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Title: "Contesting the European Normative Project: Russia as a Norm-Taker, Norm-Breaker, Norm-Faker or Norm-Maker?"

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Abstract

The emergence and re-emergence of non-democratic powers in the international sphere, the growing instability of post-Cold War unipolarity, as well as the particularistic challenge to Western liberal-democratic universalism create increasingly visible tensions in the relations between "Western" and "non-Western" powers. Russia's critical positioning against EU's "Normative power" could be seen as one of the numerous phenomena in a wider context of growing resistance against Western liberal-democratic universalism. But what is the meaning of Russia's "normative offensive": is it a manifestation of the so-called "authoritarian backlash" against European democracy promotion, an identity-construction practice of "othering", an anti-hegemonic discourse "Russian-style", or "soft balancing" within the general logic of "neo-revisionism"? The paper offers a review of the main theoretical approaches to Russia-EU relations and argues that interpretation is largely a matter of analytical perspective. The aim is to propose an analytical framework that could account for instability and change within and between discursive practices and political behavior, thus blurring the counter-productive conceptual dichotomization of norms and values on the one side, and interests – on the other.

Key-words: Russia-EU Relations, Eastern Neighborhood, Normative Power Europe, International Relations Theories, Analytical Eclecticism

1. Introduction

The conflictual situation developing within the existing world order is multi-faceted and evolves at different levels and in different, albeit highly interconnected, spheres: on the one hand, there is the material dimension which relates to the global power shift and the emergence of "old/new" spheres of interest/influence; on the other hand, there is the non-material normative dimension which concerns the growing contestation of the liberal-democratic system's "self-evidence and automatic legitimacy" (Žižek, 2011). Behavioral and rhetorical patterns rising powers demonstrate in their normative and material competition with Western powers, as well as the future of global order and specifically the impact of alternative models promoted by rising powers on its normative set-up remains a widely contested, but still underdeveloped, field of research. New and old concepts, such as great power conflict (Mearsheimer, 2003), great power concert (Ikenberry, 2011) and great power management[1] (Astrov, 2011) are being proposed as future alternatives to the current unipolar moment. Various studies under a broader analytical umbrella of "soft power balancing" have tried to conceptualize the new phenomenon of normative balancing as opposed to traditional power balancing on a regional level (e.g. in Central Asia and Eastern Europe)[2]. However, as Schweller (2011) notes, the complexity of the new order and its conflict potential is hidden in the failure to accommodate rising powers and their claims for recognition as equal norm-setters. This strategic failure is closely connected to the so-called "intellectual failure" (Sakwa, 2008a: 261), i.e. the inability to explain the highly volatile behavioral patterns of rising powers and their normative positioning against the hegemonic West due to the "perceived illegitimacy of their claims in the light of the dominant democratic-capitalist model" (Ibid.).

Russia's critical, and at times revisionist, positioning against EU's normative power[3], or Normative Power EU (NPE), – the so-called "value gap"[4], "normative offensive"[5] "or "clash

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[1] Originally developed by Bull (1977), the analytical concept is being ever more widely applied for the study of Russia's future strategic foreign policy choices (e.g.: Astrov, 2011, Makarychev&Morozov, 2011)

[2] For the analysis of Russia's and China's "soft power balancing" against the US in Central Asia see e.g.: Turner (2009), Furguson (2011); for the analysis of soft power rivalry between Russia and the EU see: Wilson &Popescu (2009); on the normative dimension of Russia-EU competition see: Makarychev (2008).

[3] "Normative power" will be understood as a power which is able to shape the conceptions of the "normal"[3] (Diez, 2005: 615). There have been heated debates about the nature of Normative Power Europe (NPE), which this project does not aim at touching upon. The definition proposed by Diez is adopted due to its flexibility and wide applicability.

[4] The term "value gap" has been coined by researchers working in the area of Russia-EU relations (Ortmann, 2010:16). The notion, however, is gaining ever broader application as an analytical concept in the study of Russia's normative alienation from and rivalry with Europe and the West.

[5] Makarychev (2009: 148) has stressed that Russia "seems to be ready to offer an alternative reading of the set of norms constructive of the European Union" which has been demonstrated e.g. by the creation of the Institute for Development and Cooperation as a response to the European normative challenges. The author conceptualizes the phenomenon as "Russia's normative offensive", but notes that it is being sustained by the understanding that democratic credentials are an important condition to gain political subjectivity in the international society.

of norms"[6], – could be viewed as one of the numerous phenomena within a wider context of resistance against Western liberal-democratic universalism demonstrated through the emergence and assertion of alternative understandings of world order and governance and through the attempted promotion of alternative normative agendas. The Russia-EU ideational rivalry in the shared neighborhood[7] may serve as an example of shifting regional balance, not only in terms of material capabilities, but also in terms of normative appeal. Recent studies have, however, confirmed that there is no consistency in Russia's normative positioning (Makarychev, 2011), and there is also no clear answer to the question of which mode of action/reaction is activated under which conditions (external and internal) and what the corresponding logic of competitive political behavior is. Moreover, it has become a dogma of sorts to view Russia's foreign policy as largely reactive and thus depending on the West (Cf: Trenin, 2012; Sakwa, 2008a).

