

## Russia and Eurasia

**Putin's Russia and the enlarged Europe. By Roy Allison, Margot Light and Stephen White.**

Oxford: Blackwell Publishing and Chatham House. 2006. 229pp. Index. Pb.: £19.99. isbn 1 4051 2647 7.

Among the consistent flood of literature on relations between Russia and Europe, this book deserves special attention. Thanks to their academic reliability and policy-oriented mindset, the three authors have delivered a very useful volume, both concise and state of the art on this complex issue. Based on a set of interviews (made between 2004–2006), thorough research and trenchant analysis (of both English and Russian sources), this book is more specifically aimed at investigating the extent to which the EU and NATO can be used as channels for the greater inclusion of Russia in Europe. Irrespective of future developments, this book manages to introduce two salient insights. The first is the successful attempt to link perceptions of the EU and NATO in the Russian mindset. The EU is, bluntly speaking, very often mistaken by not including NATO in its overall attitude towards Russia. The second insight is more indirect. In fact, it is the reader who is asked to link the second and sixth chapters (on the management of Russian foreign policy and the public dimension respectively) in order to assess Europe's importance in Russia's search for an identity. Given the title, readers could hardly be blamed for expecting an analysis of the consequences that the EU/NATO double enlargement of 2004 had in Moscow. This important point is only partly dealt with. It would have been crucial in reading Putin's evolution towards Europe. In addition, the book fails to give clear answers to the following issues: who is really in charge of Moscow's European policy in Moscow? Is this policy coherent? Is it articulated between the EU, NATO, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and European capitals? Future research will have to focus on these issues. Having said that, it is worth insisting on the richness of this volume, which is full of practical information. For instance, the book describes in detail foreign policy decision-making, which is 'personalized, opaque and often ineffective' (p. 36). Using previous research conducted with Olga Kryshtanovskaya (published in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 19: 4, 2003 and in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57: 7, 2005), Stephen White gives very clear insights on the weight of the presidential administration in the decision-making process. Beyond such factual information, the book contains at least three salient political conclusions. First, the informed chapter on the public dimension highlights the profound and recent change in Russian opinion. Whether taken individually or collectively, the European countries are not seen as a threat to Russian security. On this particular point, it is worth noting the overlapping security perceptions between military (and also some political) elites and public opinion. Second, Margot Light rightly insists on the tensions related to the common neighbourhood. After having listed the recent controversies in Russia–EU relations, Light properly reminds us that 'Russia has more agreements with the EU than with any other multilateral organization' (p. 69). At the same time, Moscow repeatedly calls for specificity and consideration. The misunderstandings between the EU and Russia mainly stem from their different natures. Light concludes by mitigating the 'systemic crisis' between the two parts described by many Russia experts. Given the recent evolution (especially Poland's veto in November 2006, blocking the Commission's mandate to negotiate the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement), this point is still highly debatable. Lastly, this book underlines the key importance of NATO in Russian perception. Russia still thinks of the continent in terms of security. Consequently, as seen from Moscow NATO is paramount. In two outstanding chapters, Roy Allison describes how the Russian leadership systematically link the EU and NATO. In short, 'the less influence the US (including through NATO) has over the ESDP [European Security and Defence Policy], the better it is viewed for Russia' (p. 74). The main concern for Russia is to get clarity about the geographical scope and nature of the operations that could be advanced under both ESDP and NATO. Compared to the nascent EU security structures, the

NATO–Russia Council, with its Russian membership and equality on decision-making in various areas, produces far more trust. Allison thus concludes that ‘this leaves the option of actual NATO membership as a possible means for Russian integration into Europe’ (p. 124). Even if, according to him, membership is unlikely in the coming decade, the EU should ponder this very political conclusion: having a genuine strategy towards Russia implies to be considered as serious in the security field.

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