

Antonio Violante

The Baltic Sea as the mediterranean of the North The Baltic Region and Poland in the periodical “Geopolitica” (1939–1942)

Abstract: In January 1939, the first issue of the Italian magazine “Geopolitica” came out: it would go on monthly until 1942. Founded in the scientific circles of Trieste by two geographers, Giorgio Roletto (1885–1967) and Ernesto Massi (1909–1997), who went on to become editor and co-editor-in-chief, respectively, the magazine was inspired by the German periodical “Zeitschrift für Geopolitik” by Karl Haushofer. However, its approach to geopolitical issues used autonomous conceptional bases quite different from those of the German school. In the intentions of its founders, “Geopolitica” should have contributed to a re-evaluation of didactics of geography and to support the imperialistic politics of Mussolini’s regime, even though it never got to have a substantial role in Italy’s governing policies. It never even obtained full recognition by the academic geographical establishment that in fact denied geopolitics its own scientific autonomy.

Frequent issues discussed in the magazine were the Mediterranean basin, the Balkans and Africa, close to the Italian geostrategic interests; but there was also cautious interest towards Poland, considered to be fully integrated into the German *Lebensraum*. Therefore, we could say there was some reticence in approaching this theme, along with a sort of reverence towards the German ally who was also “competition”, despite the fact that its territory saw strategic and political events of utmost importance during the entire four years of the magazine’s life.

On the other hand, the attention towards the Baltic region was free of any conditioning. It was perceived as a sort of a “Nordic Mediterranean”, wanted both by Germans and Soviets, and an object of desire also of the states who wanted to defend their difficult neutrality in the war that was raging throughout Europe.

Keywords: Italian geopolitics, Baltic region, territorial conquests.

Introduction

On January 31st, 1939, the first issue of the periodical “Geopolitica” was published in Milan. The publishing went on monthly until the end of 1942 when the war – entirely unfavorably to Italy – ended its existence abruptly. “Geopolitica”¹ with

¹ The periodical was founded in Trieste and its base was at the Institute of Geography of the city’s University. For the first four years of its existence, it was under the direction

its editor-in-chief Giorgio Roletto (1885–1976)² and co-editor-in-chief Ernesto Massi (1909–1997)³, despite being inspired by the German periodical “*Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*” by Karl Haushofer⁴, immediately distanced itself from their inspiration, especially because of the bases and aims of the very geopolitics. The intentions of autonomy from the German periodical can be seen already in the opening article signed by both of the two editors. Named *Per una geopolitica Italiana* (For an Italian geopolitics), it is indeed a true structure manifesto of this discipline which was relatively new to Italy. The opening essay gives heavy critique to the way geopolitics was approached in foreign countries, used as basis for their interests and “ideological settings”, “masked as scientific objectivity”. Such points of view were to be disrupted in the name of “that autarchy of thought that legitimately belongs to the Italian Empire”⁵. Going into detail of the issue, the two authors critiqued German geopolitics because of its setting deriving from Ratzel’s determinism and school. According to Roletto and Massi, this point of

of Giorgio Roletto, an economic geography professor there. Therefore, Trieste kept its role of the main diffusion centre of Italian geopolitics. However, its editorial staff was based in Milan in the same offices as its editing house Sperling & Kupfer. For more information regarding the circumstances that have led to the foundation of “*Geopolitica*”, see M. Antonsich (1994: 271–272), G. Sinibaldi (2010: 25–27).

² Giorgio Roletto was born in Bobbio Pellice in Piedmont in 1885. At first a teacher in technical institutes, from 1927 to 1969 he was professor of economic geography at the Trieste University, where he would also become head of department and vice-dean. Among his scientific interests in the first part of his career he studied environments and settlements in Western Alps. Successively, he took interest particularly in political geography and would go on to found, alongside Ernesto Massi, the monthly “*Geopolitica*” that he would direct for the entire four years of its existence from 1939 to 1942.

³ Ernesto Massi, born in 1909 in Trieste, was a student of Roletto’s. With political geography as his main interest, he founded “*Geopolitica*” with Roletto in 1939 while he was professor of economic geography at the Sacred Heart Catholic University of Milan and Pavia’s University. A convinced fascist, during the WW2 he went on to fight on the Russian front and from October 1943 on adhered to the Italian Social Republic. His fascist militancy banned him from teaching after the war; he went back to be a professor from 1955 on at the University of Milan and successively in Rome. From 1978 to 1987 he was president of the Italian Geographical Society. From a political point of view, he was in the executive of the Italian Social Movement, a party founded in 1946 that took inspiration from the Mussolini’s Republic fascism.

⁴ An article by Haushofer himself appears already in the first issue of “*Geopolitica*”, but significantly, only then: “*Der italienischen “Geopolitik” als Dank und Gruus!*” (p. 12–15).

⁵ Quotes taken from page 6. of this article published in the first issue of the periodical. The “thought autarchy” named here imitates the economical autarchy adopted in Italy following economic sanctions inflicted to the League of Nations as an act of retaliation for the Italian aggression on Ethiopia.

view was alimented by the frustration felt by the German population, forced to suffer borders “unnatural” to their country, imposed by the winners of World War One. Less accentuated but nevertheless incisive is the critique to French geopolitics⁶, influenced by the concept of *genre de vie* theorised by Vidal de la Blache, where “opposed to state geography is nations’ geography, which... aimed for a scientific justification of borders designed by peace treaties”. According to the position sustained by “Geopolitica” and illustrated by Roletto and Massi, geopolitical laws are based on balance *instead of contraposition* between the German “environmental determinism” and the French “geographical humanism and possibility”. Specifically, the “pure” determinism of the post-Ratzel era was rejected by the two authors on the bases of a principle they attributed to the “Boss” (meaning Mussolini himself), according to which “among the factors determining the life of the nation, the spiritual and dynamic element surpasses and wins environmental adversities”. In other words, there will be no forced dependence on the environment, because human will shall have the last word⁷. However, in the

⁶ The methodological confutation against the French geopolitics launched by Edoardo Funajoli in the second issue of “Geopolitica” is even heavier (*La geopolitica e la sua legittimità di scienza*, Year I, No. 2, February 28th, 1939: 91–95). According to him the French have supposedly reduced “the geopolitical issues to relations between state and territory [...] and have become an empirical classification and numeration of facts, seen fundamentally in their present instead of their future”. Furthermore, Funajoli has criticized Febvre for his concept of State considered to be not a fact but a man’s continuous creation; the consequence was that geopolitics became a sort of a “science of the spirit” (creator) and stopped being a geographical science (art. quoted, p. 92).

⁷ This is a choice of Roletto’s Trieste school that according to Costantino Caldo’s analysis (Caldo 1982: 184) “abandoned the positivity point of view which was accused of being spoiled by determinism, in order to replace it with that geographical voluntarism that supports the idealistic ‘Man’ dominating natural events”. This anti-determinism as distinctive trait of the Italian geopolitics of the time, compared to its German contemporary, was repeated ex-post by Massi himself in 1986 (Massi 1986: 18–20). Even though, if we look closely, the influence of that environment over human action had been downsized already in 1924 by Luigi De Marchi (Milano, 1857 – Padova, 1936), an academic geographer and the Kingdom’s senator from 1934, in his speech called *Politica geografica* and delivered on June 22nd, 1924 at the Venetian Royal Institute of Sciences, Literature and Arts. On that occasion, the scholar presented and adopted Benedetto Croce’s thesis according to which the environmental influences compared to “spiritual efforts” are “all irrelevant if taken singularly, lifeless and incapable of leading to any conclusion whatsoever”. De Marchi deduced that Croce “considers therefore spiritual effort to be a manifestation of a quid that is outside and above physical nature, that gives him only the conditions and means to its work” (De Marchi 1929: 182–183). It could be concluded that already in the 1920s and therefore prior to any stance taken by Italian geopolitics scholars, following the aftermath of Croce’s positions, the environmental determinism did not take root in Italian geographers.

analysis of positions assumed towards Poland and the Soviet Union for the Baltic area, it will appear clear how free human initiative is not considered at all or only in an entirely negative light for Poland, a country hardly taken into account after it lost its independence in September 1939. The Soviet Union will see recognition of its policy that coincided with the one sustained by the tsarist Russia, based on Baltic expansion and following the same direction despite the regime change⁸. Therefore, the periodical would show the Soviet interest towards the Baltic region and towards annexation of a part of Poland, as the result of “natural” dynamics and therefore detached from the decisional dynamism theorised in the first issue of the journal.

