



## Book Review / Kitap İncelemesi

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**Vsevolod SAMOKHVALOV**

*Russian European Relations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region:  
Great Power Identity and the Idea of Europe.  
(Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)*

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RUSSIAN EUROPEAN RELATIONS IN THE BALKANS AND BLACK SEA REGION: GREAT  
POWER IDENTITY AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE

**Vsevolod SAMOKHVALOV**

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The author states that this book has been the outcome of his experience under various titles like scholar, academic, journalist, etc., for fifteen years (Samokhvalov, 2017: v). Vsevolod Samokhvalov did his MA degree in International Relations at the University of Odesa (Ukraine) and South-East European Studies at the University of Athens (Greece). Then he completed his Ph.D. in International Relations at the University of Cambridge (Cambridge.academia, 2017).

The book aims to find out “how best to understand the mixed record of Russian-European interactions over the past 20 years in light of their efforts to resolve conflicts in the Balkans and Black Sea regions” (Samokhvalov, 2017:249) While the author focuses on this point, he uses the Russian great power identity and how this country has established a relationship with Europe. In addition, the author uses the time period to analyze his research from the early 1960s to the present. It is clearly understood that the author has conducted in-depth research in this book. The author examines the concept of “identity” from an anthropological point of view. So, this approach makes the book interesting from the very beginning. Namely, the book seems appropriate for its intended audience.

The book has been divided into eight chapters. The first title has been structured under the title “Russian-European Relations: ‘Unexpected’ Crisis”. In this part, the author briefly introduces the relations between Russia and Europe and emphasizes that Russian and European relations have yet to be studied sufficiently; in other words, he claims that they have not been evaluated deeply.

The relevant studies have conceptually focused on Russian and European relations. However, this has the potential to complicate Russian and European relations further. In this regard, the author has quite an ambitious thesis. He claims that International Relations issues like peace, conflict or collaboration could not be directly applied to Russian and European relations. In this regard, he asks how far Russia will push things in Ukraine and how long Moscow will tolerate the Western sanctions imposed because of Crimea,

a small sandy peninsula (Samokhvalov, 2017:4). After these discussions, he has passed to the second title, Greatness, Identity and Method.

The emerging studies have become more conceptual in many parts of their relations. Moreover, this issue might make Russian and European relations even more difficult. The author has quite ambitious thesis. For instance, he claims that some International Relations subjects such as; peace, conflict or collaboration could not be directly applied to Russian and European relations, and then he asks these questions how far will Russia push things in Ukraine, and how long will Moscow tolerate the Western sanctions imposed because of Crimea, a small sandy peninsula. After these discussions, he has passed to the second title, Greatness, Identity and Method. He explains the term “great power hood” in the case of Russian great power identity, and then he underlines the research question: Why did Russia believe it had a right to power? What role did the Balkans and Black Sea region play in Russia’s great power identity, and what did the idea of Europe play in this matter? Under the third title, he gives a brief history of Russia’s and European relations during the 1960s.

In fact, He benefits from many materials to peruse the notions of Russia, Europe and the Balkans. The same contexts have continued under the title of fourth, which is about Russianness, Greatness, Europe, and the Balkans in the Late Soviet Discourse in the 1980s. The fifth title considers Russian European security interaction and the idea of great power hood between 1991-1999. The interesting point is that the author criticizes that Russia had reestablished its identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He strongly disagrees with it. Then he examines changes in militaristic and identical points, but he concludes these changes with a parallel understanding of the Soviet Era. According to him, if the Soviets had not collapsed, also it would support these changes. This idea is one of the interesting points in this book.

The sixth chapter is titled: Reinvention of Europe and EU-Russia relations in Putin’s 2000-2010. He highlights the identical changes in Russia after

the Kosovo crisis. In this chapter, he claims the ability to change the fate of nations together with Europe.

The book was written clearly and comprehensibly in terms of narration. However, the author could have made a more in-depth analysis of the history of the Balkans and its geopolitical significance. It looks so limited for the reader with insufficient knowledge of the region that it can be hard to understand the links between regions' relations. Vsevolod Samokhvalov abides by his aims. The book recommends that those interested in Russia, Europe, and the Balkans in a constructivist perspective.

### References

Samokhvalov, V. (2017), *Russian-European Relations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region: Great Power Identity and the Idea of Europe*. Springer.

Samokhvalov, V. (2022), Cambridge University, <https://cambridge.academia.edu/VsevolodSamokhvalov>, Last Access 16 October 2022