

### Norm-Taking, Norm-Faking, And Norm-Making: Russia And The International Election Observation Norm

Bakalova, Evgeniya

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## **Norm-Taking, Norm-Faking, And Norm-Making: Russia And The International Election Observation Norm**

Evgeniya Bakalova

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# Norm-Taking, Norm-Faking, And Norm-Making: Russia And The International Election Observation Norm

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## ABSTRACT

The paper critically addresses some of the existing theoretical gaps within constructivist norm research and proposes an analytical framework for capturing and analysing non-linear variation in states' normative positioning. The study then examines the various stances Russia has been selectively adopting in the process of its internalisation, contestation and revision of the international election observation norm throughout 2000–2012. The analysis reveals that until recently Russia had been primarily adopting a 'reformist' rather than 'revolutionary' stance, – only episodically questioning the norm's legitimacy and avoiding open violations –, and stresses the importance of non-material constraints on normative revisionism.

## 1 RUSSIA'S 'NORMATIVE REVISIONISM'?

The so-called 'value gap' (White *et al.* 2005), 'normative offensive' (Makarychev 2009) or 'clash of norms' (Krajev 2007) denoting Russia's critical and arguably revisionist positioning against 'Western' normative frameworks are becoming catch-all phrases for denoting and explaining the recurrent crises and conflicts in bilateral relations, Russia's resistance against Western democracy promotion policies at home and abroad, as well as for the country's domestic authoritarian backslide. Yet despite their analytical significance, the substance, theoretical underpinnings and explanatory power of these terms appear somewhat blurry. While some have argued that Russia has been 'setting itself up as an ideological alternative' to the West (Leonard & Popescu 2007, p. 1) and initiating 'autocracy promotion' as a counter-strategy to Western democracy promotion (Burnell 2010), others have emphasised that the Russian identity discourse 'remain[ed] focused on Europe and European values' (Morozov 2009, p. 575) and that there were 'no ideological contradictions between Russia and the West' (Sakwa 2008, p. 252). Scholars adhering to competing international relations (IR) paradigms have offered divergent explanations for the complicated and ambiguous dynamics of Russia's normative positioning towards Europe and the West. Whereas supporters of liberal theories have been warning of an 'international backlash against democracy promotion' (Carothers 2006) and 'authoritarian diffusion' (Ambrosio 2010), some realist-inspired scholars have assumed the phenomenon of great power 'neo-revisionism' (Sakwa 2008, p. 251) void of any ideological component. Constructivist scholars, on the other hand, have linked Russia's normative departure from the West to the ongoing identity construction processes and the ambiguous role of Europe in Russia's self-perception discourse (Neumann 1996; Hopf 2002; Neumann 2008; Morozov 2009; Makarychev 2009).

Analysed through the prism of traditional IR paradigms, the phenomenon of Russia's 'normative revisionism' appears baffling due to its inconsistency and apparent disconnects between rhetoric and political behaviour: while repeatedly demonstrating non-compliance with European and international democratic and human rights norms (See e.g.: Heller 2008; Saari 2010), Russian officials have been persistently employing pro-democracy rhetoric, have until recently not shown outright rejection of European normative structures and have not managed to deliver any kind of alternative interpretation of fundamental democratic and human rights norms (Pavlova 2013; Morozov 2013).

The limitations of strictly paradigm-driven research explicate the need for innovative, eclectic approaches, which account for change and dynamics, and allow analysing the impact and inter-relations of multiple factors on divergent and contradictory outcomes. Socialisation and diffu-

sion theories have synthesised and combined rationalist and constructivist perspectives in their study of international and national norm dynamics and could provide more insights into the complex processes of Russia's norm internalisation, resistance and/or 'antipreneurship' (Bloomfield 2016). Yet Russia has also presented a puzzling empirical case for traditional norm research. Studies that have applied the classical 'spiral model' (Risse & Sikink 1999) and 'socialization theory' (Checkel 2005) to the case of norm internalisation (or rather failure thereof) in Russia were forced to question some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of norm research scholarship. These included: the semi-automatic causal link between norm commitment and norm compliance; the fixed and uncontested/incontestable nature of socialised norms; as well as the view on norm transfer as a one-way street, where local agents, usually in smaller states materially or non-materially dependent on the West, were prescribed the sole role of norm-receivers (Saari 2008, 2010; Heller 2008). Bearing in mind these limitations and open questions, the study at hand conducts a detailed investigation into the complex dynamics of Russia's dispositions (from assumed 'norm-taking' to alternative 'norm-making') towards the norm of international election observation. The paper's objective is two-fold: first, it aims at capturing distinct chronological phases in Russia's normative positioning (or 'normative stances') and locating specific critical junctures in the process. Second, the resulting 'map' of normative dispositions provides the foundation for tracing the impact of multiple factors on local internalisation and contestation dynamics, as well as looking into their interrelations.

The paper proceeds in five sections. First, it provides a brief review of the recent criticisms addressed towards the traditional norm socialisation literature and elaborates upon some of the outstanding theoretical gaps. Second, taking stock of the rigorous theoretical debates, it proposes an analytical framework for capturing non-linear variation in states' normative positioning, which takes contestation and normative revisionism seriously and accounts for the so-called decoupling of states' 'norm talk' from their actual 'norm walk'. The third part maps Russia's normative stances towards the international election observation norm throughout 2000–2012. Here, the findings of qualitative-quantitative content-analysis capturing the changing discourse on the norm are contrasted against the results of a timeline event-analysis of Russia's behaviour in relation to international election monitoring at home and abroad. The resulting map of the state's normative stances serves as a foundation for tracing the impact of multiple factors (both rationalist and constructivist) upon Russia's 'norm-taking', 'norm-faking' and 'norm-making' dynamics. The final part discusses the implications of the presented findings for Area Studies specialists interested in Russian national and international politics, as well as for scholars of norm contestation, norm revisionism and decoupling.

## 2 RESEARCH ON NORM INTERNALISATION, CONTESTATION AND REVISION: THEORETICAL SHORTCOMINGS AND OUTSTANDING GAPS

Constructivist-inspired theories of norm diffusion and socialisation have presented multiple excellent examples of bracketing the boundaries of meta-theoretical inquiry and have come up with complex models for explaining norm dynamics in international relations (Finnemore & Sikink 1998; Risse & Sikink 1999; Checkel 2005) by synthesising rationalist and constructivist explanations (Börzel & Risse 2002; Schimmelfennig 2005), taking into account different logics of action and analysing various underlying mechanisms (Schimmelfennig 1997; Risse 2000; Checkel 2005; Schimmelfennig 2005). However, diffusion and socialisation literature, initially developed to explain complex processes of international norm development, to study the impact of norms on the international system and the role of norm entrepreneurs in bringing about norm change and inducing states into compliance with international normative standards, has been recently increasingly criticised for certain 'sins of omission' (Risse & Ropp 2013, p. 9) and even 'biases' (Epstein 2012; Engelkamp *et al.* 2012). In this regard it is specifically worth mentioning three undertheorized problems, which are gradually opening up new research venues in norm

scholarship: the so-called ‘decoupling’ phenomenon, or the gap between norm recognition and norm compliance as a manifestation of ‘incomplete’ or ‘failed’ norm socialisation; norm contestation and the (d)evolution of international norms; as well as the dual role of emerging non-Western powers as ‘norm-takers’ and ‘norm-makers’ in the development of an alternative international normative order.

The existence of the so-called ‘persistent gap’ between normative rhetoric on the one hand and actual political behaviour on the other (Liese 2006; Hathaway 2007; Hafner-Burton & Ron 2009) has challenged the view on the if not semi-‘automatic’ than relatively consequential move from norm recognition to norm compliance (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, p. 904). Although the spiral model never assumed ‘evolutionary progress’ along its stages (Risse & Sikkink 1999, p. 35), it nonetheless fell short of accounting for the possibility of norm re-interpretation, resistance and even backlash. This limitation partially stemmed from the inherent assumption about the fixed, uncontested and incontestable nature of international norms, which has also been challenged by recent studies on contestation and norm change (Wiener 2008; Sandholtz & Stiles 2009; Wiener & Puetter 2009; Jetschke & Liese 2013). Finally, the treatment of states internalising international norms as passive norm-takers (not only in theoretical, but also in political terms) has long prevented norm scholars from addressing the complex domestic dynamics of norm reception rejection and accounting for the possibility of ‘alternative’ norm diffusion (Acharya 2011; Epstein 2012). Innovative conceptual proposals, such as ‘localisation’ (Acharya 2004; Capie 2008), ‘translation’ (Zwingel 2012; Zimmermann 2016), ‘norm subsidiarity’ (Acharya 2011) and normative ‘revisionism’ (McKeown 2009) have theoretically addressed some of the outstanding limitations. Yet a substantial research gap, relating to contestation practices on the part of powerful states and the impact these might have on their domestic political behaviour in particular and upon the development of international normative regimes in general, has not yet been fully addressed and appears as urgent as ever.

First, in order to gain more insight into the so-called gap between commitment and compliance, it is necessary to shift the attention from global to national norm dynamics, i.e. towards the development of local attitudes towards, discursive representation of, but also practices in relation to the studied norms. In light of the so-called ‘second generation’ norm research, which has been primarily dealing with processes and mechanisms of norm socialization on the ground, this might not appear as a particularly innovative proposition. It has already been acknowledged previously that despite the fact, that external and internal mobilisation do matter in pushing states from symbolical recognition of international norms to behavioural adherence with them, and that complex domestic processes of norm reception, appropriation or rejection are vital for diffusion outcomes, be it internalisation or otherwise (Cortell & Davis 2000; Acharya 2004; Bob 2012, p. 185). Yet while diffusion and socialisation research has indeed acknowledged the importance of local-level variables, even though these are often viewed as filters (Risse & Sikkink 1999) or ‘scope conditions’ (Checkel 2005; Risse & Ropp 2013), extensive research on domestic norm dynamics (ranging from rhetorical recognition to compliance, or alternatively from discursive contestation to political backlash) is still largely missing. At the same time the analysis of the different ways in which norms are discursively represented and politically handled within a given national context also requires that norms are not viewed as stable, fixed and unproblematic, but as dynamic and contested, while contestation itself might manifest itself in multiple different (verbal and non-verbal) ways and on a variety of levels.

