

Andrei Miroiu and Radu-Sebastian Ungureanu (eds) - *International Relations Textbook (Manual de relații internaționale)*, Polirom, Iași, 2006

The *International Relations Textbook* is the first comprehensive and remarkable Romanian textbook on international relations theories and approaches. The book is written by a team of Romanian international relations (IR) researchers – Andrei Miroiu, Radu-Sebastian Ungureanu, Daniel Biro, Lucian-Dumitru Dardala, Olivia Todorean, Ionut Apahideanu, Simona Soare and Stanislav Secieru – with Romanian and international academic background. Their endeavor and deep knowledge on IR theories confirm that we have in Romania a mature IR research community. Moreover this textbook opens up the perspectives for the development of various research programs by our research community in this field. It will certainly inspire the IR Romanian students to contribute to the widening of regional and global studies. It is also a useful textbook for future and actual practitioners of foreign affairs.

The readers can detect a thematic-based sequence of the chapters, although the editors did not explicitly divide the book into main parts. Thus I present the three main groups of chapters as they become salient during reading:

The first chapters introduce the reader into the history of modern states' international relations and into considerations on actors and levels of analysis in IR. Placing the actors and levels of analysis in the first chapters is a noteworthy choice because it shows the variety of angles from which we can approach the research. The second group of chapters depicts and explains the IR research programs: Liberalism, Realism, IR English School, Marxism, Neo-liberalism, Neo-realism, Constructivism and Feminism.

And the third group of chapters examines various IR concepts and processes such as security, security regime, democratic peace, balance of power, causes of wars, globalization etc.

A small shortfall of the textbook is that the connection and coordination between the second and the third groups of chapters is sometimes vague or poorly managed. It is probably an assumed flaw since the editors explain in the preface that "every author had complete freedom regarding the choice of presenting the information." For instance, the chapter on balance of power (Miroiu, Soare) has no theoretical base. The authors prefer illustrating different definitions of this concept without embedding them in any theoretical frameworks. This is not the best approach since concepts cannot be disconnected from the theoretical frameworks that use them. It should be noted that the same authors make some theoretical references on the balance of power in the next chapter, which regards military alliances.¹ However, these references are inexplicit and incomplete. The authors mention Morgenthau's classical realism approach, Walt's balance of threat theory and Schweller's balance of interests theory. First, the description is not explicit because Walt's theory of balance of threat is a refinement of the structural realism balance of power theory, and Schweller's theory is actually an application of the neo-classical realism. The authors miss here a good opportunity to link these theoretical lines with the chapters on realism and neo-realism. Walt's theory is a good case to show how neo-realism evolves through research (research programs are not static). The same can be applied to Schweller's theory that develops

¹ Since balance of power and military alliances are profoundly interconnected, it could have been better to join the two chapters in a single one.

the neo-classical extension of realism focused more on foreign policy decision-making than on systemic phenomena.

Second, the presentation is incomplete for the reason that the authors contain their assessment to the realist tradition. The recent academic puzzles on the balance of power are generated by research questions such as: Why still exists NATO after the Cold War? or Why is no balance behavior in the present international security landscape? On these puzzles there is an ongoing academic debate that involves not only realist but also liberal, institutionalist and constructivist accounts.²

A major contribution of this textbook is the description of relatively new theoretical approaches such as constructivism and feminism (chapters by the same author: Todorean). There is a striking difference between the two chapters in the way they are formulated. While the chapter on feminism is very coherent and well structured – with specified theories and approaches that constitute the feminism in IR studies – the chapter on constructivism is less explicit regarding coherent approaches. This difference is generated by the complexity of constructivism as a theoretical framework that is applied in IR.

Todorean points out accurately that constructivism in IR is characterized by methodological eclecticism, including “quantitative, qualitative, positivist, post-positivist or their combination *sui-generis*.” Yet, the merit of a textbook lies in making explainable things that do not appear so structured, such as constructivism, in this case. The author insists too much on illustrating constructivism (at the beginning and the end of the chapter) as a loose meta-theory with an excessive methodology or as a hard to classify meta-theory along the lines of rationalism, critical theory and postmodernism. Possibly this blurred image of constructivism – that raises the legitimate question of “how can we use such a thing in research?” – can be clarified by outlining some models or a typology of constructivist research.³ Of course that is very hard to abstract models of research when one deals with such an “eclectic” or “lax” theoretical framework, but when one persists in showing the complicated nature of constructivism, the outcome is an unbalanced presentation. Thus, I would point out two models, which do not encompass all the IR constructivist accounts but that could be both the starting point of an inventory and a way to substantiate and articulate the meta-theoretical nature of constructivism in IR studies.

