



International society and regional integration in Central Asia

Georgeta Pourchot*, Yannis A. Stivachtis

Department of Political Science, OLMA/NCR, Virginia Tech, USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the degree of integration in Central Asia by utilizing the international society approach of the English School of International Relations (ES). After addressing the debate surrounding the concept of ‘international society’ and discussing its contents and application the paper suggests that within the contemporary heterogeneous global international society there exist some more homogeneous regional/sub-global international societies with Central Asia constituting one of them. It argues that during the Cold War the global international society was divided into two sub-global international societies with the Soviet Union and its allies forming one of them. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia sought to re-establish its regional primacy through the establishment of a set of international organizations ranging from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The paper claims that this range of organizations reflects the existence of a regional international society in Central Asia.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine regional integration in Central Asia¹ by utilizing the international society approach of the English School of International Relations (ES). Scholarship, particularly recent scholarship on “integration” typically addresses European integration, with an explicit understanding that the concept refers to

adherence to European values as illustrated by membership in the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Council of Europe or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). A significant body of literature addresses how, why, or whether Euro-Atlantic institutions, primarily the EU and NATO should enlarge to integrate states formerly behind the Iron Curtain, how far such integration should go, and to what extent this integration benefits or weakens the institutions themselves (Gilbert, 2012; Ginsberg, 2010; Zimmermann & Dür, 2012).

With respect to Central Asia, integration is used by policy makers and politicians to refer to two possible outcomes: 1. a reconstitution of the Soviet space mostly in the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), that is integration championed by Russia, according to Russia’s priorities and rules of engagement; 2. Euro-Atlantic integration, that is an orientation towards Western organizations such as the EU and NATO. Scholars who adhere to these two interpretations of “integration”

* Corresponding author. Tel./fax: +1 703 721 0595.

E-mail address: georgeta@vt.edu (G. Pourchot).

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¹ For the purpose of this paper, Central Asia includes the following states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

identify three major groupings of states in the post-Soviet space: States with an officially declared interest to join the Euro-Atlantic community (the Baltic states, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), states interested in integration with Russia or in a *de facto* relationship of dependency on Russia (Armenia, Tajikistan; Belarus used to be part of this grouping until recently, when it started pursuing a reorientation towards the EU), and states that prefer a more independent-minded approach, maintaining good ties with both the Kremlin, and Brussels (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). This body of literature typically addresses states' readiness for Euro-Atlantic integration, their balancing act with Russia, their rationales for taking sides or wanting a balanced foreign policy towards these two centers of power (Dwan and Pavliuk, eds. 2000, Freire & Kanet, 2010; Korosteleva, ed. 2012).

The focus and analytical framework of ES scholarship addresses 'integration' as part and parcel of a historically-driven process called 'international society.' Conceptually, the ES is noted more for its articulation of a globalist rather than a regional perspective. This is due to the fact that the literature associated with the classical ES focused primarily on the study of the historical expansion of the European international society and its gradual transformation into the global international society of today (Bull & Watson, 1984; Butterfield & Wight, 1966; Watson, 1992; Wight, 1977). Although some historical regional international societies were the subject of examination, they were not, however, objects of attention in their own right. Rather, they were deemed to be important because global international society was seen to be a consequence of the expansion of one particular sub-global (European) international society. This meant that sub-global developments suffered both from conceptual underdevelopment and intellectual skepticism (Stivachtis & Webber, 2011b:110 and 2014:10).

Yet concepts derived from a global perspective still have relevance and application at the regional level (Buzan & Little, 2000). For example, there is general agreement among ES scholars that contemporary global international society is a 'thin' one, in the sense that it is pluralistic and heterogeneous, and that within the bounds of that society, there are several 'more thickly developed' 'regional clusters' in which the solidarist elements of international society are developed to a greater degree. Consequently, contemporary ES literature has paid significant attention to the study of international society at the regional/sub-global level (Ayoob, 1999; Diez & Whitman, 2002; Morgan, 2002; Riemer and Stivachtis 2002; Schouenborg, 2012; Stivachtis, 2002, 2008, 2009, 2010a; 2010b; Stivachtis & Webber, 2011a; 2014).

