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RUSSIA'S VISION OF THE WIDER BLACK SEA REGION: IMPERIUM, CONDOMINIUM OR SECURITY COMMUNITY?

Introduction

Ever since Russia became a Black Sea power in the eighteenth century, it has positioned itself as an actor striving for domination, if not for outright hegemony in what it perceived as its western 'southern rim'. While the reasons for such identifications have varied over the last three centuries, depending implicitly on the nature of its agency – Hobbesian empire and latter 'affirmative action empire' (Martin 2001) or even an empire¹ with global ideological and hegemonic ambitions (e.g. Soviet Russia) - Russia's has remained constant in rejecting 'outside' interference in the Black Sea. In the Russian view of historical, this area is central to its survival as a state, the natural barrier against invaders and the locus of greatness. The geopolitical and normative regime of the Black Sea has remained one of the most important, knottiest and most acute issues of Russia's foreign policy for more than three centuries. The particular importance of the Black Sea has been defined by Russia's geo-strategic positioning, by great power interests, by defence needs on the Black Sea coast, by in external trade and by the necessity to develop southern European Russia economically. (Nezhinskyi and Ignatiev 1999: 8)

In the view of many students of Russia, the collapse of the USSR signified a rift with the past of Russia's imperial agency. Nonetheless, given how recent was the collapse of 'the last empire' and how strictly centralized and metropolitan its political organization, doubts have been raised as to whether Russia has really become a 'normal country.' The way that Russia formats evidence and facts in the BSR – and generally in the borderland territories around it - may point towards, at the very least, a redefinition by re-evaluating the past." Moreover, the official and public narrative of Russia as an agent in the world still provides enough rhetorical

evidence of preference for a 'neo-empire of sorts,' implying an inclination to organize the territory around Russia on a hierarchical basis, whereby those subject to this framing are to be exposed to non-consensual and often informal control. In this context, regionalization of the WBSR poses a series of problems concerning acceptance by and from Russia, since political regionalism presumes that actors are in a position to construct common identities and pool resources, and that they are inclined to do so. So far, one can scarcely find instances of Russia's becoming part of and promoting any regionalizing inclusive projects. Our assumption is that the main reason for Russia's reluctance for a WBSR project resides in its agency, and the strategic identity which is inherently part of it.

Theoretical and practical underpinnings of the WBSR concept

There should be a continuum of approaches, interpretations or narratives in theoretical interpretation of the Wider Black Sea Region² (WBSR) as a geopolitically or geostrategically novel 'object' constructed or imagined by a plurality of agents - especially in recent decades. Such a contextualization would more appropriately depict the evidence of the multitude of agencies, each with a distinct vision for the WBSR. This is the natural expression of the same plural number of identities and their derivable interests.³

At first glance, such appears to be the regional background of the Wider Black Sea Region, where actors qualify into a wide spectrum of political cultures, regimes and levels of strategic interaction and self-identification, as well as national and trans-national institutions and societies, and/or internal and external regional factors. Thus, starting from Iver Neumann's post-structural reflectivist approach based on regional members' Self/Other cognition of the social environment, a region is what its constituent parts make of it. In other words, understanding the evolution of a region can be summarized to the core question of "*whose* region is being constructed?" (Neumann 2003), and whether that construction is the result of a singular or plural endeavour, the task of a singular or plural '*whose*.' Therefore, the WBSR as the sum of a plurality of political processes, cannot but represent the result of either a certain consensus among its builders - be it normatively formalized, politically negotiated, conventionally tacit, or coercively imposed - in case of a hegemonic builder, *vide* the historical

cases of Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire or the Russian Empire and the USSR.

According to another theoretical, regionalist, post-structural approach on the same theoretical continuum, a region may represent the result of negative security links or interactions⁴ through which participants in the social-political process depend so much, in terms of their security liabilities, on each other that they may form a distinct (sub-) “regional security complex”⁵ (Buzan, 1991; Buzan and Wæver, 2003), see for example the Greater Caucasus as a possible sub-regional conceptualization of the WBSR or Eurasia, or the phenomenon of the so-called “unsolved conflicts” as an element of a tacit negative proto-regionalist design of Russia’s “near abroad.” Contrary to Neumann’s inside-out logic, Buzan’s interpretation of regions stems from an outside-in logic and places great power interplay, and their impact on regional insiders, at the centre of regional dynamics. Although this approach does not by far supplant or invalidate the inside-out interpretation, it places centre stage, and on the interplay between upper levels of analysis (regional and global), such analytical elements as geopolitics, geo-strategy and strategic identity in a regionalist foreground. As a rule, these elements are considered part of hard security issues pertaining to the political-military and to a certain degree economic spheres, the latter especially in the context of securitization processes. Thus, the two logics of region formation provide us with two possibilities to perceive the driving forces of an incipient region - such as the WBSR - either a region built through the common vision of its dwellers - a so-called ‘consensual regionalism,’ or a region built through the lens of a great power game, wherein the region is marked out by the leading powers securing a sphere of influence.

To this end, a shift from the above two identity-based approaches to the WBSR might be necessary, to illustrate the evidence-based foundation of the institutional network of the WBSR. Thus, in this rationalist logic of the region’s construction, regionalist development in the WBSR has been fuelled first and foremost, but not exclusively, by liberal institutionalist, transactionalist and functionalist principles of international politics: cooperation and integration. These two principles have proven to be the less costly mechanisms of post Cold War European political order, promoted especially by Western actors - EU, NATO and the USA, and a Western-aspiring one - Turkey.

Yet, this integrative process has not only taken place thanks to efforts by the four actors in a bid to either centralize and tame the *limes*, i.e. the

border areas of Eastern Europe, or to build a platform for cooperation in the arena of low politics (the case of Turkey). Regionalization also took place as the logical expression of at least a minimum of shared identities, values and, respectively, interests and initiatives, promoted by actors which are organically both subject and object of the regional construction. Therefore the epistemic foundation of regional processes in the WBSR, as promoted by the above-mentioned regionalisers, has a hybrid (rationalist and reflectivist) and post-modern nature. It shares and combines liberal and constructivist understanding about the political order (Cooper 2003), and qualifies primarily as the 'new regionalist approach,' but with a caveat about the necessity to integrate into the theoretical framing the *multiplicity* of processes and actors at interplay in the WBSR's social architecture. Thus, the qualifier *pluralist* should be added to the 'new regionalism' approach, and the framing of the region should be not only theoretically and prescriptively driven, but also driven by 'grounded theory.' In this key, a pluralist perspective is necessary to encompass the multitude of the region's security architectures promoted by a given agent.

