



**Kremlin's heavy handed approach to its 'near abroad'?**  
**The Russian Perspective on the EU's Eastern Partnership**

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Anita Şek

*Marie Curie Early Stage Researcher on EU External Action  
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## Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Historic and theoretical background</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1. Russian <i>horror vacui</i> and “honour-based behaviour” .....	4
2.2. Russian ‘otherness’ from the West.....	4
2.3. Russian inconsistency of self- and other-identification.....	5
<b>3. Russia, the EU and the ‘common neighbourhood’</b> .....	<b>6</b>
3.1. Russian protection of its <i>ближнее зарубежье</i> .....	6
3.2. Russian perspective on common interests .....	7
3.3. Russian opinions and analysis on the EaP .....	7
3.4. Russian answer to the ‘European Eastern awakening’ .....	9
<b>4. Conclusions and recommendations</b> .....	<b>11</b>
4.1. For Russia .....	11
4.2. For the EU .....	12
4.3. For the Eastern Partners .....	13
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	<b>14</b>



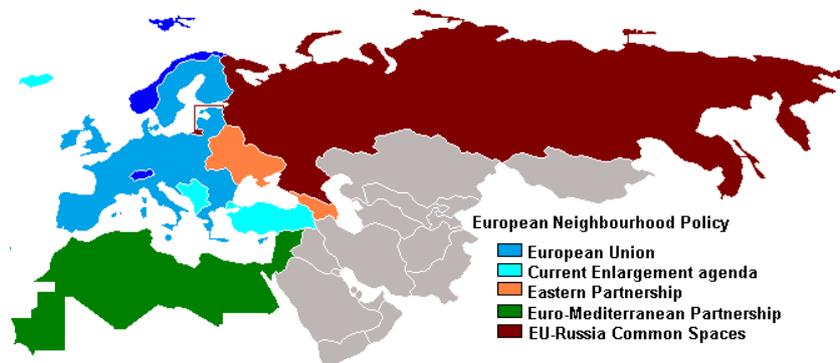
“The tragedy of the European foreign policy is that we fell in love with our own paradigm. We are so convinced that what others want is to be like us that we are only interested in whether, when and how they can be like us.”

I. Krastev, M. Leonard, A. Wilson, “What does Russia think?”<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The European Union’s (EU) **Eastern Partnership** programme (EaP) was planned to spread the EU’s fundamental values of stability, democracy and free market economy to countries beyond its Eastern flank. It was introduced in 2009 and aimed at strengthening the cooperation between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Nonetheless, it was not the first Brussels-driven projection seen in Moscow as an “intrusive process”. It was the 2004 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP, see Graph 1) that was labeled by Oleg Ziborov, the then senior advisor in the European Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, as “a psychological aggression of European Lilliputians on Russia”.<sup>2</sup> According to Vladimir Chizhov, the former deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and current Russian Permanent Representative to the European Union, “the ENP has been challenging the Russian concept of ‘sovereign democracy’”.<sup>3</sup> EU’s entry into Russia’s single and exclusive zone of influence – **the ‘near abroad’ (ближнее зарубежье)**<sup>4</sup> - has since been perceived as a battle of interests and a struggle for domination between Brussels and Moscow, which has been embodied in the recent pressure by Moscow on EaP countries, surrounding the third Eastern Partnership Summit, held in Vilnius on 28 and 29 November 2013.

Graph 1 EU regional initiatives



Source: en.wikipedia.org.

With this paper I aim to analyse the reasons behind the realist **‘zero-sum game’** and **the ‘red-line’ approach** to the **‘common neighbourhood’** between the EU and Russia, explaining Moscow’s perceptions and interests. My hypothesis is that the Russian attitude is based on a historical need of **“secured spaces”**, along with what Vyacheslav Glazychev calls **horror vacui**<sup>5</sup> and Andrei Tsygankov **“honour-based behaviour”**.<sup>6</sup> Taking into consideration different developments of the two entities located on two edges of the Eurasian continent, the (West) European and Russian experiences differ, which results in often contradictory perceptions. Reasons for that are not fully comprehended, neither in Brussels nor in Moscow. Being convinced that without the concepts of *horror vacui* and honour the Russian position cannot be understood in the EU, I focus in this analysis on explaining the **‘Russian perspective’**, referring

to concrete examples from academic and political practice in order to grasp the Russian ‘psyche’.<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to Brussels’ assurances of a ‘**win-win situation**’ not only for the EU and the EaP countries, but also for Moscow (nonetheless, this concept is not further examined in this paper), Russia is in fact afraid of being marginalised as well as of losing its influence in the region in which it has been present since the very beginning of the Russian state in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, Sergei Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, rejects the programme as “an attempt to extend the EU’s sphere of influence”, which confronts the Partner countries with the dilemma of choosing between Russia and the EU.<sup>8</sup>

It is time not only for the EU/member states’ elites to face reasons for Russian *Realpolitik* and its consequences, but also to recognize the difference of Russian politics and discover options towards pragmatic cooperation on realistic projects in the ‘shared neighbourhood’.

