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# Regionalism and Identities in the Common Neighbourhood: European and Russian Discourses

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# REGIONALISM AND IDENTITIES IN THE COMMON NEIGHBOURHOOD: EUROPEAN AND RUSSIAN DISCOURSES

## ABSTRACT

In this working paper I will argue that the key factor determining the EU's and Russia's policy tools is their status of either insiders or outsiders in the region-making projects developing in the area of their common neighbourhood. Based on this criterion, I will single out four possible models of EU – Russia interactions. Each of them will be considered from the viewpoints of identities, institutions, and policies of major non-regional actors in specific regions. In policy terms, the paper questions the practicability of a one-size-fits-all approach to the common neighbourhood countries often practiced by both Russia and the EU, and offers a more nuanced vision of this vast geographic area as composed of different regions with different degrees of institutionalization, mechanisms of cohesion, and policy agendas.

## INTRODUCTION

The voluminous body of academic literature on EU – Russia relations leaves a strong impression of crisis both in communication between Brussels and Moscow, and in scholarly discourse covering this relationship. Both Russian and European experts in their analysis usually don't go farther than stating a number of more or less obvious symptoms of political stagnation in bilateral talks such as the lack of mutual trust, dissimilar political vocabularies, divergent material interests, etc. As a rule, most of discourses shaping identities of both actors reproduce the binary logic of these relations either portraying Russia as existentially incompatible with the EU-based normative order, or, vice versa, lambasting contemporary Europe for deviating from its own traditions of democracy, the rule of law and Christian values. In a more academic vocabulary, the EU is characterized as an exponent of the solidarist type of international society, whereas Russia adheres to its more pluralist vision.<sup>1</sup> These two competing contemporary discourses, European and Russian, produce “essentialized differences between two spatial markers ('Europe' and 'East'), a practice that is heavily imbued with an identity dimension”<sup>2</sup>.

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- 1 Kaczmarek, M. (2011), 'Which Rules for the Global Order? The Global Dimension of the Russian – EU Relationship – The Case of International Crises', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 160.
  - 2 Klinke, I. (2012), 'Postmodern Geopolitics? The European Union Eyes Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 64, no. 5, p. 930.

What is often missing in the scholarship of EU – Russian communication is the interaction of these two dissimilar political subjects in a contested area dubbed “near abroad” by Kremlin and – alternatively – “common neighbourhood” in most of the European countries. What certainly deserves a closer attention for transcending the logic of binary opposition are both different patterns of communication between the EU and Russia in this vast area consisting of a dozen countries with a post-Soviet legacy, and the process of regionalization within this area.

In the academic literature a number of models of regionality are widely discussed: regional complex/system, regional society, regional community, etc.<sup>3</sup> All of them are conceptually grounded in the idea of international/cross-border socialization as developed by both the English school and social constructivism. As seen from this vantage point, two communicative processes take place simultaneously: the EU – Russia interaction, and a more complex regional socialization that involves a much wider array of actors.

Both processes are deeply inter-subjective. Being key shapers of regional dynamics in their common neighbourhood, Russia and the EU are themselves objects of influence from their neighbours. Neighbourhood is a concept against which EU’s and Russia’s identities are constantly (re)articulated. Russia defines itself as an actor able to cope with economic and security challenges originating in adjacent countries, while the EU claims to be capable of effectively using transformative mechanisms spurring normative changes in its neighbours.<sup>4</sup> In this paper I argue that it is insufficient to uncover the transformative mechanisms that the EU applies towards its multiple neighbours. What is of primary importance for my analysis is to show that EU’s political subjectivity is to a large extent dependent upon its neighbourhood that is in a position to at least partly streamline the contours of EU’s identity. In this interpretation, the EU is equally a region-maker and a product of regionalization dynamics unfolding in close proximity to its borders.<sup>5</sup> The same is true for Russia, though it is noteworthy that Russia’s integrative Eurasian Union project is short of an explicit normative dimension, which leaves the issue of norm acceptance or rejection beyond the otherwise inter-subjective framework of Russia’s relations with its neighbours.

The study of regionalism in a vast area stretching from Europe’s north to Central Asia is very much correlative with the growing number of studies claiming that the

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3 Agh, A. (2010), ‘Regionalisation as a Driving Force of EU Widening: Recovering from the EU ‘Carrot Crisis’ in the East’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 62, no. 8, p. 1244.

