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## NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE REALIST PARADIGM IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the bipolar order marked serious problems of the realist paradigm in international relations. The static and narrow structural theory of Kenneth Waltz was unable to explain domestic processes in the Soviet Union and the fall of the Soviet empire contributed to prestigious defeat of the whole paradigm. Realism has been pushed to the margin of theoretical debates as an “obsolete” approach belonging to the bygone cold-war era. This image is not justified as it reduces the realist paradigm to structural realism and ignores other streams present in the realist camp. Besides, the Yugoslav conflict a few months after the end of the cold war illustrated that even victorious liberalism would face some serious explanatory problems.

Nevertheless, realism faces a challenge of its revival in the post cold-war international reality. The structural analysis has retained some of its value yet it is obvious that any new realist theory must depart from the static perspective of structural realism and its focus on international system. Thus, some theorists in the realist camp have postulated a “return to Morgenthau”, his dynamic and multifaceted understanding of power and his links between foreign and domestic determinants of the state’s foreign policy. The article concludes that the “return to Morgenthau” is a step in the right direction and classical realist considerations may serve as a source of valuable inspirations. Yet the “return to Morgenthau” is a rhetoric figure. It calls for more flexible

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understanding of international affairs and it does not exempt new generation of theorists in the realist camp from developing a new and dynamic realist theory of contemporary international relations.

Several attempts have been made in this regard in recent years. This article refers to “elaborated structural realism” (ESR) and neoclassical realism. Yet it claims that the attempts of ESR to extend a catalogue of structural variables and retain the logic of structural analysis have been less promising in contemporary dynamic international relations than neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism’s reference to multifaceted concept of power, present in theoretical considerations of Morgenthau, and its acceptance of a broad catalogue of domestic variables helps to follow contemporary international processes better.

Yet neoclassical realism is not free from ambiguities. It is certainly not a pure “return to Morgenthau”. It declares a synthesis of the best elements of structural and classical streams of realism – in both ontological and methodological sense. This attitude is illustrated by a concept of “domestic transmission belt” between impulses coming from the international system level and state’s foreign policy decisions. It consumes a variety of domestic determinants, including the perception of power and quality of political elites. Nevertheless, the idea of the synthesis tries to reconcile contradicting ontological and especially methodological concepts present in Morgenthau’s and Waltz’s theories. It contributes to some vagueness of neoclassical realist assumptions. Besides, neoclassical realism has hardly been a consistent theoretical approach. It is more like a catalogue of loose considerations of theorists sharing the idea of the synthesis. Finally, neoclassical realism faces some difficulties with a formulation of more general conclusions about contemporary international affairs as well.

Thus, the article urges that neoclassical realism is a promising response to the crisis of the realist paradigm. Yet its ability to revive realism in the post cold-war international reality is still disputable. Neoclassical realism needs the next step ahead that would clarify its theoretical assumptions and improve its internal coherence.

## 1. CRISIS OF REALISM IN THE POST COLD-WAR INTERNATIONAL REALITY: INSPIRATIONS FROM THE “RETURN TO MORGENTHAU”

The fall of the Soviet Union marked a deep prestigious defeat of the realist paradigm in international relations. Kenneth Waltz’s structural theory, which dominated the realist camp in the 1980s, departed from the previous

classical realist considerations, including the political thought of Hans Morgenthau. Structural realism ignored classical realist assumptions about historical, social and legal determinants of political activity. It disregarded domestic variables and also their impact on the state's foreign policy. Finally, Kenneth Waltz rejected Morgenthau's dilemmas regarding the struggle for power, Morgenthau's ethical considerations and his call for a responsible leadership able to master the potential of conflict in politics<sup>1</sup>. Structural realism focused on the structure of the international system as the main determinant of the state's foreign activity. It favoured systemic variables and believed that the state's place in the structure explains the nature of its foreign policy. Structural attitude considerably narrowed the previous classical realist approach to politics, yet it favoured rationality and predictability of political behaviour rather than historical or ethical considerations<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, structural realism faced serious explanatory problems. It was unprepared to track internal changes in the Soviet state and analyse domestic sources of the fall of the Soviet empire<sup>3</sup>. It completely ignored dynamic domestic changes in the Eastern bloc and emphasised the stability of the bipolar order – even before the fall of the cold war bipolarity. To be sure, structural realism of Kenneth Waltz was not the only stream of realism developed in the decade, yet its defeat as the leading realist theory resulted in a deep crisis of the entire realist paradigm. In fact, realism faced a severe criticism and its ability to explain the post cold-war international reality was questioned. Besides, the spectacular victory of liberalism has additionally pushed the realist paradigm to defensive and strengthened its image as an obsolete theoretical attitude belonging to the bygone cold-war era.

The course of international relations after the collapse of the bipolar order has illustrated that disregard for realism has been premature. Similarly, the bloody wars in Rwanda and Yugoslavia just a few years after the end of the cold war confirmed that even the victorious liberalism would face some

<sup>1</sup> K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading–Menlo Park–London 1979, p. 99; C. Elman, *Realism*, [in:] M. Griffiths (ed.), *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction*, Routledge, London–New York 2007, pp. 13–14.

<sup>2</sup> K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88, 97–99; T.W. Smith, *History and International Relations*, Routledge, London–New York 1999, p. 99; A. Freyberg-Inan, *What Moves Man, The Realist Theory of International Relations and its Judgment of Human Nature*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2004, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> E. Jones, *Look for the Blind Spot where Structural Realism Meets Pluralistic Stagnation*, „The British Journal of Politics and International Relations”, 11(2), 2009, pp. 225–226; T.W. Smith, *History and International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107.

serious anomalies. Nevertheless, the situation of the realist paradigm in the new international reality has been difficult. In the external sense, the return of realism to the mainstream debate has required a new, attractive theory able to compete or at least initiate a dialogue with dominating liberalism. In the internal sense, the departure from the static structural realism has needed a new, much broader attitude able to follow dynamic changes in contemporary international affairs. Besides, the negative stereotypes have played their destructive role and any new realist theory has had to face the image of realism as “obsolete”.

