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Panel U24: *Political Extremism in Ukraine***Challenging Eurasian representations and geopolitical determinisms: The Intermarium project and the Ukrainian New Right.**

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Abstract: Founded in 2015 in the wake of the Azov movement and the Ukrainian Traditionalist Club, the Ukrainian “New Right” is at the heart of the Intermarium project. Although unique in the contemporary Ukrainian political spectrum, this school of thought is the expression and the extension of an ancient politico-cultural phenomenon. Indeed, it is part of an intellectual tradition that sought from the 1990s to redefine post-soviet Ukraine and Eastern Europe around the notions of “ethno-cultural singularity” and “conservative revolution”. Indeed, beyond building only a defense policy on the simple basis of a reaction to the threat posed by the return of Russia to its near abroad, the Ukrainian New Right would like to unify the Baltic-Black Sea region to create a new East European civilization based on common identity and cultural roots, allowing to preserve the European “manifest destiny” of Ukraine. Ideologically nourished by several Ukrainian and Western right-wing authors (René Guénon, Julius Evola or Viacheslav Lypynsky...), the Intermarium would tend, for the Ukrainian New Right, to have the intuition of “primordialism” and “reactionary modernism” described by the theorists of the German Conservative Revolution from the 1920’s then by the French neo-rightist Guillaume Faye in his book *Archeofuturism* (1998). In addition to establishing an alternative ancestry on the Russian imperial and Eurasian discourse, allowing the region to be opened up, the Intermarium intends to make the Ukrainian New Right, formerly peripheral to Europe and on the fringes of the debate of ideas, a new point of convergence of radical rights. This paper sets out to show how the theoretical framework of the Intermarium can provide a look at a political trend and theories that have until then been little or never studied in the Ukrainian studies. We first propose to establish the historical genealogy of the Intermarium concept and of the Ukrainian New Right. Finally we will analyze the discursive mechanisms - mythological and strategic - which underlie the project of establishing such a geopolitical union on the eastern shore of the European continent by this political movement.

Keywords: Ukraine, Far-Right, Intermarium, Ideologies, Geopolitics

Introduction

Over the past decade, it cannot be denied that right-wing ideologies have regained a prominent place in the European political landscape. Indeed extreme right-wing and populist parties have multiplied due to the political and social tensions in the West. In these old countries that sometimes lack in reference points and self-esteem, themes such as identity and conservatism's values are now part of public debates. This phenomenon does not only affect the western liberal democracies, but also the countries of Eastern Europe, located at the crossroads of European and Eurasian influences.

Until the fall of the USSR in 1991, Ukrainian nationalism was considered a 'minority faith', in the words of the historian Andrew Wilson (1997), unable, because of its polarities, to build a cultural community strong enough to create a temporal and political consciousness with its own myths and ideologies. However, the Maidan Revolution in 2014 contributed greatly to its revitalisation. In a context of division provoked by centrifugal forces, and of democratic and identity-based demands, Ukraine has become the cradle of a new narratives and political experimentations that the extreme right who is strengthened by the ordeal of war and the bloodshed tries to fill out.

Beyond the appearances that would suggest that the Ukrainian radical right is a united and distinct group in its ambitions, its rhetoric and active occupation of the public space the last few years have rather been characterized by mutations. Indeed, the Maidan Revolution contributed to the emergence of a new form of nationalism. As similar as it may be to its historical alter-ego the OUN - in terms of radicalism and the importance of the national theme in its ideology - its struggle and its political reflection go beyond the simple Ukrainian territorial framework and are deliberately embedded in a regional reflection, embracing both Central and Eastern Europe and the European continent. It is a 'neo-nationalism' that can be described as 'extroverted' because it is based, 'more on the collective affirmation of a people than on its claim to exercise political rights [...] and challenges traditional political cleavages', according to Bertrand Badie and Michel Foucher's typologies (2017:26).

The emergence and structuring of a neo-nationalist force such as the Azov movement - born in 2016 in the wake of the regiment of the same name - is the result of a socio-political transformation directly linked to the Ukrainian context. It echoes the emergence of an 'uncivil society' (Umland, 2002) in constant search of militant patriotism, subversion, and above all immediate responses to the external pressures exerted on Ukraine and its strategic environment. Unlike other far-right historical nationalist parties such as Svoboda or the Right Sector that are considered too political, not active enough on the ground, and locked in their myths and divisive representations, neo-nationalism concentrates on achieving and maintaining the autonomy, unity and identity of the nation. Although Azov's political project is deeply neo-fascist, militaristic and oriented towards the elaboration of a new form of society capable of definitively separating itself from Russia and its influence, it owes its originality to its desire to break out of cultural and

political provincialism by connecting to the outside world (Boyko, 2004). As a 'Nationalistic' enterprise (Arel, 2009), seeking to legitimise alleged political and ethno-cultural norms and conventions in order to establish the institutional durability of a 'palingenic Europeanist'¹ order (Griffin, 1994), the *Intermarium* is today the Ukrainian far right's new springboard to the international stage.

Research question

The concept of the Baltic-Black Sea Union is now regaining some interest in the scientific community. Initiated by the Polish leader Józef Pilsudski (1867-1935) based on the model of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the *Międzymorze*² Federation project planned to bring together Poland, Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine and more broadly all the countries located between Germany, Russia and Turkey as a whole in order to better fight against the Soviet Union, of which Russia is today the main heir (Chodakiewicz, 2012). This reference has been updated by the Polish and Croatian governments with the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), which aims to develop cooperation between twelve countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans in the fields of energy, transport and communication infrastructures in a context of tensions with the Russian Federation, the region's main energy supplier. Reduced to its sole Polish conception, the study of the *Intermarium* has only led to prospective analyses and hasty demonstrations reducing the understanding of this alliance to its energy and military potential and geopolitical implications, without taking into account its ideological dimension.