Although a significant amount of this literature focuses on the study of the European regional international society, a growing number of publications examine the development of international society in other world regions (Buzan & Gonzalez-Pelaez, 2009; Buzan & Waever, 2003; Qiubin, 2007). Due to its growing significance for world politics, Central Asia has attracted the attention of many scholars and analysts. As a result, scholars who employ the ES framework have become interested in studying the

development of international society in Central Asia (Aalto, 2007; Buranelli, 2013; Buzan & Waever, 2003: 397–436; Kaczmarek, 2013; Makarychev, 2011).

If one wishes to employ the ES framework in order to examine the degree of regional integration in Central Asia, one needs first to become familiar with the relevant ES concepts with the starting point being the examination of the distinction that Hedley Bull has drawn between an international system and international society.

2. The international system/society distinction

According to Adam Watson (1987:147), Bull's contribution to the theory of international relations is "considerable and nowhere more acute than in the distinction made between the concept of a system of states and that of international society." Bull (1977:9–10) defined the international system as being formed "when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave as parts of a whole." In this sense, the states of Central Asia constitute an international system since there is certainly sufficient contact between them and they have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave as parts of a whole. During the Cold War, the global international system was divided into two sub-global international systems, with the Soviet Union and its allies forming one of them. The states of Central Asia were integral part of the Soviet Union, and together with their Eastern European allies, formed an international system where they participated in institutions such as the Warsaw Pact, designed as a counter-organization to the international system of the Western states. After the Cold War, the existence of a significant systemic interaction among Central Asian states is demonstrated by the participation of those states in a network of regional organizations including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO, includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia), the Free Trade Area (CISFTA), the Single Economic Space (SES), the Russian-Belarus Union, the Tashkent Cooperation Treaty, the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC), GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) of which the CIS has received that status of 'Guest' (Aris, 2011; Malfliet, Verpoest, & Vinolurov, 2007).

According to Bull, an international society exists "when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions" (Bull, 1977:13). 'Integration' in this theoretical framework thus translates into the ability of states to recognize and abide by common rules of interaction, in the sharing of common responsibilities for the functioning of the institutions they build together.

Before a judgment is made about whether the Central Asian states form an international society, some issues regarding the difference between the concepts of 'international system' and 'international society' should be

addressed. The system/society distinction constitutes an empirical and practical formula which Bull gradually evolved in order to distinguish the homogeneous relations among a particular constellation of states from the heterogeneous relations of these states with the remainder of the political entities prevailing in the international system. In this sense, there exists an international society confined within limited geographic boundaries, which is distinguishable from an international system extended beyond the boundaries of society. This implies that if there is a regional international society in Central Asia, one should be able to distinguish it from the international system that extends beyond its boundaries.

As Bull's distinction came under closer examination, it ran into criticism (Stivachtis, 1998). The main thesis critical of Bull's distinction comes from those scholars who consider the system/society distinction as problematic not because they think that there is no difference between the two separate constellations of units that Bull identified but mainly due to the difficulty of distinguishing between the two concepts (Bartelson, 1996; Berridge, 1980; James, 1978, 1993; Jones, 1981; Waever, 1992). For example, these scholars have argued that it is very difficult to determine whether the distinguishing features of an international society that Bull has included in the definition of international society (interests, values, culture, rules, and institutions common to its members) are simultaneously present or absent in an international system. Bull himself acknowledges this by arguing that

... between an international system that is clearly also an international society, and a system that is clearly not a society, there exist cases where a sense of common interests is tentative and inchoate: where the common rules perceived are vague and ill-formed, and there is doubt as to whether they are worthy of the name of rules, or where common institutions are implicit or embryonic. If we ask of modern international society the questions when did it begin or what were its geographical limits we are at once involved in difficult problems of the tracing of boundaries. (Bull, 1977:15)

