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# Role-Play Simulation of Negotiations between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union: Teaching while Enhancing a Transnational Dialogue

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***Citation***

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# Abstract

The article reviews the experience of the role-play simulation (RPS) 'Modelling negotiations between the EU and EAEU', arranged in 2018 and 2019. Its specific goals were building knowledge (about the European Union (EU) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and enhancing a transnational dialogue between EU (Western) and Russian students in the context of a deteriorated EU-Russian relationship. This latter aspect of international RPS has received insufficient attention in the literature, yet it might contribute to the improvement of real-life EU-Russian relations through fostering a transnational dialogue and mutual understanding among young citizens. The article outlines the setting of the RPS and addresses three major difficulties that the organisers faced (designing the RPS, preparing students and fostering their dialogue), the solutions that were developed and the assessments of the results.

# Keywords

Role-play simulation; Modelling; EU-Russian relations; Eurasian Economic Union; Free trade area; Transnational dialogue

Role-play simulations (RPS) have been widely practised since the second half of the twentieth century. They model the work of a state, an international organisation (or their institutions), in limited time and space and, based on scripts and role descriptions that are close to the rules and procedures, practised in real life. This article focuses on the simulation of negotiations between the European Union (EU) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) that took place in 2018 and 2019 at Saint Petersburg State University. It pursued two goals: 1) to enhance students' knowledge of the EU, EAEU and their relations (in particular prospects for a free trade area between them); and 2) to stimulate a transnational dialogue through building contacts among Russian and EU (Western) students and developing relevant transferable skills. The article first reviews the literature on RPS; it then explains the context in which this RPS was prepared, its goals and setting. Next, it outlines how organisers dealt with three major difficulties, which are: designing the RPS; ensuring that students are prepared; and enhancing the transnational dialogue and ultimately building trust at the societal level. Finally, the article looks at how the results of the simulation were assessed (including the solutions adopted for the difficulties that were identified).

## APPROACHES TO RPS

The existing literature offers three approaches to RPS, which can be identified as academic, educational and mixed. According to the first one, RPS is a tool of analysis that, through simplifying real processes, allows for a focusing on their most significant aspects and on forecasting future developments. Historically, this is the first approach to RPS, which dates back to studies of biological logics in social organisation through observing the animal world (Tolman 1948) and to studies in modern behavioural psychology (Watson 1913; Thorndike 1905). At a later stage, econometric logic

and technical modelling were applied. As far back as half a century ago, Sidney Verba, reviewing books on simulations in international relations (IR), stressed that they 'may be most crucial for macro-political phenomena' and that they allow a researcher to control 'the direction of causality between variables', which other theoretical and methodological approaches could not provide (1964: 500).

The second, educational, approach to RPS dates back to 1953 when Harvard University held the first UN Model. This experience gradually spread throughout the world. The UN Model was followed by RPS of other national and international institutions. Currently, in Europe, a lot of attention is paid to modelling the EU as well as its institutions (Council, EP, European Council) and procedures (citizens' initiative, multi-level governance). This is the result of the EU's legislative influence, its complexity and transparency, which encourages institutional studies, as well as the EU's dialogue with citizens, supported by educational programmes and grants. According to the educational approach, RPS is a pedagogical technique that demonstrates key features of the process in question and enables learning through students 'playing' a simplified scenario in the classroom with the assistance and supervision of the course instructor. RPS are a part of the educational transformation from passive learning where an instructor is at the centre to active learning with an instructor facilitating the process. The Bologna process, with its emphasis on students' active learning and acquired competences, provided an additional impetus to the RPS (Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Baroncelli, Farneti, Horga and Vanhoonacker 2014; Lightfoot and Maurer 2014). In most cases, RPS are integrated into a university course. Occasionally, modelling brings together students from various schools as a part of extra-curricular activities (see, for example, Jones and Bursens 2014; Jones 2008; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000).

