

Chapter 9

Between the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Economic Union: Competing Region-building Projects in the ‘Common Neighbourhood’

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Abstract

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of the respective regional integration projects of the European Union (EU) and Russia, namely the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Economic Union, in their common neighbourhood. It develops the concept of region-building and combines constructivist and neorealist approaches to regionalization in order to explain the phenomena under investigation. Although both projects nominally focus on hard-law integration, they differ in terms of both overarching aims and mechanisms. While the EU promotes soft and indirect region-building, Russia pursues regional integration as well as region-spoiling with a view to securing regional hegemony. The chapter shows that the EU's Eastern Partnership and its impact on partner countries are crucially conditioned by Russia's region-building and region-spoiling actions which, themselves, are reactions to the EU's emergence as a 'normative reference' in the post-Soviet space. (This suggests that the ENP impinges not only on 'target states' but also other regional actors.) The key differences in the actions and motives of each actor are best explained by the neorealist perspective in the case of Russia and constructivism in the case of the EU.

Introduction

Since the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009, the European Union (EU) has endeavoured to spread its rules into its neighbourhood to an extent which is unprecedented in terms of scale and intensity outside the context of enlargement. However, in the post-Soviet space the European Union has not been ‘the only game in town’ in terms of regional integration. The EU’s increased presence in this region, starting with the ENP and especially the Eastern Partnership, triggered concerns in Russia. The Eastern Partnership in particular required a shift by neighbouring states towards hard-law integration with the EU that was seen in Russia as detrimental to their ties with Moscow.¹ Russia responded by launching in 2010 its own hard-law integration project, the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) which was upgraded to a Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2015. As a result, the countries located between the EU and Russia became the object of contention and rivalry between Brussels and Moscow (Haukkala 2015: 27).

In this chapter, we conceptualize the Eastern Partnership and the EAEU as attempts to build regions. We use insights from the regionalism literature to analyse the EU’s and Russia’s respective policies in their ‘common neighbourhood’. The chapter explores the EU and Russia’s pursuit of their respective region-building projects and the extent to which they interact. It also explores the extent to which they are compatible, and/or mutually exclusive. It is found that the EU and Russia promote contrasting approaches to region-building because they pursue different objectives and rely upon different mechanisms. While the EU has strived to ‘export regional integration’ worldwide (Börzel & Risse 2009), we show that it is a soft and implicit region-builder in its Eastern neighbourhood. In fact, while the EU does not support regional cooperation as such, its policies bear important region-building implications, even if implicit and longer-term. The EU’s approach rests on positive conditionality and voluntary, sovereign choice, avoiding the use of punitive actions for those who choose to abstain from closer ties with the EU. By contrast, Russia demands a higher level of commitment to regional integration from the post-Soviet states and applies a whole spectrum of mechanisms (including positive and negative conditionality) to build a Eurasian region. At the same time, it applies coercive means to those countries which eschew Eurasian integration in order to hinder integration with the EU. Thereby Russia is acting both as a ‘hard’ region-builder as well as a ‘region-spoiler’ in the common neighbourhood and its actions in response to the EU’s region-building can be seen as a quest for regional hegemony in contrast to the EU’s approach which is hard to deem hegemonic. The result is unanticipated rivalry and incompatibility between the two projects, which thereby compels post-Soviet states to choose between them and to bear the consequences of this choice. This is a new and indeed unintended consequence of the ENP in the eastern neighbourhood.

The first part of this chapter develops a region-building perspective in the study of the EU’s and Russia’s policies. In the second section, we apply our analytical perspective and develop a comparison of the EU’s and Russia’s approaches to region-building in their ‘common neighbourhood’, highlighting the essential differences between the EU’s and Russia’s objectives. We then examine the policy instruments used by each actor in support of its region-building project. We show that the EU’s encounters with Russia in the Eastern neighbourhood profoundly impacts on the EU’s engagement in this

neighbourhood, in contrast to the Southern neighbourhood where the EU hardly faces any competing region-building project. The chapter thus offers insights into how interactions with other external actors (in particular other regional powers) (re-)shape the EU's action in its neighbourhood and how it can be conceptualized in terms of competing region-building processes.

Soft and hard region-building: a conceptual overview

In this section we develop our conceptual perspective by, first, explaining why the EU's and Russia's policies can be seen as endeavours to build regions in an area that has been affected by disintegration dynamics in the wake of the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). We then examine the narratives and the rationale behind the creation of the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Economic Union. We argue that while the EU has remained cautious about promoting region-building, Russia is much more ambitious in terms of regional integration. Finally, we develop our understanding of EU-Russia interaction in the region. We show that while the narrative about Russia's Eurasian project focuses on the mutual benefits for members, Eurasian integration is a vehicle for Russia to secure regional hegemony and limit the influence of the EU.

The Eastern Partnership and Eurasian integration as region-building projects

The EU's and Russia's projects can be characterised as region-building, which can be defined as the process of constructing 'closer economic, political, security and socio-cultural linkages between states and societies that are geographically proximate' (Börzel 2012: 255). A 'region-building approach' (Neumann 1994) enables us to grasp dynamic interactions in a rapidly changing regional environment, particularly as, as was noted by Hettne and Söderbaum (2000), there is no natural or given region.