There is particular interest in the change of evaluation of these policies in the eyes of “Geopolitica”: in 1939, it considered the Soviet Union a hostile power, yet afterwards, if not an ally, at least an *oborto collo*, a “non-enemy” after the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression pact, and finally again a bitter enemy after Hitler’s June 1941 invasion. On the other hand, there was close to no legitimation of Poland as an independent political entity, except for its dispute with Lithuania regarding Vilnius which caused in the 1930s the failure of extension of the Baltic countries’ alliance.

However, the project at the base that had been delineated⁹ and then attempted to put into motion by the periodical was particularly ambitious: to make Italian geopolitics “the geographical doctrine of the Empire”, following a geographical-political method that was presented as “scientific”, considering the dynamism typical of those times and inherent to the very fascist mentality. However, the periodical and geopolitics in general both failed to carry out such guidance role in foreign policy of Mussolini’s government. On the contrary, without managing to get full legitimation as a scientific discipline recognised by at least some part of academic geographers¹⁰, geopolitics suffered – instead of guiding – strategic and political choices of the government dictated by power logic and accidental interests detached from the analysis of scientists¹¹. The present analysis of geopolitical essays in the periodical considered Poland and the Baltic area that was of interest to great powers of Germania and the Soviet Union, precisely because they were

⁸ The thesis at the root of a continuity of directions of Russian expansionism expressed by “Geopolitica”, already noticed by G. Sinibaldi (2010: 104–105).

⁹ Article of the issue I, p. 11.

¹⁰ In regard to this, M. Antonsich (1994: 273), G. Sinibaldi (2010: 28–30), M.G. Lozano (2011: 153).

¹¹ According to Carlo Jean’s analysis (Jean 1995: 243–244) it was the geographers who became immersed in fascism, not the fascist regime “to follow a geopolitical approach to definition of Italian national interests or policies or strategies to adopt in order to reach them”. In fact, the periodical could only justify ex-post the initiatives which were not contemplated previously in their analysis, such as, for example, the invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941.

not regions with direct strategic interest to Italy¹². Such detail is preferable in order to verify the analysis methods described as “scientific” in the structural manifesto of “Geopolitica”.

Poland and the Baltic in pre-war 1939

The first study involving the Baltic area in “Geopolitica” appeared in April 1939 signed by Aldo Festa¹³. It analysed the situation of the region following the Baltic Pact signed in Geneva on September 12th, 1934 by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The author highlights three fundamental reasons that caused its lack of efficiency and weakness of the three republics generated by this regional agreement. First of all, the lack of a juridical personality inside the Baltic agreement that, due to the lack of social organs did not have any rights and obligations towards each other, which are each member states’ prerogatives. The consequence was that potential decisions would not have been brought by a common organism, but only through an agreement between single states.

The other reason for this agreement’s weakness was the lack of participation of Finland and Poland, determined by the absence of common interests between the five states, both economic and political: there was no need for Finnish and Polish economies to cooperate with those of the other Baltic states, alongside diversified geopolitical orientations. In fact, especially in the view of its position, Finland has a tendency to aim for closeness with northern states, while Poland – tight between Germany and Russia – should have “actuated a policy as free and as autonomous as possible”¹⁴ according to Festa’s analysis; Poland was also too influenced by hostile relations with Lithuania over the Vilnius dispute to be able to inaugurate a friendship policy towards Lithuania. The only common political motivation that made it desirable to form an alliance pact between all five of those states – but, as the author noticed, unseen by them – was the necessity to block a possible Russian expansion over the Baltic region. In April 1939 this was a simple thesis, however it became real few months after with the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact.

The third reason – the declaration of neutrality of the three countries of the *Baltic Agreement* – “was, however, not supported by an adequate military organisation” leaving “many doubts over its efficiency”. It should also be noted

¹² A regional power, Italy had maritime interests over the Adriatic, the Tyrrhenian and more generally the Mediterranean, while those on land centred on the Balkans, Corse, north-western Italian borders and Africa because of the colonies. Therefore, studies of these regions were particularly numerous in the four years of “Geopolitica’s” existence.

¹³ “L’Intesa Baltica”, Year I, No. 4, April 1939: 222–228.

¹⁴ It can be deduced that, according to this interpretation, Poland (that had the Gdansk “corridor” as its only access to the Baltic) would have been more involved in the European continental policy than in the Baltic one.

that the latter of Festa's observations showed his geopolitical foresight in the light of dramatic events that would follow after the beginning of World War Two.

This article was supported by cartography designed by Mario Morandi, the author of *Sintesi geopolitiche* which were present in every issue of the periodical. They present geographical charts opportunely adapted in order to make a certain thesis or a geopolitical point of view more credible with an adequate visual impact. The result that it generally obtained is that of images of accentuated dynamics, apparently objective but really far from really being that¹⁵. The chart inserted into Festa's article (pages 224–225) seems to be rich in barriers and divides both physical and, especially, political, over the entire northern Europe. In particular, there is distinct contrast between the "Bolshevik" area and the rest of the European continent, immediately identified by a thick graphical divisor line showing it as insurmountable: such contrast is repeated further by the Nazi swastika on the left side of the chart and the communist hammer and sickle on the right, the only ideological symbols that the chart displays (Fig. 1).

A similar topic is brought up also in the editorial *A chi il Baltico?* in the June 30th 1939 issue¹⁶, that in the absence of a name of the author is to be considered the result of a shared editorial line of thought. The thesis sustained in it is that the new domination of the Baltic by the national-socialist Germany is not a menace to Baltic states. The real menace is the Soviet Union which, according to the article and because of the British Royal Navy's support, could attack the neutrality and the very existence of the small republics facing the eastern Baltic. This alliance between the Soviet Union and England supposedly happened because of the intent to defend their "vital interests", opposed to the policy of "vital space" of the totalitarian powers (meaning Germany). Therefore, a couple of months before the German invasion of Poland¹⁷ it was not Germany but England who threatened the neutrality of the Baltic states alongside the peace in the region; and all of that benefitted the Soviet Union. Yet there is more. It is insinuated that England – the true polemic target of this article – despite acting as guarantor of neutrality of the small European states could have attacked other states' independence if it decided to "scarify the neutrality of Baltic states" [*sic*], damaging for example

¹⁵ A good example in this matter is Edoardo Boria's comment to Mario Morandi's chart *Equilibrio statale mediterraneo*, published on "Geopolitica", Year I, No. 10, October 31st 1939: 523: "the object to be depicted was not the thing itself but the effect that it produced. The geopoliticians' charts lack any interest whatsoever for tangible subjects and they concentrate on abstract elements: force lines, penetration goals, strategic axes *etc.*" (Boria 2011: 305). For a discussion of cartography used as means of propaganda in favour of a preconceived thesis, see also D. Atkinson (1995: 155–183), E. Boria (2007, 2012).