4 Joenniemi, P. (2012), ‘Turning into a Sovereign Actor? Probing the EU Through the Lens of Neighbourhood’, *Geopolitics*, no. 17, pp. 27–38.

5 Browning, C. and Christou, G. (2010), ‘The constitutive power of outsiders: the European neighbourhood policy and the eastern dimension’, *Political Geography*, no. 29, pp. 109–118.

world becomes increasingly less Europe-centric due to the shifting political and economic interests from Europe to non-Western parts of the world.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, most of the nascent Oriental regional constructs won't be able to replicate the best European experiences of region-building, including the most successful Nordic and Baltic models. In the post-colonial literature one may find multiple regrets about the alleged Western tradition of justifying oppression and eradicating the difference, which, in the view of the proponents of such views, requires "critical border thinking" grounded in "the epistemology that was denied by imperial expansion"<sup>7</sup>. However, the ontological assumption that many regions were "created from the perspective of European imperial/colonial expansion" does not necessarily justify the politically simplistic claims for particular "anti-imperial epistemic responses" to empower regions from being "geographically caged"<sup>8</sup>. Neither obvious particularities of regions forming the EU – Russia common neighbourhood nor their dissimilarities from the well studied European examples of regional integration suggest that Europe-born theories are no longer appropriate for studying Eurasian regionalism. On the contrary, the practices of regionalism in a non-European context confirm the validity of a number of concepts of European pedigree, including inter-subjectivity, identity, institutions, external overlay and many others. The European experience includes both hegemonic and non-hegemonic forms of regionalism; it encompasses both open (Central European Initiative) and a relatively closed (Northern Europe)<sup>9</sup> forms of region-making.

This paper addresses the multiple experiences of identity-formation on a regional level in the EU – Russia shared neighbourhood. I will stem from a constructivist presumption that "regions are what states and other actors make of them... Regionness, like identity, is not given once and for all: it is built up and changes"<sup>10</sup>. Accordingly, regional identities – key elements of successful region-making projects – are constructed by both political discourses and cultural practices to be scrutinized in more detail in my analysis.

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6 Acharya, A. (2012), 'Comparative Regionalism: a Field Whose Time Has Come?', *The International Spectator: Italian Journal for International Affairs*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 3–15.

7 Mignolo, W. and Tlostanova, M. (2006), "Theorizing from the Borders. Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge", *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 206.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

9 Moisiso, S., Stokke, K., Sæther, E., Gutzon, H., Ek, E. and Hansen, A.L. (2011), 'Interventions in Nordic Political Geographies', *Political Geography*, no. 30, pp. 241–249.

10 Fawcett, L. (2005), 'Regionalism from a Historical Perspective', in Farrell, M., Hettne, B. and van Langenhove, L. (eds.), *Global Politics of Regionalism. Theory and Practice*, London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, p. 26.

## POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The interest in regionalism in a wider Europe is due to a few factors. *First*, there is a growing regional momentum within the EU where the financial crisis reactualized a number of regional for(u)m(s) of cooperation such as the Visegrad Four (V4), the 3+1 (Germany plus three Baltic states) format, etc. These new regional dynamics will have inevitable repercussions for EU's policies in the east, since many regional projects are designed as "bridges between the internal and external regionalization of the EU"<sup>11</sup>. Each of (intra-)European forms of regionalism necessarily has repercussions for EU's relations with its neighbours: Nordic Europe has strongly influenced the practices of regionalism in the Baltic Sea region, Central Europe (as exemplified by V4) is instrumental in engaging the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), etc.

Many of the current modalities of European regionalism are quite compatible with the much debated idea of "Core Europe" as encompassing Germany, Central Europe, the Baltic Sea region and Nordic Europe. Intrinsically, this alliance can envelop countries with effective and responsible models of social and economic development, as well as a record of successful outward policy transfer practices<sup>12</sup>. Core Europe, being a product of overlapping region-making projects, will be most likely dominated by Russia-sceptic countries lobbying for a more active engagement with Russia's neighbours independently of relations with Moscow.

