

Russia in a multipolar world: Role identities and “cognitive maps”

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the author argues that Russian policy- and opinion-makers, having borrowed the concept of multipolarity from the (neo)realist vocabulary, very often they use it in a much broader sense of narratives on Russian identity and subjectivity and, therefore, attach to it quite different non-realist meanings, which include issues of identity and non-state actorship. What hides beneath the pretended realist wording of Russian discourse is a much more complicated and variegated –though not always consistent– set of policy imageries. Against this background, the Russian discourse on multipolarity reminds a patchwork of scattered and loosely tied “cognitive maps”, based upon –and sustained by– certain visions of the world in the diversity of its actors. Since multipolarity originates in the sphere of ideas, it would be quite logical to assume that at certain time there might be more than one pattern of multipolar arrangements. Each of them gives a different answer to the question of what poles, nation states, regions, civilizations, or integrative constructs like EU and CIS are.

Keywords: Russia, foreign policy, security, multipolarity

RESUMEN

En este artículo el autor sostiene que, si bien la clase política y líderes de opinión rusos han tomado prestado el concepto de multipolaridad del vocabulario (neo)realista, muy frecuentemente en las narrativas sobre la identidad y subjetividad de Rusia lo utilizan en un sentido mucho más amplio; por consiguiente, lo asocian con significados muy diferentes y no realistas, entre los que se incluyen cuestiones referentes a la identidad y los actores no estatales. Bajo la formulación pretendidamente realista de la discursiva rusa se ocultan una serie de imaginarios políticos mucho más complicados y heterogéneos, aunque no siempre consistentes. En este contexto, el discurso ruso sobre la multipolaridad se asemeja a un mosaico de “mapas cognitivos” dispersos y débilmente coordinados, cada uno de ellos basado y sostenido por una cierta visión del mundo y la diversidad de sus actores. Dado que la multipolaridad se origina en la esfera de las ideas, resulta lógico asumir que en un determinado momento puede existir más de una pauta para los acuerdos multilaterales, cada una de las cuales ofrece una respuesta diferente a la pregunta sobre qué son los estados-nación, los polos, las regiones, las civilizaciones o los constructos integradores como la UE o la CEI.

Palabras clave: Rusia, política exterior, seguridad, multipolaridad

The strong accent of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy on state-centrism, national interests, hard security concerns, and ostensible sphere of influence in politics results in a great temptation to explain it as based upon the traditions of *Realpolitik* (MacFarlain, 1999). Russia's steady emphasis on the idea of multipolarity, obviously one of the pivotal concepts in the realist thinking, seems to confirm this view. In the realist vision, multipolarity is a constellation of self-sufficient power centers that possess vast material resources; these powers either balance or clash with each other. In this interpretation power is mostly material and physical (nuclear arsenal and energy resources in the case of Russia) and does not need strong social support. Under a deeper scrutiny, however, the commitments of Russia to the realist tradition may be questioned. This paper will argue that Russia, having indeed borrowed some of the key concepts from the (neo) realist vocabulary, attaches to them quite different and non-realist meanings. Russia's understanding of multipolarity – the key question for Russian foreign policy since mid-1990s – sheds light on this conceptual deviation from *Realpolitik* vision of the world.

Firstly, for classical realists multipolarity was a rather pessimistic concept heralding conflicts and instability. On the contrary, in the Russian political parlance multipolarity, embodies an optimistic worldview, based upon a “just” distribution of power among a variety of gravitation poles. While in *Realpolitik* terms multipolarity is basically about balance of power, for the variety of Russian discourses it is mostly about the management of inescapable global diversity. That is why Moscow's efforts towards multipolarity run parallel to the verbal repudiation of the balance-of-power politics, which illustrates Russia's eagerness to rhetorically break with the Cold War legacy. Secondly, should Russia have strongly adhered to the realist conceptualization of international order, it would not have demonized NATO; on the contrary, the Kremlin would have joined the chorus of those realists who predicted the dissociation of the North Atlantic Alliance in the absence of its key rival – the Soviet Union. It was realists who “expected Western order to crumble in the face of declining American power capabilities” (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999) – a view which a realist Russian foreign policy should embrace instead of lamenting about alleged American preponderance. Thirdly, Russia consistently attacks one of the key questions of the realist mindset – the idea of anarchy, which the Kremlin seeks to overcome and substitute with a more institutionalized and inclusive type of relations, as exemplified by the Medvedev's proposal on new security architecture in Europe.

