

H-Net Reviews

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J.L. Black, ed. *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1998*. Gulf Breeze, Florida: Academic International Press, 1999. \$154.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87569-209-8.

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Key Documents for the Study of Contemporary Russia and Eurasia

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Published since 1988, the series *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual* (formerly *USSR Documents Annual*), provides access to important resources for the study of contemporary politics and society in Russia and several of the successor states of the Soviet Union. The publication includes such things as translations of newspaper articles, laws, presidential and other government decrees as well as transcripts from important television newscasts, to name a few.

Initially, the publication was thematic with each volume receiving an individual title. Subjects covered were: *The Gorbachev Reforms* (1987); *Perestroika: The Second Stage* (1988); *The End of Empire* (1989); *Restructuring Perestroika* (two volumes) (1990); *Disintegration of the USSR* (two volumes) (1991). In 1992 the series was renamed *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual* with the first volume covering *The Russian Federation* and the second volume covering *The CIS and Successor States*. In 1993 the second volume of the set was renamed and given its current title of *Central Eurasian States*.

The documents included in each volume are compiled and edited by the staff of the Centre for Research on Canadian-Russian Relations (CRCR) at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. For the collection, CRCR uses major publications as sources for documents included in each volume. In volume one *The Russian Federation*, the communist perspective is drawn mainly from *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, with less attention paid to *Pravda* and *Zavtra*. The

government position is represented mainly from *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, where almost all of the laws printed [in this publication] also were found. *Izvestiia* and *Rossiiskie vesti* are the source of many mainstream positions; and *Krasnaia zvezda* is the bearer of the official military position" (p. ix). In the second volume on the Central Eurasian states, the CRCR researchers rely on Russian-language sources and FBIS reports to document events in each of the countries covered. The resource would be more useful for scholars if a detailed explanation of how and why documents were selected for publication was incorporated into the introduction.

Coverage in the first volume on Russia is thematic. Subjects included are "Government," "National Laws and Decrees," "The Political Scene," "The Republics and Territories," "Military and Security Forces," "Foreign Policy," "The Economy," "Quality of Life," "Crime and Punishment," and "Media and Intellectual Life." The second volume takes a slightly different approach using geographical groupings for each chapter rather than thematic divisions. It opens with the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ukraine, Russia's "near neighbors" (Belarus), Central Asia (including Kyrgyzstan, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Kazakhstan, and concludes with Transcaucasia (covering Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia and Abkhazia). Subject divisions similar to those in the first volume further divide each chapter. Both volumes include extensive indexes.

J.L. Black, the editor of the series and director of the CRCR, provides a concise overview to the events covered

through his informative introduction to each chapter of documents. For example, in the introduction to chapter one of volume one, Black provides a month-by-month overview of the major events, issues and changes that impacted the Russian government during 1998. Each introduction concludes with a short bibliography of additional readings on the topic. The introductions provide a solid summation of key events that took place in the Soviet successor states in 1998 that both specialists and non-specialists will find useful in their research or studies.

The preponderance of this publication is based on the thematic compilation of translated documents from published resources. The editor relies heavily on news services such as *Interfax*, *Itar-Tass*, and *FBIS* (Foreign Broadcast Information Services) reports, as well as newspapers. In addition to these sources, television news reports are also included. The primary value of *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual* is that the series makes the information more accessible, particularly to non-specialists who do not have the language skills to allow them to utilize the document in the original.

One might believe that because most of the resources included in the compilation are now available through electronic formats, there would be no need for the paper publication of a series like *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual*. For example most *FBIS* reports are available online through *World News Connection* (<http://wnc.fedworld.gov/>), and a majority of the newspapers cited are also full-text accessible through aggregate electronic products such as East View Publications' (<http://www.eastview.com/>) *Universal Database of Russian Newspapers (UDRN)*. Other companies, such as *Russia Online, Inc.* (<http://www.russia-on-line.com/>) offer access to similar databases. These new electronic formats greatly enhance our access to information through Boolean and key word searching. Additionally, databases such as the *UDRN* provide access to Russian newspapers on the day of publication rather than having to wait six to eight weeks for mail delivery as in the past. This database is further enhanced by the user's ability to search thirty-eight different newspapers and new services at one time, both for current information and in an archive that goes back to 1996.

Unfortunately, because of their content and language of publication, these products are specialized and are perceived by many to be of little use to anyone other than Slavic students and scholars who generally account for a small percentage of the overall population at colleges or universities. Therefore, library and university administrators often see the cost-benefit ratio for the acquisition of such electronic products as too expensive for the organization. As a result, these electronic databases are not widely available to scholars and students at most university or academic libraries unless the institution supports active Slavic studies programs and library collections. Thus, *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual* continues to fill an important research need by making these documents available to most academic and research libraries, in a translated and relatively inexpensive format. Even as electronic resources continue to develop and evolve this series will still be of use to students and scholars who do not have access to the original documents or are unable to use these documents because of language barriers.

Anyone who has struggled through searching a year or two of one of the sections of the Russian National Bibliography such as the newspaper index, *Letopis' gazetnykh statei* will appreciate the comprehensive indexes that are included in each volume of the publication. The index is divided into sections by name, subjects, geography and places. There is also a short glossary of acronyms at the beginning of the indexes. Names and places listed in the index are also highlighted in the text making the information included in this publication extremely accessible.

One could, perhaps, criticize the documents that were included, or excluded, in this collection. However, Black and the staff of *CRCR* continue to do a solid job of compiling documents that highlight the major events and issues impacting the governments and societies of Russia and other successor states of the Soviet Union. This series provides a good starting point for researching contemporary issues from the region.

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