Examining the defining elements of an international society, Geoffrey Berridge and Alan James have convincingly shown that either some of these elements can be also found in an international system and/or that, unlike what Bull has suggested, they do not necessarily exist in an international society. For example, James (1993:275) has rejected Bull's conception of common interests, because first, the interests of all states are far from common, and second, because even in the international system common interests are not absent. James also points out that common rules are also essential in an international system "for otherwise the interactions would not have been increased in frequency" (James, 1993:273). There is evidence that Bull himself was aware of this problem. In one of his works, Bull (1971:271) suggested that there are certain rules which

"may have the status of simply operating procedures which are prior to international law, international morality and international institutions. The existence of these rules is a necessary condition of what I have called

the international system, as well as of an international society."

Even Adam Watson, a defender of Bull's distinction between system and society, has argued that "no international system as defined by Bull has operated without some regulatory rules ... and it is hard to see how one could" (Watson, 1987:11).

James is also not convinced that the cultural context is represented in the basic practices of the international society's members and suggests that cultural practices are not necessarily transmitted when the states of one culture impose themselves on other areas, or when practices of such a group of states are adopted by others (James, 1993:277). However, many scholars disagree with James's conclusions. For example, Fred Halliday argues that

"inter-state relations may constitute a society, not so much because of the shared values involved, but because it is a grouping established by the coercion of some states by others and maintained with a variety of ideological and military mechanisms, by the more powerful members ... thus socialization becomes not the inculcation and diffusion of shared values, but the imposition of a set of values" (Halliday, 1992:441–2)

The system/society debate within the English School has resulted in an agreement that an international system represents a weak form of an international society. For example, ES scholars (Buzan & Little, 2000; Buzan, Jones, & Little, 1993) have attempted to demonstrate the validity of the system/society distinction by pointing to the difference between an international system with a low degree of interstate interaction (a weak form of international society) and an international system where interstate interaction reaches a significant degree (a strong form of international society). Moreover, ES scholars have used the terms 'thin/thick' and 'pluralist/solidarist' to express the difference between a 'weak' and a 'strong' form of international society.

Moreover, in *The Expansion of International Society*, Bull and Watson (1984:1) redefined international society as

"a group of states ... which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behavior of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements" (Bull and Watson (1984:1).

At first sight, the two definitions of international society appear to be similar, but not only are they not similar, but they, in fact, correspond to two different historical forms of international society (Stivachtis, 1998:15). Barry Buzan (1993) has used the terms *gemeinschaft* and *gessellschaft* to describe these two historical forms. Using the assumptions of Neorealism, Buzan has sought to demonstrate how an international society can emerge as a result of the logic of anarchy, and thus provide an alternative account of the birth and growth of the contemporary multicultural global international society. The *gemeinschaft* understanding sees international society as something involving bonds of

common culture, while the *gessellschaft* conception views international society as being contractual meaning that states with common interests have established by dialog and consent common rules and organizations for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements. In other words, Buzan argues that international society could evolve from an international system where the existence of a shared culture was not a necessary condition, as Bull had argued.

Despite its shortcoming, Bull's system/society distinction has been adopted by English School scholars "for the reason that they are probably still more capable of distinguishing between international system and international society" (Zhang, 1991:3) or because the term 'international society' is preferable in that this concept is more appropriate to describe the association of states (Grader, 1988; Wilson, 1989). Gerritt Gong (1984) considers the distinction as a significant basis of departure, while Terry Nardin adopts a similar position when he argues that "what transforms a number of powers contingently related in terms of shared interests, into a society proper is their participation in and implicit recognition of the practices, procedures and other rules of international law that compose international society" (Nardin, 1983:23). According to Jens Bartelson (1996:341), what distinguishes international society from an international system is that the former exists "by virtue of being present in the consciousness of agents and can be read off from their practices, whereas the latter, when interpreted in strictly empiricist terms ... only has to have certain explanatory power in order for us to be able to speak of it as if it did exist." Finally, for Stanley Hoffmann (1986:183), "an international system exists because it is known to the theorist, and an international society is knowable by the theorist because it is embodied in the practices of agents."

