

Book Review

Karen Henderson and Carol Weaver,
eds (2010)

The Black Sea Region and EU Policy: The Challenge of Divergent Agendas

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The Black Sea region is probably one of the most interesting and, at the same time, under-researched regions in the EU neighbourhood. The volume *The Black Sea Region and EU Policy: The Challenge of Divergent Agendas* edited by Karen Henderson and Carol Weaver provides an excellent overview of current research regarding the main problems in the region and the role of the EU.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the EU policy in the Black Sea region with contributions by Marek Chichoki, Lucia Najšlová, Kataryna Wolzok. It includes a critical discussion on the various EU policies in the wider Black sea region such as the European Neighbourhood policy, the Black Sea Strategy and the Eastern Partnership. The three chapters examine the evolution of the EU's approaches towards the region, pointing towards the problems of developing various policies and strategies, instead of a coherent EU policy. Both, the diverging interests of the Member States and the responses of the Black Sea countries are analysed and the instruments used in implementing the policies are critically assessed.

The second part looks into issues of security and conflict resolution, especially by analysing the relation between the EU's policies in the region and the interests and security dilemmas of the other big powers in the area, for example Russia, that seeks to preserve its influence in the region or the USA, that wants to expand its involvement through NATO enlargement. Carol Weavers tries to assess to what extent the tensions among these players have had a negative effect on the implementation and effectiveness of EU policies in the Black Sea region. The following two chapters, written respectively by Dennis Sammut and Syuzanna Vasilyan, focus on the conflicts in the South Caucasus, looking into the EU's approach to the region and the EU "cacophonic" security policy. However, by focusing on "civilian" rather than "military" security, the EU approach differs from that of other actors such as US, Turkey and Russia, whose perception of security is tightly linked to defence and energy.

The last part of the volume analyses issues of regionalisation and energy. The first chapter by Tunç Aybak explores the emerging strategic partnership between Russia and Turkey, the two largest states in the wider Black Sea area, and, at the same time, an often forgotten relationship within EU dominated discourses. Mukhtar Hajzada analyses the dynamics of the regionalisation process, which currently appears to be characterized by competition

rather than cooperation. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is analysed as a potentially important regional player, as it is the only organization whose membership includes all the states in the area; furthermore, the need for a redefinition of its role in the context of EU's Eastern enlargement is examined, as the membership of the two organisations is increasingly overlapping. The last chapter by Slawomir Raszewski looks specifically into the energy sector, focusing on the EU's external energy policy in the wider Black Sea region, which is arguably the most developed EU policy in the region.

The book focuses on a region that is often neglected by politicians as well as academics. The EU is portrayed as a confused latecomer in the region, which generally constitutes a fruitful research agenda for EU scholars. Thus, the book is a much needed contribution to the literature on the Black Sea region and gives a solid overview of the EU external policies and the problems within the region. Especially the complexity of foreign policy challenges regarding security and energy are well laid out, although a more in-depth discussion of EU-Russia relations or a chapter dealing with the Russian perspective would have been a helpful addition to the volume.

However, it would be too easy to criticise the book purely on issues regarding thematic overlaps between chapters or indeed the varying quality of the different chapters. One could also criticise and assess in how far the chapters form a coherent argument. Most of these criticisms would be quite common for edited volumes that originate from workshops or conferences. But, edited books, like this one on the Black Sea region, are very useful to assess a certain research area and to analyse possible gaps in the literature.

In fact the book reflects the quality as well as the focus of research regarding the Black Sea region rather accurately. The Black Sea research agenda is focused on security, energy and conflicts with some dashes of the problematic regional cooperation. At the same time, detailed policy case studies that go beyond the traditional IR/ foreign policy debate are hard to find. In particular, the 'sea' is often absent from research on the 'Black Sea' and topics connected to maritime issues such as the various environmental problems, transport infrastructure or fishing do not seem to capture the interest of many academics. Moreover, by looking exclusively at national governments the sub-national level is somewhat missing from the literature. Especially after the EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, it would also be interesting to look at the impact of 'internal' EU policies that may have an impact on the Black Sea region. In that context, the possible 'europeanisation' of Romania and Bulgaria seems to be a topic that needs some attention by the academic community. The role of both countries in the formulation of EU policies, as well their role in the wider Black Sea region are topics for further research. Therefore, the edited volume shows that the Black Sea region offers an interesting research topic for scholars who are interested in EU foreign policy as well International relations and regional cooperation.