Scholarly attention has concentrated on the driving forces behind the making of regions. In his attempt to classify approaches to region-building, Neumann (1994; 1999) developed a continuum stretching from 'inside-out' to 'outside-in' explanations. Regions can first emerge in an 'inside-out' dynamic, as an imagined community and a political project borne by regional political actors (Neumann 1999). Regional projects can also derive from economic and institutional factors, namely transaction costs and the demand for institutional change and integration (Mattli 1999). In line with this 'inside-out' dynamic, whatever the factors identified, regions derive primarily from the perception of a common identity that translates into a project of cooperation or integration. From a reversed, 'outside-in' perspective, regions tend to be shaped by external influences. In this case, the existence of a regional identity is preceded by region-builders who imagine spatial and chronological identities (Adler & Barnett 1998: 62). For the purposes of this chapter, we define region-builders as external players who foster the construction of closer political, security, trade and societal linkages with post-Soviet countries located in the 'common neighbourhood' between Russia and the EU.

The 'outside-in' approach also rests on the premise that regionalism – defined as the development of regional cooperation and integration – can produce spill-over effects around the world. This implies that external stimuli are powerful enough to prompt the construction of regions, regardless of local specificities. Globalization, for instance, has been identified as a driving force behind the creation of regional organizations over the

past two decades. Existing regions can also contribute to the building of other regions (De Lombaerde & Schulz 2009) by diffusing norms and policy templates (Börzel & Risse 2009; 2012) and/or 'making it regional' (Bicchi 2006), that is, designing regional strategies and aid programmes and fostering regional subgroupings (Farrell 2009), as well as pushing for inter-regional links (De Lombaerde & Schulz 2009).

The EU's role as a promoter of regionalism, in particular, has attracted scholarly attention. Regional integration is indeed a 'distinct European idea' (Börzel & Risse 2009: 5) that has emerged as a core objective of the EU's foreign policy (Smith 2008). Scholars have shown how, in a constructivist approach, the EU diffuses norms and templates and affects outcomes in other regional organizations (Jetschke & Murray 2012), primarily through their inter-regional dialogue (De Lombaerde & Schulz 2009).

The contrast with the neorealist view of international relations is instructive. In an international system which is characterized by the lack of a central authority which enforces rules and punishes aggressors, states adopt self-help mechanisms to ensure survival. Thus, states will seek to maximize their own relative power. In the words of Mearsheimer: 'great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power'. (Mearsheimer 2001: 35). As a result, great powers are likely to pursue expansionist policies, which will help them achieve either hegemony, or if this is beyond them, the status of a regional hegemon which dominates its 'near abroad'.

Mearsheimer (2001: 40) thus distinguishes between 'global hegemons, which dominate the world, and regional hegemons, which dominate distinct geographical areas', while Myers (1991: 3) defines regional hegemons as 'states which possess sufficient power to dominate subordinate state systems'. From this perspective, and in the context of EU-Russia 'rivalry', regions can be deemed to be hegemon-led alliances aimed at increasing the power of the region-builder (hegemon) and/or as a response to another region-building project (or the attempted emergence of another hegemon in 'its' geographical region). Thus, inherent in any regional hegemonic system is perception of challenge on the part of the existing regional hegemon in the event of any encroachment on its region by an aspiring region-building hegemon. As stressed by Mearsheimer (2001: 41), 'regional hegemons do not want peers'. The theory predicts that the existing regional hegemons will counteract the aspiring hegemon, if necessary, using military means. However, it clearly not needs to come to that if the regional hegemon possesses other levers of control over the states in the region (which is the target of the aspiring hegemon), such as regional interdependences (for instance with regard to trade and migration, as described by Hirschman) which would prevent stronger links being established between the target states and the aspiring hegemon.

Hence, following the neorealist approach, region-building is a vehicle to achieving external actors' interests in, and domination over, a region. This does not necessarily contradict constructivist approaches, though, as the diffusion of norms and ideas is also a means of gaining influence and achieving interests. Therefore, we use neorealism and constructivism as broad analytical grids that can be combined and meshed together. As has been noted (see, for example, Kratochvíl & Tulmets 2010: 29), different actors (hegemons) can employ different approaches and can indeed switch from one approach

to another. Therefore, by scrutinising Russia's and the EU's approaches and toolboxes for region-building we aim to gain a greater insight into the strategies employed by the competing hegemony and their underpinning rationale. Clearly, both the EU's Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian integration process are examples of region-building (or perhaps re-building in the case of the latter) or 'regionification', that is, region-building through discursive processes (Van Langenhove 2011: 65) on the territory of the western part of the Soviet Union. Therefore, in the next sections we delve into the EU's and Russia's narratives and seek to explain the rationales underlying their approaches to region-building in the post-Soviet space.

EU region-building in the post-Soviet space

Until the Eastern Partnership was launched, the post-Soviet space was as an exception to the picture of EU foreign policy as promoting regional and inter-regional links worldwide. This was at least in part due to the resistance of post-Soviet states to engage in re-integration underpinned by fears of diminishing their newly won sovereignty (Libman & Vinokurov 2013). A number of regional cooperation or regional integration initiatives either stalled or failed primarily due to² concerns over sovereignty, a lack of leadership, competing interests of countries involved in these projects or divergent political and economic trajectories of post-Soviet countries (Dragneva & de Kort 2007; Delcour 2011). In essence, regionalism failed to gain traction in the former Soviet space (Allison 2009; Wirminghaus 2012: 25).

