DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – EU AND RUSSIA IN THE LIGHT OF UKRAINE CRISIS

MASTER THESIS

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Handed in by: Constantina Budi
Email: constantina.budi@yahoo.de

Supervisor: Andrey Makarychev
Freie Universität Berlin
Osteuropa-Institut
Center for Global Politics

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CIS   Commonwealth of Independent States

EaP   Eastern Partnership

ECT   Energy Charter Treaty

EED   European Endowment for Democracy

EEU   Eurasian Economic Union

ENP   European Neighbourhood Policy

EU   European Union

FSU   Former Soviet Union

IR   International Relations

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

P4M   Partnership for Modernisation

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PCA   Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

PPC   Permanent Partnership Council

RF   Russian Federation

TEP   Third Energy Packet

UN   United Nations

US   United States

WTO   World Trade Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the ceasefire of the Minsk II agreement in February 2015, media, politics and scholars debate the results of EU-diplomacy, by which the status quo in Crimea was practically legitimized. On-going military actions in the region fuelled further discussions, sending weapons and forces to defend Ukraine or establishing a European Army. Putin's spread of narratives about recreating 'Novorossiya' in context of a 'Russian world' raised security concerns in former Soviet countries. Most recently, NATO declared it would deploy weapons to NATO-members in the former Soviet Union (FSU) in order maintain security in Europe. In response, Russia threatened further nuclear armament. The crisis is not averted yet.

Political communication and diplomacy in EU-Russia relations are at stake: EU-soft power in Minks was not able to compound the Ukraine crisis. Russia's use of hard power in Ukraine, accompanied by a nationalist soft power approach, is in stark contrast to the EU's approach of good relations with its neighbours. A power struggle evolved between Russia and the West, and the EU in particular, raising the question how to shield Europe against military conflict.

In review, Ukraine crisis and the worsening of EU-Russia relations is not a surprise (Mearsheimer 2014). As a transit country for EU energy supply and in the course of the EU's and Russia's competitive neighbourhood policies in the FSU, Ukraine proved to be a contested buffer zone in EU-Russia relations. Since Russia aimed at restoration of influence as a great power in the FSU, it gradually deviated from the democratic starting point of EU-Russia relations under Yeltsin. Yet, in the course of Russian modernisation, Russia's official discourse still signals compliance with the normative agenda of the EU (ППРФЕС 2015). Hence, the EU considered its normative agenda still as mutually shared key concepts in EU-Russia relations – though they went through several waves of rapprochement and disenchantment over time. However, Russia criticizes the asymmetry of relations precisely due to the normative agenda, which is set by the EU as an unquestioned precondition for joint relations (Lavrov 2013:7, Makarychev 2006:38, Monaghan 2013:5pp.).

Academic research identifies fundamental differences between Russia and the EU as a key source of mutual misunderstanding (Mangott 2005, Timmermann 2005, Makarychev 2006, Poyraz 2011, Makarychev/Sergunin 2013, Hill/Gaddy 2015). Part of the problem is the EU's internal lack of coherence and commitment of EU-members, hindering the EU "to speak with one voice", with weakening impact on

the outcomes of EU-foreign policy (Cross/Melissen 2013:2). Hence, political communication research in International Relations (IR) largely examines the persuasive impact of political communication in public diplomacy and the media (ibid., Melissen 2005, Kaid 2004). A smaller branch of research on supranational level focuses on the role of communication as a core instrument in diplomacy in international cooperation, conflict management and conflict resolution (Tenscher/Viehrig 2007:9, McNair 2011). The logic of deep asymmetry and miscommunication due to conceptual differences in EU-Russia relations was examined by Makarychev 2006 and further elaborated (Makarychev 2011a, 2011b and Makarychev/Sergunin 2011). In the light of Ukraine crisis one decade later, this approach regained of importance to elaborate, how EU-Russia relations can proceed.

THE THESIS ALLEGES THE FOLLOWING THRUST OF ARGUMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION:

A: The Ukraine crisis challenges EU-Russia relations in their common ground based on key concepts according to the EU's normative agenda.

B: The Ukraine crisis marks the peak of mutual misunderstandings and misperceptions between EU and Russia that evolved over time.

Investigating implications for EU-diplomacy concerning power and balance of interests in the FSU, the thesis examines the underlying misperceptions and antagonisms in EU-Russia discourse that shaped EU-Russia relations over time, questioning:

Why does the Ukraine crisis challenge EU-Russia relations? Why does the EU seem so unprepared for the situation, though there were signs of misperceptions and misunderstandings? Why EU-diplomacy towards Russia seems to be with the back to the wall?

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY:

In Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of *power/knowledge* and *discourse* (1972, 1980), normative orders are outcomes of power/knowledge, which are produced by discourse in which political communication and diplomacy take place. Applying to the research design of qualitative discourse analysis, the thesis investigates the dynamics of EU-Russia relations regarding their core differences and perceptions.

 In this context, discourse analysis will "unpack" the key concepts regarding their

status and meaning in EU-Russia discourse, applying to the conception of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). Applied data recourse to official resources of EU and the RF.

The choice of key concepts orientates on the Copenhagen Criteria (European Commission 2015).[1] In analysis, Accordingly, the concept of *democracy* refers to the political criteria of Copenhagen; *modernisation*, refers to the economic criteria and the *rule of law*, which likewise is part of the political criteria, represents the institutional criteria since they include the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* (European Commission 2015, Manners 2000). Furthermore, analysis includes the concept of *multipolarity* in relation to the concept of *multilateralism*. Multilateralism is a guiding principle for EU-foreign politics, to which documents of EU-Russian-relations refer from both sides, whereas Russia's foreign policy approach strongly refers to *multipolarity*, contesting the EU's normative approach. Analysing the different approaches of EU and Russia regarding the balance of power in international context would illuminate further aspects of recent misunderstanding between Russia and the EU.

In the frame of a master's thesis, the investigation focuses on EU and Russia, considering that EU-Russia relations in the light of the Ukraine crisis cannot be analytically regarded isolated, since the EU's activities are strongly shaped by the diversity of the EU-member states. Moreover, Russia often refers to "the West", including EU, NATO, OSCE and the US in one box and perceived EU enlargement the more assertive, as NATO expanded. Likewise the context of EU-Ukraine and Ukraine-Russia relations has particular impacts, which cannot be included in this elaboration.

According to political communication research as outlined above, the thesis refers to the core definition of political communication by Steve Chaffee (1975): political communication is the role of communication in the political process (Kaid 2004:xiii).

STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENTATION:

Chapter 2 introduces to political communication and diplomacy and discourse analysis in International Relations. Further, Foucault's theory of the 'truth of

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[1] Originally, these criteria were formulated for EU-accession of former Soviet states in 1993. Later they were adopted for ENP, since they were supposed to evolve a transformative potential for rapprochement of non-member countries in the FSU towards the normative agenda of the EU (Ghazaryan 2014:77).

power/knowledge' and *discourse* as well as the methodological conception of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers* by Laclau and Mouffe will be outlined.

Chapter 3 investigates how the dynamic of EU-Russia relations developed over time. The subchapters orientate according to three phases: during the first decade of transition, EU-Russia relations went through a period of rapprochement in the course of Russia's transition. With Putin in power, there can be outlined a phase of ambivalence between disenchantment and cooperation. The third phases is marked by a turn towards confrontation in Russia's behaviour since Putin's comeback to presidency in 2012, recently culminating in Ukraine crisis. Elaborating core differences in orientations and mutual perceptions, which affected EU-Russia relations within the last decades, internal aspects in the process of restoring Russian statehood, economic aspects in the course of introducing market economy, and aspects in foreign politics in the course of a changing European environment will be considered.

In Chapter 4, the Russian and the EU's understanding of the key concepts democracy, modernization, the rule of law, multilateralism and multipolarity as *nodal points* in EU-Russian discourse will be analysed, in order to reveal whether they turn out to be *empty signifiers.*

In conclusion, EU-Russia relations will be evaluated considering the outcomes of analysis in regard to future prospects for joint relations and the balancing of power and hegemony in the former Soviet Union.

2. Political communication and diplomacy in the mirror of power and discourse

Since power is a key aspect in International Relations (IR), foreign and security policy analysis apply to Michel Foucault's post-structural conception of *power/knowledge* and *discourse* (Hewitt 2009, Schmidt 2012, Holzscheiter 2013).

Chapter 2.1 illuminates political communication and diplomacy in International Relations as discursive practice and as a subject for discursive analysis. In 2.2, Foucault's theory of discourse and the 'truth of *power/knowledge*' will be outlined. Finally, the methodological conception of nodal points and empty signifiers in the framework of power, hegemony and democracy by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe will be elaborated upon (2.3).

2.1 Political communication and diplomacy in international relations: policy-making as discoursive practise

Discourse analysis as a theoretical method came to prominence with the rise of constructivism in the beginning of the 1990s, which marked an ontological turn in social and political sciences. Noticed as the *constructivist turn* and the *argumentative turn* respectively – primarily by Fischer and Forrester (1993), Alexander Wendt (1995) and Jeffrey T. Checkel (1998) – constructivism was introduced into IR, counterbalancing predominating *realist* policy analysis approaches.

Reviews of literature in IR differentiate between mainstream constructivism, critical constructivism and radical constructivism. Foucault's post-structuralist and Laclau and Mouffe's post-post-structuralist approach are classified into the latter (Schmidt 2012, Holzscheiter 2013). Common ground is the constructivist ontology: reality is socially constructed; it comes into existence formed and shaped by language, according to structures of signification to which rules speaking agents apply (Holzscheiter 2013:14).[2]

Constructivist research in IR acknowledges the process of construction, which shapes politics: influenced by ideas and identities of political actors, by values and by normative principles. In international cooperation and conflict resolution, the role

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[2] Constructivism rejects the *realist* idea, understanding the nature of reality as materially pre-existing. Blatter/Janning/Wagemann (2007:21) argue that constructivist qualitative research does not seek to reject *realist* ideas but rather extends the analytical scope for epistemology in IR.

of "immaterial factors such as ideals, world-views norms" on the one hand, and the "intersubjective construction of mutual horizons against the background of interpretations and constructions of reality" on the other hand, gained in importance (Blatter/Janning/Wagemann 2007:19pp).[3] This is evermore relevant, since political entities such as Russia or the EU choose normative soft power approaches for their policies.