3. The structure and institutions of international society

In *The Evolution of International Society*, Watson expressed his frustration with and doubts about sharp distinctions between systems (weak/thin or strong/thick) of independent states, suzerain systems, and empires. Therefore, he reconceptualized international society by suggesting that

"When a number of diverse communities of people, or political entities, are sufficiently involved with one another for us to describe them as forming a system of some kind, the organization of the system will fall somewhere along a notional spectrum between absolute independence and absolute empire" (Watson, 1992:13).

In Watson's spectrum, the terms *independence* and *empire* indicate two opposite ends of the spectrum, with none of them existing in *absolute* theoretical or practical terms. *Independence* is defined as the existence of political entities that retain the ultimate ability to make external and domestic decisions given, of course, the constraints that an anarchic international system imposes; while at the

opposite end of the spectrum, *empire* implies direct administration of different political communities from an imperial center. Along the spectrum, *hegemony* implies that some power or authority (most usually a state) is able to determine the operation of the system by setting the rules as well as determining to some extent the external relations between member states, while leaving them domestically independent. *Suzerainty* implies that one state exercises political control over another. *Dominion* covers situations where an imperial authority to some extent determines the internal government of other communities but they nevertheless retain their identity as separate states and some control over their own affairs. Watson identifies relations between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the Cold war, where states were formally independent and Moscow exercised a fair amount of influence in their internal affairs, as an example of *dominion* (Watson, 1992: 15). This type of relationship remains relevant in a post-Cold War environment, where as we shall see, Russia retains a higher (or lower) degree of authority and influence over the affairs of the now independent states that used to be integral part of the Soviet Union.

One additional conceptual clarification related to the ES analytical framework is in order. In international relations the terms 'international institutions' and 'international organizations' are usually used interchangeably. However, in ES literature the term 'international institution' refers to the constitutive principles that define both the basic character and purpose of an international society, while the term 'international organization' refers to bureaucratic structures created by states to manage their affairs. For example, the United Nations is an international organization, while the function of the Security Council demonstrates that the operation of the global international society is based on institutions like diplomacy, international law, balance of power, and great powers management. Although within the ES there is a polyphony about what the primary institutions of international society are, there is a general agreement that these institutions include sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, war, balance of power, great powers management, and trade (Buzan, 2004:161–204).

4. International society in Central Asia

One of the main themes that the classical ES has explored is the expansion of the historical European international society and its gradual transformation into the contemporary global international society (Bull & Watson, 1984; Watson, 1992). Because the logic of anarchy works more powerfully over shorter rather than longer distances and because states living in close proximity with one another may be forced to establish by dialog and consent common rules and organizations for the conduct of their relations, regional/sub-global international societies may be created as a result (Buzan, 1993:333). Since the term 'international system' implies a 'thin' form of international society, it can be argued that the contemporary global international system includes a number of regional international societies (Stivachtis, 1998:89). Moreover, Buzan argues that the uneven development of international society means that some parts of the contemporary global

system have more developed regional international societies than others (Buzan, 1993:344–5). In addition, Buzan has suggested that regional international organizations (such as the EU, CIS, or SCO) may reflect the existence of regional international societies.

Using Bull and Watson's concept, we now turn to the question of whether states of Central Asia constitute an international society, which is the equivalent of regional integration. We identify 1. the extent of dialog and consent to common rules and institutions among states, 2. the nature of the conduct of inter-state relations, and 3. recognition of common interests in maintaining agreed upon arrangements.