*Second*, the area known as either "near abroad" in Russia or common neighbourhood in the EU is going through a steady process of regional differentiation. This is to a large extent due to the fact that this neighbourhood spans a series of meeting points between European and non-European practices of territoriality and regionalism. From a practical perspective, regionalization within the area of common EU – Russia neighbourhood questions the appropriateness of applying to it unified political instruments – be it the Brussels-sponsored EaP or Moscow-patronized Eurasian Union. Regional fragmentation opens more space for different identities and institutional affiliations, with borderlines between regions-in-the-making (the Black Sea region and South Caucasus, South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea region, etc.) being immanently fuzzy and blurred.

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11 Agh 2010, op. cit., p. 1241.

12 Simonyi, A. (2013), 'Central Europe's Pivot to the North Is a Good Idea', available from <http://goo.gl/xuxSD3>.

## THE NEIGHBOURHOOD REGIONS: AN INSIDE – OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

Russia and the EU as two key shapers of regions constituting the area of their common neighbourhood adhere to drastically different attitudes to the mechanisms and institutions of region-building. Russia prefers the concept of “near abroad” to “common neighbourhood” and overwhelmingly perceives this area in terms of zero-sum-game and spheres-of-influence politics.

For the EU the central question of its policy toward eastern neighbours is how to create a zone of peace and stability at the Union’s borders without offering the prospect of full membership as an incentive<sup>13</sup>. By and large, this question is tackled by two discourses – civilizational and geopolitical. The civilizational discourse is about the transfer of values in a process of “education” and norms diffusion with the purpose of transforming neighbours. In the geopolitical discourse, neighbours are viewed as transit countries that constitute a buffer zone (“our backyard”) against the unfriendly Big Other. Russia is accepted as a geopolitical player<sup>14</sup>, which only exacerbates the need for control over resources, security protection and spheres of influence. Against this background, EU’s eastern frontiers are effects of “geopolitical decisions” stemming out of a “battle for Europe”<sup>15</sup> and its borderlines.

Arguably, the key factor that determines EU’s and Russia’s policy tools is their status of either insiders or outsiders in region-making projects developing in the area of their common neighbourhood. In my further analysis I will single out four possible models of EU – Russia interactions based on these criteria: a) Russia is an outsider, while the EU is an insider; b) vice versa, Russia is an insider, while the EU is an outsider; c) both the EU and Russia are insiders, and d) both the EU and Russia are outsiders. Each of these four models will be considered below from the viewpoints of a combination of identities, institutions, and patterns of external overlay.

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13 Christensen, A.N. (2011), *The Making of the European Neighbourhood Policy*. Nomos.

14 Kolvraa, C. and Ifversen, J. (2011), ‘The European Neighbourhood Policy: Geopolitics or Value Export?’ in Bindi, F. and Angelescu, I. (eds.), *The Frontiers of Europe: A Transatlantic Problem?*, Rome and Washington: Scuola Superiore della Pubblica Amministrazione and Brookings Institution Press, pp. 50–61.

15 Bindi, F. and Angelescu, I. (2011), ‘Introduction: Defining the Frontiers of Europe from a Transatlantic Perspective’ in Bindi, F. and Angelescu, I. (eds.), *The Frontiers of Europe: A Transatlantic Problem?*, Rome and Washington: Scuola Superiore della Pubblica Amministrazione and Brookings Institution Press, p. 2.

## ***The Four Models***

**Model 1** – in which Russia is outsider, and the EU is insider – encompasses two regions – Nordic Europe and Central Europe. Of course, they differ from each other in many respects, with one of the most striking dissimilarities being a de-securitized nature of the Nordic regionalism, as opposed to the ongoing securitization of energy policy and military matters for Central Europe.

However, both intra-European regions are firmly embedded in the European/Euro-Atlantic institutional structures and produce their own languages of self-description. Their normative coherence is sustained by a variety of cultural underpinnings. In both regions institutional density fosters effective mechanisms of regional socialization that give spill-over effects: Nordic Europe is keen to project its experiences to the Baltic Sea region, while Central Europe is eager to share its success stories with its Eastern European neighbours.

For both regions Russia is obviously an external force though the inside/outside relationships are not identical – Central European identity, along with the very distinction between Central and Eastern Europe, is grounded in a political set-off against Russia, though radicalization of Russia's alterity is by and large avoided for practical reasons. In the meantime, the concept of Nordicity leaves some routes for Russia to share certain elements of Northernness. In some cases, Russia tries to pragmatically take advantage of the regionalist initiatives undertaken by its neighbours (as it was the case for the Finland-sponsored Northern Dimension program), while in others it chooses to ignore the region-building capacities of its western neighbours, which is mostly the case with Central Europe<sup>16</sup>.