## 2. Historic and theoretical background

### 2.1. Russian *horror vacui* and “honour-based behaviour”

**Geographical expansionism** has been one of the main features of Russian statehood across the millennia, used as a defensive strategy to counter the ambitions of its neighbours and invasions from Mongols, Poles, to Napoleon and Hitler. In this respect, also enlargements of NATO in 1999 and the 2000s to Central and Eastern Europe states, which used to belong to the Eastern bloc, are perceived by the Kremlin as another encroachment into Russian territory. A lack of natural barriers protecting the interior has called for “**extensive security**” of Russia’s **honour**, against the danger of *horror vacui* – the horror (threat) of empty space, of which an ability to protect is limited.<sup>9</sup> The honour is defined as “a part of the Western world [Christianity – A.S] and defending its core values”,<sup>10</sup> resulting in a need for determined **assertive-cum-aggressive (imperial) politics** as an answer to geographical insecurity. In consequence, this has led to the creation of a concept of ‘**spheres of influence**’ and of special treatment of the ‘**near abroad**’. A loss of the “**secured spaces**” is feared to result in destruction of the Russian state. This Russian thinking was summarized in one sentence a decade ago by the President Vladimir Putin:

“Russia can only survive and develop within the existing borders if it stays as a great power.  
(...) during all of its times of weakness (...) Russia was invariably confronted with the threat  
of disintegration”.

11

### 2.2. Russian ‘otherness’ from the West

Since the beginning, Russian experiences with the West (understood as Western Europe and later also the United States) have been marked with the notion of ‘**otherness**’, as well as of axiological and strategic **differentiation**. The contacts with ‘the other’ had incepted into the Russian people a threat of marginalisation, against feelings of belonging to the same civilisation of the Christian world. This led to a creation of a uniquely Russian - as opposite to Western - way of (*Real*)**politik**, based on demands of equal partnership, respectful treatment and non-intervention into Russian internal issues, culminating in the refusal of being covered by the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy. The ENP concept reaches Russia’s ‘near abroad’, which is key



to understand Russian foreign policy strategy and Moscow's perspective on EU's engagement in the '**shared neighbourhood**', an expression - worth underlying - utilised by the EU and its Member States, but not by Russians.<sup>12</sup> This special attitude to the territory is a derivative of the infamous (for the Western world) Russian principle of '**sovereign democracy**',<sup>13</sup> a concept taking its root from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Westphalian order of concerts between empires-cum-nation states:

“Sovereign democracy’ [...means] the sources of our legitimacy are found in Russia, not in the West [...and that] we are the guarantors of Russia’s sovereignty and survival in the context of globalization and other external super-threats.”<sup>14</sup>

### 2.3. Russian inconsistency of self- and other-identification

Due to differentiated historic developments and turns, as surveys and opinion polls explain, contemporary Russians face problems of their **self-definition**, national identity and patriotic feelings.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, the current role of the Russian Federation in international relations also seems to be **incoherent**. According to Dmitri Trenin, director of the American Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Moscow,

“[i]t is a bizarre combination of faith in tradition (classic power-broking in the Romanov style), recognition of economic realities (globalization Gazprom-style), with a weakness for virtual, post-modern constructs (thanks to the political technocrats employed by the Kremlin administrators).”<sup>16</sup>

Leaning towards opinions of Russian commentators, Western experts suggest that Russia has not comprehended or agreed with a loss of its empire, having roots in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century **держава**<sup>17</sup> – **power**:

“[a]s long as it feels sufficient recognition and reciprocation from Western capitals, Moscow is prepared to act in concert with its significant other. However, when the West challenges Russia’s distinctiveness and internal sense of [honour], Russia tends to adopt either defensive or assertive policy postures.”<sup>18</sup>

The resulting **misperceptions** in understanding each other cause problems in EU-Russia relations: Moscow perceives the West in aggressive categories, while the West sees Moscow through the historic lens of **imperialism**.<sup>19</sup> The re-birth of Kremlin's foreign policy ambitions must be seen in the current international context: the Russian call for a realisation of a new poly-centric world is as much against American unilateralism as against the times of the arms race in the bi-polar 'cold war', and takes its roots in the rejection of "humiliating and shameful" state conditions of the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> They encompass both internal and external challenges, such as: domestic political crises, economic decline, human rights challenges, war in Chechnya, expansion of NATO, American intervention in Iraq, 'coloured revolutions', energy competition etc. Nowadays Moscow desires a world in which it will be able to fulfil its "**distinctive**" **roles** according to its capacities and capabilities, also indispensably embracing the 'near abroad' – the zone of its exceptional and "**honourable**" **responsibility**.<sup>21</sup> Russian domestic **confidence** is built upon economic development, based on revenues from energy exports thanks to high oil



prices (see Table 1). In such circumstances Russia has perceived its engagement – as a peace-broker and **regional peace-guarantor** - in the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It might be concluded that in the current terms ‘Russian neo-imperialism’ shall be termed as an attempt to define a new role in the international arena. At the same time it is more of an **assertive answer** to the EU, which is rapidly encroaching into Russian traditional territory, rather than the pure Soviet-style imperialism.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Russia, the EU and the ‘common neighbourhood’

#### 3.1. Russian protection of its *ближнее зарубежье*

In the light of the above explanation of recent Russian assertiveness, the concept of ‘sovereign democracy’ - in its part referring to the control over the ‘near abroad’ - has been intensified as an answer to **EU’s ‘soft power’** directed at the neighbouring countries, including Russia itself. The sudden 2003/2004 **European ‘awakening to the East’** has caused Russian politicians and commentators to believe that Brussels, by intervening in territories historically either belonging to the state or within the Russian zone of influence, does not treat Moscow as an equal partner; the partner, which – in its own comprehension - has an exceptional right to any transformative and integrationist processes in the area.

