EU-Russia relations: Moving beyond the conflict-cooperation dichotomy?

Abstract

EU-Russia relations have often been considered in scholarship to be governed by the dichotomy between conflict and cooperation. Cooperation has often coexisted or overlapped with conflict on a significant number of issues and policy areas, making relations between the two actors very complex. This article explores the dichotomy between conflict and cooperation, highlighting the way it has influenced the two actors' policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. It posits that the difference between *what the EU says and what it does* is desired and perpetuated both by Russia, the EU's member states and the countries within the Eastern Neighbourhood. Simultaneously, Moscow is unable to formulate a clear strategy for the Eastern Neighbourhood, which makes its approach geared at providing short term incentives to corrupt politicians in the countries in the region not sustainable in the long term. In doing so, the article also aims to enquire into the potential for EU-Russia relations to move beyond the well-known conflict-cooperation dichotomy.

Keywords: EU, Russia, conflict-cooperation dichotomy, Eastern Neighbourhood, strategic partnership.

Introduction

EU-Russia relations have often been considered in scholarship to be governed by the dichotomy between conflict and cooperation. Rhetorically both actors have articulated a discourse that praises a series of common European values and economic interests which have the potential of enhancing cooperation. On the other hand, the EU's support for democracy in its Eastern Neighbourhood has on many occasions collided with Moscow's preference for more authoritarian regimes. Nonetheless, the EU (European Union) has been less willing than Russia

to practically involve in the Eastern Neighbourhood and provide short term solutions for the challenges that the countries in the region face. Consequently, the Union's approach towards Russia and its Eastern Neighbourhood has been characterised – as with many other policy areas – by the large discrepancy between *what it says and what it does*. This article explores the dichotomy between conflict and cooperation in EU-Russia relations, highlighting the way it has impacted the two actors' policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. It posits that the difference between *what the EU says and what it does* is desired and perpetuated both by Russia, the EU's member states and the countries within the Eastern Neighbourhood. In doing so, the article also aims to enquire into the potential for EU-Russia relations to move beyond the well known conflict-cooperation dichotomy.

Cooperation has often coexisted or overlapped with conflict on a significant number of issues and policy areas, making relations between the two actors very complex. Big member states such as Germany, France or Italy have found more incentives (in varying degrees) to deal individually with Russia and ignore the common interest of the Union, while Moscow has tried to get as much as possible from each bilateral relationship. This dichotomy has often plagued the EU's endeavour to promote stability and economic development in the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Even more, the distant prospect of EU membership and the influence of Russia have made the states from the Eastern Neighbourhood open to gamble between Moscow's short term solutions and the EU's potential economic and democratic benefits. The dissonance between the EU's discourse and its practical actions has not only undermined the Union's common approach towards Moscow or the success of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), but has also *de facto* legitimised Russia's bid for having the Eastern Neighbourhood under its sphere of influence. At the same time, Russian analysts have argued that due to ever present contrast between conflict and cooperation in EU-Russia relations, Moscow is unable to formulate a clear strategy for the Eastern Neighbourhood, which makes its approach geared at providing short term incentives to corrupt politicians in the countries in the region not sustainable in the long term. The next section of the article explores the conflict-cooperation dichotomy, followed by a discussion of the way in which it has influenced the approach of both the EU and Russia towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. The final part of the article discusses the prospects for the actors to move beyond the conflict-cooperation dichotomy by looking at a series of developments in their relations.

Conflict and cooperation dichotomy

Further integration between the EU and Russia seems to be stalled by the 'peaceful coexistence' in which both actors are firmly entrenched (Sakwa, 2012a, 323). Conversely, periods of cooperation have succeeded or overlapped with subsequent periods of conflict, increasing in this way the complex character of EU-Russia relations, and making the analyst's effort of understanding them even more difficult but also worthwhile. With the last enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the EU and Russia have become increasingly interdependent and in a continuous struggle for more influence in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Most scholars would contend that the eastwards advance of the EU has brought about an intense conflictual period in its relations with Moscow (Leonard and Popescu, 2008; Hopf, 2008; Haukkala, 2008; Light, 2008; Popescu and Wilson, 2009; Tardieu, 2009; Pardo Sierra, 2011; Larsen, 2012). Not only the competition for more influence in the Eastern Neighbourhood, but also Europe's dependency on Russian gas are considered to be the main factors contributing to the increasing conflictual nature of EU-Russia relations. Together with these, a clash of identities and interpretations of sovereignty has been a fertile ground for the appearance of various misunderstandings which have deepened the conflict. While the EU can be seen as a postmodern actor which has elevated itself from the constraints of sovereignty and nationalism, Russia has questioned the possibility of convergence with the Union on these terms. On the other hand, Russia has been perceived as possessing a pre-modern identity which predisposes it to a positive and objective interpretation of international law and state sovereignty (Vasilyan, 2010, 89). Nonetheless, both Russia and the EU are in a process of defining their international actorness and foreign policy identities (DeBardeleben, 2012). The next two subsections focus separately on the emergence and presence of cooperation and conflict in EU-Russia relations.