This observation is all the more striking when it comes to the *Intermarium* project supported by the Ukrainian extreme right and the Azov regiment (Kott, 2017). Although studies devoted to the Azov movement are numerous and allow to circumscribe both its organisation and its network, its general matrix of intelligibility remains incomplete. Launched in Kyiv in 2015 as an offshoot of the Azov movement, the *Intermarium* project is above all that of the Ukrainian New Right: a school of thought that is unique in the contemporary Ukrainian political spectrum and committed to a 'metapolitical' struggle. Elaborated by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the term 'metapolitics' refers to a strategy in which the political struggle must be waged primarily on the cultural field. To establish ideological hegemony over a territory and its inhabitants, social and historical representations must be renewed and standardised. The 'metapolitics' of the *Intermarium* used by the Ukrainian New Right is essential to understand its contemporary evolution in comparison with the interwar period, and its popularisation within the Eastern European extreme right, starting with the Ukrainian one. Indeed, while Poland seems to have opted for an institutional and diplomatic *Intermarium*, the Ukrainian New Right plays an important role in the renewal of ideas and synergies around this concept and is at the same time challenging Russian and Eurasian geopolitical determinisms.

¹ The idea of a national renaissance in the thickness of conservative values.

² From *Między*: between, and *morze*: seas, translated into '*Intermarium*' in latin.

Based on our own doctoral research on the Ukrainian and Polish *Intermarium*, this essay aims to propose several reflections for identifying and understanding the ideology of the *Intermarium* project carried out by the contemporary Ukrainian far right. We are simply reiterating the observation made by Roger Griffin in 1998: studies devoted to fascism (and more broadly to the contemporary extreme right) minimize the heterogeneity of cultures and registers that can exist between groups from one geographical area to another, without rigorously taking into account their historical specificities. This generalist approach, which is criticised here, is certainly convenient at a time when the far right is tending to become internationalised and standardised in terms of both registers and practices (Kaplan 1998; Ridley 2020; Hermansson 2020), but it prevents the identification of very specific national characteristics that can give ideologies different content in terms of logic, mythology and symbolism. If the *Intermarium* promoted by the Ukrainian New Right and the Azov movement appears to be an immediate response to Ukrainian security issues, it is necessary to understand that this idea is in no way an *ex-nihilo* creation, but is part of a genealogy that needs to be traced. By reconstructing the history of ideologies and political groups of the Ukrainian New Right, we will see how ideas evolve and mutate according to the historical and political context.

As similar as it may be despite its fragmentary appearance, we can make a succinct analysis of the various geopolitical, political and historical themes around which the Ukrainian *Intermarium* project revolves. This archaeology of concepts is made possible by studying the various written sources produced or quoted by the Ukrainian New Right and then taken up by the Azov movement. Although this study still needs to be deepened - the current Covid19 pandemic has prevented us from accessing our field of study for more than a year - we can nevertheless draw up a first inventory. The *Intermarium* project carried by the Ukrainian New Right is inspired by the German Conservative Revolution and the Italian neo-fascism with a post-modern reading of geopolitics. More surprising is the strong interest in modernity and technology that we can find in this body of ideas. In addition to these ideas, there is a fascination for esotericism and the so-called 'Tradition' school, whose dogmas structure the *Intermarium* imperial project. Thus, the project carried by the Ukrainian extreme right turns out to be more an ideological '*bricolage*' (Levi-Strauss, 1962:32) with numerous roots and ramifications that a new and innovative project.

From Neo-Nationalism to the Ukrainian New Right

Since its emergence in the Ukrainian revolutionary chaos, the Azov movement has often been seen as a single homogeneous entity. Disseminated both in the general press and in specialised studies, this conception of the political party National Corps, founded in 2016 by veterans of the Azov regiment, also applies to all the initiatives that emanate from it such as the militia *Načionalnij Družiniy*, the sports associations *Sportivnij Korpus* or the engineering guild *Ares*. However, the idea of a unified and coherent movement is as vague as it is misleading. Centred around Andriy Biletsky, the founder of the Azov regiment and then the National Corps

party, the Azov movement embodies a soldatic nationalism (Taguieff, 1994), i.e., situated at the intersection of the parliamentary extreme right, in this case *Svoboda*, and ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi paramilitary groupings such as the UNA-UNSO and the Patriots of Ukraine. Moreover, the original command of the Azov regiment and the National Corps party is mostly drawn from these groups. Through its interpretation of the Maidan Revolution as the advent of a new 'Ukrainian order' and its military engagement on the Donbass front against the Russian Federation, the Azov movement leads an original political struggle: rather than destroying a democratic system deemed responsible for the loss of national greatness, it aims to reshape it from within. Although the movement is seen as mainly focused on political activism, it also has an intellectual counterpart that is responsible for the struggle of ideas and the formation of an ideological corpus. Led by Olena Semenyaka (1982-), the International Secretary of the National Corps, the Ukrainian New Right operates through the metapolitical club and the publishing house *Plomin*. The recent rise of this intellectual circle may have led to the belief that the Ukrainian New Right was an emanation of the Azov movement, or even its main ideological showcase. But this school of thought has largely its roots in the decade of the 1990s, at the time of the formation of the post-Soviet Ukrainian far right. And it would be wrong to simply reduce the Ukrainian New Right to the networks that Aleksandr Dugin maintained in Ukraine until 2014 through the Ukrainian Traditionalist Club (UTK), to which Olena Semenyaka was also attached (Nonjon, 2020).

When the Ukrainian state became independent and the USSR disappeared in 1991, first attempts were made to theorise the Ukrainian nationalism. In a context of division over the identity, economic and military issues inherited from the dissolution of the USSR, the Ukrainian nationalist movement renewed its discourse for the first time (Kuzio 2002:138). In addition to defending and restoring the ethno-cultural permanency of the Ukrainian nation, it undertook to reconsider the place of the country on the margins of the empire it previously belonged. By linking Ukraine to the European civilisation and its historical and cultural heritage, the 'neo-nationalism' is opposed to the historical Ukrainian nationalism of the OUN and its heirs, which defended the primacy of the Ukrainian nation over all others. Embodied by movements such as the UNA-UNSO or the Kharkivian branch of the Patriots of Ukraine - two organisations born in the large industrial metropolises of the centre and east of the country - the neo-nationalism has adopted a truncated vision of revolutionary nationalism³ that seeks to build a community of destiny on a national scale (Lebourg, 2010). This conception has its origins in the principles of

³ Although racism is also a component of their discourse, it remains very marginal compared to other movements like the USNP or Svoboda.

