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Russia and the EU's quest for status: the path to conflict in the post-Soviet space

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This article suggests that both the EU and Russia sought to achieve the great power status by enhancing their presence in the post-Soviet space. Conflict has arisen as the status seeking efforts of the two have been transformed into a dangerous zero-sum game. Moscow's actions in Ukraine prompted the EU to adopt a more conflictual attitude, where it now actively aims to counteract Moscow's influence. This transformed Russia and the EU's status seeking efforts into a deep security dilemma. Both actors perceive that maintaining their influence in the region is crucial for maintaining their status. Rather than seeking a mutually and sustainable agreement that would give equal importance to Ukraine's interests, the EU and Russia draw more red lines, and revert to cold war rhetoric. In the short term this behaviour will put their status seeking efforts even more at odds with each other and deepen the conflict.

Keywords: conflict; European Union; post-Soviet space; Russia; status; Ukraine

Introduction

Since Vladimir Putin became president for the third time in 2012 Russia embarked on an assertive path to maintain its sphere of influence and decrease the power of the European Union (EU) in the post-Soviet space. Russia's engagement in the Ukraine crisis is part of its assertive strategy to regain or assert the great power status. This article suggests that both the EU and Russia sought to achieve the great power status by enhancing their presence in the post-Soviet space. Conflict has arisen as the status seeking efforts of the two have been transformed into a dangerous zero-sum game. The mutual efforts to increase their status did not always lead to conflict and in the past even complemented each other. However, the period of complementariness was relatively short. Russia realized in the wake of the colour revolutions that its sphere of influence was being slowly dismantled by the EU's increasing presence in the post-Soviet space. Russia then embarked on a strategy to counter the EU, which became more conflictual as Putin's rule developed. The EU was not able to detect and take seriously these transformations in Russia's status seeking efforts. This has made conflict in the post-Soviet space between the EU and Russia virtually unavoidable.

The literature on the role of status in international relations primarily focuses on the state as the unit of analysis (Paul et al., 2014). However, this article claims that the EU, similarly to nation

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states, also seeks to enhance its status in world politics. What differs in this case is the range of tools and sources of power employed in order to increase one's status. While states can rely on well-integrated and coordinated foreign policies, and use a mix of both soft and hard power tools, the EU possesses a less coherent foreign policy which virtually lacks any hard power instruments. Space constraints do not permit a full discussion of the debate on the international actorness of the EU (Smith, 2005). Nevertheless, various arguments put forward in this debate support the idea that the EU can engage in status seeking. First, even though multiple actors (ranging from the 28 member states to the EU's institutions) can shape EU foreign policy, the ambition of constructing a united and coordinated approach in external relations has traditionally been a key common priority. Second, the EU has developed a series of foreign policy instruments and initiatives which are supported by the member states, for example the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). While policies such as the ENP might be read as purely technocratic in form, they underline the EU's aspiration of playing a greater role in the neighbourhood and through this laying the groundwork for an effective global presence (Solana, 2003). Third, rather than engaging in individual status seeking, the member states generally prefer to set the agenda of EU foreign policy. This happens because an increase in the EU's status translates into higher status for the member states, but also due to the fact that acting through the framework of the EU incurs fewer costs and provides increased legitimacy (Bickerton, 2011). At the same time, the role of individual member states (or EU institutions) is broadly understood in the scholarship as merely one aspect among others of the EU's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space (Melo, 2014). Finally, external actors tend to see the EU as an actor in its own right in international relations. For example, the eastern neighbours have continuously demanded a stronger EU involvement in the region (Chaban et al., 2013).

The article proceeds with a brief section on the role of status in international relations. It argues that in order to achieve the great power status international actors need to focus on a series of aspects: develop their sources of power; display them to other great powers; and seek recognition. The second part of the article looks at how the EU and Russia developed their status seeking efforts in the post-Soviet states with reference to five key periods since Putin became president in 2000.

Status in world politics

The question of how status affects the behaviour of states[1] (and international actors) has become increasingly studied, especially in the case of current rising powers such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Most studies that focus on status tend to equate the behaviour of humans to that of states (Paul et al., 2014). Hence, states will judge the actions of other states or international actors through the prism of their perceived status. States believe that they deserve certain levels of respect in world politics according to their status. What is clear in the scholarship is that status is essential for creating and maintaining hierarchies in world politics. However, more generally status is considered to be important for maintaining a country's self-esteem and for influencing the behaviour of other states.

