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BOOK REVIEW

ANDIS KUDORS (EDITOR), „BELARUSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: 360°”, UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA PRESS, RIGA 2017, ISBN: 978-9934-8292-3-9, 184 PAGES

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The foreign policy of each country works towards the fulfilment of its aims and interests in the world. Moreover, it creates conditions for a given country's integration with other actors on the international stage. The development of Belarusian foreign policy is crucial, not only for its future relationships with the neighbouring countries, but also for contacts with the whole European Union and the Russian Federation, which is nowadays the main partner of Belarus on many levels.

Diplomatic efforts made by Belarus constitute a big challenge in times of growing tension between “the East” and “the West”, resulting from the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Therefore, for fear of restricting or losing their sovereignty, Belarus began strategic manoeuvres in contacts with European countries so that their relations are not limited exclusively to Russia. It is worth noting that taking these actions emphasises the fact that the government of Belarus is aware of the special role of the Republic of Belarus in the relationships between western countries and Russia. Thus, an appropriate Belarusian foreign policy is very important for the prospects of the further development of the country.

The publication “Belarusian Foreign Policy: 360°”, edited by Andis Kudors, which came out in 2017, includes academic articles written by researchers from a few countries who were invited by The Centre for East European Policy Studies in Riga to analyse the relationships between Belarus and its neighbours. The publication presents relations between the Republic of Belarus and Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania and Latvia after 2014 and after the illegal annexation of Crimea. The authors of the articles emphasise in particular the relationships between Belarus and the surrounding countries. That is why the title of the publication refers to 360 degrees of foreign policy of Belarus.

The book includes answers to basic questions posed by international researchers – In what way have the relationships between Belarus and Russia changed since the annexation of Crimea? How serious is Alexander Lukashenka's criticism of Russia and how important are positive signals coming to Brussels after the annexation? Is Minsk interested enough and able to take actions which can change the basic directions of its foreign policy? How should the improvement in relationships between Belarus and Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea be treated? What are the visions of the neighbouring countries, the European Union and NATO of their mutual relations with Belarus?

The publication is divided into four sections, which draw attention to various issues connected with Belarusian foreign policy. The first section concerns mainly all identity aspects and the domestic policy of the country. The article by Ainars Lerhis "The History of Belarus: Multiply Identities" discusses facts and interpretations which are important for the history of the Republic of Belarus in creating the Belarusian identity. The presented data enable understanding the effect of the events on the creation of directions of present Belarusian foreign policy. Alla Leukavets, on the other hand, emphasises the domestic policy of Belarus and its influence on foreign policy, drawing attention to the authoritarian nature of the country. It is stressed here that understanding one's historical heritage and aiming at identifying one's own national identity is significant in creating both the country's home policy, controlled by Alexander Lukashenka, and in aiming to develop geopolitical relations and giving direction to the foreign policy of a country which is under construction.

Chapter Two is devoted to the regional dimension of Belarusian foreign policy. Dzianis Melyantson focuses here on the relationship between the country and the European Union, and Nora Vanaga concentrates on the defence policy in the perspective of relations between Belarus and the neighbouring countries belonging to NATO. Chapter Three discusses mutual relations between Belarus and Russia with regard to politics, military issues and "soft power", presented by Maris Cepuritis, Aleksander Golts and Alen Artiomenka. The final section of the publication describes mutual relations between Belarus and the neighbouring countries of Ukraine, Lithuania and Latvia as well as Poland, presented by Petro Burkovsky, Diana Potjomkin, Dovile Sukyte and Andrei Yeliseyev. The researchers point out that Belarus cannot separate totally from the East and follow the models of European Union countries. The authors claim that in order to make progress in the relationship between Minsk and Brussels, foreign policy should focus on issues such as trade, the environment, safety of the borders, energy, transport and education.

The authors discussing Belarusian foreign policy note that Belarus cannot survive without the economic help of Russia. Belarus, on the other hand, supports Russia significantly in its relations with Europe. However, there is a chance for a change in the stable Belarusian policy. In the researchers' opinion, the planned military cooperation between Belarus and Russia may result in an increase in the deployment of allied forces in the Baltic countries and in Poland, which may lead to stronger pressure on Minsk by Russia and insisting on deploying their troops in Belarus. This could make military cooperation a big problem for Belarus.

In the period of many question marks concerning the relations between "the East" and "the West", "Belarusian Foreign Policy: 360°" may help readers understand to a large extent the directions of Belarusian foreign policy as well the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation. The book is addressed to a wide range of readers, both experts in the field, politicians and enthusiasts; it can as well be a source of information for people who want to get to know the Republic of Belarus in greater detail.