

Book Review

Hiski Haukkala (2010)

The EU-Russia Strategic Partnership: The Limits of Post-sovereignty in International Relations

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Anna Visvizi

DEREE – The American College of Greece

Although the EU-Russia relationship seems to have entered a new phase framed by the Partnership for Modernisation, the nature of this relationship remains puzzling. The monograph by Hiski Haukkala, focusing on the interrelationship between ideas, power and institutions underpinning the EU-Russia relationship, constitutes in this context a timely contribution to the topic. The author of the publication makes an effort to examine the nature of this relationship in a methodologically most challenging manner consistent with developing a theoretical framework and applying it to a policy-analytical approach. The objective of the book is to examine “Why, despite the initial promise and enthusiasm, has the actual process of EU-Russia interaction proved to be so problematic and failed to meet the parties’ expectations?” (p 3).

The monograph consists of ten chapters. Following an introduction (Chapter 1), the next three chapters set the meta-theoretical foundation, the theoretical framework and the method of the ensuing discussion. Chapters five through nine engage with the evolution of the EU-Russia relationship by thoroughly examining the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the Second Chechen War, the Four Common Spaces, and the Northern Dimension (ND) of EU policies. Conclusion follows.

The strength of the book consists in its theoretical contribution (Chapters 2 and 3). IR-theorizing is a challenging domain where contributions to well-established arguments are not easily accepted requiring a very carefully selected set of arguments to grant them a niche among the discipline’s paradigms. Haukkala’s critical introduction to the possibility of, as he terms it, theoretical complementarity in IR lays the meta-theoretical justification for the ensuing theoretical move in which (liberal) institutionalist theorizing and thin Wendtian constructivism are nested into the English School framework. In other words, the English School emphasis on the primary institutions is complemented with a theory that deals with procedural institutions, i.e. with liberal institutionalism. As a result of this marriage, the normative component is brought to the fore, and the role of culture in shaping the worldviews of the actors involved is acknowledged. The discussion on meta-theory will be particularly interesting to anybody who dwells on the question of the disciplining boundaries of the discipline of IR, and has an inclination toward critical (scientific) realism. Well written and to the point, Chapter 2 with an obvious ease and grace communicates the not-so-easy matters of the philosophy of science.

The major theoretical move in Chapter 3 consists of the introduction of post-sovereign international institution, a concept meant to capture the essence of the EU-Russia relationship (p 23). Haukkala stresses that the EU-Russia interaction displays a number of characteristics that set it apart from more traditional forms of international cooperation/integration in which the limitation to sovereignty tends to be symmetrical, and material interests prevail over the normative clout. In this sense, in contrast to internal 'pooling of sovereignty', "in its external policies the EU has a more variegated logic whereby it advocates a host of sovereignty-challenging practices while seeking to preserve its own sovereign prerogatives in full" (p 24). Haukkala's point converges with what many analysts used to say about, for instance, the failed Barcelona Process whereby the notion of asymmetry, the employment of the Union's economic clout, and insistence on the universal applicability of Union's internal mode of governance, have been identified, next to political reasons, as the major causes of failure. In a way, therefore, Haukkala opens up a very neat path for empirical and theoretical engagement, possibly with a comparativist twist.

Retroduction remains the central tenet of Chapter 4 devoted to the method the study. Retroduction allows combining different methods in a single work with a view to constructing hypothetical models that in a cyclical way probe into the why-, how- and what-questions. Haukkala employs the frame analysis to uncover what the potential differences concerning commonality between the EU and Russia are, and the case study method to examine how the diverging worldviews that both actors hold affect the actual logic of their interaction, and thus why it is has been institutionalized in a particular way. Very clear, enriched with useful tables and figures, this short chapter suggests a way to meaningfully navigate four case studies presented in the following chapters.