The third, mixed, approach to RPS marries the academic and educational approaches. It remains a pedagogical technique but students themselves, as well as their output, become the object of study. Vernon L. Smith received the 2002 Nobel Prize for the results of experiments in economic sciences that involved students. Experiments in political science were initially criticised on both practical (the difficulty of establishing a control group, insufficient representativeness etc.) and ethical grounds (Brunazzo and Settembri 2015; Lijphart 1971). However, they were gradually adopted as a legitimate method (Druckman, Green and Kuklinski 2011; McDermott 2002). The constructivist approach also treats learning as an 'active process in which learners construct their own meaning, and build internal and personal representations of knowledge' (Vermetten, Vermunt and Lodewijks 2002: 265). The study can investigate how participants' preferences are formed, how they become responsible citizens, change their attitude towards various structures and develop a European identity (Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Van Dyke 2014; Asal and Kratoville 2013).

These approaches, however, fail to capture one more facet of an RPS that brings together representatives of competing actors, that of socialisation and transnational dialogue, which in the long run enhances mutual understanding and trust. In today's relations, this is the essential basis for stable and long-lasting relations. The RPS that is analysed in this article falls into the educational approach yet, at the same time, has the potential to lead to long-term consequences for real-life interaction as a result of the transnational interaction that it encourages.

## RPS AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

RPS target diverse aspects. Firstly, the RPS enhance transferable skills such as communication, retrieving and analysing information, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, public speaking, negotiating, leadership, time-management (Gastinger 2017; Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Jones and Bursens 2015, 2014; Elias 2014; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000; Dorn 1989). Individual psychological benefits are also pointed out, such as affective learning, interest and motivation, and

student and teacher emotional satisfaction (Brom, Šisler, Slussareff, Selmbacherová et al 2016; Brunazzo and Settembri 2015; Jones and Bursens 2015; Kaunert 2009; Dorn 1989). Students also become active citizens (Van Dyke 2014) because RPS bring politics closer to them (Jones and Bursens 2015; Galatas 2006; Zeff 2003; Hess 1999; Dorn 1989).

Secondly, RPS enhance students' substantive knowledge. For example, the key idea behind modelling the European Union is to demonstrate systemic institutional interactions (Zeff 2003). The complexity of rules often leads to the focus of many RPS on an institution. This may be the European Parliament (Jozwiak 2013), the European Council (Zeff 2003), the Council (Elias 2014; Galatas 2006). RPS help to apply theoretical knowledge to 'real life' processes and to experience those processes hands-on (Kröger 2018; Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015; Jones and Bursens 2015; Elias 2014; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000; Dorn 1989).

Some have commented, however, that there is frequently 'a trade-off between teaching transferable skills and substantive knowledge' (Gastinger 2017: 233). Other scholars have even disputed whether RPS work to develop skills or knowledge. In academic terms, therefore, RPS have both strong and weak points in IR and political science (Verba 1964), like any other method of research. The debates are more impassioned when RPS are approached through the educational or mixed approaches. It has been argued that the research is equivocal on whether the RPS develop relevant skills (Baranowski and Weir 2015; McCarthy 2014; Raymond and Usherwood 2013; Gosen and Washbush 2004). Moreover, some argue that RPS and other active learning techniques do not improve students' knowledge and results overall, as their tests demonstrate. Some even go so far as to treat simulations in IR as educational populism and entertainment of students (Di Camillo and Gradwell 2013; Prince 2004; Rochester 2003; Kille 2002; Dorn 1989).

In spite of all the criticisms, RPS maintain their positions as a complement to more traditional forms of study, lectures and tutorials, for instance. There is, however, a clear link between traditional methods and RPS: the success of RPS depends on prior knowledge about the subject matter of the modelling (Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015). For this reason, it is advisable to integrate RPS into a more traditional course.

With such debates in mind, the 'Modelling Negotiations between the EU and EAEU' RPS targeted both knowledge-building and transferable skills. The substantive knowledge covered the EU's relations with Russia and the EAEU, and in particular a (possibility of a) free trade area (FTA) between them. Among the transferable skills covered were public speaking and negotiation but also how to build a (transnational) dialogue - through encouraging close listening to opponents, thereby ultimately improving trust. Although the importance of communication during RPS has been noticed before (Kaunert 2009), this modelling accorded particular significance to it in the context of the present, highly deteriorated state of EU-Russian relations.

