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REVIEW BY: HAYARPI DRMEYAN *

Abstract
This book is devoted to a comparative study of the democratization of the political regimes of the post-Soviet countries, as well as the main factors in the failure of post-Soviet democracy. In different chapters of the book, special attention is paid to the integration and democratization political processes, based on the results of which the author uses the concept of the post-Soviet puzzle. The problem of formation of democratic institutions, promotion of EU democratic strategies in the post-Soviet states, protracted conflicts in this region continue to pose complex questions for the researcher about the instruments of effective influence on these countries.
The main task of the author of this study was to analyze the new and transforming old tools used by the EU and the Russian Federation, to identify the main reasons for the failure of post-Soviet democracy. The author comparatively analyzes the role of Russia and the EU in resolving ethnic and political conflicts in the post-Soviet space, exercising economic incentives, as well as other domestic and external factors which leads to the post-Soviet puzzle and the failure of post-Soviet democracy.

Keywords: *post-Soviet puzzle, democratic failure, post-Soviet states, enlargement, EU denied membership, liberalization, negative influence, pro-Russian opposition, shared neighborhood, pro-European elites.*

After the collapse of the political system of the USSR, a need had emerged for the scientific circles to outline a relevant characterization for the new geopolitical reality. The concepts that define the wholeness of new independent states proclaimed on the territory of the USSR and are used in the science of international relations first appeared in journalistic discussions and political circles during the development of the first foreign

* Hayarpi Drmeyan is a PhD candidate of the Chair of International Relations and Diplomacy at Yerevan State University. She is a Diplomat and currently is posted as Second Secretary at the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia to the Nordic countries - Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, with residence in Stockholm.
Email: h.drmeyan@gmail.com

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policy doctrines and strategies of those newly independent states. The emergence of the post-Soviet puzzle terminology in political discourse reflected a different semantic field. At the same time, this referred to the fact of common political, economic, social, cultural and civilizational problems of this space or not-so-distant common past. In this context, the concept of the post-Soviet puzzle has quickly found its reflection in the scientific space and in the lexicon of scientific literature, analyzing the situation in the countries of the post-Soviet space. The author's personal contribution to obtaining the scientific results are presented in this book through the analysis and forecasting based on the study of analytical and statistical materials, research papers on the prospects for democratization and European integration in the post-Soviet space, identifying the most significant factors that determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the integration processes. The author conduct comparative analyzes of the democratic process of four post-Soviet countries-Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine, and in a detailed manner demonstrated the leverages and methods used by Russia and EU to impact it during the period from 1999 to 2014.

Participation in different and even competing integration processes has been one of the hallmarks of self-identification of the post-Soviet countries. The vector of the integration process has a considerable influence on both the foreign policy strategy and the economic model of the states of the region under consideration.

As author noted the European integration in the post-Soviet space meets the national interests of the majority of EaP countries, allowing them to increase their competitiveness in the globalizing world. However, the success of the implementation of the "European project" largely depends on the internal political processes in the above-mentioned countries, the stability of the commitment of their political elites to choosing this particular vector of integration. The collapse of the USSR led to the destruction of the former geopolitical order. According to author, an attempt to revive it on the basis of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) did not lead to the creation of any effective integration process, which is associated with the dominance of centrifugal forces of a predominantly political nature. Under these conditions, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the EaP, being the first of its kind, turned out to be the most promising long-term comprehensive perspective for the given countries, embracing economic, social and political dimensions. It is no coincidence that the EU has become the center for the creation of resilient integration mechanisms.

Author further notes that since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has had difficult times in becoming the main initiator of effective integration processes in the post-Soviet space. Officially defining relations and integration with the countries of the region as priority directions of its foreign policy and initiating the majority of integration projects in the region, Russia aims to display its dominance, which, in turn, has escalated situation in some parts of the post-Soviet space. This and other factors have discouraged some post-Soviet countries to seek closer ties with Russia. The growth of economic costs and political risks on the part of the EU associated with its integration processes in the post-Soviet area actualizes the understanding of the European integration policy, its tasks and tools, as well as the factors that hinder and facilitate its implementation.

