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# Putting the EU Global Security Strategy to test: ‘cooperative orders’ and othering in EU–Russia relations

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**Abstract** This paper examines the notion of *othering* and its role in the development of cooperative regional orders, prioritised by the EU Global Security Strategy. It argues that the conceptual underpinnings of the relationship between the inside and the outside, the established *Self* and the emergent *Other*, are too often taken for granted and in a fragmenting global order require urgent re-conceptualisation. Drawing on post-structuralist and Freudian work, the paper contends that while living in an increasingly complex and contested world, it is imperative to develop a more nuanced understanding of a changing global order as relational and interdependent. This would require a new conceptualisation of *othering* as a reciprocal nexus (rather than an opposition or even juxtaposition) between the *Self* and the *Other*, to ensure that cooperative orders would form and become sustainable.

**Keywords** European Union · Global Security Strategy · Russia · Othering · Governance · Hegemony · Cooperative orders

## ‘Cooperative orders’ in a fragmenting world

In June 2016 Federica Mogherini, the Higher Representative for the European Union (EU)’s Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, announced a new vision for the EU’s Global Security Strategy (EUGSS) duly concerted by the EU Member States. A particular focus and strategic priority were given to the development of ‘*cooperative regional orders*’ conceived as the cornerstone for transforming global governance and making it more responsible and sustainable: ‘We will invest in cooperative relationships to spur shared global responsibilities’ (EUGSS 2016: 32).

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As the EUGSS purported further, these ‘cooperative relationships’ should not be solely premised on the EU model and prescription. Rather, they should ‘seek reciprocal inspiration from different regional experiences’ (Ibid), co-opting a multitude of actors at different levels—from sub- to inter-regional. It, therefore, comes as a surprise that this constructive vision for ‘reciprocal inspiration’ in the same paper stops short where it is needed the most—that is, vis-a-vis the neighbouring Russia, still seen by the EU as a ‘key strategic challenge’, with whom cooperation may only be possible if ‘substantial changes ... premised upon the principles underpinning the European security order’ (Ibid: 33) were to occur. If Russia were to comply, the EU pledges to stand ready to ‘discuss disagreements’ and engage in areas where their ‘interests overlap’. Not only the proposed *modus operandi* is delimiting in its reciprocal practicalities; it also lacks a strategy for realising the very same vision of ‘cooperative orders’ the EU has set to achieve in moving forward. Furthermore, it triggers a series of questions including those of utility, nature and the purpose of the purported ‘cooperative relationships’: How to achieve them in complex settings like the EU-Russia relations, and how to ensure they last? Should they only speak to the converted, ‘like-minded countries and regional groupings’ (Ibid: 8) as the Strategy Paper alludes to; or should they strive for a more inclusive learning, to make cooperative orders possible and enduring?

These questions become even more urgent when put in the context of a changing global order, with the international environment arguably growing more contested (EEAS 2015) and thus less predictable and controllable (Chandler 2014). This is further exacerbated by the unfolding multi-order struggles, whereby ‘the international system [of today] appears to be in flux’, and the world, as we know it since the World War 2—liberal international—is no more (Flockhart 2016: 3). To address these challenges, the EU has been considering a number of actions, including improving its own ‘good governance’, depoliticising ‘democracy promotion’ to capacity-building projects and more recently, introducing ‘resilience’ to empower ‘the local’ (EUGSS 2016) and ‘the peoplehood’ (Sadiki 2016). These concepts, while singly important for engendering stability, collectively, however, would struggle to foster desired cooperation, let alone its sustainability.

This paper argues that for cooperation to occur and to last in a complex and contested environment, a new understanding of relations between *the Self* and *the Other*, the inside and the outside, the established and the emergent—that is, a process of *othering* as a *nexus* with a decentred focus on the outside, needs to be developed. To date, there has been much debate about the nature of *othering* (Nicolaidis and Sebe 2015), and yet, much of it has been dominated by the greater powers’ perspective (Manners 2002; Whitman and Manners 2016). A more nuanced notion of *othering* should begin with an effort to re-evaluate the existing conventional assumptions of the *Self* and its external positioning, to understand how the *Self-Other* nexus could become not just *relational* but *reciprocal*, to avoid a ‘civilising attempt’ (Linklater 2011) of the established to shape the boundaries of the emergent orders. If anything, the EUGSS has exposed the paucity of our understandings of modern power dynamics, privileging a traditional few and perceiving the world and changing nature from their Ivory Tower. The EU–Russia relations, in the context of the eastern neighbourhood and Ukraine more specifically,



serve as testimony to the high costs that could arise from this unbalanced and limited reflexivity. This article therefore sets to problematise power relations as a process of ‘othering’, taking it to a new conceptual level whereby the *Self* and the *Other* are seen as two distinct and yet, constitutive parts of the nexus in the construction of ‘future cooperative orders’. The article first will explore the missing role of the *Other* in a coming multi-order world and then will look more specifically at the EU–Russia relations in the context of the ‘shared neighbourhood’, putting a strategy for cooperative global governance to test.

