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Russian foreign policy in the realm of European security through the lens of neoclassical realism

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ABSTRACT

There are different views on (in-)predictability and on (non-)cooperation in Russian foreign policy towards the West, but also on the question about how - that is, through which theoretical framework - to interpret it. This essay aims at contributing to the debate around these three issues. Its goal is to demonstrate the expediency of using a neoclassical realist theoretical perspective, enhanced by the inclusion of such subjective factors as status/prestige and perceptions. While there are factors in Russian domestic and foreign policy which give it a certain degree of unpredictability, nevertheless, if it is studied in a comprehensive way, it turns out to be more consistent and predictable than it at first seems. Even though Russia is often accused of being anti-Western and non-cooperative, this argument does not hold true: Russian foreign policy is selective and includes both cooperative and non-cooperative tactics.

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1. Introduction

There is much controversy among Western scholars and policy makers about the foreign policy[1] of the Russian Federation (RF). On the one hand, Russian foreign policy is frequently described as volatile with shifts from cooperation to non-cooperation and – until the recent Russian–Western "reset" – even to anti-Westernism and a new Cold War (Bugajski, 2004; Lucas, 2008; McKinnon, 2007; Scholl-Latour, 2006). According to Legvold, "Russian foreign policy … has lurched through many different - often radically different - phases… Swings of this magnitude and velocity are not a normal feature of a country's foreign policy" (Legvold, 2007, 3, 10). Because of these swings some scholars have even diagnosed Russia as a "borderline personality" (Arias-King, de Arias, and de La Canal, 2008). Western policy makers complain about Russia's unpredictability and irrationality (Miliband, 2008; Truszczynski, 2005; Vika-Freiberga, 2000) and suggest that "Moscow interprets its interests in the wrong way" (Arbatov, 2007).

By contrast, other scholars find both shifts and continuity (Thorun, 2009; Tsygankov, 2010a) or even a preponderance of continuity. For instance, Richard Pipes argues: "Despite its reputation for unpredictability, Russia is a remarkably conservative nation whose mentality and behavior change slowly, if at all…" (Pipes, 2004, 9). Or according to Allen Lynch: "… the prevalent view of contemporary Russian foreign policy as relatively

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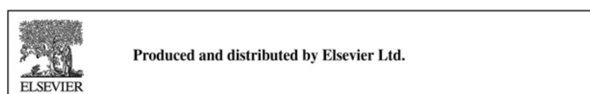

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[1] In this essay "Russia" or "Russian foreign policy" means the official position of the Russian government. A state can be equated with the main decision-makers; it can be portrayed as a corporate entity which has a stable collective identity; it can be treated as an institutional actor (Barnett, 1993, 274).

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incoherent and ineffective and, where coherent, unilateralist and anti-Western … often proved far from being the case…" (Lynch, 2001, 8). Mark Webber finds continuity "in favor of cooperative but conditional engagement with the West," and, in contrast to those who speak of inconsistency in Russian conduct, notices "a degree of hesitancy, uncertainty and inconsistency" in the West's Russia policy (Webber, 2000, 147 and 148). Russian scholars describe Russian conduct towards the West in terms of "a simultaneous partnership and rivalry" (Shevtsova, 2006, 11), a "confrontational-integrationist paradigm" (Entin & Zagorskij, 2008) and "calls for peace combined with active 'hostilities'" (Bordachev, 2008) (author's translations).

In addition to this discussion on the (un-)predictability/(dis-)continuity and (non-)cooperation in Russian foreign policy, there is the question about how to interpret it. Some scholars argue that Russia acts rationally, in particular, on the basis of realist balance-of-power calculations (Averre, 2009; Lynch, 2001; Sakwa, 2008). Others present it as a role player, behaving in accordance with its identity, norms and self/other perceptions (Feklyunina, 2008; Fischer, 2004; Neumann, 2008; Splidsboel-Hansen, 2002).

The purpose of this essay is to contribute to this discussion around Russian foreign policy, by considering three questions: is Russian foreign policy (in)consistent and (un)predictable; is it predominantly non-cooperative in relation to the West in the realm of European security; and, finally, which theoretical framework can make Russian foreign policy more understandable? The first section explains the expediency of using the neoclassical realist perspective. The second section presents Russia's attitude towards the West as expressed in its main foreign policy and security concepts. The third section deals with the changes in "the context of action" in Russian–Western relations with the focus on the years 2007–2010. In the fourth section the West is "broken up," and the focus is on the patterns of Russia's engagement with Western (-dominated) international governmental organizations (IGOs), relevant in the area of European security: the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).[2] The last section draws conclusions about the three questions, raised in this essay.

2. Russian foreign policy through the "Lens" of neoclassical realism

The current popular trend in the studies of international relations (IR) is methodological pluralism, for instance, in the form of "realist constructivism" or "constructivist realism" (Barkin, 2003; Cupchik, 2001). Scholars find "substantial areas of agreement" between rationalism/realism and constructivism, and "where genuine differences exist they are as often complementarities as contradictions" (Fearon & Wendt, 2002, 52).

