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# Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Union: Bringing 'the Political' back in the eastern region

Elena Korosteleva

## Abstract

Drawing on the post-structuralist traditions and especially Jenny Edkins' (1999) interpretation of 'politics' and 'the political', this article sets to conceptually rethink the geo-strategic dynamics of the EU-Russia relations in the context of the eastern region. It argues that while the EU's and the Russia-led Eurasian (EEU) projects may be appealing in their own right, their visions for the 'shared' eastern neighbourhood remain self-centred and exclusionary. The root of the problem, as this paper contends, is that the EU and the EEU struggle to imagine a *new social order*, which would give a relational value to the *Other as pari passu*, and assume cooperation as an interplay of differing normalities rather than subjection to one's norms and authority. Presently, the EU and Russia find themselves locked in *parallel* rather than complementary relations with the 'shared' region, each attempting to institutionalise their respective political orders, and not by way of contestation – '*the political*' – but rather by a *depoliticised* means of technocracy or compulsion. This, if anything, is likely to destabilise the region further, if '*the political*' is not back on the agenda.

**Key Words:** Eastern Partnership, Eurasian Union, Russia, the European Union, Ukraine, Greater Europe

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# Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Union: Bringing 'the Political' back in the eastern region

## Introduction

Just over a decade ago, the western world became captivated by Putin's vision of a Greater Europe, which he delivered at the Bundestag on 25 September 2001. In particular, he declared:

*It is my firm conviction that in today's rapidly changing world..., Europe also has an immediate interest in promoting relations with Russia... Europe will only reinforce its reputation of a strong and truly independent centre of world politics... if it succeeds in bringing together its own potential and that of Russia (Putin 2001).*

This discourse of a 'united Greater Europe' spanning from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans,<sup>1</sup> was also echoed by the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi in 2002, in preparation for the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) a year later. He famously stated: 'I want to see a "**ring of friends**" surrounding the Union.., from Morocco to Russia and the Black Sea... The centrepiece of this proposal is a common market embracing the EU and its partners...' (2002, emphasis original).

Ten years on, these strategic visions of the EU and Russia have translated into concrete policies effectively targeting the same region. In particular, with the launch of the Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP) in 2009 the ENP acquired a much-needed regional focus to begin forging a Neighbourhood Economic Community (NEC) with Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, by way of action plans, roadmaps, and Association Agreements (AA), with a

varied degree of success (Casier *et al.* 2014). Separately, the EU also pursued a Partnership for Modernisation with Russia working towards a successor accord for the 1997 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, and a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), once conditions were met (Commission 2008 p.2). Conversely, Russia has advanced to foresee the arrival of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) by 2015, aiming to re-integrate the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) into 'a single, organic process which should lead to a considerable expansion of harmonious common spaces of security, democratic and business cooperation in this gigantic region' (Putin 2005). This integration has also envisaged an eventual 'partnership between the Eurasian Union and the EU that is economically consistent and balanced... to guarantee a global effect' (Putin 2011). In short, within a relatively short period of time, the idea of a 'Lesser Europe' (Gromyko 2014) – that is, a 'Smaller Europe (the EU)', without Russia and 'the shared neighbourhood' – became almost inconceivable and even backward, both in rational and emotive terms.

And yet, by 2014, both visions clashed grinding to a halt. What seemingly started as another innocuous signature of the AA with Ukraine in 2013, a few months later fermented into Euromaidan, Russia's invasion of Crimea, civil unrest and military claims by Russian secessionists in eastern Ukraine. The conflict quickly acquired a civil war's proportions, and within a year claimed nine thousand lives (Guardian 2015). Consequently, the EU's diplomatic ties with Russia ceased being replaced by economic sanctions and an immovable policy gridlock vis-à-vis each other and over the region.

At a closer examination, this conflict has exposed two inter-related processes.

First, the EU and Russia's initiatives, while targeting the same region, have been evidently developing '*in parallel*' rather than in harmony with each other' (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015 p.3) being destined to come to a conflict without a reciprocal dialogue. Furthermore, while the conflict was unfolding, both protagonists advanced their isolated interactions with the 'shared' region almost as 'business as usual', in an attempt to institutionalise their respective social orders by way of technocratic expertise transference as in the case of the EU, and/or hard bargaining, compulsion and embargo on the part of Russia. This parallel engagement, which could be described as 'politics' in Edkins' terms (1999) – the process of maintenance and expansion of an established social order – if anything, has contributed to further aggravation of the EU-Russia relations rather than rendered suitable solutions to the seemingly irreconcilable stand-off.

