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Competing Rationalities: Russia, the EU and the ‘Shared Neighbourhood’

DEREK AVERRE

THE FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT BY AUTHORITATIVE Russian commentators sums up what has in recent years become accepted thinking about the EU and Russia:

The officially declared aim of relations is strategic partnership. However, the current conceptual vacuum and level of competition, and even rivalry, means that ... this aim cannot bring relations in line with the long-term needs of the two sides in the dynamic world of the future.

They conclude that, with Russia having taken a different path from the liberal-democratic evolution chosen by Central and Eastern European countries, it is not clear what model of relations Moscow and Brussels should be aiming for (Karaganov & Yurgens 2008, p. 4). Their diverging positions are manifested not only in the increasing difficulties in their bilateral relationship but also in their approaches to the shared neighbourhood. In particular, the conflict between Russia and Georgia over the separatist region of South Ossetia in August 2008—and the criticism by the EU and many of its member states of Moscow’s disproportionate reaction and its recognition of South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence—only indicated the shallowness of the putative ‘strategic partnership’. Indeed, it led to the conclusion in Brussels that ‘relations between the EU and Russia have reached a crossroads’.¹

The term ‘shared neighbourhood’ has primarily been used to denote the Soviet successor states covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and now by the recently launched Eastern Partnership—Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the countries of the South Caucasus. However, with the adoption by Brussels of the Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia in June 2007—which ‘strengthens the perception of the EU as a political and even strategic actor in the region’ (Kassenova 2008, p. 2)—and the appointment of an EU Special Representative with

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¹*Georgia–Russia Conflict: Extraordinary European Council Presidency Conclusions*, CL08-136EN, Brussels, 1 September 2008, available at: www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_8116_en.htm, accessed 16 October 2008.

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an ambitious remit covering political, governance and energy issues, the first tentative steps have been taken to cement the neighbourhood approach (albeit at present without the array of instruments and incentives offered by the ENP) in the five states of Central Asia.

The divergence between the EU's and Russia's policies towards the shared neighbourhood is often framed as follows. The EU seeks to extend a European 'postmodern' security community across the wider Europe and create a 'ring of well governed countries' to the east, without offering them the prospect of accession. This is done through trade and assistance programmes to encourage the maximum possible convergence with European norms and values, notably good political and economic governance and the rule of law (Haukkala 2008a; Emerson 2003; Vahl 2006). This idea was present in both the ENP and the European Security Strategy,² and reinforced in the European Commission's Communication on the Eastern Partnership.³ The EU approach involves the exercise of what has been, in a quite extensive literature, variously called normative power, civilian power or, as external relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner has phrased it, "'soft and smart power" to project security and create prosperity' (Ferrero-Waldner 2008). Russia, on the other hand, is often perceived as seeking to maintain or recreate a traditional, realist 'sphere of influence' by manipulating a range of hard and soft instruments to exploit its predominant structural power in the post-Soviet space. As a prominent Russian commentator has put it:

Due to differences in political culture, Russians find it very difficult to understand the complex post-modernist logic which Europe declares ... for Russia, this is the traditional understanding of force, based on economic and military-political levers; whereas for the European Union, it is soft power used to expand the European legal space and make the European model more attractive to neighbouring countries. (Lukyanov 2008, p. 1114)

Until recently at least, Moscow has relied heavily on non-military instruments to reinforce its influence—'If not by tanks, then by banks' (Tsygankov 2006). The extensive use of military force by Moscow in the conflict with Georgia, which culminated in the stationing of a Russian military presence in 'newly independent' South Ossetia and Abkhazia, has left scholars and analysts debating whether Russia's intervention was the first move in a new revisionist regional strategy:

Two quite contrary narratives are in circulation. On the one hand, Russia claims that its operation and subsequent security measures in Georgia have been *sui generis* and essentially retaliatory—an *ad hoc*, exceptional, though large-scale response to a Georgian attack in South Ossetia. Critics of Moscow's offensive argue, on the other hand, that Russia's ostensible commitment to protect 'Russian citizens', a core justification of the intervention in Georgia, has principally served as a means of coercion and a device to expedite military

²*European Security Strategy, A Secure Europe in a Better World*, Brussels, 12 December 2003, available at: http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cms_data/docs/2004/4/29/European%20Security%20Strategy.pdf, accessed December 2003; also see Cremona and Hillion (2006, p. 7).

³*Eastern Partnership, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*, COM [2008] 823/4, 3 December 2008, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/docs/com08_823_en.pdf, accessed 8 December 2008.

intervention in that country for other strategic purposes ... the question arises whether there is a new determination in the Kremlin to use military power in a more open-ended way as an instrument of policy to enforce compliance by neighbour states and assert Russia's 'regional superpower' status, as Russia considers befits its rising status and influence in the global system. (Allison 2008, p. 1169)

Insofar as Russian foreign policy is seen as having normative content at all—in terms of how domestic political culture and Russian ideas about the international system are translated into its external relations—it is presented as being rooted in 'great power' norms redolent of the 'modern' era which are incompatible with the EU's (Tulmets 2007, p. 207), and arguably the broader liberal-democratic international community's, emphasis on freedom of choice, evolution towards democratic law, and human rights-based governance. According to one commentator, 'the enlargement of the EU, initially perceived as an objective process in the development of post-bipolar Europe, is today more and more often seen by many in Russia as a source of new challenges [linked with] rivalry in the post-Soviet space' (Arbatova 2006, pp. 15–16). A leading Russian analyst has concluded that 'Russia stays out of what Europe regards as the mainstream tendencies in the region and, alone among Europe's partners, seeks to present an alternative to that mainstream' (Trenin 2008, p. 135).

This essay suggests that the approaches of the EU and Russia to the shared neighbourhood lend themselves to a more subtle interpretation. The 'competing rationalities' of the title refer not, or not just, to the incompatible logics of EU 'postmodern' or normative power and Russian 'modern' or structural power—with the conflict this incompatibility generates—but to the tension between elements of normative and structural power in the relations of both with the countries on their periphery. While a number of scholars have examined the ideas of normative and structural power as a conceptual framework for understanding how the EU makes foreign and security policy (Manners 2002, 2006a, 2008; Diez 2005; Hyde-Price 2008; Zielonka 2008; Smith 2007), there has been much less work on Russia from this point of view.⁴

In this essay we first examine the concepts of normative and structural power and go on to look at the development of the EU's and Russia's policies towards the shared neighbourhood over the recent period—roughly from the time the ENP was introduced, when difficulties in the EU–Russia relationship became more apparent. We first consider aspects of normative power in both the EU's and Russia's approaches to their neighbours and ask to what extent there are prospects for normative convergence. We then explore the extent to which they exercise structural power in regions made up of states undergoing uncertain and quite diverse trajectories of development. The conflict between the idea of the EU as a normative power and the material impact of its policies, and how this might shape relations with Russia, are considered. Finally, we assess the prospects for a common response to governance and security challenges in the shared neighbourhood.

