

## **THE INFLUENCE OF GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRIES OF GREAT POWERS UPON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

The disintegration of the former Soviet Union in 1991 generated a real domino game with planetary effects, in which some independent state on the world map appeared. That fact drastically decreased the geopolitical influence of the Russian Federation, the true successor state of the USSR. The independent Ukraine diminished the influence of the Russian Federation in Europe. As Zbigniew Brzezinski remarked, "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. Russia without Ukraine can still strive for imperial status, but it would then become a predominantly Asian imperial state... However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine..., Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia"<sup>2</sup>.

The Russian Federation's geopolitical influence in Asia is mainly reduced by the emergence of some states in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan) and in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). By the emergence of the new independent states from the former USSR, the Russian Federation has lost, besides a number of key geostrategic positions, also some important demographic and economic resources.

With regard to the economic resources problem, we note that until 1991, the Soviet Union had exclusive access to the important economic resources (mainly hydrocarbon and minerals) of the states in Central Asia and in the Caucasus. After 1991, broke the first real competition between the Russian Federation, the US and China for control of economic resources (and not only) of the Central Asian states, and, on the other hand, another competition between the Russian Federation, USA and partially EU to control this type of resources (and not only) of the states in the South Caucasus.

In this competition, the Caspian Sea's area has gained a capital importance because from here, via the wider Black Sea's area, vast economic resources of Central Asia and Caucasus can reach Europe. Experts in geo-economics and geo-

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<sup>1</sup> Iulian Chifu, Narciz Bălăsoiu, Radu Arghir, *The East-West Black Sea – Caspian Sea Strategic Corridor*, Bucharest, The Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations' Publishing House, 2014, p. 250

<sup>2</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, Basic Books, 1997, p. 46.

strategy have popularized after 1991 the term of “the strategic Caspian-Black Sea corridor”, writing various books, studies and articles about this topic.

This is also the topic of this book, which we present to the reader. One of the authors of this book, Iulian Chifu, explains in *Foreword*, its ambitious goal. Thus, he states the following: “The East-West Caspian Sea – Black Sea Strategic Corridor is a book that tries to elaborate on a vision and a concept that is aimed at linking the land locked Central Asia with the border of EU and NATO, e.g. Romania, on the West shore of the Black Sea. The project that emerged from this concept is covering 5 tracks, some already under development as a natural consequence of the previous cooperation: energy, transport, military transport, investment and trade” (p. 6).

The authors of the book are trying to answer to this challenge over the 13 chapters with the following titles: *Changing the name of the game: From Chess to GO* (Iulian Chifu); *Why is Central Asia central to Eurasian Security* (Iulian Chifu); *The South Caucasus: Going with the Wind* (Iulian Chifu); *The East-West Caspian Sea – Black Sea Strategic Corridor. A concept, a vision and a project* (Iulian Chifu); *Georgia, a piece of the puzzle or the weak link of the Southern Corridor?* (Bogdan Nedeia); *Azerbaijan: an essential link on the East-West Black Sea – Caspian Sea Corridor* (Lavinia Lupu, Sabit Baghirov); *Turkmenistan – Enormous energy resources trapped in geopolitical clashes* (Narciz Bălășoiu); *Uzbekistan – the East end of the East-West Strategic Corridor* (Radu Arghir); *Republic of Kazakhstan and its Strategic Interest for the East-West Corridor* (Adriana Sauliuc); *The Turkish Link in the East-West Corridor* (Nigar Goksel); *Russia’s neighborhood policy – from a Russian perspective* (Bordei Ciprian); *The East-West Strategic Corridor: the Case of the Republic of Moldova* (Oazu Nantoi); *The East-West Strategic Corridor from Central Asia to Europe and Ukraine’s Interests* (Volodymyr Novorotsky).

We will present to the reader the essence of these chapters, so that, finally, our own conclusions on this book will be exposed.