Cooperation: Developing a strategic partnership

One of the cornerstones of the EU's approach towards Russia is the strategic partnership it already has or wants to develop with it. From the Russian perspective, the strategic partnership is predicated on shared European interests, culture and history: 'the fact that European culture in the broad sense spans the area to the Pacific coast is definitely Russia's historic achievement'

(Lavrov, 2013, 6). According to Allen and Smith (2012, 3) such a partnership involves constructing a framework where both the EU and Russia's preferences are taken into account and have an equal say. While undoubtedly the EU shares its most special partnership with the United States, Russia has been viewed as an essential partner due to its presence in the Union's Eastern Neighbourhood. Various trade-offs have influenced the EU's strategic approach towards Russia: on the one hand, Moscow has been urged to ratify the Energy Charter and engage on a path to economic and political modernisation, while on the other, the EU has supported Russia's bid for WTO membership and recognition as a major actor in the international arena. At the same time, in its relations with the EU, but also with other global players, Russia has sought to be treated as an equal actor. For example, the Russian 2009 national security strategy emphasised that 'Russia has overcome the consequences of the systemic crisis at the end of the 20th century. All in all, the prerequisites have been established for the transformation of the Russian Federation into one of the leading great powers' (quoted in Kropatcheva, 2012, 32).

The EU's strategic partnership with Russia is built around the mutual interests they share in a number of key areas. Cooperation in these areas is considered to have a positive effect on the social, political and economic stability of the Union's Eastern Neighbourhood and worldwide (European Commission, 2007, 3). These are captured by the four Common Spaces of cooperation which were formalised at the St. Petersburg Summit in May 2003: a Common Economic Space; a Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice; a Space of co-operation in the field of External Security; and a Common Space for Research and Education, including cultural aspects. In relation to the first common space, the EU has always acknowledged that it has the upper hand as *Russia needs the EU,* because the Union is the primary market for Russian exports of raw material – especially energy (European Commission, 2008a). Here the EU aims to promote trade and investment, increase opportunities for economic operators, promote Russia's modernisation, economic integration, enhance the competiveness of EU goods and services on the Russian markets, and reinforce and provide new thrust to economic reforms (European Commission, 2009b, 40).

The EU has been a long time ardent supporter of Russia's membership to the WTO. According to the European Commission, Russia's accession provides the grounds for the opening up of a new article for trade and economic relations with Moscow (European Commission, 2008c). From

as early as 2005, Russia's integration in the global trading system has been seen by the Union as an essential step forward in fostering the innovation and growth of the global market. Former Commissioner for Trade Mandelson also underscored that the EU has played an important role in this process, as in the coming years, 'the technology, management know-how and foreign investment coming out of Europe will be important elements of Russia's success' (Mandelson, 2008). Although there was an all-round agreement that the Union's economic relationship with Russia would be strengthened by the latter's accession to the WTO, bilateral negotiations were prolonged in what could be perceived as a strategy employed by the EU in order to gain the upper hand and more leverage in its interactions with Moscow. It was not until December 2011 at Geneva that Russia was promised WTO membership, prompting the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton to praise the mutual efforts of both the Union and Moscow in achieving this goal which will provide a 'real opportunity for us to develop a deeper economic framework' (Council of the European Union, 2011b, 1). With the support of the EU, Russia joined the WTO in August 2012, a move which Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister Lavrov sees normal, due to the fact that 'total EU investment in the Russian economy exceeds US$260 billion, and Russian investment into the EU countries amounts to US$75 billion' (Lavrov, 2013, 6). Nonetheless, in the spring of 2013 the EU filled its first case at the WTO against Russia, in opposition to the protectionist fee for recycling imposed by the Kremlin on imported cars (Chaffin, 2013).

The Common space on External Security has involved the EU's engagement in Afghanistan and the Middle East or Russia's activity in the UN Security Council, where at times it has disagreed with Britain or France. In this respect, EU-Russia relations are dominated by two major somewhat interrelated elements: Transatlanticism as a driver behind the EU's approach to regional and global security, together with the member states' apparent lack of solidarity and their tendency to deal bilaterally with Russia (Kaczmarski, 2011, 167; Kazantsev and Sakwa, 2012, 290–291). This has meant that the EU member states' common approach towards Russia has been characterised by the predominance of low politics (economy and trade) over high politics (security). However, cooperation in the field of crisis management has found a rather fertile ground, encouraging two modest practical results: the improvement of dialogue and communication between the two actors, and Moscow's participation in the EU NAVFOR