⁴Among the honourable exceptions are Makarychev (2008) and Haukkala (2008b), with interesting contributions by Tsygankov (2006) and Popescu (2006) on Russia's soft power approaches to the shared neighbourhood.

Power and norms in the shared neighbourhood

An immediate problem arises in defining power. Hard power is usually taken to mean the coercive use of military and economic might; soft power works more through persuasion and rests on the attractiveness and legitimacy of ideas, political culture and economic and social models (Tulmets 2008); civilian power and normative power both incorporate much inherent in soft power, but the former focuses on the application of non-military means and principles to settle differences and the latter works towards establishing shared understandings by extending ideas and opinions (Tulmets 2007). As we shall see, however, the boundaries between what constitutes normative, civilian, soft and hard power are fuzzy and the conception of the EU as a normative power is contested.

Part of the problem lies in how we interpret the concept of the normative. As Tocci points out, normative can be taken in a neutral sense to mean what is considered normal in the international environment. In this interpretation all major international actors have a normative element in their foreign policy in that they shape the norm. This is especially evident in regions where they have an active presence; in this case norms are in danger of becoming confused with the exercise of power. Alternatively, the normative can be associated with a moral imperative, or a 'good' or 'ethical' foreign policy; in this case the problem lies in a subjective interpretation of what is 'good' and in claiming universality for one's own model of political organisation (Tocci 2007, pp. 2–3). The latter reading is often present in analysis of the EU's external policy. The central claim of Ian Manners is that 'the EU has been, is and always will be a normative power in world politics'; quoting Javier Solana ('We do system change, not regime change. We do it slowly and on the basis of partnership') he argues that 'it is not just substantive normative principles such as democracy that are important, but the way in which the EU promotes such principles' (Manners 2008, pp. 45, 55, emphasis in original). This essay is less concerned with 'comparing the ethical and moral content of different norms' (Makarychev 2008, p. 3) and making value judgements, but rather seeks to investigate the EU's and Russia's adherence to specific norms as distinct from other modes of conducting foreign policy, such as through economic, military or military-technical instruments. The tension between these two definitions—and over what can be considered legitimate and widely accepted norms—are important in our consideration of their respective approaches.

The essay makes use of the concept of structural power developed by Susan Strange as a framework for analysing the political, economic and social arrangements affecting relations between states.⁵ Operating at a different level to traditional realist concepts of political authority exercised to gain or maintain international influence, structural power denotes control over four key 'structures' of power in the international political economy, namely security; production; credit and finance; and knowledge, beliefs and ideas. Control over these four pillars of the system allows an actor to control the rules of the game and shape the environment within which states relate to each other (Strange 2004, chapter 2). It should be noted that structural power is not a binary opposite of normative power, but offers a more comprehensive basis for under-

⁵This is also introduced by Haukkala in his contribution to this collection.

standing the diverse sources and effects of power in the globalising international system.

The aim here is not theoretical refinement of these concepts but to put in place a more flexible analytical framework to examine EU and Russian approaches and challenge the conflictual representation of what one scholar has called the 'sovereignty–Europeanization binary' (Hopf 2008, p. 5). A deeper understanding of recent events, and of the security and governance challenges the shared neighbourhood presents to both the EU and Russia, is particularly important at a time when the European policy community and media are manufacturing a highly subjective interpretation of Russia's regional role, not least following the conflict over South Ossetia.⁶

Several other problems need to be highlighted here. First is the nature of the EU as a foreign policy actor. Its external relations encompass a much wider range of policies—financial, legal, regulatory, and environmental—than 'classical' foreign policy. Also, divergences exist in the national preferences of its member states, not least in their policies towards the shared neighbourhood, and, despite progress in some areas in the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the notion of a common EU foreign policy must be heavily qualified. The EU can, however, be considered an international actor in the sense of the impact its policies have on the global and regional environment, and on relations with other major international actors (Zielonka 2008, pp. 473–75). This essay thus examines how the EU's external policy is influencing the political and security situation in the shared neighbourhood and the impact on relations with Moscow. Second, the focus on the EU's and Russia's policies in the shared neighbourhood should not blind us to the fact that the countries of these regions are themselves actors and in turn influence the approaches of the EU and Russia through interaction on a wide range of issues, both bilaterally and within the framework of regional organisations. The scope of this essay precludes detailed examination of this but raises some questions which may form the basis of a future research agenda. Third, the policies of other international actors, in the form of both states and international organisations such as the OSCE and Council of Europe, inevitably intrude on the policies of the EU and Russia. Again, their role is only briefly touched on and referred to mainly in the context of Moscow's and Brussels' approaches to their neighbourhood.

The EU and Russia as 'normative powers'

As much of the substantial literature suggests, the EU's approach to its Eastern neighbourhood constitutes an extension of the internal 'European project', based above all on norms and values which place good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as an attractive economic model for modernisation, at the forefront of its policy concerns.⁷ The ENP, and to an extent the Strategy for a

⁶These include some authoritative commentators who, astonishingly, see Russia's 'dictatorial leadership' as 'ready to go to war in order to satisfy its hunger for hegemonic power' (Emerson 2008, p. 1).

⁷For a good overview of this literature see Delcour (2007).

New Partnership with Central Asia, derive from the accession logic—‘be more like us’—and are articulated according to a normative agenda set by Brussels. The EU is unequivocal about the aim of these policies: to establish stability and prosperity on its periphery, and as a result to foster sustainable security in its broadest sense. It pursues this aim largely through bilateral relationships with states in the region, encompassing a range of trade and assistance programmes legally formulated in Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and operationalised through Action Plans, programmes under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, investment and governance facilities. Progress with each ‘norm-taking’ neighbour country is differentiated and dependent on their meeting a set of benchmarks established by the EU in exchange for financial assistance, mutual exchanges and a degree of integration (Casier 2007, pp. 73–94; Zielonka 2008, p. 476; Haukkala 2008a, pp. 41–43). This approach has been stepped up through a Commission document strengthening the ENP⁸ and the launch of the Eastern Partnership which, in its own words, marks ‘a step change in relations with these partners . . . *responding to the need for a clearer signal of EU commitment following the conflict in Georgia and its broader repercussions*’ and includes the prospect of Association Agreements and much more extensive political and economic benefits.⁹ It is important to note that, though vague on commitments, the launch of the Eastern Partnership was accelerated as a response to political turbulence in the South Caucasus and suggests a greater role for the EU in regions of ‘strategic importance’ for it.¹⁰

Indeed a regional approach has developed to complement the bilateral relationships, notably the Black Sea Synergy, which aims to lend greater focus and coherence to the EU’s efforts to promote stability in the countries around the Black Sea.¹¹ The Eastern Partnership also incorporates a multilateral dimension, complementing Black Sea Synergy, through ‘policy platforms’ to address common challenges focused on democracy and good governance, economic integration and convergence with EU policies, energy security and enhanced contacts between people. The Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia is essentially an attempt to add a regional dimension to bilateral relations and create a seamless link between the EU’s approaches to countries on its immediate periphery and the increasingly important Central Asian region. It also offers the EU’s experience in regional integration and addresses security and energy issues. These initiatives appear to be designed to respond to the charge that the EU, with the exception of some of its new member states, is ambivalent about the emergence of fully fledged regional organisations such as GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) and the Community of

⁸*A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy*, Communication from the Commission, COM [2007] 774 final, Brussels, 5 December 2007.

