

Chapter 8

Ukraine and the Restructuring of East-West Relations¹

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Introduction

The context in which Russian foreign policy has been developing has changed. The domestic context in Russia has changed, with recentralization politics tightening again after Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, and the direct impact on the political sphere of low in oil prices in recent years – in an economy still too dependent on energy resources. Changes in the international context include a new low in Russia-West² relations with European (in)security at centre-stage. Despite the dense level of political and economic integration between Russia and the West, the current state-of-affairs has pointed to difficulties in maintaining a friendly dialogue, and relations have been immersed in misunderstandings and conflicts. This includes Russia's intervention in Ukraine and the resulting sanctions imposed by the Western states. Ukraine became the example not to follow, but the turbulence in the Middle East, with Libya and Syria, in particular, raised a number of questions about the challenges arising from an increasingly unstable and less predictable international system. These differentiated contexts for Russian politics at the domestic and international level, despite affecting the decision-making and implementation processes, do not point to fundamental changes in Russia's traditionally defined foreign policy goals. These are framed in the well-known guiding lines of Russia's assertion as a great power in the international system, the definition of the latter as polycentric and conferring on Russia a relevant place in international decision-making, with a particular role in the definition of areas of primary influence (the Commonwealth of Independent States – CIS), and the protection of Russians abroad. Broadly sketched, these principles have been the backbone of Russia's foreign policy for twenty years in both its cooperative moves with the West and in its contestation to Western policies. The goals remain, the methods have changed.

This chapter looks into these changes, seeking to understand how Russia's relations with the West have been evolving, particularly in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, and what this tells us about European security. The argument draws on norms' literature, particularly on norm-diffusion, and the role of the norm-maker and norm-taker (concepts borrowed from Checkel, 1999), and its co-constitutive nature, along with norms' acceptance/resistance, adaptation/contestation. Starting from a post-rationalist approach to norms' dynamics and the way they affect and are affected by politics, the chapter looks into how Russia and the West have been building relations after the Cold War, at the constant intersection between norms' acceptance and resistance. This framework assists in better understanding Russian actions and reactions towards the West and the configurations of European security that have resulted from these processes. The role of the North Atlantic

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² West is understood in this chapter broadly as including the United States (US), the European Union (EU) and the Atlantic Alliance. Despite differences in relations between Russia and each of these actors, the chapter looks at the broader relationship between the Western 'whole' and Russia.

Treaty Organization (NATO), the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), later renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the various strategic partnerships signed, and the Russian proposal for a European Security Treaty are relevant in this regard. Ukraine will be the test case for discussing European security, what it means, what it entails and what it misses.

The way in which security is conceptualized and articulated in discourse and practice has differed, both in the West and in Russia. Similarly, discourse and practice have served different purposes. The formula of the ‘othering’, naming the ‘other’ as the ‘enemy’ or as the ‘partner’, for example, aims at providing legitimate ground for action/reaction, independently of a real, constructed or perceived threat. The paper adopts a social constructivist approach to security, where norm-diffusion through adaptation/resistance practices provides the framing for the analysis of the development of Russian relations with the West – the latter defined as the constitutive ‘other’ in Russian discourse.

The chapter looks into the evolution of the European security architecture after the end of the Cold War, with the reinvention of NATO, the restructuring of the OSCE, the establishment of the CSTO, besides the building of ‘strategic partnerships’ as central pillars of the post-Cold War remapping of security. I will argue that in the process of consolidating European and Western security, insecurity dynamics were created by inclusion/exclusion processes that have extended in time. From Russia’s point of view, the current security architecture in Europe is unbalanced, unrepresentative, and unable to respond to current challenges. The proposal for a new Security Treaty for Europe, the establishment of the CSTO and the drafting of the ‘greater Europe’ proposal, are examples that attest to this reading of Russian responses. From the West’s perspective, Russia has been socialized in different contexts, becoming a member of the Council of Europe, signing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU or becoming a part of the Russia-NATO Council. These interactions are understood as informal integration mechanisms and the inclusion of Russia in Western multilateral institutions. The readings about European security from the eyes of the West and Russia are clearly different, in ways that this chapter brings to light and seeks to contextualize for a better understanding of the current status of relations. How do processes of norms’ adaptation and contestation frame Russia-West relations? What do the several ‘strategic partnerships’ established between Russia and Western institutions mean? How does Ukraine play into the eventual redefinition of European security? What does this imply in Russia-West relations? Seeking answers to these questions, this chapter aims at unpacking distinct interpretations of security, normative order and international status, discussing the state-of-affairs and possible ways ahead in Russia-West relations.

