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**Józef M. Fiszer, Tomasz Stępniewski,
Konrad Świder, *Polska - Ukraina -
Białoruś - Rosja. Obraz politycznej
dynamiki regionu*, Institute of Political
Studies of the Polish Academy
of Sciences, Warsaw 2019, pp. 251**

Review

Recent years have witnessed increasing interest of researchers and international observers on issues concerning geopolitics. The renaissance in this branch of knowledge is related, among others, to the destabilized situation in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. Problems of the security of Eastern Europe are particularly important for our country, Poland. Last year, a book entitled *Polska-Ukraina-Białoruś-Rosja. Obraz geopolitycznej dynamiki regionu*, authored by Józef M. Fiszer, Tomasz Stępniewski and Konrad Świder, was intended to familiarise its readers with those complex conditions and relations, and much more. It should be noted that the authors are renowned researchers with a substantial record of investigating history, politics and changes within Central and Eastern Europe. In 2017, Józef M. Fiszer and Tomasz

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Stępniewski published a well-received work entitled *Polska i Ukraina w procesie transformacji, integracji i wyzwań dla bezpieczeństwa Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*.¹ As a result, their most recent publication may be seen as a certain reference to that text and analyzing the issues undertaken there more deeply. The content of the book in question clearly suggests that the authors analyzed the available materials in further detail.

The entire publication is composed of an introduction, six chapters, conclusions, summaries in Polish and Russian, a list of sources and an index of persons.

The introductory section features, among others, one of the main theses of the entire book. It briefly describes the process of changing the attitude of NATO and EEC members, later on also of the EU, towards Russia: “The West initially supported Russia, especially in the matter of ‘gathering’ post-Soviet atomic weaponry. It was mainly the problem of the USA, which was troubled by the issue of controlling such armament. In time, the West turned towards supporting other post-Soviet countries and their attempts to liberate themselves from the influence of the Russian Federation. As for Russia, CIS became a platform of multidimensional (re)integration of the post-Soviet area and a large geopolitical buffer.”² In my opinion, the quoted fragment is crucial as it provides a kind of a background for analyzing further specific events. The authors managed to summarise the goals and strategies of Russia and the widely understood West over the last thirty or so years in just a few sentences.

The first chapter is entitled “Positive and negative experience of Poland during the accession to the European Union. Model solutions for Ukraine.” It briefly presents the path of Poland joining the European Union and NATO. It is duly noted that the success of European integration resulted from the efforts of the entire nation, not only the political class. Simultaneously, the main goal was to outline the Polish efforts in the context of the Ukrainian pro-European aspirations and difficulties with fulfilling them.

- 1 J.M. Fiszer, T. Stępniewski, *Polska i Ukraina w procesie transformacji, integracji i wyzwań dla bezpieczeństwa Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Warszawa 2017.
- 2 J.M. Fiszer, T. Stępniewski, K. Świder, *Polska – Ukraina – Białoruś – Rosja. Obraz geopolitycznej dynamiki regionu*, Warszawa 2019, pp. 10-11.

In the second chapter, the authors analyze “The premises and the development of political relations between Poland and Russia in the years 2000-2014.” The objective is to investigate the bilateral relations, the political dialogue on the background of internal conditions and the international situation.³ The academic character of such analyses needs to be highlighted. The authors refer to, among others, the theories of international relations, such as neorealism and constructivism. In the chapter summary, the authors justly highlight the weakness of the Polish policy towards Russia in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century. It largely stems from the reactionary character of its Eastern aspects.