In unpacking Model 1 I will further focus on the region of Central Europe due to its stronger relevance for the common EU – Russia neighbourhood. Institutionally, this is a very dense region that encompasses the Visegrad Four (V4), the Central European Initiative and the Danube regional strategy. These three institutional frameworks reveal three different facets of Central European regionalism: the Poland-led V4 is focused on tackling energy and military security issues among its member states and is eager to develop flexible communicative formats with adjacent countries; the Central European Initiative extends the concept of Central Europe to the Balkans, and the Hungary-driven Danube-based regionalism is basically about jointly managing a plethora of soft security and transportation projects (<http://www.danube-region.eu>). Among the three it is the V4 that has

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16 Zachaczkowski, W. (2013), 'Ignorirovat Tsentralnuyu Evropu nepravilno', *Rosbalt Information Agency*, available from <http://goo.gl/xPLOqC>.

the most immediate bearing for the EU relations with Russia in their common neighbourhood area.

The V4 identity discourses focus on two mutually correlative nodal points – the historical trauma of imperial submissions and well articulated democratic attitudes. This is why EU's core narratives – Europeanization and normative expansion – find a fertile ground here. The V4 strongly positions itself within a trans-Atlantic security community and calls for boosting EU security functions, including conflict management resources: by 2016 the V4 pledged to form a Visegrad battlegroup as a regional contribution to hard security agenda. Cyber-security and energy security – including the mechanisms for mutual support in case of energy disruptions<sup>17</sup> – are also matters of key importance, including in the framework of V4's cooperation with eastern partners<sup>18</sup>.

The outward role of the V4 appears to derive from the group's European commitments. The four Central European countries are eager to engage their East European neighbours by developing "V4 – Eastern Partnership" program. By the same token, the V4 members support the Southern Energy Corridor facilitating the access of countries of Central-, East- and South-East-Europe to gas and oil supplies from the Caspian Sea region and the Middle East, thus reducing their dependencies on Russia<sup>19</sup>. They also advocate measures for the liberalization of the energy market and competitive energy prices, support the continuing Europeanization of EaP countries; and are critical towards the human rights situation in Russia<sup>20</sup>.

Obviously, Russia's attitudes towards the region of Central Europe are drastically different. For Moscow most of Central European nations are culturally close, but politically unfriendly. Indeed, the V4 countries share the history of challenging the Soviet Union whose fall in 1991 was characterized by Vladimir Putin as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20st century. Poland's role as the strongest lobbyist for Ukraine in Brussels seems geopolitically unacceptable and irritating for Russia.

Thus, as we see, the countries of Central Europe are still in the process of carving out their proper role identities within the EU and simultaneously developing their outreach strategies. They are sources of multiple institutional initiatives aimed at engaging a wider circle of countries into the Europeanization process, yet in the meantime they themselves are objects of criticism from major EU actors for

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17 'Declaration of V4 Energy Ministers', Bratislava, 25 January 2011, available from <http://goo.gl/TojgJu>.

18 'For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defence Policy 2013 Declaration of the Visegrad Group Foreign Ministers', 19 April 2013, available from <http://goo.gl/aOn52a>.

19 'Press Statement of Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai', 24 February 2010, available from <http://goo.gl/E0V9AH>.

20 'Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Visegrad, Nordic and Baltic countries', Gdansk, 20 February 2013, available from <http://goo.gl/frrSkp>.

insufficient compliance with the European normative standards (in particular, this is nowadays the case with Hungary, yet the governments of Poland and Slovakia have also had similar problems earlier). Despite those cleavages, the attempts to draw political lines between “old” and “new” Europe – initially articulated by Washington and then reinterpreted by Moscow as a distinction between “good” and “bad” Europeans – by and large failed, leaving scarce leverage for Russia to build its European strategy on dividing its neighbours into different identity-related categories. The inception and maturing of the Berlin – Warsaw axis is a game-changing move that not only legitimizes Poland’s role as the key partner for Germany in Europe, but also augurs closer coordination of their policies towards Russia and common neighbourhood countries<sup>21</sup> (The Visegrad Group... 2011).