Second, if one acknowledges that norms are not fixed, but possess a dual quality as constituting and constituted, the discursive representation and interpretation of norms is to be (at least analytically) separated from (compliant or non-compliant) political behaviour. This also means that commitment and compliance should not be treated as two ends of a continuum (Risse & Ropp 2013, p. 10), but as mutually constituted and constituting elements of complex processes of norm take-over, reform or revision. The separation of normative rhetoric, so-called ‘norm talk’, from states’ behavioural practices allows looking at various instances of ‘coupling’ and

‘decoupling’ between them, without assuming linearity and implicit causal linkages between norm recognition and compliance, – since norms do not and cannot cause behaviour ‘in the sense that a bullet through the heart causes death’ (Kratochwil & Ruggie 1986, p. 767).

Third, the possibility of alternative norm diffusion (‘bad’ norm-making, or norm ‘antipreneurship’) should also be taken into account. The exclusive focus on norm entrepreneurs and external norm ‘socialisers’ as inherently ‘good’ agents of ‘good’ norms has limited norm scholarship’s analytical scope and did not allow for studying the promotion and assertion of ‘alternative’ norm-sets. This has been extensively criticised by recent studies on discursive representation of international norms in domestic contexts and on alternative norm diffusion (see, e.g.: Terhalle 2011; Bob 2012; Heller *et al.* 2012; Wunderlich 2013; Bloomfield 2016). Moreover, it can’t be assumed that the normative roles states take upon themselves are stable, either. These might vary in relation to different norm-sets and towards one particular norm over time.

The outlined research gaps explicate the need for a revised approach, which would account for dynamism, seriously consider the possibility of normative backlash, analytically address the ‘compliance gap’ and consider the dual role of states as potential ‘norm-takers’ on the one hand and ‘norm-makers’ on the other.

### 3. A CONCEPTUAL PROPOSAL FOR CAPTURING DISTINCT NORMATIVE STANCES: NORM TAKE-OVER, REFORM, REVOLUTION AND THE DECOUPLED ‘GREY ZONE’

Empirical studies in the area of norm socialisation and diffusion have repeatedly stressed that states’ reactions in regard to international norms cannot be conceptualised in simple binary terms as either internalisation or failure thereof, but rather fall into the ‘grey zone’ between full acceptance and outright rejection (Kersbergen & Verbeek 2007, p. 221; Dukalskis & Johansen 2013, p. 571). Such studies have attempted to move beyond the simplistic ‘acceptance/rejection’ dichotomy by proposing more nuanced frameworks for capturing variation in states’ dispositions towards international norms. Following the famous inquiry of Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui and Meyer<sup>1</sup> scholars started paying increased analytical attention to the so-called ‘compliance gap’ or ‘decoupling’. This phenomenon denotes disconnections in states’ commitments to international norms from their actual implementation on the ground (see e.g.: Clark 2010; Cole & Ramirez 2013; Cole 2013). In a more recent study Dukalskis and Johansen developed a system of so-called Normative Disposition Indicators, or NDIs, for capturing and analysing variations in states’ responses to international norms (2013, pp. 576–577). Drawing on these theoretical and empirical considerations the present section will sketch out an analytical framework for studying different ways in which norms are handled within the official state discourse on the one hand, and in political practice on the other. The aim is to propose a comprehensive conceptual tool for mapping variations in states’ normative dispositions.

On the one hand contestation literature has demonstrated, that domestic discourses on norms are not linear (i.e. moving from rejection to total acceptance, or otherwise), but are multifaceted and more nuanced, than norm scholarship has sometimes suggested (Kersbergen & Verbeek 2007; Wiener & Puetter 2009). Actual textual analysis of the relevant corpus of government statements, debates and other official communication, i.e. an inquiry into the different ways international norms are represented in the domestic discourse, is crucial for making any claims as to the progress or failure of socialisation on the ground (Simmons 2013, p. 52). Thus, this study differentiates between *re-iterative*, *critical* and *revisionist* state discourses.<sup>2</sup> The conceptu-

1 Thus, Hafner-Burton *et al.* not only demonstrated cases where treaty ratifications on the part of authoritarian states produced little or no effect on actual human rights improvement, but also pointed out to the phenomenon of ‘radical decoupling’, – when treaty ratification coincided with increased repressions (2008, p. 132).

2 Since the study is primarily interested in norm dynamics at the state level, the analysis of textual documents is limited to the communication of government officials and does not encompass the entire societal discourse on a specific norm.

alisation of compliance on the other hand faces two essential challenges: differentiating between implementation, compliance and effectiveness (or input, outcomes and impact); and dealing with instances or degrees within one concept (say, implementation). The focus of this study is on the various and distinct instances of *compliant* and *non-compliant behaviour*, rather than on effectiveness or impact. But it is also broader than a strict examination of implementation, since it aims at covering a wider range of practices, which go beyond simple fulfilment/non-fulfilment of specific treaty obligations.

Table 1 provides a summary of the conceptual categories for mapping the different ways norms can be re-presented, reformulated or rejected in the official discourse, and the variation in norm-conforming or non-conforming political practices on the part of rule addressees (the state, understood narrowly). Since this research treats discursive and behavioural practices separately, it is also assumed that these may be ‘coupled’ or ‘decoupled’ over time, the basic premise being that national norm processes are dynamic, open-ended and non-deterministic, thus the proposed scheme allows capturing certain normative stances at given moments in time.

**Table 1**  
**A Conceptual Proposal for Capturing Distinct Normative Stances**

<b>Discursive Handling of Norms/ Political Behaviour</b>	<b>Compliant Behaviour</b> Behaviour in line with inter-subjectively shared international expectations of proper action.	<b>Partially Compliant Behaviour</b> Partial implementation or modification.	<b>Non-Compliant Behaviour</b> Substantial deviation from inter-subjective expectations, norm violation and counter-activism.
<b>Re-Iteration</b> The norm is acknowledged as universally valid, legitimate and unproblematic.	<b>Take-over</b>	Loose coupling	<b>‘Ceremony without Substance’ Decoupling</b>
<b>Critique</b> Acknowledged validity and legitimacy of the norm, but demand for certain changes in its application.	Loose coupling	<b>Reform</b>	Loose coupling
<b>Revision</b> The norm is denied universal validity and legitimacy.	<b>‘Substance without Ceremony’ Decoupling</b>	Loose coupling	<b>Revolution</b>

### 3.1 Norm Take-Over: Internalisation as a Successful Outcome of Socialisation?

Norm research usually equates norm ‘take-over’ with internalisation, which has in turn traditionally been understood as a successful outcome of norm socialisation practices on the part of norm entrepreneurs, hegemons, international organisations or a broader community of ‘core’ states. Yet at the conceptual level neither internalisation, nor socialisation are non-problematic and clearly defined in the literature. First of all, there has been a certain deal of confusion between the two terms, these often being conflated or treated synonymously. This definitional problem is connected to the dual nature of the socialisation/internalisation phenomena which may denote both process and outcome, and represent causes and consequences at the same time (Wetzel 2013, p. 180). Second, even if the distinction between socialisation as process and internalisation as outcome is clearly made, the causal paths and mechanisms leading from one to the other are not easily traceable. Third, and most importantly, it is being disputed what exactly

qualifies as internalisation, what constitutes it, and how to identify whether a norm had indeed been internalised or not (Rosert & Schirmbeck 2007, p. 280). These issues illustrate how problematic the conceptualisation of norm take-over as internalisation might be. It is therefore essential to analytically distinguish between internalisation as it is referred to in socialisation research and norm take-over, as it is understood within the framework of this paper. Since this study is primarily concerned with the state's official normative stances, which are viewed as dynamic and not fixed, the label 'norm take-over' does not and cannot refer to successful socialisation or complete internalisation when a norm becomes 'locally owned'. It rather denotes an official stance where the state demonstrates rhetorical readiness and willingness to conform to specific normative expectations and employs political practices, which are in line with its discursive commitments. Unlike the 'spiral' and 'socialisation/internalisation' models, which view internalisation as a result of a gradual move from the logic of consequences to the logic of appropriateness, norm take-over is void of any assumptions as to the actors' motivations which are often unidentifiable and their long-term effects uncertain.

### 3.2 *Norm-Reform and Norm Revolution: Norm Adaptation or Normative Revisionism?*

In the recent years political scientists and socialisation scholars have made extensive use of the anthropological concept of translation (Zwingle 2012; Zimmermann 2016), the philological concept of vernacularisation (Levitt & Merry 2009) and localisation (Acharya 2004) in order to describe and analyse complex processes through which international norms are not simply copied in a top-down manner, but are re-shaped, re-interpreted and reinforced within specific national contexts. It is generally assumed that such practices contribute to the successful internalisation of norms, as they open the discursive field for local perspectives, allow for inclusive deliberation and thus facilitate the appropriation of international normative standards. Zimmermann and Wolff have recently pointed out to the implicit bias in some studies on localisation, contestation and local resistance, which tend to view contestation practices as *per se* positive and thus run the risk of overseeing or even ignoring its potentially disruptive nature (Wolff & Zimmermann 2016). In line with these considerations it is assumed that 'norm-reform' might go in both directions: it might signify attempts at accommodating a universal norm which in some aspects is incompatible with certain elements of national culture/institutions and would have otherwise been rejected, or it might signify an act of watering down and excluding 'uncomfortable' elements for the sake of preserving established practices and institutions. At the same time, while localisation and translation are most commonly understood as complex efforts of re-interpretation and gradual introduction of a global norm into the local context on the part of local activists (Levitt & Merry 2009; Acharya 2004), norm-reform is used to describe a short-term official stance at a certain moment in time.

Unlike norm-reform, 'norm-revolution' implies that a norm is discursively contested in a way that challenges the norm's legitimacy and universal validity and encompasses political practices ranging from outright violation to counter-activism. Recent years have witnessed a sharp spike in academic interest towards such 'revolutionary' normative practices and the possibilities of norm erosion, regress or even death usually associated with them (Rosert & Schirmbeck 2007; McKeown 2009; Heller *et al.* 2012; Panke & Petersohn 2012; Jetschke & Liese 2013; Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2013; Bloomfield 2016). Yet most of these studies have primarily looked into cases of revisionist contestation in domestic and international discourses without paying much attention to corresponding political practices. Or have alternatively looked into instances of norm violation without tracing the dynamics of contestation discourses.

