

A review of the book: Karolina J. Helnarska, *Cultural factor in French Foreign Affairs*, Adam Marszałek Publishing House, Toruń 2013, p. 410

by Józef M. Fiszer

France with its turbulent history, of foreign affairs and rich culture, has over the centuries been a fascinating topic of academic research for historians, political scientists, lawyers, sociologists, culture experts and publicists. And no wonder, since this country – as a continental superpower – was always conducting its politics on a global scale and was – still is – an important player in the international arena. From medieval times, the 17th

century especially, France has been considered an important centre of European and world culture, even of civilisation in general, whose status and role grew stronger in the Napoleonic era, when the French language became the language of diplomacy and politics, the language of people of science and culture. Culture, its rich content and spiritual values quickly became a part of France's foreign policy. The special place and role of culture

within France's foreign policy was emphasised by king Louis XIV, Napoleon Bonaparte and the creator of the Fifth Republic, General de Gaulle, who stressed that foreign cultural policy would help France's world status and that was why he instructed his diplomats to feel responsible for promoting the French language and culture around the world. It is estimated that around 175 million people in the entire world speak French and therefore are familiar with French culture, science and technology. This helps to create contacts and also to develop forms of cooperation with France in all other areas of life. French is an official language in about 30 countries located on different continents. Thanks to that, after the decolonisation process ended, France is still active in its former colonies' areas in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Furthermore, France feels historically and morally responsible for countries created on its colonies' ruins, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean region, for example in the Maghreb area (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria). De Gaulle's idea to create the Mediterranean alliance – *l'alliance Méditerranée* – is still the foundation of foreign policy there. As a result, there are 4 million Muslims living today in France, including 3 million from the Maghreb area. This became a serious social, political and cultural problem. Economic factors and benefits deriving from France's cooperation with post-

colonial countries are not to be disregarded and so became a good reason for continuing such collaboration, in spite of the problems that seem to come with it.

Pragmatic and rational foreign cultural policies enabled France to cooperate with numerous countries around the world on political, social and economic levels, for many years. It played a considerable role in improving relationships and reconciling with Germany, the process commenced by the *Élysée Treaty*, signed on 22nd January 1963 by President de Gaulle and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Incidentally, the French cultural policy is today less active towards Central European countries, particularly Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia. There are many reasons for that: of financial, legal, housing and language nature. The scientific and research cooperation however, between French universities and research institutions and Central European higher education and research centres is developing really well.

Pragmatic aspects of the French cultural policy, both internal and foreign, can be easily observed among the emerging powers: China, India and Brazil, with which France is now expanding cooperation regarding culture, science and other fields, especially dynamically developing economic and commercial relations.

Year after year, more French cultural units appear around the world (culture institutes, foundations, language schools

etc.), who's task is to popularise the French culture and language, as well as to act as a venue for presenting the culture of partnercountries. The institutions' roles and tasks are diverse of course, since they are determined by the current preferential directions of France's foreign policy. As the Author writes in the reviewed work: "Cultural units contribute to realising the strategy now known as the »strategy of influence« (before as the »strategy of interaction«), which was and is directed to the political elites in a broad sense. An important element here is education of future elites that might one day evolve into important decision-making authorities. Education gained in France or in a country that through history and close cooperation with France has a French education system, is supposed to not only share knowledge about administering the state in a French way, but also to imbue thinking through the perspective of French ideas, norms and with France's interest at heart. Such an approach tends (and still tends) to increase sympathy towards French standards and to back up France's foreign policy's goals on an international arena" (p. 379).

I believe the attitude of France and of the decision-making authorities towards culture and its role in state foreign affairs should be copied by Poland and our authorities, especially those responsible for foreign affairs and the country's image on an international forum. Unfortunately

so far Polish cultural institutes, even embassies and consulates are getting closed down, which definitely does not help our national interest nor strengthens any positive image of Poland in the world, as an average country predestined to become a superpower of Central Europe.

The Author's conclusions in the reviewed book are educational and have great utilitarian importance for each country's foreign policy, including Poland. It turns out that "culture and a cleverly conducted cultural policy enable states to influence the political and economic environment in which they are bound to function". France's example and the Author's research presented in the hereby work, show clearly how culture drives economic growth and increases the number of jobs, how it offers a place for innovation for society based on knowledge and new technology, and is one of the factors of local territorial growth (p. 380).