The problems in EU-Russia relations concentrate on **democratisation** of political, social and economic life in the Russian Federation, particularly on: the protection of human rights and a role of civil society; democratisation of EU-Russia security linkages (e.g. on energy); as well as on requiring from the countries of the ‘shared neighbourhood’ the implementation of EU standards (*acquis communautaire*) in return for closer economic integration and political association, against the will of Moscow. Irina Bolgova from the Russian International Affairs Council and MGIMO, the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, noticed that:

“between Russia and the European Union there is no consensus on the place of liberal-democratic values in their politics in the post-Soviet space.”<sup>23</sup>

According to some Russian commentators, the West has the following three strategic aims in its relations with Moscow:<sup>24</sup>

- (1) **reduction** of Russian geopolitical influences in the world and “in vitally important regions for Moscow” (other countries of Commonwealth of Independent (CIS));
- (2) **weakening** [underlined by A.S.] Russian economic and military power” and debilitation of the CIS;
- (3) **subordination** of Russia to the Western worldview under leadership of the US.

**Table 1 The correlation between the oil price and Russian GDP**



It seems these challenges have made Russia aware that as long as it does not start counter-acting, its immediate neighbours will turn to the West. Such a situation would pose a serious threat to the independence of the Russian state, as cited by Irina Arsentyev:

“security of Russia in large part will depend on relations with Ukraine and Belarus, Central Asia republics and South Caucasus countries. Without exaggeration it can be stated that future perspectives of Russian statehood depend on the role and place, character and degree of influence of Russia in the post-Soviet area.”

25

### 3.2. Russian perspective on common interests

The integrationist processes run in parallel by Moscow and Brussels differ fundamentally: while – as seen from Brussels - the EU proposes ‘carrots’, attracting others by the virtue of its ‘being’ and according to a principle of conditionality, Russia prefers using ‘sticks’: (political) disqualification of the EU and of the EaP programme, by e.g. accusing the Partner countries for mitigating Brussels, even without true partnership and joint-ownership of the initiative; (security) threats and (economic) sanctions towards both European and ‘near abroad’ partners (see point 3.4). Nonetheless, Moscow is frustrated that in the current vulnerable times of the crisis of the international system and a need for a worldwide *perestroika*, Brussels neglects a synergy effect that could result from cooperation upon any open Russian proposals for: a **Greater Europe** (2004), a **new European collective security architecture** (2008), or an **Alliance/Union of Europe from Atlantic to Pacific Ocean** (*Союз Европы*), perceived as the **Helsinki-OSCE 2.0**.<sup>26</sup> The idea behind these projects is “to prevent the marginalisation of the ‘old continent’”. In Kremlin’s view it could “close the Pandora box” of mistrust between Moscow and Brussels,<sup>27</sup> by combining both European and Russian experiences and practices in order to integrate the continent on ‘truly’ universal and common – and not purely EU’s – values of equality and mutual responsibility. According to Sergei Karaganov and Igor Yurgens, “Europe without resources and military potential of the Russian Federation is bound to a ‘beautiful fading’”.<sup>28</sup> Only the strong *Союз Европы* or the **Union of Unions** (*Союз союзов*) in areas such as: economy, energy, trade, industry, transport, hi-tech, as well as political and legal harmonisation and military cooperation, constitutes a “solution for artificial ‘choice’ demanded from the countries between Russia and the EU”.<sup>29</sup>

For the reasons of honour and *horror vacui* as explained above, the Kremlin perceives the EU’s involvement in its ‘near abroad’ as a way to constrain and humiliate Russia. Creation of the ‘ring of friends’ buffering Brussels from Moscow - according to the romantic vision of new EU Member States – aims to contain Russian imperialistic inclinations, by freeing the nations dependent on and controlled by the Kremlin from its grasp.

### 3.3. Russian opinions and analysis on the EaP

The intensification of links with the EaP countries in the form of finalisation of negotiations on the Association Agreements (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with four countries, until recently has not been judged by Russia as preventing exclusive Kremlin-led integration in the post-Soviet space. Since 2008 up to middle of 2013 Russian commentators did not perceive the EaP initiative as going against Moscow interests. As I. Bolgova wrote in the year of programme’s establishment:



“[the EaP] is not about aspirations of developing a sub-regional integration on the premises of CIS (...) and it can be concluded that the alarmism on the EaP undermining existing traditional links in post-Soviet area is unjustified”.