Chapter 1 outlines a basic picture of the world’s geopolitical scene, shaped by the current US policy of focusing on the Asia-Pacific region not on the European regions, by the increase of economic power of China, by the complex issues related to hydrocarbon supply of the world’s states, by the global economic crisis and, finally, by Russia’s aggressive policy inclusively based on the usage of its military capacities. Ultimately, it is suggested the necessity of strengthening the economic cooperation between the EU and the US and the requirement of this state’s involvement in the problems generated by “the Eurasian Suppliers Belt” (i.e. the member supplying states of hydrocarbon from

the Persian Gulf, Middle East, Central Asia and Russia areas), in order to achieve a “peaceful development of the world on the road to globalization”. (p. 16)

In the next chapter is summarily but very accurate depicted the geopolitical picture of Central Asia, starting from presenting the main actors directly involved or only interested in problems of the region (Russia, the US, the EU and the Western Countries, China, Turkey, Iran, India) and getting to highlighting the main political/geopolitical, economic and cultural characteristics of the component states (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan).

Chapter 3 analyzes the geopolitical situation of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, dominated by “the failure of the security complex” from here (due to the rivalries between the three states and Russia’s interference) and the Caspian’s geopolitical situation, where, apart from the above-mentioned states, as regional players, are appearing Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

Chapter 4 is basically representing the theoretical essence of this book, in which it is again reiterated the dimensions – slightly modified or reversed – of this project, already exposed in *Foreword* (“Energy, Transportation, Military corridor, Trade, Investments”, p. 49). In the final of this chapter are provided essential information regarding the countries that would be involved in this project and the need for political support necessary to achieve it.

Thus, the author shows that “A good, solid, start to the project would be a common declaration by the presidents involved that would give both an important signal for the political support of the project and the impetus to concrete economic projects that would consequently give it substance. The signature of the representatives of the countries directly involved – Romania, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and possibly Kazakhstan and Turkey – would give guarantees that the project will move on to more concrete stages in transportation, trade, energy, etc.” (p. 61).

The next chapter deals with the complex geopolitical situation of Georgia, trapped between his aspirations pro-EU, pro NATO and Russian’s force, which is opposing to such trends.

In Chapter 6 are firstly presented the main physical-geographical and political data of Azerbaijan. Subsequently, the problems related to the economic resources and transport networks of the country (including hydrocarbon), completed or in the planning stage, are shown. The end of the article emphasizes the importance of Azerbaijan’s geographical position, which allows it to act as a transit area for transport of raw materials between Europe and Asia and, of course, the advantages that this country would get if “*The East-West Black Sea - Caspian Sea Strategic Corridor*” would be achieved.

Thus, the authors of these chapters are stating following:

“Moreover, the East-West Corridor is a good opportunity for Azerbaijan and its objective of becoming a regional transportation hub between Europe and Asia. A very important aspect is that, after the implementation of this project, there won't be only a hub, but several hubs at the same time: Constanta, Poti, Baku, Turkmenbashi, Aktau” (p. 109).

Regarding the presented issues, we remark that the American geostrategists Zbigniew Brzezinski and George Friedman wrote a long time ago about the particular geopolitical value of Azerbaijan, as the best transport area of resources of Central Asia's and the Caspian Sea's area to Europe. However, we conclude that this can only happen if Russia is economically or militarily forced to give consent for the fulfillment of this plan.

Chapter 7 is basically a successful geo-economic analysis of Turkmenistan, yet suffering from an obvious lack, inadmissible in a book of this level: it does not contain a bibliographic note in the text, endnote or footnote.

The next chapter, devoted to Uzbekistan, analyzes the situation of its borders, the issue of the inhabitants' national identity, the pros and cons of the economy and its political system. The author raises the question of bilateral relations between Romania and Uzbekistan (“overall Romania's relations with Uzbekistan are more of a project than actual institutional relations” - p. 140). In the final of the chapter, the author inserts a series of interesting personal opinions related to the balance game that Uzbekistan must play in its relations with Russia, China and the US who have interests in this country.

