

## **Book Review**

# **Book review “Baltic-Black Sea Regionalisms. Patchworks and Networks at Europe’s Eastern Margins”, Olga Bogdanova, Andrey Makarychev (eds.). Springer, 2019”**

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Baltic-Black Sea Regionalisms are becoming a serious task for academics’ and policy analysts’ studies. The existing academic literature is short of a systematic and comprehensive conceptualization of the spatial connection between its two regional components. What is known as the Baltic-Black Sea region is a trans-regional and cross-border space still in search for its name. Many of concepts – liminality, marginality, peripherality, in-betweenness, hybridity – can undoubtedly be applied to its countries. Moreover, the structure of this space looks rather paradoxical given its declaratory centrality and de-facto marginality vis-à-vis the EU’s core.

In this edited volume, edited by Olga Bogdanova and Andrey Makarychev, senior and junior researchers present the most advanced results of their individual and communal work, by offering a sophisticated and insightful basis for reflection. All chapters are based on the study of a logical sequence of events or existing situations. Already massively explored issues appear in a new light.

They identify the main trends in the development of regionalism phenomena by exploring its regional and global dimensions. The most innovative character of the book appears in the discussion about BBSR as a dubbed the Baltic-Black Sea/ the Black Sea-Baltic (BBS-BSB) regionalism, which in many aspects reverses the conventional logic of territoriality and identifies new dimensions in regional settings that might be important elements of a post-liberal European order. This is exactly how authors propose to read this book – as multiple explorations of the political space in flux that can be traversed and transcended from north to south and in the opposite direction and that also embeds some meaningful components of East-West and West-East distinction(s).

The book aims to introduce new dimensions to the Baltic-Black Sea con-

nection, and relate them to domestic and foreign policies of major international actors in the region.

The book is divided into three parts, focused on different dimensions of BBSR.

The first one is aimed at introducing a variety of conceptual approaches that might be useful in the course of exploring the intricacies and complexities of the Baltic-Black Sea/Black Sea-Baltic regional spaces. Tomasz Brańka, Łukasz Donaj, and Jarosław Jańczak discuss the interconnected dynamics of border making and unmaking in the BBS-BSB region, underlining military, symbolic and functional aspects of bordering and debordering. Vassilis Petsinis in his contribution explicates the importance of ethnopolitical framework for analyzing events and developments in this area overburdened with various manifestations of ethnic and religious nationalism, which makes possible drawing lines of comparisons with such regions as the Balkans. Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk offer a different research vocabulary – that one of biopolitics – as an explanatory frame that gives nuanced explanations of the rise of national conservatism and right-wing politics all across the BBS-BSB region (as well as, of course, much beyond it). Eleonora Narvselius proposes a regional application of cultural approach to the diversity of urban spaces and their historical legacies that include a strong post-colonial element. Polina Sinovets and Iryna Maksymenko take us back to the world of power (geo)politics where major military actors project their policies onto regional spaces and thus define security dimension of regionalism. They investigate the so-called “Narva paradox” as a potential trigger of the Third World War, arguing that Russia’s provocative strategy aims at creating a scenario similar to Donbas in one of the Baltic cities where the “struggle of Russians for their rights” would be supported by the “little green men”. Experts, politicians, and mass media have effectively reproduced the discourse about Russia preparing for the invasion of Baltic states. In particular, in 2016 the President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė has said that she could not exclude a Russian invasion in the Baltics as Putin is obsessed with the idea “of returning all states of the former Soviet Union to Russia’s zone of influence”. President Putin’s speech in front of the Federal Assembly in 2019 contained a paragraph pushing for one more coercive element for the West forward: Russia “will have to use... weapons not only against the regions where the threat comes from but also against the decision-making centers”, which clearly hints at the US. According to Sinovets and Maksymenko, Russia follows the Soviet patterns.

The second cluster looks at practices of political communication and policy interaction between major actors in the BBS-BSB regional space, including bilat-

eral and multilateral relations. Mindaugas Jurkynas ventures to give his account on the Baltic World as seen from the perspective of political elites of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Anna Kuznetsova applies the concept of the “world” to the Finno-Ugric cultural, educational, and linguistic ties, and uncovers a set of political undercurrents in some of them. Andrea Schmidt discusses how Polish-Hungarian relations might be approached from the perspective of the Intermarium and the Three Seas Initiative projects. Oleksii Polegkyi uncovers the diversity of nation state-based security policies in the BBS-BSB region, using case studies on Ukraine and Poland as reference points. Przemysław Furgacz unpacks the variety of memory politics, referring to Polish-Russian conflictual interpretations of history and the clashing narratives about the past. Yana Volkova presents her vision of the concept of “domestic abroad” and the concomitant citizenship policies in the BBS-BSB region, using them as illustrative manifestations of the phenomenon of trans-nationalism. In the chapter by Volkova she stresses that the act of denomination by the kin state, even when supported by the agreement of the home state, is not sufficient in itself to construct a social group. It needs to be accompanied by the imposition of a common national myth that unites a population abroad with the one within the borders of the kin state. Different interpretations of history by different communities within a state are the central components of national iconography. By transmitting its iconography through holiday celebrations, conferences, festivals and concerts, states create imaginary boundaries in the minds of people, which separate one group of population from others, and distinguish ‘ours’ from ‘others’. These shared historical and cultural links are preserved and reinforced by education, which makes cooperation in that sphere an important element of kin state policy. Through different educational initiatives, such as language courses, summer schools, or lessons on history and culture, kin states infuse in the kin population a sense of belonging to the common nation. The kin states usually provide scholarships for kin minorities to study in the kin state, grant support to educational institutions in the home states which teach in the kin language and facilitate the study of kin-state language and culture. Information technologies in identity shaping have a very substantial impact on human perceptions and beliefs, and thus cannot be politically neutral. These technological developments have given kin states increased power to maintain and reinforce the identity of populations abroad. Widespread access to the internet and national television programs ensure the connection of geographically-scattered populations to their homeland. Thanks to information technologies states have become able to transmit particular symbols and messages to their populations abroad, and help creating a “feeling of belonging” in the minds of people. In this