Neoclassical realism reflects this trend of searching for ways to apply different material/objective but also subjective explanatory categories, both of an external and an internal nature. It is an approach to international politics that stresses that "the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities," but that also acknowledges the importance of the "intervening variables at the unit level" (Rose, 1998, 146). For instance, perceptions, historic memories, culture and other subjective factors play a role "in the selection and implementation of foreign policy responses to the international environment" (Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman, 2009a, 280; see also: Kindermann, 2001; Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009; Meier-Walser, 1994; Siedschlag, 2001a, 2001b).

To remind, one of the main realist assumptions is that states aim at the provision of security, maintenance/maximization of power, influence and sovereignty (Burchill, 2001; Grieco, 1997). However, classical realists have also noted that not only material factors (e.g. availability of natural resources, the state of military-industrial and socio-economic development, quantity and quality of armed forces), but also subjective or socio-psychological ones (e.g. competence of the political elite, national character, morale) matter (Baumann, Rittberger, & Wagner, 2001, 43). Furthermore, they have noted "that not all foreign policies have always followed so rational, objective, and unemotional a course…", but argued: "Yet a theory of foreign policy… must for the time being, as it were, abstract from these irrational elements…" (Morgenthau, 1993, 7).

Neoclassical realists go a step further: while re-claiming the importance of material factors as a driving force for a country's foreign policy in the anarchical international system, they have incorporated into their analysis "traditional" constructivist categories, giving primacy, however, to interests and international imperatives rather than to identities. J. Samuel Barkin argues that it is a normal development. While many realists worked under the conditions of the Cold War, where military threats had special importance, today "in situations in which no imminent military threat exists, as is currently the case among many of the world's major powers," no *a priori* reason exists within realist theory to privilege material/objective factors (Barkin, 2003, 329). Furthermore, subjective factors have become a part of *Realpolitik*: "In the current international system, states need not compete for military power… But states still contend for status, influence, and prestige – international pecking order" (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, 184; see also: Mastanduno & Kapstein, 1999; Wolf, 2008).

Neoclassical realism can offer important insights into the issues of shifts and continuity as well as cooperation and non-cooperation in Russian foreign policy. Realists claim that while the main interests of a state are "more or less permanent" and "tend to show little variation over time," what can and does change, "if the context of action changes, are policy preferences" (Freund & Rittberger, 2001, 71). The changes in the context of action are predetermined by changes in the international power distribution and in

[2] The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was institutionalized into the OSCE by a decision of the Budapest Summit in December 1994.

domestic capabilities. In the international system, which is seen as inimical and anarchical, cooperation can be a policy preference, if it helps to increase security, influence and power capabilities, including economic utilities. In addition, states will be more inclined to cooperation if their concerns for international prestige and status are taken into account by other actors (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, 184).

At the same time, a state's behaviour does not have to be either cooperative or non-cooperative, but rather it is "adaptive" (Taliaferro, Lobell, & Ripsman, 2009b, 30). Neoclassical realism explains that states may view each other simultaneously as security threats and valuable economic partners; it is also possible "for *irrational* national collective identity politics to coexist with *rational* self-interest" (Sterling-Folker, 2002, 103). In other words, "cooperation and competition cannot be separated;" cooperation "can be used and often is used to compete" (Doran, 2010, 41). Finally, a state may act in a compensatory way: "…a conflictual action in one policy area is followed by cooperative action vis-à-vis the same government in the same or another policy area, and the other way around … In this way, governments try to keep open as many behavioral options and interaction opportunities as possible" (Faber, 1990, 309).

To sum up, neoclassical realism is chosen as the theoretical framework for this analysis of Russian foreign policy, first, because of its focus on a state. Second, neoclassical realism helps to stress the importance of external imperatives: Russian foreign policy towards the West predominantly changes together with the West's policies towards Russia. The Russian international position "has emerged as historically dependent on the West's power and recognition" (Tsygankov, 2010b). Dmitri Trenin notices that in conditions under which the process of defining national identity has not come to an end and due to the deficit in long-term visions and strategies, Russian foreign policy has been reactive, in that it responds to the policies of the West (Dmitri Trenin, 2009, 15). According to Thomas Graham, "What Russia can afford to do in the world arena will, to a large extent, depend on the ups and downs of other powers and on the change of their weight in relation to Russia…" (Graham, 2010, 112, author's translation). This is why, the balance-of-power calculations and international imperatives "affect broad contours of foreign policy" of the RF (cf. Rose, 1998, 167). Third, while stressing the importance of material factors, neoclassical realism helps to integrate subjective categories, such as status/prestige and perceptions.

3. Conceptualization of Russian foreign policy in relation to the West

Even the short comparative overview[3] possible within the framework of this essay, demonstrates that Russia's main realist interests have been continuous throughout the process of (re-)conceptualization of its foreign policy through its main documents – "The Law on Security" (1992),[4] "The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine" (1993),[5] Foreign Policy Concept (1993,[6] 2000,[7] 2008), National Security Concept (1997,[8] 2000), Strategy of the National Security of the Russian Federation (RF) until 2020 (2009), and Military Doctrine (2000,[9] 2010).[10] These realist interests proceed from one document to another, despite domestic changes in Russian leadership (different foreign ministers and presidents) and despite external changes in the EU and NATO and in the US government and in their Russia policies. At the same time, policy preferences or tactics change, when the context of action changes.