Norm diffusion: the political dynamics of normative acceptance/resistance

The role of norms, culture and identity in political change has been widely acknowledged in the literature (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Katzenstein, 1996; Jepperson, et al., 1996). The combination of material and ideational factors in policy-shaping and making has gained research ground, in the face of static power conceptions limited in the framing of motivations, identities and normative considerations. As Kowert (2010) makes clear, this approach fits the constructivist focus on ‘the social constitution of agents (that is, *identity*) and the regulation of their behaviour (that is, *norms*)’. The intersubjective analysis of political evolution through this normative outlook, combined with material readings of power, provides a more thorough picture of foreign policy decisions. These are made at the intersection of domestic and international politics, though as argued elsewhere this interrelation needs not be symmetrical (Freire, 2012). The case of Russia is quite relevant in this regard, as the interlinkages between the domestic and the international are clearly

visible in its foreign policy: ideally domestic strength, translated in economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability, provide the ground for the expression of Russian power and influence in the polycentric international system. In fact, and despite status seeking in the international dimension, foreign dealings are an important share of Russia's internal consolidation through the reinforcement of nationalist goals regarding the 'great Russia' status. These dynamics will become clearer with the analysis of the case of Ukraine.

Cross cutting foreign policy, norms have become a fundamental part of global governance, providing frames of reference for guiding policies and actions at the international level. Norms can be defined as 'collective expectations about proper behaviour of actors with a given identity' (Jepperson et al., 1996, p. 54; see also Finnemore, 1996; Koschut, 2014). Norms evolve, adapting themselves to the context and reshaping the latter. This dynamic nature of norms informs processes of socialization and resistance. The 'norm-maker' and the 'norm-taker' are not unidirectional or necessarily part of an asymmetrical relationship of subservience. '[N]orm-takers also seek to promote and internationalize their own beliefs, values and principles' (Bettiza and Dionigi, 2015, p. 622). Norm-diffusion as a process through which norms 'travel' but which does not assure adoption and implementation in the 'destination', allows for these differentiated responses to take place – acceptance/resistance, adaptation/contestation. The theoretical readings about how norms 'travel' has evolved from the 'conversion' approach of norm-makers, socializing norms in an imposition format, where Western neo-liberal principles were travelling as the ones to prevail, to a more complete approach to the bi-directional relationship between norm-makers and -takers, as the dynamics are not only of absorption and adoption, but also of resistance, contestation and adaptation, allowing reinterpretation (Reidel, 2015, p. 319; Bettiza and Dionigi, 2015, p. 623; Checkel, 1999; 2005; Finnemore, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996).

The most relevant input arising from this evolution in the debate points to the fact that Western norms are not uncontested and that their projection is not unlimited. In fact, in accord with Checkel's views (1999), 'domestic agency is fundamental to understand different types of reception of norms, so their international dimension solely is not enough to understand adaptation'. Diffusion can take place in different formats, both cooperative and competitive, such as rewards and coercion (see for example Lenz, 2013, p. 213). The way that these processes play out in West-Russia relations is fundamental to an understanding of the continuous construction of this relationship, in moments of both collaboration and competition. Moreover, as the context and different dimensions of power are also fundamental elements in the norm-diffusion process (Engelkamp and Glaab, 2015, p. 203), this framework helps in unpacking the norm-making and-taking processes. The case of different interpretations and significance of concepts such as democracy or intervention is clear in this regard, with Russian-Western meaning-attribution not always coinciding. For example, 'the collective understanding of meaningful peaceful behaviour must ultimately result in peaceful practices such as the demilitarization of common borders or the removal of tanks by political actors in order to generate mutual trust', meaning that norms are object of political selection and might become part of the normative guidance, or when competing, eventually be delegitimized (Koschut, 2014: 344). The reinterpretation and delocalisation of norms has impact in relations and in the broader configuration of European security as analysed in the next section.