This study proceeds from the assumption that there is an important difference between norm violation practices coupled with discursive justification in terms of 'exceptional necessity' on the one hand, and revisionist discourses targeting the norm's legitimacy and universal validity, and followed by violation or even deliberate counter-activism on the other. Addressing this issue,



Sandholtz and Stiles have briefly outlined some of the popular misconceptions regarding norm violation and alternative norm proliferation (2009, pp. 13–14). The researchers stressed that ‘rule breaking and rule making’ might converge sometimes, but essentially these are two different things (Sandholtz & Stiles 2009, p. 14). This means that the ability of states to violate international rules without suffering adverse consequences does not necessarily presuppose their ability to create or change the norms in question. In a similar vein, Panke and Petersohn reaffirmed that sole non-compliance does not automatically lead to the abolishment of international norms: the ‘norm is abolished if the emerging practice is no longer framed as non-compliance’ (2012, p. 723). Thus, non-compliance and/or rhetorical strategies of criticism deflection do not necessarily lead to norm erosion, even if these are employed by ‘hegemons’ and powerful states. More important are the arguments used in the process and their consistency (Sandholtz & Stiles 2009, p. 15). McKeown also stressed that a challenge to the norm which only presents ‘secretive change in political practice unaccompanied by a legitimating change in discourse’ will likely soon die out and leave the prescriptive status of the norm intact (2009, p. 11). Consequently within this framework norm revolution denotes an internally consistent stance, where revisionist discourses (targeting the norm’s legitimacy and universal validity) are coupled with non-compliant or counter-activist political practices.

### 3.3 ‘Ceremony without Substance’ and ‘Substance without Ceremony’ Decoupling

As it has been mentioned previously, the gap between commitment and compliance or the gap between ‘norm talk’ and actual norm-conforming behaviour has been traditionally labelled as and researched in terms of the ‘decoupling’ phenomenon. While decoupling of formal rules from actual practices or the institutionalisation of ‘ceremony without substance’ (adoption of formal structures or commitment to generalised principles without their incorporation into political practice) has long been at the centre of attention of sociologists and sociological institutionalists (See e.g.: Hafner-Burton *et al.* 2008; Cole & Ramirez 2013), recent empirical studies have also documented decoupling in the form of ‘substance without ceremony’ (Frank *et al.* 2009; Cole 2013). Studies on norm diffusion and socialisation often do not clearly differentiate between behavioural adaptation (changes towards more compliant behaviour without respective re-adjustment in the official political discourse) and ‘cheap talk’ (rhetorical adaptation to the human rights discourse without corresponding implementation practices). Thus, ‘Fake compliance’ (Noutcheva 2009) denoting ‘insincere’ institutional or *behavioural* adaptation of external norms on the one hand, and *rhetorical* lip-service on the other are usually both perceived as manifestations of incomplete or failed internalisation. Recent studies have suggested, however, that despite their similar decoupled nature these are essentially two different phenomena, which presumably occur for different reasons. Thus Clark argued that coercive isomorphism and normative isomorphism tend to produce ‘ceremonial convergence’, or ‘ceremony without substance’ decoupling, while mimetic isomorphism produces ‘material convergence’ pushing states to imitate actual practices without necessarily participating in symbolical ceremony (2010, p. 88).

Following the theoretical discussions briefly outlined above, the assumption of this study is that different mechanisms, factors and conditions are not contradictory or even potentially mutually exclusive, but rather that certain discursive and behavioural outcomes are more or less likely depending on the presence and/or strength of particular factors and their interrelation.

#### 4 INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION AS AN INTERNATIONAL NORM, AND ITS 'NORMALISATION' AND INSTITUTIONALISATION IN EUROPE

International election observation (IEO) or international election monitoring (IEM)<sup>3</sup> has become one of the most widespread and broadly practiced activities in the area of democracy promotion and democracy assistance.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have noted that 'by sending out more and more delegations to monitor elections in politically transitional countries, the established Western democracies have reinforced the basic idea that holding elections is something that civilized countries do' (Carothers, 1997, p. 21). To turn the argument around, inviting international observers to national elections has gradually become a 'shared standard of appropriate behaviour' (Hyde 2011, p. 5) for 'governments not yet under established democracy' (Kelley 2008, p. 223). Yet nowadays ever more observation missions are being invited and sent to monitor electoral conduct in 'established Western democracies' (Eicher 2009, p. 267; Hyde 2011, p. 6). Previous studies on the evolution and socialisation of the international election observation norm<sup>5</sup> point out to a series of important nuances, which should be taken into account in the study of its dynamics 'on the ground'.

First, commitment to and compliance with the norm of inviting international observers to national elections does not automatically presuppose compliance with the norm of free and fair elections. The paradox of the IEO norm is not that its surprisingly wide acceptance has produced little improvement in the electoral conduct of cheating non-democratic states (since the presence of monitors is neither necessary, nor sufficient for truly democratic elections), but rather that it persisted despite its obvious 'inconvenience' for semi- or non-democratic states not genuinely interested in organising free and fair elections, but inviting election monitors nonetheless.

This leads to the second observation: the fact that international election observation has become a widespread practice does not necessarily presuppose that it has in fact changed the states' normative beliefs and has acquired the kind of 'taken-for-grantedness' needed for successful internalisation. Multiple qualitative studies have demonstrated that contestation still occurs regularly at the national, regional and to some degree international levels (Carothers 1997; Fawn 2006; Eicher 2009; Bader 2011). At the same time there are specific regional variations in the acceptance of the international election monitoring norm (Kelley 2008, p. 250). It is therefore important to specifically look at the national level, also taking into account the regional normative specificities and institutional frameworks, in order to capture and reveal patterns of national acceptance and/or contestation of the election monitoring norm in more detail.

Although the IEO norm presumably originated in the Americas and was facilitated through the pioneering work of the Organisation of American States (OAS) (Santa-Cruz 2005), its 'normalisation' and institutionalisation has proven to be most intensive in Europe (Kelley 2012, pp. 34–35). The end of the Cold War and the wave of transformations in post-Communist and post-Soviet societies have created fertile ground for the development and popularisation of election monitoring on the European continent. The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), later Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and in particular its Office for Free Elections in Warsaw, later Office for Democratic Institutions and Human

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3 Similar to Kelley (2008, 2012) and Hyde (2011) I use the terms 'international election observation' and 'international election monitoring' interchangeably. For a discussion of the differences between observation (which is sometimes used to refer to short-term 'passive' observation shortly before, during and immediately after the polling day) and monitoring (more 'engaged' long-term practices), see: Bjornlund 2004, pp. 38–43. Domestic observation and monitoring are excluded from this analysis.

4 The number of international observation missions sent to monitor national elections in different parts of the world has been growing exponentially since the end of 1980s; as of 2006 more than 80% of elections in the world were internationally monitored (Hyde 2011, p. 2).

5 The two most elaborate explanations of the puzzling evolution and diffusion of international election monitoring as an international norm have been delivered by Judith G. Kelley (2008) and Susan D. Hyde (2011).

Rights (ODIHR), have played a central role in this development. By signing the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document the participating states agreed that ‘the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, [could] enhance the electoral process for States’ and pledged themselves to ‘invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national proceedings’.<sup>6</sup> At the 1991 CSCE Human Dimension meeting in Moscow they asserted that commitments undertaken within the Human Dimension were ‘matters of direct legitimate concern to all participating states and [did] not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned’,<sup>7</sup> and later, at the Budapest Meeting in 1994 ODIHR was assigned to ‘play an enhanced role in election monitoring, before, during and after elections’.<sup>8</sup>

Although the OSCE has traditionally been an inter-governmental organisation with a top-down operation logic, the development of election observation rules and practices has been occurring in a bottom-up pragmatic ‘learning by doing’ manner, through the accumulation of experience and identification of best practices (Sender 2012, pp. 44–46). What is more important, the Warsaw Office has been gradually gaining more and more autonomy from OSCE member states and its Permanent Council. The OSCE also possesses an inter-governmental pillar in the area of election monitoring; the members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA OSCE) regularly participate in election observation missions as short-term observers. Some researchers have even argued, that specifically ‘among OSCE states, monitoring has acquired a “taken-for-granted-quality”’ (Kelley 2008, p. 250). Although the reality of election observation in Europe is not as optimistic as analysts sometimes depict it (Fawn 2006; Bader 2010; Boonstra 2010), it can nevertheless be stated that with the formalised and unique provisions of the Copenhagen Document election monitoring has become a particularly strong standard of appropriate behaviour on the European political space.

##### 5 RUSSIA AND THE INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION NORM: FROM ‘NORM-TAKING’ TO ALTERNATIVE ‘NORM-MAKING’?

As it has been mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Russia presents a challenging empirical case for socialisation scholarship (Heller 2008; Saari 2010). Previous studies with a focus on Russia and international election monitoring have registered a gradual deterioration in the relations between Moscow and monitoring organisations in the 2000s.<sup>9</sup> Although the late Soviet Union and then Russian Federation had either been generally disinterested or content with the work and development of international observation within the OSCE during the 1990s, this particular area of the Organisation’s activity later became ‘the most negative part of the OSCE’ for the Russian authorities (Boonstra 2010, p. 87).

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6 CSCE Copenhagen Document 1990.

7 CSCE Moscow Document 1991.

8 CSCE Budapest Document 1994.

9 While it is impossible to provide a comprehensive review of all the empirical studies on international election observation in/and Russia, the following works deserve specific mention: Fawn 2006, 2013; Ghebali 2005; Evers 2009; Saari 2010; Hutcheson 2011; Sender 2012; Cooley 2015.

**Table 2**  
**European Monitoring Organizations in Russian National Elections, 1993–2012**

Year	Elections	OSCE (ODIHR/PA)	PACE	EP	EU	CIS	Approx. amount*
<b>1993</b>	Nation-wide referendum, 25 April 1993	X					N/A
	Constitutional referendum, 12 December 1993	X					36
	Parliamentary Elections, 12 December 1993	X	X		X		36
<b>1995</b>	Parliamentary Elections 17 December 1995	X	X	X	X		114
<b>1996</b>	Presidential Elections, 16 June, 3 July 1996	X	X		X		506+350
<b>1999</b>	Parliamentary Elections, 19 December 1999	X	X	X			459
<b>2000</b>	Presidential Elections, 26 March 2000	X	X				414
<b>2003</b>	Parliamentary Elections, 7 December 2003	X	X			X	535/200
<b>2004</b>	Presidential Elections, 14 March 2004	X**	X			X	370/233
<b>2007</b>	Parliamentary Elections, 2 December 2007	X***	X			X	130/132
<b>2008</b>	Presidential Elections, 2 March 2008		X			X	30/110
<b>2011</b>	Parliamentary Elections, 4 December 2011	X	X			X	325/208
<b>2012</b>	Presidential Elections, 4 March 2012	X	X			X	262/282
Total missions		12	11	2	3	6	

\*The numbers represent the aggregated amounts of OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE PA, PACE and CIS observers.

\*\*According to OSCE PA it did not send an official monitoring mission to Russia's 2004 presidential election; however its observers formed part of the OSCE/ODIHR short-term monitoring team.