¹⁶ "Geopolitica", Year I, No. 6, June 30th 1939: 327–329.

¹⁷ It is to be considered a Baltic state too because of Gdansk's status as a free city, not given to Germany after the Versailles treaty.

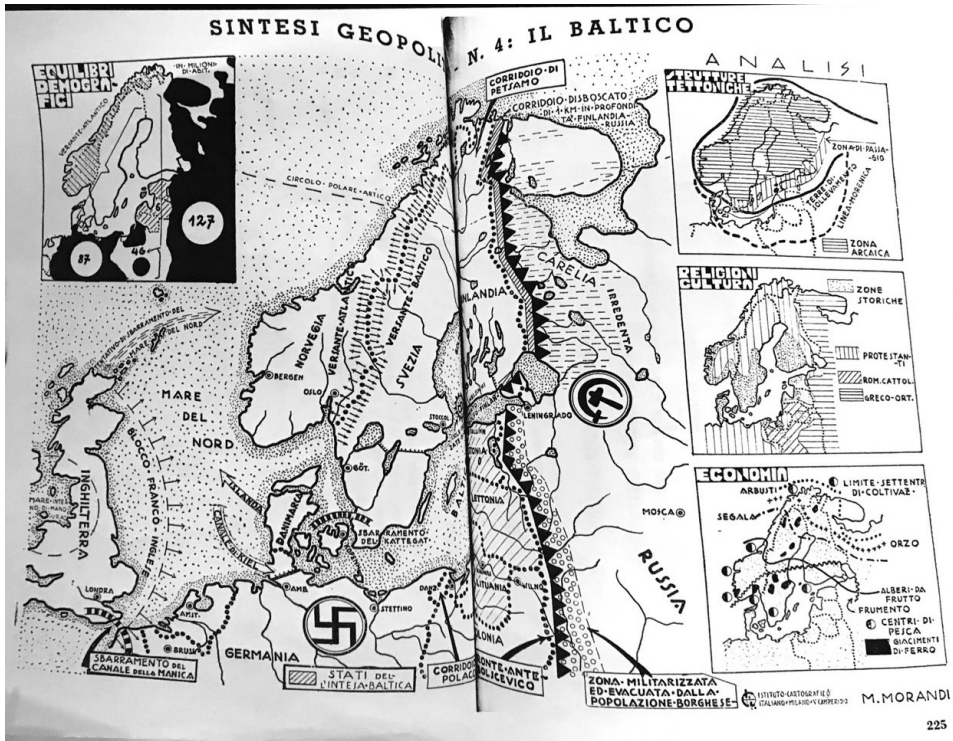


Fig. 1. Map of Morandi's *Sintesi geopolitiche*

Source: from A. Festa's article *The Soviet threat over the Baltic*, pages 224–225.

Belgium, Holland and Portugal. Consequently, it is easy to see slight irony in this, considering that the Nazi Germany violated Belgium, Holland and Denmark's neutrality the following year, after doing the same in 1938 and 1939 to Austria and Czechoslovakia.

It is easy to conclude that this article represents England as a *democracy* (defined as such in evidently derogatory way) that destabilises a peaceful status quo, even that of Germany, who after the Versailles humiliation had taken back the role of the guarantor of free coexistence in the Baltic area. On the other hand, the role that appears to be designated for the Soviet Union is quite different: it is indicated as a power pursuing an expansionist policy in the Baltic region not because of its strategic choices, but because of the revival of the old Tsarist policy based on a strong regional presence. In other words, the Soviet Union is credited for an attempt of territorial enlargement provoked – according to notions close to environmental determinism applied to political subjects – by the tendency of imperial powers to try and occupy all the available space at the expense of their neighbours, often small and weak: an effect of compliance to nature's laws

inspired by Darwinism and theorised in Ratzel's political geography, instead of being initiatives resulting from precise choices.

Another essay which is significant to the present research is not a true article, but a contribution in the section *Note e attualità* named "Gdansk and the Vistula"¹⁸. The name of the author is missing, which is a sign of collective work of the entire editorial room, giving the periodical a line of thought to follow. In the month Poland was invaded by Germany, "Geopolitica" conducted an exclusively economic analysis on the fluvial traffic on Vistula, up to its estuary near Gdansk. The dominant topic of the article was the under-use of this river and its terminal destination Gdansk, especially when it comes to transportation of products such as rice and legumes that – until the begin of the World War (1914–1918) – went from the Baltic to the internal areas of the country, even as it was politically divided between Austria, Prussia and Russia. Successively, after the end of the war and despite hopes for a revival of Gdansk's role thanks to the political unification and creation of the "Polish corridor" as the exit to the sea for the new state, and despite a project of a connection between the Baltic and the Black Sea through Vistula, Bug, Pripyat and Dnieper, there were no significant changes compared to before the war. It is easy to see the consequences of this in the fact that Poland's main river did not obtain the role of a modern fluvial artery (there was also mention of the lack of an adequate canal), alongside a barely marginal function for Gdansk – a city annihilated, among other things, by the development of the neighbouring Gdynia¹⁹. The latter was already the terminus of the main Polish railroad going towards the Baltic, and also the final point of a canal projected to serve as a connection to the coal basin in Upper Silesia.

Therefore, if we read into this editorial not as an essay in traditional political geography, but through the geopolitical lens following guidelines provided by Roletto and Massi in their January 1939 introductory article, Poland's economic initiatives would show quite a depressing picture. In fact, the theoretical premise of the two editors called into question the validity of the determinist Ratzel-inspired approach, attributed to the 20th century German geopolitics; in its place, "the spiritual and dynamic element" was to be enhanced, "surpassing and winning environmental adversities", highly championed by the two Italians. According to the latter presumption, it would appear that Poland would not have been capable of benefitting from its extremely favourable environmental conditions, with its big river crossing the country as an excellent transport artery. Consequently, there were none of that "dynamic elements aiming to win over the adverse environment", while it was possible to highlight a guilty inertia of one that was not able to take advantage of profitable environmental conditions. However, such considerations

¹⁸ "Geopolitica", Year I, No. 9, September 1939: 502–503.

¹⁹ In the port of Gdynia, Poland's military and commercial exit in the Baltic (Giannini 1940: 64–66).

do not appear in the September 1939 editorial, which shows a more traditional political-geographical orientation which was preferred to innovative geopolitics despite the declared intentions expressed in the programming manifesto of the two editors. Such scarce consideration towards Poland manifested by “Geopolitica” is surprising. September 1939 was the month that saw its destruction as a political entity. However, already in months prior the beginning of war, the Country was threatened by Nazi Germany exactly under the pretext of the Gdansk issue, showing a not-so-remote possibility of a European conflict, which most certainly was not in Mussolini’s plans despite the Pact of Steel made with Hitler. Among other things, in the period between two wars Italian cultural circles saw the myth of Poland as the bulwark of the western catholic society, standing against external enemies, whether Byzantine, Lutheran Germans and then Bolsheviks. In fact, the Mussolini regime gave ample space to publications in favour of Poland, in the name of “spiritual closeness” between the two countries, even in issues such as the Gdansk dispute by assuming anti-German positions, defining Hitler’s demands “a return of the pan-German long-living expansionism on the Baltic”²⁰. In short, according to an analysis of the issue conducted by Stefano Santoro (2005: 154), the Italian debate arrived at a paradoxical conclusion where the Polish were preserved by “Latin” characteristics from a sense of spiritual belonging to both the Slavic world and Germany. Yet nothing of this debate appears in “Geopolitica”, not in the 1939 September issue, and not in those which followed, once the true intentions of the Reich over the Polish population and territory were revealed and became reality. Under the mask of an apparent objectivity, the periodical’s approach to the Polish issue stayed firmly anchored in mere descriptions of the existing and mentioning the lack of initiative of the Polish populations, implying support to German positions.

