



## Assessing European neighbourhood policy

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result cannot be other than compensating since the bunk of information and analysis the reader will gain is immeasurable. The study is not just a welcome addition to the topic, but a necessary one.

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**Assessing European neighbourhood policy**, edited by Hrant Kostanyan, London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, xi + 171 pp., £19.95 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-78660-445-3

*Assessing European Neighbourhood Policy* is a comprehensive literature review commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands authored by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). The ministry together with the researchers rightly identify that “despite the rapidly growing body of literature, there was no systematic review available that catalogued the explanatory variables used by ENP scholars” (xi). Indeed, as a result of the enormous amount and fragmentation of studies about the European Neighbourhood Policy, findings are often left without sufficient contextualisation, which has made it difficult for researchers to identify overarching dynamics. In order to systematise the various research strands an iterative research design is used. The initially defined framework of explanatory factors is continuously refined and adapted according to the findings of the in-depth literature review. The bulk of the reviewed literature is English language A1 and A2 academic journals, books from quality publishers and publications from high-ranked think tanks.

The book seeks to answer three questions: how does the literature conceptualise effectiveness; to what extent does the literature consider the ENP to be effective and coherent and finally, what are the factors that explain effectiveness and coherence? Regarding these questions, it is interesting that recent scholarly endeavours reflect more critical attempts going beyond an EU-centric perspective and the mere study of ENP effectiveness, such as Elena Korosteleva, Igor Merheim-Eyre and Eske van Gils’ approach of revitalising “the political” in the study of the ENP or the focus on “unintended consequences” advocated by Olga Burlyuk, which challenges the notion of unconfined positive effects of EU external governance.

In chapter 2 the authors find that the conceptualisation of the impact of the EU’s policy instruments remains within the realm of traditional Europeanization mechanisms based on a rational-choice theory and constructivism. The fact that this chapter focuses mainly on the application of negative and positive conditionality shows how limited is the understanding of EU socialisation in its neighbourhood. Contrary to what might be expected, this misbalance does not indicate a greater effectiveness of rational-choice instruments, but rather a lack of conceptualisation of the constructivist and sociological dimensions of ENP policy instruments.

In chapters 3 to 7, the five major explanatory variables of the effective/ineffective application of conditionality and socialisation are identified: the tensions between interests and values (i.e. promotion of democracy versus stability); joint ownership and local dynamics; perception and visibility; external factors, mainly the impact of other regional “hegemonic” powers (i.e. Russia and the Gulf States) and finally coherence. The chapters outline the major academic

debates around each of the factors and discuss the often conflicting assessment of their contribution to effectiveness. Thereby the review demonstrates the mutual dependence of, and the trade-offs between the explanatory factors, revealing the dilemmas involved in balancing the sometimes conflicting ENP objectives. For example, the “interest versus values” dilemma (Chapter 3) remains a recurring issue throughout the book, strongly affecting other determinants such as local political dynamics and the external actors’ perception. While plenty of studies treat democracy promotion as an end, it has become evident that the EU strongly shifted its focus on strategic interests to which democracy promotion is mainly seen as a means. The ambiguity of objectives that is rooted already in the EU treaties and major policy documents (44) does not only hamper the ENP’s effective application on the ground but also a coherent benchmarking and reforming of the policy itself.

It is creditable how the book bridges insights from the southern and the eastern neighbourhood despite their contextual differences. For example, it demonstrates the similarity of the roles of alternative regional hegemony such as Russia, Iran or Saudi Arabia (the “neighbours of neighbours”), allowing researchers and policy-makers to draw the lessons from developments in both contexts. With regards to such external factors, the authors note that the southern neighbourhood is highly understudied compared to the eastern neighbourhood. While this part of the review (Chapter 6) pays great attention to the security dimension and sectoral convergence, democratic transformation could have been considered more carefully in the context of the growing literature on “autocracy-promotion” or “democracy-obstruction” (e.g. recent work by Risse, Babayan, Libman, Obydenkova and Tolstrup).

The book does not aim to present surprising insights or a new hypothesis. However, as a systematization of the main internal and external factors that contribute to policy effectiveness it is a much-needed contribution to ENP literature. From a practitioners’ perspective it is a helpful tool for policy-makers, evaluators and civil-society experts who would like to find an overview of determinants of ENP effectiveness and additional sources on specific issues. For the use by academics the book would have benefited if the authors had attempted to synthesise the “lessons learned” from this comprehensive review into concrete contact points of a conceptual debate.


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