

Russian approaches to the 'common neighbourhood': change or preservation of the status quo?

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SPES Policy Papers

Russian Approaches to the ‘Common Neighbourhood’: Change or Preservation of the Status Quo?

Andras Racz

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Introduction

The internal dynamics of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) have been widely analyzed and criticized (Emerson/Noutcheva 2007, Duleba 2008, Böttger 2010). Instead of contributing to these debates, the paper mainly intends to address the role of the 'common neighbourhood' for the EU-Russia relations and to provide an insight into the Russian perspective. The term 'common neighbourhood' is used for Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, since the study focuses on these three states only. Though the three countries of the Southern Caucasus are also included both in the ENP and in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, their situation is not analyzed here.

The paper seeks to answer the following two research questions: (1) What were the Russian reactions to the development of the ENP and the EaP? (2) What are the main political tools Russia used in the common neighbourhood? Instead of exactly measuring their efficiency, this paper aims at providing an overview by using both officials' and experts' opinions as empirical sources.

In the Russian interpretation, the analysed region traditionally belongs to the Russian zone of influence, which is an opinion that is generally based on historical arguments. The paper argues that Russia has some definite security and defence interests in the common neighbourhood, which are mostly inherited from the Soviet times. Strategic considerations, especially the defence-related interests, are definitely playing a role in shaping Russia's current attitude towards the region. As a result, Russia perceives the whole ENP from the very beginning as an EU effort to gain influence in the countries of the common neighbourhood, i.e. Russia's traditional zone of influence. As an unsurprising reaction to the EU policies, Russia has been ready either to give positive offers to countries of the common neighbourhood, or to use restrictive measures.

The main argument of this paper is that in the field of foreign, security and defence policy¹ most of the Russian political offers towards the common neighbourhood have been weak and unattractive. They were mere reactions to Western initiatives, mainly aiming at preserving the political status quo.²

The paper is composed of four main parts. The first chapter presents the Russian security interests in relation to the common neighbourhood. In the second chapter Russia's perception of the development and functioning of the ENP is analyzed, based not only on official documents and academic papers, but on interviews conducted with Russian experts. In the following two chapters, two dimensions of Russian policies towards the common neighbourhood are studied. Thus, the third chapter deals with the political offers made, while the fourth chapter provides an overview of Russian capabilities of using restrictive political measures. The fifth and concluding chapter not only summarizes the previous parts but makes an effort to address the possible fields of political cooperation between the EU and Russia in the common neighbourhood. The recommendations given are aimed at decision-makers working either in EU institutions or in individual EU member states, dealing with foreign policy towards the common neighbourhood.

¹ This analysis focuses almost exclusively on foreign, security and defense policy. Economic aspects, such as foreign trade, foreign direct investment, energy policy, etc. are addressed to the extent that is inevitable for understanding the political contexts.

² This reactive nature of the Russian 'neighbourhood policy' is officially recognized by many Russian officials and

I Russian Security Interests in the Common Neighbourhood

In the field of security and defence, Russia clearly holds a much stronger position in the analyzed countries of the common neighbourhood than either the EU or the United States. This is partly a consequence of the historical heritage of the Soviet times and partly due to the developments, which have taken place since then.

First and foremost, in all three studied countries Russian troops are deployed, though in different frameworks. In Belarus and Ukraine their presence is legitimized by mutually agreed and still unchallenged international agreements, while in Moldova they could remain on the ground only due to the Russian intervention in the civil war in 1992. The ceasefire agreement forced on Moldova in summer 1992 prescribed the presence of Russian troops as peace-keepers.

Military presence in the common neighbourhood is something that Russia does not intend to give up, even in the long run. Besides their geo-strategic value, Russian forces stationed in the neighbourhood are an important political tool for exercising direct influence over the politics of the neighbouring countries. Thus, it is not surprising that Moscow tries to preserve the presence of its forces in the ‘near abroad’.³

already been pointed out by some experts (Jasutis 2007). The most important forums for this are the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and partially the Union State. Up to now, a fully integrated system of air defence has been established, which saw its first live test during the ‘Zapad 2009’ military exercise in September 2009 (Soyuzinfo.ru 2009). During the debate on the U.S. missile defence shield installations to be built in Central Europe, the real significance of this system became visible: Russia reacted by declaring its readiness to deploy modern S-400 air defence missiles and Iskander-M surface-surface missiles in Belarus (Charter97.org 2008). Additionally, there are two Russian bases operating on Belarusian soil (Semionov 2006), and the defence industry cooperation between the two countries is also intensive.

All in all, Russia’s main aim in security policy related to Belarus is to deepen the defence integration of the two countries with all its consequences. Thus, it is not only ensuring the political and security loyalty of Minsk, but also possessing a strategic outpost and reliable ally in the region. Interestingly enough, despite the on-going gradual political opening up of Belarus towards the EU, no efforts are visible from the Belarusian side to extend this to security and defence policy to any extent. A pessimist interpretation of this ‘symptom’ might be that the Belarusian regime has *de facto* already lost its autonomy in issues of national security and defence.

Belarus

Belarus is perceived as a country of primary importance for Russia in the field of defence. There are expert opinions according to which Minsk is the only remaining military ally of Moscow⁴ (Jasutis 2007). The recently adopted Russian military doctrine mentions Belarus on the first rank when priorities of defence cooperation are discussed (Voennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii 2010: 51). The importance of the joint use of military infrastructure with Belarus is explicitly mentioned. This also demonstrates that defence cooperation between two states is rapidly advancing, a development that has

Ukraine

The situation is much more complex regarding Ukraine, primarily because in times of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had a prioritized role in Soviet security and defence policy. There were numerous military bases, including those equipped with nuclear weapons. Significant parts of the Soviet defence industry complex were located on Ukrainian soil, which made the break-up a painful, complicated, and in many aspects, unfinished process. At the same time, Russia still considers Ukraine as a region of vital strategic importance. Consequently, the Kremlin did, does and will do everything possible to prevent Ukraine from joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Danilov 2009). Even the Ukrainian NATO approximation ambitions (especially in the reform of the armed forces) have generated harsh Russian criticism. One may recall the anti-NATO demonstrations in Crimea, several anti-NATO statements of various Russian politicians, and even the ill-fated anti-NATO referendum effort of the pro-Russian Ukrainian politician Viktor Medvedchuk in 2006 (Korduban 2007).

The presence of the Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian soil is strongly connected to this problem. The pre-2010 Ukrainian governments perceived the presence of the Russian fleet as an imminent

³ The expression originates from the Russian term ближнее зарубежье (blizhneye zarubezhye), and is referring to the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union. The term „common neighbourhood“ is not commonly used in Russia.

⁴ Interview with Dmitry Danilov, director of the Centre for European Security Studies at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Moscow, 13 November 2009.

security concern not only because of the warships themselves, but also due to the large number of Russian navy and security personnel stationed on the bases. Following the 'Orange Revolution' and the Ukrainian leadership choosing a more pro-Western and pro-NATO course, the presence of the Black Sea Fleet was considered as being a blocking element on Ukraine's way towards NATO. Thus, the planned complete withdrawal of the fleet by 2017 was long awaited by pro-Western political forces (BBC 2005).

