

Mateusz Czasak*

JÓZEF M. FISZER (RED.)

GRA O ŚWIAT. W STRONĘ NOWEJ JAŁTY?

[THE GAME TO WIN THE WORLD. TOWARDS THE NEW YALTA?]

INSTYTUT STUDIÓW POLITYCZNYCH PAN, WARSZAWA 2018, SS. 266

DOI: 10.26399/meip.3(66).2019.35/m.czasak

The picturesque Crimean Peninsula has been an arena of historical struggles for centuries. In the years 1853–1856, the empires of that time fought a war on its territory, which exposed the weakness of the Romanov Empire and contributed to attempts to reform Russia. In the twentieth century, a particularly important event that took place there was the conference of the great powers that won the Second World War. The USSR authorities organised one of the most important meetings of Allied leaders in the town of Yalta, in the scenery of the summer manor houses of the rulers of pre-revolutionary Russia. Despite the ongoing war, the three powers decided not to wait for the end of the conflict and to speed up the process of agreeing on the future world order.

During the Yalta conference, the leaders made decisions also about Poland. Issues concerning our country were not the most important problem raised in the debates, but they took most of the time and caused many difficulties to the participants.

At the Yalta conference, the issue of Polish borders was settled. The three leaders agreed upon the Curzon line as the eastern border, and on the course of the rivers Oder and Lusatian Neisse as the western. It was also settled that the future Polish government will consist of representatives of the Provisional Government and the democratic ‘leaders of the London camp’ introduced to it. As a result of the arbitrary solutions in this matter, truncation of eastern

* Mateusz Czasak – M.A., Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, e-mail: mateusz.czasak@gmail.com; ORCID 0000-0003-0052-3189

provinces from the territory of Poland, the formula of future elections which opened the way to manipulation, all these decisions contributed to the fact that the word ‘Yalta’ has become a symbol of betrayal of Polish interests by its allies after the Second World War. One of the co-authors of the book, Stefan Troebst, describes it in an interesting way. Already in the protest issued in February 1945, after the conference, the government of the Republic of Poland stated that ‘the decisions of the Three Powers Conference concerning Poland cannot be recognised and cannot bind the Polish Nation’ and

‘the Polish Nation treats the detachment of half of its eastern territory from Poland by imposing the so-called Curzon Line as the Polish-Soviet border as a new partition of Poland, this time made by Poland’s allies’.

Today, Crimea has also become an important place for the emerging new world order. The annexation of this peninsula by Russia in 2014 was a violation of international law. It has become one of the symbols of the increasingly overt, imperialist policy of the country ruled by Vladimir Putin.

Both historical events that took place in Yalta and the importance of the peninsula in shaping the new world order were discussed during a scientific conference entitled *The Game to Win the World. Towards the New Yalta?* crowning the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It took place on 7–8 December 2015 at the Pałac Staszica in Warsaw.

The proceedings were divided into three panels:

- 1) Conference in Yalta in February 1945: contemporary interpretations – disputes – misunderstandings.
- 2) Geopolitical consequences of Yalta from the German, Russian and Polish perspectives.
- 3) New global order? Premises, historical facts, forecasts.

Its outcome is a collective work under the same title, with the preface and edited by Professor Józef M. Fiszer. It consists of an introduction, eight chapters, summaries, an index and notes about the authors. The individual chapters are grouped into three parts corresponding to the titles of the panels. Just like the conference, the book is trilingual, it contains texts in Polish, German and Russian.

The first part of the work consists of three chapters. In the first of them Inessa Siergiejewna Jaźborowskaja discusses the question of ‘socialist bloc’ and ‘socialist brotherhood’ in the bipolar world. Another one, written by Stefan Troebst, is entitled “Jałta jako europejskie miejsce pamięci?” [‘Yalta

as a European place of remembrance?']. The frequency of the appearance of the term 'Yalta' in works concerning the latest European history in various countries is analysed here. In addition, the author describes the connotations associated with this word in each country. The starting point for him is Poland, where the term 'Yalta' is identified with the decisions on the future of Poland taken by the Allies at a series of conferences at the end of the Second World War. It is also one of the synonyms of betrayal of its interests and concessions to the USSR resulting in its hegemony and Sovietisation. In other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, 'Yalta' is no longer, according to the author, such an important place of remembrance. This results from the different wartime and post-war history of these states. For example, in Czechoslovakia, a pre-war political system was reconstructed after the war, while Hungary as the ally of the Third Reich had much lower expectations related to the end of the war.

