

spheres of influence in exchange for cooperation against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and terrorism, in the energy sector, and in resolving regional crises. This space of cooperation seems extremely constrained, and the exchange appears wholly unequal. However, the prospects of World War Three are an unacceptable scenario for the West, for the states of eastern Europe and, hopefully, for Russia.

This collection has allotted limited space to other states' interests in this region. Among them are China and Turkey, states that play a critical role in the geopolitical balance in eastern Europe. In addition, the dilemma of returning the Donbas and Crimea to Ukraine's jurisdiction, and the challenges of conflict resolution in other "frozen conflict" zones, have received scant attention in this volume. Nevertheless, Hamilton's and Meister's anthology makes a tremendous contribution to our understandings of the "eastern question" and provides a thoughtful consideration of important possibilities to those who actively engage in the national and global security decision-making processes.

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Martin Brusis, Joachim Ahrens and Martin Schulze Wessel (eds.), *Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 251 pp.

In the age of competitive authoritarianism, non-democratic regimes receive a substantial amount of well-deserved scholarly attention. Nevertheless, it is quite rare to find an academic publication of the same analytical depth and theoretical insight as Brusis, Ahrens, and Wessel's edited volume. The book presents a great selection of theoretical and empirical contributions focusing on a variety of issues in the former Soviet republics.

In this book, the contributors explore the politics of legitimation in Russia, Belarus, Georgia, and the Central Asian republics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all fifteen republics

pursued different paths of political and economic development. By the present, the majority of the former Soviet republics have secured themselves a place on the spectrum of contemporary variations of authoritarianism, offering rich empirical material for observation and research.

Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel employ a new methodological tool—the Regime Legitimation Expert Survey. They use this tool here to explore the autocracy spectrum and build a brilliant comparative analysis of legitimation strategies in post-Soviet countries. Soest and Grauvogel identify a total of six strategies exploited by non-democratic regimes to justify their claims to legitimacy: foundational myth, ideology, personalism, international engagement, pseudo-democratic procedures, and performance. Each post-Soviet authoritarian regime uses a unique combination of these strategies and adjusts this combination as external and domestic circumstances change.

Ahrens, Hoen, and Spechler shift the discussion onto economics and uncover the phenomenon of state capitalism in Central Asia. Using the area of development economics as their starting point, Ahrens, Hoen, and Spechler explore the unique mixture of Soviet-era command economy and capitalist features found in this region. They compare and contrast the economic development paths of the two largest Central Asian economies—Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In both countries, the sectors at the core of the national economy are often under control of the state, while peripheral sectors operate under market rules. This dual economic arrangement serves the purposes of the political elites and ensures stability of political regimes.

Adele del Sordi brings the discussion back to the issue of legitimation in authoritarian post-Soviet states. Her exploration of legitimation in Kazakhstan focuses on several legitimation strategies. As del Sordi demonstrates, international recognition and economic performance are by far the most efficient instruments to justify the legitimacy of President Nazarbayev, the longest serving president in the former Soviet Union. Kazakhstan's proactive multi-vector foreign policy and its petroleum-based economic success are crucial for the regime's survival.

Christian Timm examines the case of liberal economic reforms in Georgia through the legitimacy lens. Following the failure of Shevardnadze's presidency, President Saakashvili introduced an extensive program of liberal economic reforms aimed at reviving the country's stagnant economy and integrating it into international markets. Economic performance was seen as key to both the development and the stability of the political regime. However, the implementation of the reforms has been affected by an issue that is common for the region: the difficulty involved in and the reluctance to engage in shifting away from state control.

In his contribution, Alexei Trochev investigates the dual nature of the contemporary Russian judiciary. On one hand, little has changed in the way the Russian courts handle criminal cases as pre-trial detention orders are issued en masse and acquittals are rare. And yet there has been one important change: in recent years, Russian judges have increasingly ruled against the federal government, a development which might be an indicator of growing judicial independence. However, as Trochev discovered, this unprecedented change is not in fact a marker of judicial independence; rather, it can be explained as an outcome of the complicated system of accountability within the Russian executive and judiciary bureaucracy. This case will be particularly interesting for specialists working in the areas of the rule of law and judicial reform.

Fabian Burkhardt explores the so-called "last dictatorship in Europe"—the case of Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka, national identity, and regime legitimation in Belarus. Burkhardt analyzes the factors contributing to the sustainability of this authoritarian regime which, based on all political prognoses, should have failed long ago. The analysis is based on a good range of primary data (interviews) and highlights the complex reality of a flexible authoritarian regime.

Philipp Burger demonstrates interesting linkages between constructed historical narratives, contemporary state programs, and the legitimacy of the current political regime in Russia. The use of history and national collective memory to substantiate legitimacy claims is by no means unusual, but each case set out here in this chapter is unique and insightful. In the case of Russia, the se-

lective use of national history and the construction of patriotic historical narratives have been centralized and solidified under Putin's regime. The implementation of patriotic indoctrination bears elements of the most recent information strategies (e.g. viral YouTube videos) and old traditional Soviet propaganda (e.g. military parades). This chapter offers an insightful case study and excellent empirical material.

Finally, Sproede and Zabirko offer a take on Benedict Anderson's famous concept of "imagined communities" in their exploration of the construction of these communities in Russia. While earlier chapters in the book focus on the state-led patriotic education programs, this chapter explores private individuals' perception of state, homeland, and politics. In particular, it analyses the contribution of such contemporary Russian writers as Aleksandr Prokhanov and Zakhar Prilepin to the collective creation of an imagined community through literary works.

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Jacek Kurczewski (ed.), *Reconciliation in Bloodlands: Assessing Actions and Outcomes in Contemporary Central-Eastern Europe*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014. 352 pp.

In the 1990s, the end of the Cold War and the broader global trend in historical apologies prompted a widespread push for reconciliation across Central and Eastern Europe. Until quite recently, one could have been forgiven for viewing this reconciliation process as a great success. Yet the latest political developments in the region and the growth in power of populist rhetoric and nationalist sentiments show the urgent need for a new conceptualization and understanding of reconciliation. Jacek Kurczewski, renowned Polish sociologist and the author of important books on the sociology of law and conflict, has taken up this challenge and, together with a group of regional specialists, has created a book that traces the meaning and possibility of mutual dialogue and understanding in the region. Although the book's title suggests a broad overview across the region of