Russia and the West: the aftermath of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War did not mean the end of the old order. The West and Russia sought to overcome the enormous gap separating them, particularly in ideological terms, a dimension which permeated the whole political, economic, social and security reasoning. Old organizations were reformed: NATO found a new *raison d'être* and the NATO-Russia Council was later created, and the CSCE gave way to a renewed OSCE. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Communities was signed, and a partnership agreed to of Russia with the United States (US). Russia became also a member of the Council of Europe. Western norm-diffusion seemed to be the rule after the crumbling of the Soviet system, with Russia's socialization in Western principles and democracy-building becoming part of the narrative. The Western norms and values seemed to gain ground as part of the transformations taking place in the post-Soviet space where the discourse became Western-friendly.

However, this Western-led atmosphere did not last long. Transition processes were enmeshed in difficulty and Western support in material and non-material ways did not come to the extent expected. Western norm-diffusion started facing contestation, which has prevailed until the present. In Moscow anti-Western rhetoric regained its place, side-by-side with more pro-Western supporters. Throughout the post-Soviet space, even in the most pro-Western states, criticism about Western-norm 'imposition' was voiced, regarding for example the negotiations of the initial agreements with the EU and their aftermath.³ The Russian recognition of the CIS space as an area vital to its national interest also contributed to this detachment, with comments about Western interference permeating political discourse. In this setting, foreign policy in Russia clearly stated that the CIS is an area of primary relevance for Russia and that a more balanced approach than the very initial Western-oriented one required the development of relations with Asian countries and organisations). The Middle East was also presented as a key area, and later the addition of Latin America and Africa to the Russian foreign policy agenda, shows regained relevance of these regions in Russian politics. From 1993 the main foreign policy guidelines were set, and they have remained unchanged structurally, although the tone has shifted very much in tune with the status of relations with the West. In fact, the hardening of relations with the West has been highlighted in the wording of Russian security documents, with more recent foreign and security documents highlighting the destabilizing role of NATO, including its identification as a major threat to Russia's security; Western interference in the post-Soviet space -- for example, by support to the colour revolutions and Western-oriented regimes; and differences in roles and goals in Ukraine, just to name a few (Russian Foreign Policy Concept, 2013; Russian Military Doctrine, 2014; Russia National Security Strategy for 2016, 2015).

The old discourse concerning the 'enemy' and of 'threat' soon made its reappearance and remained in Russian official discourse. NATO has been often described by Russian officials as perpetuating the dynamics of exclusion of Russia from strategic European security decisions. Official documents identify NATO enlargement as the primary external threat to Russia (Military Doctrine, 2014), and the NATO-Russia Council was not understood in Moscow as an inclusive mechanism, but instead as an addition of Russia to discussions with no real power (in terms of veto and in terms of influencing decisions). Moreover, security norms promoted in Europe, including through NATO, were contested. The movement of armoured vehicles and military equipment closer to Russian borders or the anti-ballistic missile defence project of the US are such examples. The establishment of the CSTO back in 1992, led by Russia, was at some point described as the 'NATO of the East', when the decision to create a collective rapid reaction force was made.

³ Interviews conducted by the author (2006 and 2007) in Georgia and Azerbaijan regarding the process of implementation of the Action Plans and negotiations of the Association Agreements with the EU.

At the time, in February 2009, then President Dmitry Medvedev commented that these forces ‘will not be less powerful than those of NATO’ (Medvedev cited in RT, 2009). More recently, with the events in Ukraine, tensions have risen, including the suspension of the work of the NATO-Russia Council (Statement by NATO Foreign Ministers, 2014), and military manoeuvres by both NATO states and Russian forces. The ‘collective understanding of meaningful peaceful behaviour’ that Koschut (2014, p. 344) talks about has not become enrooted in Russia-NATO relations. Nor has the course of ‘transformation’ that Rynning (2015, p. 542) mentions was the starting point for NATO-Russia relations, a process of transformation of these two actors into a new international order that did not mean transformation in line with convergence.