Even though multipolarity constitutes the cornerstone of Russian foreign policy, it is, paradoxically, among the least dealt with questions in Russian diplomatic discourse. What may constitute the starting point for this much needed debate is the analysis of the changing nature of power in the post-Cold War international society. The very concept of “pole”, apart from the possession of material resources, is being filled with strong social content, an aspect that is well addressed in non-realist theories, including social constructivism. It is the multiplicity of social resources what defines the concept of

power. In the case of Russia, three factors seem to be of utmost importance. Firstly, to be a pole is a matter of inter-subjective recognition rather than unilateral self-proclamation. Secondly, in order to be recognized as a pole, a country is supposed to possess soft power resources which come as a power of attraction of its model of development, and as a source of normative / ideational appeal. Thirdly, to achieve the status of pole, a country needs to invest resources in its neighborhood policies with the view of forming a social milieu that is comfortable and also convinces others of the country's ability to cooperate with its most immediate neighbors.

As it will be shown, a much more complicated and variegated – though not always consistent – set of policy approaches are hidden under the seemingly realist wording of Russian foreign policy discourse. This discourse reminds of a patchwork of scattered and weakly coordinated “cognitive maps” (Kildiushov, 2006), each of them based upon - and sustained by - a certain vision of the world and its diversity. In this paper, eight of such maps are singled out. Arguably, some of these ideal type models could be quite compatible with each other, while others certainly are in conflict. The identification of these models and the strategies they entail does not necessarily imply the existence of certain political groups behind each of them. This typology of scenarios is sustained by different articulations of Russia's role identities in a multipolar world, yet neither of them “belongs” to any specific political grouping. None of the scenarios or strategies has its natural “bearers”; the same group may simultaneously adhere to two or more strategies thus showing the high volatility of Russia's role identities.

1. POWER BALANCING: AN OUTDATED STRATEGY?

The first – and most conservative – perspective on multipolarity is grounded in the balance of power approach. As a Russian scholar argues, the multipolar system can be stable only under the condition of maintenance of some kind of balance among great powers (Batiuk, 2010) – a statement that for most of his European colleagues would be reminiscent of the European diplomacy in the 19th century, which only confirms the hypothesis that the Kremlin-promoted “multipolar world is a direct and unequivocal alternative to globalization” (Fiodorov, 1999). Consequently, the reverse side of the balance of power approach is the unilateral logic of sovereign decisions which Russia favors itself and sometimes expects from other countries as well. President Medvedev's multiple suggestions that Western governments need to be pragmatically guided by their own “genuine interests” (Medvedev, 2008) fit, altogether, this foreign policy philosophy. This seemingly anti-institutional and anti-normative utterance is a blunt declaration of

Russia’s mistrust to those forms of international cooperation that entail a weakening of the sovereignty, understood by Moscow as a right to control territories rather than as responsibility to the population.

Yet, what is left unnoticed by the Kremlin is that the idea of power balancing presupposes a certain degree of conflict between different poles that might be both inimical to each other and stronger than Russia itself. In other words, balance of power includes divides and clashes between a number of poles, and “there are absolutely no guarantees that in a world with unbalanced power centers Russia would be able to successfully pursue a policy of balanced equidistance” (Tsymburskiy, 1999). This statement is quite in line with the anticipation of a new phase of remilitarization of world politics (Center for Socio-Conservative Policy, 2008). Against this background, Dmitri Trenin calls the balance-of-power type of multipolarity “a continuation of the Cold War inertia, which strengthens the arguments of those who would like to see Russia returning to the Soviet pathways” (Trenin, 2001). In his opinion, the implementation of this model would result in Russia’s submission to China as a junior partner and ultimately harm Russia’s international subjectivity. The fact that China has never featured among the powers that Russia might wish to balance, which reveals a predominantly anti-Western profile of the balance-of-power concept, is indicative of that. It is here where a paradox emerges. On the one hand, the balancing strategy indeed presupposes Russia’s association with anti-Western identities shaped by post-colonial type of discourse that emanates from semi-peripheral actors. On the other hand, in addressing the most pressing security issues Russia tends to appeal to - and prefers to deal with - the leaders of the West. These two dispositions may not easily sit together, since a Russia sympathetic with anti-Western discourse will most likely be perceived by the United States and the European Union as an external actor rather than recognized as part of Euro-Atlantic region.