In fact, structural realism lost its prestige because of its exaggerated emphasis on the stability of the bipolar order and a narrow structural analysis of power. To be sure, Erik Jones indicates that some assumptions of the Waltz's theory could retain their plausibility in the post cold-war reality<sup>4</sup>, yet it has been obvious that the “revival” of realism must reach beyond the static and “disgraced” structural stream. The structural realist perspective, based on the systemic determinants alone, has hardly been able to analyse more dynamic and less predictable reality of the post cold-war international relations<sup>5</sup>. Thus, Jack Donnelly rightly concludes that:

„Structure pushes states in certain directions. It does not mechanically determine outcomes. States are also subject to numerous other pressures and influences. Sometimes ‘exogenous variables’ are decisive in determining outcomes. This does not make polarity or anarchy unimportant. It just happens that other forces are sometimes more powerful”<sup>6</sup>.

Besides, the realist approach to international relations has never been limited to the structural theory of Kenneth Waltz. Some other realist streams, including the hegemonic rivalry theories, did not suffer as deep explanatory defeat as that of structural realism<sup>7</sup>. The defeat of the most popular Waltz's structural approach, however, has also affected the public reception of other realist theories. Finally, even the structural stream of realism has evolved to

<sup>4</sup> E. Jones, *Look for the Blind Spot...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 235–236.

<sup>5</sup> J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, *Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*, [in:] S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, J.W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, pp. 1–2; J. Donnelly, *Realism*, [in:] S. Burchill, A. Linklater et. al., *Theories of International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills–Basingstoke–Hampshire–New York 2005, pp. 40–41.

<sup>6</sup> J. Donnelly, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> See W.C. Wohlforth, *Realism and the End of the Cold War*, „International Security”, 19(3), 1994/95, pp. 92–94.

develop its offensive and defensive perspectives. The latter have considerably broadened the catalogue of structural determinants of the state's international behaviour and have departed from the narrow Waltz's system level analysis<sup>8</sup>.

As a result, several attempts for „optimisation” of the realist paradigm have been made after the fall of the bipolar order. Defensive realists have continued their search for “structural modifiers” that could reduce the severity of the security dilemma and broaden the structural analysis. Some of defensive realists' considerations, including their dynamic attitude to the regional balance of power or the pressure of international political and economic environment, have been valuable and inspiring<sup>9</sup>. Yet, in the face of the domination of liberalism, the reference to the security dilemma has been a bit anachronistic and the new structural variables developed for the old “cold-war” concept could hardly change the stereotypical image of realism as belonging to the bygone era.

Besides, it was the offensive stream of structural realism that has initially attracted more attention in the post cold-war international reality. In fact, John Mearsheimer's considerations about the decrease in the US global power and regional hegemonic ambitions of Germany and China receive growing interest<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, some cooperative stances in the policy of China and self-restriction mechanisms in the German foreign policy have ultimately contributed more to the liberal perspective of analysis than the considerations of offensive realism.

Similarly, the growth of the power of China, a potential challenger to the United States' position in the international system, has not contributed to a new wave of interest in the realist theories of hegemonic rivalry. Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war revealed the mechanism of hegemonic change, including the relations between a hegemonic state and its challenger<sup>11</sup>. Yet, again, the domination of liberalism has focused attention more on economic interdependences and dialogue between the US and China than a scenario of their hegemonic conflict. Hence, even the hegemonic rivalry stream of

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<sup>8</sup> T.W. Smith, *History and International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108–109; J. Donnelly, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–46.

<sup>9</sup> J.W. Taliaferro, *Security Seeking under Anarchy. Defensive Realism Revisited*, [in:] „International Security” 25(3), 2000/01, pp. 136–141.

<sup>10</sup> P. Toft, *John J. Mearsheimer: an offensive realist between geopolitics and power*, „Journal of International Relations and Development” 8(4), 2005, pp. 381, 396–399.

<sup>11</sup> R. Gilpin, *The Theory of Hegemonic War*, „Journal of Interdisciplinary History” 18(4), 1988, pp. 591–597.

realism, despite its explanatory potential in the post cold-war international relations, has been considered “obsolete” in the new reality.

Thus, the problems of the realist paradigm after the fall of the bipolar order have encouraged theorists in the realist camp to return to the classical realist thought for inspirations<sup>12</sup>. This return has been a reaction to the explanatory defeat of structural realism. Yet it was a conviction that in the post cold-war reality the realist paradigm must depart from the static and narrow structural attitude to be able to offer new, more dynamic explanations of international processes. As a result, the political thought of Hans Morgenthau, the most prominent theorist in the classical realist camp, his flexible understanding of power and his warning against a narrow, single-factor attitude to international relations, has become one of the sources of inspirations.

Indeed, Morgenthau’s theoretical attitude offers a multifaceted concept of power and politics, much broader than in Kenneth Waltz’s structural realism. Power in Morgenthau’s considerations has its material character, including the state’s military and economic potentials. Yet it has a less tangible dimension, including the quality of the state’s political elites, the effectiveness of its government and diplomacy<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, Morgenthau emphasises obvious links between the systemic and domestic determinants of the state’s foreign policy. He underlines a variable character of national interests and international environment<sup>14</sup>.

Besides, Morgenthau accepts the antagonistic nature of politics and the potential of conflict that accompanies any political activity. Yet he rejects the brutal power politics and calls for taming and mastering the struggle for power present in politics. To be sure, Morgenthau remains sceptical towards the effectiveness of instruments developed so far to mitigate conflicts in international relations, yet he warns against potential consequences of untamed power politics<sup>15</sup>. Hence, he introduces the concept of the responsible, moderate and self-restricted leadership able to prevent the struggle for power from its most radical forms. Finally, and contrary to structural realism, the

<sup>12</sup> W.C. Wohlforth, *Realism and the End of the Cold War...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 125–129.

<sup>13</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1948, pp. 73–75, 105–108.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 13–18; H.J. Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1960, pp. 200–205, 212–223.

<sup>15</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–9, 391–392.

area of domestic politics, including the personalities of leaders, plays an important role in Morgenthau's analysis of the state's foreign activity<sup>16</sup>.

The article notes an intellectual attractiveness of the idea of the "return to Morgenthau". It considers the inspirations from Morgenthau as more promising to revive realism in the post cold-war international reality than any further references to structural realism, even the most advanced defensive realist considerations. Despite his exaggerated emphasis on the human nature as the source of the lust for power, Morgenthau offers a more dynamic perspective of analysis than the Waltz's structure of the international system<sup>17</sup>. His flexible and variable understanding of power encourages the search for new determinants of the state's foreign policy – other than structural ones. Finally, it allows noticing the presence of domestic and even personal variables ignored by structural realism. As a result, the "return to Morgenthau" may help the new generation of realists to understand a dynamic and complex nature of contemporary international relations and avoid the mistakes made by the structural stream of realism.