⁹*Eastern Partnership*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, COM [2008] 823/4, 3 December 2008, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/docs/com08_823_en.pdf, accessed 8 December 2008, emphasis in original.

¹⁰*Brussels European Council Presidency Conclusions 19/20 March*, 20 March 2009, 7880/09, annex 2; also, Hillion and Mayhew (2009, p. 5).

¹¹*Black Sea Synergy—Bringing the Region Closer to the EU*, document IP/07/486, Brussels, 11 April 2007; also Delcour (2008).

Democratic Choice and that it prefers the bilateral approach to relations with countries in its neighbourhood.

The success or otherwise of the EU's normative engagement can only be briefly considered here. Some scholars have criticised the lack of clarity in terms of priorities and concrete action in the ENP (Sasse 2008, p. 302) and the lack of coherence of the policy-making process based on the 'values agenda' (Bosse 2008). Others bemoan the fact that it is essentially a '*unilateral policy* aimed at changing the Union's environment ... a vehicle for the EU to *project* a corpus of norms and practices considered to be appropriate for political and economic reform' (Cremona & Hillion 2006, p. 21, emphasis in original). A number of studies have focused on the difficulties of persuading elites in the ENP countries to 'internalise' EU norms and thus to avoid what Kataryna Wolczuk has called (in relation to Ukraine) 'declarative' Europeanisation (Wolczuk 2004), or a lack of progress in making changes to domestic institutions and policies in line with EU normative targets. Particularly when compared to countries with accession prospects, the ENP has 'had an important but not transformative effect in Ukraine' (Wolczuk 2009, p. 188). A recent study focusing on Ukraine, Belarus and Azerbaijan has challenged the extent of the EU's commitment to improving governance and human rights. According to Youngs,

the feeling is widespread that in practice European governments have become less committed to promoting political change in many third countries ... Within the EU there is an apparent absence of political will fundamentally to revise approaches to democracy support, even if the shortcomings of these policies have been apparent for some time. (Youngs 2008, pp. 1–2, 7)

The increased expectations prompted by the Eastern Partnership risk further widening the gap between the EU's promised deeper engagement with its partners and what it is able to deliver in terms of coherent and consistent policies (Hillion & Mayhew 2009, p. 21).

The attempt by the Union to balance democracy promotion with its economic and security interests, particularly acute in the case of securing energy supplies from authoritarian states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan, has also been questioned (Cornell & Jonsson 2008). Brussels undoubtedly has much to offer these countries in terms of economic modernisation and financial assistance for development. However, while their governing elites may well wish to keep the European door open as an alternative, albeit partial, to predominant Russian (and in the case of Central Asia) Chinese influence, the extent of their commitment to political pluralism and good governance in a volatile domestic and regional security environment is highly uncertain (Melvin 2007; Kassenova 2008; Boonstra 2008). A recent paper argues that 'many western international and non-governmental organizations that have emphasized a values-based agenda have been criticized and even driven from the region by Central Asian governments that are keen to limit outside interference in their domestic affairs' (Cooley 2008, p. 1174). The EU's ability to open up the political space in these countries thus faces substantive constraints. Whether normative ties with Europe will prove to be thicker than oil, or whether the Central Asian states will gradually adopt the EU's values-based agenda over and above economic engagement, remain unanswered questions.

What of Russia's own normative claims? As the present writer's own recent work has sought to demonstrate (Averre 2008, pp. 32–33), the Russian governing elite—despite its claim to share fundamental values with Europe—has over the recent period engaged more and more in a 'battle of ideas' with the EU to promote and defend the legitimacy of its own norms, or competing principles of political organisation, as an alternative to purportedly 'universal' Western liberal democratic norms. Popescu has described Moscow's attempts—part of a broader strategy to cement its own economic and security interests, which he terms 'smart authoritarianism'—to develop an infrastructure of ideas, institutions and NGO networks, supported by a directorate attached to the Presidential administration that was specially created for the purpose, and to gain influence at the level of both government and society in the states of the shared neighbourhood (Popescu 2006). This has in fact been openly acknowledged by foreign minister Sergei Lavrov:

Concerning the question of what we have at our disposal apart from diplomacy, I would stress again that it is above all our internal development, our internal prosperity, our attractiveness for other countries ... the actions we undertake to strengthen and expand humanitarian cooperation in the CIS framework. Our influence, like the influence of any other country in today's world, depends more and more on so-called 'soft power'.¹²

Moscow's aim is similar to that of Brussels—to shape its external environment by establishing stable and friendly states on its periphery as a prerequisite for security. However, in normative terms it privileges sovereignty, regime stability and non-interference in the internal affairs of these states, together with the gradual evolution of local models of governance, over what it presents as the EU's imposition of democratisation—pejoratively termed *demokratizatorstvo*, or 'democratisationism'—as a means of managing its unstable environment. A recent report suggests that Moscow's views on the potential destabilising impact of the Western democratisation agenda are shared by the political establishment in Kazakhstan, an emerging regional leader (Dave 2007, pp. 5–6). One scholar has framed this normative conflict as follows:

'Sovereignty' and 'Europeanisation' are two competing bureaucratic strategies of managing globalization, one aimed at *protecting* internal order, and another aimed at *projecting* internal order. Russia is reinforcing domestic stateness as a conservative means of minimizing the ambiguity of global challenges, while the EU projects its domestic structures as a means to manage ambiguity along its periphery. (S. Medvedev 2008, p. 225, emphasis in original)

Moscow's increasingly sophisticated efforts to integrate and promote common understandings through regional organisations—the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation—signals a greater reliance on their collective normative potential to enforce the rules. These efforts have produced patchy results, stemming from the absence of a genuine common ideology and differing strategic aims among

¹²S. V. Lavrov, speech before the State *Duma*, Moscow, 2 April 2008, available at: www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/spis/7C41DAEEDA986E1EC32574250026F72F, accessed 6 May 2008.

the regions' states, so that in practice bilateral relations have often predominated. Nevertheless they have hitherto been more pronounced than the EU's attempts to encourage a multilateral regional dimension to its neighbourhood strategy (as mentioned above, something the Eastern Partnership is designed to address directly). As with the EU, Moscow's strategy also represents an extension of its internal project: Russia's recovery to (relative) domestic order under Putin was largely based on regime stability through 'managed' democracy and increasing reliance on the strong sovereign state model. Thus, in criticising interference by Europe in neighbouring countries—by means of support for 'colour revolutions' and advocacy networks promoting democracy and human rights—Moscow often warns of these countries' 'desovereignisation'.