2. THE GREAT POWERS (MIS)MANAGEMENT: A REJUVENATED PRAGMATISM?

Great power management (GPM), or a “concert of great powers” (Center for Socio-Conservative Policy, 2009), may have different meanings in Russian discourse. One of them refers to geopolitical background: it affirms the utility of various “axes” to link Russia to the strongest international actors, including the United States, Germany, or Japan. In its most radical version – adduced, in particular, by Alexander Dugin - the

Russian government is urged to restitute Kaliningrad and the Kuril Islands in return for privileged relations with Germany and Japan. Another – and much more widely spread – approach to GPM denotes a pragmatically de-politicized type of bargaining between the world poles. The NATO-Russia Council, as well as club-like international entities (G7/G8) could exemplify this model. Indeed, the Russia – NATO relations which reached their peak of securitization during the Russian – Georgian war of August 2008, have gradually evolved into a more business-as-usual type of bargaining with concessions from both sides. Under the Obama administration, the United States has cancelled the deployment of anti-missile systems in Poland and Czech Republic and has decreased its involvement in countries that Russia includes in its sphere of interest. NATO has frozen the accession process of Georgia and Ukraine, while Russia has increased its involvement in the operation in Afghanistan and has pledged to cooperate against piracy in Somalia. The EU – Russia partnership could be seen as equally important for GPM model of conflict resolution. Thus, INSOR (Institute for Contemporary Development, a pro-Medvedev think tank in Moscow) argues that EU growth seems to be quite in line with Russian interests, and calls for strengthening the strategic partnership with the EU (Yurgens, 2008).

However, the success of GPM does not lie simply in any sort of technical cooperation between Russia and NATO or the EU. Two political conditions are much more important: whether the EU and NATO will recognize Russia as a great power of its own, and whether Russia will eventually accept NATO and – to a lesser extent – the EU as legitimate security actors in the “near abroad”.

3. MULTILATERALISM: AN AGENDA IN THE MAKING?

Multilateralism seems to be an important strategy in Russian foreign policy, since it compensates the multiple failures of international legal mechanisms with the logic of collective action, including the experience of coalition building as well as experimenting with different institutional frameworks. Multilateralism is conducive to making the Russian foreign policy more formalized and institutionalized. Traditionally, multilateralism gained its currency in the West, while in Russia seems to be one of its weakest points, as illustrated by Moscow’s weak performance in G8, the hollow results of the cooperation agreement between Russia and the EU in the Four Common Spaces (security and justice, economy foreign policy, and investigation and education), and the lack of any liaison between Russia and NATO in, for example, Libya. Even within the Commonwealth

of Independent States (CIS) Russia's policies lack strong multilateral background, as evidenced by Moscow's unilateral behavior in its conflicts with Estonia (over the Second World War monument in Tallinn), Ukraine (over gas price) and Georgia (over Abkhazia and South Ossetia).

Even so, the implementation of multilateral policies strongly depends upon regional contexts. Russia has serious problems with participation in Western multilateral institutions, yet in Asia-Pacific the Russian security approach is generally more conducive to multilateralism. While in Europe Russia views the US and its allies as impinging on its own interests, in Asia the US is treated as a guarantor of the status quo and as a possible partner in maintaining regional stability vis-à-vis an emergent China. This demonstrates that in many cases Russia does recognize the validity of multilateralism and seems to reject the logic of unilateral actions as ineffective and futile. The Kremlin tries to gradually build its own multilateral agenda, which seems important for its participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) where Russia aspires to be the key agenda setter (Aris, 2010).

Medvedev's proposal of a new security architecture in Europe is conceptually grounded in the idea of multilateralism as well, yet the way it was promoted uncovers the predisposition of the Kremlin to negotiate it primarily with other great powers. The Western responses to Medvedev contain much more explicit references to the desirability of a multilateral agenda which is strategically appealing to the EU in particular. The “Helsinki Plus” report of the EU-Russia study group gives a good sense of differences in the idea of the EU-Russia cooperation as a type of great power management model, on the one hand, and as a multilateral type of relationship, on the other (Helsinki Plus, 2010).

The exchange of views on security between Russia and the EU unveils a number of deeply political gaps that divide them in their search for a multilateral agenda. Firstly, what lies beneath the procedural debates between Moscow and Brussels is the disagreement over the meaning of security itself. It is clear that there is a set of ideas that can be described as a “European” way of looking at security, which include, apart from multilateralism, two other arguments, both containing scrambled messages to Russia. One of them points to the close interrelatedness between European and global security, which is a different way of inciting Russia – should it wish to keep conferring with EU on security matters - to clarify its global security agenda and, consequently, strengthen its global commitments. The other argument stresses the importance of human security, a message that summons Russia up to go beyond a balance-of-power and containment type of thinking. In other words, the human security agenda sympathetic to Brussels is about multilateralism, not GPM. The search for a multilateral EU – Russia agenda is further complicated by the debate about the

feasibility of tackling security in a value-ridden context. Unlike Europe, Russia lacks traditions of thinking about security as a normative concept, which explains why the EU wishes to share its experience and vision with Russia, arguing, in particular, that there is no practical need in separating “hard” from “soft” dimensions of security, and that the promotion of the concept of human security can reconcile and bridge the gap between the two.

