

Book Review

Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, ed. (2010)

The Security Context in the Black Sea Region

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Dimitrios Triantaphyllou presents a cross-section of substantive research on the Black Sea Region (BSR) and its relationship with its neighbors. Examining the positions of the United States (US), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union (EU), Russia Federation, and Turkey, among others, the analysts contributing to this volume delve deeply into the trends of security, energy and energy security, regionalism, and governance dynamics that greatly impact this hotly contested locale. Though much of the literature surrounding the study of the BSR is directed toward the oft-times symbiotic relationship between the EU and the Russian Federation, the editor and contributors of this volume bring to the surface a range of paradoxes and interplay of many more nuanced and intricate forces that are seen as ones in constant flux.

Triantaphyllou, the Director General of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) in Athens, and Assistant Professor of International Relations at the University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece, has invested an extensive measure of his career to the study of the flowing body of research on BSR. He sees the international order as one having "[...] entered a new era that is characterized by dramatic changes in terms of both structure and process, resulting in the emergence of a precarious new world balance" (p. 3). No longer wrestling predominantly with Cold War attitudes and mentality, Triantaphyllou perceives the BSR as one now home to a surfeit of "[...] vestigial attitudes and ideological divides [...]" rendering it full-to-the-brim and overflowing with great power (neorealist) politics, strained by a fragile house of cards comprised of relatively "[...] weak states that seek or need protectors, anchors or hegemons [...]" (p. 9).

The Security Context in the Black Sea Region presents ten faultlessly researched and methodologically sound chapters that cautiously traverse the fault lines perilously weakening the foundation on which the region rests. These danger zones include, in particular, regional and subregional governance, cooperation versus power politics, competing neighborhood policies, security partnerships and the dialectic of regional and EU security, post-Cold War paradigm shifts, soft- and hard-power applications, and issues of projected and supposed neutrality and belligerence. Of particular interest to readers of this work should be the injection of US strategic interests, chiefly as they relate to the administration of President Barack Obama, which runs the gamut of issues encompassing elements of democratic and market reform, energy and commerce, security architecture, institutionalism, strategic rivalry, historical animosity and ethnic conflict.

Following Triantaphyllou's introductory chapter, which illustrates the "[...] interplay between economic growth/subregionalism versus ethnonationalism/security dilemmas

and the 'neighborhood perception paradox'" (p. xii), Yannis Tsantoulis, in chapter two, explores the troubled power triangle in the Black Sea. Tsantoulis analyses the interrelated terms of geopolitics, subregionalism and discourse via an assessment of the significance of the geography of the region, the role of hegemon(s), the interplay of regional organisations, the impact of history and identity, and the policies implemented by the US, Russia, and the EU.

Chapter three, written by Oksana Antonenko, traces the regional framework existing in the BSR in the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war. Antonenko plunges into the prospects that exist for establishing a comprehensive cooperative security community in the region. The author, while noting considerable obstacles that hinder the process, grasps the existence of drivers of regional cooperation to an extent that might stridently redefine the role of the BSR's more prominent and region-centered states such as Turkey and Russia.

Great power security is the dominant feature of Mustafa Aydin's following chapter, which presents the argument that dividends are not necessarily paid through increased attention of major actors that include the US, EU, and Russia. Rather than highlighting some of the region's prospects for cooperation and partnership, Aydin exemplifies the potential for creating a greater frequency of clashes (pp. 50-52). The lens of analysis is narrowed in the subsequent chapter, contributed by Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova, who illustrates the impact of the Caucasus crisis with respect to regional and European security. Alexandra-Arbatova contends that security in the European periphery is not an achievable end so long as rushes headlong into the geopolitical interests of policy-makers in Moscow. The Russian Federation, according to Alexandra-Arbatova, "[...] should learn to actively create collective positions within the scope of international cooperation, because no single country can throw down a challenge to the whole world" (p. viii).

F. Stephen Larrabee turns the lens over to the US and its interests in the Black Sea zone, showing that US officials are at a point of increased interest and awareness regarding the events that have and continue to transpire there. Larrabee underscores the role that Russian-induced events can have on the US in trying to advance a coherent policy toward the perilous region. He stresses that institutional reform, energy, and security have "[...] thrust the Black Sea region onto US policy agenda and given it a new visibility" (p. 80).

Chapters seven, eight, and nine, written by Andrews Wilson and Nicu Popescu, Sabine Fischer, and Sergii Glebov, respectively, bring the focus of this volume to bear on the turbulent relationship between the grand players of the European chessboard: the EU and Russia. They cast diagnostic light on the neighbourhood policies of both Russia and the EU, the nature of the EU's security policies toward the region in a post-Georgian crisis era, and the protracted threats pitched further afield as a consequence of the August War reinforcing the need for strengthening greater military security in the region.

The final chapter, authored by Jeffrey Simon, brings Ukraine into the picture vis-à-vis the question of strategic alignment for a country suffering from "political schizophrenia" (p. 147). The entrenchment of Ukraine's political future in the European Union is mirrored by its historical envelopment by the Soviet Union, and its current immersion in Russian political and economic ambitions. Simon postulates that the growing need for Ukraine to, in spite of its even split between the EU and Russian blocs, realise that it will no longer be afforded the luxury of having its cake and eating it too. Pressing upon readers the increasingly precarious situation in which Ukraine find itself, Simon asserts that, "[...] many Europeans find Ukraine less appealing as a potential (NATO-EU) integration partner" (p. ix). Notwithstanding the growing need for Ukraine to pick a team, Simon postulates that, "[b]uilding political stability has become even more difficult and complicated because Ukraine's increased strategic importance as a natural gas bridge has raised the stakes for all concerned" (p. 155). The analysis leads one to consider that Ukraine might not have

long to enjoy its forged position of privilege on the fence before either the EU or Russia (or the competition between the two blocs) knocks it to the ground.

The analyses presented in this volume are highly praiseworthy, not least because of the holistic perspective assumed consistently throughout. The contributing authors make appreciable use of both primary and secondary sources of information and data, including policy briefs, governments documents, reports, interviews with EU officials, diplomats, and political representatives from Moldova, Georgia, the Czech Republic, among others, as well as news reports from Russia, Ukraine, the EU, and the US. The sweeping range of source information is subsequently processed through constructivist, institutional, and neorealist instruments of analyses, and ultimately blends with both empirical and qualitative points of view.

Encyclopedic and profound, this volume compresses a great deal of information in a relative concise framework. The product of the efforts of each author delivers overall a sprawling reference piece for practitioners and scholars alike. Although a highly praiseworthy work for its comprehensiveness, the title indicates a far broader range of examination than is currently featured within the book's 168 pages. Either the ambitious scope of this volume or the foci of the works presented within it necessitate restructuring to present what is actually an exploration of specific issues along the geopolitical spectrum of the BSR or a broader examination of the region as the title suggests.

In spite of this, Triantaphyllou's volume is a commendable effort to make sense of the many dynamics and paradoxes cast across the BSR, and are ultimately shown to spawn implications for states beyond the normative boundaries of the BSR and with it the numerous states that are intricately and unequivocally correlated.
