

Răzvan Mihai ALBU
Craiova Univ., Craiova, Romania

GEOPOLITICS OF ROMANIA AND POLAND IN 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY

Abstract:

The Romanians and Poles share many cultural, economic and political connections since medieval times, but are often neglected in comparison to other “typical” alliances that both nations had in the course of their history. Yet in many of the occasions both Romanians and Poles were fighting in the same team or against a common enemy. It is geography in the end that tied these 2 countries into necessary alliances in the past and in the present day, and which will still affect in the future.

In the following document I will focus more on the 20th and 21st century socio-political scene but I will also take a short review of the context that lead to the current situation. It is also worth to mention that at the end I will try to offer a short description of what it might happen in the near future, based on the current data and context of the time of when this document was written (May 2020).

Key words:

Romania, Poland, Intermarium, NATO Eastern Flank, 3 Seas Initiative

TERRITORIAL CHANGES IN CENTRAL EUROPE AFTER WORLD WAR I - INTRODUCTION

“Who rules Eastern Europe commands the heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the World Island, who rules the World-island commands the World.” The quote belongs to Halford John Mackinder and it’s a short description of his theory of the Heartland: The entity that manages to

control the “Pivot area” of the Eurasian continent will eventually come to conquer the whole of World-Island.

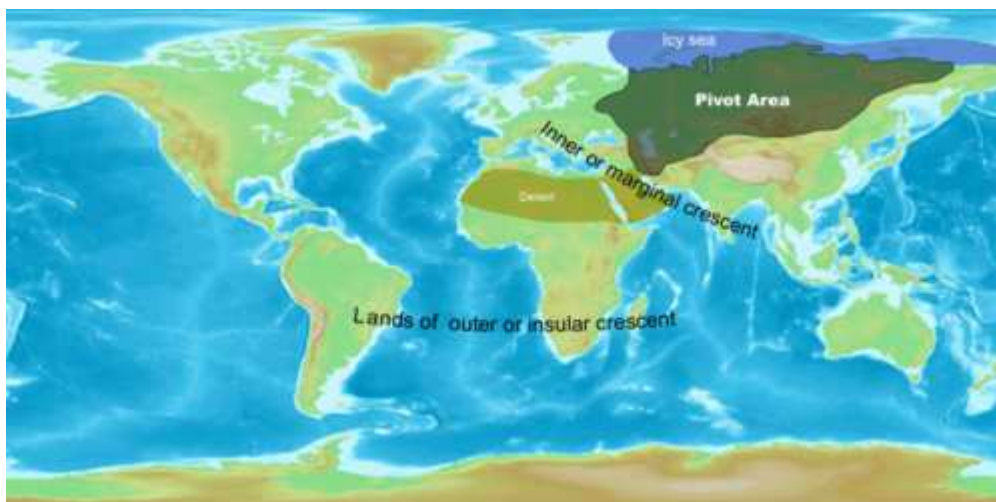


Figure 1: Demarcation of the Pivot area on the Eurasian landmass

“World-island” is the term used to describe the Afro-Eurasian land mass. Mackinder also uses the terms of “Offshore islands” which include the islands right next to the land mass: such as the British Isles and the Japanese Isles. Austria and The American landmass are mentioned as “Outlying islands”.

“Pivot area” is the landmass that is defined by the Carpathian mountains, Caucasian and Zagros Mountains, The Himalayas and the Altaic Mongolian Plateau and the entity that manages to conquer this area will have enough power to expand further while the Outside forces are trying to stop this from happening. – This situation can be very easily described by “The Game” that existed between the Russian Empire and the British Empire. The Russians were in a constant struggle to access a warm port in Asia while the British were on the other side of the mentioned geographical barriers of the Pivot area and were doing all necessary to make the Russians fail in this objective.

While in Asia the geographical features were making an easy-defendable border, there is a gap in Europe which can be used as a “highway” to either invade the Pivot area or the other way around. This is the North European Plain on which today

it is situated Poland. And while in medieval time, when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had a firm grip in the area it had no centralized hostile power, neither in the east nor in the west. As soon as the Prussian and Russian states had a more stable and powerful position on the world stage the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth declined and ended-up being divided between those 2 powers, and a lesser extent to the Austrian Habsburg Empire.

The end of World War 1 brought dramatic changes of the borders of Europe. The most drastic ones happened in Central and Eastern Europe. Before the war there was a stable border between the Russian Empire and the German Empire which haven't changed since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, both of the countries keeping each other in check while they were focusing on other objective: For Germany the naval race with UK and colonization of Africa while the Russians were targeting Constantinople, Persia and Manchuria.

The whole situation changed dramatically after the First World War, all 3 Empires that were situated in the Central part of Europe were abolished and from them new republics appeared obtained their independence or countries such Romania and Serbia greatly expanded at their expense. The new states that appeared on the Northern European plain were mainly either with a small population or a hard to defend territory. In the chaos of 1918 and the wars that followed the war until 1921 some of them managed to secure their independence while countries such as Ukraine and Belarus ended up divided between the newly formed Polish republic and Soviet Russia.

