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BOOK REVIEW

**MAŁGORZATA ZACHARA (EDITOR),
“POLAND IN TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AFTER 1989:
MIRACLE FAIR”, CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING,
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The fundamental shift in Polish politics and policy-making after 2015 invites various attempts to develop summaries and conclusions on the period before. The work edited by Małgorzata Zachara analyses the achievements of the Polish post-communist transformation in the perspective of the transatlantic relations evolving in this period in their own right. With changes in Polish and American internal and external policies, as well as processes outside of these governments' direct control, not only the Polish and American political actors evolved in the period after 1989, but they were also playing on an ever-changing stage. The partnership, whose importance or even strategic significance is stressed by both parties, also makes up a part of a broader, multilateral system of cooperation, which is also undergoing variable processes. Doubtlessly, this is an intertwined complex of phenomena that requires attention and analysis. Although these issues are well-studied in both English and Polish specialist literature, the authors of “Miracle Fair” attempt to take a new approach to the analysed subject.

In the introduction, the editor Zachara defines the objective of the book as “to provide a key resource for scholars and students of transatlantic politics with a special interest in Central Europe and Poland”. She rightly points out that conclusions on Poland's role and position in regional and global relations tend to be insufficiently nuanced, presenting “too unequivocally pessimistic or optimistic” evaluations. Therefore, this book is not designed to make up for a gap of research or refer to omitted subjects and issues, but it rather tries to display a more balanced view, avoiding the moral or ideological stand. This goal was achieved, even though most authors are associated – by origin, background or employment – with Poland, making it more difficult to omit the local perspective.

To achieve this objective of a balanced view, Zachara has ensured threefold diversity of the completed work. Firstly, the book, which was developed within an interdisciplinary research project, consequently concerns highly variable areas and problems. Secondly, with authors of particular chapters representing different disciplines and institutions, it explores transatlantic relations as a broad panorama of subjects rather than a single,

closed theme. And, thirdly, thanks to the interdisciplinary background of the authors, it is also a collection of different approaches and methods.

On the other hand, Zachara does not shy off from taking a clear stand on the analysed issues, as evidenced by the title of the book itself. The editor refers her readers to the Polish Nobel Prize-winning authoress Wisława Szymborska, thus highlighting the Polish achievements in her literary success, but also the chosen poem (*Miracle Fair*) speaks of “commonplace miracles” which can easily go unnoticed and unappreciated. This seems to also be the authors’ perception of Poland’s success in transatlantic relations after the post-communist transformation: a success that might have been taken for granted but is still threatened nowadays with various processes in international relations, either associated with the actors themselves or external ones.

In the first chapter, titled “Setting the scene: transatlantic relations in transition”, Zachara, a political scientist of Jagiellonian University, explores the framework of transatlantic relations, analysing both American and European perspectives and discussing the historic development of the partnership processes during the cold war. By presenting these processes in the context of modern transformations (e.g. globalisation), Zachara provides the necessary background before the other authors proceed to present the particular place Poland has come to occupy in this partnership. Chapter 6 by Wojciech Michnik of the American University of the Emirates also attempts to analyse the impact of external processes on the transatlantic relations, focusing on the case of the new Russian policies after the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The second chapter of the book introduces a historian’s perspective by Marcin Fatałski of Jagiellonian University, who refers to the process of political transformation in Poland and the US diplomatic response to it, setting the discussed subject in the broader context. Starting from the paramount importance of the evolving situation in Poland in the final stages of the US-Soviet relations, the author proceeds to analyse also the US’s policies vs. Poland in the first years of the post-cold-war transition process. This is an important insight into the origins of what is still frequently perceived in Poland as a fundamental partnership.

In the following two chapters, three Kraków-based specialists in international relations, Christopher Reeves, Marcin Grabowski and Tomasz Pugaczewicz, explore the alternatives to the transatlantic relations lying before Poland and the US. In chapter 3, Reeves takes a fair look at the potential opportunities and obstacles in Poland’s policies in Central-Eastern Europe, while trying to elaborate on Poland’s potential role in this region. In chapter 4, Grabowski and Pugaczewicz focus on the balance between transatlantic and transpacific vectors in the US’s policies, discussing the negotiated trade partnerships for those two regions. A similar subject is undertaken further in the book in a chapter by Zachara concerning Poland’s choices and opportunities between “Atlanticism” and “Eurocentrism”.

The book analyses also selected areas of transatlantic relations, such as defence (chapters 5 and 6), culture (chapters 8, 9 and 10), economy (chapter 12) and civil society development (chapter 13). These are especially interesting and enriching contributions, as they are interdisciplinary in nature. They broaden the perspective by displaying the diversified and evolving character of transatlantic relations and Poland’s role in them in various contexts. Some themes go well beyond the strictly defined political science; however, they do very well not only to display the diverse background and determining factors of the transatlantic cooperation, but rather to explore many different facets of the relations be-

tween the US and European actors, including Poland, because the dynamics of one aspect (e.g. the evolution of perception of American popular culture in Poland, as discussed in chapter 9 by Jolanta Szymkowska-Bartyzel, who specialises in American film and culture studies) affects the transformation of other dimensions of the relations.

The book also observes the effects of the Smolensk airplane crash as an event of significant consequences for Polish politics and policies. Importantly, the author of this chapter, Paweł Ścigaj, puts the post-crash attitudes and actions in the theoretical framework of the terror management theories. In this respect, he also draws some parallels with American reactions to the September 11, 2001 attacks. This part is especially valuable as it brings an original perspective and attempts to find a theoretical, and not only descriptive, approach to the fatal crash and its devastating outcomes.

While the book's diversity of subjects and perspectives is undoubtedly an asset, it would benefit from a more disciplined organisation, possibly even a division of the material into broader sections. As each chapter provides interesting conclusions, the linkage between them is lost at moments due to the book's construction. Thus, it is also more difficult to see the overall picture of Poland's position within transatlantic relations, as the structure of the book directs the reader rather to different perspectives related to specific areas of the relations.

Certainly, this book can achieve the objective set by the editor of becoming an important source of descriptive and analytical knowledge on the transatlantic relations, but, more importantly, it includes an inherent discussion of various points of view and it may serve as the beginning of further discussions, analyses and even controversies concerning not only more in-depth, but also the delineation of the studied subject (e.g. potential inclusion of the subject of the Polish minority in the US and its activities, omitted in the book) or the proportions of the analysed material (e.g. in the "Miracle Fair" more attention is paid to "soft" social and cultural issues than "hard" themes of economy and defence). This potential of initiating a more multi-aspectual and nuanced discussion is undoubtedly the editor and authors' success.