30

The more that the objectives of the programme were similar to the four “**common spaces**” agreed earlier, in 2003 and strengthened in 2005, between Brussels and Moscow.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, for Russian experts the EaP initiative was a clear signal of the Union’s **enlargement fatigue** and a lack of will to propose to the Eastern neighbours anything beyond vague “economic integration and political association” or “everything but institutions”. The commentators also drew attention to the **weaknesses** of the programme, watering down the whole idea, such as the: inclusion of Belarus, whose leader Alexandr Lukashenko has been perceived in Europe as “the last European dictator”; lack of institutionalisation and poor financing of the EaP project; as well as differentiation inside the EU and a division into the ‘old’ and ‘new Member States’; and last but not least the dissatisfaction of Ukraine, which counted on stronger bilateral links with the EU, while with the inception of the EaP it was degraded to the least common denominator of all six countries.

Nonetheless, in the following years, due to the development of the EaP, the attitude towards the programme changed. The Russian commentator Rick Rozoff named the initiative “[t]he West’s final assault on the former Soviet Union”<sup>32</sup> and on 21 March 2010, at a forum in Brussels, S. Lavrov was asking rhetorically:

“We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to expand EU’s sphere of influence, including to Belarus?”

33

Therefore, it shall be stated that the Kremlin has been preparing for a concrete **pragmatic competition**. Some steps were taken already in previous years, such as embargos on some EU Member States and EaP countries’ products, gas crises, political pressures, but all of these activities did not come close to the scale of action which took place over the last months, before the Vilnius Summit (see point 3.4). It would also be in accordance with a ‘doctrine’ of Alexander Gorchakov, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, which states: “Russia does not take offence, it gets itself together”.<sup>34</sup> The recent most visible **change of rhetoric** is a fact, such as the words of the Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev directed not only at the Ukrainian government, but also at the Ukrainian people that “entering the free trade zone with the EU cannot be reconciled with membership of the Customs Union and that Ukraine needs to make a choice”<sup>35</sup> (due to WTO regulations, as the tariffs of two trade blocks are not compatible); an argument that was earlier utilised exclusively by the European side. Recent Russian estimations reveal negative consequences for Ukraine and other EaP countries if they join the EU-led DCFTA for their economy, trade and business, and positive outcomes resulting from the integration with the CU, such as an increase in GDP between 1.5% to 6.5%, depending on the depth of harmonisation, which run contrary not only to European, but also Ukrainian analyses.<sup>36</sup>

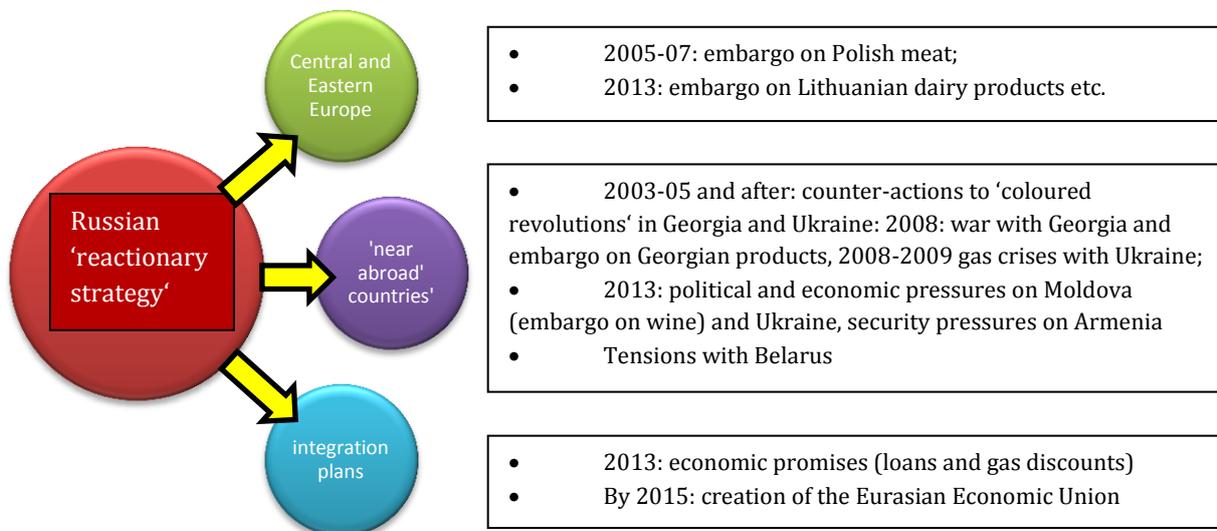


Moscow's dynamic offensive in the last months could have been predicted, but appeared to surprise Brussels, which seemed unprepared for such a response.

### 3.4. Russian answer to the 'European Eastern awakening'

The counter-offensive events which followed the implementations of the ENP and the EaP, can be classified into three groups, according to the targets of what can be called a '**reactionary strategy**' (see Graph 2). It is the strategy which Russia has been using in order to secure its interests in the sphere of influence, protecting thus its honour and decreasing the threat coming from the *horror vacui*.