The consequences of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in “Geopolitica”

The October 1939 issue is interesting for Baltic and Poland: it came out soon after the beginning of the European war and therefore it ignored its developments, which at the time could not be predicted. Even this issue has no real articles signed

²⁰ According to Stefano Santoro (2005: 154). In the matter of the “spiritual proximity” between Italy and Poland and the use of the German danger to support the necessity of “Italy’s historical function as an unbiased spiritual guide of the Polish people towards freedom”, see S. Santoro (2005: 154). For Poland’s role as bulwark against the external “barbarity” see N. Davies (1997: 145) – “The myth of Poland’s role, as the “Bulwark of Christendom”, the *antemurale christianitatis*, had a very long career. Initially inspired by the wars against Turks and Tartars, it was later employed to justify Poland’s defence of Catholic Europe against Orthodox Muscovites, and later against communism and fascism”.

by authors, but rather a joint editorial named “The Russian front”²¹, alongside the resumé of an article published in Poland in May of the same year about navigable canals from the Baltic to the Black Sea²². The way the subject was treated in “The Russian Front” is affected by the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact which, however, is not named. The Russian advancement in the Baltic does not affect any immediate Italian interests, while the authors see it as a defeat of the English, whose Baltic policy – as the article states – is to stop the Russians from advancing. Afterwards, it is noticed that the Baltic is in no danger of going under the Bolshevik influence as there are no industrial countries on it. It is highlighted how this possibility would become even lesser because of Germany, as it could guarantee the geopolitical equilibrium of the region. From this way of illustrating the regional Baltic situation, it can be deduced that the polemic target of the editorial is again Great Britain, even though it was not at war with Italy, but was particularly unpopular to Mussolini’s government both because of its Mediterranean naval presence (where the Mediterranean was conceived as an “Italian” space), and because of its war declaration towards Germany, at the time Italy’s tightest ally following the Pact of Steel, and therefore qualifying as a stability guarantor. On the other hand, the representation of the Soviet Union is quite ambiguous. Despite being an ideological enemy of fascist Italy because of its role of guiding the country of international communism, it made sure to have a programme of territorial expansion in accord with Germany²³. Therefore, it was inappropriate for “Geopolitica” – unwilling to assume even the role of opposition to government policy – to highlight the Soviet Union in an explicitly negative way; instead, it appears as a sort of a giant who is indeed potentially dangerous but quiet and still easily controllable. There is obvious embarrassment by the periodical in not being able to consider the Soviet Union an open enemy because of the “almost-alliance” pact that tied it to Germany, where the latter constituted – through the Pact of Steel – the main key to Italian foreign policy. This explains the relief visible only after June 22nd, 1941 and noticed by Sinibaldi in his essay about Italian geopolitics (Sinibaldi 2010: 106), in treating the Soviet Union as an ideological and political enemy that was such even prior to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.

In the other essay inside the October 1939 issue, there is a certain insistence on the Polish opportunity to take advantage of the fluvial route of Vistula–San–Dniester–Prut–Danube by building specific connection canals, thus making the connection between the Baltic and the Black Sea, which was preferable to the one along Rhine–Main–Danube as, instead of crossing seven countries, it would

²¹ “Geopolitica”, Year I, No. 10, October 31st 1939: 519–521.

²² “Geopolitica”, Year I, No. 10, October 31st 1939: 555–557, that mentions *Poland’s geopolitical axes*, in: “Problemy Europy Wschodniej”, Warszawa, May 1939.

²³ A plan that was always denied by Moscow until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Buttar 2018: 48).

have crossed just Poland and Romania. However the recent invasion endured by Poland, even if not mentioned explicitly, proved this study obsolete by the very authors.

The following article regarding the area in question which appeared in the 1939 annual closing issue²⁴ attributes to the populations of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland a rejection of the war induced by a long addiction to “a diligent peace and wellness present in almost all social classes”: such a situation inspired a policy of neutrality. Yet despite this there is mention of potential threats to Denmark and Finland because of their proximity to big powers: Germany for Denmark and Russia to Finland. In particular, Finland’s position is described as very precarious, because “it was well known that Russia never got over the loss of the old Grand Duchy [of Finland]” and had limited its presence in the Baltic to Finland Gulf only. These were the premises that Festa isolated after the failure of every mediation attempt, because of the Soviet attack to Finland on November 30th. The article describes the behaviour of the other three Nordic states following this aggression, which does not go beyond a generic solidarity to Finland and is based on the rigid neutrality that they maintained. Furthermore, a map by Morandi, integrated in the article, shows visibly the Soviet aggression to the Baltic area through the territories of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, following a representation through low gravitational areas, directions of the attack from the USSR space and objectives to reach, all of it entirely coherent with the goals of cartography used as means of propaganda (Fig. 2).

In view of this Russian-Finnish war that had only begun, Festa’s vivid sympathy towards Finland is immediately visible, though not expressed explicitly, being a country under attack by a great power and lacking in allies. However, this author and “Geopolitica” itself could not condemn openly the Soviet Union, tied to Germany through a pact, and the latter united to Italy through the Pact of Steel of May 22nd, 1939. Consequently, there was no way of condemning the benevolent German acquiescence towards the Soviets. However, there is some anti-German critique emerging from the article as the official Berlin position is commented upon and found to have “too many unilateral and polemic arguments to be objective and have constructive value”. The Italian geopolitics periodical did not dare go further than this enigmatic observation regarding Germany.

The anti-Russian and pro-Finnish line makes a timid appearance in the last issue of 1939 and shows fully in the first one of the following year²⁵: in *The Baltic dominion* inside the *Rilievi* section, there is a sort of an appeal for help for Finland in order to avoid it “succumbing oppressed by the Russian bear”.

²⁴ A. Festa, *La neutralità degli Stati nordici*, “Geopolitica”, Year I, No. 12, December 31st 1939: 623–627.

²⁵ *The Baltic dominion*, “Geopolitica”, Year II, No. 1, January 31st 1940: 31; L. Cossovich, *Ai margini della questione finlandese*, ivi, p. 32–34.



Fig. 2. Map of Morandi's: Soviet pressure in the Baltic area

Source: from A. Festa's article in "Geopolitica", Year I, No. 12, December 31st 1939: 625.

There is even a reference to the "heroism of its soldiers who fight for freedom of their home country". Finally, there is no mention of France and Great Britain supporting Finland – embarrassing to "Geopolitica" – or to Germany's tacit consent to the Soviet aggression, which only gave away the deal of territorial divisions in the Baltic area and eastern Europe between the two powers²⁶. In any case, this was an embarrassing and paradoxical situation for "Geopolitica", which found itself showing sympathy for a country supported by Italy's potential enemies – France and Great Britain²⁷. Not only that, but it was also induced to stay silent in regard

²⁶ As it is well known today, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was not merely an agreement of non-aggression between the Soviet Union and Germany but had an added secret protocol that inside art. 1 delimited areas of interest of the two parties involved, separated by the northern Lithuanian border. Therefore Finland, Latvia and Estonia – explicitly mentioned in the very agreement – were fully inside the Soviet area. The existence of Secret Protocols was definitely confirmed following the opening of Soviet archives in 1991 when the original text of the Pact was found. However, already in August 1939, immediately following its entry into force, the Finnish did not fail to notice that alongside the non-aggression pact between Germany and the USSR there could be also a secret agreement between these two countries that gave the Soviets free rule in the Baltic. Naturally, at the time Germany denied the existence of such agreement to the Finnish government. In regard to this see T. Snyder (2011: 314).

