

BOOK REVIEW

Sieglinde Gstöhl and Simon Schunz (eds.), *Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, 294 pages, ISBN: 978 113 820 4799

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Since its inception at the beginning of the 2000s, the approach of the European Union (EU) towards its neighbourhood has been afforded significant attention by the academic literature. Many research projects and studies have presented significant empirical insights regarding the way the EU has developed its approach towards its southern and eastern neighbourhoods (Theuns 2017; Ademmer, Delcour, and Wolczuk 2016; Nilsson and Silander 2016; Edwards 2008; Bechev and Nicolaïdis 2010; Beauguitte, Richard, and Guérin-Pace 2015). At the same time, the success and effectiveness of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been debated and reviewed by official institutions, think tanks or scholars, with the EU almost always lagging behind its ambitious goals and commitments (Schumacher 2015). More recently, various studies have also provided extensive accounts of what the ENP countries expect from and how they perceive the EU, generally recognising the fact that the EU has had an asymmetric and unilateral approach towards the neighbourhood (Juncos and Whitman 2015; Gnedina, 2015; Korosteleva 2015; 2014; 2013). The EU has thus conditioned access to various benefits of European integration by the adoption of its menu of rules, regulations and norms, without really taking into account the needs and interests of the neighbourhood states (Theuns 2017). What the academic literature is still missing, however, is a coherent and comprehensive theoretical account that can explain the complexity of the ENP. Here, Gstöhl and Schunz's edited volume comes in and brings together a number of both young and well-established scholars in order to debate the possibility of developing an overarching theoretical approach to the ENP. While the volume does not deliver such an integrated approach, it does provide the most significant collection of issue-focused theoretical perspectives on the ENP that are currently present in the literature. Moreover, the volume is laudable in the fact that it challenges mainstream theoretical accounts of the ENP (such as rational choice and constructivism) and brings to the fore a wide range of innovative perspectives (e.g. structural foreign policy, bounded rationality, or the practice of EU relations with other international

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organisation in the neighbourhood). All in all, the book is an essential reading for anyone interested in the complexities of the EU's foreign policy in the neighbourhood, as well as for students of foreign policy analysis, international relations, or EU politics.

Most theoretical accounts aim to explain various aspects of the EU's policy towards its neighbours. Firstly, some use institutional approaches in order to untangle the range of interests, norms, values or historical legacies and path dependencies that have been involved in the creation and development of the ENP (Smith, 2005; Haukkala, 2007; Christou, 2010). A large focus within these studies is on the way the EU's institutions and member states have contributed to the ENP, with general agreement that this policy mirrors the institutional realities of the EU and tends to be an extension of various policies that the EU has deemed successful during the enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Secondly, a separate group of studies try to explain the effectiveness of the EU's approach in the neighbourhood, broadly measured by looking at the EU's ability to influence various domestic reforms in the neighbourhood countries. This strand of scholarship has produced very innovative and in-depth accounts of the EU's impact on various policy sectors in ENP countries, as well as on political reforms (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz, 2008; Ademmer, Delcour, and Wolczuk, 2016; Burljuk, 2014; Langbein, 2015). It has also shed light on the mechanisms through which the EU's impact is played out in practice (with an emphasis on soft conditionality, compliance or persuasion). Thirdly, other studies have looked at the ENP as part of the EU's external relations and debated on what this means for the EU's actorness and presence in the international arena, feeding into, for example, discussions about the EU's normative power (Boedeltje and Houtum 2011; Romanova, 2016; Nitoiu, 2012). Finally, various studies have also enquired into the regional meanings and consequences of the ENP, aiming to explain the region-building aspects of the policy and its effect on geopolitical structures in the neighbourhood (Yakouchyk, 2016; Cadier, 2014).

To a large extent, 'Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy' tends to mirror the tendency to segment various areas of the ENP when aiming to theorise the policy. The book comprises three parts: the first discusses the usefulness of applying mainstream rationalist and constructivist approaches in explaining various aspects of the ENP; the second goes beyond the mainstream and proposes novel ways of explaining several characteristics of the ENP; the third part and the conclusion are looking even further and try to place the ENP into the regional context and unpack some of its the less studied effects on the region. Even if the volume in the end falls short of presenting a more coherent approach to the ENP, it does present a valuable overview of existing approaches, and more importantly, it highlights their weaknesses, while putting forward novel ways of looking at various characteristics of the ENP.