In both the Romanian and Polish cases, the political situation of 1918 proved to be a chance that is impossible to happen again in the modern world. Both countries had a native population scattered in countries that were on the opposite sides of the conflagration. Normally, there would one side that emerges victories which could create a Polish puppet state on the territory controlled by the enemy and Romanians could take either the territory of Bessarabia from Russia or Transylvania and Bukovina from Austro-Hungary if they were situated in the victorious team. But the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the withdrawal of the country from the war

combined with the defeat of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires created the opportunity to annex all the desired territories with a Polish and Romanian population. To secure the desired territories and to stop the Ukrainian threat in both of the countries (as Ukraine had territorial claims in both Bessarabia & Bukovina and Eastern territories of Poland) there was also a coordinated attack from both sides on the West Ukrainian People's Republic by the Polish and Romanian Armies, and thus, the Polish-Romanian border came into existence.

In 1921, after the end of the Polish-Soviet War Poland was situated between a revanchist Soviet Union, a defeated but not collapsed Germany, a Hostile Lithuania and with a Czechoslovakia with border disputes and Romania being situated between a recently occupied Hungary which was de-sovietized, a hostile Soviet Union and a Bulgaria with territorial claims on Southern Dobrogea region, the most logical action was the sign an alliance between the only two non-hostile neighbors.

ROMANIAN-POLISH ALLIANCE OF 1921 AND INTERMARIUM IDEA

In 1920 & 1921 there were signed 2 important Treaties that changed dramatically the borders of Central Europe. The first one was the Treaty of Trianon on 4th of June 1920 between the winning powers of the Entente and the Hungarian side of the dissolved Austro-Hungarian Empire. In this treaty the Romanian side was given control of the territories of Transylvania proper, half of Banat, Crișana and half of Maramureș territory. These territories were awarded with a demarcation line on the territories where the Romanians were part of the majority, even though there was a substantial Hungarian population as well, especially in the eastern side of Transylvania, which created an "island" of Hungarians broken apart from the rest. In the Romanian diplomatic circles this treaty was viewed as a victory of a millennial struggle for self-rule in the Transylvanian region, yet there were politicians who were not happy with the result: In 1919 when the Romanian-

Hungarian war was raging, the Tisza river proved to be a favorable defensive asset for the Romanians and a border on the river would prove helpful in case of a future Hungarian aggression. There was also a debate in the Western powers if Romania should be awarded any land considering the fact the in the spring of 1918 the country signed a separate peace treaty with the Central Powers but reentered the war on 10th of November 1918, one day before the armistice was signed. Nevertheless, the French help was decisive in defending the Romanian cause.

On the eastern side of the new Romanian borders the situation was more tense. After the Treaty of Saint-Germain in 1919 Romania received Bukovina but USSR never recognized the annexation of Moldova from 1918 and this created a tense situation that could have easily escalated into a soviet invasion in the beginning of the 1920s. The most delicate moment for Romania was in 1919 during the war with Soviet Hungary, when it was neighbored by 2 communist states, but the swift action of the Romanian army on the Hungarian front and the Polish-Soviet war prevented these 2 entities to connect and create a land-bridge that would halt the expansion of the new state to rule over the “Pivot area”, USSR.

In 1921 it was signed the Treaty of Riga that defined the border of Poland and USSR, which will remain the same until the start of World War 2.

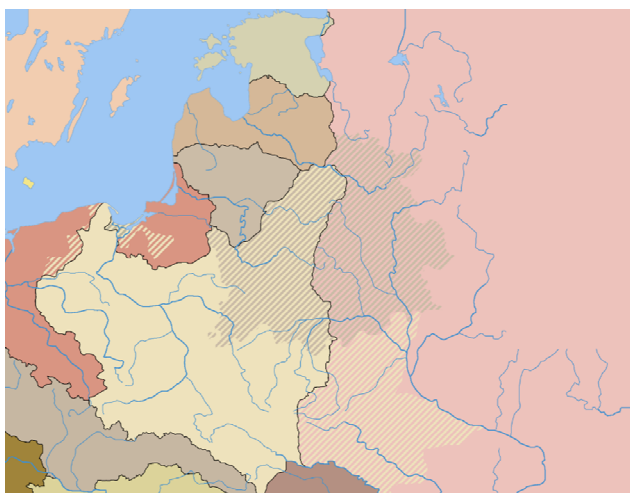


Figure 2: Polish borders of after the Treaty of Riga – 1921 with the pre-partition border overlaped

In Poland there were 2 important currents on which diplomatic stance the newly reborn country should follow:

1. The Intermarium idea backed by Józef Piłsudski, which followed the idea of a recreation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth path, with Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus together with Poland would form an Union and Poland being the senior partner.
2. The modern Polish nation-state backed by Roman Dmowski, which opted for the creation of a Polish state which encompassed an absolute majority of the Polish population inside the country, and it should follow the national self-determination principle.

The treaty of Riga favored neither of the sides as it didn't make Poland obtain control of the historically desired territories that used to belong to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in the same time it made Poland rule over significant non-Polish population on its eastern border which were of Belorussian and Ukrainian origin.