Mykola Stsiborsky's (1897-1941) 'natiocracy'⁴ and Yaroslav Stetsko's (1912-1986) 'social-nationalism'⁵, which constituted the definitive ideology of the OUN from August 1939. Rejecting the ethnicist and centralising principles of the Nazi and fascist regimes, but also the collectivist principles of communism and those of the liberal-democrats, this new nationalism promotes the principles of solidarity and of the 'Third Way'⁶.

The Ukrainian neo-nationalism intends to overcome the complexity of identity issues specific to its history and thus escape the traditional geopolitical and civilisational choice between Europe and the Russian world (*Russkiy Mir*). While, in order to distance themselves from the Russian orbit, parties such as *Svoboda* favoured NATO membership and increased cooperation with the Western countries (Shekhovtsov, 2018)– which brought them closer to extremist parties such as the French *Front National* within the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM) and allowed them to acquire a certain national legitimacy – the Ukrainian neo-nationalists were mostly in favour of a 'perpetual war' against the Russian Federation, which was seen as the main obstacle to the foundation of a Ukrainian nation-state that would be prominent in the Slavic world. Mainly promoted by the UNA-UNSO and its leader Dmytro Korchinsky (1964-), this strategy involved taking advantage of the instability of the Russian peripheries, which are geopolitically vital to the Russian Federation. The organisation thus engaged militarily against Russian forces during the conflicts in Chechnya (1993-1996) and Georgia (2008).

In addition to the regional focus of their activism, the neo-nationalists have above all introduced into Ukraine a range of concepts such as 'imperial Europe'⁷ and pan-Europeanism from authors such as Alain De Benoist, Guillaume Faye or Julius Evola. In contrast to the

⁴ With a distant fascist inspiration, this state would be authoritarian and corporatist (where society and the economy are organised into groups defending their interests), driven by an elitist and technical vision - the only one capable of favouring national independence - but also paradoxically by a vision ensuring the primacy of the people over elites deemed corrupt and nepotistic. It is therefore a question of recomposing the state around the principle of: '*organised and united cooperation of all social strata, united in accordance with their social functions in representative bodies of state governance*', based on the rejection of classes and parties and on the affirmation of the individual, a member of the nation who will occupy a predefined place within society, according to his or her real value. This value is measured by his struggles, his physical and intellectual abilities, and his capacity to relate to others.

⁵ The name 'social-nationalist' may come as a surprise. Elaborated by Yaroslav Stesko in his 1951 essay *Dvi Revolutsyi* (Two Revolutions), he himself took up the theses of his 1938 work *Bez natsional'noyi revolyutsiyi nemaye zhodnoyi sotsial'noyi* (Without a national revolution, there is no social), this doctrine emphasises that: 'The political [revolutionary] moment is an extract-synthesis of all the central processes of life, it is their point of convergence and above all the full realisation of the requirements of a social, economic and cultural nature. As a motive and target moment, it develops organically from life and directs it, its whole and each area in particular, it is that element common to all areas of life. Thus, a national revolution can only triumph if it is able to bring equal opportunities, a sharing of material and spiritual values to the people who are the driving force of any revolution. This Ukrainian national revolution can therefore only be social. Opir, <http://www.vatra.cc/nashi-klasiky/yaroslav-stetsko-bez-natsionalnoyi-revolutsiyi-nemaye-sotsialnoyi.html>

⁶ Close to the German national-bolshevism of the 1920s, this doctrine is both political and geopolitical. Indeed, its proponents reject both the right-left political divide and the two geopolitical poles of the time, namely the West and the USSR.

⁷ A united Europe of the regions, leaving room for local identities and cultures and not centralised.

'integral nationalism'⁸ of Dmytro Dontsov (1883-1973), the European nationalism popularised by movements such as the Autonomous Nationalists of OPIR and the National Labour Party in their journals *Vatra* and *Strike*, supports a policy of peaceful co-existence between white European peoples and others. This means preserving the identity and purity of European civilisation, without claiming any racial superiority (Taguieff, 1994). Beyond appearances, this ethno-differentialism remains xenophobic, with inward-looking attitudes and the interests of 'race' taking precedence over all other forms of open and mixed policies. While the introduction of these themes owes much to the reading of foreign authors and their translations, it should be noted that a number of Ukrainian personalities have also worked in their own way to promote these ideas. For example, we can distinguish three figures who constitute this embryonic New Right: Ihor Kahanets (1961-), a futurologist and philosopher, founder of the website '*Narodnyi Ohliadach*', a think-tank wishing to explore post-industrial Ukrainian society on the basis of esotericism and science; Oleh Hutsuliak (1969-), a mythologist and geopolitologist known for his work on '*Meso Eurasia*', a geopolitical concept formulated in 2005 to counterbalance the centrality of the Russian world within Eurasia; and Halyna Lozko (1952-) a folklore scholar known for her involvement in the revival of Ukrainian paganism with the Association of the Native Faith in Ukraine (*Ob`iednannia Ridnoviriv Ukraïny*) and the newspaper *Svaroh* (Lesiv, 2016). If the neo-nationalism born in the 1990s remained marginal and partially recognised internationally⁹, unlike groups such as GRECE in France or the Alt-Right in the United States, it was nevertheless at the origin of an original intellectual and militant posture during a first period of doctrinal research between 1990 and 2010. What distinguishes neo-nationalism from the outset is therefore not just its 'world view', but its so-called 'cultural' or 'metapolitical' strategy, which aims to enrich the ideological corpus of a political movement. This approach finally came to fruition in 2015 with the formation of the Ukrainian New Right through the *Plomin* club led by Olena Semenyaka.

