E. Chmielewska, "Logos or the Resonance of Branding: A Close Reading of the Iconosphere of Warsaw," *Space and Culture*, vol. 8, iss. 4 (2005), pp. 349-380.

92 J. Ławski, "Polskie mitologie Odessy," in. J. Ławski, N. Maliutina (eds.), *Odessa w literaturach słowiańskich. Studia*, Białystok–Odessa 2016, at https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/12619/1/J_Lawski_Polskie_mitologie_Odessy.pdf, 2 IX 2018, pp. 180-188.

93 Ibid., p. 180.

94 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*; A. Czubiński, *Spory...*, N. Davies, *Heart...*

95 S. Troebst, "'Intermarium' and 'Wedding to the Sea': Politics of History and Mental Mapping in East Central Europe," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, vol. 10, iss. 2 (2003), pp. 293-321.

96 Ibid.

97 J. Ławski "Polskie...," p. 180.

Ławski notes that the Intermarium and the Eastern Borderlands often function in Polish consciousness as the only authentic *spiritual heritage of the Polish nation*, as emphasized in Chodakiewicz's book.[98]

Although he does not define myth explicitly, he stresses its political resonance in Poland's contemporary landscape.[99] For many, Ukraine and Odesa form part of what he terms the 'imaginary of conquest'.[100] A continuation of the vision of 'Poland from sea to sea'. The maritime element links the Intermarium to the modern Three Seas Initiative, encompassing the Baltic, Black and Adriatic regions.

Ławski thus identifies the enduring role of myth in shaping political imagination in Poland. While writing from a literary and cultural perspective, he acknowledges the broader historical and geopolitical dimensions of the Intermarium.[101] He situates its revival as a response to Western European liberalism and growing Russian influence, tracing its ideological roots to Piłsudski and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[102] In his interpretation, the Intermarium embodies the re-emergence of an imperial and federal myth that continues to influence Polish perceptions of history and politics.

Building on Ławski's framework, Monika Jurkowska in *Cultural and Political Aspects of the Intermarium Myth* analyzes the cultural dimension of Intermarium and its modern continuation through the Three Seas Initiative.[103] She argues that the myth of geographically fluid land *between the seas* remains a unifying and motivating ideal for the states of the region.[104] The myth, she writes, encourages resilience and resists political complacency. Like Ławski, Jurkowska notes that this shared myth resurfaces in times of existential threat, particularly amid renewed imperial ambitions from neighboring powers such as Russia.[105] Therefore, today, especially in the context of the Nord Stream II case, the Intermarium, with its mythical symbolism, is again becoming an important reference point for building an alliance within the Slavic-Balkan states. In particular, these two academic studies of Intermarium especially illustrate that the concept is more complex than just its geopolitical application.

SUMMARY

The literature demonstrates that the application of the Intermarium concept is far from uniform. Scholars generally discuss it three main strands: first, Intermarium as a geopolitical concept, emphasizing its pragmatic and realist features as a mechanism for balance

98 M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium...*, p. 418.

99 J. Ławski "Polskie...," p. 185.

100 Ibid., p. 186.

101 R. Riedel, "Tri-Marium..."; J. Ławski "Polskie...".

102 J. Ławski "Polskie...," p. 186.

103 M. Jurkowska, „Kulturowe i polityczne aspekty mitu Międzymorza," in J. Ławski, N. Maliutina (eds.), *Odessa i Morze Czarne Jako Przestrzeń Literacka*, Białystok–Odessa 2018, pp. 429-440.

104 Ibid., p. 440.

105 Ibid.

of power. Second, Intermarium as an ideological concept, reflecting a form of tradition, collective memory, and model of citizenship. Third, Intermarium as a form of historical, cultural and national identification, particularly in the context of political debate. The academic literature presents Intermarium as a blurred and ambiguous concept but also highlights its spiritual dimension, which can be powerful tool in political communication.

Intermarium plays a significant function in post-communist identity formation in Poland because of its layered meaning and its ability to link modern aspirations and historical roots.[106] Following the decades under Soviet dominance, Eastern European nations have sought to rebuild sovereignty and forge identities grounded in their past while shaping their future. Intermarium symbolizes independence, regional solidarity, and resistance to foreign control – values central to the post-communist experience. It recalls the memory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth while acting as a counter-narrative to both Russian and Western European influence,[107] helping Poland reclaim control over its political and cultural direction.[108]

Functioning as a form of collective memory and national ideology, Intermarium draws on romantic traditions in the process of Polish nation building.[109] [110] In political discourse, it adapts historic symbols and myths to modern conditions, providing continuity and stability.[111] This romantic identity embodies moral values and virtues expected of the ideal Polish citizen. Citizenship is often defined culturally, and even economic issues are interpreted through cultural frameworks. Political elites use the concept to define the regional character, national belonging, and the foreign policy perspectives. Recently, in the context of ISIS and the refugee crisis, Intermarium has been also invoked by some political groups as a defence of European, Christian and civilizational values.[112]

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106 Prochniak, A., *How Did the Political...*

107 R. Riedel, "Tri-Marium...".

108 M. Bartoszewicz, "Intermarium...".

109 T. Żarycki, R. Smoczyński, T. Warczok, "The Roots of Polish Culture-Cantered Politics: Toward a Non–Purely Cultural Model of Cultural Domination in Central and Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, vol. 31, iss. 2 (2017), pp. 360-381.

110 Ibid.

111 J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, *Introduction*, in J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman (eds.) *Neoclassical...*

112 R. Riedel, "Tri-Marium...," pp. 97-99.

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