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*The European Union and Russia's Integrationist
Policies in the Post-Soviet Space*

Tomislava Y. Penkova

*Research fellow
Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Milan*

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Tomislava Y. Penkova

Research fellow

Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Milan

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Abstract

Since 1991, Russia has been searching for a niche for itself in the new European (Western) system. The various integrationist projects it has promoted in the post-Soviet space (Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Economic Community, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization) suggest that it also seeks to create a system of its own there. This regional design, however, clashes with the European Union's regional policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. Tensions are heightened by the new independent states as well, which often experienced periods of state weakness, economic instability and persistence of unresolved conflicts, exposing their vulnerability to external forces. The result of these dynamics is the understanding that the fate of these countries cannot be detached from the course of Russo-EU relationship.

This paper will try to cast light on the poorly explored issue of EU and Russia's policies in post-Soviet space with the purpose to determine to what extent they are competitive, as often affirmed by Moscow, and what are the possible future regional developments. The underlying logic of both the EU and Russia reinforces the view of a current competition over the region. However, considering EU's weakened leverage and its insufficient engagement in the region, we believe that the antagonism regards only a competition for being a positive source for attracting countries in the area.

The EU has always exercised influence, meant as attractiveness, over its Eastern neighbours, though this influence has never been converted into any kind of control over regional trends. On the contrary, Russia exercises to some extent control through a combination of soft and hard power, but it still lacks sufficient attractiveness to ensure the effectiveness of its policies. EU enlargement fatigue and its neighbourhood policies excluding membership prospects greatly weaken the Union's impact. This offers Moscow a chance to pursue its own regional design of becoming an attractive and influential, regional power-centre in a multipolar world. Its success, however, will depend on its ability to maintain economic growth pace, restore confidence in neighbouring countries (undermined by the Soviet legacy) and implement its domestic agenda for modernization. The latter may become a source for higher standards and resources to be transferred to the region strengthening its cohesion. Cooperation and coordination with the EU should not be ruled out. In fact, some Russian scholars speak of the creation of a pan-European integrated space comprising the EU, the states of the common neighbourhood and Russia.

Keywords

Russia, European Union, post-Soviet space, regionalism, multipolarity, Partnership for Modernization, EurAsEC, SCO

1 Introduction

In the West's narrative the year 1991 marks the victory of the US and the defeat of the USSR and Russia as its successor. That victory seemed to confirm the universality of Western liberal values and the need to promote and consolidate them in other countries. Russia's perspective on the course of events, however, is quite different. From Russia's point of view, the US did not "win" the Cold War, but rather "voluntarily withdrew from Central and Eastern Europe"¹. In any case, both Russian and Western scholars agree that since 1991 Russia has been searching for a niche for itself in the new European (Western) system, and that the various projects it has promoted in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the so-called "near abroad", suggest that it also seeks to create a system of its own there.

The latter region was regarded by Russia as a kind of compensation for the loss of the USSR, and Russia's interests were "legitimized" by the traditional, historical and social ties existing between Russia and the countries in the post-Soviet area. These regional designs, however, clashed with the US stance, which vehemently supported the newly independent countries' sovereignty (often regardless of their democratic performance) as a way to prevent the restoration of Russia's influence over the region. The gradual rise of Russia's status in global affairs during Vladimir Putin's presidencies exacerbated the competition between Russia and the US in the post-Soviet space. To some extent, therefore, both Washington's and Moscow's regional policies were not so much an expression of a long-term vision, but a

¹ According to Karaganov, "[it] gave the green light to and even assisted in the reunification of Germany ... [and it was] the Russian political class of that time [that] initiated the break-up of the Soviet Union and lost some historical Russian territories". See Karaganov, S. (April-June 2009) *The Magic Numbers of 2009, Russia in Global Affairs*, 2, p. 76. Moreover, as former Russian President Putin remarked "we should not forget that the fall of the Berlin Wall was possible thanks to a historic choice – one that was also made by our people, the people of Russia – a choice in favour of democracy, freedom, openness". See Monaghan, A. (2008) *An Enemy at the Gates or from Victory to Victory? Russian Foreign Policy, International Affairs*, 84, 4, p. 730.

reaction to the other's regional agenda. This fierce competition created a zero-sum game in the region that has shaped Russia's subsequent stance. The EU position as a promoter of Western values somewhat overlapped with the US one, presuming a logic of competition with Russia. However, the main difference between EU and US policies towards the region was that the latter sought to stimulate a process of independence from Russia and disruption of any ties with it², whereas the former sought regional integration, which did not necessarily mean breaking the region's interdependence with Russia.

Tensions were heightened by the new independent states as well. Within the area of the former Soviet Union three distinct sub-regions gradually emerged (excluding the Baltic States): new Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine), South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) and Central Asia³. The first two became objects of competing integrationist projects by the EU and Russia, while in the third sub-region, rich in energy resources, Moscow's presence is mainly challenged by the US and China.

These countries often experienced periods of state weakness, economic instability and persistence of unresolved conflicts, exposing their vulnerability to external forces. The perception of being a contested territory and a bargaining chip in relations between big powers encouraged their ruling class to explore the benefits of establishing shifting partnerships. As a result, political (and sometimes personal) convenience determined national allegiances: to side with the West against Russia (reliance on the West was expected to neutralize Russia's pressure as these states perceived their independence as independence from Russia, predetermining a centrifugal geopolitical drift)⁴ or with Russia, in order to achieve some economic advantages that the West was not willing to offer. On the one hand, Russia tried, with questionable success, to exploit common inherited characteristics, such as the model of statehood, political and economic structures, geographic proximity, use of the Russian language as a lingua franca, and its military presence. On the other hand, the West (EU and US) pushed these independent states to define a new identity for themselves and protect their sovereignty.

The successive enlargements of the EU and NATO have influenced those

² This was largely the US position until 2009 when Barack Obama came to power.

