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The CSCE and the end of the Cold War: diplomacy, societies and human rights 1972–1990

by Nicolas Badalassi and Sarah B. Snyder, New York, Berghahn Books, 2019, 365 pp., US$97.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-789-20026-3

Demyan Plakhov

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The CSCE and the end of the Cold War: diplomacy, societies and human rights 1972–1990, by Nicolas Badalassi and Sarah B. Snyder, New York, Berghahn Books, 2019, 365 pp., US$97.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-789-20026-3

This book sheds light on the less-mentioned processes and successes of the conference that led to the largest security-focused inter-governmental organization in the world and played a crucial role in the fall of the Soviet Union: the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). It harnesses the thesis of how the CSCE – founded in 1973 to reduce Cold War tensions – incorporated, validated, and promoted the ideas of liberalism and human rights throughout the Soviet Bloc, empowering the dissident opposition from within. Rather than focusing on external factors of Western forces in military and economic aspects, the book looks at the internal combustion sparked by human rights activists and legitimized by diplomats that facilitated the breakdown of the Bloc.

Contending that the CSCE was crucial to the Soviet Bloc collapse through its shift from a Westphalian order to a transnational system, the authors argue that the West used it as a tool to influence the internal social structure of the East. This theory adds to the more conventional explanations of the fall of the Soviet Union such as Reagan's arms build-up, Gorbachev's reform attempts, economic deterioration, and the spillover of Western culture. This book's thesis does not counter these conventional explanations; in fact, this theory furthers them by providing additional evidence of how the CSCE helped exacerbate these factors.

The book's self-proclaimed goal is to show that the CSCE was not a closed-circuit diplomatic machine, and that it was part of a socio-political and poli-economic evolution. Utilising a constructivist approach, there is substantial focus on human beings and non-government groups. The authors evaluate the CSCE's mechanisms by fully appreciating Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), dissidents, scientists, and artists, and how individual diplomats linked the CSCE mechanism to these movements and organizations. Split into three major parts, the book overviews: a) diplomats, diplomacies, and the creation of the CSCE; b) the promotion of human rights and the role of dissidents beyond borders; and c) four case studies of the European detente and CSCE politics in the 1970s–80s. Overall, it provides a helpful timeline depicting the CSCE's evolution and its priorities over time, with microanalysis of the finer details and actors involved.

The authors emphasize the significance of non-governmental groups (for example, NGOs and dissidents) in enhancing foreign policy through certain pathways (for example, human rights). This book provides an interesting case of how the CSCE legitimized both government foreign policy and the activists in other countries by linking the two. On the one hand, the promotion of human rights laid the foundation for justifying Western diplomatic strategy, while on the other hand, dissidents and opposition groups received a platform and support that legitimized their actions. The book also gives more light to smaller and less-mentioned countries – Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Albania –, recognizing the more nuanced details of the European detente and East-West relations. These countries provide interesting case studies of various national positions and strategies.

The authors add to the significant literature available on the Cold War, its history, and explanations for how it ended. In the contested debate over the CSCE's contribution, these authors add evidence to the side arguing its significant role in ending the Cold War. Nevertheless, what it lacks is a substantial review of the Soviet Bloc's representation, argumentation, and strategy at the CSCE, limiting itself to an oversimplified summary of Soviet viewpoints. Utilizing this book's perspective, one would argue that Soviet-led diplomats largely failed in representing their government's best interests, restricting the power of

Western institutions and values, and preventing the uprising of opposition against their government. In this case, a closer examination of the Soviet side could identify elements explaining this outcome in conjunction with the elements already mentioned in this book. This includes a possible investigation into the Soviet-led failed diplomatic strategy at the CSCE, which could create a more holistic account detailing successful *and* failed strategies.

Understanding the transnational implications of human rights and dissidents, this book sparks other discussions about other contemporary transnational elements. Recognizing that diplomatic strategies can harness human rights to justify foreign policy and pursue a counter to rivals, can other pathways be promoted by states to do the same? This is a fundamental book for historians, diplomats, and political scientists who would like a reference of *how* international organizations come out of diplomatic negotiations and seemingly *temporary* gatherings. This is best exemplified by chapters one through four, which include detailed descriptions of the parties involved in the making of the CSCE and the discussions led by diplomats. It is an essential manual for effective diplomacy and political manoeuvring while manifesting liberalism and human rights as foreign policy goals. Due to its complexity, this should not be a starting point for those beginning to learn or understand the security dimensions of Europe in the late twentieth century, as it is far too detailed and nuanced for those studying in university for instance.

Demyan Plakhov
Carleton University

demyanplakhov@cmail.carleton.ca

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Devastation and laughter: satire, power, and culture in the early Soviet state, 1920s–1930s, by Annie Gérin, Toronto, ON, University of Toronto Press, 2019, 255 pp., $60.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-487-50243-0

Annie Gérin's useful new book sees laughter, and the genres that inspire it – satire above all –, as an entryway to both the lofty and the banal preoccupations of a culture and society in the making, that is, of the nascent Soviet state. When it comes to satire, the Soviet case is unique: a genre that is most often used in the critique of power is, in this case, state-sponsored. Gérin's is thus a study of an "official laughter," one of the foremost tools in the rapid acculturation of the new Soviet citizen, meant both to educate and to entertain. According to Gérin, laughter is a rhetorical mode that demands a contextual field common to both the joker and the audience. To reconstruct this contextual field for a culture that is removed, both spatially and temporally, from the Soviet 1920s and 1930s, becomes the task of her book. Gérin sets for herself another task, too: "to address the scarcity of Soviet visual satire in art historical research" (6). Rather than focusing on the satirical literature of the period, Gérin instead sets her sights on the visual manifestation of satire: state-sponsored satire in the visual arts, cinema, theatre, circus, and a host of other propagandistic practices.

In 1930, Anatolii Lunacharskii founded a government commission to study satirical genres in all art forms. This is the book's jumping-off point, and Lunacharskii acts as the fulcrum of the book as a whole (his 1931 speech "On Laughter" ["*O smekhe*"], delivered at the first working session of the commission, is featured in full in its first English translation as an