Atalanta CSDP mission (Fernandes, 2011). According to Lavrov, cooperation cannot spill over to other issue areas in the absence of political will:

> If there is political will, we may find a formula that would allow us to increase our co-operation in foreign policy and security without jeopardising the EU's autonomy as regards decisionmaking in the common security and defence policy (CSDP) or Russia's sovereignty as a country that is not seeking membership of the EU (Lavrov, 2013, 11)

In 2008, the Commissioner for the European Neighbourhood Policy, Ferrero-Waldner argued that both economic and energy ties between Russia and the EU were increasing at a rapid rate. Moscow was reassured that the member states were to continue to be major consumers of Russian energy, at least in the medium term (Ferrero-Waldner, 2008). The European Commission has also recognised the importance that Russia plays in securing the Union's energy supplies. Moreover, as Boute has shown, the EU is also interested in the potential energy savings that Russia can offer, due its decrepit energy infrastructure which leaves room for European investment (Boute, 2013, p.6). The energy dialogue the EU has initiated with Russia since 2000 has been built on the assumption that the Union and Russia are highly interdependent and share common interests in the energy sector. The partnership which has spawned from the dialogue since 2000 is considered to have aimed at:

> improving the investment opportunities in Russia's energy sector in order to upgrade and expand energy production and transportation infrastructure as well as improve their environmental impact, to encourage the ongoing opening up of energy markets, to facilitate the market penetration of more environmentally friendly technologies and energy resources, and to promote energy efficiency and energy savings (European Commission, 2009a).

Nonetheless, regular Strategic Reviews drafted by the European Commission have underlined that while striving to maintain a close strategic dialogue and partnership with Russia in the energy sector, the EU has also sought to diversify its energy suppliers and the countries of transit (European Commission, 2008a, 2009a, 2009b; European External Action Service, 2011).

The 2008 Review of EU-Russia relations stated that the two actors share a complex web of overlapping interests, which can form the basis for a constructive engagement (European Commission, 2008b). This attitude has also been mirrored by Russia's leadership, which has often underlined the country's adherence to a set of European norms: 'a stable, prosperous and united Europe is in our interest (…) the development of multifaceted ties with the EU is Russia's principled choice', Russian President Vladimir Putin's in a letter to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the European Union, 25 March 2007 (European Commission, 2007, 7). The agreement on space exploration signed in the spring of 2013 is an example of an area where the EU and Russia have established effective patterns of cooperation. Nonetheless, although Russia and the EU have become increasingly interdependent, their relationship is yet to transform into one of mutual cooperation (Tsygankov, 2013; Ziegler, 2012; Baev, 2012)

Conflict

Two main interrelated aspects underpin the conflictual character of EU-Russia relations. Firstly, the lack of solidarity among the member states in the EU's relations with Russia has had salient implications for decision-making in foreign policy both at the EU level and at the level of national policymaking. Cooperation between member states has been the result of the lowest common denominator, in this way limiting the scope and power of the EU's common voice towards Moscow (Verhoeff and Niemann, 2011). Secondly, as Haukkala points out, both Russia and the EU share two seemingly irreconcilable 'world views' which are constructed in a path-dependent and deterministic manner, undermining their cooperation in the short term (Haukkala, 2010a). One example of the clash of 'world views' is evident in the fact that Russia declined participating in the ENP, because 'greater Europe in the Russian conception is to be populated by a number of great powers (and this includes Turkey), and not a single expansive hegemon in the form of the EU' (Sakwa, 2012a, 317). Hence, being treated as an equal partner by the EU has often been articulated by Russian elites as a prerequisite for cooperation in EU-Russia relations, whose absence is at the root of the conflict in their interactions:

> We can only achieve a fundamentally new, higher level of partnership if we regard each other as equal partners, respect each other and take into account each other's interests. I have to say that we see some inertia in the way the EU treats its

> relations with Russia. This is due to the Union's general tradition of developing ties with neighboring countries only if they approach EU standards and follow EU policies. In fact, it seems that recently our European partners have even somewhat abandoned our common understanding regarding the consistent development of Russia–EU co-operation (Lavrov, 2013, 7).

On the other hand, Timmins (2005) has suggested that due the competition among the member states for possessing a special relationship with Moscow, no coherent EU policy towards Russia can be achieved. Hence, division could be seen as the best term to characterise the EU's approach toward Russia on issues such as democracy promotion, rule of law or human rights. At the same time, Moscow has encouraged all member states to seek its favours, a strategy often articulated in the official papers of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Haukkala, 2010b). In his recent JCMS article, Lavrov explains that Russia's strategy of dealing bilaterally with EU member states is based on practical arguments, as most of the areas where Moscow cooperates with individual member states are not within the remits of the European Commission's competences. He adds that agreements signed with individual member states have in the past spilled over to the EU level, whilst the Commission's attempts to limit the freedom of the member states have only jeopardised the EU's strategic partnership with Moscow (Lavrov, 2013, 8). Hence, the Kremlin is set to continue its approach of pursuing a dual strategy, developing the strategic partnership with the EU, whilst also cooperating and negotiating individually with the member states.