³ Trenin, D. (April 22, 2010) *Rossija i novaja vostocnaja Evropa* (Russia and the New Eastern Europe), <http://www.carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=40669>.

⁴ Moshes, A. (March-April 2010) *Avenue of Independence. Will Russian-Belarusian Relations Take the Ukrainian Path?*, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2.

states' internal processes while aggravating relations with Moscow. The August 2008 war was the culmination of this rivalry to secure one's influence over the region, won by Moscow. The launch in 2009 of the EU Eastern Partnership policy (excluding Russia) was an "almost desperate" attempt of the EU to continue to play the game gradually replacing the US, which in the meantime was weakened by the global crisis and transformed by the Obama administration. Unlike former president Bush, Obama downgraded Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space in his foreign policy priorities in order to concentrate US attention elsewhere (Afghanistan, Iran). The result of these dynamics was, and still it is, the understanding that the fate of these countries cannot be detached from the course of Russo-Western relationship as, to a large extent, it is inserted in that framework.

This paper will try to cast light on the poorly explored issue of EU and Russia's policies in post-Soviet space with the purpose to determine to what extent they are competitive, as often affirmed by Moscow, and what are the possible future regional developments. The underlying logic of both the EU and Russia reinforces the view of a current competition over the post-Soviet space. However, considering EU's weakened leverage and its insufficient engagement in the region, we believe that the antagonism regards only a competition for being a positive source for attracting countries within the space and influencing their future choices. Today Moscow has the chance to realize its integrationist agenda and to take the initiative away from the West. Such a scenario would confirm Russia's international status and prestige, and open the way for future pan-European integration.

2 EU and Russia: a competition between different approaches

The underlying logic of the EU and Russia supports competitive scenarios in the former Soviet space. The EU is an expression of the postmodern state, whereas Russia is an expression of the traditional modern state. The European postmodern system defies sovereignty, which, on the contrary, is a priority in Russian politics⁵. The newly independent states indeed have always refused to cede even part of their sovereignty to a supranational body. Consequently, the EU and Russia's policies are based on two diver-

⁵ Krastev, I. (October-December 2007) Russia as the Other Europe, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 4.

gent and irreconcilable assumptions.

On the one hand, the EU policies emphasize an EU-centred understanding of the European continent⁶ as a whole, and the importance of shared European values, which should be a basis of future relations with all neighbouring states. These include stable political institutions, guarantees of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, support for the development of civil society, and reform of judiciary and fight against corruption. Their rationale is to establish (or impose) an EU order in Europe by transferring and diffusing EU norms, values, rules and regulations⁷. By spreading ideas and values across time and space, the EU promotes integration within Europe, which becomes both a “normative and causal idea on how best to achieve peace, wealth and social justice”⁸. It is this peculiar role of the EU that identifies it as a normative or transformative power. It is symptomatic that the claim to encompass and guide the whole European continent hints at the ultimate goal of integrating the whole Eastern Europe. In other words, the EU policies towards its neighbours conceive of the Union as the key actor in the reform and modernization efforts that will lead to the adoption of Western (European) standards. This is the underlying logic of the enlargement process. “The EU acts in a manner similar to any regional power that has a stake in preserving stability on its doorstep. The EU has often used enlargement as an instrument in locking its neighbours into stable and democratic transition. Especially in the post-Cold War era the Union has come to acknowledge the indivisibility of security in Europe: the EU cannot feel secure and continue to prosper if the rest of the continent is in a downward spiral towards increased insecurity and poverty”⁹. This self-perception of the EU as determining the prerequisites for “Europeanness”, coupled with an accession process that entails sweeping domestic reforms, has inevitably prompted

⁶ In this regard Kratochvíl notes that while the original European Neighbourhood Policy initiative consistently talked about the “new EU neighbourhood policy”, thus keeping up the distinction between the “EU” and “Europe”, all documents after 2003 refer to the Neighbourhood Policy and hence make an EU policy identical with a “Europe’s policy”. See Kratochvíl, P. (Autumn 2009) Discursive Constructions of the EU’s Identity in the Neighbourhood: An Equal Among Equals or the Power Centre?, *European Political Economy Review*, 9, p. 11.

⁷ Haukkala, H. (2008) The European Union as a Regional Normative Hegemon: The Case of European Neighbourhood Policy”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60, 9, p. 1604.

⁸ Börzel, T. - Risse, T. (2009) The Rise of (Inter-) Regionalism: The EU as a Model of Regional Integration, Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Political Science Association, Toronto, p. 2.

⁹ Haukkala, op. cit., p. 1603.

tensions between Brussels and Moscow.

Russia, by contrast, acts as an independent great power seeking to secure favourable external conditions for growth on the basis of pragmatism and geoeconomic agreements, rather than on ideological identity. As Gomart points out, “the EU is probably too obsessed by regionalism to the detriment of geopolitics. On the contrary, Russia is possibly too obsessed by geopolitics, to the detriment of regionalism. Their respective obsessions are definitely sources of misunderstanding. It is crucial that both sides find out the proper combination between regionalism and geopolitics in order to think their common neighbourhood with common intellectual tools and appropriate scales”¹⁰.

Russia also claims to be laying the foundation of a new multipolar world order – a system where different poles, with varying weight in different spheres, can interact so that no country can be the most influential in all spheres. The desire to cast Russia as an independent regional pole compels the Kremlin to focus on the country's strategic neighbourhood – famously identified by President Medvedev as Russia's sphere of “privileged interests”. From Russia's point of view, this space is a self-sufficient, cohesive geopolitical unity of a multipolar world¹¹. This vision is a direct expression of that process of re-thinking the post-Cold War international order and mechanisms that Russia is trying to stimulate among its Western partners (for example, in President Medvedev's Draft on a Pan-European Security Treaty). In fact, the near abroad occupies a primary place in all recent national doctrines¹². “The former imperial borderlands of Russia are deemed to be both elements of its power-centre and a cushion to protect Russia itself from undesirable encroachments by other great powers”¹³. At the same time, “creating the image of Russia as an independent pole in the multipolar world can make it easier for the country to re-claim the status of

¹⁰ Gomart, T. (May 2006) *The EU and Russia: The Needed Balance between Geopolitics and Regionalism*, *Russia.Nei.Visions*, 10b.

