

Review: Poland's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century / ed. by Stanisław Bieleń

Gretsky, Igor V.

Postprint / Postprint

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Gretsky, I. V. (2012). Review: Poland's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century / ed. by Stanisław Bieleń. [Review of the book *Poland's foreign policy in the 21st century*, ed. by S. Bieleń]. *Baltic Region*, 4, 120-123. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2012-4-13>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den DiPP-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a Free Digital Peer Publishing Licence. For more information see: <http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

REVIEWS



POLAND'S FOREIGN POLICY

**Poland's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century / ed. by Stanisław Bieleń.
Warsaw: Difin, 2011. 462 S.**

In the recent years, perhaps, the only comprehensive research on the issues of modern Poland's foreign policy published in the English language was the monograph entitled *Poland's Foreign Policy After 1989* by Prof Roman Kuźniar, the advisor to the President of Poland for international affairs. The book was published in 2006 and soon gained popularity among specialists in international relations and diplomats, as well as at universities both in Poland and abroad. It offered the author's periodization of Poland's foreign policy since the 1980s based on Poland's achievement of certain objectives in the international arena. Prof Roman Kuźniar paid special attention to the description and analysis of the Polish accession to NATO and the EU.

The monograph under review is a fundamentally new study into current Polish foreign policy. Firstly, this publication follows the problem focusing on solving the most complicated and topical problems of foreign policy. Secondly, despite the fact that the monograph is co-authored by several contributors, all of them agree that the turning point in Poland's foreign policy was the year 2004, when the country entered the European Union and faced a new political situation. Of course, this circumstance requires further examination and analysis. Thirdly, while giving credit to certain Poland's achievements in the field of international relations, the authors pay significant attention to the system problems of Poland's foreign policy and offer new solutions and alternatives.

One of such problems is the axiological dimension of current Poland's foreign policy. The authors emphasise that the Polish identity undergoes significant changes after the country's accession to the EU. It embraces both national and European values. However, a part of national values hampers the formation of the European identity in Polish society. These are the remnants of the romantic spirit peculiar to medieval Polish nobility, of the exaggerated attention to the historical policy, and the prejudices against the neighbouring peoples and states, which contradict the liberal values of modern Europe. Indeed, this contradiction often affects Poland's performance in the international arena. Romanticism and a lack of pragmatism result in ill-conceived actions. Moreover, Poland's foreign policy is permeated with the idea of messianism and the perception of the country as an outpost of western traditions and values in Central and Eastern Europe. Some right-wing parties cash in on these sentiments and reproduce ideologies that can hardly be harmonised with the current circumstances. Historical policy is overly

emphasised, which results in the image of Poland as an independent, strong, and proud country that treats neighbours with suspicion. In effect, this image is a product of the history of relations between Poland and its neighbours — Russia and Germany. But the authors are right to emphasise that, today, Poland — being a part of the EU and NATO, as well as other international structures — faces a fundamentally different situation, whose advantages should be made use of so that the country can improve its standing in the world.

The problems impeding an effective foreign policy include, according to the study, the propensity of officials to take impromptu actions and improvise in international affairs, considerable discrepancies in the views of political parties on the foreign policy agenda, and the failure of Polish diplomacy to form a coalition to support their initiatives with the EU. The book pays special attention to the lack of highly qualified staff in the structures of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After 1989, Poland inherited a pool of highly trained diplomats; however, the ensuing staff reshuffled negatively affected professional potential of the agency. Even today, the appointment of a new minister of foreign affairs is accompanied, as a rule, by numerous other appointments. Moreover, the quality of Polish foreign policy also depends on the salaries at the ministry, which, being the lowest in the EU, cannot attract talented young people.

Despite the existing problems, Polish scholars register a certain improvement of the image of Poland in the international arena. First of all, it is a result of rather good economic performance of the country. Over the recent years, the growth of Polish GDP has been significantly higher than that of the EU GDP, which allows Poland to reduce the gap between its level of economic development and that of the West. However, the authors emphasise that the GDP growth rate may slow down in the future, since it is a result of rather low production cost of manufactured goods and services. In this connection, the authors formulate the ambitious task of creating external conditions for retaining the high level of economic growth against the background of rebalancing the economy towards hi-tech production.

The major regional priority of Poland's foreign policy is the EU. At this level, the country managed to achieve certain positive results. In particular, Warsaw made a significant contribution to promoting "Eastern partnership" and the issues of energy security on the EU agenda.