\*\*\*Although ODIHR refused to send its monitoring mission to Russia in 2007, observers from OSCE PA have been present at the Duma poll.

Sources: Hutcheson 2011, p. 988, OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE PA, PACE, EP, EU, CIS.

Russia together with a number of other post-Soviet states has 'sought to resist the influence' of OSCE International Election Observation Missions (IEOMs) by 'challenging [...] how they operate, [...] and threatening to undermine the whole [election observation] utility of the OSCE' (Fawn 2006, p. 1150), which has also been interpreted as a deliberate attempt at challenging and revising the norm of international election observation from within (Saari 2010, p. 104). Parallel to this Moscow has been building up an alternative election observation institution within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) since the early 2000s. Such 'shadow organizations', as they are sometime referred to in the literature, made up of individual parliamentary delegations from 'friendly' countries or even delegations of intergovernmental organisations are believed to be strategically created and employed in order to limit the influence of critical observation missions and to grant legitimacy to non-democratic states, not wishing to directly refute the monitoring regime (Kelley 2012, pp. 45–47). The CIS election observation activities 'replicate and in large part contradict analogous OSCE efforts' (Bader 2011, p. 16) by providing non-democratic governments with tools for fending off international criticism and delegitimizing critical organisations and institutions, such as ODIHR. Russia is widely believed to have stood at

the centre of this particular effort with the aim of stabilising and supporting authoritarianism on the post-Soviet space (Ambrosio 2009; Bader 2011; Tolstrup 2014).

Summarising the case of international election observation in Russia throughout the 1990s–2000s, Kelley noted that Russia demonstrated the ‘ability of international monitors to socialize countries when domestic conditions [were] favourable’, yet it also explicated that ‘some socialization is not particularly deep’ and showed just ‘how difficult it is for monitors to influence great powers’ (2012, p. 258). The following sections provide a detailed analysis of Russia’s changing normative dispositions and trace the influence of multiple factors on the varying outcomes.

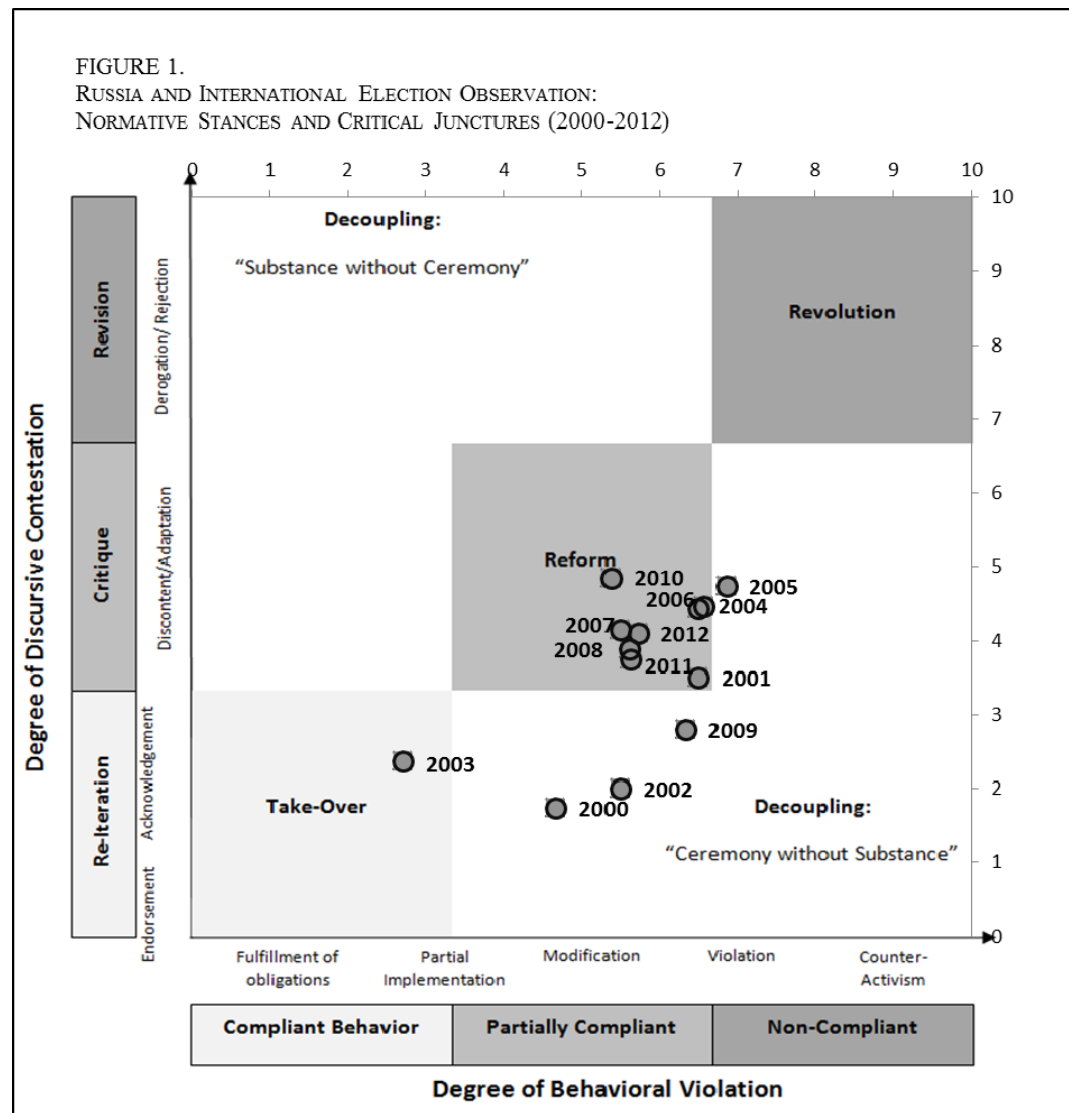
### 5.1 *Mapping Russia’s Normative Stances: International Election Observation in Discourse and Practice*

The textual analysis<sup>10</sup> of Russia’s official discourse in relation to the IEO norm allows outlining a number of preliminary observations (see Figure 2 in the Appendix). Although the issue itself has not been particularly salient in the overall official communication throughout the studied period, the discursive treatment of the election observation norm has shown considerable variation over time. Most interestingly, despite the apparent discomfort Moscow felt about the norm, it has not gone as far as openly rejecting its legitimacy or universal validity. The timeline event-analysis<sup>11</sup> of the changes in Russia’s political practice also render some relevant preliminary findings (see Figure 3 in the Appendix). Thus, the changes in Russia’s behaviour have not occurred in a linear manner (from compliant to non-compliant, or otherwise), but have demonstrated erratic and even contradicting patterns and combinations of cooperative as well as assertive tactics.

The preliminary analysis has thus shown that neither the discursive representation of the international election observation norm, nor Russia’s behavioural patterns in relation to it have been stable, but have demonstrated notable fluctuation over time. Figure 1 combines the results of content- and event-analyses and demonstrates a general move from ‘loose coupling’ (‘ceremony without substance’) in 2000–2003 to an internally consistent ‘reformist’ stance, where critical rhetoric was coupled with partially-complaint or modification-aimed political behaviour (in 2004–2008 and 2010–2012). Consistent with previous empirical observations and with the theoretical predictions of the constructivist theory, radical decoupling has proven to be a ‘dynamic temporal process’ (Cole & Ramirez 2013, p. 703), rather than a persistent problem, as rationalist theory would have suggested. Nonetheless, the distribution of Russia’s stances towards the norm does indeed show a certain ‘lag’ in the discourse as compared to practice: the overall language, or ‘norm talk’, tended to be more affirmative, than the political behaviour accompanying it. Finally, the results of timeline event-analysis and the content-analysis of official statements taken together allow mapping out the distribution of Russia’s normative stances in relation to the election observation norm, and pinpointing specific critical junctures, which will be briefly recapitulated in their chronological order.

10 Figure 2 (see Appendix) presents the results of a quantitative–qualitative content analysis of 342 statements from 118 official documents (official statements, press statements, speeches, interviews and articles) of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Heads of State (Vladimir Putin in 2000–2008 and Dmitry Medvedev in 2008–2012) containing at least one reference to international election observation. The texts were retrieved from the online archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru)) and the President of Russia ([www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru)). All textual sources have been analysed in the original language.

11 The quantitative event-analysis (the results of which are depicted in Figure 3) is based upon 297 coded events, ranging from ‘over’-fulfilment of obligations to counter-activism in accordance with the conceptual scheme developed for capturing distinct types of compliant and non-compliant political behaviour. The analysis builds upon more than 1650 Russian mass media information pieces from 2000–2012 recovered from the Integrum World Wide database (covering both pro-government and critical media outlets), primary sources, legal texts, as well as secondary literature (primarily OSCE Yearbooks 2000–2012).



The first notable conflict between Russia and the OSCE on election observation grounds occurred as early as the year 2000, when the overall norm discourse appeared rather unproblematic. The reason, quite unsurprisingly, was a contested parliamentary election, yet not in Russia, but in Belarus (see also: Ghebali 2005, p. 217; Fawn 2013, p. 65). One month after the election, in November 2000 Russia and Belarus drafted a joint proposal for the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vienna calling upon ODIHR to conduct a comparative review of the participating states' electoral legislation in order to assess their conformity with international standards. As it will be shown in more detail below, Russia's active push for reform of the OSCE election monitoring standards and practices had begun in 2004 and continued throughout 2005–2007 to somewhat subside after the 2008 presidential election. However, Moscow's parallel activities at developing an 'alternative' election monitoring structure within the CIS have been somewhat chronologically detached from its assertive reformism at the OSCE and can be dated back to the end of 2000, when the Russian Central Electoral Commission (CEC) initiated the preparation of the Convention on the Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights, and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was adopted two years later at the CIS Heads of States Summit in October 2002 (see also: Fawn 2006, p. 1144; Hutcherson 2011, p. 689). Shortly afterwards the CIS adopted the first official Recommendations for CIS Observers. These not only contained detailed provisions for the activities of CIS monitors prior to and during the poll, as well as recommendations for preparing the preliminary and final reports, but also gave clarifications on what constituted 'standards of democratic elections'.