Above all, since its first post-Soviet documents, Russia has proclaimed its readiness to protect its sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and security, which corresponds to a realist understanding of a state's main interests (Burchill, 2001; Grieco, 1997). Furthermore, Russia consistently aspires through its foreign policy "to promote the development of the national economy" – utility maximization – ("Foreign Policy Concept of the RF," 2000). Though Russia has, since the 1990s, aspired to be integrated into the "world economy and politics," this goal has not yet been achieved (Foreign Policy Concept 2008). Economic modernization has become the slogan of Medvedev's presidency (Foreign Policy Concept 2008). The "Program for Effective Use of Foreign Policy in the Long Term Development of Russia," an unofficial Kremlin strategy[11] emphasized the need to develop modernization partnerships, especially in view of the consequences of the global financial crisis. Russian state leaders realize that the main security threats are of an internal nature (e.g. poor socio-economic conditions, environmental threats, threats to territorial integrity), but it compares its domestic development and international capabilities with those of Western actors (a realist feature). Russia wants to become economically stronger *vis-à-vis* the West, but it realizes that it can only achieve this goal with Western help.

Furthermore, Russia has aspired to equal great power status. Most of the documents are optimistic about the potential for achieving this goal. Medvedev's national security strategy (2009), in particular, starts by noting that "Russia has overcome the consequences of the systemic … crisis at the end of the 20th century… All in all, the prerequisites have been established for … the transformation of the RF into one of the leading great powers…" (author's translation). The paradox is that this concept

[3] For more detailed comparative analyses see: De Haas, 2010; Kassianova, 2001; Sergounin, 1998.

[4] It can be accessed on the webpage of the National Security Council (NSC) of the RF at http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/20.html, last accessed 10 July 2010.

[5] Cf. Jane's Intelligence Review, Special Report (January 1994), p.6.

[6] "Kontseptsiia vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii" (1993), *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, January, 3–23.

[7] Cf. http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/25.html, accessed 10 July 2010.

[8] Cf. http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/1.html, accessed 10 July 2010.

[9] The text in Russian was published by Nezavisimaya Gazeta, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2000-04-22/5_doktrina.html, accessed 10 July 2010.

[10] The remaining documents can be accessed on the Russian MFA webpage.

[11] Cf. the Russian edition of Newsweek on 11 May 2010, at http://www.runewsweek.ru/country/34184/, accessed 15 May 2010.

emerged at the time when Russia had been weakened by the global financial crisis. This shows the need to draw a line under the crisis of the 1990s and to emphasize Russia's achievements for internal mobilization of the population to overcome the economic crisis. According to neoclassical realism, "leaders almost always face a two-level game in devising and implementing grand strategy: on the one hand, they must respond to the external environment, but, on the other, they must extract and mobilize resources from domestic society, work through existing domestic institutions, and maintain the support of stakeholders" (Taliaferro, Lobell, & Ripsman, 2009a, 7).

Another continuity is that most of these foreign policy-related documents underline the need to transform the Western-dominated international system into a multilateral one, where Russia can play the role of a great power. The Foreign Policy Concepts of 1993 and 1997, in particular, called for creating a new pan-European security architecture on the basis of the CSCE/OSCE. Because this hope turned out to be futile, the subsequent documents criticize "the striving of particular states and intergovernmental associations to belittle the role of existing mechanisms for ensuring international security, above all the United Nations and the OSCE" (Security Doctrine 2000) and call for reforms in the OSCE, so that it can fulfill its function "of being a forum for an equitable dialogue" (Security Concept 2008).

While in 1993 the foreign policy focused on a partnership with the US, since 1997 Russia's documents have referred more negatively to the US and NATO and have paid more attention to the EU. In 1997, Russia identified "bloc politics" by other countries as well as attempts to isolate Russia, primarily because NATO would not give up its enlargement plans. After NATO's 1999 military operation in the former Yugoslavia, which Russia strongly opposed, it concluded that "a number of states are stepping up efforts to weaken Russia" (Security Concept of the RF 2000). Russia feels excluded from the international decision-making process, and this affects its foreign policy (Light, Löwenhardt, & White, 2006). The most recent documents no longer have such harsh wording, but also speak of "global competition" with respect to the models of development and values, "the incompetency of the existing global and regional system," disagreements between major international actors, and Russian aspirations to equality (Foreign Policy Concept 2008).

In terms of military threats, the military doctrine of 2010 has caused a lot of astonishment and generated a great deal of criticism in the West,[12] primarily due to two points: first, because NATO is in first place on its list of national security "dangers," or, more precisely, attempts to empower NATO with global functions and to move NATO infrastructures close to the borders of the RF, including by means of enlargement, and, second, it emphasizes Russia's right to use nuclear weapons, if it or its allies are attacked. However, the Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine in 1993 also mentioned "expansion of military blocks and alliances to the detriment of the interests of Russia's military security" and "the build-up of forces on the Russian borders to limits upsetting the existing balance of forces," without naming NATO explicitly. In both the 1993 and the 2010 documents it is not NATO *per se* but rather its enlargement that is identified as a danger and it is thereby warned not to enlarge. If in 1993 this point was in ninth place on the list of "existing and potential sources of external military dangers," in 2010 it is in first place. However, the 2010 military doctrine differentiates between "dangers," where NATO is mentioned, and "threats," which are considered more serious. Despite this overall negative attitude towards NATO, the doctrine offers many areas for cooperation with the West (see: Schmidt & Müller, 2010). As for the second point – Russia's right to use nuclear weapons – it had already abandoned the principle of no-first-use of nuclear weapons in 1993 (Basic Provisions 1993).