The EU itself initially 'made it regional' (Bicchi 2006) in the post-Soviet area, *inter alia* by including the former Soviet republics (except the three Baltic countries) in a similar assistance programme³ and designing a similar contractual framework – namely the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) – for all twelve post-Soviet states.⁴ However, as early as the 1990s the EU envisaged the possibility of closer relations with those post-Soviet countries that would become its direct neighbours after the enlargement to the Central and Eastern European countries (Delcour 2011). This was evidenced by the introduction of a special clause on a future free trade area in the PCAs signed with Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, and by the drafting of Common Strategies with Russia and Ukraine in 1999, giving an early signal of an increased EU political commitment *vis-à-vis* these countries. In the early 2000s, the EU reframed its policies in the post-Soviet space and differentiated between several subareas according to the policies it was pursuing, namely the Strategic Partnership with Russia, the European Neighbourhood Policy with Eastern Europe and the South Caucasian countries, and the subsequent partnerships with Central Asian countries.

The ENP reflected the desire of the EU to become a 'projection-oriented actor' (Charillon 2004: 252) and shape developments in countries that border on the EU, and were therefore important for its security. This is clearly articulated in the EU's Security Strategy:

Even in an era of globalisation, geography is still important. It is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed. Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe (Council of the EU 2003).

The Eastern Partnership, launched in 2009, reflects a strengthening in the EU's region-building. Indeed, whereas all of the EU's neighbours were subject to the ENP, despite their disparate nature, the Eastern Partnership explicitly categorises Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus as a distinct regional area. The partnership framed relations within a specific policy framework distinguishing them from relations with other countries that once belonged to the Soviet Union (Russia, Central Asian republics) and to those in the Southern neighbourhood. This is because of two factors. First, the Eastern Partnership was an enhanced offer to post-Soviet neighbouring countries, although the offer of a Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Area (DCFTA) was subsequently been extended to some Southern Mediterranean countries already associated with the EU (such as Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan). However, at present the southern neighbours have no perspective for visa liberalization (a cornerstone of the EU's offer under the Eastern Partnership). Second, the EU crafted a distinct policy framework which encompassed all six post-Soviet countries. With the Eastern Partnership, the EU indeed recognizes 'the need to further promote regional cooperation among the Eastern neighbours and between the EU and the region', in parallel to bilateral cooperation (European Council 2008). As a result of gaps noted in the early ENP implementation process, cooperation among Eastern neighbours has incrementally emerged as a necessary component in the ENP:

Thus far, the ENP has largely been bilateral (...) Nevertheless, there are a number of cross-cutting themes where the EU and its ENP partners (...) share common interests and concerns and which could usefully be addressed in a multilateral context (European Commission 2006).

However, it is important to note that it is not one of the EU's explicit objectives to foster regional cooperation. Since the Eastern Partnership was created, the words 'multilateral' and 'thematic' have been widely used in the EU's policy discourse. Indeed, the word 'regional' was barely used in the Polish-Swedish joint proposal for an Eastern Partnership (2008) and carefully avoided both in the Commission proposal and in the declaration launching the Partnership (2008 and 2009). Therefore, the EU's discourse mirrors an indirect approach to region-building. From this perspective, region-building is a means of enhancing stability and security, something which is contingent on cooperation among regional actors.

Russia's region-building in the post-Soviet space

Russia's Eurasian integration project is a work of 'social engineering of a regional identity' (Adler & Crawford 2004: 23) that draws on the civilizational, cultural and economic ties among post-Soviet countries (Putin 2011). According to Putin (2011), the CIS was instrumental in preserving these links after the collapse of the Soviet Union. (This view discounts not only the organization's ineffectiveness but also the extreme reluctance of several post-Soviet countries, such as Ukraine, to engage in it other than minimally). Therefore, the Eurasian integration project is designed to not only reverse the advanced stage of disintegration between the former Soviet Republics but intensify the multiple dependencies which continue to more or less bind them. Despite legal discontinuities, the Russian President clearly sees the Customs Union/Single Economic Space and all the regional cooperation projects that have been promoted (and failed) since the breakdown of the Soviet Union as linked by the same objective.

The path ... was not easy and until now it has been convoluted; It started twenty years ago, when the Commonwealth of Independent States was founded after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Putin 2011).

In essence, the Eurasian Economic Union (like most regional organizations in the post-Soviet space) is 'Russia-centred' (Kobrinskaya 2007: 13). The Eurasian project hinges crucially on Russia's eagerness to promote regional integration, its economic potential and its attractiveness as a centre for integration (ibid.: 13). While post-Soviet countries remained a priority area for Russian foreign policy after the collapse of the USSR, Russia was too concerned with its own internal transformation process and too weak at the time to act as a driver of regional integration. It was only in the mid-2000s, after Putin's election and a rise in the oil price which replenished Russia's coffers that Russia started to reassert its influence over the post-Soviet space (Vinokurov 2007). Region-building was a means of re-establishing Russia's hegemonic role at a time when other external players (primarily the EU in the West and China in the East) were becoming increasingly influential. Thus, under Putin's leadership and thanks to resurgent oil prices, Russia took on the costs of regional integration (ibid.).

