

BOOK REVIEW

MARCIN W. SOLARZ (ed.), *Atlas of Poland's Political Geography, Geopolitical Atlas, 2018, University of Warsaw*

Marcin Wojciech Solarz is a professor of Geography and vice-dean at the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies from the University of Warsaw. He is the author and editor of several important works in political geography and global studies, like "The Language of Global Development: A Misleading Geography" and "New Geographies of the Globalized World", both of them in the prestigious Routledge. His new recent project, under the national patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland, was dedicated to the political geography of the Polish state, one century after rebirth of modern Poland (1918-2018) and thirty years of regaining democracy (1988-2018).

The book combines political geographical analysis with the geopolitical consideration of one of the largest countries in the European Union, but also provides an excellent review of the current geography and policy of Eastern Europe, through a wide range of social, political and economic indicators for countries surrounding or related to Poland. The atlas has an introductory part, focusing on the original ideas about the state, its boundaries and location attributes and on the geopolitical concepts that establish Poland's role and position in Europe. These are

followed by a wide range of maps, from political to economic and cultural representations, in an outstanding cartographic condition.

Political Geography in Poland is one of the most visible in the scientific literature of this part of Europe. With a slightly longer history than the modern Polish state, the concepts developed in Polish political geography and geopolitics were strongly influenced by the **location** between two great European powers, Germany and Russia, and between Western and Eastern civilizations. The location is so important, that almost the entire book and analysis revolves around the concept. This position has been recognized as both a "geographical and historical fate" and a "director of life", giving the location the role of resource or constraint. This advantages or disadvantages have been accentuated by the lack of natural barriers to the East or to the West of Poland, which makes this space more open to change, but also more vulnerable. At the same time, Poland was viewed not in the middle of Russia and Germany, but in the center of Europe, with a tumultuous history. This history has been marked by the status of a regional power, of a partitioned state, two

times in two hundred years, and of a recent new regional emergent economy. The relative location gave Poland the role of an invasion route and a “barometer” of power relations between Germany and Russia: the state became a regional power when the two designated states were disorganized, defeated or eroded by internal conflicts or has disappeared at the time of the conflict or agreement between the two. Location has produced history and evolution is a product of location, between the centre and the periphery, as the margins of expanding empires.

The first part of the theoretical introduction is dedicated to that space and location in which Poland emerged, evolved, disappeared and reappeared on the European political map. As in other works by Marcin Solarz, the emphasis is on those geographical determinants that were the supporting pillars of the Polish state: Dnieper, Oder, Baltic Sea and Carpathians, limiting a space where the main geographical constant was Vistula River, as the most “faithful reflection” in the character of the Polish people. Wisła has always remained within the borders of the state and the capital Warsaw, central, while the territory had moved to east or west, between the Dnieper and the Elbe. If the last changes in the political configuration lasted since the World War Two, the new political map found Poland a stable country, while its neighbors, actors completely transformed: the new surrounding states emerged when communism collapsed and multinational federations disintegrated after 1989.

To describe the international environment in which Poland has evolved over a thousand years, the author identifies **three meta-concepts** associated

with the past and present East-West and North-South relations. The concepts initiated by important figure of Polish geography and political analysis argued that Poland was a transitional land (Wacław Nałkowski), a bridge country (Eugeniusz Romer) between the Baltic and Black Seas and a bulwark (Giedroyc-Mioszowski doctrine) of Western Christianity. All this provides a framework for a geographical explanation of foreign policy and of the role that Poland has played throughout European history: a transmission belt of Western civilization, a shield to Ottoman Islamic expansion and a pioneer of resistance against communism, and expansionism.

The second part of the book, the atlas itself, contains a wide range of high quality maps providing a large variety of projections and cartographic perspectives at different territorial scales and GIS techniques. The maps offer a wide range of geopolitical indicators and an excellent review of Eastern Europe. Each entry contains information and excellent representation of the territorial transformation of Europe, of Poland and Polish people (in Poland and abroad), geo-economic dependence, cultural and diplomatic relations, freedom of movement, political and social demography, electoral behavior and representation, collective perception and attitude towards supranational associations or public space, economic performance, etc.

Every country has its political geography, but there are is much in common between Romania and Poland, the only communist states without a direct physical border with the Western world. These historical and geographical similarities make this atlas more interesting for the Romanian readers. The two

states are not only the largest in the eastern part of the European Union, but also the ones that are in the front run of the new geopolitical context post 2008. The shift in Russia's geopolitical actions in the first decade of this millennium, finds the two countries in the centre of the new containment policy and the geopolitical location become strategic for both the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance, as the outer limits of the two supranational organizations. Many associations can be made in the geography, politics and history of the two countries, and the subject remains open to a careful analysis of the European course of the two states. It can also be a remarkable model for analyzing Romania's political geography.

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