### **Rethinking *othering*: Why now, and what is it?**

Much conceptual framing of international relations continues to be from the lens of the great power dynamics—the *established*—situated within the increasingly less adequate logics of the hegemonic order and macro-security power constellations (Buzan and Waever 2009; Bull and Watson 1984). These logics, pungent at a time of conflict, are nonetheless conservatively furnished in terms of geopolitics, resource competition and normative exceptionalism of the established regimes. Their right to dominate seems to stem from either their historical legacies (Manners 2002), or hitherto accepted conventions, which, however, may be less suited for capturing the *here and now* (let along the future), and the challenges of the emergent (and the disruptive) *Other*. Recent events that swept across Europe—plunging Ukraine into an ongoing civil conflict, bringing Syria to the forefront of international struggle, and EU–Russia relations into an antagonising impasse—have exposed the increasingly fallible nature of the existing power arrangements, and with it, the paucity of power conceptualisations *to date* highlighting the limited presence of and regard for the emergent *Other*. Instead of depicting the reality as it is, in its rich polyphony of voices, mainstream reflections of the existing power politics (Manners 2002; Whitman and Manners 2016) display strong bias towards the established hierarchy of geo-strategic interests, duly reflected in the treatment of ‘the outside’ as ‘a backyard’ (Prodi 2002) for the accomplishment of great powers’ ‘civilising’ ambitions. As Elias passionately contended: ‘Any theory which explains power differentials *only in terms* of a monopolistic possession of non-human objects, and disregards figurational aspects of power relations’ (1965: 4, emphasis added), becomes self-limiting and impotent in trying to capture the world as it is, in its diversity and relational dynamic. This is simply because the ‘established’ powers are often too reliant on their own preconceptions of the outside (or what it should be), thus taking little trouble to externalise and hear the voices of the *Other*. From their perspective, the outside—the emergent and different *Other*—is simply seen as an extension and realisation of the insiders’ Self-conceived ambitions. Too often the outside is portrayed not only as different, but also as perceivably unstable, and inferior (Diez 2005), lacking the know-how of the *established*, and displaying resistance to its aiding hand. This kind of perception only reinforces the view that the outside is a threat to the inside’s stability and security, and thus requires prescriptive treatment, and alignment with what is considered to be ‘a universal normal’. Furthermore, this view (or ‘stigmatisation’ in Elias’ words) of the outside,



once constructed, is difficult to reset: it becomes the ‘politics’ of the established, by way of closing contestation (or ‘the political’ as an open forum for debate), and simply an exercise of technocratic governance, to enforce rule adherence over the emergent *Other* (Edkins 1999). If anything, these arrangements of power may render an illusory sense of *stability*, rather than a true understanding of how *sustainability* and coexistence between the established *Self* and the emergent *Other* could be achieved. A fresher outlook is needed to draw less on hegemonic and emphatically asymmetrical power relations of today, in order to give a chance to the emergence and endurance of ‘cooperative orders’ in the future.

### Why othering, and why now?

Whitehead (in Hobson and Kurki 2012: 21) once suggested that the best way to see the world for *what it is*, in its quality and asymmetry, is perhaps through the lens of another discipline. This may generate an ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking to understand the processes and events, which may otherwise be considered as given, or forgotten, and left unresolved.

In relevance to our debate, if we were to rely on conventional power conceptions, we would struggle, for example, to uncover and explain EU failings vis-à-vis the neighbourhood, which if seen from the EU’s perspective, come in a stuck contrast with its continuing effort to improve its governance over the region. And yet, despite the effort, the EU has recently been charged with ‘hubris and myopia’ (Lavenex 2016)! A lack of understanding may also put at risk the new EU strategies of resilience and ‘cooperative orders’, which have been coined to improve governance over the fragmenting global order.

This is where *othering*, we believe, might make a difference for understanding the emergent complexities and changing power dynamics, especially when seen from a different discipline. The nexus between the *Self* and the *Other*, when viewed, for example, from a perspective of biological sciences (‘theories of mind’), cannot be underestimated, in prioritising awareness of the outside over the inside. In *the world of nature* for ‘a being’ to be considered ‘established’ and secure it has less to do with having a complex active brain (‘the Self’), but rather how it interacts and relates to ‘the Other’. In particular, to have much higher chances of survival, one would need first to instinctively recognise *the Other*, so that they could model ‘another’s behaviour’ to gain advantage of anticipation, in order to survive. Second, less commonly one needs to develop a sense of *the Self*, ‘since the only model available to understand another’s is itself’ (Ibid: 79). As noted, this behaviour is not commonplace in the world of nature, and only superior animals could respond intelligently to the so-called mirror effect—that is, to the process of recognising their own *Self* in the mirror.