²⁷ Following the French and British declaration of war to Germany and also Poland's invasion on September 1st, 1939, Mussolini's Italy did not stand as neutral, but as "not

to the ally tied to Italy through the Pact of Steel – Germany, a country that was not exactly applauding Bolshevik Russia but was not hostile to its war initiative against Finland, because of the programme of division among the two countries that recognised the Soviet Union’s territorial rights in the Baltic area²⁸.

The fact that sympathy went entirely to Finland is confirmed in the short article by Leone Cossovich *Ai margini della questione finlandese*. Its inhabitants are described as a population who has “a vivacious and clear national conscience”, while the country itself is presented both as anti-communist (as that particular ideology never took roots there) and as a land able to utilize fully its own natural resources. The praise for the Baltic state did not end with this particular remark: the Finnish people are described as serious, honest, hard-working and tenacious, the country has almost zero illiterates, since even the peasants entertain the habit of reading. However, there is a note of condescension too, since the author finds that the Finnish population “is not made of geniuses”, even though it is “a cultured one”. On the other hand, Germany – who could not benefit from any support, not even moral, as that one went in favour of Finland because of the agreements between it and the Soviets – is somehow reevaluated from a cultural point of view, meaning that Cossovich highlights the influence of German culture and language over Finland, presented as more widespread there than the Slavic one.

The sympathy that the periodical shows for the Finnish cause is not different than the one of the Italian government itself, which still had not gotten over the German–USSR pact of August 23rd, 1939 or the attack on Poland on September 1st, 1939 that Hitler ordered without any previous warning to Mussolini. Consequently, the Italian support to Finland was an act of hostility not only towards the Soviet Union but also towards its German ally. It was not only moral and ideological

belligerent”. A slight difference that aimed to signal an Italian position in the conflict, which was not equally distant between the parties involved, but close to Hitler’s Germany, to which Italy was tied by the Pact of Steel, despite having not fought together against the common French-British enemy.

²⁸ Made explicit in the articles 1 and 2 of the Secret Protocols of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact who read: “1) In the event of a territorial and political transformation in the territories belonging to the Baltic states (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern frontier of Lithuania shall represent the frontier of the spheres of interest both of Germany and the U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilnius territory is recognised by both parties. 2) In the event of a territorial and political transformation of the territories belonging to the Polish State, the spheres of interest of both Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San [...]”, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/24/world/text-of-secret-protocols-to-1939-hitler-stalin-pact.html>. The Pact’s content was modified partially on September 28th 1939, including Lithuania in the Soviet sphere of interest: “a bitter pill to swallow for Hitler that was not sweetened at all by the German acquisition of larger Polish territories” (Cinnella 2013: 77).

support against Bolshevism, but also tangible help in terms of weapons and ammunition, whose second largest provider was indeed Italy, other than being the first country to sell airplanes to Finland (Kanervo 2013: 160–162). On the contrary, Germany was the only country supporting the Soviet Union²⁹, while the rest of the world showed sympathy for “the brave little Finland” (Read, Fisher 1989: 472). Furthermore, in order not to provoke hostility in the Soviets, Hitler had prohibited the deliveries to Finland of weapons already purchased prior to the war (Longo Adorno 2013: 218), and also blocked the passage through German territories of weapons going towards Finland (Read, Fisher 1989: 473). Besides, the Winter War happened in concomitance to the worst phase when it came to the relationship between Italian and German allies following the signing of the Pact of Steel, when Italy had the opportunity to distance itself politically from the Berlin–Moscow axis (Longo Adorno 2013: 218). In fact, the Foreign Minister of Italy Galeazzo Ciano (also Mussolini’s son in law) instituted a “Finland Office” on January 15th, 1940 that was to coordinate military and economic help to the Finnish state (Pasqualetti 2013: 231). However, other than vivid sympathy for Finland as a small country attacked by the Bolsheviks, “Geopolitica” does not mention government support in its favour, which could have distanced Italy from its uncomfortable alliance with Germany if only Finland did not surrender on March 12th, 1940 (Pasqualetti 2013: 234) and could have drawn it closer to France and Great Britain, both Finland’s supporters.

The evolution of political relations and territorial situation between Russia and Poland is approached by Giorgio Pullé in the April 1940 issue³⁰. After a short historical excursion, the consequences of the renewed Russian acquisition of Belarus and western Ukraine are highlighted, consisting in the extension of western borders to the line of Neman–Bug–San, and especially full control of the Baltic–Black Sea isthmus. These results were obtained to Poland’s detriment, again vanished from geography charts as a sovereign state, “without or almost without a single gunshot, with minimum aggressive military action that has always been repugnant to the Slavic-Russian”. Obviously, this refers to Soviet territorial acquisitions obtained thanks to the division of Poland with Nazi Germany. The present research finds particular interest in the analysis of the changed strategic situation on the Baltic alongside previsions regarding the future. There is the end of the small Soviet access to the Baltic, at first limited to Leningrad and the naval base of Kronstadt, while afterwards it was enlarged to a “respect zone” made of Karelia’s isthmus. When it comes to future Soviet perspectives, Pullé speculates of full access to the Baltic based on the incorporation (as new Soviet republics) of three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Therefore, there

²⁹ Expelled from the League of Nations with a unanimous vote on December 14th 1939, because of the aggression against Finland.

³⁰ G. Pullé, *Russia e Polonia*, “Geopolitica”, Year II, No. 4, April 30th 1940: 176–177.

was never a more correct geopolitical forecast, considering the disappearance of these sovereign states that happened that very summer. In conclusion, there is recognition of communist Russia's expansion over the Baltic that is analogous only to the one made by the Tsarist Russia but without further, more ambitious goals.

Aldo Festa's examination of the Baltic policy of the Soviet Union is more thorough in the October issue³¹, when Italy was at war for only four months by Germany's side and against France and Great Britain. There is a reiteration of inevitability for Russia of more Baltic pressure, resulting from a new communist imperialism that was following the same territorial and strategic directions of the previous Tsarist one. This happened first with Poland, followed by the three little states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and all of them endured the consequences. There is another map designed by Morandi that is extremely efficient in representing this Russian push: from Finnish naval bases and the three Baltic republics, there is a series of arrows showing a threat towards Sweden, in order to show much better than words the Soviet ambition to exert full control over this entire sea (Fig. 3).

The present research also finds interesting the narration of the stages of Soviet Union's meddling in internal policies of the three republics in 1940, making them states with limited sovereignty afterwards and finally, transforming them into three Soviet republics. There is a show of distinctive sympathy towards those states, considered victims of potent power deriving from mere physical power and not law. However, the author could not go as far as to critique openly such policy. In fact, the Soviet Union – among other things, under a communist regime that incarnated a clear antithesis of Mussolini's dictatorship – was not a true ally. It was, however, tied to Germany by the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact that only involved non-aggression, but also included clauses regarding territorial divisions between the two powers, to the detriment of neighbouring small countries³². Furthermore: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, incorporated into the Soviet Union in August of the same year following elections with “social-communist” lists only, were beneficiaries of traditional sympathy by France and Great Britain, abhorred democracies that Italy fought in war alongside Germany.