Blatter, Janning and Wagemann emphasise that the processes of policy-making and how political strategies are presented to and perceived by the public became a complex process of interpretation and (re-) construction since the societal turn towards information, communication and mass media made (Blatter/Janning/Wagemann 2007:17pp.). Similarly, public attention to political communication and diplomacy on a supranational level increased significantly. International affairs are still negotiated "behind closed doors". However, governments started to use communication tools via mass media, in order to influence public opinion (McNair 2011:173). For instance, Putin benefits from the impact of his narrative about Novorossiya and the 'Russian World' by increased support by the Russian population (see chapter 3), whereas the EU is criticized for its inconsistency, which is often claimed as an impact of the EU's rather weak public diplomacy (Cross/Melissen 2013).

Fischer and Forrester (1993:1pp.) claim that policy and planning analysis is an argumentative practice, as itself is constructing its subjects. Following Foucault's approach they see "that policy-making is a constant discursive struggle [...] that guide the ways people create the shared meanings which motivate them to act." (ibid.). Accordingly, political decision-making goes beyond a purely rational and knowledge-driven process: it includes the way in which political actors perceive and interpret their debates in the policy-making process (Blatter, Janning and Wagemann 2007:21). Consequently, policy and policy analysis appear as discursive practices themselves, containing particular patterns of *narratives* and *frames* of interpretation (ibid.). The Ukraine crisis proofs this to be correct, as the elaboration of EU-Russia relations in chapter 3 and the analysis of their key concepts in chapter 4 outlines.

2.2 MICHEL FOUCAULT: DISCOURSE AND THE 'TRUTH OF *POWER/KNOWLEDGE*'

Regarding the recent power struggle between Russia and the EU in the light of

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[3] All citations of Blatter/Janning/Wagemann 2007 are the author's own translation

Ukraine crisis, political communication and diplomacy in EU-Russia relations can be analysed with Foucault's concept of *discourse* and *power/knowledge*, from which truth and "different regimes of knowledge" derive (Jørgensen/Phillips 2002:13). The discourse of EU-Russia relations was shaped by an asymmetry in joint relations since the dissolution of the USSR, since Russia was economically and domestically weakened and needed the EU's help in the process of transition (Timmermann 2005, Mikhaleva 2005). Hence, EU-Russia discourse was shaped by the normative agenda, which was applied by the EU with the adoption of the Copenhagen Criteria in 1993 (European Commission 2015).

In difference to structuralist understanding of discourse as a fixed, consequent linguistic structure of signs, Foucault defines discourse as a group of statements, which appear in context of a certain discoursive formation:

> "We shall call discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation; [...] it is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined." (Foucault 1972:117)

Hence, statements do not follow a "canonic form of succession and permutation", they do not relate to what they state in the same way as the structuralist idea of the relation between a signifier and its significant (ibid., 88).[4] Statements bring groups of signs into existence, since the statement "enables these rules or forms to become manifest." (ibid.). Embedded into an enunciative field, the statement has a place and status in-between of its possible past and future relations – thus it has to be analysed in context of a historical dimension.

Statements are never generalized, free, neutral or independent, since they belong to a network of statements that is build in "enunciative coexistence", correlating to each other within a discoursive formation (ibid., 99). Hence, discoursive practice does not mean the "expressive operation by which an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image, [...], when he constructs grammatical sentences." (ibid., 117). Instead, discourse evolves over time, and space in the context of a given period:

> "[...]; it is a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic,

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[4] According to structuralism, reality comes into existence by linguistic structure based on the relational character of language, which constructs meaning. This linguistic structure or language consists of a system of linguistic signs: the signifier, which means the material sign, and the signified, which is the object to which the signifier refers (Newman 2005:3).

geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of the enunciative function." (ibid., 117).

Statements appear according to a regularity that derives from the discursive formation they belong to. In a *system of dispersion* between objects, types of statements, concepts, or thematic choices, the statements are dispersed by certain *rules of formation* that follow complex conditions, by which they come into existence (ibid., Foucault 1972:38).

For instance, the post-Cold War narrative comes into existence under the rules of formation according to a certain time – the post-Cold War period – and space that is mainly the West consisting of EU, NATO and the US and the FSU. The power of this discourse that understood Russia largely integrated into the international system is recently challenged by Putin's narrative of NATO threat of Russian security (Hill/Gaddy 2015:261pp.).

Continuously produced by and circulating within discourse throughout all members and parts of society, the rules of formation accumulate *power* in shape of a productive network of

> "[...] manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute a social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse." (Foucault 1980:93)

Foucault's definition of power rejects the traditional idea of power in shape of individual agents, groups or states. Hence, it is not the traditional notions of sovereignty, the rule of law and political domination that define the rules of a government, as Hewitt (2009:6) outlines: the rules of a government "are themselves elements of a pervasive discourse of the state, but the rules of knowledge and power operating within the practice of government" (ibid.).

Power generates as a 'truth of *power/knowledge*': [5]

> "[...] it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power." (Foucault 1980:94)

All that we do or do not do, what we perceive and interpret is derived and predefined by the 'truth of *power/knowledge*', which circulates within our respective

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[5] *Power/knowledge* is translated from *savoir/pouvoir* as Michel Foucault originally termed the concept in French: the implicit knowledge, which refers to a specific historical period similarly to a „common sense" and power as a productive force, implicating a "to be able to", a potentiality or capacity or capability (Feder 2010:55).

society. We are forced to (re-)produce, to confess or to discover this 'truth of *power/knowledge*' according to the demands of society, in order to function (ibid., 93). In this sense, we "are also subjected to truth" (ibid., 94):

> "In the end we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power." (ibid.)

Transferred to EU-Russia relations, EU and Russia are subject to the truth that derives from discourse: Russia was initially supposed to integrate into EU discourse according to the EU's normative agenda, which is a precondition for membership or cooperation. The normative agenda is a manifestation of the rules of *power/knowledge*, operating as rules of formation with the practice of the EU. Russia tried to resist the regime of the EU by holding an exceptional status towards EU, manifested in the Four Common Spaces and not being part of the ENP (Makarychev 2006:34).[6]

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:14) underpin Foucault's rejection of the idea of a universal truth: it is impossible to stand outside of any discourse. Hence, truth cannot exist outside of discourse and there is no of 'true or false': the key is to ask, how the effects of truth are created (ibid.). In this sense, ideology is not an external concept outside of discourse: it emerges as an accompanying outcome of the major mechanisms of power. It quasi functions as a driver for the 'truth of *power/knowledge*' within discourses:

> "It is quite possible, that the major mechanisms of power have been accompanied by ideological productions [...]; but basically I do not believe that what has taken place can be said to be ideologically. It is both much more and much less than ideology. It is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge [...]." (Foucault 1980:102)

The discourse produces "ideational rules or rationality of a given setting" and addresses it to certain audiences at appropriate times and in appropriate ways, providing a certainty for appropriate acting within a set of given rules (Schmidt 2012:17pp.). The normative agenda of the EU is an example for this "discoursive institutionalism" (ibid.): it can be analysed as an outcome of the power of discourse, as the effective instrument for the accumulation of *power/knowledge*.

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[6] Makarychev (2006:37p.) hints at the perception of rules in EU-Russia relations, revealing the struggle of *power/knowledge* in EU-Russia discourse: Russian analysts perceive the EU making Russia to accept certain rules and to force it into a certain framework, whereas European analysts claim Russia first to adapt to EU's rules before taking benefits from the partnership (ibid.).

Schmidt (2012:6) emphasizes discourse analysis based on Foucault to investigate the content of ideological concepts and their continuity or discontinuity over time: "through examination of networks of rules establishing what is meaningful at any given time." (ibid.). In this context, the concepts of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers* by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) serve to elaborate how actors employ ideational concepts (ibid.).

2.3 ERNESTO LACLAU AND CHANTAL MOUFFE: POINTS OF REFERENCE – *NODAL POINTS* AND *EMPTY SIGNIFIERS*

Michel Foucault's theoretical framework considers methodological assumptions, however, it lacks of a concrete methodology to put discourse analysis into practice (Foucault 1980:96pp., Hewitt 2009). Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) post-poststructuralist approach shares the core assumptions of Foucauldian discourse theory (Jørgensen/Phillips 2002). With their conception of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers*, the key concepts in EU-Russia relations can be methodologically "unpacked" as points of reference in EU-Russia discourse in the logic of 'truth of *power/knowledge*'.

Laclau and Mouffe further differentiate discursive formation: objects and actions become meaningful by *articulation*. *Articulation* means "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau/Mouffe 1985:105). A *discourse*, hence, describes the "structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice" (ibid.). The "differential positions, insofar they appear articulated within a discourse", the authors identify as *moments* (ibid.). In difference to *moments*, "any difference, that is not discursively articulated, is called *element* (ibid.). Elements are *floating signifiers*, which are – if articulated – transformed into *moments*, which constitute dispersed but interrelated differential positions within discourse formations. This articulation into a discursive formation never accomplishes and never appears outside of discourse:[7]

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[7] In contrast to Foucault, who assumes an objective, material field constituted outside from discourse as a mental field, Laclau and Mouffe locate any kind of object or discoursive entity – or difference – within discourse, as it is produced by regularity in dispersion (Foucault 1972:162). Hence, objects cannot come into existence beyond discursive formations (Laclau/Mouffe 1985:145). Moreover, discourse constitutes relational identity not only by linguistically produced differential positions, but also by non-linguistic, material elements (ibid., 108). The extension of discourse to material structures in society increases its applicability for political analysis. Accordingly, institutions or a state entity can be considered as constituted by discourse.

