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## **GEOPOLITICAL FUTURE OF ROMANIA IN RELATION TO POLAND**

Romania and Poland are countries that have been cooperating since Poland reappeared on the map after World War I. Close ties between the two countries have existed since the Middle Ages, mainly through Moldova – which was for a significant amount of time a vassal of the Poles, and later of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and possessed a high degree of Polish influence on multiple aspects, such as diplomatic, economic and even linguistically to a small degree. On many occasions Romanians and Poles were on the same side fighting for common goals. The subject of the study is the current possibilities of cooperation as well as scenarios for future cooperation between Romania and Poland within such structures as the EU, NATO or the 3 Seas Initiative. It is important to note that during the time when this article was written both of the countries were still experiencing the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing tense situations at the borders between Belarus and Poland, and Ukraine and Russia.

### **Cultural and historical context**

Poland can be generally considered as part of Mitteleuropa, the territory controlled by the German-speaking empires of the Habsburg and Hohenzollern dynasties. Poland had sections of its territory as part of Prussia, and later Germany, but also parts that belonged to the Habsburgs and later Austro-Hungarians. The bond is still present today through alliances such as the Visegrad Group – a cultural and political alliance consisting of Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary, where these countries cooperated since its foundation in 1991 and later developed a common front to support their interest inside the European Union, once they joined in 2004. It is also important to specify that Poland had a significant portion of its territory under the Russian control and thus being exposed to a second type of civilization, the eastern Slavic one, which creates even today a social and economic divide in the country

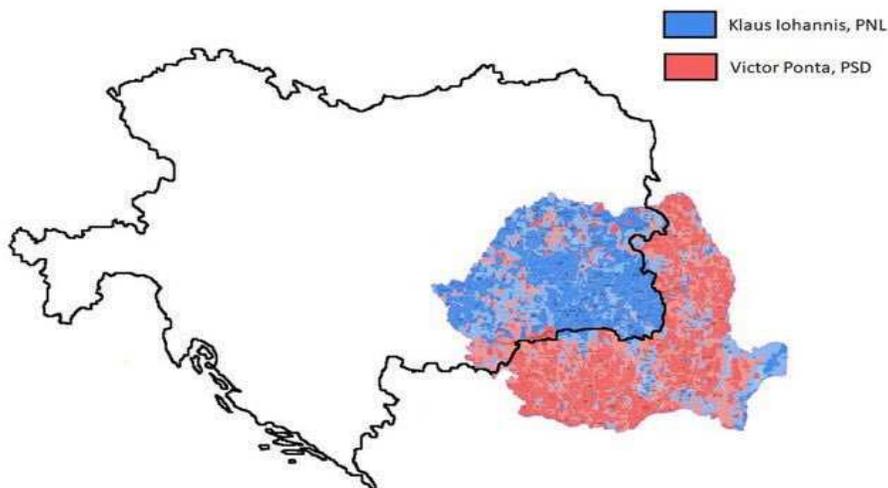
visible on maps regarding infrastructure and so on (e.g. electoral geography).

Romania on the other side, it is right at the meeting point of three different regions, each having its own cultural identity shaped by the historical and cultural factors: **Wallachia** (*Valahia, Țara Rumânească*) – the southern region (with capital Bucharest), has a very strong Balkan influence. Its extension is the smaller seaside area of Dobrogea, which, unlike the rest of Wallachia that was a vassal state to the Ottomans, was directly administered by the empire and oriental culture is significantly higher than in the rest of the country, especially due to the local Turkish and Tatar communities. **Moldova** in the north-eastern side of the country has a stronger Slavic influence compared to the rest of the country and the period of time that was a vassal of the Poles played its part in shaping the region's identity as well. **Transylvania** represents the central and north-western parts of Romania and is characterized by its strong European influence due to its Hungarian and German population and its administration by the Magyars and Austrians, as well as hundreds of years of common inhabitation of the area of these communities together with the Romanians. These are the main 3 communities of the region, but there are also Ukrainians present in the northern part called Maramureș and Serbians living in the Banat region that bring their own cultural influence.