Germany has developed the closest ties with Russia in the economic area and energy sector, which has led it to 'clearly punch below its weight', in terms of constructing and acting through a common European framework (Larsen, 2012, 117). Often, Germany has been torn apart by its aspiration to demonstrate that the EU can behave as a single actor in foreign policy, and its plans for further industrial and energy integration with Russia. Along with the other big member states (France, Italy and Spain – in varying degrees), it has afforded greater value to the pursuit of national economic interests than to regional stability through economic integration (Carta and Braghiroli, 2011). However, since Putin started his new term as president, Germany has been adamant in its rhetoric in relation to the breach of civil rights in Russia, which the Kremlin has dismissed as interference in its internal affairs (Jolkver and Goncharenko, 2013). Chancellor

Merkel has also tried to build a somewhat distanced relationship with the Russian leadership. This has allowed Berlin to coordinate on energy issues without raising questions regarding personal connections – such as those that floated around former Chancellor Schroeder (Kazantsev, 2012, 309).

Early in 2013 frictions between the two countries emerged when the German government tried to pressure Russia to contribute to the bailout that was being discussed for Cyprus, because its banking system had generously accommodated the needs of Russian of businessmen (Pop, 2013b). Nonetheless, Germany's approach to Russia is based on the idea that developments cannot be influenced in a significant manner in the short term, baby steps towards the goal of promoting democracy being the only viable strategy (Siegert, 2013). In practice, Germany has done little in order to help and pressure Russia to improve its human rights record, whilst also providing Moscow various carrots: for example, in March 2013 the German government dropped its criticism to the EU visa freedom for Russian officials (Pop, 2013a). Moreover, trade between Germany and Russia was estimated at a record 80 billion Euros in 2012 (Siegert, 2013), as most German investors argue that disputes dealing with business matters can be settled in Russian courts in a satisfactory manner (Jolkver and Goncharenko, 2013).

In practical terms, the big member states' enhanced bilateral relations with Russia have involved hindering the EU from acting in a way that would damage Moscow interests in the Eastern Neighbourhood. During Sarkozy's term as president, France assumed an active role in building a strategic partnership with Russia. For example, during the Georgian-Russian war of 2008, France (holding the presidency of the EU) successfully led the Union's diplomatic efforts and brokered a peace deal. However, any other member state in the function of EU president would have shown the same degree of eagerness and commitment to involve in settling the conflict. France's approach to the Georgian conflict was overtly criticised both by the media and some of the CEE member states such as Poland, Romania or the Czech Republic for not adopting a tougher stance towards Russia. The final peace accord negotiated by France was seen as a mere appeasement of Russia's hegemonic interests, without considering Georgia's claims. Unlike other member states, France has also developed an economic relationship with Russia based on trade with military equipment. In 2011 it sold Mistral helicopter-carrying assault vessels to Moscow, in a move which worried most of the member states from CEE. The French have benefited economically

from their enhanced relations with Russia, but have also seen them as an avenue for the realisation of the goal of transforming the EU into a truly global player recognised by other major actors in the international arena.

On the other hand, the big EU member states can be considered to have engaged in developing close bilateral relationships with Russia in an attempt to stall the development of the emerging security dilemma in EU-Russia relations. Accordingly, successful cooperation with Russia in the area of energy could reassure it that the EU's initiatives in the Eastern Neighbourhood are not aimed against Moscow's interests. This strategy is considered to have been adopted in order to pressure Moscow to refrain from using gas prices in order to condition political developments. Feklyunina points out that Russian policymakers have been very sensitive to the way in which Moscow's image has been constructed in Europe, being particularly attentive to Gazprom's image (Feklyunina, 2012, 453). They have engaged since the Ukraine gas crisis in the winter of 2008-2009 in countless campaigns aimed at convincing the West that Gazprom was not using gas prices in a preferential manner, and that it was merely taking measures similar to other European companies. However, she finds that, on most occasions, Russian policymakers have been unable to convince public opinion in the EU of Moscow's benign interests. This failure can be explained by the lack of trust in Russia's intentions which is based on its past behaviour and on its path dependent way of using its energy resources.