Given the complexity of the phenomenon, we propose to use the following reading grid: although in its infancy, the expression 'Ukrainian New Right' seems to correspond to the hybridization of Ukrainian nationalism with that of European nationalist-revolutionary and 'Third Way'. While the Azov movement thought it could appropriate this label by ensuring Olena Semenyaka's role as International Secretary of the National Corps and head of the *Intermarium* project and through its financial means, we consider the Ukrainian New Right to be an autonomous entity that has sought to build itself through the Azov movement, even if this means sometimes competing with it. Indeed, the observations made show that within the Azov movement there is a multitude of spaces of power led by different actors who follow their own agenda. This polycracy is more circumstantial than reasoned, and is primarily due to the revolutionary political context of 2014. Reconfigured in the emergency to respond to popular demands and the constant insecurity exerted by the conflict in the east of the territory, the

⁸ A nation-state built exclusively on one ethnic group.

⁹ Oleh Hutsuliak was for example a member of the international "Thule-Seminar" organisation of the French-German neo-rightist Pierre Krebs and the UNA-UNSO was close for a while to Alexander Dugin (Umland & Tarasiuk 2020).

Ukrainian political field has become the cradle of new conflicts, coalitions and ideologies that overflow and transform its initial configuration (Ishenko, 2018; Shekhovtsov & Umland 2013). Built on a heterogeneous base of militants from both the military and the counter-cultures, the Azov movement was only a means to give body and life to different right-wing tendencies which were previously marginalised. Beyond the alleged common objectives (to make the Azov movement the vanguard of Ukrainian and ultimately European nationalism), the strategic and cultural divergences between the Ukrainian New Right and the leading apparatus of the Azov movement create a situation of mimetic rivalry and struggle for the orientation of the doctrinal and militant capital of Ukrainian nationalism. Moreover, as a movement mainly composed of veterans and hooligans, Azov and its ruling elite are largely disinterested in the 'metapolitical' dimension of nationalism, preferring to oppose it head-on through hard-line actions. This strategy of occupying the public space helps to gain acceptance for the violence, to make it legitimate, but also to strengthen the group and make it more visible. Indeed, a movement is not based on ideology alone but aims above all to obtain symbolic capital, as this is the only vector of credibility (Horvath, 2021). Since its failure in the 2019 presidential elections, the Azov movement has redeployed its forces around the Donbass conflict and against the economic liberalisation undertaken by President Zelensky, thus prioritising internal over external affairs.

Despite appearances, the Ukrainian New Right increasingly considers itself to be an autonomous pole within the Azov movement, which implicitly raises the question of its room for manoeuvre. However, the Ukrainian New Right, led by Olena Semenyaka, intends to use the *Intermarium* project to promote its own worldviews. Consequently, the study of *Intermarium's* ideology becomes essential for understanding the doctrinal developments of Ukrainian neo-nationalism and the subsequent emergence of the neo-rightist movement.

Between 'post-modernism' and 'conservative revolution': the geopolitical origins of the *Intermarium*

Among the many references used today by the Ukrainian New Right, the German 'Conservative Revolution' is the most recurrent one. Introduced in the 1990s by thinkers such as Alexander Dugin, the theorists of the Conservative Revolution were mainly rediscovered in Ukraine in the 2000s by intellectual circles close to the neo-Hetmanist monarchist trend, such as the Ukrainian Traditionalist Circle (Nonjon, 2020). They subsequently passed on their enthusiasm for this German intellectual movement to other extreme right-wing groups, which in turn adopted it as an important ideological reference. Born in Germany after the First World War, the 'Conservative Revolution' is a school of thought developed by intellectuals such as Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), Ernst Jünger (1895-1995) or Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Situated halfway between European idealism and anti-democratic conservatism, the German 'Conservative Revolution' intended to found society on the basis of structured and hierarchical natural communities, led by a new aristocracy of merit and action (Mohler, 2005). These authors were mainly concerned with the process of civilisation in Europe. Although neither

liberal nor national-socialist, the 'Conservative Revolution' was part of the legacy of the Romantic movement, which opposed the modernity of the Enlightenment and the conservatism of values with the idea of a mythical organic society. This ideology was based on a pessimistic and cyclical vision of history, influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche. It was also characterised by cultural pessimism (*Kulturpessimismus*) (François, 2005).

The interest of the Ukrainian far right, and more particularly the Ukrainian New Right, in the Conservative Revolution is relatively recent. It can be explained by strategic reasons on the militant level - to distance itself from any amalgam with National Socialism - but also for its reading grid of contemporary events. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the end of the Cold War are interpreted negatively: the disappearance of the rivalry between the two Eastern and Western blocs has left a strategic vacuum in the region, which leads to crises and tensions whose implications go beyond the regional framework. Young states of modest size, having gained their independence some thirty years ago, the states of Eastern Europe are at the centre of a highly unstable space of rivalry from which it would be necessary to escape. The threat posed by Russia on the borders of its former empire is one of the essential markers of the pessimistic approach to geopolitics by the Ukrainian New Right. As a fragile space marked by multiple divisions and dissensions instrumentalised by the great powers, Eastern Europe would be condemned to remain a periphery (upcoming Nonjon, Wishart, Wierenga).

In addition to the Russian interventions in Crimea and Donbass, the events of 2014 left a bitter taste in the mouths of the nationalist supporters of Maidan. They considered the EU unable to impose itself on Russia in the Ukrainian case and shaken by the rise of populism and sovereignty, appears to be a power in decline. The EU is said to be more inclined towards compromise than voluntarism since the creation of the Eastern Partnership and is subject to Russian injunctions in its near abroad. On the other hand, the Trump presidency has shown that the policy of consultation has often been replaced by that of *fait accompli*. In line with its desire for authoritarianism, the Ukrainian New Right defends the idea that democracy is not a lawful phenomenon. Far from appearing as a model of balanced governance, the EU's action has disappointed during the events in Ukraine. Its humanist universalist image has been replaced by one of 'every man for himself', national logics and the end of shared solidarity, which is in line with the EU representation of the Ukrainian New Right and the Azov movement (Nonjon, 2017). They then theorised the idea of a conservative and anchored in traditions Europe of nations that would be able to confront Russia.