¹¹ Vorob'ev, V. (2009) *Problemai razvitija i reformirovanija SNG*, Moskva: Vostok-Zapad, p. 158.

¹² Russia's Foreign Policy Concept (2008), the successive five principles of Russia's foreign policy announced by President Medvedev in the aftermath of the August 2008 war with Georgia, National Security Doctrine (2009) and even the leaked in May 2010 Foreign Ministry document titled the “Program for Effective Utilization of Foreign Political Factors on a Systematic Basis for Purposes of Long-Term Development of the Russian Federation”.

¹³ Trenin, D. (October 2009) *Russia's Spheres of Interest, not Influence*, *The Washington Quarterly*, 32, 4, p. 4.

a great power”¹⁴. In this sense, regional stability in the neighbourhood, formation of a regional centre and acceptance of Russia’s status as a great power are interdependent elements of Moscow’s foreign policy. The preservation of Russia’s “special role” in post-Soviet space has become a test-case for the validity of these goals, and precludes the presence of other international actors in the region, such as the EU, which might prevent the configuration of a distinct Russian pole in a multipolar world.

Summing up, Russia’s objective of safeguarding its place in global affairs through the near abroad is set against EU’s aspiration to transform the near abroad. The EU’s soft power is offset by a combination of soft and hard power employed by Russia on a case-by-case basis. This diversity of approaches creates the perception of a zero-sum game, severely limiting alternatives for the newly independent states.

3 The EU policies *vis-à-vis* the post-Soviet space

The two EU policies embracing countries in the shared neighbourhood are the 2004 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the 2009 Eastern Partnership (EaP). Whereas the former policy includes also the Southern rim of the EU, the latter comprises only the Eastern EU neighbours – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Both policies originated from a combination of factors. On the one hand, there was the awareness that further enlargement of the EU was not doable due to its enlargement fatigue and related absorption capacity. On the other hand, the Union had to step up activity on its Eastern borders, because without the establishment of stable and functioning economies on its new periphery, the wealth gap would pose a direct challenge to EU security, meant in the broadest sense¹⁵. Thus, the ENP and EaP were adopted as policies expressing EU val-

¹⁴ Feklyunina, V. (June 2008) Battle for perceptions: Projecting Russia in the West”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60, 4, p. 620.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that the new EU members in Central and Eastern Europe saw the policy clearly as a pre-enlargement strategy and fought vigorously for achieving a membership perspective for their Eastern neighbours. On the contrary, the “old” EU members were aware of the enlargement fatigue and EU absorption capacity and viewed the policy as an enlargement substitute. The EaP policy is a sign of the activism of the new Central and Eastern EU members, especially of Poland. One of its main objectives in the aftermath of the Cold War is indeed the Eastern Dimension, where it is supposed to play a facilitator role in the integration of the EU Eastern neighbours into Western institutions and the EU. This approach stems from the understanding that EU Eastern neighbours need an upgraded support against assertive Russia,

ues and claims, but constrained in their impact by the condition that they did not per se lead to membership. In this sense, the ENP and the EaP are attempts to devise an alternative to new enlargements. Both of them are set up as highly asymmetric bilateral relationships between the EU and its neighbours. Although the latter are supposed to adopt the *acquis communautaire* to prove their Europeanness and readiness to accede the Union (principle of conditionality), in fact, the EU unilaterally determines the normative agenda: objectives and means are non-negotiable.

Although the EU asserts the principle of “joint partnership”, and states that “both the ENP partner country and the EU can hold each other accountable for living up to their mutual commitments”¹⁶, in practice the mechanisms in place do not provide partner countries with any ways to hold the EU accountable. Thus, the joint partnership is transformed into an imbalanced partnership, where the partner countries are supposed to carry out reforms, while the EU unilaterally decides whether and what kind of reward to grant them. “Unlike in the case of enlargement, the ENP would seem to reveal the uglier face of the Union’s normative power as one based on domination. The exercise of power is understood as a form of domination when it rests on the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgment dictate”¹⁷. The perception of the EU as a dominant power imposing its will over another sovereign region, however, is at odds with the EU’s view of itself as a soft, normative power, dealing with other actors without recourse to force¹⁸.

One consequence of the above stated conditions has been that, since the beginning, the ENP has displayed a weak and inefficient leverage (only the prospect of membership is deemed a powerful stimulus for reforms and domestic transformation). As a result, the claims of being a pan-European centre of integration for its Eastern neighbours were not supported by a corresponding implementation mechanism.

The EU lacked not only the leverage it needed to change its neighbours’ behaviour, but also a power to engage with them. Moreover, the ENP ran

which so far has not been offered by the “old” EU members, who are instead Russia’s partners. See Ozbay F. - Aras, B. (Spring 2008) Polish-Russian Relations: History, Geography and Geopolitics, *East European Quarterly*, XLII, p. 35.

¹⁶ See COM(2007) 774 Final. Communication from the Commission. A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy, Brussels, December 5, 2007.

¹⁷ Haukkala, op. cit., pp. 1612-1613.