Nevertheless, the "return to Morgenthau" itself does not guarantee a success of the realist paradigm in the new international reality. For this article, the idea of the "return to Morgenthau" is a call for a more dynamic and flexible understanding of international processes. Yet it is not a proposal of a direct application of Morgenthau's theoretical assumptions, even if some of them retain their plausibility. Morgenthau's theory needs a reinterpretation<sup>18</sup> and some of his theses formulated seventy years ago will certainly not correspond to the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, the "return to Morgenthau" is a symbolic and rhetoric figure. It is going to inspire flexible thinking about international affairs, different from narrow and static character of Waltz's structural theory. Yet it will not exempt the new generation of realists from developing a new, dynamic and adequate realist vision of contemporary international relations.

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<sup>16</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, Latimer House Limited, London 1947, pp. 186–188; M. Neacsu, *Hans J. Morgenthau's Theory of International Relations. Disenchantment and Re-Enchantment*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills–Basingstoke–Hampshire–New York 2009, pp. 60–61, 94–98.

<sup>17</sup> B. Buzan, *The timeless wisdom of realism?*, [in:] S. Smith, K. Booth, M. Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 54.

<sup>18</sup> M. Neacsu, *Hans J. Morgenthau's Theory of International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 165–166.

The new, neoclassical stream of realism has been one of the attempts in this regard, accepting the inspirations from Morgenthau. The next part of the article will discuss the basic assumptions of neoclassical realism and the originality of this theory. It will discuss the value and intellectual attractiveness of neoclassical realist attitude to contemporary international relations.

## 2. NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND THE ORIGINALITY OF ITS THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The debate inside the realism camp after the fall of the bipolar order has confirmed that structural realism, at least in the form of Kenneth Waltz's theoretical considerations, could hardly be a platform for new realist theories of international relations. Nevertheless, the structural thinking about international affairs has not completely lost its intellectual value for realists. The realist paradigm has responded to its post cold-war crisis with two concepts – “elaborated structural realism” (ESR) and neoclassical realism. Both have rejected the static structural theory of Waltz, yet both have remained inspired by defensive realists' attempts to introduce new structural variables – other than the distribution of power in the international system alone<sup>19</sup>. Neoclassical realism, however, has departed from theoretical considerations of Kenneth Waltz much further.

The concept of “elaborated structural realism” has postulated a redefinition of structural analysis and further extension of “structural modifiers”, including the concentration of capabilities or alliance abilities of states in the system. The aim of ESR has been to avoid the static character of Waltz's theory, yet the intention of this approach has been to retain the structural perspective, its theoretical cohesiveness and unity, and its assumptions about rationality of states as international actors<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, as Patrick James emphasises:

„ESR is neither offensive nor defensive realism. Instead, it advocates the integration of structural indicators into a causal vision of international politics filtered through rational

<sup>19</sup> T.W. Smith, *History and International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108–109; C. Elman, M.A. Jensen, *Introduction*, [in:] C. Elman, M.A. Jensen (eds.), *Realism Reader*, Routledge, London–New York 2014, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> See A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James, *What Way Forward for Contemporary Realism*, [in:] A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James (eds.), *Rethinking Realism in International Relations*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2009, pp. 4–5; P. James, *Elaborating on Offensive Realism*, [in:] A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James (eds.), *Rethinking Realism in International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.



choice. In other words, ESR seeks to answer the question of what can be expected from states as rational actors in response to the full range of structural indicators (...)"<sup>21</sup>.

The proposals of “elaborated structural realism” could be inspiring at the beginning of the 1990s, yet together with growing dynamics of international relations, ESR has become less convincing. Thus, other post cold-war realists, called the neoclassical ones, have favoured more considerable departure from the structural logic of analysis and the impact of the international system on the state’s foreign policy<sup>22</sup>. They have turned to Hans Morgenthau as well as classical realist dynamic understanding of power and politics.

The term neoclassical realism was coined by Gideon Rose and first used in his review article *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy* in 1998. Rose identifies neoclassical realism as a specific approach that:

“(...) incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical”<sup>23</sup>.

Gideon Rose refers in his article to theoretical concepts of Michael E. Brown, Thomas J. Christensen, Randall L. Schweller, William C. Wohlforth and Fareed Zakaria. They are considered the most recognizable neoclassical realists. Nevertheless, the neoclassical realist camp is a broader one, including the recent works of Jeffrey W. Taliaferro or Norrin M. Ripsman. It is generally a new generation of theorists conducting their research in the 1990s and at the beginning of the new century. Yet the border between some previous defensive structural realist concepts, to mention Charles L. Glaser’s research on the perception of power or Stephen Walt’s idea of the balance of threat, and the area of neoclassical realist interests is thin – even if the former do not aspire to be referred to as neoclassical realist ones.

Thus, the specific feature of neoclassical realism is that it considers both the systemic (structural) and domestic determinants of the state’s foreign policy. Both factors intertwine in the neoclassical realist approach. The shape

<sup>21</sup> P. James, *Elaborating on Offensive Realism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> See A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James, *What Way Forward for Contemporary Realism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> G. Rose, *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*, „World Politics” 51(1), 1998, p. 146.

of the state's foreign policy is still determined by its place in the structure of the international system. The systemic constraints limit the state's ambitions and its foreign policy aims. Yet impulses coming from the international system are often unclear and states may react to the systemic pressure in different ways<sup>24</sup>. As a consequence, the countries with a similar power may act on the international scene quite differently and formulate different foreign policy goals<sup>25</sup>.

This difference is explained by domestic variables and neoclassical realists indicate a specific "domestic transmission belt" that exists between the systemic constraints and the state's foreign policy decisions. They urge that domestic variables intervene between the international system and the state's foreign activity. The systemic pressure is filtered in this regard through a catalogue of factors at the domestic level and the "domestic transmission belt" explains why the same systemic impulses may bring about different foreign policy goals<sup>26</sup>. Hence, neoclassical realism rejects the division between domestic and systemic determinants of the state's foreign policy introduced by structural realism. It also departs from the structural realist thesis on rational and unitary character of states as international actors. Neoclassical realism notes the presence of strong systemic constraints at the international system level, yet it accepts a broad catalogue of domestic variables that could ultimately modify the impact of the systemic impulses<sup>27</sup>.

