

Galina Michaleva (Hrsg.), Europa und Russland: Annäherungen und Differenzen (Europe and Russia: Rapprochement and Difference), LIT Verlag, Münster 2007, 290 pp., ISBN 3-8258-9373-6, €19.90



Galina Michaleva (Hrsg.)

Europa und Russland:  
Annäherungen und Differenzen



Relations between the EU and Russia have always been full of contradictions and tensions, and they remain so today according to this extremely informative book. Mutual dependence, especially in economic and security questions, common cultural roots and in some respects shared value systems form the basis for rapprochement. Historically, there have been periods of close cooperation interspersed with times of alienation, enmity and war.

Until the end of the 1980s, the Cold War determined relations between the then Soviet Union and Europe. The enemy camps belonged to different value systems of which each side sought supporters in the so-called Third World. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union from the world stage, the situation has changed fundamentally but it has also become more complicated. Most of the states of central and Eastern Europe have introduced democracy and the market economy and they are now nearly all members of the EU and NATO.

Russia feels threatened by this, as the Western alliance comes ever closer to the Russian border.

According to its constitution, Russia is "a democratic state of law". But the country has not yet found its role in the international system. Russia is trying to win back its status as a great power and it is deploying its energy resources, its atomic weapons and its membership of the G8 as means to achieve this end. The increasingly authoritarian developments are causing serious doubts in the West as to whether it is possible to speak of a shared community of values with Russia. Some Western agitators even speak of a "new Cold War".

The book contains some articles which have been published elsewhere but also a large number of original texts. They deal with various subjects. Russia experts like Heinz Timmermann, Margareta Mommsen, Frank Umbach, Dimitrij Trenin, Martin Malek, Vladimir Kantor, Sergej Ryzenkov and the editor herself are among the authors. The publication was conceived mainly for undergraduate and M.A. students. The book begins with the construction of the teaching module and with a list of the most important links to the most important political documents and texts for further reading.

Especially interesting is the essay on "Force and Civilisation in Russia" by Kantor. He sees forces as a cultural phenomenon in Russia and is worried whether we are capable of overcoming the stereotypes of our consciousness and of calling a spade a spade. Failure to understand such things can push a country back into illness. Mommsen's essay on "The European Union and Russia" is very informative. The relationship between the two can be understood only through a broader perspective, from perestroika via the Yeltsin era through to Putin's European policy. The particularly hopeful signs are the way in which Russia identifies with Europe, especially with the democratic and law-based aims of the European organisations. The author says that Putin has based his foreign policy largely on the so-called "Primakov doctrine" which pursues classic balance of power policy in a bipolar world. Important elements of this doctrine are the "many-sidedness" and the "diversification" of foreign policy.

Although this "doctrine" has never taken on the form of an official document, the author says that it is had a long-lasting effect.

Most of the authors welcome the return of Russia as a central actor on the world stage. It seems urgently desirable that a counter-weight should emerge to the unilateralism of the American "hyperpower" so that the world is not plunged further into chaos, as the examples of Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East show. Bipolarity will be the most likely form of international relations in the future, with a strengthened Russia as a central player.

Ludwig Watzal