At the regional level, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is defined as "a priority area of Russia's foreign policy" (Foreign Policy Concept 2008). While in the 1990s Russia rather sporadically pursued its objective of some integration into the CIS, not knowing which formats of integration to prioritize, in 2008, Medvedev's strategy identified three regional institutions to be strengthened: the CIS *per se*, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC). However, questions remain about the attainability of these goals (Alexandrova, Götz, & Halbach, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Kobrinskaya, 2004; Lawson & Erickson, 1999; Ofer & Pomfret, 2004). While its CIS policy has been a tool for Russia to assert its global power and to become more equal with the West, it has drawn Russia even further away from the West.

Summing up, Russia's foreign policy has been consistent in pursuing its main realist interests: maximization of power and security as well as maximization of utilities – military and economic capabilities – *vis-à-vis* the West – but *with* the help of the West. Russia is also aiming at maximizing prestige and at receiving Western recognition as a great power.

On the one hand, Russia wants to be a great power, to survive in the unfriendly realist world. The majority of Russian analysts interpret Russian foreign policy from a realist perspective: each state "little by little is waiting for the other to become weaker" (Bogaturov, 2010a, author's translation).[13] Under these conditions, Russia is interested in strengthening its power and its military and economic capabilities as well as its ability to exert influence both within the international system (for instance, within the framework of the OSCE but also in relation to NATO's decisions), and also at the regional level (CIS): "Strength is a precondition for dialogue" (Areshev, 2007, 142, author's translation). The overall negative role, attributed to NATO and the US, is not only a sign of the "inertness of mentality"

[12] Cf. Interview of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, "We can't say that NATO presents a threat to us," *Kommersant*, 11 June 2010, in: *David Johnson's Russia List*, 116, 15 June 2010.

[13] See also on the realist vision of the Russian IR scholars: Baranovsky & Bogaturov, 2010; Bogaturov, 2010b; Sergunin, 2004; Shakleyina, 2003; Tsygankov, 2005; Tsygankov & Tsygankov, 2010.

of the Russian military command and of lingering Cold War stereotypes, but also of a "pragmatic choice of maintaining military might" (Trenin, 2003, author's translation).

On the other hand, this great power objective reflects Russia's self-perception and its historic memory of being a great power – the Russian empire – or even the Soviet superpower: "Our present life would seem to be devoid of anything visible bearing out the correctness and aptness of the words 'Russia is a great power.' But while these words may sound surprising, few Russians will fail to perceive them as natural and their meaning as self-evident" (Pozdnyakov, 1993, 4). As a result, "Russia wants to be recognized – not only in word, but also in deed – as a great power among great powers" (Arbatov, 2007).

This dualism – the desire to strengthen power capabilities vis-à-vis the West, but seeking its help and recognition – create preconditions for both cooperation with the West as well as some balance-of-power opposition and potential for non-cooperation and even conflict. In its foreign policy concepts Russia proclaims cooperation but also uses warnings to the West, to try to influence its actions.

One more point worth mentioning is that all these documents are vague about the meaning of Russia's great power role, its goals and the means of realizing them. Russian leaders do not know what to prioritize: Russia's regional role as a leading CIS power or its global role; Russia's competition with Western actors in the CIS, or greater integration with the West; its own autonomy or greater dependence on the West, which would be the result of greater integration. This ambivalence, in addition to the overall lack of transparency in the foreign policy decision-making process, a tendency to act on a short-term case-to-case basis, and questions about the tandem relationship between President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin and its future, contribute to Russia's foreign policy being seen as unpredictable. However, it is fair to say that in the face of constant changes in domestic and international conditions and the appearance of new threats, it is also challenging to define clear long-term strategies for Western actors, and their decision-making processes leave questions open as well. Furthermore, the vagueness of conceptual documents is often used as a tool in international practice, for example, to avoid unnecessary commitments. In Russia's case, it is both the incapability of formulating clear goals and tactical ambiguity.

4. Russian–Western rollercoaster ride and the change in the "Context of Action"

The previous section has indicated that Russian foreign policy concepts reflect the changes in the context of action. Many Western policy makers and even analysts are often taken by surprise with Russian actions, precisely because they ignore or underestimate these material and subjective changes. This section looks into these, by considering several examples from the Russian–Western rollercoaster-like relationship – with great ups and downs – in 2007–2010.