Finally, RPS practitioners have long debated what has to be done to enhance the educational value of RPS. The choice of the subject matter is an important factor for success. The issues discussed should be topical, controversial, open for various solutions and at the same time stay clear of two extremes, i.e. being overly political or technical (Di Camillo and Gradwell 2013; Van Dyke, DeClair and Loedel 2000). The need to set clear educational objectives and to integrate the RPS into a course are always stressed (Elias 2014; Usherwood 2014; Asal and Kratoville 2013; Di Camillo and Gradwell 2013). Students' preparation is crucial for the success of both an individual participant and the RPS as a whole (Elias 2014; Kaunert 2009; Asal 2005; Switky 2004). Another major concern is how to measure the results of the RPS in terms of skills and learning outcomes (Brunazzo and Settembri 2015; Elias 2014; Raymond and Usherwood 2013; Chin, Dukes and Gamson 2009; Raymond 2008).

This article seeks to contribute to this latter strand of literature, summarising the experience of organising the RPS, incorporating several schools in four different countries, targeted at building knowledge and enhancing a very specific transferable skill, that of building a transnational dialogue between Russian and EU (Western) students. The next section explains the context, goals and setting of this RPS while the remaining two outline the steps that were taken to deal with three major difficulties of this simulation and the way this RPS was assessed.

## GOALS AND SETTING OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE EU AND EAEU

Saint Petersburg State University (SPbU) started UN Modelling in 2004 and EU Modelling in 2007 and since then has annually organised them. EU Modelling was partly integrated into the curricular of the MA programme on European studies (it was compulsory for its students but open to others). SPbU also experimented creatively with modelling events, introducing the roles of lobbyists, mass media as well as making some events bilingual. The launch of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) led the team of SPbU to design an RPS, simulating the functioning of its bodies (a series of small-scale activities were conducted between 2015 and 2017). Hence, by 2017, the team[1] had considerable experience in organising RPS.

Two reasons led the team to design an RPS of negotiations between the EU and EAEU and shaped the goals of this RPS. First, EU-Russian relations have deteriorated for a number of years and were nearly frozen in 2014 with the events in Ukraine being conceptualised differently in Moscow and Brussels (coup d'etat vs. revolution, repatriation of Crimea vs. its annexation) and provoking sanctions and counter sanctions. In this context, a dialogue between the EU and EAEU emerged as a possible channel to preserve at least some constructive, long-term economic agenda. Russia repeatedly called for a launch of negotiations leading to closer economic relations between the EU and EAEU. The EU has remained sceptical of the EAEU, arguing that the latter did not have sufficient competences, was not recognised in the WTO and was meant to preserve Russia's geopolitical influence throughout the post-Soviet space. Only modest technical contacts have been established between the EU's Delegation in Moscow and the Eurasian Economic Commission.

At the same time, studies (Emerson 2018; Vinokurov, Balas, Emerson, Havlik et al. 2016; Pelipas, Tochitskaya and Vinokurov 2014) confirmed the potential of an FTA between the EU and Russia. Yet the actors understood their goal differently: Russia was only ready to restate what it committed to in the WTO while the EU wished to go further. Deep and comprehensive free trade area agreements between the EU and its eastern neighbours emerged as a model for this cooperation for the EU. Hence, it was interesting to explore what sort of FTA could be established between the EU and Russia and how it could impact their relations. In other words, this RPS was meant to expose differences on both sides, to teach students the arguments of both sides and, in a way, to divine some real-world events (negotiations on an FTA).

Second, the deterioration of EU-Russian relations led to information warfare (the scope of which is debated). Above all, it has affected ordinary citizens and increased their mistrust of the other side in these relations (Letterman 2018; Levada 2018). The RPS that would bring together students from various universities from Russia, the EU and beyond was seen as a way to counter this unfavourable climate in EU-Russian relations and to enhance mutual understanding through a transnational dialogue that would be established in the context of the RPS. The RPS was therefore seen as a way to improve not only the usual (for RPS) transferable skills (public speaking, negotiations) but also to get both sides to foster a dialogue, which is the first step for trust and any constructive discussion in the future, and to teach students how to build such a dialogue. The team believed that contacts, dialogue and trust-building had to be promoted among young people particularly. In that sense, this RPS developed a very

particular transferable skill, that of building a transnational dialogue among Russian and EU (Western) students.

