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Book review: Przemysław Grudziński, *Intelligent State: Poland in Search of an International Role*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2008, pp. 180

by Jakub Tyszkiewicz

The new book by an experienced historian and a diplomat Przemysław Grudziński, who in this moment is the vice minister of Polish Foreign Affairs, is an interesting effort to answer the key question - what foreign policy is needed by Poles at the beginning of 21st century.

The book can be divided into three main parts. First, the author, based on a theory of international relations and history, and his own diplomatic and scholarly experience, tries to find a solution for the Polish foreign policy. Secondly, the theoretical foundation shows the place of Poland in history and an international system since modern era until today. Thirdly, such an approach allows him to consider what kind of policy is needed for Warsaw today.

According to the author the two periods – the first which describes the fight for independence up until 1990ies and the second – the fight for a status that was achieved by the membership in the NATO and the European Union. Hence, now is the time for formulating a policy in which Poland can appoint a specializing function in the international system.

Undoubtedly, Grudziński in his thinking

over that subject is influenced by the theory of P.W. Schroeder, who stated that the survival of states depends upon their functions and roles. He claimed that states which successfully specialized within the international system could continue to exist and prosper long after they were unable to defend themselves. Opposite, those states that failed to specialize or whose speciality is lost in its international relevance might be destroyed. In other words, the international imperative is, in a real sense “Specialize!”. Such a function is for Grudziński a crucial one and he tries to answer how it should be used in a Polish context.

The author stresses that Polish foreign policy cannot be reduced to a narrowly understood security of the country but it should be connected with its existence within the European Union. The most important task, according to Grudziński, is to define the role Poland can play in Europe. In his opinion Warsaw could easily play the real role of a so-called “middle state”. The main role of Poland would be a role of a mediator in relations between the European Union and Eastern Europe.

Hence, Polish foreign policy cannot be

reduced to a narrowly understood safety of the country but it should be connected with the existence within the European Union. The Polish policy has therefore to take into consideration the key problems of the 21st century. The most important task, according to Grudziński, is to definite the place of Poland in Europe. In his opinion Warsaw could easily play the real role of a so-called “middle state”. The main role of Poland would be being a mediator in relations between the European Union and the Eastern Europe.

The author stresses that an international role of Poland as a member of NATO and the European Union can be based on such an activity that would not be a “policy punching above weight” but a role that allows Poland to organize its better efforts in achieving real and useful aims for the Polish nation. Grudziński thinks that Poland should function as an “intelligent mediator” at the same time abandoning a model of the geopolitical bulwark. This new function is *mixtum compositum* of all elements that creates a new characteristic of a pragmatic and realistic mediator. It means that Poland, as a small actor on the international scene should use different vessels and Polish politicians and diplomats have to understand exactly the policies realized by great powers, international institutions and global norms.

According to the author, Poland has a chance to play a role of a mediator between Europe and Russia, as well as between the Old Continent and the United States. At the same time policy of Warsaw should fix its image as a stabilizer of an international system and draw benefits from it for Poland. In order to be a significant player in the

world it has to have a well defined offer – its own interests, a brand of successful mediations, a will of political activity.

Grudziński thinks that real security and success of Polish policy depends on its role and its function in the system and it should not be based on futile dreams about being a regional power. At the same time Poland can draw conclusion from its past.

Basing on his historical experience the author managed to build a very interesting catalogue of strategic lessons for Poland. In his opinion the most important thing is that Poland should build its European future based on a system of real relations and not concentrating on a status and a formal aspect. The long-term goal can be defined as a systematic strengthening of its own value as a member of a greater European and Atlantic community, a member which uses its functions intelligently. In such a case it is seen by that community as a state that can bring benefits for the community as a whole. Secondly, according to Grudziński any formal guarantees to give Poland security would cost too much for a sole guarantor, even a superpower. Therefore, in the interest of Poland lies all activity which consolidates the European and the Atlantic communities. Grudziński stresses that the future of Poland lies in Europe and the reaction of other countries will be dependent on its domestic and foreign policies. Poland could be in danger of being marginalized in case its internal system and the foreign policy is different from the system of its close allies. Only an integrated, well ruled and democratic Poland can be seen as an attractive partner. The author sees great opportunities

for Warsaw in playing the role of a mediator in the sub-region of East-Central Europe. Therefore, the Polish activity should not be the “punching above weight policy” but it should play an active role and propose different solutions to any potential danger. The effort of building a special function in Europe directs Poland not to concentrate only on its domestic matters but to be an active participant of international relations.