Commonly, the regions of Wallachia (together with Dobrogea) and Moldova are part of the Old Kingdom – the regions that were part of the Kingdom of Romania before World War 1, a separate entity from the newly acquired regions after the war, mainly Transylvania. Even after 100 years since the region became part of Romania there are still visible the differences between the Old Kingdom and Transylvania on aspects such as political options, infrastructure and overall economic development due to the advantages the region possessed when it was integral part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and also due to its isolation that the Carpathian Arch provides from the rest of the country and makes it more oriented towards the West. A similar situation exists in Poland as well, between the so-called Poland A and Poland B where the infrastructure and economic development, as well as political orientations, are still visible on a map of Poland. Probably the most emblematic situation of the divide between Transylvania and the Old Kingdom was the second tour between the PNL candidate Klaus Iohannis, a Saxon-German born in Sibiu, which is part of one of the

historical minorities of Transylvania and the PSD candidate Victor Ponta, born in Bucharest (Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1. Contours of Austria-Hungary before World War I overlaid on the results of the second tour of the Romanian presidential elections in 2014**



Apart from the political divide there are other cultural similarities between Poland and Romania. Both countries have a **significant Christian population**: in Romania during the latest census 81% of the respondents declared themselves Orthodox, 6,2% Protestant and 5.1% Roman Catholic and just 0.2% not religious but with 6% of population that did not want to specify. In Poland in the latest census the Poles declared themselves as following: 86% Catholic, 4% other Christian denominations, 6% no religion and 3% preferred not to answer.

Both countries have as well a significant part of their **population living abroad**, although in Romania this is a process that expanded in the last 20 years while in Poland it was a common practice since the time when the industrial revolution changed the economic and social status-quo. In the case of Romania, the process started in the last part of the 90s due to economic difficulties that the country was experiencing during the transition process from a communist hyper-centralized economy to a free-market economy and it had grown in intensity once the country entered in the European Union. The biggest expat communities of Romanians can be found in Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United States. There are also a number of countries where there are historical Romanian populations

and culturally and linguistically tied romance populations such as Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians, Vlachs. These populations can be found on the territory of Moldova, Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, and Greece.

One feature present in both of the cultures that I would like to develop more, although it can be considered controversial, are the **hostile tendencies towards Russia** that exist in both Romania and Poland. This behavior it is not something new and for many centuries there has been a hostility coming from both nations towards Russia and the main reasons can range from the russification process of the Polish and Romanian populations in Russian controlled-territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Bessarabia respectively during both of the Empire and Soviet times, the effects of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and the annexation of territories that belonged to interwar Romania and Poland and to ongoing resurgence of Russian influence in the region which is threatening Polish and Romanian interests. In the last 150 years excepting the interwar period, the government of Romania was following a similar model to the Russian one: when Romania was a monarchy, Russia was as well, after World War II Romania also became a communist country just like Soviet Union was and after the collapse of communism both countries transitioned towards free market but with a strong oligarchic presence in the economy, yet, even though there were political similarities, these were not enough to contain the distrust of the common Romanian towards its neighbor on the east. One important factor was also the Pan-Slavic ideology that the Russian Empire was promoting which was a threat towards the Romanian national, Latin-based identity, such as it was a threat towards the Polish identity at the respective time. Other factors that played their role in the shaping of the attitude of Romanians were: 1) The territorial changes after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, when Russia, as an ally in the war, took the counties from north of the Danube Delta that Romania was administrating and in return they gave the territory of Dobrogea where the Romanian presence was present mainly close to the Danube and apart for a short rule under Wallachia between 1394 and 1404 it never controlled it. 2) The forcibly-imposed communist regime in the country after the war. 3) Ongoing informational war and growth of influence of the Russian Federation in the former Soviet territories. Romania and Poland share a common experience on all of the mentioned situations and it naturally led to similar feelings towards the common threat in the east.

At the moment the three main objectives of Romania are to further consolidate its position in the European Union, through actions such as becoming part of the Schengen Area, the development of its economical capabilities, in which an important part is played by the development of the infrastructure by following the Polish model, and the containment of the Russian influence in Moldova and by extension in Ukraine and Belarus. These objectives will require a close cooperation between the two nations and the main channels through which they will be succeeded will be through EU, NATO but also through direct local cooperation between Romania and Poland and regional projects such as the Three Seas Initiative.

### **Three Seas Initiative& Via Carpathia**

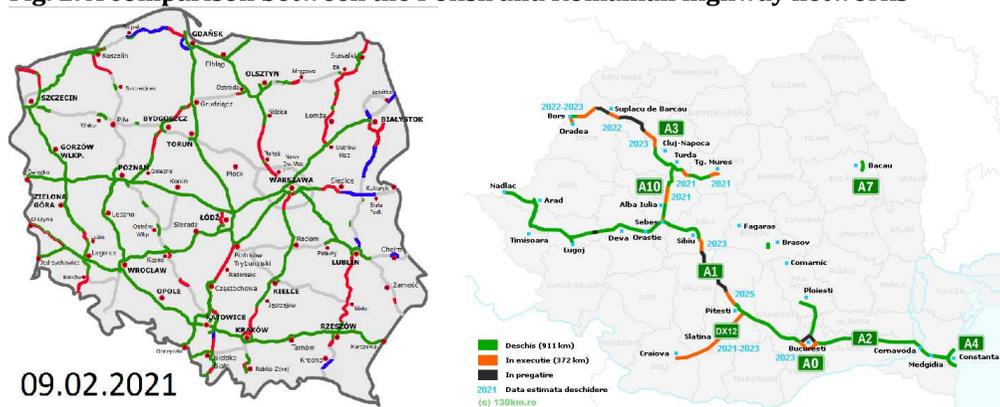
The Three Seas initiative consists of 12 member states and had its first summit in 2016, being one of the most recent trans-national economic projects. The main objective of the initiative is to create a stronger cooperation between the member-states and bringing them closer economically through infrastructure and energy projects such as:

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

The first step towards realizing these projects were the pledge of Romania and Poland to allocate 500 million euros through Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego and Export-Import Bank, while United States of America pledged to support the Initiative with an additional 1 billion dollars. It is worth mentioning that the infrastructure in Eastern Europe was developed mainly as an East-West route, as the countries of the Warsaw Pact were under the Soviet Union's economic and military control and developed their infrastructure to benefit them. The same attitude was kept after the fall of communism as well and today if you check a map of the highways built in Romania and Poland you can notice that there is a highway between Bucharest and the port city of Constanta and from Bucharest to the border of Hungary, with a missing section that crosses the Carpathians, or that in Poland there has been first built a highway that connects Warsaw with the German border or an east-west highway that connects Rzeszów, Kraków and Wrocław with German border before a direct route from Warsaw to Kraków has been built. There is a noticeable lack of infrastructure projects that benefits the

north-south trade with the Lithuanians or Slovaks in the Polish case and with the Bulgarians in the case of Romania. These highways once completed can facilitate a tighter commerce between the members of the 3 Seas Initiative and facilitate the transit of goods on a rapid pace between Lithuania and Greece from which the biggest beneficiaries would be 2 of the biggest economies within the 3 Seas Initiative – Romania and Poland (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. A comparison between the Polish and Romanian highway networks



The Initiative has created some controversy and interest from within the member-states and neighboring EU members. In Czechia there was an initial negative opinion from some of the diplomats and experts, as they viewed the Initiative as attempt of Poland to expand its influence in the region, similar to the Intermarium initiatives in the Interwar period and advocated for a continuation of the cooperation within the Visegrad group, while in Finland the populist Finns Party supports the idea of joining within the Initiative. Apart from the comparison between the 3 Seas Initiative and Intermarium there is also the controversy that the Initiative as a whole is an American strategy to maintain its influence in the region, as the member-countries share many similar interests that suit the American agenda as well, compared to the western members of the European Union who are following a more independent agenda. It is important to see how the things will evolve, as United States continues to focus gradually more into the Asian theater and putting Europe on a secondary position. In both Romania and Poland the pro-American sentiment is present in their national policies decision and also within the population perception.