Besides the Fleet's very presence, there were also several smaller scale insults and conflicts after 2004, but the situation significantly worsened during the war in Georgia. The Black Sea Fleet actively participated in the war: after defeating the Georgian navy, it blockaded the country during the conflict. However, Ukraine actively supported Georgia, both politically and by training, the shipment of military equipment, etc.⁵ This resulted in an obvious conflict of interests between Moscow and Kyiv. Besides condemning the Russian 'aggression' several times, President Yushchenko ordered to restrain the movements of Russian navy on Ukrainian waters. Ethnic tensions in the Republic got strengthened, especially after the return of the victorious Russian warships to Crimean ports (RFE/RL 2008). Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries induced further fears that Crimea could be the next case. The protection of Russian citizens could have easily been the pretext, while the fleet could have provided the necessary political and military backing.

However, the fleet-issue seems to be solved with the so-called Kharkiv agreement, signed by the new Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in April 2010. According to the deal, the presence of the Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian soil will be extended by 25 years, until 2042 (Hedenskog 2010). This does not only mean a *de facto* hindrance of Ukraine's NATO membership in the near future, but also the enabling of Russia to maintain its military presence in Ukraine. Consequently, the status of Crimea will remain unsettled and will continue to be a source of further tensions in the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, being easily exploited by the former (Hedenskog 2010).

In addition to the fleet presence, Russia has maintained two additional bases in Ukraine, namely two early warning radar facilities, one in Mukachevo and the other one in Sevastopol. Moscow has already

announced in 2007 that these bases in Ukraine will be closed (RIA Novosti 2010) and similar facilities built on Russian soil, more exactly in Armavir, will take over their duties (WMD Insights, 2007 - 2008).

A third element of Russia's security and defence-related interests towards Ukraine is connected to the defence industry. It is a direct heritage of the Soviet period that numerous interconnections exist between the Russian and Ukrainian defence industry (Szabó 2009: 57). Moreover, Ukraine has enjoyed a monopolistic position in the production of weapons and parts of weapons until recently: helicopter and ship engines produced by the *Motor Sich* company in Zaporozhe, as well as air-to-air missiles, sensors, etc. Russia is striving to get rid of these outside dependencies, but this is supposed to take time. For example, though combat helicopter-engine building capabilities have been established in Russia, production numbers are still not sufficient. Thus Moscow still needs to rely on Kyiv. Besides, in other fields of industry, such as in the space rocket production, certain critical elements of the production line are still available only in Ukraine (Szabó 2009: 59).

However, despite these still existing interconnections between Russia and Ukraine, defence policy coordination has been very weak between the two countries, especially since the 'Orange Revolution'. Ukraine did not join the CIS formally, not to mention the Collective Security Treaty or later the CSTO, instead it chose GUAM⁶, and started to develop its relations with NATO. All these steps were well in line with the 'multi-vectorial' foreign policy pursued under former President Leonid Kuchma (Poti 2001). Moreover, since the 'Orange Revolution' there also have been concrete cases of tensions between the two armed forces: the most visible ones were connected to the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Crimea. Besides, before the August 2008 war Ukraine has been accused by Russia several times of supplying Georgia with weapons, an information that is confirmed by the public arms trade data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.⁷

In the long run and in line with the diverging foreign and security policy objectives of Moscow and Kyiv, one can well count on decreasing defence-related interconnections between both countries (Szabó 2009: 70). Nevertheless, Russian military presence will supposedly be maintained in Ukraine,

5 Ukraine supplied the Georgian army with T-72 tanks, including the modified T-72 SIM-1s. In: „Georgia Army.” Globalsecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/georgia/army.htm>, accessed 10 Nov 2010.

6 GUAM is a regional organization, composed of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. The first letters of the country names give the acronym GUAM.

7 The Arms Transfers Database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute is accessible at armstrade.sipri.org.

whether in one form or the other, its main purpose 'only' being to keep Ukraine away from factually joining NATO.

Moldova

The security and defence aspect of the Russian-Moldovan relations is relatively simple. First and foremost, Moscow's main interest is to preserve its political and military influence in the region, which includes preventing Moldova from joining NATO. The primary tool of this is the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria. Initially, in 1999, Russia committed itself to withdraw these troops until 2002, this deadline being extended to 2003 later on. Finally Moscow started to claim that the remaining troops have been stationed there according to Russian-Transnistrian bilateral agreements, thus claiming that the Istanbul commitments did not apply to them. In summer 2008, Russia made a settlement offer: Moscow would have been ready to allow Moldova's re-unification and pull out its troops from Transnistria in exchange for Moldova giving up pro-NATO intentions and stepping out of GUAM (RFE/RL 2008). The Moldovan side rejected the proposal due to its political conditions which were unacceptable for the Moldovan government. Until recently Russia was basically satisfied with the status quo in the Moldova-Transnistria conflict. All the solutions proposed by Moscow included some key elements from the current situation, which made it very favourable for Moscow: legitimating the presence of Russian troops on Moldovan soil and thus ensuring Moldova's neutrality, guarantee of a *de facto* veto right for Transnistria in the unified state (regardless of the structure of the future state), recognition of the privatization that took place in Transnistria, etc. Characterizing the Russian attitude to the Transnistrian conflict more generally, Russia has rather been interested in prolonging the conflict than in solving it (Popescu 2005: 17). Though, taking the most recent negotiations of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Dmitry Medvedev into account, this attitude seems to change.

However, one has to note that besides the troops, gargantuan amounts of ex-Soviet ammunition are still located in Transnistria. Although, approximately 12.000 tons of the original 40.000 tons (!) have already been taken back to Russia in the early 2000s, the removal of the rest cannot only be a question of political will, but a technically complicated, dangerous and expensive task, due to the bad physical condition of the ammunition stored there.

As another tool of preserving influence, Russia has been constantly pressing Moldova in order to prevent closer relations with NATO. The efforts to make Moldova sign the Collective Security Treaty, and later to make it join the CSTO, were

aimed at this objective, though Moldova refused to comply.

The interesting element in this context is the constitutional neutrality of Moldova. The latter and a ban of any foreign troops on the territory of Moldova have been prescribed in the 1994 constitution. Russia tends to refer to the neutrality of Moldova when it pushes against any kind of closer cooperation with NATO. However, as expert Ion Marandici points out, the Russian military presence in Transnistria at the same time "shows a clear disregard of and represents an infringement on Moldova's permanent neutrality" (Marandici 2007: 2). The debates on neutrality did not prevent Moldova from deepening cooperation with NATO in the framework of the Individual Partnership Action Plan in 2006 (Marandici 2007: 3). Nevertheless, the Russian efforts seem to have achieved an important success when the then Communist-dominated government adopted the new National Security Strategy of Moldova in 2008, keeping the provision of permanent neutrality (moldova.org 2008: 6). The main question in this regard is how the new Moldovan government is going to perceive the foreign and security policy priorities set by its predecessor, and whether the constitution and the national security strategy remain unchanged.