Faced with this issue the Idea of Intermarium shifted from the re-creation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to the idea of having a "Sanitary cordon" that stretches from Scandinavian countries to Greece and Italy, creating a wall between the Soviet Union and Germany. This plan was doomed to fail from the beginning as it included countries that were hostile to each other, such as Bulgaria and Greece/Yugoslavia/Romania and the distrust that Lithuania and Czechoslovakia had towards Poland regarding the territorial disputes in Vilnius and Silesia.

The last attempt for the Intermarium idea was initiated in 1935 by one of Piłsudski's close associates, Foreign Affairs minister Józef Beck. In his contracted version of the Intermarium there were only 3 countries included: Poland, Romania and Hungary but this initiative was also doomed to fail from the start, as Romania and Hungary were having a tense diplomatic situation regarding Transylvania and that made the cooperation between them highly improbable.

As these 3 attempts to create a strong unified power in Central Europe as a balance to Germany and Soviet Union failed to materialize, the German Weimar republic also crumbled and instead it became a militaristic expansionist

power which desired to reclaim the lost land in the Treaty of Versailles but also to expand further into Eastern Europe. The “Lebensraum” (Living space) idea promoted by Adolf Hitler in his book, *Mein Kampf*, promoted the seizure of the rich soil and minerals from the Slavic countries east and to replace the native population with Germans. In the previous attempts to conquer the “World Island” the forces came from the east towards west but in this situation a country situated outside of the Pivot Area wanted to obtain the control of the territory that provided a leading role in the world stage.

Previous Swedish and French invasions were not targeted to obtain other material and territorial benefits but not the total control of this specific area: The Swedes desired full control of the Baltic Sea and the French were following to make Russia obey the Continental System and create one Unified economical force against the British, but never to direct control this specific area. Due to its ruling system the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth that stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea never desired to expand further than the territories it already controlled through the Union with Lithuania, preferring to interfere into the internal affairs of the Czarate of Moscow instead of direct administration. With the ascension of Peter the Great, the Russian Empire was consolidated as the sole power of the Pivot Area and it wasn't challenged until 20th century.

ROMANIA AND POLAND BEFORE THE START AND DURING WORLD WAR 2

What is important to mention is that the Romanian-Polish alliance, when it was signed in 1921, was a defensive alliance against Soviet Union and not against any other neighboring state, as neither Poland didn't wish to get involved into a potential Balkan conflict nor Romania wish to sour relations with other Central European countries that have disputes with Poland. In the 20s and 30s there were 4 visits of the Romanian Royal House members in Poland with also a constant renewal of the alliance and substantial military purchases of Polish equipment, such as gas masks and P-11

planes from PZL, but both of the countries were too weak to handle the growing threat of both Nazi Germany and Soviet Union.



Figure 3: Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs – Grigore Gafencu executes a visit to Poland on 3-7th of March 1939 (source: The Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Foreign Affairs Ministry)

On 17th of September 1939 when the Polish republic was attacked by the Soviet Union from the eastern side while most of the Polish Army was fighting on the western side against the Nazi aggression, the Polish state released the Romanian side from the alliance obligations. The move was done in the hope of being allowed by the Romanian authorities to cross the Romanian border and head to France and continue the fight from there. In the moment of crossing the border the soldiers were disarmed and the members of the Polish government were interned in places such as Bicz, Slănic Moldova and Craiova before they were able to head to Western Europe and many common Polish refugees settled, especially in the Bukovina territory. In October 1939 there were registered 21.042 soldiers from which in June 1940 there were around 6000 left on the Romanian soil, there rest being able to go either on the Western front or in the North-African Front with the tacit help of the Romanian government. The number of common Polish refugees that managed to escape to Romania varies between 50.000 and 100.000.

The biggest success is considered the transit of the Polish gold reserves to the port of Constanța under substantial Soviet and German pressure. Even though Romania struggled to maintain a neutral position during the invasion of Poland, the passive support for the Polish cause of the Prime-minister Armand Călinescui one of the motives that led to its assassination by the members of the Iron Guard, ruled by Horia Sima on 23rd of September 1939.

The diplomatic relations between the 2 countries were officially closed on 4th of November 1940 when the Romanian authorities ordered the closure of consulates and posts with the Polish government.

ROMANIA AND POLAND IN THE WARSAW PACT

With their fate decided at the Yalta Conference, both Romania and Poland were at the end of the war in the Soviet sphere of influence. Both countries had a rapid and brutal switch to a communist-based government and had Soviet soldiers stationed on their soil. The military, political and economic grip of Soviet Union was maintained in Eastern Europe through Treaties of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance and through the military defensive alliance of the “Warsaw Pact” which was founded on 15th of May 1955, as a response to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

At this point the Pivot Area was not under threat anymore and Soviet Union could expand its influence in Asia and Africa. The singular moment of escalation was in 1968 with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact members, when Romania condemned the ongoing invasion, but it didn't withdraw from the Alliance, like in the case of Albania.