4.1. Dialog, consent, rules, and institutions

According to ES literature, the global international system of the Cold War era was divided into two sub-global international societies with the Soviet Union and its allies constituting one of them (Watson, 1992:290 and 293). The existence of this sub-global *gesellschaft* type of international society was reflected in the dialog, agreement and operation of international organizations like the Warsaw Pact, the COMECON and, for a short period of time, the Cominform. The inter-state dialog and consent processes of the Cold War era were driven by the Kremlin's priorities and political agenda, with the armed forces oftentimes playing a 'persuading' role in the region (Kaplan, 1981). A case by case analysis of the diversity of Moscow's relations with its Eastern European neighbors is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the overall process involved Moscow leaders inserting the Kremlin's priorities into domestic and foreign policy agendas in both overt and covert diplomacy. Sometimes, pressure was applied on national governments, other times envoys were sent to Eastern European capitals to represent and impose the Soviet position; yet other times Eastern allies, were summoned to Moscow for 'consultations.' The Kremlin would then report to the rest of the world that the Warsaw Pact states 'unanimously agreed' with the priorities set by the Kremlin. Up until the 80s, such 'agreement' extended even to support for Soviet policies at the level of the United Nations, where communist states were the only supporters of Kremlin East-West proposals (Daniels, 1960; Kanet, 1982; Rakowska-Harmstone, 1984).

In principle, states were sovereign, retaining authority to make decisions on their domestic affairs. In reality, the socialist/communist rhetoric of the Kremlin informed decisions both in domestic and foreign policy. 'The West' and the capitalist system were the enemy, socialism and communism 'would prevail,' the 'class struggle' would be victorious. These values were reflected in domestic politics, where attempts to break free from the communist ideology were (forcefully) stifled either by national governments loyal to the Soviet Union, or by direct Soviet military action. National elections were organized in each country, and they were said to be free, but freedom meant choosing from a single-party list of candidates, that is from Communist Party lists often times pre-approved in Moscow. There was no competition until the Solidarity challenged the state of affairs; it took Solidarity leaders almost a decade

underground before they were able to compete openly in national elections – by that time, the Cold War was almost over. There were instances of Eastern European deviation from Kremlin values throughout the Cold War in the form of mass protests, organization of non-Communist groups such as the Polish Solidarity, the Hungarian Revolution, or the Czech rebellion – what has been sometimes called processes of de-Stalinization and re-Stalinization (Stokes, 1991) – but none of them amounted to fundamental change in the relations between the center of power in the Kremlin, and what came to be known as the "cordon sanitaire" of the Warsaw Pact states (Ascheron, 1981; Lettis & Morris, 1961). The structure of this sub-global international society was thus imperial within the boundaries of the Soviet Union, while the nature and character of the relations between Moscow and the Soviet Union's allies reflected what Watson called *dominion*.

The scholarship on integration recognizes that dialog in the Central Asian space has been in constant flux since the end of the Cold War, witnessing periods of calm and cooperation, as well as acrimony and disengagement. Regional developments indicate that between the disintegration of the Soviet sphere of influence and the emergence of sovereign states, a *thin* regional, sub-global international society took its place, with a range on Watson's spectrum between somewhat imperial to somewhat independent.

Starting with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of 15 states in its stead, the process of establishing sovereign states with functioning institutions has been arduous. The process of dialog and co-existence among these states has been equally uneven. "Vanguard" former Soviet states decoupled themselves from the imperial center and pursued Euro-Atlantic integration, despite Moscow's strong opposition. The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania pursued and acquired membership in the EU and NATO, refusing to join any of the Central Asian international organizations in which Russia was involved. Relations between the Baltic states and Russia were at times tense, with strong disagreements regarding the situation of the ethnic Russian population living in these states, issues of language and respect for cultural heritage, and acrimonious debates about the historical record of Soviet occupation of the Baltics, or Baltic sympathies with Nazi Germany. Interestingly, Moscow did not attempt to preclude Baltic Euro-Atlantic integration by military force (Pourchot, 2008: 64–117). These states are now part of the Euro-Atlantic international society dominated by values of democracy, market economy, and respect for human rights, forming a regional international society located towards the independence end of Watson's spectrum.