Agents of Black Sea Regionness

As a part of the same continental integrative process, the WBSR has witnessed a common declared desire for regionness as expressed by the existence of a plurality of (sub-) regional organizations, regionalizing dimensions, initiatives and platforms. Still, every regionalist project has been intimately connected to the strategic value system of each actor concerned and consequently, in a region heavily marked by so many historic discrepancies and strategic overlays, common geo-strategic views have become scarce. Regional insider champions have to a certain extent had positive security expectations from deepening regionalization projects; Romania, intermittently Ukraine (for reasons of inconclusive strategic identity and contradictory strategic culture of the elites, both of which reflect into Ukraine's unstable regional projection), and insulatingly Turkey (implying a strategic preference to limit regionalizing participants exclusively to Black Sea coastal states). Meanwhile however, other potential 'regionalizers' have been either reluctant and marginal participants in some regional projects, or even outspoken critics in others, challenging the very basis of such projects. Thus, for the regional dwellers with an active regionalizing agency – mostly Turkey and

Romania, and much less Ukraine - the WBSR seems about the extension of their security and identity concerns, or as Felix Ciută has termed “transfer of strategic identity”⁶ (Ciută 2008: 139).

For the outsider champions - the United States, NATO and EU - the Black Sea Region is often valued in different terms. For the US the region is more a link in a chain of wider global security concerns (Ciută 2007), whereby a stable WBSR would allow for more geo-strategic flexibility in the Eurasian Balkans. For the EU it is still a liminal area to be potentially and incrementally subjected to soft normative centralization processes (Zielonka 2006), or stabilized through combining a variety of geostrategic models of regionalization (Browning and Joenniemi: 544 – 546); while NATO expects the region to be subject to regional endeavours for macro-stabilization, in a greater Eurasian dynamics supposedly far from being under its coveted exclusive custody, especially in the aftermath of the August 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the American-Russian “strategic reset” and reassessment, contextualized by the global war on terror and nuclear non-proliferation, or even in the frame of CSTO-SCO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) incremental collaboration.

Therefore, the incipient regionalism developing today in the Wider Black Sea Region⁷ ought to be characterized in the following heterogeneous ways: as multidimensional, fragmented, intertwined and contradictory. The need for such disparate qualifiers to characterize the WBSR stems, first, from the different projects that each significant actor, - i.e. each actor capable of initiating, with a certain degree of success, a regionalist project for specific reasons – is trying to develop in the region. Intimately connected to the projects themselves and for path-dependent reasons, each project initiator has a strategically unique mindset, this being a second defining element of the WBSR heterogeneity. Finally, because of the optional backgrounds mentioned above, each region-builder or group of region-builders places special emphasis on certain social aspects – economic, political and/or military – quite likely to the detriment of other aspects, thus further blurring the cohesion of the wider regionalist project. Russian strategic identities, perceptions and interests give rise to one of the main (complexes of) factors constituting the “blocking heterogeneity” of the WBSR. Thus far, by the end of the second decade after Turkey’s first attempt at regionalizing through the BSEC, Russia has come to impose itself as the ‘gate-keeper’ of Black Sea regionness, whether by default or by design.

Russia in the WBSR - neither insider, nor outsider

The most significant actor left in the regional dimension, represented as the Other potential builder of a regional project, is Russia. It places itself at the other end of the strategic spectrum, and is mainly a traditionalist and realist-Hobbesian⁸ observer of and participant in the geopolitics of the WBSR. In this context, the West's central paradigms of regionalism building, such as neo-liberalism (functionalism, institutionalism or transactionalism) and constructivism, are difficult to apply prescriptively when considering Russia as a would-be regional policy-maker. Russia's strategic culture of *realpolitik* is the first reason to consider in this respect. It would, however, be simplistic to call this merely realism-driven. In organic relation to this stands Russia's post-imperial syndrome, reflected in its anxiety about leaving the imagined glorious past of the Yalta-Potsdam continental arrangements and switching to a new post-modern 'mode' of security building, eloquently represented by the philosophy of 'new regionalism' and a post Cold War western drive for commonality of objectives, goals, strategies and pluralism. As a consequence, the mutual zero-sum perceptions of the regional and extra-regional actors towards Russia tend to be self-reinforcing.

Thence, the compelling questions on the Russian factor in the WBSR ought to be as follows: What is Russia's perception of the Wider Black Sea Region security *problematique*?⁹ How does this perception influence the evolution of the concept and its implementation through concrete, regional, formal and informal projects? What design does Russia have, if any, for the WBSR? What mechanisms does it employ to ensure that its interests are and will be implemented? What impact do the design, interest and mechanisms of Russia's foreign and security policy have on regional states and outsider regional actors? What can the way ahead be for Russia and the region?

Paradoxical as it may seem, Russia's special case presents a not insignificant challenge, since it can be considered neither an insider nor an outsider to the WBSR due to a number of relational-subjective reasons. First, for a majority of both insiders and outsiders, Russia is perceived as the 'Other' in contrast to which different regionalist projects are envisaged. Thence, the 'othering' perception by regional actors assesses Russia within a broad range of security categorizations; enemy for Georgia, 'sovereign obstructionist' for Ukraine and Moldova, testy interlocutor for Romania and Bulgaria, or competitor and spoiler for EU, NATO and the

U.S. Second, the importance of the Wider Black Sea Region to Russia can also be judged by the fact that it has waged no fewer than three wars in the last 15 years (two in Chechnya – Russia’s internal ‘Other’ - and one with Georgia) and has been both a covert and overt sponsor of three other conflicts, in order to assure its perceived vital internal and external interests, as defined by the elites.

In addition, the WBSR is home to what Russia calls the “problems of the South”¹⁰ or “the southern rim” (Pryzel 1998: 280 – 288), i.e. the most sensitive spheres (territorial integrity, porous borders, ethnic struggles, demographics, ecology) of Russia’s survival and strategic posture as a great power. Third, continuing the ‘regional issues catalogue,’ Russia is a central player, if not outright sponsor as well, in some of the most intractable political-military and social phenomena – the “frozen/unsolved conflicts.” Finally, Russia is the WBSR’s main protagonist in one of the most securitized ‘great games’ for energy transportation on the Eurasian continent.

Symptomatically, the WBSR is that region, comprising both vast territories of Russia and a great number of neighbouring states, where Russia’s still evolving post-USSR strategic identity strives to define itself through (sub-)regional institutions and arrangements, whether through opposition to these (NATO, EU, OSCE, GUAM-ODED, CFET) by means thereof (CIS, CSTO, SCO, EAEC) or selectively (BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR Group and BS Forum). Therefore, together with Russia’s WBSR ‘southern underbelly,’ the *problematique* of the new European security architecture building and power projection emplacement should be considered an important link in the wider global positioning of Russia as a sovereign and legitimate member among the major powers of international politics, as well as for its own society at large.