The buffer-states that separated Soviet Union from the rest of NATO states gave more opportunities for the communist state to export its ideology in other parts of the world that were not bordering the country. The communist expansion in Asia in the 50s and 60s and the late stage of expansion in the 70s and 80s in Africa proved that Mackinder's theory can have a practical use. But the Soviet Union could not achieve full

control of the European continent and so it could not divert fully into expanding its power further.



Figure 4: European member states of NATO and Warsaw Pact in 1960

The buffer-states that separated Soviet Union from the rest of NATO states gave more opportunities for the communist state to export its ideology in other parts of the world that were not bordering the country. The communist expansion in Asia in the 50s and 60s and the late stage of expansion in the 70s and 80s in Africa proved that Mackinder's theory can have a practical use. But the Soviet Union could not achieve full control of the European continent and so it could not divert fully into expanding its power further.

In the end, with the internal and external pressures led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and to reset the Geopolitical playground of Central Europe, giving a significant advantage for NATO countries, and United States in particular. The buffer-states could not maintain a neutral stance and they will be absorbed into NATO and EU gradually and Russian sphere of influence was limited to the former member states of the Soviet Union.

FALL OF COMMUNISM AND ASCENSION TO EU AND NATO

The fall of communism gave the possibility of both Poland and Romania to apply to NATO and European Union.

On 25th of January 1993 the first treaty of economic cooperation was signed between the 2 countries and the military cooperation continued to improve as Poland joined NATO in 1999 and Romania in 2004.

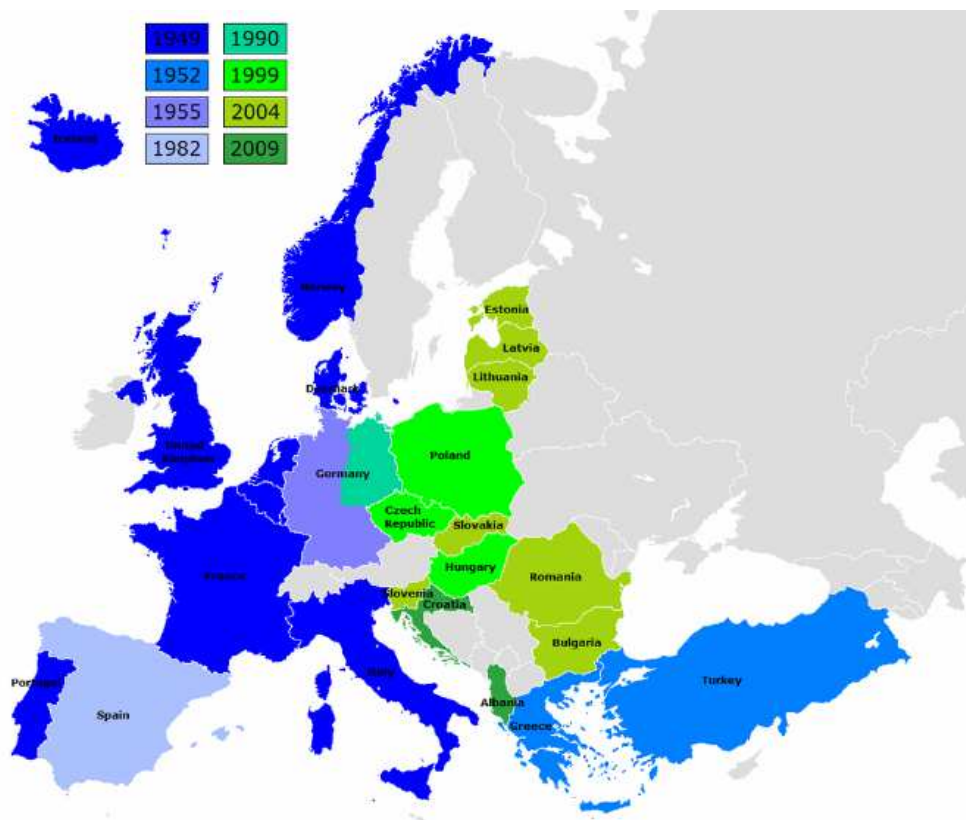


Figure 5: Expansion of the NATO member states in Europe

The same situation can be mentioned on the economical part, as Poland joined European Union in 2004 and Romania in 2007. The scope of this rapid expansion was to expand the European market, to consolidate the defensive alliance with the addition of the former soviet satellite states. Romania and Poland participated in the initiative of the American interventions to grow closer ties with the western powers. When it comes to foreign affairs policies both countries share a historical animosity with Russia, a relative dependence on the Russian Gas, even though Romania has a smaller percentage than Poland and a historical connection with the countries of

Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova which collides with the Russian interests in the region.

It is important to mention that during the time of the NATO and EU expansion in the eastern side of the continent Russia was in a very delicate situation and it could not put the same pressure to stop the former members of the Warsaw pact to join EU and NATO. At the beginning of the 21st century the Russian economic and military power started improving and it could react more hostile towards further incursions of the alliances in the countries that they perceive as being part of their sphere of influence. In 2008 the Russian army intervened into Georgia, to stop the pro-NATO and pro-UE stance of the Georgian officials. This moment can be considered as the moment when Russia re-emerged as a regional power and further incursions into Eastern Europe would be met by a Russian response.