In the first part, Tulmets presents an approach that takes the middle ground between rationalist and constructivist perspectives, in that it acknowledges both the interests of the member states, and norms and values in explaining the development of the content of the ENP. In doing so, she mainly presents a narrative of the evolution of the ENP, with constructivist aims (stability, prosperity and security) dominating the earlier period (up until the 2008 Georgian-Russian War), and then rationalist means (primarily assuring security interests) gradually become more prevalent. Kahn-Nisser's chapter also aims to combine constructivist and rationalist insights in order to evaluate the impact of EU human rights conditionality. She finds that initially cost-benefit calculations lead to unconditional effects on the ENP states, while later on, socialisation effects tend to entrench the EU's conditionality regardless of punishments. These two chapters support the idea that neither constructivist nor rationalist approaches can explain various aspects of the ENP alone. The following two chapters in part 1 take a somewhat different approach, looking at Russia's perceptions of and responses to the ENP. On the one hand, Giusti uses neoclassical realism in order to pin Russia's approaches to the ENP unto the various developments in its broader foreign policy. Neoclassical realism allows her to focus on both the way the material structure of international relations and the range of underlying ideas in Russian foreign policy have shaped Moscow's interactions with the ENP. On the other hand, Zaslavskaya focuses on Russian perceptions of the EU and the ENP. More specifically, she charts the way the Kremlin's interpretations of the ENP changed according to various periods in EU-Russia relations. She highlights a shift away from cooperation in EU-Russia relations during Putin's first presidential term when common interests trumped any inherent contradictions in the shared neighbourhood. Putin's second term then marked the implementation of the ENP, and the start of the development of growing tensions between the EU and Russia, as well as normative competition between the two. The last period, opened by the 2008 war in Georgia, has seen EU-Russia relations slipping gradually into intense rivalry and even conflict, with the ENP being perceived by Moscow as a threat and instrument for countering Russian interests.

The second part contains a series of novel theoretical approaches which shed new light on various aspects of the ENP. Firstly, Moga's chapter applies cognitive heuristics associated with bounded rationality in order to highlight the salience that the experience of the enlargement of the EU towards CEE had on the creation and development of the ENP. He skilfully underscores that EU policymakers used a similar template to the enlargement when designing the ENP and that they were operating under the assumption that the results of the enlargement could be replicated in the neighbourhood. This approach in turn ignored the specificities of the countries in the neighbourhood or the importance of the membership carrot. Manoli applies the structural foreign policy perspective developed by Keukeleire and MacNaughtan (2008) which holds that foreign

policy is aimed at changing broader structures in other countries. She argues that the ENP as an expression of EU actorness in the neighbourhood is a good example of structural foreign policy. Unlike most studies that focus on the EU's effectiveness in the neighbourhood, her analysis shows that the ENP has aimed and, to some extent, managed to impact broader governance and societal structures in the neighbourhood. In his chapter, Natorski uses insights from practice theory in order to highlight that the EU's ability to promote change in the Eastern Partnership countries is very much dependent on its ability to identify with the legitimacy of various international regimes and organisations. Nizhnikau's chapter goes to the micro-level and supports the argument that the EU's main aim in the neighbourhood has been to promote the creation of domestic institutions that would safeguard the states in the region against predatory elites. He analyses the EU's practice in this regard by looking at Ukraine's anti-corruption policies in the areas of migration and environment protection.

The last part of the volume presents a more forward looking perspective by analysing the way eastern neighbourhood is a battleground between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and the way the EU's approach to the neighbourhood defines political subjects and the boundaries of the 'political'. Firstly, Delcour and Wolchuk juxtapose the European and Eurasian integration projects, arguing that while the EU tries to influence the eastern neighbourhood through persuasion, Russia is more bent on manipulating and constraining the states in the region. Both the EU and Russia have developed regional projects, but the former has a more positive agenda of building the region, while the latter is bent on spoiling the EU's efforts. Staeger takes a different approach and argues in his chapter for the need and possibility of developing cooperation between the EU and the EEU in the eastern neighbourhood. He claims that interregionalism can help overcome the monism promoted by the ENP and the EEU, which has constrained eastern neighbours to choose between two mutually exclusive integration projects. Korosteleva, Merheim-Eyre and Van Gils's chapter presents a critique of the EU's approach towards the eastern neighbours by arguing that the ENP is the result of a deep process of othering which overlooks the diversity and interests of the countries in the region. Empirically, the chapter looks at the EU-Azerbaijan relations and the visa liberalization policy towards Moldova. In the final chapter, Del Medico employs a poststructuralist approach and argues that the EU's democracy promotion endeavours are focused on creating new polities beyond the nation state and are an instance of 'proactive cosmopolitanism' or 'proactive governmentality'.

The concluding chapter written by Schunz takes stock of the approaches presented in the volume, and contends that even though a comprehensive theory is hard to develop, the book delivers a useful theorising exercise which can form the basis for a new research agenda. Hence, this programmatic chapter suggests that further theorising should focus on the blind spots and gaps that still remain.

Notwithstanding, the overall impression that the book portrays is that theorising the ENP requires a deeply eclectic approach due to the complexity which characterises this policy area. The volume is a very successful example of an eclectic perspective which tackles a wide range of aspects of the ENP, but is also unified by the larger finding that this policy has been largely EU-centric, which in turn, has hindered the EU's ability to influence developments in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the volume tends to pay more attention to the eastern neighbourhood, which begs the question whether the EU itself focuses more efforts and energy on the post-Soviet space than on Northern Africa. Moreover, is there any theoretical relevance and value in theorising the ENP as addressing a unified neighbourhood, or should analysts make a clear differentiation between southern and the eastern neighbours? (do similar theoretical approaches apply to these two regions?) These are some points among others that future endeavours should consider. Following from the volume, it would be useful to theorise the way the ENP has influenced the foreign policies of the neighbours. That being said, the volume is an important breakthrough in the study of the EU's approach towards its neighbours.

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