The Ukrainian New Right uses the disenchantment about Europe of the Maidan activists to promote a break with liberal Europe, which is considered materialistic and crisisogenic, and to ensure that the Ukraine evolves away from any integration process. The emergence of centrifugal forces in Europe, considered as primitivist, echoes the ideas of the German 'Conservative Revolution' on the necessary transformation of the world (Semenyaka, 2011). Ukraine must build an ultra-defensive scheme to face future threats, which the *Intermarium* could embody. This idea is part of the geopolitical 'post-modernism' from which

the critique formulated by the Ukrainian New Right on the basis of the German Conservative Revolution derives, and is largely inspired by the theory of the 'Clash of Civilisations' elaborated by the American Samuel Huntington. According to him, the post-Cold War world is dominated by identity claims, with inter-state relations determined by the cultural affiliation of states (Huntington, 1997). Driven by a nostalgic representation of Europe as a civilisational peak, the Ukrainian New Right intends to return to a distant 'golden age' that would no longer be centred on the West. It endorses the question of redefining the balance of power in the international relations but also the cooperation which would be structured by the cultural criterion, useful in the confrontation with Russia. This theory underlines Ukraine's definitive break with the Soviet heritage and thus reinforces its cultural independence from Russia.

At the crossroads between the Orthodox and Western civilisations by its geographical position between Europe and Eurasia, Ukraine is the strategic point of passage between these two worlds. This positioning is enough for the Ukrainian New Right to claim that Ukraine belongs to the West through a Nordic and Germanic historical imaginary. For Olena Semenyaka, Ukraine is fighting two civilisations: the 'Eurasian civilisation', i.e., Russia and its margins, and the 'Western civilisation'. The first confrontation is in the East of Ukraine against the imperialist Eurasian civilisation. This idea was theorised in the 1920s by Dmytro Dontsov, when Ukraine was fighting for its independence against Bolshevik Russia. According to this philosopher, Eurasian civilisation was the result of the interbreeding of the *Rus'* peoples with the Mongols of the Golden Horde (Dontsov, 1944). Although Ukraine experienced the same domination, it would have escaped this racially and culturally Eurasian crossbreeding. On the other hand, Russia would have had a natural attraction for imperialism and expansionism towards the West. By relying on the nostalgia of the Soviet era while reorienting itself towards Asia, Russia would try to make Ukraine fall into its own model of civilisation. This summary and schematic vision corresponds to the political project of Azov in Ukraine: to oppose everything that reminds of the Soviet era and to prevent any integration of Ukraine into the sphere of influence of Moscow.

The second confrontation is between Ukraine and the liberal West. Faced with what it considers to be a process of standardisation of lifestyles and cultures, symptoms of acculturation to the benefit of 'Islamism' and 'cultural Marxism'¹⁰, the Ukrainian New Right claims to belong to the 'real Europe'. The aim is to develop a federative dynamic around precise and common cultural frontiers - such as the heritage of the Jagiellonian dynasty, which reigned in Eastern Europe from the Middle Ages until the middle of the modern era -, the fight for independence or the enhancement of the Indo-European identity, which is scorned as 'racial and white'. This essentialist vision of Central and Eastern Europe makes it possible to grasp the importance of geographic 'representations'. Indeed, as Rainer Schmidt indicates in his book *Die Wiedergeburt der Mitte Europas. Politisches Denken jenseits von Ost und West* (*The*

¹⁰ A term popularised on the far right, it refers to the alleged desire of followers of the Frankfurt School to undermine Western culture and attack traditional society through feminism, homosexuality and multiculturalism.

Rebirth of the Centre of Europe. Political thinking beyond East and West (1997), spaces are not the product of geography and history but they are the product of cognitive acts. The idea of a 'cognitive space' is not so far from the notion of 'geographical imaginary' formulated by Gerard Toal to designate a set of representations of power relations and geography that can influence political decisions and popular perceptions of the world order. The Azov movement and the Ukrainian New Right have thus invested in the idea of Europe, which has a strong symbolic value for the countries which belonged to the Soviet bloc, and intends to defend its 'politico-cultural authenticity'. Central and Eastern Europe has gradually become the matrix of the ideological renewal of the far-right, with a desire to emerge from cultural and political provincialism by connecting with the outside world through a new ideological and spatial grammar capable of export beyond the borders of the nation-state.

If the alliance project proposed by the *Intermarium* is based on different theoretical substrates, it is on the school of thought of the 1920-1930s German 'Conservative Revolution' that this project is based in its search for a new regional metaphysics. According to Olena Semenyaka and based on an evocative reading of the story taken from Julius Evola and his *Fascism seen from the right* (1964) which analyses in a traditional and counter-revolutionary way the fascist and Nazi doctrines and their failures, the national revolution in Europe would have been plunged into a liberal interregnum removing it from any form of power. However, she believes that the hoped-for revolution will eventually break out, leading to a spiritual and national renewal within Europe, provided that contemporary nationalism redefines its paradigms following the directions of the German philosopher Ernst Jünger (1895-1998):

'Nationalism does not want to be reconciled with the domination of the masses, but demands the domination of the individual, the advantage of which is created by its internal content and living energy. He does not want equality, fair justice, or freedom that boils down to empty demands. He wants to enjoy happiness, and happiness is being yourself and not others. Contemporary nationalism does not want to spread theories in a vacuum; he does not aspire to 'free thought'; rather, he wants to acquire strong bonds and order, to settle in society, in blood and land. He does not want socialism for opportunities; he wants the socialism of duty, the cruel stoic world for which the individual must sacrifice himself.' (Semenyaka, 2011:41-44)

It is by an effort of intellectual renewal and a revolutionary approach going against historical imperialist tendencies that the nationalists could finally rally and mobilize around a common goal. This philosophy instilled by the Ukrainian New Right is therefore at the crossroads of the positive and creative dimension of nihilism - which can '*bring the world, with its multiple and complex antagonisms, to a common denominator*' (Nietzsche, 1901) - and the pan-European philosophy of the jüngerien anarch described mainly in *The Worker* (1989). It contributes to the dissemination of an identity discourse that is both cultural and modernist in Central and Eastern

Europe. It is to highlight that this vision is reminiscent of the pan-European projects of revolutionary fascists and nationalists of the second half of the twentieth century such as Francis Parker Yockey, Jean Thiriart and Oswald Mosley, all of whom dreamed of an alliance of European peoples and nationalists in order to defend their civilization (Lebourg, 2019).

