

**Review of Emma Welsink, Geopolitical rivalry in Central Asia and Turkmenistan's power as a weak state, MA diss. (Praha, IMS FSV UK, 2019), 96 pages, manuscript**

The present thesis is a contribution to the debate on small (or weak) states and their role in the international system. It seeks to explore the ways a weak state can capitalize on a geopolitical competition by great powers in order to pursue its own foreign policy agenda. To illustrate this, the thesis takes a case study of Turkmenistan's foreign/energy policy vis-à-vis Russia and China as an example.

The thesis proceeds from a concise overview of the state of research on the weak states in the international system. The overview is then followed by a separate chapter highlighting the author's chosen theoretical framework. Both the literature review and the theoretical chapter are adequately reasoned. More importantly, having identified the blind spots in the academic debate, the author has eventually arrived at an operational definition of her key used concept of a "weak state." These chapters are clearly above-average as far as the precision of execution is concerned. In effect, they make for some one third of the thesis's overall length, and give the entire work a solid theoretical underpinning, and also a clear focus and a firm analytical framework.

The subsequent chapter on methodology outlines the main parameters of the author's crafted research design. These include the aims and objectives, the question to be addressed, the way the author is going to work with her chosen theory in the course of analysis, the data, and finally, the selection of the studied case and the justification thereof as well the way she is going to proceed. I see some room for specification in the chosen data set part, which is a bit sketchy. But generally, this part is very precise as well and has all the features an academic work shall have.

The analysis itself is a case study of Turkmenistan's energy policy, namely the genesis of its main infrastructure project to date--the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline, whose foundations were laid during late Turkmenbashi era in the period from 1991 to 2006. The author introduces her analysis with an application of her defined (and adapted from Handel) concept of a weak state on Turkmenistan according to her set individual defining criteria. In the following subchapters, she traces the evolution of Turkmenistan's foreign policy with respect to its energy exports diversification. In so doing, she provides a series of snapshots of the main phases of Turkmenistan's foreign policy maneuver, which eventually led to the agreement on the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline.

All in all, the thesis under scrutiny is an original piece of work that stands out for its precision of analysis. Perhaps, the author could have given the thesis one more look for slight edits and cuts and provided for example a more elaborate synthesis of her main findings. Also I would have recommended to rely more on primary data in the analysis. But all these are really minor things. The thesis as is fully meets the requirements set for a successful MA thesis. I suggest it be graded as excellent (A).

Praque, June 3, 2019

Jan Šír