**Model 2** – in which the EU is an outsider, while Russia is an insider – embraces two regional cases, non-EU Eastern Europe and the Caspian Sea region. This model starkly differs from the first one discussed above. It is characterized by weak – if ever existent – institutionalization: neither of the two regions is cemented by more or less binding institutional commitments. They also lack common identity discourses, as well as external spill-over effects – neither Eastern Europe nor the Caspian Sea region think of themselves as model regions eager to project their norms to other regions. In both cases Russia claims to have an upper hand in shaping regional milieux, and takes – sometimes aggressively – a protective stand against EU’s attempts to have its say there.

*Eastern Europe* is a very volatile region, where interests and identities of its key actors are far from fixed. The region is mostly shaped by a competition between Moscow and Brussels, but it can’t be easily divided into “Russian” and “European” segments – in fact, being “pro-Russian” or “pro-European” is a matter of interpretations. The elites in Ukraine, Moldova and – to a certain extent – Belarus often choose to portray themselves as being different from Russia, in the meantime being aware of their dependence on Russian energy resources and military power. Russia, from its part, does its best to present itself as a country belonging to this region that it alternatively might call “a different/non-Western Europe”. However, the very structure of EU’s – as well as Ukrainian and Moldovan – discourses grounded in the inescapable choice between joining Russian or European models of integration ascribe to Russia external characteristics by placing it in the same category of outsiders as the EU.

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21 ‘The Visegrad Group and Germany Foreign Ministers Statement on the Eastern Partnership’, Bratislava, 3 March 2011, available from <http://goo.gl/D34bFv>.

In fact, it is Eastern Europe's positioning between the EU and Russia and the structural impossibility to make either identity-based or institutional choice between Moscow and Brussels that constitutes the region's specific role identity. This situation enhances two interrelated foreign policy models: a multi-vectored diplomacy of balancing between the two hegemonic poles, and a zero-sum game bargaining (presuming that the more EU turns out of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, the more they are to cooperate with Russia). As an ideal model for foreign policy, most of the regional actors seem to prefer multilateralism with collective consultations and decision-making by multiple parties<sup>22</sup>. Yet this is hardly a completely feasible option within the system of spheres of influence that leaves little room for Russia's Eastern European neighbours' political strategies of their own. A power-based system of international relations reduces the role of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus to junior partners of great powers, and forces them to the spheres of influence shaped by the EU that will always prevail as a source of normative power, and Russia with its domination in the hard security domain.

As seen from the inter-subjective perspective, Eastern Europe – with Russia as its element – represents a political challenge for the EU. On the one hand, should the EU opt for consistently playing its cherished “normative power” role, Ukraine under the Yanukovich regime ought to be increasingly marginalized and therefore will most likely fall in the Russian sphere of influence. On the other hand, a more pragmatic attitude to Ukraine would lead to signing the much awaited Association Agreement in spite of practices of selective justice that irk many Europeans. But should the EU choose to close its eyes on the Timoshenko affair, it would hardly manage to justify its continuing focus on predominantly normative issues in relations with Russia – like limitations of civil freedoms, political repressions, etc.

In the *Caspian Sea region* Russia's legitimate belonging to the regional milieu is not contested, but Russia faces a strong competition from external powers, including the EU. Moscow and Brussels take incompatible positions towards the whole set of energy issues: the EU supports Southern Gas Corridor with Nabucco and Trans Caspian Pipeline System as its key elements<sup>23</sup>, while Russia develops the South Stream project. Besides, the EU has its say in the regional dynamics via EaP (where Azerbaijan is a member) and the European energy companies working in the region.

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22 Lo, B. (2011). 'Russia: The Eastern Dimension' Dutkiewicz, P. and Trenin, D. (eds.), *Russia: the Challenges of Transformation*, Social Science Research Council & New York University Press, p. 369.

23 European Commission (2011), 'EU starts negotiations on Caspian pipeline to bring gas to Europe', available from <http://goo.gl/q9XKro>.

It is the absence of common approaches to the key energy issues – the delimitation of the Caspian seabed and the competition in gas transportation projects – that created preconditions for securitizing the regional milieu<sup>24</sup>. In particular, Russia increasingly considers Astrakhan' as its military outpost in the Caspian Sea<sup>25</sup>.

