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INTRODUCTION

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This collection of articles brings together several discrete but overlapping perspectives of both the content and form of federalism. In most cases there is an empirical focus upon centralising and decentralising trends in federal states, but here and there is also a focus upon federalisation as a process, and special attention is paid to the notion of de-federalisation in the case of the Russian Federation.

Other common features in this special edition would naturally include the two articles on the European Union (EU) which, while looking at different public policy perspectives of federal political integration and cooperation, related principally to education and trade policy, nonetheless address cognate contemporary issues and questions. Identity formation in terms of citizenship and territoriality at the supranational level is one example but so too are the broad questions of decision-making processes, intergovernmental relations and power-relationships.

In the first paper of this special issue, Nadja Douglas demonstrates how Russia has seen a process of re-centralisation. She also demonstrates how the stagnation in the process of democratisation and indeed the development towards more authoritarianism distinctly influenced the federal system. This case study once again allows us to conclude that a federal system that deserves the name cannot work in an un-democratic political framework (Burgess and Gagnon 2010).

The two papers that follow engage with different aspects of European integration. Zeynep Arkan demonstrates the importance of education policy for the definition of "European identity." She concludes that while the EU continues to have very limited impact on education policy, there nevertheless is a clear discourse in EU documents

on the role of education policy in the creation of a European identity that focuses on geography, history and cultural heritage.

Building on this, the following paper by Gilroy, Schreckenberg and Seiler examines subsidiarity in the EU by focusing on trade policy. Examining processes of decision-making and different discourses on competences in EU trade policy, they demonstrate the need for ongoing discussions about competences in federal systems.

The aim of this collection of very interesting and diverse papers is to demonstrate that in the field of comparative federalism and federation there are a number of contemporary debates about issues of identity, federalisation and subsidiarity. Not always can these elements be clearly separated. However, it is also important to highlight that the reader should not only look for the ongoing debates in this academic field, but realise that each of the papers also offers new and innovative perspectives on the respective topics. Comparative federalism and federation may have been a key area of study in the last decades, but discussions about state-formation and the evolution of new federal systems like the European Union and post-Soviet Russia require us to rethink and adjust our understanding of the theory and practice of federalism and federal government all the time. Borrowing from related disciplines – such as International Relations, international public law, or business administration – can be useful also for the “identity” of federal theory and the “practice” of studying federations.

References

- [1] Burgess, Michael and Gagnon, Alain. eds. 2010. *Federal Democracies*, London: Routledge.