Curiously, in the *social* world, the process of locating ‘the conscious/the established’ is actually the reverse: there is a far greater Self-awareness and knowledge about one’s *Self*, including their distinctive qualities and respective needs, while the ability to know *the Other*, a primordial instinct of the natural world to ensure survival, is far less common and even redundant. ‘The social Self’ behaves as a self-sufficient and self-reliant being, which, however, generates a false sense of



security entailing ‘forgetting’ and perceiving *the Other* as a mere extension of *Self*, a ‘background’ that needs absorbing into the world of *Self*. ‘Modelling behaviour of another’ to gain advantage of understanding and prediction, as a principal feature of the natural world, seems less relevant to the world of social beings. Instead, it is increasingly replaced by a sense of entitlement, exceptionalism and competition for resources to strengthen the established order over the emergent *Other*. In this context, order and hegemony naturally hinge on the established *Self* and form the premise for projection and maintenance of power relations. In the circumstances of a *missing Other*, the outside, as Freud would argue (Zahavi 1999), becomes an imagined extension and ambition of the *Self*.

This missing *Other*, however, may become a particular problem, in the coming multi-order world (Flockhart 2016), which is likely to operate through contestation by way of questioning the very foundations of the existing power arrangements and multi-polar constellations. It places the ‘identity component’ at the very heart of a changing international system, which will be ‘derived from self-understanding, core values, and vision expressed through shared norms and social practice’ (Ibid: 15). As Flockhart argues further (2016: 25), for the coming multi-order world to become coherent and cooperative, it is important to understand the identity core for different orders, and to ensure dialogue and connectivity between them, in order to better organise society and achieve the good life.

So, *othering* matters, to achieve cohabitation and stability in a changing international system. However, how should *othering* be conceptualised in the social world traditionally dominated by the sovereign Selves?

### **The meaning of othering in the world of the established *Self***

We owe to Freud a great advance in understanding the world of *Self* as well as group dynamics within and between the established and the outsider group settings. Applying the Freudian perspective renders an additional explanatory value to our (mis)understanding of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the inner–outer group dynamic and their relational positioning in the social and political world of sovereign beings.

Freud has argued (in Elias 1965: 26) that ‘every human being is a self-contained unit—a *‘homo clause’*—who are self-conscious and self-reliant on a specifically human ability to structure the outside around their own needs and interests, as a *norm-setting Self*. For Freud the outside only existed as a background for the accomplishment of the *Self*. As Elias contended, Freud did not conceptualise how a person participated or related to the ‘group image’. Instead, in Freud’s vision, the world was an extension of a ‘structured individual’, and ‘the societies formed by interdependent persons as [their] backgrounds’ (Ibid: 27). The natural task for a person in those circumstances would be to reorder a group dynamic to their liking, and bring ‘the abnormal’ in line with the perceived I-driven normal. If these persons come to form a structured group, they would find it instinctive to try and externalise their viewpoint beyond their norm-setting environment, or what Elias called ‘the established’. But they would do so in the pursuit of their ‘dreams’, ‘self-visions’ and ‘fantasies’—that is, in line with *how they* imagine the world ought to be—without particular knowledge or indeed the need for it, about the outside. *The Self* becomes



the centre, and self-awareness—a means to extend to and reshape the outside, in line with the Self's perspective of the world. This is where the distinction between *the imagined* and *the real* becomes blurred, and the outside becomes 'forgotten' in an attempt to structure and to develop control of the external environment, the *Self's background*, in a Self-dominated world. The outside thus simply becomes an extension of the 'established' order, making venturing into the unknown redundant, dangerous and unwise. Why take the trouble to study the outside, if it could be modelled by and perfected to the perhaps historically proven standards and norms of the inside? The world of dreams, desires and hidden 'libido' becomes a reality and is seemingly in reach, which of course, as Freud observed in his later work, is only an illusion, albeit an important one.

When transposed to the world of states as sovereign political beings, underpinned by a similar relational logic, it is not just the centrality of and the disconnect between the *Self* and *the Other* that becomes apparent in the existing status quo. It is also the assertive 'production of truth' (discourses) to legitimise the given order of things in a Self-centred world, that presents a particular concern. In particular, Foucault (in Edkins 1999: 58) has argued:

The problem is not changing people's consciousness – or what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime for the production of truth.

