

Normative Power, EU Preferences and Russia. Lessons from the Russian-Georgian War

*Florent Parmentier**

Abstract

The Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2008 proves to be a useful case in order to understand the functioning of the EU as a normative power in times of crisis. The core of the article is focused on the six EU major countries – Germany, France, Great-Britain, Italy, Poland and Spain – which embody different sets of preferences, and the way they want to deal with Russia. In the end, it tries to understand how preferences are linked with norms in that geopolitical context.

Keywords: *Normative power, Georgian-Russian war, Mediation, Sanctions.*

* Florent Parmentier, Ph.D., is a post-doctoral research fellow at Sciences-Po, Centre d'études européennes (CEE), Paris.

1. Introduction

While the French rotating EU presidency was widely expected to turn its attention Southward with the launching of the “*Union pour la Méditerranée*”, it had to shift its attention Eastward with the outburst of the Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2008. This conflict proved to be a useful case in order to understand the functioning of the EU as a normative power in times of crisis, which is not supposed to be its main assets because of the decentralized nature of the decision-making process. In this sense, the EU should be conceived as “*a pluralist actor composed of political and administrative elites, as well as of interest groups, economic and non-governmental actors originating from member states with sometimes very different preferences*” (Delcour, Tulmets 2008: 13).

The preferences vis-à-vis Russia change both in time and space, they are not homogeneous at the European level neither at the national or social levels. The historical perception includes the post-1991 period, during which Russia has been described first as the “sick man of Europe” in the 1990s, and then as a quasi-monolithic entity and resurgent power in the 2000s, but also the tsarist and as Soviet eras. The core of the article is focused on the six EU major countries – Germany, France, Great-Britain, Italy, Poland and Spain – which embody different set of preferences, and the way they want to deal with Russia. Thus, how the EU can act collectively under the condition of a divisive geopolitical issue with a reluctant partner (Russia), given its diverse preferences?

Among the various positions regarding Russia and the management of the common neighbourhood, these preferences can be summarised through two ideal-types: on the one hand, a “*creeping integration*” approach of Russia is suggested, trying to build interdependence between the EU and Russia. On the other hand, the relations can be based on a “*soft containment*” approach, aiming at rolling Russia back of the common neighbourhood. Then, beyond the debate between “value” and “interest” in the EU foreign policy, the emphasis is put on the various preferences and the way they are translated into norms.

2. A preference for Partnership

The “creeping integration” logic aims at attracting Russia into the EU’s orbit through institutions and economy. It was supported by major countries in the EU, such as Germany, France, Italy and Spain, un-at-ease with the Russian-Georgian war.

Following the founders of the EU, the three most populated countries evoked do not see why the extension of the original project – bypassing French and German animosity through economic integration (the “*spill-over effect*”) would not work in the broader neighbourhood. They argue that this logics remains preferably to a confrontationist approach, even in the energy field (after all, France and Germany integrated first through the European Coal and Steel Community just a few year after the war). For the same reason, they want to defend a certain political vision of the EU project, which supposes to carefully think about the “EU absorption capacity” before any new EU enlargement.

France, Germany and Italy have established strong bilateral ties with Russia, notably in the energy sector – Spain remaining behind them. France and Russia are not major trading partners, although there is an emerging trend toward cooperation in the energy field, including Total, which signed a deal with Gazprom to develop the Shtokman gas field, Gaz de France, which may take part to the Nord Stream project (after being expelled from the Nabucco project), and even more recently EDF (with the South Stream pipeline project). Traditionally, Russia was thought as an ideal counterweight for French geopolitics, able to contain the German empire (before WWI, a curious alliance between French Republic and tsarist system) or limit US hegemony in the Gaullist tradition (after WWII, especially in the times of “*détente*”). If President Sarkozy was critical against Russia during his electoral campaign (using a Human rights rhetoric), he has moderated his discourse while in power. His Prime Minister, François Fillon, publicly declared that Ukraine and Georgia’s integration into NATO is not the right answer for the balance of power in Europe, and between Europe and Russia. During the IFRI-organized Evian conference in October 8th, Sarkozy expressed his satisfaction over “the departure of the Russian soldiers”, completed two days before the deadline, and

answered positively to the idea of discussing reconstruction of the European's security architecture.

