

## BOOK REVIEW

Valentin Naumescu and Dan Dungaciu (editors). 2015. *The European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood Today: Politics, Dynamics, Perspectives*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 365 pages. ISBN (10): 1-4438-7191-

5

**Ionela Maria Ciolan**

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration  
Bucharest, Romania  
*ionela.ciolan@drd.snsupa.ro*

The Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, in 2013, represents the starting point for a paradigm shift within the international community and more particularly regarding the European security architecture. Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula followed by the ignition of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and by the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation by the United States and the European Union led to the deterioration of the West relations with Moscow. In this regard, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) changed its nature from a technical instrument to a geopolitical one. The EaP, as the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, had the purpose to foster security, prosperity and stability in its vicinity by promoting a strengthened political dialogue and economic cooperation with six partner states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and Republic of Moldova).

The complex regional context and the dynamics of the Eastern Partnership are the focus of this book edited by Valentin Naumescu and Dan Dungaciu. Published in the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, in 2015, the volume is a successful attempt in analysing the Eastern Partnership mechanism in presenting it in an

analytical, objective way. The book does not only offer a critical review of the Eastern Partnership but also various scenarios through which the weaknesses of the Eastern Partnership can be transformed into opportunities by the European Union. "The European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood Today: Politics, Dynamics, Perspectives" comprises fourteen articles that tackle high sensitive subjects for the region using various relevant study cases and different theoretical approaches.

In the introduction of the volume, Valentin Naumescu makes a comprehensive contextualization to the topic, framing the events in the broader regional and international context. In this regard, the author starts by defining the concept of "Eastern Europe" and explains how it has ideological connotations being used in different time periods to delimit different geographical areas. Currently, as Naumescu suggests, "Eastern Europe" is perceived as a synonym for the Eastern Partnership, a "buffer zone" between the Euro-Atlantic organizations and the Russian Federation. The second part of the introduction rises a question that has become, since the publication of this book, one of the most debatable subjects within the international relations domain. By asking if the Ukraine crisis represents the starting point for a Cold War II between the West and Russia. Analysing this hypothesis, the author successfully foresee one of the hottest discussed and researched themes, the ignition of a New Cold War, that became more acknowledged by mass-media and policy makers after 2016.

The first part of the volume "The Eastern Partnership at a Crossroads: Success or Failure, Realism or Illusion?" offers a holistic approach upon the creation, implementation and the objectives of the Eastern Partnership in terms to the different perspectives of the engaged actors. In this regard, the article "Poland and the Creation of the EaP: Between Western Preferences and Eastern Concerns" by Ruxandra Iordache is a good example concerning the rationale belonging to one of the founding states, Poland, regarding the need to create this initiative.

The article of Lucian Jora, "Functional Aspects of the EU Eastern Partnership on Debate", goes further on and identifies the major challenges and weaknesses of the reports and analysis on the Eastern Partnership and present some solutions for realistic ground-based feasibility studies that the author considers necessary

for the future implementation of the European projects. The third article “Implications on the Security and Stability of the Eastern Partnership” researches the interests of the European Union towards its Eastern neighbourhood with a focus on security and the impact of the EaP on the relations between the European Union and Russia. On the next article, “The Eastern Partnership and the Question of the EU’s Political Identity: The Case of Belarus” Lucian-Ştefan Dumitrescu and Darie Cristea study the political identity of Belarus in relations with the EU identity and the Russian identity by employing the concepts of “othering process” and “significant other”. In the last article of this section, “Frozen Conflicts in South Caucasus and their Impact on the Eastern Partnership: The case of Georgia and its Break-away Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia”, the authors - Laura M. Herța and Alexandra Sabou- using socio-constructivism (with an accent on the socialization concept) present the implications of EU norms on the relations of Georgia with its break-away territories. As a critical review of the EU’s norms that were internalized by Georgia, the article offers a complex view of the dynamics between the Georgian state and Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The second part of the book entitled “Eastern Europe” Today: Weaknesses, Dilemmas and Opportunities” goes beyond the study of the Eastern Partnership and researches the challenges of the region. Among the most discussed topics in this segment, we can identify: political discourse, NATO on its Eastern Flank, energy security in the Black Sea region, the Association Agreement and the DCFTA in Ukraine, and the European integration of Moldova. In the article “Energy Security – A Core Issue for Consolidating the Eastern Border: The EU in Search of a New Black Sea Strategy”, Dragoş Păun and Oana Poiană examine the current situation in the Black Sea region with a focus on energy security and suggest that in order to avoid an “energy cold war” the EU should rethink its Black Sea Strategy in order to make it more comprehensive, inclusive and suitable for the long-term needs of the Black Sea countries. The relations between the EU and Ukraine are the subject of the article “EU-Ukraine: The Need for a Revisited Approach”. In this material, Georgiana Ciceo by using conditionality and socialization underpins the weaknesses and challenges of the relation between Brussels and Kiev and suggests that “the EU needs to come up with a

more vigorous and sympathetic approach to conditionality". In the third article, "Ukraine at an Economic Crossroads", Cristian Conțan presents the dynamics of the EU-Ukraine-Russia from an economic point of view. The author employs an overview of the function that economy played for the rationale, motifs and actions of the states involved in the Ukrainian crisis. Vincent Henry and Sergiu Mișcoiu in "Political Discourses, Search for Identity and National Imagination in the Republic of Moldova" change the focus from Ukraine to Moldova. By using discourse theory in researching the speeches of high-ranking dignitaries, the authors aim at examining the evolution of the Moldavan identity process building. The following analysis, "Romania and the Republic of Moldova: Common Assets and Challenges amid the Europe 2020 Agenda" by Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean proposes to examine the implementation of the Europe 2020 Agenda by a comparison between Romania and Republic of Moldova with the purpose to lay out the challenges for the European integration process for Moldova. "The Case for the Rebalancing of NATO on the Eastern Flank" of the authors - Octavian Manea and Paulina İzewicz - moves beyond the analysis focused on the EU and approaches the security challenges of the Eastern Flak, followed by a critical review to the NATO Summit in Wales and finalising with some recommendations that might strengthen the position of the Alliance in the region. In the last article of this section, "The Insecurity Concept of the EU-r-ASIAN Borderline: The Caucasus", Bogdan Nedea studies the new emerging security paradigm in the South Caucasus, highlighting the geopolitical importance of Georgia.

The volume concludes with an afterword about the Romanian-Russian Relations since 1989 written by Sergiu Celac and Dan Dungaciu. This is a valuable historical and comprehensive analysis that presents the relations of the two actors keeping in mind the most important stages of Romania's foreign policy for the past quarter-century. In addition, the authors also offer a perspective upon the dynamics of the internal political situation and various points of view regarding some hot topics on the Russo-Romanian relations.

The overall contribution of this volume is impressive because it deals with topics that offer in-depth perspectives on the functioning of the Eastern Partnership. The book has the merit of presenting a holistic picture, provided by the study of

the regional politics, security and foreign affairs dynamics. Therefore, I consider the book an important Romanian contribution to the study of the Eastern Neighbourhood as it successfully captures the essence of the complex regional situation.