Further, neoclassical realists consider a variety of domestic factors that contribute to the idea of a "domestic transmission belt" and research on

<sup>24</sup> J. Czaputowicz, *Mapa współczesnego realizmu: realizm klasyczny, neorealizm, realizm neoklasyczny* [Map of contemporary realism: classical realism, neorealism, neoclassical realism], [in:] E. Halizak, J. Czaputowicz (eds.) *Teoria realizmu w nauce o stosunkach międzynarodowych. Założenia i zastosowania badawcze* [Theory of realism in the study of international relations: research assumptions and applications], Rambler, Warszawa 2014, pp. 32–33; C. Elman, M.A. Jensen, *Introduction...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> J. Sterling-Folker, *Forward Is as Forward Does: Assessing Neoclassical Realism from a Traditions Perspective*, [in:] A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James (eds.), *Rethinking Realism in International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 208–209; G. Rose, *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147.

<sup>26</sup> C. Elman, M.A. Jensen, *Introduction...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11; M. Kaczmarek, *Realizm neoklasyczny* [Neoclassical realism], [in:] R. Zięba, S. Bieleń, J. Zając (eds.), *Teorie i podejścia badawcze w nauce o stosunkach międzynarodowych* [Research theories and approaches in the study of international relations], WDiNP UW, Warszawa 2015, pp. 18–19, 23–24.

<sup>27</sup> J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, *Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy...*, *op. cit.*, p. 4; S.E. Lobell, *Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model*, [in:] S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, J.W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–45.

a number of domestic variables that could modify the state's foreign policy decisions. This research is far from cohesiveness and Jennifer Sterling-Folker rightly concludes that:

“Some nonsystemic realist work has focused on the role of first-images variables, such as emotions, in-group/out-group differentiation, perceptions, social identity, personality, and risk aversion in foreign policy choice and IR in general. Other work has explored the role of second-image variables, such as state institutions, political parties, and interest groups. Still other work has been more interested in reclaiming normative elements of classical realism than in explaining particular instances of foreign policy”<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, there are three main areas of interests that could be identified in the neoclassical realist approach. The first is the perception of power among political elites and its impact on the foreign policy making. The second is the state's domestic characteristic, including the effectiveness of its institutions and the game of different interest groups. The third is the quality of political leadership and first of all its ability to “extract” and mobilize different components of the state's power<sup>29</sup>.

The problems of the perception of power appear in neoclassical realist research of William C. Wohlforth, Randall L. Schweller or Mark R. Brawley. Neoclassical realism points out in this regard to the state's perception of power and its knowledge about a variety of motives that may guide foreign policies of other states. False images of other actors and misperceptions of their motives, disregarded by the structural stream of realism, may contribute to international tensions and conflicts<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, different perception of threats may considerably affect the state's political preferences and in the extreme cases it may completely paralyse the state's ability of response, despite the systemic impulses demanding reaction<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> J. Sterling-Folker, *Forward Is as Forward Does...*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>29</sup> C. Elman, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17; J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, *Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>30</sup> Ch.L. Glaser, *Structural Realism in a more complex world*, „Review of International Studies”, 29(03), 2003, pp. 405–407; L. Feng, Z. Ruizhuang, *The Typologies of Realism*, „The Chinese Journal of International Politics”, 1(1), 2006, p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> M. Brawley, *Neoclassical realism and strategic calculations: explaining divergent British, French, and Soviet strategies towards Germany between the world wars (1919–1939)*, [in:] S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, J.W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–77; B. Devlen, Ö. Özdamar, *Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy Crises*, [in:] A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James (eds.), *Rethinking Realism in International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–138.

For example, the perception of the decline of the Soviet power among the Soviet leaders and its impact on Gorbachev's strategy of reforms plays an important role in William C. Wohlforth's explanations of the fall of the Soviet Union. As Wohlforth indicates:

“(...) the story cannot be told now and will not be able to be told in the future without according an important causal role to the problem of relative decline. The keys to keep in mind in any causal evaluation are that power is always relative; that perceptions and expectations link power to policy; and that rational assessments can change quickly when new evidence becomes available”<sup>32</sup>.

In the same vein, Randall L. Schweller notes the role of the perception of power while considering the way in which states react to risks and threats present in the systemic environment<sup>33</sup>. He indicates that statecraft is also a consequence of “(...) elites' preferences and perceptions of the external environment” and notes that possible misperceptions may affect elites' consensus on both the nature of threat and the best way of how to deal with it<sup>34</sup>.

In fact, neoclassical realism recognises ineffective state's domestic structures and lack of consensus among its political elites as factors impeding the quality of the state's foreign policy. Randal L. Schweller's research on balancing and “underbalancing” in international relations clearly opposes structural realist theses about the unitary nature of the state and its foreign policy. Schweller indicates that:

“Variation in the way states respond to similar changes in their external environment turns on the preferences of relevant political and social actors and the unique structural characteristics of society and government that constitute constraints and opportunities for these actors, all of which leads to one or another political outcome”<sup>35</sup>.

Further, Norrin M. Ripsman and Randall L. Schweller emphasise a potential impact of domestic interest groups on the state's foreign activity, and especially the role of the most powerful and privileged of them in the states' foreign and security policy. They research into the ways through which

<sup>32</sup> W.C. Wohlforth, *Realism and the End of the Cold War...*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> R.L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats. A neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing*, „International Security” 29(2), pp. 168–170; C. Elman, M.A. Jensen, *Introduction...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> R.L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 169–170; C. Elman, M.A. Jensen, *Introduction...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> R.L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats...*, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

interest groups affect foreign policy decisions and a degree to which the game of domestic interests groups may change the state's foreign policy goals<sup>36</sup>. Ripsman underlines in this regard that:

“(...) in democratic states, we should expect the greatest influence from well-organized, coherent, vote-rich, single-issue interest groups that can provide an electoral payoff, the legislature that can act as a veto for the government's policy agenda, groups that can frame executive thinking on foreign affairs, and, occasionally, the public as a whole (...). In non-democratic states, kingmaker societal groups, and those such as the military that can lead a revolt against the leader, should have the greatest influence on national security policy, followed by bureaucratic or economic actors that have the potential to obstruct policy implementation, and in unusual circumstances, public opinion as a whole”<sup>37</sup>.