The analysis strongly suggests that affirmative and neutral statements were employed strategically (not only in 2000–2003, but throughout the whole period), and do not allow treating the increase or decrease in re-iterative articulations as a sign of the norm’s incorporation and ‘normalisation’ within the discourse. This means, that the norm had not acquired a ‘taken-for-granted’ quality in the first place. While some authors connect the change in Moscow’s attitudes towards the election observation norm and the OSCE monitoring framework exclusively to ODIHR’s critical reporting of the 2003 parliamentary election (Saari 2010, p. 111; Kelley 2012, p. 259), a detailed investigation has shown that the roots of the conflict can be traced back to the events of the constitutional referendum and presidential election in Chechnya in March and October 2003 respectively (see also: Sender 2012, p. 137). While the refusal of European organisations to monitor the polls in Chechnya substantiated the first direct conflict over the legitimisation of Vladimir Putin’s policy in the Northern Caucasus, ODIHR’s criticism of the Duma elections in December 2003 put into question the legitimacy of the whole political system. From this moment on the transformation had become evident. If election monitoring had previously been seen as routine, although not entirely convenient, practice with certain legitimacy benefits, it started being perceived and represented as a discriminatory and even potentially threatening activity from the end of 2003 onward.

Following the critical evaluation of the 2003–2004 elections on the part of ODIHR, Russia activated its reformist assault at the OSCE. Frank Evers calculated that throughout 2004–2007 Russia ‘together with varying combinations of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan’ confronted the OSCE with some ten position papers dealing specifically with the issue of election monitoring (2009, p. 247). Four of these were produced and brought to the attention of the OSCE in 2005–2006. Russia’s proposals covered a wide range of topics: election observation methodology, procedures regarding mission composition, accountability, reporting, fund allocation, geographical scope and even working language (see also: Evers 2009, pp. 247–249; Sender 2012, pp. 147–148). Not only the substance of Russia’s criticism and demands, but also the political means of achieving the proclaimed goals were being employed in a situational and seemingly inconsistent manner. These ranged from cooperation initiatives, active lobbying and wooing of potential allies to open threats of cutting financial contributions to the OSCE and eventual financial pressure. Most of the time ‘soft’ techniques and ‘hard’ pressure were employed simultaneously through different channels (parliamentarian, diplomatic and executive). Thus, early in 2005 Sergei Lavrov reportedly attempted to convince Azerbaijan to join Russia’s OSCE reform initiative during his visit to Baku.<sup>12</sup> Later in 2006 Russia attempted to hinder the re-appointment of ODIHR’s Director Christian Strohal,<sup>13</sup> under whose leadership ODIHR refused to take up Russia’s invitation to the 2003 Chechen elections and issued its first outspokenly critical report of the Duma and presidential elections in 2003 and 2004. At the end of 2006 Russia allegedly threatened to leave the OSCE altogether, should its reform proposals be ignored.<sup>14</sup>

While Russia’s election monitoring initiatives at the OSCE, faced against strong resistance on the part of Western states (especially the United States), were failing to provide the fruits Russian diplomats had been hoping for, the counter-activist efforts within the CIS were reinvigorated and even acquired some innovative features in the aftermath of the revolutionary events in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2003–2005. These did not limit themselves to strengthening the CIS election monitoring apparatus, but also included such moves as: the creation of home-grown NGOs and letterbox companies, which were used to distort critical coverage of domestic

12 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 3 February 2005, *Vneshnepoliticheskiy kurs Azerbaidzhana ostanetsya bez izmeneniy*.

13 *RIA Novosti*, 2 March 2005.

14 *Kommersant*, 6 December 2006.

elections and polls in neighbouring states, as well as the establishment of a network of dubious election monitoring NGOs registered in foreign countries and featuring foreign experts.<sup>15</sup>

In 2007 the situation for the first time escalated into an open conflict. After the failure of the Russia-backed proposal for the OSCE Permanent Council ‘On OSCE/ODIHR Observation of National Elections’, in effect designed to put ODIHR under direct control of the inter-governmental Permanent Council and to reduce OSCE election monitoring to a simple presence of a limited observer contingent shortly before and at polling day (see also: Ghebali 2008, p. 85), Russia introduced unilateral restrictions on the scope of international monitoring missions at the Duma poll in 2007 and the presidential election in 2008. The number of short-term monitors was drastically reduced (from around 1000 present at the Duma election in 2003 to a maximum of 400) and only 70 experts from ODIHR were invited (compared to approximately 400 present at the poll in 2003). Moreover, for the first time the Russian CEC issued invitations with significant delays, which made long-term observation practically impossible. This was then followed by delays in the issuance of visas for ODIHR experts on the part of the Russian Embassy in Warsaw. The pattern largely repeated itself in the forerun to the presidential poll in 2008, which resulted in both ODIHR and PA OSCE cancelling their missions to Russia.

After this outspoken crisis the year 2009 signified a period of relative calm. Russia continued its push for OSCE election observation reform, but did not voice any qualitatively new demands and kept referring to the issues it had been stressing throughout 2006–2008. The Central Electoral Commission also switched from confrontational tactics to a more ambiguous approach. On the one hand, the CEC was expressly demonstrating its openness and cooperativeness by, for instance, inviting ODIHR experts to the opening of an electoral ‘hotline’ in Russian regions,<sup>16</sup> on the other hand its representatives kept stressing that Russia didn’t require any ‘supervisory agency’ or ‘control body’ to pass judgments over the legitimacy of Russian elections and that in the absence of collectively defined rules Russia reserved the right to establish its own modalities for the presence of international observers on its own territory.<sup>17</sup>

This relative calm was followed by a period of reformist inertia. Russia appeared to have lost interest in the battle for reform of OSCE election observation practices (See also: Kropatcheva 2012). Yet the episodic and minor squabbles between ODIHR and Russian authorities proved that the conflict had become ‘frozen’ – but not necessarily resolved. In the years 2011–2012, which were to open the new electoral cycles in Russia, the old disappointments and disagreements surfaced once again. Yet the degree of hostilities was nothing compared to the previous crisis. Russia did not back down on its restrictions regarding the scope of international observation missions, but made minor, one might say ‘cosmetic’, concessions: ODIHR received an invitation for 200 observers seven weeks prior to the poll. The overall working atmosphere for OSCE and PACE election monitors also appeared more or less unproblematic. The repressive focus of the Russian authorities had switched from international monitoring bodies to domestic election observation NGOs,<sup>18</sup> yet although the language of ODIHR and PACE preliminary and final re-

15 This network included such organisations as: the ‘International Expert Center for Electoral Systems’ (ICES) registered in Israel in December 2005, the ‘Independent American Center of Political Monitoring’ registered in the US in 2005, the ‘London International Democracy Institute’ (LIDI) registered in Great Britain, and the ‘Zentraleuropäische Gruppe für politisches Monitoring’ registered in Germany in January 2006. All these entities, according to the information provided on their official websites, were created around the second half of 2005 with the primary focus on election observation on the post-Soviet space. All these organisations listed each other as partners on their official websites and mentioned the same people among their ‘experts’.

16 *RIA Novosti*, 24 February 2009.

17 Igor Borisov’s interview in the aftermath of an ODIHR elections seminar: *ITAR-TASS*, 17 July 2009.

18 One of the most prominent victims was the voter rights association *Golos*, which was partially funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy and later became subject to the Russian ‘foreign agents’ law in the aftermath of the Duma elections and the public rallies against election fraud at the end of 2011. Similar to 2005–2006, which witnessed the creation of multiple letterbox companies and ‘international NGOs’ designed to monitor and provide appropriate assessments of the elections on the post-Soviet space in the aftermath of the colour revolutions, the pre-election period saw the creation of a myriad of domestic state-sponsored election rights and election monitoring NGOs.



ports was strikingly reserved, this did not prevent some Russian commentators from accusing the European institutions of bias and prejudice against Russia and the newly elected president.<sup>19</sup> The wheels of the OSCE election observation reform were once again set into motion with MFA Special Representative for Human Rights, Konstantin Dolgov, calling for the establishment of common election observation criteria in Vienna about a month after the poll. A few months afterwards Sergei Lavrov announced that Russia was once again preparing reform proposals on the issue of election observation for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Ministerial Council. As promised, at the 15<sup>th</sup> OSCE Council Meeting in Dublin Russia, accompanied by Belarus and Kazakhstan, once again submitted a draft decision which suggested a comparative review of electoral laws across the OSCE space – an echo of the old proposal first made by Belarus and Russia back in the year 2000.

### 5.2 *Analysing the Influence of ‘Push and Pull’ Factors: From ‘Norm-Taking’ to ‘Norm-Making’*

What explains the transformations which have occurred in Russia’s normative positioning towards the election monitoring norm throughout 2000–2012? Detailed process tracing allowed pinpointing specific ‘push’-factors, inducing the state to engage in discursive criticism and behavioural violation (regime dynamics and the transformation of the political system, sovereignty concerns and threat perceptions, justice considerations, autocratic solidarisation, material conditionality and external dependence), as well as ‘pull’-factors, inducing state to engage in rhetorical re-iteration of the norm in question and compliant behaviour (OSCE’s internal conditionality, self-identification with the so-called ‘core’-states, strive for internal and external legitimacy and degree of prior national legalization). In the following the relative importance and strength of the various ‘push’- and ‘pull’-factors will be assessed in the order provided above.

### 5.3 *‘Push-factors’ and Resistance Mechanisms: International Election Observation as an ‘Inconvenient’ Norm*

The popular supposition that ***non-democratic states are more resistant towards efforts of democratic and human rights norms socialisation***, precisely because they are non-democratic (Risse & Ropp 2013, pp. 16–17) is in a way tautological. This is especially true for the IEO norm, since Russia’s democracy scores have been affected by its disposition towards election monitors and the electoral assessments of international monitors themselves. For example, the development of the CIRI Electoral Self-Determination Index for Russia indicates changes to the worse – in 2004 and 2008 (the years of presidential polls). The overall consensus is that the quality of the electoral process has been gradually deteriorating and the regime experienced an autocratic transformation in 2000–2012.<sup>20</sup> Yet such quantitative indicators do not allow looking into the specific transformations which have been occurring on the ground.

It is not surprising that certain fluctuations in Russia’s normative stances towards election monitoring have occurred parallel to specific personnel changes in the government at large (with Vladimir Putin’s re-election in 2004 and Dmitriy Medvedev’s election in 2008), but also at the operative level. Thus, shortly before the 2007 ‘crisis’ the Central Electoral Commission experienced significant staff reorganisation and soon emerged as a new (if not central) assertive player on the political battlefield between Moscow and election observation institutions alongside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Aleksandr Veshnyakov, who acted as head of the CEC since 1999, was replaced by Vladimir Churov, an outspoken Putin loyalist, ominously famous for his self-

19 See, e.g.: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 6 March 2012.

20 See: Freedom House ‘Electoral Process in Putin’s Russia’, Polity IV scores, CIRI ‘Electoral Self-Determination’ scores.

proclaimed ‘first rule’, postulating that ‘Putin is always right’.<sup>21</sup> Moreover Igor’ Borisov, former Chairman of the *Rossiiskii obshchestvennyi institut izbiratel’nogo prava* (Russian Public Institute for Electoral Law, ROIP) and a passionate critic of colour revolutions, Western election observation in general and ODIHR in particular,<sup>22</sup> joined the CEC as one of the newly appointed members. Churov and Borisov became the two most prominent media figures in the showdown between the Russian authorities and the Warsaw Office in 2007 and 2008. While Churov retained his office in the forerun to the 2011 parliamentary elections, Borisov fell short of being re-appointed. Coincidentally the CEC opted for comparably compromising tones in 2011–2012 after Borisov’s departure. Yet it would also be too simplistic to treat regime and personnel dynamics as the beginning and the end of the story.