An interesting and recent case was the option of deploying Russian missiles to the region of Transnistria, as an 'answer' to the U.S. plans to establish a missile defence base in Romania. This idea was voiced by the separatist leader Igor Smirnov in February 2010. However, the Kremlin quickly turned down this invitation by declaring that such a move "could trigger a serious regional conflict", thus being against Moscow's interests. This can be seen as a signal of Moscow intending to discuss the missile defence issue primarily with Washington, and not with smaller states (EurActiv.com 2010). Such a move also showed the limited importance of Moldova in the eyes of the Russian leadership in comparison to issues of global importance like the U.S.-Russia relations.

This chapter has shown that Russia has certain security and defence-related interests in countries of the common neighbourhood. The question to what extent these interests shape Russia's perceptions of EU policies in the common neighbourhood will be in the focus of the following chapter.

II The European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Common Neighbourhood - from a Russian Perspective

Russia has traditionally perceived Eastern Europe as its special sphere of interests, and this has particularly been true regarding the countries of the former Soviet Union. Thus it is not surprising, that the eastern enlargement of the EU was high on the agenda of Russian political debates way before it actually took place in 2004 (Baranovsky 2002: 125-128, 132-141). Especially the NATO and EU accessions of the Baltic States were perceived as an interference of the 'traditional' Russian sphere of influence.

Russia's perceptions of the ENP

As the eastern enlargement started to become reality in the early 2000s, the problems of Eastern Europe suddenly started to 'come closer' to the European Union. The birth of the ENP was in many aspects an answer to this challenge. The original "Wider Europe" proposal envisaged to involve Russia and offered it to have a stake in the EU's internal market (European Commission 2003). However, Russia was left out from the ENP, launched in 2004. According to both Russian and EU opinions, the exclusion took place mostly because Moscow rejected the idea of being put into the same category with small neighbours like Moldova. At the same time it demanded to be treated as a strategic partner of the EU (Selivanova 2008: 101).

Besides the prestige elements, Russia's motivations to stay out from the ENP could well be connected to the fact that Moscow was not consulted on the 2004 enlargement to a sufficient degree, although similar demands were voiced in line with negotiations to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) (Danilov 2009). The 'Wider Europe' proposal already brought Russian officials to claim that the PCA should be modified as a reaction to the EU enlargement and due to the intended strategic change (Grushko 2004: 22).

According to many Russian political and academic views, Poland intended to dominate the Eastern policy of the EU following the 2004 enlargement, pretending to be the outpost of the West in the East (Shishelina 2006: 54). The establishment of the Community of Democratic Choice "for the democratic states, which do not want to belong to the Russian zone of influence" was a demonstrative example (Bukharin 2006: 122). As Bukharin further argues, the Polish foreign policy was clearly directed against Russia, and indirectly against its strategic interests in the common neighbourhood, especially between 2005 and 2007. In the 'Solidary Country' (Solidarne Państwo) programme of the Marcinkiewicz-government, the NATO membership of Ukraine was planned to

take place in 2008. Furthermore, Poland actively supported the Belarusian opposition (Bukharin 2006: 123). Shishelina recognizes that besides irritating Russia, the Polish attitude was also a problem for the EU as a whole. It complicated the EU's attempts to improve relations with Russia (Shishelina 2006: 54-55), particularly with the veto during the start of negotiations on the new PCA.

Since its launch, the ENP has clearly been perceived in Russia as an EU-effort to extend its zone of influence in the post-Soviet region, and as the intention to decrease the power of Moscow (Selivanova 2008: 102). While the EU is pushing its foreign partners towards the adoption of European standards, legal approximation and regulatory harmonization, Russia in fact aims at increasing its influence over the given partner countries (Karaganov/Jurgens 2009: 72-80).

Unlike the EU, seemingly in favour of a more comprehensive and multilateral approach, Russia prefers to address the countries of the common neighbourhood bilaterally. This logic of action is identical to Russia's approach towards the EU in different policy fields: bilateral intergovernmental relations are preferred to negotiations with the EU as a whole. Russian experts openly admit and justify this behaviour claiming that Moscow has had many negative experiences with cooperating with the EU in the past, primarily with regard to Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Siberian overflights and the delayed start of the negotiations for the new PCA (Karaganov/Jurgens 2009: 109f.). At the same time, most successes in political and strategic dialogues were achieved on bilateral bases, primarily with Germany, France, Italy and Spain. The preference for the bilateral track also accounts for external trade and investment contacts. However, Russia's bilateral approach in the common neighbourhood meets with criticism: In a joint publication of the National Investment Council and the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the authors argue for the need of a comprehensive 'Russian neighbourhood policy' towards the countries of the former Soviet Union (Evropeyskaya politika sosedstva 2008: 127-129). The proposal suggests that all activities conducted in the common neighbourhood should be included in the negotiations on the new PCA. Besides, it advises that many aspects of the ENP should simply be copied and adopted to Russian standards and capabilities. Foreign trade and economic contacts are mentioned as elements of primary importance, which should be used in a highly preferential way in order to have a demonstrative effect as well. Moreover, given the EU's slowly developing relations with these states, the paper envisages the strengthening of various Russian-led regional integrations, especially the Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan. Russia should bond the neighbouring 'states of European orientation' to itself, by realizing the political-military integration

in the frameworks of the CSTO, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Union State. Russia should also strive for membership, or for observer status as a minimum, in all organization operating on the territory of the common neighbourhood, just as the U.S. does in the GUAM.

Though at first glance the proposal appears to be rather aggressive, it also contains suggestions on the cooperation between the EU and Russia. It prescribes the launch of large-scale projects between the EU and the CIS and between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) in the field of transcontinental infrastructures, East-West transport and traffic, etc. It also suggests that the PCA negotiations should deal with the creation of the legal-institutional framework of energy cooperation, because this would be of joint interest for the EU and Russia. So far no public reactions were made on this proposal.

Russia's reactions to the Eastern Partnership

Both the general analysis of Russia's sensitivities regarding the common neighbourhood and the more specific evaluation of the Russian attitude towards the EaP require a close consideration of the circumstances under which the EaP was born.

The original Polish-Swedish proposal (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 2008) contained certain elements, which were perceived in Russia as hostile; especially both the support of the territorial integrity offered to the Eastern neighbours, and the committed promotion of democratic values were alarming signs for Russia. Moreover, following the August 2008 war in Georgia, the EU has openly declared that it was going to intensify the relations with the Eastern neighbours. It was stated that there was a connection between the EaP proposal and Russia's role in the Caucasus crisis, which made the initiative appear to be directed against Russia (Stewart 2009: 1). The EU seemed to stir Russia's apprehension: while discussing the EaP in autumn-winter 2008, the EU also granted a number of benefits to Ukraine, suspended the visa ban against numerous Belarusian leaders including Lukashenko, and started negotiations with Moldova on a possible accession to the Energy Community Treaty.

According to the mentioned documents, this impression on the anti-Russian nature of the EaP project was further strengthened by the fact that Russia could eventually play a secondary, 'third party' role in the partnership only. At the same time, some Russian experts – though vaguely – demanded the role of a 'controller' or 'observer' to be given to Moscow (Borko 2009). In other words, Russia criticised the EU because it made another step towards the common neighbourhood, without at least asking the opinion of Moscow. All in all, the Russian reactions were rather harsh; they accused the EU of

creating its own zone of influence, and of forcing the neighbouring countries to make a choice between the EU and Russia (Stewart 2009: 2). Similarly to the ENP, the EaP has also been perceived by experts as a type of "soft power" influence (Borko 2009).