¹⁸ Kratochvíl, op. cit.

the risk to result in a “superficial transposition of legal norms and institutions [that] would not only not have the desired benefits for the economy but, more damagingly, would strengthen the prospect of simulated reforms”¹⁹. The EU approach to its Eastern rim thus exploited the methods of past accessions of the Central and Eastern Europe countries, while excluding any prospect of accession itself. Therefore it inevitably encounters a fundamental problem of inconsistency with the post-Soviet space reality. For example, neither the ENP nor the EaP allocate sufficient funding nor they address controversial security issues on the territories of the Eastern neighbourhood such as ethno-territorial conflicts and secessionist entities²⁰. Some analysts hence conclude that “The EU will fail in projecting its influence – its much-vaunted soft power – if it does not prove able to efficiently help resolve conflicts in its neighbourhood that undermine its multilateral initiatives in the East”²¹. It becomes clear why EU’s regional stance is a test-case for EU’s broader political agenda

There are two main differences between the ENP and the EaP. The first is the re-definition and strengthening of bilateral relations (the so-called bilateral track) with those Eastern neighbours that showed real progress in implementing the *acquis*. For them the ENP’s political and economic integration tools (Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and the establishment of free trade areas) are to be gradually replaced with Association Agreements, deep and comprehensive free trade area and visa liberalization²². The value of the bilateral track stems also from the fact that it creates conditions for multi-speed integration in accordance with an

¹⁹ Wolczuk, K. (February 2008) Ukraine and its relations with the EU in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, in “Ukraine: Quo Vadis?”, *Chaillot Paper*, 108, p. 109.

²⁰ To some extent the absence of a security component can be explained by the presence of NATO and by the fact that according to the EU vision security and stability should be ensured through sharing the same political, economic and social values and norms.

²¹ A strategy for EU foreign policy, ISS Report No. 7, (June 2010), p. 37.

²² The Association Agreements confirm the positive conditionality inherited from the ENP and most of them are supposed to be legally binding with enhanced system of monitoring. Deep and comprehensive free trade areas promise Eastern neighbours access to the EU internal market but at present such outlook appears rather remote for most of the countries in the region. The EU has also envisioned a visa facilitation process, more comprehensive consular coverage and common visa application centres in return for adoption of readmission agreements and migration policy reforms by the partner countries. Interestingly, however, in this sector the EU started adopting the vague and ambiguous term of “visa liberalization” instead of the previous more concrete reference to “visa-free travel regime”. In addition to this tendency most EU members seem reluctant to offer the prospect of scrapping visas completely, even in the case of frontrunner states such as Ukraine.

individual country's level of improvement. The more advanced EaP countries could thus serve as an inspiration for those lagging behind.

As Börzel and Risse observe, the EU regional policies of promotion of norms and values are based on emulation and competitive isomorphism, with the EU spurring competition among countries seeking integration in the EU²³. However, the lack of membership perspective and related unwillingness to respond to the specific security and ethno-national challenges arising in the region, have resulted in slowing down the reform process. It is symptomatic that during the 2010 presidential election in Ukraine, a country considered as a leader in regional European integration, analysts now detect a wave of popular disenchantment with the EU²⁴. This EU-scepticism has led many to doubt whether at present a membership perspective may encourage reforms at all. In the absence of full EU integration, there are no rewards for the successful implementation of reforms and no sanctions for abandoning such commitments. The consequence is that nourished hopes for EU integration, largely perceived as alternative to Russia's regional dominance, have blocked the growth of regional integrationist potential and have stirred up antagonism with Moscow.

The second difference of the EaP is the introduction, along with the above mentioned bilateral track, of a multilateral one²⁵. It is an operational structure providing practical support for both high-level political and non-state actors and opening up a number of channels for socialization. The four multilateral thematic platforms comprise democracy and good governance, economic integration, energy security, and people-to-people contacts. The EaP also launched an EU-Eastern partners Parliamentary Assembly (EURONEST) and an EaP Civil Society Forum. The EaP's multilateral dimension may be assessed as an attempt to involve and empower non-state agents vis-à-vis their governments and make them equal partners with the EU at both national and regional levels. In this sense the EU is trying to diversify its attention from the standard governmental focus towards civil society and other local communities (where it lacks a real impact) in the

²³ Börzel and Risse, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁴ Kulyk, V. (December 2009) The End of 'Euro-romanticism' in Ukraine. The Origins of Anti-Western Sentiments in the Presidential Campaign, SWP Comments.

²⁵ In the past the EU did not support any regional grouping in the former Soviet space. It only indirectly backed regional cooperation in transport and energy sectors through technical assistance programmes such as TRACECA and INOGATE and encouraged individual partners to cooperate regionally within the margins of the ENP Action Plans. In addition, in 2007 a regional cooperation initiative for the Black Sea region, called Black Sea Synergy, has been inaugurated by Brussels.

Eastern Neighborhood. The EU is searching for ways to boost political, social and economic cooperation with the states included in the area despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that its diluted leverage prevents a deeper engagement with the Eastern rim. But while this is certainly an appreciable effort, for the foreseeable future these non-state actors will continue to be disadvantaged compared to national governments.

Finally, the EaP also envisions a third country's involvement on a case-by-case basis in concrete projects and activities of EaP thematic platforms. The allusion is to Russia, although there is no consensus among EU member states on how to engage Russia. The inclusion of third countries is in fact an initial, crucial and necessary step towards cooperation between the EU and Russia in the former Soviet Union space which may range from energy issues (modernization of energy transport grid) to security (see for example the recently proposed by Russian President Medvedev and German Chancellor Merkel EU-Russia Political and Security Committee)²⁶. Such cooperation seeks to diminish the perception of a zero-sum game.

All in all, the EU has to define better its role in the region as its current incentives remain too distant for their beneficiaries. As yet, EU assistance seems insufficient to compensate national stakeholders for what they feel would be lost through reforms that bring them closer to the EU or to encourage cooperation with Brussels at the expense of traditional foreign policy regional alliances.

4 Russia and the near abroad

Russia's policy of forming a regional power-centre in the post-Soviet space and becoming its leading force comprises two elements: achieving closer integration with specific countries and exerting greater influence over the entire region.