The OSCE, praised and contested as a security norm-maker, has been charged by Russia with replicating the Western discourse and of bowing to Western principles and excluding other visions. In the case of Moldova-Transnistria negotiations, the non-recognition of self-determination has been a subject of Russian criticism, despite the sovereigntist principle that Russia has been citing to support non-intervention in internal affairs and respect for the territorial integrity of states. Norms of sovereignty – where traditionally a Westphalian conception prevailed – have been the subject of diverging interpretation according to context, with Ukraine-Crimea representing again an important example. In fact, whereas for the West Crimea was annexed, for Russia it was reintegrated; whereas for the West Ukraine’s territorial integrity was violated, for Russia Crimea was legitimately and historically part of the Russian Federation; whereas for the West the move was illegal in the eyes of international norms, for Russia the move complied with the protection of minorities abroad. The establishment of the CSCE back in 1975 at Helsinki, in a very particular context of the Cold War period was an achievement. And it bore fruit, since it helped bridge differences and provided a forum for dialogue, despite the many difficulties it faced. It was the recognised norm-maker on European security issues in face of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. It allowed arms reduction agreements to be signed, military confidence-building measures to be adopted, an inclusive reading of European security to be shared. In the current context of tension between Russia and the West, as well as already back in 2008 when relations were at a very low, and of which Georgia became then the symbol of disagreement, there have been calls for a Helsinki II to take place.

Then President Medvedev’s proposal for a European Security Treaty (2008) (The Kremlin, 2009; RFE/RL, 2009) was clearly conveying the message – European security cannot be complete without Russia. In 2008 when the proposal was made public it was restrictive in terms of membership (excluding the US, for example), and in its final formulation after several iterations it became too wide (including international organisations, such as NATO and the CSTO). The Treaty proposal never became a real agenda item, but it became very symbolic in its meaning. Russia was asking for a role and place in European security: it was underlining the feeling of exclusion from European security dealings still at the hands of NATO, thus seeking also to limiting US influence, and signalling the need for a pan-European security system to be developed. Through this new arrangement, Russia would assure that no security decisions would be made without taking into account all members interests, therefore assuring its right of oversight on European security (Kanet and Freire, 2012).

This idea of a restructuring of the security system has been high on the Russian agenda, and the issue of Ukraine has been added to the discourse. Sergei Karaganov, the Russian representative to the OSCE Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project (Ministerial Council in Basel, December 2014), has been voicing for a new security architecture, stretching to China, and bringing the Asian dimension in (see Tanner, 2015). To some extent this reflects central elements of the Security Treaty

proposal, whereas it widens geographically the scope of the proposal, highlighting the increasing relevance of the Asian dimension in Russian politics. The argument is that interdependence along with successive failures to build a system of pan-European security point to the need to move forward.

The old system is withering away, partly because of the Ukraine crisis, even though some are trying to use it for reviving now defunct institutions and approaches. But there is no need to reject all of its elements. It would be more reasonable to raise a new structure within it, including through accelerated creation of a Community of Greater Eurasia, and a broad dialogue on the future within the Eurasian Cooperation, Development and Security Forum. (Karaganov, 2015)

The Russian positioning in Ukraine was, therefore, not a surprise move, as the dissatisfaction with the state of affairs had been signalled earlier. The war in Georgia in 2008 became one of the clearest expressions of Russia's willingness to use military power to be listened to as a relevant player in European security. Ukraine, in a more aggressive manner, reiterated this desire. Thus, independently of how divisive the proposal for the security treaty became, it gained a new place in the discourse. The division of understanding between Russia and the West underlined the need to rethink ways for new possibilities for cooperation. In the wording of Lukin (2015, p. 65), 'we shall have to get back to the idea of a "Helsinki II" discussion over charting a new road map, showing the path towards a united Europe. Of course, this is still just a possibility, not an inevitability. But it is far more realistic than nostalgic, neoimperial dreams of Russian grandeur'.