The political cooperation forms a good basis to develop bilateral defensive cooperation. The cooperation of the two states within NATO is based on a common position in key issues related to NATO activities. Poland and Romania are mainly interested in maintaining the defensive nature of NATO, and in the face of Russia's aggressive actions, in maximum enhancement of collective defensive abilities based on art. 5 of the Washington treaty and strengthening the eastern flank of the Alliance. At the Newport summit, Romania was Poland's main regional ally who made endeavors for the Alliance to adapt strategically to the new situation concerning security in the East of Europe. Very helpful in developing a common position was the eastern flank summit organized by the Polish president, Bronisław Komorowski, on 22nd July 2014 in Warsaw. The participants included the presidents of Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. An example of mutual support within NATO may be the fact that in 2008 Romania delegated 2 officers to work with the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin. It also joined the NATO Military Police Centre of Excellence in Bydgoszcz. The Polish army, in turn, have one person in HUMINT COE (Human Intelligence Centre of Excellence) in Oradea, Romania. Poland and Romania actively participate in NATO's programs and activities. Both

states joined the AWACS program (Poland in 2008, Romania in 2011), which is the aerial component of the of NATO's early warning system. Allied reconnaissance aircrafts regularly use Polish airspace for reconnaissance flights, they may use the airport in Powidz, and 6 Polish soldiers work in the structures of the NAEW&C Program Management Organization.

THE DEFENSIVE PILONS OF THE EASTERN FLANK OF NATO

When it comes to the Eastern Flank of the NATO alliance defense, there are 3 countries that take the bulk of the pressure to withstand any interference from the Eurasian steppes: Turkey, Poland and Romania.

Turkish people themselves arrived in Anatolia from the vast steppes of Asia and formed a nation that stretched from Hungary to Caucasus and North Africa. Nowadays the mountainous relief of the country and vast population (around 82 million) and specific features such as the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and the Caucasian mountains from the Georgian-Russian border separates them from any Russian clear threat and even traps the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, as there is no way of leaving this body of water into the Mediterranean Sea without their approval. This stability gives Turkey the strong position of having a more independent, if not "rebellious", attitude in the alliance and seek their own regional power projection in scenarios such as Northern Cyprus or the intervention in Syria and to placate the other regional power in the Middle-Eastern Area: Iran.

The other 2 pilons are Poland and Romania: both of the countries are based at the edge of the former Soviet territory, are in a process of transition from Warsaw pact-based military equipment to NATO-standard equipment and have a historical animosity with Russia.

Nowadays Poland is defended by relief from 3 sides: In the North the Baltic Sea, in the West the Border with Germany is formed mainly by the river Oder, this combined with the proximity of the German capital to the border and the demilitarized policy of the German government give guarantees

of stability for the Polish government. In the southern side the Carpathians and Sudeten mountains create a clear border between Poland and its southern neighbors. The main threat comes from the East and North-East. In the North-East the Kaliningrad enclave is the most militarized region of Europe, capable of disrupting the NATO support in the Baltic sea and the Baltic States. The Baltic states are especially vulnerable as the main land supply route goes through the small border of less than 100 kilometers between Poland and Lithuania, the Suwalki corridor. This corridor is caught between Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus, which is heavily dependent on the Russian influence, economic and military decisions and It can be considered as part of the Russian sphere of influence, even though it has no official hostile relations with Poland or NATO in general. Belarus also has what it used to be the prime defensive asset of Poland during the time of the Commonwealth: The Smolensk corridor: This corridor is a narrow strip of land between the rivers Dnieper and Daugava rivers. These rivers used to be the prime defense on the eastern borders of the Commonwealth, and they had a much bigger defensive potential than Bug river, that creates now a part of the eastern border of Poland.

The main advantages of Poland include the EU and NATO membership and the fact that it can focus on mainly one side of the border while the other 3 are either stable and peaceful or the natural barriers deter any incursion on its territory. A strong economy with an expanding infrastructure, a modernization process of the armed forces and a significant population – being the most populated country from the former Warsaw Pact nations that joined EU and NATO.

Romania features 3 geographical particularities: The mountainous central terrain – which can be a formidable defensive feature, the Danube river which can also have defensive potential, especially in the Danube delta area which tunnels the transit route through the Vrancea corridor (between the Carpathians and the Danube), in similar way in which the Smolensk corridor worked for the Commonwealth but this one is still under the control of Romania, also the Danube river can create a strong navigable connection between Romania and Central Europe. The last feature is the Black Sea

presence of the country: The Black Sea main powers are Turkey and Russia, but Romania comes as a very important factor when it comes to balance the power struggle in the area. When Crimea was annexed by Russia in 2014, a strong process of militarization created the enclave to be in a similar situation with the Kaliningrad Oblast. The proximity of Romania to the peninsula puts pressure on the government in Bucharest to seek further NATO support in the stand-off with Russia. At the moment 2 of the most important NATO military bases are situated in Romania: Deveselu military base – part of the AEGIS missile system and the Mihail Kogalniceanu base in Dobrogea which grants fast access to the military forces dispatched for the Middle-Eastern theaters of operations. The only base that has a higher strategic importance for NATO in the area which is not on the territory of Romania is the Incirlik base in Turkey.