**Graph 2** The targets and examples of Russian 'reactionary strategy'



Firstly, instruments of featured '**checks-and-balances**' were used towards the 'new EU Member States' – countries of Central and Eastern Europe which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, and which became the main advocates of strengthening the relations with new EU Eastern neighbours. In this respect, there have been observed events such as the 2005-07 **embargo** on Polish meat, the country which together with Sweden proposed the EaP initiative in 2008; as well as the most recent economic **threats** and embargos, like on Lithuanian dairy products, the country which currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU Council and hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> EaP Summit in Vilnius. These **sanctions** have been officially introduced – as explained by Russian officials - due to sanitary concerns.

The second direction of action has been the 'near abroad'. These have encompassed: **counter-actions** towards the 2003-2005 'coloured revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine; the August 2008 **war** with Georgia and embargos on Georgian wine and water; the 2008-2009 **gas crises** with Ukraine; **tensions** with Belarus over the functioning of the Union State; and most recent **pressures** on EaP countries on the eve of the Vilnius Summit, where the AA including the DCFTA were to be initialled with Georgia and Moldova and signed with Ukraine, effectively sealing EaP's legal bounds with the EU.<sup>37</sup> The latter comprise: a mini trade war with Ukraine,<sup>38</sup> embargo on Moldovan wine,<sup>39</sup> hard-security issues with regards to Armenia and the Nagorno Karabagh conflict, as well as higher gas prices and restrictions on access to the Russian job market for the countries closest to the EU agreement. Armenia unexpectedly succumbed to pressures and



resigned from initialling the AA already on 3 September 2013, after three years of negotiations; while Ukraine was swinging until the last moment before the Summit, and finally withdrew from further bargaining with the EU, too. These ‘U-turn’ events have made it clear that the Kremlin remains serious about ‘flexing its muscles’, and that certainly it must not be underestimated and its interest must not be ignored by the neighbours. Moreover, Moscow was not to wait passively for geopolitical developments driven by Brussels in its ‘near abroad’, but has been willing to **counter-attack**, in line with its principles, that is *horror vacui* and honour.

The final area of the offensive constitutes the intensification of **integrationist plans** for both European and immediate neighbourhood (‘near abroad’) spaces, combined with **economic support** from Moscow (such as a \$750million loan in September 2013 and gas discount offered to Ukraine),<sup>40</sup> as well as later benefits resulting from the new Russia-Ukraine ‘strategic partnership’ discussed just after the Vilnius Summit.

With regard to this, the newest “Foreign Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation” (the “Strategy”) accepted by President Putin in February 2013 underlines what Russian commentators, like Sergey Karaganov, a Russian political scientist who heads the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, noticed a few years earlier.<sup>41</sup> The worldwide tendencies, intensified by the financial-economic crisis, have shifted the world balance away from the politically and economically struggling West towards re-emerging booming economies of **BRICS**<sup>42</sup> and **Asia**. These circumstances, fuelled additionally by an *impasse* in relations with the EU, additionally boost **Russia’s self-confidence**. In the light of this, the “Strategy” reminds both the outside and the inside world that the regional cooperation within the **Commonwealth of Independent States** remains crucial for Moscow’s interests, constituting “a great potential for deeper integration in many spheres”.<sup>43</sup> It is in this context – and not as a ‘reincarnation’ of the Soviet Union – that the **Customs Union** (CU) between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan shall be seen. According to agreements between the participating parties, the cooperation within the CU will result in the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union by 2015. In words of S. Lavrov, it will provide “a model of integration” for the whole globe.<sup>44</sup> In the light of recent pressures, it is worth underlining that **Ukraine**, the second biggest economy of the region, is titled “the priority partner”. At the same time, Russia “does not forbid its neighbours to integrate with other forums”. Nevertheless, Moscow requires first of all “fulfilling all obligations resulting from international agreements” between the post-Soviet partners, which – as it is stipulated by the Kremlin – are not compatible with the EU’s agreements.<sup>45</sup> The political undertone of the **Euro-Asiatic project**, whose economic sense has been questioned by analysts from both the EU and EaP countries,<sup>46</sup> is demonstrated by the arrangement of the Customs Union Summit on 24 October, right before the Vilnius Summit, instead of initially planned December 2013.<sup>47</sup>



#### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

“The historical record suggests that Russia is only successful in defending its perceived interests when its assessment of an international situation – and threats and opportunities that stem from it – is more similar to than different from that of Western nations.”