In this world of political illusion, as Foucault claims further, what appears to matter more is the said 'truth', which comes to replace reality in the production of knowledge. It is produced and disseminated through manifold channels of technology of expertise and bureaucracy (Ibid: 126) to imbue a particular set of norms, rules and regulations, which transpose the Self-centred perspective onto the outside, in an attempt to make it a better-governed environment. Unavoidably, the established *Self* comes to offer a particular historically specific account of 'reality' and a 'regime of truth', of which the sole purpose is to reproduce itself by maintaining the core and expanding the boundaries of 'knowledge' to the outside world.

Using the studies of mind, and the positioning of *the Self* vis-à-vis *the Other* in a natural world, an instructive distinction henceforth is emerging. In the world of nature, in order to survive, prioritisation and modelling of the *Other* become a necessity for the *Self*, a natural instinct of survival and endurance. This relational link is broken and has a reverse meaning in the world of social and political beings, whereby *the Self*, effectively defined by a power resource differential, is seen as autonomous of and even domineering over the world of *the Other*, in a continuous effort to reorganise the outside to its own standards. The outside simply becomes an ambition, a fantasy of the *Self*, giving the outside no immediate urge to discover it anew and as different, if it is to be subjectivised by *the Self* in its ever-expanding 'regimes of truth'. And yet, the world, as we know it, is regularly shaken by resistance and the new and disruptive *Other*, challenging the legitimacy of the established orders and their 'regimes of truth' and consequently calling for not just a relational, but also a reciprocal recognition of the *Other*.

What are the implications of this Self-dominated world of politics, for the establishment of 'cooperative regional orders' as reciprocal inspiration and



recognition of multi-order dynamics of the future? Do we or do we not need to learn about the *Other*, if the established order of things is essentially constructed inside-out? There are at least three implications worth considering here, as to why the process of *othering*—that is, recognition and reciprocation between the *Self* and the *Other*—must regain its prominence in the world of sovereign beings, protected by power resources, and yet remaining as vulnerable to the outside, as those in the world of nature.

First, forgetting what the real world is, rather than what it should be, or what it is like in the interpretation of the *Self*, is one of the imminent dangers of the inverted ‘regimes of truth’. In the diminished need to learn about the *Other*, while residing in the world of fantasy and ambition, the *Self* tends to forget the true meaning of the world out there, and the true likeness of the *Other* in their distinction and self-worth. In the wider literature, these ambitions have been described as ‘colonisation’ (Nicolaidis and Sebe 2015), and presently reified as ‘civilising’ (Linklater 2011), ‘normative’ (Manners 2002) or ‘ethical’ (Aggestam 2008) attempts of the EU, in this context, to internalise the outer world into the centrality of *Self*. In this context, even when the *Other* is recognised and acknowledged as a third party, and/or even as a partner, the method of communication, as a rule, remains that of hierarchy (Börzel 2010) and governance—internally driven, to ensure coordination and control of the external environment. Hence, in this order of things, resistant and rebellious *Other* may come as a shock, leaving the *Self* unprepared and unequipped to resolve the issue of ‘other-ness’, as, for example, in the case of the EU vis-à-vis the neighbourhood, confronted by the assertive presence of Russia.

Second, in order to maintain the dominance of *Self*, and its control over the outside, the meaning and utility of ‘politics’ as defined by Edkins (1999) is further reinforced by focusing more on the production of ‘truth’ (rather than the study of *Other*) and their competitive struggle over each other’s authority. What emerges then is a ‘language’ or ‘discourse’ game, which as both Freud and Foucault argued, becomes not a tool ‘to express ideas about reality’, but rather a process of embedding ‘the speaking subject ... in a pre-existing language structure’ (Edkins 1999, 22) which would convey the purported ‘truth’ of the established order. For Foucault, discourse is a historically located practice, which both produces and locates ‘the subject’ within a given society of the dominant *Self* and the excluded *Other* (Ibid: 45). Discourse, as a ‘thing said’, in the case of the unknown *Other*, could be either lulling or divisive, thus becoming a tool of either stability or insecurity in the ‘world of said things’, as will be shown in the next section.

Finally, in this dominated world of *Self* often defined by power resource differentials, what is left to the *Other*? From a perspective of a hegemonic *Self*, the power struggle is intrinsic, incentivising outsider groups either increase their power resource differentials (e.g. arms acceleration between the US and Russia during the Cold War), or ‘direct tacit pressure or open action towards the decrease of power differentials responsible for their inferior position’ (Elias 1965, 22). Russia vis-à-vis the EU, in the context of Ukraine, demonstrates a similar kind of urge to increase its power resource differential, precisely in order to reduce its own perception of inferiority, and to gain more credibility within its own *Self* (e.g. Eurasian) group.



