

Divided States: Strategic Divisions in EU-Russia Relations,
Scott Nicholas Romaniuk, Marguerite Marlin (eds.). Hamburg,
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Book Review by Miles Maftean*

Abstract: *This review analyses Scott Nicholas Romaniuk and Marguerite Marlin's book, *Divided States: Strategic Divisions in EU-Russia Relations*, highlighting the main aspects of the European Union's relation with the Russian Federation. This book introduces the topic by presenting the two major players involved, underlining the fact that many scholars have regarded the EU as the "good" and Russia as the "bad." Referring also to the regional impact of each actor, the review examines the role of third parties, civil society and minorities in official relations between the two entities. Influence of the Western world, often periods of hostility and isolation, and also relations with other actors represent just some of the main aspects of the research carried by the authors. Attractive to all types of readers, this book is suitable for students and scholars interested in this topic of research.*

Keywords: *EU-Russia relations, civil society, human rights, opposition*

President Vladimir Putin has recently taken great strides to limit, if not completely dissolve, any influence that the Western world might have on the Russian Federation, especially on its institutions, practices, and citizens. As issues on the many agendas found within the framework of EU-Russia relations appear to carry on routinely, disquieting changes have been taking place within this partnership that sees Russia pulling further away from Europe. In doing so, Russia has implemented a number of astonishing domestic and foreign policy measures that demand new and careful assessment of this turbulent relationship. *Divided States: Strategic Divisions in EU-Russia Relations* responds to these dramatic changes by addressing the complexities of multi-level (state and non-state) interaction from the Russian and different EU perspectives.

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Scott Nicholas Romaniuk and Marguerite Marlin, both specialists in international relations (IR) and contemporary European history and politics, present a unique collection of works that provide a nuanced understanding of what may be considered some of the most critical and impacting issues within the realm of EU-Russia relations. This area is often oversimplified or obfuscated, and tends to be seen within isolated or inappropriately compartmentalized contexts. Experts in their respective fields drift from this unfortunate practice and present readers with highly original and thought-provoking chapters. The product is nothing short of essential reading for anyone interested in the intricate mechanisms that fuel political, social, and economic interests and policy within Europe and across its periphery.

Comprised of twelve chapters, the editors introduce readers to the topic by noting almost immediately that two major players, each carrying a sub-set of their own actors, are involved in the overall exchange. They draw attention to the idea that “Russia, to a great extent, has been demonized by Western scholars, who find that those casting analytic light on the EU point to the many weaknesses of the Union, particularly when it comes to (not) understanding its (own) neighbourhood and even the contemporary geopolitical world in which it attempts to operate” (p. 2). Romaniuk and Marlin, therefore, aptly plant the broader issue in terms of what it is *not* just as much as they engage with what it *is* and might *become*. They point to the formulation of a spectrum of socio-political uncertainty in which this topic flutters. They reason that the EU still remains an “experiment” composed of integration, immigration, monetary development and relationships, processes of decision-making, balanced or complementary and conflicting institutional arrangements, identity, policy-making, and power struggles. Their rich characterization in such a way establishes a useful stance from which springs a discussion undergirded by both theory and praxis. Setting the stage accordingly assists in delivering “thought provoking collections of interpretations that ultimately add to, and even fundamentally alter, tradition perspectives on the colourful subject matter and debates” (p. 2).

The opening chapter is a meticulously researched exploration of the “common values” and “conflicting interests” found within the EU-Russia relationship from a European perspective. State centric qualities of Russian foreign policy and EU values are depicted discordantly, and therefore EU norms can become relatively ineffectual on Russian foreign policy elite. Hybridity theory informs the analysis of Chapter 2, arguing that the EU-Russia relationship has been formed and reformed by habitual outbreaks of hostility and periods of isolation; but it needs not be understood solely in these terms. Chapter 3 brings readers’ attention to decision-making practices amongst EU institutions. The conceptualization of important informal procedures within the European Council’s (EC) decision-making culture is made. To what extent can the EU apply its “normative” power in Eastern Europe? Romaniuk considers this question through two case studies: Ukraine and Belarus. The argument is made that, “[d]espite a conscious attempt to spread EU policies beyond the Union’s external borders, disparities in ‘norm’-adoption among ENP target-states exemplifies incongruence in the success of the EU’s normative power in foreign relations” (p. 131). In maintaining a focus on institutions and disputable state building, the subsequent chapter discusses the role of the EU in a multi-ethnic Kosovo and its negative impact on the relationship shared by the EU and Russia.

