

Introduction: EU-Russia Relations and the International Society Theory

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THE 2004/07 ENLARGEMENT BROUGHT THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) AND RUSSIA A STEP closer to one another at least geographically. Regional actors mapped their already interrelated geopolitical interests via various negotiating frameworks such as the EU-Russia Summit, the G-20 and the United Nations. Nevertheless, due to the quasi-federal nature of the EU, a continuing fear of Russia that is once again on the rise, and the glowing ambition of some Member States, EU-Russia relations are still shaped by the intertwined bi- and multi-lateral relations between individual Member States and Russia. In this process, the European Commission, multinational corporations and non-governmental organisations tackle specific issues *vis-à-vis* Russia, such as energy security, trade deficit and educational reform, but a wider level-playing field is still a long way from being achieved. The complex mechanisms of dialogue in the EU-Russia discourse are hard to be narrowed down to mere inter-state power politics or liberal institutionalist understanding of EU affairs alone. A broader consensus must be evidenced.

The annual agenda of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (the EU Presidency) is currently shared by Hungary and Poland within the rotation mechanism. Despite the diminished role of the Presidency in a post-Lisbon Union, EU-Russia relations, in particular the issues related to the concept of 'shared neighbourhood', continue to be the primary subjects of much discussion amongst EU institutions. By externalising EU-Russia relations, however, the focus of scholarly debate largely omits the critical internal competition and opposition within Brussels itself. This being said, there has been a trend towards commonality in forming a single European Foreign Policy *vis-à-vis* Russia since the Central and Eastern European transitions. A shift from Cold War politics to 'strategic partnership' is being noted but how founded is this assumption?

In answering this critical question this special issue embeds the discourse on EU-Russia relations in International Society (IS) theory in order to create a level-playing field that has thus far eluded scholarly debates. Unlike World Society, where scholars emphasise the influences of non-state actors, International Society is a theory of states where members share a common set of rules with often an administering body. Hedley Bull stated in his *Anarchical Society* (1977), that IS, despite its capacity to embrace supranational institutions, remains without a governing organisation. In other words, each member's behaviour is based on its own rationale. Furthermore, we theorise that there exist several ISs at regional level. Russia, for one, shares a different set of common rules with the US than it does with the EU. While our contributors analyse different aspects of IS, there are three unifying features which this special issue emphasises more generally in its contribution to scholarship: (1) members of an IS share the understanding that they are capable of establishing common values, interests and institutions; (2) members of an IS react not only to opportunities and threats, but also prestige and reputation; and (3) all regional ISs are a

sub-set of the global IS and, therefore, regional ISs are characterised by their members' relations with the global IS.

Outside of the disciplinary boundary of political science, the theoretical approach of IS coincides with New Institutional Economics (NIE). The NIE scholars generally define an 'institution' as a mechanism which produces a set of rules and penalties, both in the broader sense of the terms. For an institution to be efficient¹, its members have to be informed about the rules, and penalties must be credible enough to give incentives to alter a member's behaviour. In this regard, even abstract concepts, such as the market, can be considered an 'institution' since market price or reputation can act as a penalty. In this sense, an IS is also an 'institution', whereby each regional and global IS has its own set of rules with a penalty mechanism, primarily understood as loss of reputation and stick in some future negotiations. Likewise, rewards in IS act as incentive-giving mechanisms to comply with the rules of the level-playing field.

From the standpoint of Law and Economics (also Economic Analysis of Law), a normative argument originating from a NIE understanding of IS is that members of an IS can collectively – and perhaps correctively – design the very rules they are governed by, thereby creating incentives for others to achieve socially beneficial common goals. Methodological individualism, i.e. each member of a society focuses on own benefits, does not contradict such collective designing mechanism. To put this into the EU-Russia discourse, it is not too optimistic to hope for achieving mutual agreements among all layers of individual participants. The creation of such a level-playing field depends on rules which are currently shared, mechanisms of incentive-giving, and communication amongst the parties concerned. In this respect IS theory acknowledges path-dependency.

This special issue begins with the paper by *Marcin Kaczmarek*, which illustrates the complexity of global IS by analysing how regional actors promote their own vision of international order. Within the context of various international crises, EU-Russia relations have faced difficulties in applying a common approach. Thus, a layer of EU-Russia relations as a regional IS interacts with the global IS, while the process of synthesising them may prolong. Such an analysis is linked in with the so-called concept of 'securitisation' by the Copenhagen School of international relations, whereby the securitising actors themselves are the audience. In other words, despite each actor's own vision within the global IS, the decision of regionalised collective action must coincide with some degree of consensus whether it is written or not. This consensus in turn is the core of regional IS.

