

## Neighborhood Challenge: The European Union and its Neighbors

Edited by *Bezen Balamir-Coşkun* and *Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun*

Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2009, 423 pp., ISBN 9781599429687, \$35.95.

The EU's neighborhood policy presents an alternative perspective to its position on enlargement and membership. As such, it complements the EU's broader objective of promoting political, economic and social development and stability on its periphery. *Neighborhood Challenge* evaluates the progress and coherence of the EU's foreign policy practices through an examination of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in several key regions. The book consists of 18 chapters focusing on various dimensions of EU policies toward the Western Balkans, the Middle East, Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Turkey.

Contributors contend that the neighborhood policy is a significant reference point for the EU to exhibit its status as an international actor. In various chapters, they discuss the implications of the EU's growing role in key regions around the globe. One concrete implication refers to a significant process in the making: the shift in the EU's policies from fostering regional stabilization, reconstruction, and the return of refugees to encouraging regions to implement their own political, institutional, economic and social reforms. Another major conclusion is that the EU's deficiencies result from fragmented bureaucratized mechanisms that complicate the allocation of aid. In one concrete proposal to overcome this problem, it is suggested that the EU programs and initiatives be consolidated into one major European project to streamline the bureaucracy. In addition, the EU should

encourage local actors to participate in EU programs on the basis of jointly agreed priorities and strengthen civil society.

The book focuses on different cases related to the EU's neighborhood, from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and North Africa, to the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. These studies help demonstrate the variations in EU policies, the EU's foreign policy potential, and the attitudes of other powers toward EU policies. Comparison with US policies enriches the book's analytical strength. Also significant are the theoretical insights that undergird various individual chapters. For example, the EU's approach toward organized crime in the Balkans, which is emphasized as one of the main problems in the region, is analyzed from various theoretical perspectives, namely utilitarian, constructivist, and structuralist.

Another case study looks at the EU's role in the Middle East. The contributors compare differences between the EU and the US approaches, as exemplified by the US-led Middle East Partnership project and the EU's Barcelona process. A major conclusion of this study is that the EU's policies in the region did not act as a factor to move authoritarian regimes toward democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the un-institutionalized framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and the lack of dialogue between Euro-Mediterranean Partners are offered as the major fac-

tors perpetuating the current situation. The contributors also stress that the financial aid restrictions placed on the southern partner governments in the Middle East and their civil societies have led to deficiencies in aid management. Such restrictions are products of the EU's inclination to use aid for political purposes. Yet, the contributors note that the EU's strategic thinking reduces the importance of aid policy in sparking reforms in the Middle East.

The contributors argue that the EU approaches Central Asia and the Caspian from a strategic perspective, focusing on their place in EU security policies, especially in terms of foreign energy resources and the region's potential as a market for European products. They show how the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the war in Afghanistan resulted in the EU's revision of its policies toward this region through the implementation of a wider range of financial programs and agreements. They take this case as an example of how pragmatism shapes the EU's role in the international area.

The EU's presence in the Black Sea area is examined in relation to Russia's weight in the region. In that regard, the contributors discuss in great detail the factors that hindered the formation of a coherent EU security strategy toward the Black Sea area. They identify various issues where the EU could exert greater influence, such as engaging in the resolution of the region's frozen conflicts, and the activation of crisis management capabilities.

The book concludes by discussing the main elements of the European strategy, which are based on cross-border cooperation for developing an area of good neighborliness. Turkey's western borders are taken as a model to study cross-border cooperation, which has achieved some suc-

cess in terms of fostering stability on the European periphery.

Perhaps the major contribution of the book is its conclusion that the EU suffers from certain deficiencies in terms of creating common policies in the international arena, due, among other things, to its failure to eliminate the contradictory policies of individual member states, and its one-size-fits all approach toward different target countries. Various chapters in the book agree with this conclusion to different degrees. In particular, they identify other factors that reinforce the EU's deficiencies: the contradictions in various EU policies, the lack of common definitions regarding international problems, the EU's secondary role in regional security problems, and the absence of obligatory and compulsory benchmarking in ENP action plans. Still, they do not attribute all the shortcoming to the EU's own misdoings. For example, the South Caucasus's lack of a working regional mechanism, and the different economic and political priorities that beset the regional countries, hinder the successful implementation of the ENP there.

*Neighborhood Challenge* can be considered a significant reference source which defines the EU's neighborhood policy in detail, assessing the European Neighborhood Policy and its political, economic, and social instruments and competencies, and analyzing the shortcomings of the EU with regard to its neighboring regions. Overall, the book's issue-specific and region-specific chapters offer some of the few systematic attempts to analyze the EU's foreign policy on its periphery, extending beyond the context of the ENP. The focus on various issue areas, such as the financial aid programs; and the use of different research techniques, such as statistical data

and comparative country profiles, enrich the book's strength. Perhaps one weakness of the study is its failure to build on a common theoretical understanding regarding the concept of neighborhood. Indeed, the book falls short of providing scholars and policymakers with a new perspective regarding the EU's efficacy as an international actor in relation to its "neighborhood challenge." This shortcoming is a sign that the

arguments in the book indicate prevalent ideas on the EU's efficacy as an international actor by jumping to imperfect conclusions. Nonetheless, as a basic contribution to the literature, *Neighborhood Challenge* stands out with its thorough and valuable discussions about the factors which determine the EU's position in global politics.

Sezgin Mercan, *Dokuz Eylul University*

## Imagine Europe: The Search for European Identity and Spirituality

Edited by *Luk Bouckaert and Jochanan Eynikel*

Garant: Antwerpen Apeldoorn 2009, 136 pp., ISBN 9789044124552, €14.00.

Lately, the search for the revival of a European spirit to respond to the continent's pervasive crises in economic, social, cultural, and political spheres has been the subject of many books and articles. This search has brought forth several different approaches, along with heated debates, as to how this resurgence in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century could be crystallized and projected into the future. *Imagine Europe: The Search for European Identity and Spirituality*, edited by Luk Bouckaert and Jochanan Eynikel sets out to keep track on these debates and delve into the question of the identity crisis besieging Europe.

The book is composed of two parts. The first part attempts to take an in depth look into the question of European identity in political and cultural spheres, while the second one deals with spirituality in European business. All in all, the authors of the book agree that Europe is built upon relations of reciprocity and fraternity and these old moral concepts should be reinvented

in order to tackle the economic, social, and political stalemate that the continent has been mired in for some time. The main question that the book revolves around is how Europe or/and the European Union should address problems such as immigration, rising nationalism, a democratic deficit, identity, and economic issues over the past two decades. Flipping through the pages one would get the impression from the authors that the EU can not overcome these challenges in its current form. Furthermore, even a limited reorganization of the EU and making some adjustments would not help either. What is needed, according to the authors, is creating a novel alternative approach relying on ethical and spiritual bases to the current system. Throughout the book, the authors aim to depict the impact of this alternative model on the economic, social, and political lives of Europeans. The authors argue that the key component of this new Europe is the rebirth of the European spirit, particularly