

# Book Review

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## *Eastern Partnership: A New Opportunity for the Neighbours*

by Elena Korosteleva (ed)

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This book is a reprint of a special issue, 27 (1), in the *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*. It offers a collective assessment of the development and impact of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership initiative on its Eastern neighbours, most specifically Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, and, entirely logically, Russia. It is unfortunate that the volume does not extend its geographical coverage further, especially to those South Caucasus countries of strategic importance such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, since additional focus here would have enriched the data, adding value by answering several critical questions that the manuscript tackles.

Chapter One deals with the ambitious but ambiguous ENP, explaining its practical limitations and often vague offerings. The research underlines the importance of differentiating between each of the partners, suggesting that the “one size fits all” principle does not work in relation to such a diverse set of countries. Thus, the EU has to approach each partner country individually. The idea of differentiating between and categorising “the neighbours of Europe” to the South and the “European neighbours” to the East with a “natural membership perspective” is a welcome addition to our understanding and worth highlighting. The chapter further focuses on Russia which still entertains its divisive Cold War attitude of “who is not with us, is against us” towards its external environment. This is particularly noticeable in relation to Russia's aggressive stance as energy-supplier both to EU states as well as Eastern neighbour countries, in particular Ukraine.

Chapter Two, mostly based on surveys, provides a good source of evidence. It aims to describe the foreign policy choices and priorities of the Eastern neighbours by revealing that there is more talk than action in the EU's relations with neighbouring countries. It argues too that the rhetoric and action are not always compatible with each other, a conclusion that is also valid for several other neighbouring countries. The case of Moldova shows us the nuanced nature of the reality; officially European integration is declared the main objective, but in reality Russia is still a priority in the country, implying a level of inconsistency and ambiguity in the foreign policy focus. The chapter further reveals that the values of altruism, collectivism and spirituality are closer to the Eastern neighbours, which, combined with emotionality, paternalism, irresponsibility and disregard for the law are in stark contrast to those of the EU countries, namely individualism, pragmatism, competitiveness, a willingness to abide by the law, political awareness and environmental consciousness. The differences in (cultural) values are indeed very much relevant and help to explain the complexities behind the (dis)integration process. The volume further exemplifies that the EU uncompromisingly dictates its conditions without offering membership. Therefore the declarative and vague character of the EU policies and the uncertainty of dividends upon meeting obligations are negatively assessed. However it is very much believed that it is only the prospect of EU membership that will cause Moldova and Ukraine to surrender their relationship with Russia.

The following chapters are also focused on the mismatch between what the EU offers and what it demands, with country specific cases of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The research on Ukraine refers to the growing lack of motivation amongst Ukrainian political elites and considers current EU-Ukraine relations to be ineffective. Predictions here are that relations will continue to remain declarative in nature, within a framework of a multi-vectorised foreign policy. It is evident that Ukraine will not be welcomed into the EU in the near future, while Russia can offer real economic, military and political opportunities for the country and therefore a rational basis for Ukraine maintaining relations with Russia. In the case of Belarus, the chapter further examines the strategic preference that has clearly been given to the Russian vector at the expense of its relations with the EU. Since the level of trust of the Belarusians towards the West is rather low, Belarus wishes to cooperate with the EU on the basis of common interests rather than strict convergence with its norms and values. By doing so, Belarus acts as a "connecting bridge" and as a "separating buffer" between East and West.

Unlike Belarus, the Moldovan case demonstrates a more optimistic picture, even though the evolution of EU-Moldova relations is largely characterised by missed opportunities and sporadic actions, as the expert survey reveals. Often labelled as a front-runner, Moldova created all the necessary institutions that were expected of the candidate countries, owing to the Moldovan government's ambitious reform-orientated agenda. However, the chapter argues that the EU itself did not have a clear and transparent message for Moldova. This and other malfunctions can be explained by the limited legitimacy within the EU which makes it difficult to make demands of partner countries and to push for further reforms.

In the last chapter, Stephen White attempts to define the concept of "Europe" and its "neighbourhood". The author argues that membership is a matter of values and practices and not simply of location, by giving solid examples of participation of "non-European" countries in "European" activities: Russian membership of the European Broadcasting Union, its representation in the annual song festival Eurovision and Kazakhstan's UEFA membership.

In summary, this book presents a good source of data with a methodological analysis predominantly based on data collected in surveys. The volume therefore makes a significant contribution to the EU studies literature. However structural problems, perhaps relating to its history as a special issue, detract somewhat from the other qualities. Apart from the above-mentioned reservations, this edited contribution can be recommended to those researchers and practitioners interested in the EU's external relations.

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