The third part of the book is entitled “Polish policy towards Ukraine: geopolitics, strategic partnership, security.” It encompasses the entire period of relations with our Eastern neighbour. It describes in detail the milestones in Ukrainian politics. During the Orange Revolution, the Euromaidan and the Kiev unrest, the Polish party played an active role in the attempts of stabilising its neighbour and helping them settle down on the path of democracy and westernisation. Next to presenting the function of Poland in those events, the authors aimed at analysing the broadly understood evolution of our country’s policy towards Ukraine.⁴

Chapter four discusses the policy of Ukraine in the international setting, referred to as “the environment of danger.” The main research question faced by the authors is the issue of the direction of the foreign policy of this country, “Whether it is oriented towards Europe or Russia?”⁵

The penultimate section of the book analyses the Russian attitude towards Ukraine after the downfall of the Soviet Union. Those countries became the largest entities size-wise that emerged after the disintegration of that empire. However, Russia became the formal successor of the USSR. The weight of the relations between the two countries is a result of various factors, potentials, and divergent goals of their foreign policies. Apart from the neoimperialist Russian poli-

3 Ibidem, p. 55.

4 Ibidem, p. 86.

5 Ibidem, p. 116.

tics, those difficult relations were also affected by the Crimean issue and the question of the Russian minority in Ukraine.⁶

The sixth part of the book is entitled “Belarus in the Russian politics during the presidency of Vladimir Putin.” It is a medium-sized country and its relationships with its neighbors are rarely subjects of deeper analyses. It is not the right approach, as the authors state at the very beginning of the discussed chapter: “The relations of Belarus and Russia are crucial for the contemporary distribution of power in Europe, and their geopolitical context requires further attention.”⁷ Moreover, the description of the history of Belarus itself, the fate of which was slightly different from those of other post-Soviet countries ever since the perestroika, should be noticed.

The book ends with “Conclusions,” where the authors highlight, among others, the increased activity of Russia on the international scene and the determination of this country to establish its dominance within the post-Soviet Eurasia.⁸ On a global scale, it aims at a concerto of superpowers, very unfavorable for smaller players, including Poland. Simultaneously, the dynamics of the changes within the observed areas do not allow for presenting any forecasts, neither possible nor probable.

In those six chapters, the authors managed to show a series of complex political and geopolitical relations in the region, also encompassing our country, Poland. The book is of indisputably academic character. Aside from the fact-based layer that familiarises the general audience with the discussed events, it also bears a significant explanatory value. The authors deeply analyze the events and present their, often complex, causes and effects, both for bilateral relations and the mosaic of international political relations in the region and within the global powerplay.

6 More on the roots of geopolitics and imperialism of Russia in papers by Konrad Świder: K. Świder, ‘Od imperium do geopolityki: rosyjskie geopolityczne racjonalizacje Rosji’, in: J. Staniszkis, W. Marciniak, K. Świder, *Sekularyzacja myślenia politycznego w Rosji, przejście od religijnej idei, właściwego istnienia” do koncepcji imperium i geopolityki*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 123-190. The issue of the modern political discourse of Russia and its roots is broadly discussed also by: W. A. Gutorow, ‘O niektórych aspektach kształtowania dyskursu polityczno-filozoficznego we współczesnej Rosji’, in: E. Jeliński et al., *Political Science, Politische Wissenschaft i Politologija. Antologia tekstów*, Poznań 2017, pp. 131-145.

7 J.M. Fiszer, T. Stępniewski, K. Świder, *Polska – Ukraina – Białoruś – Rosja...*, p. 189.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 210.

The content of the book demonstrates the deep knowledge and scientific engagement of the authors. The theses they propose are a highly desirable added value. Outlining the processes within the broad temporal, geographical and geopolitical framework is also significant. The references to geopolitics, which, as I mentioned before, undergo a certain renaissance, are also a huge benefit and a determinant of the book's contemporary validity.

The long list of sources is evidence of the authors' erudition. The entirety is clearly divided into chapters and subchapters, all described in detail. Such a structure enables both reading the book from cover to cover and selecting the fragments of interest. Another advantage of the book is the comprehensive language used therein.

Such in-depth analyses bore the fruit of objective postulates on determining the Polish foreign policy. Those fragments are especially useful for all politicians and institutions handling this issue. The publication may, therefore, be recommended to fellow academics, students, people interested in the history and politics of the region, as well as the already mentioned analysts and policymakers.