As mentioned above, in his norm-centred analysis of Russia's foreign policy Makarychev does not compare the ethical and moral content of different norms but poses the 'core question' of whether Russia 'is in principle committed to (any) norms as opposed to pursuing self-interest through conquest, force or possession'. He argues that Russia's actions do not derive exclusively from *Realpolitik* but that it seeks legitimacy for its normative agenda. However, in a rapidly evolving foreign policy influenced by a range of diverse external and domestic factors, including Russian elites' understanding of the global political environment and their attempts, often dislocated and contradictory, to define Russia's role in it, 'its normative aspects are often encoded in other arguments, including geopolitical, economic or security ones' (Makarychev 2008, pp. 3–4). This was strikingly illustrated by Putin's speech at the Munich security conference in February 2007, which raised what are for Moscow fundamental issues concerning the international security order, but which at the same time engaged in a normative debate to stake Russia's claim to a legitimate global role (Putin 2007). Less graphic but just as forceful were President Medvedev's comments to an international audience in the wake of the South Ossetia conflict. His defence of Russia's actions and his claim that Russia has a sphere of 'privileged interests' were accompanied by a restatement of Russia's unchanging commitment to broader shared norms including 'the development in all possible ways of rights and freedoms, the struggle with corruption, strengthening the right of private ownership; and with respect to its foreign policy vector. Russia has no other choice' (D. Medvedev 2008a). Lavrov also appealed to international norms in equating Georgia's incursion into South Ossetia with genocide, as well as with a breach of the right of freedom and self-determination, asserting that Moscow's response was intended to avert a humanitarian catastrophe under the rubric of 'responsibility to protect'.¹³ Furthermore, he argued, Russia was defending

the growing support in the international community of the idea of security of the individual, which in no way contradicts the traditional conception of the security of the state. To kill people whom you consider your own citizens is not an internal affair. (Lavrov 2008a)

¹³S. V. Lavrov, interview with the BBC, Moscow, 9 August 2008, available at: www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sp/s/C4367C2B715EDA6DC32574A2005548AC, accessed 19 September 2008.

Moscow's normative appeals are open to question. Lavrov's arguments relating to the international consensus over the 'responsibility to protect' are based on misinterpretation, whether deliberate or otherwise (Allison 2008, pp. 1152–54; Makarychev 2009, pp. 7–8). More broadly, Moscow's policy of reinforcing domestic stateness by supporting authoritarian regimes risks producing elite-driven and bureaucratically enforced political and social models which may jeopardise the 'rights and freedoms' spoken of by Medvedev. The rather non-transparent political and business interests of Russia's governing elite may also intrude both on the struggle against corruption and on foreign policy. Russia is thus perceived more as 'a norm-exploiter than a norm-producer ... [disregarding] norms that regulate transparency, accountability, sustainable development, good governance, and so on' so that 'communicative problems with its major Western partners are inevitable' (Makarychev 2009, p. 7).

The central problem is that differing approaches to internal governance mean that Russia's normative claims frequently encounter scepticism or rejection on the part of its European partners. This stems partly from the idea, common in democratic peace debates, that only liberal democracies can lay claim to legitimacy: '[nonliberal states] tend to be seen as lacking a basic legitimacy in international affairs, traceable to the idea that only liberal democratic domestic arrangements can possibly reflect the consent of the governed and constrain the foreign policy behavior of elites' (Blaney 2001, p. 35). Haukkala has framed the problem in similar terms:

gaining [sovereign] recognition has always entailed meeting expectations concerning the modes of internal governance. Indeed from the outset, sovereignty was not only a source of internal authority—the freedom for the ruler to do as he or she pleased domestically—but it also had a side of external legitimacy to it.

He has traced this idea back to the very start of the post-Soviet period and the failure of Gorbachev's idea of a Common European Home:

Western Europe continued, or restarted, the imposition of its normative basis on the Soviet Union yet again ... it was the Western powers and increasingly the EC and its member states that were able to seize the initiative in laying down the rules for the emerging 'New Europe'. (Haukkala 2008c, pp. 38, 51)¹⁴

In this reading, Russia does not have legitimate interests beyond its borders: 'the model of governance that Russia pledges to implement here runs directly *against* a key liberal trend ... Russia is once again rigged with a system of governance that jeopardizes its possible standing as a great power' (Neumann 2008, p. 31, emphasis in original).

However, Moscow has vigorously taken up what is a fundamental debate, challenging the Western powers' monopoly on legitimacy as Russia has recovered confidence based on stability of the domestic economy and governance. A recent speech by Lavrov summarises the official view:

¹⁴See also Postel-Vinay (2008, pp. 40–41).

... [T]wo principal approaches can be observed. First, that the world is gradually, through adoption of Western values, becoming the Greater West. This is a kind of variation on the 'end of history' theme. A different approach—and this is what we are promoting—boils down to the fact that competition is becoming genuinely global and acquiring a civilisational dimension, in other words values and developmental models are themselves also becoming the subject of competition. (Lavrov 2008b)

Lavrov has defended Russia's internal development and linked it to its regional policy, questioning the assumptions underpinning the extension of the European order to the East:

Those who criticise the internal development of our country cannot explain clearly why Russia cannot be considered a normal country ... On the whole one must admit that this problem is of wider importance for the entire post-Soviet space. As has happened more than once in history, society in a state of intellectual 'ferment' faces the temptation to accept as axiomatic the dubious premise that 'the sun rises in the West', and that what has been achieved there is the end product of humanity's development, a kind of 'end of history'. This often disorients and demobilises society and as a result harms democratic development ... we are acting in the European way, from the position of a pluralist political culture, which by definition should treat debate with tolerance. This kind of discussion should not be approached from the position of infallibility of any party. (Lavrov 2008c)

Essentially, Russia's governing elite rejects the politicisation of the EU's normative agenda which, it believes, is as much about interests and influence as about values and which places a stark choice before the countries of the shared neighbourhood: accept 'normative power Europe' or risk being branded illegitimate. While it might concede that the 'thicker' norms that constitute the international order (or, more properly, international society) have largely been shaped by the liberal democracies within a broader European values system, Moscow now contests the hegemony of Western-led political and economic institutions and privileges pluralist over solidarist norms. Put simply, local models of governance should be allowed to develop in accordance with local needs and take account of the political, social and cultural pressures arising from modernisation.

Moscow's normative concerns are part of a larger challenge to the liberal democracies over the rules of international politics. This was reflected in Dmitrii Medvedev's recent proposal for a new European security pact to reaffirm what Moscow considers as the basic principles for intergovernmental and security relations in the Euro-Atlantic region: respect for state sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, inadmissibility of the use or threat of force, equal security and no exclusive rights for any state or organisation for peace and stability (D. Medvedev 2008b). Medvedev's proposal appears regressive in that these principles are similar to those which underpinned the Helsinki process, culminating in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, but are heavily skewed towards political-military aspects of security and do not mention human rights (which is at least partly an attempt to rectify the perceived bias in the work of the OSCE in recent years). However, the proposal signals Moscow's deep dissatisfaction with 'double standards' in Europe's normative claims which have arisen over a number of issues in recent years.

