

Book Review

Jackie Gower and Graham Timmins,
eds (2011)

*The European Union, Russia and the
Shared Neighbourhood*

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While the European Union (EU) seems constantly to be searching for its identity and foreign policy strategy, Russia has resolved its Yeltsin-era identity crisis since Putin's inauguration. Moreover, it has reiterated its great power claims and has spared no effort to reinstate its dominance over its traditional "sphere of influence". However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, that sphere of influence has turned into a "shared neighbourhood" of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, and become a battlefield between the EU and Russia (p. 1). This volume edited by Jackie Gower and Graham Timmins provides a collection of well-constructed and original insights into a battle that has increasingly been characterised by "zero-sum calculations and geopolitical competition" (p. 2).

Going beyond the conventional format of edited volume with a uniform, though often restricted, analytical framework, this book provides its target readership of graduate students and scholars with seven substantive chapters on the political, economic, and social relations between the EU and Russia that may *inter alia* influence their shared neighbourhood. Without imposing a single theoretical framework, the contributors familiarize readers with different analytical tools that may account for the divergence of EU-Russia interests and their outcomes.

The opening contribution by Derek Averre questions "the assumption that Brussels and Moscow offer radically different approaches to the shared neighbourhood" (p. 24). Averre argues that describing Russia as a malign nineteenth century power and the EU as a "good thing" (p. 24) is "misguided" (p. 25) and threatens to "overemphasize conflicting approaches and overshadow positive elements" (p. 24). Examining the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as an attempt to "integrate third countries of the immediate vicinity into 'policy-taking'" (p. 32), Stefan Gänzle argues that the ENP "will only have an impact on domestic contexts that are favourable to it" (p. 46). Broadening the inquiry into the ENP, Martin Dangerfield analyses the rhetorical position and the actual contribution of the Visegrad Group to the EU's Eastern policy. Dangerfield argues that the Visegrad Group role has been "to endorse and advocate" (p. 68) initiatives of larger EU members.

Adopting a framework of power, Hiski Haukkala explains why the EU "has failed to reach practically any of its original objectives with Russia". He argues that the main reason for this failure "resides in the nature of interaction between the EU and Russia" (p. 87), which is

based on the amorphousness of the EU's actorness and "Russia's new assertiveness" (p. 87) due to the increase of crude oil prices. Provoked by the championing of democracy by post-communist countries, Rick Fawn asks to what extent human rights and democracy have been used for "political expediency" (p. 94) to negatively depict Russia. He warns that an increased advocacy of human rights and democracy by post-communist countries in Russia may result in an increased tension. Tuomas Frosberg and Antti Seppo focus on expectations-capabilities gap in the EU's Russia policy. They argue that even if the EU is stronger than Russia "by almost all conventional indicators of power" (p. 135), it has not been successful in solving trade disputes due to reasons including weak strategies and exaggerated expectations about success. Adopting the framework of diversionary tension, Mikhail Filippov investigates the uneasy relations between Russia and Georgia, which culminated in the 2008 armed conflict. He argues that with its immediate neighbours Russia pursues "the traditional geo-political goals, as well as the domestic diversionary goals" (p. 160), because the promotion of a "virtual conflict" with the West helps to keep domestic politics and the domestic public under control.

Throughout the volume, there is a feeling that some of the chapters, focusing extensively on the intricate interplay of the EU and Russia's interests, either overlook the influence of that interplay on the shared neighbourhood or let the readers contemplate it on their own. On the other hand, the volume demonstrates a genuine striving for objectivity, without falling into the trap of merely depicting the EU as a benign power and Russia as a megalomaniac one. The analyses of various issues and the engaging writing of the contributors, suggesting a number of important and innovative perspectives, make this volume a thought-provoking analysis for readers interested not only in EU-Russia relations, but also in those factors that separately shape EU and Russian politics.