48

##### 4.1. For Russia

Concentrated on emotions and rhetoric, Russian politicians and commentators seem to neglect that the EU’s programme of the Eastern Partnership is more **about pragmatism of the European Union** itself and that Brussels’ interest in the region is a fact. Nevertheless, the ‘red-line’ approach acquired by Moscow aiming at protecting its ‘near abroad’ does not leave much room to Brussels for manoeuvre, what is in turn against EU’s ambitions, and in consequence produces frustrations on the both sides. It seems therefore indispensable for Russia to comprehend that such a **‘zero-sum game’ approach is neither economically nor politically sustainable, as it is detrimental to Kremlin’s principles of honour and the containment of *horror vacui***. With different Russian and European narratives it is difficult if not impossible to set up a basis for serious cooperation between Russia and the EU in the ‘common neighbourhood’, be it on complex issues of energy security, coordination of foreign policy or ‘hard security’. So far the approaches exclude and disqualify each other, therefore **a new discourse** between Russia and the EU is needed.<sup>49</sup> Moscow’s more assertive-cum-aggressive, comprehensive-cum-inconsistent ‘reactionary foreign policy strategy’, is not economically and politically sustainable neither for Moscow, nor the EaP, nor the EU.

In order to liberate itself from the *horror vacui* and deliver on its honour, only **reconciliation and cooperation** with the West in the ‘shared neighbourhood’ constitute the solution for Russia. Such a **three-party collaboration** concentrated on economic development would bring Moscow welfare and socio-political stability, too. Nevertheless, it must go together with the efforts of the European side.

##### Main recommendations for Russia:

1. It is indispensable for the development of Russia, Russia-EU relations and the wealth of the ‘common neighbourhood’ that Moscow starts perceiving the EaP as a pragmatic ‘win-win game’, from which it can also benefit.
2. In order to achieve the cooperation, a new discourse based on new Russian and European narratives upon concrete projects is needed. With regards to this, Moscow can expect from its neighbours understanding of its symbolic honour and *horror vacui*.
3. Russia should aim to develop a three-party bargaining (Russia-EU-EaP) on the development of the region.



#### 4.2. For the EU

Moscow's 'reactionary strategy' constitutes both **good and bad news** for Brussels. The good news is that Russia's nervous reaction brings light to the fruits already produced by the Eastern Partnership, be it the AA or DCFTA. This clearly shows the beginnings of political and legal harmonisation and economic integration, based on European values. The bad news is that at the finish of the first phase of the programme, and at the start of filling it with content, the EU's endeavours have been seriously undermined in the result of the resignations from further approximation from the side of Armenia and Ukraine. Therefore, the **intensification of communication** efforts, as well as of **support towards the civil society** (which in Ukraine has turned out to be decisive in protesting against the government decision), from Brussels towards the EaP societies is now all the more important.

This has been already happening. Being aware of a possible 'domino effect', the European leaders spoke up: Jose M. Barroso, President of the European Commission, in his annual "State of the Union" underlined that "[w]e cannot accept any attempts to limit these [Eastern Partnership] countries own sovereign choices";<sup>50</sup> EU Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP Štefan Füle was even more robust in accusing Russia – as seen from Brussels – of intervening into sovereign decisions of the EaP countries in his speech to the Members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 11 September:

“the development of the Eurasian Economic Union project must respect our partners' sovereign decisions. Any threats from Russia linked to the possible signing of agreements with the European Union are unacceptable.”<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the European Parliament on 12 September passed an express "Resolution on the pressure exerted by Russia on Eastern Partnership countries in the context of the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius".<sup>52</sup> These examples show that the EU perceives Kremlin's actions as taken against the sovereignty of the EaP countries, but does not take into consideration Russian rationale behind them: of honour and *horror vacui*. Moreover, against the logic of the 'win-win EaP game', Brussels never **communicated with Moscow** on any possible benefits for the latter.

Therefore, it cannot be ignored that in the decision of both Armenia and Ukraine there is also **fault of the EU** itself. Brussels has been focused on itself (financial and institutional crises, European elections in 2014, enlargement *fatigue*), and concentrated the rest of its efforts on firstly keeping politically unstable Moldova on the European tract, and secondly on energy talks with Azerbaijan. Crucial factors had been neglected: 1) short-term socio-economic benefits, pertinent particularly in case of finding itself on the verge of bankruptcy Ukraine; 2) Russia as a partner to the programme and not its competitor; and 3) security concerns raised by the Nagorno Karabagh conflict, what left room for the Kremlin offensive re-action. Moscow presented itself to Yerevan as the only reliable peace – understood as *status quo* - guarantor in the vulnerable South Caucasus, and to Kiev as the 'unconditional' saviour, able to provide immediate financial relief.

It all proves only that the **EU does not possess necessary capabilities** on its own to cope with challenges outlined above, e.g. to provide the EaP countries with what they find indispensable



for them. Thus the only way is not to leave **Russia** aside, but to **engage** it. The 'near abroad' is for Moscow a case of symbolism and honour, in all the three directions of its 'reactionary strategy'. It is therefore important for the EU and its Member States to **better communicate to Russia** its ideas and plans, and to **involve** the country in common projects of a '**win-win game**', e.g. by offering a three-party negotiation upon a far-sight free trade agreement between the EU and Customs Union 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok', as well as multi-sector support. Such an action should prevent further 'gambling' over Ukraine, and instead foster upgrading the existing free trade deals with the countries of the 'near abroad' within the CIS, which are aiming at the DCFTA with the EU. This way, both Brussels and Moscow, as well as the Eastern Partners would be satisfied.