³¹ A. Festa, *La Russia sul Baltico*, “Geopolitica”, Year II, No. 10, October 31st 1940: 445–450.

³² The added secret protocol indicated in its Article 1 that in case of territorial and political change in the sectors corresponding to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) the border of the German sphere of influence was to coincide with the northern Lithuanian border. Therefore Finland, Latvia and Estonia, explicitly mentioned in the agreement, were in the Soviet area. Even though successively and before the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, Lithuania too was incorporated consensually in the Soviet sphere of interest.



Fig. 3. Map of Morandi's: The Soviet hegemony projects for the Baltic area following the annexation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia

Source: from A. Festa's article in "Geopolitica", Year II, No. 10, October 31st 1940: 447.

A different attitude of "Geopolitica" towards the Baltic policy of the USSR during the Winter War and in the following phase is easily perceivable, in view of the annexation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the Soviet Union: explicit hostility in the former case and substantial acceptance in the latter. In this circumstance, the periodical did not distance itself from the Italian government's positions and the USSR was represented as a ferocious aggressor at first and the author of territorial policy arranged with Germany afterwards. In fact, only six days after the end of the Winter War, on March 18th, 1940, Mussolini and Hitler met at the Brenner Pass and recomposed their fractured alliance, which resulted in USSR aligning fully its policy with Germany. At that point Italy could not consider it an enemy anymore.

Poland and the Baltic in front of the new Soviet enemy

After the start of Operation Barbarossa that transformed the Soviet Union – attacked by Germany – into an open enemy of Italy too, “Geopolitica” took a firm stance towards the Baltic region and in particular towards Finland, along with its unfortunate neighbour, which was not different from what the periodical showed up to that point. In fact, if the communist force became “the” enemy and a supporter of an aggressive policy towards the entire Baltic, Finland was now an ally of the Axis, to be praised and valued without any reticence.

This change can be perceived already in a Morandi’s article on Finland published in October 1941³³. He highlighted its function of a divisor between a German West and a Slavic East, showing also its function of bulwark between the western society and another one, foreign to it:

Both because of its position and geography and for the racial and geopolitical structure, in the past Finland was always an area of contrast between the Atlantic West (seaside) and the continental East, between the northern-Germanic and Slavic civilizations. It represents a divisor wedge that is racially different from both contenders, with particular characteristics which are mainly developed from the local environment it evolved from³⁴.

However, there is more. When it comes to Finland as a land of contrasts and competition up to that point in time, the same article foresees that it “not only will represent in the Baltic a balance element of pure differentiation, but with its economy it should be and will be an advocate of rational exploitation of the Antarctic areas [*sic*], which not even the future Europe will be able to ignore following victory”. Therefore, Finland was given the choice of adhering to the West in both political and economic fields, and the aftermath of the Axis war win was a given.

When it comes to Nordic policy in the Soviet Union, in October 1941 it was entirely negatively outlined. In regard to this, an article by Festa³⁵ analysed a decidedly aggressive Soviet policy towards the West, indicated as a threat not only to Finland and Sweden but also to Norway. This observation pushed these

³³ M. Morandi, *Appunti per una geopolitica degli stati nordici. I° La Finlandia*, “Geopolitica”, Year II, No. 10, October 31st 1941: 472–481.

³⁴ Article quoted in note 24, p. 477: *La Finlandia, sia per la sua posizione e struttura geografica, che per quella razziale e geopolitica, fu sempre, per il passato, un campo di contrasti tra l’Occidente atlantico, ossia marittimo, e l’Oriente continentale, tra la civiltà nord-germanica e quella slava. Essa rappresenta un cuneo separatore, razzialmente differenziatosi tra entrambi i contendenti, con particolari caratteristiche, maggiormente sviluppate dall’ambiente locale, in cui esso si evolvette.*

³⁵ A. Festa, *Ulteriori considerazioni sugli avvenimenti dello scacchiere nordico*, “Geopolitica”, Year III, No. 10, October 31st 1941: 486–489.

three countries into a defensive alliance. It would be possible to read in this an interpretation of political and strategic Soviet directives which is quite different from the one in the “Geopolitica” editorial *A chi il Baltico* from June 1939 which was previously mentioned. In fact, the Russian expansion was presented then as both a mere sequel to the tsarist interests over the Baltic region and as a mandatory consequence of “natural” dynamics according to Ratzel’s concept. On the other hand, two years later the accent was thrown on policy as a stubborn expansion intending to spread all over the whole Baltic area, based on blackmail against smaller neighbour countries, which was opportunely prevented by the Axis:

On this occasion too (meaning because of the obligation to de-militarise the Finnish archipelago of Aland, October 1940) the Soviet diplomacy followed what could be called the policy of progressive extortions, using and abusing the blackmailing systems so dear to it, the very same it attempted to use towards Germany and which resulted in a known situation: the Axis action prevented the Soviet Union’s attempt to achieve its hegemonic design, with the ambition of conquering Finland only its small part and a necessary prerequisite³⁶.

The interest towards the Baltic region continued in November and December 1941 with two articles respectively about three Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia³⁷ which were by then “de-Sovietised”, and about other Nordic states of Sweden, Norway and Denmark³⁸. In both, the Baltic basin is described as a “Nordic Mediterranean”, symmetrically opposed to the real one, defined as seven times smaller. From a political point of view, an anti-Soviet function of these states is pointed out. In particular, Estonia gets the geopolitical role of a barrier against the Russian expansion in the Baltic area, after the primary one, which is really Finland³⁹. Morandi’s praise of Finland is expressed yet again in assigning this state a role of a guide of the entire Baltic region: “Perhaps in the future it could be Finland, which is neither of German or Slavic race, and which is dynamic especially at its eastern borders, the one to have a directional role in all

³⁶ Article quoted, in note 26, p. 489: *La diplomazia sovietica anche in questa occasione (cioè per l’obbligo a demilitarizzare l’arcipelago finlandese delle Aland, ottobre 1940) seguì quella che potrebbesi chiamare la politica delle estorsioni progressive, usando e abusando di quei sistemi ricattatori che le erano tanto cari, gli stessi che tentò di usare nei riguardi della Germania con quel risultato che ci è noto: l’azione dell’Asse ha sventato il tentativo dell’Unione Sovietica di realizzare il suo disegno egemonico del quale le ambizioni di conquista nei riguardi della Finlandia, non costituivano che una piccola parte e un necessario presupposto.*

³⁷ M. Morandi, *Appunti per una geopolitica degli stati nordici. II° L’Estonia, la Lettonia, la Lituania*, “Geopolitica”, Year III, No. 11, November 30th 1941: 543–549.

³⁸ M. Morandi, *Appunti per una geopolitica degli stati nordici. La Svezia, la Norvegia e la Danimarca* “Geopolitica”, Year III, No. 12, December 31st 1941: 587–593.

³⁹ Art. quoted, in note 28, p. 545.

of the Baltic block”⁴⁰. Such credit to the Finnish state is not surprising considering that among sovereign states in the Baltic, in 1941 this one was the biggest among those openly sided with the Axis.