In any event, multilateralism can be part of Russia’s relationship with EU in different respects. The think tank INSOR argues that Russia has to accept the prospects of multilateral EU – CIS and China – CIS relationships (Kulik et al., 2010), and thus give up its ambition to monopolize the “post-Soviet” region. In developing its multilateral strategy, Moscow certainly has to react to other proposals of European experts as, for example, the idea of a “European security triad” to include the EU, Turkey and Russia (Krastev and Leonard, 2010).

4. DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS?

Certain Russian scholars argue that multipolarity can only be successful if based upon civilizational background (Martynov, 2009). According to this approach, references to civilizational terms serve as a prove for Russia’s possession of its own distinctive cultural profile in the world. Under closer scrutiny, the civilization-based approach decomposes into several different arguments each one serving different purposes. References to civilizations may even be used to support mutually irreconcilable arguments. The civilizational framework may become a discursive tool justifying skeptical attitudes to the “post-Soviet” integration from the part of non-Slavic countries of which Georgia or Azerbaijan are good examples. In the same vein, civilization-driven analysis may lead to assuming that Russia is an alienable part of an integral all-European civilization (Isaev, 2006).

One of the key proponents of the civilizational dimension of Russian foreign policy, Vladimir Yakunin (the head of state-controlled “Russian railways” corporation), warns about the alleged dangers of a US-led cultural unification which, in his reasoning, may even have some historical parallels with the Nazi Germany. By making this both provocative and dubious comparison, he clearly unveils the ostensibly anti-American bias of his reading of civilizational approach which, in his imagery, is the only alternative to the violent domination of “one sole superpower” (Yakunin, 2010). In the meantime, there are more practical interpretations of the civilization-based model of multipolarity.

Leonid Ivashov (2011), for example, deems that the BRICS have become the first political and institutional reification of the century-old expectation of civilizations’ political subjectivity. BRICS states represent, in his view, the model types of different civilizations that are in dialogue with each other (Ivashov, 2011). He proposed the reorganization of the UN Security Council on civilizational grounds, provided that Europe and United States form two different civilizational units.

The ruling party “Edinaya Rossiya” (United Russia) gives a different rationale for the civilizational approach, arguing that only on the basis of a common civilizational platform may Russia incite Belarus and Ukraine to integrate in one single bloc. In accordance with this logic, these two Slavic neighbors of Russia ought to be included into a wider “Russian civilization” that, in this context, looks like a cultural version of the “spheres of influence” policy, which contravenes the concept of post-Soviet integration as a project transcending ethnic or national boundaries.

5. MULTIREGIONALISM

The multipolarity discourse in Russia includes explicit references to the idea of “regionalization of global politics” (Lavrov, 2009). Regionalization has two meanings within this context. On the one hand, it denotes “a search for regional solutions for conflicts and crises”, which means the avoidance of possible interventions from external actors, among which NATO in general and the US in particular seem to be the most menacing for the Kremlin. On the other hand, regionalization, in Sergey Lavrov’s eyes, could serve as an insurance mechanism to prevent the possible fragmentation of international society as a result of “de-globalization”, or a reversal of the global moment. It is through the prism of these two arguments that the conceptual meaning of multiregionalism might be discussed.

Paradoxically, in both readings – as a possibility for local crisis management and an insurance against a Hobbesian world – the concept of multi-regionalism may question Russia’s exclusive sphere of influence in its near abroad. Instead of supporting the idea of a Kremlin-protected “area of vital interest”, which serves as one of the proves of Russia’s claims for the status of major international pole, the multiregional perspective decomposes the post-Soviet space into several regions that are far from being under Russia’s supervision. These regions are rather an effect of the EU enlargement and its neighborhood policy. Hence, it is through the prism of multi-regionalism that the concept of an allegedly unified post-Soviet space can be deconstructed, and

the gap between Russia's and Europe's perceptions identified. Indeed, the "cognitive maps" of Europe's margins are seen quite differently from Moscow than from Brussels. The EU deliberately invests its resources and efforts in region-building for both pluralizing Europe's regional scene and making it more adaptable and sensitive to Europeanization. Russia finds itself strongly influenced by this type of policy and wishes to take some practical advantage of the EU-sponsored regional projects, yet in the meantime Russia sometimes resorts to discursive and real distancing from those regional initiatives which the Kremlin perceives as alien to Russia, i.e. orchestrated by other great powers. Thus Russia sees no much avail for itself in adapting to the EU-sponsored regional initiatives in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, as well as the Mediterranean. This raises an important question of whether the idea of region-making as a protection against "extra-regional forces" can be universally applicable and productive. Even in those cases where this approach comes into prominence - like the Caspian region-building project -, there are multiple external non-state actors like major oil and gas companies playing decisive roles. In the meantime, debates about new regions-in-the-making, including those with Russia's participation, should not miss one important point: some of them may contribute to mitigating global security concerns. For example, Iran's involvement in the Caspian region-building project along with Russia and other littoral states may facilitate Teheran's opening up to the international community.