To start with the first example, in December 2007, the Western partners were shocked, when the RF showed its political teeth by suspending its participation in the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The CFE treaty was concluded between two groups of states (the NATO and the Warsaw Pact), and it no longer corresponds to the post-Cold War reality (Dunay, 2004, 259–290; Dunay & Zellner, 2000, 349–363; Zellner, Schmidt, & Neuneck, 2009). In 1999, at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul, OSCE member states agreed on the adaptation of the CFE treaty.[14] At the same time, Russia committed to "complete withdrawal of the Russian forces from the territory of Moldova by the end of 2002"[15] and to disbanding two of its bases in Georgia by 1 July 2001.[16] When this did not happen, NATO states saw no "basis" to "work towards bringing the adapted Treaty into force."[17] According to Russian representatives, the CFE Treaty was used as tool of pressure on Russia by the West, and this was not acceptable (Areshev, 2007). Most outstandingly, in 2007, during the Munich Conference on Security Policy, the then-President Putin clearly expressed discontent with the "pitiful condition" of the CFE Treaty, when "NATO countries openly declared that they would not ratify this treaty… But … It turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, and we continue to strictly fulfill the treaty obligations and do not react to these actions at all" (Putin, 2007). In his shocking speech, he also criticized the international system, in which: "One state, the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way" and "imposes [its policies] on other nations" (Putin, 2007). Despite the forcefulness of these statements, NATO countries did not take them seriously. They were used to empty Russian warnings and threats in the 1990s (e.g. against NATO enlargements or NATO's operation in the former Yugoslavia in 1999), which were not followed by real actions.

In 2008, the Western partners were again taken by surprise, when President Medvedev made his proposal on a dialogue on a new European Security Treaty (EST).[18] They did not know how to assess it: positively, as an invitation to discuss problems in Russian–Western relations or negatively as Russia's attempt to limit NATO's activities or even to get rid of NATO altogether. The RF had developed only a vague proposal, first, because of the inability to develop a more comprehensive framework, and, second, because a concrete, well-elaborated treaty would have caused much criticism from Western partners for not including them in the conceptualization process. Though this proposal seemed to be something new, it resembled Russia's earlier proposals on pan-European security.

Just a few months later, the West was again shocked, when Russia showed its military teeth in the crisis around

[14] Istanbul Document. Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, November 1999, pp. 119–235.

[15] Istanbul Document. Istanbul Summit Declaration, p. 50.

[16] Cf. Joint Statement of the RF and Georgia, Istanbul, 17 November 1999, point 1, Annex 14 of the Final Act of the Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on CFE, CFE.DOC/2/99.

[17] Cf. NATO, Final Communiqué, Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, 24 May, 2000, Florence.

[18] Cf. The draft of the European Security Treaty, 29 November 2009, available at: http://www.kremlin.ru. See also: Dunay & Herd, 2009,77–98 East-West Institute, 2009; Lo, 2009; Lukyanov, 2009; Monaghan, 2008; Yurgens, Yu, Dynkin, & Baranovsky, 2009.

the South Ossetia. According to Karaganov, "By the end of the decade, in August 2008, Russia achieved victory once again. … Having defeated Georgia, behind which were the US and NATO, Russia once again demonstrated the political ability to resist aggressors in a harsh way. Moreover, Russia thereby stopped further enlargement of NATO…" (Karaganov, 2011).

Even though these three events are quite different, they nevertheless reflect the main goals of the RF: revision of "rules of the game" of the current international system, from which it feels excluded, a greater inclusion of Russia as a great power and recognition of this status by the West. This policy is in line with the major foreign policy and security concepts of the RF.

This assertive foreign policy was made possible by improved material domestic capabilities, by the self-perception of being stronger as well as by the previous actions of the West, which neglected Russia's concerns and generated its negative emotions. First of all, Russia's Western partners did not expect that it would be able "to rise up from its knees" so quickly after the collapse of the 1990s, and that, thanks to its economic growth (due primarily to high energy export prices and increased world energy demand, but also to internal reforms), Russia would acquire the necessary capabilities to pursue a more assertive and competitive foreign policy. According to Rose, "The neoclassical realism predicts that an increase in relative material power will lead eventually to a corresponding expansion in the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy activity" (Rose, 1998, 167). In addition to Russia's improved domestic capabilities, the West needed Russia's energy exports, but also its cooperation on such important security issues as Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan and terrorism, which also added to Russia's assertiveness.

Second, even though Russia still had many economic and military weaknesses vis-à-vis the West, it started to feel stronger and more self-assured. Domestically the image of Russia, "showing Kuzkina's mother" to the West, as well as the image of the anti-Russian West has served to strengthen the ruling regime and to distract attention from difficult socio-economic issues. The majority of the population sees Russia's role in the world as that of a great power.[19] Arbatov notes that today none of the political parties or state institutions are ready to accept the international position Russia had in the 1990s, when its interests and opinions were simply ignored (Arbatov, 2010).

Third, throughout the 1990s while Russia was seeking inclusion and acceptance of the Western countries, it "had to swallow the war in the Balkans, two rounds of NATO expansion, the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty, U.S. military presence in Central Asia, the invasion of Iraq and plans to deploy elements of nuclear missile defense in Eastern Europe" (Tsygankov, 2009, 58). According to Arbatov, the West missed a "unique opportunity" to engage Russia more in the political-military and economic Western institutions and to contribute to the creation of a new multilateral order. Instead, the Western powers chose a different path: "not only did they interfere in the internal affairs of Russia under the conditions of its deep internal crisis, the West also rushed to use its foreign policy and military weaknesses, in order to stake out a claim to as many advantages as possible, before Russia started to reassert its national interests" (Arbatov, 2010, author's translation; see also Trenin, 2006).