Making modernity a 'reaction': the *Intermarium* as an Archaeofuturist power

Beyond this new nationalism promoted by Olena Semenyaka within the Ukrainian New Right, 'archaeofuturism' constitutes the second ideological pillar of the *Intermarium* project. Although it was also developed in Estonia by the local New Right, embodied by the metapolitical organization *Sinine Äratu* (Kaalep, 2020), this concept, as it is understood in Ukraine, has its origins in a precise ideological lineage, the opposite of the usual extreme right-wing discourse on modernity.

Within the German 'Conservative Revolution', there was a fringe of personalities from the 'front generation' of the Great War and the former corps-francs, ideologically close to the fascism of the early years and represented in particular by Ernst and Friedrich Georg Jünger. In contrast to the moralising discourse on modernity of the majority of the 'Conservative Revolution', this group advocated the total acceptance of modernity and sought to go beyond it, distancing itself from *Kulturpessimismus*. Anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist, it had pre-fascist overtones. Its aim was to restore Europe's greatness by establishing a new order using modern means. The 'archaeofuturism' developed by Guillaume Faye (1949-2019), a historical member of the French New Right, is a contemporary reformulation of this trend. In his book *Archaeofuturism*, Guillaume Faye states that: "*archaic and premodern models of social organisation are valid only insofar as archaism constitutes in its original sense a totally immutable 'foundation' compatible with modernity.*" He argues that:

"the return to archaic values should not be understood as a cyclical return to the past, but rather the re-emergence of archaic social configurations in a new context. In other words, it means applying secular solutions to completely new problems; it means the reappearance of a forgotten and transfigured order in a different historical context." (Faye, 1990:150)

For Guillaume Faye, this principle should be transposed to modern societies without demonising technology.

The Archaeofuturism advocated by the Ukrainian New Right within the *Intermarium* project is first and foremost turned towards the cult of reality in order to construct a dogmatic meta-reality. It is neither meditative nor contemplative. It is part of a cyclical vision of history and a form of nihilism based on the aesthetics and ethics of power, capable of defying the established order. In this project, science is at the service of this will to power, capable of recovering the European soul. It is therefore around this quest for common feelings in Eastern

Europe in a perspective of a ‘fourth industrial revolution’ based on tradition and new technologies that the construction of an alter-Europe could be envisaged according to the New Rights. As a geopolitical block encompassing the geographical configuration of the former Polish *Rzeczpospolita*, which stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea in the 16th century, the *Intermarium* is intended not only as a defensive buffer of Eastern Europe against Russia, but also as the matrix of a great project for the restoration of the past creative values, reconciled with technological innovations. According to archaeofuturism, the *Intermarium* encourages and even demands that the various nationalist groups in the region unite under the banner of a single civilisational ideal, as conceived, for example, by Olena Semenyaka in collaboration with Andriy Voloshyn, founder of the ‘Ukrainian Traditionalist Club’ and the ‘Ukrainian Archaeofuturist Association’ (ARFA)¹¹. As a new geopolitical power, the *Intermarium* could maintain a traditional framework associated with the tools of modernity, and recover the duality that characterises its geographical space, between Eurasia and the West. Indeed, as Olena Semenyaka says in her inaugural speech at Etnofutur II conference:

“[...] the intuition of being in the middle between the two overlaps even with the disappointed and the themes of the Golden Age as a maximum of ontological existential potential as the origin of those things we would say. It is no coincidence that the ancient Chinese also referred to the 'Celestial Empire' as the 'Middle Empire'. And indeed, Intermarium is not only this spatial notion, it is not only space [...]; it is also the temporal milieu, [...] the balance, which means first of all [that which] is temporal, cultural and political. After all, when we talk about East and West, we do not want to talk about abstract geographical notions either [...]. Even transit routes have a cultural, not just an economic, significance. Intermarium is therefore the space where different eras and the very concepts of time, history and tradition, conservative values and progress, Eastern autocracy and Western love, collectivism and the individual personality meet.” (Semenyaka, 2018)

The Ukrainian New Right explicitly considers the *Intermarium* as a third geopolitical path that would be neither a Western nor a Eurasian power. Indeed, the North-South axis of Central and Eastern Europe would correspond to the traditional cultural dichotomy between East and West. Because of their median positions, Ukraine and the Baltic States would constitute the synthesis of these two poles. This argument is based on the ancient period and the colonisation of the Black Sea coast by the Greeks, who introduced elements of Western civilisation from the South, particularly its democratic foundations. On the other hand, the North is closely linked to the migrations of the Nordic peoples, the Goths, in the 3rd century in the region. This northern polarisation was also the axis chosen by the princes of the Ru's of

¹¹ A student cultural organisation promoting the modernisation of Europe and its margins, its geopolitical reorientation and the renewal of its nationalism.

Kiev and the Duchy of Lithuania, considered as 'Europeanising barbarian forces'. The New Rights aim to create a federative dynamic that can take account of these heritages and encourage a North/South integration.