> "No relation can be contingent or external, since the identity of its elements would then be specified outside the relation itself." (ibid., 106)

Though they never fully reach completion, discursive formations are of characteristic coherence and appear contingent, as an "ensemble of differential positions" (ibid.). Applying to Foucault, discourse is unified by *regularity of dispersion*, but with emphasis on the aspect of *regularity*: Though the differential positions are dispersed, the ensemble of differential positions is identifiable from outside, "*signified* as a totality" (1985:106):

> "Now, in an articulated discoursive totality, where every element occupies a differential position – in our terminology, where every element has been reduced to a moment of that totality – all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character." (ibid.)

Transferred to the example, the post-Cold war narrative emerges as a discoursive formation, consisting of the ensemble of differential positions set by the actors within this discourse: the EU, the US, Russia, NATO, and the FSU. Though the moments, or with Foucault the statements, are dispersed, the regularity of its dispersion makes it identifiable in total as the so-called post-Cold War narrative.

Precondition for the relational character of elements, constituting the differential positions, are the *nodal points*: they are fixed to a certain degree, but never fully completed. N*odal points* mark the accordance of meaning within a field of discursivity. Hence, only *nodal points* enable the practice of articulation and the production of discourse:

> "Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, *nodal points*:" (ibid., 112)

Nodal Points are constructed by the practice of articulation; they are "partially fix meaning" (ibid.). The fixation remains partial due to the "openness of the social" that results from the floating character of elements, which constantly overflow every discourse and, hence all *nodal points*, within the "infinitude of the field of discursivity" (ibid., 113).

The rule of law, for instance, can be identified a *nodal point*, as it is partially fixed fin meaning: A society, which is organized by the rule of law as a privileged discoursive point, is in consensus regarding the legislation as an essential reference for any kind of action. Hence, it arrests the flow of differences by constructing certain rules as the core orientation for each individual in society.

In his later works, Laclau elaborates his approach of power, hegemony and democracy. Emphasizing hegemony as initial point of political analysis, Laclau defines hegemony as an asymmetry between *universality* and *particularity*:

> "[...] the type of political relation by which a particularity assumes the representation of an (impossible) universality entirely incommensurable with it." (Laclau 2001:5)

Democracy in Laclau's conception only exists within this construction of hegemony. In a democracy, the place of power that marks the representation of universality, remains empty: It is a "hegemonic terrain", which is occupied by certain particular forces but never reach complete accordance with it (ibid., 7). Democracy requires, that "the gap between universality and particularity is never filled but is, on the contrary, ever reproduced" (ibid.). Laclau calls the competing attempts of particular forces, aiming at representing universality within this field of hegemony, *politics:* the "hegemonic game" that can be never fully accomplished (ibid.). He states:

> The recognition of the constitutive nature of this gap and its political institutionalisation is the starting point of modern democracy". (Laclau 2007:46)

How can agents of particular forces apply to universality, in order to occupy the place of power within political discourse? Therefore, Laclau introduces the notion of *empty* signifiers: they give reference to a particular meaning in the asymmetry of universality and particularity, around which the hegemonic battle is organized. Similar to the concept of *nodal points*, they give the system its "systematicity", though they are "constitutively unreachable" (ibid., 2007:39). Likewise, *empty signifiers* give reference to selected agents that relate to each other in the hegemonic game, and thus make political discourse possible (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000:9).

Laclau concludes that *empty signifiers* are a precondition for hegemony – and consequently for democracy – insofar that they

> "[...] while maintaining the incommensurability between universals and particulars, enable the latter to take up the representation of the former." (Laclau 2001:11)

Here Laclau formulates the problem, which is probably relevant for EU-Russian-relations: In society there exists a plurality of particular groups with a plurality of demands that are aiming at representation of universality. When certain particular forces take up representation of the universal, a chain of equivalences emerges, which generates an "area of universalizing effects" (ibid., 10). The more particular

forces participate in one hegemonic discourse, the more likely the original particular meaning will be weakened or relativised as a "particularized universality". The original, becomes an *empty signifier*:

> "[...] the more extended the chain of equivalences that a particular hegemonic sector comes to represent and the more its aims become a *name* for global emancipation, the looser will be the links of that name with its original particular meaning and the more it will approach the status of an empty signifier; [...] ." (ibid.)

Hence, the signifier is emptied, lacking of coherence with a certain signified. Laclau concludes: „A signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified" (ibid., 36).

The EU appears as a hegemonic sector: aiming at becoming a "name for global emancipation", it organised and centred foreign relations on the basis of key concepts according to the EU's normative agenda. During the transition after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia was in a weakened economic position. In partnership with the EU as a strong trading partner, Russia began to play the "hegemonic game" as a particular force in the EU's discourse. Within this discourse, universality is represented by the EU-constituent normative agenda that sets key concepts as *nodal points*. Since the EU is an entity that unifies an increased number of states, the chain of equivalences is likely to be evermore extended. Consequently, the links to its original meaning are getting looser, so that the EU's normative agenda would probably approach the status of an *empty signifier*.

Meanwhile, Russia targeted becoming a hegemonic sector itself, contradicting Russia's original position as a particularity in EU-Russia relations. The following chapter will demonstrate, Russia's reference to key concepts shifted over time. Consequently, misperceptions and misunderstandings between EU and Russia increased towards alienation and confrontation in the recent Ukraine crisis.

Before the key concepts in EU-Russia relations will be analysed with the methodological conception of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers*, the dynamics of EU-Russia relations will be examined in chapter 3.

3. THE DYNAMICS OF MUTUAL ALIENATION IN EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS

The chapter outlines the underlying dynamics of EU-Russia relations over time, examining the genesis of core differences in orientations and mutual perceptions. EU-Russia relations were influenced by domestic and economic aspects in the course of Russia's restoration of statehood and transition towards a market economy on one hand, and, by foreign affairs in context of the changes in the European Environment on the other hand.

During the first decade after the dissolution of the USSR, relations can be characterized as a rapprochement in context of Russia's transition process. With Putin in power, EU-Russia discourse shifted towards distance, continuing partnership in terms of cooperation. However, disenchantment evolved in the course of events, oscillating between alienation and rapprochement. Finally, with Putin back in office, EU-Russia relations gradually took a course of confrontation, culminating in the Ukraine crisis. In conclusion, the outlined periods will be compared with regard to the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's 'truth of *power/knowledge*' (3.4).

3.1 'LOST IN TRANSITION': RUSSIA'S RAPPROCHEMENT TO THE WEST

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Cold War came to an end. In the course of transition, the former Soviet countries required support from the West.[8] Hence, suspicion, which shaped the former East-West constellation, dissolved. Similarly, EU-Russia relations in the first decade of transition were shaped by Russia's rapprochement towards the EU.

Russia was particularly challenged in the domestic and the economic sphere, in Russia known as "times of troubles" (Hill/Gaddy 2015:23): domestically, a weak Russian leadership with high fluctuation in the top positions and the government shaped the process of restoring the political system. The peak was in the fall of 1993, when power struggles between Yeltsin and the parliament resulted into a violent confrontation in consequence to the abolition of the parliament and announcement of the new State Duma by Yeltsin. He installed the State Duma with rather weak legislative functions and "quasi-monarchical powers" for the president (ibid., 27). However, this did not work out to improve the situation, since quarrels within the Duma continued. A new election law opened the path for parliamentary elections in 1995 and presidential elections in 1996. Only by

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[8] Regarding EU-Russia relations, the notion of the West is used with emphasis on the EU, but including the US and the institutions of the international community.

hairsbreadths and with the help of oligarchs, for instance, Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Yeltsin prevailed over his rival Zyuganov. The price was the involvement of oligarchs in privileged positions in the economy, but also in politics, as Berezovsky became Deputy Secretary in the Russian Security Council (ibid., 28p.). These political upheavals and decisions under Yeltsin have had a distinctly eroding effect on the Russian state system. As Hill and Gaddy conclude, they later became incentives for a decisive change of Russian politics towards a governance of a 'strong hand' under Vladimir Putin (ibid.).

Simultaneously, Russia suffered from the impact of the ambiguous economic reform program, which was launched by Yeltsin in 1991. For an instant transformation of Russian planned economy towards a market economy Russia was not prepared. In 1993, the economic crisis culminated in a high rate of inflation and unemployment (ibid., 24). Against this background, relations with the EU became essential for Russia: joint projects guaranteed financial and economic support, for instance, the TACIS Programmes that were initially implemented in 1991 (Mikhaleva 2005:110).

Besides the inner turmoil, the loss of the Russian Soviet identity as a world power due to the dissolution of the FSU was perceived as another weakening factor. In contrast to the self-perception of the former Soviet Empire under Russian hegemonic influence, post-Soviet Russia found itself in dependence on Western aid – the former enemy – to handle its profound structural and economic problems. Moreover, the dissolution of the USSR shifted a great share of ethnic Russians beyond the borders of the Russian Federation: notably, two third (69,4 per cent) of them resided in the Ukrainian territory and Kazakhstan (Mangott 2005:16).[9]

Russia hoped to recover from its weakness by regaining international influence, especially in the FSU. For instance, Russia perceived the activities of NATO in Bosnia-Herzegovina and UN-sanctions against Serbia in 1992 as a setback considering Russia's international position.[10] Likewise, NATO expansion to the FSU since 1994 was perceived as a threat in Russia's sphere of influence. The Russian answer was the creation of an own regional integration project in the "near abroad" (Hill/Gaddy 2015:35p.).

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[9] All citations of Mangott (2005) and Timmermann (2005) are the author's own translation.

[10] Since Serbia was a former primary ally of Russia in times of the FSU, Russia expected the US to consult Moscow beforehand. These events compromised only recently pacified relations with the US (Hill/Gaddy 2015:32p.).

However, Russia's regional initiative establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was not successful. In context of armed conflicts with Russia in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, the Baltic States and Georgia refused to sign. Moldova and Azerbaijan became only associated members.[11] In this context, the Russian behaviour towards the Baltic States in 1993 bears a resemblance to Ukraine crisis, explaining recent concerns about a Russian invasion in the Baltic States: In reaction to the demand of the UN towards Russia to withdraw former Soviet troops that practically annexed the Baltic states, the Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev declared "Russia's "special responsibility" for protecting Russian language speakers" (Hill/Gaddy 2015:34). A similar argumentation came up again in the recent Ukraine crisis, when Putin stated he would "authorize the use of force to protect Russian speaking residents in Ukraine" (The New York Times 2014). Having been annexed by the USSR during World War II, the Baltic States focused on membership in EU and NATO after the end of communism, instead of joining the CIS.