With regard to the EU, its post-Cold War process of expansion and reaching out to Central and Eastern European states, as well as the Baltic countries, resulted in the movement of its borders closer to Russia. The process was not read as unfriendly, although Russia became critical of the normative 'cover' the EU used towards its new neighbours in the so-called 'shared neighbourhood' – the Eastern Partnership countries. With a 'no' to Russian accession to the EU (DeBardeleben, 2013, p. 45), both parties signed the PCA back in 1994 (ratified in 1997), that politically and legally framed bilateral relations. With an expiry date of 10 years, the PCA became after a decade an automatically renewed document, without much substance. The inability of Russia and the EU to renegotiate the new wording of a framing agreement for the relationship clearly demonstrates how the strategic dimension of this relation is relevant, but the partnership dimension is lacking. The Four Common Spaces and roadmaps for implementation (Council of the EU, 2005) became guiding documents in the development of relations, but the dragging of negotiations on a new PCA (whatever its new naming) is telling. On the way Russia has described the EU as a hegemonic bloc that creates new border lines in Europe – the 'wider Europe approach' it has been promoting in its neighbourhood reflects its ambitions, according to Russian sources (Averre, 2016, p. 3). It also limits the enlarged multipolar Europe model Russia has been promoting – the 'greater Europe' approach (Sakwa, 2012, pp. 315-316), where the EU, Russia and Turkey would be centre-poles of norm-making.

This Russian view is in line with its integration into the BRICS,⁴ a political club that allows voice and place to non-Western countries. Nevertheless, the contestation of Western norm-making does not mean that the BRICS seek the demise of the West, or a replacement of Western-led institutions, as BRICS countries work and want to keep working with the West. The BRICS share the political objective of contesting the hegemonic posture of the West, which they understand as questioning the very principle of state sovereignty. As Laïdi (2012, p. 614) notes, '[w]hile they do not seek to form an anti-

⁴ BRICS stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Western political coalition based on a counter-proposal or radically different vision of the world, they are concerned with maintaining their independence of judgment and national action in a world that is increasingly economically and socially interdependent'. In this sense, the BRICS are a very conservative group with regard to power sharing and autonomy, promoting national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs as overriding principles. Moreover, they are also part of the liberal international order, which they themselves seem to be challenging, thereby rendering this challenge limited in its reach.

Emerging powers have actively participated in existing international governmental organisations, albeit without weakening their sovereignty or giving in to binding targets and commitments that are not in their clearly expressed interests. They continue to call for a greater say in these international institutions and are more sensitive to manipulation or being dealt with on unequal terms. (Destradi and Jakobeit, 2015: 68-9)

Russia clearly shares this perspective, with the proposal for a European Security Treaty or for the reforming/refunding of the OSCE demonstrating how it aims at playing both as a norm-maker and norm-taker.

The old Cold War order is not back. It has never really been overcome. This does not mean that there has been no positive evolution in Russian relations with the West, since there are many signals that attest to this. But, it underlines the lingering mistrust and 'otherness' readings that have been perpetuated over time. These allow also the perpetuation of logics of exclusion/inclusion, just as before. The remnants of the walls that should have been discarded a long time ago have prevented the building of a constructive West-Russia relationship based on 'strategic partnerships' and normative principles charged with substance. The renewal of multilateral institutions after the end of the Cold War, particularly NATO and the OSCE, ended up as one more brick in the remnants of distrust. Rebuilding this relationship is much needed and urgent for European security. The case of Ukraine is illustrative in this regard.

Ukraine in West-Russia relations: back to basics?

The crisis in Ukraine goes back to political discussions about the option of economic integration, with the EU through the signing of an Association Agreement (and the DCFTA associated with this) or integrating with the Customs Union with Russia. A country that since its independence in 1991 had pursued a multivectoral foreign policy, both negotiating and conceding to Russia and the EU, was confronted with the need for a choice. The 'and/and' policy gave place to an 'or/or' option. The steps back and forth in making this option only contributed to reinforce the division that it implied. The protests that started in Kiev and other cities in Ukraine soon escalated into violence, materializing the division inscribed in this opting-in/out approach. The mutual accusations about 'who' initiated clashes reinforced distancing, but most importantly violence showed the deepness of the divide. 'Karl Marx once described a situation where the weapon of criticism gives way to criticism by weapon' (Lukin, 2015, p. 59). This quote expresses Russia's approach, fitting its foreign policy goals of maintaining a *droit de regard* in the CIS space and demonstrating its discontent towards an unfavourable context in West-Russia relations; it makes clear its desire to be recognized as a norm-maker and -influencer in the European space. However, this has been pursued with ambivalence, as this section analyses.