Finally, Thomas Christensen, Fareed Zakaria, Randal L. Schweller and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro emphasise the ability of political elites to “extract” and activate different components of the state's power and mobilize social support for its foreign policy aims. Contemporary states may differ in this ability and their effectiveness may depend on the quality of political leadership itself but also the strength of the state's institutions and ideology behind its foreign policy aims<sup>38</sup>. Randall L. Schweller notes in this regard that:

“(...) in the age of mass politics, ideology plays an instrumental and necessary role in helping leaders extract resources and mobilize domestic support for novel and expensive grand strategies. This is particularly true in the case of revisionist great powers”<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> N.M. Ripsman, *Neoclassical realism and domestic interest groups*, [in:] S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, J.W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 170–174; R.L. Schweller, 2009. *Neoclassical realism and state mobilization: expansionist ideology in the age of mass politics*, [in:] S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, J.W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy...*, *op. cit.*, p. 227; M. Kaczmarek, *Realizm neoklasycyzy...* [*Neoclassical realism...*], *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>37</sup> N.M. Ripsman, *Neoclassical realism and domestic interest groups...*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>38</sup> J.W. Taliaferro, *State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State*, „Security Studies”, 15(3), 2006, pp. 465–469; J.W. Taliaferro, *Neoclassical realism and resource extraction: State building for future war*, [in:] S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, J.W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–199, 215–222; M. Kozub-Karkut, *Realizm neoklasycyzy – główne założenia i możliwości* [*Neoclassical realism; main assumptions and possibilities*], [in:] E. Halizak, J. Czaputowicz (eds.), *Teoria realizmu w nauce o stosunkach międzynarodowych. Założenia i zastosowania badawcze...* [*Theory of realism in international relations studies: research assumptions and application...*], 2014, pp. 48–49.

<sup>39</sup> R.L. Schweller, *Neoclassical realism and state mobilization...*, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

Thus, a short look at the problems discussed by neoclassical realism illustrates that it returns to a more dynamic and flexible understanding of power present in Hans Morgenthau's theoretical considerations. It accepts Morgenthau's assumptions that the state's power is a multifaceted concept and depends not only on its material capabilities but also on a broad catalogue of less tangible and less verifiable factors. Besides, neoclassical realists refer to Morgenthau's previous considerations about the quality of diplomacy and political leadership, including the latter ability to mobilize the state's power and social support for its foreign policy goals<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, neoclassical realism definitely departs from the separation between the systemic and domestic determinants of the state's foreign policy introduced by structural realism. It recognises the role that domestic determinants may play in the process of foreign policy making<sup>41</sup>.

Nevertheless, neoclassical realism is not a simple continuation of Morgenthau's theoretical assumptions. It is not a proposal of a new revived classical realist theory. Neoclassical realists return to some classical realist considerations about power and politics to explain a more complex catalogue of determinants shaping the state's foreign policy. In this sense their "return" to Morgenthau is obvious and it is necessary to follow the dynamic changes of contemporary international relations. Yet the emphasis on domestic variables, closer to Morgenthau than Waltz, does not mean the rejection of structural (systemic) level of analysis. The systemic constraints still create stable frames for the state's foreign policy and limit its ambitions. Neoclassical realists note the role of systemic impulses and accept the significance of systemic (structural) determinants of the state's foreign activity. Thus, neoclassical realism is neither a classical nor a purely structural approach. It is more an idea to combine structural determinants with the modifying role played by a "domestic transmission belt" and variables at the domestic level<sup>42</sup>.

Indeed, neoclassical realism proposes a specific synthesis of concepts coming from both the classical and structural streams of the realist paradigm. It appreciates Morgenthau's considerations about a dynamic nature of politics and complex sources of power. Furthermore, it declares a departure from structural realist assumptions about rationality of states as international actors

<sup>40</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–75; M. Neacsu, *Hans J. Morgenthau's Theory of International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61, 94–98.

<sup>41</sup> C. Elman, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17; A. Freyberg-Inan, *What Moves Man, The Realist Theory of International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, *Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5, 13–19; C. Elman, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

and considers foreign policy making to be a more complicated process<sup>43</sup>. Nevertheless, neoclassical realism accepts the basic assumptions of structural realism that the state's place in the structure of the international system may effectively limit its foreign policy ambitions. It emphasises that systemic determinants are filtered by a variety of domestic variables, yet accepts both the existence and impact of systemic constraints<sup>44</sup>.

Thus, neoclassical realism is not a simple "return to Morgenthau" but an attempt at a creative synthesis of the most valuable elements of classical and structural streams of realism. As Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell and Norrin M. Ripsman note:

"Proponents of neoclassical realism draw upon the rigor and theoretical insights of the neorealism (or structural realism) of Kenneth N. Waltz, Robert Gilpin, and others without sacrificing the practical insights about foreign policy and the complexity of statecraft found in the classical realism of Hans J. Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger, Arnold Wolfers, and others"<sup>45</sup>.

Furthermore, the idea of the synthesis sounds in the neoclassical realist methodological approach. Neoclassical realists do not reject the value of qualitative methods of classical realism, including the analysis of historical, social and legal determinants of the state's foreign policy. Nevertheless, they refer to the positivist tradition present in structural realism and aspire to a "greater methodological sophistication" than in the classical realist considerations. They emphasise the scientific rigour of quantitative methods and their ability to formulate more verifiable predictions of international processes<sup>46</sup>. Thus, neoclassical realism seems to declare a pragmatic methodological attitude that accepts the presence of less-verifiable aspects of contemporary international relations but retains some of the rigour of positivism.

Finally, a difference between "elaborated structural realism" and neoclassical realism seems obvious. ESR has proposed a modified structural perspective that continues the tradition of rationality of political actors. As Annette Freyberg-Inan, Ewan Harrison and Patrick James indicate, ESR believes that it will be able to retain the cohesiveness of structural realism and its ability to formulate some more general predictions about the state's

<sup>43</sup> See C. Elman, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–19.