Russian attitudes to the neighboring regions-in-the-making are very varied. *The Nordic region* seems to be quite attractive to Moscow. There are multiple positive connotations associated with the North in the Russian discourse. In particular, Finland has always enjoyed a great deal of sympathy in Russia. In Sergey Medvedev's reasoning, Finland "tried to control and localize the subconscious by identifying it with Russia (Medvedev, 1999). For a number of Russian regions Finland serves as a model country (Kaganskii 2008); the Finns are believed to be "rather close to the residents of the Russian North by their psychological setting - they are modest, peaceful, sincere, considerate people who are tremendously devoted to their land" (Muliavin, 2008). In the meantime, Russia seems to follow the critical logic of those commentators who are of the opinion that there is a certain degree of exclusion in the Nordic Dimension project sponsored by Finland. This vision is based on the understanding of "dimensionalism" as a by-product of the successive rounds of the EU enlargement: "the emergence of new dimensions is in a sense an external manifestation of the limits of expanding" (Haukkala, 2002).

In the *Baltic Sea* region, Russia has usually preferred to keep a low profile. Of course, Russia has been keen to participate in those region-building projects that had a material background, but has never taken political initiative. With that, Russia has challenged the expectations of those (mostly Nordic) European experts who expected that

the Baltic Sea regionalism, along with initiatives like the Northern Dimension, could eventually incite Russia to take a more integration-friendly stand. Moscow has from the outset perceived the Baltic Sea as an EU-sponsored project. Russian caution and skepticism are the result of the EU enlargement which, as Russia expected, has unfortunately strengthened Russia's distance from EU. The tensions around Kaliningrad in end-1990s only sharpened Russia's critical position. On the one hand, the Kremlin viewed the EU policy in this Russian enclave in the Baltic Sea as detrimental for Russia and potentially dangerous for the integrity of the federation. On the other hand, there were no evidences that such supposedly regional problem could have a regional solution: ultimately the Kaliningrad controversy was taken to the Moscow – Brussels level and thus became part of the macro-political agenda.

The *lack Sea region* is a combination of nascent collective security mechanisms and balance of power approaches. Both bilateral and multilateral communications seem to be feasible here. The Black Sea region vindicates how easily the global / macro-structural concepts – like balance of power, collective security, multipolarity, etc. - could be transferred to the regional level, and how unprotected are constitutive regional actors against this transfer. Thus, for example, the Obama administration is believed to set aside “regional balancing approach” for the sake of “resetting” its bilateral relations with Moscow. This is a good testimony to the direct dependence of the regional setting upon external forces, which, in turn, can be considered as prove of the Black Sea region's incorporation to the global agenda. The *Caspian Sea* is another example of regional formation, less institutionalized and with a higher degree of conflict, which is also subjected/open to external overlays. Again, the logic of power balancing seems to play the pivotal role here. Yet this logic does not seem to be conducive to promoting regional integration, which needs a more pronounced multipolar and inclusive approach in order to include both Russia and Iran.

Clearly, Russia's interest in the regionalization of security is to a large extent politically motivated, being grounded in the Kremlin strategy of countering US influence worldwide. However, the political effects of this strategy seem to be quite detrimental for Moscow, since Russia's foreign policy philosophy of looking to regional solutions for regional problems is perceived by other actors as a hidden attempt of Russia to ensure its hegemony in the near abroad. Correspondingly, counter-balancing Russia, which in turn intends to counter-balance the United States (and the West in general), becomes a strategy for most of Russia's neighbors. Therefore, the key problem with the above-mentioned regions is that both Russia and the West tend to look at them through their global agenda. As seen from some of the regional actors' perspective, Russia's endeavors in the neighboring regions are meant to install mechanisms to sustain Russia's supremacy, which, in Moscow's eyes, is essential for the successful implementation of the multipolarity project.

6. PROCEDURAL INTEGRATION

In the Kremlin's view, the same set of rules has to apply to all analogous cases, be it the territorial integrity of states or the right of self-determination, Vladimir Putin has admitted that should the members of the international society agree to reverse their normative preferences, this should be a universal move, applicable to each and every specific case: "if someone of the participants of international community deems that the principles of international law have to be changed, it appears possible, but without imposing anything to any of the conflicting parties" (Putin, 2007a). On a different occasion he mentioned: "even if we intend to put the principle of self-determination above the principle of territorial integrity, this approach has to be of universal character and be applicable in other parts of the world, at least in Europe" (Putin, 2007b). Putin's stance is thus a conflation of two broad policy frameworks: de-politicized pragmatism, on the one hand, and global idealism, on the other. Putin and Medvedev seem to believe in the global applicability of the international norms which are, however, undetermined or can be mechanically reversed and then reinterpreted. Paradoxically, even by resorting to normative discourse, the Kremlin appears to sustain the very decisionist principle which it otherwise rejects as unacceptable and even menacing to Russia.