In the absence of a coordinated EU diplomacy on energy issues, Russia can easily cash on the EU's weakness and lack of solidarity, increasing the conflictual character of the relations between Moscow and Brussels (Finon and Locatelli, 2008, 428). The European Commission has ventured at times in trying to endow the principle of solidarity with a more substantial form, but most member states have thwarted its efforts or have even gone to great lengths to reject them. This has been most visible in the energy sector, where the Commission tried to convince (unsuccessfully) the member states to pursue agreements among each other which would allow those in a disadvantaged position to be aided in the event of energy shortages. In practical terms, the European Commission has also made use of its ability to regulate the internal market and influence energy policy in some member states, even though it lacks the power to negotiate with external actors (i.e. Russia) on behalf of the member states. However, according to Finon and Locatelli, the EU cannot pursue a consistent common external policy on energy, particularly

since the interests and ideas of the member states often diverge, and the internal rules of decision-making in foreign policy do not allow the assertion of any efficient energy policy (Finon and Locatelli, 2008, 438). The next section draws on the discussion regarding the dichotomy between conflict and cooperation in order to highlight the way in which it has influenced the approach (and its effectiveness) of both the EU and Russia towards the Eastern Neighbourhood.

Influencing the Eastern Neighbourhood

The dichotomy between conflict and cooperation has had a salient impact on the way the EU has constructed its rhetoric towards the Eastern Neighbourhood and aimed to put into practice its ambitious goals in the region. The 2007 enlargement brought the EU closer to the post-Soviet space. With the development of the Eastern Dimension in 2004 in the EU's foreign policy, the region at the Union's eastern border became an increasingly important policy focus. At the time, there was a pervasive assumption that if the EU were to play an important role in the international arena or promote multilateralism and new forms of global governance, it would have to assume a leading role in democratising and advancing economic development in its new eastern neighbours (Tonra, 2010). Bengtsson and Elgström have argued that since 2004 the EU has sought to position itself as a normative leader in the region, by not delegating a large amount of resources in order to influence policy outcomes in the post-Soviet states, but by building on the 'external expectations that associate EU action with fairness and the promotion of noble goals' (Bengtsson and Elgström, 2012, 97).

The ENP, and later the Eastern Partnership (EaP) formalised the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours and set the former on a limited path to European integration. This was a consequence of the fact that with the Lisbon Treaty, the Union shifted its approach from widening (in the case of the enlargement to CEE) to deepening the existing processes of European integration (Agh, 2010). To this end, the EU devised a framework of asymmetrical bilateral relation with its eastern neighbours characterised by a one-way flux of regulations, rules, norms and values. The prime reason for this might reside in the fact that the Eastern Neighbourhood is plagued by transnational criminality, corruption, terrorism, or illegal immigration towards the EU, all the ideal conditions for and effects of sustained political and economic instability (Christou, 2010,

415). In this context, the EU provides its eastern neighbours with only one option, that of adopting its set of rules and regulations unilaterally without asking too much in return.

However, in practice two conditions undermine the way in which the EU seeks to impose its values in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Firstly, the absence of the promise of future membership has stripped away the EU's carrot in its endeavour of conditioning progress and reform in the states in the region. Secondly, and related to it, Russia has acted as a major pole of attraction for the post-Soviet states by providing them with short term incentives to cooperate: such as preferential energy deals or political support for corrupt elites. Russia's political clout is also enhanced by the fact that its 'pattern for electoral patronal regimes that is relatively common to Eurasia, a pattern characterised by strong and tough leadership tactics and regime popularity' (Hale, 2010, 40). Although Russia has been largely unsuccessful in trying to integrate the post-soviet space – and unable to construct a sustainable strategy towards for the region –, it has managed to attain a maneuvering space due to its policy of supporting to power corrupt elites. This pattern is present in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and to a certain extent in Ukraine (Timuş, 2013; Simão, 2013; Khasson, 2013).

Even more, the EU's strategic approach towards Russia has involved refraining from substantially engaging in frozen conflicts in the region, whose existence seems to benefit Moscow's energy interests (Popescu and Wilson, 2009; Whitman and Wolff, 2010). This has led the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood to adopt an opportunistic attitude, trying to get as much as possible from each relationship, both with the EU and with Russia. While in this dynamic the EU has been unable to create a stable and secure Eastern Neighbourhood, it has managed to attain a fine balance between its economic interests in the region and Russia's aspirations of regaining its former status as an important international actor. Nonetheless, Pardo Sierra (2011, 233) has shown that the EU has been so successful in finding such equilibrium in that it has decreased the influence that Russia has in all but one country, Armenia. Simultaneously, he presents coherent evidence showing that the EU has slowly started to increase its presence both in the economic area and the energy sector. These developments must not be viewed as a decline of Russian power in the region, but as part of the continuous accommodation processes that characterise the strategic partnership between the EU and

Moscow, motivated by the latter's desire to be recognised 'as a distinct and separate pole in the international system' (Sakwa, 2012b, 449)