The demonstrations in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities soon escalated into violence, and led to a change in government. Moscow did not accept the 'forced resignation' of then president Yanukovich and contested the political changes taking place as showing power

being taken over by ‘radical extremists’ (BBC, 2014). In the sequence of rapidly unfolding events, the Crimean Parliament elected a new prime-minister (pro-Russia in his views) and voted in favour of secession with the declared goal of protecting the population from the ‘extremists’. The organisation of a referendum conferred on these moves concrete substance. Taking place on March 16, the voters were requested to choose one of two options: 1) Do you support reunifying Crimea with Russia as a subject of the Russian Federation? or 2) Do you support the restoration of the 1992 Crimean constitution and the status of Crimea as a part of Ukraine? (BBC, 2014). The results announced did not leave any margin for doubt, according to the counting of ballots, which expressed willingness to join Russia (The Guardian, 2014). Russian President Putin stated very clearly that in light of the results, the signature of the reunification treaty two days later showed a simple disposition, ‘we did what we had to do’ (Putin, 2015).

The annexation of Crimea in spring 2014 was the culmination of a process where Russian feelings of exclusion played loudly. It sought different goals in one and the same action: showing political willingness and strength allied to capability, both reassuring support at home and affirming the status-seeking goal as a great power in an unfavourable context. It also made clear to the EU the limits of its own neighbourhood policies. put NATO in a difficult position in terms of response to Russian moves, and sent a warning to other post-Soviet states about their political options. The overall message touches the central issue of European security, how it has been read as exclusionary, and how Russia wants a redrafting of security configurations to be more inclusive. The referendum held on March 16, 2014, where the majority of the population in Crimea voted for ‘secession’ (The Guardian, 2014), was at the centre stage of dissent. Accused of violating fundamental norms of international law, Russia replied with a legally-framed justification based on historical principles and an organised process that led to the free expression of self-determination. It was, in the words of President Putin, a process ‘in full compliance with democratic procedures and international norms’ (Address by Putin, 2014). Moreover, criticisms arising from the West were described as mirroring Western self-contradictions. As Putin put the matter:

Here is a quote from another official document: the Written Statement of the United States America of April 17, 2009, submitted to the same UN International Court in connection with the hearings on Kosovo. Again, I quote: “Declarations of independence may, and often do, violate domestic legislation. However, this does not make them violations of international law.” (Address by Putin, 2014)

Despite Russian claims that it fulfilled international law and sustained the rights and liberties associated to the self-determination principle, the process was immersed in criticism. In his speech on March 18, 2014, Putin noted that ‘[t]ime and time again attempts were made to deprive Russians of their historical memory, even of their language and to subject them to forced assimilation’ (Putin, 2014). Putin added that the referendum was ‘fair and transparent, and the people of Crimea clearly and convincingly expressed their will and stated that they want to be with Russia’ (ibid), and that this act was in line with ‘the United Nations Charter, which speaks of the right of nations to self-determination’ (ibid). Independently of historical and nationalist motivations associated to the speech on Crimea, seeking to justify and gain legitimacy for an action widely criticized as illegal, the borders regime in Europe was violated and Crimea was the material expression of this violation.

Russia has been a traditional norm-upholder of the European borders regime, as became visible at the time of the negotiations of the Helsinki Final Act (1975), or even

when settling post-Soviet borders, with the signature of the Almaty Declaration (1991) or the Budapest Memorandums (1994). However, the Russians violated these agreements in that they established the legal framework informing relations between the newly independent states, with the Almaty Declaration including explicit mention of the respect for the territorial integrity of states and the inviolability of borders, and the Budapest memorandums, despite having their main focus on nuclear regulation, reinforcing the commitment towards the respect for Ukraine's independence, including the non-use of political, economic or military pressure that might put into question its independence (RFE/RL, 2014). The Ukrainian Constitution was also violated in the process, as according to art. ° 37, for any secession referendum to take place, it must be previously approved by the Ukrainian population. The Russian actions had, thus, both juridical consequences and political ones. Interestingly enough, the Russian annexation of Crimea did not bring wide support from abroad, with no CIS state endorsing the Russian move, and only six countries internationally recognising the new status of Crimea as 'reintegrated' or 'rejoined' to Russia, namely Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Syria, Afghanistan and North Korea (Business Insider, 2016).