The EU saw the foundations of EU-Russia relations in Russia's declaration to develop a democratic statehood (Mikhaleva 2005:110, Ведомости Верховного Совета СССР 1991).[12] Supposing Russia's democratisation, the EU's security concerns of the Cold War subsided and Russia's economic transition "to be admitted to the system of world trade" became central in viewpoint of EU (ibid., 111). Based on these assumptions, the agreement on partnership and cooperation was signed in 1994 (Timmermann 2005:206).

However, irritations emerged with the first Russian war in Chechnya 1994-1996:[13] From EU-perspective, Russia's violation of human rights in Chechnya, and similarly in armed conflict with Georgia, caused a "first serious political crisis between Brussels

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[11] The initial foundation CIS was already announced in the declaration on the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 (Ведомости Верховного Совета СССР 1991). Another weakness was that CIS was practically incapable of acting, as it lacked of a common sense regarding structural preconditions and mutual targets. Mutual decisions were practically not implemented. In the long-term, Russia was not capable to enhance the CIS due to a lack economic, financial and military resources (Mangott 2005:76p.).

[12] Democratic declarations were expressed first yet in times of *perestroika* under Mikhail Gorbatshev in 1990 (Сайт Конституций Российской Федераций 1990). They were confirmed in the declaration on the dissolution of the USSR in December 26, 1991 (Ведомости Верховного Совета СССР 1991). The author's own translation.

[13] For Russia under Yeltsin but even more under Putin, Chechnya is a strategically important border region in the Caucasus: with its majority share of Muslim population it is vital for Russia to keep Chechnya within the RF, moreover regarding security in the North Caucasus and domestic unity with other Muslim-populated parts within the RF (Trenin 2005:127).

and Moscow", since Moscow rejected any interference by the EU in internal affairs (Poyraz 2011:151). Moreover, differences in the respective understandings of joint partnership gradually emerged: Russia saw the EU solely in the role of a supportive partner, whereas EU considered Russia adapting the EU's liberal-democratic system of values (Timmermann 2005:206). The confusions manifested in a considerable delay in EU-Russia negotiations: the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was ratified only in 1997.

3.2 DISENCHANTMENT AND COOPERATION

After Yeltsin's resignation and appointment of former Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as president in December 1999, disenchantment evolved: in the light of Russia's economic recover, Putin's new course of strengthening Russia and the EU's increasing security and energy dependence on Russia created a mix of interdependence and geopolitical rivalry for influence in the FSU. Though the official discourse of EU-Russia relations continued cooperation, relations started to oscillate between rapprochement and alienation.

Putin's priority in power was the restoration of the state, combating degeneracy under Yeltsin, to overcome Russia's domestic and economic weakness (Hill/Gaddy 2015:39): Domestically, he intensified the inner discourse on a new Russian self-concept of the "Russian idea". This idea was initiated in the end of the 1990 by the Russian elites in order to mobilize the population in the course of political and economic reforms (Hill/Gaddy 2015:39).[14] In his "Millennium Message", Putin claimed the loss of the Russian status in course of the dissolution when its people were divided on one hand, and the loss of the common values that hitherto had united them, on the other hand (ibid.). Furthermore, he rejected the universal values Russia had adopted after the dissolution of the USSR as not "Russian" and announced the "based on "Russian" values (ibid.): patriotism, collectivism, solidarity and the concepts of a Russian destiny as a great power (*держава*) and *государственничество*. The meaning of the latter might be explained with the primacy of the state and relates to the notions of country of origin (*родина*) and Mother Russia (*Мать Россия*), which has to be protected but not inevitably protects its citizens (ibid.).

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[14] Hill and Gaddy refer to Putin's treatise "Russia on the Threshold of the New Millennium" published two days before Yeltsin's resignation, which they assess as the political mission statement for Putin's system of governance (ibid.). The "Russian idea" was not new, since Yeltsin's government raised the debate on a national idea in the Duma in 1996-97 in order to stabilise Russia within the crisis. Its emphasis on Russian history and culture traces back to a book of the Russian philosopher Igor Chubais, published in the time (ibid., 45pp.).

The "Russian idea" as a foundation for the restoration of the Russian state contains the core aspects of Russian history, language and religion (ibid., 46p.). It is related to the Russian conception of a 'true' Europe that refers not geographically but temporally to a 'real' Europe, imagining Russia as "inheritor of the centuries-long European Culture" Marakychev 2006:21). Recently, this conception recurs in the new Russian soft power approach of the 'Russian world', emphasized in context of Ukraine crisis (see 3.3).

Another strategy for inner stabilisation was Putin's determined action against Chechen separatists in the second Chechen war in 1999. Poyraz (2011:154) states that Putin's reaction to the desire of the Russian population for a strong and secure Russian state supported his appointment as president. Accordingly, the *Russian Federation National Security Doctrine*, ratified in 2000, targeted the fight against terrorism. Moreover, it declared Russia's status as a great power, claiming full participation in the international community (Russian Foreign Ministry 2000).

Russia's repeated human right violations in Chechnya reawakened irritation on the EU's side. However, partnership with Russia remained a priority for the EU. Thus, the EU pragmatically decided to follow a double-track strategy (Poyraz 2011:153): to combine addressing issues such as Chechnya with continued efforts in building an effective relationship based on values and cooperation. This was later criticised as a justification for inaction and appeasement policy (ibid.).[15]

Economically, Russia under Putin recovered in the period from 1999-2008: the rising price for oil and gas enabled Russia to strengthen the domestic and economic sphere. Putin's emphasis on rebuilding reserves was successful (Hill/Gaddy 2015:86p.). Putin envisioned Russia as a modern power: technologically and economically on the rise, independent and with influence, actively shaping the new international order as a global player (Trenin 2005:131). Particularly fostering the Russian modernisation process, Putin was committed to continue cooperation with the EU as pivotal partner for Russian trade relations. Hence, (Poyraz, 154).

Notwithstanding, Russia's behaviour towards the EU became ambivalent with Putin in power: yet as a Prime Minister, Putin rejected the "*General strategy of EU for Russia*" in 1999. The strategy declared shared values in terms of democracy and the rule of law as "enshrined in the common heritage of the European civilization" (European

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[15] In the case of the second Chechen war, the EU considered to exert economic pressure for the aim of political influence on Russia by reducing TACIS, but practically not realised it (Mikhaleva 2005:116p.).

Council 1999). Conversely, Putin presented the *Medium-term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000-2010.*[16] Similarly to the Russian *National Security Doctrine*, the document revealed Russia's orientation: to regain influence and recognition in the FSU and as a world power. Irritation turned to disenchantment for EU: Russia interpreted partnership with the EU pragmatically regarding economic and technical aspects of modernisation, whereas the EU's emphasis on shared democratic values were practically not of importance (Timmermann 2005:207p.). However, the EU avoided to risk stable relations with Russia and did not insist on the requirements according to its normative agenda (Mikhaleva 2005:116p.).[17]

In this context, a "power dialogue" between Russia and EU began (Mikhaleva 2005): Russia demanded mutual relations at eye level instead of asymmetric "one-way influence assumed in EU policies towards Russia" (Makarychev 2006:16). Likewise, the EU started to perceive the necessity to keep Russia in a stable partnership in favour of security in Europe (Mikhaleva 2005:116). Simultaneously, against all "ideological alienation", EU-Russia relations intensified during Putin's first term as president (Timmermann 2005:203). Since Russia was not willing to join the ENP, an alternative path was chosen:[18] in 2003, the Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) replaced the Council on Cooperation established in 2001. Moreover, four common spaces of cooperation were established: a Common Economic Space, a Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, a Common Space of External Security and a Common Space of Research and Education (Timmermann 2005:211p., European Council 2003a). During these negotiations, different positions occurred: EU continued emphasising a discussion of values and frozen conflicts. However, Russia insisted on focusing on the economic, educational and cultural sphere and refused any interference into Russian inner affairs. Finally, Putin asserted pressure by casting doubt on his participation at The Hague Summit in 2004. The EU instantly turned on focusing a pragmatic task-oriented common strategy and agenda (ibid, 212.).

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[16] Main targets of the strategy: 1) Support of Russia's national interests; repositioning in European and global context; establishment of a collective European security-system; 2) the EU's economic and administrative support for developing a Russian social market economy based on fair competition; 3) further development of a democratic state rule of law (Mikhaleva 2005:115, Timmermann 2005:207pp.). Unfortunately, the original document of the Russian Federation is not anymore available, since the link expired (European Union 2015a).

[17] The divergence of interests practically affected the implementation of agreements regarding their outcomes. Thus, partnership and democratisation remained rhetoric (Mikhaleva 2005:116, Timmermann 2005:207).

[18] With the creation of the Four Common Spaces instead of joining the ENP, Russia consolidated its path of exceptionalism in EU-Russia relations (Makarychev 2006).

At the same time facing new challenges prior to EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Strategy (ENP) in 2004, the European Council started to consider Russia as a "major factor in our security and prosperity" (European Council 2003b:10pp.). The EU's self-perception shifted towards the role of a global power: it reinforced its self-conception based on the principle of a shared 'normative' identity (Ghazaryan 2014:6).[19] Promoting democracy in order to establish a "world of well-governed democratic states" became a major EU-objective for international security prevention (European Council 2003b). Russia reacted with distrust, considering that the EU was intruding Russia's geopolitical sphere of interest in the FSU. Eventually, the EU's strive for democratic values in EU-Russia relations was undermined due to security concerns and the EU's increasing dependence on Russia's energy supply (Mikhaleva 2005:114pp.).