Finally, the concept of strategic “overlay”¹¹ has a strong position in Russia’s regional perceptions. Both Russian decision-makers and outside experts acknowledge that the bulk of the current issues in the BSR are regional projections of fundamental differences in Russia’s relations with its major Western interlocutors (Alexandrova-Arbatova 2008, 2009). This explains why all EU, NATO and US activities in the WBSR stimulate geopolitical rivalries. Furthermore, as *the* area where so much is at stake, including Ukraine’s position towards the West and Russia as well as that of the South Caucasian states, Moscow views the WBSR concept as an alien and potentially hostile project, that if successful could downgrade it from the status of a great power to that of a regional power, casting it

back to a status comparable to seventeenth-century Russia. Moreover, a successful implementation of a WBSR *à la Euro-atlantique* would jeopardize Russia's own version of Europe, a non-Western one (the CIS project(s)), and would mean a failure for its present costly model of development, based on an autocratic political regime and rentier elite, an exclusivist status in a post-Soviet environment "with limited sovereignty" and subject to "Russian internal policy" (Shevtsova 2007: 188). For these reasons, Russia's behaviour cannot be arranged in any tidy matrix of Western regional projects; this is due to Russia's agency, and the strategic identity stemming from it. In the next section I will substantiate the ideas set out above.

Russian pervasive perceptions and their impact on region-building

Buzan and Wæver's seminal work on regional security complexes (RSCs) characterizes Russia's standing in the Russian security complex (whether we call this the post-Soviet realm or the CIS) as having a predilection and informal preference for "manageable instability," or as the "guarantor of an inconclusive status quo" (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 420) within and for its "sphere of privileged interests" (Medvedev 2008) - as the official narrative postulates. Besides reflecting its own unsettling strategic experience as a post-imperial state, still swinging between a crypto-imperial and post-imperial condition, this instability has usually been performed with the help of a number of already well-tested foreign and security policy tools in the two decades of Russia's post-Cold War existence, creating a complex formal and informal governance structure on the territories of the former empire exerted by virtue of the highly uneven power ratio in the area (Birgersson 2002, 24). Among the most resonant policy approaches should be numbered 1) the repudiation of continental defence arrangements, 2) (at least partial) sponsorship of "frozen" and dormant conflicts, 3) the quest for symbolic hard power projection through the positioning of military bases, 4) the securitization of energy contracts or rerouting of pipeline projects, 5) the politicization of economic issues, 6) foreign policy instrumentalization of the Russian diaspora and, 7) a tool-kit of various soft power instruments. A summary listing of policies used in bilateral and multilateral relations with regional actors allows us to conclude that few regional and extra-regional actors were spared the

proverbial “Russian special treatment,” based on elements of coercion and all sorts of conflict-mongering.

Makarychev (2009)¹², writing about Russia’s perceptions of the region, identifies Buzan and Wæver’s RSC theory as the best corresponding starting point from which to problematize Russia’s perception about the BSR, and notes that

“[t]he point is that countries forming RSC may not be able to construct their particular identities without resorting to constant references to other countries belonging to the same RSC. This process of mutual constructing of identities is by no means free from controversies and conflicts; what is important is that there is no way to describe the Russian identity without, say, pointing to such emblematic regions as Crimea in general and Sebastopol in particular”.

Furthermore, the BSR¹³ in Russia’s perception is either an in-between “pre-subcomplex” formed by bilateralism, not yet capable of wide cross-linkage and having a rather prescriptive character, or could be perceived as an “insulating mini-complex” at the crossroad of two competing RSCs – the EU RSC and the Russian RSC (the post-Soviet area except for the three Baltic States). (Makarychev 2009: 65 – 66) In this Russian view, the WBSR is a scarcely distinguishable sub-region of the CIS, and its constituent components are the post-Soviet Black Sea states.

This *status quo* of “fuzzy borders” is caused by a range of perceptions resulting naturally from Russia’s definitions of this wider post-Soviet area, reflected in terms of security and strategic importance, and which Makarychev (2009) calls an ambiguity of the “contours and shapes of *Russian spatial order*” [italics mine]. As a logical step, given how Buzan and Wæver’s theory identifies Russia’s regional perceptions, the same author argues that Russia contours its “spatial order” through securitization/de-securitization processes. Thus, he identifies five securitized ‘dossiers’: 1) Russia’s place and acceptance in international society as a normal power; 2) NATO enlargement, with a strong component constituted by the geopolitical status of Ukraine; 3) border-related issues; 4) identity-related issues; and 5) ‘alleged encroachments on economic issues’ (Makarychev 2009: 66 – 68).

Although I concur with Makarychev’s cogent argumentation based on the RSC theory and securitization processes, as well as with the identification of the ‘dossiers,’ I consider that first, the list is a little too

short; given the RSC security externalities, it comprises geo-economical processes in the Central Asian states. Second, the geo-political area concerned is too restricted, especially as concerns the restless North and South Caucasus region, which has become a quasi-RSC within the WBSR because of its high social-military volatility and its capacity to act as an incentive to securitize a number of hard and soft security issues. Moreover, historical or traditional Russian perceptions, and their impact on the present geopolitical projections do have a say in reading Moscow's WBSR strategy. Or else, reflecting its self-perception as a 'hegemonic' regionalist in a multipolar world order, Russia seems inclined to see the WBSR as an intermediate link in the chain of three marine regions: Caspian Sea - Black Sea - Mediterranean Sea (admittedly in opposition to some Western views, which favour blending into one strategic area the Baltic Sea – Black Sea – Caspian Sea); this is also linked to the tendency to identify regions around seas as bearers of sub-regions, correspondingly: Central-Asia – the Middle East – South Caucasus – the Balkans (Arbatova 2009: 289). These are sub-regions where Russia normally has big stakes and, but for the latter, semi-exclusive interests.