These interconnected changes in the context of action were overlooked in the West, and "only after a military conflict in Georgia did the West understand that Moscow was serious and was ready to act" (Arbatov, 2010, author's translation). In the words of Lukin, this was "a justified - and quite possibly, much overdue - signal that it did not find the post-Soviet foreign policy paradigm acceptable any longer" (Lukin, 2008). According to Karaganov: "…I repeatedly asked Western experts: 'Do you not understand that this large country with a great history will revive and will never agree to NATO expansion to its historical territories?' My interlocutors quietly agreed or looked away in the vain hope that the 'moment of truth' would never come and that the great country would never think of its interests again" (Karaganov, 2009).

Through its military actions in Georgia and the following recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia solidified the status quo, and this was also a step to prevent further NATO enlargement (Allison, 2009; Averre, 2009). Even though it is also possible to argue that this step was irrational and illogical because it could have led to bigger problems in Russian–Western relations, Russia's greater isolation and the reduction of economic cooperation with the West, neoclassical realism warns that foreign policy steps, such as this one, do not have to be due to "irrationality, stupidity, or lack of foresight, since the policy-makers involved are often acutely aware that the decisions made will have negative consequences elsewhere" (Sterling-Folker, 2002, 126). Russian political experts stressed that Russia's actions were painful, but necessary.[20]

There are signs that the Georgian crisis has made Western partners more attentive to Russia's concerns. French President Nicolas Sarkozy recognized "that Russia may have felt neglected by Western countries that no longer saw it as an equal partner, to the point that Russia may have believed that only a relationship of force would ensure that it was respected" (Sarkozy, 2008). Or as the US Secretary of State admitted, the previous US administration took "a rather confrontational approach toward Russia" (Clinton 2009). Obama's administration aims to "reset" Russia-US relations. NATO's Secretary General Rasmussen recognized that a new missile defense system should include "not just all countries of NATO but Russia too."[21]

[19] See: Rossiia v mire: nashi natsionalnye tseli i kak ih dobitsia [Russia in the World: Our National Goals and How to Achieve Them], WCIOM, 11 November 2008, http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=268&uid=10954, accessed 1 June 2011.

[20] Author's interviews with political analysts, Moscow, October 2010.

[21] RFE/RL (2010), NATO urges Russia to help create 'Security Roof', 27 March.

NATO postponed granting Ukraine and Georgia a Membership Action Plan,[22] and NATO and Russia reaffirmed their partnership at the NATO Lisbon Summit in 2010. The Corfu Process was launched within the OSCE with the goal of reloading the dialogue on "the current challenges and future perspectives" in the area of joint European security and "restoring confidence and trust among all stakeholders."[23] A "fast-forward"[24] has begun in EU-Russia relations, and talks on a new EU-Russia agreement that would replace the PCA have restarted. However, questions remain on how to implement these declarations in practice, as many objective and psychological problems remain.

Summing up, the changes in the context of action at different levels – domestic material capabilities, domestic subjective self-perception and Western actions – have made Russian foreign policy more assertive in pursuing security, autonomy and maximization of status/prestige. While "Russia's aspiration to regain its positions in the international arena were often perceived … as an anomaly, as an expression of Russia's 'traditional animosity towards the West and its values,' as a relapse into imperialism and a mentality in the spirit of the Cold War" (Arbatov, 2010, author's translation), this new assertiveness, nevertheless, "does not imply confrontational behavior and does not mean that Russians have acquired a taste for hegemony to replace multilateralism" (Tsygankov, 2009, 59). On the contrary, this rollercoaster ride-like development in Russian–Western relations in 2007–2010 demonstrates the co-existence of both cooperative (EST initiative) and non-cooperative (suspension of the CFE treaty and developments around Georgia) approaches in Russian foreign policy. As was the case with the CFE treaty, many of Russia's non-cooperative actions are actually responses to the West's lack of cooperation and readiness to integrate Russia more closely into its security frameworks.

5. Russian–Western relations at the level of institutions

Even if we treat the West as a generalized actor, as in the earlier parts of this essay, an overview of Russian foreign policy over several years, shows that Russian foreign policy has not been anti-Western. This section reviews Russia's policy in relation to the West, by breaking the West up into three security institutions – the CSCE/OSCE, the EU and NATO. This underlines the compensatory character of Russian foreign policy, its general Realpolitik-continuity, but also changes in policy preferences which reflect the aforementioned changes in the context of action.

Starting with the CSCE/OSCE, Russia's attitude, as mentioned above, changed from hope to disillusionment and even a desire to downplay the importance of the organization. Early in the 1990s, Russia associated the CSCE with a great number of tasks, the fulfilment of which could have helped Russia to reaffirm its great power position, but they exceeded the real capabilities of the CSCE (Zagorskiy, 1997, 518). Gradually realizing that its dream of a pan-European organization in the form of a transformed CSCE/OSCE would not come true, Russia "transformed from one of the major pillars of the OSCE into its most vocal critic" (Gerrits, 2008, 107). It "has lost most of its sense of ownership in the OSCE" (Zellner, 2005, 389). On many occasions the OSCE became a "hostage in an ongoing political battle" between Russia and the West (Nikonov, 2003, 23). As a result, today Russia sees the OSCE as a Western IGO, trying to diminish the great power position to which it aspires.