The Caspian Sea region, as well as Eastern Europe, clearly demonstrates that even being a regional insider, Russia has to compete for the influence with the explicitly extra-regional powers<sup>26</sup>. This drastically differs from the regions – like Central Europe and the Nordic – that are plugged into the EU project and where no external power has chances for a comparable impact. Apparently, it is the lack of normative resources and soft power traction, as well as institutional weakness, that make Russian positions in the two regions of this model vulnerable and unstable and Russian policies more reactive than pro-active.

**Model 3** – where both Russia and the EU are regional insiders – encompasses the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions. It is mainly in these two regions that the EU offered "Russia access to regional-level international societies with a thicker set of institutions than are available in its relations with the United States and Asia"<sup>27</sup>. With all controversies, the Nord Stream project can serve as one of the few examples of economic compatibility between Russia and the major gas consuming countries in Western Europe. In the same vein, with all its limitations, the Russian – Polish agreement on visa-free border-crossing regime for the residents of Kaliningrad *oblast* and two neighbouring Polish *voivodships* is a good argument for a more comprehensive visa facilitation bargaining between Russia and the EU<sup>28</sup>.

Yet paradoxically, an equal status of region-shapers, however, is hardly conducive to a fruitful dialogue, since Russia is fully aware that from 1990s Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania perceived the Baltic Sea regionalism as a step towards EU and NATO membership, along with Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Georgia for whom the Black Sea region-making was in one way or another inscribed in their Europeanization drive. Consequently, many regional actors were redefining "their identities in opposition to an 'other' symbolized by Russia – the imperial, barbaric

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24 Michaletos, I. (2012), 'Caspian Sea's Part in the Great Game', available from <http://goo.gl/8uf0HI>.

25 Hayashi, H., Kuzsnir, J., and Magomedov, A. (2013), 'Modern Russian energy policies in the Caspian basin in context of military strategy', Valdai Club, available from <http://goo.gl/ucYUgv>.

26 Labban, M. (2009), 'The Struggle for the Heartland: Hybrid Geopolitics in the Transcaspien', *Geopolitics*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 1–7.

27 Aalto, P. (2007), 'Russia's Quest for International Society and the Prospects for Regional-Level International Societies', *International Relations*, vol. 21, no. 4, p. 459.

28 Korejba, J. (2012), 'The Kaliningrad Triangle: a New Directorate for Central Europe', available from <http://goo.gl/8mvY1U>.

neighbour<sup>29</sup>. For its part, Russia proved unable to counter this negative othering by promoting its own long-term regional projects in either the Baltic Sea or Black Sea regions, and has chosen to compensate the shortage of strategy with distancing from the EU and refusing to join the EU-centered normative order. Russia's – mostly rhetorical – claims for equality in the absence of long-term alternative strategies of region-building were conducive to the reproduction on the regional level of communicative disconnections between Moscow and Brussels.

In spite of optimistic expectations for a thicker EU – Russia convergence on regional levels<sup>30</sup>, the two parties are steadily drifting apart from each other. Identity-wise, Russia's association with the European idea – with all undeniable inter-subjectivity of Russia – EU relations – turn out not that strong. Even the market – as an international institution potentially conducive to a more solidarist type of interaction – played a divisive role in both regions of the 3rd model due to different conceptions of energy transportation routes. Solidarity within the Black Sea region is undermined by a competition between the Russia-sponsored South Stream project and its EU-supported alternative Nabucco. The Baltic Sea region is a home to two other competing approaches to energy business: the Russian – German Nord Stream project that may potentially enlarge to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, on the one hand, and a nascent strategy-in-the-making of a group of Baltic and Central European states eager to rid themselves of excessive energy dependence from Russia by means of diversifying their supplies and investing in alternative sources of energy production (renewables, shale gas, nuclear energy, etc.), on the other. In the Roadmap of the EU – Russia Energy Cooperation till 2050 both parties have agreed on two most important points – energy interdependency (Kaliningrad from Lithuania, the three Baltic states from Russia and Belarus) and diversification of energy supplies, yet these two notions are differently understood by the parties involved. As the head of the Russian Permanent Mission in the EU Vladimir Chizhov argued, instead of interdependence some Baltic and Central European countries are longing for energy independence from Russia, which is hardly achievable technologically. As for diversification, this is exactly what Russia believes to contribute to by developing South Stream and planning for constructing new legs of the Nord Stream<sup>31</sup>.

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29 Cuita, F. (2008), "Region? Why Region? Security, Hermeneutics, and the Making of the Black Sea Region", *Geopolitics*, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 133.