In this article status captures the collective beliefs held in the international system regarding an actor's capabilities and attributes such as: wealth; soft power; culture; demographics; diplomatic relations; military power; or coercive capabilities. Status reflects collective beliefs aggregated in an international system – that is beliefs about how others evaluate the status of a certain actor. It is ultimately conferred by the recognition of other actors, but is also related to visible and symbolic actions. Status can lead to or reflect an increase in a state's power, but it is not a guarantee of it. Moreover, status matters because great powers are expected to play a more salient role in world politics, set the agenda of and settle conflicts in the international arena or are constrained by

domestic public opinion to assume global leadership on various issues on the international agenda (Smith, 2014, p. 356). This article argues that international actors need to go through two steps in order to gain the status of great power in the international arena:

(1) Develop various sources of power: these include both hard and soft power attributes, which may or not be material.
(2) Display power and seek status recognition from other great powers. Secure formal recognition by other great powers, which may or may not imply change of the regional or global order(s).

Building up power

Power is key to understanding the status seeking efforts of international actors. In this sense the article claims that international actors seek to enhance their status by developing various sources of power (soft or hard) – which may or may not be material. Hard power refers mainly to military capabilities or natural resources together with the ability to constrain or deter other states. The sources of soft power that could lead to an enhanced status include: cultural appeal, national identity and memory; language; attractiveness of the state in terms of living, working or as a tourist destination; the reputation and professionalism of the state's diplomatic system; quality of life; the reputation of national leaders on the global stage; social cohesion and trust in the government; political and economic ideologies; the quality and strength of political institutions; sports achievements (Urnov, 2014, p. 306). States that score well on some capabilities and poor on others can still have a high status: the example of the Soviet Union is relevant here, as its military capabilities gave it the status of superpower even though it possessed a weak and decrepit economy.

Displaying power and seeking recognition

States choose to display their sources of power in different ways. In this sense, a distinction can be made between status-consistent and status-inconsistent states (Smith, 2014). Status-consistent powers tend to engage in less costly actions in world politics in order to make visible their power. They use a wide range of tools and rely on multiple sources of hard and soft power. In the event of conflict with other great powers, rather than adopting offensive and risky strategies, they try to create new and innovative practices in international relations, adapt to the changing international system or compromise. The United States and the EU are examples of status-consistent powers. Status-inconsistent powers tend to take risky actions and manifest their status through the use of limited sources of power. The gains of such risky moves can be impressive but equally disastrous for status-inconsistent powers. Russia's assertive stance in Ukraine can be considered the mark of a status-inconsistent power.

Status recognition does not always stem directly from the fact that states develop and display their hard or soft power. In order to be successful they need to understand the prevailing world order and try to complement it, rather than aim to change the prevailing status quo. Higher status actors usually recognize the achievements of other actors and acknowledge their rise in status. However, at times states need to offer something in return for the recognition of the great power status. This may include preferential military, political or economic deals or the prospects of future collaboration. Actors ultimately seek formal recognition of their (increased) status. Formal recognition is usually enshrined through treaties or agreements which prescribe relations and hierarchies among international actors, for example the UN Charter or the Charter of Paris. At the same time, formal recognition can materialize in membership of

international organizations (which are more or less exclusive, e.g. G8). Informal recognition of status usually precedes (but also complements) formal recognition, and most times is merely symbolic: such as being invited to high level meetings, hosting international events or through discourse.

However, even though some attributes may be thought to be conducive to assuring higher status, status is subjective. Status cannot be obtained unilaterally and involves a certain degree of voluntary deference by other actors. The search for higher status is prone to lead to conflict with established great powers. Conflict usually arises when the status expectations of a state do not match the recognition received from other great powers. Hence, if a state considers that it has the necessary capabilities to have a higher status and the international community does not recognize this status, the state can become dissatisfied and seek to use its capabilities in order to shape the prevailing world order. The severity of the conflict will depend on the way status is conceived. For example, in situations where states understand status as an implicit reflection of hierarchy, a lack of recognition resembles a zero-sum game which has the potential to lead to a security dilemma.

In what follows the article will discuss the ways in which the EU and Russia sought to enhance their status in world politics by having a greater presence in the post-Soviet space. The next section will analyse comparatively the ways both Russia and the EU sought to develop and display their sources of power in the region while seeking recognition from each other. This comparison allows pinpointing the way their status seeking efforts came into collision and caused what seems to be from this perspective an inevitable conflict in Ukraine.