Romania has half of the population of Poland (around 19 million) and half of the national budget, which also implies half of the money for defense, as both countries have around 2% allocated for Defense, as part of the official NATO policy. What Romania lacks compared to Poland in demographic and economic factors makes up by defensive and strategic positioning while the process of rearmament that started in 2010s will continue in 2020s to bring the Romanian army up to NATO standards.

At the moment, there are Romanian military personnel dispatched in Orzysz, Poland in official military missions as well as Polish military personnel dispatched in Craiova, Romania as part of the multinational forces dispatched throughout the Eastern flank of NATO – the purpose of this action is to create strong military cooperation between the involved countries and be used as a deterrent against a Russian incursion in the Baltics.

ROMANIAN & POLISH INFLUENCE IN THE EAST: MOLDOVA, UKRAINE AND BELARUS

The countries of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus were all once part of the Soviet Union and Russia considers them as

part of their Sphere of influence. Once the Baltic states Poland and Romania joined EU and NATO in the early 2000s, this was considered as a turning point for Russia which had NATO troops on its border now and it would not accept any expansion in the east without repercussions, such as the intervention in Georgia in 2008 or 2014 in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The countries caught between NATO/EU – Russia Tog-of-war present 3 different cases which can be exploited by Poland and Romania.

Belarus – From these 3 countries Belarus has the weakest national identity, as at the early years of independence the Belarusian language and symbols were suppressed by the pro-Russian attitude present in the county, even today the population speaks predominantly Russian over Belarusian as the first language and the economy of Belarus is heavily dependent of the Russian economy. Yet since 2014 there has been a change in the Belarusian society. The annexation of Crimea, which had a majority Russian-speaking population and the embargo that followed of the western products to Russia made Lukashenko to diversify its options and seek ties to the European market. This was taken into advantage by Poland which now also has a growing Belarusian population on its territory by giving Polish identification cards of Belarusian citizens of Polish descent and constant media coverage from Warsaw's press and NGO institutions of Belarusian Pro-nationalist messages. In Belarus even the use of the old White-Red-While tricolor flag could have gotten you in the past into prison, but lately there has been an ease on these effects and an increase for more nationalistic elements, such as the use of Belarusian language. The refusal of acknowledging of the Crimean annexation and a more neutral stance of the country could indicate a slow drift of the country from the Russian sphere, which EU and NATO could speculate at the right time. Unfortunately this is not something that could happen in the near future as Russia still holds a firm grip on the country and at any sign of rebellion could simply roll over the tanks on its territory so a more cautious stance must be applied.

Ukraine – One of the most efficient tactics of the Kremlin to halt any western expansion on the territories that they perceive as part of their sphere of influence is to create a

“frozen-conflict”, to supply and support secessionist movements on the respective country and block its ascension to EU or NATO by having a unstable situation in the country which would make unprofitable and risky for the alliance to expand in the respective country. Ukraine has a much stronger national identity than Belarus, but it still lacks the unity other countries such as Poland or Romania have. Centuries of Moscow or Sankt Petersburg direct rule had a significant effect on the national identity of the country. Its literal meaning being “Borderland” it was always caught between the regional powers: Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Tsarist Russia and Ottoman Empire, it lacks natural defenses on all sides so it always had to switch to the influence of one of its stronger neighbors. There is also an East-West divide: The western part being predominantly native Ukrainian while the eastern parts have a much stronger Russian influence. In 2014 the Maidan protests toppled the Ukrainian president which suspended the EU-integration process in favor of Eurasian Union, and as a result the Russian Army invaded Crimea and started to support Pro-Russian rebels in the eastern side of the country. Initially the conflict was active but nowadays the fighting stopped and only minor skirmishes on the frontline can happen sporadically but without any territory gained by either side.

After the start of the conflict the Kiev authorities started to follow a more drastically nationalistic and pro-Ukrainian path which worried Romania, Hungary and Poland, all 3 of them having significant ethnic population on their respective borders. The economy of the country got hit hard by the conflict and many Ukrainians left to work abroad, a big part of them opting to go to Poland due to economical, linguistical and proximity reasons. This gave to Poland an increased soft power over Kiev and its decisions and due to historical connection, just like in Belarus, it is the main influence of the pro-EU and NATO affiliation.

At this moment, there is no possibility to interfere in the eastern conflict without a Russian intervention which would be detrimental. Russia also has the higher influence by controlling the Crimean peninsula which blocks a significant part of the Ukrainian mobility in the Black Sea and also puts additional

pressure on the NATO/EU countries that have access to the sea: Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey. In the same time the Russian economy was affected by the sanctions the west imposed on the after the annexation and there is no possibility for a direct attack on Ukraine without a provocation. The country's size and population make it more difficult to conquer and control compared to other past interventions done by the Russian Federation: Transdnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia or Chechnya. For the moment, the frozen conflict will continue until one of the sides will release some of its pressure.