30 Aalto (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 471, 474.

31 Chizhov, V. (2013), 'Intervention by Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov at the conference 'Third Investment Energy Summit', organised by The Economist', available from <http://goo.gl/paOXIB>.

Moscow often portrays the Baltic Sea Region as one of the interfaces where Russia faces serious problems in dealing with the EU. The Kremlin in fact accuses the EU in applying allegedly protectionist measures against Russian investments, impeding Gazprom's business and derailing for political reasons joint projects like the launching of a unified energy system to embrace Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The growing tensions between Russia and the EU (and its member states) in the Baltic Sea region are particularly consequential due to the widely discussed perspectives of the concept of "Core Europe" to potentially encompass Germany, Northern Europe, Central Europe and the Baltic Sea region. Should a new constellation of economic and political forces take a more concrete shape in a long run, the future contours of EU – Russian relations will to a very large extent be dependent on a number of developments either spurred by countries belonging to these regions or unfolding in their premises. The most important political problem for Russia is whether the potential of the existing mechanisms of Russia's engagement with its Baltic partners (the Nord Stream project, the German – Poland – Russia triangular diplomacy, etc.) would be sufficient to counter a well pronounced series of opposite moves (such as the legal process against Gazprom spurred by Lithuania and Czech Republic, the energy security policy coordination mechanisms between the Visegrad Four and the Baltic countries, etc.).

By and large, the future of the Baltic Sea region is defined by the collision between at least two different versions of energy regionalism. One is the model of the Russian – German energy condominium rhetorically supported by Brussels and some Scandinavian countries. Another model is shaped by alternative visions of energy security mainly emanated from the three eastern Baltic States in conjunction with their V4 partners. Their strategy includes heavy accent on practically implementing the idea of energy diversification that presupposes forming coalitions to balance Russian influence and to prevent Gazprom from acquiring new energy assets in the region. For the Baltic and the V4 states the Nord Stream project is problematic since it maintains non-competitive prices and technically creates preconditions for disrupting Russia's energy supplies to the Baltic States while continuing deliveries to Western European consumers<sup>32</sup>. The Baltic countries are also wary of the EU's policies of introducing stricter environmental protection regulations that can eventually lead to rising energy prices due to new investments in expensive technologies and potentially to a growing dependence from Russia. This explains the interest of the Baltic States in the exploration of shale gas reserves,

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32 Tarus, T. and Crandall, M. (2012), 'Is Russia a Threat to Estonian Energy Security?', *Baltic Journal of Political Science*, no. 1, pp. 77–90.

the building of liquefied natural gas terminals, investing in renewables, and a search for alternative transportation routes.

In spite of the tensions between different visions of regionalism in the Baltic Sea, Russia and the EU possess a better record of cooperation in this region than in the Black Sea. As recent military exercises demonstrated<sup>33</sup>, for Moscow the Black Sea is mostly a region that is emanating threats to Russian security than an interface for cooperation. Again, it is the lack of a normative appeal that seriously undermines Russia's policies in both regions.

**Model 4** – under which both the EU and Russia are formally outsiders – embraces South Caucasus and Central Asia. In these cases there are potentialities for both cooperation (the EU mediating between Moscow and Tbilisi after the Georgia war in 2008) and competition (basically in the soft power domain) between Moscow and Brussels. Multiple external overlays (China, Turkey, US) are indispensable elements of regional policy constellations, which can be explained by an almost non-existent institutional basis for the regions' cohesiveness and the deliberate preferences of regional actors for multi-vectored diplomacies.

It appears that Central Asia and South Caucasus represent a strong challenge for the EU international role identity since the widely used otherwise normative discourse doesn't bring here the desired communicative outcomes. This is why the EU had to refocus/recalibrate its normative agenda from promoting human rights and civil freedoms to supporting good governance and sustainable development<sup>34</sup>.

Yet Russia as well had to partly adjust its policies to the Central Asian regimes. This is especially the case for the Russian-speaking population that in most other post-Soviet regions is elevated to the highest rank in Russian priorities. Yet in Central Asia Moscow has never seriously raised this flammable issue, which might be interpreted as part of Russia's policy of accommodating the Central Asian dictatorships and avoiding conflicts with them<sup>35</sup>.