But is Moscow's normative approach proving any more attractive than that of the EU to its neighbouring states? In the aftermath of the South Ossetia conflict these states did not recognise the independence of the separatist territories and many were reluctant to approve Moscow's show of force against Georgia. One commentator's assessment is unequivocal:

Russia discovered in the five days of the Georgian war that it does not have any meaningful 'soft power'. Russia is dangerously lonely in the post-ideological world. The end of the Soviet Union and the death of communism deprived Moscow of its universal language and universal appeal; nothing has emerged to replace it. (Krastev 2008)

Some countries in the shared neighbourhood appear to be moving firmly in Europe's direction; others are seeking political, economic and security benefits to serve pragmatic national interests through more diversified foreign policies, including developing relations with the EU. Both the geostrategic and normative spaces are opening up; while support for 'regime security' and economic levers will gain Moscow some purchase in the more authoritarian states in the region, the prospects for far-reaching shared understandings are uncertain. Perhaps even more so than the EU, Russia has struggled to devise a coherent strategy and articulate an attractive set of ideas and values for the shared neighbourhood. Its policy has often been reactive and, as a result, it has tended to be overtaken by developments. Events such as the colour revolutions and the South Ossetia conflict have pushed Moscow into hasty, ill-considered responses and reinforced negative perceptions among its neighbours.

Yet it is important to note that, despite the many difficulties involved in negotiating and absorbing European norms due to its lack of leverage on EU decision making and Russia's own internal divisions, Moscow's approach does not signal a wholesale disengagement from the EU's normative agenda. Early in his presidency Medvedev emphasised not only Russia's demand for a place at the European table but also that

Russia has laid the foundations for the formation of a state which is absolutely compatible with the rest of Europe—to put it more precisely, with the best that a common legacy of European civilisation represents. To use the figurative language of John le Carré, Russia today 'has come in from the cold'—after almost a century of isolation and self-isolation. (D. Medvedev 2008c)

Some Russian elite members, particularly at the less politicised level of government agency professionals dealing with technical aspects of planning and implementing reforms, are by no means impervious to the attraction of EU and broader European norms for Russia's own political, social and economic modernisation.

Negotiations over a new agreement to replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement have resumed following delays over trade disputes with Poland and in the aftermath of the South Ossetia conflict. A 2007 progress report on the EU–Russia Common Spaces states that though

much remains to be done and some important points agreed in principle are yet to be implemented in practice ... [a]ll dialogues have substantially deepened mutual understanding

of policies and rules thus providing the underpinning of the future negotiations of the New EU/Russia Agreement.¹⁵

A recent study has argued that, although the political will has sometimes been lacking to incorporate agreements reached within numerous sectoral dialogues in the Common Economic Space into a far-reaching programme of internal reform, Russia has accepted approximation to EU standards of governance in specific policy areas relevant to the internal market such as competition policy, company law and consumer protection. According to Meloni,

gradual but incremental consolidation of bilateral contacts and the enhancement of a complex system of soft institutional design have provided the partners an important tool for coordination which has proved critical in order to promote the partnership ... [this] has allowed the creation of a framework for discussion and confrontation which has added new elements of convergence. (Meloni 2008, pp. 3, 8)

Russia's modernisation has thus drawn on EU experience, though adherence to EU standards has been selective due to the complex interplay of state and sectional interests. As a recent EU document recognises, there are also substantial common interests in the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, and the Common Space of Research and Education.¹⁶ Even though Russia's domestic political environment has presented serious challenges to the promotion of human rights—not least due to the politicisation of human rights advocacy described by Rick Fawn in this collection—Russian NGOs involved in European human rights policy networks do have opportunities to introduce European norms and values into the policy-making process in Russia through interaction with government agency professionals (Klitsounova 2008).

It would be premature to judge to what extent the EU and Russia might become 'more like' each other, or in other words, whether transactions across a range of issue areas might lead in time to shared values, or whether Russia's commitment to the normative element of the Common Spaces will remain largely 'declarative'. However, the measure of engagement, and even partial convergence, reached within the three Common Spaces mentioned above arguably constitutes more than a purely token acceptance by Russia of the need to foster and sustain standards of governance directed towards sustainable development, social stability and prosperity—elements which form the basis of security in the broader sense promoted by the EU across its Eastern borders via the ENP, the Eastern Partnership, the Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia and Black Sea Synergy.

Might there be scope in the longer term for Moscow and Brussels to devise a joint approach to promote human security in the region—extending even to parts of Brussels' democratisation and human rights agenda and involving renewed

¹⁵ *EU–Russia Common Spaces—Progress Report 2007* (2008) 8134/08, Brussels, 7 April 2008, pp. 2–3, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/russia/docs/commonsplaces_prog_report2007.pdf, accessed 17 February 2009.

¹⁶ *Review of EU–Russia Relations*, MEMO/08/678, Brussels, 5 November 2008.

commitments to OSCE and Council of Europe norms—in order to mitigate normative conflict and thereby cement a genuine common security space? In spite of inevitable and in many respects legitimate economic competition and specific political disputes, and of Brussels' apparent unwillingness to incorporate Russia into its regional initiatives, regional engagement on such broader security and economic issues could be stepped up.¹⁷ Indeed, a recent report advocates regional sectoral initiatives to bring the ENP closer to the EU–Russia common spaces agenda (Duleba *et al.* 2008, pp. 30–33, 67–68; see also Hillion & Mayhew 2009, pp. 13–15). The EU's leverage is otherwise likely to be limited in many of the countries of the shared neighbourhood. There are indications that Brussels, in danger of perpetuating the 'sub-regionalisation of the post-Soviet space' in its policies (Delcour 2008, p. 173), is beginning to understand the size of the task involved in engaging with its neighbours. The EU's National Indicative Programme for Azerbaijan refers to the latter's pursuit of 'an "evolutionary" reform strategy to develop democracy and a market economy', resonating with Moscow's own emphasis in official pronouncements on the 'evolutionary' transition to democracy and the rule of law in these countries.¹⁸ There is a substantial research agenda here for scholars and analysts in the field.

The EU and structural power

The introduction to this essay pointed to the widespread view that Russia's policy in the shared neighbourhood amounts, as one scholar has put it, to the establishment or reestablishment of a traditional 'sphere of influence that gives Russia a *droit de regard* over its former republics [*sic*]' (Stent 2008, p. 1102). It is certainly the case that the fourth EU–Russia Common Space—the Common Space of External Security—is contested. They cooperate on a range of international security issues which do not directly impinge on relations with their neighbours (including a Russian contribution to EU peacekeeping in the Central African Republic and Chad, and cooperation with the EU naval operation Atalanta to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia). However, in spite of a joint commitment in the road map to cooperate in regions adjacent to their borders, engagement in the shared neighbourhood on issues such as conflict resolution and crisis management has been limited. In the EU's 2007 Progress Report the Common Space of External Security was conspicuous by its virtual absence (the report states that it 'concerns principally matters related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and is not covered by this progress report'), suggesting the lack of any substantive progress.¹⁹ Given the current state of relations and the unstable regional

¹⁷Russia is not mentioned at all in the Partnership with Central Asia, and only in passing in the ENP strategy papers and the Eastern Partnership.

