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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56384/jes.v39i2.319>

BOOK REVIEW

The European Union, Russia and the Post Soviet Space: Shared Neighbourhood, Battleground or Transit Zone on the New Silk Road? Editors: Viktoria Akchurina and Vincent Della Sala. Publisher: Routledge, 2023

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This book is a special collection of essays initially written as a proposal for the Jean Monnet Project in the late 2013. The entire theme of the various essays revolves around the fact that the wide-ranging partnership between the European Union and Russia is much more than greater prosperity, predictability, and security. Furthermore, the re-emergence of new global actors and regional powers and the growing number of transnational issues that brought Europe and Central Asian states in proximity with each other is demanding new policies and institutional framework to adjust with rapidly changing scenarios. These essays also focus on how various social and political actors approach these issues and processes that are leading towards a wider Europe and Eurasian space. The book also discusses how the shared interests and challenges are changing the behavior of key actors towards this arena.

The end of cold war and the emergence of new states made the 'local' actors autonomous in shaping their destinies. It was believed that converging interests would play a role in making Russia and Europe view their space as a shared neighborhood. However, at the same time, it was also believed that the end of cold war could pave the way for a return of power struggles and adversarial posturing.

The first chapter, 'The Role of Power in EU Russia Energy Relations: The Interplay between Markets and Geopolitics', is written by Marco Siddi. The author has discussed that one of the essential features of the EU–Russia

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relations is the energy trade. Russia has exerted its geopolitical influence through the sale of its vast energy resources. On the other hand, the EU has attempted to achieve its aims mostly through the use of its regulatory power. In energy policy, the geopolitical muscle is defined as the capability of the state to maintain control of the national energy resources and transport infrastructure and to use it in the pursuit of achieving its foreign and security policy goals. This makes Russia an 'energy superpower' with decisive influence on global energy markets and, consequently, on international politics.

The second chapter, 'From 'Unilateral' to 'Dialogical': Determinants of EU–Azerbaijan Negotiations', is written by Eske van Gils. It discusses the bargaining power of the government of Azerbaijan in order to make its cooperation with the EU more successful. While the general perception of the EU in all its Eastern neighbours is of a narrative that is EU-centered, the government of Azerbaijan, however, wants to negotiate on its own terms. It aspires to alter the pattern from a unilateral to a more bilateral approach. Its chief aim is to ensure the representation of its own interests and a more prominent position, especially, for the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The post-2015 economic turndown had diminished Azerbaijan's power base relative to the EU and had turned the negotiation dynamics in favour of the latter.

The third chapter, 'Between Russia and a Hard Place: Great Power Grievances and Central Asian Ambivalence', is written by Scott Radnitz. In this chapter, the writer has focused on the interests, perceptions, and the decisions of the Central Asian States vis-a-vis Russia and the West by examining their conception and the use of power since 1991. It is said that, since their independence, the Central Asian states have skillfully managed the art of governance and had remained under the privileged umbrella of Russian interests. They had aimed at maintaining the status quo and thus were able to minimize the risk of external influence and internal dissent. These states have spent little on conventional military forces. The resources have, instead, been devoted to maintain an elaborate and comprehensive internal security apparatus. With the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan entered into basing agreements by securing Russian consent. A shift in the policy was seen after the color revolutions which led the Central Asian states to align their security doctrines with Russia and China and against the West. While Russia faces turmoil on its political and economic forum, long term Chinese prospects for growth are

favourable. This relationship is conducive to China in achieving its hard power interests such as energy, security, and trade.

The fourth chapter, 'Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of 'Greater Eurasia'', is written by David G. Lewis. This article revolves around the Sino-Russian cooperation in the post-Cold War era. It suggests that the Russian role has declined from a global superpower to that of a regional power. Therefore, its struggle to reclaim that Russo-centric approach which is devoid of western influence still continues. This led to the emergence of an imaginary terminology of 'Greater Eurasia' that puts the Sino-Russian alliance in a new political and economic space. In 2015, the Eurasian concept became institutionalized in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and in the May 2015 summit, the Sino-Russian relations were marked by a particular cordiality at high level meetings. Following this arrangement, now, Russia does not see China as a threat but as an ally. It has readily accepted Chinese investment in transport and other infrastructure projects. Another characteristic of the Eurasia project envisages a world in which political and conflict management is conducted primarily by leading powers. They wish to make this place an example of a zero-sum game which must be beneficial for all making cooperation triumphing over competition.

The fifth chapter, 'Russia, Europe and the Ontological Security Dilemma: Narrating the Emerging Eurasia Space', is written by Viktoria Akchurina and Vincent Della Sala. This chapter discusses that the EU's relationship with Russia has been driven by the narrative of the EU as a rule-based actor and model for the new established order. Similarly, all its Eastern Partnership agreements were not seen as strategic moves but as promotion of democracy and economic assistance to the neighboring states. Today, both Russia and the EU are engaged in a spiral to consolidate their identities and also mutually reinforce their ontological insecurity.

The sixth chapter, 'One Europe or None? Monism, Involution and Relations with Russia', is written by Richard Sakwa. This section highlights that the end of cold war had brought some weakening in the usual patterns of Atlantic solidarity and thus opened avenues for institutional development and ideational innovation. The EU integration led to an estrangement from enlargement. Russia felt trapped in a space where it could neither join the EU nor NATO. Its space to maneuver strategically began to constrict. It triggered conflict and resistance. According to the author, this second

version of cold war is more dangerous than the first one because the latter had capitalist democracy and revolutionary socialism to combat each other. At present, there are a number of structural interactions and customary practices that have no common ontological perception of reality and, therefore, has minimal chance of conflict resolution. The monist representations of the EU are also embedded in the fact that rather than acting as the solution to the historical problems of peace and reconciliation, the institutional trajectory has exacerbated traditional European divisions.

This book quite efficiently covers various themes relating to the EU, its Eastern Partners, and Russia. It brings into light those various challenges that are faced today by these nations. The aim of every country is to maximize its interests while preserving its national integration and solidarity. The EU is a unique example where a variety of interests coexist without having a clash. Similarly, when any single state deals with the EU, all that is counted is the fulfilment of their goals with a much higher success ratio. As none can exist in isolation, surviving with competitors and thriving has become the motto of today's world.