However, in the Russian official discourse the new body differs significantly from the USSR, the CIS and other existing regional arrangements.

The initial impetus behind Eurasian was economic rationale as according to the Russian President, the integration project would be beneficial for all participating countries (Putin 2011). Equally importantly, and in sharp contrast to its predecessors, Putin stressed that it ought be designed around the needs of citizens and businesses, whose involvement was viewed as a condition of success, as well as help integrate Eurasian countries into the world economy (ibid.). Economic integration was therefore at the root of the emergence of the Eurasian region as a new pole of influence between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Hence, the project was a means for Russia to regain control of the region as well as a strategy of adaptation and survival in a globalized world.

In contrast to its predecessors, the Eurasian project was specifically designed to achieve these ambitions by making integration irreversible. It is based upon hard-law integration, binding legal commitments and a pooling of sovereignty. It developed from a Customs Union to an Economic Union, thus proclaiming a priori deepening at a much faster pace than any other regional integration project. Also, from the outset, Russia has sought to widen Eurasian integration by bringing in new members (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2013: 3) to join the founding members (Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia); Armenia and Kyrgyzstan joined in 2015. While based first and foremost on CIS members, the Eurasian project is also open to other countries (Putin 2011). Its final boundaries remain undefined.

All in all, Russia is proposing more direct engagement in regional cooperation and a higher level of integration than the EU. In essence, while the ENP is offered as an alternative to enlargement, the Eurasian project is premised on rapid enlarging to the post-Soviet states.

Competing projects

Based on the preceding analysis, both the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian integration project can be conceptualized as attempts ‘to invent a region that does not yet exist’ (Adler & Crawford 2004). In fact, both deep economic integration projects are based upon hard-law integration, premised on taking on comprehensive and binding legal commitments (Delcour & Wolczuk 2013), in sharp contrast to the earlier initiatives (either the ENP or the CIS). However, the EU-led framework, namely the DCFTA, accommodates post-Soviet countries’ pre-existing relations with Russia and the CIS. Despite its comprehensive nature and approximation with the EU’s rules, the DCFTA allows countries to participate in multiple free trade agreements, including bilateral and multilateral ones. The CIS bilateral and multilateral agreements were hardly legalized and lacked a comprehensive framework, meaning that the participating countries had only very selective and weakly binding commitments (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2015). None of the countries expressed a desire to join the Eurasian project while negotiating the DCFTA, and the EU only acted on their explicitly declared preferences with regard to respecting and accommodating their pre-existing trade agreements with Russia/CIS. In that sense, the DCFTA does not disrupt the pre-existing trade ties within the CIS. With the Eastern Partnership, the EU offers thus a soft variant of region-building.

By contrast, membership of the EAEU entails a much greater commitment from the participating states as it involves giving up sovereignty over common external trade policy. In addition to agreeing to develop comprehensive and binding rules on non-tariff barriers to trade, member states agree to common customs tariffs. In so doing, they give up their right to enter bilateral free trade agreement with third parties, including the EU. For that reason, membership in the EAEU precludes a DCFTA with the EU. As a consequence of this deeper form of integration inherent in an economic union as opposed to a bilateral free trade agreement, the Eurasian option amounts to a more advanced and exclusive form of regional integration (‘hard’ region-building) for post-Soviet countries. This integration contest makes the post-Soviet space a unique example worldwide, as there are no other examples of region-building initiatives competing beyond the micro-level, that is, across state borders (Söderbaum & Taylor 2008).

Over the past decade, the rivalry between the EU and Russia has often been analysed through a normative prism. The idea of Europe as a ‘normative power’ (Manners 2002) has been contrasted with Russia’s policies in the post-Soviet space. Yet, as argued by Vinokurov and Libman (2012: 269), the picture is much more complex and nuanced. The view of the EU as a normative power been questioned (Casier 2013), as has the view that Russia and the EU offer drastically different approaches to their neighbourhood (Averre 2009). Others postulate a competition in the post-Soviet space between a ‘neo-imperial’ EU and a ‘post-imperial Russia’ (Torbakov 2013: 173). This normative reading limits or even precludes the possibility of a comparison between the EU’s and Russia’s policies in the post-Soviet space.

Whose region? Mechanisms of region-building and region-spoiling ers

In the remainder of this chapter, we apply our conceptual perspective to the analysis of the mechanisms underlying the EU’s and Russia’s region-building projects. We

explicitly incorporate the power dimension by drawing attention to the readiness/reluctance to use ‘hard’ power, namely coercive economic and military measures. In our view, the use (or lack) of ‘hard’ power is indeed a major indicator testifying to the readiness (or lack thereof) to accept and co-exist with other peer region-builders. Therefore, it clearly differentiates between actors engaged in ‘soft’ versus ‘hard’ region-building, with the latter aiming at establishing (or retaining) regional hegemony. With the Eastern Partnership, the EU combines ‘soft’ region-building mechanisms with bilateral rule-based integration that bears major, even though implicit, region-building effects. Russia combines a nominally hard-law regional integration with a deployment of various mechanisms to not only attract new participants but also to punish those who decline participation, thereby seeking to undermine the EU’s own region-building project.

