

Michel Foucher:
The European Republic (Evropská republika)

Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2002, 135 pages, ISBN: 80-85947-79-X.

Michel Foucher is a professor of political geography at the University of Lyon, France. He was appointed to several high positions in the French ministry of foreign affairs, and currently is the French ambassador to Latvia. His research is focused on the political geography of Europe, with special attention to the concept of borders in the construction of modern Europe. Originally published in French in 1998, "The European Republic" offers a short overview of historical, geographical and geopolitical aspects of the construction of political Europe.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first two chapters are entitled "History I & II", the next two chapters "Geography I & II" and the last two chapters "Geopolitics I & II". The introductory historical part may be best described by Foucher's term "geohistory". The author looks, retrospectively, for the historical and cultural definitions of the geopolitical term "Europe". At the beginning he refuses the deterministic notion that the current development is an inevitable result of the European cultural and historical experience. "...Europe as an organised community is not historically inevitable."¹ This geohistorical part offers chronologically arranged summarisation of the main myths and visions of Europe: from Ancient Times, Christian Middle-Ages, Enlightenment and modern nation-states to the redefinition of Europe after the end of the Cold War. Each historical period developed its own perception of Europe, which was often in conflict with the previous one. Simultaneously, he points to the crucial aspect of the process of the construction of Europe – throughout the course of history its identity has been shaped and constructed in opposition to other entities, for example Muslim Ottoman empire. Nevertheless, Foucher's attitude is not solely ideational – for him, Europe is constituted both by the ideational (imaginary) and by the material (geographical) components. Europe, as a sociogeographical and geopolitical reality is in a constant flux, it is a repeatedly reinvented tradition.

The contemporary political Europe is understood as a conjunction of both contingent (ideational) and objective (material) realities – in the chapters devoted to geography the author touches upon the latter ones. They are represented (1) by the objective reality of diverging national visions of Europe, (2) by the intense migration pressures after the end of the Cold War. National visions as Foucher elaborates at them are especially worth focusing on. The geographical part adds another level of diversity into the construction of today's Europe. Europe is not only a product of often competing, yet historically rooted visions of Europe, but also a product of competing national interests, projected onto Europe, cf. "Through the building of Europe, France aims at its reincarnation and Germany strives for redemption".² The European integration of the past 50 years was possible only thanks to the convergence of these national expectations and visions of Europe. According to

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Foucher, the nation-states remain the main political players. "Nation, the European invention, remains at the centre of the European geopolitics."³ The chapter called "Geography I" introduces several diverse (although complementary) visions of the most important European players. But in contradiction to the historically contingent and contested notion of the geopolitical term Europe in the first part of the book, the national interests in the second part are described as fixed. In line with the rationalist model of simple, Bayesian learning, this national interests and visions of European integration are only moderated through interaction with other actors. Although the author admits the striking similarity of attitudes and policies on the level of actors' behaviour, the interests and motivations of individual states are seen as "permanently diverse" and exogenous to the process of interaction.

In the last two chapters titled "Geopolitics I & II", Foucher reassures the reader that his notion of Europe as a geopolitical entity is not limited to its geographical components. He even claims that "the geographical reality – land surrounded by the sea – is of low importance from the historical and geopolitical point of view".⁴ The author advocates "the loose geopolitics" of political Europe that (1) respects the natural diversity of national interests and motivations and (2) simultaneously acknowledges the power of human will to shape Europe "realistically". This means that the construction of Europe should be able to reflect geo-economical and geopolitical reality of the current international system, namely the process of economic globalisation and the American hegemony. Foucher identifies himself with the concept of geo-economics, claiming that the natural rivalry between the actors of international system has been transformed from military into economic competition among states that no longer strive for military conquest. With regard to the distribution of economic, technological, military and cultural power, the reality of international system clearly shows the hegemony of the USA. Nevertheless, as Foucher argues, this hegemony has reached its horizon thanks to the increasing cost and risks of this unique American position. The global situation offers the opportunity to build strong Europe that would share the global leadership and spread its modern experiment of truly multipolar and polycentric system.⁵ Quite interestingly, on the last two pages of the chapter "Geopolitics II", this unique European system is described as a "democratic geopolitics", multi-state system based on genuine interest in co-operation ("Commonwill" as an opposite to "Commonwealth"). Yet the question how the world overcame the warring geopolitics and reached the stage of geo-economics (not to mention the desired stage of tamed, democratic geopolitics) remains an unanswered puzzle. Also, it is not clear how the appeal for Europe to be a herald of the new self-restricting "global democratic geopolitics" is compatible with the call for economically and militarily powerful Europe as a response to the objective rivalry of contemporary geopolitical (or geo-economic) system.

Despite rooted in material geography, Foucher sometimes introduces a more ideational approach, resembling constructivist works on the European integration. Nevertheless, he does so without questioning the material ontology and positivist epistemology of geopolitics. The first two chapters of the book ("History I & II") are leaning more towards constructivism, acknowledging the ideationally contingent character of the term Europe, but the last

geopolitical chapters shows a return towards materialism. Although Foucher admits that Europe is at least partly socially constructed, he does not go as far as to acknowledge the contingent nature of the rivalry in a multipolar global system and of the global geopolitics. Similarly to constructivists, he admits the social and ideational nature of Europe as a geopolitical entity of international system (Europe as an idea), but at the same time does not question the sources of European states' identities and motivations, or the nature of the international system (anarchy) within which Europe as a whole is embedded. The initial freedom of interpretations of Europe (historical chapters) is therefore constrained by the objective nature of the global geopolitical system (geopolitical chapters). Therefore, the whole book offers inevitably only one possible (rational and realistic) interpretation of the future of today's Europe. The author agrees with Karl Lamers: "I can not imagine that Europe would be anything else than a great power, on the basis of strong economy and military power guarantying security."⁶ After reading the geopolitical chapters, the last remark on the democratic geopolitics seems as a vision of a politician rather than a scientific conclusion of a scholar.

Foucher's work offers a good empirical analysis of several ideational and material aspects of the construction of political Europe. This book can be read as a gathering of historical, geographical, economic and political realities of Europe. Especially valuable is the summarisation of different historically contingent visions and interpretations of Europe, going beyond the geographical notion of Europe, and the summarisation of the diverging but compatible national expectations and interests in the integration process. Finally, the picture is completed with the description of the current global system. On the other side, the text sometimes lacks coherence. Empirical findings (some of them are quite detailed facts) are sometimes piled up without any reference to a more general thesis that they would support (while presumably based on the concept of geopolitics). Linking particular empirical facts to general propositions on European integration is also difficult thanks to sometimes confusing style and language (however, this may be due to the translation into Czech). Lastly, it is too difficult to embrace all presented aspects of the construction of political Europe under the theoretical concept of geopolitics. From the theoretical point of view, geopolitics offers too little instruments to take into account the importance of described ideational and normative factors (for example the historic ideas of Europe, democracy and co-operation as norms governing European political system). In practice, current European political system can be hardly described as geopolitics in traditional terms, since it often resembles domestic political system tamed by a constitution rather than an anarchical international order.

Vít Beneš

ENDNOTES

¹ Foucher, Michel: *Evropská republika*. Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2002, p. 21. All quotations are the translations from the Czech version of this book, even though it has been translated into several languages including English.

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² Ibid., p. 58.

³ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

⁶ Karl Lamers cited in Foucher, Michel: cit. op., p. 115.