¹⁸*Review of the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy*, 27 March 2007, available at: www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/3647DA97748A106BC32572AB002AC4DD, accessed 4 May 2007.

¹⁹*EU–Russia Common Spaces—Progress Report 2007* (2008) 8134/08, Brussels, 7 April 2008, p. 1, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/russia/docs/commonsaces_prog_report2007.pdf, accessed 17 February 2009.

environment there appears to be little prospect of more extensive joint EU–Russia ‘hard’ security commitments.

The logic of cooperative action within a space of ‘common security’ undoubtedly conflicts with the logic of competition inherent in ‘realist’ trends in Russian foreign policy thinking, which push it towards autonomy and resist any perceived challenge to its sovereignty. These trends are to a considerable extent a legacy of Russia’s weakness in the first post-Soviet decade and the perception that Western powers and institutions took advantage of this weakness to the detriment of Russia’s national security. One commentator concludes that

Russia wants to be accepted as a great power again and that it aspires to regain as much of its predecessor’s power and influence as is practically possible ... [and this] automatically involves changes in the international order, and these changes will inevitably impact the position of the United States and the European Union, the two powers that benefited most from the geopolitical consequences of the end of the Cold War. (Gerrits 2008, p. 7)

However, the term ‘sphere of influence’, cheerfully tossed into debates on Russia’s neighbourhood policy while rarely being defined with any great precision, needs to be reconsidered. The static conception of a traditional *droit de regard* enforced by ‘hard’ political–military instruments is misconceived; it misses the point that both the sources and effects of power are more diffused. The concept of structural power outlined earlier—the idea that control over security, production, credit and finance, and knowledge and ideas enables a state to shape its environment—provides a much more dynamic framework for understanding the security environment. Indeed, the thinking of Russia’s foreign policy elite has evolved; it now perceives that structural shifts in the distribution of material power, with the emergence of rising states and regional groupings, the relative decline of the Western powers and a crisis of confidence in liberal-democratic ideas, favour recovery of its own position as an independent and influential power (Averre 2008, p. 30). The elite’s attempts to maximise Russia’s structural power in its immediate neighbourhood in order to shape or influence external conditions is, when based in these perceptions, rational state behaviour. (This does not exclude occasional irrational or ill-conceived responses to certain events, recognition of the independence of Georgia’s separatist regions being a case in point.) Hence Moscow insists on a number of conditions: that Russia remains the main security ‘provider’ in these regions through the presence of ‘peacekeeping’ troops, provision of military or military–technical support and a central role—excluding as far as possible direct European participation—in peace settlement negotiations; that Russia positions itself as a major source of regional finance and trade, playing a key role in energy production and transportation (again, limiting Europe’s influence); that Russian economic development becomes a model for modernisation in the markets of the region; and that Russia is seen as a viable source of political culture and ideas, a ‘cultural–civilisational bridge’ across a wider historical community or *obshchnost’*.

Even without the effects of the global financial crisis there are substantive constraints on Russia’s capacity to exercise structural power (Averre 2008, pp. 35–36).

The fragmentation of the neighbouring regions described earlier—understood by the more responsible political actors and far-sighted commentators in Russia²⁰—and the potential for security breakdown and the loss of economic advantages impact directly on Russia. The economic, social, cultural and demographic legacy does give Russia an important role in neighbouring states but the cohesion of this wider community is under threat from a mix of both internal (political, social and demographic) and external (security and energy) factors—not least from its neighbours' growing engagement with Europe, however limited that may be at present. Despite its incursion into Georgia, Russia is not able—and I would argue is not willing—to shoulder the burden that regional hegemony would impose. Nor is Moscow any longer able to sustain economic dominance as the markets in the region become increasingly diversified and countries pursue interdependent relations with other major centres of economic activity. Even the use of energy supplies as a political 'weapon' is circumscribed by business interests and Russia's own partial dependence on Central Asia's energy output to maintain its exports.

As suggested earlier in this essay, an extensive debate has emerged about the nature of the power exercised by the EU. Diez notes that 'a lot of the discussion about "normative power Europe" does not really examine the de facto impact of EU policy ... [M]ilitary and economic forms of power may underpin normative power' (Diez 2005, p. 616). Two important points may be made here. First, the EU is developing a military capability as part of its foreign policy machinery (a point made by others, including Haukkala in his essay in this collection); this trend 'is often seen as the EU developing towards a state-like entity and, as a result, possibly losing some of the particularities that are assumed to make it a "normative" power' (Sjursen 2006a, p. 171). This is discussed in detail in an authoritative article by Alyson Bailes, who notes that in establishing the European Security and Defence Policy 'the EU ... joined rather a small group of "militarized" international institutions, in Europe comprising only NATO and the post-Soviet Collective Security Treaty Organisation' (Bailes 2008, p. 116, footnote 3). Secondly, and in fact more importantly, the EU's insistence on norms and values masks its pursuit of economic and strategic interests: 'The point is not that normative power is not strategic, but that strategic interests and norms cannot be easily distinguished, and that the assumption of a normative sphere without interests is in itself nonsensical' (Diez 2005, p. 625). Hyde-Price is less equivocal, arguing (from a structural realist theoretical viewpoint) that, while it is

the institutional repository of the *second-order normative concerns* of EU member states [the EU's evolving role means] it is far from being a 'normative' power whose influence derives from 'what it is' rather than 'what it does'. On the contrary, whatever 'transformative power' the EU has wielded is based on its economic clout, the fear of exclusion from its markets and the promise of future membership—all very tangible forms of hard power. (Hyde-Price 2008, p. 31, emphasis in original)

²⁰*The World Around Russia 2017: An Outlook for the Midterm Future*, report by the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, State University Higher School of Economics and RIO-Center, November 2007, pp. 8, 121, available at: www.globalaffairs.ru/docs/2017_eng_reader.pdf, accessed 4 May 2008.