The Eastern Partnership

This section argues that the EU is deeply, yet unreflectingly engaged in region-building in the post-Soviet space. This is primarily achieved by attaching post-Soviet countries to the EU’s hub through expanding the legal boundaries of the EU (Lavenex 2011). Therefore, we seek to explain what may appear as a paradox: while the EU primarily relies on bilateral relations with its Eastern neighbours, it pursues implicit regionalization objectives and its policies, especially the bilateral instruments which are the cornerstone of the EU’s framework, bear strong implications in terms of regionalization.

Since the European Economic Community (EC) was launched, the place of regions as objects of EU foreign policy has been central in light of the EC’s own experience of integration and even more so in the context of a new regionalism flourishing worldwide in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the post-Cold War context, the EU’s support for region-building seems to be natural (De Lombaerde & Schulz 2009: 2), taking into account both its successful internal model and international developments. However, since 1991, the post-Soviet area has been an exception in the EU’s efforts to promote regional cooperation worldwide (Delcour 2011: 146). This is because the EU has been strongly constrained by the disintegration dynamics evident in the post-Soviet space. As a result, the EU has mainly relied on bilateral relations in the region. In essence, the ENP continues along those lines since it was built upon a set of bilateral relations with partner countries (Haukkala 2010: 164).

The Eastern Partnership is a continuation of this ‘hub-and-spoke’ approach, yet it also marks a shift of paradigm. In essence, the EU has pursued a twofold approach to region-building under the Eastern Partnership: a multilateral and a bilateral track. First, the multilateral track pursues regionalization through socialization. While it provides a framework where ‘common challenges can be addressed’ (European Commission 2008), in practice it has mainly served as a forum to share information on partners’ reforms and to structure the legislative approximation process. In other words, the multilateral track has contributed to developing links with the EU rather than among the partner countries. This is because the whole process appears to be framed principally by the EU. At the technical level, as a general rule, platforms are chaired by the Commission or the European External Action Service, which places the EU at the centre

of the policy process. The EU side is responsible for convening meetings, setting a provisional agenda, presiding meetings, managing information flows, including meeting reports, and it also plays a role when it comes to setting objectives and reviewing progress. Flagship initiatives are also directly managed by the European Commission. The EU's agenda-setting role on substantive issues of regional cooperation is even more central in light of the partner countries' diversity.

However, the six countries of the Eastern Partnership have increasingly taken different political and economic trajectories and EU norms and rules are referenced in domestic debates in only some of these. The Partnership seems to reflect an EU-driven regional agenda. At the political level, the multilateral track has been highly sensitive to intra-regional conflicts.⁵ However, the multilateral track also offers a useful framework for post-Soviet countries to develop regional links. For example, the non-governmental formats (the Civil Society Forum and the Business Forum) have fostered contacts and dialogue between Eastern Partnership societies. Overall, the multilateral track has been very soft and non-imposing in terms of acting as a platform for socialization. But its effectiveness has been limited, primarily because of the lack of a shared region-building agenda amongst the Eastern neighbours.

Second, and perhaps paradoxically, it is the bilateral track that has emerged as a major vector of regionalization through Europeanization. The bilateral policies developed by the EU *vis-à-vis* the post-Soviet countries 'do have transversal effects and thus affect region-building processes in the post-Soviet area' (Delcour 2011: 149). The bilateral track entails a massive approximation to the EU's *acquis communautaire* with a view to upgrading contractual relations towards Association Agreements, setting up DCFTAs, progressing towards visa liberalization and concluding sectoral agreements. Even though these agreements 'do not per se aim at the creation of a homogeneous and dynamic legal space' (Gstöhl 2015: 863), the bilateral track bears potentially strong region-building effects. This is because Association Agreements, DCFTAs and sectoral agreements are legally binding. DCFTAs are based upon the approximation of partner countries' legal framework with the EU *acquis* in trade-related areas (Van der Loo *et al.* 2014). In a similar vein, the Energy Community (of which Ukraine and Moldova are members; Georgia is a candidate country and Armenia an observer) is premised upon members' alignment to the EU's internal energy market rules, including the third energy package. Therefore, approximation with EU standards brings Eastern partners closer to the EU and to one another by *de facto* attaching partners to a common regulatory space and thereby promoting greater convergence both with the EU and between those countries in the post-Soviet space which align themselves with EU rules.

This hub-and-spoke approach indeed fosters links between Eastern partners. This is already evidenced by the strengthening of ties and the creation of new formats of dialogue between the three countries that have signed an Association Agreement including a DCFTA with the EU. For instance, in March 2015 the Deputy Foreign Ministers' of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine met in Tbilisi at level to develop a joint vision on the final declaration of the Riga Summit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2015). A first trilateral Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Forum also met in May 2015 to discuss common challenges facing the associated countries (Parliament of

Georgia 2015). Informal consultations between these countries are also taking place bilaterally on a regular basis.