During Putin's second term, EU-Russia relations turned towards alienation due to the rise of nationalist and authoritarian tendencies in Russia, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Georgian-Russian war: Since relations with Ukraine was first priority for Russia, EU-Russia relations became tensed with the Orange Revolution in 2004, by which Ukraine explicitly turned towards EU (Hill/Gaddy 2015:261). Russia alleged the West to detach Ukraine from Russian ties by financial support of Ukrainian organisations and to assert Western influence in Russian institutions.[20] In turn, Putin supported the founding of nationalist oriented youth movements such as *Nashi* and started to restrict Western democratic institutions located in Russia (ibid., 434p., Mikhaleva 2005:114). In his speech in Munich in 2007, Putin underpinned Russia's increasing alienation with Western democratic values: Western financial help of non-governmental organisations in Russia was perceived as interference into inner affairs (Putin 2007).

When Russia's economic growth enabled Moscow to settle its international debts and achieving solvency in 2006. Hence, there was no more justification for the Western financiers to assert pressure on Russia in political issues. Putin had achieved his target of political sovereignty (Hill/Gaddy 2015:317). For Putin, sovereignty is related

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[19] ENP was initially launched to bridge the dividing line, which emerged due to the "inclusion-exclusion-dilemma" in the course of EU enlargement (Ghazaryan 2014:2pp.).

[20] Though Russia perceived the Georgian Rose Revolution in 2003 similarly, Ukraine was of greater importance for Russia, as it is perceived strongly related to Russia and borders on the EU (Hill/Gaddy 2015:306).

to complete independence and freedom to manoeuvre.[21] Under the new conditions of independence he introduced the concept of "sovereign democracy", which emphasises the independent Russian state and its single importance. (ibid., 317). This concept traces back to the tsarist idea of autocracy according to the *Uvarov doctrine* announced in 1833, shaping an "Official Nationality" based on orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality (ibid., 64).[22] As it promotes the unique Russian culture and history, Putin continued his campaign according to his millennium message, in order to strengthen the population's loyalty towards the state. Finally, considering first stirrings of economic crisis, Russia pursued to enter international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and to diversify relations with non-Western countries, for instance, with China (ibid. 319).

Though the EU was aliened by the Russian course towards authoritarianism and nationalism, preserving stable relations with Russia remained first priority (Timmermann 2005:216). This was mainly for security reasons considering the new geopolitical situation of EU after enlargement. Due to the latter, the EU's decision-making processes became more complex, entailing a paralysing tendency in the external representation of EU interests (Mikhaleva121p.).

Under Medvedev as president, negotiations of a Partnership of Modernisation (P4M) raised new optimism in the EU (David/Romanova 2015:6): since negotiations considered normative aspects such as democracy, rule of law and respect to open-market economics, the EU saw Russia returning to rapprochement (European Council 2010). The point of return emerged when the Russian economy declined in 2008, due to the oil price (Medvedev 2009). Though Putin was pursuing the modernisation process pushed in the first decade after transition, domestic affairs and the diversification of the Russian economic sphere had dropped behind foreign policies. Realising this, Putin envisioned a modernisation agenda, which was then carried out by Medvedev.[23]

To foster domestic economic and technical advance, Russia required external trade and investment partners. Consequently, the P4M as a follow-up of the expiring PCA

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[21] This explains why Putin avoids alliances such as ENP, since he sees them as limiting state sovereignty. Consequently, Russia requires a minimum of obligations in any kind of institutional arrangements (Hill/Gaddy 2015:318).

[22] Uvarov, minister of education in times of imperial Russia under Nicholas I, introduced the doctrine in 1833. Its reformulation as a "sovereign democracy" under Putin was initially termed by a member of his administration, Vladislav Zurkov (ibid.,68).

[23] Putin as Prime minister continued key strategic planning and goal setting, whereas Medvedev as president was rather fulfilling an executive function (Hill/Gaddy 2015:201).

emphasised relations with the EU a major partner for trade and investment, besides the US (Freire/Simão 2015:127pp.).[24]

Until the P4M was announced in 2010, certain events hampered EU-Russia relations again: Since Russia aimed at global competitiveness to strengthen Russia's position in the international world order, modernisation was closely related to Russian foreign policy (Russian Foreign Ministry 2008). In context of the loss by the dissolution of the USSR from Russian point of view, the Russian Foreign Policy Concept in 2008 rebuffed the monopoly of a "historic West" in global processes and, particularly, the "continual political and psychological policy of "containing" Russia" (ibid.). The international recognition of Kosovo's independence was perceived again as a setback in Russia's international positioning. Furthermore, the offer of NATO-membership to Ukraine and Georgia in the course of NATO expansion to the East made Russia feel vindicated in the perception of a Western threat. In this context and considering EU-enlargement, ENP and EaP, Putin claimed the annexation of Crimea in 2014 a "reasonable act of self-defence" (Hill/Gaddy 2015:265).

In course of the Georgian-Russian war against secessionists in South Ossetia in 2008, Russia instantly recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, the international community did not follow (Kirova 2012:7). In response, the EU did not react directly towards Russia but implemented a policy of non-recognition and engagement, to offer an alternative to Russia as the major partner for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, the policy turned out too weak to rival with Russian influence (ibid.). In order to preserve security in the East of Europe, the EU strived to strengthen political integration of the new neighbours based on the EU-foreign policy approach of shared values: in 2009, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was launched, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

In retrospect, Poyraz (2011:153) stresses the EU's weak reaction regarding Russian conflicts in Chechnya and Georgia as a fatal mistake towards Russia: though Russia regarded the EU stepping into its sphere of influence with EaP and ENP, the EU's repeatedly inconsistent behaviour signalled that the EU would rather not interfere in Russian conflict zones than risk stable relations with Russia. David and Romanova (2015:6) explain this with the EU's enthusiasm in regard to Russia's modernisation

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[24] The P4M agreements with the US included bilateral trade and support to accession to the WTO, the latter backed by the EU as well. However, Russian bilateral relations with the US were disturbed similarly by events that fell into the sphere human rights violations and civil society development, which the US had set as preconditions for partnership towards Russia (Hill/Gaddy 2015:309).

project that was supposed to be a chance for political reforms in Russia. Medvedev underpinned this perception with his strive for strengthening relations for the P4M with his "Go Russia"-speech in 2009 (Medvedev 2009). Negotiations of the P4M resulted in concessions of the EU regarding political demands towards Russia, emphasising a "strategic partnership" based on a "balanced and result-oriented approach" (European Council, 2010).

Though rapprochement was fostered by P4M, EU-Russia relations remained ambivalent. Prior to presidential elections in 2012 and considering the recovery of the Russian economy according to the oil price, the dilemma for the EU continued: weather to insist on its normative agenda as a precondition for cooperation and risk stable relations with Russia, or to focus on pursuing pragmatically its interests (Barysch 2011:5). Continuing a double-track strategy, efforts for rapprochement manifested with the German impulse known as the Meseberg initiative in 2010, taken up positively by Russia on one hand.[25] However, it was blocked on EU-level due to disunity questioning the committee in context of NATO and NATO-Russia council. Simultaneously, the EU engaged in fostering democracy in the East by creating the EU-Russia civil society forum and European Endowment for Democracy (EED) in 2011, suspiciously watched by Russia (ibid.).[26]

3.3 CONFRONTATION: TOWARDS UKRAINE CRISIS

Russia perceived the EU's foreign policy-turn towards geostrategic security manifested by ENP and EaP to be evermore assertive. Since the EU was challenging Russian influence in the East, EU-Russia relations became gradually confrontational, marking a peak with the Ukraine crisis.

At the end of Medvedev's term of presidency, internal and economic challenges shaped Russia's policy: Domestically, Russia underwent a time of unrest prior to Putin's return as president. Public protest against fraudulent parliamentary elections backed by broad social media 2.0 mobilisations in December 2011 was unexpected for Putin. When Putin's public ratings dropped simultaneously, he was struggling to manage election campaign in order to get re-elected in 2012 (Hill/Gaddy 2015:228). Economically, due to the oil price stagnation, Russia was not able to continue

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[25] The Meseberg initiative suggested to establish a conflict resolution committee involving Russia, in order to solve conflict in Transnistria. This was appreciated by Russia as an acknowledgement of Russia in the international community and strengthening Russia's role as a peacemaker (Barysch 2011:5).

[26] The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) is not yet active in Russia: besides countries of the Far East it includes Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia.

economic growth. Though Russia withstood the economic crisis of 2008-09, Moscow was concerned about the global economic challenges in the light of debt crisis in Greece and turned towards an economic policy as a priority (ibid., 246pp.).

Besides efforts to strengthen the domestic markets, the emphasis of pursuing economic advance continued to be in the international sphere of Russian politics. In 2012, Russia announced to enlarge the former Customs Union with Kazakhstan and Belarus to a Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in the FSU (Emerson 2014:5).[27] The sudden Russian foreign policy turn irritated on-going negotiations on a free trade area between EU and Russia, particularly, as the Eurasian Union was planned to comprise quite restrictive international trade regulations. Consequently, EU-Russia negotiations were halted. However, Russia succeeded accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012 after many years of negotiations (Bildt 2015:6).

When Russia prolonged the modernisation agenda with the Russian Foreign Policy Concept in 2013, the EU returned to optimism, as it prioritised relations with the EU (David/Romanova 2015:2). Yet with Putin back in office, modernisation shifted towards an "authoritarian modernisation" according to Putin's vertical-power approach (Freire and Simão 2013:130). The trend of diminishing progress in the domestic modernisation process continued, whereas Russia pushed its international repositioning by integrating the former Soviet space, particularly Ukraine (ibid., Russian Foreign Ministry 2013).