In other words, Brussels uses its material power capabilities to exert direct influence over other actors and shape its external environment. Zielonka, while noting the importance of the EU's normative attraction, analyses the interplay between normative and soft power in what he calls the EU's 'imperial politics':

[T]he EU's efforts to spread its norms and extend its power in various parts of the world ... [are] truly imperial in the sense that the EU tries to impose domestic constraints on other actors through various forms of economic and political domination, or even formal annexations. The effort has proved most successful in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, where it has enormous political and economic leverage and where there is a strong and ever growing convergence of norms and values. (Zielonka 2008, p. 471)

Most of these scholars emphasise the EU's use of economic and bureaucratic instruments rather than coercive military power, although Hyde-Price's characterisation of positive conditionality as 'hard' power is debatable. Nevertheless, they shift the focus away from the normative. Smith has contributed to this debate, asking 'to what ends or for whose benefits are the institutional assets of the EU deployed in the changing European order, especially given their achievement of a form of (qualified) institutional hegemony, which has both material and normative forms?' He further notes the

unresolved contradictions between the self-conceptions of the EU as a civilian power or a normative power and the more material impact of institutional power and structural power ... If the EU gains traction within the European order primarily because of its dominant presence and structural power, reinforced by its institutional strength, does that mean that the image of the EU as a normative power needs to be qualified and/or reassessed? ... [T]he focus on recent, current and prospective developments in the European order alerts us to the growing linkage between normative and material power: can it be that normative power Europe will adopt coercive means with which to spread its truth? (Smith 2007, p. 448)

Haukkala concludes that 'there is nothing particularly "soft" in the application of this [normative] power: the ability to frame the very nature of issues and the resultant interaction in certain ways is a very robust form of power indeed' and consequently characterises the EU as a regional normative hegemon (Haukkala 2008b, p. 104). In a curious realist twist, the corollary is often drawn that the EU needs to promote itself in the region in order to 'balance' the influence of Russia (Melvin & Boonstra 2008, pp. 7–8).

Normative attraction is undoubtedly an important source of the EU's influence. However, the actual or potential impact of the EU's structural power in the shared neighbourhood, and the extent to which it tends to lead to conflictual relations with Russia, is rarely considered. Although EU political–military involvement in these regions has hitherto been very limited—and indeed controversial among member states—conflict prevention and peace support are important elements of its security policy. It is increasingly being called upon to be a security provider by some ENP partners, including in the separatist conflicts. As Bailes notes, apart from the EUJUST-Themis rule of law mission—which aimed to contribute to Georgia's overall

stability and transition by supporting coordination of the relevant Georgian agencies in the field of criminal justice reform—and the customs initiative on the Moldova–Ukraine border, the EU has also considered a peacekeeping operation in Moldova to solve the Transnistria issue, following its rejection of the Kozak plan put forward by Moscow in 2003 to settle the conflict by establishing a loose federal state. She points to ‘the basic European quandary that acting *with* Russian approval is likely to be ethically (and politically) questionable, but acting *against* Russian wishes too dangerous’ (Bailes 2008, p. 124, emphasis in original). Brussels has made an open-ended but explicit commitment ‘to assume a greater role in the resolutions of conflicts in the neighbourhood’ as well as promoting stability through support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law (A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy 2007). In the wake of the South Ossetia crisis it was encouraged to go further and assign peacekeeping forces to the Georgian border as well as sending a civilian mission and supporting reconstruction efforts (Popescu *et al.* 2008). The European Council Presidency conclusions on the conflict stated that the EU has ‘decided on the immediate dispatch of a fact finding mission with the task of helping to gather information and defining the modalities for an increased European Union commitment on the ground, under the European Security and Defence Policy’, though without defining the scope or mandate of the civilian observation mission (Georgia–Russia Conflict 2008). Furthermore, the EU is an increasing source of finance for the neighbouring countries and its ability to use economic levers has been growing quite rapidly; the potential for closer reciprocal economic ties, with these countries supplying energy and other raw materials and opening their markets for European goods and services, is considerable and EU documents talk of ‘deep and comprehensive free trade areas’ in the longer term (Brussels European Council Presidency Conclusions 2009). Finally, as discussed earlier, Brussels’ attempts to influence political culture and internal governance in these countries by setting benchmarks and offering incentives—while subject to constraints—are constantly being stepped up.

The debate on how the EU is evolving, and what it is evolving into, is complex. Given its trade, energy and security interests, separating normative and structural aspects of EU power may well become more difficult as its involvement in the Eastern neighbourhood develops. Put simply, it is not yet clear ‘what kind of combination of power and norms best serves the EU’s ends’ (Zielonka 2008, p. 482). On the one hand, the logic of EU policy hitherto might lead it to restrict its role to being the key regulatory player in the wider Europe, promoting—albeit fundamentally to protect its own interests—rules and standards to the general good (Manners 2008, p. 52; Zielonka 2008, p. 480). Its member states’ capacity and appetite for coercion is at present very limited and its previous declarations of intent to play a more active role in the South Caucasus have largely been confined to post-conflict rehabilitation. On the other hand, as Bailes contends, with NATO moving out of the business of territorial defence and active security-building with Russia—and despite divergent positions among EU member-states—

the EU can not pose as a small huddle of venerable do-gooders sheltering under the wing of NATO and the United States. It has a strategic weight of its own and an external impact that

can be experienced in many places as oppressive and challenging: it is moving down the road towards having potential enemies as well as competitors. (Bailes 2008, p. 119)

She concludes that the contradictions in the evolution of the Union boil down to 'one supreme ambivalence in the EU's overall strategy between *doing good*—through visible, active intervention—and *being good*—that is, the assumption that the Union's creation and survival is something of existential value for the world' (Bailes 2008, p. 121, emphasis in original).

The differing approaches of the EU and Russia to regional security challenges, and the choice of instruments used to promote their respective interests, are likely to present a series of dilemmas which go to the heart of their relations. A central dilemma for the EU—which means that it cannot rely solely on the quasi-enlargement mantra 'be more like us' but may require more of the traditional attributes of power—is between 'the recognition (not least by the EU itself) that the Union is both a large part and an indispensable maker of the world order' and the problem that 'having delegitimised power politics on the European continent, the EU cannot defend power politics on a global scale' (de Vasconcelos 2008, pp. 17, 24). At a time of shifting strategic realities in the wider Europe, might situations arise where the EU is forced to consider 'hard', coercive policies in the shared neighbourhood?

While the policy community in Moscow has voiced concern over the challenge posed by the EU to Russia's interests in the shared neighbourhood, including through the Eastern Partnership, there is also a keen sense that a more constructive approach is needed.²¹ Running counter to the widespread notion that Moscow relies on a divide-and-rule strategy in its relations with Europe, the chairman of the *Duma* International Affairs Committee, Konstantin Kosachev has deplored the EU's lack of cohesion in decision-making on external policy and has called for Europe to speak with one voice:

I don't agree with those who say that Russia will benefit from any failure of future EU integration ... It's better to recognise now that within the foreseeable future there will no longer be a Europe of individual countries. And we shouldn't base our plans only on thinking that it's more convenient to deal with individual countries. All the more so because in some cases—security issues, for example—it's sometimes even harder to negotiate singly, because European security is indivisible. It is in our interest that the European Union in particular forms a common foreign and security policy concept and doesn't hand these topics over to NATO and the US. (Kosachev 2008a, p. 8)

Kosachev has, however, pointed out the lessons of the South Ossetia conflict and the dangers of a reactive EU policy towards the shared neighbourhood based on normative criteria rather than a sober assessment of Europe's interests in a volatile region:

Europe found itself dragged into a serious conflict without even having had time to make sense of the situation, acting upon the natural desire to defend those who were waving its flag about and talking a lot about freedom and democracy ... The European Union itself will not

²¹ *News Conference following Russia–EU Summit* (2009), Khabarovsk, 22 May, available at: www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2009/05/22/1419_type82915_216713.shtml, accessed 10 June 2009.

formulate its own agenda in security matters and so is forced only to react to issues set by others ... But reality will each time bring Europe up against more and more new problems which demand a distinct sovereign position which would meet the interests of the continent as a whole. (Kosachev 2008b, p. 19)

This appeal for the EU to adopt a 'sovereign' position may betray a lack of understanding of the Union as a foreign policy actor, but raises important questions: to what extent will the EU be changed by engagement in its Eastern neighbourhood in terms of its approaches to external policy, and how will the 'reality' of a region fragmenting along political, economic, social and ethnic lines impact on Brussels' normative agenda? And as the EU responds to the shifting balance between normative and structural power, how will Moscow itself deal with the opportunities and constraints generated?

