B.N. Floria, *Russkoe gosudarstvo i ego Zapadnye sosedi (1655–1661 gg.)* [Флоря Б.Н., *Русское государство и его Западные соседи (1655–1661 гг.)*], Moscow: Indrik, 2010, 656 p. ISBN 978-5-91674-082-0

When this monograph by Boris Floria appeared, it was hoped that the work would evaluate the earlier Russian historiography on the topic, and, relying on newly discovered sources, present a contemporary, new approach to this painful, ‘Deluge’ period. According to the Imperial Russian, and even more Soviet understanding, in 1654–1666, the Muscovite state fought a fair war of liberation: it helped (having been asked) the Ukrainian and Belarusian nations to free themselves from the yoke of the Poles and Lithuanians, while uniting all three East Slavic lands into a united tsarist government.

Unfortunately, the annotation on page 4 of the discussed book causes alarm. It declares that the monograph is analysing relations between Russia and its Western neighbours *after the Pereyaslav Rada and Ukraine’s annexation* [here this desire is presented as a reality?]¹, *the Russian state made great efforts to resolve the most important challenges it faced in foreign policy – the unification of the Eastern Slavic lands and the conquest of an outlet to the Baltic Sea* [wondering just who, and when, raised such challenges for Russia, and what forced them to decide?].

In the first sentences of the monograph’s introduction, albeit tentatively, it is admitted that in the middle of the 17th century *a crisis arose in the traditional system of international relations in Eastern Europe with the actions of the Russian side playing not the final role ...* (p. 6). But later some challenges (without specifying them) standing against Russia are mentioned again and, apparently, fate or even higher powers faced the Russian elite *with the necessity* [my emphasis – *E.M.*] *to make decisions* on the fate of Ukraine and the joint *state of Poland–Lithuania* (p. 6). The short review of sources mentions only the Moscow *Prikaz* records in the *Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents*, and, as if insuring against possible criticism, stresses that the monograph *explores the history of Russia’s foreign policy in 1655–1661, rather than the system of international relations of part of Eastern Europe* (p. 7). But it does not succeed in avoiding criticism. The Ukrainian historian Jaroslav Fedoruk, with full justification, stated that for a thorough study of the various processes and intentions that took place at that time in Eastern Europe, it is clearly too small, and provided a number of examples of sources

¹ This is something new; up to now in Russia there was talk and writing about the unification of Russia and Ukraine.

and how (especially by comparing them) they could be used, so that the view would be much more complete, and not one-sided².

From the Russian side, all of its neighbours (at least to the West) often hear exhortations 'not to politicise history'. However when in a single page one reads that *war became inevitable* when the decision was made in Moscow to accept Ukraine into Russia's custody (although it was not Poland and Lithuania which thereby broke the *Eternal Peace* with Russia, concluded just 20 years earlier, but vice versa), and on another page, it is noted as axiomatic that someone always gave Muscovy the task of uniting *all the Eastern Slavic lands around Moscow*. One might think this, a Sisyphean task, which is still underway without a chance of completion. Is this not due to the little Lithuanians and treacherous Poles incited by the treacherous West with the Pope at the forefront? Or perhaps just these unhappy, 'enslaved' Eastern Slavs and Orthodox Christians did not really wish to be *pod vysokoju carskoju rukoju*, but played their games, as they are playing them up to now? They went to rescue the Ukrainians, but probably the Belarusians and those very Ukrainians suffered the most ...

Discussing the diplomatic activities of the Russians, it is pointed out that the Muscovites formed the opinion of Europe's rulers at that time, that essentially no one would come to the assistance of Poland and Lithuania. One can note that one of the main reasons provoking another aggressor, Sweden, to attack the state of Poland and Lithuania was the aim to stop the expansion of Russia to the west, that is, that it by itself would not destroy the victims and become established on the Baltic coast.

The monograph makes the bold conclusion that *the magnates and szlachta of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania clearly stopped considering the Russian government temporary* (p. 42). Yes, at that time many gentry and a few magnates in the conquered lands, wanting to preserve their possessions under the conditions of occupation, swore allegiance to the tsar, but as subsequent events showed, most of them were to forsake that forced oath at the slightest opportunity, namely because they considered the Russian government temporary, and swore an oath to it only when they were forced by circumstances.