The important change in the officially voiced perception of the norm and the assertive behavioural tactics both within the OSCE and the CIS in 2004–2005 coincided with the *events of the colour revolutions on the post-Soviet space* (Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan). These events did not only have significant repercussions for the transformation of the Russian political discourse and foreign policy in the neighbourhood, but had direct implications for Russia’s treatment of the IEO norm. Shortly after the ‘tulip revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan in the early spring of 2005, Moscow held an international conference which brought together politicians and opposition leaders from the neighbouring states to reflect upon the implications and lessons learnt from the revolutionary events in the neighbourhood. This conference stood out in comparison to similar academic and/or political events with its list of high-ranking Russian participants, among them: then First Deputy of the Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov and former adviser to the Presidential Administration Gleb Pavlovskiy. Within the general discussion of issues relating to electoral legitimacy the participants reportedly went as far as envisioning the creation of an ‘alternative ODIHR’ on the post-Soviet space.<sup>23</sup> Almost immediately after the event the infamous ‘spin-doctor’ Pavlovskiy together with three of his business associates and political engineers registered a letterbox company ‘International Monitoring Bureau, Ltd’, which in the following years was most prominently featured in media items relating to election observation in the countries of the post-Soviet space. A few months later, in August 2005, Vladimir Frolov, then Deputy General Director of Pavlovskiy’s ‘Effective Policy Foundation’ provided an academic groundwork for this institutional innovation. In his article for *Rossiya v globalnoi politike* (Russia in Global Affairs), Russian analogue of the Foreign Affairs magazine, the author sketched out what he referred to as the Western ‘model of controlling election results through managing election legitimacy’ and concluded that Russia should ‘master the Western tools of legitimizing the political processes in the post-Soviet space’ as a means of ‘sovereign and democratic self-defence’ (Frolov 2005).

This negatively-framed discourse soon surfaced in the state’s official communication as well. The year 2007 which marked the first open conflict in the relations between Russia and ODIHR, started on a rather dramatic note – with Putin’s famous speech at the Munich Security Conference. The president took the opportunity to deliver harsh words directed at the OSCE, which in his opinion was being transformed into ‘a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries’.<sup>24</sup> Although ODIHR was not mentioned by name,

21 *Kommersant*, 9 April 2007, *Intervyu s glavoi CYKa Vladimirom Churovym*.

22 At the end of 2005 Igor’ Borisov was prominently featured in the Russian press after having joined the ODIHR mission to the parliamentary election in Azerbaijan. Later he attacked the work of ODIHR in Baku pointing out that the mission came with pre-formulated assessments in order to ‘create a dysfunctional Parliament’ for President Aliiev and complained that he was forced to sign a statement prohibiting him to make any public comments without ODIHR’s consent.

23 See, e.g.: Aleksandr Portnov, ‘Mezhdu molotom i skal’pelem’, *Novye Izvestiya*, 7 July 2005; *Novaya Gazeta*, 7 July 2005, *Kreml’: Urok polučen – peremena!*

24 Vladimir Putin, 10 February 2007, *Vysstuplenie i diskussiya na Myunkhenskoi konferencii po voprosam politiki bezopasnosti*.

the speech did refer to the 'OSCE's bureaucratic apparatus', which was 'purposefully funded and therefore under control' of foreign states and used as a tool of interference in member-states' internal affairs. The debate was further stirred by pro-Kremlin political experts and loyal analysts. Shortly before the 2007 parliamentary poll Sergei Markov, member of the Public Chamber, Kremlin mouthpiece and to-be Duma deputy, published a text in state-owned newspaper *Izvestiya* exposing Western plans for a 'birch revolution' in Russia.<sup>25</sup> Repeating the parables about 'orange technologies' and election 'de-legitimisation' schemes, which were becoming increasingly pronounced in the Russian political and public discourses in the aftermath of the Ukrainian orange revolution, the author called for 'resistance counter-projects' aiming at the neutralisation of external de-legitimisation methods. He specifically mentioned international election observation as one of the political 'technologies' for either regime overthrow or defamation of unfavourable political authorities. Within this narrative ODIHR was represented as the core element of the 'corrupt' system, 'compromised even more than some of the observed elections'.

Most of the studies, which have previously analysed Moscow's reformative stance on the matter of international election observation, have interpreted Russia's criticism of OSCE's double standards as a rhetorical tool for criticism deflection. Yet can Russia's persistently voiced discontent be easily dismissed as cheap talk or could Russia's critical disposition towards the IEO norm have at least partially been influenced by *the perceived inequality in the norm's application*? Although the norm of international election observation is often defined as a standard of appropriate behaviour for non- or semi-democratic states, the OSCE Copenhagen Document does not differentiate between democratic and democratising states and calls upon *all* signatories to invite observers to national elections. The somewhat discriminatory application of the norm in practice prompted Polish authorities to refuse ODIHR's monitoring request in 2007. Under strong pressure on the part of the OSCE and some Western European states Poland eventually backed down and accepted the monitoring mission, but the initial rebuff effectively played into the hands of Moscow officials. Thus, Sergei Lavrov did not miss the opportunity to point out that 'one OSCE participating state downright refused to invite Strohal to monitor [its election], and he had to coax it into issuing an invitation'.<sup>26</sup> Later he stated that the 'presence of [OSCE] missions is perceived [by the majority of OSCE states] as a sign of inequality'.<sup>27</sup> In response to earlier accusations ODIHR started deploying monitors to elections in states that are generally considered developed democracies. The first missions were sent to the presidential poll in France in April 2002 and the US general elections in November 2002.

Yet after the geographical imbalance had been somewhat corrected, Moscow started voicing complaints about biased and politicised assessments of international monitors. A number of academic studies also mentioned certain drawbacks in the work of OSCE monitoring institutions, which Russia had been targeting throughout the years. Hutcheson, for example, documented that in the forerun to the 2003 Duma poll he himself witnessed the draft of the ODIHR preliminary report two days before the actual vote (2011, p. 694). Another alleged 'bias' concerned Christian Strohal's refusal to accept the invitation of a limited contingent in 2007 and 2008. Russia was not the first state to put up obstacles in the way of ODIHR monitors, but it was the first time ODIHR had demonstratively cancelled a mission.<sup>28</sup>

25 Sergey Markov, 'Chestnost' kak politika', *Izvestiya*, 20 June 2007.

26 Sergey Lavrov, 29 November 2007, *Stenogramma vystupleniya i otvetov na voprosy SMI Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V.Lavrova v hode uchastiya v zasedanii Soveta ministrov inostrannykh del OBSE*.

27 Sergey Lavrov, 5 December 2008, *Vystuplenie Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V.Lavrova na 16-m zasedanii SMID OBSE*.

28 In 1996 ODIHR could not monitor the Serbian poll because of 'extraordinary short notice' (two weeks in advance). At the same time faced with strikingly similar obstacles prior to the 2001 presidential election in Belarus (delayed invitations, visa denials accompanied by references to 'compliance with international obligations') former ODIHR Director Stoudmann refrained from cancelling the mission and opted for a limited election observation mission instead.

However, Russia's criticism had not subsided even after Christian Strohal was replaced by Janez Lenarcic, a Slovenian diplomat who opted for a more cooperative approach towards Moscow and even voiced his agreement over some of Russia's proposals in relation to OSCE election monitoring practices. It is true that Lenarcic's steps in Moscow's direction were followed by some symbolic gestures of good will on the part of the Russian Central Electoral Commission, but these did not substitute long-term change. It is generally hard to separate genuine perceptions of injustice and unfair treatment from rhetorical justification of misconduct or criticism deflection. Yet one does not necessarily have to contradict the other. It can't be ruled out that Russian officials felt genuinely frustrated over certain imbalances in the monitoring work of OSCE institutions, while also strategically employing these accusations in order to justify one's own electoral misconduct.

While the presented arguments regarding the norm's obvious inconvenience (regime transformation, fear of a 'colour' revolution and justice considerations) for Russian officials can explain the state's growing resistance against IEO in the aftermath of the first critical report of the 2003 Duma election, they cannot fully account for Moscow's sudden counter-activist initiatives in 2000–2002 (see Figure 3). By all accounts Russia had no reason to fear negative reporting as early as the year 2000. Reports of international monitoring missions issued in the aftermath of the 1999–2000 nation-wide elections radiated optimism. Researchers noted that international monitors 'were initially willing to give Russia the benefit of the doubt and to encourage transition despite difficulties' (Kelley 2012, p. 259). A detailed recollection of events shows that the initial idea of erecting an alternative monitoring body within the CIS most probably came from Belorussian president Aleksandr Lukashenka – which suggests that Russia's early counter-activist stance was also driven by *authoritarian solidarization*. It was presumably the CIS Heads of States Council Meeting in Minsk on 1 June 2001 which provided the kick-start for the intensification of the overall activity in this regard. Commencing the Summit Vladimir Putin announced that Lukashenka appealed to the CIS as an international organisation to send monitors to its upcoming presidential election in September and requested that the CIS Secretariat worked out a format for CIS observers' presence at the poll.<sup>29</sup> With the election observation norm becoming ever more inconvenient for Russian authorities, Moscow intensified its counter-activist efforts within the CIS, but the initial idea apparently came from Russia's authoritarian neighbour. At the same time, Moscow's relative reformist exasperation at the OSCE in 2009–2011 was preceded by an unexpected blow dealt by its long-term ally in the struggle for OSCE election observation reform – Kazakhstan. At the 2007 Ministerial Council Astana supposedly agreed to withdraw its support for Russia's reform proposals in exchange for OSCE Chairmanship in 2010 (See: Dubnov 2008). The Madrid Council became an utter diplomatic disaster for Russia; none of its proposal had been accepted, not to mention the 'backstab' on the issue of election observation reform which came from one of its most significant partners. This suggests that Russia could not act as a 'lone crusader' in its counter-activist or reformist endeavour, but needed the support of its autocratic allies.