Whichever the outcome, the world of the *Self* at the expense of the *Other*, unlike the world of nature, is not a safe and stable place. It perpetuates the logic of exceptionalism, inequality and naturally, expansionism. More so, it becomes further and further away from the reality itself by producing and exporting the conventional ‘truth’ and its fantasised reality as merchandise to the outside and essentially alien world. Such world is unsustainable, and our analysis below exposes its limitations and costs. The task ahead is to rethink the *Self–Other* nexus, in order to ‘detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, within which it operates’ (Edkins 1999: 140). This implicates the urgency to equate *the Self* and *the Other*, in their reciprocal need for one another, in order to ensure their survival and cohabitation, as it would normally occur in the world of nature.

## **The EU and Russia: colliding ‘fantasies’ or cooperative regional orders?**

Let us explore and expose what appears to be conflicting rather than ‘cooperative’ logics and discourses of Self-assertion by the EU and Russia over the eastern neighbourhood. In what follows, particular attention will be given to both ‘greater powers’ strategies/ambitions over the region, and their political discourses (‘regimes of truth’) produced to maintain and expand their respective orders over the emergent *Other*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Disconnected strategies: the EU and Russia’s othering efforts in the eastern neighbourhood**

The struggle of the ‘established’ over the emergent in the eastern region goes back to the early 1990s, if not before. The focus of this paper, however, will be a decade later, when the EU and Russia’s regional projects began to take shape.

#### *The EU’s limited othering*

With its ‘proximity policy’ in 2002 (subsequently renamed into a European Neighbourhood Policy, ENP), the EU articulated its ambition to transform the eastern region (Schumacher et al. 2017) by way of using the logic of enlargement, albeit without a membership perspective, to address its security concerns over the unstable and differing outside. With the launch of the Eastern Partnership Initiative

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<sup>1</sup> This study is supported by empirical evidence consistently gathered by the author from a number of related studies focusing on the EU relations with the eastern neighbourhood (including ESRC project 2008-11 RES-061-25-0001 covering Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia; ODB/SIDA project (2013, 2016) covering Belarus and Ukraine with Russia’s added perspective; Slovak Atlantic Commission of European Communities (2004) covering Moldova). These studies applied the same methodology including nation-wide representative surveys, semi-structured elite interviews, and focus groups, whose full description is available at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/europeansing-securing-outsiders/>.

(ESRC) and <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/gec/research/index.html> (*Other* projects). Such design allowed for cross-temporal comparison and respective analytical inferences related to the concepts *othering*, and differing normative *Selves*.



(EaP) in 2009, the policy gained its further differentiation, emerging as an EU-centric hegemonic *region-building initiative* as argued by Delcour et al. (2016). At its heart was the promotion of low-key technocratic strategies of engagement to codify EU agenda into a series of roadmaps and AA requirements, with some profound implications for the wider region.

Notably, the policy's 'regional' framing was predicated on two fundamental principles—externalisation of EU governance and promotion of 'European cohesiveness'. It naturally prioritised the EU legal and economic *acquis* to 'first and foremost ... ensure that the benefits of the single European market based on free movements of goods and services, labour and capital, were as widely spread as possible' (Commission 2009). As far as the European neighbourhood was concerned, as the Commission further argued, 'the EU [specifically] wished to promote key concepts of EU regional policy such as open markets, respect for environment, participative democracy and partnership in the conception and implementation of its *development policy*' (Commission 2014; emphasis added), thus reflecting the Self-fantatising discussion earlier on.

By 2011 the ENP/EaP became primarily 'a set of instruments'<sup>2</sup> to promote the eastern region's internalisation of the EU norms and regulations, supported by a complex machinery of financial tools and inclusive of all levels of society. The instruments in particular evolved to reflect the EU's manifold aspects of *acquis*, as transcribed in individualised roadmaps and the late AAs with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (Commission 2012; 2015). The ambition was to develop the 'capacity of the third countries to set strategies and prioritise *convergence* of their regional policies with those of the EU' (Commission 2014: 7, emphasis added), and to foster a *Neighbourhood Economic Community* (Casier et al. 2013), firmly anchored in the EU's rules of the game.

This regional project had been initially extended to Russia, though without the latter's consent (Korosteleva 2012). Thereafter, it pursued the EU's vision for 'the wider region'—'from Morocco to Russia and the Black Sea' (Prodi 2002)—favouring rule conformity and isolating resistance (Delcour 2011), and more instructively, running in parallel to Russia's regional ambition.