In Russia, Germany is taken as a gateway to the EU: the two countries have had very dynamic relations in economic (Germany is for instance the largest gas market) and political terms, even before the end of the Soviet Union. Recently, more than the growing Russian-speaking community (from Jewish and German descents),¹ the energy question has taken a wide place. The Nord Stream pipeline, initiated under the second Schröder government by Gazprom, E.ON and BASF, was carried forward by Chancellor Angela Merkel in spite of harsh Polish criticism. Former foreign Minister Franck-Walter-Steinmeier remained strongly attached to a partnership with Moscow, and has assured continuity in the German policy toward Russia.

Italy, another EU founding member, has a long tradition of economic cooperation with Russia; FIAT started an industrial collaboration with VAZ–Lada in Togliatti (or Tolyatti) in the 1960s. More recently, the Italian multinational oil and gas company ENI (*Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi*) and Gazprom agreed in June 2007 to build the South Stream pipeline, linking Russia to Italy through the Black Sea. This project is generally considered to be more or less in competition with the pipeline project Nabucco, supported by the EU institutions. Political relations have been close under left-wing (Prodi) as well as right-wing (Berlusconi) governments.

The relations between Russia and Spain are not as important as the other major countries², notably in terms of economic relations (e.g. the difficulty to conclude an agreement between Repsol and Lukoil, two major energy groups). However, the two countries share the same point of view on Kosovo (i.e. on the principle of sovereignty), anti-terrorism, and Spain supports the idea of reforming the security architecture of the continent. Besides, the Euro-Russian agreement

¹ There is a “third wave” of emigration of Russian-speakers in Germany in the 1970s-1980s, following the first wave of the 1920s and the second wave after WWII. A “fourth wave” can be identified in the recent years; overall, some estimates up to 1,000,000 the number of Russian-speakers in Germany.

² Excepted the Soviet support to the Republican Army in the Spanish Civil war against the Franquist troops in 1936-1939.

on Kaliningrad was concluded under the Spanish presidency of 2002.

Thus, the four countries favour a creeping integration of Russia. At times, they do not feel at ease with a confrontational view of Russia embodied by some of the “new members” – notably Poland and Lithuania. They sometimes see this strategy as a loss of time or as a not very constructive desire of revenge (although understandable to some extent), and even as a way to artificially increase the tensions on the European continent. This view is shared by Greece and Cyprus, who are often vocal supporters of Russia’s action.

3. A preference for “soft containment”

The “soft containment” approach mainly sees Russia as a threat for EU’s interests and values; the Russian Georgian conflict is seen as the manifestation of a “neo-imperialist Russia”. Poland, and to a lesser extent Great Britain, follow this path, among others. Poland is probably the standard-bearer of this approach which does not follow a dichotomy between an ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Europe, since even the Visegrad countries are divided (Cadier 2009). Polish hostility toward Russia is proverbial, based on a tumultuous common history dating back to the late Middle-Ages. The accession of Poland in the EU institutions coincides nearly exactly with the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution” of December 2004, in which Warsaw was very much involved. Polish observers and associations were well implanted in Kiev, while Kwasniewski was the European mediator alongside with the Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus and the High Representative Javier Solana. According to local journalists, the Orange Revolution was the beginning of a “Polish Europe”: they mean that the EU neighbourhood would inevitably follow the path of Warsaw nearly a quarter of century after the “*Solidarnosc*” movement. However, the claimed value-driven Polish agenda for democratic promotion in Ukraine was mixed with an equally important interest-driven agenda for preventing a Kiev-Moscow axis.

In fact, establishing a European “Eastern Dimension” constitutes one of the main strategic aims of Poland, before and after the enlargement; it wants to strengthen the ENP, or rather to introduce a

fundamental difference between “neighbours of Europe” (the Southern rim of the EU, or the “Mediterranean axis”) and “European Neighbours” (basically Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the three Caucasian neighbours), which deserve a membership prospect.

In that regards, recent relations between Russia and Poland should be analysed; they have not been easy at least since the negotiation of the Kaliningrad status in the early 2000s, and later the “Orange Revolution” in winter 2004. Nonetheless, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov chose Warsaw to make his first trip in Europe after the Russian-Georgian war, on September 11th 2008.