James Ker-Lindsay examines the way in which political debates over international law shaped EU-Russia regional IS during the Kosovo status process. He focuses on the core differences between two actors rather than their similarities, drawing a marked difference between EU 'pragmatism' and Russian 'constitutionalism' during this period – although, as is also noted, Russia's claim to adhere to international law was severely undermined a few months later by its decision to recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia. His analysis emphasises that the EU was not simply 'a victim of external machinations' during the Kosovo crisis, as has been suggested. Rather, key EU members felt that it was necessary to accept independence, which was been strongly advocated by the United States, despite the serious legal questions over such a move. In doing so, they decided to bypass Russian concerns and circumvent Moscow's veto power in the UN Security Council. This analysis completes our view of looking at EU-Russia relations as a single regional IS. The analysis has opened a theoretical discussion that regional IS can be thematic, whereby actors freely opt-out from IS institutions. In this sense, it opens the way for further research on EU's negotiation behaviour *vis-à-vis* Russia in other international crisis where the opt-outs have

¹ 'Efficiency' of institution is also understood as the minimisation of the so-called 'transaction costs' and the internalisation of negative externalities. See Coase (1960) and Williamson (1979).

been observed.

Departing from individual case studies, *Sandra Fernandes* presents an analysis of the European security architecture. She focuses on the gap between the highly institutionalised interactions between Russia and the EU on the one hand, and the lack of 'political convergence' on the other. Despite seemingly multilateral approaches by the EU and Russia, Brussels reacts in a peculiar manner even though both actors need to address common security challenges, some of which are discussed in details both by Kaczmarek and Ker-Lindsay. The normative conclusion is, therefore, that the development of the EU-Russia dialogue in the area of security is 'in the search for collective and legitimate solutions'. The outcome of dialogue highly depends on bi- and multi-lateral levels of interactions in forming the relations. Especially noteworthy in this is the role played by individual states in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Estonia during their respective rotating leadership of the EU Presidency. While the Presidency as an EU institution has limited decision-making power in the post-Lisbon EU, it has enormous potential for promoting multilateral political convergence.

In line with the 'securitisation' debates, *Olga Khrushcheva's paper* raises the question of whether Russia takes advantages of the EU for its lack of solidarity over a common energy policy. She analyses EU-Russia energy relations as a multi-layered dialogue, where a disagreement between an EU Member State with Russia becomes a disagreement within the EU. She implicitly points out that the political dimension in the EU-Russia discourse (negatively) influences the economic dimension of relations, while an effective dialogue should be the other way around. This view is shared by Bozhilova and Hashimoto (2011). The novelty of the analysis lies in the normative view on 'de-securitising' EU-Russia energy supply whereby the Moscow-Brussels dialogue becomes a single channel for coordination. The potential for further research in this field with the aid of methodologies derived from law and economics, such as the game theory, is enormous.

Ekaterina Gorbunova casts a light on EU-Russia relations from a unique point of view: education. If the EU itself is seen as a regional IS, its shared value includes democracy and its common action includes democratisation of neighbouring countries. Without determining which value – European or Russian – is superior to the other, her positive analysis evaluates the EU 'soft power' presence in Russia. She characterises the EU effort to promote democratic values through education in Russia not as paternalistic or an exploiting action, but rather as an 'exporting' action. In her article, IS theory meets with traditional social constructivism through the EU-Russia discourse. While theoretical applications of such synthesised schools of thought are yet limited to education, it is easy to foresee the practical values of this theory in conjunction with other fields of enquiry, such as foreign direct investment, party politics and ethnic conflicts. A pessimistic stance whereby the EU and Russia do not – or even cannot – share the fundamental values or common regional IS is therefore refuted.

The special issue concludes with an empirical research by *Caterina Carta* and *Stefano Braghirolli*. They compose an index to measure 'friendliness towards Russia' for each EU Member State, reflecting their political and economic reality. Intuition tells us that energy dependence as well as the long shadow of history would retain the East-West divide in EU-Russia relations. The index, however, illustrates rather a nuanced picture beyond a simple East-West cleavage. From the perspective of IS theory, this is a frequent phenomenon whereby the power balance between regional ISs, the EU and the former Eastern bloc, modifies the behaviour of political actors located at the centre of the spectrum. Furthermore, the methodological novelty of the study lies in the fact that it focuses on voting behaviours in the European Parliament, rather than on individual Member States' behaviours in the Council. The authors find that some members of the European Parliament continuously defect from respective Political Groups and vote along a 'national'

preference vote. Those are indeed the Member States to be found at the extreme ends of the 'friendliness index'. The index is likely to have further applications to the field of EU external relations, as well as EU-Turkey relations.

In conclusion, this special issue presents the competing, overlapping and functional nature of regional IS. It is *competing* as each state simultaneously channels foreign policy objectives towards the global IS through various regional ISs. In some cases, EU-Russia diplomacy functions as a single regional IS, whilst in others, the new Member States of the EU act with one voice as an IS themselves, hence, the idea of *overlapping*. Such IS is *functional* as each member promotes their own issues while many share negotiation behaviours or a pattern culture common to others. The EU as it stands in the views of our authors is a competing, overlapping and functional IS (Frey and Eichenberger 1996), and its efficiency, as well as high degree of democracy, can be maintained through flexible membership guaranteed by the opt-out mechanism (Schmidt 2009).

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