*Material conditionality or material pressures* are usually quoted as one of the important factors for inducing states to comply with international norms. Studies which have dealt with the norm of international election observation have specifically pointed out to the significance of material factors (Western financial support and democratic conditionality on the part of international donors) for the overall diffusion of the norm (Kelley 2008; Hyde 2011). Yet Russia can be considered an outlier case in this regard. In the forerun to the G8 summit in Evian as early as June 2003 the Russian government indicated that it no longer wanted to be a recipient of internation-

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29 Vladimir Putin, 1 June 2001, *Vstupitel'noe slovo na zasedanii Soveta glav gosudarstv SNG*. The Council issued a Decision 'On the deployment of observers to the Presidential Election of the Republic of Belarus', which ordered the CIS Executive Committee to take over the coordination of CIS observers and called upon the governments of CIS member-states to provide monitors for the poll.

al assistance, but announced its ambition of returning to the development cooperation stage as a full-fledged donor. Shortly afterwards Russia was officially removed from the OECD list of international assistance recipients and started building up its own donor infrastructure. Although some Western states continued providing funds which are commonly considered development aid (support for democracy and the rule of law) even afterwards, the Russian government had been repeatedly stressing its discomfort over receiving this type of assistance. The conflict over Western financial assistance for Russian civil society first surfaced in 2005–2006 with the passing of the so-called ‘NGO Law’ and later culminated in the forced closure of the Moscow USAID office in October 2012. Indeed, such support has not been seen as something to strive for, but as shameful and later – with the rise of concerns regarding external interference and fears of an exported revolution – as something potentially harmful and even threatening. The fact that Russia had been turning increasingly bold in its criticism of the election observation norm at the OSCE beginning in 2004 onward, parallel to the strengthening of its economy in the context of rising oil prices and the general reduction of Russia’s economic dependency, does not serve to either falsify or confirm the rationalist expectation about the power of material conditionality as an instrument of inducing compliance.

#### 5.4 ‘Pull-factors’ and Socialising Effects: Constraints on Normative Revisionism

The previous section has outlined multiple reasons for the increasing inconvenience of the election observation norm for Russian authorities. The transformation of the political system, which fostered fears of ‘regime change’ in the aftermath of a series of revolutions in neighbouring states, as well as the implicit perception of election observation as an ‘unjust’ and ‘discriminatory’ tool used by Western states to influence Russian internal affairs together with its material emancipation from Western donors provide a complex explanation for Russia’s growing resistance against the election observation norm. Yet the more puzzling question is why the Russian authorities did not engage in discursive revisionism and avoided open violations, *despite* these obvious inconveniences. This section will analyse the constraining factors on Russia’s normative revisionism.

Some researchers have connected Russia’s relative restraint in regard to the IEO norm with *the socialising power of the OSCE as an international organisation*. Thus Rick Fawn saw the fact that the Russian government, ‘most inventive [...] at trying to resist ODIHR’ (2013, p. 89), continued to nevertheless invite OSCE monitors as an ‘outstanding example of [OSCE] internal conditionality’ (2013, p. 91). Central to Fawn’s concept is not the Organisation’s power of inducing material costs for non-compliance with its norms, but the non-material value, which participating states ascribe to membership. Internal conditionality might not have been able to prevent Russia’s (at times restrained and at times assertive) reformism, but it explicated the necessity of providing justification for one’s not-entirely-compliant actions. It is no surprise that during the 2007 crisis Russian authorities were extensively referring to the provisions of the 1990 Copenhagen Document in order to stress their compliance with the ‘letter of the law’. The legalistic argument, emphasising that the unilaterally introduced restrictions to the monitors’ mandate were in full compliance with Russia’s OSCE commitments, was extensively used by both the Foreign Ministry and the Central Electoral Commission. Although there is no way to know for sure, there are reasons to believe that it were precisely the OSCE commitments which did not allow Russian authorities to blatantly violate the norm by not inviting international observers whatsoever. Yet as appealing as it sounds, Fawn’s internal conditionality argument is an integral part of the explanation story, but not the whole story, since it can only provide a static explanation (organisational membership) for the variation which can be observed in Russia’s normative stances. Also, the perceived value of the OSCE for Russian authorities has also been a contested issue. Multiple studies have pointed out towards the growing frustrations and disappointments

Russia had connected to the Organisation from the end of the nineties compared to the high hopes of the early post-Soviet decade.

Ideational and identity-related factors have already been examined by multiple constructivist studies of Russia's foreign policy (Thorun 2008; Morozov 2009; Makarychev 2008; Neumann 2008). Most of them referred to *Russia's identity discourse and its instability* for the explanation of Russia's instable policies at home and abroad. At the same time, these studies have registered certain transformations in the referent role of Europe in Russia's self-identification discourse. It has been argued, that Russia's normative withdrawal from European values has been becoming ever more visible since Putin commenced his second term as president in 2004 (Allison 2006). Shortly after that, Russian officials started increasingly stressing that the state refused to participate in European affairs as an 'object of civilizing influences', but wanted to be treated as an equal among equals (cf.: Allison 2006, p. 166). This phenomenon has been pinpointed by Gomart, who noted that 'Russia has demonstrated its unwillingness to further discourse on the universalism of European values, instead developing a discourse on their relativity' (2008, p. 9). What has also been explicitly stressed, however, is that Russia's identity discourse has traditionally been centred on Europe. One remote, but nevertheless telling example might be drawn from the intensive normative squabble between Russia and the Baltic States prior to and shortly after their entry into NATO and the EU in 2004. Throughout most of the post-Soviet period Russia has been repeatedly and consistently attacking the governments of Estonia and Latvia for human rights violations against Russian-speakers. Despite the fact, that Russia has traditionally been rather sceptical and distrustful of European democracy and human rights promotion efforts, in the case of the Baltic States the EU has been re-presented as a vital and significant actor in socialising its new members in the wake and upon the 2004 accession round. Apart from the reference towards the EU's role as a norm-setter and a kind of normative authority for Latvia and Estonia the language of Russia's human rights criticism explicitly and saliently employed references to 'European standards', 'European values' and 'European norms', which were represented as a sort of *étalon de mesure* of democratic development which all 'civilized' states had to conform to. While it is true that the discourse on Europe and Russia's place in it has been turning increasingly negative over the recent decade, the final departure has not yet occurred and can be conceived of as one of the restraining effects.

Another factor, which could have constrained Russia's normative revisionism, is the *wish for external and internal legitimacy*. At the same time previous studies have observed that Russian voters generally tended to view elections which were criticised as fraudulent by European monitoring organisations as generally free and fair (Hutcheson 2011). Opinion polls have also indicated a high level of confidence of the Russian electorate in state authorities and domestic observers as opposed to international observers (both OSCE and CIS). In 2008 only 3–4% of the respondents were ready to trust OSCE monitors in the case of contested elections; for comparison, the amount of those who would have rather trusted the Central Electoral Commission and domestic observers stood at around 30% and 20% respectively.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless the Russian public was positively predisposed towards the presence of international monitors in general and agreed that the presence of international observers contributed to the free and fair conduct of elections.<sup>31</sup> These somewhat contradictory dispositions within the general public suggest that the desire for internal legitimation through election observation might be considered somewhat relevant, but cannot be seen as crucial.

The desire for external legitimation, on the other hand, has proven to be more salient. This was evident in the way Russian representatives have been particularly active at international fora –

30 VCIOM, 20 January 2008, <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=9652> – Accessed 17/08/2015.

31 VCIOM, 9 October 2011, [http://wciom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=762&q\\_id=54625&date=09.10.2011](http://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=762&q_id=54625&date=09.10.2011) – Accessed 17/08/2015; VCIOM, 9 October 2011, [http://wciom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=762&q\\_id=54631&date=09.10.2011](http://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=762&q_id=54631&date=09.10.2011) – Accessed 17/08/2015.

but not so much at home. It was the refusal of European organisations (OSCE ODIHR, OSCE PA and PACE) to observe the presidential election in Chechnya in October 2003, which provoked the first meaningful expressions of deep discontent and even insult on the part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then president Putin himself. In a heated speech at his annual press conference almost two years after the actual event Vladimir Putin recalled the incident to complain about the hypocrisy of European election observation institutions in particular and the West in general:

[...] I am troubled by these double standards we so often talk about. What do we mean when we speak about double standards? [...] Afghanistan held elections. [...] Kosovo also had elections. [...] But when we proposed monitoring elections in the Chechen Republic – no, they said, this cannot be done, because the conditions are not ripe, although hostilities ended a long time ago, and there are bodies of authority and administration. And with Iraqi territory 100% occupied, it is possible to hold elections! [...] According to our information, just yesterday fighting raged in nine cities and large populated areas – indeed, the conditions are normal, and people can go to the polls. But not in Chechnya!<sup>32</sup>

The recurrence of this episode in Putin's official communication suggests its overall significance not only for the relationship between Russia and European monitoring organisations (OSCE and PACE) in particular, but for the change of attitude towards election monitoring in general. For Putin this gesture apparently substituted a personal blow, since it denied him the desired legitimisation of Russia's policy in Chechnya. The importance of such legitimisation was evident in Russia's 'courtship' towards ODIHR prior to the constitutional referendum in the Chechen Republic in March and the local presidential election in October 2003. The critical assessment of the nation-wide parliamentary poll in 2003 also produced a rather vocal reaction on the part of Russia's OSCE Representative. It was the mission's doubt in 'Russia's fundamental willingness to meet European and international standards for democratic elections'<sup>33</sup> specifically which was met with vocal opposition on the part of Russia's Permanent Representative at the OSCE,<sup>34</sup> since this particular statement was perceived as calling into question the legitimacy of Russia's overall political course.

While as a member of OSCE Russia is only politically (but not legally) bound by relevant commitments (Saari 2010, p. 82), *Russian domestic legislation* contains detailed provisions regarding the presence and rights of domestic and international election observers. The current Law on Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights from 2002 defines foreign (international) observers as 'representative[s] of a foreign or international organization entitled to monitor the preparation and conduct of elections and referenda in the Russian Federation as provided by the law' (Article 2.43). It is important to note that both international inter-governmental organisations and international non-governmental organisations are eligible to send observers to Russian national elections. The legislation contains detailed and rather liberal regulations in what concerns the rights of international monitors. International observers are entitled 'to meet with candidates, their official representatives, [...], voters organizations, observers', 'to have access to all documents [...] regulating the conduct of elections', 'be present at voting stations, including voting premises' prior, during and after the voting up to the time of the official adoption of voting returns, 'being provided access to voting lists', 'observe the issuance of ballots', etc.<sup>35</sup> International monitors have initially been praising Russia's electoral legislation as 'very liberal particularly

32 Vladimir Putin, 23 December 2004, *Press-konferenciya dlya rossiiskikh i inostrannkh zhurnalistov*.

33 ODIHR Final Report 2003.

34 Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 March 2003, *Vystuplenie Postoyannogo predstavatelya pri OBSE A.Yu. Alekseeva na zasedanii Postoyannogo soveta, 6 marta*.