This approach is based on ancient history and the notion of recent geopolitical confrontations. In this respect, the Azov movement and the Ukrainian New Right take up theories of the Ukrainian geopolitical school, such as those developed by Yury Lypa, in his Ukrainian Trilogy (*Vseukrayinska Trylogia*), or Stanislav Dnistrianskyi (Wilson, 2015). These authors tend to reconsider the 'manifest destiny' of Ukraine and its European peripheries through geographical and historical substrates, in order to distance Russia. Their theories are linked to the approach expressed by Dmytro Dontsov (1883-1973), who published in 1944 *The Spirit of Our Antiquity* (*Dukh nashoi davnyny*) in which he established a typology of European races. Largely influenced by the *Völkisch* and racialists Alfred Rosenberg and Hans F. K. Günther, whose translator he was, Dontsov developed a fascination for the spirit of the Nordic race, which, according to him, had the best chances of realising its full 'biological potential' from the Danube to the Caspian. Because of its median position between the north and the south, Dontsov believed that the Ukrainian ethnos was a legitimate 'race' to occupy this region.

Thus, the *Intermarium* is a land of synthesis between two seemingly diametrically opposed essences, tradition and (post-)modernity, yet considered complementary for archaeofuturists. Following the legacy of the reactionary thinking of Martin Heidegger and the Nietzschean 'super-humanism' and the Italian neo-rightist Giorgio Locchi, the true 'European spirit' would be the result of a mixture of the scholarly and the historical spirit. The former Soviet Union, with its peasant but also Soviet and therefore technician identity, would be the region best placed to move towards this ideal, thus opening a window of opportunity towards a third geopolitical path combining tradition and modernity, as was the case with Japan during the *Meiji* era¹².

The *Intermarium* as a tool for legitimising the 'imperial idea'

Both in terms of its ideology and its aims, the *Intermarium* appears as a potential hegemonic power. Indeed, through its connections with Eurasia, Russia and Europe, the *Intermarium* aspires to counterbalance external influences that see the region as a mere strategic axis. As its name might attest, the *Intermarium* reflects the demiurge, voluntarist and irenic character of the revolutionary nationalist thinking of the New Right. The choice of the suffix *-ium* in Latin refers to the *Imperium* which defines military power and translates the idea of greatness. The prefix *-inter*, as opposed to *-intra* (which can be compared with the space *Intrabalticum*) refers to the notion of large discontinuous areas within a single block similar to that of an empire.

¹² Under the reign of Mutsuhito, Emperor Meiji (1852-1912), Japan underwent an overhaul of the political, economic and social systems resulting in an extremely rapid modernisation of the country while keeping in mind its past and its traditional values.

The idea of empire is a constant in European neo-rightist movements. At the crossroads of several influences such as those of Nazism or the school of Tradition represented by authors such as René Guénon (1886-1951) and Julius Evola (1898-1974), this school is above all based on two substrata: one esoteric; the other ethnic. Derived from the Latin word *tradere* meaning ‘to transmit’, the word ‘tradition’ refers primarily to the legacies of the past. Although considered in most cases as a spiritual and esoteric doctrine devoid of any political colouring, the Tradition is perceived by some authors, including Olena Semenyaka, as a metaphysical, supra-human, immemorial doctrine, pertaining to the knowledge of ultimate, invariable and universal principles. Considered unique and even 'primordial', in other words prior to all local traditions and of Nordic origin, the Tradition to which the Ukrainian New Right claims to belong is largely based on perennialism and the theory of cycles, which it is important to distinguish from that of Nietzsche. This theory is based on the idea that within each cycle, humanity follows a path from perfection to spiritual decline and materialism, with each cycle being devolutionary, i.e., moving towards an ever-greater decline. The authors of the Tradition see the contemporary era as the time of the *Kali-Yuga*, i.e., the apogee of the darkest age, the terminal phase of the cycle of spiritual decline. For some members of the Ukrainian New Right, such as Eduard Yurchenko and Olena Semenyaka, the notion of *Intermarium* has a mystical dimension. Only the doctrinal recourse to the primordial Guenonian Tradition¹³ would be able to give a metaphysical content to the *Intermarium*. The recourse to the perennialism would allow this region, reconstituted as an Empire, to preserve the diversity of traditional hierarchies wherever they still existed. It would also allow a reactivation of the most ancient traditions, notably that of the Byzantine Empire and the Ru's.

Beyond any filiation with an original spirituality (often fantasised or artificial), the traditional empire that the *Intermarium* would underpin would refer to a form of ideal integration of peoples. But the Empire would first and foremost represent a community of destiny, encouraging everyone to give the best of themselves, while respecting their differences. In this respect, the United States, but also Russia, are thus considered as anti-Empires for having established their own civilisations (in the cultural and linguistic sense) over other peoples such as the Amerindians, the Balts, the Belarussians or the Ukrainians. Built on the set of counter-revolutionary doctrines of the 18th century, the Traditionalism claimed by the Ukrainian New Right is also opposed to the European integration model. Judged to be Jacobin¹⁴, it is responsible for the destruction and acculturation of provincial and regional identities. Thus, the *Intermarium* is a concrete expression of the differentialist and communitarian discourse, and is in essence against the modern nation-state and in favour of ‘civilisation’.

¹³ A common origin of knowledge and learning.

¹⁴ A political movement that emerged during the French Revolution of 1789, Jacobinism, inspired by the political ideas of the Jacobins, is a political doctrine that defends popular sovereignty and the indivisibility of the French Republic, rather than a strong centralisation of the state.