This entails promoting integration in two directions: economic as well as

²⁶ The Russian-German Memorandum envisages a new body bringing together EU Foreign Relations Chief Catherine Ashton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to "exchange views on current issues of international politics and security". The Committee should also "develop guidelines for joint civil/military operations" and "make recommendations on the various conflicts and crisis situations, to the resolution of which Russia and EU are contributing within relevant international formats". Another important point of the document zooms in on the frozen conflict of Transnistria foreseeing "joint activities of Russia and the EU, which will ensure a seamless transition from the current situation to the final stage".

security issues. These vectors match the key thesis of the supporters of regionalism in Russia, who urge the country to create its own macro-region within Eurasia in order to facilitate Russia's integration into the global economic system and reaffirmation of its international prestige²⁷. From an economic perspective, they view the post-Soviet market as an extension of the Russia's market and it is necessary for the latter's stable development, and for the elimination of its shortcomings. The economic integration of the two therefore refers to the creation of a customs union, a single economic space of leading states, and a monetary union.

A driving factor in the restoration of Russia's economic and financial might is maximizing oil and gas profits²⁸ ("the country can preserve its independence only if its economy becomes one of the most developed in the world"²⁹) and, to facilitate this, the expansion of Russian capital in the near abroad. While relying on its economic advantages, Russia will also try to gain these countries' political loyalty and to maintain the social ties connecting Russian citizens with the citizens of neighbouring countries. Such an economic strategy should prevent a scenario under which small states become an easy target for foreign political intervention, which might have negative implications for Russia itself.

Establishing Russian pre-eminence throughout the former Soviet Union territory is central to Russia's security interests. Most of Russia's neighbours are seen by Moscow as not stable or strong enough to maintain independent foreign and security policies. Moscow believes that, left to their own devices, these states will find themselves victims of instability and caught in webs of transnational crime, terrorism and interethnic, inter-confessional militancy, potentially posing an ever greater threat to Russian security. Alternatively, they might be pulled into the orbits of other major powers, a scenario that does not serve Russian interests either. From a security standpoint, therefore, the near abroad constitutes a buffer zone around Russia suitable for establishing military bases along Russia's perimeter and preventing attempts by the West to integrate the region or to even only alter its military balance (NATO). To this end, Russia aspires to

²⁷ Kosikova, L. *Ekonomicheskie strategii Rossii na postsovetском prostranstve* (Russia's Economic Strategies in the Post-Soviet Space), available at: www.econorus.org/consp/files/8g82.doc.

²⁸ In fact, in the 1990s and early 2000s Russia ceased to exist as an industrial power, becoming instead a "pipeline economy".

²⁹ Evans, A.B. JR. (2008) *Putin's Legacy and Russia's Identity*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60, 6, p. 902.

create a single regional defence policy, with a collective security system at its heart.

This integrationist project, however, does not imply an imperialistic design or a restoration of a union analogous to the USSR, as is often claimed in the West. During the 1990s, Russia promoted the CIS seeking to position itself as the centre of the post-Soviet space. Although former Russian President Putin has praised CIS's crucial role in the "civilized divorce" of the former members of the USSR demise, beyond being a forum for political dialogue, it seems to have largely exhausted its potential. The CIS decline was further deepened when a number of CIS states started to resist Russia's leadership in it. This situation induced Moscow to significantly re-adjust its regional strategy. It has abandoned the CIS's universal approach to cooperation in the post-Soviet space, and opted instead for strengthening multilateral integration within smaller, existing or newly founded, regional organizations, where Russia can rely on the loyalty of its partners in the pursuit of common goals and interests. Unlike the EU's integration strategy, which is governed by a single centre and by a uniform set of accession criteria, Russia has developed a relatively sophisticated approach to integration, which includes:

- a focus on specific areas of integration, and purposes that are complementary to one another;
- a precise configuration of partnerships with key neighbouring states. Such partnership often leads to a regional core of states, from which Russia then seeks to promote the integrationist potential of a given organization³⁰;
- whenever necessary, an exchange of multilateral integration for bilateral interaction³¹, energy politics being an example of the latter³², and,
- efforts tailored to encompasses only those parts of the post-Soviet space which are deemed fundamental for the defence of Russia's national interests. Alternative integrationist projects are therefore seen as disrupting regional balances and undermining Russia's security interests.

³⁰ Usually this core is constituted by the most advanced regional economies emphasizing the fragmented and uneven economic level of development of the countries in the region.

³¹ Libman, A. (December 2009) Models of economic integration – Russian and post-Soviet experience, MPRA Paper No. 19434, pp. 261-264.

³² Moscow's energy politics is a bilateral level tool (so far none of the organizations above has developed an operative multilateral energy platform) that aims to keep a country interdependent with Russia. In case the two countries are members states of a multilateral organization this bilateral mechanism reinforces multilateral integration.

The three main organizations through which Russia pursues these objectives today are: the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)³³. Durable engagement within the framework of these organizations is expected to provide Russia with the necessary infrastructures, resources in specific sectors, and security mechanisms to ensure its future competitiveness and stability in a multipolar world.

EurAsEC was created in 2000 and is Russia's main mechanism for promoting regional economic integration counterbalancing the US and Chinese presence in the area. Its membership includes Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, along with Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine as observers. It mainly focuses on deepening economic cooperation and integration with the ultimate goal of establishing a single economic space, and mechanisms for more effectively coordinating the economic and social reforms needed for integration into world economy. The peculiarity of EurAsEC economic integration is the predominant attention paid to micro-level customs coordination, as well as cooperation in sectors such as transportation, energy, labour migration, and agriculture³⁴. Despite various delays and setbacks during the last decade, on January 1, 2010 EurAsEC succeeded in establishing a customs union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. These three regional economies form a nucleus, which is expected to lead to the formation in 2012 of a single economic space and to attract other EurAsEC members to join the initiative.

Analysts note that, in contrast to the declining integration within the CIS space, this core done quite well at promoting a higher level of integration³⁵. Although many have interpreted the customs union as a way of opposing

³³ It is beyond the scope of this article to thoroughly analyze the evolution of these organizations. Instead, their principal features will be sketched out in order to demonstrate Russia's regional integrationist stance.