Summarising the successful year 1655 for Russia, the author states that *never before were Russian politicians so close to resolving the task, which they raised* [my emphasis – E.M.] *in the 1490s to unite all the Eastern Slavic lands in a unified Russian state* (p. 43). But here, as always, the Poles interfered, as well as the Swedes ... Emphasising the Swedish reluctance to make any decisions that would consolidate the new situation unfolding between the two countries in 1655, because it was preparing to attack Russia. Therefore, *to hinder the plans of Charles X Gustav, a plan for a preventive* [my

² Ia. Fedoruk, *Vilens'kii dogovyr 1656 roku. Skhidnoevropejs'ka kriza i Ukraina u seredini XVII stolittia* (Kiev, 2011), p. 30.

emphasis – *E.M.*] *war with Sweden was raised* (p. 49). How useful here would have been the sources of the same Swedes ...

Considerable attention is devoted to the economic considerations justifying the war against the Swedes, showing how the Swedes ‘harmed’ Russian merchants, restricting their trade through the Livonian ports belonging to the Swedes in every way, even though somehow Russian trade through these ports increased, and the Swedes themselves were interested in its growth and the income from it. But here, it appeared to the Russians that they were unfairly wronged, even though everything was based on bilateral agreements, and they, as the author writes, decided to destroy the Swedish-erected barriers to Europe by force. The Swedes, according to the author, were also guilty, for by becoming involved in this conflict, they forced other countries to engage in it, which previously had not intended to, and were inclined to leave Russia unhindered to defend its interests in the fight against its neighbours.

Describing the failed Russian attempt in 1656 to take Livonia with Riga away from the Swedes, the author believes that the Russians overestimated their strength. On the other hand, it is shown that the Polish and Lithuanian side, after the recapture of Warsaw from the Swedes, also overestimated their options before the beginning of the 1656 negotiations near Vilnius. The Russian positions with respect to the Poles and Lithuanians were eased by their defeat near Riga. Since both sides needed a ceasefire very much, on 11 March 1656 near Vilnius (in Nemėžys), it was signed by both parties without adopting any major commitments, but only agreeing not to end the war against the Swedes, and promising to elect the tsar as the ruler of Poland and Lithuania in the next Seimas.

In discussing the situation that arose in 1657, when the forces of Sweden, Brandenburg-Prussia, Transylvania and Ukraine united in a coalition against Poland and Lithuania, the author shows how this threatened the latter, and how they tried to seek Russian assistance. In turn, even though B. Khmelnytsky, by joining this coalition, actually joined the side of the enemies of Russia, the Russians did not make very strong statements, because they believed that the situation would speed up the Polish decision to elect the tsar to their throne. Moscow had to make important political decisions, because otherwise, by not interfering, the danger of completely losing control of the situation and no longer being a decisive factor in this war threatened.

But in the summer of 1657, matters turned out differently. The Crimean Tatars, the Turkish Sultan and Austria provided assistance to Poland and Lithuania. Denmark invaded the Swedish holdings, and therefore the Swedish king and his army left Cossack troops and the Transylvania army in Poland actually alone, and the latter were eventually forced to surrender to Polish, Lithuanian and Tatar forces. And Khmelnytsky was forced to abandon the

independent policy that he had carried out at the end of 1656 and in the first half of 1657, and then to seek a rapprochement with Moscow again.

After the situation in Poland had changed radically, Moscow realised that the election of the tsar to the throne of the Republic had become very questionable. Only the Lithuanians, not wanting a war in their lands, supported, at least in words, this wish by the Russians, while the Polish *szlachta* were inclined to choose the son of the Austrian emperor. Meanwhile, in Ukraine after Khmelnytsky's death, the Cossacks elected Ivan Vygovski as the new hetman, who at first continued the line of cooperation with Moscow, but a conflict within the country arose when the peaceful period became established, the Cossack masses, accustomed to fighting continuously, no longer had a source of livelihood, because salaries were not being paid. Here is the interesting observation by the author that *the Moscow 'bureaucracy' was known for its many flaws, but unlike, for example, the Republic's government, it regularly paid wages for service*, and was therefore acceptable to the Cossack masses (p. 296).

