

THIS BOOK EXAMINES TWO THEORETICAL APPROACHES to European integration, constructivism and rationalism, in the case of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP as a nascent element of EU external policy is still in flux and new initiatives are constantly being created under its auspices (such as the Union for the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership). This makes it, on the one hand, much more difficult to analyse due to its changing nature, while on the other hand it increases the importance of complex scrutiny that can help us to understand its development. By bringing together contemporary theoretical discussion and empirical examination of the developing external policy of the EU, the authors have managed to write a publication that reflects some of the main current issues in the study of European integration.

The first part of the book is theoretical and offers a detailed discussion of the literature that connects rationalism and constructivism in their explanatory frameworks. The authors prove their excellent knowledge of theoretical discussions and manage to explain its nuances in a very readable style, which is, for scholars dealing with constructivism, more often the exception than the rule. ‘Bridge-builders’ are identified as trying to merge these two approaches (constructivism and rationalism) into one, while struggling with basic ontological and sometimes even epistemological contradictions. Omitting these issues and focusing on a pragmatic method, ‘opticians’ are seen as applying the two frameworks as lenses, or methodological instruments, which can be swapped to offer a more accurate explanation.

Kratochvíl and Tulmets adopt the latter approach for their analysis since it is ‘better equipped for a pragmatic synthesis of rationalism and constructivism’ (p. 23). Such a pragmatic method suggests that theoretical approaches should not be chosen until after the empirical utility has already been proven. As the authors note, ‘While we are more inclined to adopt the position of the “opticians”, we argue that their *a priori* methodological choice should be replaced with empirical testing of the suitability of the two approaches’ (italics in original, p. 46). Since constructivism suffers from inconsistency and rationalism is an even broader term that encompasses many theories of European integration, the authors have had to formulate their own definitions of the terms that would leave out metatheoretical issues and at the same time would be specific enough to allow for empirical analysis. As a result, constructivism is defined as the ‘conviction that ideas matter and that the basic behavioural mode of social actors is rule-following’, while according to rationalism ‘social actors try to maximize their self-interest . . . to reach their ends’ (p. 26).

In the next step the authors categorise possible relations between actors on the scale from strong constructivism to strong rationalism, with weak constructivism and weak rationalism in

between. While the discussion in the first part was on a general level, this part explains categorisation in the case of relations between the European Union and its partner countries. The questions that the authors ask concern the mode of behaviour (strong/weak constructivist or weak/strong rationalist) of the EU towards neighbouring countries and vice-versa as well as variations between these modes. Unfortunately, however, Kratochvíl and Tulmets do not deal with the questions of why such a change in modes of behaviour occurs, and which factors influence this change.

The next chapter of the book addresses the ENP and its development. After the literature review on the launch of the ENP, the book proceeds with a detailed description of the evolution of the policy. It shows the importance of the presidencies of the Council of the EU in the formation of the ENP since new initiatives in this area were introduced usually by the country holding the EU presidency (with the arguable exception of the Czech Republic and the launch of the Eastern partnership).

An added value of the book is that it combines positions on the ENP from the perspective of EU institutions (the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament), the key member states (France, Germany and Poland) and also the partner countries (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia). Although both the main geographical dimensions of the ENP are discussed (south and east), the sample of member states is, with the exception of France, focused on countries for which the Eastern neighbourhood is of principal interest. The Polish preference for engaging Eastern neighbours spans the pre-accession period. The German role in the creation of the Eastern partnership (EaP) is considered crucial and even France played a role in its establishment by trading off support for the Union for the Mediterranean. The three partner countries analysed in the book are all part of the EaP project, which is incorporated into the ENP umbrella scheme. Therefore, the book would definitely benefit from a more detailed examination of the EaP, which is mentioned only marginally.

Relations of these nine actors towards the ENP (strong or weak constructivist, weak or strong rationalist) are studied in detail in the empirical part of the book. This is based on 34 interviews conducted with representatives of all of the countries as well as EU institutions and dozens of official documents and speeches. Every actor's attitude towards the ENP is examined in a single subsection with a separate analysis of documents and speeches and interviews. This makes the empirical part very well structured and easy to approach. Each subsection ends with a summary table that shows the development of these relations over time but does not provide conclusions that sum up the main arguments in a nutshell. What is not that clear is the reason for a separate analysis of the two types of empirical material. Discourse analysis of documents and speeches is only partially connected to the analysis of interviews. Although interviews were 'the main methodological tool' (p. 49), they follow only after the discourse analysis and are mostly shorter than the discourse analysis. Moreover, analysis of the interviews seems to have a supplementary character since it often goes beyond the question of the ENP and examines wider EU-related topics.

Unfortunately, the book contains a few editorial inaccuracies that, however, by no means lower the value of the publication and the authors can be hardly blamed for them (twice the heading 'Chapter II' appears twice, no heading 'Chapter III', different font style for Chapter IV). The conclusion does not reflect extensive theoretical examination and only marginally evaluates the usefulness of the employed approach while focusing on the empirical results of the study. Only strong constructivism, as a mode of relations, is discussed briefly; the other three positions are left out from the final summary. The concluding analysis discusses the results of the study in terms of constructivism and rationalism, thus simplifying the original four prepositions and missing the opportunity to contribute more to the theoretical discussion on a synthesis of these approaches.

To sum up, although the book suffers from the above-mentioned shortcomings, Petr Kratochvíl and Elsa Tulmets have succeeded in writing a concise and readable book on

## REVIEWS

1511

European Neighbourhood Policy. Thanks to its empirical richness and well elaborated theoretical approach, they manage to examine the ENP in considerable detail. On the one hand, the book is accessible to those who are new to the topic, and on the other hand, it brings a new point of view and data for those who are already familiar with it.

*Comenius University*

MATÚŠ MIŠÍK © 2011