Beyond Poland, Great Britain has also been an advocate of this rather harsh approach over the last few years. In the 19th Century, the strategic rivalry between the Russian and the British empires for the supremacy in Central Asia was framed as the “Great Game” (or “Tournament of Shadows” in Russian terminology).³ Even more relevant for our topic, Great Britain was ready to back Georgian independence in 1921-1922, when the British saw that the White Generals would not succeed in restoring a “One and Indivisible Russia”. Hence, Prime Minister Lloyd George favoured Georgian independence in order to establish a Caucasian “*cordon sanitaire*” (Ogden 1988). Yet, the Russo-British relations were at time very good, the two countries fighting on the same side in the Napoleonic Wars, in World War I and II. The relations between the two countries have recently been tarnished – considering the Litvinienko case, a former KGB agent murdered in London in 2006,⁴ the revision of the contract of BP and Shell, the pressure on the British Council – even if there are about 200 000 Russians in London, including top billionaires.

³ According to the classical definition, the rivalry ran approximately from 1813 (Russo-Persian Treaty) to 1907 (Anglo-Russian Convention). The Crimean war (1854-1856) was even an open conflict between the two countries, where the protection of Christians from the Ottoman empire was at stake. See Piatigorsky, Sapir (eds.) 2009.

⁴ The U.K. has explicitly asked for the extradition of Andrey Lugovoy, a presumed murderer of Litvinenko; however, Russia cannot extradite him according to its Constitution. Similarly, the U.K. has refused several times to extradite Russian political asylum seekers, such as Boris Berezovsky.

4. Finding a way between mediation and sanctions

So far, two main approaches have been identified: the “creeping integration” and the “soft containment” ones. These preferences lead toward different sets of policies, based on norms: the creeping integration approach should be linked with a will to mediate the conflict, while the preference for “soft containment” should be linked with the threats of sanctions. In the following developments, three kinds of norms should be distinguished and put in perspective (Finnemore, Sikkink 1998: 891): *regulative norms*, which order and constrain behaviour; *constitutive norms*, which create new actors, identities, interests or categories of action; finally, *prescriptive norms*, which refers to “oughtness”.

4.1. The EU effort to mediate the conflict

The EU mediation: why?

The USA could not mediate the conflict for many reasons: the most obvious is that it has clearly sided with one actor of this conflict, namely Georgia. Its involvement includes close military cooperation with Tbilisi, and support for its NATO bid. Furthermore, the Kosovo precedent, the US presidential elections and a growing “dialectics of resentment” (Chaudet, Parmentier, Pélopidas 2009; see also Tsygankov 2009) between the USA and Russia explain why a constructive dialogue would have been uneasy to set up.

The French EU presidency was instrumental regarding the leading role of the Council. President Sarkozy led a mediation on August 12th, starting with a four-point plan, which was renegotiated in a sense more favourable to the Russian side, thanks to its military superiority on the ground. It ended up with an agreement on a six-point peace plan: abstain from the use of force; cease hostility definitively; assure free access for humanitarian assistance; Georgian military forces should withdraw to their usual places of deployment; Russian military forces should withdraw to the lines preceding the outbreak of hostilities; finally, opening of international discussions on the modalities of security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This core agreement, criticized for not putting explicitly the full sovereignty of Georgia on its whole territory (i.e. including the

separatist entities), constitutes the basis of the EU action, and has inspired the various options envisaged.

The EU special representative

The nomination of a EU Special Representative can be considered as a constitutive norm, in the sense that its formulation and exercise has the effect of highlighting a particular version of European identity which is constructed as a regional actor, a peace-maker. The EUSR represents a way to pursue a common approach in a puzzling area, enabling the Union to act cohesively. It enhances the EU position in the negotiation of the peace process. The EU has appointed in February 2006 a EUSR for South Caucasus, the Swedish Peter Semneby, whose role and mandate have been reinforced over time. In order to facilitate confidence-building measures, he has been endowed with a support team under the umbrella of the EU Rule of Law Mission to Georgia (EUJUST THEMIS).

Interestingly enough, the conflict of August 2008 did not lead to the strengthening of the current EUSR for South Caucasus, whose mandate includes Georgia as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan, but to the creation of a new EUSR. In fact, Pierre Morel, already the EUSR for Central Asia, was appointed on 25 September 2008. His mandate is different from Semneby's one in the sense that he should dedicate its attention to the crisis in Georgia itself, on the basis of the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council meeting in Brussels in 1 September 2008 and the Council conclusions of 15 September 2008 on Georgia.