Second, the EU-Russia relations over Ukraine and the wider neighbourhood have also revealed a glaring lack of *othering* as a process of recognising and engaging with one another and especially with the recipient parties,<sup>2</sup> with the purpose of developing compatible and cooperative knowledge regimes. The lack of *othering* has clearly prevented the protagonists from 'sharing' and reconciling their grand visions not only with each other, but more importantly – with partners' regional needs and aspirations. Being confident in their individual appeals, both the EU and Russia have naturally assumed a premature closure of an ideological debate over the choice for an integration course, which, without proper public legitimation, has naturally led to a normative clash of rule transference by the established orders in the neighbourhood: 'the political' as a moment of undecidability and openness has been avidly amiss in the EU and Russia's relations with the region.

In light of the above, this article sets to examine and re-think the geo-strategic dynamics of the EU-Russia relations, in the context of the deeply destabilised and evidently contested eastern region. It argues that both the EU and the EEU have failed to imagine a *new social order*, which would give a relational value to the *Other as pari passu*, and assume cooperation as an interplay of differing normalities rather than subjection to one's hegemonic set of norms and authority. At the heart of this paper is the need to recognise and understand power as ideological and contingent, which should not take 'politics' as a given but rather as 'a result of contestation' (Donald and Hall in Edkins 1999 p.2). Power relations are inherently dependent on a particular social order (norms and rules), and when externalised, require winning the 'hearts and minds' first by way of contestation and acceptance – 'the political' – before shifting from instalment to maintenance of *social order*, by a means of bureaucracy and technocratic agreements.

This is where a more discernible understanding of differences between 'politics' and 'the political' is needed, which should render a better understanding of the EU-Russia relations, and help find suitable solutions to the ongoing conflict and policy gridlock over the contested region. If we take 'politics' as a process of institutionalising and expanding the established order of things; 'the political' then would represent an opportunity for contestation, openness and undecidability, 'when a new social order is on the point of establishment, when its limits are being contested' (Edkins 1999 p.126). This is where the EU and the EEU neighbourhood policies, as this article believes, are presently located. In particular, much of the EU politics in the neighbourhood to date has been essentially *depoliticised*, having taken for granted the need for continuing legitimisation and agitation for the European course. Instead, it prioritised promotion of EU normative convergence by way of technocracy and conditional rule transference. With the launch of the EEU, conversely, Russia has been advancing its own 'politics', in an increasingly

assertive manner and often by way blackmail, compulsion and embargo. These ‘politics’ of the EU and Russia however have failed to speak to each other, and to engage with the region to seek legitimisation and complementarity, thus causing conflict and deadlock in nudging its stabilisation.

By placing our analysis within the conceptual frame of ‘the political’, this article argues that power could and should be exercised in many different ways, and their interface, especially when contested, should be more nuanced than is currently understood. While daily politics is an important instrument for institutionalising an agreed political order, it generally affords no room for real political change, and becomes ‘depoliticised’ and deprived of the opportunity to think ‘outside the box’. ‘The political’, on the other hand, allows to re-imagine and experiment with the emerging power arrangements, especially when such are deeply contested, as in the case of Ukraine, and the wider eastern region. This may engender new and/or additional social space to help overcome the limitations of the *existing social order*, and avail new opportunities for dialogue and cooperation – if ‘the political’ is brought back on the agenda.

What follows next is our brief discussion of the conceptual framework which unpacks the nexus of ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ in a dialectical manner, and also contextualises the key tenet of this paper – *othering*. A subsequent section then examines the disconnects and advantages of *othering* in the EU and Russia’s regional projections, before closing the debate with further discussion about the relevance of ‘the political’ for resolving the EU-Russia impasse in the common neighbourhood.

## **'Politics' and 'the Political' in the context of *othering*: framing the concept and its application**

In her seminal work, Jenny Edkins (1999 p.2) argues that 'much of what we call "politics" [today] is in many senses "depoliticised" or "technologized"', thus missing an essential element of intellectual debate and contestation by differing and proliferating subjectivities. Instead, often forgetting about the relational nature of power politics, we tend to objectivise the outside world as a simple extension of our own Self, at the expense of the rationalities and subjectivities it has to offer. While this view of the outside is perhaps natural to a human desire of 'governance' inferring control and coordination, or as Foucault terms it, of 'governmentality' implying the composite of power institutions and their need to dominate and regulate the outside (2007 p.108-9); this logic is nevertheless potentially perilous.

The principal caveat of this kind of projection of the Self is that it is invariably *unilateral* perpetuating a parochial cycle of knowledge production that centres on the Self (no matter how worthy it may be), and reducing the boundaries of knowledge to a simple transmission and acceptance of the Self's standards. This is what 'politics' seems to have become today in international relations, as Edkins argues – deprived of contestation, and displaced by a technology of expertise and bureaucracy, in the promotion of an unreciprocated and seemingly agreeable order. Foucault however reminds us that at the heart of 'governmentality' with its inherent need to regulate, is an understanding that power can only work through the *practices of freedom* (a calculated rationality) and as a process of interacting with *the Other*. For Rose (1999 p.4), by example, 'to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed', while Miller and Rose (2008 p.53) argue that 'power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon



citizens' but rather 'making up citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom'. Hence the task of this paper is to radically rethink the rationality of the ENP in the eastern neighbourhood while clearly distinguishing between 'politics' and 'the political' in an attempt to bring the 'dialogue' and 'openness' back in.