Overall, with the Eastern Partnership the EU has strengthened its hub-and spoke approach (European Commission 2007) by introducing legally binding agreements. But, in parallel, a web of relations is also emerging with the developments of links between partner countries, either within the EaP's multilateral track or in smaller formats. This soft, implicit, rule-based model of region-building is evident in three regards. First, the EU pursues regionalization by weak positive conditionality. The EU provides only limited incentives for the adoption of EU rules, relying on the countries' declared interest in socio-economic modernization and good governance. The EU eschews punitive measures for abstaining from participation. This was evidenced in the EU's reaction to Armenia's sudden decision to join the EAEU project in September 2013, despite having completed DCFTA negotiations several weeks earlier. While it regretted the country's decision, the EU stressed that Armenia (like any other Eastern Partnership country) was free to choose the integration scheme it wanted to join (authors' interviews in Armenia 2014). Two years after President Sargsyan's decision, in December 2015, Armenia and the EU opened talks for a new type of agreement, compatible with the country's Eurasian commitments. In a similar vein, when Ukrainian president Yanukovich announced the decision to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement in November 2013, the EU adopted a 'wait and see' approach. Despite massive and violent protests, it adopted the role of by-stander, refraining from imposing sanctions against the Yanukovich regime to pressurize it in any way to seek a compromise with the protesters and/or to sign the Association Agreement (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2014: 97). Second, as argued above, the way that the DCFTAs have been designed made them compatible with existing regional (CIS) or bilateral agreements within the post-Soviet space (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2014: 225). This compatibility was especially important for Moldova and Ukraine, which are CIS members (albeit only an associate member in the case of Ukraine). Third, while countries are confronted with punitive measures applied by Russia, including military aggression, the EU explicitly rules out the use of force (Auer 2015).

Despite the fact that only three Eastern Partnership countries eventually joined the core part of the EU's project (the Association Agreements and DCFTAs), the EU is sticking to its flexible and differentiated approach. While membership of the EAEU precludes the conclusion of a DCFTA, the EU has made it clear that other bilateral or sectoral instruments remain open to all Eastern Partnership countries. In essence the EU views integration to the regional hub as a voluntary process. Countries are free to participate and no punitive measures follow if they eschew participation.

Yet, the EU does not engage in inter-regionalism. The EU has so far ignored Russia's calls for the development of inter-regional links with the EAEU.⁶ While it supports the establishment of interregional links worldwide, it has not explicitly recognized the Eurasian integration project and has limited dialogue with the ECU/EAEU to a technical level. Besides the issue of the EAEU's compatibility with the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), concerns over Russia's violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity may account for this reluctance. Instead, in line with Moldova's and Ukraine's preferences and commitments, the EU refers to the CIS free trade agreement

as the main multilateral framework in order to underscore that the Association Agreements and DCFTAs are fully compatible with other regional projects in which these two states participate (European Commission 2015). Therefore, while the EU is engaged in region-building in the sense of attaching Eastern Partnership countries to the existing regional hub on a voluntary basis, it does not claim exclusivity over partner countries' wider regional (trade) links.

Russia's quest for regional hegemony

Russia pursues region-building as a way to assert hegemony in the post-Soviet space. To this end, Russia combines investment in its own hard-law regional integration project with deliberate and explicit actions to undermine alternative region-building projects. Three major periods can be identified in Russia's attitudes to the EU's policies in the post-Soviet space: First, from the collapse of the Soviet Union until the early 2000s, the EU was primarily viewed as a partner in Russia's own transformation process. The EU's policies in the post-Soviet space were not perceived as hostile, given both Russia's low profile in the early 1990s and the EU's limited engagement in the region throughout the decade. In the 1990s, the EU's nascent involvement in the post-Soviet area was thus welcomed by Russia, for whom the EU was at that time a major economic and political partner (despite growing criticisms of the EU's lack of a strategic vision and of the imposition of its norms in its relationship with Russia).

Second, the launch of the ENP in 2003-04 did not mark a major shift *per se*, as the new policy (premised on soft law) was not taken seriously in Moscow (Haukkala 2013). Yet a few months later, the 'Rose Revolution' in Georgia and especially the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine triggered Russia's concerns over a loss of influence in the post-Soviet space, and these events were interpreted in Moscow in terms of geopolitical contestation with the West (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015b: 460). This, in turn, led to a shift toward the 'old paradigm of control' (Vinokurov 2007: 35) over the post-Soviet space, achieved mainly by means of bilateral relations and existing interdependences.

Third, the creation of the Eastern Partnership in 2008-09 prompted Russia to work out a more comprehensive approach to regional integration. This is because the prospect of legally binding agreements touched upon 'Russia's sensitivity as to the question of who sets the rules in its perceived sphere of influence' (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2014: 240). In an unprecedented attempt (since the 1990s) to assert its regional hegemony, Russia reacted by investing heavily in regional integration. Yet while in the 2000s Russia sought to combine (sub-)regional cooperation in the post-Soviet area with its own expanding relations with the EU, it designed and developed the ECU as an alternative to the EU's Eastern Partnership.

As noted above, the ECU/EAEU evidences 'a clear move towards extensive delegation to a developed supranational bureaucracy' (Dragneva 2013: 51). While the EU's offer can be combined with the CIS and other bilateral post-Soviet arrangements that are crucial for partner countries, Russia has offered a higher degree of integration and pressured post-Soviet countries for full membership of the ECU (Delcour & Kostanyan 2014), thus making its own integration project incompatible with a DCFTA. Membership of the Customs Union implies a loss of sovereignty of member countries over trade policy and sets common tariffs that are incompatible with the elimination of

tariffs planned under the DCFTA. With the ECU/EAEU, Russia has thus compelled countries in the common neighbourhood to choose between the two projects (Delcour & Kostanyan 2014; Dragneva & Wolczuk 2015) - a goal it could not achieve with the earlier regional cooperation schemes, especially the CIS which was long considered 'a moribund organisation in Moscow' (Zagorski 2012).