Within the logic of an international society integrated in its procedures, the most serious threat to Russia is a "settlement that would exclude Moscow from the mechanism of decision making on the key issues of international politics" (Rogov, 1999). What the Kremlin fears is not a NATO military attack but any form of exclusion from the mechanisms of security decision making in Europe. The Kremlin believes that all forms of integration without Russia are meant against Russia (Maximych, 1999). The feeling of being left outside the security governance is the major source of danger for Russia which sees itself as a major European power. It may be concluded then that Russia does not intend to launch a wide-scale Cold War-like confrontation for world domination, but rather seeks to bargain for ensuring a niche where Russia would feel comfortable and safe enough. Russia's strategies within this model of international society thus reveal its fears of marginalization and isolation.

Dmitry Medvedev's proposal of a "new security architecture in Europe" altogether fits into the normative/solidarist logic of procedural integration. It is meant to raise Russia's international profile as a country apt for normative moves (like that one assessing the Kosovo's independence as both immoral and legally questionable). Hence, the crux of Medvedev's proposal lies in an attempt to join the hegemonic security community of Euro-Atlantic partnership that NATO and EU consider, by and large, already established and functioning. As Pertti Joenniemi assumes, inclusion

in such a community requires that the applicants become increasingly “more like us” and, consequently, presupposes a sense of “we-ness” and togetherness. In such a community, difference and pluralism are externalized, and Russia is one of those outsiders that is perceived as external to the Western security (Joenniemi, 2010). Some linguistic questions nicely reflect this perceptual gap: while Russia prefers to speak about “Euro-Atlantic security” (presupposing Russia’s participation), most of Europeans think in categories of “trans-Atlantic security” (which does not envision Russia as an actor).

There are some grounds to believe that the Kremlin does understand the possible negative effects of the normative distancing from Europe. In particular, Sergey Lavrov’s portrayal of Russia and America as two branches of the European civilization seems to be an attempt to reformulate the Western discourse on Russia through three inter-connected perspectives. Firstly, Lavrov’s enunciation is meant to repudiate the US-centric worldview in favor of a Europe-centric one, much closer to Russia’s world outlook. His claim that America has to think about “returning to Europe” – in a sense of sharing the European worldview (Lavrov, 2008b) – underpins this point. Secondly, within this logic, Russia portrays its role identity as an extension of Europe. Thirdly, this discursive strategy equates Russia with the United States, presenting both countries as sharing a common European legacy in historical and cultural terms. However, there are two sets of problems in implementing Russia’s integrationist policy: one is related to intrinsic inconsistency of Russia’s vision, while the second deals with miscommunication between Russia and the EU. Russia’s vision of a “new security architecture” in Europe seems to be rather fuzzy. This is particularly true with regard to the constantly reiterated idea of “indivisible” and “equal” security that arguably stems from the belief that security could be “justly”, “evenly” and “smoothly” distributed among the members of the international society. This sort of technocratic idealism misses an important point: security is neither a physical substance nor merchandise, but rather a delicate and sophisticated social construct whose existence is possible only within a heterogeneous communicative framework.

Concerning the presumed “indivisibility” of security, the Kremlin explains it from a rather narrow standpoint, as a rejection to safeguard one’s own security at the expense of others. Yet seen from other angles, security can be – and, in fact, is - both divisible (the hard – soft security dichotomy is perhaps the best illustration for that) and dividing (for example, the freezing of the UK – Russia anti-terrorist partnership illustrates how deep are disagreements between the two countries as far as security is concerned). What follows from Russia’s standpoint is that the Kremlin is interested in basically hard security provisions, which differs very much from the EU standpoint. Brussels is a lot more inclined to concentrate on soft security issues and claims that the EU-Russia negotiations “should not be limited to security” (CIDOB, 2010) in

a strict sense but should include a broader range of issues – from energy to human rights. The problem is that this broad approach makes the differences in security perceptions in Russia and the EU even more pronounced. Thus, for example, in the field of energy relations it is typical for Europeans to assume that “the transatlantic partners can no longer take our energy supplies for granted, as the majority of our supplies currently come from countries which are not democracies or are inherently unstable” (Elles, 2010). Russia, arguably, may easily find itself in this list.