Moldova – If the previous 2 countries have a stronger historical and economical connection with Poland, Moldova falls into the influence of Romania. It has even today a predominantly Romanian-speaking population after significant processes of russification. It used to be part of the medieval kingdom of Moldova until 1812, when it was annexed by the Russian Empire. In the chaos of World War 1 it was annexed by Romania and lost again 1940, only to be recaptured in 1941 and lost in 1944 due to the Soviet advance. The country gained its independence in 1991 with the fall of Soviet Union and at that point there were proposals for reunion with Romania but the election of Iliescu in Romania, which had a pro-soviet stance and the start of the Transdnistrian War in Moldova stopped this process. The aftermath of the Transdnistrian War created the Transdnistrian Republic, which is not recognized by any state of the world, a strip of land between Moldova and Ukraine which hosts the 14th Russian Army on its territory which is 6000 personnel strong, and in the case of a hypothetical Moldovan unification with Romania it could be used in the same way as it was used in Crimea in 2014 and put a halt on this process. As part of the russification process, Kremlin uses the “Moldovanism” idea, which separated Moldovans and Romanians as two different ethnic groups even though both of the people use the same Latin-based language to communicate which is understandable by each side and apart from regionalisms that exist in any language the similarities are quite evident. Moldova until recently was under the power grip of the socialists but in 2009 protests the government was changed, the new government had a significant increase in the pro-EU diplomacy but also turned

the country into an oligarchy. The Russian influence is still significant even though it's decreasing and the "Romanianizing" process increases: various TV and Radio channels connected to Romania air also in Moldova. The Romanian government offers scholarships to study in the country and provides financial and military help to the country.

At the moment, in Moldova, the latest polls over 30% of its citizens have a pro-unification or pro-EU sentiment while the rest of them are either for an independent Moldova which can be used as a buffer-state between the West and Russia or are for a more pro-Russia stance. It is worth to mention that the Russian military presence in Transdnistria it is the main factor why Moldovans prefer the buffer-state option instead of unification. In Romania more than 70% of the population are for an unification and the main reason why the rest of the citizens don't support the unification is because of the economical difference between the two countries: Moldova being the poorest country in Europe and would bring a significant pressure on the Romanian economy, which is also far from developed and solid compared to the rest of EU members.

The historical connection and the necessity for a continuous pressure on the country that controls the Pivot area obligate Poland and Romania to continue to exercise soft power of these 3 countries to take into consideration any procedure that could detach them from the Russian sphere of influence without triggering a Russian response: Poland in Belarus and Ukraine and Romania in Moldova respectively, according to their military, economic and mass-media options and capacity.

INITIATIVE OD THE 3 SEAS – THE RETURN OF THE INTERMARIUM IDEA

Consisting of 12 members and having its first summit in 2016, the Initiative of the 3 Seas is one of the most recent trans-national economical projects and the main objective of it is to create a stronger cooperation between the members states and tie them up through infrastructure and energy projects:

- Via Carpathia: to create a north-south highway from Klaipeda – Lithuania to Thessaloniki – Greece
- To develop the liquified natural gas infrastructure in Poland and Croatia with pipelines from Romania which will reduce the energy dependence of the respective countries from Russia.

For these projects Romania and Poland pledged to allocate 500 million euros through Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego and Export-Import Bank and USA pledged to support the Initiative with additional 1 billion dollars. The infrastructure of Eastern Europe goes mainly East-West as the countries of the Warsaw Pact were dependent on the Soviet economy and under military control from Moscow, all the infrastructure was designed to benefit them, neglecting the north-south routes. A north-south connection would especially benefit the 2 biggest economies of the initiative: Romania and Poland and it would tie the respective countries in their external-policy actions regarding their eastern borders. EU funds will also prove very beneficial to the development of these infrastructure projects alongside national budgets.



Figure 6: Members of the Three Seas Initiative in 2020

The expansion of the Initiative to include also Slovenia and Croatia could prove risky, as this move would also alarm Serbia and make the members of the initiative to divert resources to placate Serbia, which has a conflicting situation with these countries instead of focusing on its initial purpose of creating a stronger buffer region between Western Europe and Russia.

The initiative is still in its emerging state and it might require time to solidify into a real economical alliance between

these countries, yet the potential is much higher than just the Visegrad Group, which included just 4 members from Central Europe. If in the geopolitical game the cards will be played right, this might be the closest it has ever been to create a belt of states to oppose Russia, the holder of the Pivot area from the Baltic sea to the Black Sea, a 21st century version of the Intermarium idea that existed in the Polish diplomatic circles since it reappeared back on the map in the 20th century.

FORECAST FOR THE NEAR FUTURE IN THE REGION

As it was stated in the previous chapters, Russia still holds a firm grip in the countries of Ukraine Belarus and Moldova and in the last chapter I will try to point out on course of action of what might happen in the near future. It is important to mention that these actions are unpredictable in detail and it can cover just some broad idea based on the diplomatic tendencies of the countries.