### *Russia's assertive othering*

Following the dissolution of the USSR, and the subsequent interstate integration tendencies, in 2007 Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, at the latter's initiative, inaugurated the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU). The latter, modelled on the EU, soon became known as Russian-led region-building project in the post-Soviet space (Eurasian Economic Commission 2013). The construction of the ECU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) moved considerably apace from 2007 to establish the ECU Commission in 2011, and Single Economic Space in 2012. The launch of the EEU took place in 2015, with further expansion of its membership to include Armenia (which chose the former over the EU AA) and Kyrgyzstan, and

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<sup>2</sup> From the author's interviews with Commission officials in 2012.



prospectively Tajikistan, Turkey and Iran. Noting this fast-flowing regional integration, Vladimir Putin commented:

It took Europe 40 years to move from the European Coal and Steel Community to the full European Union. The establishment of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space is proceeding at a much faster pace because we could draw on the experience of the EU and *Other* regional associations (2011).

The key features of this alternative integration project included *market harmonisation*<sup>3</sup> and interest-driven multilateral partnerships dominated by Russia with the consent of *Other* signatories. Since its launch, this regional project has not received adequate international recognition, including on the part of the EU. This was surprising, as ‘unlike previous integration regimes, the ECU and SES provision have developed alongside Russia’s accession to the WTO in 2012, ... [intending] in future agreements to comply with the WTO regime’ (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2014).

In sum, by 2011, the two parallel regional ambitions of the EU and Russia have evolved into tangible projects supported by a set of instruments, structures and agency, targeting the same area of interest. While their initial intentions may have been to ‘form a harmonised community of economies stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok’ (Putin 2011), they never grew into a single pan-European effort over the region, owing much to the Self-centred nature of the prevalent power politics, which was further reinforced by the assertive ‘truth production’ of the protagonist regimes.

### Exclusionary ‘regimes of truth’ in a grand pan-European vision?

While each project has been deploying a set of specific narratives to support and disseminate the knowledge about them from the start (Korosteleva 2016; Delcour et al. 2016), their rhetorical projections have considerably intensified, by 2011 entering into a competitive mode for the ‘Grand Vision’ for Europe. A few years on, they escalated into what Foucault (2007) termed a full-blown ‘production of truth’ driven by one purpose only—to seal the debate and to enforce the authority of one (of the two competing Selves) over the region. Consequently, the projects have become *incompatible* for the third parties imposing a choice of allegiances and the need of subscription for the one of the established regimes.

The coming escalation was already manifest in the etymological phrasings towards the area of joint interest at their earlier stages of the respective projects. Notably, the EU has been consistently referring to the region as a ‘*shared* neighbourhood’, implicitly inferring competitive influence and the need for ‘division’ of power. Russia, conversely, from the early 2000s has been methodically depicting the region as ‘common’ rather than ‘shared’, with a subtle but crucial difference which invokes an alternative meaning—of a no-man’s land—for the

<sup>3</sup> This is different to the EU’s unilateral convergence requirements for DCFTAs, but similar to the EU’s *modus operandi* with Switzerland, Canada, Norway, etc., based on the conformity assessment principles. See [http://ec.europa.eu/taxation\\_customs/customs/policy\\_issues/customs\\_security/aao/mutual\\_recognition\\_agreement/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/policy_issues/customs_security/aao/mutual_recognition_agreement/index_en.htm).



same region (Shishkina 2013). More importantly, these terms of diplomatic reference, while always there, became significantly politicised in the Russian media with the launch of the EEU and what was depicted as a prospect of the EU and NATO expansion into the region.

The tacitly competitive rhetoric has soon articulated itself in a new furnishing of the ‘Grand Vision’, making the latter increasingly binary. The Commission, for example, in 2013 insisted that ‘our vision is that the AAs should contribute in the long term to the eventual creation of a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, based on the WTO rules’ (Füle 2013); however, for this to happen, in a short term there had to be *full compliance* with the EU set of rules and regulations. In a similar manner, Putin, suggested that the Eurasian project did not ‘contradict [some of our neighbours’] pro-European stance’. If anything, apart ‘from bringing direct economic benefits, accession to the Eurasian Union would help countries integrate into Europe sooner and from a stronger position’ (2011). The binary choice and its rationality became increasingly explicit to the peoples of the region. The latter, however, found the growing rivalry between the two regional powers increasingly alarming and potentially detrimental to their national and region-wide development. As numerous surveys indicate, the people in the neighbourhood wanted to remain neutral with a strategic advantage of cooperation with both the EU and Russia.<sup>4</sup>

Instructively, all this time, the EU and Russia have clearly recognised each other’s presence in and their importance for the region (Council 2010). At the same time, in this acknowledgement of joint interests, they nevertheless failed to understand, let alone to facilitate the need for dialogue over and cooperation with the region itself, treating it more as a ‘backyard’ for the advancement of their respective Self-visions, as well as ambitions for regional and global orders. The danger of this exclusionary truth production was that it would eventually lead to the disruption of the status quo in the struggle for hegemony over the region.