The dissertation project, upon which this paper is based, aims to explore the question of **how Russia reacts (rhetorically and practically) to the normative challenge of the EU in its direct environment and perceived sphere of influence, how these reactional patterns have been changing over time, and why**. With a specific focus on Russia's contestation of EU's normative project and its attempts at presenting a "normative alternative" in the common neighborhood[8] the dissertation project proposes an eclectic multi-method study of the ways a rising power develops and presents its norm-setting claim against "the West", of the various stances it adopts in relation to the contested order and of the factors contributing to the volatile behavior in the process. The aim of the paper at hand is to provide a review of the main positions on the Russia-EU normative rivalry in the neighborhood offered within different theoretical traditions and to sketch an eclectic theoretical and research framework which could potentially move away from a paradigm-driven research agenda and lay foundations for a holistic explanation. The paper proceeds as follows: after the discussion of the current state of research, the outstanding research gaps will be identified and the substantive and analytical puzzles will be conceptualized. Taking into consideration the limitations of strictly paradigm-driven approaches, the paper will further discuss the possibility of breaching meta-theoretical gaps by applying analytical eclecticism. The final

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[6] "At the heart of the current crisis is […] the clash between the post-modern state embodied by the EU and the modern state embodied by Russia. […] In short, the clash between Russia and the EU is ideological in nature. What is at stake is the future of the European order. For the post-modern state sovereignty is "a seat at the table". For Russia sovereignty is the right of the government to do what it wants on its territory…" (Krastev, 2009).

[7] Cf.: Delcour (2008) suggests that Russia is confronting the EU with a critique of the former's coherence, consistency, capacities and influence; Haukkala (2008) talks about Russia's challenge to EU's normative power in the neighborhood.

[8] The Post-Soviet space (specifically, Eastern Europe) is commonly interpreted as a "grey zone" comprised of the "lands in-between" an expanding Europe and a resurgent Russia (Stent, 2007:20), a "sphere of "competing near abroads" (Sakwa, 2008a: 265), a contested neighborhood, etc.

part will briefly outline a research framework, which may be suited for a complex multi-method study the of various mechanisms influencing the dynamic of Russia's reactional (rhetorical and behavioral) patterns in the process of normative competition with the EU

2. State of the Art: Competing Explanations and the Unclear Subject

Despite the fact that various studies have been looking into the problematic of Russia-EU normative rivalry, Russia's discursive relativation of the European model and political resistance against its normative expansion, as well as into the different aspects of Russia-EU competition for "hearts and minds" in the shared neighborhood, there are important questions that remain unanswered, yet the answers to which are crucial for the understanding of the future regional order and its normative set-up. The literature review section will provide a brief systematization of explanations for the complex phenomenon offered by four respective theoretical approaches: liberal, constructivist, post-structuralist and realist.

The Liberal Approach (Democratic Peace Theory): "Authoritarian Backlash" and Resistance to Western Democracy Promotion

Studies conducted in a (neo-) liberal key link Russia's assertive foreign policy and the increased tensions in its relationship with the West (US and EU) to Russia's gradual, but steady turn away from the democratic model towards an authoritarian political regime. McFaul and Spector (2010: 117) argue that a "subtle ideological dimension" has re-emerged in Russia's foreign policy, which demonstrates itself through the promotion of a "managed democracy" or "sovereign democracy" model *at home and abroad*. Ambrosio (2009) argues that the Russian sovereign democracy project has been designed as a response to external pressures and materialized into "an alternative political program which would discredit democracy promotion and […] reinforce legitimacy of the regime in power". Carothers (2010) sees Russia's ideational conflict with the West in a wider context of an "international backlash against democracy" on the part of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes. The emergence or re-emergence (as in the case of Russia) of non-democratic states as great powers has given ground to debates about autocracy promotion as a counter-strategy to Western democracy promotion (Ambrosio, 2009; Burnell, 2010a). However, Burnell (2010b) warns against exaggerated generalizations and dichotomization of democracy and autocracy promotion policies, first of all, because such policies are not easily comparable on the scale of actors, interests and employed instruments ("it is a bit like trying to compare chalk and cheese" (Ibid: 12), but also because of the absence of a generally shared teleological

component in autocracy promotion. Exactly the lacking or fuzzy answers to the question of why autocratic regimes would want to support the establishment of similar political rule in other countries signals the need for a case-to-case approach which can potentially explain motivations and interests of specific countries in their policies of de-stabilizing democracies and promoting autocratic regimes.

