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Book Review: Patrycja Olchowska, *Spółeczna konstrukcja problemu niepodległości Czeczenii*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2018, pp. 359.

Many social science publications prove the popularity of issues related to Chechnya. Many monographs deal mainly with themes related to the First Chechen War. Still, the reviewed book outlines strictly social aspects in the context of Chechnya's pursuit of independence while considering the social theory of international relations proposed by Alexander Wendt – one of the most famous constructivists in international relations, next to Friedrich Kratochwil and Nicholas Onuf. The author of the reviewed work proposed the topic in question to specify the introduction, ending, bibliography, and division into five crucial chapters. In the introduction, the author indicates the current state of the literature on Chechnya. She highlights the issue of statehood in the theory of international relations.

The first chapter presents the theory of international relations in social sciences regarding the Chechnya case. The proposed approach poses two main questions: what are we researching, and how do we investigate social issues. Let us look at the point of Chechnya. We can define the research subject because Chechnya is a being with specific geophysical features. A created identity (constructed by internal and external factors) is visible. The author stressed that the situation inside Chechnya influences the inner aspect while the external factor is the influence of the structure. Going further, referring to sovereignty, whether a geopolitical being is a state is decided by the interested party and the international community.

Through its policy implemented in the 1990s, Chechnya has not been recognised as a separate geopolitical entity or an integral part of Russia (Pietrasik, 2020). The discussed part was an excellent place to recall that the literature on the subject divides the history of Chechnya into three periods: tsarist, Soviet, and contemporary history (pp. 62–63). By all means, this division is correct. It is worth mentioning that the Chechen rebellion began in the late 1980s, and the conflicts were known as the First and Second Chechen Wars. In the next part of the work, the author proves that Chechnya met all aspects to become a sovereign state according to Wendt's theory. In Chechnya, an authority created and functioned in a specific

institutional and legal order, had the exclusive right to use force, and had geographical (territory) and social space and society. The author discusses Russia's influence on Chechnya and the first and second Chechen presidents' policy styles to better understand these facts. The phenomenon of unemployment was pointed out as a factor shaping the situation in Chechnya at that time and as an important social factor. Another important element was also mentioned: multinational, which created the political, cultural, and social functioning of Chechnya during the Soviet Union period and how the population of Chechnya developed from 1990 to 1998 (p. 115). Looking at the population number's data, we may conclude a downward trend from year to year. The reasons could be, for example, migrations to the neighbouring Caucasian or Russian republics of Georgia and the deaths of soldiers and civilians during the First Chechen war. The author of the book drew similar conclusions on this basis. The events before and after the Chechen war could have been a consequence of the Russian republic's declining population. We may point to discrimination against the Russian people: before the war, the struggle for influence and power, and the spread of a different religion and rules that were not accepted by most Chechen society).

On the other hand, the third chapter is devoted to analysing cultural, religious, and historical factors in the Chechen state's formation, mainly in the 1990s. An interesting topic is the presentation of the Chechen nation's genealogy in the times of the Mongol empire, which caused a change of beliefs through the invasions of today's Chechen lands. Until then, many Chechens and Caucasians were Christians or professed tribal religions. It was only the Mongols that made it adopt Islam. In the context of Islam's spread in today's Chechnya, the periods proposed by Mikhail Roshchin. In 2003, he received the Andrei Sakharov prize for civic courage. This event can be seen as a good representation of the gradual development of Islam in Chechnya. Then it was rightly noticed that religions, e.g., Wahhabism, appeared, which did not gain significant popularity among most Chechens and Caucasians. The ideas and principles introduced (for example, the destruction of historical Islamic monuments) harmed the relations of Caucasian people.

A similar opinion is also shared by a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs, Professor Hamid Algar. In this part, the author points out that the policy toward Chechnya implemented and proposed by Putin only aimed to ensure stabilisation in this republic and region. It prevented Chechnya from becoming a sovereign state, not aimed at a permanent solution (p. 200). For now, it can be regarded as a correct statement because the current president of Chechnya is a guarantor of security in the republic through an extensive security system and apparatus for exercising power. However, it is uncertain how long this will occur. The Chechen community in Russia and abroad may not follow the path of some Middle East and North African countries, where protests (known as the Arab Spring) forced local presidents to resign their office.

In the fourth chapter, the author focused on aspects, among other things, of legal records in the context of self-determination by nations. According to A. Wendt, in the 1990s, Chechnya later met the conditions to become a state, not an entity within Russia. According to Wendt, even anarchy is a norm that can be tamed through their actions and interactions.

Countries may decide for themselves what it can become. They are capable of keeping order and seeking cooperation or conflict. In the case of Chechnya, it can be assumed that the Chechens sought collaboration with the Russian authorities. Still, these authorities did not accept any terms of cooperation. By sending troops to Chechnya, they aimed at an armed confrontation by initiating a conflict with the Chechen people. It is worth mentioning that the author noticed that it was thus a sign that imperialist dreams and a longing for „Great Russia” appeared in Russian society, especially among the Russian authorities (p. 234). The secession of Chechnya from Russia was perceived as a serious threat to its interests, building its new position and maintaining security throughout the North Caucasus (p. 226). It is difficult to disagree with this statement. It was believed that the Chechnya movement could be seen as (see the case of Yakutia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan) a „domino effect”. It would make other republics want to proclaim independence.

On the other hand, in the last part of the discussed work, attempts were made to recognise Chechnya as a state. According to the theory of international relations, the threat appears for this reason. According to Czaputowicz, who cites constructivists’ thinking, it cannot be „generally” stated that a given historical moment would be interpreted as a threat to a specific state’s security to destabilise the entire system. Going further, it is worth mentioning that the same constructivists believe that specific historical, social, or cultural factors influence social perception with different forces. At various times, that shapes the perception of threats by entities or entities (p. 252). In this part, it was also proposed to present the international community’s attitude to Chechnya’s independence. Scientists such as Jaimoukha and Haque devoted much attention to this matter. The advantage of the issue raised is that the author quoted her observations and authors other than Jaimoukha and Haque. In the ending, the author summarises the topic in question and rightly points out that the problem of the social structure of Chechnya is complicated and complex. It was noted that the situation in Chechnya until the beginning of the First Chechen War would have been different if Chechnya’s independence had been recognised internationally, as was the case with Kosovo later.

In conclusion, the reviewed work brings a lot of importance to Polish literature. It becomes innovative thanks to taking up necessary, not fully explored topics in this work. One may be tempted to say that this work would be a good source of valuable information, professional analyses on Chechnya’s pursuit of independence and Russian policy towards Chechnya for Polish students who study such fields as, for example, political science, international relations, and eastern studies. The author hopes this work will have an English-language version, which will significantly impact the Anglo-Saxon literature on the subject, just like the Polish literature.

References:

Pietrasik, K. (2020). *Uchodźcy czeczeńscy w Polsce w latach 1994–2000*. Difin.