Russian neo-imperial ambitions: nothing new under the sun

As mentioned before, on the opposite strategic track, starting from the turn of the century, the Euro-Atlantic integration shaped by consecutive waves of eastward enlargement by two major Western continental actors – EU and NATO - favoured the conceptualization of the Wider Black Sea Region as the next shore on which to extend the region of stability and collective security on the greater European continent. In the long run, this endeavour was supposed to have the automatic political impact of galvanizing support in the Black Sea regional states, with a view to completing the project of a true, politically united, post-Westphalian and post-modern Europe based on a similarity of values, interests and objectives. Besides EU's *acquis communautaire* and Copenhagen criteria, and NATO's instruments for integration and cooperation - IPAP, Intensified Dialogue and MAP - that were to result in the mega-project of Euro-Atlantic enlargement and European political cohesion, Western actors envisaged and included the WBSR through the prism of institutionally specific tools and arrangements to tackle various regional and extra-regional problems¹⁴. Thus, the (conventionally called) West empowered a potential shift from

the Russian Security Complex to an embryonic Black Sea Security Complex including Russia *inter alia*, an area most probably characterized by a security community value system and inspired by “geopolitical pluralism” (Brzezinski 1997, Kuzio 2000a, 2000b), with multiple cores and benign interactions within and among them, and backed by a larger Euro-Atlantic community.

This strategy - and generally speaking, any Western strategy - included and still includes, Russia as a traditional game maker on the greater regional chessboard and as the main contender in a perceived ‘critical region’ of its own. (Oliker *et al* 2009: 93 – 94) Russia’s conduct is rooted in a number of historically pervasive foreign security policy constants that have constituted and driven its essence as an imperial entity. (Legvold 2007) These constants can briefly be enumerated as: 1) the perception of losing its grip on border areas, internalized as its exclusive sphere of influence and interest; 2) apprehension about lessening economic fortunes, mainly (but not exclusively) related nowadays to the new energy corridors that are developing parallel to or against Russia’s interests; 3) its territoriality instinct, which can be read through the lens of a loose (neo-) imperial design, on a hub and spoke model, a hyper-centralized governance system, and driven mainly by fear of fragmentation and its geography of borderlessness; and 4) Russia’s identity quest and its great power place in an emerging multipolar world. (Rieber 2007: 204 – 278; Graham 2009: 56 – 57) All these pervasive perceptions have permanently fed into the Russian elite’s narrative of vulnerability, insecurity and fear of collapse. Moreover, in their interpretation of a thousand years of Russian history, the elites reckon that “only with the rise of an imperial Russian state was Russia able to defend itself from invaders” (Birgerson 2002: 61-62). Thus, the imperial past left indelible marks on Russian strategic identity and perceived national interests expressed through status exceptionalism in the former Soviet states.

These perceptions have also been expressed through a number of myths or well-entrenched foreign policy clichés¹⁵ having a deep hold on Russian elites and the national psyche, such as “besieged fortress,” “encirclement,” “enemy at the gate ... we are left alone, there is no one but us ... rally around the flag,” “vital sphere for survival,” “losing our grip on the borderlands” and a more informal “coveted target for a juicy piece of land,” see for instance Putin’s narrative in the immediate aftermath of the Beslan tragedy (2004)¹⁶ or the already trite “the collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical disaster of the century” (Putin 2005).¹⁷ Along these lines, it seems that the crux of Russia’s strategic identity lies in how the elites constantly tackle the question of Russia’s glorious

imperial past through policies that aim to impose a specific and unique interpretation of history in the post-Soviet states – evoking the centrality of Russia’s victimhood on the path to world peace, but also great power and superpower status - and thereby seek legitimation through this narrative (Birgersson 2002, 47).

Thus, one way to grasp Russia’s stance towards numerous projects in the WBSR is to explain it by pervasive perceptions shaping its foreign security policies. Historically, by which we mean over the last four centuries, these perceptions and factors were the main drivers for Russia’s instinctual imperial approach towards the world around. For reasons of geography, size, power, demographics, foreign security policy culture and/or identity, Russia has been paradoxically both an exception and an eloquent expression of the WBSR security *problematique*. Nonetheless, it does not easily fit into any of the groups of actors described above, shaped by a liberal and constructivist interpretation of the regional order. Thus, Russia’s regional uniqueness stems from its specific foreign security policy perceptions and its historically specific self-positioning not only in the wider Black Sea regional context, but also and especially on the wider global scene, from which it legitimizes a significant part of its regional positioning.

Manifestations of Russian regional designs in WBSR

Ever since becoming a European power and *de jure* empire in the eighteenth century and even before, Russia’s strategic identity and culture identified the West as its significant Other. (Neumann 1996; Pryzel 1998: 270 – 280) It placed Europe, and much later the USA at the top of its offensive and defensive concerns through which it established strategic goals and imagined imperial national identities in practically all areas of its existence as a state and society. (Hosking 2001) Although the demise of the Soviet Union two decades ago supposedly brought Russia to post-imperial development as a state, the many centuries of imperial heritage have not still waned, and systematically re-emerge in the normative, strategic and identity debates on Russia’s place in the world. Moreover, the 18 years since the demise of the USSR - the last quasi-absolute master of the Black Sea - are too short a span to allow for an interpretation of Russia as completely healed from the “imperial virus,” as a polity with a post-imperial worldview (Sherr 2009) based on an equal-to-equal treatment for its erstwhile ‘imperial subjects.’ The neo-imperial strand in

Russia's politics towards the Black Sea results also from "Russia's identity construction, which is derived precisely from a glorification (rather than repudiation) of its history." (Makarychev 2008: 10)

Yet, we do not imply that Russia's self-perception through the 'splendid imperial past' as the founding myth has not changed at all. The magnitude and consequences of the 1991 collapse of the USSR have been immense and most probably irreversible. What we do affirm is that the elite 'collective consciousness' is still haunted by what can be qualified as "empire lite"¹⁸ or "neo-imperial" identity. The projections of this mindset or identity are substantiated by policies and events that take place on a vast territory from Central Asia to the Baltic Sea. These policies range from soft (peacekeeping) and hard military intervention to economic coercion and soft power ambitions. Therefore, any 'alien' (read Western) project – such as Western-backed Black Sea initiatives - that attempts to attract post-Soviet territory in security arrangements would be met in Moscow with deep suspicion at best and outright hostility at worse, as posing increased danger to Russia's control over its perceived boundaries.

Nevertheless, by the end of the second decade of post-imperial existence, developments within the post-Soviet realm and close to its borders, under the guise of a number of regionalist dimensions, influenced the practical regionalist policy approach on the Russian foreign policy agenda. It brought regionalism closer to acceptance, especially in areas of direct geographic contact with the EU and with an emphasis on the "new regionalist" approaches due to the relative "safety" of the issues usually considered in this context: cross-border economic and social cooperation, education, health, ecology and other matters of low politics. The most eloquent example of Russian involvement through the "new regionalism approaches" is represented by the Northern Dimension *problematique*, considered an important political tool by virtue of endowing Russia with equality in partnership, obtaining inside access to EU politics and establishing a counterweight to other regionalist projects in the post-Soviet area (Smith 2008: 22). As a regionalizing approach, it proved less successful and showed its limits when it reached the prickly issues of access by the EU to the Kaliningrad exclave through direct contact with the local authorities and society (NGO level) and not through the federal authorities (Makarychev 2004). Also, it met the same fate in the highly sensitive sphere of energy cooperation, *vide* also the Arctic Dimension, which although a similar moderate success replicating the Northern Dimension and containing almost the same actors, presented a lesser degree of application of "new

regionalism approaches," two important reasons being US presence in the regional format and the liminal character of the area concerned (Howard 2010). Consequently, it is hard not to notice that power politics dominate Russia's narrative, even in low-politics regional projects.