Likewise, the EU watched an increase of nationalism and further deviation from the EU normative agenda (Makarychev/Sergunin 2013:314). Since Russia strives for equality with Europe and for compensating Russian weakness as a nation, a Russian civilisational discourse evolved, which emphasises "belongingness to a civilisation as a key criteria of sovereignty" (ibid., 318). The conception of civilisation highlights the spread of Russian-speaking people in the FSU, characterized as the 'Russian world'.[28] This idea of a Russian soft power approach re-conceptualised Putin's aim to

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[27] The EEU was finally established January 1, 2015, meeting its ambitiously regarded deadline with five members (Kazharski 2013:5): Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Though structurally strongly influenced by example of the EU, it is first of all an economic alliance (ibid., 17). On one hand, regimes in Belarus and Kazakhstan signalled reluctance to the political part of the Union, since they fear Russia's hegemony (ibid., 5). On the other hand, the comprehensive integration seems too ambiguous for Russia, as there are certain issues such as labour migration and support of uncompetitive economies such as Belarus (ibid., 6).

[28] 'Russian world' likewise traces back to the essential meaning of belonging to the Russian peasant commune: to respect its intern rules, working together and protecting each other.

strengthen Russian identity, similarly to the 'Russian idea' he had declared in his millennium message (Makarychev 2011b:5p.).[29] This rather propagandistic approach probably serves as a foundation for Putin's recent rhetoric in the recent Ukraine crisis: crucial to the idea of the 'Russian world' is the geography, the language and the religion. Consequently, the 'Russian world' would be located everywhere, where Russians are residing. However, the centre of the 'Russian world' is seen in the three Slavic nations Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (Maliukevičius 2013:87).

In this context, a EU-Russian geostrategic struggle for influence in the common neighbourhood, primarily Ukraine, erupted: in 2013, prior to EaP Summit in Vilnius Russia aggressively attempted to dissuade Armenia, Ukraine and Georgia from signing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU. Aiming at convincing them to join the planned Eurasian Union instead, Ukraine was pivotal for Russia since Putin considers Ukraine as the "birthplace of the Russian state" (Hill/Gaddy 2015:362). By creating a "zero-sum choice"-scenario by trade embargoes and information campaigns and offering significant financial help and reduction of oil price, Russia achieved to convince Ukraine (Emerson 2014).[30] Eventually, only Moldova and Georgia signed DCFTA.

Vilnius-summit marked a considerable shift in the EU-policy concept: In contrast to the previous "Russia first philosophy", the EU turned towards a geostrategic orientation by bringing the common neighbours closer to the EU's normative agenda (Makarychev/Devyatkov 2014:1). As a result, a geopolitical EU-centric strategy emerged quite similar to the "Russian-centric Eastern Policy", as Makarychev and Devyatkov stress (ibid.).

In the aftermath of Vilnius, events rapidly turned to Ukraine crisis: Russia's persuasive methods and pressure in terms of the Ukrainian energy debts caused Yanukovich's breakaway from EU negotiations (Hill/Gaddy 2015:364, European Union 2015b). Vehement mass protest in Kiev, known as EuroMaidan, claimed pro-European values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights and "decent governance" (Emerson 2014:9). However, protests were harshly repressed by

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Disunity or expulsion from the commune was a worse case scenario in earlier times (Hill/Gaddy 2015:266).

[29] Monaghan (2013:5pp.) suggests to term Russian soft power rather "soft strength": the Russian notion of soft power differs from the Western understanding, since Russia understands soft power as a mean to promote Russian culture and language, and to protect Russia from "soft attacks" (ibid., 7).

[30] Armenia was similarly convinced to follow Russia, due to Russian gas dependency, military presence and the conflict with Azerbaijan (Bildt 2015:7).

Yanukovich administration. In spring 2014, tensions suddenly turned to armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, culminating in annexation of Crimea in February 2014.

After Yanukovich's fleeing, Putin declared the new president Petro Poroshenko and his interim government illegal. He instantly took the advantage from the announcement of Russian as the second official language by the interim government: Denouncing the government as "a band of xenophobic, anti-Semitic extremists", he declared it a threat against the Russian speaking ethnic and religious minorities (Hill/Gaddy 2015:365).[31] Claiming historic roots in Crimea and the Donbas, Putin's narrative of Novorossiya and the need to protect the Russian-speaking population against a fascist trend in Ukraine strengthened the Russian nationalist discourse (ibid.).[32] Though Russia's accusations lacked actual evidence, Russia extended its military action to the Donbas in April 2014.

EU-Russia relations turned towards an "arena of geopolitical battle between Russia and the EU/the West" (David/Romanova 2015:3): The EU instantly froze negotiations on the PCA replacement and visa regime, banned alleged supporters of the Crimean annexation and froze their assets. The EU-Russia Summit scheduled for June 2014 was cancelled. The shooting down of the Malaysian Airline in pro-Russian controlled Ukrainian territory in July 2014 marked another peak of tensions between Russia and Ukraine. In response to the EU's threats of sanctions, Russia hindered investigations by OSCE (ibid.). The ceasefires, agreed in Minsk mediated by OSCE in September 2014 and in February 2015 mediated by EU representatives, were repeatedly violated. When negotiations in Minks turned out to be fruitless similarly to the cases of Georgia and Chechnya before, the EU's soft power approach in EU-Russia relations started to be intensively debated. The decision whether to invite Putin to the EU summit in Riga in May 2015 was challenged within the EU and finally rejected with the claim that Russia should acknowledge international law in Ukraine.

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[31] The accusation of fascism refers to the Russian concept of *Europeaness*, introduced in Putin's first term of presidency in order to reconstruct Russian identity: the ideological concept of antifascism was initially a core conception of identity in the Soviet empire. It based on the idea of a 'true Europe' and certain core European values, described in 3.1, that have to be preserved. Under Putin, the concepts of antifascism, sovereign democracy and, foremost, the 'Russian World' became central for Russia's soft power approach (Maliukevičius 2013:85p.).

[32] Novorossiya was a territory conquered by the Russian Empire from the Ottomans in the 18th century. It covers a large territory of today's Ukraine, with pivotal relevance to Russian security policy: access to the Black Sea, preservation of Crimea as a base of the Russian fleet, and the extension of Russian borders towards the West up to Romania and Moldova, including Transnistria into Russian territory (Basora/Fisher 2014).

Mearsheimer (2014) argues that Ukraine-crisis was not a surprise: EU and NATO enlargement in the FSU appear as threats and main argument for Russia's reaction in the Ukraine crisis. A "Europeanized" Ukraine in the Russian 'front yard' would weaken Russia's position in Europe and make it vulnerable to Western influences (ibid.). In the same moment, Crimean annexation helped Putin to increase his domestic popularity, as it distracts the Russian population from inner economic problems. Accompanied with the increased nationalist discourse, central control over dissent and media manipulation, Moscow's course seems to aim at maintaining the elite's positions, as Flenley (2015:23) argues.

From the viewpoint of security, Ukraine functions as a buffer zone for both sides. Russia is strongly focused on preserving Russian interests, whereas the EU's motives seem to focus on balancing out Russian power interests in the EU-Russian competition for influence in the region. In fact, by blocking NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia, Russia marked "red lines" that the West ought not to cross (Makarychev/Sergunin 2013:317).

In the light of Ukraine crisis, EU-Russian relations are under high scrutiny: they dropped far below original expectations and presumptions according to PCA in the 1990s, since they are challenged by the recent Ukraine crisis. The EU ultimately decided sanctions against Russia in the course of events in Ukraine. In March 2015, the European Parliament declared Russia a challenge for the EU, questioning the strategic partnership with Russia at all:

> „Points to the considerable challenges posed by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the continuing military involvement in eastern Ukraine; stresses that this policy of aggression is a continuation of Russia's slide towards authoritarian rule, with a worsening human rights situation inside the country; stresses that Russia is now a 'strategic challenge' for the EU, and no longer complies with strategic partnership criteria;" (European Parliament 2015a)

Simultaneously, EaP Summit in Riga confirmed the EU's new course of a creating a common ground based on the EU's normative agenda in the EU's new neighbourhood (European Council 2015).[33] However, similar to ENP, the EaP significantly heated up rivalry with Russia in the region (Mehlhausen 2015). Mehlhausen stresses that in order to increase its effectiveness in the region towards cooperation with Russia, EaP would be better off by focusing on good governance instead of democratisation (ibid.).

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[33] In Riga, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were represented (ibid.).

Makarychev and Devyatkov (2014:4p.) outline two scenarios for EU and Russia: either a 'great power management' evolves, or the EU would resort to power balancing strategies by dissociating FSU countries from Russian influence. Both options are unlikely: Russia's Soviet heritage in the FSU keeps certain FSU countries in adherence of its influence, partly backed by oil dependency on the one hand. On the other hand, the EU distinctly differs in its political structure as an entity of states compared to Russia in terms of great power status. The EU's weaknesses manifests in the EaP similarly to EU-Russia relations: for instance in the case of DCFTA, the internal lack of unity within EU impedes it to act swiftly and consistently in urgent foreign affairs, in contrast to Russia's short-term actions under use of pressure (ibid.). Similarly, the question whether to invite authoritarian regimes such as Azerbaijan and Belarus to the Riga Summit was solved with inconsistency: Belarus was sanctioned, whereas Azerbaijan not (Kostanyan 2015).

Finally, interdependence appears as the key motive for the EU and Russia to keep strategic partnership (David/Romanova 2015:4): in terms of energy, trade and modernisation on one hand, and geopolitical competition and security in the shared neighbourhood on the other hand. Hence, the EU sees stable relations with Russia as a precondition for stability and peace in Europe. Mehlhausen (2015) recommends a shift in the EU's focus from democratisation towards good governance in the FSU. Moreover, he stresses the importance for the EU carefully to assume carefully Putin's ultimate objectives in order to choose an appropriate strategy – one that would strengthen the EU's "resilience" for cases such as Ukraine (ibid.). Likewise, the EU needs to work out its weaknesses in terms of unity in order to react instantly, and most important, consistently. Otherwise, the EU would risk to prove Poyraz' critical argument to be correct, that the EU is "likely further to contribute to the construction of a less democratic and more totalitarian state in Russia" (Poyraz 2011:153).

3.4 CONCLUSION

The dynamics of EU-Russia relations over time elucidate how differences and perceptions between Russia and EU towards each other were swayed in accordance to certain factors: Initially, the EU-Russia discourse was predefined by Russia's democratic declarations of democratisation with the dissolution of the USSR. Later confirmed by the PCA, it adopted certain key concepts according to the EU's normative agenda, to which Russia was supposed to adapt to.