The objective behind the examination of the negotiation process leading to the signing of the PCA (Chapter 5) is to set the baseline against which the following more specific cases are discussed. Although a number of studies sought to examine the early stages of the evolution of the EU-Russia relationship, Haukkala's argument adds a fresh touch to the discussion by locating the subject-matter in the broader geopolitical context of the 90s as well as by including in the discussion arguments voiced by Russian scholars and diplomats.

The following chapter (Chapter 6) examines the strategy documents that the EU and Russia have adopted on each other over the period 1995-2000. The purpose of this exercise is to reflect on the worldviews, Russian and the EU-ones respectively, that these documents embody. As the author concludes, clear differences concerning the normative foundation of their institutionalized relationship exist, thus suggesting a fairly low level of commonality between Russia and the EU. It is also emphasized that whereas the EU aims at using post-sovereign methods to transform Russia in line with European values and models, Russia implements a hybrid approach to PCA. Accordingly, although the transformative logic of the relationship is embraced, the notions of sovereignty and global actorness (as well as reluctance toward joining the European community of values) balance it up in the approach followed by Russia.

Chapter 7 focuses on the first phase of the Second Chechen War (1999-2000), a period that according to Haukkala exemplifies plainly the lack of commonality between the EU and Russia. The discussion in this chapter starts with a concise yet comprehensive account of the causes of the Second Chechen War, and continues with a discussion on the EU's reactions to Russia's intervention in the Chechen Republic. By so doing, Haukkala observes that Russia's military intervention in Chechnya was justified by a traditional reading of Russia's sovereignty. For the EU, by contrast, the conflict was predominantly about the infringement of liberal values, namely human rights, the EU sought to emulate on Russia following the end of the cold war. Although, sanctions against Russia were adopted by the

EU, it was the Russian reading of the conflict that prevailed, in a path-dependent way casting shadow on the nature of the EU-Russia institution.

The erosion of the value component in the EU-Russia relationship is quite visible also in the case of the Four Common Spaces. Chapter 8 suggests that as the EU-Russia relationship unfolds, the Russian framing of the relationship becomes dominant (p 129). Haukkala demonstrates that although the EU enjoyed clear leverage in terms of market power, and it was Russia that requested improved market access etc., Russia's insistence on equality and respect for sovereignty has actually diluted the post-sovereign principles originally codified in the PCA in 1994. For instance, "the explicit reference to the EU as a source of norms and standards has been removed and largely replaced with vague references to wider international rules and standards" (p 151). Instead, Russian documents have emerged as officially recognized benchmarks, thus breaking the normative monopoly of the EU, and indicating a shift in the logic underpinning the EU-Russia relationship.

The notion of the evolving logic behind the EU-Russia interaction returns in Chapter 9 that focuses on the ND of the EU policies. A brief but detailed introduction to the origins and the evolution of the ND, along with a subsequent discussion, reveal that "most of the original, and largely post-sovereign, objectives of the policy have remained unrealized" (p 165). As Haukkala concludes, once again by waving its sovereignty banner, Russia was able to resist the EU's agenda, and essentially ignore the policy. Overall, "the snapshot we have gained from frame-analysing the new ND documents is no longer that of a post-sovereign international institution at all, but one of traditional inter-governmental cooperation, a radical change in the logic of interaction indeed" (p 166), possibly bearing consequences for the future outlook of the EU-Russia relationship.

One final remark: by introducing the concept of post-sovereign international institution, Haukkala places the EU's attempts at spreading its norms and values internationally in a quite unusual context. By highlighting that this approach tends to lead to asymmetric nature of the relationships forged, and relies on unidirectional expectations concerning normative convergence between the parties concerned, Haukkala implicitly questions the normative component in the normative power Europe argument, and paves the way for some very interesting theoretical and empirical questions. This propensity to trigger new questions, rather than foreclose them, constitutes one of the greatest strengths of the monograph discussed here. As such it will be of particular interest to researchers and academics focusing in their work on EU-Russia relations, external relations of the EU, on IR theorizing, as well as on questions of norms and values and their diffusion in international context.