To 'induce' these countries to join the Eurasian project, Russia has exploited the wide-ranging and strong dependencies of the post-Soviet countries on Russia. These are multifaceted and range from the deployment of military forces and involvement in the protracted 'frozen' conflicts to trade flows, labour migration and support for non-democratic leaders (Ambrosio 2009).

Yet Russia's pressure has yielded diverse outcomes in terms of region-building. It was (apparently) successful in the case of Armenia, where Russia employed its leverage over the country's overarching foreign policy priority, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia's massive arms sales to Azerbaijan in early 2013, combined with threats to substantially increase energy prices, forced Armenia to reject the EU's offer of deep economic integration even though negotiations had been completed a few weeks earlier (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015a: 503). However, Russia's increasing pressure on Ukraine (starting with the trade war in summer 2013) had counter-productive effects and failed to induce the country to join the ECU/EAEU.

The EU's signature of Association Agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in June 2014 seemed to have exposed the limits of Russia's hegemonic approach to region-building.

Unable to compete with the EU's power of attraction, Russia has shifted its strategy to region-spoiling, involving a plethora of measures. Most conspicuously, Russia responded to the conclusion of Association Agreements and DCFTAs by resorting to economic punitive measures and military measures. The most spectacular act has been the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Donbass to punish Ukraine for its pro-European orientation and raise the costs and risks of the European choice in Ukraine (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2015). In Moldova and Ukraine, Russia denounced the existing CIS free trade agreement and introduced a series of additional trade bans. In Moldova, Russia facilitated the emergence of new political 'hooks' inside the country, *inter alia* the Party of Socialists in favour of cancelling the Association Agreement signed with the EU. Russia also used breakaway and autonomous regions as pressure points over Georgia and Moldova. Besides supporting the breakaway region of Transnistria, Russia sought to empower pro-Russian forces in the autonomous Moldovan region of Gagauzia (Delcour 2015). The organization of a referendum on the Customs Union in 2014 (with 98 per cent of voters in favour of joining the ECU) and the election of a governor supported by Russia in March 2015 are vivid examples of Russia's counteracting power. In Georgia, besides threatening to suspend the bilateral free trade agreement signed in 1994, Russia stepped up its pressure by signing treaties of Alliance and Strategic Partnership with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015b).⁷ These envisage an alignment of the secessionist territories with the EAEU through the creation of a common social and economic space with Russia, and could therefore undermine the implementation of the DCFTA. In particular, Abkhazia is expected to adapt its customs regulatory framework to that of the

EAEU. Following the signature of the Association Agreement, Russia has conducted a concerted campaign at the regional (sub-state) level questioning the benefits and feasibility of implementing the DCFTA for Georgia (authors' interviews in Georgia, January 2016). Russia's attempts to spoil integration with the EU in the three newly associated countries have yielded contradictory outcomes though. While Russian measures indirectly affect the three countries' capacity to conduct reforms, they have also provided a push for EU-demanded reforms.

While Russia has been trying to either block or undermine post-Soviet countries' engagement with the Eastern Partnership, its own region-building project, the EAEU, is increasingly struggling to deliver on its promises. Despite the declared ambitions, the benefits have yet to materialize. Trade flows among participating members (except Belarus) have continuously declined since 2013, with trade down 36 per cent during the first three months of 2015 (Boguslavska 2015: 10). This only adds to the disruption of trade flows with non-EAEU members as a result of higher tariffs. The economic crisis in Russia partially accounts for the decrease in trade flows between EAEU members. However, the latter also seems to confirm that despite the modernization narrative, the Eurasian integration project's economic benefits remain questionable.

In essence, 'like other Russian initiatives in the post-Soviet space, it is first and foremost a political project' (Zagorski 2012). Yet other members of the ECU/EAEU have been resisting Russia's attempts to develop political integration ever since the Eurasian project was launched. In addition, the rule-based nature of the project is increasingly dubious, as illustrated by Russia's unilateral reintroduction of customs checks with Belarus (in retaliation for the sanctions adopted by the EU) in clear breach of customs union rules. The political substance of Eurasian integration is also demonstrated by Russia's use of the post-Soviet countries' vulnerabilities to induce Eastern Partnership members (primarily Armenia) to join the process. However, Russia's resort to coercive means in return for the conclusion of Association Agreements underscores its limited capacity to offer an attractive region-building alternative to that of the EU. This constitutes a major obstacle to its claim for regional hegemony but does not seem to detract Russia from pursuing it.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have scrutinized the way in which the EU and Russia pursue their respective region-building projects and the interactions between these projects. Our comparative analysis of the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian economic integration reveals significant differences in the EU's and Russia's approaches to region-building although both projects are based upon hard-law integration and entail legally binding commitments on the part of members. With the Eastern Partnership, the EU does not foster the creation of a permanent regional grouping, but rather emerges as a regional hub. It thus promotes soft and indirect region-building that may lead to the creation of a shared identity, as anticipated by constructivist approaches. Therefore, we find that the constructivist interpretation of region-building better applies to the EU's approach to region-building. In this vein, the EU places the emphasis on the diffusion of norms, regardless of whether these can effectively lead to regionalization.