The 23 March 2009 agreement between the EU and Ukraine on the European participation in the reconstruction of the gas transit infrastructure induced huge outcries in Moscow: Putin summoned a special press conference for condemning the deal, Medvedev cancelled the next round of consultations with Ukraine, and many official declarations warned the EU of trying to take control over the Ukrainian energy infrastructure, otherwise Russia could stop buying EU-made equipments for its energy sector (Górska 2009: 2-4). This seemed to be the first time that Russia perceived the EU's actions as a really serious blow on its energy positions in the post-Soviet region.

One has to admit that Russian concerns and demands have partially been taken into account during the elaboration of the EaP, and the final text differs from the previous version in a number of ways. The most significant modification was already mentioned; namely, the reference to the "consolidation of their [i.e. the partners, A.R] statehood and territorial integrity" was withdrawn.⁸ The change happened mostly in order not to cause diplomatic irritation in the Georgian post-war context and thus to ease the tensions with Moscow.

When the EaP was finally launched on 7 May 2009, the Russian minister of foreign affairs Sergei Lavrov commented that he was hoping the EU did not intend to make the neighbours choose between Russia and the EU (Lavrov 2009b). Nevertheless and generally speaking, Moscow has been fully aware of the limited importance and capacity of the EaP initiative, especially regarding its financial dimension (Chizhov 2009). Although the initiative itself is not perceived as something which would endanger the Russian influence in the region (Strelkov 2009: 11), both Russian and Western authors seem to agree that Moscow needs to pay particular attention to its energy-related dimension (*ibid.*, Meister/May 2009: 2).

Concerning Belarus, a problematic country for the EaP (Meister/May 2009: 2), Moscow is concerned about the improving EU-Belarus relations. However, this is rather connected to the rapprochement in general and not to the EaP in particular. As Lavrov stated on 25 November 2009, Russia is not opposed to the Belarusian participation in certain EaP projects, because this is not seen as

⁸ One of the main advocates of the modifications – mainly aimed at easing the tensions with Moscow – was Germany (Végh 2009: 2).

a rival to the active participation of Belarus in the integration processes in the CIS area, including the EurAsEC and the Customs Union (Lavrov 2009a).

Regarding an eventual Russian participation in the framework of EaP, the final version of the EaP document leaves the door open for third party participation in certain projects. Russia's originally harsh reaction to this possibility seems to be softened. In November 2009, Lavrov did not rule out that Russia could join certain EaP projects (Lavrov 2009b). Nevertheless, Russia's behaviour remains dominantly passive (Danilov 2009).⁹ No initiatives have been proposed by Moscow as it seems to wait for any concrete EU proposal.

The thematic platforms and flagship initiatives raise more serious concerns in Russia than the general EaP initiative does. The proposal of providing border management assistance for the eastern partners means for Moscow that the EU would assist the strengthening of the – to date practically non-existent – Ukraine-Russia, Belarus-Russia and Azerbaijan-Russia borders. Thus it might be interpreted as an effort to isolate Russia via separating it from its neighbours (Danilov 2009).

The harsh Russian reactions to the 23 March 2009 EU-Ukraine agreement on the reconstruction of the energy infrastructures demonstrate Russia's sensitivity: if the EU supports the Eastern neighbours in the reconstruction of their energy transit infrastructure, as the EaP also prescribes for the countries of the common neighbourhood, it hampers Russian efforts to take them over in order to ensure an uninterrupted westward flow of oil and gas, and to decrease the freedom of movement of the transit countries. From a strictly theoretical perspective of energy security, the security of transit gets improved anyways, as technological, infrastructural developments take place. However, the type of improvement requested by Russia and the EU differ completely.

Another reason for Russia's resentment towards the EaP relates to its approach concerning the phenomenon of weak statehood in the countries of the common neighbourhood. Russia has a set of leverages (Hedenskog/Larsson 2007), such as, *inter alia*, economic pressure, corruption, and energy supplies. These are used with the aim to hamper the functioning of state administrations in the common neighbourhood, exercised especially in Ukraine. However, the comprehensive institution-development plans in the EaP, based on the financial support of the European Investment Bank, seek to make the state administrations of the partner

countries more efficient and more transparent. Russia fears that the more the performance of the national administrations will improve, the more its potential to interfere and exercise informal pressure on the respective governments will decrease.

Another element of Russian concerns about both the ENP in general and the EaP in particular is their nature of "soft power" (Danilov 2009). When Western actors, including the EU, refer to the promotion of democratic values and the support of civil society, this is often connected in Russia with the so-called "coloured revolutions", which took place in several countries of the common neighbourhood. Thus support given to the local civil societies is often interpreted as Western efforts of 'destabilization'. The fact that the main beneficiaries of the EaP will be the state level public administrations, while only limited sums will be spent on the support of the civil societies (European Commission 2009: 4) does hardly change this general perception.

An additional, though less visible, element of growing importance is that Russia recognized the importance of 'soft power', and has started using its own resources. It already has a remarkable potential, for example through the Russian-speaking media and the visa-free travel in the CIS area (Popescu/Wilson 2009: 27-39). Besides, there are a lot more possible reserves to be used, for example in the field of investment, science, education, culture, and via a further strengthening of the role of the Russian language in the CIS (Solovyov 2009). Some of the competent organizational structures are already set up and function, for example the Russkiy Mir Foundation, the Rossotrudnichestvo government agency, the Institute for Russians Abroad and some others (Lerhis/Kudors/Indāns: 2007). However, currently the activities are mostly limited on Russian ethnic minorities in the neighbouring countries. An 'opening up' to the wider public is taking place only with moderate pace – one could name, for example, the rapidly growing number of centres financed by the 'Russkiy Mir' not only in the CIS, but also in many EU countries. However, informal sources in the Russian expert community say that the coordination between various actors and agencies could be enhanced. As Russia is on the way to start a more active use of its 'soft power' capabilities, it obviously perceives similar activities of the EU as rivalling.

9 Interview with Susan Stewart, Research Fellow of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, 11 January 2010.

III Political Offers and Initiatives Towards the Common Neighbourhood

Similar to the EU, Russia operates a number of political tools in order to pursue its own interests in the countries of the common neighbourhood. One may call these moves either influence building (Popescu/Wilson 2009: 17) or legitimate realization of interests (Danilov 2009). Benefits and sanctions are used by both sides in their relations with the common neighbourhood. While the EU approach has been widely analyzed – and often criticized – by a number of experts, (for example Duleba 2008, Chilosi 2006), relevant Russian initiatives and policies towards the common neighbourhood seem to receive less attention in the West.

As an introduction, one has to see that both the original ENP and the EaP initiative use a clear wording: they do not imply any kind of accession perspective for the targeted countries, thus these policies must not be perceived as gateways to EU membership. The lack of membership perspective is regularly criticized by both West- and East-European experts, who argue that the EU deliberately deprives itself of its most effective foreign policy tool and motivation method (Duleba 2008). Regarding the political perspectives offered to the neighbours, EU policies are still conducted in line with Romano Prodi's famous sentence: neighbours may "share everything with the Union, but institutions" (Prodi 2002). However, as the Italian analyst Chilosi argued, even this promise was not likely to be fulfilled, simply because the EU has been unable to give the same economic advantages to the neighbours as it gives to its poorest members (Chilosi 2006: 3). With other words, even the promised "everything" has not been realized. Russia is aware of this structural weakness of the EU neighbourhood policy and tries to exploit it via offering alternative proposals.