The strategic partnership between the EU and Russia has had a sound influence on the Union's approach to its Eastern Neighbourhood. As is the case with many policy areas, effective and successful policy outcomes are considered evidence of the existence of a coherent European Union foreign policy (EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011). The 2008 conclusions of the Council regarding the European Neighbourhood Policy underscored the effectiveness of the ENP as a tool for promoting reform in the EU's eastern neighbours. The ENP was identified to have fostered sectoral reform and modernisation through the action plans, and to have also implemented a series of benchmarks regarding human rights, democracy or rule of law (Council of the European Union, 2008). In the autumn of 2011, the member states reiterated the fact that 'the Eastern Partnership is based on a community of values and principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law' (Council of the European Union, 2011a, 1). The summit also recognised the need to increase the sense of ownership of the Eastern Partnership within the countries in the region. Considerable progress was also acknowledged to have been achieved towards building multilateral platforms where the Union could interact on equal terms with its eastern neighbours.

The main initiators of the EaP were Germany, Sweden and Poland, while member states such as Bulgaria or Romania, which lie at the Eastern frontier of the EU, were sidelined due to their poor record in involving in the Black Sea Synergy. However, this does not mean that the latter do not support the EaP – as energy security and democracy are high on their agenda -, but only that they do not have an active role within it. The EaP was signed in 2009 and employed with lightning speed in response to the Georgian-Russian war of 2008. For the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the Georgia-Russian war of 2008 raised deep concerns whether Moscow 'would combine hard and soft power to pry them away from the western part of the continent' (Saivetz, 2012, 376). It also precipitated the gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine (2009) and the street clashes that followed the 2009 elections in Moldova. By proposing a model tailor-made for each country in the region (which was set to enhance cooperation), the EaP has allowed each state to develop links with the EU at its own pace. Attention to the characteristics of each country has made regionalisation under the EaP more effective (Khasson, 2013; Hajizada and Marciacq,

2013; Iangbein and Börzel, 2013). However, what the EaP lacked in the eyes of the post-Soviet states in the region, was a clear commitment towards the resolution of regional conflicts (Weaver, 2010). Governments here are left dealing with conflicts on their own, while the EU reassures them that internalising its norms and values is the first step in creating stability – as promotion of good governance is preferred to intervening in frozen conflicts (Vasilyan, 2010).

Ongoing disagreement among the member states surrounding the role that the EU should play in its Eastern Neighbourhood has had profound influence on the format of the EaP. Tonra (2010) highlights that competing interests and myriad narratives regarding the way in which the EU should behave in its international relations – and towards its neighbours – have undermined the overall ambition which informed the EaP, and more generally the ENP. For example, Sweden wanted a membership perspective within the EaP, but France and Germany opposed it in the final drafting of the document (Wolczuk, 2010). A *Russia first* policy was preferred by the latter, which were more inclined to first strike a deal with Moscow and then negotiate the terms of the EaP with the other member states. This has happened due to Russia's fear that a more substantial and coherent approach from the EU might further undermine its political, economic and cultural influence in the region.

Inconsistencies in the EU's approach coupled with Russia's short-term incentives have encouraged political elites in the states from the Eastern Neighbourhood to gamble between the two actors (Korosteleva et al., 2013; Delcour, 2013). Ademmer and Börzel emphasise that 'when the EU is not 'the only game in town', domestic actors appear to have even greater potential to cherry-pick and (ab)use EU demands for policy change to consolidate their power or finance and legitimise their own political agendas' (Ademmer and Börzel, 2013, 603). Through this, at times, they have tried and succeeded in playing Moscow and the EU against each other in order to gain as much as possible from each of them. Although recently a debate has spawned regarding the relative success and influence of the EU in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Ivan, 2012), most arguments developed in the literature converge around the idea that the EU represents the most powerful political model for the region due to the economic (investment, trade) and social benefits (visa facilitation or even free movement) it can provide for the peoples in the post-Soviet space. However, assessments of the actual practical engagement of the EU in its Eastern Neighbourhood have uncovered the fact that the Union has been unable to build on its alluring

appeal created by the prospects of the social and economic benefits mentioned above (Korosteleva et al., 2013).

Moving beyond the conflict cooperation dichotomy?