The flagship of the 3 Seas Initiative is the Via Carpathia project, a desired highway connection from Klaipėda to Thessaloniki. The planned route starts in Klaipėda and continues to Suwałki – Warsaw – Lublin – Rzeszów (in Poland) – Presov – Kosice (in Slovakia) – Miskolc – Debrecen (in Hungary) – Oradea – Timișoara and then it follows a secondary route to Sibiu – Bucharest and Constanța, while the main one continues from Timișoara to Calafat (in Romania) – Vidin – Botevgrad – Sofia (in Bulgaria) and end in Thessaloniki in Greece. The project has different stages of completion in each country. For instance in Poland the routes from Warsaw to Ostrów Mazowiecki and the one from Warsaw to Lublin are completed and from Ostrów Mazowiecki to Suwałki and from Lublin to the border with Slovakia there are ongoing construction projects that are either close to be finished or in the initial stages when the contracts are attributed to different companies and the proper construction hasn't started yet. In Slovakia only half of the route is finished due to the other half being in a very difficult mountainous terrain while in Hungary the route is fully operational since the autumn of 2021. In Romania at the moment of writing of this article there are operational only the portions between the border with Hungary and Oradea, the one between Arad and Lugoj on the main route, while on the secondary route, apart for a 15 km break the highway between Sibiu and Arad is completed and it continues from Pitești, on the other side of the Carpathians in Wallachia to Bucharest and then to Constanta. The 3 gaps that the route has are located around Bucharest, where the circle around Bucharest is under construction on the southern side of the city while on the northern one there are segments where the construction will start in 2022 or the contracts will be assigned. For the missing 15 km in Transylvania it is expected that a new constructor will be selected in 2022 while the biggest issue remains the connection between Sibiu and Pitesti. This is to be considered the biggest issue for Romania for 2 reasons: First, the difficult mountainous terrain makes this portion of around 100 km of missing highway to be very demanding regarding the costs and the complexity of the construction. Secondly, it is shameful situation that after 100 years since the unification of Transylvania with Romania there is no direct highway connection between the capital and the second biggest city in the region, Cluj-Napoca. The missing portions between Oradea and Arad and Lugoj-Calafat have started the procedures for the feasibility projects in 2021 for both of them and the authorities would like to see the section between Oradea and Arad completed by 2024. In 2020 Romania changes the way the contracts are assigned and

started to implement the changes based on the Polish procedures that proved to be very efficient in finalizing the contract attribution procedure.

The region of Moldova will also benefit with extensions of the Romanian planned highway systems which will prove to be crucial regarding future plans to expand their economic potential in the eastern regions of the country but also towards the state of Moldova and Ukraine. In these countries there are also political interests that require close cooperation between Romania and Poland to further expand the influence of EU and NATO and pull these 2 countries together with Belarus away from the Russian sphere of influence as much as possible.

At the time when this article was written, Romania just ended a 3-month political crisis in which the coalition that proposed the new Prime-minister contains the National-Liberal Party (PNL), the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) and the Party of the Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). In the same time in Poland a new draft for expanding the military forces up to 300.000 people is discussed and in the same time is facing a humanitarian and political migrant crisis at the border with Belarus while Russia is gathering its armed forces at the border with Ukraine. All these situations are also happening in the context of a global pandemic which is constantly putting pressure on national healthcare system, and the capacity to stop the spread of misinformation – a valuable tool in the new hybrid informational war that the countries must endure. Due to their proximity, at the edge of the NATO flank in Eastern Europe, Romania and Poland, together with Turkey are the main pillars that have to endure the main threats that might come from the East and to further expand the interests of the North Atlantic Organization into the former Soviet countries.

The geography of Poland makes it vulnerable towards its western and eastern borders due to the lack of natural barriers – such as the Baltic Sea in the north and the mountain ranges in the south. This issue on the western side it was fixed once the country joined NATO and EU in 1999 and 2004 respectively but it remains exposed on its eastern side. Being located on the eastern part of the European Plain, Poland experienced countless invasions from its eastern borders varying from nomadic hordes such as the Mongols to the Tatar raids and Muscovite and later Soviet incursions. The terrain favors the attacker which uses speed and maneuverability in their advantage and makes the borders to be constantly changing, compared to the stability of the Spanish-French border for instance where the Pyrenees mountains made the border

between the two countries to be rarely modified in the course of their history, the same scenario cannot happen on the eastern part of the European Plain. The exposure has prompted Poland to allocate over 2% of the GDP to the defense. This percentage represents the minimum of which each NATO country should allocate to the defense budget but only a few of them fulfill this standard – Romania and Poland being two of those exceptions.