<sup>44</sup> See J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, *Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5, 13–19.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 16–17 and 19.

international behaviour. Neoclassical realism, on its part, identifies a much broader catalogue of determinants of the state's foreign policy and accepts less verifiable nature of some of them. Hence, it aspires to combine the elements of positivism and traditional humanism, and focus more on foreign policy making than general rules of international relations<sup>47</sup>.

The article prefers neoclassical realism as a more attractive theoretical approach proposed in the realist paradigm after the end of the cold war. Thanks to its flexibility and ability to analyse broader spectrum of variables, it may potentially offer some valuable realist analysis of contemporary international processes. Yet it does not mean that neoclassical realism is free of any controversies and doubts. Its declarations of the ontological and methodological synthesis of classical and structural traditions of realism may provoke some questions and criticism. Thus, the next part of the article will analyse the strengths and shortages of the neoclassical realist approach.

### 3. CONSIDERING THE VALUE OF NEOCLASSICAL REALISM: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF NEOCLASSICAL REALIST PERSPECTIVE

The unquestionable value of neoclassical realism is its return to Morgenthau's dynamic and multifaceted concept of power as well as the reference to domestic determinants of the state's foreign policy. In both cases, neoclassical realists cross the narrow borders of Kenneth Waltz's structural theory. This flexible attitude gives the neoclassical stream a chance to follow dynamic changes in contemporary international affairs<sup>48</sup>. Furthermore, the acceptance of both domestic and systemic variables helps to understand a complex process of foreign policy making, including the game of domestic interests in its frames<sup>49</sup>. Thus, neoclassical realism returns to Morgenthau's conclusions that the effective foreign policy needs no less effective domestic politics<sup>50</sup>. And its departure from the narrow and static structural theory strengthens the realist paradigm in the post cold-war international reality.

<sup>47</sup> A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James, *What Way Forward for Contemporary Realism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>48</sup> B. Buzan, *The timeless wisdom of realism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–54; W.C. Wohlforth, *Realism and the End of the Cold War...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 107–108, 126–129.

<sup>49</sup> J. Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, pp. 48–49, 196; C. Elman, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 200–205, 212–223.



Nevertheless, there are some ambiguities in neoclassical realism's assumptions that could affect its chance to revive the realist paradigm. The most obvious is the lack of cohesiveness. In fact, the neoclassical stream of realism is not a cohesive theoretical attitude. It is still a collection of loose conclusions and thoughts of several theorists rather than a single theoretical approach to international relations. They examine similar problems, present similar views on international reality and recognize similar inspirations. Yet, they do not constitute a coherent theoretical perspective.

Jennifer Sterling-Folker indicates in this regard that:

“This approach does not, however, represent a coherent research program or even a statement regarding what, beyond the permissible condition of anarchy and polarity, is the most important to foreign policy choices and outcomes”.

Similarly, none of the variables researched by neoclassical realism

“(...) adds up to a coherent theory with a consistent internal logic that can be applied from one situation to the next”<sup>51</sup>.

To be sure, Jack Donnelly points out Randall Schweller's work, including his considerations on revisionist powers, as one of the exceptions in this regard, which

“(...) aims to meld structural, motivational, and identity elements into a coherent and rigorous realist account”<sup>52</sup>.

Yet the cohesiveness of neoclassical realism is an obvious problem.

Another area of potential criticism is neoclassical realism's difficulties with a precise identification of its ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions<sup>53</sup>. Indeed, neoclassical realist ambitions for the synthesis of the best elements of classical and structural realism meet some ontological and methodological ambiguities. The idea of this synthesis sounds attractive, yet in both ontological and methodological perspectives it attempts to merge two positions that differ significantly<sup>54</sup>. Neoclassical realism does not necessarily

<sup>51</sup> J. Sterling-Folker, *Forward Is as Forward Does...*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>52</sup> J. Donnelly, *Realism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>53</sup> J. Sterling-Folker, *Forward Is as Forward Does...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 209–210.

<sup>54</sup> R.L. Schweller, D. Priess, *A Tale of Two Realisms: Expanding the Institutions Debate*, „*Mershon International Studies Review*” 41(1), 1997, pp. 7–8.

explain what the synthesis should finally look like. It does not specify which determinants – structural or domestic – should be considered to be leading in the neoclassical analysis. It develops a strong research on domestic variables but (following the heritage of defensive realism) it still suggests that material capabilities and systemic determinants play a principal role for the state's foreign policy. It seems that domestic factors can only modify structural constraints. Yet it is still unclear what the concepts of systemic or structural constraints mean in contemporary international relations.

Further, it is difficult to reconcile the rationality and predictability of structural realism and Morgenthau's emphasis on unpredictable nature of politics or his criticism towards any forms of scientism<sup>55</sup>. It seems that the emphasis on a variety of domestic variables, including the psychological ones, reduces this predictability even if it does not eliminate it completely. Nevertheless, the question of the state's rationality seems ambiguous in the neoclassical realist approach. Some theorists note that the reference to the game of domestic interest groups confirms the neoclassical realism's departure from the Waltz's theses about the unitary character of the state. Yet the neoclassical realism's departure from the model of states as rational actors in the international relations is not so obvious for others<sup>56</sup>. As Balkan Devlen and Özgür Özdamar indicate:

“(...) although most neoclassical realists might have chosen to eschew (at least explicit) rationality assumptions in their work, there is nothing inherent in neoclassical realism that would forbid such theorizing (...)”<sup>57</sup>.

Thus, this ambiguity contributes to previous ontological dilemmas of neoclassical realism.

In the same vein, the synthesis of methodological approaches typical of classical and structural realism may be a bit problematic<sup>58</sup>. Morgenthau's humanist attitude to the study of international affairs and his criticism towards any forms of scientism clearly contradict the positivist methodology of structural realism<sup>59</sup>. Neoclassical realism declares a flexible methodological attitude that combines the positivist rigour and the value of less tangible

<sup>55</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23, 183, 195.

<sup>56</sup> P. James, *Elaborating on Offensive Realism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 45, 49–50; B. Devlen, Ö. Özdamar, *Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy Crises...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 159–160.