The EUMM

Just as the EUSR, the EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission) constitutes both a constitutive and a regulatory norm, since it emphasizes a specific European identity, creates a new actor and constrains behaviour. This temporary mission was established by the Council on Monday 15 September 2008 as an autonomous civilian monitoring mission, under the ESDP. It tries to contribute to stability throughout Georgia and the surrounding region, in accordance with the August six-point agreement and the subsequent implementing measures.

The deployment of more than three-hundred unarmed European monitors started as soon as 1 October 2008, and was quite well organised, in contrast with the Kosovo mission (EULEX) or the EUPOL mission in Afghanistan. While this civilian mission looks relatively unimpressive compared with the Russian Army's 76th Air Assault Division, the EU observers were able to enter the buffer zone surrounding the separatist South Ossetia region, a move that was at the start opposed by Russia. As such, the well-planned EUMM shows how the EU has borrowed from the military in the way it operates civilian mission (Korski 2008).

4.2. Sanctions and threats of sanctions

Sanctions appear as prescriptive norms which define what ought to be. If the sanctions are undeniably coercive in essence, according to academic definitions of hard power, the threat of sanctions can be used as soft power.

The Polish debate on sanctions

The Polish debate is interesting in the sense that Poland has been the first country to evoke the possibility of sanctions among the six bigger states, and was reluctant from the start to back the six-point plan given the fact that it did not include a reference to Georgian sovereignty. Hence, Poland suggested tough financial and economic measures before the EU emergency summit on relations with Russia after the war in South Ossetia, held on September, 1st 2008. Britain and Poland, as the main advocates of a tough line towards Russia proposed to postpone the negotiation of the PCA. Among others, the head of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Polish deputy Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, claimed that "*if Russia does not respect its own commitments under the six-point plan, the EU should reconsider its negotiations*" (Abdullaev, von Twickel 2008). However, the negotiation had already been delayed for a year and a half because of the position taken by such EU members as Poland and Lithuania, and resumed only in summer 2008. This move was largely symbolic, since it is not of a first-rate interest for Russian leaders.

Yet, all political members were not in a hurry to support Saakashvili's move to attack South Ossetia. For instance, Leszek Miller, a former Prime Minister, criticized his President Lech Kaczynski for equating Polish patriotism with anti-Russian position, and supporting the interest of the Georgian President rather than the Georgians' ones (Miller 2008); contrarily to Kwasniewski in the Orange Revolution, Kaczynski couldn't manage to become a mediator of the crisis, because he preferred to side with Saakashvili. Instead, the current head of the EU, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, endorsed the role of negotiator with Russia. It may be difficult for the Polish President to convince far beyond countries which already share its position, since, for instance, he has alienated any kind of support from Germany at the diplomatic level.

The efficacy of sanctions

Generally, EU statements on common foreign and security policy put the emphasis on incentives rather than on 'restrictive measures' i.e. 'sanctions'. Yet, the EU sanction policy has developed over time, for many reasons, notably to protect its own strategic interest (stability and security) and to promote a normative order in its neighbourhood. Sanctions might in the end lead to negative consequences for the "sender"; it may be costly for some or all member-States. Some can be simply useless: an arm embargo on Russia would not fit its situation of great power. Boycotting the Olympic Games of Sochi 2014 would only be a symbolical decision. It can even be counterproductive in the long run: freezing Russia's application to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) would for instance be counterproductive for the EU, since it aims at introducing Russia to the principles of international trade and to the dispute settling procedures.

In the immediate aftermath of the crisis in Georgia, one of the fathers of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Chris Patten, looked sceptical as regards the possibility to use sanctions: "*I doubt whether anything tougher than strongly worded communiqués will ever be employed*" (Patten 2008), given that Russian troops will stay in a truncated country for years. However, as part of 'smart sanctions', the *Financial Times* (22 August 2009) suggested to target influential Russian oligarchs. These billionaires may be the

Achilles' heel of Kremlin politics since their goal is to run business, not to obey to political objectives. Overall, the use of sanctions would have been very difficult to put into practice, while the financial crisis has made them less relevant.

5. Conclusion

The EU is considered as a normative power not only because it aims at exporting norms – in that sense, all major powers could be normative to some extent – but because it has to get along on legitimate and shared norms in order to act collectively. Its decentralized decision-making is generally thought to preclude the EU ability to act efficiently in the international scene. It is especially true with Russia, which confronts the EU with a series of challenges in terms of coherence, consistency, capacities and influence (Delcour 2008).