First, *the antinomy model: ideational versus rational*. For instance, a group of IR researchers – Risse, Engelmann-Martin, Kopf and Roscher⁴ – argue that the Euro and the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) do not originate in the material economic⁵ or geopolitical interests, but in the vision of the European order that is informed by the politics of collective identity. The same line of interpretation – identity versus interest – is applied regarding transatlantic security agreements that persist after the Cold War. Western Europe and the United

² For a wide-ranging positions in this debate see Ikenberry, John G. (ed.) (2002) *America Unrivaled. The Future of Balance of Power*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. A fine example of a neo-liberal institutionalist approach on military alliances is Haftendorn, Helga, Celleste Wallander and Robert O. Keohane (eds) (1999) *Imperfect Unions: Security Structures Over Time and Space*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Regarding theoretical developments on security cooperation (which includes also military alliances) comprising realist, institutionalist, liberal and constructivist perspectives see Muller, Harald (2003) “Security Cooperation” in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (eds) *Handbook of International Relations*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

³ It should be outlined that the textbook has distinct chapters that describe specific constructivist theories (see “Security Community” and “The Extension of the Security Concept” by Ungureanu).

⁴ Risse, Thomas, Daniela Engelmann-Martin, Hans-Joachim Knopf and Klaus Roscher (1999) “The Euro or Not to Euro? The EMU and Identity Politics in the European Union,” *The European Journal of International Relations*, 5(2): 147-187.

⁵ One of the authors’ arguments is that the rational economic interest can go against EMU.

States remain allied even after the direct military threat has vanished, because they form a pluralistic security community that is based on collective identity and shared values.⁶ The merit of this model is that it clearly describes the lines of meta-theoretical divisions between the rationalist and constructivist theoretical frameworks. Rationalism envisages actors that act under the logic of pre-given preferences based on self-interest and utility maximizing. In contrast, constructivism considers that actors act according to collectively constructed inter-subjective beliefs based on identity, norms and ideas.

The second model is *norms formation: building bridges between constructivism and rationalism*. This line of research emphasizes the origin and genesis of international norms within a process that converges ideational and rational processes. It is theorized and applied empirically mainly by Finnemore.⁷ She explains that norms formation does not imply necessarily an ideational versus rational construction of arguments, but rather a complementarity of both. The researchers that employ this model start from a constructivist perspective on norms, but they consider rationalist insights within different stages of norms dynamics: for example, at compliance and promotion levels. Exploring empirically the cases of citizenship/membership norms compliance by Germany and Ukraine, Checkel concludes that compliance with norms is a process that encompasses on one hand social learning, socialization or internalization of norms (constructivist perspective), and on other hand cost-benefit mechanism or instrumental choice (rationalist perspective).⁸ In the case of international norms that are promoted by transnational actors, Price focuses on how non-governmental organizations advance the norms on prohibiting land-mines and convince governments to agree for international conventions on land-mines ban.⁹ This paper is a constructivist undertaking, but it should be noted that Price points at instrumental action employed by transnational actors that promote anti-personnel land-mines ban.¹⁰ The merit of this model is that it shows how constructivist research can be employed as a research tool without ontological strictness regarding social processes.¹¹

Concluding, this textbook represents a major undertaking of the Romanian IR studies. However, I extended this review in order to explain the nature of the minor shortfalls of this textbook. These remarks should not alter the merits of this book, which represents a comprehensive and elaborated textbook of IR theories. Its authors master and employ soundly their theoretical knowledge. The textbook is comparable in terms of academic standards with widely known IR textbooks edited in Western countries. It also raises an expectation regarding the future development of Romanian IR research using different strands of theoretical orientations.

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⁶ See Risse, Thomas (2002) "U.S. Power in a Liberal Security Community" in John G. Ikenberry (ed.) *America Unrivaled. The Future of Balance of Power*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

⁷ Finnemore, Martha and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, 52(4): 887-917.

⁸ Checkel, Jeffrey T. (2002) "Why Comply? Social Learning and European Identity Change," *International Organization*, 53(3): 553-588.

⁹ Price, Richard (1998) "Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines," *International Organization*, 52(3):613-644.

¹⁰ *idem.*, 631-637.

¹¹ I draw here on Fearon, James, and Alexander Wendt (2003) "Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Skeptical View," in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (eds) *Handbook of International Relations*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.