Grudziński in his book draws three important conclusions which could be also guidelines for Polish foreign policy at the beginning of the 21st century. First of all, he stresses that Poland alone is not able to function as a sovereign and secure state. In his opinion, any strategy that puts stress on the so-called real or neo-real approach in foreign policy is futile and a very dangerous alternative for Poland. Warsaw is not able to mobilize such resources which would protect its position in case of a “bare power” policy of its neighbors. Secondly, Poland should avoid building its security on being supported by international institutions alone, because they usually are not able to assure its members a proper defense against a potential threat. Thirdly, the Polish government should carefully estimate its real power and quality of its policy avoiding “wishful thinking” activities. Therefore, an ideological approach, which shows Poland as a very important country with a special mission to play is actually against Polish national interests. Instead of using its historical and moral advantages, at the beginning of the new century, Poland should present behavior based on norms which are useful and acceptable by Europe. Grudziński stresses

that due to the fact that Polish politicians and diplomats should devote much more time to a conscious creation of an international function of Poland. It would allow it to be a part of the European and world machine, and create a safe position of the country and realize its own interests at the same time.

The author points out that such an “intelligent” state can influence its future even if economics, military power and a cultural activity limit its functioning. It is possible because its activity as a useful part of the wider system allows to overcome limitations of its geographic position. In Polish interest there is building a new picture of a mature and reliable state that uses a system of norms similar to other democratic countries of the Old Continent in the European consciousness. Individual elements of Polish functions and specialties should establish and strengthen the structure of the whole of Europe. The special role for Poland, Grudziński sees in its efforts to stabilize the situation in East-Central Europe. In such a case, Polish policy will be able to influence the shape and future of the whole Old Continent. A significant role in the control of the European foreign policy and in the situation in the sub-region is much more important for the author than the illusory pose of the “middle power”.

Undoubtedly Grudziński's arguments seem very convincing. On the one hand this book is a debate with Polish foreign policy of 2005–2007, which, by the author, was led by an inferiority complex and based on the role of a “hedge-hog state”. Such a position discouraged real and potential allies and was

harmful for Poland. It alienated and confronted Warsaw with the European Union putting it between the West and Russia. On the other hand, according to the author simple return to the beginning of 2005 is not possible. The new challenge for Poles and

their government is to create modern, open state which is able to play an important role on the map of the united Europe. Let's hope that Grudziński's book will be on the compulsory reading lists of all persons responsible for Polish foreign policy.

**Book review: Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion*,
Oxford University Press, 2007**

by Rafał Riedel

Paul Collier's recent publication: "The Bottom Billion" tries to give an answer to the question stated on the cover: why are the poorest countries failing and what can be done about it?

Collier points at fifty states claiming that the real problem lies there, affecting circa one billion of their population. The sources of the decline in living standards are identified in four groups: the trap of a conflict, natural resources – usually being a part of the problem, less frequently part of the solution, the problem of being landlocked by "bad neighbors" and last but not least – bad governance.

All the above mentioned put together result in a situation that even in the 90s of the 20th c., when we observed the positive trend in global economy, the average income in those countries dropped by 5%. This is in average terms, the problem becomes even more intense and evident when we realize that quite often in those countries the growth produced benefits only a handful of its people. In fact, they are not only falling behind but also falling apart.

The author, being the former director of the World Bank, responsible for research and currently a professor of economics and Director of the Center for the Study of African Economies at Oxford University, represents a high level of competence and represents also the authority of an expert of a world-wide scale.

Worth noticing Paul Collier does not show even the shadow of clerical approach or academic pose of distance, as if from an "ivory tower" perspective. When reading the book, one feels the engagement of the author and his determination in persuading his audience, rather than lecturing or preaching.

The author uses a lot of exemplifications and picturous forms of explanation.

"The countries of the bottom coexist with the twenty first century, but their reality is the fourteenth century: civil war, plague, ignorance. They are concentrated in Africa and Central Asia, with a scattering elsewhere."¹

Paul Collier writes with noticeable passion which makes the book easier readable for

¹ P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, p. 3.