Russia, as well as most of Central and Eastern Europe will head into a significant demographical decline which will affect its power projection. At this moment, Russia it is the sole ruler of the Pivot Area and so far I have covered its Western borders in Europe, but Russia is also facing pressure from the south and east: Fractions appeared in Syria between Russian and Iranian influence in the conflict and the emergence of Iran as a regional power makes Russia divert more of its resources to balance the scale in the region. Iran has a significant Azeri population on its territory and the country of Azerbaijan used to be part of Persia in various occasions, as such, Iranian soft power is also projected into a country that borders Russia. The emergence of India will also put additional pressure in the region of Afghanistan, as Afghanistan is an important part of the Anti-Pakistani strategy of India.

The biggest threat will come though from its eastern borders. The constant growth of China will lead to increasing pressure from their side on the Manchurian territory controlled by Russia, but it is seen as part of the Chinese historical territory from Beijing. China also seeks to expand its political and economic power into the former Soviet Central Asian

republics who are under Russian sphere of influence and were until recently unchallenged by any external power.

Faced with these pressures from all sides Russia cannot follow for long its own agenda and it will have to gravitate towards one of the factions. It seeks right now to federalize Moldova and placate Ukraine and Belarus from joining EU and NATO and as soon as these objectives could be fulfilled, they will be able to divert more resources combating the Chinese. It is necessary for EU and NATO to maintain a pressure on Eastern Europe until Russia will no longer have the capacity to dictate the policies of the countries that it perceives as part of their sphere of influences and prevent those countries into falling into a federalization that would benefit Russia or a frozen conflict that could hinder their ascension towards NATO and EU. Eventually, Putin will be out of office and the modifications that he is doing into the Russian political theater will lead towards a more decentralized and parliamentary Russia once he will step out from power. In the moment when Putin and his policies influenced by Alexander Dugin will be cease to be a threat there will be a chance of expansion into Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova which together with a switch from a weaker Russia from anti-Western stance towards a more Anti-Chinese policy will lead to a radical change of the political game and the expansion into the Pivot area of the World Island.

As mentioned, this is just one of the possibilities and everything is up to change and only time and the decisions of the leaders will decide the path in the future. For the moment Poland and Romania have a very strong alliance through NATO, EU and Initiative of the 3 Seas and it will continue to exist as both of the countries share similar interests and have a say in the never-ending political chess game of Central and Eastern Europe.

References

- Bak, T. (2018). Polish - Romanian Military Cooperation, *International conference Knowledge-based Organization*, 24, pp. 9-18.
- Białoskórski, R. (2020). NATO and CSTO: the Game of Power and Interests, *Przegląd Geopolityczny*, 33, s. 33-49.

- Black, J., Jenkins, D., Paoli, G.P., Kepe, M., Kokkoris, A., Hlavka, J. (2016). *Central and Eastern European countries: measures to enhance balanced defence industry in Europe and to address barriers to defence cooperation across Europe*, RAND Europe, Cambridge.
- Davies, N. (1972). *White Eagle, Red Star*, Random House, New York.
- Davies, N. (2014). *Istoria Poloniei. Terenul de joaca al lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Polirom, Iasi.
- Ištók, R., Nováková, Š., (2014). Geopolitical Position Analysis of Transcarpathia with Emphasis on Period Between 1918-1939, *Przegląd Geopolityczny*, 10, s. 7-22.
- Mackinder, H.J. (1904). *The Geographical Pivot of History*, Royal Geographical Society, London.
- Mackinder, H.J. (1919). *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, Royal Geographical Society. London.
- Wancercz-Gluza, A., Knyt, A., Luft, A.M. (eds.) (2012). *Iar pământul vostru a devenit casa noastră: refugiații polonezi în România în anii 1939-1945*, Centrul Karta, Warsaw.

Internet sources

- Czyż, A. (2019). *The Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund officially established*, <https://media.bgk.pl/61041-the-three-seas-initiative-investment-fund-officially-established>, accessed: 30.05.2020.
- Encyclopædia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Pact>, accessed: 30.05.2020.
- Macrotrends, *Romania Military Spending/Defense Budget 1960-2020*, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ROU/romania/military-spending-defense-budget>, accessed: 30.05.2020.
- North Atlantic Council (2008). *Partnership with the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23858.htm, accessed: 30.05.2020.
- Paiusan-Nuica, C., *Polonezii în exilul românesc (1939 – 1941)*, <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/polonezii-in-exilul-romanesc-1939-1941>, accessed: 30.05.2020.
- Romanian Business News – Actmedia (2019). *Iohannis at the summit of the Three Seas Initiative: The US economic presence in the region is a true catalyst for co-operation*, <https://www.actmedia.eu/daily/iohannis-at-the-summit-of-the-three-seas-initiative-the-us-economic-presence-in-the-region-is-a-true-catalyst-for-co-operation/81243>, accessed: 30.05.2020.