<sup>57</sup> B. Devlen, Ö. Özdamar, *Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy Crises...*, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>58</sup> See R.L. Schweller, D. Priess, *A Tale of Two Realisms...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>59</sup> See H.J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23, 183, 195.

personal or ideational factors<sup>60</sup>. It corresponds to some other ideas of epistemological and methodological pluralism in social sciences that attract more attention after the end of the cold war<sup>61</sup>. Yet, it still does not clarify how to reconcile the empirical tradition of positivism and the studies on such domestic variables as the perception of power or the quality of political leadership.

Finally, neoclassical realism, and especially its reference to domestic determinants of the state's foreign policy, meets some criticism as an approach that potentially weakens the unity of the realist paradigm and "blurs" the borders between realism and other paradigms in international relations<sup>62</sup>. As Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik claim:

"(...) the theoretical core of the realist approach has been undermined by its own defenders – in particular so-called defensive and neoclassical realists – who seek to address anomalies by recasting realism in forms that are theoretically less determinate, less coherent, and less distinctive to realism"<sup>63</sup>.

The article does not share such criticism and considers the return to a broad catalogue of variables as a neoclassical realism's asset. Besides, the realist paradigm in international relations has never been fully cohesive and an attempt to identify the structural theory of Kenneth Waltz as the leading stream of realism would be a mistake. It would ignore the contribution of Hans Morgenthau's theoretical considerations and the revival of the classical realist thought in the post cold-world reality. Hence, Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt rightly conclude that:

"Here it is perhaps a mistake to understand traditions as a single stream of thought, handed down in a neatly wrapped package from one generation of realists to another"<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, *Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>61</sup> S. Smith, *Diversity and Disciplinarity in International Relations Theory*, [in:] T. Dunne, M. Kurki, S. Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York 2010, pp. 7–8.

<sup>62</sup> J.W. Legro, A. Moravcsik, *Is Anybody Still a Realist?*, „International Security” 24(2), 1999, pp. 6–9, 18–22, 45–53.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> T. Dunne, B.C. Schmidt, *Realism...*, [in:] J. Baylis, S. Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 148.

Further, realism cannot miss the dynamics of international relations again and ignore the growing interpenetration of problems considered initially as typical of realists or liberals<sup>65</sup>. Thus, it is neoclassical realism and its multifaceted analysis of international affairs that gives a chance to revive the realist paradigm in the post cold-war environment and not the static structural stream of realism.

Nevertheless, Legro and Moravcsik are right that together with the extension of domestic variables, neoclassical realism will have to reach for the factors of psychological, social or cognitive nature. Besides, it seems that the extension of the area of research interests is inevitable and becomes a problem for all previous “mainstream” paradigms in international relations<sup>66</sup>. Legro and Moravcsik warn that: “The incorporation of variation in underlying domestic preferences, we argue, undermines (if not eliminates) the theoretical distinctiveness of NCR [neoclassical realism – J.W.] as a form of realism by rendering it indistinguishable from non-realist theories about domestic institutions, ideas, and interests”<sup>67</sup> This article does not share these warnings yet it claims that further extension of variables actually makes neoclassical realism face two types of risks.

First, together with the reference to the perception of power or other social and psychological variables, neoclassical stream risks that some psychological and sociological theories would explain these phenomena better. This may reduce neoclassical realism to a theoretical approach that makes compilations of concepts developed by other social sciences. Thus, a clear linkage between domestic variables and a practice of foreign policy making seems crucial in the neoclassical realist research.

Second, the potential risk is a limited ability of neoclassical realism to formulate more general conclusions about the nature of contemporary international affairs. The article fully shares Jack Donnelly’s thesis that no theoretical approach may aspire today to be a general theory of international relations<sup>68</sup>. Further, it appreciates the neoclassical realism’s departure from the “false” predictability and rationality offered by the structural realist model of analysis of international relations. As Michael P. Sullivan notes,

<sup>65</sup> Ch.L. Glaser, *Structural Realism in a more complex world...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 407–411.

<sup>66</sup> O. Waever, *Still a Discipline After All These Debates?*, [in:] T. Dunne, M. Kurki, S. Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 298, 302–303; S. Smith, *Diversity and Disciplinarity in International Relations Theory...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>67</sup> J.W. Legro, A. Moravcsik, *Is Anybody Still a Realist...*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>68</sup> J. Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 74–77, 194–196.

“Propelling the debates about the system, which have produced more sophisticated and complex models, has been the serious defect contained in the Waltzian view of basically static orientations”<sup>69</sup>.

Yet neoclassical realism’s rejection of the narrow structural realist analysis should not prevent it from any attempts to formulate more general conclusions<sup>70</sup>.

Indeed, Randall Schweller and William Wohlforth correctly note that the end of the cold war was a serious problem for all theories aspiring to generalization<sup>71</sup> although Waltz’s structural realism seems to suffer most because of its highly exaggerated theoretical modesty. The departure from the parsimonious model of structural analysis proposed by Waltz’s theory is fully understandable in this regard. Yet the neoclassical realist considerations about the role of domestic, perceptual or organizational variables should not fall into another extreme of no generalizations about contemporary international relations at all.

Thus, the return to a more flexible understanding of power and acceptance of the role of domestic determinants of the state’s foreign policy is a value of the neoclassical realist approach. Nevertheless, the question is whether the concept of a “domestic transmission belt” alone is attractive enough to revive the realist paradigm in the post cold-war reality and compete (or at least launch a dialogue) with liberalism. There are still some doubts in this regard. It seems that neoclassical realism needs a step ahead. It would introduce an order to NCR considerations about domestic variables, explain the idea of synthesis of classical and structural realist assumptions, and finally propose some more general considerations about contemporary international affairs.

Finally, neoclassical realism should be aware of the existence of the English School of international relations as a potential intellectual competition for the new theories in the realist paradigm. The original location of the English School (at least in the case of Hedley Bull’s theoretical concepts) as a form of synthesis of classical understanding of realism and liberalism may also be a competition for the realist idea of the “return to Morgenthau”. It seems that inability of any theoretical approaches to aspire to a single “grand theory”

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<sup>69</sup> M.P. Sullivan, *Theories of International Relations. Transition vs. Persistence*, Palgrave, New York 2001, p. 140.