Building up power

European Union

The main source of power for the EU in the post-Soviet space lies in its attractiveness premised on the promise of economic growth and development. The economic success of the European project was a key attraction for the Central and Eastern European (CEE) post-communist states. The prospect of economic growth also attracted the post-Soviet states to look towards Europe and aspire to deeper integration with the EU. The Association Agreements (AAs) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) were in this sense the most powerful tools at the EU's disposal. The EU invested over the years through the ENP in civil society organizations in these states, or in transport and energy infrastructure. The EU also offered funding for cross-border cooperation between the member states and the eastern neighbours. Improving its attractiveness in the post-Soviet space has been a key concern for the EU (European Parliament, 2015).

Moreover, the EU benefited from its cultural appeal and ability to attract people with its higher quality of life. In this sense European culture and lifestyle are seen as superior to the native ones or to the model offered by Russia. European liberal culture is in line with the aspirations of younger generations in the post-Soviet space for more freedom, liberty and autonomy in the public sphere (Melo, 2014). In practice the EU offered the prospect of free travel for citizens of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries.

During the last decade the EU constructed its identity as a normative power, which underlies the ability to export its norms and values – for example human rights, rule of law or democracy – and shape those of other international actors (Haukkala, 2008). In practice the EU sought to convince (or coerce) the post-Soviet states to adopt its norms and values by conditioning economic benefits and financial aid on democratic reforms. Nevertheless, this approach registered moderate successful only in a few cases such as Moldova or Georgia, and failed miserably in Belarus, Azerbaijan or Armenia (Nilsson & Silander, 2016). A key reason for this was the asymmetric way in

which the EU promoted its norms and integration project in the region. However, the 2015 revision of the ENP presents a new approach which empowers the eastern neighbourhood and increases their ownership of the ENP by allowing them to adopt the EU's menu of values and regulations at their own pace (European Commission, 2015).

The EU's sources of hard power are limited. It mostly outsources its security needs to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the USA, and in some cases relies on the individual initiatives of the member states to get involved militarily in conflict situations. Nevertheless, the EU sent two civilian missions in the neighbourhood mostly aimed at training local officials and assuring the security of borders (in Moldova) or post-conflict management (in Georgia). The absence of clear military capabilities puts the EU at a disadvantage in the post-Soviet space. Consequently, the EU constantly failed to respond to the pleas of the states in the region for the Union to engage more substantially in settling frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space. Nevertheless, the 2015 revision of the ENP (for the first time in EU official documents) contains references to the EU's potential to get involved in conflict resolution in the eastern neighbourhood.

As a tool to project power in external relations, diplomacy is a weak spot for the EU. In spite of the creation of its own diplomatic system, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU still has a sluggish, uncoordinated and divided diplomacy in the post-Soviet space. EU delegations in the region still play a marginal role to the embassies of the big member states such as France, Germany or the UK. Moreover, among these embassies information sharing and general collaboration is extremely ineffective. This has been coupled with a lack of expertise on the countries in the region which led to a one size fits all approach to the neighbours (Baltag & Smith, 2015). The EEAS indeed brought a sense of coordination in Brussels, but in the post-Soviet space it is yet to prove its effectiveness and added value.

Russia

During the last decade Russia focused on building up its sources of hard and material power (Forsberg, 2014). This mainly included the development of military power, but also the use of energy resources. In the post-Soviet space Russia fuelled through its military presence a series of frozen conflicts (Transnistria, South Ossetia or Nagorno Karabach). Moreover, it also displayed its military strength on a series of occasions. First, it had a show of strength on its own territory silencing the Chechen separatist movements in two wars. Then in 2008 it intervened in Georgia in order to protect its citizens and Russian speakers. Russia's war with Georgia was a sign that Moscow was aiming to regain its former great power status and that Putin had developed hegemonic intentions in the post-Soviet region (Cornell & Starr, 2009).

These intentions came to fruition in 2014 when Russia engaged in a "hybrid war" in eastern Ukraine. The conflict in Ukraine highlights the range of military capabilities that Russia has at its disposable. Moscow's hybrid war included the use of traditional warfare, propaganda, support for rebel groups, the presence of "little green men" and complex covert actions. At the same time, the annexation of Crimea and the Ukraine crisis allowed Russia to increase its military build-up in the Black Sea.

Russia's main strategy in the post-Soviet space has been the use of coercion on a grand scale. Moscow uses energy prices together with the presence of Russian military forces (or the threat of Russian invasion) in order to convince the leaders in the region not to turn towards the EU. Russia also backed to power in the region a series of corrupt leaders (some with authoritarian inclinations) who can be easily influenced. While the EU provides incentives to the leaders in the region and conditions them on the adoption of democratic reforms, Russia is willing to provide impressive financial support without expecting or demanding costly political reforms.