The manipulation of the borders' regime resulted from the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, thereby questioning the role of Russia as a norm-taker and -enforcer. Crimea's annexation signals norm-contestation, showing ambiguity in interpretation: on the one hand, contestation of political change in Ukraine as well as of Western interference in the post-Soviet space, as drivers for Russian aggressive behaviour in Ukraine; on the other hand, this contestation approach revealed contradictions in Russia's own terms, as it has traditionally been a sovereignist power, opposing foreign interventions as interference in internal affairs. The borders' regime was part of Russia's socialised practices in its relations with the West, regarding which Moscow became a norm-diffuser. Crimea's annexation reversed the process and made of Russia a norm-contester of one of the dimensions it most valued regarding European security – respect for the principle of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. But the ambivalence extends further, as it seems simultaneously Russia is accepting the sovereignty norm, as it always did, but also resisting this when it understands its interests are at stake, particularly in the post-Soviet space. What this means for European security is that the security regime is under pressure – the annexation of Crimea and lingering instability in Eastern Ukraine have added to existing distrust between Russia and the West.

The principles of responsibility to protect and self-determination have been part of Russian rhetoric in support of intervention, read in Russian terms as not pinching the sovereignist principle that guides its domestic and foreign policy. However, this show of force does not hide the tension in the Russian approach: a conservative approach based on an anti-Western discourse of exclusion and imposition of norms and principles, and a reformist approach concerned with the backlash effects that this more aggressive policy might produce. In August 2014 Putin stressed that Russia should not 'fence itself off from the outside world', recognizing the need for keeping dialogue on and to overcome the consequences of the crisis in Ukraine, of which the sanctions have become a baseline (RFE/RL, 2014). Moreover, Putin added that 'we should also not let them treat us with disdain', refocusing discourse on the inclusion/exclusion divide and demanding a different treatment from Western partners (RFE/RL, 2014). Putin's discourse after Crimea's annexation is very telling of the state-of-affairs in Russia-West relations. It summarizes the confrontation of foreign policy perspectives, where Russia demonstrates willingness and capability to project its political goals, read in the West as a combination of power politics, consolidation of influence and projection of an image of force that leads to an

understanding of Russia as simultaneously sovereignist and expansionist, as illustrated by Crimea, and thus not a ‘partner’ in matters of European security.

East-West relations: where to?

Russian foreign policy statements and actions point to two main ideas: on the one hand, Russia sees itself as having consolidated its domestic and international course as a great power, in a polycentric international system; on the other hand, it faces the constant duality of principles sustaining this vision, where the tension between goals and means has been clear. The sovereignist alignment, combined with a defensive-aggressive policy in the post-Soviet space, reflect the dilemmas Russia faces. The post-Soviet space is increasingly heterogeneous, Russia has limited influence in this area, and the goal of a pan-European security order is far from accomplished. Losing influence to the West in this area became a sensitive matter for Russia, with Georgia and Ukraine signalling the ‘vital interests’ it has in the area and that are in need of protection. The positioning of Russia in the face of unfavourable developments, opens up serious questions about the management of European security. By showing force Russia might create an immediate impact, but not necessarily gain leverage. The conflictual readings out of this defensive-aggressive posture play both favourably and unfavourably in Russian politics.

The need to find a diplomatic way to reignite political dialogue and cooperation in different areas seems to be acknowledged both in Russia and in the West. But the terms for this are not clear. Again the narrative of the ‘self’ and of the ‘other’ (Neumann, 1995; 2006), the discourse on inclusion/exclusion, as it is pursued both in Russia and in the West, constitutes an obstacle to creative possibilities. The events in Syria reinforced the understanding that Russia is a relevant player, sitting with western powers at the table of negotiations. The immediate gain from Russian military airstrikes seems to be a more active diplomatic role. However, it is not clear that this equals the conferring of the status that Russia has been seeking. In the long run mistrust still pervades relations. And this might mean that Russia’s gain in Syria, in terms of its role in security-building, might not extend much beyond that context. What would this mean? Generally, it would mean that Western-Russia relations still have a long road to run before matching perspectives on European security might be found. This might also mean that the destabilising effect of the status of Russia-West relations might extend in time, with negative consequences for both.