Drawing a brief parallel with Russia's stance on similar regionalist projects described above gives us more insights on how Russia understands its involvement in such projects. Notwithstanding obvious benefits, such projects have not persuaded Russia to consider them the only or main option for its strategic concerns, of which the most important are *great power status, sovereignty, multilateralism* and *multipolarity*, by which it implies, among others, the possibility of its own development as a peaceful alternative to Western political models. Thus, an alternative design comprises the "privileged sphere of influence," where the WBSR is on the front line of a more than symbolic strategic identity battle.

As mentioned above, the Russian historical impulse to empire has been always a constant in the mind both of its elites and of those in the West or elsewhere seeking to assess the former's strategic vectors (Legvold, 2007; Davisha, 1998; Hosking, 1995; Pipes, 1994). The ideology envisaged by the Russian elites is contrary to building a Black Sea region taking after a Western scenario, as for example the Baltic case. Russian regionalism in the Black Sea Region is based on hegemonic and/or cluster-oriented regionalization and highly fixed on post-Soviet 'candidates' to the WBSR project. As one Kremlin spin doctor has symptomatically noted,

Russia -- and I'm talking about the majority of the population and most representatives of the political class -- *wants to be a nation-state, but with an imperial culture, imperial breadth, an imperial style.* [italic added] I don't know of any significant group in Russia that would like to create a real empire and would be ready to pay for that or to risk for that. Certainly they wouldn't risk themselves. There are no groups like that. But they all want some sort of space, imperial space within the country.

1) At the level of normative discourse expressing Russia's great power identity, one of the most eloquent expressions of this understanding of the political order is reflected by security documents. Although no Russian Federation foreign security policy documents in the last decade¹⁹ mention the Black Sea Region as a region of deliberate concern (except for a secondary one, the Naval Doctrine of the Russian Federation until 2020), the sheer evidence of the complexity of issues pertaining to

Russia's interests and relationship with the West and Russia's positioning in the world is manifest in this area. Essentially, the security documents emphasize a multipolar world, without unilateral domination, such as the putative US hegemony. Second, normative projects mention Russia's desire to cooperate and maintain friendly relations with the West, identifying it as the main source of Russia's modernization. Third, all security schemes underline protection of Russians abroad as a policy priority. Fourth, all documents assert that Russia has privileged interests in certain regions, i.e. the post-Soviet realm (de Haas 2010). Among the additional policy priorities, the leitmotif of Russia's official foreign security policy is Russia's strength-based posture, capable of influencing international developments and rejecting Western security programmes, such as the existing Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Ultimately, special emphasis is placed on military-security management of the strategic affairs of state, whereby the state should be able to resist the threat of Western "expansion" (read also encirclement); the state should also be able to resist the threat of Western "expansion" (Gomart 2010: 13 – 14). In this context of a territorially-centred rationale, the positioning of Russian bases in the WBSR is of primary interest. Russia has ensured its privileged military presence *de jure* in Ukraine (Crimea) and Armenia, and *de facto* in Moldova and Georgia, for at least the next four decades. Thus, the WBSR is easily identifiable as the springboard for Russia's global role.

2) The WBSR is for obvious reasons the springboard of Russia's global concerns as an energy superpower. In this respect the region has a unique geo-economic value. Notoriously, the National Security Strategy (2009) quasi-openly declares that Russia considers energy resources a tool of leverage over other states (de Haas 2010: 160), while diversifying energy pipelines and supply markets is a fundamental tenet of Moscow's foreign policy (Putin 2008). Together with the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea is the pillar of Russia's energy offensive towards the most lucrative European markets, while at the same time it is the battlefield on which to isolate the energy-rich Central Asian states in transit dependency on Russia, and to anchor Ukraine and Belarus in its economic space. In the bitter competition for pipeline projects that would arrange for a maximum or exclusive role for Russia (South Stream, Burgas-Alexandropolis), the stakes are not only in maximizing profits, but also in maximizing the extent to which 'avoided' states (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus) are dependent on the "regional sovereign." Thus, any presumed success of such projects as Nabucco or Odessa-Brody is a highly securitized issue in the corridors of

power in Kremlin. Aside from this, a Western success along the lines of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, would reveal the real value of the WBSR, by opening the Central Asian states to a genuine West-East dialogue on energy and infrastructure mega-projects. As a long-term consequence, this would open the strategic options to regional leaders like Uzbekistan, creating the premises for other post-Soviet Central Asian states to constitute a supplementary pillar for a wider regional security community, much to Russia's dismay.

3) A crucial element to 'Russian regionalism' resides in one of the most important principles of Russian foreign policy – the multipolar world. According to this narrative, as applied at the great powers level – the best expression being the UN Security Council, G8, G20 and BRIC – the multipolar world consists of 'each pole's world' where the custodian of the pole has sovereign rights, responsibilities and privileges. Translated into 'Russian,' that certainly means applying the unofficial 'doctrine of limited sovereignty' to post-Soviet states, as well as quite likely legitimizing this set of policies through Medvedev's 'new security architecture' proposals for the West as a medium to long term 'pan-European' project. Hence, among the most evident restrictions to sovereignty there could be numbered:

- *Foreign security policy coordination* under the aegis of CSTO, or neutral status vis-à-vis NATO, and assured exclusive Russian military presence for long periods of time.
- Acquiescing to *Russia's exceptional status* as a peace-maker, peace-builder and peace-enforcer. Discouraging other specialized institutions from becoming involved, e.g. UN, EU, OSCE.
- *A breach in neutral status should be punished* by fomenting secession and irredentism, the most eloquent examples being represented by the 'fulfilled' aspiration of Abkhazia and South Osetia, by quasi-dormant Transnistria or the latent 'Crimean question.'
- The *great power recognition game* expressed through the commonality of identity, culture and civilization. This soft power 'basket' implies that there is a privileged area for political, social and humanitarian rights to for the Russian diaspora or 'compatriots.' It includes privileged status for the Russian language, education for ethnic Russians in their mother-tongue, unrestricted activity of the Russian Orthodox Church and a privileged status for the Russian media. Last but not least, any 'symbolic infringement' on the historic probity of the Soviet legacy of liberation and Russia's civilizing

mission is punishable by means ranging, for instance, from economic sanctions to cyber attacks and sponsored street violence.

