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Book review: Delcour, Laure (2011). *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space? EU Policies and Approaches to Region-Building*. Farnham, Surrey: Asghate.

The book provides an extensive overview of EU approaches to region building in the post-Soviet space. It seeks to explain the absence of such policies vis-à-vis the region. The case study is contrasted with a more holistic EU strategy for the Southern Mediterranean countries, but the book does not contain a systematic comparative analysis of EU approaches to the two regions. Delcour proposes two hypotheses to explain the counterfactual. The first one focuses on disintegration processes following the collapse of the Soviet Union (p. 12). The second one highlights the emergence of subregionalization policy, which is treated as an expression of the interests of the new EU member states following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements (ibid).

Theoretically the book presents a mixed approach relying on the constructivist paradigm, but also adding historical institutionalism, functionalism and bits of neorealism. Arguably, a rather thin and loose theoretical conceptualization is a major weakness of the book. As the story of “what Europe does” (5) in the region unfolds, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand how theory informs observed dynamics. For example, the case of EU-Russia relations (51-69) reveals how the EU changes and adjusts its policies in response to Russian demands. A similar dynamic seems to take place with the EU Black Sea Synergy initiative whose agenda has been radically curtailed by Russia’s disruptive actions (144). The EU behaviour can hardly be regarded as an expression of its internal identity, but seems to be shaped by geopolitical realities and by the economic interests of its members. Even in the case of Central Asia, the author acknowledges that these countries have leverage in shaping bilateral relations (107) because of the EU’s security and energy interests. This logic of action starts to increasingly resemble rationalist approaches, where one’s interests dictate willingness to compromise and adjust to your partner’s interests. Although the EU’s tendency to reproduce itself can still be detected at the initial stages of policy formation, its relevance in terms of policy outcomes is rather limited (101).

In addition to the missing comparative case of EU approaches to the Southern Mediterranean countries, the book might have benefited from a closer analysis of the EU Eastern enlargement strategy. The argument that Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) “though similar in their main features, were negotiated bilaterally, thus highlighting differences in the pace of reforms and in relations with the EU” (30) can also be applied to the ongoing enlargement process into the Eastern bloc countries. So maybe EU bilateral and subregionalization policies are not that unique to the post-Soviet space and apply elsewhere.

Despite some of these contentions, the book provides a very useful overview of EU policies toward the region since the breakup of the Soviet Union. It also demonstrates the evolution of EU policy as it grappled with rapid regional changes. One is left with the impression that the EU identity-based preferences repeatedly fall subject to the preferences of the NIS countries. Given the lack of membership incentives, the EU is struggling to maintain its arguably traditional profile as a region-builder. Its soft power has limited reach, although some convergence with EU rules and norms among NIS countries take place. Whether this is the

result of intentional region building attempts, as the author suggests, or simply an unintended consequence of similar bilateral issues (like trade) on the table of negotiations, remains an open question.