

## **Review - Security Entrepreneurs: Performing Protection in Post-Cold War Europe**

Written by Scott Fitzsimmons

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***Security Entrepreneurs: Performing Protection in Post-Cold War Europe*  
Alexandra Gheciu  
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018**

*Security Entrepreneurs: Performing Protection in Post-Cold War Europe* addresses the question of who provides everyday, non-military security within Eastern European states and in what ways they go about doing this. This line of inquiry is important given that the interrelated practices of providing and governing security in these states influence how state institutions are constituted and reconstituted over time, the relationship between the public and private sphere, and the association between these practices and broader trends in European and global approaches to security provision.

Adopting a hybrid theoretical approach, the book argues that recent developments in the security field within Eastern Europe are a form of “glocalization,” meaning a condition in which, “far from being disconnected from the local, global processes are local in each of their points” (p.6). More specifically, it claims that the global normative transformation that has occurred through the acceptance of neo-liberal ideas and practices in the area of security – seen most clearly in the proliferation and widespread use of private security companies by European and other Western governments – has interacted with the local processes of post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe to produce unique approaches to the provision of security within the states of this region. In advancing this claim, the book builds on the works of several leading scholars of private security, including Deborah Avant, Rita Abrahamsen, Anna Leander, and Elke Krahmann, while also incorporating insights from scholars like Marina Caparini, Otwin Marenin, and Philip Gounev who have pioneered the study of security privatization in Eastern Europe.

To support and illustrate its arguments, this book explores the process of security privatization that followed the collapse of communism in four Eastern European states: Bosnia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia. It finds that this process, in combination with global normative change promoting greater acceptance of privatized security, has produced complicated hybrid networks of public and private security providers. These hybrid networks not only transcend the conventional boundaries separating the public/private and domestic/international spheres but also act as norm entrepreneurs that, through their performative behaviour, are redefining the norms governing security in post-communist Eastern Europe. This book finds that private security providers in these states have cooperated with their respective governments but also challenged traditional rules about the provision of security.

Readers who are more familiar with the US and UK-centric focus of much of the existing scholarship on security privatization are likely to find this book’s detailed investigation of recent security practices in Eastern Europe quite enlightening. The book demonstrates that scholars should not presume that the characteristics of the public-private relationships associated with the familiar cases of Western firms, like Blackwater, DynCorp, and ArmorGroup, are necessarily present in other regions of the world. Indeed, one of this book’s most interesting chapters is partly devoted to the nexus of state officials, private security organizations, and organized crime in the early post-communist era in Eastern Europe, a distinctly different context for the growth of private security from that seen in the West.

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The book's focus on the private provision of security inside Eastern European states by firms that developed and are headquartered in those states is another feature that distinguishes this work from much of the existing scholarship in the field. Many of the leading works have explored the provision of security by firms that are based in the West but conduct the vast majority of their security work overseas, in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Gulf of Aden. As this book aptly demonstrates, when private security providers are primarily oriented toward the domestic environment, this fosters different kinds of relationships with public security providers than are likely to develop around externally-focussed firms. In particular, it demonstrates that many of the domestically-oriented firms in Eastern Europe have established highly corrupt relationships with local police forces where police officials allege they are unable to provide adequate security for their societies and then encourage individuals and businesses to purchase additional security from private organizations that these same officials, or their close associates, own and operate. Readers craving new theoretical approaches to the study of security privatization are also likely to look favourably on this work because it draws on a range of disciplines and analytical frameworks, such as constructivism, dramaturgy, and performance studies, that cross traditional conceptual divides and provide a multifaceted assessment of its subject matter.

At the same time, some readers may find this book's use of theory to be needlessly complex and, in consequence, challenging to approach. Its prose is also ripe with jargon that, at times, obscures the authors' intent. For example, when rationalizing its hybrid theoretical approach, it argues that "the private security industry has used particular scripts as well as various 'stage props' to construct chains of meaning that legitimize their proposed courses of action" (p.18). Closely related to this, it is not clear that this book's primary theoretical contribution – the invitation to view "security as a performative practice" – is an optimal or even necessary way to advance arguments that could be explained more clearly with a conventional constructivist approach to norm entrepreneurship (p.18). Nevertheless, this book should be considered as required reading for any serious, advanced scholar who seeks to broaden their theoretical and empirical understanding of private security providers.

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## **About the author:**

Scott Fitzsimmons is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Limerick, specialising in the behaviour of armed forces and the use of force in contemporary conflicts. His primary research interests include developing and testing theories of how armed forces behave in conflict zones, combat operations involving mercenaries and private security companies, psychological approaches to foreign policy decision-making, and public attitudes toward defence spending and the use of force.