Throughout the whole book, one can notice the author's reluctance to see in the actions of the Ukrainians the nascent independent Ukrainian state. All Ukrainian actions are presented only as some form of decision adopted by the *Cossack leaders* for their own interests, and they are valued only as much as they were in line with or conflicted with the interests of the state of Moscow rather than the interests of the Ukrainian state, even though often those of one group contradicted those of the other. From this followed the constant instability in Ukraine, which allowed its neighbours to manipulate it.

The author tries to portray the Cossack rapprochement with the Poles and Lithuanians essentially only as the dissatisfaction of the then Cossack hetman, I. Vygovski, and his entourage of Cossack chiefs with the Russians, who did not support them sufficiently against their enemies within Ukraine and tried to limit their autonomy. This, without doubt, had an impact on the Ukrainian decision, especially the second motive for autonomy; but, apparently, there is no doubt that the Cossack leadership saw more opportunities for statehood in the weakened and, according to the conditions at that time, liberal state of Poland and Lithuania, than in the growing autocratic Russia.

The author acknowledges that in the occupied territories of Lithuania, the Russians lost control, and the *szlachta* that had sworn an oath of loyalty to the tsar went over to the side of King John Casimir. The situation was no easier in the Belarusian GDL lands, where the majority of the population acted against the Russians. After the Russian victories at the beginning of 1660, from the summer, the Lithuanians and the Poles took the initiative and pushed the occupiers out of Lithuania and a large part of the Belarusian and Ukrainian lands. The errors the Russians made in the Belarusian lands in the GDL and Ukraine are analysed. According to the author, the Russians realised that they did not have the trust of the majority of Ukrainians, but not

fearing anything pursued in their own interests, mainly relying on the left-bank Ukraine, where there were more Cossacks supporting Moscow's side.

At the end, it became clear why the chronology of the book covers such a rather strange period, 1655–1661. It turns out that the Swedes were guilty, because by intervening in 1655 in the traditional, chronic and usual conflict between two East European states about which no one in Europe cared too much, they created an international crisis. The crisis ended when in the summer of 1661, the Russians and the Swedes signed a peace treaty in Cardis, and Moscow could once again, as it was accustomed to, manage its bilateral relations with its neighbours without the interference of the international community. It seemed that it turned out that no one could have their own legitimate interests where Moscow had them, because by interfering with its and the other side's relations, the 'outsider' as if distorts the natural course of events, and thereby hinders Russia *in resolving the challenges standing before it*, and then it *faces the necessity to make decisions related to the destinies of states and nations*. It seems that Russia has always been right in bilateral relations for hundreds of years, and if it is wrong, then read from the beginning ...

The author states that in the middle of the 17th century, in the ruling circles of Russia, projects were created to make it dominant in the region, its western neighbours had to be subdued, but they did not succeed in implementing them fully. The reason for this was not only the insufficient Russian military and financial capabilities, but also the underdeveloped diplomatic corps, and as a consequence the lack of accurate information, as well as the slow making of decisions. In the author's opinion, *the most important (Russian) priority in the year was the fight for the attachment of the Belarusian and Ukrainian lands previously [sic] being in the composition of the Polish-Lithuanian state*. And the solution to resolve *the Baltic question* was taken at a time when it was already thought that *the problem of the 'collection' of the Eastern Slavic lands was already essentially resolved* (p. 645). It is stated that Moscow consistently adhered to this order of priorities, and no one was able to distort it, and it made all major decisions, though not always correct, independently, and not affected by anyone.

The book ends with a minimal index of names and a brief glossary. Unfortunately, as is quite often the case with Russian monographs, there is no list of literature and sources, nor an index of place-names.

One can say that this book creates a dual impression, because the author has really provided a multitude of hitherto unused sources from Russian archives. This is a definite plus for the work. But there are not, except for ones already published, any sources from the archives of other countries. This undoubtedly makes the work one-sided, all the more so as the author accepts rather uncritically the data provided in Muscovite sources, and this makes the job even more one-sided, even though there were very great efforts to maintain objectivity and neutrality. Another major drawback of the work is

that the author, in essence, does not know the latest foreign historiography, and relies mainly on works 20 years old or even older. Even so, Floria's study is really valuable, if only for bringing into scholarly circulation a multitude of Russian sources, and new insights. However, the repetition of the old Imperial Russian and Soviet stereotypes (about the Russian duty, not fearing any other interests *to unite the Eastern Slavs*, and *open a window to Europe*) in assessing the events of that time, makes, these days, a rather strange impression.

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