Edkins argues that 'politics' is in essence the outcome rather than the process of contestation: it is the debate that occurs *within* the limits set by the new order (1999 p.126), when a legitimate authority emerges, to exert 'a bureaucratic technique of governance elaborated through recognised expertise and endorsed ... through a regular, ritual replacement of the placeholders of authority' (Ibid p.4). It does not account for how power 'establishes a social order and a corresponding form of legitimacy' (1999 p.3) or explains how 'one social form rather than another emerges from a period of contestation and struggle'. To achieve this understanding one needs to examine 'the political' as a *process of struggle* and mutations of one social order into the next. What takes place thereafter... is not "the political", but a technology of governance', and ironically, 'this technology of governance is what we call "politics"' (Ibid p.5). As Edkins contends further, when a new social order is legitimated, it then 'sets out a particular, historically specific account of what counts as politics and defines other areas of social life as *not* politics' (Ibid p.2). Politics, therefore, is more concerned with the social rather political space, in the intention to institutionalise new structures of governance and make them sustainable. 'The political' in this case becomes removed, and politics – 'depoliticised' representing a closure of an ideological debate, a moment of forgetting 'the political' and making history.

From this perspective, it is precisely the analysis of 'the political' in a deeply contested ideological environment of the eastern region, rather than the 'politics' of the EU and the EEU respectively

which should give this revision a new meaning. A decade-long struggle of both regional projects running in parallel, but targeting the same region, demonstrates the dangers and the consequences of such premature ideological closure, in a situation when political space still requires ‘winning-over’, canvassing and legitimation by the peoples of the region, as well as reciprocation and engagement by the protagonists themselves.

Instead, as the practice attests, the ENP and the EEU have found themselves locked in Self-centric ‘politics’ of boundary expansion rather than in ‘the political’ contest of their rationale and prospects for cohabitation and reciprocity. Their parallel development, without seeking complementarity and dialogue, has been a ‘ticking bomb’, invariably lending itself to an eventual clash of not so much the visions – these are still pertinent foreseeing a ‘united Greater Europe’ (Putin 2005) – but *politics-driven* actions, implicating dichotomous requirements by both sides towards the production and maintenance of two differing orders.

This paper however contends that there should be another way in this highly intense and polycentric world of power relations whereby *cohabitation* rather than exclusionary hegemony, which by its very nature is always disruptive ‘in trying to secure itself’ (Gramsci in Edkins, 1999 p.127), ought to be imagined by rethinking the place of the ‘*Other*’ as the interplay and alignment of different norms.

If we are to open ideological offerings to contestation, a more nuanced understanding of *othering* is imperative.<sup>3</sup> In reality, however, a modern Self-dominated world of politics often tends to forget and treat the *Other* as a mere extension of its own Self, or if resisted, as a threat (Diez 2005), to be nudged towards a prototype of Self. In either case, *othering* as a process of

recognition and reckoning between the *Self* with the *Other*, is clearly missing, leaving the world of sovereign Selves, protected by power resources, too vulnerable to the unknown and rightfully challenging outside. The implications of not knowing, ignoring or 'forgetting' *the Other* are enormous, as the ongoing conflict over Ukraine and the eastern region once again testifies.

First, treating the outside as a mere extension of the *Self* leads to forgetting what the real world is, rather than what it should be. This 'inside-out' approach, as often exercised by the EU and Russia, may lead to the diminished need for external learning, and natural overestimation of its own worth. In this order of things then, a resistant and rebellious *Other* may come back as a shock, leaving the *Self* insecure and unprepared to resolve the issue of dealing with 'other-ness', as, for example, in the case of the EU vis-à-vis the neighbourhood, confronted by the assertive presence of Russia.

Second, if *the Other* is forgotten, the 'politics' of the *Self* becomes naturally domineering and increasingly involved, as Edkins (1999) argues, in the production of its own 'truth' about the outside this way compensating for its lack of knowledge about the *Other*. What emerges then is a 'language' or 'discourse' game, which becomes not a tool 'to express ideas about reality' but rather a process of embedding 'the speaking subject .. in a pre-existing language structure' (Edkins 1999 p.22) serving one purpose only – to convey the purported 'truth' and reinforce the boundaries of the established order. Discourse, as a 'said thing', in the case of the unknown other, could become a tool of either stability or insecurity in the 'world of said things', to which the increasingly aggressive case of Russian propaganda attests (Sherr 2015; Giles 2015).