The choice of the subject matter of negotiations – negotiating an FTA agreement between the EU and EAEU – was to strike a balance between being too political and too technical. The specific goal of the simulation was to develop an FTA agreement between the EU and the EAEU. On the one hand, the topic allowed for debate of sanctions and of the overall climate of EU-EAEU trade and investments. On the other hand, any FTA presupposes plenty of technical details, many of which were on the table during this RPS. In fact, the choice of the subject matter gave students plenty of flexibility. The RPS presupposed the simulation of the three key institutions of the EU (Commission, Council and Parliament) as well as two institutions of the Eurasian Economic Union (Eurasian Commission and Supreme Eurasian Council) and the national parliaments of the five EAEU members. In that sense, the simulation was unique in its institutional complexity. The negotiations were conducted by the EU Commission and the Eurasian Economic Commission, and the resulting draft text was submitted to theEU's Council and the European Parliament and to the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council for a final vote (see Table 1 for details of the script).

**Table 1. The Script of the RPS of the negotiations between the EU and EAEU**

| Timing | Activity | Output |
|---|---|---|
| Day 1. Morning session | Meeting of the EU's Council (with representatives of the EP attending the meeting) | Decision of the Council on the start of negotiations and draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages) |
| | Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (with representatives of the EAEU's national parliaments attending the meeting) | Decision of the Supreme Council on the start of negotiations and draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages) |
| | Meeting of the European Commission | Draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages) |
| | Meeting of the Eurasian Economic Commission | Draft negotiation directive (2-3 pages) |
| Day 1. Afternoon session | Meeting of EU Council and European Commission (with representatives of the EP attending the meeting) | Negotiation directive (2-3 pages) |
| | Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council and Eurasian Economic Commission | Negotiation directive (2-3 pages) |
| Day 1. Evening sessions – online | Discussions within the respective parliaments on the start of the negotiations and the overall context of EU-EAEU relations (with participation of remote participants online) | Position on the negotiations (1-2 pages each parliament) |
| Day 2. Morning session | | |
| | Negotiations between the EU Commission and EAEU Commission members in 3 groups (freedom of goods, services and capital) – 2 rounds | Interim results of the 1st and 2nd negotiation rounds in each group (2 pages each group, each round) |
| | Discussions within the EU Council (with participation of the EP) on the sanctions, their possible removal and prospects for further relations – 2 meetings | Draft proposals (2 pages) – 1st meeting; proposals (2 pages) – 2nd meeting |
| | Discussions within the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (with participation of the national parliaments) on the sanctions, their possible removal and prospects for further relations – 2 meetings | Draft proposals (2 pages) – 1st meeting; proposals (2 pages) – 2nd meeting |
| | The European Commission informs the EU Council and the EP about the progress of negotiations and | Draft corrected negotiation directive (2 pages) |

| Timing | Activity | Output |
|---|---|---|
| Day 2. Afternoon session | receives instructions from the Council, assisted by the EP | |
| | The Eurasian Economic Commission informs the Supreme Council and national parliaments about the progress of negotiations and receives instructions from the Council, assisted by parliaments | Draft corrected negotiation directive (2 pages) |
| Day 2. Evening session – online | Discussions within the respective parliaments on the interim results of the negotiations (with participation of remote participants online) | Position on the negotiations (2 pages each parliament) |
| | | |
| Day 3. Morning session | The parliaments' representatives deliver their positions, and the instructions for the respective Commissions and the positions of the respective Councils are corrected | Corrected negotiation directives (2 pages each) |
| Day 3. Second morning sessions | Negotiations between the EU Commission and EAEU Commission members in 3 groups | Interim results of the 3rd negotiation round in each group (2 pages for each) |
| | Meeting of the European Council (the European Parliament is present) and the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (the EAEU parliaments are present) | Declaration (2 pages) |
| Day 3. Afternoon session | Negotiations between the two Commissions | Draft agreement (appr. 8 pages) |
| | Meeting of the EU Council and the EP | Declaration regarding the other side (2 pages) |
| | Meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council and the EAEU parliaments | Declaration regarding the other side (2 pages) |
| Day 3. Evening session – online | The European Commission informs the EU Council and the EP about the results of negotiations, answers questions and critique and puts the agreement to a vote in the Council and the EP | Decision on signing or refusal to sign |
| | The Eurasian Commission informs the Supreme Eurasian Council and national parliaments about the results of negotiations, answers questions and critique and puts the agreement to a vote in the Supreme Eurasian Council | Decision on signing or refusal to sign |