This section explores the prospects of moving beyond the conflict-cooperation dichotomy in EU-Russia relations by focusing on three recent developments: the potential role of the EEAS in dealing with the Eastern Neighbourhood, the failure of the Nabucco pipeline and the proposed creation of the Eurasian Union. The further development of the EEAS can have a positive effect on the EU's policy record in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Currently, the EU seems to favour within the EaP stability over reform and the economic development of its eastern neighbours. Hence, when the EU speaks of human security in the ENP a dilemma between democracy and stability arises. Such concepts as democracy, human rights or good governance are only part of a framing strategy on the part of the EU which tries to attach a normative meaning to its actions. The focus is more on constructing an ability to promote development and reform in the long term by shaping conceptions of normality, and not trying to respond directly to the problems that the countries in the region currently face. Christou (2010) contends that the EU's approach seems to be built on a hierarchical understanding of its relation with other states and the need to export unilaterally its norms and values in order to safeguard its security and economic interests. At the root of this problem lies the lack of institutional capacity, resources and commitment of the member states to the EaP. A number of studies point to the fact that Commission officials have often complained regarding the lack of funding and political interest that the EaP arouses in the quarters of high politics (Whitman and Wolff, 2010; Chatré and Delory, 2012; Bengtsson and Elgström, 2012). Moreover, at the moment, with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty it is not yet clear which institution is the primary actor in dealing with the Eastern Neighbourhood. However, analysts are optimistic regarding the potential of the European External Action Service (EEAS) to assume leadership and coagulate a position towards Russia shared by most member states:

> In this process, it seems inevitable that EU Member States will, also be engaged, given their own existing and often long-standing strategic relationships with a very wide range of partners. Here the role of the EEAS as a „diplomatic

> entrepreneur‟ might be seen as a key part of the development of a diplomatic strategy (Allen and Smith, 2012, 6).

The failure of the Nabucco pipeline project in the summer of 2013 has made more apparent the divisions among the member states in terms of energy security. Nabucco had been competing with the Trans Adriatic Pipeline which cuts across Greece to southern Italy and is supported by Statoil, AXPO and E.ON Ruhrgas (Reuters, 2013). Behind Nabucco are various European firms which include, Romania's Transgaz, Bulagargas from Bulgaria, the Austrian firm OMV, the Hungarian company MOL, Turkey's Botas and the French firm GDF Suez. Sceptics have argued in the past that the Nabucco pipeline, delivering 31 bcm at its full capacity, would account only for a limited fraction of the EU's annual gas demand of around 450 bcm (Barysch, 2010, 4). In spite of this, advocates of the pipeline have argued that it could have offered access to alternative supplies, strengthening the relative position of EU gas companies and governments in relation to Gazprom. Analysts have also pointed out that one of the major shortcomings of the project resides in the fact that it was overstretched, making it very hard to find a reliable single source of supply which is also independent of Russia (Recknagel, 2013). Nonetheless, the failure of the project has set the big members states (such as Germany or Italy) and the European Commission on a less conflictual path with Moscow, whilst making some new member states from CEE (i.e. Romania, Hungary or Bulgaria) more vulnerable to Russia's use of energy prices.

The proposed creation of the Eurasian Union might provide new drive for cooperation in EU-Russia relations. For example, Sakwa (2012a, 321) sees the new integration project as epitomising a grand bargain based on the development of multilateralism which would provide structural stability in the region. The Eurasian Union is set to stretch from the Eastern border of the EU to the Pacific, being based around its first four members Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia. These countries aim to unite their legal system, economies, customs into a larger transnational entity similar to the EU, which would contribute to the creation of a new strong international actor in Eurasia. The central transnational institution in this new set-up is the Eurasian Commission which was launched in the summer of 2012. It functions in a similar fashion to the European Commission supervising and ensuring cooperation on the range of issues where it has the ability to enforce rules and regulations: 'tariff and non-tariff regulation (e.g., sanitary controls), customs administration, technical regulation, competition policy, energy,

transport, intellectual property protection, migration, and other areas' (Cohen, 2013). Moreover, it is expected that the Eurasian Commission will function according to WTO provisions, fostering transparency and predictability in decision-making (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012, 8). It also seen by Russian policymakers as a tool for promoting development in the post-Soviet space through gradual integration. Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Lavrov has cautioned that Eurasian integration would not happen overnight, and Russia will try to learn from the experience of the European project which took 40 years to evolve into the 'full-fledged European Union' (Lavrov, 2013, 10). Nonetheless, some analysts argue that the Eurasian Union merely represents an attempt from Russia to reintegrate the post-Soviet sphere in its sphere of influence, luring the countries in question even further away from the EU:

> To date, the Eurasian Union is the most serious attempt by post-communist Russia to recreate a deeply integrated sphere of influence. The Russian elites already refer to it as *Bolshaya strana* (the Big Country). While Vladimir Putin states that the Eurasian Union is not an attempt to restore what did not work in the past but to achieve greater integration based on new values, politics, and economy, the project appears to head straight for the past—to Soviet-like integration (Krupnov, 2012).