Concerning positive political offers, Russia has a number of parallel proposals on the table. In addition to the present efforts to provide integration alternatives, there already have been two of such Russian initiatives in the past, which seriously changed the political landscape of the studied region. The first was the plan of the Russia-Belarus Union State, and the second was the Kozak-memorandum, a settlement proposal made in the Moldova-Transnistria conflict.

Efforts of Inducing Constitutional Changes

The Russia-Belarus Union State project goes back to the clearly pro-Russian course pursued by the Belarusian foreign policy in the late 1990s to the early 2000s. As Wilson and Rontoyanni argue (2004: 44), the motivation of Lukashenko was mainly to strengthen the social and economic stability of Belarus via getting into closer cooperation with Russia. Following a few preliminary agreements, the Treaty on the creation of a Union State with Russia and Belarus was signed in late 1999, with the ratification process finished 26 January 2000.

However, despite the official Belarusian enthusiasm about the Union State, the cooperation intention from the side of Minsk was limited to extract as many economic benefits and subsidies from Moscow as possible. As Belarus is a key transit country for the Russian energy shipments to Europe, Moscow had hardly any other choice than tolerating this behaviour. Though moderate Russian moves were already made in these times in order to take control over key Belarusian energy infrastructure, Minsk managed to resist the pressure via constantly delaying the privatization of the Beltransgaz company, the Mozhyr oil refinery, etc. The situation changed in August 2002, when Putin made Lukashenko choose between full-fledged integration to Russia, or a gradual integration based on the EU 'harmonization' model (Wilson/Rontoyanni 2004: 49). The first choice was obviously unacceptable for the Belarusian president, as he did not want to give up his position as president of a sovereign country. As Piontkovsky argues, Putin did not want Belarus to really become part of Russia, he only intended to end the demagogic around the Union State, and put the relationship on a more pragmatic basis (The Russian Journal 2002).

Since then, the Union State project has hardly made any real progress. Though a number of union institutions are set up – the Union State has its own budget, focusing mostly on issues of economy, trade, infrastructure, and in a growing extent security and defence – both the fundaments and the final political objective of the organization are still undefined. Ever since the above-mentioned proposal by Putin, Belarus has been lacking rhetorical and active enthusiasm in further integration with Russia. According to Sergey Kastsyan, deputy chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the lower house of the Belarusian parliament, the two sides understand the integration in a different way (RFE/RL's Belarus Service. Newsline 2008).

On the other hand, one may observe Moscow increasing the pressure on Belarus in certain policy fields, mainly in defence, energy, economy and foreign policy. The Union State project is one of many frameworks in which Russia intends to increase its influence over Belarus. Put differently, it has been degraded from a political objective to a

political tool.

The story of the Kozak-memorandum also reveals Russia's efforts to induce institutional change. In late 2003, Russia proposed a settlement plan for the Transnistrian conflict to the Moldovan government. The latter prescribed the federalist re-unification of Moldova in a way which would have empowered Transnistria to have a veto right over all important decisions of the whole state (Löwenhardt 2004: 6). The reject of the Kozak-memorandum by the Moldovan president resulted in a lasting cool-down of the Russian-Moldovan relations. If the memorandum had been successfully realized, it would not only have changed the constitutional system of Moldova, but would have also conserved the legitimate presence of Russian troops in the country for another two decades.

Providing integration alternatives

Though the fundamental re-shaping of the political

landscape in Eastern-Europe seems to be currently off the Russian political agenda, Moscow keeps pursuing its own interests via "presenting itself as an alternative" to a Western integration (Popescu/Wilson 2009: 29). Moscow encourages the neighbouring countries to favour the international organizations dominated by Russia, instead of longing for either EU or NATO accession. They should either join these organizations, if they are not members yet (such as Ukraine in the CIS, or Belarus to the new Customs Union), or be more active members (Moldova in the CIS, or Belarus in the CSTO) (Danilov 2009).

The particularity of the Russian-dominated network of international organizations is their much more limited focus of issues than the EU's, pursuing the overall goal of a constantly deepening integration in the common neighbourhood. Though the author does not aspire to provide a full list of functions, a short overview on competencies and members of the Russian-dominated organizations might still be useful:

Organization	Established	Full members	Main functions
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	1991	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan (+ Ukraine as participating non-member)	Political coordination Economic cooperation Loose security and defence cooperation
Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)	2002	Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	Security and defence cooperation, mutual defence guarantee, defence industry cooperation
Union State of Russia and Belarus	1999	Russia, Belarus	Political coordination (limited functioning) Security and defence cooperation Economic cooperation, joint investment and development projects Cultural links
Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC)	2006	Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	Economic cooperation
Common Economic Space / Customs Union of the EurAsEc	2010	Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia	Intensified economic cooperation, customs union
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	2001	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	Cooperation on security, defence, mainly against terrorism and separatism Economic cooperation, energy Cultural cooperation, research, education

Table 1: Overview on competencies and members of the Russian-dominated organizations.

The overlapping memberships in the various Russian-led integration structures apply mostly to the Central-Asian republics as well as Belarus, while Ukraine and Moldova are participating only in the CIS. Georgia has stepped out even of this latter organization in 2009. Membership and participation in Russian-led integration structures can be used as indicators of how close the relationship between a given state and Russia is. Of the three Western neighbourhood countries studied, only Belarus has been favouring membership in almost all Russian-initiated integration structures, while Ukraine and Moldova have been much more reluctant in this regard.

Some of the (Russian-led) organizations are often perceived as mirror-images of Western integration, such as the CSTO as an equivalent of NATO, or EurAsEC as an answer to the European Economic Area (Popescu/Wilson 2009: 30). Though there is an element of truth in this comparison, the picture is (slightly) more complicated, concerning both the economic and the security dimension. Preserving the economic ties originating from the former Soviet Union was enough of an essential motivation behind establishing the CIS in 1991. The plan to create a Single Economic Space with the membership of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan was regarded as a natural step forward, being finalized in 2003. But the victory of the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine put the proposal to a halt, as the new Ukrainian leadership started to pursue a pro-European course instead.

Membership in the Russian-led organizations offer easy-to-get economic benefits, such as free trade, a customs union, subsidized energy prices, etc. Besides, they also serve as tools of exercising pressure in a way that they either prevent, or hamper joining Western organizations. The already mentioned Single Economic Space project had an "express purpose" to keep Ukraine away from the EU and NATO (Trenin 2007: 200). One of the most recent examples is the WTO. With the signing of the Customs Union agreement in the framework of the Common Economic Space of the EurAsEC in 2009, Moscow effectively prevented both Kazakhstan and Belarus from joining the WTO, if Russian membership in the latter organization would be blocked. As Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin put it in June 2009, when the establishment of the Customs Union was already in its final phase: "Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan intend to join the WTO as a single customs union, not individually" (RIA Novosti 2009). Another Russian-led sub-regional organization, the CSTO also has such a political preventive function.¹⁰

A typical element of this strategy aiming at 'providing an alternative' is that Russia successfully presents these regional organizations as respected players of the international arena. For example, CSTO has achieved observer status in the UN General Assembly, CIS regularly sends election observers to all elections which take place in the post-Soviet region. Besides, CSTO was recognized both by the OSCE and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). There are also plans to start cooperation with NATO, especially in Afghanistan.

