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Laure DELCOUR, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space? EU Policies and Approaches to Region-Building* (Ashgate, 2011) pp 182, £55.00, ISBN: 978-1-40940-2244 (hbk)

Relations between the European Union and the states of the former Soviet Union have gained increasing prominence in recent years. This book examines the range of these relations from support for policy domestic development through to attempts to guarantee energy security in the face of an increasingly assertive Russian Federation. The focus of the book is on EU attempts to foster regional cooperation and interregionalism in the post-Soviet space. The position that emerges is that, although the EU has attempted to promote regionalism in line with its broader approach to foreign policy, this has not been successful. The book begins by introducing the framework on which the subsequent analysis rests. The central argument “is that the post-Soviet area stands as an exception in EU external action and that the EU does not appear to be trying to strengthen regional cooperation or to develop interregional links in this area.” (p. 11) Delcour identifies two possible hypotheses that may provide the answer for the different stance. The first is that the disintegration of the USSR worked against the formation of a stronger regional approach (pp. 11-2). This leads to the second hypothesis which is that EU interests, particularly security, have encouraged a focus on sub-regionalism (p. 12). In examining these tendencies the book draws on historical institutionalist, constructivist, and realist approaches. These are in turn represented by EU institutional processes, endogenous regional initiatives, and the role of other region-builders (particularly Russia) (pp. 148-9).

Chapters Two and Three provide an overview of the EU’s engagement with the post-Soviet region from the late 1980s to the present. Important in establishing the context is the fact that EU relations with the USSR were late to develop and were only in embryonic form at the time of the breakup in 1991. It also examines a potentially contradictory tendency within EU policy towards the region, supporting development of a regional identity alongside a drive for differentiation that encouraged the states to assert their independence. Developments during the 2000s have demonstrated a more focused interest and attempts to define sub-regions, building on existing bilateral connections and recognising diversity. Internal changes that resulted from EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007 were also important in shaping the relationship, as the

new borders of the EU mean that it is contiguous with the former Soviet Union and increasingly raised security issues.

The case study chapters (Four to Six) present a clear overview of the development of EU policies across the region. This analysis is supported by close reading of EU documents and extensive fieldwork in the countries concerned. The picture that emerges reinforces the points made regarding the complexity of relations within the region, but also EU failures to appreciate these. The inability of the EU to recognise the role of Russia in the region and how this has changed has created difficulties in establishing a more influential role, with Russia acting as spoiler. The analysis of the situation in the western states (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and those in the Caucasus) demonstrates the divergence within the sub-region, varying from autocratic Belarus and Azerbaijan through to a democratising Ukraine. The extent to which these countries can be seen as possessing common identities could be examined in more detail.

Geography has also played an important role, with the relative remoteness of the Central Asian states meaning that they were largely overlooked by the EU until the 2000s, when issues of energy security gained prominence. While these chapters are useful in demonstrating the role of the EU, their number and variety mean that some of the finer-grained detail is lost, with the effects of the 'colour revolutions' being largely overlooked. The relatively late interest of the EU in Central Asia has also restricted its influence. Other actors in the Central Asian region, such as Russia, China, the United States, and Turkey have a stake in events there and longer histories of involvement. Greater consideration of their influence relative to that of the EU would have strengthened the analysis and assisted understanding of the context the EU is operating in. In addition, more detail on the historical legacy of the USSR, and the way in which it has shaped developments, would be have been useful.

This is a compelling study of the challenges the EU has faced in seeking to exert its influence in the former Soviet space. A close analysis of policy developments coupled with field research in a number of the countries examined strengthens the analysis. The author makes a strong case for the importance of a combination of endogenous

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and exogenous factors in shaping EU policy in the region. The influence of Russia looms over attempts at region-building and has resulted in a lack of consistency in EU policy regarding the region. Domestic priorities of member states together differing historical relations have at times worked against a collective approach. In spite of this apparent confusion, recent developments have pointed towards a more realistic assessment of the context. The creation of the Northern Dimension and the Black Synergy, based around the Baltic and Black Seas respectively, have tied regional development to shared interests through a network governance approach in which participants are more equal. Overall, the book provides a well constructed examination of EU attempts to support regionalism in the former Soviet republics. The discussions of EU policies and the actions of the states involved are clearly illustrated. The book will be of interest to anyone seeking to gain a greater understanding of EU foreign policy, as well as the effects of Russia's growing assertiveness on the world stage.

Thomas O'Brien
Cranfield University
thomas.obrien1@gmail.com