During the last decade Russia increased its public diplomacy efforts in the post-Soviet states by funding numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, media institutions or even extreme right wing and nationalistic groups. For example, Saari (2014) charts how Russia started to support financially separatist ideas and movements in Crimea from the mid-2000s. Moreover, the ideal of Novorossiya was included in Russia's public diplomacy strategy. It sought to bring together Russian speakers in Ukraine and Transnistria and undermine the sovereignty of Ukraine and Moldova. Helping or protecting Russian citizens (or speakers) living abroad was the rationale not only for Moscow's public diplomacy campaigns, but also for its military incursions in Ukraine and Georgia.

Russia also benefited from the cultural and economic ties that it has with region. These ties stem from the Slavic and Orthodox roots shared by the people in the post-Soviet space. However, and more importantly, these ties are premised on the shared experience of Communism and the post-Soviet transition, which created certain types of economic and political elites. These elites find it easier to interact with each, rather than with the EU or the USA. Russia's return to the old ways of doing politics and business is thus a comfortable and less costly option than adopting the EU's rules and values (Sherr, 2013).

Russian diplomacy also banked on the culture and networks built during the Soviet times. It is much savvier than the European or American diplomatic efforts, and understands to a better extent the dynamics in the region. This shared understanding of politics, business and the state is captured by the concept of "sovereign democracy" which implies that Russia respects the right of all states to determine their political or economic system (Laruelle, 2015). Moreover, Russia argues that it does not condition cooperation with states on political economic issues. This gives Moscow a broader appeal, especially to authoritarian regimes, which are allergic to the EU's democratic requirements.

Displaying power and seeking recognition

The EU and Russia's efforts to have their status recognized by each other went through several phases since Putin came to power in 2000. The EU generally behaved as a status-consistent power employing a diverse range of tools and sources of power in its status seeking efforts. In the absence of clear of substantial hard power capabilities it sought to create new practices and tools in international relations. Even though its endeavours were not always successful in the post-Soviet space and the EU accepted drawbacks and compromise in its status seeking efforts.

On the other hand, Russia sought to enhance its status in an inconsistent manner by adopting risky strategies and relying solely on the development and use of its sources of hard power (i.e. military capabilities and energy resources). Russia under Putin aimed to unilaterally shape the regional order by resorting to military threat or extortion in the area of energy security. In the face of the advance of the EU in the post-Soviet space Moscow enhanced its public diplomacy in the region, but was unable to invent new policy practices and create a model of governance that would serve as a successful point of attraction. Russia sought recognition from the EU on western terms only when it felt that it did not have a powerful position – this lasted for only a few years during Putin's first term. In time, status seeking efforts in Moscow became more assertive due to the realization that Russia's military and economic power was steadily improving (Tsygankov, 2005).

Russia and the EU differ in the way they perceive increases in their status (and subsequent recognition). For the Kremlin, the main indicator for recognition of its great power status is the (more or less formal) acknowledgement that Russian values, interests and worldviews are equal to those of the EU (and the West). These include Russia's interpretation of the legitimacy of the use of force in international relations, the prominent role it attaches to sovereignty and

regime stability or the legitimacy of preserving spheres of interests. On the other hand, recognition for the EU means acknowledgement that the values it promotes in its foreign policy are universal and lead to peace or stability, and that in doing so it transcends the constraints of the Westphalian system. Nevertheless, both Russia and the EU seek formal recognition along similar lines by having "a seat at the table" which would allow them to set the agenda in world politics – for example leading the Iran nuclear deal in the case of the EU, or mediating the Syrian crisis in the case of Russia. Moreover, both Russia and the EU sought formal recognition from each other for their integration models: the EU pushed for the strategic partnership (an attempt to integrate Russia in the liberal multilateral system), while Moscow advocated the need for the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to sign a free trade agreement on equal terms.