President Medvedev's new European Security Treaty proposal contains similar elements, as it mentions both the CSTO and the CIS as possible participants of the new agreement next to EU, OSCE and NATO (President of Russia 2009). To sum up, the intents to present these Russian-dominated organizations as legitimate and equal to the Western ones are clearly visible.

However, the Russian approach of providing integration alternatives also has its own weaknesses. Namely, the targeted countries, i.e. countries of the common neighbourhood and Central-Asian countries, show a tendency of using these organizations as forums for bargaining with Russia over receiving newer and greater economic and political benefits.¹¹ If the Russian offer is not attractive enough, they might easily turn towards the EU (like Ukraine and Belarus do), the U.S. or China (like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan do) in order to either convince Russia to grant the requested benefits, or receive it from the other 'great powers' interested in the region. Although these weaknesses are recognized by the Kremlin (Danilov 2009), to date there seems to be no successful Russian effort to counteract them. As shown above, its offer and proposals remain mostly unattractive.

10 This issue will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter under the aspect of political restrictive measures.

11 Meister: Interview with Dr. Stefan Meister, Research Fellow of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik, 23 February 2010, Berlin.

IV Restrictive Political Measures Used in the Common Neighbourhood

Apart from the political offers and initiatives discussed in the previous chapter, Moscow also has a rich inventory of various restrictive measures, aiming at influencing, pressurizing and sometimes openly forcing governments of the neighbouring countries to comply with the Russian will. Three main types of these restrictive political measures, which have the greatest influence on the three countries studied, will be discussed. The analyzed measures are (1) support for separatism, (2) trade embargoes, and (3) immigration restrictions.

Supporting Separatism

Both Moldova and Ukraine face threats of territorial separation. In Moldova, the existence of the *de facto* independent 'Republic of Transnistria' depends mostly and almost exclusively on Russia. Even during the civil war of 1992, separatists could resist Moldova only with the support of the 14th Russian Army stationed there (King 2000: 194). The ceasefire agreement, signed on 27th July 1992, that ended the armed phase of the conflict, was also negotiated under Russian influence and already recognized Transnistria as an independent actor (in the three-sided Joint Control Commission both Transnistria and Russia were given one of the seats). Transnistria is also included in the five-sided negotiation format, composed of Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Transnistria and the OSCE. As decision-making in both bodies has been based on consensus, this allows the separatists to block every settlement initiative they want and to pursue the prolongation of the conflict. Besides, as already explained, Russia maintained the presence of its peacekeeping forces in the region, thus preventing Moldova from re-unifying its territory.

However, the most important element of Russian support given to Transnistria is the economic one. First and foremost, Transnistria has paid almost nothing for the gas used in the last 20 years. This cheap (i.e. practically free) energy has therefore kept the economy and industry of the separatist republic running. Up to now, the gas debt of Transnistria accounts to over 1,7 billion dollars (AZI.MD 2008:12:18). Moreover, Gazprom counts the debt accumulated by Transnistria to the gas debt of Moldova, which means that Chisinau will also have to pay for the consumption of the separatist region. Moreover, Moscow regularly provides Transnistria with 'humanitarian aid', which allows the separatist regime to increase pensions, run the school system, etc. For example, in 2007-2008 Transnistria received 30 million USD from Russia to overcome the drought consequences. A year later, another 14 million was transferred in order to help Transnistria to cope with

the global financial crisis (Moldova.org 2009).

Concerning Ukraine, the Russian support of separatist forces is of a more complex nature. The region of primary importance is Crimea. As a territory it was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic only in 1954 and since the dissolution of the Soviet Union the status of the territory has constantly been on the Russian-Ukrainian agenda, despite the autonomy that the Republic of Crimea enjoys inside Ukraine. It has its own parliament and political parties, though the judicial system of Ukraine is applied here. This and the Russian Black Sea Fleet stationed here, provides a fertile ground for separatism. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, Moscow has kept supporting various Russian nationalist forces in the Crimea in order to put pressure on the central government in Kyiv. In 2006, a coalition of the Party of Regions of current president Yanukovich won almost 70% of the seats in the Crimean Parliament. Another member of the coalition was an extremist pro-Russian party, reportedly financed by Moscow mayor Yuriy Luzhkov. They demanded the recognition of Russian as an official language and the allowance of dual citizenship – acts, which were against the laws of Ukraine (Hedenskog/Larsson 2006: 38). Besides, in order to hamper the then on-going Ukraine-NATO approximation, large anti-NATO rallies were organized in June. As a result, not only had the first-ever NATO Partnership for Peace military exercise had to be cancelled, but the demonstrations also contributed to the collapse of the governing coalition of the parties of the 'Orange Revolution' (Hedenskog/Larsson 2006: 39).

Until very recently, Russia has actively tried to incite ethnic tensions between the Tatar minority in the Crimea and ethnic Slavs. Experts claim that the reasons behind this were manifold. First, if Crimean Tatars were radicalized, they would lose support of their biggest donor, secular Turkey. As a side-effect, the regional influence of Turkey would also decrease. Second, sharpening ethnic tensions in the regions weakened the central government in Kyiv. Third, referring to the danger of growing Islamic radicalization, Russia could increase its forces stationed in Crimea in order to protect Russian citizens (Hedenskog/Larsson 2006: 40). However, with the new pro-Russian government coming to power in Ukraine, Russian-Ukrainian tensions over Crimea will probably decrease quickly.

As Russian security services have been usually involved in Crimean matters, a long debate in December 2009 was followed by the Ukrainian order to all FSB-agents attached to the Black Sea Fleet to leave Ukraine (Hedenskog 2010: 2). However, in May 2010 the new Azarov government has ordered Ukrainian security services to stop counter-intelligence activities against Russian FSB agents operating in Ukraine, "as a gesture of goodwill and to demonstrate new policies," as the agreement puts it (RIA Novosti 2010).

Besides Crimea, there is another, though

small and marginal separatist movement in Ukraine, which also enjoys Russian support, namely the one of the ethnic Rusyns. The Rusyn minority lives mostly in the Zakarpatska region of Ukraine. Their ethnic movement strives mostly for being recognized as a separate nation among the ones living in Ukraine and for some cultural rights (Belitser 2000: 15). However, some radical leaders, for example Dmytro Sidor, voiced the need for some form of territorial autonomy more than once. In reality, the situation has no escalation potential, as Rusyns are rather small in terms of population, are not organized and their ethnic identity is weak. However, financing and supporting such a movement has been used by Moscow to put additional pressure on Kyiv.