Chapter 6 turns to the monetary dimension of the both actors. A hierarchical understanding of international monetary relations between the two serves as a suitable basis for an analysis of the central reasons regarding a lack of Euro-adoption in the Russian private sector. Histories of European monetary integration, Russian monetary history, and the impact of United States (US) monetary diplomacy are brought in discussion with the aim of contextualizing the phenomena. Controversy as regards human rights issues retains a prominent position within the EU's relationship with Russia, delivering a great deal of negative force because of the precarious position in which Russia's minority groups live and work. Civic activism is described as limited in Russia where this is regarded as a Western import. Chapter 8 extends beyond the confines of Europe and considers in detail the strong "asymmetric" features of two pairs of relations – EU-Russia and Russia-China. This chapter offers a view of the far-reaching effects of these relations, especially when it comes to one of the world's rising powers and major players. The reader is brought back to Europe's ubiquitous periphery with the highlighted role of civil society groups operating in Turkey in the integration process based on their "capacity for diffusing norms and values" (p. 304). Further along the border regions, Belarus has sharply impacted the relationship that the EU shares with Russia expressly in the post-Georgian conflict era. "Belarus' rebuke of Russia's demand for the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia," as argued in Chapter 10, "was brought on not only by increasing tensions between the two states over gas pricing and economic subsidies" (p. 347). Chapter 11 analyses the risks of European integration through a case study of Turkey. The final contribution focuses on the Baltic region with particular attention on Estonia and its national minorities, which may have arguably become a forgotten issue. It discusses the possibility of the peacefully coexistence of the two communities (Estonian and Russian) in the Baltic state. The extent to which the EU mediates ethnic strife within the borders of one of its own member states speaks to its ability to understand part of its own history and act to maintain and strengthen its own security.

Indeed, this volume argues convincingly against traditional ways of viewing and interpreting many of the currents found within the EU-Russia relationship. Attitudes toward both might become largely reoriented by means of the examinations throughout this weighty and collaborative tome. The contributions try to reformulate frameworks for some of the most contentious issues in Europe today. Many running themes are reintroduced but in ways that attempt to disassociate them with either narrow definitions or freeing them from stale or outright obsolete analyses. Most chapters bring with them conceptual frameworks that are either chosen specifically for delving into such subject matter or else reformulate existing frameworks in order to suit a constellation of changes that have taken place between the EU and Russia in recent years. This would be no easy task given the tremendous state of flux in which both the EU and Russia exist; yet, the contributions interact directly with the practical aspects of this perplexing relationship – a commendable achievement. When taken together, the chapters provide a history of transformation of the evolving relationship and a special narrative that places, not merely *states* but the *people* that comprise those states, at the fore. By addressing strategic actors at multiple levels of European affairs, this book should have no difficulty drawing the

attention of researchers and practitioners involved in the very politics of the EU and Russia deliberated therein.

Much of the events and issues that underscore the prevalent theme in *Divided States* tend to come across as systematic and therefore are taken for granted in academic circles and by politicians. With the help of their contributors, Romaniuk and Marlin turn some of the commonly held views and assumptions of the touchy EU-Russia relationship upside-down. Taking this forward, what might have been a valuable contribution to the book is an exploration of some of the drivers of the EU's Russian policy from the position of those states that once operated as part of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. As it stands, a presentation of both the EU and Russia is made in crystal clear terms. When taking into account some of the deeper and somewhat historical mechanisms of EU foreign policy toward Russia, one might question the role of the EU's more recent enlargement countries since many, if not all of them, possess long-standing enmity with Russia. Although the editors have succeeded in bringing together a breadth of insight about the two actors in interesting and relevant fields, the manner in which they have connected each chapter might not appear entirely smooth. This, however, would have been no easy task as one of the propositions of the work was to engage with pressing but sometimes disregarded issues in the EU-Russia relationship at multiple points of inquiry. Thus, a cogent narrative might be impossible to achieve.

This book was overdue as far too often publications concerning the EU and Russia in their interaction have done so in journalistic fashion and tend to misrepresent the nature of both – usually depicting the EU as the civilizer with Russia being overtly demonized. Despite a long list of abuses and political misconducts by Russian élites, there is much more to be said about the EU and Russia than simply dividing them between “good” and “bad.” As the content of this book is relevant and would certainly be of interest to professionals in international affairs and related fields, it courts a large and healthy body of readership. The strongest markets for this book are all levels of undergraduate students, post-graduate researchers, and professors directly or indirectly interacting with the overarching topic.