Admittedly, the Russian elites consider that the *post-Soviet* world has been an accident for idiosyncratic reasons and that “it did not lose in the Cold War” (Karaganov 2009). Quite the contrary, it interprets the retrenchment of the 1990s as caused by weakness in Yeltsin’s Russia and the West’s wish to break promises through NATO’s ‘Eastern creep’ (Kramer 2009). Therefore, it craves a partial return to the ‘golden age’ of a ‘*pax Sovietica* redux,’ assuring a stable and secure geopolitical external environment. In this logic, the ‘multipolar world’ rhetoric is rather a means to an end, to underpin the re-creation of Russia’s own security ‘orbit.’ In this respect, it regards the WBSR project as a counter-project, intended to marginalize its security concerns and impose a western governance style involving agents at different levels of social interaction on the greater regional scale, evidently involving Russia as well.

Hence, mainly as a pole of regional attraction (but not of construction in the meaning given to regionalism as a *Black Sea Region security community*) the Russian Federation potentially has a binary impact, whether by default or by design. It can slow down region-building by means of conflict sponsoring and the political-criminal nexus (e.g. in Transnistria and South Ossetia) that permeates the sponsorship of the region’s *de facto* states, by means of military bases and *divide et impera* politics, which is the dominating present stance; or it can act as a catalyst for its own informal sub-region-building strategy by means of soft power policies *à la russe*, i.e. influence through a combination of situational experiences and processes, and historical-political aspects inherited by the political elites of the post-Soviet Black Sea, all of which converge in policies of business, energy, historical narrative and societal factors²⁰, media, culture and intelligence (Wilson and Popescu, 2009). To these can be added the capacity in post-Soviet elites and societies to “self-colonize,” by which we mean the latter’s (identity-based) preference for the system of values that Russia is trying to construct as an alternative to the European one, see the eloquent case of Yanukovitch’s Ukraine or Voronin’s Moldova and their soft *sovereign democracy* mimesis. Thus, Russia’s regionalist ambitions are not only a one-way street; they are also a contest of deliberate choices, by virtue of its strong cultural attraction among some segments of post-Soviet societies and elites. It can thus potentially contribute to the continuation of old imperial patterns of standard creation, both formal and informal, by the would-be metropole.

Regional inconclusiveness

Although the Five-Day Russo-Georgian War seems to have been a “little war that shook the world” (Asmus, 2009), our assumption is that on the regional level it changed the order by adding uncertainty to the *status quo ante*, making many experts ask whether the perception of Russia’s increased military, political and economic clout in the Black Sea post-Soviet area pushed the order closer and/or back to a (neo-)imperial design, a condominium (with Turkey), or toward the security community so loosely envisaged by the Euro-Atlantic community. Whatever the perception might be, Russia remains the central piece of the Great Game, while fanning the flames of uncertainty by abstaining from any official and/or normative projections towards the region through recognition of the region as a coherent and conceptualized Wider Black Sea Region and/or as a proto-security community with a distinct identity.

In the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008, it became common wisdom to reckon that incipient regionalist projects in the WBSR have reached a plateau (BSEC), with some even prone to decline and obsolescence (GUAM-ODED, CDC, BS Forum). Almost two decades after the demise of USSR, the contemporary debate around the WBSR as a legitimate unit of political interpretation, and horizontal organization of the social space, is intimately linked to the future of politics in Eurasia, which harks back again and again to the so-called ‘Russian Question.’ The essence of this question resides in the West’s interpretation of Russia as a major source of strategic uncertainty, risk and threat for the European continent. Uncertainty is also caused by a unique view of the paradigm shift in the European triad EU-Russia-US and the fate of their mutual strategic overlay, first and foremost the Ukraine, whereby many Russian decision-makers do not shy away from denying the latter the right to sovereign existence. (Lourie 2008)

Furthermore, Russia’s present view of a ‘transition period’ in international relations puts constraints on any regional political-strategic construction involving it as an active participant. Rather it sees itself as a promoter of its region in the dialogue taking place on the global scale – “communication ... mainly through G8 and new formats such as G20” (Medvedev 2009) - on issues such as post-crisis economic recovery and low-politics. This speaks more about conclusive tactics and less about strategy. In all likelihood, Russia has mostly been inclined to choose “strategic loneliness” based on its nuclear, energy and geographic potential

in its sphere of 'privileged interests.' As a result, any strategic dialogue involving a regionalization of the WBSR with Russia as a willing partner on the geo-strategic level seems to result in failure.

Conclusions:
what kind of Russian regionalism in the WBSR, if any?

The WBSR can be seen as a testing ground for a number of dominant contemporary developmental trends, all affecting Russia and consequently counting it among the main protagonists: *globalization*, *regionalization*, *integration* and *soft re-imperialization*. Whether or not in the context of the present 'strategic reset' with the U.S., the potential neo-imperial strategy is always an option to the Russian elites. It is a potential and partly 'an objective Russian reality' for the following reasons:

- Russia's identities and pervasive perceptions about its standing on the geo-strategic map as a great power on the Eurasian continent.
- Russia's 'fibre' as an agent, i.e. a traditional, conservative and autocratic state.
- Russia's rising military conventional deterrent in the region.
- the internal political divisiveness of post-Soviet states' regimes and societies.
- a conflict-ridden geo-political dynamic in the region, at Russia's discretion and by its sponsorship.
- the shift of global priorities towards other regions (the Greater Middle East) and priorities (economic crisis).
- disengagement by powerful Western region-builders.
- the difference in perception about the regional *what*, *who*, and *why*; about commitment, reflected in the willingness to prioritize the region's *problematique*; and about the scale of the WBSR, by Russia and the Western region-builders. To the former it is part of 'vital interests,' to the latter it is still a remote *limes*.

The WBSR is in considerable part what Russia makes of it. On the one hand, Russia has not accepted the political label *WBSR* as legitimate, for evident reasons of perception and vision. On the other hand, Russia is by now very far from being able to impose a hegemonic discourse exclusively, through labels – the 'near abroad,' 'privileged sphere of

interests,' *Pax Medvedica* or "*suveranizatsyia* [sovereign-ization] Rossii" (Pavlovskiy 2010b) - labels pertaining directly or indirectly to the region (cf. indeed the European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, Black Sea Synergy). Consequently, it gradually creates the playground for 'great bargains' that the Russian decision makers are trying to promote in their relationship with global players.