³⁴ This integration includes completing the formalization of a free trade regime, creating a unified customs tariff and a unified system of non-tariff regulation measures; laying down the common rules for trade in goods and services and their access to internal markets; introducing a unified procedure for foreign exchange controls; creating a common unified system of customs regulation; creating equal conditions for production and entrepreneurial activities; forming a common market for transportation services; forming a common energy market; creating equal conditions for access by foreign investment to the parties' markets; harmonizing national legislation, and so on.

³⁵ Vinokurov, E. (2009) The System of Indicators of Eurasian Integration, Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA) Paper No. 20914, p. 104.

the EU's regional policies³⁶, and others have underlined the inherent difficulties in joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a custom union³⁷, the realization of this project is proof of the success of Moscow's pragmatically oriented policies to bind two of the strongest post-Soviet economies into a Russia-led economic zone.

Another regional organization – the SCO – deals with economic integration but from a different angle. The SCO stems from the 1996 Shanghai-5 group (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan), which in 2001 welcomed Uzbekistan and founded the SCO. Contrary to other organizations, where Russia tends to dominate member-states, China's presence in the SCO compels Russia to harmonize and balance its interests with the Chinese ones, especially in Central Asia. Its key areas of cooperation and integration are political, economic and military. The political arena deals with the preservation of national political regimes, and resistance to Western criticism over insufficient democratic commitments. Unlike China, Russia does not emphasize SCO's economic integration and the establishment of a free-trade area and a common market (which would open CIS markets to

³⁶ “Moscow simply could not ignore the emergence of a contending European project – the plans to create a free trade zone affiliated with the EU and conceived in the format of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative. [Therefore] against the background of Russia's yet another failure in getting membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the political rationality of an efficacious regional integration initiative [such as the Customs Union] has apparently grown”. See Suzdaltsev, A. (January-March 2010) *Politics Ahead of the Economy. Risks and Prospects of the EurAsEC Customs Union, Russia in Global Affairs*, 1. Moreover, this conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the EurAsEC customs union became a top priority in spring 2008, when the EU announced its Eastern Partnership policy involving countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

³⁷ These analysts emphasize that negotiation with WTO as a customs union, as announced by the Union's leaders, entails a particularly complex process. For example, a new WTO Working Party on the accession has to be formed. “This new Working Party would have to be convinced that the conditions of agreement would be applied throughout all three countries. These commitments include, but are not limited to: commitments on bound tariffs; rights of foreign investors in services; technical barriers to trade; sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures; trade related investment measure; agricultural trade distorting subsidies, and intellectual property commitments. This is sufficiently difficult that no customs union has acceded to the WTO, only individual countries. But there is another problem. Since Belarus is far behind Russia in its WTO accession negotiations, simultaneous accession would mean that Russia would have to wait until Belarus is ready to join the Organization. Furthermore, the chief negotiator for Kazakhstan has implicitly acknowledged that the customs union tariff will violate commitments Kazakhstan has made in its bilateral market access agreements on its WTO accession”. See Tarr, D. - Volchkova, N. (March 2010) *Russian Trade and Foreign Direct Investment Policy at the Crossroads*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5255, pp. 13-14.

Chinese goods). It would prefer that the lead in this be taken by EurAsEC. Instead, Russia is promoting cooperation on large-scale projects such as: increasing energy efficiency, developing green energy technologies, using renewable energy sources, ensuring energy security, introducing innovative technologies, and launching joint transport projects.

The proposal for a SCO Energy Club, launched in December 2006 is still high on Russia's agenda. Its purpose is to transform the SCO into a self-sufficient energy structure (producer-supplier-customer) in the Eurasian space. Russia also promotes its security interests through the Shanghai Organization. SCO's security dimension is characterized by the absence of bloc-type and military-political components similar to the CSTO ones. The challenges and threats originating both internally (in Central Asia) and externally (in Afghanistan) relate mainly to non-traditional threats, which range from transnational crime and drug trafficking, to natural disasters, water and energy problems, environmental and food security.

The SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Centre (operating since 2004), and the various military and anti-terrorist exercises held by the SCO since 2002, have contributed to strengthening the SCO anti-terrorist cooperation. Moreover, the Anti-Terrorist Centre is working on the harmonization of anti-terrorist legislation in the member states, compiling common lists of terrorist organizations and key terrorists, and tracking the financing of terrorist organizations. The fight against terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism (dubbed "the three evils" in the SCO) is a major rationale for the Organization's existence. In late 2007, the SCO and the CSTO signed a Memorandum of Understanding providing for consultations and information exchange, joint cooperation programmes and an intensification of interaction on the fight against terrorism.

The SCO's security agenda is to some extent complementary to the CSTO one. The latter, however, is a military alliance founded in 2002. Currently its members include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It differs from SCO in focusing on traditional military cooperation. In fact, Article 2 of the Collective Security Treaty states that "In case of a threat to security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of one or several Member States, or a threat to international peace and security, Member States will immediately put into action the mechanism of joined consultations with the aim to coordinate their positions and take measures to eliminate the threat that has emerged". Article 4 stipulates: "In case an act of aggression is committed against any of the Member States, all the others Member States will provide it with necessary assistance, including military assistance, as well as provide support with any means at their disposal in exercise of the right to collective defence, in accordance

with Article 51 of the UN Charter”. Moreover, the CSTO endorses the establishment of a collective security system and a joint military infrastructure. It trains military staff and specialists for the armed forces, furnishes the latter with the necessary arms and military technology, and helps to coordinate the fight against international terrorism and extremism, illicit drug and arms trafficking, organized transnational crime, illegal migration and other threats to the security of its member states.