The additional plans to expand the national defense forces up to 300.000 people and the ongoing military modernization programs which include the acquisition of new military equipment such as the Patriot System, HIMARS system or F-35 planes are to further bolster the Polish capabilities and make the country reliable on assuring the stability of NATO's eastern border. Romania is also going through military modernization programs which includes the acquisition of new Piranha armored transports, Patriot system, HIMARS rocket system, F-16 planes with further plans to buy F-35, main battles tanks – most likely Leopard 2 and to further expand the naval forces and so on. These are necessary investments as both of the countries have underdeveloped military capabilities compared to their potential. In the Romanian context, the new prime-minister is a general that has combat experience in Iraq and it is further assuring the path on which Romania is dedicated to continue the expansion of its military capabilities.

Romania has some advantages by comparison to Poland: The country does not border directly Russia as Poland does, yet it has its aerial space constantly violated by the Russian planes that are located in Crimea. The country also has a more favorable terrain for defense, as the Carpathian arch creates a shield for the western part, although it does not provide additional protection to its capital, Bucharest, which is located on the flat Romanian plain. The country has also access to the Black Sea, which offers NATO an advantage when it comes to the tense situations that existed in the past in the respective region, either with Russian interference but also the face of growing Turkish independent foreign policy which is constantly interfering with NATO interests. Romania, just like Poland, hosts a number of NATO military facilities such as the Mihail Kogalniceanu military base and the AEGIS interception rockets in Deveselu, which further solidifies the importance of Romania within the alliance.

Since 2017, after the events in Crimea, the cooperation between Poland and Romania increased through the creation of the NATO contingents. In Poland now there are Romanian soldiers stationed close

to the border with Russian Królewiec District and in Romania there are Polish soldiers stationed in Craiova. These contingents are tasked with further exchanging the military knowledge and techniques between the NATO countries and to develop the cooperation between the bordering countries. This cooperation is constantly put to the test through constant aerial and maritime violations of Poland and Romania from forces belonging to the Russian military located in Królewiec and Crimea and through outgoing disinformation campaigns aimed towards their national but also EU and NATO institutions in cases such as the migrant crisis at the border between Belarus and Poland and CoViD-19 misinformation campaigns.

As United States will continue to allocate a higher priority of the Asian theater and downgrading the European one in significance, a higher call for autonomy of the European NATO members will be required. Turkey following its interests in the eastern Mediterranean sea the Middle East and Caucasus will mean that the main promoters of the NATO interests in Eastern Europe will have to be Poland and Romania, according to the economic, military and diplomatic possibilities of the countries in the region, on which Poland has the first position, followed on the second place by Romania, who has approximately half of the population and economy of Poland but presents its own strong points within the alliance, mainly because of its location. The cooperation between the two countries was insignificant on the wider NATO scale until 2014 and the factor that change the attitude of the foreign policy was the annexation of Crimea by Russia, which signaled a constant increase in cooperation and military expansion every year in both Romania and Poland to finally meet the NATO standards and made the chief of the diplomacies in both of the countries aware of the cooperation that is required between the two.

### **Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus through the eyes of Romania and Poland**

When it comes to the Romanian case, the foreign affairs treated as a priority after the fall of communism the integration into the Euro-Atlantic organizations. And as such, in 2004 the country joined NATO and EU in 2007. At the moment, the Schengen goal has not been reached yet and there is still not a clear date when the country will adopt Euro.

When it comes to the Balkan diplomacy, Romania tends to maintain a neutral stance towards the issues that plague the peninsula, with the exception of the situation that it doesn't recognize Kosovo as an

independent state due to warm diplomatic relations with Serbia and also to avoid further unrest and demands within the country, as it might create a precedent in the issue that concerns the Szekely people's demand for autonomy in Transylvania.

One of the main concerns of the Romanian population when it comes to foreign policy is the situation in Republic of Moldova. It is important to mention that in Romania the unionist movement with Moldova was always present in a higher percentage than in the case of the people of Moldova. This can be attributed also to the fact that in Moldova there are Russian peacekeepers stationed on the breakaway region of Transnistria and a hypothetical union with Romania would not be possible, as it would trigger a response from the Russian side, similar to the scenario in Crimea. This is just one of the frozen conflicts that characterizes the Russian diplomacy in the former Soviet republics. The tactic is efficient in halting any progress of the respective country when it comes to fulfill its EU and NATO aspirations. Apart from the troops stationed in Transnistria after the war in 1992, similar scenarios have been implemented in Georgia, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Ukraine, with the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics, and Crimea being fully annexed by Russia. These actions are a result of the Russian siege mentality, as a country that during World War II was faced with the prospect of total annihilation and suffering countless invasions before that on its core territory from both east and west due to the lack of natural defenses that could halt an invading army or create a stable border, its main focus was to always expand towards the Carpathian and Caucasian mountains in Europe which can offer the desired protection and to constant stop any effort of an entity that might surround Russia, as in the case of NATO or EU.