With the EAEU, an international organization with a legal personality, Russia envisages a more ambitious and advanced form of regional integration. In line with neorealist views, and in sharp contrast to the EU's approach, the rationale behind the EAEU is to secure Russia's exclusive influence over the member states (or potential participants) in the Eurasian project, even if the Russian narrative about the EAEU stresses the mutually beneficial nature of integration for all participants.

Our contribution also contrasted EU and Russian mechanisms of region-building. While the EU relies on positive conditionality, socialization and long-term incentives such as modernization, Russia draws uses coercion in pursuit of regional hegemony. These mechanisms bring to light the hegemonic rationale behind the EAEU project. Therefore, we find that neorealist approaches better explain Russia's policies.

This 'hard', hegemonic approach to region-building, combined with Russia's insistence on full membership of the EAEU and unilateral withdrawal of bilateral/regional arrangements, bears major implications for the EU's own region-building project. These consequences have been blatantly exposed at the end of 2013 when Armenia abruptly announced that it would join the Eurasian project after completing negotiations for a DCFTA with the EU. The annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Donbass have demonstrated the extent to which Russia is prepared to use coercive means to undermine the EU's region-building project. Therefore, neorealist interpretations enable us to disentangle the interactions between the two projects.

While the EU has developed its policies irrespective of Russia's role and links with post-Soviet countries, Russia has sought to counteract the ENP/Eastern Partnership in order to secure its hegemony and avoid the emergence of a peer in the region. Yet, while it is premised upon a high degree of integration, the Russian project does not offer a template for rule-based integration leading to socio-economic modernization. The assertion of regional hegemony is thus constrained by Russia's own weakness and unattractiveness as a regional hub for integration.

We show that the way in which the two analysed region-building projects (including Russia's policy vis-à-vis the 'missing' EAEU member - Ukraine) have developed thus far forecloses the possibility of inter-regionalism in terms of the fostering of cooperation between the two projects.⁸ Even though Russia called for the development of a bloc-to-bloc dialogue from the outset of the Eurasian project (Putin, 2011) this became impossible once coercion was used to induce Eastern Partnership countries to join the EAEU. The launch of an inter-regional dialogue is also hindered by the EAEU members' (primarily Russia's) breaches of the rules that the organization itself has developed.

Analysing the Eastern Partnership and Eurasian economic integration from the region-building perspective thus enables us to enrich our understanding of the interlocking temporal dynamics in regionalization projects. It highlights shifting behaviour and policies as a result of the interactions between the two projects and thereby offers a dynamic understanding of actors' policies. As is shown in this chapter, the EU's Eastern Partnership and its impact on partner countries are crucially conditioned by Russia's region-building policies which, in turn, respond to the EU's emergence as a 'normative reference' in the post-Soviet space.

The co-existence of two region-building projects and the actions of Russia as a region-spoiler, determined to countervail the EU's influence, are absent in the Southern neighbourhood. Hence, the interactions between the two projects highlighted in this chapter are specific to the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. However, our findings also allow for more general conclusions on the EU's external action in the neighbourhood. Our analysis indeed highlights both the incremental and flexible nature of EU external action. In its neighbourhood, the EU offers norms tightly connected to its own identity and integration process. These have important transformative long-term implications in the East, in terms of region-building. The ENP has been gradually refined and adapted in response to developments in the region. As indicated by the 2015 ENP review (European Commission/High Representative 2015), these adaptations reflect the limitations of the EU's external influence and result in scaling down the EU's transformative and region-building ambitions in the neighbourhood.

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¹ See also chapter 4 by Giusti and chapter 5 by Zaslavskaya in this volume.

² Wirminghaus (2012: 25) has counted 39 initiatives of regional integration in the post-Soviet space between 1991 and 2010. Out of these, 36 gave birth to regional organizations.

³ TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) was launched in 1991 and remained operational until December 2006.

⁴ Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) have been in force with Russia (1997), Ukraine (1998), Moldova (1998), Armenia (1999), Azerbaijan (1999), Georgia (1999), Kazakhstan (1999), Kyrgyzstan (1999), Uzbekistan (1999) and Tajikistan (2010). A PCA was negotiated with Belarus but not signed due to the country's shift toward authoritarianism in 1996. An EU-Turkmenistan PCA was signed in May 1998, but has not yet entered into force.

⁵ The multilateral track was affected by tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan hampering the adoption of a common statement at the first Euronest plenary session in Strasbourg in 2011; and the absence of a delegation from Azerbaijan at the Euronest plenary session in Yerevan in 2015.

⁶ See also chapter 11 by Staeger in this volume.

⁷ See also chapter 13 by Del Medico in this volume.

⁸ In November 2015, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, made it clear that for the EU a bloc-to-bloc dialogue was subject to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements in Ukraine – a link that was rejected by the Kremlin (Reuters, 2015). For an opposing view, see chapter 11 by Staeger in this volume