

Book Review

Splitting Europe – The EU, Russia, and the West; Jens Stilhoff Sørensen. London; Roman and Littlefield. 2021. pp. 242. Price: £88.00 ISBN 978-1-5381-5079-5. eBook available.

Jens Stilhoff Sørensen's book argues that European integration and the reconstruction of Europe implying the rebuilding of the nation state 'have eventually become dislodged and now threatens the splitting of Europe' (p. 23). Sørensen asserts that neoliberalism as 'ideology and governmental practice' paired with enhanced 'authoritarian supranationalism' are a problem for the EU which 'has become projected as an edifice in conflict with the nation state' (p. 193). Tensions between national sovereignty and supranationalism have been a contested issue in EU politics since its inception. Despite a series of factors undermining democracy in some EU member states, such as the appointment of judges by the Polish government, the rise of populism and increasing support for right-wing parties, a discussion on the splitting of Europe is shaped by both *internal* and *external factors*. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and President Putin's instigation of war in Ukraine in February 2022, current threats to European security are unprecedentedly high.

Sørensen addresses one of these external (f)actors – the role of Russia, which undermines the EU's united and affirmative stance towards Moscow since 1999 (Maass, 2017)¹. According to Sørensen, Russia aimed at restoring its role as a major power in international relations and in the new multipolar order that is emerging. [...] [Hence,] both Russia and China and many other states embody a 'competing vision of international order' (p. 194). This divergent vision is another factor compounding the maintenance of European security.

Sørensen's book addresses two questions examining internal and external factors undermining European integration: First, 'how did the European post-war integration project go so astray as to lead to internal conflict and strictures'? Second, 'how did the vision that ended the Cold War become replaced by a new Cold War only 20 years later?' (p.4). The book assesses the time period from 1989 until early May 2021. The author embeds his analysis in three conceptual approaches: Antonio Gramsci's organic crisis; the distinction between institution and movement as phenomena by Francesco Alberoni and Karl Polyani's concept of double movement describing a 'dynamic especially between liberal deregulation protection methods on both national and international levels.' (Sørensen, 2021, p. 5.). Whilst Sørensen acknowledges the potential shortcomings of this conceptual framework due to the fact that some political tensions are outside the 'liberal core', in countries such as Hungary, Poland or Russia, for instance (p. 13), a more in-depth critical engagement with merits and shortcomings of the conceptual framework could have been provided.

Some potential room for improvement of this book regards the chapter structure. Chapter six *Last visions and failed promises ending the Cold War in the end of the Soviet Union* providing an overview of the end of the Cold War and chapter seven *Russian identity and foreign policy. National reconstruction* could have been added at the start of

¹ Maass, A.-S. (2017). EU-Russia Relations, 1999-2015. From Courtship to Confrontation. Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series. London and New York: Routledge.

the book. This concise historic overview will be helpful for a reader without prior knowledge on historical and ideological origins of the Cold War before reading about a more specific examination of the transformation from communism in Hungary and Poland for instance, which is addressed in chapter four.

The book also offers an overview of some of the root causes of the gradual escalation of tensions in Russia's relations with the West. Sørensen concluded that 'there can be no war with Russia, and Russia cannot be isolated as some remnant of containment [...] [n]or can a country with the resources and the size of Russia be isolated' (p. 196). Sørensen's plea for both the US' and the EU's need 'to rediscover their diplomatic tradition and skills' to 'seek détente with Russia' whilst developing a 'broader [...] framework within which to rebuild European security' (p. 196) is a crucial policy recommendation, yet very difficult to implement. Rebuilding European security is remaining the most pressing issue of our times. Since the EU's Eastward expansion in May 2004, the EU and Russia became adversaries in their engagement with countries in the post-Soviet space. Increasing mistrust over both the EU's and NATO's intention about enhancing integration with countries in the former Soviet space undermined the development of a dialogue with Russia.

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 a new security dilemma emerged in Russia's relations with the West, which culminated in President Putin's self-imposed geopolitical isolation since his instigation of war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Sørensen's crucial proposal on the need to rebuild European security is more difficult than ever, at a moment which demonstrates both a breakdown of diplomacy as a means of conflict prevention and a new era requiring the re-thinking of new parameters for European security.

Word count: 815

Anna-Sophie Maass, Lecturer International Relations and Diplomacy, Lancaster University