



Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy

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BOOK REVIEWS

Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy, edited by Sieglinde Gstöhl and Simon Schunz, Abingdon, Routledge, 2017, 294 pp., £92 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-138-20479-9

The motivation behind this edited volume seems to be a feeling of dissatisfaction among scholars working on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) with available theoretical approaches. This dissatisfaction stems from a mismatch between empirical studies dealing with the political and social reality on the ground and the theoretical assumptions towards the ENP's functioning that cannot be simply explained by a lack of efficiency. In her introductory chapter, Sieglinde Gstöhl traces the *problematique* of theorizing the ENP back to its hybrid nature between, on the one hand, foreign policy and, on the other hand, enlargement policy (5). She identifies the major challenges to the study of the ENP grouped together in three clusters: first, the prevailing difficulty to ultimately understand the relationship between the social-constructivist logic of appropriateness and the rational logic of consequence in the light of the complexity in which the ENP operates; second, the fact that contextual (external as well as domestic) factors in the eastern neighbourhood are fundamentally different than those of the enlargement process (a false '*ceteris paribus*' assumption) not least because of the increasing relevance of geopolitics in the region; and third, the prevailing EU-centrism of Foreign Policy Analysis, preoccupied with EU decision-making procedures. Given those challenges, what is the way forward in terms of theory-building? This is the gap that *Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy* seeks to fill. It suggests rethinking theoretical assumptions about the functioning of the ENP instead of explaining the 'failures' by the lack of efficiency. In order to do so, Sieglinde Gstöhl and Simon Schunz, both outstanding ENP experts, bring together a balanced mix of other well-known scholars (e.g., Laure Delcour, Elena Korosteleva and Elsa Tulmets) and fresh ENP scholars. In contrast to what the title suggests, the book only covers insights from the eastern dimension of the ENP. However, from a reader's perspective, this is an advantage rather than a shortcoming given the differences between contexts and policies in both regions which are often difficult to bridge.

The initially identified three clusters also set out the three parts of the book. The first part elaborates on traditional International Relations theories: this is, on the one hand, a contribution to the longstanding debate about bridging the constructivist-rational choice divide (Chapters 2 and 3), but also a realist and a constructivist perspective on Russia's perception of the ENP (Chapters 4 and 5). More innovative accounts in terms of theory-building are put forward in the second and the third part, in which the authors draw on mid-range theories such as bounded rationality (Chapter 6), structural power (Chapter 7) or insights from regionalism (Chapters 10 and 11). In addition, Chapter 9 applies the 'practice turn' to the study of the ENP, and Chapters 12 and 13 bring in insights from post-structuralism. Even critical approaches towards the ENP find space in Chapters 11, 12 and 13. The fact that only two contributions elaborate on traditional Europeanization mechanism suggests that the 'dichotomization between interests and a "logic of consequence" and norms and a "logic of appropriateness" is considered as unhelpful for a full understanding and explanation of the ENP' (267). Instead, transcending the dichotomy of normative and rational power towards a Foucauldian understanding of 'power within norms' or a Bourdieu-inspired 'logic of habits' seems to be a promising way forward (276–279). Although such an inductive and often single case-based

theorization hampers overarching theoretical coherence, it allows scholars to not only transcend problems deriving from the dichotomy of consequence/appropriateness but also to pay specific attention to the role of agencies, structures and processes, and subsequently neglected domestic and external factors in the eastern neighbourhood.

While it makes sense to structure the book along the initially identified challenges, it would have also been useful to structure the contributions along theoretical or methodological clusters. Many of the contributions represent stand alone papers and focus on very specific cases. Each of the contributions individually fails to convincingly show the broader applicability of the respective theoretical approach. This makes it hard to identify coherent theoretical and epistemological strands across the chapters. Especially, the nontraditional but promising perspectives, such as poststructuralism or practice theory, would have benefitted from further systematization. Instead, the concluding chapter points to the virtue of ‘pluralistic theorizing’ and ‘analytic eclecticism’ in order to make the wide range of theoretical perspectives and the various mid-range theories account for the complex empirical reality. Such an approach, however, does not tackle the lack of overarching theorization of the functioning of the ENP. In sum, *Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy* is a much-needed contribution not only as a non-exhaustive overview of available theoretical approaches, as the editors themselves state, but especially as a kick-off for a more comprehensive debate on theory-building of EU external action in general and the ENP specifically. Although theorization of the ENP remains patchwork for now, the book will become a pivotal source for all those who wish to contribute to this debate in future.

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Negotiations in the EU Council of Ministers: ‘and all must have prizes’, by Sandrino Smeets, Colchester, ECPR Press, 2015, 264 pp., £30.00/€41.00 (paperback), ISBN 9781785521379

Rarely does one come across work on the EU Council of Ministers that is as thoroughly researched as this book by Sandrino Smeets. The author has painstakingly reconstructed 10 years of negotiations within the Council concerning the European trajectory of the Western Balkans. His main aim, as stated explicitly in the introduction, is not only to shed light on the relevant debates that have taken place in the Council, but also – and perhaps more importantly – to offer insight into the way the Council works in general.

In the first three chapters, Smeets’ innovative theoretical framework and the research design of the project are laid out. Chapters 4–8 comprise the empirical part of the book and cover the period between June 2000 and October 2010. The main actors’ positions are discussed (Chapter 4), before the author proceeds with an insightful historical analysis. This is when the book is at its best. Smeets manages to reconstruct the negotiation process within the Council of Ministers in a vivid and knowledgeable manner. In Chapter 5, he deals with the very early stages of the Western Balkans enlargement process, when the initial vague promises on behalf of the EU eventually crystalized into a more concrete accession agenda. Chapter 6 covers the period from June 2003 until late 2005,