Putin's first years in power (2000–2003)

When Putin came to power in 2000 he was faced with a country on the brink of collapse. Yeltsin's rule not only weakened Russia's standing in the international system, but also led to the loosening of the state's grip on the economy and the regions. The Kremlin did not focus too much energy on developing the country's sources of power in foreign policy or the post-Soviet space during this time. Putin concentrated on internal issues trying to centralize the state and bring the numerous oligarchs under his control. He frequently emphasized Russia's European orientation, seeking both formal and informal recognition from the West of the fact that Russia was heading in the right (more or less liberal) direction (White & Feklyunina, 2014). In turn, the EU took Putin's European aspirations at face value and sought to increase its status by helping Russia to make a successful transition to a fully functioning market economy and democracy. Russia was seen in Brussels as a declining power which had to be helped. The EU thus provided support for the development of democratic institutions, civil society and Putin's leadership as a whole. Conflict in the post-Soviet space between the EU and Russia was absent during this period as both actors' status seeking efforts and subsequent recognition were linked to Russia's modernization. Moreover, the EU did not have at the time a coherent strategy for the post-Soviet space as it was still grappling with the challenges of the future enlargement towards CEE.

The colour revolutions (2003–2005)

The colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine were a wakeup call for Russia. By 2003 Putin managed to a large extent to consolidate his regime, bring most oligarchs under his control and centralize power from regional governors (Gvosdev & Marsh, 2013). The two revolutions made the Kremlin recognize that a policy of inactivity in the post-Soviet space can be very damaging, as the countries in the region shared European aspirations and wished to shake off Russia's influence. However, Russia still believed that it was in a weak position which would not allow it to assert its power in the region and in its relations with the EU. Hence, Russia was very vocal against EU support for the two revolutions, but did not do too much beyond discourse, while still seeking recognition from the EU.

On its part, the EU perceived the colour revolutions as an important breakthrough in promoting its norms in the post-Soviet space, similar in scope to the 1989 revolutions in CEE. This gave the EU the attitude of moral superiority. Moreover, Russia's timid immediate response made the EU think that Moscow recognized and was happy with the new pro-European order in the post-Soviet space. The EU then went ahead and promoted in Ukraine and Georgia a programme of democratic modernization and reform, which in the next few years not only drew these countries further away from Moscow, but also made them increasingly anti-Russian.

The Georgian–Russian war and its build-up (2005–2008)

After the colour revolutions the Kremlin realized that if it does not assert its power it stands to lose its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. In the background of the rising global oil prices and the high level of annual growth experienced by its economy Russia started developing its sources of power discussed earlier; for example, modernizing its army. The Kremlin also began to invest significantly in energy infrastructure and to use energy and trade deals in order to pressure leaders in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, it started to invest in public diplomacy in the region by financing NGOs and media institutions that would promote nationalist ideas among Russian speaking populations – while also giving them Russian passports. During this time, the EU enhanced its efforts to promote democratic reforms in the region which were formalized through the ENP. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria brought the EU to the shores of the Black Sea, thus prompting the Union to get involved in the geopolitics of the region.

The independence of Kosovo together with Georgia and Ukraine's aspiration for NATO membership made Russia realize that not only was its economic sphere of influence under threat, but also its strategic and security interests. The war with Georgia gave Russia the opportunity to showcase its military power and assertive intentions in the post-Soviet space. It signalled that the EU's advance in the region will be met with a swift and decisive response. The Kremlin no longer sought recognition from the EU on liberal terms. It sought to be recognized as an equal great power (on its own terms) which had exclusive security interests (and a legitimate sphere of interest) in the post-Soviet space. The EU was taken by surprise by the conflict and at first tried to mount a strong response to Russia, but then reverted to a more appeasing stance. It also welcomed the fact that Russia formally recognized it as the main actor in the West that had legitimate grounds to be present in the post-Soviet space – the EU signed the cease-fire with Russia, in a sense taking the lead from the USA on security issues in the region. The escalation of the conflict was avoided as the EU seemed to recognize Russia's new intentions and was happy to be portrayed as the actor that brought peace and stability in the region.

Medvedev's presidency (2008–2012)

In the wake of the Russian–Georgian war the EU revamped its policy towards the post-Soviet space and developed the EaP which sought to bring the states in the region closer to the EU in economic terms – even though it lacked the promise of membership. The EU's efforts in promoting liberal and democratic norms were thus increased. However, it proceeded with the EaP ignoring and not taking into account Russia's concerns. The experience of the Georgian–Russian war made the EU believe that Russia did not mind the EU's economic policy in the post-Soviet space, and that it was only fearful of a change in the security and strategic order of the region. As a consequence, the EU invested significant efforts in devising the strategic partnership with Russia. The strategic partnership was meant as mutual formal recognition of the great power status of both the EU and Russia, and of the fact that they share common interests in the post-Soviet space. However, in practice neither Russia nor the EU believed that the strategic partnership was anything more than symbolic.