The CSTO developed against the background of Ukrainian and Georgian aspirations to join NATO, and is part of Russia’s attempt to safeguard the region from external intrusions, especially those designed to re-arrange current military alliances. Russia is apparently anxious that political elites in countries like Georgia may provoke NATO intervention in regional disputes. From Moscow’s perspective, in situations such as the August 2008 conflict in the Caucasus, a military reaction under the auspices of the CSTO would be more legitimate and practical. In line with this, the Kremlin has justified some of its military bases in the near abroad as contributions to the CSTO. The deployment of Russian troops and military bases across the post-Soviet space can be seen as reinforcing multilateral integration and interdependence.

An important step ahead in the evolution of the CSTO has been the long-awaited establishment in early 2009 of a Collective Operational Reaction Force or CORF. It is intended to transform, and considerably expand, the existing rapid reaction force, creating a permanent combat-ready force for intervention in crisis situations on the territory of CSTO member states³⁸. The CORF can also be used to repulse military aggression, conduct anti-terrorist operations, fight trans-national crime and drug trafficking, and assist in the handling of natural disasters. President Medvedev has stressed that the CORF should be “adequate in size, effective, armed with the most modern weapons and must be on par with NATO forces”³⁹. This suggests that CSTO should be developed to the level of NATO, so as to make any NATO expansion in the post-Soviet space redundant. Yet “Russia’s desire to transform organizations such as the CSTO into viable regional structures should be

³⁸ The region is already covered by a CSTO peacekeeping force and recently a CIS integrated air defence network has been created. The latter is designed to safeguard the airspace of its members from missile attacks by means of coordinated early-warning system and to promote the establishment of three air defence networks: East European (Belarus and Russia), Caucasian (Armenia and Russia), and Central Asian one (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia).

³⁹ Felgenhauer, P. (2009) Moscow Struggling to Transform CSTO into a Russian NATO, Eurasia Daily Monitor, 6, 107.

viewed not only through the prism of rivalry with NATO and the US, but also as a contribution to the creation of effective toolkit that could be used in the vast space 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok'. Russia does not want to change the result of the Cold War, but rather to re-think the notion of 'European security' in order to bring it into line with the realities of the 21st century"⁴⁰. In other words, Moscow regards itself as a proactive great power that has the duty to contribute to the definition of regional and international (security) politics along with other global players (especially in a moment when NATO acknowledges the need for its collaboration in Afghanistan).

Finally some have drawn the attention to the fact that the creation of a common security space within the framework of CSTO "implies the formation of a single economic space among its member-states, providing for the material resources required for common actions in the military-political sphere. It is not by chance that the leaders of CSTO and EurAsEC declare their desire to proceed towards a deeper level of integration. The key purpose is to ensure an interaction between the two organizations, namely safeguarding the security of the single economic space"⁴¹. The overlapping membership of the two organizations allows such a scenario, which was confirmed at the dual – CSTO and EurAsEC – summit in June 2006, which affirmed that "developing closer cooperation between EurAsEC and the CSTO is one of the most important tasks, which will make it possible to protect integration processes from various threats"⁴².

Russia's second objective in regional policies is maintaining influence over the post-Soviet space. This is understood as a challenge to the country to become a more attractive and self-sufficient centre for the region in the mid- to long term, to be the source or provider of economic and social progress, of innovation, research, technologies, and investments in accordance with each country's developmental needs. This is particularly demanding goal now, when the global economic crisis has unveiled Russia's primary economic weakness, i.e. the urgent need to modernize its economy and raise the level of technological innovation in industrial processes in order to sustain its future economic and political prosperity. To create an

⁴⁰ Lukyanov, F. (2009) Rethinking Security in Greater Europe, in Krastev, I., Leonard, M., Wilson, A. (eds) (2009) *What Does Russia Think?*, European Council on Foreign Relations Report, September (London: European Council on Foreign Relations), p. 59.

⁴¹ Vorob'ev, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

⁴² Socor, V. (2006) CSTO Summit: Military Bloc not yet Cemented, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 3, 125.

attractive, politically powerful and durable integrationist regional architecture fits the general idea that small states should be prevented from becoming weaker and targets of destabilizing transnational forces. Russia therefore seeks to develop a set of mechanisms and resources that will allow it to replace the EU as the source of attractiveness and prestige in the region⁴³.

The new design for closer integration and interdependence outlined above, and the support expressed by Moscow for the concept of a multipolar world, are seen as steps towards the accomplishment of this goal. The “Partnership for Modernization” between the EU and Russia may be interpreted as a means to reach those technological, industrial, financial and normative advanced standards that will boost Russian economy and transform the country into an autonomous centre able to adapt and transmit those standards throughout the region. It is at this level that Russia views the EU as a competitor in relation with the countries in the post-Soviet space. This explains why the Kremlin has been so reluctant to involve directly the EU as part of its regional policies⁴⁴. Moscow now has to develop its appeal and strengthen the confidence of its neighbours in its policies. What hampers Russia-led integrationist initiatives most is the negative attitude – a Soviet legacy – that some states display towards Moscow. Some of them tend to see Russia’s initiatives as temporary, compared to the EU integration, which seems to them more stable and hence preferable. Gaining their trust through continuous and effective dialogue is the only way to offset the influence of other actors (China, EU, Turkey, US) in the region. The very fact that, unlike the EU, this dialogue is not premised on fundamentally changing the nature of the political regimes in those countries, provides the Kremlin with considerable flexibility and advantages.

5 Future scenarios

There is a common agreement among scholars that both the EU’s and

⁴³ The very existence and defence of the concept of Russia’s sovereign democracy can be viewed as an example of this approach, i.e. as a way to “offer” to its neighbours a political model of governance, which resembles the Western one but is tailored to the regional post-Soviet space peculiarities, which Russia claims to comprehend better than the EU.

⁴⁴ On the contrary, the introduction of a multilateral track in the economic sphere of the EaP shows openness towards a trilateral cooperation on specific projects with Russia.