The goal of transnational dialogue meant that the project involved students from SPbU (which provided the venue for negotiations between the councils and commissions) and five other universities (which were venues for the parliamentary discussions). Three of these universities were located in Russia (Perm, Kazan and Tomsk), two were based in the EU (Tampere and Leuven) and one in Canada (Carleton).[2] The support of the EU's Jean Monnet Programme facilitated the presence of a substantial number of external participants. Partner universities sent students to the main event in Saint Petersburg and participated in the RPS by representing the EP and five national parliaments of the EAEU remotely. Internet-based means of communication (mainly Skype calls and conferences) were used to connect them with SPbU where the core negotiations, involving councils and commissions, took place in the course of three days in April 2018 and then again in March 2019. The setting allowed for the participation of a relatively large number (80 in 2018 and 150 in 2019) of students, based in Russia, the EU and Canada, all of whom specialise in EU-Russian relations. Students who did not belong to any partner university could enrol on an individual basis. Some foreign students were in Saint Petersburg as exchange students but did not have much contact with their Russian peers due to a separate training programme.

In the course of the RPS, there were lots of public presentations, a painful search for compromises in the text, impassioned negotiations. In substantive terms, participants proved able to discuss quite specific issues. The number of issues was large; they ranged from trade in hydrocarbons, through issues of roaming or accounting services, to eventual relations between the European Central Bank and the Eurasian Development Bank. The negotiations led to quite predictable disagreements among the parties. For instance, the EU's representatives made a reference to values. The EAEU Commission asked for guarantees that the EU would continue to buy energy resources from the EAEU. Russian representatives questioned the idea of the EAEU sticking to 'European standards' and said that relations with the EU should be more balanced and 'equal'. These discussions neatly mirror the reality of present EU-Russian (and possibly future EU-EAEU) relations.

Participants worked on documents in quite a detailed way. For instance, a draft document from a group on freedom of capital movement reflected the authors' hesitation where it read: 'aiming to achieve full / partial / selective liberalization of movement of capitals' (the alternative words 'full', 'partial' and 'selective' were highlighted in different colours). Such arduous work on wording taught participants how complicated negotiations can be. At the same time, drafts were not free from vague phrases. Take as an example the following: 'Explore the possibility of the establishment of a common technical platform for discussing the issues of implementations of financial integration measures'. This may reflect a lack of ideas and precision on the part of the participants but it may also point to the more real-life difficulties of specifying the terms of cooperation given the EU's and the EAEU's different interests and visions.

During the first year, the final draft agreement was not approved due to a miscommunication among simulated EU institutions. Although some participants were disappointed with this, this failure is of pedagogical value as it reflects the importance of better self-organisation and internal communication, as well as the complexity of institutional and transnational interaction. In the second year, improved coordination procedures among participants playing in different sites led to the approval of the agreement on an FTA.

The planning and execution of this RPS presented three major difficulties: designing the RPS itself to reflect its goals; ensuring that participants were prepared; and fostering a transnational dialogue. These problems and the solutions that the project team developed are addressed in the next section.

## CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES

### *Designing the RPS*

The literature informs us that the RPS have to be well prepared. The problem of this RPS was how to achieve that when modelling something that does not exist (EU-EAEU negotiations) and taking into account the involvement of six different universities, located in time zones that stretch from Tomsk (GMT+7) to Ottawa (GMT-5).