Trade Embargoes

Misusing trade relations connecting Russia with the post-Soviet countries is an obvious tool for the Kremlin to influence the politics of its neighbours. Compared to the well-known and well-documented energy cuts, trade embargoes have a huge advantage: they do not directly affect any other country except the targeted one, and especially not the rich, Western consumers of Russian energy and raw materials. Thus the chances of any outside pressure or intervention are much lower. Concerning the three countries of the common neighbourhood, Moscow has used trade embargoes relatively frequently. Both with Belarus and Moldova there have been regular clashes mostly connected to the import of agricultural products to Russia.¹²

For example, in 2005 a serious Belarusian-Russian conflict took place over the price of the sugar imported from Belarus. Belarusian producers took advantage of a valid intergovernmental agreement, through which they were able to export their products to Russia at a much lower price than the Russian producers could offer (Kommersant 2005). Though the debate was temporarily settled, the issue came up again in June 2007 (Democraticbelarus.eu 2007). The then introduced Russian import ban had a clear political motivation (along with its economic nature) which entailed the take over of several Belarusian milk plants. The technical reasoning of the ban were the irregularities experienced in the packaging of Belarusian milk products (Time 2009).

On the other hand, regardless of these temporary conflicts, trade relations between Russia

and Belarus are uniquely close in the post-Soviet region, owing to the creation of the so-called Union State in the late 1990s. They are to become even closer with the establishment of the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan on 1st January 2010.

While one could consider the 2005 conflict over the Belarusian sugar import to be primarily of an economic nature, the ban put on the Moldovan wine import a year later was clearly different. Following the 2005 elections in Moldova, when President Vladimir Voronin pursued an increasingly pro-Western foreign policy (at least at that time), Russia banned the import of Moldovan (and actually Georgian) wines and other alcoholic products in March 2006. The official reasoning was the same in both cases. Gennadiy Onishchenko, Head of the Rospotrebnadzor (Russian Consumer Protection Agency) argued that heavy metals and pesticides were found in these wines. Thus their import would have endangered the health of Russian consumers. The step delivered a serious blow to Moldovan and Georgian agricultural business, as Russia had an export market share of 80-90%.

The political nature of this ban on Moldovan wine products became apparent, when an article was published in the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* with the telling title: "The Plan of Victory Over Moldova" (Kommersant 2005). Here the measures necessary for preventing "Moldova's further lean on the West" were explicitly listed, among them the ban of Moldovan agricultural goods. As the article puts it, 'technical reasons' could easily serve as a pretext – so they did, as demonstrated above.¹³

The history of Russian agricultural import bans on the neighbouring countries did not end in 2007. Two years later, another conflict came up over the milk exported to Russia, this time with Belarus. In June 2009, Moscow banned the import of Belarusian milk products, once again voicing sanitary concerns (Time 2009). The background reasons might well be connected to the increasingly pro-Western oriented policy of Lukashenko, as well as to the ongoing debates of Belarus and Russia over the rising energy prices and the gradual take over of key Belarusian companies by Russian investors. The ban struck the Belarusian economy seriously. In 2008, Russia bought up almost 93% of Belarusian meat and dairy products (Time 2009).

However, compared to Moldova, Belarus has

12 Of course, the visibility of such trade conflicts largely depends on the overall international attention paid to the region. These issues started to appear in Western media only from early 2000s, parallel to the already mentioned growing importance of the Eastern neighbourhood.

13 Concerning Georgia, the political nature of the ban could also hardly be questioned, taking into account the remarkably anti-Russian policy of Mikheil Saakashvili. Though an interesting side-story is that as a reward for his anti-Georgian action, Onishchenko was granted honorary citizenship by the 'president of South-Ossetia, Eduard Kokoyti in 2009 (RIA Novosti 2009).

two relative advantages in resisting various negative Russian measures. The first one is its already discussed key transit position on the way of Russian oil and gas exports to Europe. Second, Belarus is able to block the gas electricity supply of Kaliningrad. Minsk has used this threat in January 2010 during the actual debate of Russia over the transit price of oil (Charter97.org 2010). The Belarusian capability to block the transit was also used as a threat during the recent gas dispute between Moscow and Minsk over their mutual gas price debts, which took place in late June 2010 (EurActiv.com 2010).

Immigration Restrictions

Guest workers coming from countries of the former Soviet Union are integral parts of the labour market of the Russian Federation. Their number is hard to estimate, due to the fact that many of them reside and work in Russia illegally or semi-legally. According to Federal Migration Service data, in 2005 there were about 15 million illegal guest workers in Russia, 80% of whom were citizens of former Soviet Union states (Pravda.ru 2005). The main source countries have been the Central-Asian republics, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

As guest workers mostly send the earned money back to their home countries, they make an important contribution to the economy of their home states. For example, in the case of Moldova, according to World Bank data, the remittances of guest workers provide approximately one-third of the country's GDP (AllMoldova.com 2010). Therefore, if a host country – Russia in the current example – decides to restrict its immigration policy towards guest workers, it can easily damage the home countries of the guest workers economically. This is an integral part of Russia's policy towards countries of the former Soviet Union.¹⁴

From the three countries of the common neighbourhood, Belarus is the least affected. This is due to the framework of the Union State, which makes working in Russia a relatively simple process for a Belarusian citizen. However, in the case of Moldova the issue of guest workers is a serious one. Already during the parliamentary elections in 2005, Russia tried to pressurize President Voronin by introducing restrictions to Moldovan guest workers (Jamestown.org 2005), and the above mentioned "The Plan of Victory Over Moldova" has also named expelling guest workers as an important political tool against Moldova.

However, the situation appears to be changing. Since 2007, new laws on labour migration were passed in order to legalize as many guest workers as possible and in order to increase budget incomes. Immigration helps Russia to fill gaps in the labour market, mostly in construction, retail trade, services, public transportation, etc. Approximately 80% of all migrants are not required to have any qualification, thus they compete with unskilled Russians only. Moreover, their expected wages are much lower than those of Russian workers (Euromonitor 2007). Besides simply attracting labour force, there are also other motivations beyond the surface. According to Tatiana Golikova, Russian Minister for Health and Social Development, immigrants also play a role in sustaining the population growth (RIA Novosti 2009). In February 2010, President Dmitry Medvedev has announced that immigration restrictions are to be further eased for highly qualified labour force, primarily for doctors, engineers, etc. (RIA Novosti 2010). This policy is called 'optimization of immigration'. However, it is important to keep in mind that all these changes do not exclude any sudden backlash. The Kremlin may for instance decide to tighten the control of guest workers coming from one particular country or another. All in all, immigration restrictions as political tools are still not taken out of the Russian political inventory, since, as shown above, Russia is in the position to pull the strings in its own interest.

14 One may easily remember, when in 2006 Russia decided to deport Georgian guest workers en masse (BBC News 2006:10:5), and this was not the only case indeed.

Conclusions

The paper has shown that Russia perceives the common neighbourhood as a region that belongs to its own zone of influence. This attitude is based primarily on the historical legacy, and is further supported by the ongoing presence of Russian military forces in the analysed countries. The Russian forces stationed in these states are important not only from the geo-strategic point of view, but also for exercising direct political influence on them. Belarus is declared to be the most important security and defence ally of the Russian Federation, due to the Russian bases there and the ongoing integration of the military structures of both countries. The Russian Black Sea Fleet, whose presence was further extended by the Kharkiv Agreement until 2042, *de facto* excludes the NATO accession of Ukraine in the long run, even if the Alliance would be ready for the Eastern enlargement. In Moldova, the Russian peacekeeping forces stationed in Transnistria *de facto* guarantee the existence of the separatist 'Republic' by their very presence. Moreover, as long as the territorial integrity of Moldova is not restored, neither a NATO, nor a EU-accession of the country is possible. Thus Chisinau will not be able to leave the Russian sphere of influence in this regard.