Finally, in this dominated world of *Self* often defined by power resource differentials, what is left to the *Other*, if not to fend for itself? From the perspective of a hegemonic *Self*, the power

struggle is intrinsic, incentivising the outsiders either to increase their power resource differentials (e.g. arms acceleration between the US and Russia during the Cold War), or 'direct tacit pressure or open action towards the decrease of power differentials responsible for their inferior position' (Elias 1965 p.22). Russia vis-à-vis the EU, in the context of Ukraine demonstrates a similar kind of urge to increase its power resource differential, this way aiming to reduce its own perception of inferiority, and to gain more credibility within its own wider Self (e.g. Eurasian) group.

Whichever the outcome, the world of the *Self* without the *Other as pari passu*, dominated by the urge to maintain an established social order, is not a safe and stable place.<sup>4</sup> It perpetuates the logic of exceptionalism, inequality and naturally, of expansionism. More so, it becomes further and further removed from the reality itself by way of producing and exporting the dogmatised 'truth' and its fantasised reality to the outside world. Such world, as the EU-Russia conflictual relations show, is unsustainable, and our analysis below exposes its limitations and costs. The task ahead is to try and 'repoliticise' the 'truth', and turn it into an open space of debate and reconciliation. As Jenny Edkins puts it: 'It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, within which it operates' (1999 p.140). This implicates the urgency to equate *the Self* and *the Other*, in their relational need for one another, and to open up a new space – 'the political' – for dialogue and complementarity, to ensure the region's survival and the achievement of ever Greater Europe.

### **The EU and Russia: colliding visions or complementary regional efforts**

Let us now explore the logics and discourses of Self-assertion and *othering* in the eastern neighbourhood from the EU and Russia's perspectives, by framing and explaining their relations

in terms of the interchange of 'politics' and 'the political'. This would help us see the disconnects in the process of the EU and the EEU's power application to the contested region.

### **The EU's Self and its *othering* effort in the eastern neighbourhood**

With the articulation of its 'proximity policy' in 2003, the EU registered its explicit interest in the eastern region and articulated its vision for a more stable Europe, by way of forging a ring of 'well-governed' countries: 'Even in an era of globalisation, geography is still important. It is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed' (ESS 2003:7), in line with its understanding of a secure and stable social order.

At the same time, the vision lacked a purposeful and more importantly, reciprocated strategy to support these intentions.<sup>5</sup> The initial policy resembled more of a generalist security-predicated aid package, primarily intending to safeguard the EU borders while expanding its influence (Youngs 2009). Moreover, it also adopted an 'enlargement-lite' strategy (Popescu and Wilson 2009) to give the region a distinct European direction premised on the EU norms and requirements. How did it fit with the concept of a 'Greater Europe' articulated by Putin in the early 2000s? The vision did not find its way to the official documents, and was only implicitly mentioned in the later iterations of the ENP – via a multilateral track to enhance intra- and inter-regional cooperation with third parties. Essentially, the policy was developing in isolation from the Russian initiative, and was increasingly seen as a set of instruments<sup>6</sup> intending, on the one hand, to reform the region by the EU standards which may lead to the formation of the NEC; and on the other, to engage Russia into some form of strategic partnership. The latter soon progressed, albeit slowly, into a Four Common Spaces Agreement in 2005 to extend in five years into a Partnership for Modernisation (Council 2010).

Predictably, the ENP was struggling to find traction with the eastern neighbours, who historically saw themselves at the cross-roads of Eurasian space, to which a recent diplomatic history of Ukraine's relations with both powers, thoroughly examined by Dragneva and Wolczuk (2015), serves as testimony. An emerging sense of rivalry between the two regional powers – the EU and Russia - in the neighbourhood has been registered across the neighbourhood by wider public opinion<sup>7</sup> as 'alarming' and un conducive to the future sustainability of the region, and which, as the latest events in Ukraine illustrate, has now led to a long-term instability in the neighbourhood, and the disruption of global order.

To make its policy more adaptive and its governance more effective, the EU had to go through a number of policy iterations (Korosteleva 2016). By 2009 it launched the EaP, giving the policy an increasingly regional focus and a more differentiated approach, which by 2011 (its 3<sup>rd</sup> iteration) branched out into a set of highly technocratic road maps, Action Plans, Association agendas, and Association Agreements – in short, a complex matrix of enablement to be able to reach out to different levels, actors and existing structures within the neighbourhood space. As the policy progressed with the negotiation of AAs, it was clear that the EU has fully embarked on the path of a region-building *politics* (Delcour 2015) with a purpose to converge the region to the EU standards. At its core was the promotion of low-key technocratic strategies of engagement to codify an EU-centred agenda into a series of AA requirements, with some profound implications for the wider region.<sup>8</sup>