Also in the West the term 'Yalta' is not as widely known and emotionally connected as in Poland. For German citizens, more important 'places of remembrance', which are more often mentioned at history lessons are Verdun, Wannsee, and Potsdam. Similarly, Yalta occupies a marginal position in French or British historiography. The present policy of Vladimir Putin, who is trying to increase its importance, does not contribute to strengthening the significance of this term-symbol.

In the last chapter of the first thematic block, Wojciech Roszkowski writes about "Polskie spojrzenie na geopolityczne konsekwencje konferencji Jałtańskiej" ['A Polish look at the geopolitical consequences of the Yalta Conference']. At the beginning of the text he states that

'Although the narrative about Yalta is still today based mainly on the great powers victorious in the Second World War, it is worth listening to the Polish story about this conference and drawing logical conclusions from it'.

The author writes that the division of Europe into spheres of influence according to Stalin's principle stipulating that 'the extent of military control corresponds to the stretch of the communist system' resulted from the application of pure Realpolitik.

Wojciech Roszkowski describes how the Western allies basically agreed to subordinate the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe to the USSR, and at the same time demonstrates that during the Tehran conference in 1943 the Atlantic Charter, signed in 1942, was broken when the politicians of the 'Big Three' agreed to move Poland's borders without informing the

Government-in-exile about it. The Polish issue was one of the most important points of the meeting in Yalta, but it was settled in a way that resulted in the hegemony of the USSR over the country and the region. At the same time, the author contrasts the course of the conference so unfavourable for our country with the situation of France writing that

‘Yalta was the triumph of France, which entered the victorious coalition, having expended the least war effort’.

In conclusion, he states that only partially free elections of 4 June 1989 were in a way the end of the Second World War.

The second part of the book also consists of three chapters. The first of them by Leonid Gibianski is entitled “Jałta i dążenia ZSRS w tworzeniu powojennego porządku świata: między rzeczywistością historyczną a interpretacjami w sowieckiej i rosyjskiej historiografii” [‘Yalta and the USSR’s strivings towards the creation of the post-war world order: between historical reality and interpretations in Soviet and Russian historiography’]. In the second chapter, Christoph Kleßmann takes up the subject of changes of historiographic assessments of Yalta in divided Germany. In the first part of the text he analyses the position of historians from the German Democratic Republic (GDR). From the beginning, they put emphasis on the description of opportunities and new perspectives that opened to the Germans after the capitulation. They saw prospects of a promising future in the new territorial arrangement and political system.

While the GDR historians’ opinion on Yalta was relatively homogeneous, three main positions, differing from one another, crystallised in the Federal Republic of Germany. The author uses here the names ‘Traditionalists’, ‘Revisionists’ and ‘Post-Revisionists’. According to the first group, the USSR and Joseph Stalin, who strived for expansion, were responsible for finishing Allied war cooperation and the beginning of the Cold War.

Revisionists, in turn, were close in their assessments to their colleagues from the Eastern bloc and attributed main responsibility for the development of the Cold War to the United States. The last group combined the elements of both these trends.

Describing how the assessments of the Yalta conference changed after the end of the Cold War, Kleßmann emphasises that

‘The end of communism and the availability of new sources do not in any case provide a completely clear and unequivocal answer to the question about the beginning and alternatives to the Cold War and thus also to Yalta’.