First, the script had to be developed from scratch. The EU's trade and economic negotiations were the point of departure; they were then combined with official provisions of the EAEU on this matter and its thin experience of negotiations (with Singapore, Egypt, Israel and India). Key institutions on both sides were identified and a way forward for their interaction was suggested. Any RPS requires substantial simplification of the rules and procedures. Simplification enhances the educational value of the RPS by allowing concentration on the task in hand and helping to deal with the time constraints. The EU-EAEU modelling only confirmed this rule. For example, the EU Council and the European

Council were merged; procedures of parliamentary consultations were standardised among the EU and EAEU members.

Furthermore, the project team also developed a detailed description of rules and roles, which included the script itself, general rules, descriptions of the EU's and the EAEU's institutions (including their detailed functioning during the days of the RPS); rules for lobbyists and journalists. This set of documents is available in full at the website http://model.euactive.ru. It was distributed to all participants and served as their manual in the course of the RPS. Moreover, the task of developing an FTA was clearly specified.

The RPS programme contained time slots, rooms and specific results that participants were expected to deliver at each stage (in terms of written texts – mandates, positions, drafts etc, see table 1 above). Specific and tangible results were crucial to avoid empty discussions and structure students' interaction to achieve the goal of the script. They also provided an important basis for students' assessment in the end. The first year of the RPS demonstrated students' difficulties when drafting the documents (and facing the blank page in the beginning). To remedy this, templates of all the documents were developed by 2019. The schedule took into account the wide time difference among institutional participants. Online consultations with external participants took place at the end of each day in Saint Petersburg, which was late evening in Tomsk and Perm and early morning in Ottawa.

Finally, the selection of chairs was crucial for each institution. They had to be well versed in the rules and roles description, programme and task but also needed the charisma to drive the process and possess relevant communication and language skills. Chairs were nominated from students who attended preparatory trainings in Saint Petersburg (see below).

Having done its preparatory work, the organising team decided not to intervene in the RPS. In this way we opted for the role of observers and at time facilitators but not that of 'the sage on the stage' (King cited in Guasti, Muno and Niemann 2015: 210). However, a representative from the team was always present in each room of the RPS to help the chair should any problem arise.

### *Participants' preparation*

As the literature demonstrates, student preparation is key for any simulation. This is particularly the case when such a complex script is on the table. Thus, the question that had to be resolved was how to prepare students when they came from different universities and faced negotiations which had not yet taken place in real life.

First and foremost, the organising team made all script materials available on the website of the project several months before the start of each of the two RPS. These texts were complemented with support materials on the EU, EAEU and free trade areas. They were divided into compulsory and supplementary parts to take into account students' interests and time constraints. The materials consisted of articles, official reports of the EU and EAEU but also short videos. The amount of preparatory reading had to be manageable, given that for many students it is an extra-curricular activity. Use of a variety of media (books, video, graphs) catered for different types of learners.

Next, the team provided a series of preparatory trainings in Saint Petersburg to students for whom participation in the RPS was mandatory (those enrolled in the courses 'EU Institutions', 'EU-Russian Relations' and 'Analysis of the Developments in the Post-Soviet Area'). A series of mock sessions and discussions on the EU, EAEU and FTA were arranged to make sure that students were well versed in the rules and subject matter. The team also distributed roles in such a way that students who had

attended trainings were present in each institution and served as its backbone. The team also asked external players to write a short essay to check their level of knowledge and ability to analyse similar substantive problems. The roles were allocated on the basis of participants' knowledge that was collected from the information that they supplied at registration, their essays and attendance at trainings.

Much of the preparation of external participants depended on the commitment of partner universities. Some of our interlocutors integrated this RPS into a class, others just delegated responsibility to their students and recommended remaining students follow the simulation in an extra-curricular way. The latter approach had negative consequences for these students' motivation and commitment (including to support their peers, delegated to SPbU). Hence, some parliaments were very powerful in the RPS while others were virtually missing from negotiations. The situation did not necessarily reflect the real-life situation but again was of great pedagogical value for participants. Our experience confirmed the literature on the importance of integrating the RPS into a course and combining it with more traditional learning.