With the disappearance of Poland as a sovereign state, the periodical did not have any more geopolitical interest towards it. However, it still held some interest from an economic point of view. In fact, as the Axis advanced towards east, Poland’s territory annexed to the Reich and the area included in the General Government of Poland are recognised by “Geopolitica” as a rear zone functional to Germany’s interests in an article by Armando Troni within the “Goeconomia” section of the last 1941 issue⁴¹. Topics similar to the fluvial viability are mentioned in September and October 1939 issues, when Poland – which was about to be disbanded as a political entity – was still an independent country. However, towards the end of 1941 the accent is placed on the previous Polish government’s inertia, especially when it comes to development works on the Vistula river as a navigation route, opposed to a big project of reorganisation of fluvial waters in central and eastern Europe promoted by the Reich government, both in order to connect industrial and commercial centres and to favour agriculture through irrigation, and to facilitate the transport of timber from nearby woods. Five fluvial regions were distinguished, most important of them being the Vistula river basin with its valley tributaries. A grandiose plan of connecting the river with Bug and Dnieper is envisioned through canals built by the “great German Reich”, especially considering “a better arrangement and a larger development which both meet the needs of a new European asset”⁴². In this case, it is implicitly a given that the Axis shall win the war, therefore a functional network of water courses would have been “a noticeable contribution from nature itself to a rapid organisation of rear areas of an extremely large front”⁴³.

Old and new project for Central-Eastern and Baltic Europe

Such a plan of development of fluvial routes – similar to what the periodical published on the topic even in 1939 – corresponds to an intention to extend communications through internal water from the Baltic to the Black Sea, contributing to an economic recovery of the whole microregion facing the isthmus between these two seas. At the end, it was a project quite similar to the Trimarium announced in 2015 by Croatia and Poland’s presidents Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović

⁴⁰ Art. quoted, in note 29, p. 593.

⁴¹ A. Troni, *Le comunicazioni nelle retrovie del fronte orientale. Le vie fluviali del Governatorato Generale di Polonia e nei territori ex polacchi annessi alla Germania*, “Geopolitica”, Year III, No. 12, December 31st 1941: 594–598.

⁴² Art. quoted, in note 32, p. 594.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

and Andrzej Duda, aiming to connect through internal routes the Baltic, the Black Sea and the Adriatic⁴⁴. In 1939–1941 the attention was focused on fluvial routes – and there was only marginal interest for the railroad development between the carbon basin of Silesia and the Baltic – while today the goal is to reinforce road axis along the north-south route (Zieliński 2017: 94–95), even though the intention to intensify commercial traffic on this axis is unchanged. Such development of connections auspicated by “Geopolitica” can relate much more to today’s Trimarium than to the Intermarium project envisioned by Józef Piłsudski in the 1920s. The latter was supposed to be a defensive alliance and a deterrent from aggression towards countries between the Baltic and the Black Sea by the two main powers from central and eastern Europe: Germany and Russia (Soviet Union at the time). When it comes to today’s Trimarium, the controversy is in the fact that economic goals prevail over those openly political of a reinforcement of states along the Baltic–Black Sea axis that was supposed to hold back the western EU countries on one side and Russia on the other⁴⁵. In “Geopolitica”, the development programme of fluvial communications in the

⁴⁴ For a review of the projected north-south route axis, Żurawski vel Grajewski (2017: 109–111).

⁴⁵ For a primarily political meaning of the Trimarium, see C. Mutti (2017). According to this author, the Trimarium’s goal – conceived by the Obama administration and inaugurated by Trump on July 6th 2017 during his visit to Warsaw – from an economic point of view is to limit the Russian gas exports to Europe by favouring the natural gas exports from America through the Baltic port of Świnoujście and other terminals, including in Croatia. This way, the macroregion between three seas would have been reinforced through energy ties alongside military ones [the countries of the Trimarium are almost all NATO members], and tied more to Washington than to Brussels and Berlin. This led to a *de facto* breaking point of the EU, that by involving Ukraine in the Trimarium tightened a sanitary cordon alongside Russian borders. While Zieliński is a supporter of a merely economic role, he sees the Trimarium – in contrast to the Intermarium which was conceived in order to front a bilateral threat of Germany and the Soviet Union – as something that should not exist by opposition to a similar double threat. On the contrary, it was supposedly created in order to operate within the EU and not to satisfy interests external to it (ivi, p. 97). However, according to the author, Zieliński’s opinion that the Trimarium is not “against” anyone is not common. In fact, if the countries involved in the project need to build and implement infrastructures “that allow foreign gas and petrol imports by diversifying supply sources” (ivi, p. 95) – meaning from the USA too and not almost exclusively from Russia anymore, it is difficult to imagine a peaceful acceptance by the Eurasian power of an inevitable decrease in gas exports towards Europe. For an interpretation of the Trimarium as an anti-Russian but not anti-western barrier (Ilari 2017: 99–106). For a Trimarium considered not to be a merely lobbying project under Poland’s guidance aiming to give more value to the Visegrád countries, the Baltic ones and Balkan countries within the EU (Vitale 2017: 175–180).

large area between the two seas is described as a mere economic project, detached from political goals. In fact, at the time this macroregion was either integrated into the Reich or administered by it, or otherwise in an entirely exploitable territory, thus creating a large European space integrated into an entity without potential rivals who could contend it, not in western Europe, nor in the east in communist Russia. In fact, at the end of 1941 “Geopolitica”, along with Axis governments, predicted a certain war victory even if it was not to happen immediately as it was popularly believed months before, thus creating a new European order without rivals to the east and west. However, the Italian periodical does not mention anything regarding the plan to also “Germanise” demographically the Baltic area and the huge hinterland between it and the Black Sea. Its situation, as it is largely recognised today⁴⁶, would have produced a division on an alleged racial basis between the German *Herrenvolk* and the Slavic *Untermensch*, where the latter could have lived only as work force benefitting the superior German race.

If we should draw some conclusions between the experiences from the past and those of today which are to develop in future, and beyond the monstrosity of Hitler’s plans which were never acknowledged by “Geopolitica”, not in 1941 and not in the following year after they had been reshaped⁴⁷, we can see two characteristics shared by all three of them. First, even though for different reasons the declared projects were not realised, despite the fact that it is premature to evaluate the Trimarium today; secondly, all of them were aiming to separate Russia in the east from the rest of Europe.

⁴⁶ Already in May 1941, Hitler had decided to starve the entire Soviet population which was considered useless to the Reich. Therefore, 30 million north-western citizens of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine cities should have been eliminated in winter 1941–1942. Cities and industries would have been destroyed and their farmlands, now abandoned, turned into natural forests. On the contrary, the large spaces of fertile Ukraine would have been used for the sustenance of the German population. In regard to this (Snyder 2011: 194–198). Regarding the project to starve the populations of conquered territories it is useful to see Hitler’s order to Göring of May 23rd, 1941 which says not to do anything to save the population from starvation following the famine that would have been the consequence of the destruction of the occupied region’s productive structures (Read, Fisher 1989: 675).

⁴⁷ In summer 1941, Hitler’s intentions were focused on four points: 1) destruction of the USSR within a few months, 2) a rapid starvation for 30 million people considered useless to the Reich’s interests, 3) elimination of Jews after the war was over, 4) downgrading the western Soviet Union to a German colony. However, once it was clear that points 1, 2 and 4 could not be accomplished shortly, the German priority was to eliminate the Jewish population already during the war: a definitive solution that was to be accomplished without the intermediate passage of enslaving the Jews (Snyder 2011: 223–224).

Conclusions

After the end of 1941, the periodical ceased studies about the Polish territory and the Baltic area⁴⁸. This is a comprehensible omission considering that the Axis' victory over the eastern front – which was given for certain two or three months from the beginning of Barbarossa operation – was still far from reality in winter of that year. The Soviet Union did not disintegrate⁴⁹ or would proceed to do so following offensive actions which came afterwards. Therefore, neither the eastern front which in 1942 kept swallowing men and resources of the Axis without giving decisive results, nor the rear Baltic fronts and the General Polish Government could be a truly interesting topic for geopolitical studies within “Geopolitica”, which was strictly fascist-oriented and without any mistrust or aversion towards the German ally.