Has the policy, especially in its advanced stages preceding the conflict in 2013, made any substantial effort to connect with the vision of a 'Greater Europe', as well as debate and engage with the parallel developments in the Eurasian Union? According to the House of Lords' (HoL) inquiry into the EU-Russia relations (2015), evidence revealed that there was little effort on both

sides to engage with one another to develop a joint vision, especially of much-wanted economic reforms. While negotiating an AA and especially the part of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Ukraine, according to Luk'yanov, Chairman, Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, 'the Commission "never showed any interest in discussing" Russia's economic concerns', being either 'indifferent' and 'blunt' by way of pointing to the Russian side 'It is not your business. It is our bilateral business' (Ibid, Ch.5 p.2). When Russian hostility to the project became apparent, the EU, as the HoL report argues, undertook the following two steps, which reflect a rather 'depoliticised' nature of the the EU-centred order: one is that it continued pursuing the negotiations over the AA 'with reasonable confidence that they were going to be brought to a successful conclusion' (Ibid); and two – separately, the Commission engaged in a consultation process with Russia on the economic effects of the AA, but rejected Russia's claim to engage in a 'trilateral talk' over Ukraine's negotiation of the AA. According to a senior Russian official, 'the EU did everything to facilitate the power change in Kiev; while the bloodshed could have been avoided' if both sides listened to each other's concerns (Ibid) and allowed some space for contestation ('the political'), to engender a compromise. The HoL's conclusions of the inquiry explicitly stated: 'It is clear that Russian concerns about the impact of EU trade agreements, while having an economic basis, were also politically driven.... While seeking to address Russian concerns, the Commission was putting forward free-market liberal arguments. Both sides were to some extent talking past each other' (Ibid, Ch.5 p.6). Furthermore, the HoL insisted:

*An element of "sleep-walking" was evident in the run-up to the crisis in Ukraine, and important analytical mistakes were made by the EU. Collectively, the EU overestimated the intention of the Ukrainian leadership to sign the AA, appeared unaware of the public mood in Ukraine, and, above all, underestimated the depth of Russian hostility towards the AA.*

*While each of these factors was understood separately, [no institution] connected the dots*  
(Ibid p.5).

It is evident from the above that the EU's reformist ambitions in the neighbourhood, underpinned by its grand vision of a well-governed space from Lisbon to Vladivostok (Füle 2013) seem to speak primarily to the EU's own interests, being effectively disconnected from a similar initiative which has been unfolding in parallel across the post-Soviet space, to which we now turn.

### **Russia's Self and its *othering* effort in the eastern neighbourhood**

Following the dissolution of the USSR, and the subsequent inter-state integration tendencies, in 2007 Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, at the latter's initiative, inaugurated the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU). The latter is an (alternative) Russian-led region-building project in the post-Soviet space (Eurasian Economic Commission 2013). The construction of the ECU and the EEU is claimed to have followed the EU's supranational integration model (Putin 2011; Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015, Tsygankov 2015), and has considerably moved apace from signing the initial treaty on the ECU Commission and Common Territory (2007), to establishing the ECU in 2011, and a single economic space (SES) in 2012. The launch of the EEU took place in 2015, with further expansion of its membership to include Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, and prospectively Tajikistan, Turkey and Iran. Noting this fast-flowing regional integration, Vladimir Putin commented:

*It took Europe 40 years to move from the European Coal and Steel Community to the full European Union. The establishment of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space is proceeding at a much faster pace because we could draw on the experience of the EU and other regional associations. We see their strengths and weaknesses. And this is our obvious advantage since it means we are in a position to avoid mistakes and unnecessary bureaucratic superstructures (2011).*



The key features of this alternative, Russia-centred integration project allegedly include market harmonisation and interest-driven multilateral economic partnerships, predominately initiated and led by Russia. The EEU, as Dragneva and Wolczuk observed (2015), has developed alongside Russia's accession to the WTO in 2012, and is intended to be guided by the WTO laws to harmonise EEU legal provisions. By compelling the neighbouring countries to this new integration initiative, Russia was hoping to enhance its regional competitiveness predicated on historic interdependencies and its hegemony across the post-Soviet space.