More focused liberal or "transitionalist" studies of Russia-EU relations see the failure or slow progress of liberal reforms in Russia as the key cause for political conflict between Russia and the European Union (Trenin, 2004; Shevtsova, 2010). At the same time the authoritarian regime and Russia's assertive foreign policy are seen as an obstacle and a direct challenge to Western and EU's democratization practices in the Eastern neighborhood (Stent, 2007; Klitsounova, 2009). Ambrosio (2009) in his extensive work on Russia's resistance to democratization in the states of the former Soviet Union provides a detailed description of moves Russia has employed or attempted to employ in order to undermine or sabotage Western democracy promotion strategies and to destabilize newly established democratic orders along its borders. The researcher provides insightful answers to the question of "how", but not merely as many deep accounts in regard to the "whys". In conclusion the author acknowledges that the theoretical understanding of autocracy promotion within the liberal paradigm is constrained by multiple limitations, e.g. by the problem of categorization and by the fact that political and security factors are deeply interconnected and cannot be easily separated analytically (Ibid: 202). More specifically, the question is whether democracy promotion becomes a target of autocratic regimes because of the supposed threat towards the stability of one's own regime or because of more structural (in a realist sense), i.e. security considerations. In regard to this issue, liberal studies are being criticized for their relatively limited scope and teleological view of internal political development, which greatly reduce their explanatory and theorizing power. Prozorov (2006: 16) attacks the transitionalist approach as it "not merely attempts to explain the occurrence of conflictual dispositions but is directly complicit in their contribution". From the author's point of view, delegitimation of regimes that do not comply with the liberal-democratic standard leads to marginalization of peripheral (in terms of democratic development) states and thus makes conflict not only a "theoretical possibility", but rather a matter of "political necessity" (Ibid).

Constructivism: "Self/Other" Discrepancies

Unlike traditional liberal approaches liberal (conventional) constructivism attempts to look at the broader picture and include issues of cultural and historical identity in the analysis, but

bears the similar mark of universalistic liberal-democratic teleology characteristic of liberal theories and eventually presents a pessimistic picture of the possible future development of political communication between Russia and the EU. While acknowledging the inherent societal and ideational differences which have historically existed between Russia and Europe, Neumann (2008: 148) stresses that in a world of a liberal standard Russia will never get recognition as a great power from the leading European powers – the recognition, which Russia, according to the constructivist logic, strives so hard to achieve and the absence of which ultimately leads to the practices of "othering", rhetorical manifestations of a "special path" and further distancing from the West and Europe (Tsygankov, 2009; Makarychev, 2009). Such accounts present a vicious circle of reasoning from inherent conflict to conflict inevitability. In the specific case of Russia-EU relations, as Prozorov (2006:18) argues, the presumed incompatibility of subject positions of the actors becomes "a matter of conceptual premise" rather than an empirically derived (much less verified) conclusion. Critical constructivist accounts of foreign policy stress the role of cultural and historical practices as well as Self/Other mechanisms of identity construction in order to explain the ideational tensions between Russia and Europe. Studies that have looked at Russia-EU relations through the prism of the constructivist approach have confirmed that, first, the national identity discourse and the foreign policy debate in Russia are intertwined and are mutually influencing each other (Groys, 1992; Neumann, 1996; Hopf, 1999; Kassianova, 2001; Lo, 2002; Tsygankov, 2009; Thorun, 2009; Clunan, 2009); second, that Europe has been used as a referent point in the Russian quest for self-identification, both nationally and internationally, performing the role of the significant other in the socialization of norms and values (Baranovsky 2000; Tsygankov 2009; Heller, 2010); and third, that the referent role of the West, and also Europe has been becoming increasingly negative in the Russian discourse (Krastev, 2007; Makarychev, 2008; Medvedev, 2008; Simao, 2011), which according to the constructivist logic explains Russia's non-cooperative behavior (Tsygankov, 2010).

Post-Structuralism: "Anti-Hegemonic Discourse, Russian-Style"

An altogether different focus in explaining the normative conflict between Russia and the EU is offered by studies that have tried to move away from traditional interpretations of policies within the theoretical frameworks of dominant IR paradigms. Using the discourse theory of Laclau and MouffeMorozov (2009) assesses the relations between Russia and the West (specifically Europe) through the prism of the post-structuralist approach. The author analyzes Russia's foreign policy discourse as a means of delimitating the borders of the political

community, within which meanings and understandings are created. The author refers to texts from the representatives of the ruling elite (the president, the prime-minister and the ministries), since he takes the positions of these subjects as *a priori* representative of the hegemonic articulations which define the cognitive content within a given social reality. The conflict is thus represented as a result of Russia's discursive practice of "othering" in the process of constructing a distinct national identity. Constituting antagonism is seen as a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of a political community; and Russia's ideational challenge to the West is interpreted as a sign of resistance against the global hegemon and its universalistic democratization project. At the same time Morozov points out to the ambiguous role of Europe in Russia's anti-hegemonic discourse. On the one hand, there is a clear connection between the signifiers of "Russia" and "Europe", which means that actual political articulations attempt to prevent by all means the exclusion of Russia from Europe (Morozov, 2009: 574); but on the other hand, European critique towards Russia, especially on the question of democracy and human rights, leads to articulation practices which attempt to fill the above-mentioned signifiers with a different (Russia-specific) meaning. More importantly, Morozov points out to the crucial contradiction between Russia's anti-hegemonic articulation practices and actual foreign and internal policy practices, which undermine the validity of foreign policy rhetoric and turn it into "banal populist antagonism" (2009: 570).