<sup>70</sup> A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, P. James, *What Way Forward for Contemporary Realism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> R.L. Schweller, W.C. Wohlforth, *Power Test; Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War*, „Security Studies” 9(3), 2000, p. 65.

today means an acceptance of interpenetration of liberal and realist concepts in contemporary international affairs. The English School, and especially its idea of coexistence of law, cooperation and power in international relations<sup>72</sup>, could easily integrate the elements of realism and the dominant liberal approach. Thus, it may be a more attractive perspective to explain contemporary international affairs than neoclassical realism, especially if the latter falls into new modifications of structural assumptions inherited from Waltz's cold war structural theory.

## CONCLUSION

The fall of the Soviet Union marked a prestigious defeat of the realist paradigm in international relations, and especially the structural theory of Kenneth Waltz. It has contributed to both the return to Hans Morgenthau's theoretical considerations and the departure from the static and narrow analysis of structural realism. Neoclassical realism and its acceptance of domestic variables seems a better option to revive the realist paradigm than the concept of "elaborated structural realism". The latter one's defence of rationality of states as international actors has been extremely difficult in the dynamic post cold-war international reality.

Indeed, the return to Morgenthau's multifaceted understanding of power declared by neoclassical realism is the right direction in the realist thinking about contemporary international relations. Nevertheless, the links of neoclassical realists and the previous defensive stream of structural realism are also obvious. Thus, neoclassical realism is not a simple "return to Morgenthau" despite its acceptance of classical realist inspirations. It favours the synthesis of classical and structural streams of realism and the concept of a "domestic transmission belt" is a good illustration of this attitude.

The idea of the synthesis, however, may be a bit problematic as it attempts to reconcile two streams of realism with a contradicting attitude to methodology and some differences in ontology. This contradiction contributes to a vagueness of neoclassical realist theoretical assumptions. Besides, neoclassical realism suffers from incoherence and it is still far from a single and internally consistent theoretical approach. Finally, it faces a dilemma of avoiding the extremes – to depart from the structural

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<sup>72</sup> See T. Dunne, *The English School*, [in:] T. Dunne, M. Kurki, S. Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theories. Discipline and Diversity...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–144.

realist emphasis on predictability and rationality of the state's international behaviour but to retain some abilities to formulate more general conclusions about contemporary international affairs.

Thus, the fundamental question is whether neoclassical stream is able to revive the realist paradigm in the post cold-war international reality. Its reference to dynamic and multifaceted understanding of power is certainly the right step ahead. Yet the concept of the "domestic transmission belt" and some declarations of the synthesis of classical and structural elements of realism may not be convincing enough. Neoclassical realism requires a further clarification of its ontological and methodological assumptions. It needs further attempts to make its theoretical approach more cohesive as well as to formulate some more general conclusions.

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## NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE REALIST PARADIGM IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### Summary

The article refers to the crisis of realism after the end of the cold war. It considers neoclassical realism as a promising theoretical attitude to revive the realist paradigm in the post cold-war bipolar international reality. The paper appreciates neoclassical realism's return to a multifaceted concept

of power present in Hans Morgenthau's theoretical considerations and its acceptance of the importance of domestic variables developing the power of the state. Nevertheless, neoclassical realism is not a simple "return to Morgenthau". It still emphasises the impact of systemic determinants and aspires more to a synthesis of classical and structural streams of realism. The article indicates that the idea of the synthesis contributes to some ambiguities in neoclassical realism's assumptions, especially in the methodological context. Besides, neoclassical stream suffers some internal inconsistencies as a theoretical approach. Thus, neoclassical realism's ability to revive realism in the post-cold war international relations is still disputable and the approach needs some more efforts to clarify and harmonize its theoretical assumptions.

#### REALIZM NEOKLASYCZNY ORAZ KRYZYS PARADYGMATU REALISTYCZNEGO WE WSPÓŁCZESNYCH STOSUNKACH MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH

##### Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia problematykę kryzysu, w jakim realizm znalazł się po zakończeniu zimnej wojny. Wskazuje na realizm neoklasyczny jako atrakcyjny intelektualnie nurt mogący ożywić paradygmat realistyczny po rozpadzie ładu dwubiegunowego. Atutem realizmu neoklasycznego jest powrót do wielowymiarowej koncepcji potęgi obecnej wcześniej w rozważaniach Hansa Morgenthaua, w tym dostrzeżenie znaczenia wewnątrzpolitycznych czynników kształtujących potęgę państwa. Realizm neoklasyczny nie jest jednak prostym powrotem do koncepcji Morgenthaua. Docenia bowiem równocześnie wagę czynników sprawczych na poziomie systemu międzynarodowego i aspiruje do swoistej syntezy klasycznego i strukturalnego nurtu realizmu. Idea takiej syntezy budzi wiele wątpliwości, głównie natury metodologicznej. Mimo niewątpliwych atutów, podejście teoretyczne proponowane przez realizm neoklasyczny, pełne jest również wewnętrznych sprzeczności. Realizm neoklasyczny, mimo istotnego wkładu w ożywienie paradygmatu realistycznego po okresie zimnej wojny, sam wymaga w efekcie dalszych starań na rzecz zharmonizowania i uściślenia jego założeń teoretycznych.

## НЕОКЛАССИЧЕСКИЙ РЕАЛИЗМ И КРИЗИС РЕАЛИСТИЧЕСКОЙ ПАРАДИГМЫ В СОВРЕМЕННЫХ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ

### Резюме

В статье затрагивается проблематика кризиса, с которым столкнулся реализм после окончания холодной войны. Под углом зрения находится неоклассический реализм как направление, интересное с точки зрения интеллекта и способное оживить реалистическую парадигму после распада биполярной системы. Преимущество неоклассического реализма заключается в возврате к многомерной концепции силы, ранее являющейся предметом размышлений Ханса Моргентау, в том числе осознании значимости внутриполитических факторов, формирующих мощь государства. Тем не менее, неоклассический реализм – это не просто возврат к концепции Ханса Моргентау. В то же время осознаётся важность причинных факторов на уровне международной системы и наблюдается стремление к своеобразному синтезу классического и структурного направлений в реализме. Идея такого синтеза, однако, вызывает множество сомнений, в основном методологического характера. Несмотря на несомненные преимущества, теоретический подход, предложенный неоклассическим реализмом, также полон внутренних противоречий. Неоклассический реализм, несмотря на значительный вклад в возрождение реалистической парадигмы после периода холодной войны, в результате сам нуждается в дальнейших усилиях для согласования и уточнения своих теоретических предпосылок.