Karolina J. Helnarska describes in the reviewed work how France treats its culture and what role it plays within the foreign policy. In Poland this is a relatively unknown topic and is rarely undertaken by researchers of modern international relations, i.e. political scientists, culture experts and sociologists. It is another reason why this book gives so much pleasure – it fills a certain gap in Polish subject literature, that has lasted many years. This publication, a result of the Author's arduous research conducted in

Poland and abroad, mainly in France, has a pioneer feel to it and certainly deserves careful reading; not only because of its rich merits, but also considering its high scientific level, its cognitive, methodological and utilitarian aspects.

The reviewed book, as I mentioned before, is a result of many years of scientific study, based on excellent resources, as shown in the Author's extensive reference list, comprehensive footnotes consisting of documents and materials, as well as compact literature, articles and foreign studies, mainly French. Furthermore, the analysis is founded on an extensive theoretical basis and presented problem-wise, which I consider justified from both the cognitive and methodological perspectives.

Issues taken up in the reviewed work i.e. place and role of a cultural factor in France's foreign policy is – as I already mentioned – unique and difficult to analyse, as well as extremely interesting and up to date, since it touches some topics connected to dynamic changes on the international arena, changes determined by the globalization process and building of the new international order, changes within basic parameters of the international environment, including quality alterations within its subjective structure, and finally in the organisational sphere and social processes regulations.

The main goal of the reviewed book is – as we read in the introduction – an

attempt to “analyse the meaning of a cultural factor in France's foreign policy” (p.12), and its main thesis is the Author's statement that “Strengthening the status of culture and the French language remains the most important goal of France's cultural foreign policy, because France's position on the international arena depends on it” (p.5). This goal, I want to stress, was achieved in whole, and resulted in an original in every aspect scientific masterpiece, containing many interesting hypotheses and research questions, regarding a fascinating, but relatively unknown range of problems concerning the place and role of culture in international relations and therefore its meaning for the foreign policy of every country, here based on France's example. Nevertheless, the Author justly states that a cultural factor in international relations should only be considered against the background of other factors, so that culture's role in developing international relations would not be exaggerated.

The reviewed work consists of five chapters, each divided into subsections, an interesting, extensive introduction and an ending, as well as a rich reference list, including mainly documents published in French, compact works, articles and studies from foreign and Polish research magazines.

That said, the first chapter titled *The meaning of culture in international relations* is a theoretical preface to the

Author's reflection upon a cultural factor in France's foreign policy. The starting point of getting the gist of the analysed issue is an attempt to define culture itself and show its place in foreign policy in the perspective of numerous paradigms and theories that stand in international relations study. This chapter also discusses over psychosocial means, described also as a cultural and ideological means. In foreign policy they include promoting culture, education and research, as well as ways of keeping society informed, social values and ideology.

The second chapter titled *Motives and means of French cultural impact* shows assumptions of French foreign policy and the role of culture and language as such policy's tools. Tourism is also discussed, as a mean of popularising French culture among other countries and nations around the world.

In the third chapter, *The organisation of France's cultural foreign policy*, the Author presents the genesis of France's cultural foreign policy, as well as entities responsible for it: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Communication, the French Culture Agency, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, *Alliances Françaises* and others. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on the role of these French cultural centres abroad, their programmes and tasks. Many issues discussed here have – as mentioned

already – a utilitarian meaning and France's experience and the structure of its cultural policy can become a role model for other countries, including Poland.

The fourth chapter, *Priority directions of French cultural policy*, also very interesting and inspiring, presents the main trends of France's foreign policy and various supporting institutions' activities – institutions that are responsible for the French cultural policy. According to the Author, priority trends in French foreign policy and at the same time in cultural policy are as follows: relations with Germany, relations with Sub-Saharan Africa's countries and with Maghreb countries such as Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

The fifth chapter, *Other trends in the area of French foreign cultural policy*, presents directions (fields) of activities that are not of a high priority. These include – among others – Latin America with Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, as well as Central Europe with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria, and furthermore the region of Asia, especially China and India.

In general, we have here a valuable work, which has a lot of advantages and effectively fills in the gap on the topic in Polish subject literature. The Author did extensive research work and her masterpiece with all certainty deserves acknowledgement. It is a unique, original work, bringing a lot of new knowledge to social

sciences. There are no concerns regarding its form, especially when it comes to language, style and skills.

In conclusion I state once again that we have here a mature, valuable book,

with significant content and scientific qualities, for which there is a need in society. There have been no monographs like this one in Poland yet.