

BOOK REVIEW

A World More Equal: An Internationalist Perspective on the Cold War

Tsvetelina Marinova, Ph.D.¹

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ABSTRACT

Kott, S. (2024). *A World More Equal: An Internationalist Perspective on the Cold War* (A. Gharibian, Trans.). Columbia University Press, 312 pp. offers an insightful and highly relevant perspective on the Cold War, moving beyond the traditional narrative of confrontation to highlight the role of international cooperation and the emergence of global governance after the Second World War. The book is grounded in the historiography of internationalism, transnational history, and global history. It combines insights from the history of international organizations with debates on globalization, development, and international political economy.

Keywords: international organizations, internationalism, capitalism, socialism, international economic order, global governance, global history

JEL codes: F02, F53, N44, P10, P20

Introduction

Kott, S. (2024). *A World More Equal: An Internationalist Perspective on the Cold War* (A. Gharibian, Trans.). Columbia University Press, 312 pp. offers an insightful and highly relevant perspective on the Cold War, moving beyond the traditional narrative of confrontation to highlight the role of international cooperation and the emergence of global governance after the Second World War. Sandrine Kott is Emerita Professor of Modern European History at the University of Geneva and Global Distinguished Professor of European

¹ Associate professor, Department of Economics, New Bulgarian University; Research Associate LEFMI, University of Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens, France; e-mail address: tsmarinova@nbu.bg

History at New York University². Throughout the years, her extensive historical and archival work and publications have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the development of internationalism and the emergence and evolution of global governance in the twentieth century. Having had the opportunity to interact with Sandrine Kott, I am familiar with her important contributions to the study of internationalism, European history, and global governance.

Her book aims to show how international organizations became key arenas for dialogue, collaboration, and efforts to address economic and social problems and global inequalities in the postwar world of existence of two opposing political and economic blocks and competing ideologies. The research seeks to provide “a history of the period through the prism of internationalism understood as both a project and a social practice” (Kott, 2024, p, 3).

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Today, as the world faces constant wars, rising geopolitical confrontation and rivalries, emergence of new blocs and ideological camps, growing economic and social divergencies and unprecedented challenges to multilateralism, the book seems particularly relevant, timely and important to understand current dynamics and the ongoing transformation in the world economy and politics. Internationalism as an ideal founded on shared values and principles of liberty, democracy, solidarity, and peaceful coexistence has been completely undermined. In that respect, the research reminds us that even in periods of deep conflicts and fragmentation, international cooperation and exchange is not only possible but crucial for building a more prosperous, just and inclusive global order.

Internationalism and the enduring significance of the Pan-European vision

The book offers a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of internationalism from the end of the Second World War to the 1980s. Through a chronological approach, it examines the role of international organizations in shaping relations between Eastern and Western Europe, the emergence of competing international projects during the Cold War, and the growing importance of the Third World in global affairs. Particular attention is devoted to the development of pan-European cooperation, the demands for a New International Economic Order, and the impact of global imbalances and inequalities on international relations. Furthermore, it explores the decline of Cold War internationalism and the transition toward neoliberal globalization, highlighting the profound transformation of the international order in the late twentieth century.

² In April 2026, Professor Kott presented the reviewed book at the seminar entitled “International Organizations and the Cold War” organized by the Political economy department at the University of National and World Economy in Sofia.

The author portrays the pan-European project as a vision of a more balanced and integrated Europe, promoted through international organizations such as UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and UN Economic Commission for Europe after the war. The relevance of such a project has become particularly evident today, as growing geopolitical conflicts, the war in Ukraine, and the resurgence of divisions between East and West have renewed debates on European cooperation, economic interdependence, and the future of Europe.

A recurring theme throughout the book is the persistence of centre–periphery relations, as Eastern Europe and later many newly independent countries of the Global South struggled to overcome their subordinate position within an international order largely shaped by the economic and political dominance of the developed Western world. The author broadens the analysis to the decolonized world, examining the emergence of a Third World internationalism, the demands for a New International Economic Order, and the centrality of global wealth inequalities in reshaping Cold War dynamics.

The significance of the book

First, the study is based on extensive archival research and a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The author draws on archives of many international organizations, policy reports, and contemporary publications. The chronological organization of the book allows the reader to trace long-term development and transformations in international cooperation from the post-war period to the rise of neoliberal globalization.

Second, the book makes a significant contribution to the fields of international history, Cold War studies, and the history of international organizations. By emphasizing cooperation alongside conflict, it enriches our understanding of the Cold War period and offers a valuable reinterpretation of post-war international relations. It also provides important insights into the historical origins of contemporary debates on globalization, European integration, and international governance.

After the WWII the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) represented a remarkable example of the post-war pan-European project, founded on the belief that economic cooperation could transcend political and ideological divisions. Combining elements of liberal internationalism, Keynesian economic coordination, and technocratic planning, the UNECE sought to create a common framework for dialogue and collaboration between Eastern and Western Europe. As emphasized by Oskar Lange, the Commission demonstrated the possibility of peaceful coexistence and practical cooperation among countries with different economic and social systems. Under the leadership of Gunnar Myrdal, the UNECE became one of the most important institutional expressions of the pan-European vision (UNECE, 1957). The discussion is particularly relevant today, as Europe faces renewed geopolitical tensions and growing divisions between East and West. In this context, the idea of a pan-European project based on cooperation, dialogue, and the

reduction of economic inequalities remains an important reference point for addressing contemporary challenges to European unity and peace.

Third, the historical perspective offered by the book helps illuminate the origins and dynamics of integration processes on both sides of the Iron Curtain, making it particularly relevant for scholars interested in the emergence and development of the European Union and the socialist integration within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Nenovski and Marinova, 2024).

Fourth, the book analyzes the decline of Cold War internationalism during the 1980s, showing how the failure of the New International Economic Order and the collapse of the communist system paved the way for the rise of neoliberal globalization and a new paradigm of international competition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the book makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of international organizations, internationalism, and the evolution of the post-war international order. By moving beyond conventional interpretations of the Cold War, it reveals the complex interactions between cooperation and conflict, as well as the competing visions that shaped Europe and the wider world during the second half of the twentieth century.

Particularly relevant in today's context of geopolitical tensions and renewed debates about European unity, the book provides valuable insights into both the possibilities and the limits of international cooperation. It will be of great interest to historians, political economists, scholars of European integration and development studies, as well as to policymakers, researchers, and graduate students seeking a deeper understanding of international organizations, global governance, and contemporary European challenges.

References

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