Finally, several lectures were arranged on the morning of the first day of the RPS to provide some key information to participants on the EU, and EAEU as well as on the possibilities for and associated problems of an FTA between them, and hence to cater for knowledge discrepancy among participants. For that purpose, we also invited a Russian and an EU academic to deliver presentations on the context and issues of an FTA between the EU and the EAEU. That guaranteed a more balanced approach to the topic. In addition, on the morning of the first day, the project team specified one more time the learning objectives of the RPS in order to focus participants on the task ahead.

### *Enhancing the dialogue*

A peculiar goal of this simulation that distinguished it from others described in the literature lay in the importance that it accorded to fostering transnational dialogue. Involving several universities was only a stepping stone; in itself it was not sufficient. In order to maximise the interaction of people who did not know each other before, several things had to be done.

First, from the very beginning, the project team opted for mixing students among all of the institutions. This way, Russian participants presented their views on both EU and Eurasian institutions, interests and constraints while their Western peers provided an alternative picture. That fostered much of the discussion and personal discoveries as students' feedback demonstrated. To make sure that parliaments can also profit from varying compositions, we added Russian and EU / Western students to the on-site delegations of the EU and EAEU legislative bodies.

An important second lesson, learnt in the first year, was the complexity of coordination among six universities. So, in the second year some participants from partner universities that travelled to Saint Petersburg played the roles allocated to their universities (i.e. Carleton played the European Parliament while Leuven, Tampere, Tomsk, Kazan and Perm universities were responsible respectively for the Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Armenian and Belorussian parliaments). Some students from these universities who were in Saint Petersburg during the day assisted at various meetings and then reported to their peers online, took their instructions and delivered them to their Councils and Commissions on behalf of their simulated institutions. We also developed two storage platforms on the projects' website (one for the EU and another one for EAEU players) so that they exchanged their documents there, which ensured better communication and guaranteed that no instruction or text was lost.

Third, language skills proved crucial for the exchange of ideas, mutual understanding and ultimately transnational dialogue. English was chosen as the only language of the RPS. Sufficient language proficiency was a requirement for all participants, which, regrettably, limited the number of players on the Russian side. It also meant that socialisation and dialogue were limited to those who were exposed to information from outside Russia and could read English-language sources anyway. Frequently, they did not present an extreme Russian official point of view that needed to be explained to EU (Western) participants. As with the preparation, the project team relied on external participants to guarantee the English language skills of their participants. (If resources are available, those who decide to replicate this RPS could assess participants' language skills beforehand.) The project team limited it to a self-imposed check in the case of external participants, stating clearly that all negotiations would be in English.

Finally, the script made sure that sufficient time was left for informal discussions among participants. This time was used to exchange ideas on the subject matter of the consultation, including among representatives of institutions who did not come into contact according to the script of the RPS, to build coalitions but also to communicate with the press. The latter issued a newsletter outlining key debates and also their problems and provided an additional space for communication.

## EVALUATING THE RESULTS

Three types of assessment were used in this RPS. They helped to improve the modelling of the second (2019) year significantly. First, organisers were continually present at all meetings, looking at whether they progressed steadily, followed the scenario in terms of procedures and rules and drew on their knowledge of the EU, EAEU and FTAs. Given the tasks of the RPS, of particular importance was whether the substantive knowledge and transferable skills were improved as well as whether transnational dialogue was being constructed. Three criteria were used to assess participants: their knowledge of the formal rules and subject matter, the intensity of their participation and attendance at the meetings. Certificates were awarded to participants on the basis of these criteria.

Second, students actively participated in the evaluation. On the one hand, some students were given the roles of the press. In the course of the RPS, they visited various negotiations, interviewed participants and raised some important issues. They put this in the form of a daily press report, which allowed us to gauge progress and identify some unexpected problems (for example, at one occasion, students complained about gender discrimination in the course of debates). On the other hand, all students filled out evaluation forms at the end of the game where they identified what they had learnt about the substance of the RPS, how they had improved their transferable skills, how they felt about the transnational dialogue. In addition, students from SPbU for whom the RPS was a part of the course, submitted detailed reports on both their individual learning and on what to improve in the RPS to target its goals better.