Moreover, the present Black Sea regional order points to a structural and strategic uncertainty. An inconclusive *status quo* says less about strategy, but quite a lot about tactics and Russia's pragmatic, gradualist and bilateral approach in tackling the region's security. *De-securitization* of the WBSR *problematique* is next to impossible to attain, since the frozen conflicts remain among the main tools of region building *à la russe*. As became evident in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian 'little war', Russia is prone to act as a 'conclusive security de-stabilizer' just enough to be able to disturb any Western project implementation and re-make the *status quo ante*. Hence, its relative regional military and economic strength qualify it as a regional gatekeeper vis-à-vis any other western regionalizing project. The 'Turkish factor' is also an important pillar contributing to this inconclusiveness by Turkey's reluctance to accept any consistent long-term Western military post in the Black Sea. Ultimately, Russia's preference for dealing with the 'big players,' in order to question the legitimacy of any regional insiders on the regional scale dooms to insignificance any initiatives from such small to medium powers as Romania or the Ukraine.

The uncertainty surrounding Russia's regional standing has an enormous bargaining potential for Kremlin. Admittedly, it serves Russia's interests for reasons of unfinished internal re-construction of its great power status. It is expected that Russia will become expert in 'unfulfilled/unfinished regional contracts' in the foreseeable future (Karaganov 2010). The reasons range from incomplete modernization, going through undefined strategic identity and 'civilizational choice' – what is its place in the world, and what kind of actor should Russia be? - to the unsettled 'great bilateral dossier' on NATO's advance into post-Soviet territory. Besides, a coherent, regionally oriented BSR policy as envisaged by the other region-builders would contradict Russia's 'infatuation' with strategic autonomy, because a genuine regional proclivity is organically based on some sort of pooling, which totally contradicts Russian state and elites mindsets, interests and priorities, and the preference for 'strategic loneliness.'

NOTES

- ¹ Throughout this paper the term ‘empire,’ and its derivatives, will not be used in a delegitimizing or pejorative key. I am interested in ‘empire’ as a hierarchical structure of organizing space or as a way of establishing political order often, but not exclusively, resembling a hub and spoke mechanism. Mark Beissinger (2005) ponders the concept of empire when discussing post-Soviet Russia and states that “[...] according to the formal, legal underpinnings of the contemporary state system, empires are not supposed to exist anymore. They are part of history, supposedly eliminated during the first six decades of the twentieth century and universally replaced by [...] the nation-state” (p. 14). However, the same author writes in relation to the “fundamental issues of empire” that “the vast majority of historians have approached these issues trans-historically – by which I mean that they assert the fundamental similarity between the Soviet Union and traditional empires. [...] The problem with this kind of transhistorical thinking is not that one cannot find parallels across the centuries and millennia and across these political units at a high level of abstraction. Empires have cores and peripheries. But then again, so do contemporary states. Empires exercise sovereign control over peoples who consider themselves distinct political societies. But again, this is true of many modern multinational states as well”. Furthermore, a neo-empire still may be discerned in Beissinger’s conceptualization whereby he states that “Empires in the contemporary world are not just relationships of control of one political society over another; they are, rather, *illegitimate* relationships of control specifically by one *national* political society over another. Thus, embedded within our contemporary understanding of empires are a politics of *national* identity and a politics of *claims-making* [...].” For more see Beissinger 2005, ‘Rethinking Empire in the Wake of Soviet Collapse’, in Barany Z. and Moser Robert G. (ed.) *Ethnic Politics after Communism*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- ² I identify the Black Sea Region in its **wider** delineation, whereby those agents are considered Black Sea regional that, for reasons of geography and/or security interplay, are clustered in the Black Sea Region through their presence in a number of regional initiatives, projects and institutions. These are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine. The addition of the ‘wider’ qualifier has become an accepted form of conceptualizing the region, especially in the context of western efforts to bring embattled Black Sea neighbours closer to a security community logics of reasoning international relations.
- ³ See for example Ted Hopf, who states that “Interests should be derivable from identity in the sense that an individual’s identity implies his interests. This relationship should furnish a non-tautological understanding of the

- origins of an interest that is endogenous to the more general theoretical account of identity and interest in another state.” For more see Hopf, T. 2002. *Social Construction of International Politics. Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 16 – 20.
- 4 Buzan, while defining regional security, terms these “a durable ... amity and enmity patterns among states”. For more see Buzan, B. 1991. *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 191 – 193.
- 5 A security complex was initially defined as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another”, Buzan, B. 1983. *People, States and Fear*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 106. In the course of his research with Ole Wæver at the Copenhagen School in IR, the definition of RSC was attuned to the new evolving characteristics of the post-Cold War, post-structuralist and post-state centric security architecture. Thus, a RSC has been defined as “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another”. See Buzan, B. and Wæver O. 2003. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 43 – 45.
- 6 It should be mentioned that Felix Ciută’s syntagm was used in a context referring only to Romania. I consider that this logic can be extended regionally at least to Turkey as well; although in the latter’s case the basic strategic identity mechanism is the same, the givens are different for reasons of the same (unique) strategic identity and path dependence. Turkey as a regionalist actor has a wider spectrum of options in its strategic discourse, especially from the beginning of the 2000s with the advent of AKP as a ruling party, while in the Romanian case the regionalizing options are more limited to a few BSR partners, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, to intra-NATO collaboration, and in the Black Sea proper involving low-politics issues.
- 7 Region and regionalism as political narrative are hard to define and contour in a heavily “parted region” (Ciută 2007) like the BS, but because they can be more easily postulated and prescribed, we consider that term ‘wider region’ is more appropriate here as a comprehensive construct. Given the incipient degree of ‘regionality’ in the BS the term ‘wider region’ is in our opinion easier to problematize, especially when including Russia. The boundaries of the region are still difficult to contour because of the same contradiction between various projects and region-builders. Presently, the term ‘region’ is easier to use if we speak of concrete economic regional arrangements, while in case of (geo-)political and strategic approaches/interpretations the term ‘wider region’ is considerably more appropriate for reasons of inclusiveness. Also, the energy aspect creates the premises for Black Sea