Currently, since the protests that erupted in Belarus after the last election, Lukashenko is dependent on Russian support more than ever and as a retaliation to the EU sanctions there is an ongoing migrant crisis at the border with Poland orchestrated by Belarussian authorities. His regime is facilitating the transport of Middle-Eastern refugees to the border with Poland and pushes them to continue towards Germany, creating in this way instability within the EU member states and also using this situation in promoting further misinformation and anti-EU rhetoric. This tactic is also used to probe the strength and unity of the members of the union, but also to divert the attention from the Russian troop gathering at the border with Ukraine. At the moment of the writing of this article President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the discovery

and thwarting a coup d'état complot. This comes at the moment when there is an inflation of the Russian gas prices and an internal fight within Ukraine between the president and the oligarchs that affected the support for the president combined with a lack of external support from the EU and NATO countries. Romanian support for the Euro-Atlantic cause of the Ukrainians is lacking determination, as Ukraine previously adopted policies that were detrimental towards Romanian population located in the territory that used to be part of Interwar Romania, although these policies were adopted due to the ongoing conflict in the east it also hit the Polish and Romanian communities in the country and soured the diplomatic relations. Poland is the main local leading force that is working on reducing and further blocking Russian influence in Ukraine and Belarus due to their proximity and common historical and cultural grounds, while Romania is focusing on Moldova due to the same reasons.

The current Moldovan government managed to break the deadlock in which the country was situated before their presidential and general snap-elections and the first visit at Chisinau was of the Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis, to further assure the support that Romania offers to Moldova in achieving its goals of joining EU. This is a very hard to complete objective, due to the issue in Transnistria, rampant corruption and the interference of Russia into the country's internal affairs, which tries to maintain Moldova on its orbit. On 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 Romania demanded Ukraine to stop recognizing the Moldovan language stating that it doesn't exist and it's a fabrication meant to create a separation between the Romanian and Moldovan identities. In Moldova now exist newspapers and TV stations that are transmitting in Romanian such as TVR Moldova which are eroding the "Moldovan" language and identity that was aggressively promoted during Soviet Union and it continued after it's dissolution through Russian Federation.

It is hard to speculate what will be the next steps, although no matter in which way the current events will develop, it is crucial that Romania and Poland will further cooperate on affairs that concern both countries and also provide support to the political forces that want to change the status-quo in the former Soviet countries.

## **Conclusion**

As final words, I would like to put an emphasis once again on the volatile situation that is currently developing in the Eastern Europe, at the border of EU and NATO. The latest tension at the border of Ukraine

and Russia exposed once again that both Poland and Romania are too small to influence the power dynamic in the region by themselves and that negotiations and decisions are made either directly between Washington and Moscow or with EU or NATO as a whole block. Even though 3 Seas Initiative as a project presents a lot of economic and political potential for both countries and the rest of the members that it contains. It can create a unitary block of smaller countries that joined EU after the collapse of the Iron Curtain that do not have the same economic and political power within the union, as a counterweight to the decisions that are made at Paris and Berlin, it is in the end a tool for internal politics within the Union that could not be implemented by itself on the world stage.

Poland and Romania share common interests and fears when it comes to regional development and security that are not present within the members of the Visegrad group as well and the cooperation has been constantly increasing in the recent years: economically since the EU ascension of both countries and militarily as both countries are part of the AEGIS ballistic defense system in Eastern Europe and after the Crimean annexation by Russia. These common interests must also be coordinated with the rest of the NATO and EU structures as part of the whole picture to obtain the best results in achieving our goals. There is no Intermarium idea from the Interwar period that could be implemented in our modern days but through direct coordination and projects such as the 3 Seas Initiative both Romania and Poland can bring new perspectives and opportunities for both EU and NATO and expand their influence into the former Soviet states, in which there are still a cultural and historical ties.

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