Finally, dialogue with our colleagues in five remote universities was important to assess the level of their involvement in the RPS, the script, as well as the individual learning results of their students. This part was particularly key when assessing the adequacy and reliability of the script and the efficiency of the transnational dialogue (including between SPbU and other partners).

All three types of assessment had to answer first and foremost whether the goals – to develop knowledge about the substance of EU-EAEU economic negotiations and transferable skills, in particular that of transnational interaction – were achieved. Furthermore, the assessment had to reveal any weak points in the organisation. In our case, these weak points were grouped into three categories (development of the script, students' preparation, and enhancing the transnational dialogue) and

addressed as documented above. The evaluation of the second year demonstrated the success of the adopted solutions.

In terms of the learning, all participants noted an increase in their knowledge about the EU, EAEU and FTAs. The project team could also verify that through their participation in the RPS and consequent in-class discussions with Saint Petersburg students for whom the RPS was a part of the class. The share of students' negative self-assessment, claiming that they did not learn much, was around 9 per cent. The habit of traditional (lecture-type) instructions and to lecturers being at the centre of the process manifested itself in those negative feedbacks; students complained about insufficient active guidance on the part of the organising team during the simulation.

Similarly, students were very detailed about their transferable skills. On the one hand, they noticed the difficulty of cross-cultural communication, particularly in English. On the other hand, they claimed that their language and negotiations skills improved considerably as a result of the practice and they benefited from meeting and working with 'people with different perspectives'. Students also stressed the value of transnational dialogue that emerged in the course of the RPS. Students in particular were fascinated both by learning from their peers and by the need sometimes to represent 'the opposite' side (i.e. Russian students simulating EU institutions and the other way around). These transferable skills were also very noticeable to our partner universities for the students who participated in the RPS.

Finally, both our assessments and feedback from our partner universities also demonstrated that measures adopted to strengthen the transnational dialogue (redistribution of roles, composition of groups, platform for the exchange of documents) delivered positive results in the second year.

## CONCLUSION

Some techniques that were used to meet the two goals of the EU-EAEU negotiations' modelling (knowledge-building and development of transnational communications) are universal for RPS and well documented in the literature. These are ensuring students' preparation through reading and video material as well as essays, preparatory lectures and mock sessions, integration of the RPS into a course, reliance on partners to prepare their students, the importance of sufficient language and negotiation skills. Others were developed on the basis of our own experience, taking into account the feedback that we received, to meet the challenge of modelling something that does not exist, of managing the participation of Russian and Western students and of six universities, as well as of enhancing a transnational dialogue. Among the key solutions that the team developed are the particular script design, which outlines clearly the output that has to be achieved at every stage and takes into account the different time zones, the setting up of a shared space to exchange documents, the particular composition of each institution (to ensure a dialogue among students of the hosting and remote universities and to cater for the goal of fostering the transnational dialogue). Different assessments were also instrumental for perfecting the script and the overall organisation.

The results of the RPS – as reflected in participants' feedback – demonstrated that students positively assessed the game and benefited in terms of substantial learning and transferable skills. The project team witnessed participants actively exchanging various points of views, arguing about concepts and technicalities but also trying to understand the opposite point of view. The adjustment made in the second year allowed us to increase the efficiency of this transnational engagement. It is crucial that discussions reflected many real-life issues and lines of EU-EAEU confrontation. Personal discoveries about how relations are seen from the other side and efforts to understand alternative positions form the most important result of this RPS. They enhance transnational contacts (and the skills required for

their construction) and contribute to trust-building, which are essential when polls tell the tale of a deep mistrust of EU citizens towards Russia and the other way around (Letterman 2018; Levada 2018).

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## ENDNOTES

[1] The team initially consisted of three scholars from the Department of European Studies (Tatiana Romanova (project leader), Nikolay Gudalov and Dmitri Levi). It was then enlarged to include one colleague from the Department of CIS Studies (Evgeny Treschenkov) and two colleagues from the Department of World Politics (Tamara Nemchinova and Maria Lagutina).
[2] These five universities were selected because they specialised in studies of the EU and Russia, had a relevant MA programme, and were ready to commit their staff and students to the exercise. They also had established contacts and experience of cooperation with SPbU by 2017.

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