After its disillusionment with the CSCE/OSCE, Russia supported the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), hoping that it would replace NATO (Danilov, 2005). Nevertheless, Russia-EU relations in the security area remained "in the embryonic stage" (Ivanov, cited in: Fridman & Haass, 2005). One more problematic and controversial issue was that of EU enlargements. Russia presented its concerns to the EU, while concurrently hoping that the EU enlargement would replace the NATO enlargement (Arbatova, 2005, 133). After the EU enlargement in 2004 Russia started seeing the EU as divided into the "old" Russia-friendly versus the "new" US-friendly and anti-Russian EU (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2008; Ševtsova, 2007). With the EU's greater focus on its and Russia's common neighbourhood, "[t]he Union's well-meant insistence on common values … is seen as … basically demanding Moscow's capitulation in the face of Europe" (Haukkala, 2005, 9). Russia distrusts the EU (Tumanov, Gasparishvili, & Romanova, 2011). Despite problems between Russia and the EU, their economic cooperation has been strong and the focus is on the Partnership for Modernization.[25]

Coming to NATO, the variety of activities and documents on cooperation is striking. However, if the effort and time invested and the real results are compared, then the overall conclusion on Russia-NATO cooperation is hardly satisfying (Adomeit & Kupferschmidt, 2008). Furthermore, "cooperation exists until a point is reached where either side - mostly Russia - finds it difficult to invest in further exchange. Unforeseen events … continue to shape NATO-Russia interaction much more than any efforts aimed at institutionalizing the relationship" (Steinel, 2008, 126). Russia has, on many occasions, faced a dilemma of either refusing to cooperate and being sidelined, or participating but on NATO's terms (Headley, 2008, 327).

Generally speaking, while Russia has aspired to greater inclusion and cooperation, its relations with these three Western IGOs have developed, at least until the recent "reset," from more positive interests, hopes and optimism towards more negative "aversive" interests, disappointment and the desire to prevent Russia's further exclusion and marginalization of its role in European or even global

[22] Cf. Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Final communiqué, Press Release: (2008) 153.

[23] Corfu Informal Meeting of OSCE Foreign Ministers on the Future of European Security. Chair's Concluding Statement to the Press, 28 June 2009, at: http://www.osce.org, accessed 10 July 2010.

[24] EU President Herman Van Rompuy, cited in: Aris, 2010.

[25] Cf. Joint Statement on the Partnership for Modernization, EU-Russia Summit 31 May–1 June 2010, Rostov-on-Don, 1 June 2010, Document 10546/10 PRESSE 154.

security. Russia often feels like an outsider and an opponent, even within the framework of the OSCE, and competition is developing between Russia, one the one hand, and the EU and NATO, on the other hand, in the CIS area. While competition can be positive and lead to new constructive ideas and policies if there is a common political platform, the competition between Russia and the West is rather of a negative character, undermining each other policies (see: Tyler 2008, 107; Dovidio et al. 2008).

Nevertheless, if we look at Russia's tactics *vis-à-vis* the three IGOs over the same periods, we will also see that its tactics have been selective – a combination of cooperative and non-cooperative steps. For instance, in 1992, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev declared, within the framework of the CSCE, that Russian foreign policy was being "amended" to recognize that "traditions based in Asia" limited "rapprochement with Europe," that the territory of the former Soviet Union was "at bottom a post-imperial expanse" where Russia expected to establish its interests using all possible means (Hurlburt, 1995). In the second part of his speech he explained that this was just a dramatic rhetorical tactic to warn the West, especially NATO, of what might happen, if NATO continued to deliberate on its enlargement, and if Russia's interests were not taken more seriously (Hurlburt, 1995). While Russia used the CSCE as a platform to proclaim its dissatisfaction with NATO policies, its NATO relations *per se* developed quite positively, and the same year Russia became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. During this period, the EU and Russia were negotiating the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) provisions. At the same time, Russia was negative about the Maastricht Treaty and the Petersberg tasks, which envisaged military deployments outside the EU.

During the first Chechen campaign in 1994–1996, there were again quite mixed developments: Russia joined the Partnership for Peace, but criticized NATO's enlargement plans and the 1995 airstrikes in the former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, it joined the Implementation Force in January 1996 (Smith, 2008, 3). Russia became more critical of the CSCE/OSCE, but agreed to the OSCE Assistance Group (AG) to Chechnya and the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only after Russia agreed to the OSCE AG, did the EU renew its process of ratifying the PCA with Russia, which had been stopped to express the EU's criticism of the war and human rights violations by Russian troops in Chechnya.

In 1999 – one of the most difficult years for Russian–Western relations (NATO enlargement, the second military campaign in Chechnya, the military operation of NATO in Kosovo) – Russia "froze" its cooperation with the Alliance from March to July after NATO operation began. Simultaneously, Russia-EU relations developed positively, and new strategic documents were adopted: the "Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia"[26] and "Russia's Middle Term Strategy towards the EU (2000–2010)."[27] Moreover, as mentioned, at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in November, Russia agreed to a number of challenging concessions.

Like 1999, 2008 was also dramatic: Kosovo's declaration of independence, its recognition by many Western states and Russia's opposition; Medvedev's proposal on the EST; the crisis around South Ossetia. In response to Russia's military operation in Georgia, NATO "froze" cooperation with Russia within the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) Meetings and the EU "froze" negotiations with Russia on the new PCA. However, as early as November 2008 the EU resumed PCA negotiations with Russia, and NATO members agreed to restart NRC meetings in March 2009. Despite problems in NATO-Russia relations in 2008, they continued to cooperate on such important issues as Afghanistan and a "well-known triad: international terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation and the energy dialogue" (Shevtsova, 2006, 12). Border security, migration, trafficking, soft security issues, and economic and environmental dimensions also numbered among unproblematic issues.