**Main recommendations for the EU:**

1. In order to prevent the 'domino effect', the EU must intensify communication towards both the EaP and Russian elites and societies, and support the grass root citizens' initiatives;
2. Additionally, the EaP programme needs to re-invent itself: together with its Eastern Partners the EU should come up with a new joint full-range strategy, which will (to a certain extent) involve Moscow, confirm that 'one size does not fit all' and embrace also the security issues;
3. Not having enough of capabilities on its own, the EU must not leave Russia aside, but to communicate with it better and engage it into common projects, e.g. on a far-sight FTA between the EU and Customs Union.

4.3. For the Eastern Partners

Working on **bringing closer** the two main regional actors: the EU and Russia is the only way for the EaP countries which can guarantee success in the form of political stability, security and economic well-being of the region. Building common understanding, trust, and concentrating on multilateral problems and interests, such as energy security, transport, sustainable development and rule of law, while not forgetting about the protection of human rights and the role of civil society, is the function that shall become the main foreign policy priority for the countries of the – however symbolically it is named - 'shared neighbourhood' or 'near abroad'.

**Main recommendation for the Eastern Partners:**

Bringing closer Russia and the EU by building common understanding, trust, and concentrating on multilateral problems, interests and values channelled and tackled via common projects.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> I. Krastev, M. Leonard, A. Wilson, *Introduction*, in: "What does Russia think?", European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2009, p.1.
- <sup>2</sup> O. Ziborov, "To Harmonize International Relations", *International Affairs*, 2007, No. 53: 2. p.13–14.
- <sup>3</sup> See: V. Chizhov, "European Union: A Partnership Strategy", *International Affairs*, 2004, No. 50(6), p.79–87; and: "Russia – EU Cooperation: The Foreign Policy Dimension", *International Affairs*, 2005, No. 51(5), p.134–138.
- <sup>4</sup> A term promoted by Andrey Kozyrev, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs (1990-1996), to denote a special right for the Russian Federation in the post-communist space. Nowadays it is used by media and commentators, but not by official Russian governmental sources.
- <sup>5</sup> V. Glazychev, "The 'Putin Consensus' Explained", in: Krastev, Leonard, Wilson, *op.cit.*11.
- <sup>6</sup> A.P. Tsygankov, "Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin. Honor in International Relations", Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012.
- <sup>7</sup> In its assumption, this paper simplifies both the entities of the 'Russian Federation', 'the European Union' and 'the West', treating them as political monoliths, without considering different political, national, ethnic, social, economic and other sub-divisions. When referring to the 'Russian perspective', these are the Russian political leaders from the presidential office and the government, as well as their advisors and prominent commentators that are taken into account, in the time frame from the beginnings of the ENP (2003/2004) until today.
- <sup>8</sup> S. Lavrov in "EU Expanding its 'Sphere of Influence', Russia Says", *EU Observer*, 21.03.2009.
- <sup>9</sup> M. Czajkowski, "Rosja w Europie. Polityka bezpieczeństwa europejskiego Federacji Rosyjskiej", Dante, Cracow 2003, p.16-19; see also: M. Heller, "Historia Imperium Rosyjskiego", Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 2000; and: S. Bieleń, W. M. Góralski (red.): „Nowa tożsamość Niemiec i Rosji w stosunkach międzynarodowych”, Scholar, Warsaw 1999, p.80. All translations come from the Author.
- <sup>10</sup> Tsygankov, *op.cit.*5.
- <sup>11</sup> V. Putin, "Послание Федеральному Собранию Российской Федерации", 16.05.2003, portal Kremlin.ru.
- <sup>12</sup> See e.g. S. Lavrov "Россия-Евросоюз: перспективы партнерства в меняющемся мире", *Journal of Common Market Studies Annual Review*, 14.08.2013. An exception to the rule is I. Bolgova, see: "Политика России и ЕС на постсоветском пространстве: конкурентное соседство", 17.07.2013, Russian Council.
- <sup>13</sup> A. Okara, "Sovereign Democracy: A New Russian Idea or a PR Project?", *Russia in Global Affairs*, № 2, July - September 2007.
- <sup>14</sup> S. Bieleń, K. Khudolyey (ed.), "Stosunki Rosji z Unią Europejską. Отношения России с Евросоюзом", Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warsaw 2009, p.14-24.
- <sup>15</sup> See e.g.: "Опрос: большинство россиян не ощущают гордости за страну, 11.07.2013, BBC Russia.
- <sup>16</sup> D. Trenin, "Russia's foreign policy: self-affirmation, or a tool for modernization?", 13.05.2008, Open Democracy.
- <sup>17</sup> "an entity that can influence the international power equilibrium. (...) To cultural nationalists, the term 'derzhava' implies the ability to protect the national unity of the state" in: Tsygankov, *op.cit.*185.
- <sup>18</sup> Tsygankov, *op.cit.*5.
- <sup>19</sup> I. Rozhkov, V. Kismierieshkin, "Имидж России. Ресурсы, опыт, приоритеты, Moscow 2008.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>21</sup> "Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации" Утверждена Президентом Российской Федерации В.В.Путиным, Moscow 12.02.2013.
- <sup>22</sup> See e.g.: I.I. Arsenyev, "Россия между востоком и западом: стратегия национальной безопасности", *Vostok-Zapad*, Moscow 2008, p.31.
- <sup>23</sup> I. Bolgova(2013), *op.cit.*3.
- <sup>24</sup> Arsenyev, *op.cit.*32.
- <sup>25</sup> K.C. Gadhziyev, "Геополитические горизонты России (контуры нового миропорядка)", cited in: Arsenyev, *op.cit.*144.
- <sup>26</sup> S. A. Karaganov, I. Y. Yurgens (ed.), "Россия vs Европа. Противостояние или союз", *Rus-Olimp*, 2010, p.48,51&192; see also: Lavrov(2013).
- <sup>27</sup> Karaganov, Yurgens, *op.cit.*47-48.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*,10.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*,21&150-151; see also: Lavrov(2013).
- <sup>30</sup> See e.g. I. Bolgova, "О политическом значении и возможных последствиях программы ЕС 'Восточное партнерство' для СНГ и России", Аналитические записки ИМИ, МГИМО, Moscow, 2009.
- <sup>31</sup> 1.The Common Economic Space, covering economic issues and the environment; 2.The Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice; 3.The Common Space of External Security, including crisis management and non-proliferation; 4.The Common Space of Research and Education, Including cultural aspects.
- <sup>32</sup> R. Rozoff, "Eastern Partnership: The West's Final Assault On the Former Soviet Union", 13.02.2009, Centre for Research on Globalisation CRG, Montreal, Canada.
- <sup>33</sup> Cited in: S. Costea, "The profound causes of Russia's hostility towards the Eastern Partnership", 25.04.2010, World Security Network.
- <sup>34</sup> Cited in: W.C. Fuller Jr, "Strategy and Power in Russia 1600-1914", New York, 1992, p.270.