Russia's integrationist strategies display varying degrees of progress. No significant reforms, as prescribed in EU neighbourhood policies, have been implemented and no substantial change in the EU's attitude towards its Eastern neighbourhood has been achieved. The EU continues to demonstrate a lack of thorough knowledge of the post-Soviet space, and its policy, rather than being shaped in accordance with specific regional needs, relies on the integration of Central and Baltic Europe as a model.

The EU's appeal has not been strong enough to motivate its Eastern neighbours' commitment to implement the *acquis communautaire*. At the same time, the EU also suffers from internal disagreements with regard to whether and when to enlarge (Which are Europe's borders? What countries should be integrated? On what conditions and criteria?, etc.). The prospects of future enlargements are increasingly uncertain and gloomy. Thus, European integration is still at a crossroads. Moreover, the EU does not foresee any mechanisms of co-existence with other regional groupings, such as EurAsEC, which are important for both Russia and the region itself. This weakens the viability of Brussels' long-term strategy in the region, and generates antagonism within the region.

In the case of Russia's policies, real integration has often been impeded by the disintegration of the post-Soviet space, and by fears of Russian neo-imperialism. Opposition to Russian policies was not so much as an opposition to integration, but a way to undermine Russia's impact in the region. This circumstance has delayed advancements in Russia's plans, but some progress has been achieved despite this (for example the Customs Union and CORF). Furthermore, recent developments in Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia may give further impetus to an alignment with Russia's integrationist politics. In any case, this process is far from being completed.

So, what will the dynamics of EU and Russia look like? Will they be inspired by reciprocal accusations of attempts to carve out spheres of influence over an area of interests of the other, or by cooperation? The EU has always exercised influence, meant as attractiveness, over its Eastern neighbours, though this influence has never been converted into any kind of control over regional trends. On the contrary, it is Russia that to some extent exercises control through a combination of soft power (social ties, the Russian language, Russia's media presence in the region, its mediation in regional frozen conflicts) and hard power (military bases, energy politics, and the outcome of the August 2008 war with Georgia), but it still lacks sufficient attractiveness to ensure the effectiveness of its policies. Thus, the EU continues to represent a source of competitive dynamics in the post-Soviet space. The enlargement fatigue and the neighbourhood policies that preclude the possibility of membership greatly weaken its leverage. In addition,

the current economic crisis makes future accession even less likely. EU policies toward Eastern Europe seem to be in a cul-de-sac because they are unable to offer more attractive options in the economy and security sectors, and become a stakeholder in the internal transformation of the ENP countries.

This offers Moscow a chance to pursue its own regional design of becoming an attractive and influential, regional power-centre in a multipolar world. Its success, however, will depend on its ability to maintain economic growth pace, restore confidence in neighbouring countries and implement its own domestic agenda for modernization. In other words, Russia will need to maintain its activism both in relation to the EU, to achieve the necessary higher standards and technologies, and in relation to the countries of the regions, to which it should seek to transfer these “resources” in order to strengthen regional cohesion. It is also worth noting that, besides the EU impasse, there has recently been another very positive element for Russia – the recent “reset” of relations with Poland, previously a prominent adversary of the Kremlin’s plans for regional integration. Such a change may have broader positive impact within the EU internal balances and policies towards Russia. Brussels seems to have come to the conclusion that promoting multilateral dialogue and synergies in the region that include Russia, are more effective than addressing regional problems by itself. As a European think tank has noted: “The focus on bilateral relations has made it difficult for the [EU neighbourhood policies] to act as a mediator in the unresolved conflicts in the region. If it wants to take on this role in the future, it should seek for ways to engage constructively with all parties to the conflicts”⁴⁵.

Cooperation and coordination with the EU should not be ruled out, but to be successful they must proceed on the basis of equality. Some Russian scholars speak of the creation of a pan-European integrated space comprising the EU, the states of the common neighbourhood and Russia⁴⁶. They point to sectors such as foreign policies, energy, technological and economic cooperation, and humanitarian, cultural and educational spheres as areas of cooperation⁴⁷. In December 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov

⁴⁵ ISS Report No. 7, op. cit., p. 43.

⁴⁶ The assumption is that a stronger EU-Russia relationship will be capable to oppose the US and China while its failure will mean both EU and Russia’s marginalization in world affairs.

⁴⁷ Karaganov, S. (July 2010) *Soiuz Evropai: Poslednij shans?* (A Union of Europe: The Last Chance), *Russia in Global Affairs*, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/Soyuz-Evropy-poslednij-shans-14943>. Trenin too draws similar conclusions. See Trenin, *Russia’s Spheres of Interest, not Influence*, op. cit., p. 21.

declared that Moscow is ready to build a common economic space with the EU if every party is treated equally⁴⁸. More recently, a similar vision of a “harmonious economic community stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok” in reaction to the economic crisis was put forward by premier Putin. As the European Union Institute for Security Studies notes, “a new European regional order would be an enormous contribution to international peace. However, this is not an endeavour that the EU can assume alone but one that requires the full participation of Russia, as well as all states directly involved. In fact, this is the natural conclusion of the process of building a united and free Europe that was started in 1989”⁴⁹. Such coordination could help to overcome the futile policies of “competing integration” that still persist in the former Soviet Union area.

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⁴⁸ See <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/91033.php>.

⁴⁹ ISS Report No. 7, op. cit., p. 37.

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Tomislava Y. Penkova

Tomislava Y. Penkova is a Research Fellow on Russia and EU Eastern neighbours at ISPI (Institute for International Political Studies), Milan and Assistant Professor at the Catholic University of Milan (Italy). Her main interests include Russia's foreign policy, Russia-US relations, Russia's policies in the post-Soviet area, and Ukraine's foreign policy. She is currently working on a project on the EU-Russia relationship and its impact on the common neighbourhood.

tomipenkova@hotmail.com

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