- states to participate in organically related projects around the Caspian Sea, making them de facto Caspian states, and vice versa for Caspian states to become Black Sea states. Therefore, by using the term 'wider region' we contour a more inclusive concept for a larger *problematique* with a great number of actors.
- ⁸ Angela Stent (2008: 2) quotes Bobo Lo, stating that "the Russian world view has been described as 'a Hobbesian understanding of the world as an essentially hostile and "anarchic" place; the fear of encirclement by outside forces; and a strategic culture dominated by the geopolitical triad of zero-sum calculus, the balance of power and spheres of influence' (Lo, B. 2006, *Evolution or Regression? Russian Foreign Policy in Putin's Second Term*, in Blakkisrud, H. (ed.), *Towards a Post-Putin Russia*, Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 63. Also emblematically, Strobe Talbott (2009), referring to the "dangerous Leviathan" or "Russian version of Hobbesianism" after Medvedev's threat to deploy ballistic missiles targeted at Poland, summarized Russian worldview "to two pronouns: "who—whom." That is, "Who will prevail over whom?"
- ⁹ By *problematique*, I mean a non-positivist theoretical or ideological framework, the production of which conveys a value judgment on what is relevant in the world around. By *security problematique* in the WBSR, I presuppose the conceptualization of fundamental issues derived from the answer to questions of what and who is securitized? – by whom? – from what threats? – and, through what means? It implies the analysis of discursive and policy processes perceived as shaping and/or changing the WBSR security landscape. It includes mainly the agency of states and the actors that represent them, external powers and international and transnational forces, and processes such as globalization and integration.
- ¹⁰ By the term "problems of the south" we refer to the security *problematique* pertaining to the southern border area of the Russian Federation and its neighbours. It includes a vast swath of land, starting with the north and north-eastern Black Sea coast and the Caucasus and ending in the junction of the Central Asian states with Russia, China and India. The partial overlap of the Russian southern area security *problematique* with that of the WBSR is evident. In Russian strategic discourse the security problems of the south are closely linked to the viability of the state, and include such internal and external security issues as total sovereignty over its decisions as a great power, territorial integrity, border impermeability, "negative" demographic balance, access to energy transport routes and resources, economic prosperity and the Islamic factor. For more see Trenin, D. 2001, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization*, Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Centre, 177 – 207. A very eloquent attempt to provide evidence for the strategic and identity issues of the Russian Federation linked to the southern area *problematique*, with the epicentre in Chechnya, can be found

- in Malashenko, A. and Trenin, D. 2002, *Vremya Yuga: Cecinya v Rossii, Rossia v Cecine*, Moskva: Ghendal'f. [Time of the South: Chechnya in Russia, Russia in Chechnya].
- 11 More specific to the confines of Neorealism in IR, by strategic overlay I understand a situation in which, as a reflection of regional multipolarity, great power interests come to heavily dominate a region. Thus, no regional cooperation or security community is truly possible until the pole reactions (great powers) settle on a common strategic regionalist project. For more see Buzan, B. 1991. *People, States and Fear*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 219 – 221.
- 12 It ought to be mentioned that Makarychev is among the few Russian IR theoreticians writing about the BSR from an identity-centred perspective. In the few other academic venues dedicated to the BSR in Russia, this region is rather a link in a chain of vague extent, starting from the Mediterranean and ending with post-Soviet Central Asian states. We consider it an eloquent example of the still fuzzy role which Russian foreign and security policy opinion-makers and decision-takers credit to the BSR as an academic, analytical and political construct. See for example Shmeleva, N.P., Guseynova V.A., Yaz'kova, A.A. (eds.) 2006. *Sredizemnomorye – Tchernomorye – Kaspiy: Mezhdru Bol'shoy Evropy i Bol'shim Blizhnim Vostokom*, Moskva: Granitsa; or, *Bol'shoye Pritschernomorye: Vyzovy XXI veka i poisk strategicheskikh resheniy*, conference transcript, 15 – 16 June 2008. Available at: <http://www.ieras.ru/grsredcher-1.htm> [accessed: 20 September 2008].
- 13 Quite tellingly, Makarychev does not refer to Romania and Bulgaria even once in the BSR context. Neither does he refer to it as a “wider region”, nor does he mention the Greater Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Therefore, we assume that by implicitly excluding from the greater picture the two other important parts of the region that are the most emblematic cases for Russia's foreign security policies, he actually substitutes it for the post-Soviet realm.
- 14 Among the most important are: NATO's PfP (Partnership for Peace), NATO-Russia and NATO-Ukraine Councils; EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Eastern Partnership (EaP), Black Sea Synergy and the EU-Russia Four Spaces; (with U.S. encouragement) Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova – Organization of Democratic and Economic Development (GUAM-ODED); the Romanian-sponsored Black Sea Forum (BSF) and Turkey's comprehensive Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).
- 15 Alastair I. Johnston, elaborating on the role of symbolic analysis and cognitive mapping in the creation of strategic identity, states that “[...] literally anything can be a symbol: A word or a phrase, a gesture or an event, a person, a place, or a thing.” He further specifies that in the conduct of foreign affairs “there are maxims and precedents that were so constantly quoted that they become clichés and, like political slogans, exert an influence in

- the shaping of policy and the making of decisions.” For more, see Johnston, A.I. 1995. *Cultural Realism. Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton University Press: Princeton New Jersey, 49-52.
- 16 Putin’s notorious compound sentence was: “*Some want to cut off a juicy morsel from us while others are helping them.* [italic added] They are helping because they believe that, as one of the world’s major nuclear powers, Russia is still posing a threat to someone, and therefore this threat must be removed. And terrorism is, of course, only a tool for achieving these goals.” (*TV Address, 4 September 2004*)
- 17 “[T]he collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical disaster of the century. ... Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside of Russian territory. ... Old ideals [were] destroyed.” *Poslanie Federal’nomu Sobraniju Rossiskoy Federatsii*, 2005. <<http://president.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223type63372type8263487049.shtml>>.
- 18 “Empire lite” was introduced as a term by Michael Ignatieff, for the degree of a great power’s [in his research case USA] coercive apparatus interest in neo-imperial interventions (especially for economic reason) and the moods of its population, both of which influence decision-makers to intervene at the peripheries. In Russia’s case, this is especially visible in the moods of the establishment. For more see Ignatieff, Michael. 2003. *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan*, London.
- 19 By the foreign security policy documents of the last decade we mean: National Security Concept (January 2000), Military Doctrine (April 2000), Foreign Policy Concept (June 2000), Naval Doctrine until 2020 (July 2001), Defence White Paper [MoD publication ‘The priority tasks of the development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation’] (October 2003), Overview of Foreign Policy (March 2007), Strategy Towards 2020 (February 2008), the Foreign Policy Concept (July 2008), a Statement on Major Policy Principles (August 2008) and the National Security Strategy (May 2009), and Military Doctrine (February 2010).
- 20 The use of NGOs and media, casting territoriality into doubt, the use of language and education as political instruments, publishing anti-state newspapers, (forced) distribution of passports, renaming streets/towns, the use of religion as a political instrument and the modification of shared common memory.

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