

Book: Sovjetistan

Author: Erika Fatland

Publisher: Information Publishing.

430 pages. 299.95 DKK

Reviewer: Jens Malling is journalist. He often reports from the post-soviet world – primarily Ukraine and Caucasus.

Forget everything about “transitional period”

Competent and critical overview of the five Central Asia countries that all end on - stan.

WITH SOVJETISTAN Erika Fatland fills a white spot in the consciousness of West Europeans. The book is downright a mix of anecdotes, travel reportage and anthropology from an eight-month long travel, which the author went on to Central Asia.

The Norwegian Erika Fatland has set out to describe Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is a good idea, in the case that this part of Asia is chronically underexposed. Journalistic reports from there are rare, and the countries are – if anything at all – most known for their closedness. This is now thoroughly remedied on over 430 pages. Each country is assigned a chapter on up to 100 pages. Nothing is sacred for the critical, anthropology-educated and Russian savvy Fatland. She harshly criticises one dictator after another with a fierceness, which when the book is read to the end makes you doubt, if she ever is let in into at least Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan again – two particularly bad dictatorships in this part of the world, we learn.

For those who are still in doubt, the author punctures – through the people she meets, insight into their fates and in-depth knowledge of the countries, she travels in – once and for all a specifically tenacious myth, which long prevailed in the West: that the previous Soviet republics are in a “transitional period” from planned economy and dictatorship to democracy and market economy that the latter constitutes a kind of natural law, and that the story in this way can be described linearly.

At the same time the book is an invitation – and amount almost indispensable travel literature – for a trip to Central Asia.

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