The objectives of the EEU, as the then Russian Deputy prime minister and now the chairman of the Eurasian Commission, Victor Khristenko argued, were extending far beyond the post-Soviet space than is conventionally assumed:

*Russia is interested in integration with its neighbours in the CIS and in developing relations with the EU. These two are not alternative directions – they mutually complement each other: an alliance of post-Soviet republics will be better positioned to develop relations with Europe (in Menkiszak 2013 p.31).*

Khristenko also observed that these two regional processes could progress independently, in isolation, or, alternatively, 'they could be linked, and thus mutually enrich themselves and gradually consolidate a sphere of economic integration which, in terms of population, would be three times as big as Russian. We think that for us the second variant is preferable and more realistic' (Ibid). Why in this case, did the two initiatives never connect in a cooperative manner, and proceeded to develop in isolation? As Dragneva and Wolczuk (2015) contend, Russia, just like the EU, saw the integration process predominantly through its own interests in expanding its own sphere of influence: by way of bureaucratisation, compulsion and hard bargaining it has been nudging neighbours to commit to the Eurasian economic integration course – which, from

Edkins' perspective, effectively betrays the *'politics'* of intended boundary expansion of the established knowledge regime by Russia to exert influence and control. And yet again, this expansion has been undertaken without further contestation or canvassing; instead compelling of 'the heart-and-minds' went hand in hand with brutal economic blackmailing and political destabilisation of neighbours' regimes. For example, the view that was communicated to Ukraine by Putin was 'that Customs Union membership and a FTA with the EU *were* compatible' (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015, p.69), on the condition that Ukraine followed the Russian integration course. This would have required Ukraine 'to abandon bilateral negotiations with the EU, and join the Eurasian regime to achieve free trade with the former' (bid). When Ukraine however rejected the Eurasian offer of membership, Russia opted for denouncing the European integration course as harmful to the Customs Union and the CIS economy as a whole (Ibid p.70). As Dragneva and Wolczuk argue further, 'the Kremlin was [working] on devising a geopolitical veto mechanism rather seeking functional solutions to specific problems arising from potential regime overlaps' (Ibid p.76). Further investigations revealed that Russia's pressure on Ukraine was not necessarily on economic grounds, but rather driven by *political* motifs (HoL 2015, Ch.5 p.5). The two integration regimes clearly clashed, because each was pushing for their own rules of the game ('politics'), without contestation, or indeed consideration ('the political') of the interests and needs of the third party – Ukraine as the target country and the eastern region more broadly. As Dragneva and Wolczuk aptly put it:

*Both Russia and the EU ignore the role of the third and most important party – Ukraine itself... It is undeniable that the protest and war brought into a sharp relief the growing rivalry between the EU and Russia, with both actors offering alternative regimes for advanced economic integration... These initiatives have been pursued in parallel rather*

*than in harmony with each other. Yet, Ukraine has not been a mere bystander waiting to see what is being offered (2015 p.3)*

### **From competing to incompatible Selfdoms of the EU and Russia?**

The EaP and the EEU *Self*-assertive integration projects, by their design, objectives and general rules of the game – both WTO-premised with the latter even following the EU's prototype – are not at all dissimilar. At the same time, where they seem to diverge irreconcilably is in the area of their normative regimes. Each established order seeks to inculcate their own authority and the bureaucracy of rules to maintain and expand their governance over the overlapping region, which they do by way of *politics* (respective regulatory frameworks) rather than '*the political*' to generate discussion and seek compromise for reciprocal solutions and joint interests.

In this case, what about the grand vision of a Greater Europe which by the mid-2010s has been reduced and fragmented to the many smaller and irreconcilable fragments of Europe? Is a 'united economic Europe' at all feasible, and would a dialogue between the two blocs – the EU and the EEU – enable a constructive solution to the current standoff? While both sides individually agree on the necessity of inter-regional cooperation, especially in economic and security terms, none is prepared to *imagine* and negotiate a *new order of things* – cohabitation, rather than regional hegemony. The overlapping 'grand rhetoric' – or the production of the individual regimes of 'truth' – by the EU and Russia, however, falls short when coming to implementation, thus often resembling more a tug-of-war than regional cooperation to achieve global presence and market expansion by mutual agreement. While the EU demands convergence with its *acquis*, claimed to be incompatible with the EEU standards; Russia conversely, although envisaging a prospective application of the WTO rules to the EEU, operates more through compulsion and dependency arguments bearing the mark of the Soviet times.<sup>9</sup>

The EU and Russia clearly recognise each other's presence and interests in the region. At the same time, they reject the idea of allowing 'the political' back on to agenda, which would invariably challenge their self-purported authority but may open space for re-negotiation of their orders and visions, on reciprocal terms – as part of othering and aligning different normalities (Foucault 2007).

And yet, in this acknowledgement of their overlapping interests, they continue to fail to understand, let alone to facilitate the need for interface and dialogue over and with the region, treating it as a 'background' for the extension of their respective Selves, and the advancement of their ambitions. In this vein, they continue their promotion of overlapping but disjointed projects in the region – through 'politics' rather than 'the political' involving freedom of choice and contestation – which in 2013, owing to their highly *depoliticised* (in Edkins' understanding) focus on economic integration, led to the eruption of conflict in Ukraine. While recognising the region's historical complexity, the EU efforts in particular fall short of discernment and resemble more of an 'ostrich' approach in a blinkered pursuit of its technocratic governance. Russia's efforts, conversely, caused much turmoil in the region, spreading fear even amongst the converted (Noucheva 2014). The decision to begin triangulating the EU and Russia's intentions with Ukraine came rather late in 2014, as a consequence of war and the negotiated ceasefire in Ukraine (Council 2014). The format of this dialogue however is not of cooperation, but rather of parallel and isolated intentions: while the EU aims to mobilise the agreement, Russia seeks to veto it altogether (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015; Tsygankov 2015; Wiegand and Schulz 2015).