The rapprochement of EU-Russia relations in the 1990s was strongly conditioned by Russia's economic and political weakness in the course of transition. When Russia

became economically stronger under Putin, Russia perceived the dependence from the EU as gradually decreasing. Russia started to be openly reluctant to implement transition according to the key concepts in the way the EU expected it. Gradually, a different understanding of the concepts became apparent. The EU perceived Russia's reluctance and Russia's behaviour in the context of the Chechen wars and the Russian-Georgian war was evermore assertive. Conversely, Russia perceived EU and NATO enlargement in the FSU as an increased threat.

As a result, EU-Russia relations shifted towards a geostrategic power struggle, which manifested itself in the competing neighbourhood policies – the EaP and ENP and, in turn, Putin's integration project of the EEU. The power struggle appears to be grounded in a normative rivalry, which came to a peak with the Ukraine crisis. Up till the crisis, EU-Russia relations seemed relatively stable, due to interdependence in regard to security and economic issues. However, Russia repeatedly challenged key concepts of EU-Russia relations in their meaning of the EU's normative agenda.

Notwithstanding, the initial key concepts of EU-Russia relations, set in PCA, are still (re-) produced in official EU-Russia discourse. Their meaning in the Russian and the EU's readings will be 'unpacked' with the methodology of Laclau and Mouffe's conception of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers* in chapter 4.

4. ANALYSIS: CONTESTING KEY CONCEPTS OF EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS

The chapter elaborated analysis of key concepts in EU-Russia relations in official documents of EU-Russia relations. With the methodological approach of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers*, the concepts will be "unpacked" in regard to their meaning for EU and for Russia. The choice of the concepts refers to the Copenhagen Criteria, since they build the core foundation of EU-Russia discourse.

Democracy as the essential concept of governance in EU-Russia discourse will be analysed first. Then the set of *multipolarity* and *multilateralism* will be examined, since Russia's reading of multipolarity is strongly related to the Russian understanding of democracy. Subsequently, the *rule of law* will be analysed, particularly in respect to international law in case of Ukraine crisis. Finally, *modernisation* and its relevance regarding future prospects for EU-Russia relations in the light of Ukraine crisis will be examined.

4.1 DEMOCRACY

Initially, democracy as an objective in EU-foreign policy was affirmed in the Treaty on European Union (EU Treaty) and the Treaty on Establishing the European Community (EC Treaty) (European Union 2015c):[34] In 1993, democracy was adopted in the political of the Copenhagen Criteria, as precondition to EU-accession for former Soviet countries. Thus, democracy significantly gained relevance as a *nodal point* in EU-discourse.

Only in 1997, the EU recognized democracy as founding principle with the Amsterdam Treaty (ibid. 98). In the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the EU proclaimed its "general mandate to promote democracy abroad" (ibid., 15).[35] Ghazaryan illuminates that both, the legitimacy of the normative identity of EU as European and the promotion of democracy, were derived by the fact that these 'founding' values are rooted in Europe.

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[34] Article 11 EU declares the development and consolidation of democracy and rule of law, as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Further, the EU declared the "safeguarding of 'common values'", albeit their concrete meaning remained rather vague (Ghazaryan 2014:14). Democracy in EU-foreign relations has the function of a value in terms of an ethic attitude, of a principle in terms of legal norms and of an objective for concrete results of actions (ibid. 16p.).

[35] In the Lisbon Treaty, the former 'founding' principles have been reformulated as founding 'values': human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights including minorities (Ghazaryan 2014:16).

The democratic base of EU-Russia relations is mirrored in PCA in 1997, setting democracy as a referential point for EU-Russia relations in terms of a *nodal point*. [36] In the Joint Declaration of EU/Russia Summit in 2000, the EU signalled Russia to intensify domestic democratic progress in the course of modernisation, claiming the EU's role as a global actor:

> "The conditions are favourable: the European Union is equipping itself to play its full role on the international stage, in particular by establishing a European security and defence policy, and the Russian Federation is engaged in internal reforms in order to consolidate the democratic rule of law and the modernisation of its economy." (European Commission 2000)

As in 3.2 examined, the importance of EU values for joint relations was increasingly recognized with the turn of Russia's politics under Putin on one hand, and increasing security concerns of the EU on the other hand: In 2003, the European Council included Russia as a "major factor in our security and prosperity". In the same document, the EU declared the target to foster democracy in order to establish a world of well-governed democratic states as an objective for international security prevention (European Council 2003b:10pp.).

However, EU-Russia relations developed towards a pragmatic middle ground over time. This became manifest in the Joint Statement on the Partnership for Modernisation in 2010:

> „The European Union and Russia, as long-standing strategic partners in a changing multipolar world, are committed to working together to address common challenges with a balanced and result-oriented approach, based on democracy and the rule of law, both at the national and international level." (European Council 2010)

What is the EU's understanding of democracy? Since democracy is featured as a system of governance and a means to ensure legitimacy, Ghazaryan defines democracy in terms of the EU as a:

> "[...] multi-level system of governance, which represents the will of the peoples of Europe to be governed also at the European level in a way that would lead to the acceptance of such governance" (ibid., 99).

By this definition, Ghazaryan underpins the interrelation of democracy and legitimacy of EU governance. Since the EU is accused for democratic deficits on supranational level, Ghazaryan stresses the EU's incapability to realize traditional democratic

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[36] The EU implemented democracy as a PCA-objective in Article 1, as a principle in Article 2, and as part of political dialogue in Article 6 (European Union 1997).

discourse in terms of majoritarian practices at the EU-level (ibid).[37] As outlined in 2.3, the weakness of EU hegemonic sector (representing *universality*) in EU-Russia relations derives from its character as a democratic system of nation states (*particular forces*) in terms of *universality*. The enlargement of the EU and partnerships such as ENP, EaP or P4M (*the extension of the chain of equivalences*) weakens the links to its original particular meaning. As Ghazaryan terms it, the EU faces "complications undermining the 'output' legitimacy, and thereby the capacity of the EU as a problem-solver" (ibid., 101). Consequently, normative concepts probably approach the status of *empty signifiers*.

Russia's introduction of democracy as a *nodal point* begins in times of *glasnost*, yet under Soviet rule: Russia declared to establish a "state of law" (*правовое государство*) in 1990 (Сайт Конституций Российской Федераций 2015).[38] The declaration on the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 confirmed the "democratic development of the state" (Ведомости Верховного Совета СССР 1991).[39] Under Yeltsin, Russia's transition towards democracy remained rather rudimentary, characterized in academic discourse as "guided democracy" (Maliukevičius 2013:86). However, Russia's willingness to adopt EU norms and standards focused on economic aspects, whereas incentives of the EU regarding the normative political were rather ignored (Timmermann 2005:207).

Over time, Russia's different understanding of democracy as a concept became visible. Putin introduced the notion of "sovereign democracy" that can be seen as a new *nodal point* in discourse, emphasizing Putin's idea of the strong state (Hill/Gaddy 2015:317).[40] The commitment to democracy continued rather rhetorically, underpinning the universalizing effects on democracy as a *nodal point* and its loss in value towards an *empty signifier*. This is mirrored in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2013: Russia declares its commitment to 'universal democratic values' in Article 39 (Russian Foreign Ministry 2013). However, democracy is related to Russia's economic interests: Russia's economic and technological modernisation

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[37] The debate of the EU's democratic deficits is divided in two strands: the 'input' democracy and the external representation of democracy respectively the 'output' democracy (ibid.).

[38] The author's own translation.

[39] The author's own translation. Hill and Gaddy (2015:52) suggest the translation of „law-based state" instead of "constitutional democracy", since the former underlines the Russian idea of the strong state, "standing above any party or other institutional entity, with rights guaranteed by the state itself" to which Putin later referred (ibid., 53, 317).

[40] Putin termed the approach of a "power vertical" (Maliukevičius 2013:78).

and, internationally, the establishment of a global equitable and democratic trade (ibid.).[41]

Makarychev (2011b) stresses Russia's inconsistent and interest-driven application of democracy: aiming at voice as a global power in the international community Russia applies democracy to the Kremlin's idea of "international democracy", demanding a "democratic system of international relations based on collective decision-making in addressing global issues" (ibid., 4). However, violations of democratic principles such as human rights violations raise questions on Russia's reading of democracy (Monaghan 2013:6). Makarychev (2011b) concludes that democracy in Russian reading is stronger associated with security than with democratic development, human rights protection and the like, as the Western understanding implies (ibid., 4). Putin's critique on foreign financial support of non-governmental organisations in Russia, as mentioned in 3.3, underpins this assumption:

> "Financing from foreign governments, including within governmental campaigns, proceeds through non-governmental organisations. [...] Because there is no democracy here, there is simply one state exerting influence on another." (Putin 2007)

Moreover, Makarychev (2011b:3p.) remarks Russia's use of democracy as a concept depending from Russian interests: Russia demands or disregards compliance with democracy.[42] Russia's declaration in Article 51 of the Russian Foreign policy Concept to support separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia "as modern democratic states" practically appears as a reframing of the term *democracy* in the light of Russia's target to gain recognition as a global power (Russian Foreign Ministry 2013).

As Makarychev (2011b) points out, *democracy* in Russian reading correlates with the Russian concept of *multipolarity*. Further elaboration below will reveal the coherence of the concepts in terms of *empty signifiers* in EU-Russia relations.

4.2 MULTILATERALISM AND MULTIPOLARITY

Multipolarity is a concept of diplomacy in IR, which relates to the international system. By definition, multipolarity describes the character of global power distribution as a "structural-descriptive measurement word for the existence of several centres of

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[41] Russian Foreign Ministry (2013): Article 4.b) and 33.

[42] For instance, Ukraine's intention to enter NATO was claimed as undemocratic, whereas the authoritarian Belarus-Regime was not criticised (Makarychev 2011b:3p.).

power, multiple 'poles', in the international system" (Scott 2013:30).[43] Multipolarity is to distinguish from *multilateralism*: multilateralism is likewise an IR term of diplomacy, but marks a process of action that involves several collaborating states regardless their respective scale (ibid.).

