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Introduction: The European Union, Russia and the Shared Neighbourhood

JACKIE GOWER & GRAHAM TIMMINS

THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) AND RUSSIA'S 'shared neighbourhood' of Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was, according to Löwenhardt, writing in 2005, 'an economic and diplomatic battlefield' (Löwenhardt 2005, p. 7). The period that has followed has seen this agenda develop into a mainstream political debate on the prospects for European security and spill over into the military domain with the conflict in South Ossetia in August 2008. This conflict and the Ukrainian energy crisis in January 2009 have contributed to the generation of a new post-Cold War low point in EU–Russia relations.

Apart from the frozen conflicts scattered around the region, it was not until the creation of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), initially outlined in 2003, that attention began to focus on the states comprising the shared neighbourhood. The ENP was a strategy designed to extend a European zone of peace and stability eastwards, and it came in response to the imminent enlargement of the EU's membership into Central and Eastern Europe in 2004. The ENP was considered an essential step forward in establishing stable relations with its new neighbours, but, as Haukkala has argued, Russia's self-exclusion from the ENP has had the effect of creating a competitive agenda between the two actors (Haukkala 2008, p. 38), and has failed to create the positive political dynamics that were intended. The launch of the ENP had coincided with the re-election of Vladimir Putin as Russian President and the projection of a more assertive Russian foreign policy agenda. Russia had failed to prop up the Shevardnadze regime and to prevent the Saakashvilli government coming to power in Georgia's 'Rose Revolution' in autumn 2003, and had likewise failed to divert the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine which brought the more pro-Western candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, to power after the original elections in December 2004 were declared void. The view from Moscow towards the ENP and the very concept of a shared neighbourhood was thus increasingly driven by the perception of a threat from Western encroachment into what Russia considered to be its traditional sphere of influence.

Where the states in the region are themselves concerned, there is an obvious tension between, on the one hand, the attractions of a pro-Western agenda which promises aid, technical assistance and eventual integration into the single European market if not membership, and which would have positive benefits for trade and investment, and

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on the other hand, cooperation with Moscow given their dependency on Russian energy supplies, as well as the cultural and historical affinities that many of the states share with Russia.

Although both the EU and Russia have a common interest in regional stability, what we have seen in recent years is the gradual re-emergence of zero-sum calculations and geopolitical competition. It cannot come as any real surprise that both the EU and Russia have expressed an interest in the shared neighbourhood given the geographical location of the region, and Trenin is correct in his assertion that the tensions we are currently witnessing do not necessarily translate into old-style Cold War conflict. What, however, is clearly the case is that the 'overall state of EU–Russia relations will be a key variable in the future development of the countries that lie between them' (Trenin 2005). The common space on external security created by the EU and Russia in 2005 has so far failed to produce tangible results, and it remains to be seen whether the Eastern Partnership, launched in May 2009, will provide a more productive framework for political agreement on regional cooperation and stability, and whether strengthening the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours will facilitate improvements in the EU–Russia political relationship. As the Polish Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski, has argued,

> If we see Russia's future as being in partnership with the European Union, we cannot deny the same prospect to the people of the countries that make up the joint neighbourhoods of both. It would be a poor solution for the EU and Russia to be separated by a region whose contacts with Europe are less substantial than those it has with Russia. (Sikorski 2009, p. 41)

The contributions to this collection have emerged out of a series of academic activities convened by the EU–Russia Joint Research Network during the 2008–2009 academic session, an initiative which has been joint funded by the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) and the University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES).

Derek Averre provides the opening contribution with an examination of the competing rationalities of Russian and EU foreign policy in the shared neighbourhood, and argues that there is a deep-rooted incompatibility between the EU's use of post-modern, normative power and Russia's use of modern, structural power, an incompatibility which sets out a range of complex challenges in developing any tangible meaning to the concept of 'strategic partnership' between the two actors. Stefan Gänzle's examination of the EU's security governance strategy towards its eastern neighbours suggests that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) employed by the EU comprises a dynamic which ultimately will bring some neighbouring countries closer to EU membership. Martin Dangerfield's evaluation of the internal dynamics of the EU's eastern policy-making, and the specific contribution made by the 'Visegrad Group', the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, argues that there is mixed evidence regarding the extent to which these states have been able to influence the development and projection of the EU's eastern policy, and the newly-established Eastern Partnership in particular.

Three contributions focus on the development of EU–Russia relations. Hiski Haukkala provides a discussion of why the EU has failed to influence Russia's

development, and argues that situational characteristics have forced the Union into some rather difficult trade-offs between securing its normative agenda and developing a relationship with the at times turbulent and unpredictable Russia. Rick Fawn discusses the human rights dialogue between the EU and Russia, and contends that human rights have taken an instrumental dimension in relations between post-Soviet states, in particular the Russian Federation, and several of the post-communist states that achieved membership of the EU and NATO. Tuomas Forsberg and Antti Seppo consider the EU–Russia relationship from the perspective of recent trade disputes and assert that although the lack of unity has been a very common explanation for the failures of the EU foreign policy, the poor success in solving these disputes cannot be explained purely in these terms and requires a broader debate regarding the contextual nature of power resources which highlights the dependence of the EU on Russia's energy resources. Finally, Mikhail Filippov looks at the Georgian crisis of 2008, and suggests that Moscow's strategy has been rooted in an attempt to create diversionary conflicts in the region, which are intended to disrupt the perusal of a Western agenda by the states concerned.

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