Chapter 9 provides essential data regarding to the political and economic situation of this country, particularly insisting on its transport structures, existing and being in a project form. The second part of the article presents and provides essential information about the main transport corridors designed post 1991 to link Europe to Asia, via the Caucasus and Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Russia by various Asian countries. Finally, are analyzed the prospects of bilateral relations between Romania and Kazakhstan.

Chapter 10 provides interesting information about “Turkey's role in linking Central Asia and the Caucasus to Europe” (p. 178), by focusing on issues related to Turkey's relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan.

The next chapter is important because it highlights the principles of foreign policy of the most important opponent of the project analyzed in this book - the Russian Federation. The author concludes – correctly, in our opinion – the following: “Russia is undoubtedly a European state if only geography as well as European civilization, its culture, tradition and religion as the defining

criteria. What places Russia beyond Europe's bounds is its politics. ... Russia's overriding foreign policy goal is to establish Russia as one of the most important global powers, and to create a multipolar international order. However, Russia's understanding of multilateralism in international affairs is rather a form of multipolarity characterized by a collective decision-making procedure amongst a handful of great powers, or at best a selective and instrumental use and understanding of multilateralism. This means that Russia supports multilateralism as long as it affirms its great power status and deals with the issues and interests of the leading states" (pp. 191-192).

In the following pages are correctly highlighted the Russia's political-economic, demographic and social strengths and weaknesses, Russia's role in Central Asia, the areas where its interests compete with the USA and China.

Chapter 12 reveals, with painful clarity for Romanians in Romania, the main political, economic, social, territorial and ethnic vulnerabilities of the Moldovan Republic, as well as the hopes that this state had, until in 2013 in the Eastern Partnership, the at least semi-failed project of the European Union.

Chapter 13 clearly summarizes the essence of the geopolitical battle for the domination of Central Asia, waged between Russia, the US and China. It also presents the expectations that Ukraine had, before the civil war that started in 2014, from the project presented in the book: strengthening of the economic and political ties with Turkey, Romania and the Central Asian states.

The paper gathers a considerable amount of work, and the authors' views/conclusions are well reasoned, but from a US-centric geopolitical perspective (we refer exclusively to the US) and European-centric perspective (referring mainly to the EU and, tangentially to Moldova and Ukraine). Excepting one chapter (11), there are analyzed (little or at all) the geopolitical paradigms promoted by two geostrategic players with planetary influence: Russia (to Central Asia and Southern Caucasus) and China (to Central Asia). This diminishes the value of the work (not mentioning that it has not been cited works of Russian experts, who are yet able to provide the most consistent expertise on these issues). Unfortunately, here certainly works the language barrier and, very likely, some sort of anti-Russian cultural stereotypes. But stereotypes have no place in a scientific research because, starting from them, the determinism is reached: conclusions from some theses (true or false) are obtained, not from rigorous research of the facts.

The analyzed paper presents and clarifies with great accuracy a number of real possibilities of cooperation in the geographical area under review that would have a perennial value, with one condition: the Russia's military rebirth

and economic growth of China being more or less remote possibilities, not immediate realities. Unfortunately for the interests of Europe and the US, we add, to the interests of a stable world that excludes the use of force to regulate relations between states in international relations, Russia's military rebirth and economic growth of China are already realities. Humanity has gone from the unipolar world to a multipolar world, in which Russia and China already claim to be recognized as important geostrategic players with planetary importance. And they will decide if they want to cooperate with the West (Western Europe and USA) in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea basin. History shows that, after any competition (even military) between the big powers, generals are replaced with diplomats and it comes back to cooperation.

Therefore, we believe that the prospects of cooperation presented in this paper certainly deserve to be resumed after cessation of current planetary geopolitical storm.

**Florin PINTESCU**

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava