

EU'S EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND THE RUSSIAN NEAR ABROAD: A CONTESTED ARENA

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Abstract

While negotiations for the accession of some countries to the European Union (EU) are still underway, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), initiated in 2004, is working to bring the states neighbouring the EU territory in the east and the south, to a closer economic and security coordination. Further, in 2009 the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program was inaugurated with a particular objective of coordinating with the post-Soviet states. In this context, the Soviet successor states – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been approached, and some instruments of partnership have been signed. On the other hand, these countries also form a part of what Russia perceives as her “near abroad”, whose interests Moscow has tactically aligned with its own through many bilateral accords as well as ventures like the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In 2015, along with Belarus and Kazakhstan, Russia announced the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). In order to compete with the European Union, the organisation aims to incorporate other Eurasian states. Against the backdrop of the stated developments, with the help of the ‘dualistic operational model’, this paper attempts to compare the functionalist and imperialist aspects of the two endeavours (Eastern Partnership and EEU). It questions the viability of the idea of Eastern Partnership. Also, it weighs the possibilities of a confrontation between the EU and Russia, and its repercussions on the concerned states.

Keywords: Eastern Partnership, European Union, Eurasian Union, CIS, European Neighborhood Policy, Russian Near Abroad, Dualistic Operational Model, Functionalist and Imperialist paradigms

"To the south, we have neighbors of Europe. To the east, we have European neighbors...they all have the right one day to apply [for EU membership],"

Radoslaw Sikorski (Polish Prime Minister).¹

"It's time to look to the east to see what we can do to strengthen democracy,"

Carl Bildt (Swedish Foreign Minister).²

"We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence ..."

Sergei Lavrov (Russian Foreign Minister).³

The European Union and Russia have been locked in a power struggle over the former Soviet space. Both entities have ventured to introduce their own integrationist mechanisms to pull the vast Eurasian region into their respective folds. Brussels and Moscow are likely to remain entangled in a long multi-dimensional conflict over their perceived spheres of influence – a conflict that encompasses political, economic and strategic aspects.

This paper is divided into three major parts: the first explores the theoretical dimensions of the integration policies of the EU on one hand and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) on the other with special reference to the functionalist and the imperialist paradigms related to the EU's 'Eastern Partnership' and the Russian 'Near Abroad'; the second covers the historical background tracing the conflicting policies of the EU and Russia vis-à-vis the six concerned countries lying on the borders of the EU and Russia; and the third analyzes conflicts within these countries and their repercussions for the region.

¹ Polish premier at the time of proposing Eastern Partnership Program, *EU Observer* (Brussels), 27 May 2008 at <https://euobserver.com/foreign/26211>, accessed 12 February 2018.

² *Ibid.*

³ Russian reaction to EaP, see *EU Observer*, 21 March 2009 at <https://euobserver.com/foreign/27827>, accessed 12 February 2018.

Theorizing the Eastern Partnership and the Near Abroad

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a joint initiative of the EU, its member states and its six Eastern European partners and neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Launched in 2009 at the EU Prague Summit, to bring Eastern European partners closer to the EU. The Eastern Partnership supports and encourages reforms in the EaP countries for the benefit of their citizens.⁴

Figure 1- Map of countries included in the EU's Eastern Partnership



On the other hand, since the Soviet breakup Russia has viewed the post Soviet territory as it's 'near abroad', a part of the grand Eurasian dream where Russia holds the geo-strategic key. Since 1991 majority of the post-Soviet states have been a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) often called the Russian Commonwealth.⁵ The formation of Eurasian Union in 2015 with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus as the founding members was a further step towards the realization of that dream.

⁴ http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index_en.htm, accessed 13 March 2018.

⁵ The three Baltic States Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia never became a part of the CIS. They rather joined NATO and the EU in 2004. Georgia left the CIS in 2008.

Figure 2 - RUSSIA'S NEAR ABROAD

The above maps clearly show the geopolitical fault lines between the two perceived blocks where at least five countries viz. Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan are a part of both groupings viz. EaP and CIS of which one – Belarus has also formed the EEU with Russia and Kazakhstan. Georgia had left the CIS and became a part of EaP but still coveted by Russia. If not managed tactfully this situation is likely to bring the EU in direct conflict with Russia and its jealously guarded sphere of influence. To understand the dynamics of overlapping interests and a probable clash of the two unions in this geopolitical setting, this paper tends to develop a relevant conceptual framework. For this purpose the paper borrows the “dualistic operational model” from Vernygora et.al,⁶ and applies it as a comparative framework for the ambitions and working of the two groupings viz. the EU and the CIS along with EEU in the context of the ‘Eastern Partnership’ and the ‘Near Abroad’ approaches and then visualizes the future prospects.

The Dualistic Operational Model suggests that the EU’s policy towards its neighbors promulgated in 2004 as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) can be viewed from two different perspectives: first, the functionalist

⁶ Vlad Vernygora, David Ramiro Troitino and Sigrid Vastra, “The Eastern Partnership Programme: Is Pragmatic Regional Functionalism Working for a Contemporary Political Empire?”, in Tanel Kerikmae and Archil Chochia (eds.), *Political and Legal Perspectives of EU Eastern Partnership Policy* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 7-22.

perspective; second, the imperialist perspective. The functionalist paradigm⁷ is informed by the basic idea behind the inauguration of the ENP in the wake of the fifth enlargement of EU in 2004. By that time a large section of European leadership and population had grown wary of further enlargements what was being referred to as “enlargement fatigue”.

"We all know the EU has enlargement fatigue. We have to use this time to prepare as much as possible so that when the fatigue passes, membership becomes something natural," Radoslaw Sikorski⁸

As the statement shows, the ENP and later the EaP were functionalistic responses to the enlargement fatigue. It implied the extension of economic and political coordination with the EU neighbors without bringing them directly under the EU umbrella. To statesmen like Sikorski the doors to future enlargement remain open and the neighbors, particularly if they are geographically and culturally ‘European’ such as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, might join EU eventually when the fatigue is over. Meanwhile, the neighbors could enjoy the EU partnership while establishing “a ring of friends that will be gradually connected and integrated into the EU space of governance”.⁹ In addition, such partnership also includes the various bilateral Action Plans with these neighbors fulfilling mutual interests. This led to the widely agreed idea that EU represents “a new model of international relations based on institutionalized multilateral, multifunctional cooperation.”¹⁰

On the other hand the imperialistic perspective of the ENP and EaP asserts that opening doors for the neighbors makes EU “a contemporary empire on

⁷ The term ‘functionalism’ originated in 1940s from David Mitrany’s work who suggested gradual European cooperation particularly in technical in eventually establishing peace in post-war era. For details, see Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

⁸ *EU Observer*, 27 May 2008.

⁹ Bodhana Dimitrovova, “Imperial Rebordering of Europe: The Case of European Neighborhood Policy”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25, No.2 (2012), 249-267, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2012.678298, accessed, 14 March, 2018.

¹⁰ A. Cottey, “Regionalism and the EU’s Neighborhood Policy: The Limits of the Possible”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 12, No.3 (2012), 375–391, doi:10.1080/14683857.2012.711090, accessed 16 March, 2018.

a presumably unstoppable mission to grow”.¹¹ Zielonka in 2006 presented the so-called ‘Neo-Medieval Paradigm’ asserting that the enlarged EU has increasingly become a “neo-medieval empire” which is though not a monstrous super-state but rather “a polycentric polity penetrating rather than controlling its environment”.¹² He defines an empire as “a vast territorial unit with global military, economic and diplomatic influence” with essentially “a record of acting in a way that imposes significant domestic constraints on a [...] periphery to be governed by the imperial centre. The rule over peripheries is justified by the empire’s civilizing mission or vocation. In other words, empires must have an imperial vision of themselves or a mission *civilisatrise* of some sort towards their external environment”.¹³ Vernygora et.al use Howe’s definition of ‘empire’ as a “large, composite, multiethnic or multinational political unit, usually created by conquest and divided between a dominant centre and subordinate, sometimes far distant peripheries”.¹⁴ All these definitions qualify not only the EU but also Russia and of course USA as modern empires.

Now if the dualistic operational model is applied to the Russian led CIS and the Eurasian Union we can arrive at similar results. In this case also there exists a marked dichotomy between the functionalist and the imperialist perspectives. Resembling with the early and the middle stages of European Union, the Eurasian integration also was built on functionalist foundations. Russian urge to form a regional grouping in the wake of Soviet disintegration can be explained by the functionalist perspective which highlights the imploding Soviet economy, massive population displacements, ethnic tensions, rising religious extremism and four armed conflicts erupting in the post Soviet Eurasia¹⁵ as factors underscoring an urgent need to form cooperating alignments to redress the volatile situations. Further, presence of a repository of Soviet-time nuclear weapons and warheads in Ukraine and Kazakhstan made the situation more uncertain unless formal agreements were reached through

¹¹ Vernygora et al, 12.

¹² J. Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The nature of the enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

¹³ *Ibid*, 509.

¹⁴ S. Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30, cited in Vernygora et.al, 12.

¹⁵ These include the Tajik civil war, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts and the Chechen uprising against Russia.

consensus between those states which were then “doomed to cooperate” for the safety of the region and the world at large.¹⁶

Formation of the CIS as early as December 1991 to oversee a peaceful disintegration as well as future coordination between the member states shows the validity of the functionalist perspective. Just like the European Union, the Neo-functional spillover of the integrating arenas as well as the membership is also evident since the beginning.¹⁷ Paradoxically, the functionalist approach was also used by the member states to enhance their own autocratic designs within their countries. To them the integration fulfilled the much needed function supporting authoritarianism.¹⁸ Unlike the EU's functionalism, where the national sovereignties were pooled apparently for the sake of peace, prosperity and democracy, the Eurasian authoritarian regimes integrate “to suppress democracy, protect sovereignty and insulate key economic sectors”. Stoddard calls it counter-functional dynamics which “largely pre-date regionalist efforts but appear to be exacerbated by regional cooperation”.¹⁹

On the other hand the old grand Eurasian dreams of Russia never ceased to encourage her expansionist and hegemonic designs. Here comes the imperialist perspective to the regional integration. After a long history of Tsarist imperialism and later the Soviet hegemony the Russian mindset seemingly has still not completely recovered from the breakup trauma. The ‘near abroad’ still means a lot to Russia – its sphere of influence where the social, political and economic ties keep the Soviet successor states heavily dependent on Russia. From Dostoevsky to Dugin the Eurasianist dream

¹⁶ Siegfried Hecker, *Doomed to Cooperate* (Los Alamos: Los Alamos Historical Society, 2016). The book supported by a website of same title documents the collaboration between the nuclear weapon laboratories of USA and Russia after the Soviet breakup.

¹⁷ Neo-functionalism is one theory of European integration suggesting occurrence of a spillover effect from a few to more areas of integration among the member states as well as the increase in the number of member states attracted by the apparent advantages of integrative policies. For details, see Ben Rosamond.

¹⁸ All the Soviet successor states have shown clear tendencies towards authoritarianism and centralization of power.

¹⁹ Edward Stoddard, “So far so functional? Examining functional and counter-functional dynamics in authoritarian regional cooperation”, *KFG Working Paper*, No. 68, December, 2015.

seems to dominate the Russian foreign policy.²⁰ Building upon the idea of a separate and unique Russian ethno-geographical and cultural identity, with a central position between the West and the East, Europe and Asia, Eurasianists aim at assuring stability of Russian borders and accommodation of ethnically diverse Euro-Asian periphery and domestic population. Hence, Lev Gumilyev writes in 1960s that “ethnic Russians are... rather a separate ethnos, which was created by blending the Turkish - Tatar and the Slavic peoples”.²¹

Similar thought patterns appeared in the post-Soviet period particularly in the late nineties beginning with the Primakov Doctrine asserting that Russia should resume its stabilizing role in its neighborhood and aiming to build a Eurasian counterbalance to NATO and to counter US influence in the Middle East and Eurasia. To perform that role Russia must remain a great power without which there will be no stability and peace in Eurasia.²² The expansionist school of Eurasianists goes further beyond in asserting Russia’s hegemonic role perceiving it as a “culturally anti-western and a constantly expanding territorial empire” for which a constant expansion of territory and power is the only appropriate policy.²³

In the light of the above theoretical discussion, the divergent interests of EU and Russia in the context of Eurasian region become self-evident and are reflected in the integrationist policies of both the powers leading to a conflict situation at many occasions. Particularly when the functionalist paradigm takes an imperialist shift, a clash of the titans is foreseeable. The major developments in this context are discussed in the second part of the paper.

²⁰ Dostoevsky was the famous 19th century Russian philosopher who advised the Tsarist government to initiate a Eurasian policy. Dugin is a current Russian scholar who strongly advocates an expansionist Eurasian policy.

²¹ Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*.

²² A.P. Tsygankove, “Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia’s geopolitical thinking after the Soviet breakup”, 36(2003),108, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967X\(02\)00055-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967X(02)00055-7), accessed 3 March, 2018.

²³ *Ibid*, 101–127.

Eastern Partnership vs. Russian Near Abroad – A history of overlapping endeavors

Eastern Partnership

The breakup of USSR shook both the East and the West. Intoxicated with the triumph of Fukuyama brand of liberal democracy, many countries of Eastern Europe previously under the Soviet predominance, applied for the membership of NATO and the EU. By 2004 along with some East European states the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania which were previously an integral part of USSR, had joined both NATO and the EU. Georgia and Ukraine became recognized aspiring NATO members. Meanwhile, the EU management after its 5th expansion was working on other alternatives to interact with the EU neighbors. Hence, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) developed in 2004 (as discussed above) and the endeavors accelerated with the inception of the European External Action Service by 2009. The ENP's functionalist approach laid particular stress on promotion of stability, security, prosperity and democratic culture in the EU neighborhood. The initiative of Eastern Partnership (EaP) proposed jointly by Polish and Swedish foreign ministers in 2008, was finally launched in 2009 inviting six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

EU's values of democracy, rule of law and human rights formed the core of the EaP while its interests in the region were also highlighted by identifying the region as "of strategic importance" and its stake in developing an increasingly close relationship with its Eastern partners...".²⁴ The program was funded by the Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund (EPTATF) established by the European Investment Bank (EIB). Between 2009 and 2017 five summits have been held in Prague, Warsaw, Vilnius, Riga and Brussels and a number of instruments on economic cooperation, visa facilities and civil society initiatives have been signed. By mid 2014 Association Agreements with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova were signed while all the six states have signed the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) valid from 2014 to 2020. The instrument aims at fostering human rights, gender equality, rule of law, good governance and thriving civil

²⁴ Values to form core of EU 'Eastern Partnership', *EU Observer*, 18 March, 2009 at <http://euobserver.com/24/27799>, accessed 3 March, 2018.

society apart from coordination in the fields of environment, small businesses, energy, youth employment and transport etc.

However, there have been debates over EU's priorities in Eastern Partnership – values or interests. EU has been projected as a union based on values of democracy, human rights, rule of law and equality. But in case of Eastern Partnership there are questions over the Union compromising its values to assure interests. The case of Belarus (and in fact all post-Soviet states) is self evident. Offering partnership, even marginal, to states where authoritarianism and human rights violations are general norms is seen as a stark anomaly. The partnership entails heavy investment in terms of financial, political and bureaucratic resources through an arrangement of free trade agreements, border relaxations and civil society initiatives for the sake of “prosperity, stability and security for the people”.²⁵ But the problem is that the messianic role of a savior and a stabilizer has imperialist connotations. Zielonka's empire as a “vast territorial unit with global military, economic and diplomatic influence” does not seem far from the expanded EU. To him the imperial centre justifies its dominance of the periphery through a humanitarian and civilizing mission that will eventually transform the latter.²⁶

While the West celebrated the ‘end of history’ with an imminent triumph of liberal democracy all over the world, the Russian scholars and policy makers were trying to come to terms with the reality of a sudden loss of land, resources and power. Amidst chaos and disintegration the CIS was born. Ironically, it was the Russian leadership that brokered the end of Soviet Union and beginning of the Russian Commonwealth. During the first few years after the breakup Russians seem to be less interested in Eurasia and more in “windows to the west”,²⁷ with the Zapadniki foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev in office who believed that Russian security cannot be achieved without coordinating with the West.²⁸ However, his successor

²⁵ European Neighborhood Policy (Resource document). European Union External Action (2015), http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/about-us/index_en.htm, accessed 14 March, 2018.

²⁶ Zielonka.

²⁷ Windows to the West was Tsar Peter's (1696-1725) famous policy of bringing Russia closer to the Western European nations.

²⁸ Zapadniki is a school of thought in Russian intelligentsia with pro-Western and comparatively liberal disposition.

Primakov (who later also served as the prime minister of Russia)²⁹ took a 180 degree turn enunciating the famous Primakov Doctrine upholding the Eurasianist ideology in Russian foreign policy.³⁰ Since that time Russian policy seems to be more and more tilted towards the imperialist paradigm asserting less in words but more in deeds, their 'near abroad' including the post-Soviet states as Russian sphere of influence. Hence the Russian National Security Concept of 1997 identified Russia as a great and influential European and Asian power in a multi-polar world. Though a threat of direct aggression against Russian Federation has decreased, "the desire of a number of states to weaken Russia's positions in the political, economic, and military spheres has increased". It clearly warned that European "models of general and all-embracing security" and particularly NATO's expansion to the East is a threat to Russian security and hence "unacceptable". The document further recommended an active foreign policy for Russia including closer integration with CIS and equal partnership with other great powers.³¹

The imperialist perspective became more pronounced with Vladimir Putin in power in Moscow. Proclaiming "Geography as a destiny", Putin from the beginning seemed determined in stepping up the Russian involvement in the 'near abroad'. Following the issuance of the EU report on 'Wider Europe' (2003) Russian policymakers as well as intelligentsia extensively discussed the possibilities of Russian joining the wider Europe initiative, and the compatibility of the EU led and the Russian led integration models in the post-Soviet territory.³² The subsequent EU Russia Summit clearly reflected the incompatibility wherein Russia agreed to collaborate in several areas but rejected the idea of being "just a partner" in the ENP which virtually exhibits the "normative hegemony" of EU.³³ Since then more emphasis was put to the idea of Russia's own style integration of the

²⁹ Yevgeni Primakov served as foreign minister from 1996 to 1998 and as prime minister from 1998 to 1999.

³⁰ Y. Primakov, "Russia in world politics: A lecture in honor of Chancellor Gorchakov", *International Affairs* 44 (3), 1998, 7–11.

³¹ Russian National Security Blueprint 1997, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 26 Dec 1997, 4-5, \ FBIS-SOV-97-364, 30 Dec 1997.

³² I. Gretskey, E. Treshchenkov and K. Golubev, "Russia's perceptions and misperceptions of the EU Eastern Partnership", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (2014), 375-383, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.10.006>, accessed 28 March 2018.

³³ H. Haukkala, Russian reactions to the European Neighborhood Policy, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216550504>, accessed 28 March, 2018.

post-Soviet Eurasia. Eurasianism became the cornerstone of Putin's electoral campaign for his third term in presidency in 2012 (and also for the fourth term in 2018) which was also supported by the Orthodox Church. The launching of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 with Belarus and Kazakhstan was a further reassertion of Russian sensitivity towards her near abroad. Hence, a reciprocal sequence of action and reaction seems to work between the EU and Russia on the issue of integration of the six post-Soviet states both wrought with misperceptions and misgivings. The effects on the recipient countries have been significant.

Recipients: Responses and repercussions

The six post-Soviet states, which are geo-politically considered the common neighbors of EU and Russia, are similar and different in many aspects. These showed variant responses towards the EU's partnership offer and the Russian Eurasian policy. Each case will be discussed separately (proceeding geographically from northwest to southeast) as follows:

Belarus

Being 'the last dictatorship in Europe'³⁴, Belarus' entry to the ENP and later EaP remains an anomaly. Declaring independence amidst the death pangs of Soviet Union in 1991 as an independent Republic³⁵, Belarus became the founder member of CIS (along with Russian Federation and Ukraine) with its headquarter at Minsk. However, the internal political chaos continued till 1994 when following a constitutional reform converting the republic to a presidential system, fresh elections were held and a pro-Russian anti-corruption activist Alexander Lukashenko won the run-off by 80% vote. Lukashenko's first approach as the head of state was naturally towards Russia, visiting Moscow and later signing the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation in 1995, he hoped for gaining a prominent niche in Russian foreign policy and concessions on trade and energy deals. Those hopes were not realized.

Lukashenkov's authoritarian tendencies soon become evident with nominations of cronies at high offices and manipulation of the parliamentary procedures. Corruption also could not be controlled. On the other hand general apathy and distrust towards political process kept the

³⁴ A. Wilson, *Belarus: The Last Dictatorship in Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 2011).

³⁵ The March 1991 all-USSR referendum showed 83% Belarusians voted in favor of continuing the Soviet Union.

parliament as well as the political parties weak. Parliaments elected through various controversial elections remained conservative and wary of political and economic reforms as frequently suggested by the democrats inside and outside the country. Lukashenkov is presently serving his fifth term at the presidency after being re-elected in 2015 elections. Elections and referendums are regular and maneuvered. Fully confident of himself being the only competent Belarusian to hold the top-post, he has made sure to control the legislature, the bureaucracy and the media for his own interests, initiate periodic constitutional amendments to allow him to run for indefinite number of terms and to exercise leverage over rivals, to bulldoze opposition and to eliminate dissent of all types. In the realm of foreign policy Lukashenkov remained closely associated with Russia and just as Belarus was the founding member of CIS, so it became the founding member of the EEU in 2015. This is understandable not only in the backdrop of long cultural, historical and geographical ties with Russia but also the fact that Russian led partnerships, unlike EU, do not insist on internal political and economic reforms.

Understandably Belarus showed least interest when offered the EU Neighborhood status in 2004. However the decreasing hope of a substantial economic assistance from Russia created a soft corner for EU. A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed in 1995 but never ratified by EU due to authoritarian tendencies and human rights violations and by 1997 the EU-Belarus relations almost ceased to exist. Sanctions were imposed until the fulfillment of twelve conditions with reference to democracy, transparency and human rights. However, keeping the potential neighbors engaged was EU's stand and in 2007 the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) was operational with 16 neighbors including Belarus. The inauguration of EaP in 2009 further brought the two parties closer. The ENPI was replaced by ENI (European Neighborhood Instrument 2014-2020) with Belarus getting financial and organizational benefits related to thematic programs for democracy, human rights and civil society. The European "outpost of tyranny" remains so till date³⁶

³⁶ Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State in a statement to Senate's Foreign Relations Committee on 18 January 2005, identified six "outposts of tyranny in the world: Cuba, Burma, North Korea, Iran, Belarus and Zimbabwe, <https://www.senate.gov/>

Ukraine

Gaining independence from the USSR through a nationalist movement and a referendum, but not before the Soviet collapse in late 1991, Ukraine also became the founding member of the CIS under President Kravchuk who was later succeeded by Kuchma. To the satisfaction of the world Ukraine also withdrew from the 1900 nuclear warheads inherited from USSR. The presidential elections of 2004 led to the so-called Orange Revolution which in turn led to a series of color revolutions in the region. The run-off election won by the previous premier and Moscow's favorite Yanukovich was challenged by the pro-western Yushchenko. Countrywide protests later led to Yushchenko's victory in the second run off. The things did not come to a peaceful end and between 2004 and 2014 continuous upheavals brought different leaders and coalitions to power and pulled them back. The 2014 Maidan uprising and sit-ins resulted in killings of more than eighty people and total failure and collapse of the government. Meanwhile the Crimean crisis erupted later encouraging pro-Russian separatist movements in eastern and southern Ukraine. Russian forces intervened and seized control of Crimea which was eventually annexed by Russia unilaterally.

Doors to the West were kept open and in 1994, Ukraine became the first country in EU's eastern neighborhood to sign the PCA. However its EU policy shifted from Kuchma's declaratory Europeanization (1994-2004) to Yushchenko's stagnated Europeanization (2005-2010) to Yanukovich's new pragmatism (2010-2014). Although Ukraine did show improved indices on some aspects of democracy, its political upheavals and imperfect democratic culture as well as its close links with Russia remained problematic for EU. Conversely, by 2007 EU seems to compromise on those shortcomings while emphasizing the economic partnership with neighbors. During the turbulent years Ukrainian leadership seems to vacillate between pro-EU and pro-Russia positions though trying to give a semblance of balance. "This 'balancing act' however resembles more of an attempt to preserve the existing status quo than a real effort to reform and commit to either direction".³⁷ The EaP also provided insufficient incentives³⁸ while President Yanukovich in 2010 asserted the need of clarity in the

³⁷ Elena Korosteleva, *The European Union and its Eastern Neighbors: Towards a more ambitious partnership?* (London: Routledge, 2012), 82.

³⁸ Surveys show a majority of people in Ukraine in favor of full integration to EU. See *ibid*, 142.

relationship declaring “We should not be in the position of humiliated beggars asking for something. We must cooperate as partners”.³⁹

Moldova

The small land-locked and strife-ridden state of Moldova showed even lesser prospects of viability during the early decade of independence from USSR. Added to a dwindling economy and rising social evils like organized crime, drugs and arms trafficking, the Transdniestrian separatist movement sapped the energies of the nascent republic to the level of bankruptcy and state-failure. Though more tilted to West, Moldova tried to maintain a balance between EU and Russia. By 1996 Moldova officially declared its desire for EU membership. Negotiations continued while a number of fields of engagement were identified.

From the PCA (1994) to the signing of Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) in 2014,⁴⁰ Moldova enjoyed a greater level of trust of the EU countries thanks not only to its willingness to comply but also to the fact that ‘Moldova is more European than other neighbors sharing history, culture and language with the bordering EU member Romania.’⁴¹ Moreover, a kind of submissiveness to the extent of inferiority complex is evident from the statements of some politicians, e.g. “Of course we are not equal partners, and we should realize and accept this! We aspire to become a younger brother, who should look up and obey the big brother’s orders”.⁴²

Nevertheless, hurdles exist. First, the abject poverty making Moldova the poorest EU neighbor; second, the continuing Transdniestrian separatism creating uncertain security conditions with Russian Peacekeepers deployed in the affected area since 1992; third, democratic culture still lagging behind the EU standards. Disputed elections, corruption and misuse of power have marred the transition to democracy. Further, continuous presence of Russian factor, not only in Transdniestrian issue but also in economic tussles such as gas disputes, trade restrictions and meddling with Moldovan politics seem to be perpetual.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 83.

⁴⁰ The agreement entered into force in 2017.

⁴¹ See Michael Emerson and Denis Cenusă (eds.), *Deepening EU-Moldavian Relations* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies), 2016.

⁴² Korosteleva, 120.

In 2001, the Communist President Vladimir Voronin came to power and slowly took control of the state media while Transdniestrian peace process halted. 2009's disputed elections returned Communists to power followed by countrywide protests bringing the Liberal Party to premiership while Voronin resigns from presidency. However, political crisis continued while pro-EU parties remained in majority in the parliament. The position of president was consolidated when in 2016 after a Constitutional Court's ruling, Presidential elections were held through a popular vote wherein the pro-Russian president Igor Dodon won over pro-Europe candidate. However, this brought a democratic back-slide and a chaos. Under the influence of the political oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc, the head of Democratic Party, supported by some Socialist sections in parliament, electoral laws were further amended to the dismay of the Council of Europe, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the USA.⁴³ The suspicious relationship between Dodon and Plahotniuc irritates the opposition and confuses the people. Pro-EU stance also appears more confused.

Georgia

Another post-Soviet republic which gained independence following a strong nationalist movement is still going through a long transition. Georgia inherited intra-state conflicts from USSR in the form of Abkhazia and South Ossetia both of which had enjoyed an autonomous status within Georgian SSR. Naturally, from the beginning the two regions stood for separation from the new republic leading to long unrest in the north western (Abkhazia) and north central (South Ossetia) parts of Georgia. After a referendum the nationalist leader Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992) became the head of independent Georgia. Ousted by an armed coup because of his authoritarian tendencies, he was succeeded by Eduard Shevardnadze the former Soviet foreign minister and anti-corruption crusader. In 1993 the Abkhazian separatists, with covert Russian support, succeeded in ousting Georgian forces and people from their region. Meanwhile South Ossetian uprising was quelled by force. A formidable coup headed by the former president Gamsakhurdia was crushed in 1993

⁴³ See Mihai Popsoi, "A Year in Review: Oligarchic power consolidation defines Moldova's politics in 2017", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 15, Issue 3, <https://jamestown.org/program/year-review-oligarchic-power-consolidation-defines-moldovas-politics-2017/>, accessed 2 March 2018.

only with the Russian support after which Georgia joined the CIS. Normalization remained a dream while Shevardnadze won two disputed presidential elections in 1995 and 2000. Windows to the US and EU were opened while Russia blamed Georgia of clandestinely supporting Chechen guerillas. The disputed parliamentary elections of 2003 led to widespread protests and eventual resignation of Shevardnadze in what is known as the Rose Revolution. The new elected president Mikheil Saakashvili tried to curb corruption with an iron hand invoking opposition.⁴⁴ Meanwhile the situation in the separatist regions deteriorated with the continued Russian influence. Failure to carry out reforms, rising corruption, human rights violations, and increasing conflict with Russia affected the regime's popularity. However, he managed to win a second term in 2008 elections.

The conflict in South Ossetia led to an open Georgia-Russia War in 2008, which is called the first European war of 21st century. Relations with Russia remained tense even after the ceasefire and Georgia became the first country to exit CIS in 2009. The 2012 parliamentary elections brought an end to Saakashvili's power who lost the presidential election to Giorgi Margvelashvili in 2013. This is hailed as the first democratic transfer of power in Georgia.

Relations with the west showed an upward move since 2003 when Georgia became a NATO partner after approval of its Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). A small Georgian contingent was part of NATO forces in Iraq. Leaving CIS further brought Georgia closer to EU and a number of agreements including the DCFTA, Visa liberalization deeds and AA were signed during the last few years. While Georgian contribution to EU's peacekeeping missions is applauded, EU also commits to Georgian territorial integrity and her international borders thus providing the latter leverage against the separatists.

Armenia

After independence in 1991 the new republic was ruled by Levon Ter-Petrosyan as president who was reelected in 1996 but had to resign in

⁴⁴ The dramatic improvement of Georgian position in the Transparency International indices from 133 in 2004 to 51 in 2012 was applauded but not without suspicion. See ESI, Georgian Liberation Revolution: Georgia as a model, 2010, http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_-_georgias_libertarian_revolution_-_part_one_-_georgia_as_a_model_-_10_april_2010.pdf, accessed 15 March 2018.

1998 amidst protests on Nagorno-Karabach issue⁴⁵ and succeeded by Robert Kocharyan. Conditions further deteriorated with killing of several politicians including prime minister in a terrorist attack in the parliament in 1999. Kocharyan got re-elected in 2003 and despite protests against rigging continued in office till 2008. In another disputed election the former premier Serge Sargsyan came to power. The colossal agitation was finally crushed by promulgating a brief emergency and use of force. In 2013 after the second electoral victory of Sargsyan in the absence of a strong opposition, the protests were again quelled by the government.

Armenia appears marginally in the EU discussions though it has been a part of both ENP and EaP. Earlier the PCA signed in 1999 provided for cooperation in a number of fields. The unresolved Nagorno Karabakh conflict with the neighboring Azerbaijan has been a major hurdle. EU's efforts for conflict resolution and peace-building have been appreciated by both concerned states but the issue persists. Negotiations for a comprehensive partnership agreement were concluded in 2017 while the internal chaos, undemocratic culture and human rights violations are still major obstacles in the way.

Azerbaijan

The last but not the least, the only Muslim-majority state, deficient on democracy but floating on oil has been approached by EU since its independence in 1991. PCA was signed in 1996 and enforced in 1999, several economic cooperation deals have been reached and the draft of a deeper partnership is being discussed since 2017.

Internally Azerbaijan remained affected by political misconduct and ensuing upheavals. The two-year term of Ayaz Mutalibov who got himself elected in an opposition-free election in 1991 which were neither free nor fair was eventful. A full fledged war with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue brought the economy to steep decline in addition to massacres of Azerbaijanis in the region. Mutalibov was forced to resign on the issue and though later restored by the Supreme Council, was ousted by armed forces backed by a popular uprising. The 1992 elections brought Abulfaz Elchibey to presidency only to be ousted by another uprising which brought Hyder Aliyev (1993-2003) for ten years winning two consecutive

⁴⁵ Nagorno Karabakh is an Armenian enclave within the territory of Azerbaijan, demanding independence from the latter along with a corridor to the neighboring state of Armenia.

elections while suppressing all kinds of opposition. Ground breaking agreements in hydrocarbon exports to the West stabilized the economy but the inherent corruption and nepotism kept it under stress. Haider died in 2003 succeeded by his son Ilham Aliyev through two controversial elections in 2003 and 2008. Following the foot-prints of his father Ilham continues to eliminate rivals successfully. This is evident from 2010 parliamentary elections wherein not a single candidate from main opposition parties could be elected. Azerbaijan stood 148th out of 167 on the democracy index of 2017.⁴⁶

Conclusion

A comparison of the EU and Russian led groupings from the perspective of dualistic operational model clearly shows that both the functionalists as well as the imperialist models seem to work simultaneously in both cases.

From the functionalist paradigm the EU-led Eastern Partnership as well as the Russia-led Eurasian integration serves a wide array of functions for the six countries which form the 'near abroad' both for EU and Russia. All of these countries badly needed substantial economic assistance and security assurance vis-à-vis their internal and external vulnerabilities at the time of their independence in 1991. All sooner or later joined the CIS more as a *fait accompli* as their economies had been integrated to each others' as well as Russia's economy for decades and their leadership trained in Soviet tradition. March 1991 referendums showed that preservation of the Union appeared or molded to appear differently in different republics. While some like Belarus were indecisive and the Central Asian Republics were shocked, none wanted a new Russian hegemony.⁴⁷ In this backdrop there was a general 'yes' for Russian economic assistance and 'no' for the dominance of the Muscovy. On the other hand USSR's own economic collapse was a major cause of breakup and the continuing economic weakness precluded generous packages to the successor states while Russia itself was undergoing a transition phase.

⁴⁶ Ukraine stands 83rd, Belarus 138th, Moldova 78th, Georgia 79th and Armenia 111th on the Democracy Index 2017. http://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/Democracy_Index_2017.pdf, accessed 30 March, 2018.

⁴⁷ 83% vote in the March 1991 referendum in Belarus was for the preservation of Soviet Union their leadership seemed confused over the anti-Union politics of Boris Yeltsin. See "Remembering a futile referendum", <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/20110324163178963/>, accessed 23 March, 2016.

The stabilizing role of Russia in the intra and inter-republic crises was also dubious. The Russian Security Blueprint (1997) states that “deepening and development of relations with CIS member states is a most important factor promoting the settlement of ethno-political and inter-ethnic conflicts, ensuring socio-political stability along Russia's borders, and ultimately preventing centrifugal phenomena within Russia itself”.⁴⁸ However, evidence shows that the Russian border security forces as well as the peace-keepers tended to aggravate the crises rather than containing them particularly in cases of Georgia and Azerbaijan. In any case economic or military aid is never without political strings and here enters the imperial paradigm which ties the peripheral states to the Russian core and in many ways affecting the former's capacity to participate in EU originated schemes.

The imperialist approach is also evident in the grand Eurasian schemes promoted by various schools of thought in Russia.⁴⁹ Though differing in their approaches and the modus operandi, all agree on the geopolitical and socio-cultural affinities built through a long common history upon which a modern Eurasianist scheme (read empire) could be built. In this backdrop the Russian officials and intelligentsia both see the color revolutions in the Russian periphery as an organized conspiracy of the Western and particularly EU's endeavors with the help of executed by their secret services through the NGOs.⁵⁰

On the other hand the EU's Eastern Partnership has also both functionalist and imperialist connotations particularly in the context of the EU core and the peripheral states. In the absence of general and ready packages from Russia the six countries looked to EU as a savior. Hence, the latter correctly claims that the ENP received a quick and voluntary positive response from those countries except Belarus where a kind of political inertia marred the prospects of change. As a result a number of interactive schemes in the form of thematic programs e.g. civil society initiatives; bilateral cooperation such as individual partnership schemes; and regional projects such as

⁴⁸ Russian National Security Blueprint.

⁴⁹ See Tsygankov.

⁵⁰ “We see them (NGOs) as an instrument that foreign states use to carry out their Russian policies”, Putin in 2007, cited in Hannes Adomeit, *Russia and its Neighborhood: Competition and Conflict with the EU* (Warsaw: College of Europe, 2011), 19-20.

Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC), European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) etc.

Simultaneously, the imperialist paradigm works in the form of a grand noble civilizing mission for the EU neighbors who unfortunately happened to miss the European Enlightenment and the liberal train because of Russian imperialism. Hence, they must be brought to a partnership which inculcates 'European values' in them and makes them 'true Europeans'. This attitude often transforms the much publicized status of 'partners' to that of mere subjects of a superior Europe, pointing to an "imperial re-ordering" that is "less visible but more intrusive ... based on voluntary submission and adaptation".⁵¹ This is more or less similar to the 19th century 'British utilitarianism' where the Empire had a utility – in fact a *noblese oblige* towards the heathen subjects to civilize them. And definitely in return if the empire gets some minor benefit from the subjects (read exploits them) it is quite justified in the context of what it is bestowing them with i.e. civilization (read democracy, equality and human rights).⁵²

When two empires expand in opposite and convergent directions there is a strong likelihood of collision or a zero-sum game that may lead to centuries old realist positions. This has already happened in the case of internal and inter-state conflicts in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and also in the political skirmishes in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Both EU and Russia should realize that the imperialist paradigm will neither serve their purpose in the long run nor benefit the recipients. Both should envisage a policy of mutual interests and values negotiated rather than imposed through pressures and punishments. After all, if both EU and Russia contend themselves with the functionalist approach offering their cooperation wherever required and fulfilling the needs of the concerned states, they will be able to keep the doors of negotiation and bargain open to all – a facility which is never available in imperialistic setups.

⁵¹ Dimitrova, 264.

⁵² For details see Raghwan Iyer, *Utilitarianism and all that* (New Delhi: Concord Group Press, 1983).