The Russian–Georgian war has been framed as a major crisis, as the regional stability was threatened due to a perceived disproportionate use of military force. Contrarily to pessimistic views, the EU has been able to maintain its unity on the six-points plan, which situated at the epicentre between two main preferences vis-à-vis Russia: partnership and soft containment. The room for interpretation allowed by the plan has helped to maintain the European unity on a highly divisive subject. Thus, the crisis in Georgia provides an interesting case-study of the EU normative power, which reveals able to act in this difficult context. While the efficiency of the sanctions remained to be seen, the EU presence has been strengthened strategically, establishing itself as the diplomatic broker.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Zaki Laïdi, Benoit Pélopidas, Laure Delcour, Elsa Tulmets and David Cadier for their help and comments, as well as to the participants to the Sciences-Po / Fudan Seminar of September 26th, 2008 in Shanghai directed by Pr. Chen Zhimin.

References

ABDULLAEV Nabi, VON TWICKEL Nikolaus (2008), "EU Seeks Common Response to Russia", *The Moscow Times*, n°3976, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/1010/42/370482.htm>

CADIER David (2009), "CFSP and Central European strategic cultures: the Visegrad countries and the Georgian crisis", EU – Award PhD (3rd) Winner,

CHAUDET Didier, PARMENTIER Florent, PELOPIDAS Benoît (2009), *When Empire Meets Nationalism. Power Politics in the USA and Russia*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

COUNCIL JOINT ACTION 2008/760/CFSP, of 25 September 2008 appointing the European Union Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia.

COUNCIL JOINT ACTION 2008/736/CFSP of 15 September 2008 on the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, EUMM Georgia.

DELCOUR Laure, TULMETS Elsa (eds.) (2008), *Pioneer Europe ? Testing EU Foreign Policy in the Neighbourhood*, Baden-Baden, Nomos.

DELCOUR Laure (2008), "The European Union after the Conflict in South Ossetia: A New Impetus to the Common Foreign and Security Policy?", *Jane's Intelligence Review*.

FINNEMORE Marta, SIKKINK Kathryn (1998), "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization*, 52 (4), pp. 887-917.

HAUKKALA Hiski (2008), "The Russian Challenge to EU's Normative Power: The Case of European Neighbourhood Policy", *The International Spectator*, 43 (2), pp. 35-47.

KORSKI Daniel (2008), "Learning from the EU's Georgia Success", European Council on Foreign Relations, http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/eu_georgia_eumm_esdp/

LAIDI Zaki (2008), *Norms over Force: The Enigma of European Power*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

LAIDI Zaki (2008), *EU Foreign Policy in a Globalized World: Normative Power and Preferences*, London, Routledge.

LEONARD Mark, POPESCU Nicu (2007), "A Power Audit of EU – Russia Relations", *Policy Paper*, European Council on Foreign Relations.

LINTONEN Raimo (2004), "Understanding EU Crisis Decision-making: The Case of Chechnya and the Finnish Presidency", *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 12, pp. 29-38.

LYNCH Dov (2006), "Why Georgia Matters", *Chaillot Paper*, 65, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris.

MILLER Leszek (2008), "Kaczynski and Sarkozy. War and Peace", *Ria-Novosti*. <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20080819/116124625.html>

OGDEN Dennis (1988), "Britain and Soviet Georgia, 1921-1922", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (2), pp. 245-258.

PATTEN Chris (2008), "Putin's Gold-Medal War", *Project Syndicate*. <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/patten7>

PIATIGORSKY Jacques, SAPIR Jacques (eds.) (2009), *Le Grand Jeu – XIXe siècle. Les enjeux géopolitiques de l'Asie Centrale*, Paris, Autrement.

PORTELA Clara (2005), "Where and Why Does the EU Impose Sanctions?", *Politique européenne*, 17, pp. 83-111.

TOCCI Nathalie (2006), "EU Neglect and Competing Mediation in Georgia's Conflicts", *The International Spectator*, 41 (4), pp. 69-84.

TOCCI Nathalie (2008), "The EU and Conflict Resolution in Turkey and Georgia: Hindering EU Potential Through the Political Management of Contractual Relations", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46 (4), pp. 875-897.

TSYGANKOV Andrei (2009), *Russophobia. Anti-Russian Lobby and American Foreign Policy*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

ZIELONKA Jan (ed.) (1998), *Paradoxes of European Foreign Policy*, The Hague, Kluwer Law International.