The remaining eleven "late blooming" former Soviet republics have complex relations with Russia, and Russia with them. On the one hand, these states had the tremendous task of establishing themselves as viable sovereign states, with functioning governments and institutions. On the other hand, in foreign policy, they had to make decisions about what course their new statehoods would pursue. Some of them had an interest in Western institutions and tried to pursue a delicate balancing act between asserting their interest in Euro-Atlantic

integration, and maintaining a good relationship with Russia. All, including Russia, joined Partnership for Peace (PfP), a NATO program of bilateral practical cooperation. They also pursued relations with the EU, in the format of the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighborhood Policy, some even applying for Individual Action Plans (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine).

Other states preferred to develop a more balanced foreign policy, forging good relations with both centers of power in Brussels/Washington and Moscow. These states tend to have abundant energy resources and are therefore in a stronger position to leverage those resources and their geostrategic position in Central Asia when or if pressure is being applied on them to side with one center of power or another (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). Overall, these states participate in Central Asian organizations set up either by Moscow, or by their Central Asian or East European neighbors. For instance, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova participate in CIS (Georgia withdrew in 2009 in the aftermath of Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states), an organization dominated by Russia's leadership and priorities. They also participate in the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC), an informal organization that promotes democracy, human rights and the rule of law, made up of the Baltic states, Romania, Slovenia and the Republic of Macedonia. The 2005 Borjomi Declaration of the CDC stipulated common interests such as "strengthening of democracy and civil society" as one of the main tasks of and prerequisites for the economic development of a region identified as "Baltic-Black-Caspian seas," and identified that this region, "if based and developed on the right principles of democracy, freedom and prosperity," it would represent "today in Europe one of the major areas of opportunity, with a unique potential of human resources, transit lines, energy resources and communications between Europe, Central Asia and the Far East." (Borjomi Declaration 2005; Peuch, 2005). Interestingly, the declaration stipulates that Russia, the EU and the US are invited as observers. In addition to pursuing democracy and prosperity, the founding act of CDC indicates that this organization was also interested in putting an end to "a history of division in Europe, of restricted freedoms and domination by force and by fear, and mark a new beginning of neighborly relations based on mutual respect, confidence, transparency and equality." (Ibid.)

Russia sought to reconstitute its international society by establishing a net of regional international organizations of which CIS was of primary importance for through this organization Russian foreign policy began to put emphasis on the attainment of its indisputable position of leadership in the post-soviet space (Malfliet et al., 2007). If one applies the *gessellschaft* conception of international society then it can be argued that CIS reflects the existence of a regional international society since the member states have established by dialog and consent common rules and policies for the conduct of their relations. Given the position and goals of Russia, this society occupies the hegemony-dominion space on Watson's spectrum.

However, the resistance of a number of CIS member states, such as Ukraine and Georgia, to Russia's efforts to create a dominion led to the diminishing role of this

organization which in the eyes of the Russian leadership failed to fulfill the objectives and goals of the Russian strategy and policy (Hunter, 1996:107–23). As a result, Moscow shifted its attention to another regional international organization, namely the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Unlike CIS, which evolved around a single great power (Russia), SCO has now evolved around two major world powers, Russia and China. Consequently, SCO came to reflect the existence of a *gessellschaft* type of regional international society in Central Asia that occupies a place closer to the independence location on Watson's spectrum. For example, it has been argued that the structure and mechanisms of this organization are based on the principle of mutual recognition of sovereign equality among its members, while the 'Shanghai spirit' reflects values and norms associated with equality of the member states (Aris, 2011:2–53). The operation of the Central Asian international society is based on the institutions of sovereignty, diplomacy, trade, balance of power, and great powers management (Rumer, Trenin, & Zhao, 2007). Moreover, the high and dense degree of interaction among the states of Central Asia, reflected in the operation of SCO but also the rest of the regional international organizations network is what distinguishes the Central Asian regional international society from the international system that extends beyond its boundaries.