When the EU started its neighbourhood policy, Russia articulated its opposing position openly. Though Russia was still included in the Wider Europe initiative, Moscow decided to stay out of the ENP, claiming that Russia was an equal, strategic partner of the EU, and not simply a neighbour. The development of the ENP was perceived in Moscow as an EU effort to build its own zone of influence in a region, that belonged to the 'near abroad' of Russia. However, Russia gave only careful, moderate reactions to the final version of the EaP, launched in 2009. Russian officials did not even exclude the possibility of cooperating with the EU on certain issues, though no concrete proposals were made. Most probably, Moscow has been aware of the weaknesses of the EU's neighbourhood policy, e.g. that neither the ENP, nor the EaP itself would be able to politically turn away countries of the common neighbourhood from Russia.

Russia already made two efforts in the late 1990s and early 2000s to ensure the loyalty of the neighbouring states by inducing constitutional change. The project of the Union State of Russia and Belarus seemingly stalled due to the limited cooperativeness of the Belarusian side, while the so-called Kozak-memorandum was openly refused by Moldova in 2003. Besides these efforts, Russia has been providing a number of integration options to the region, in order to ensure that the countries of the common neighbourhood would favour the Russian orientation to the Western option. Unlike the EU, the Russia-dominated organizations are not comprehensive (with the exception of the CIS,

formed already in 1992), but rather focused ones. The CSTO has a security and defence cooperation as its main profile, while the Eurasian Economic Community and the newly established Customs Union are of economic purpose. As Wilson and Popescu argue, these Russian initiatives and political offers are easier to access and to understand by the neighbours than the sometimes complicated and blurry EU policies directed towards the neighbourhood (Popescu/Wilson 2009: 27).

In case of non-compliance, Russia has a number of political tools to put pressure on the countries of the common neighbourhood. Besides the well-known politicization of the energy prices, supporting separatist movements, introducing trade embargoes and immigration restrictions are also integral parts of the Russian political inventory. However, though the choice of restrictive measures is relatively rich and hard power influence is ensured by the military presence, Russian experts admit that in terms of 'soft power' Russia is much weaker than the European Union. There would be much room for improvement in terms of using cultural influence, media power, scientific contacts and economic links. In Russian foreign policy concepts the idea of literally copying the ENP is emerging, e.g. to set up a 'Russian Neighbourhood Policy' towards countries of the post-Soviet region, in order to provide indeed attractive political and economic offers.

Space for cooperation between the EU and Russia in the common neighbourhood?

If one puts aside the Russian efforts to provide alternatives to Western influence, theoretically there is a definite overlapping of EU and Russian interests at least in one fundamental question. This issue is the future EU-accession – and also the NATO accession – of the three countries studied. Interestingly enough, the EU and Russia seem to be of the same opinion, and pursue the same objectives, though with different background motivations. From the side of the EU, mentioning the accession perspective is constantly missing from the relevant documents, only approximation is on the agenda. Statements are firm: no further Eastern enlargement is possible in the near future. The Russian objectives are basically the same: preventing the three studied countries from joining the EU and NATO. This is why Russia strives for maintaining its troop presence, offers alternative integration formats, and reacts distanced and opposing, whenever it perceives the EU to 'intervene in Russian spheres of influence'. However, though the theoretic overlapping of strategic interests is present hereby, hardly any cooperation could be built on that. The reason for this is the obvious and fundamental difference of the EU and Russian attitudes towards these countries: the antagonism of gradual approximation promoted by the EU versus the 'status quo' approach of

Russia. All in all, the lack of accession perspectives from the EU side, and the lack of attractive political alternatives presented from the Russian side seem to condemn these states to remain in an in-between position in the near future.

The complete re-orientation towards Russia does not seem to be on the agenda in Minsk, Kyiv and Chisinau. During the parliamentary and presidential elections of the recent years, no serious candidates have campaigned with a clearly pro-Russian agenda in any of these states. This means a significant change compared to the early and mid-2000s. In the pre-Revolution Ukraine, Yanukovich campaigned with a strongly Russia-oriented and anti-Western programme. In Moldova, the ruling Communist party enjoyed Russian support during the 2005 elections, not to mention the fraudulent Belarusian referendum in 2004, which permitted Lukashenko to run for a third time for presidency. Nowadays, the situation has become different, as it was most recently visible in Ukraine. Viktor Yanukovich won the elections with a foreign policy programme, which aimed at having a pragmatic relationship both with the West and Russia. Even though Yanukovich is getting Ukraine increasingly closer to Russia with the Kharkhiv-agreement (Hedenskog 2010: 2), this may only be a backlash effect that follows the mostly pro-Western course of the previous five years.

States of the common neighbourhood share one attitude in their relations towards the EU and Russia: namely that they are ready to utilize their in-between positions (Meister 2010). They show a tendency of playing the two actors off against each other: if one benefit is not granted by one, it is still possible to turn to the other. Both foreign and trade policies serve as good examples for this. By using a more positive wording, one could say that the era of 'multi-vectorialism' (a term originally connected to former Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma) is returning in these countries. Besides, the countries of the common neighbourhood could also try to play off the EU against Russia in order to avoid necessary, but painful domestic political and economic reforms (Popescu/Wilson 2009: 25).

Against this 'bifocal' attitude of the neighbours, there would actually be room for pragmatic, ideology-free coordination between the EU and Russia. This is especially true in fields which are of mutual importance for both Brussels and Moscow. The most important one is energy security, more concretely the security of energy transit through the common neighbourhood, as the uninterrupted flow of oil and gas is crucial both for the EU and Russia.

Similar areas of coordination could be various fields of security: nuclear safety and security, WMD-proliferation, fight against terrorism, fight against drug trade, etc. In these fields it is of mutual interest for the EU and Russia to encourage and facilitate the necessary reforms in the common neighbourhood. However, focal points in security

cooperation should be selected with care. For example, putting the general term 'fighting against organized crime' on the agenda, one could not be sure that all important actors of the Russian elites would be ready for honest cooperation. However, the inflow of drugs from the region of Afghanistan is clearly a common threat, so is the spread of radical Islam terrorism. Obviously, not only coordination over the common neighbourhood, but also closer direct EU-Russia cooperation would definitely be of help. Concerning the Russian attitude to the EaP initiative, despite the efforts to counter various Western policy initiatives, Russia is far from being completely against cooperation with the EU in the common neighbourhood. Though the option of third party involvement did not meet enthusiasm in Moscow, there was no open refusal. Official reactions were moderate, not ruling out the possibility of future cooperation. However, experts assess the options of cooperation with the EU pessimistically. Since the Russian attitude is dominated by passivity, there are no proposals from the central government in Moscow. This means that the EU mostly needs to initiate any further cooperation.

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