Conclusions: a common EU–Russia response to security and governance challenges?

This essay—perhaps controversially in the wake of the South Ossetia conflict—questions the assumption that Brussels and Moscow offer radically different approaches to the shared neighbourhood, and argues that it is simplistic to talk of a benign, normative power Europe in relentless competition with a malign Russian 'sphere of influence'. Moscow is generally considered as a normative and political rival to Brussels and consequently as the main stumbling block to any EU–Russia cooperation in the shared neighbourhood. However, the design and implementation of EU strategy, namely differentiated bilateral relations with the countries in these regions based on conditionality, with regional initiatives which are largely pursued separately to the 'strategic partnership' with Russia—what might in fact be considered a 'divide-and-rule' strategy—arguably leaves little room for enhanced dialogue. Indeed, opening up a genuine common external security space would challenge this strategy and thereby reduce the EU's structural power.

A more subtle conceptual and analytical framework is needed which recognises structural and normative elements in the policies of both the EU and Russia towards the shared neighbourhood, and which is prepared to reflect upon the rational basis for Russian approaches. Taking the EU's normative approach at face value—and saying that it is unequivocally a 'good thing' (Sjursen 2006b, p. 236)—obscures what is in fact a dynamic and messy process and at the same time threatens to overemphasise conflicting approaches and overshadow the potentially positive elements of Russia's regional policy. That other factors intrude was evident in the South Ossetia conflict. This involved Georgia's NATO ambitions and US strategic plans for the region—and in the wider context, energy politics—as well as deep-rooted historical grievances. Georgia and the other states of the region, while becoming the front line of larger political projects, also face balancing the normative demands imposed by EU policy with security demands deriving from sovereignty, the right to define their own political space and their national project; for them, 'modernisation' often means the modern rather than the post-modern. Both Brussels' and Moscow's actions in the conflict demonstrated weakness; both are struggling to come to terms with the new normative, geopolitical and

commercial implications of what might be called post-post-Soviet developments in the region.

It has become clear that EU–Russia relations can no longer be reduced to bilateral technical negotiations over trade, visas and scientific cooperation; nor can their focus be confined to the liberal-democratic ‘values agenda’. Much wider aspects of the international system and the global economy are generating political challenges, impacting on both the EU’s and Russia’s foreign policy choices. The global financial crisis, the breakdown of arms control agreements, energy and resource dependencies and—witness the disputes over independence for Kosovo, South Ossetia and Abkhazia—disagreements over the fundamental principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, humanitarian intervention and legitimate use of military force are forcing a rethink of the ‘rules of the game’ that have underpinned international relations over the last few decades. Added to this the rapidly changing landscape of the post-Soviet space, we face a very different EU–Russia relationship to that of five years ago and an uncertain future.

A series of questions arises. Can Brussels rethink its Eastern strategy and seek consensus which might involve shared approaches with Russia? In doing so would it open up another of what Manners calls ‘normative “black holes”’ in its external relations; in other words will it have to accept constraints on its normative ambitions in dealing with Russia and its less malleable neighbours in pursuit of the larger aim of stability in the wider neighbourhood? Or should this be seen differently, as the inevitable—and in some respects positive—acceptance of pluralist approaches in divided regions? Is it prepared to face up to ‘the costs and risks associated with the conduct of a “real” foreign policy’ (Smith 2007, p. 439)? Bailes argues that ‘the EU cannot be a “force for good” in the world unless it (1) survives and (2) has surplus security to export both to neighbours and to more distant regions’ (Bailes 2008, p. 129). The immediate alternative to greater EU involvement appears to be acceptance of Georgia’s, and perhaps Ukraine’s, fast-tracking into NATO, which would absolve the EU from many responsibilities as a ‘security provider’ but would place many of its member states in direct political confrontation with Moscow.

Manners recalls

Monnet’s warning regarding the temptations of turning the EU into a nineteenth-century great power ... the acquisition of better policies, such as martial potency and preventative engagement, like those of great powers, risks making the EU more like bigger states ... whilst leaving the problems of interstate politics precisely where they were. (Manners 2006b, pp. 193–94)

Several commentators have in fact described Russia’s foreign policy as that of a nineteenth century ‘great power’ (Krastev 2008). This idea is misguided: global politics has moved on irreversibly towards greater interdependence; but while neither the EU nor Russia is a ‘great power’ in the traditional sense, they are the two most influential actors in the shared neighbourhood, both exercising structural and normative power to shape their environment and both confronting directly the external challenges emanating from the region. Is there longer-term potential in the wake of the South Ossetia crisis for a genuine twenty-first—rather than nineteenth—century EU–Russia partnership, rooted in agreed shared norms and principles and aimed at stability,

security and prosperity but with a clearer appreciation of each other's interests and problems of governance in the region? Statements by Medvedev about the need for the rule of law and avoiding 'legal nihilism', adhering to international norms and pursuing domestic modernisation as a priority, suggest that there could be a basis for common approaches to mitigate shared challenges. As argued above, Moscow does not reject out of hand the normative basis of the 'European project', and the partial adoption of EU standards of governance might in the longer term be incorporated into its policies towards the shared neighbourhood. Medvedev has welcomed 'the EU's constructive role in finding a peaceful variant for overcoming the crisis in the Caucasus ... I consider this, incidentally, as proof of mature relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union' (D. Medvedev 2008b). Acceptance of a greater political role for the EU—even though its limits are sure to be tested—may be an important breakthrough.

Deeper shared understandings and 'thicker' norms are some way off, however. Russia has had a very different historical experience—a 'civilised' but nevertheless messy divorce from the other USSR successor states, the loss of former spheres of influence, economic 'shock therapy' in the 1990s, two internal wars and a painful and still incomplete recovery of national identity—from that of 'post-sovereign' Europe. Moscow will resist the wholesale imposition of EU normative hegemony in neighbouring regions where sovereignty and governance is weak and stability under threat, and—a key point—where it perceives Brussels as motivated by a refusal to accommodate Russia's core interests. Russia's governing elite still mistrusts the EU's 'universalist claims' which, it believes, 'more often than not serve to disguise particularist interests' (Hyde-Price 2008, p. 33). Caught between the competing rationalities of normative and structural power, Europe's policy-makers have a long way to go to dispel Moscow's mistrust.

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