Realism: "Neo-Revisionism and Soft Balancing"

For some realist-inspired researchers the crisis in Russia-EU relations stems from a clash of economic and political interests, born out of the energy-related asymmetric interdependency trap, which boils down to EU's energy dependence on Russia (Hughes, 2006; Leonard &Popescu, 2007). From a more general perspective the rise of Russia has been viewed as a natural process of restructuring the unipolar system into a new multipolar one, since in structural terms the power of the United States could not remain unbalanced for long. Mearsheimer (2003) and Waltz (2000) predicted that Russia would challenge the global power of the US and strive for a regional hegemonic position in Europe once it has recovered economically. Here normative considerations do not play any significant role. Rather normative criticism is seen as an attempt at moral justification of assertive power politics in Morgenthau's (1967) terms and as one of the tools of promoting interests via soft power. Walt (2009) argues that medium powers tend to pursue a strategy of soft balancing in the situation of unipolarity. Classical and structural realist studies of Russia's behavior in the region have also met a certain deal of criticism, both from outside and from within the realist camp.

Sakwa (2008: 245), e.g., argues that Russia's ambiguous policies in Eurasia can be defined neither in balancing, nor in bandwagoning terms, while Neumann (2008) criticizes realists for their disregard of ideational and discursive factors, which in his opinion, are crucial drivers of Russia's foreign policy thinking and policies. The realist approach to post-Soviet area studies has lost a certain deal of its credibility after the failure to predict the end of the bipolar system and to propose a plausible analytical framework for the study of inter-state relations in a post-bipolar world. The limitations of neo-realism, which prioritizes structural issues at the expense of internal factors and local conditions, has provoked an internal debate within the realist paradigm, which resulted in the acceptance of the need to acknowledge the domestic level as an "intervening variable" into the analysis of foreign policy (Schweller, 2004: 164). Neo-classical realism apart from analyzing structural factors proposes to open the "black box" of the state and accommodate endogenous factors as filters between systemic pressures and the resulting foreign policy choices. From a neo-classical realist perspective Russia's critical rhetoric and return to assertive foreign policy is a sign of the adoption of a neo-revisionist (that of a dissatisfied power) agenda which is reflected in its behavior. Sakwa (2010: 9) conceptualizes Russia's neo-revisionism as "mimetic imperialism",

> "where the form of external ambition is preserved above all as a system-shaping power accompanied by the demand for recognition of status and respect, but where these ambitions are derived by the desire to emulate the most successful of the existing powers rather than to achieve a fundamental reordering of the system in its entirety."

Thus, renouncing the neo-liberal predictions of a new systemic conflict between democracies and autocracies R. Sakwa (2008: 251-252) stresses that there are "no fundamental ideological contradictions, direct conflicts over resources or major differences on strategic issues" between Russia and the West; Russia does not wish to set itself up as an alternative to the West, but is more concerned with preserving a status-quo in power politics terms. The revisionist stance does not result from dissatisfaction with the existing balance of power, but rather from the lack of acknowledgement of Russia's great power status by the West and from the inability of the international system to accommodate rising powers. Gomart (2010) argues that the assertive stance Russia has taken towards Europe following its economic and political recovery has signaled a return to the balancing paradigm. At the same time the anticipated marginalization of Europe in Russia's eyes encourages a more assertive stance. This observation links Russia's policies to the domestic perceptions of the European Union.

1. Substantive and Analytical Problems

The brief literature review reveals a set of problems which remain in the existing research on Russia-EU normative rivalry in the neighborhood. The puzzle that the study aims to address consists of two components: an empirical (substantive) and an analytical one[9]. At the heart of the **empirical (substantive) problem** lies Russia's ambiguous and contradictory use of foreign policy rhetoric, on the one hand, and foreign policy tools, on the other, in what concerns normative issues in the relations with the EU and neighboring countries. These ambiguities demonstrate themselves not only in discrepancies along rhetorical-behavioral lines, but also in the observed inconsistencies within normative positioning and political practice, respectively.

In regard to the latter, i.e. inconsistency *within* normative manifestations, it has been noticed, that the so-called "normative offensive" is not a stable phenomenon – offensive stances alternate with defensive stances in what appears to be an arbitrary manner; e.g. Russia's use of pro-democracy rhetoric in the environment has been selective – depending on the addressees, i.e. receivers of the critical messages (Makarychev, 2011: 3-4)[10]. Another problem, which demonstrates itself in Russia's ambiguous attitudes towards Europe, has been summarized by Morozov (2009: 574): "despite the demonstrative move away from the West, Russian identity discourse remains focused on Europe and European values". Moreover there is an ambiguous attitude towards the principle of "democracy" (Ibid.: 575): on the one hand, Russia's active involvement in the process of contestation of its conceptual meaning shows explicit dissatisfaction with being seen as "an object of civilizing influences"[11]; on the other hand, however, the acknowledgement of the central role of the concept itself signals an adherence to the rules of the global "hegemonic" game. As regard to Russia's new-found rigor in exploring the potential of its "soft power" (Tsygankov, 2006), it has also been noted that the attempt at normative power operationalization is unstable and controversial, since it in itself is a "learning process" (Makarychev, 2011: 3).