The consequences of these parallel regional intentions have been debilitating for the region and global order, exposing its hegemonic and unsustainable nature. These developments lead us to

seriously question the intentions of *othering* by both powers. Two particular manifestations become apparent.

First, in their Self-centred projections, both the EU and Russia have explicitly disregarded each other's rationalities over the contested region, which, as Freud has argued, is to be expected in the competing worlds of Selfdoms. In particular, the EU focused on the default assumption that the exposure of Ukraine and others to the future benefits of the EU, and the promise of a 'well-governed ring of friends' (centred on the EU) would enable recipients to unequivocally legitimise the European course. This was clearly an error of judgement, not only in terms of the timing to harvest allegiances, but also, more essentially, in failing to factor Russia into the EU's expansionist normative *modus operandi*.

Second, and most significantly, both powers evidently failed to understand the **region itself** and its historical urge for complementary rather than dichotomous relations with the wider Europe. As the following research findings<sup>10</sup> indicate both powers yield similarly appealing offers in the eastern neighbourhood, which, instead of mobilising binary loyalties, foster an ambivalence of choice for the peoples in the eastern region: in 2013/14 a healthy plurality (40 per cent on average) of the polled respondents across Belarus and Moldova indicated attractiveness of both regional projects. Furthermore, a temporal cross-regional comparison<sup>11</sup> reveals that both powers appeal to the residents of the region, in their own, complementary way: while the EEU is seen as important for energy security and trade; the EaP and the EU have stronger clout in promoting functional government and effective sector-specific cooperation. Enforcing a dichotomous choice on the region, not yet ready for making these commitments through their internalised norms of behaviour, testifies to the profound lack of understanding the 'Other' – the partner countries – including their needs and aspirations. The error of judgement by the EU and

the loss of control by Russia are, in an equal measure, the causalities of the decision-making process which occurred in the vacuum of correlated knowledge about *the Other*, resulting in *depoliticisation* – that is, assertive promotion of their respective ‘regimes of truth’ (Edkins 1999) and subsequent securitisation of the contestable narratives, as the case of Ukraine has lately demonstrated.

The bigger question here, however, is whether and how the EU and Russia’s discourses could be defused and re-politicised in their rhetorical furnishings, to return to a zone of peaceful coexistence, rather than the explicitly ‘manufactured truth’ on both sides? As our comparative research conducted in 2008-9 (en7) and 2013-14 (en6) indicate, the normative framing of discourses continues to conflict in a profound way but they are not necessarily insurmountable. Both powers profess and are associated with differing sets of values which in turn support and engineer different behavioural patterns and expectations. Notably, the EU is clearly identified as a liberal democratic model, premised on the values of democracy, human rights, market economic, and the lack of corruption; and the spatial analysis of 2009 and 2014 public associations indicated a relative endurance of this model in people’s mind-sets’. At the same time, the EEU and Russia, in the respondents’ eyes, offer a mix of qualities, a hybrid case, which could be referred to as a social democratic model, but which could potentially approximate the EU especially along the values of market economy, stability, economic prosperity, and security, and at the same time retain its cultural uniqueness. Furthermore, the 2014 findings suggest there is more proximity in these values than was publicly purported in the earlier days of the EaP, which could avail some prospects for economic cooperation as optimal space if mutually agreed rules were to be considered, and *othering* were to take place between the involved parties .

## Conclusions: 'The political' and *the new social order*

Drawing on the above, and with reference to the preceding conceptualisation of 'politics' and 'the political' in the context of *othering*, it becomes apparent that the relational nature of power is far more complex and essentially understudied than is currently understood. In order to survive and more importantly, sustain itself, it requires, as in the world of nature, the recognition of the *Other* vis-à-vis the *Self*, which would enable the *Self* to treat the outside in its own right and distinction, and not as a simple extension of the *Self*.