4.2. Conduct of relations

The conduct of inter-state relations in Central Asia reveals an equally mixed set of circumstances, indicating that a sub/global, regional international society in the area displays ES characteristics ranging from imperial, to hegemonic, to independent on Watson's spectrum. On the one hand, most states maintain a level of civility in their interactions, and respect one another. The multitude of organizations they have created to address trade, cultural, economic, energy, security and foreign policy issues is a testament that constructive dialog among Central Asian sovereign states is not only possible, but also lucrative. The institutions of balance of power and trade are particularly represented in intra-state relations, where a number of competing energy projects could have created significant disruptions, or confrontations in the region. For instance, Russia strongly opposed the construction of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) transporting crude oil from the Caspian Sea to a Turkish port on the Mediterranean Sea, and from there to European markets. The opposition had to do with the fact that this is the first pipeline to bypass Russian territory, which leads to revenue loss for Russia. Yet the channels of communication between Azerbaijan, the state that supported this pipeline, and Russia, the state that opposed it remain open. It can be argued that the values on which states such as Azerbaijan base their diplomacy are closer to the independence location on Watson's spectrum. Ukraine's position is somewhat similar, with Ukraine pursuing both diplomacy towards Russia, but also close relations with the EU. During President Yushchenko's administration, membership in NATO was also pursued, which resulted in strong opposition from Moscow. During the current Yanukovich administration, ties with Moscow

have strengthened, particularly in defense and security policy; but ties with Brussels were also enhanced. Ukraine is one of the few Central Asian states that has an EU Action Plan under the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Institutional structures emerged in Ukraine starting in 2004, to coordinate the country's European integration: a Coordination Council for adaptation of Ukraine's legislation to that of the EU was created in 2004, a post of Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration followed in 2005, a Coordination Bureau for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was created between 2008 and 2010, a government Committee for European Integration and International Cooperation followed in 2008, and a Bureau of European Integration within the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers was created in 2010 (Stegniy, 2012: 55). This independent-mindedness created tensions with Russia, who, in the words of its former president Medvedev, expressed doubt that this move towards EU integration by Ukraine "does not harm Russia's interests," (Marson, 2009). Yet the two states continue to pursue bilateral relations, despite Ukraine's steady pursuit of European integration, and two 'gas wars' that threatened gas supplies to Europe, with Ukraine conceding on one important aspect of bilateral frictions: renewing the lease for the stationing of the Russian fleet in the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol for another 50 years.

On the other hand, some states remain clenched in standoffs regarding territorial issues. Armenia and Azerbaijan do not have diplomatic relations and the border between them is closed due to the inability of the two states to agree on a political solution for the breakaway republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. Georgia closed its diplomatic mission to Russia in the aftermath of the August 2008 war in which the Russian military sided with two Georgian secessionist republics, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The result of that war was Russia's diplomatic recognition of sovereign status for the two breakaway republics, a situation that leaves Georgia *de facto* partitioned. Additional inter-ethnic tensions among the seven republics in North Caucasus, located in Southern Russia have amounted to the most serious crises in post-Soviet Russia. This includes two Chechen wars, the Budennovsk hospital siege (1995), the Nord-Ost theater siege (2002), the Beslan school hostage siege (2004), and the Moscow Metro bombings (2010) (Foxall, 57). While these crises are intra-state, the forceful manner in which Russia chose to resolve them is an indicator of a conduct of relations closer to the imperial position on Watson's spectrum.

Additional intra-state conflicts such as the secessionist Trans-Dniester region in Moldova, and the inter-ethnic tensions and violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups in Kyrgyzstan indicate that while a regional international society exists in Central Asia, it is weak/thin in ES sense. It does not help that Moscow sometimes takes confrontational positions, dismissing or diminishing its neighbors' sovereignty. A recent and famous example involves Russia's position vis-à-vis Ukraine. Calling Ukraine "little Russia", Vladimir Putin has raised eye-brows on more than one occasion regarding his views about Russia's neighbors. In April 2008, Russia's *Kommersant* newspaper claimed that Putin described Ukraine to US President George W. Bush at

a NATO meeting in Bucharest disrespectfully. "You don't understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a gift from us," (Marson, 2009). Elsewhere, Putin appears to have spelled out that in his view, "Ukraine is not even a state" (RFL Newslines, 2008). Such attitudes and conduct in inter- and intra-state relations indicate an unevenness in this regional international society, a perpetual tug of war between imperial ambitions, independent positions, and hegemonic tendencies.