Russia’s relational definition to the ‘Western other’ has carried this dual weight of the politics of confrontation and cooperation. Reading the ‘self’ as excluded from Western security framings, such as NATO, since despite signing partnership agreements it has never been formally integrated into the Atlantic Alliance, Russia faces this inside-outside dynamic – it is a *sui generis* position of not being fully integrated, but also not fully excluded. This applies to other multilateral European institutions, as well, and contributed to the Russian decision to create the Eurasian Union as in the mirror image of the EU. The politics of dissension as well as the politics of cooperation have been constant in Russia-West relations. This is not new. Norm-diffusion has also been present in this relationship for a long time, along with norm-acceptance and norm-resistance dynamics. Again this is not really new. What is new is the ambivalence that these processes of resistance and socialization have brought to readings of European security, and how they informed the inclusion/exclusion narrative so strongly present in recent Russian discourse. The politics of resistance and reinterpretation in Russia have made this dimension clearer in recent years, particularly with Georgia and Ukraine marking a turning-point. The rhetoric of discontent gave place to concrete aggressive action as well as a tighter approach in terms of socialization/resistance dynamics, with politics of resistance and dissent prevailing. The self-reinforcing discourse of exclusion feeds national feelings at home and rhetoric built

on civilizational goals and the great power status of Russia. It also feeds the anti-Western discourse that the BRICS have been empowering, or the NATO as ‘enemy’ image reestablished in Military Doctrines and other fundamental documents in Russian foreign policy. This framing of a counter-Western move seeks simultaneously, however, to pave the way for a re-foundation of relations with the ‘Western-other’. This otherness becomes blurred into the Russian self-European identification, and willingness to be included (on its own terms). Understanding this ambivalence that permeates Russian politics is fundamental to rethinking any steps ahead. Tsygankov (2015: 20) argues that the ‘[e]stablishment of common rules of behaviour with respect to Ukraine and other states in Eurasia has been long overdue (...)’ This points to the initial idea about how norms-design is central to European security. Who is included and how remains a central issue in relations between Russia and the West.

Concluding remarks: restructuring East-West relations?

Russia-West relations are going through their most difficult times since the end of the Cold War. The events in Ukraine, including Crimea, challenged the main building blocks of a difficult relationship: existing partnerships that showed their emptiness, cooperation agreements that showed their vagueness, guiding norms that showed their inability to assure European security. Three main ideas come out of this analysis: first, the actions in Crimea constitute a serious violation of the borders’ regime in Europe, and the lingering instability in Eastern Ukraine will not reinforce European security. To the contrary, these actions brought more insecurity to Europe, and might backlash on Russia, further isolating it. Second, the continuous criticism about the ‘Western other’ and the inclusion/exclusion feelings of Russians in the European security order were materialized through Russian actions, demonstrating Russia’s willingness and capability to use force in defence of what it understands as its vital interests. The Western response was slow and mainly centred on the imposition of sanctions (with limited reach), leaving Russia the space for manoeuvring that allows it to amplify its claims. However, the aggressive Russian reaction in Ukraine, as analysed above, might play unfavourably to its great power status goal. A non-complying actor, not just resisting norm-socialization in European security, but also violating security regimes, might be read more as a foe than as a friend. Again, this immediate gain for Russia might revert into more demands for assurance from the West, as it has been feeding the long-time mistrust instead of reducing it. Third, thinking about restructuring Russia-West relations becomes each day more pressing. Despite the contradictory signals -- for dialogue towards framing relations in a more cooperative tone, or that this is not possible in face of tough stances on both sides -- there seems to be no other way than rethinking these relations and how it might be possible to break new ground. It is not easy to look forward in the current context, as the issues of lifting sanctions and finding a political solution to the situation in Eastern Ukraine need first to be agreed. However, rethinking the European security architecture in a more inclusive way, through a restructured security system where the OSCE might play a central role, and where Russia and the West might be better integrated in norm-making and -taking, socializing principles and means for actions, might be a first small step. Exclusion has shown not to be the right path. Maybe putting together an inclusive format could assist in slowly overcoming distrust and get the basis for starting building something new.

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