However, the book describes more cases of Polish diplomacy suffering image and reputation losses. Often it is a result of inconsistency and inability to look for compromise solutions together with the EU partners, as well as the application of "double standards". So, Warsaw often appeals to Brussels to show solidarity when it comes to Polish interests (Northern Stream) and ignores the solidarity principles when Poland must make concessions (the distribution of financial burden to help developing countries carry out reforms aimed at environmental protection).

The authors believe that a more successful foreign policy in the EU will require Warsaw to coordinate its actions with Germany. They emphasise that, in the today's EU, no decision is ever made without Berlin's approval. Even the success of the Eastern Partnership largely depends on German sup-

port. Thus, Poland has to cease building a coalition of smaller European countries around itself, since Polish initiatives are often treated in Berlin with a degree of distrust. Moreover, it is recommended that the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopt the German practices of using “soft power” tools. Indeed, there are dozens of German NGOs operating in Poland, whereas there are just a few Polish organisations of the kind in Germany. However, one must admit that, at the moment, the country does not have enough financial opportunities to develop a comparable network of these institutions.

The authors direct sharp criticism against Polish foreign policy towards the USA. First of all, it relates to the “no-alternative” pursuit of Washington’s policies pertaining to a number of issues of international security. A good example is the participation of the Polish military forces in the war in Iraq, as well as the unstinting support of the US plans to deploy a missile defence complex in Europe. Poland occupied a one-sided position ignoring the arguments of Russia and the EU, as well as the fact that the American initiative will not contribute to closer integration in the framework of NATO.

The authors of the monograph believe that the blind following of the US policy is an indicative of certain disorientation of Poland in the international arena. They insist that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pursue a more balanced policy towards the USA, since only the long-term cooperation with the EU can yield tangible results. Indeed, practice shows that Poland should avoid global conflicts without prior coordination of its position with Germany and France. It is the EU that can guarantee Poland security and welfare.

The monograph also pays attention to Russian-Polish relations (contributors: S. Bieleń, A. Szeptycki). For the first time over a rather long period, Russian-Polish relations got a chance of normalisation. The authors give a positive evaluation of the efforts of both countries towards coordinating their positions on a number of political and economic issues. Since 2010, Poland and Russia try to return to developing bilateral relations on the basis of mutual understanding and good will. However, the countries have to balance their values and interests and find a platform for dialogue and understanding.

Moreover, one can agree with the Polish colleagues that, today, Poland lacks a clear-cut foreign policy strategy towards Moscow; Warsaw’s policy is of pronounced reactive nature. At the same time, despite Polish membership in numerous western structures, a part of the Polish elites resort to fear-mongering rooted in geopolitical determinism when it comes to the eastern neighbour. Geopolitical determinism suggests that Russian attempts to occupy Poland will never cease. The authors of the monograph are right to believe that such logic is inconsistent and erroneous and results in the marginalisation of Poland in world politics. Moreover, it is indicative of a fundamental re-evaluation of modern Russia. In effect, Russian standing in Central and Eastern Europe has weakened over the recent years; even its closest allies — Armenia and Belarus — are urgently seeking a way to reduce their dependence on Moscow. Russia is not an enemy of Poland; it is also in need of dialogue with the EU on many issues. There is no other way for Moscow than convergence with the West, since only this way can provide Russia with the necessary modernisation catalysers — investment, technology, and stable sales markets.

The book gives a comprehensive overview of the discussion about the possibility of Russia's energy blackmail. The Polish scholars strive to dispel these fears and believe that there is a faint possibility of such scenario on Russian-Polish relations; they emphasise that natural gas processing accounts for only 12 % of Poland's energy needs. In total, approximately 20 % of Poland's energy needs are met through import, where Russia, however, plays the role of the lead partner. The Polish experts come to a conclusion that Warsaw has either to find an alternative energy supplier to stop the war of words with the monopolist regarding the North Stream and its other projects.

In conclusion, one cannot but mention that the research has been carried out at a high professional level, is up-to-date, and offers a high-quality analysis of the problems and promising lines of today's Poland's foreign policy. As the study shows, it is implemented with a varying degree of success and is at the stage of search for the most efficient ways of achieving goals in the international arena. However, one can say with assurance that, over the last 20 years, its dynamic and multivector policy helped Poland ensure a strong standing in Central and Eastern Europe and claim the status of a regional power, whose interests cannot be but taken into account. Thus the book can be recommended not only to specialists in the field of international relations and polonists, but also politicians and diplomats.

I. V. Gretskey

About the author

Dr Igor V. Gretskey, Associate Professor, Faculty of International Relations, Saint Petersburg State University (Russia).

E-mail: gretskiy@rambler.ru