The EU has argued that it adopts a cautious approach to the Eurasian Union, as it seems to aim to function in parallel with EU, 'rather than in harmony with it, thus closing the door to Eurasia's integration into the EU' (Cohen, 2013). On the other hand, China, the other major player in Eurasia, has largely ignored the project for the Eurasian Union, but has also argued that it welcomes any initiative which can have a positive effect on the stability and prosperity of the region (Wang, 2012). For the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood the emergence of the Eurasian Union could provide an alternative to the EU, which would put even more pressure on the EU to adapt its policies in order to enhance its influence in the region (Jarábik et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the creation of the Eurasian Commission has led some to argue that Russia is willing to accept to a greater degree and engage in multilateralism both in its relations with the EU and globally (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012). From a different perspective, the proposed Eurasian Union, can also be seen as a Russian project aimed at transcending American conceptions of power in the international arena, as 'Eurasian is essentially an intellectual

repackaging of anti-Americanism, reflecting a desire to exclude the US from the Eurasian land-mass' (Rutland, 2012, p.352).However, from a theoretical point of view, it is hard to picture how sovereignty would be constructed in an arrangement where it is meant to be shared.

Conclusion

During the last ten years, and with the eastward expansion of the Union, relations between the EU and Russia have become increasingly more complex. A dichotomy between conflict and cooperation has been traditionally thought to encapsulate the dynamic of the relationship between the EU and Russia. Cooperation has often coexisted or overlapped with conflict on a significant number of issues and policy areas, making it harder to distinguish between cooperation and compliance. The first part of the article emphasised that cooperation is synonymous to the strategic partnership that both Russia and the EU seek to develop in their relations. The EU has viewed Russia as one of its most important strategic partners with which it shares a series of common values and interests. Four Common Spaces of cooperation between the two actors have been identified and developed by the EU, progress within each of them being periodically praised for its achievements.

On the other hand, the article argued that conflict has been spurred on in EU-Russia relations by interrelated two factors. Firstly, the seemingly irreconcilably 'world views' shared by Russia and the EU based on their different understating of international law, sovereignty or democracy have been at the root of intense disagreements between the two actors. However, both Brussels and Moscow seem to have accepted this stalemate and entered into a state of 'peaceful coexistence'. Secondly, and linked to the first factor, the article highlighted that the lack of solidarity among the member states in regard to their approach to Moscow, has had a salient influence on the emergence in EU-Russia relations. Bilateral relations with Russia on substantive issues (such as energy, trade, tourism) have been pursued by the big member states (such as Germany, France or Italy), often in a competitive manner. On its part, Moscow has encouraged such bilateral ties, seeking to profit as much as possible from each relationship. Hence, unity at the European level in dealing with Russia was sacrificed in favour of pursuing short term interests, which also put the weaker new member states dependent on Russian gas from CEE in a vulnerable position.

The conflict-cooperation dichotomy has also impacted the way in which the EU and Russia have devised their approaches towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. The EU's ambitious and normative rhetoric towards its eastern neighbours has not been matched by practical achievements in areas that overlapped with Russia's aspirations in the region. The EU has asked the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood to unilaterally adopt its values and set of regulations without offering clear benefits that would outweigh Russia's short term incentives (e.g. low energy and gas prices). Nonetheless, Russia is found to lack a clear strategy for the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood that could be sustainable in the long term. This raises questions whether Moscow is committed to actually exert its influence in Eastern Neighbourhood, or feels pressured due to the advance of the EU (and the emerging security dilemma) to act in the region.

The last section of the article emphasised that recent developments can be thought to perpetuate the conflict-cooperation dichotomy and reinforce the 'peaceful coexistence' between Russia and EU. One reason for this resides in the lack of institutional capacity, resources and political willingness for the EU to approach in more a coherent, in its relations with Russia, issues related to human rights, democracy or energy security. Moreover, the EU's structural weaknesses decreases its attraction power in the Eastern Neighbourhood, prompting the countries in the region to adopt even more opportunistic strategies in playing Russia and the EU against each other. Armenia's decision to become part of the Eurasian Union might provide an example for other states in the region, with even Georgia considering membership (Rettman, 2013).

The Eurasian Union has been seen as a Russian attempt to recapture the country's former influence and reintegrate the post-Soviet space in its sphere of influence, whilst offering an alternative model to the EU. However, the Eurasian Union might signal that Russia is ready to adopt a more multilateral approach in its relations with the EU, but also in the international arena. The failure of Nabucco pipeline project has the potential to open a new chapter of cooperation between the EU and Russia, as the pipeline had been framed in an overtly conflictual manner towards Moscow. Other factors and issue areas which have not been analysed or have been only briefly touched upon in this article can also have a salient impact on the conflict cooperation dichotomy: such as Russia's track record in the WTO, it's support for the Assad regime in Syria, or the deepening internal contrasts between regions in Russia in their relations with the EU. Nonetheless, from the point of the Union, the further development of a well-

functioning EEAS might build a broader unity and consensus between member states, and steer the dynamics of EU-Russia into less competitive waters.

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