What concerns the former, Russia has, on the one hand, rhetorically confirmed its readiness to participate in a "global competition" of "values and development models" (cf.: Lavrov, 2008;

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[9] The distinction of problems draws from Sil&Katzenstein (2010a: 418-419). Substantive problems are understood as relating to the "issues that exist apart from academic discourse and that constitute practical dilemmas facing social and political actors" (SIl, Katzenstein, 2010a: 418), whereas analytic problems "are posed in such a way as to reflect the ontologies, epistemic principles, and theoretical vocabularies embraced by adherents of a given research tradition" (Ibid.).

[10] The author describes the discrepancies in the selective use of democratic criticism applied to "countries with explicit pro-Western orientations" and "less Westernized countries" (Makarychev, 2011: 3).

[11] By 2004 Russian officials started stressing that Russia would not participate in European affairs as an "object of civilizing influences", but as an equal among equals (Chizhov, 2004 cited in Allison, et. al., 2006: 166).

Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2008), but on the other - the general impression shared by foreign (Dembinsky, et. al., 2008: 8) and Russian (Bordachev, 2007; Makarychev, 2009; Bratersky, 2009) researchers alike is that the actual foreign policy, despite the proclaimed goals, has remained pragmatic, non- or anti-ideological (Trenin, 2012), "conservative, reactive and pro-status-quo" (Bratersky, 2009: 10). The contradictions in normative and behavioral positioning have been observed to signal themselves most vividly in the relationships within the Russia-EU-Neighborhood triangle. Torbakov (2011: 1) conceptualizes the phenomenon as "the attraction-assertion dilemma": "being unable to integrate its neighbors, Russia seeks to aggressively assert itself and its interests. But Moscow's increasingly muscular policies seem to contradict Russia's stated intentions to attract allies and cast itself as an appealing socio-economic model." Preliminary empirical research done by the author has shown that a gradual increase in references to normative categories, such as democracy, human rights, international law, global peace, cooperation, openness and transparency has been a characteristic feature of Russia's state rhetoric throughout 2002 – 2008. However, the aggressive stance Russia has taken in the wake of color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, the denial to participate in the European Neighborhood Policy, the use of the energy tool as a pressure instrument in the recurring gas scandals with Ukraine and Belarus, and finally the armed conflict in Georgia – all these political acts have been perceived as contradicting to the official normative positioning[12].

The disconnects in rhetorical normative positioning and foreign policy behavior have been empirically observed by a number of previously conducted studies, but even if these studies have pointed out to the discrepancies in political rhetoric and practice (E.g.: Morozov, 2008; Torbakov, 2011) they have not attempted at providing any causal explanations to the phenomenon. Thus, the **analytical problem** is closely connected to the empirical one. It stems from the lack of detailed analysis of the instabilities in foreign policy rhetoric and political practice in the normative sphere, and from the lack of an eclectic, as opposed to paradigm-driven, approach which could allow for systematic examination of various factors shaping this instability. More importantly, there is a lack of an analytical model which could explain the interchanging convergences and divergences within and between the state's normative positioning and foreign policy behavior. The table below provides a rather crude systematization of the most widely pronounced arguments on conceptualizing the phenomenon of Russia's turn away from the West, its reasons and the character of resulting

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[12] Statements based on the author's empirical findings retrieved by means of content-analyzing Annual Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly of Russian Federation and the Foreign Policy Concepts of Russian Federation. More detailed information available on request (bakalova@hsfk.de).

policies, proposed by various analytical traditions. Despite the fact that this division is rather rough, it nevertheless shows that explanations of one and the same phenomenon offered *between and within* different theoretical approaches can stand in diametrical opposition to each other.

Table 1. Analytical Perspectives on Russia-EU Normative Competition: A Systematized Representation of Claims

Approaches	What? - Characterization	Why? – Rationale	Foreign policy logic	Predicted policy outcomes
(Neo-)Liberal studies E.g.: McFaul and Spector, 2010; Ambrosio, 2009; Stent, 2008.	Rhetorical legitimation of the authoritarian political regime.	Prevent domestic political overthrow; Counter Western attempts at supporting unfriendly and unstable regimes in the neighborhood.	Defensive (Stent)/Offensive (McFaul)	Re-active (Stent)/Pro-active (Ambrosio)
(Classical) Realist studies E.g.: Mankoff, 2009.	Justification of expansionist (neo-imperial) economic and political interests.	Secure profitable commodities contracts; Secure military presence.	Offensive	Pro-active
Neo-classical Realism Cf.: Gomart, 2010; Sakwa, 2008; 2010.	"Neo-revisionism" (Sakwa, 2010)[13].	Move from the periphery to the core of the international system, but without revising the existing world order; Preserve a balancing act.	Defensive	Re-active
Constructivist studies E.g.: Neumann, 1996; Hopf, 1999; Clunan, 2009; Thorun, 2009; Tsygankov, 2008.	Discursive practices of "Othering".	Constructing an image of the Self; Self's acceptance by the significant other; Struggle for recognition.	Constitutive	Re-active (depending on the acknowledgement or non-acknowledgement of the Other)
Poststructuralist research E.g.: Morozov, 2009	Counter-hegemonic discourse.	Establishing the borders of the political community.	Constitutive	Unknown