At the same time, Russia profited as much as possible from the strategic partnership, but did not seek formal recognition as part of the liberal global order and the EU-centric European order. On its part, the EU viewed Russia as inherently weak and dismissed from the start president Medvedev's proposal for new security architecture, while putting less value on formal recognition from the Kremlin. For Putin, the presidency of Medvedev represented a failed experiment to see whether the EU (and the West for that matter) would treat Russia as an equal in a liberal

regional and global order. This prompted him to embark on a path towards assertiveness meant to declare openly Russia's great power status (even if it was not recognized by the West).

Putin's third term and the Ukraine crisis (2012–)

The state of EU–Russia relations at the end of the Medvedev presidency led Moscow to enhance its status in an overtly inconsistent manner by risking everything on a strategy of constraining the post-Soviet states through the use of military threat, energy prices or the right to protect Russian citizens (or speakers). Foreign policy discourse in Russia moved from asserting the great power status and seeking recognition for it, to an implicit assumption that Russia had achieved both the status and global recognition. Moreover, in his third term Putin sought to manifest Russia's status not only through the use of military or energy resources, but also through innovations in regional integration – namely the EEU. However, Russia pushed for the EEU in an inconsistent manner, coercing the post-Soviet states to become members through the use of military or economic pressure. The Kremlin had a rigid approach to this innovation striving at all cost to convince Ukraine to become a member. Kyiv's European aspirations and outright rejection of Russia's integration project spelled the virtual failure of the EEU. It also put in doubt the great power status which Russia assumed it already possessed. Moscow's engagement in Ukraine is thus a bid to salvage its great power status and send a message that it is willing to take immense risks in order to maintain and increase its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. As a consequence, Russia's actions in Ukraine isolated it from the West, but made the Kremlin increasingly seek recognition on its own terms from other non-western powers (e.g. the other BRICS).

The EU was unable to read the warning signs that were coming from Moscow since Putin came to power for the third time in 2012. It was also not able to understand that Russia felt after Medvedev's presidency that formal recognition from the West was not necessary for achieving the great power status, or that Putin became deeply disaffected with the liberal regional and world orders. At the same time, the EU's integration project in the post-Soviet space became increasingly fatigued. The EU has reached a point where it has offered to the post-Soviet states most of the benefits it could without putting on the table the prospect of future membership. During the Ukraine crisis the EU failed to create new policy innovations as it had managed to in the past. Rather it scaled down most of its previous ambitions and reverted to a cold war type of Atlanticism turning to the USA for its security needs. The strategic partnership with Russia seems to have been side-lined as recognition from the Kremlin seems redundant now. The only positive achievement of the EU during the crisis was its ability to have a common stance on sanctions towards Russia, which brought a higher degree of solidarity in EU foreign policy. This is a turn to the use of sources of material power, namely constraining Russia through economic means. Adopting sanctions has been a risky strategy, which by now radicalized Russia's response and turned their status seeking efforts into a veritable security dilemma. Hence, the Ukraine crisis underlines the fact that the EU and Russia's status seeking efforts have become a zero-sum game.

Conclusion

The Ukraine crisis emphasizes the shift in the way both Russia and the EU seek to enhance their great power status in the post-Soviet space. Russia stopped seeking recognition from the EU and the USA and turned its attentions towards other rising powers. However, even though the BRICS are not satisfied with the western-led liberal world order, they might not be entirely happy with Russia's intentions. Before the crisis, the EU did not argue or even imagine that its policy in the region is a threat or might be perceived by Russia as a threat. Moscow's actions in Ukraine

prompted the EU to adopt a more conflictual attitude, where it now actively aims to counteract Moscow's influence. This transformed Russia and the EU's status seeking efforts in a deep security dilemma. Both actors perceive that maintaining their influence in the region is crucial for maintaining their status. Rather than seeking a mutually and sustainable agreement that would give equal importance to Ukraine's interests, the EU (or the West for that matter) and Russia draw more and more red lines, and revert to an increasing cold war rhetoric. In the short term this behaviour will put their status seeking efforts even more at odds with each and deepen the conflict. The EU should try to avoid viewing relations with Russia in a conflictual manner which would give Moscow fewer incentives to adopt risky strategies in Ukraine (and in the post-Soviet space) or seek recognition from other rising powers.

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Note

1. The article posits that states and other international actors are affected by concerns over their status in regional or world politics. However, for practical reasons the terms "state" is used throughout the article in conjunction with the concept of status.

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