Conceptual divisions, by the same token, are complemented by geographical ones, only to shed more doubts on the feasibility of attaining “equal” or “single” security space. Russian diplomacy is explicitly skeptical about the existence, within a wider Europe, of spheres with different mechanisms of influence, humanitarian commitments, market regulations, etc. Yet the dominating European discourse views Europe exactly in a manner refuted by Russia - as a conglomerate of different regions-in-the-making, each of them potentially having its own security agenda. In this sense one may argue that security concerns of the Nordic Europe are definitely very different from – and thus unequal to – security troubles faced by the Black Sea countries. The Balkans are an example of a region that deserves special treatment and its own tools for post-conflict settlement; the same is true for potential “hot spots” with either disputed or not universally recognized territories (Kosovo, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transdnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh). Besides, Russia and the EU draw different lessons from their involvement in military conflicts in adjacent areas. The EU seeks to invest its resources in internal reforms in trouble-making territories and diversify its own operational tools (in particular, find a balanced combination of military and police forces), while Russia disregards both of these perspectives and instead is keen to focus its post-conflict discourse on glorifying its military strength (‘back from the knees’) and power capabilities.

7. RUSSIA’S “NORMATIVE OFFENSIVE”

Russia is sometimes keen to counter-attack on the normative field, presenting its policies as grounded in normative ideas of democracy, justice and equality. However, Russia’s policy toward neighboring countries illustrates the gap between the pursuance of the normative goals, on the one hand, and the lack of normative results, on the other. In particular, Russia seems to be eager to fathom the relations of friendship with its neighboring countries through explicitly normative criteria –

namely, their adherence to the traditional Soviet interpretation of the Red Army as the liberating force that brought freedom to Europe. Yet the structuring of Russia's relations with post-Soviet and post-socialist countries on historical arguments appears to be extremely vulnerable due to, at least, two factors. Firstly, both the state of the Second World War monuments and the treatment of the veterans inside Russia are far from being perfect, which weakens a Russian policy based on history. Secondly, in its bitter dispute with Estonia in 2007 over the removal of the Soviet war memorial from Tallinn downtown to a military cemetery, Russia was unable to get any meaningful support from other CIS countries, despite the fact that there were soldiers of different ethnicities among the Soviet troops which the removed monument meant to symbolize.

Besides, in Russian discourse, normative or value-ridden messages are repeatedly contaminated by purely materialistic arguments. Two examples are the most telling in this respect. The first one deals with Russia's fierce resistance to any possible particularization of the Stalinist repressions as geared against specific ethnic group. Thus, the ‘great famine’ of mid-1930s (known in Ukraine as ‘*golodomor*’), in the Kremlin official interpretation, was only part of Stalinist repressive policies and was not specifically targeted against Ukraine or any other republic. There is, however, a material argument underpinning this apparently normative logic: as some of the opinion makers in Russia say, what troubles Russia most is the perspective of financial claims against the Kremlin from post-Soviet countries as a compensation for the crimes of the Soviet regime.

Another telling example is the situation with the Russian Black Sea Fleet. On the one hand, the Russian position was at the outset formulated in normative terms: the port of Sebastopol features in the Russian discourse as an identity-making city with triumphalist historical background. Yet on the other hand, the Medvedev-Yanukovich 2010 agreement to extend the lease on the Sebastopol base in exchange for preferential and long-term gas prices for Ukraine looks like a typical economic bargaining. There is a strong impression that what Russia seeks is not that much confirmation as great power status through identity issues but rather economic penetration and domination in Ukraine. In fact, it was reported in the media that Russian demands also include the participation of Russian companies in major Ukrainian projects in energy and aviation, as well as exploitation of uranium (Vedomosti, 2010).

Russia's normative role of a defender of international law is also far from conclusive. It was Moscow who repeatedly raised the non-interference issue from 1999 (when NATO bombed Yugoslavia) till, at least, February 2008 (the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence). In the meantime, however, this strategy was disavowed by Russia's war against Georgia and the recognition of the independence of two break-away territories, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

8. MAINTAINING NORMATIVE PLURALITY

Russia's real stake in the Kosovo crisis was not this separatist region but Russia's future role in European security. The real impact of the Kosovo conflict on Russia's relations with its international society partners is the lesson that Russia has drawn from it: in a situation of two international legal norms competing with each other – i.e. territorial integrity vs. self-determination – the whole political vocabulary becomes a matter of politically biased and subjective interpretation.