Summing up, Russia has an instrumental approach towards Western IGOs. Its specific goals towards each of the IGOs are different, depending on the nature of the organization, from political-military through soft security to economic goals. However, Russia's overarching main strategic interest that it pursues within the framework of all three Western IGOs is to be somehow involved in the decision-making processes and/or that its concerns not be ignored. Furthermore, it aspires to recognition as a great power. The overall disappointment in Russia (which is also seen in Russian strategic foreign policy concepts) is because this goal of "inclusion" and "equality" has not been reached. Because of other powerful actors within the IGOs, Russia is frequently unable to instrumentalize them.

6. Conclusion

This essay has considered three questions around Russian foreign policy: whether it is (in-)consistent and (un-)predictable, whether it is cooperative or non-cooperative in relationship to the West and, finally, what theoretical perspectives can help in understanding Russian policy. The essay looked at Russian foreign policy at its conceptual level, by giving an overview of the main foreign policy and security concepts; it analyzed Russian foreign policy over a number of years; it considered Russia's attitude and interests towards the West as a generalized actor, but also by "breaking up" the West into three IGOs. This approach has helped to achieve a more diversified look at Russian foreign policy.

To start with the first question, Russian foreign policy is more predictable and more consistent. To understand it, both the domestic context of action – material power capabilities, subjective self-perception and perception of international realities – as well as objective changes in the international context, that is the actions of the West, have to be taken into account. Even though there are some features of vagueness in Russian policy (e.g. non-transparent decision-making process, lack of long-term strategic vision and inability to formulate concrete strategies), nevertheless, Western politicians and even some analysts have often failed to recognize the clear signals that

[26] It is available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/kol2_en.htm#an2, accessed 12 June 2010.

[27] It is available at: http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/en/p_245.htm, accessed 12 June 2010.

their Russian counterparts were sending them. Neoclassical realism helps in understanding that Russia is pursuing more or less permanent interests throughout different phases of its post-Soviet foreign policy. These include provision of security and autonomy, maximization of material utilities, but also maximization of status/prestige.

Shifts at the level of policy preferences depend on the changes in the context of action. Improved domestic power capabilities together with more self-confidence and restored pride lead to a more assertive foreign policy. Because Russia's security and status concerns have largely been ignored by the West, this has led to a decline in cooperation and trust. By contrast, greater respect for Russia's concerns in the course of a "reset" has led to its greater readiness to cooperate.

It is especially this last factor of prestige/status that has not been paid enough attention to. Even if there are domestic weaknesses, Russia feels self-assured, and this subjective self-confidence adds to its improved material power capabilities, making Russia more able to take risky and self-assertive steps. While Russia often makes mistakes that lead it further from its Western partners (e.g. the war in Chechnya, violation of human rights, autocratic tendencies, problems with the rule of law), the Western states have to recognize that: "Inclusion into higher-status groups may be a wiser strategy in the long run than containment… It is best to co-opt a state into the 'family of nations' early in the process, before the challenger turns to military competition, out of frustration, as the only available means of improving its relative position" (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, 192). Furthermore, treating Russia's status concerns "seriously and respectfully" and according it a positive identity leads to "major progress in securing its cooperation" (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, 206).

While Russian foreign policy has often been seen to be anti-Western, even without considering the recent Russian–Western "reset," this assumption does not hold true. First, there is a dualism in Russian foreign policy: while trying to strengthen its power capabilities vis-à-vis the West, it also looks for the West's recognition of its status. While considering some Western actions, such as NATO enlargements, as a security risk, Russia is interested in cooperation in other areas of security, such as Afghanistan, and modernization of its military equipment, but also in modernization partnerships with Western countries in the economic sphere. This is why Russian foreign policy is compensatory and cooperation and non-cooperation coexist. This co-existence can be found in different periods and in Russia's policy towards different IGOs. Russia instrumentalizes different multilateral and bilateral frameworks while pursuing its interests. Second, domestic anti-Western rhetoric is often at variance with Russia's actual politics, through which Russia tries to present itself as a well-behaved, friendly international actor which is, however, aware of its own interests. This dualism of foreign policy, being played at the domestic level for a domestic audience and at the international level for an international one, is also highlighted by neoclassical realism. Third, while interpreting Russia's new assertiveness as anti-Western, the Western partners often forget that foreign policy is connected to domestic issues, and stronger capabilities are also needed to enable Russia to resist the internal and transnational security challenges this country is facing. Finally, there is also the role of the West in Russia's new assertiveness.

Thus, as far as the third question raised in this article is concerned, neoclassical realism is an expedient theoretical framework for studying Russian foreign policy. It helps in understanding the sources of new assertiveness in Russian foreign policy, which is based on improved domestic capabilities. Neoclassical realism pays special attention to the international context of action, and Russian foreign policy strongly depends on what the West does. Finally, neoclassical realism also integrates subjective factors into the analytical framework. In the future, this perspective could be further expanded to include more research on psychological issues, such as status/prestige, but also emotions, while still maintaining the predominant importance of an international balance of power and domestic power capabilities.

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