The conflict in Ukraine therefore serves a testimony to this exclusionary and self-aggrandising logic, which comes at higher human and political cost. Paradoxically, even in 2013, in the midst of growing tensions, the EU approach remained unaltered: while negotiating the divisive AA/DCFTA with Ukraine, the EU also had separate talks with Russia on a ‘new’ Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), to belatedly consider ‘provisions for greater convergence of the regulatory framework between the EU and Russia’. The latter, however, did not aim to defuse regional tensions caused by the hyped-up ‘incompatibility’ of the two economic projects, but rather ‘to generate stability and predictability for both Russian and EU companies’ (Füle 2013). The decision to finally triangulate the EU and Russia’s intensions with Ukraine came rather late in 2014, as a consequence of war and the negotiated ceasefire in Ukraine whereby the DCFTA implementation by the latter was agreed to be delayed by six months, on Russia’s demands (Council 2014). The Commission subsequently proposed to establish official contacts with the Eurasian

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<sup>4</sup> For more detailed discussion of public perceptions visit recent research at <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/gec/research/index.html>. Author’s opinion polls (see footnote 2) have also been corroborated by the *Other* surveys (NISEPI; Levada). For more information visit <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/gec/research/index.html>.



Union to open negotiations on harmonisation of their respective FTAs between the EU and the EEU.<sup>5</sup> This is, however, a rather tentative narrative, which requires backing by the EU institutions, and more so by individual Member States—a difficult task to achieve in the EU torn by differing attitudes to and expectations from Russia.

### The ‘battle over Ukraine’: the ‘Self’-centric world vs ‘cooperative orders’

The consequences of these Self-aggrandising projects have been debilitating for the region and global order, exposing its hegemonic and unsustainable nature. While Ukraine refused to sign a deal with the EU at the Vilnius summit, it lost control over its own population, resulting in the Euromaidan protests and the ousting of President Yanukovich. From that moment on, the EU–Russia relations became fully ‘antagonistic’ and irreconcilable, following Russia’s invasion and annexation of Crimea, and its continued defiance over eastern Ukraine. ‘The battle over Ukraine’ has also left the EU and the international system incapacitated, once again challenging the infallibility of the established global order, defined through resource differential, rather than the recognition of the *Other*. While drafting NATO troops to Ukraine’s western borders, with Russian troops stationed on high alert on Ukraine’s eastern border, the global actors lost control over a common strategy vis-à-vis Russia. A few years on, a highly antagonistic discourse between the EU and Russia continues, seeing the latter as a perennial ‘security challenge’, as the EUGSS presently reifies.

In light of the above developments, one would question the validity of the (*Self*) *Grand Vision* of the EU and Russia vis-à-vis their respective regional projects in the neighbourhood, and even more so, the prospect of them ever becoming cooperative. Two particular observations become apparent.

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

Second, and most significantly, both powers evidently failed to engage in the process of *othering* to understand the **region itself** and its historical urge for complementary rather than dichotomous relations with the wider Europe. As our research findings<sup>6</sup> indicate both powers yield similarly appealing propositions for the eastern neighbourhood, which should foster the need for complementarity and

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.focus-fen.net/news/2014/09/13/348455/unian-it-is-time-for-eu-to-establish-official-contacts-with-eurasian-union-says-fule.html>.

<sup>6</sup> For more details see the 2013–2014 research results available at: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/gec/research/index.html>.



cooperation: while the EEU is seen as important for energy security and trade; the EaP and the EU have stronger clout in promoting functional government and effective sector-specific cooperation. Enforcing a dichotomous choice on the region, not yet ready (if it ever be?) for making these commitments independently, through their internalised norms of behaviour, testifies to the profound lack of understanding the ‘*Other*’—the partner countries—including their needs and aspirations. The error of judgement by the EU and the loss of control by Russia are, in an equal measure, the causalities of the decision-making process which occurred in the vacuum of correlated knowledge about *the Other*, resulting in an assertive promotion of their respective ‘regimes of truth’ and subsequent securitisation of the contestable narratives, as the case of Ukraine has lately demonstrated.