The studies conducted so far have been primarily prioritizing specific factors – be it identity (Neumann, 1996; Hopf, 1999; Tsygankov, 2009; Morozov, 2008, Clunan, 2009; Thorun, 2009), regime type (McFaul & Spector, 2010; Ambrosio, 2009; Stent, 2008), material capabilities and resources or structural pressures (Sakwa, 2008; Gomart, 2009), – which has prevented a systematic examination of various factors and their causal effects, both on normative positioning and political action, as well as their synergy. At the same time, the

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[13] According to Sakwa, the difference between revisionism and neo-revisionism lies in the motivation of the actors: neo-revisionist powers "do not seek to challenge the existing world order, but only the place accorded to them in that order" (Sakwa, 2010: 8). Specifically on Russia he notes elsewhere: "Russia remains committed to joining the existing system by and large as it now exists, although the mere fact of its membership as an active and equal participant entails a revision of the existing order" (Sakwa, 2008: 251).

interplay between normative stances and policies has not been thoroughly studied so far due to the exclusive concentration on either the discursive or material sphere. Moreover, a significant flaw of previously conducted studies is their focus on the static state of events as opposed to dynamism. At the heart of the problem lies the challenged constructivist assumption that identities inform interests, which in turn inform political action. The co-constitutive nature of interest and identities makes it extremely hard to separate one from the other and trace the causal mechanisms of their interplay in applied research, even if empirical evidence suggests that there is discontinuity. Or if, as in the case of Russia's foreign policy, this link is instable and the relationship is sometimes contradictory. On the other hand, the realist approach, which argues that rhetorical games, rhetorical critique of normativity and normative positioning should be viewed as classical weapons in the arsenal of realist foreign policy, cautions us that norm-driven policies may be interpreted as power politics "dressed in the clothes of political morality" (Barkin, 2010), but bears certain methodological and ontological constraints, which limit the study of ideational conflicts to the acknowledgement of their mere instrumental or structural nature. Lately researchers have been calling for the abolition of the norms/interests dichotomy as counterproductive and complicit in the production of more conceptual problems than it is able to solve (Diez: 2011). Since norms and interests are ontological categories that cannot be easily separated (Cf. Manners, 2011 in Diez, 2011), Diez (2011: 5) goes as far as arguing that "norms inform interests and interests inform norms". Therefore an eclectic analytical approach combined with methodological pluralism could prove effective in solving the puzzles by looking at the picture in dynamic and weighing factors proposed by different theoretical schools against each other in this dynamic picture.

4. Theoretical Background: The Promise and Constraints of Analytical Eclecticism

The above-mentioned limitations of strictly paradigm-driven approaches to the study of Russia's inconsistent foreign policy rhetoric and foreign policy behavior towards Europe signal the need for new explanatory approaches. The growing literature that criticizes the paradigmatic divide in the IR discipline has in the recent years been stressing the possibility and the desirability of an eclectic view (Sterling-Folker, 2002; Barkin, 2003; Barkin, 2010). Peter Katzenstein and Rudra Sil have become "the most prominent exponents of 'analytical eclecticism', advocating a problem-driven approach to research, in which the pursuit of understanding leads scholars to 'mix and match' methods and insights" from research traditions seen as incompatible within the traditional paradigm-dominated scheme (Reus-

Smit, 2011: 1). Sil, Katzenstein (2010b: 10) provide the following definition for eclectic research:

> "We define as eclectic any approach that seeks to extricate, translate and selectively integrate analytic elements – concepts, logics, mechanisms, and interpretations – of theories or narratives that have been developed within separate paradigms but that address related aspects of substantive problems that have both scholarly and practical significance."

Analytical eclecticism presented and advocated by Sil and Katzenstein (2010a: 412) possesses three characteristics, which distinguish it from paradigm-driven research: 1) the pragmatist foundation manifested in the search for middle-range explanations, which apply for specific phenomena, but do not offer a general model of universal theory; 2) attention to wide-scope problems in the attempt at incorporating the complexity and messiness of real-world situations, in contrast to narrowly formulated research-puzzles designed to fill research gaps within certain traditions: 3) generation of complex causal stories with the ambition of capturing interactions among different types of causal mechanisms normally analyzed separately by different research traditions. Thus, analytical eclecticism "explores how diverse mechanisms posited in competing paradigm-bound theories might interact with each other, and how, under certain conditions, they can combine to affect outcomes that interest both scholars and practitioners" (Sil, Katzenstein, 2010b: 10). Katzenstein and Sil (2010a: 16-18) also define what eclecticism is not, namely - it is not unifying (theoretical) synthesis[14] and it is not multi-method research or triangulation[15].