In conclusion, he asserts the lack of unambiguous answers to a number of questions, such as whether the cold war was inevitable, as long as Stalin lived and ruled. Or how to explain the predominance of relatively positive opinions on the results of the Yalta conference in the USA and Great Britain. I find this text showing changes in the interpretation of events in Yalta depending on the country and the epoch immensely interesting especially since the author also indicates that there are still no answers to a number of questions.

The next chapter by Wojciech Materski is entitled “Jałta jako kluczowy etap finalizacji ładu powojennego” [‘Yalta as a key stage in finalising the post-war order’]. The establishment of a new post-war order was the subject of interest of the anti-Hitler coalition from the beginning of its existence. The principles adopted in the Atlantic Charter created not only the basis for cooperation during the Second World War, but also the framework for later organisational and legal solutions. During the Yalta conference, the Allies paid a lot of attention to the Polish issue, its future government and the course of the Polish-German border. The author writes about the way of settling the ‘Polish issue’ and other problems related to Central and Eastern European countries:

‘In a similar way that the Polish issue was resolved in Yalta, other decisions regarding Central and Eastern Europe were made. If they did not exaggerate the solutions advocated by Moscow, they did not close the road to their implementation in the future, albeit in a camouflaged manner with phraseology in the spirit of the Atlantic Charter’.

In this context Wojciech Materski advocates an important thesis that during the conference, under the pretence of adopting solutions in line with the Atlantic Charter, Soviet domination in the region was sanctioned, as well as the possibility of vetoing unfavourable decisions of the Security Council by the USSR. In conclusion, he states that the conference in Yalta was crucial for the post-war order in Europe. It crumpled only with the collapse of the USSR, which confirmed the artificiality of solutions decided upon at the Crimean conference.

In the final text “Jałta: kto wygrał II wojnę światową, a kto przegrał pokój?” [‘Who Won the Second World War and Who Lost Peace?’] Józef M. Fiszer describes the post-war world situation, and the creation of the new Yalta-Potsdam order in a very interesting way. Answering the question asked in the title, he defines the US as the main winner, who won not only the war but also peace. West Germany is a country which, although it lost the war, it ‘won peace’, largely thanks to the help of the West and the USA. The losers turned out to be Central and Eastern European countries, including

Poland, which lost their sovereignty, freedom and were also forced to resign from participation in the Marshall Plan. At the end of the text, the author emphasises the necessity of the presence of an efficient Euro-Atlantic system, the UN, democratisation of Russia. All these entities should work together to build a new, democratic multipolar order. According to the author, this is the only way to prevent the Third World War.

The presented book consists of a number of interesting, erudite texts. They show not only the events that took place in Yalta but also their various assessments. The Yalta Conference and its impact are discussed against a backdrop of world events both during and after the Second World War. The value added of the book is the fact that it was published in three languages, it gives a reader an opportunity to read articles written by scientists who are leading specialists with notable scientific achievements, in their original versions.

After annexation in 2014, the Crimean Peninsula has once again become one of symbolic places, confirming Russia's desire to recreate the empire. In this context, Józef Fiszer's line of argument about the necessary cooperation of the greatest actors of the international political scene and the democratisation of Russia in order to prevent another world war is extremely important. Let us hope that the new world order will be born peacefully without the need for a 'new Yalta'.

The book *Gra o świat. W stronę nowej Jałty?* [*The Game to Win the World. Towards the New Yalta?*] can be recommended to both scholars and students as well as readers interested in topics related to history, politics and international relations.

Cite as:

Czasak, M. (2019) book review (in *Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna* 3(66), 201–206): Józef M. Fiszer (ed.), *The Game to Win the World. Towards the New Yalta?* Warszawa 2018: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 266 pp. DOI: 10.26399/meip.3(66).2019.35/m.czasak

Cytuj jako:

Czasak, M., recenzja książki: Józef M. Fiszer (red.) *The Game to Win the World. Towards the New Yalta?* [*Gra o świat. W stronę nowej Jałty?*], Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2018, ss. 226, „*Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna*” 2019 nr 3(66), s. 201–206. DOI: 10.26399/meip.3(66).2019.35/m.czasak