

BOOK REVIEWS

The Neighbours of the European Union's Neighbours Diplomatic and Geopolitical Dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy

by Kevork Oskanian, University of Birmingham

The Neighbours of the European Union's Neighbours Diplomatic and Geopolitical Dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy, by Sieglinde Gsthl and Erwan Lannon, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been the subject of extensive scholarship. Its aim—to provide the European Union with a ring of stability in its immediate geographic vicinity—has largely remained unrealized. A large selection of works are now available explaining the ENP's failures in the South—where the Arab Spring has long upended many of its assumptions—and the East—where the EU project eventually came into conflict with Russia's perceived sphere of interest. Instability and conflict now surround Europe, an irony not lost on quite a number of authors. In comparison, little has been said about the Neighbours of the European Union's Neighbours, the states adjacent to the participants in the ENP. And as this volume rightly points out, this is a remarkable oversight. Many of the issues within the immediate European neighborhood (the refugee crisis, energy security, terrorism, e.a.) cannot be dissociated from processes beyond the ENP's frame of reference.

This highly interesting collection of chapters attempts to address this lacuna by focusing on the regions adjacent to the countries of the ENP: the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, the Gulf, and Central Asia. It provides a wide range of analyses with a strong, prescriptive policy component. This is quite a challenge, considering the widely divergent nature of the various regions described, with little uniting them except for the fact that they are adjacent to the ENP and have a common tendency toward instability. The volume is divided into four parts, looking respectively at Africa, the Gulf, Central Asia, and the object of inquiry as a whole. Providing theoretically light touch analyses, the thirteen regionally focused chapters work very well as compendia of EU policy toward these various areas and internal conditions within them. As such, they are clearly aimed more at the policy-making community than academics, providing a wealth of empirical information, complemented by clear and quite relevant prescriptions related to concrete EU policies.

The first section, which is on Africa, provides an excellent overview of conditions in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. There are, however, several omissions that stand out: Why, for instance, is there little discussion of interactions between the EU and the African Union? On a more general note, there appears to be a tendency to minimize the agency of African states and societies, that appear more as passive recipients of EU policy rather than advocates of African solutions to African problems. Also important, considering the colonial

history of the region, is the absence of discussion on the role of former colonial powers within the EU, like France, and the interaction of the interests of these individual member states with EU policy (something left out of other analyses as well). Surely, this would be important in any understanding of the dynamics between the EU and the region.

The section on the Gulf region is better in regard to the weaknesses highlighted above. For instance, interactions between the Gulf Cooperation Council and the EU are discussed extensively, and local actors are imbued with more autonomy than their African counterparts. While the analyses provided are of a high and comprehensive quality, the chapters are hampered by something that is outside of every author's control—the very rapid progression of history in the MENA region. The fact that the book was published in 2014 jumps out here, especially as important events—like the refugee crisis, the rise of ISIS/Daesh, the nuclear deal with Iran, and the Houthi uprising in Yemen—are left outside its scope. This is rather unfortunate, since the authors would most definitely have had interesting points to make on these developments. This datedness affects other chapters but to a lesser extent. Little is said, for instance, of Russia's Eurasian Economic Union and China's Belt and Road Initiative, both of which are now very relevant to conditions within Central Asia.

The final section provides closure by pulling the various parts together to provide evidence-based policy prescriptions, and here, history actually works in this volume's favor by providing some of the prescriptions and predictions with the confirmation of hindsight. Chapter ten stands out in this respect by calling for a “more for less” approach within the European Neighbourhood Policy. This is a pragmatic, differentiated approach tailored to conditions of the participants rather than the traditional “one-side-fits-all” approach tainted by the policy inertia of enlargement—a suggestion that appears to have been followed in Mogherini's recent strategic reassessment of EU neighborhood policy. The final chapter is similarly important in its attempts to devise a coherent EU policy toward this neighborhood of the neighborhood. It nevertheless leaves many questions unanswered, most importantly, the tension between the necessity for a coherent strategy toward this arc of instability and the need for differentiation in a set of regions whose internal and external dynamics remains undeniably distinct. The call also comes just as the ENP itself appears to be diverging away from an integrated, uniform approach into a set of separate policies.

The question arises whether anything more than an issue-by-issue cooperation would be feasible for relations between the EU and these disparate regions. After all, the EU is not omnipotent; its lack of hard, especially military, power might severely limit its effectiveness in places where—unlike in its immediate, especially Eastern, neighborhood—its soft or normative power can only play a limited role. The current crisis of the EU would also appear to militate against greater engagement with the outside world. In that sense, the irony of China taking some of the measures suggested on page 282 (building infrastructure, especially in Central Asia and Africa) shouldn't escape anyone and might also be indicative of what is in store for the future. At the very least, this informative collection of chapters should get policy-makers and analysts thinking about what comes next in these unstable and unpredictable areas of the globe.