The pursuit of *Selfdoms* while 'forgetting' the *Other* is dangerous and unsustainable. First, instead of knowledge and learning about the other, the established regimes, as a rule, resort to fantasies and the production of 'truth' for the promotion of *Self-vision*. Knowledge regimes and legitimacy in this case become replaced by manufactured 'truth', which deploys specific language and discourse, to inculcate itself onto the outside. The language becomes not a tool for the promotion of ideas, but a harness to embed the logic of the established order, through 'politics' rather than contestation ('the political'). As has been shown in the case of Ukraine, the framing of political narratives (including 'planting the flag' over the region) became a conflictual matter, leading to the breaking of a dialogue between the EU and Russia, and the eruption of Ukraine. Transmitting narratives, producing 'truth', defined by the 'politics' of sovereign culprits could be either disruptive or peace-making, paving the way either towards 'frozen' conflicts or conversely, to a prospective normalisation – that is, involving the interplay between differing normalities (Foucault 2007) – and cooperation. It remains to be seen how the new negotiations over the respective regional FTAs will proceed in defusing tensions between the EU and Russia over and across the region.

In the meantime, while Russia remains exclusionary in the pursuit and expansion of its regional authority, the EU has gone through a wide-reaching consultation and reform to make its policies more effective and sustainable in the neighbourhood. Collected public evidence corroborated our previous discussion and testified to the fact that the EU's 'current practice and policy has been regarded by other partners as too prescriptive, and as not sufficiently reflecting their respective aspirations' (Commission 2015 p.3). While reflecting on these criticisms, the Commission has expectedly proposed that 'differentiation and mutual ownership will be the hallmarks of the new ENP', and recognised that 'the new ENP will now seek to involve other regional actors, beyond the neighbourhood, where appropriate, in addressing the regional challenges' (Ibid, 2-3). At the same time, while the new narratives intend to be reinvigorating and flexible, accounting for the needs of partners, and the presence of *other* actors in the region, there is a strong feeling that the same old practices are likely to persist. In seemingly recognising *the outside* as different and diverse in its aspirations, the Commission however pledges to prioritise *stability*, in its relations with the region, and in doing so, 'the EU will pursue its interests which include the promotion of universal values and the EU's own stability' (Ibid). Once more, the EU is prepared to face the outside as the extension of its own Self, in the process of externalising its interests and rules of the established internal order.

To close this discussion of politics, the political and *othering*, we must insist that a new framing of international relations is needed. This would infer in the first instance developing a more discerning approach to the EaP partner countries by the EU, and Russia, in order to understand their needs and prospective difficulties, and to send the right signal to the eastern neighbourhood, which seeks *complementarity* rather than competition between the respective regional projects. Rather than competition and struggle for dominance, there has to be cooperation between these projects, if the 'grand vision' of the greater neighbours – for a



*sustainable* (rather than *hegemonic*) pan-European single space, premised on reclaiming *othering* and *re-politicising* the authority of the Self – were to be achieved.

## Notes

1. This discourse of a 'united Europe' was further refined by Putin in his speech in 2005
2. In this article 'the Other' is viewed as an important referent object in defining the outside. To date, the conventional reading of 'the Other' has been mainly through the lens of the Self, whereby the Other was seen as instrumental but not necessarily as *pari passu*, to the construction of the Self in its external projection (Diez 2005; Flockhart 2010; Neumann 1999). We argue, however, that this recognition of the Other is not sufficient and requires its affirmation and empowerment as an equally constitutive part of the relational world of power (Edkins 1999:24).
3. For more discussion see Korosteleva, E. *et al.* (forthcoming) *"The Politics" and "The Political" of the Eastern Partnership Initiative: reshaping the agenda'*, special issue, *East European Politics* 2016; Edkins 1999, Foucault 2007
4. While the nature of 'the Self' is recognised as referential, its understand nevertheless does not extend to treat the Other as *pari passu*. Instead, the Other is often viewed either as the projection of the Self, or indeed as a different kind (and inferior or threat as a rule). Our post-structuralist interpretation of the Other calls for a more nuanced meaning of the Other, which is seen as complementary and yet distinct to the Self, in defining the outside. See Korosteleva *et al* (forthcoming 2017) for further discussion
5. Hence, the initial inclusion into the ENP of Russia (subsequently rejected by the latter), and almost incidental - of the Southern Caucasus. For more discussion see Korosteleva 2012; Delcour 2015
6. From the author's interviews with Commission officials in 2012
7. Opinion polls were conducted by the author in Belarus in 2013 and Moldova in 2014; findings have been corroborated by other survey sources. For more information visit <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/gec/research/index.html>
8. EU region-building policies *de facto* assume the primacy of economic inter-regional cooperation, without a prospect of EU membership for the willing partners
9. This distinction is further underscored by significant normative differences between the EU and the EEU. As our research indicates, these differences are profound and enduring, with the EU being associated with a liberal model of democracy, while the EEU and its member states – with a hybrid case of 'socialist democracy' containing a curious mix of market economy and stability, tolerance, collectivism and cultural traditionalism. For more information see Korosteleva 2013; Kurki 2010
- 10 . For more details see the 2013-14 research results available at: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/gec/research/index.html>
11. Please refer to the results of 2008/9 ESRC project (RES-061-25-0001) available at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/europeanising-securitising-outsidere/>

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