In the wake of Serbia’s parliamentary and presidential elections held in May 2012, relations with Russia came to the foreground of the country’s top political discourse. A considerable increase in the frequency of mutual visits by high-level representatives of both states, the symbolic prioritising of visits to Moscow by the president-elect Tomislav Nikolić and the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić, along with a positive political climate, agreements in the defence industry and Moscow’s announced financial help to Serbia, raised the question of the need for a deeper analysis and objective picture of Serbian-Russian relations.

Among the extremely scarce academic literature on this topic, the volume *Russia-Serbia Relations at the Beginning of XXI Century* aims to serve precisely this purpose. The book draws on the research project initiated by the Belgrade-based think-tank International and Security Affairs Center back in 2008, when Serbia and Russia converged politically (both opposed Kosovo’s unilateral proclamation of independence) and economically (Russia’s Gazprom Neft bought 51% of Serbia’s oil energy company NIS (Naftna industrija Srbije), while Serbia joined Russia’s South Stream gas pipeline megaproject). After two years of research, four roundtables and seven reports, the book presents a summary compendium of twenty-six articles by nineteen authors that provide researchers of Serbian-Russian relations with relevant guidelines and in-depth analyses of Serbian and Russian foreign and energy policies. In the introduction (pp. 5–8), the editor of the book, Žarko Petrović, departs from the assumption that in contemporary Serbia most sources about Russia and its foreign policy are emotionally charged and biased, therefore distorting the real picture of Russian-Serbian relations. Petrović attempts to introduce a critical reassessment and a deeper and realistic analysis of contemporary Russia, its foreign policy and the implications of Serbia’s foreign policy leanings towards Moscow since 2008 in the light of Serbia’s EU integration efforts. In his two following articles (pp. 25–40; 101–113), Petrović gives proof of considerable expertise in Russia-related issues and political processes in post-Soviet states. He carries out a valuable analysis of Serbian and Russian foreign policy coordination in numerous fields, including the common stance on Kosovo and Serbia’s support for the Russian position at OSCE and UN meetings, which strengthened the Russian “pillar” in Serbian foreign policy – at the expense of Serbia’s EU integration, Petrović argues. Still, one cannot underestimate the developments that have imposed crucial limitations on the long-term strategic partnership between Serbia and Russia. The author shows awareness of this fact, stressing the point that Serbia did not support the Russian initiative for a new European Security Treaty during Medvedev’s visit to Belgrade in October 2009, and subsequently applied for EU membership in December 2009.

The first section of the volume provides the reader with historical and political perspectives on Serbian and Russian relations. A novel and detailed periodisation is offered by Aleksey Timofeev (pp. 20–23), who distinguishes four different phases of Russian foreign policy in the Balkans since the fifteenth century. Miroslav Jovanović’s contribution (pp. 11–18) further elaborates the reasons behind two diametrically opposite discourses about Russia that exist in Serbia.
The following section delves into contemporary Russia. Its focus on Russia’s internal politics (the democratic deficit is analysed by Nikolay Petrov, pp. 43–48, and freedom of the media is tackled by Olga Sadovskaya, pp. 57–60) speaks more of the authors’ intention to direct the readers’ perception of Russia along critical lines, rather than contributing to the study of Russian-Serbian relations, which is supposed to be the main object of the book. Still, Mikhail Vinogradov’s (pp. 49–55) analysis and categorisation of Russia’s decision-making bodies, along with the classification of the most important groups of influence, can be of a certain interest to researchers of Russian foreign policy.

The section on the Eurasian security framework gives a basic description of Russia’s relations with the West through an elementary analysis of Moscow’s relations with the USA, the EU and NATO. Here, the most interesting point for foreign policy researchers is made by Srđan Gligorijević. Comparing levels of Russian and Serbian cooperation with NATO (pp. 95–100), Gligorijević points out that Serbia falls drastically behind Russia in this respect.

The largest section is dedicated to the debate on Russia’s role in the energy sector of Serbia and Southeastern Europe at large. Igor Tomberg (pp. 118–123) and Pavel Baev (pp. 125–129) doubt the ability of Gazprom (already tormented by the current economic crisis) to bear the incredibly great costs of the South Stream project’s construction. Andreas Deak (pp. 131–137) adds that Serbia’s participation in the South Stream project was the most important argument for the Serbian government to sell the state-owned energy company (NIS) to Gazprom Neft for a relatively low price, and cast a shadow of doubt on the feasibility of finishing the construction of South Stream by the predicted deadline (2015). A big contribution to the understanding of Russian and Serbian energy sectors is provided in several articles by Zorana Mihajlović Milanović. Besides providing a brilliant analysis of Serbian (pp. 153–158) and other Southeast European energy sectors (pp. 167–174), as well as Russia’s energy relations with the neighbouring countries and the EU (pp. 61–69), she also offers a comprehensive critique (pp. 159–161) of the biggest economic deal ever struck between Serbia and Russia – the 2008 Oil and Gas Cooperation Agreement. A variety of perspectives on this Agreement, including those introduced by Konstantin Simonov (pp. 142–143) and Anatoly Pomorcev (pp. 163–166), help the reader to build an all-round picture of Russian-Serbian energy relations and also add to the academic value of the book.

A timid analysis of Serbian-Russian relations in the spheres of culture and religion is attempted in the final and shortest section of the book. Miroslav Jovanović (pp. 181–191) presents a concise and lucid theoretical analysis, while Goran Miloradović (pp. 193–201) summarises several research results conducted in this field, providing the reader with the relevant empirical data.

The main weakness of the book lies in the fact that it does not pay sufficient attention to several fundamental events in Serbian-Russian relations. The study would have benefited a lot had it addressed the role of Russia in the events of 5 October 2000, the subsequent extradition of Slobodan Milošević to the ICTY, and the reasons behind the Russian troops’ withdrawal from the Balkans, as well as the alleged mistreatment of Russian capital during the initial post-Milošević period. All of these developments had and still have an impact on bilateral relations and remain under-researched by academics.

Despite these shortcomings, the book’s novelty, as well as its academic and practical value, is indisputable. It can thus be recommended to researchers and policy-makers