As we see, countries of the regions under consideration are reluctant to accept either European or Russian normative supremacy, yet are they capable of producing their own norms instead? Examples of Central Asia and South Caucasus depreciate one of the key claims of post-colonial theorizing, namely that one presuming the ability of non-Western regions not only to reject Western norms, but also to "replace

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33 Weier, F. (2013), 'In the wee hours, Putin ordered impromptu Russian war games', *Christian Science Monitor*, available from <http://goo.gl/cSN2Cp>.

34 Council of the European Union (2009), 'The EU and Central Asia: the New Partnership in Action', available from <http://goo.gl/yNMI52>.

35 Malashenko, A. (2012), 'Tsentralnaya Azia: na chto rasschityvaet Rossiya?', *Moscow Carnegie Center*, available from <http://goo.gl/kD8uDM>.

or modify them with ones which are consistent with their interests and identities”<sup>36</sup>. The situation on the ground looks less certain: in fact, both Central Asia and South Caucasus are examples of under-regionalized areas that suffer exactly from the lack of norms to institutionally bind the countries. This normative deficit is exacerbated by either an inability or unwillingness to adopt European norms and, consequently, to integrate with a Europe-centric normative order.

The experiences of the two regions also question the relevance of the principle of “regional solutions for regional problems” that is portrayed as key to non-Western regional actors’ search for their autonomies in regional settings<sup>37</sup>. None of the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries seriously stands for keeping outsiders aside as a principle of their policies; moreover, some of them (especially Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia) welcome the actorship of external powers and do their best for taking practical advantages of competition between them (a practice known as multi-vectorized diplomacy).

## CONCLUSIONS

In the concluding section I would like to briefly compare Russia’s and the EU’s policies as region-makers, bearing in mind their different role identities and instruments.

As an insider to regions of the common neighbourhood, Russia faces serious competition with the EU (as well as other major actors) and tries to avoid it by downplaying the dissimilarities between the Eurasian Union project and European integration. In some cases (like in Eastern Europe) Russia advocates inclusive versions of regional integration presupposing some de-bordering connotations (the rhetoric of closer cooperation and even convergence between the ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ flanks of integrative processes in a wider Europe), while in other situations Moscow sticks to clearly articulated bordered approaches (in the Caspian Sea, for example). Yet by and large, Russia has voluntarily closed for itself the possibilities for both co-making/co-sponsoring region-building projects with the EU, and pragmatically using regional institutions as a means for diversifying its channels of communication with Europe. This adds strong notes of conflictuality in Russia’s communication with the EU in various regional formats.

As an outsider, Russia pursues a policy of alluring its South Caucasian and Central Asian neighbours in the Moscow-sponsored integrative project of the Eurasian Union mainly through soft power mechanisms. Simultaneously Russia tries to

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36 Acharya, A. (2011), ‘Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World’, *International Studies Quarterly*, no. 55, p. 99.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

challenge its status as an outsider by strengthening its military presence in South Caucasus (in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Armenia) and Central Asia (Tajikistan). In the meantime, Russia's impact on Nordic and Central Europe is miniscule, which attests to Russia's scarce resources for influencing developments to the west of its borders.

As an insider, the EU hosts a number of regional projects that maintain institutional diversity within the Union, on the one hand, and are instrumental to developing rather variegated policy approaches to EU's neighbours. In fact, it is countries forming the regions of Nordic Europe and Central Europe that are the most instrumental in shaping EU's *modus operandi* in the adjacent regions, with the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions remaining the key laboratories of EU – Russia communications with all their complications and inconsistencies.

As an outsider, the EU combines “soft” securitization of its eastern neighbours with attempts to normatively transform them. The key problems are a lack of EU's security resources in frozen conflicts<sup>38</sup>, as well as a limited utility of the normative power policy. EU's normative power projection implies a distinction between European Self and a variety of regional Others with different degrees of adaptability. In some cases the EU has to reconsider the universality of its normative appeal and recognize the limits of its applicability even within the EaP.

The different patterns of regionalism analyzed in this paper hopefully can elucidate the variety of role identities between the EU, Russia and their common neighbours. As analytical models, they may be used for better comprehending the dynamics of the inside – outside relationship based on a combination of discursive and institutional practices.

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38 Siddi, M. and Gaweda, B. (2012), 'Bystander in Its Neighborhood? European Union's Involvement in Protracted Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space', *IEP Policy Papers on Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, no. 1, p. 823.

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