

able to expand and consolidate his power. His paranoia culminated in the purges of the later 1930s that cost a large number of his erstwhile comrades their lives. Not only did this massive bloodletting weaken the military and old party elite, it also caused serious psychological damage, with the result that Soviet society was singularly unprepared to engage in a major military conflict in the early 1940s. Service makes it clear that Stalin dreaded such a war and sought to avoid it at all costs. When war came, he reacted by colossal blundering, sinking into temporary stupefaction, only to reemerge with a newly strengthened determination to succeed. The chapters on the war are some of the finest in a narrative rich in vivid episodes. As always, Service does not focus on Stalin alone but paints a far larger canvas that incorporates developments from the military, economic, cultural, and social front as well. The result is the dramatic picture of a society teetering on the brink of the abyss and seemingly held back by the iron will of a single man.

The author's claim to the contrary notwithstanding, there is little groundbreaking evidence in these pages. Indeed, the occasional flash of humanity that Stalin displayed does not alter the familiar image of a resourceful but cold-blooded mass-murderer that has become associated with Stalin's name. The book's real strengths lie not in a novel interpretation but in its author's vast expertise, his admirable powers of synthesis, the astuteness of his judgment, and, last but not least, the elegance and sparkle of his style. Disdaining lengthy discussions of scholarly debates that can interest none but the specialist, Service manages to present Stalin both as a product of his times and as an actor simultaneously shaping the times. The result is a striking example of what solidly researched historiography with an appeal for a wider readership might look like. Erudite yet never abstruse, comprehensive and gripping at the same time, *Stalin: A Biography* should become required reading for students, specialists, and anyone else interested in modern history.

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Sven Eliaeson (ed.), *Building Democracy and Civil Society East of the Elbe: Essays in Honour of Edmund Mokrzycki* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 406 pp.

Civil society has rapidly become what ‘globalisation’ once was (maybe still is); a term with ubiquitous presence that assumes a new meaning or definition whenever and wherever it is utilised.

While the term ‘civil society’ has been used in a variety of ways by a variety of people, its popularity has waxed and waned since first coming to prominence during the Scottish Enlightenment. However, as Ernest Gellner observed, it was the dramatic events of 1989 in Eastern Europe that bought forth a powerful revival in the interest of the notion of civil society. For a number of authors, civil society played a key role in the overthrow of these Communist regimes. *Building Democracy and Civil Society East of the Elbe: Essays in Honour of Edmund Mokrzycki* serves in part as a continuation of these debates. However, whereas earlier writings often focused on the dissenting opposition in the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the role they played in the overthrow of these regimes, the contributors to *Building Democracy* are primarily concerned with the new democracies that have been (or are being) established in this region, and what role civil society plays in this process.

The result of a symposium held at Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2002, the contributions to *Building Democracy* come from a variety of disciplines: political science, history, and sociology. Although interdisciplinary collections are often productively challenging for the ways they bring different perspectives together, this book has an unstructured feel, and the parts often do not cohere into a greater whole. Although it is a worthwhile exercise to examine the problems of democratisation in countries that historically lack a democratic tradition, this collection presents this undertaking in a rather haphazard manner that serves to further muddy the civil society waters.

In the introduction, Sven Eliaeson admits that ‘despite the real and ideological denotations of the concept of “civil society”, basic confusion about the meaning and implications of the concept remains’ (2). This is a fair and reasonable comment. However, rather than attempt to ease some of this confusion, the various chapters of this book add to it: George Kolankiewicz (48–60) uses ‘civic construction’ and ‘civic engagement’ interchangeably with civil society; Nikolai Genov suggests that NGOs are the sole representatives of civil society (115); and Kristian Gerner tacitly, yet uncritically, subscribes to Adam Michnik’s claim that Solidarnosc’s opposition to the Polish party-state between 1980 and 1989 was representative of a particular Polish civil society. It might have been more

productive in an edited collection such as this for the contributors to work with an agreed or consensual concept of civil society.

The vastly contrasting methodologies represented in different chapters also detracts from the book's value. For example, Christopher Adair-Toteff's very personal contribution (196–201) explains how he introduced the writing of Max Weber to students in the early years of The American University in Bulgaria; in contrast, Sally N. Cummings and Ole Nørgaard's chapter (61–86), through a series of interviews, adopts a quantitative approach to establish the ideal balance between state and civil society involvement in decision making.

Furthermore, some chapters seem not to 'fit'. It is sometimes puzzling i) why they were included or ii) why they are placed where they are in the book. While Adair-Toteff's contribution was a pleasant and informative read, it was unclear how this story related to emerging civil society East of the Elbe. Was Adair-Toteff suggesting that his student's keenness to embrace new ideas is representative of a civil society? Or was he suggesting that Weberian sociology is a particularly effective approach for understanding civil society? Similarly, Sidonia Jędrzejewska's summation of the four previous chapters (119–124) was a strange addition especially as it was placed in the middle, rather than at the end, of Part II of the book.

The highlights of the book are found in those chapters that vigorously engage with questions regarding the relationship between the state and civil society and the degree to which each entity has a role in strengthening currently weak democratic institutions. Both Sven Reichardt's (17–28) and Kolankiewicz's contributions engage with these issues. Reichardt's acknowledgment that 'the question of the circumstances under which civil mobilisation fosters a more or less democratic outcome is still unresolved' (22), is especially insightful. Many of the chapters in this collection fail to acknowledge this, and assume that the smallest form of social mobilisation is representative of civil society, and that in turn functioning democratic institutions can thus be established. Similarly, Kolankiewicz's attempts to tease out the complex relationship between democracy, citizenship and participation should be applauded. Again, rather than assuming that solutions to Poland's struggling democracy can be found in the vague notion of civil society, Kolankiewicz acknowledges the necessity of a mutually beneficial relationship between the state and civil society. At the same time, he understands the problems associated with developing such a relationship in post-Communist societies.

The emerging democracies in the former Communist states of Eastern Europe, and the relationship between the state and civil society in these emerging democracies, are a fascinating area for contemporary research. Some contributions to *Building Democracy* provide excellent stand-alone contributions to this literature. However, the collection's lack of focus and idiosyncratic assemblage make what should have been a valuable contribution to the subject area just another book with civil society in the title.

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Olessia Koltsova, *News Media and Power in Russia* (London and New York, Routledge, 2006). xv + 271 pp.

It has been very gratifying in the past two decades to witness the increasing number of publications written by Russian academics and published in the West and the equally increasing opportunities for western scholars to be published in the Russian Federation. This cross-fertilization is undoubtedly an important step in achieving greater mutual understanding. In the field of journalistic studies, among the works published in recent years are monographs by Yasen Zassoursky, Ivan Zassoursky, Elena Androunas, as well as the book under review by Olessia Koltsova who brings her own insights to the field as a former journalist. In her preface she declares herself a pragmatist who is convinced that an expectation that those involved in news production would act in the public interest is 'quite naïve' (xi).

The book is divided into three parts: the first entitled 'Theories, Methods and Historical Context' contains two chapters, the first of which canvasses conceptual problems while the second provides a historical overview of the Russian media. The second part deals with agents of power with each of the seven chapters in this section dealing with one aspect of power relations (owners, advertisers, journalists, state agents) It is in these chapters that Koltsova provides her particular analysis of the essential features of the current media situation by revealing the agendas of the groupings and the ways in which these interests occasionally mesh, but more frequently come into conflict. The third part 'Special studies' presents