

"What is the *Intermarium*? Geography and Destiny"

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Defining precisely the physical setting of our inquiry is a daunting task. And it is an integral part of our project to explore various definitions. The very fact that no one seems to either know or agree what "Central and Eastern Europe" precisely is underscores the necessity for our study.

The most crucial task is to define "East" and "West." There are moral, ideological, cultural, geographical, and geopolitical definitions. For us "the West" consists of the sphere of freedom; "the East" denotes the opposite. At the moment, the eastern boundary runs along the western borders of Russia and Belarus. The nations to the east of that line are largely or fully free.

There is a certain relationship between freedom and cultural heritage in the area. Nations which adhere to Western Christianity tend to display characteristics more amicable to freedom than people who follow Eastern Orthodoxy or Islam. However, non-Western faiths do not preclude embracing freedom, as reflected in the democratic path followed by, say, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

But where does Central Europe start? Where does it end? What of Eastern Europe? What about Central and Eastern Europe? Well, it depends. Geographically, the heart of Europe is located by the current border of north-eastern Poland and western Lithuania. The western rim of the continent rests on the Atlantic; the eastern part ends at the Ural Mountains. Geography is immutable. Geopolitically, however, the notion of the "East" and "West" shifts with the vicissitudes of the region. Thus, until 1989, East Germany was "the East." Prague was also "the East," even though it is geographically located to the west of Vienna, which ideologically belonged to "the West." This rule also applies to earlier periods in history. For example, south-eastern Hungary under the Ottoman rule in the 16th century was definitely "the East," but, following its liberation in the 17th and 18th centuries, it must be squarely placed in "the West."

We focused on the *Intermarium*, the land between the Black and Baltic seas for several reasons. First, most importantly, it is culturally and ideologically most compatible with American national interests and political culture as the inheritor of the freedom and rights stemming from the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian/Ruthenian Commonwealth. Second, it is the regional pivot and a gateway to both East and West. Third, since the *Intermarium* is the most stable part of the post-Soviet area (and most free and democratic), the United States should focus on solidifying its influence there to use it as a springboard to handling the rest of the successor states, including in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Russian Federation itself. Fourth, the ongoing political and economic success of the *Intermarium* states under American sponsorship undermines the enemies of freedom not only in the post-Soviet sphere but also all over the world. Fifth, the *Intermarium* is the most inclusive political concept which successfully operated in practice for several centuries within the framework of the

Commonwealth. Sixth, at its zenith, the *Intermarium* projected its might well beyond its borders, influencing events as far afield as Scandinavia and the Balkans, and it can do so again in congruence with America's objectives and its own interests. Last but not least, seventh, by reintroducing the concept of the *Intermarium* into the intellectual discourse we would like to stress the autonomous and independent nature of the area (rather than either its non-existence or submersion into conquering empires).

We acknowledge, of course, that there exist other ways to conceptualize the area. There were imperial efforts to deny the existence of the *Intermarium* or to imagine it as an extension of the conquering empires (e.g., 19th century Russia's idea of "the Slavdom," invoking a block in need of a "Slavic monarch" to protect it, while ignoring both the majority that rejected such protection and the non-Slavic minority peoples; or Germany's contemporaneous concept of the *Mittleeuropa*, a German dominion and a passageway to the Middle East)

However, most locally-generated geopolitical ideas draw directly on the legacy of the *Intermarium*. For example, in the interwar period the "ABC" seas solution for the *Intermarium* (Adriatyk-Bałtyk-Czarne) was touted. This was a maximalist approach that included everything between the pre-1939 Soviet and German borders to be organized in a loose confederation. Later, the project was reduced to the Polish-Czechoslovak Federation, as unveiled in London during the war years. The Vyšehrad Triangle (or Group) of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic is the modern day extension of this idea.

The knowledge of the *Intermarium* entails the fluency with its component parts. Most focus on ethnic differences, indeed "ancient hatreds." While considering ethnic differences, we shall also underscore cultural affinities and other positive features (e.g., economy) which tend to unite, rather than divide the nations of the region. We shall dwell on particularities and peculiarities of each of the nation-states and suggest ways to address them to facilitate overcoming of their differences, or at least downplaying them for the sake of regional cooperation. We also shall differentiate between usually constructive cultural nationalism and potentially pernicious ethno-nationalism. The former is indispensable to reconstruct each nation's identity following the pestilence of Communism; the latter threatens to turn the reconstruction endeavor into a conflict of the local nations, thus seriously jeopardizing the *Intermarium* project of cooperative nationalisms. It is within this context that our "broad sweep of regional history" ties "to contemporary geo-politics" as well as "accounts for the major differences among the countries of the region that inevitably require a differentiated U.S. policy approach to the individual states."

Thus, our focus on the *Intermarium* reflects not only the most efficient way to tackle the complexities of the region as a cohesive collection of a million indigenous component parts, but also reflects a tradition that the disparate people of the region will find most familiar and least threatening. Since the objective is to share the knowledge of the *Intermarium* with American policymakers, it is crucial to explain the region in such terms that would help the US influence the target populations. This is indispensable to break with the practice of talking only to their imperial overseers in Moscow or elsewhere.