

Review

Emma Welsink (2019). *Geopolitical Rivalry in Central Asia and Turkmenistan's power as a weak state*. Master's Thesis. Department of Russian and East European Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague. 94 p.

The author applies the theory of weak states and its interaction with great powers to the position of Turkmenistan vis á vis mostly China and Russia. The first theoretical part about theories of weak state as well as Hanzel theoretical framework used in the thesis are explained in systematic, deep and comprehensive way. The second part, the application of the theory is more problematic, while the third part and final analysis out of theoretical framework resulted in a strong and well-argument text.

As for the structure of the thesis, I am not sure about the order of methodological chapter just after the theoretical part. Usually the researcher defines topic, explains its selection and provides with the methodology in the introductory part of the text. In case of reviewed thesis, the author selected the other-way-round option which does not contribute to the text flow and transparency of the text.

The serious problem is the middle part of thesis. Even if clearly anchored in the literature, the definition of weak state seems to become more problematic if applied to concrete cases. The interpretation of some facts is also quite strange. Just few examples. Considering the economy (p. 44-48), I am wondering why the author was not surprised by 300% percent of GNP grow in case of Turkmenistan between 2000-2006 which is highly questionable figure. At the same time, it seems to be absurd to compare the military forces of Turkmenistan, Russian and China. Quantity does not also necessarily show real power of the army. Although Turkmen army has lot of troubles, it has adequate number of forces regarding its population and neutral status. The comparison of gas prices purchases in Turkmenistan and Russia (p. 70, table 6) is based on partial misunderstanding of price-making in this industry. The price of Turkmenistan gas was based on Turkmenistan border measuring (import), while European prices are based on Russia's western borders. In addition, Turkmenistan gas was designed for either Russian internal market with regulated prices or for CIS countries with limited purchase ability (particularly deal with the Ukraine). Yes, Russia used this position, but, as the situation in 2010s showed, the price deal is not necessarily the only criteria for making business in this field. There are much more problematic comparisons made by the author in the same and subsequent chapter.

The author focused here mostly on providing pure figures without their proper analysis and interpretation. The timespan of the work (1991-2006) also did not allow the author to analyze the gas export and geopolitical position of Turkmenistan after 2009-2010 with substantial shifts. From this perspective the Russian as well as Chinese (or Iranian) factor could be interpreted in another way with much less involvement of geopolitics. Of course, it's hard to deny Russian geopolitical interest in Turkmenistan generally, but the author sees "Russian foot" even in the cases where it is hardly applicable. At the same time, it is hard to speak about "zero sum game" in case of Turkmenistan gas as the amount of gas ready to be exported has its own dynamics and more Chinese influence in this or other spheres need not to be balanced in the same decrease of Russian impact in the country.

Generally, speaking, the text shows the gap between some theoretical geopolitical concept and its adaptation to the political reality, which is usually much more complex and complicated. As a paradox, the author proved its skills in the final part of the thesis in which solid and realistic analysis of Turkmen gas export is provided.

In sum, despite some trouble in a kind of artificial and strained application of the theory and some facts not adequately interpreted, the text fulfills the requirements for Master Thesis and can be evaluated as **grade B**.

Within the defense, the author should explain following problematic issues and answer some questions:

The time framework of the thesis was limited by 2006. However, geopolitical rivalry (if we can call it in this way) over Turkmenistan just started. Could you provide a brief analysis of shift of geopolitical position of the country in 2010s?

Think about the role of geopolitics in general. Is there really any clear strategy in Russian/Chinese policy towards Turkmenistan? In which aspects we could speak rather about ad hoc steps of these (or other) great powers in this “geopolitical rivalry”?

What are the main internal reasons that Turkmenistan was not able to use eventual geopolitical interest of China, Russia and, eventually, other powers to increase its role in Central Asia and fell into another geopolitical dominance (China in this case) instead?

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