Furthermore, when it came to Poland and the Baltic area, the periodical failed to provide innovative proposals in the geopolitical sector, contrary to what its initial programming manifesto had announced in January 1939. The impression that can be derived today while reading the articles on this topic is that the editorial board and the authors limited themselves to acknowledging the situation and its evolution from 1939 to 1941, but without suggesting or indicating any guidelines for the political actors. What inhibited a major dynamism, which was only theorised but unexpressed, were the sudden geostrategic changes that Mussolini's regime was not able to control or that the Italian geopolitics could foresee, as it was always Germany who dictated the rules while Italy was relegated to accepting facts. This way the Soviet Union, once an ideological and political enemy *par excellence* of the anti-communist dictatorships, after the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact became Germany's “ally” and therefore was not to be openly opposed anymore. This produced an analysis of the Winter War distinguished by a certain dose of embarrassment because Finland – the recipient of “Geopolitica's” (and more generally, Italy's) sympathy which was impossible to hide – was supported by Great Britain and France, potential enemies for Italy. Therefore, the Soviet Union was indicated as the aggressor country until the end of the Winter War, despite the fact that it was fully supported by Germany. Afterwards, following the encounter between Hitler and Mussolini at the Brenner Pass on March 18th, 1940 that mended the fracture between Germany and Italy, “Geopolitica” perceived that the USSR could no longer be the target of open critique, not even after the

⁴⁸ With the exception of Morandi's article, *Stoccolma*, “Geopolitica”, Year IV, No. 10, October 31st, 1942: 443–453. An analysis of the position of the city and its communication routes whose extent was mainly local, and the capital of the only neutral state of the region, which was not occupied by the Axis, and without contemplating a larger geopolitical vision.

⁴⁹ As it was bitterly observed by a German general already in September 1941 (Snyder 2011: 202).

disappearance of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as sovereign states, engulfed by the “Russian bear”. A new turnaround happened with the Barbarossa operation. In its aftermath, the Soviet Union became the loathed Bolshevik enemy, even though in this case the lack of victory in a brief war after the end of 1941 would have made embarrassing the attempt to treat this rear front as a region integrated into a new European order. If we should draw final conclusions regarding the directives of the periodical in the matter of these European regions which were far from immediate Italian interests, there are two possible observations.

Firstly, “Geopolitica” detached itself from the guidelines adopted by Mussolini’s government in a couple of cases and thus confirmed its own partial judgement autonomy which was not always following blindly the government’s positions. This can be seen at first in not defining Poland as an almost “Latin” country, an expression dear to Italian institutions and culture, which saw Poland as a sort of a wedge between the German and the Slavic worlds. On the contrary, “Geopolitica” pointed out mostly its negative aspects, meaning the lack of initiative and technological weakness. It could also be perceived when the Winter War failed to highlight the fracture of the Pact of Steel between Italy and Germany, caused by the German consent to the Soviet aggression of Finland. In both cases “Geopolitica” emerged more pro-Germany than the fascist government itself, by avoiding both a cultural valorisation of Poland when it was crushed by Germany and also avoiding any critique towards Hitler in view of his benevolent acquiescence towards the Soviet attack on Finland. This is a guideline that was really a counter-trend compared to the rest of Italy’s mood, when aversion to Germany was a largely generalised feeling in the public opinion and was also shared by many hierarchs of the Mussolinian regime, in a period when dissent towards the USSR as a communist country was tolerated, but not towards Nazi Germany whose regime was affiliated with the fascist one. In order to understand the pervasiveness of these feelings it is useful to take a look at Ciano’s diary which shows sentiments not even mentioned in “Geopolitica”.

The Italian population is becoming increasingly anti-German. Also, this growing wave of anti-Bolshevism is merely an anti-German thing. Finland’s destiny would be much more indifferent to Italians if Russians were not practically Germany’s allies” (December 3rd 1939). “In all the Italian cities there are students’ manifestations in favour of Finland and against Russia. Yet we should not forget that the people are shouting «death to Russia» and are really thinking «death to Germany»” (December 4th 1939)⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ *Il popolo italiano è sempre più antitedesco. Anche questa fioritura crescente di antibolscevismo è fatta soltanto in funzione antigermanica. La sorte dei finlandesi sarebbe molto più indifferente agli italiani, se i russi non fossero praticamente alleati della Germania (3 dicembre 1939). In tutte le città italiane scoppiettano qua e là manifestazioni di studenti in favore della Finlandia e contro la Russia. Ma non bisogna dimenticare che la gente grida “morte alla Russia” e pensa “morte alla Germania” (4 dicembre 1939).*

Secondly, the Italian periodical ignored entirely the destructive goals of genocide pursued by the Nazi on territories conquered in 1939 and 1941. Such procedures were presented as aseptic territorial reorganisation prior to the realisation of a new order within the dominion of the Reich, despite the acquisition of *Lebensraum* which was obtained through enslavement of entire populations, mass deportations and extermination of unwelcome populations, by applying secret plans which were revealed following these invasions (Vitale 2013: 114).

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Bałtyk jako morze śródziemne Północy. Region Bałtycki i Polska w periodyku „Geopolitica” (1939–1942)

Zarys treści: W styczniu 1939 roku ukazał się pierwszy numer włoskiego magazynu „Geopolitica”, który wydawany był co miesiąc do 1942 roku. Założony został w środowisku naukowym Triestu przez dwóch geografów – Giorgio Roletto (1885–1967) i Ernesto Massiego (1909–1997), którzy zostali odpowiednio redaktorem naczelnym i współredaktorem. Magazyn inspirowany był niemieckim czasopiśmie „Zeitschrift für Geopolitik” Karla Haushofera. Jednak w podejściu do kwestii geopolitycznych zastosowano własne podstawy koncepcyjne, całkowicie odmienne od tych w geopolityce niemieckiej. W zamyśle założycieli „Geopolitica” powinna była przyczynić się do ponownej oceny szkolnej dydaktyki geografii i wspierać imperialistyczną politykę reżimu Mussoliniego, chociaż nigdy nie musiała odgrywać znaczącej roli w polityce rządzącej Włochami. Nigdy nawet nie uzyskała pełnego uznania ze strony akademickiego środowiska geograficznego, które w rzeczywistości odmówiło geopolityce cech autonomii naukowej.

Najczęściej poruszonymi problemami w tym magazynie były basen Morza Śródziemnego, Bałkany i Afryka, regiony bliskie włoskim interesom geostrategicznym; ale było też ostrożne zainteresowanie Polską, uważaną za w pełni zintegrowaną z niemieckim „Lebensraumem”. Można zatem powiedzieć, że „Geopolitica” podchodziła do tego tematu z pewną powściągliwością, a także ze swoistą czcią wobec niemieckiego

sojusznika, który był także „konkurencją”, pomimo faktu, że na jego terytorium przez całe cztery lata obserwowano wydarzenia strategiczne i polityczne o najwyższym znaczeniu.

Z drugiej strony uwaga skierowana na region bałtycki była wolna od jakichkolwiek uwarunkowań. Był on postrzegany jako swoisty „nordycki region Morza Śródziemnego”, pożądany zarówno przez Niemców, jak i Sowieców, a także jako obiekt pożądania państw, które chciały bronić trudnej neutralności w wojnie szalejącej w Europie.

Słowa kluczowe: geopolityka włoska, region bałtycki, podboje terytorialne.

Antonio Violante
University of Milan, Italy
Institute of Human Geography
e-mail: antonio.violante1@unimi.it