However, the ethnicist reading of the *Intermarium* project appears to be the most visible compared to the traditionalist one, in order to understand the motives of this 'imperial' geopolitical project. Indeed, the *Intermarium* is associated with another more confidential project: the Reconquista. Referring to the Spanish reconquest of Iberia in the fifteenth century, this name alone is enough to show the offensive character of the *Intermarium*. As a political and cultural project that would bring together all European nationalist forces around Ukrainian nationalists, the Reconquista and the slogan 'Today Ukraine, tomorrow Rus' and the whole of Europe' would correspond to the final phase of the *Intermarium*: the European civilisational Empire. This project, which is above all an ethnic claim addressed to all Indo-European regions, is largely based on the ideas of Jean Thiriart (1922-1992), the founder of the Young Europe movement. In his main writings *L'Empire qui viendra (The Empire that will come)* (2018), the author describes a federal project stretching from Reykjavik to Vladivostok. Thus, reviving the theme of the 'Europe of ethnicities', which disappeared after the Second World War, the Empire is above all defined here by 'blood borders' and 'civilisational identity'. In a context of globalisation and multipolarisation of ethno-cultural paradigms, it seems that among some supporters of the *Intermarium* project, nationalism had become too narrow as a framework and had to evolve towards a 'white pan-racial' scale of thought. In this 'ethno-political' school of thought, the defence of 'race' takes precedence over any form of political interest, so the imperial model of the *Intermarium* seems best suited in Europe to deal with post-national and ethno-racial issues. As an Asian entity, Russia cannot be included in this project. However, due to its membership in Kyiv Rus' for several centuries, this exclusion could be reconsidered for its western part.

While some neo-rightists intend to support the *Intermarium* in the name of white nationalism, others like Olena Semenyaka qualify this explicitly racial orientation. Indeed, when we take a closer look at the few texts she published, we can discern certain elements that constitute the Jüngerian universal state, which does not confuse homeland (*Heimat*) and state. Indeed, the proposed imperial model combines, while respecting particular cultural diversities, the defense of minority 'ethnicities' and the various European peoples. This model seeks above all to associate these peoples in a community of destiny, without reducing them to the identical. It is a whole where the parts are all the more autonomous as what unites them is more solid - and these parts which constitute it remain differentiated organic wholes. This project of union is inspired in particular by the model of the union of the States of Europe proposed by Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919). For this German ideologue, author of *Mitteleuropa* (1917), vertical governance in Europe is impossible, it must be horizontal: each State being jointly responsible for the issues and the future of the community to which it belongs. Like the Roman Empire, the Union should live to the rhythm of this horizontal governance made up of as many poles of power as there are member states. In the face of foreign aggression, the countries of Central Europe, which have no real natural borders to prevent invasions, could ally

themselves. For Naumann, “*Mitteleuropa is the result of war*” (“*Mitteleuropa ist das Ergebnis des Krieges!*”) (Naumann, 1917).

While remaining within the framework developed by Naumann, the New Rights introduce into this decentralized and ‘nuclear’ model, the federative idea of pan-national Europe. Far from becoming an instrument of domination, this horizontal union would preserve the role and free will at the decision-making level of each country as a nation while combining means and efforts for collective defence. For the Ukrainian New Right, Central and Eastern Europe is the playground of neighbouring powers and appears to be a fragile space. In order to find answers in an increasingly globalized world, it is therefore in favour of a return to large civilizational groups capable of organizing themselves in self-centered spaces and of equipping themselves with the means to resist. This desire to reactivate the Empire is not based solely on the desire to unite the peoples of Europe. It is part of a search for a third geopolitical path for the region, with the aim of creating a new ‘cordon sanitaire’ between two groups deemed imperial: Russia and the EU.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian history, marked by nationalist outbreaks, might have suggested that the radical right-wing phenomenon wanted to belong to a single continuum of ideas. In a context of transformation of the Ukrainian state and distancing from the Soviet heritage since its independence, the Ukrainian extreme right is in search of new references and seeks to occupy the field of ideologies as well as the public sphere. The neo-nationalism claimed by both the Azov movement and the Ukrainian New Right is positioned as a force which draws its main inspiration from its engagement in the Donbass conflict and from a messianism born from the geopolitical situation of contemporary Ukraine. Out of step with the wanderings of historic ultra-nationalist parties, this movement has made itself popular within a society disillusioned with politics and a youth not very sensitive to the Bandera legacy promoted by historic nationalist parties. Examining this school of thought is part of the body of research carried out to best define the body of ideals that today drive the Ukrainian far-right. Although still marginal and in competition with the Azov movement more oriented towards direct political confrontation, the Ukrainian New Right is an intellectual current which potentially promises to transgress conventional political divisions to carry the commitments or the potential future successes of radical movements through the development of new geopolitical doctrines such as the *Intermarium*.

The *Intermarium* is a long-term project, an ideal from which the Ukrainian New Right is nourished to give a more exciting meaning to its political ambitions. However, to give substance to this project, this movement must find the means to unite the nationalists of Eastern Europe and to gradually associate them with pan-Europeanism. As Nicolas Lebourg specifies in his book *Les Nazis ont-ils disparu? (Did the Nazis disappear?)* (2019), the extreme right tries to orient ‘*the action of the masses according to a mobilizing myth, with a horizon of*

expectation that seems rational because of its spatiality (Lebourg, 2019:64). In the case of Central and Eastern Europe, both in contact with a hybrid Russian power and a West, considered by some populist and nationalist tendencies as dying from an ethno-cultural point of view, the Ukrainian New Right exploits its 'post-modern' geostrategic environment in crisis to format its discourse, designate enemies and distil its own ideals. This once-marginal trend is being built not 'with a view to its own finality and in natural contrast with competing ideas, but in proactive opposition to different ideas and human groups which represent an otherness to be combated' (Vullierme 2014:179). This is why the programme of the Ukrainian New Right goes beyond the simple framework of so-called 'traditional' nationalism.

With concepts borrowed from the West and rearranged according to a new reading grid, the *Intermarium* project is the bearer of demiurgean ideals. It is a utopia created in the hope of reviving the idealised 'myth' of greater Europe. In view of its importance today in the geopolitical game of the extreme right in the post-Soviet space, the approach that we have favoured is important in order to identify the ideological and cultural mood in which the *Intermarium* was developed. This history of ideas, which could be completed by an anthropological and sociological approach, asks us about the ways in which these discourses are disseminated, about what Dan Sperber calls 'the contagion of ideas': why do certain extremist discourses spread so widely? Why are extreme right-wing circles so attracted to radical materials such as esotericism? What is the real role of cultural media, in the development of a radical right-wing counter-culture? The study of these topics could provide new insights into the far-right milieu.

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Interviews:

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