4.3. Common interests in maintaining arrangements

While James argued that the interests of all states are far from common (1993:275), the concept that states have a common interest to maintain agreements that they reach remains an important pillar of ES theory. As the previous two sections indicate, Central Asian interests range from maintaining a position of strong hegemony in the region (Russia), to independent-mindedness in domestic and foreign policy (Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine), to being in a dominion relationship with Russia (Armenia, Belarus). Yet all the states have a vested interest to respect the agreements in which they entered, especially those agreements related to respect for sovereignty. That is one reason why the recognition of two Georgian break-away republics by Russia led to a significant break in bilateral relations: the sovereignty of the state of Georgia was threatened by such recognition.

There are, however, other examples of common interests in maintaining agreements in the region, particularly in trade and customs. In 2011, Vladimir Putin proposed the formation of the Eurasian Union, between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The scope of this new organization was to remove obstacles to the flow of goods and people, within a common economic space. Preceded by the Common Economic Space, this project is well on its way of becoming a functioning entity. In 2010, the three countries implemented a uniform external customs tariff and adopted a customs code. In 2011, internal border controls were lifted. And in 2012, the Single Economic Space was inaugurated with a Eurasia Economic Commission based in Moscow to administer it. The Eurasia Union is expected to be fully functional by 2015. Interestingly, Putin acknowledges that the Schengen Agreements of the EU were used as a model in thinking about a common economic space (Putin, 2011).

The (lack of) recognition that mutually agreed arrangements should be respected, and that all parties have a common interest in the predictability that such recognition brings about is reflected in the manner in which Central Asian states remained in, or disengaged from organizations in which they were part. Uzbekistan's departure from GUUAM was prompted by what the Uzbek authorities called a "deviation of the organization from its stated goals of economic cooperation," focusing too much on security at the expense of the initial goals (RFL/RL, 2005). Georgia's withdrawal from CIS was a direct result of the August 2008 war with Russia over its two break-away republics, as an explicit result of the fact that Georgia saw Russia's actions as running counter to what the CIS stood for. On the other

hand, the fact that all the other initial signatories to CIS remained members, even as they refused Moscow's pressure to recognize the independence of the two Georgian break-away republics, is a testament to their recognition that the CIS retains some use for their national interests, but that they can no longer be forced into decisions than run counter to those national interests.

5. Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented in this paper, it is thus a fair assessment to state that Central Asia constitutes a sub/global, regional international society in the sense of the English School theory of international relations, with a *thin* development of intra-state relations ranging in location from imperial to independent on Watson's spectrum, set within a broader context of a thicker global society that includes well integrated and functioning organizations such as the Euro-Atlantic organizations.

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Georgeta Pourchot is Director of the On-Line MA Program in Political Science in the Northern Capital Region at Virginia Tech. She is a former member of the Romanian Parliament and the Romanian Green Party. She has worked on democratization projects in Central Europe and Central Asia during her tenure at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. Her research interests include democratization theories, security, American foreign policy, and English School theory. She teaches international relations theory, American foreign policy, global security, global governance, post-communist societies, and Euro-Atlantic integration. She published book chapters and is the author of *Eurasia Rising. Democracy and Independence in the Post-Soviet Space*.

Yannis A. Stivachtis is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the International Studies Program at Virginia Tech. His research interests include the expansion of international society, conditionality and international order, international society and the civilizing process, the study of international society at the sub-global level, regional international society in Europe, and European international society and global order. He teaches in the areas of international politics and security studies. He is the author of *Human and State (In)security in a Globalized World*, *Cooperative Security and Non-Offensive Defence in the Middle East*, and *The Enlargement of International Society*. He has published several journal articles and book chapters and has edited and co-edited several books and journal special issues.