- <sup>35</sup> "Вступление в ЗСТ с ЕС несовместимо с членством в ТС, Украина должна сделать выбор – Медведев, 09.09.2013, Korrespondent.
- <sup>36</sup> European experts suggest that in a short-term after entry into force of the DCFTA, the Ukrainian economy will indispensible suffer, because of Ukrainian worse competitiveness and effectiveness, but in a long term it will bring the desired effects and benefits, see: I. Wiśniewska, "Integracja euroazjatycka. Rosyjska próba ekonomicznego scalenia obszaru poradzieckiego", Prace OSW nr 44, July 2013, p.32-33, Centre for Eastern Studies.; and "Ukraine's trade policy choice: pros and cons of different regional integration options", Analytical Report, Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting, Kiev, December 2011.
- <sup>37</sup> For more evidences of Russian action see: A. Wierzbowska-Miazga, "Rosyjska ofensywa przed wileńskim szczytem Partnerstwa Wschodniego", Komenatrze OSW, 01.10.2013, Centre for Eastern Studies.
- <sup>38</sup> "Rosja przeciwdziała zblizeniu Ukrainy z Unią Europejską", Tydzien na Wschodzie OSW, 28.08.2013, Centre for Eastern Studies.
- <sup>39</sup> "Russia bans Moldovan wine ahead of EU summit", 11.09.2013, EU Observer.
- <sup>40</sup> A. Sarna, "Rosyjski rabat gazowy dla Ukrainy w interesie Gazpromu", Tydzien na Wschodzie OSW, 09.10.2013, Centre for Eastern Studies.
- <sup>41</sup> Karaganov, Yurgens, op.cit.7-8.
- <sup>42</sup> Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- <sup>43</sup> "Концепция внешней политики..." op.cit. footnote 21.
- <sup>44</sup> Lavrov(2013).
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>46</sup> See e.g. O. Schumylo-Tapiopla "The Eurasian Customs Union: Friend or Foe of the EU?", Carnegie Paper 03.10.2012, Carnegie Endowment for Democracy.
- <sup>47</sup> A. Wierzbowska-Miazga, "The Customs Union summit: crisis instead of success". EastWeek, OSW, 30.10.2013, Centre for Eastern Studies.
- <sup>48</sup> Tsygankov, op.cit.49.
- <sup>49</sup> Thus the recommendations of the report "Eastern Partnership and a new impulse for Russia-EU relations" prepared by Polish-Russian group of experts on the margins of creation the Polish-Russia Centre of Dialogue and Understanding, calling for harmonisation of European and Russian legislation by implementation by Moscow of the *acquis aommunautaire*, sounds very doubtful and naïve; available at: [http://www.newprospects.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=10](http://www.newprospects.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=10).
- <sup>50</sup> J. M. Barosso, "State of the Union address 2013", 11.09.2013, European Parliament, Strasbourg.
- <sup>51</sup> Š. Füle, "Statement on the pressure exercised by Russia on countries of the Eastern Partnership", 11.09.2013, European Parliament, Strasbourg.
- <sup>52</sup> "European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2013 on the pressure exerted by Russia on Eastern Partnership countries (in the context of the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius)", 2013/2826(RSP), 12.09.2013.