Based on the formulated goal of the study in this book, the main tasks are as follows:

- a comparative analysis of the regime outcomes and degree of democracy in the post-Soviet states, the main approaches to the study and development of European integration in the post-Soviet space in the conflicting interests of the EU and Russia (Lebanidze 2020, 71-84);
- to identify domestic prerequisites for democratization, economic and political factors, both facilitating and hindering the implementation of the integration direction of the post-Soviet states (Lebanidze 2020, 85-109);
- determine the dimension of external leverage in the post-Soviet states, the place and the role of the post-Soviet countries in the development strategies of the EU (Lebanidze 2020, 111-124);
- to compare the European and Russian strategies in the post-Soviet space, highlight the experience and stages of the formation of the integration policy of the EU and Russia, linking them with real integration processes in the region, as well as with social and economic problems (Lebanidze 2020, 125-190).
- to show direct external influence in the context of elections in the post-Soviet states, to substantiate the need and importance of a full-fledged EU integration strategy in foreign policy in the post-Soviet space (Lebanidze 2020, 191-245).

The author was able to study the assessments given by scientists, the characteristic features and instruments of the policy of Russia and the EU towards the the post-Soviet states, and also analyze their views on the development of relations of Russia and the EU with various states of the post-Soviet region and key events for the region. As a result, the tasks that the author set for himself in this study were fulfilled, and the main goal of the work was achieved.

In this book, the author studied a large array of different sources, which made it possible to create a comprehensive work that presents a holistic picture of the views of representatives of the research communities on the relations of Russia and the EU with the states of the post-Soviet space.

Further analyzing Russia's policy in the post-Soviet space in 2000-2008, the author notes that under the President Putin, the post-Soviet space continued to retain its importance for Russia. At the same time, it was emphasized that by the end of the year 2003, the presence of foreign powers, especially the United States, began to grow and moreover it was followed by further expansion for the period of 2004-2008, including 'color revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. This trend caused fears and suspicions in Russia regarding the involvement of the West in this events. There has been a general deterioration in relations between Russia and the West. It was noted that Russia's tough response to the policy of the United States and its European allies on the democratization of the post-Soviet space was aimed at defending its interests in the region and pursuing an active, offensive line. Despite the existing contradictions, in general, relations between Russia and Armenia, according to a number of experts, were of a close, strategic nature, and the political elites of Armenia pursued a policy of active participation in Russia's integration initiatives. Therefore, Russian economic and military assistance, among other factors, was critical to maintaining the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Russia's actions to defend its interests in the strategically important region were strongly criticized. Its peak fell on the period 2004-2008. This was largely due to the fact

that at that time Russia's line of upholding national interests was increasingly at odds with the policy of the United States and its European allies, including in the post-Soviet space. However, the Western European academic community was following the concept, according to which the interests of the West favor the strengthening of sovereignty of the former Soviet Republics and their integration into the Western community rather than strengthening Russia's position in the region. The assessments expressed regarding the Russian initiatives in the region by experts from the countries of the former Eastern Bloc and the newly independent states often suffered. Since 2000, Russia has had a significant arsenal of means to carry out its policy in the region, but the emphasis has been on the economic instruments of influence, especially playing the energy card. At the same time, the tradition of critical interpretation of Russia's use of these factors has been upheld in the majority of research works.

The author also refers to the opinions of those researchers who noted with pragmatism, the presence, if not the dominance of the economic factor, the desire to strengthen influence, develop integration processes and gain dominant positions in the region, including for regaining the status of a great power, as well as the rigidity shown over time by Russia in defending its interests. At the same time, many researchers believed that Russia, pursuing its policy, often interferes in the internal affairs of its neighbors and infringes on their sovereignty. It was pointed out that in Russian politics there were both continuity compared to the 1990s (attention to the region, the desire to restore influence), as well as new moments of pragmatism and attention to the economic component. According to the author, the necessary conditions that allowed Russia to actively implement its foreign policy course were not only natural factors (geographical proximity, common historical and cultural heritage with many countries of the region, economic ties, etc.), but also domestic political stability and economic growth. With regard to Russia's relations with the post-Soviet states, researchers noted the role of the Russian influence for all states in the region. The author also noted the role of the unresolved armed conflicts in the post-Soviet states, particularly in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine as a tool by both Russia and the EU in expanding their influence on the leaderships of those countries and elaborated how it impacted the process of democratization.

Another important aspect of this book is that author comprehensively researched the role of the EU's democratic conditionality tool, as a tool do enhance democratization process in the above-mentioned countries. The various examples underline that it can't operate successfully as a stand-alone mechanism but should be implemented along with other criteria, such as strong domestic pro-democratization movements or consistency of exercising the mentioned tool even after democratic elections, as the latter not always guarantee that a state is following the path of sustainable democracy.

Altogether, it should be noted that the academic community will benefit from such a complex new work, due to the lack of such research in modern historiography. It is obvious that in the context of growing attention to the post-Soviet space, this work will be of significant interest to those dealing with issues in this region.

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