sense, Volkova concludes, cyberspace offers great promise for the preservation of identity and national culture.

The third cluster of the book is structured as a Forum section, with three different contributions looking at the most topical issues in contemporary Ukraine, a country whose future is central for the entire BBS-BSB region. Markiyany Mal'skiy, Nataliya Antonyuk, Marianna Gladyshevskaya and Oksana Krayevska apply the concept of spill-over effects to identify and assess the changes in Ukrainian institutional system caused by the Association Agreement with the EU. Mikola and Anastasiia Trofimenko contributed to discussion by underlining the importance of Ukraine's public diplomacy that in many respects is modelled on previous experiences of this country's western neighbours. Olga Brusylovska and Sergii Glebov critically engage with the Russian World discourse, interpreting it as a doctrine that justified the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. The key research question is how the concept of the Russian World influenced the evolution of national identities in Ukraine, and how these identities became part of the hybrid war. Russian mainstream discourse keeps questioning the very existence of the Ukrainian nation, claiming, for example, that “the Ukrainians and Ukrainian language were invented by the General Chief of Staff of the Austro-Hungarian empire during the First World War to weaken Russia”, “the Ukrainian language is just a mix of Polish and Russian”; “there is a war against Orthodoxy in Ukraine led by the Uniates, Protestants and apostates (supporters of the Kiev Patriarchy)”; “people from western Ukraine are behind all patriotic actions held in the south-eastern regions”. In 2010 the former Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov said that “Russians and Ukrainians are one nation with their own nuances and peculiarities”. Besides, at Russian Universities Ukrainian history is not considered a separate discipline; it was always included into Russian history. The Group for the Analysis of Hybrid Threats has analyzed news policies by top Russian channels in 2016-2018 and singled out six basic narratives of Russian propaganda regarding Ukraine. The first narrative (33% of all news) is related to the thesis of an ongoing “civil war in Ukraine” and the concomitant de-legitimization of Ukrainian Armed Forces. The second narrative presents Ukraine as ‘not-a-real-state’, thus delegitimizing the state authorities. In 15% of all materials mentioning Ukraine, Russian propaganda highlights Russia's extensive help to Donbas. This serves as evidence of Russian authorities' attempts to justify why Crimea was taken as part of the Russian World, while Donbas was not. Other narratives of Russian propaganda include presenting Ukraine as a Russophobic state, where the Russian-speaking population is allegedly marginalized and ostracized. Finally, Russian media create the image of Ukraine as a Western

marionette. So, Brusylovska and Glebov conclude that the Kremlin's media arsenal, which includes state-controlled media holding, radio- and TV-stations and their subsidiary enterprises in the regions, news agencies and printed media, was for years providing information support to the Russian authorities, closely working with the Office of the Press Service and Information of the President of the Russian Federation.

Many of individual contributions either complement or critically engage with each other. Thus, there are different approaches to the concept of "civilizational words" – "Baltic" (Mindaugas Jurkynas), "Finno-Ugric" (Anna Kuznetsova), and "Russian" (Olga Brusylovska and Sergii Glebov) – that overlap in the BBS-BSB area. What the reader may see in each of them is different modes of political operationalization of cultural constructs, which in the case of the Russian world projection has evident security repercussions. When it comes to issues of identities and subjectivities, there is some competition between ethnopolitical (Vassilis Petsinis) and biopolitical (Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk) approaches since both aim to explain the intermingled phenomena of nationalism, conservatism, and right-wing populism. In the meantime, the biopolitical and ethnopolitical theorizing conflates in such specific cases as, for instance, citizenship policies (Yana Volkova) that are used as an instrument of biopower grounded in the idea of taking care of groups of co-ethnics who reside beyond national borders. A similar conflation is noticeable in juxtaposing the biopolitical analysis of the phenomenon of national populism by Makarychev and Yatsyk with Anna Kuznetsova's story of Finno-Ugric identity that includes narratives of ethno-linguistic authenticity used by radical groups as an instrument of political mobilization.

The volume significantly contributes to the ongoing debate on the new dimensions to regional studies, particularly the Baltic-Black Sea connection, and offers interesting insights to those interested in foreign policy and international relations, both academics and practitioners.

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