What makes the “normative plurality” model peculiar is that the pursuance of normative behavior provokes two types of conflicts. Firstly, there might be structural conflicts between different constitutive principles of international law – like, for instance, the principle of territorial integrity and the right for self-determination. The Kosovo situation, as well as Russia's policies towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia, had sharpened collision between these two norms, forcing governments to choose one over another. Secondly, international agents themselves may provoke contests between norms through infusing different meanings in them. In the security sphere two examples of normative disagreements could be given. One is related to the conflicting interpretations of the energy security concept. For user countries in Europe, raising the level of energy security is connected with partial access to Russia's energy resources through working with “Gazprom” and other large companies. European countries define energy security as providing acceptable (that is stable and reasonable) prices for oil, gas and their future equivalents, derived from reliable and diversified sources. There are two main threats from this point of view: high prices for energy and instability of supply. In other words, energy security is a means of creating regulatory regimes which would lower the risks of unexpected price changes, and would provide at the same time an appropriate level of openness in the markets. Yet for transit countries, security is associated with the possibility of controlling the process of transit itself and obtaining rents for it. In the opinion of Lithuanian specialists, for their country “the transit of gas to Kaliningrad is a source of revenue and creates a sense of security. Losing the position of transit state would make Lithuania more vulnerable to Russian politics” (Janeliunas and Molis, 2006). As an exporter country, the main source of danger for Russia is the dependence on transit across the territory of countries which are politically hostile.

Another example is related to the divergent interpretations of the human security concept. In August 2008, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov mentioned the pursuit of “human security” as one explanation for Russia's offensive in Georgia (Lavrov, 2008c). Later he suggested that Russia was the first country to practically stand for human security in South Ossetia (Lavrov, 2008c). Lavrov's statements seem to be rather far away from the original meaning of the human security concept, that is as a

critical tool to shed light on the failures of state-based security and aimed against existing hierarchies of power (Chandler, 2008). In the West, the concept usually denotes a stronger role for non-state actors, while in Russia, on the contrary, human security is more frequently interpreted as a justification for increased state intervention.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE

Today’s international scholarship of Russia’s relations with the West is to a great extent grounded in the recognition of the deep imbalances and miscommunications. Against this background, the question of why Russia is such an uneasy interlocutor for its partners understandably attracts a lot of attention. According to one of the explanations, the key problem on the Russian side is the growing – and in most cases unsubstantiated - international ambitions to unleash an imperial type of foreign policy. In this paper, however, it has been argued that the key problem is not Russia’s “great design” but rather the inconsistency inherent to Russia’s international policies. Russia appears to be lacking a coherent foreign policy; in its stead, Russia follows a bunch of sometimes mutually contradictory policy pathways, grounded in competing conceptualizations of both the structure of international society and Russia’s role identities in it.

In the meantime, what seems to be common for all policy strategies described above is their - mostly explicit - pro-Western tilt. Generally speaking, none of the various versions of multipolarity is capable of undermining Western hegemony. On the contrary, the discourse(s) of multipolarity may be regarded as part(s) of the Western hegemonic power. Unsurprisingly, the integration with the Trans-Atlantic institutional structures remains the key priority for Russia. Thus, despite protesting against Ukrainian and Georgian engagement with NATO, Russia itself has fully restored cooperation with the alliance, particularly in Afghanistan. In spite of expressing some suspicions about the Eastern Partnership, Moscow continues to view strategic partnership with the EU as a top priority for Russia’s modernization.

However, as shown in this article, a deeper integration in the normative and institutional order crafted by the West is complicated by what may be dubbed cognitive dissonances between Russia and the West. As the balance-of-power version of multipolarity shows, Russia’s foreign policy philosophy is still grounded in the modernist understanding of sovereignty, while the EU seem to a greater extent to adhere to a “post-modernist” version of governance predicated upon the dispersal of sovereignty as the direct result

of trans- cross- and supra-national integration. Moreover, as Medvedev proposal of a “new security architecture in Europe” suggests, Russia prefers to verbalize its messages to the EU according to interest-based acts and with obvious pragmatic overtones, while European countries are inclined to formulate their worldviews in a more normative (identity- and value-based) language that inevitably contains the mechanisms of “othering” Russia. It is obvious that the EU is interested not in any type of strategic order but in one grounded in “a set of fundamentally liberal values – democracy, the rule of law and individual freedom” (Rynning, 2003). Besides, Russia is, to a much larger extent than Europe, concerned about hard security problems. As it has been shown, the EU focusing on soft security agenda leads to further marginalization of Russia, which cannot justifiably expect to become a soft security partner of the EU unless it undertakes robust improvements of its democracy record and starts effectively protecting its population against corruption, environmental decay, etc.

Russia’s policies of multipolarity have strong connotations with sovereignty, self-assertiveness and self-sufficiency. The EU logic embraces a different chain of meanings of multipolarity which include integration, dispersal of sovereignty, norm-based identity, soft/human security, or democratization through Europeanization. Consequently, the two parties – Russia and Europe – still have different understandings of the nature of diversity and pluralism as constitutive features of international society they are embedded in.

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