35 CEC Resolution No. 10/98-6 2011.

regarding the presence of observers'.<sup>36</sup> Yet the development of the relevant legislative provisions (regarding both foreign and domestic observers) has been showing a slight restrictive trend since the early 2000s onwards. While the clauses specifying the rights of observers have remained widely unaffected, additional clauses clarifying the responsibilities of international observers have been added over time, so that the text of the resolution issued prior to the presidential election in 2012 was somewhat contradictory in its formulations. Thus, while international observers may 'inform the representatives of the electoral commissions on the results of their findings, issue recommendations without interfering in the work of the electoral commissions' and 'express their opinion about the electoral legislation, preparation and conduct of the [...] elections, hold press conferences and appeal to the mass media after the polling day', they should refrain from expressing bias or preference regarding the work of the electoral commissions and state authorities prior, during and after the polling day.<sup>37</sup> Although the outlined obligations regarding impartiality, integrity, professionalism, respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the electoral process closely correspond (and are in some cases completely identical) to the internationally recognised standards of election observation,<sup>38</sup> the CEC resolutions have been gradually introducing restrictive requirements for the accreditation of international monitors, which are formulated in a way that allows for rather broad interpretation and misuse.

Although the legislation in its direct wording is still very much in conformity with OSCE and Council of Europe standards, ODIHR harshly criticised the existing laws for (indirectly) limiting the quantity and scope of activities of international monitors prior to and during the State Duma elections in 2011.<sup>39</sup> Despite this criticism, it should be noted that Russia's national legislation on international observation is still outspokenly permissive and much more comprehensive than that of the majority of other OSCE participating states – democratic or not.

## 6 CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE POWER AND FRAGILITY OF NON-MATERIAL CONSTRAINTS ON NORMATIVE REVISIONISM

In the beginning of this paper I have outlined some shortcomings of the traditional norm socialisation literature and have proposed an alternative non-linear framework for capturing variation in state's positioning towards international norms. This framework provided conceptual tools for a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the changes in the discursive representation of international norm, and of the various material and non-material factors and mechanisms influencing the coupled and decoupled outcomes. The empirical investigation into the various normative stances Russia had been selectively adopting in relation to the international election observation norm throughout 2000–2012 delivered some interesting findings which could be relevant for both Area Studies specialists and socialisation scholars. Two significant findings can be singled out in particular: evidence that decoupling of the so-called 'norm talk' from political practice has proven to be a temporal rather than persistent phenomenon, and the importance of non-material constraints on normative revisionism.

Contrary to the expectations of rationalist scholars, 'ceremony without substance' decoupling has proven to be self-defeating in the long-run. Yet cognitive dissonance, which in the expectations of the 'spiral model' should have induced Russian authorities to change their behaviour in accordance with normative expectations, had reversely lead Russian officials to change their generally affirmative discourse to match its assertive political behaviour. The critical discourse which was gaining more and more amplitude in Russia's reformism at the OSCE in turn prede-

36 See e.g.: ODIHR Final Report 2000, pp. 12–13.

37 CEC Resolution No. 10/98-6, 2011.

38 See: UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers 2005; Code of Conduct for OSCE/ODIHR Election Observers.

39 ODIHR Final Report 2011, pp. 16–17.



terminated its behavioural disposition towards international monitors at national elections. Despite harsh international criticism in reaction to Russia's restrictions regarding the amount and scope of international observers as well as the failed attempt at pushing through its reform proposals at the OSCE in 2007, Russian authorities appeared set on sticking to the established procedures in the run-up to the presidential poll in March 2008 and later in 2011–2012 – despite some minor concessions which had been made on the part of the CEC. This appeared to have become a matter of principle. As then Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko pointed out: in the absence of consensually defined criteria for observers' work Russia reserved the right to define such modalities itself.<sup>40</sup> Putin echoed this statement, calling it 'a matter of principle' that Russia would 'not allow anyone to impose conditions of any kind upon [it]', meaning that 'the country has a duty to respect the agreements it has made, but it is not bound to abide by conditions imposed from outside'.<sup>41</sup>

While it does not appear particularly surprising that Russia was turning more and more critical toward the election observation norm in the context of autocratic regime transformation, fears of an 'imported revolution' and the reduction of its material dependency on the West, the role of non-material factors (prior legalisation in national legislation, OSCE organisational conditionality, self-identification as a 'European' state) as constraints on normative revisionism is what substantiates a more interesting finding. Despite the obvious inconvenience of the election monitoring norm for the Russian authorities, they have not gone as far as openly questioning its legitimacy and have refrained from direct violation of the OSCE Copenhagen commitments.

At the same time the analysis has shown that the presence of these non-material constraints cannot be taken for granted and their power should not be overestimated. The mechanisms (material emancipation, situational 'othering' and discursive de-legitimization of 'moral entrepreneurs') which Russian authorities have been employing throughout the years in order to minimise the constraining effects of specific 'pull factors' (self-identity conceptions, legitimacy concerns, organisational conditionality) show just how fragile normative and ideational factors are and how easily their effects can be reversed.

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40 *RIA Novosti*, 26 December 2007, MID RF podtverdil priglasenie BDIPCh OBSE na vybory presidenta.

41 Vladimir Putin, 14 February 2008, *Ezhegodnaya bol'shaya press-konferenciya*.

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APPENDIX

FIGURE 2.  
DYNAMICS OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION OF THE ELECTION OBSERVATION NORM  
IN RUSSIA (2000-2012)

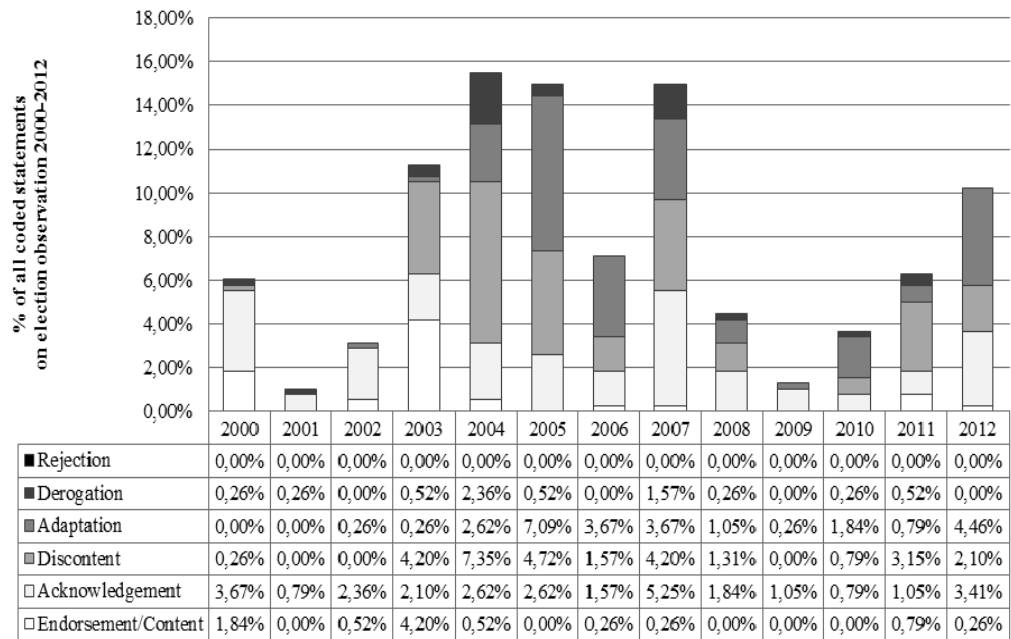
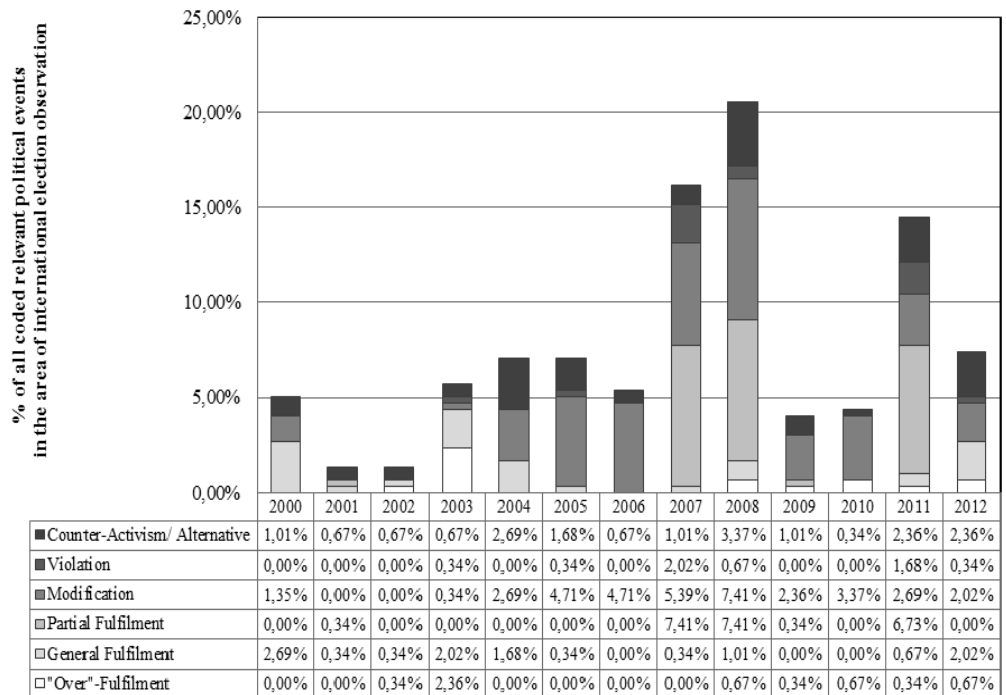


FIGURE 3.  
DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIA'S POLITICAL CONDUCT IN THE AREA OF INTERNATIONAL  
ELECTION OBSERVATION (2000-2012)



### Contact

Evgeniya Bakalova  
Ph.D. Candidate and Research Associate  
bakalova@hsfk.de  
Tel: +49 69 959 104-0

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Peace Research Institute Frankfurt  
Baseler Straße 27-31  
60329 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

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