Reus-Smit (2011:2) sees eclecticism as a "scholarly stance: an attitude towards knowledge and inquiry, and a set of attendant investigative, argumentative and communicative practices", but criticizes the eclecticist project for its largely empirical nature and underlying, although unstated, metatheoretical commitments. His critical comment touches upon an important difficulty of "bracketing metatheoretical inquiry" and the concern relates to the "stuff we carry with us", or a distinct ontological framework that eclecticism remains bound to despite the pronounced ambition of shunning away from explicit paradigm-driven inquiry. The eclecticist ontological framework is the "one that connects materiality, rationality and

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[14] Theoretical synthesis requires a "marked departure from the core ontological and epistemological assumptions associated with contending research traditions, followed by a convergence upon a new set of foundational assumptions that will bound and guide research on all kinds of substantive issues and problems" (Sil, Katzenstein, 2010b: 17).

[15] Sil and Katzenstein argue that analytical eclecticism benefits from the application of multi-method research design, but is not limited to it: "the combinatorial logic of analytic eclecticism depends not on the multiplicity of methods but on the multiplicity of connections between different mechanisms and logics normally analyzed in isolation in separate research traditions" (Ibid: 18).

intersubjectivity in a distinct way" (Reus-Smit, 2011: 14), but this in the author's view is not a drawback, but rather a promise. He stresses that the major paradigms that Katzenstein and Sil refer to in their work (realism, liberalism and constructivism) privilege one of the factors – power, security, utility maximization, or recognition – as founding stones for theory-building; however, "these imperatives are deeply interconnected" (Ibid.). Thus, the study of these interconnections is a field where eclecticism could greatly benefit both theoretical and empirical enquiry. This project aims at addressing the intricate interconnections between the discursive and the material spheres by empirically studying the divergences and convergences in rhetorical normative manifestations and foreign policy practice, as well as the various factors contributing to unstable outcomes.

It has already become an academic tradition of sorts to view Russian foreign policy in the light of ideational factors and identity issues, which is apparent in the dominance of constructivist- and liberal-inspired research with a surprising underrepresentation of realist studies. Statements have been made that there is "an almost universal consensus amongst IR theorists, foreign policy analysts, and area studies specialists that identity and ideational factors are key determinants for any understanding of contemporary Russia's foreign policy" (Shearman, 2001). On this account Sakwa notes, that "one does not have to be a full-blooded constructivist to argue that the shaping of foreign policy is to a large degree determined by the way that a country defines itself and its place in the world" (Sakwa, 2008: 365). At the same time, Russia's official establishment regularly announces its adherence to realism and pragmatism in foreign policy conduct while the actual behavior stays ambiguous and appears disoriented – a fact, which is often dismissed as a consequence of non-established and conflicted identity. Recent discussions within the constructivist circles of Post-Soviet studies have shown that the building block of constructivist explanations – the concept of identity itself – is being increasingly challenged. It has been claimed, that despite its ambiguity and vagueness acknowledged even within sociological studies where it has its roots (Cf.: Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), the concept is being taken for granted as unproblematic and commonsensical in IR (Ortmann, 2010). The true test for constructivism, however, is the study of how political rhetoric translates into political practice and vice versa. This study will shun away from positivist views on the causes and effects of ideational and identitary structures, but will look at the connections and disconnections between the ideational and the material domains in an attempt at revealing the complex and various causes of observed consistencies and inconsistencies.

5. The Analytical Framework: A Preliminary Sketch

It has been recently argued that rising powers, which attempt at becoming agents of normative contestation, "*are conflictual states with multiple identities, variously adopting roles […], depending on the particular issue and the targeted audience*" (Schweller, 2011: 287). This view, eclectic in itself, offers a useful lens for looking at individual emerging powers, their specific normative claims and their competitive political behavior. More significantly, this perspective allows looking at consistencies and inconsistencies, interpreting change as a general rule and not as non-systematic and unexpected deviation (as it is seen within traditional positivist approaches). This study sets forth to address these controversies and to look at the specific factors that have contributed to the divergence or convergence of rhetorical-practical dynamics across time in order to build a complex explanation of Russia's reactive patterns towards the European normative project.

Since the study is concerned with the Russia-EU normative rivalry and the resulting competition for influence, the geographical space will be limited to the immediate geo-strategic environment shared by Russia and the European Union. Russia's activities in the countries of the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) therefore are of direct relevance to the study, since the European Union has committed to promote democracy and good governance in these countries – which is perceived as a challenge to Russia's influence aspirations. The selection of issues, or central themes within the Russia-EU normative rivalry, may preliminarily be tied to the (rather broadly defined) issues highlighted in the Copenhagen Criteria for EU accession. These criteria are roughly divided into political, economic and legislative, but for this study the so-called "political criteria" ("stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and respect for and protection of minority rights"[16]) are of major interest. Further selection will be based on information availability and sufficiency. The time period under investigation is 2000 – 2012 covering the two consecutive presidential terms of Vladimir Putin and the presidential term of Dmitry Medvedev. This will allow for tracing the development of foreign policy rhetoric and practice along the lines of domestic political transformation (establishment of Putin's "power vertical", evolution of "Putinism"), transformations of foreign policy

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[16] European Council in Copenhagen 21-22 June 2003. Conclusions of the Presidency. (Available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=DOC/93/3&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

discourses (from "romantic realism" to "new pragmatism" and towards "great power assertion"[17]) and increase in power capabilities (economic and military).

