

**B**OGDAN-ALEXANDRU SCHIPOR, *POLITICA  
MARIİ BRITANII LA FRONTIERA DE VEST A  
UNIUNII SOVIETICE, 1938-1941* [GREAT  
BRITAIN'S POLICY AT THE WESTERN BORDER  
OF SOVIET UNION, 1938-1941], ED. JUNIMEA, IAȘI  
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The outcome of a Ph.D. work defended in the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iassy, the book published by the prestigious Romanian Printing House "Junimea" represents a fresh investigation into the aims of British diplomacy in what was termed at the beginning of 1920s by some authors the "cordon sanitaire" area surrounding Soviet Union. In contrast to Elisabeth Barker<sup>1</sup>, Patrick Salmon<sup>2</sup> and Anita Prazmowska<sup>3</sup>'s monographs or to my comparative research facilitated by Glasgow University based mostly on British archival documents and focused on the British policy on Romania, Finland and Estonia (March 1939-March 1940)<sup>4</sup>, Bogdan Alexandru Schipor deals with the British policy in the entire area from Helsinki to Bucharest and approaches the period 1938-1941, i.e. from the Anschluss to the "vanishing" of the states of this area or to their relegation to a status of dependency on Germany. The author is a researcher in the "A.D. Xenopol" Institute of History of the Romanian Academy and teaches university courses at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iassy, while also being the chairman of the Section for Nordic Studies of the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies.

The book consists of five chapters which systematically and thematically approach the British policy in above mentioned area. It must be

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Anita Prazmowska, *Eastern Europe and the origins of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Silviu Miloiu, "Building the Eastern Front? The British Policy toward Romania, Finland and Estonia (March 1939 - March 1940): A comparative Approach", in Mioara Anton, Florin Anghel, Cosmin Popa, *Hegemoniile trecutului. Evoluții românești și europene. Profesorului Ioan Chiper la 70 de ani* (București: Ed. Curtea Veche 2006), 165-186.

remembered that, as a traditional balance power, British presence in European affairs was considered by smaller states useful to the maintenance of European equilibrium and order. Thus, the first chapter tries to catch the underlying factors in British policy towards this area between 1919 and 1938. Special chapters are dedicated to topics such as the British understanding of “cordon sanitaire” in the 1920s and the basis of British appeasement in the 1930s. The place of the two mid-sized actors in this equation, i.e. Poland and Romania, is approached in chapters two, three and five. The author investigates the British policy in the area in the wake of the Anschluss and the German occupation of Czechoslovakia the “revolution” in the British policy of March 1939 and the British interests and expectances from the tripartite discussions with France and Soviet Union in Moscow in the summer 1939. Schipor considers the question of “indirect aggression” raised and insisted upon by Viatcheslav Molotov as an important factor which undermined the possibility of reaching an agreement regardless the preparedness of the Western Powers to make concessions to Soviet demands (p. 192). The last chapter of the book is dedicated to Romania’s place in British policy from the outbreak of World War II to 1941 when Romania was inescapably attracted into German sphere of influence. The author states his opinion that Romania started to acquire a “quite significant” role in British policy once the World War II started, the British being particularly interested in blocking the German access to Romanian oil. The author pays a consistent chapter to British policy regarding the Baltic states and Finland in the first two years following the outbreak of World War II when the independence of the former subsided until it was lost altogether while Finland was a victim of Soviet mixture of imperialism and search for security.

In his conclusions the author professes his inability to give an answer to the question whether Britain has drawn a coherent plan regarding “the East European states that have sought its sympathy and help” (p. 324). The author estimates that at least regarding Poland and Romania the British Government at least in 1938-1939 has pursued a predetermined policy.

The research for this book is based on investigation of the Romanian and British archives. To supplement the lack of access in the Baltic, Finnish and Polish archives, the author makes use of an important number of published documents, memoirs, diaries, special and general works.

As a professor of Baltic and Nordic studies, I consider this book as marking a progress in our knowledge of British policy in the area and in the East European states’ policies of enlisting British help to their independence strivings and, therefore, I strongly recommend this book to both specialist and non-specialist Romanian and foreign readers.