Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine - Facing the Challenges of the Contemporary World

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Summary

In 1990 came the break-up of the Warsaw Pact, a political-military alliance of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and with it came the break-up of the bloc system. Soon after, in 1991, follows the break-up of the USSR, which gives birth to a new arrangement of geopolitical power in Europe. New premises, new rules, but what is most important – new players on the political arena. These turbulent changes in the structure of international relations bring about the rebirth of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, which, in turn, triggers changes of the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe. Undergoing constant changes, the new distribution of political powers has not yet been established. In other words, a competition for power still takes place on the political arenas of Eastern Europe and its outcome will determine not only the shape of the political systems in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova but will also set course for their foreign policies. The choice of the foreign policy by the countries of the Eastern Europe is determined not only by their internal affairs but also by the quality of their relations with Russia and western countries. It very often means than the foreign policies with the West are shaped, as it were, “in Russia’s shadow”.

The 21st century brings more problems and threats, particularly for the sovereign states. On the one hand, the changes in the international relations, also in Europe, make the contemporary Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine “a stake in the game” played by the parties interested. On the other hand, they become buffer states between the West and the East.

The expansion of the European Union to the east triggered changes in the political and cultural borders of Europe. After the EU accepted the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary in 2004 and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, Belarus, Moldova Ukraine and Russia became the EU’s eastern neighbours. This gave rise to a new strategic area called the New Eastern Europe.
The notion of New Eastern Europe in the contemporary arrangement of power on this territory encompasses the ex-Russian republics of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine—countries which, as a result of the geopolitical changes that took place in 2004–2007, are now between the EU and the increasingly assertive Russian Federation. The fact that Ukraine is treated by Russia like a subordinate, even with hostility, and the long period of stagnation followed by the growing activity of the EU have brought about a myriad of challenges that Ukraine, but also Belarus and Moldova, will have to face. By correctly recognizing and reacting to the threats which come from both the internal conditions of the country and the international political arena, these countries can offset the disadvantageous arrangement of powers, even benefit from their geopolitical position and current situation by thinking ahead.

For analytical purposes the book is divided into four parts. Part one presents the activities and difficulties connected with the transformations of Eastern Europe: the current condition, challenges, susceptibility of these countries to external factors and the specification of the region. To what extent has the heritage of the soviet era influenced the current situation of these states? To what extent can their transformation, though long-lasting and difficult, bring about a change of their political systems? Also references were made to the nationalisms and conflicts as factors that can potentially and realistically destabilize the internal situation of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, as well as that of the entire region. What are the goals of other political players, primarily Russia’s, that are interested in this region? By what means are they realizing these goals? The issue of economic challenges to the region is also addressed here. Is the international financial/economic crisis a threat or rather an opportunity? It is a chance because without it the process of restructuring the economies in these countries would not be possible. It is a threat, as the crisis becomes an open door for the flow of Russian capital onto these countries’ markets, thus increasing their economic and political dependence. Is it possible for the Eastern Europe to free itself from the energetic dependency from Russia in the nearest future? Also, the characteristic of these economies as a system of interconnected vessels (a remnant of the soviet era) should be mentioned. Are there any signals coming from other countries that there is a chance for the situation in the Eastern Europe’s economy to change?

The second part of the book deals with an attempt to analyze the factors which influence the security policy of Eastern Europe as well as the concepts of security policy and the challenges concerning security which Eastern Europe will have to face. Is the “security void” in which the other Eastern European countries exist affecting the Atlantic direction of foreign policy, or is this role of this particular factor marginalized? Is the Atlantic direction just another slogan which has nothing to do with actual shaping of Ukraine’s, Moldova’s and Belarus’ policies, both internal and foreign? Or maybe quite on the contrary? The issue of military security, as well the notion of so called “soft threats” to the region and other countries’ security, has been addressed.
Part three of the book deals with (1) the complex subject of religion, i.e. multiple religions in the countries of Eastern Europe, (2) the historical heritage and its importance: the problems of the soviet era, *homo sovieticus*, and (3) the influence of the long-lasting russification of the region. In this part the book also the tensions between politics and religion, and politics and history are shown, including the challenges Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus face on the European political arena. The geopolitical changes that have taken place in Central-Eastern Europe moved the “iron curtain” of the Cold War era further east, thus creating the possibility that a new, “glass curtain” will be drawn on the borders of the Slavic countries. Is such a state of affairs an outcome of Russia’s effective policy of driving away the EU or is it caused by the cultural-civilizational background of these countries? Are these countries willing to change the state of their internal affairs and redirect their foreign policies to the euro-Atlantic zone?

Part four of this book is to help establish whether or not there is a possibility of integrating East Europe with the EU. Does the faltering position of Russia in the area of “immediate abroad” become a chance for the EU to take its place? Several important problems should be mentioned here, namely: the efficacy of the EU’s new foreign policy, whether Eastern Partnership, targeted at the EU’s eastern neighbours, can bring about a change of these countries’ position or if it is doomed to failure. Other questions also arise: are we witnessing an evolution of the policy of Russian Federation towards the countries which are the EU’s eastern neighbours? Are the methods and means employed by Russia to be regarded as signs of neo-imperial policy or are they a sign of going back to its “old policy” towards Eastern Europe? What are the chances for a change of Ukraine’s, Moldova’s and Belarus’ relations with Russia and the European Union?

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