The key for the analysis of dynamic change has been recently provided by Schweller (2011) and his assumption about rising great powers as conflicted states with "multiple identities variously adopting roles" and constructing policies depending on the issue and the audience. A systematic examination of the changing rhetoric on normative issues within the official communication will aim at distinguishing meaningful fluctuations in Russia's normative positioning conceptualized in distinct forms: norm-reproduction, normative criticism and normative revisionism[18]. This will allow for the identification and documentation of turning points in rhetorical positioning on specific normative issues. The outline of rhetorical dynamics will then serve as a framework for tracing the dynamic of political behavior. Respective of changes in normative positioning specific reactive policies will be traced and sorted by degree of normative compliance - from compliant and cooperative to revisionist. The points of intersection of attitudinal and behavioral changes will provide further material for in-depth analyses of individual cases of connections and disconnections in FP rhetoric and practice dynamics. Along the intersections of re-iterative, critical and revisionist rhetorical stances with compliant, status-quo and non-compliant political behavior respectively distinct stances will be conceptualized[19]. A sketch of the analytical matrix is provided below:

Table 2.Convergences and Divergences of Rhetorical Positions and Policy Acts.

Rhetoric/ Policy nexus	Compliant (cooperative)	Status-quo (no corresponding action)	Non-compliant (assertive/revisionist)
Re-iterative – norm reproduction	**Norm-Taker**	**Norm-Faker**	-
Critical – normative criticism without a viable alternative	Limited Opposition	**Norm-Breaker**	Norm-Reformer
Revisionist – alternative reading of the norm	Subdued Opposition	Limited Provocation	**Norm-Maker**

The differentiation of various roles draws somewhat upon Kratochvil's (2004) role-identity concept. But unlike Kratochvil who attaches primary importance in the distribution of different roles to the external others who act as receivers of a particular normative message,

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[17]Tsygankov (2009) distinguishes two dominant discourses that have defined Moscow's foreign policy from 2000 to 2009 within a general framework of what the author calls "Great Power Pragmatism": "great power defensiveness" and "great power assertiveness". Morozov (2002) conceptualized the turn of foreign policy thinking that occurred with the coming of Putin as "romantic realism". Sakwa (2008) distinguishes two foreign policy approaches Russia has been pursuing during Putin's presidencies: "new realism" and "new revisionism".

[18] This distinction is strictly analytical.

[19] These modes roughly correspond to the roles that rising powers can selectively adopt in regard to international order and its' normative set-up conceptualized by Schweller (2011): Spoilers ("hell-bent on revising the international order") – Norm-Maker, Supporters ("responsible stakeholders of the Western liberal order") – Norm-Taker, and Shirkers ("demand greater voice and representation, but shirk their fair share of responsibilities") – Norm-Breaker.

this study will base its conceptualization of role-identity on the specific attitudes towards norms. This approach can be justified by the social identity theory (SIT) which defines various "identity management strategies" (Welch, Schevchenko, 2010) as reactions to exclusion from the dominant group. Since exclusion is based on the actor's compliance or non-compliance with specific normative criteria, it is the attitude to the norm which forms the base for the definition of a specific role/stance and not the "others" and the self's identitary positioning towards them. SIT views role-identity as relatively unstable which contradicts the constructivist thesis about the relatively fixed character of identity. In order to avoid confusion we shall concentrate on roles as a mechanism of social adaptation and not use the much debated identity concept. Thus, we shall adopt a different take on role-identities as linked to "norms", and not "others", – specifically the dominant norms promoted by normative power EU.

Table 3. Conceptualization of Distinct Stances

Norm-Taker	reproduction of the legitimate norm/ compliance
Norm-Breaker	normative criticism without a viable alternative/ no corresponding action
Norm-Faker	reproduction of the set norm/ no corresponding action
Norm-Maker	proposal of an alternative reading of the norm/ non-compliance

The unresolved question here is whether the rhetorical move on Russia's side is a symbolical claim for autonomy or alternativity. Morozov (2009), Makarychev (2009), Sakwa (2008a), Gomart (2010), etc. believe that Russia's relativist positioning towards Europe has been a manifestation of one's emancipation from the hegemonic West inspired by a strategy of integration without accession (cf. Sakwa, 2008a). Although Makarychev and Morozov, who follow a constructivist-inspired line of argumentation, put stress on identitary factors, whereas Sakwa and Gomart, whose view is more realist-inspired, emphasize structural ones, the conclusions they draw are quite similar – autonomy is preferred over alternativity, but the discourse is rather unstable and has potential to change its focus and message. Another interpretation is that Russia's whole rhetorical normative positioning is an attempt at re-creating a system of norms, which the society cannot follow, but which it feels the demand and pressure to imitate (Furman, 2007). On the other hand, there are studies that not only confirm that Russia does indeed pursue an alternative (in the meaning of opposite) way of development, but also seeks to promote this model in its close environment (cf.: Ambrosio, 2009, Stent, 2007).

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