The bigger question here, however, is whether and how the EU and Russia’s discourses could be defused and re-politicised in their rhetorical furnishings, to return to a zone of peaceful coexistence and even one day, cooperation, rather than the currently ‘manufactured’ truth of antagonism and ‘strategic challenge’ on both sides? As our comparative researches conducted in 2008–2009 and 2013–2014 indicate,<sup>7</sup> the normative framing of discourses continues to conflict in a profound way, but they are not necessarily insurmountable. Both powers profess and are associated with differing sets of values which in turn support and engineer different behavioural patterns and expectations. Notably, the EU is clearly identified as a liberal democratic model, premised on the values of democracy, human rights, market economic and the lack of corruption, and the spatial analysis of 2009 and 2014 public associations indicated a relative endurance of this model in people’s mindsets. At the same time, the EEU and Russia, in the respondents’ eyes, offer a mix of qualities, a hybrid case, which could be referred to as a social democratic model, but which could potentially approximate the EU, especially along the values of market economy, stability, economic prosperity and security, and at the same time retain its cultural uniqueness. A dialogue is necessary, in the very least, to avail a prospect for economic cooperation as optimal space if mutually agreed rules were to be considered, and *othering* were to take place between the rival parties. The details of these possibilities, however, are subject to another paper.

### **The strategy of empathy for regional stability**

Drawing on the above, it becomes apparent that the relational nature of power is far more complex and essentially understudied than is currently understood. In order to survive and more importantly, sustain itself, it requires, as is in the world of nature, the recognition of the *Other* vis-à-vis the *Self*, which would enable the *Self* to treat the outside in its own right and diversity, and not as a simple extension or fanciful fantasy of the *Self*. More importantly, *othering* should no longer be seen in opposition (negative) as in ‘We–They’ relations; nor should it be seen in

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<sup>7</sup> For 2008–2011 results please refer to the ESRC project (RES-061-25-0001) available at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/research/research-projects/europeanising-securitising-outsiders/>; for 2013/14, to the results available at: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/politics/gec/research/index.html>.



juxtaposition to one another, just exposing their contrasting qualities rather than complementarities. *Othering* should be *empathising* by ‘placing the *Self* in the *Other*’s shoes’, and promoted as a nexus of distinction and organic complementarity between the *Self* and the *Other*, if ‘cooperative orders’ between the emergent multi-order identities were ever to be achieved.

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

In the meantime, while Russia remains exclusionary in its pursuit and expansion of regional authority, the EU seems to have gone through a wide-reaching consultation process of how to make its policies more effective and sustainable in the neighbourhood. Stemming from above, a new ENP allegedly commits to ‘differentiation and mutual ownership’ to ‘now seek to involve *Other* regional actors, beyond the neighbourhood, where appropriate, in addressing the regional challenges’ (2015: 2–3). A few years on, the same old practices continue to persist having been re-articulated by the updated policy. In seemingly recognising *the outside* as different and diverse in its aspirations, the Commission, however, pledges to prioritise *stabilisation*, in its relations with the region, and in doing so, ‘the EU will pursue its interests which include the promotion of universal values and the EU’s own stability’ (Ibid). Once more, the EU is prepared to face the outside as the extension of its own *Self*, in the process of externalising its interests and rules of the established internal order, and at the peril of its own survival.

To learn from the above-referenced ‘theories of mind’ and the world of nature naturally striving cohabitation and survival, it is imperative to try to recalibrate the nexus between the *Self* and the *Other*. It has to become less about fantasising the outside, but more about learning, understanding and engaging with it—both at the level of great powers, and the emergent *Other*—in an open and legitimising manner. Notably, the EU has to come to the recognition of the EEU, so much so as to enable it to guide the EEU’s development into the internationally legal terrain of co-joint rules and norms, which could be defined by way of mutual recognition, and the process of normalisation, and which could be mediated if necessary by independent



and mutually appointed bodies (CABs), as the past experience suggests.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the EU could also draw lessons from its ongoing negotiations with Kazakhstan, an EEU member, on developing a new PCA, and Armenia, a signatory of the AA, and also a member of the EEU, in particular, to see how *othering* could aid a better understanding of the needs of partner states, and advancement of a sustainable dialogue. This may help to find solutions to the allegedly incompatible economic practices.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, though, the EU and Russia should engage in the process of legitimate canvassing, with each *Other* and the region, to ensure a voluntary choice and subjection of the peoples to one's governance and norms-sharing.

To close this discussion of *othering*, we must insist that a new framing of international relations (and by extension of the EU Global Security vision) is needed. This also includes developing a more discerning approach to the EaP partner countries by the EU, and Russia, in order to understand their needs and prospective difficulties, and to send the right signal to the eastern neighbourhood, which seeks *complementarity* rather competition between the respective regional projects. Rather than competition and struggle for dominance, there has to be cooperation between these projects, if the 'Grand Vision' of a *sustainable* pan-European space, premised on reclaiming *othering*, were ever to be achieved.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/single-market-goods/free-movement-non-harmonised-sectors/mutual-recognition/index\\_en.htm#h2-1](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/single-market-goods/free-movement-non-harmonised-sectors/mutual-recognition/index_en.htm#h2-1).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.astanatimes.com/2014/09/kazakhstan-eu-close-completing-talks-new-partnership-cooperation-agreement/>.



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