Mangott (2005:94) outlines that *multipolarity* was already an ideological concept of Russian Foreign policy already under Yeltsin – or in terms of Laclau and Mouffe, a *nodal point* in Russian discourse. Russia intended to counter US unipolar dominance in the aftermath of the Cold War but likewise pursued economic interests. However, Russia's multipolarity approach was perceived as a mean of pressure on the West regarding political, military and economic decisions. Another aim of this strategy was the strengthening of Russia's position as a great power. Mangott concludes that the concept of multipolarity did not work out: economically weakened post-Cold War Russia was not yet an attractive partner for diversified partnerships with non-Western countries such as China or India (ibid.).

For the understanding of *multipolarity* in EU-Russia relations today, a core difference between EU and Russia plays a crucial role: Russia and EU are different types of power. As a supranational entity that unifies a number of nation states, the EU combines institutional and productive power, Makarychev and Sergunin (2013) explain. Striving to integrate all EU-members and partners under the roof of shared values, the EU rather applies to the strength of *multilateralism*. Implemented by the European Strategy, this concept is emphasized to foster collaboration in the international system through coordinating the behaviour among several states by shared principles (Scott 2013:32). In terms of a *nodal point* in EU-discourse, the EU proclaims multilateralism in context of global security and prosperity:

> „In a world of global threats, global markets and global media, our security and prosperity increasingly depend on an effective multilateral system. The development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order is our objective." (European Council 2003b:9)

Accordingly, relations with the EU presume *normative unification* by accepting EU-values, which are pivotal for the EU's soft power approach in foreign policy (Makarychev/Sergunin 2013:318).

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[43] In long-term, *multipolarity* succeeded the *bipolar* Cold War-scenario with the USSR and the US as poles of power, whereas *unipolarity* terms the hegemony of only one pole of power. In academic research the only unipolar scenario in contemporary history is widespread seen in the role of the US during the immediate post-Cold War period (Scott 2013:30).

Barroso (2010:2) reaffirms the *multilateralist* approach considering the EU's target "to build order and governance in a multipolar world". The EU's idea of being an actor of global governance bases on the idea of legitimacy by integration on a global scale:

> "In the 21st century, the legitimacy of global governance depends on integrating rising powers into shared efforts at international leadership. Again in Europe, we have a long history of sharing political leadership with rising countries. It is what happens every time the Union enlarges to integrate new members." (Barroso 2010:6)

Barroso appreciates the original meaning of multipolarity as a mechanism that limits hegemonic or imperial tendencies by distributing power.[44] Likewise, Barroso warns against the potential of multipolar strategies if they would be used for expansion and competition – a scenario that would create critical conditions for preventing peace and stability in Europe and the EU:

> „At the risk of oversimplifying, one can say that a paradox lies at the heart of modern European history: attempts to create a multipolar balance of power, in order to avoid the emergence of imperial or hegemonic states, ended up with violent competition between great powers." (ibid., 3)

Consequently, Barroso sees multipolarity rather as a necessary condition for global multilateralism, but distinctly underpins multilateralism as key concept for a global balance of power (ibid.,4).

Since Russia focuses on great power management according to multipolarity in order to be accepted as an equal power in the international system, Russia's reference to the concept of multilateralism as a *nodal point* in official EU-Russia discourse turns multilateralism rather towards the status of an *empty signifier* (Russian Foreign Ministry 2013, Putin 2007).[45] Russia's tendency towards an exceptionalist position in EU-foreign relations illuminates this (Makarychev 2006): being "just" part of a multilateral community seems rather to be incompatible with Russia's claim of being a great power. Actually, Russia prefers bilateral agreements with single EU-member states than with EU as a multilateral entity, for instance regarding visa negotiations (Lavrov 2013:8).

Makarychev and Sergunin (2013) characterize Russia's concept of multipolarity as a *normative plurality*: In Russian understanding, the multipolar world is a plurality of normative orders of multiple civilisations that exist in parallel. Hence, all poles of

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[44] Scott (2013) outlines the *realist* origin of *multipolarity* in IR: presuming multiple centres of power in the international system, multiple relationships and partnerships become possible.
[45] This supports the assumption that Russia rhetorically continues to follows Western ideas but internally refers to another understanding of concepts (Makarychev 2011b:3).

power are particular civilisations. Consequently, Russia sees itself as a particular civilisation with a particular cultural profile, a pole of power equal to the others. In this sense, Russia understands multipolarity as democratic, whereas unipolarity is authoritarian (Makarychev 2011b). This conception of multipolarity re-signifies power in the way of a r*ealist* approach, by which Russia also seeks to address non-Western partner: the "ideal of a plurality of power holders" that build equal poles of power in the international system (ibid., 4). Hence, Makarychev suggests terming Russia's demand of a democratic international world order as *democratic multipolarity* (ibid.).

From this perspective, Sergey Lavrov (2013:9) claims a shift of the global power balance that would relativise European hegemony:

> "[...] a new, polycentric system of international relations is emerging, where Europe will no longer play a central role" (ibid.).

He concludes that "unquestionable" and "traditional" concepts and views are undergoing radical change towards a plurality of models, in which the "factor of civilisational identity" would become more prominent (ibid.). Makarychev and Sergunin (2013:318p.) illuminate that the Russian idea of civilisation, which relates to the concept of the 'Russian world', serves as key criteria for sovereignty and, likewise, as a key argument for the expansion of Russia's sphere of influence. Consequently, Russian Foreign Policy focuses at the expansion of influence by strengthening the ties to the Russian-speaking minorities abroad, as it is recently the case in Ukraine:

> „[...] ensuring comprehensive protection of rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad, and promoting, in various international formats, Russia's approach to human rights issues; [...]" (Russian Foreign Ministry 2013)

Makarychev (2011b:4) concludes that mixing the concepts of *democracy* and *multipolarity* bereaves the concepts from their original meaning, rather reducing democracy to the "multiplicity of sovereign states". Furthermore, Makarychev stresses Russia's rapprochement towards non-Western authoritarian regimes by applying the concept of a multipolar world as a plurality of power holders. This leads to the effect that democratic norms and standards become devaluated (ibid.). In conclusion, the concepts democracy and multipolarity appear as *empty signifiers* in the hegemonic game.

4.3 THE RULE OF LAW

The rule of law is a founding principle in Article 6 EU Treaty (European Union

2015c).[46] It belongs to the political of the Copenhagen Criteria, which aims at the stability of institutions (European Commission 2015). Likewise, the rule of law refers to the institutional Copenhagen Criteria, as the latter is concerned with the administrative and judicial implementation of the rule of law (ibid.). Hence, the rule of law is an essential concept within the EU and serves as a *nodal point* in EU-discourse.

In EU-Russia relations, the rule of law was adopted in PCA and reconfirmed in the Joint Declaration of EU/Russia-summit in 2000 as well as in 2010. Nonetheless, "conceptual disagreements" between Russia and the EU became visible, for instance, at EU/Russia-summit in 2011 (Makarychev/Sergunin 2011:2): The EU repeatedly insisted on correct and politically unbiased investigations in the cases of Mikhail Khodorkowsky and Sergey Magnitsky. Furthermore, the EU demanded of Russia to realize the legal aspects of modernisation in terms of an independent judiciary, fight against corruption and strengthening of civil society (ibid.). Flenley (2014:20) illuminates the difficulty to implement the rule of law in Russia: informal rules such as corruption are based on a "culture of informal networks and what is perceived as 'common' practice". This culture is hard to overcome, since personal loyalty often takes precedence over the formal rules, he explains (ibid.). In terms of Laclau and Mouffe's conception, the rule of law as a *nodal point* becomes devaluated towards an *empty signifier* in cases where informal rules predominate formal rules in the frame of legislation.

On international level, the rule of law became an issue, most recently in EU-Russia relations, most recently due to the annexation of Crimea. Aiming at global governance, the EU's conception as a 'normative power' and global actor includes the international promotion of rules based on the rule of law:

> "The European Union is also a rule generator and rule promoter, in domains such as non-discriminatory regulation, fair competition and intellectual property law, particularly in our neighbourhood. By promoting rules at international level the Union also contributes to global governance." (Barroso 2010:6)

Though Russia affirmed the rule of law including international law in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2013, the different understanding becomes apparent regarding the Ukraine crisis. In Article 31, Russia warns against misuse of international law:

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[46] The rule of law is often named simultaneously with democracy in a number of EU-treaties and agreements (European Union 2015c).

> "It is unacceptable that military interventions and other forms of interference from without which undermine the foundations of international law based on the principle of sovereign equality of states, be carried out on the pretext of implementing the concept of "responsibility to protect." (Russian Foreign Ministry 2013)

These claims appears inconsistent with the Russian course of action in Ukraine: firstly, the annexation of Crimea was a conquest of territory within the sovereign state Ukraine, violating the Ukraine's sovereignty. Secondly, Russia later attempted to legitimize the annexation by claiming the need to protect the Russian-speaking minority. However, from the Russian perspective the referendum on the status of Crimea in March 2014 seems to be consistent with the rule of law, according to Article 104 on the implementation of Russia's foreign policy:

> „The consistent implementation of Russia's foreign policy aims to create favourable conditions for the realisation of the historic choice of the peoples of the Russian Federation in favour of the rule of law, democratic society and social market economy." (ibid.)

Having created precedence in Crimea, legitimising it by a referendum only afterwards mirrors the Russian understanding of the rule of law. Besides, Putin's narrative of a 'Russian world' in terms of a Russian soft power approach aims at reaching public support among the Russian-speaking minorities abroad. [47]

The Crimean case is highly debated in International Law: In a declaration in May 2015, the EU claimed human rights abuses in Crimea similar to the human rights violations in the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. Self-critically, the EU concluded the impact of the EU's weak reaction towards the violation of Georgian territory by Russia in 2008, probably having encouraged Russia to risk the violation of international law in Crimea (European Parliament 2015b). Consequently, the EU decided not to acknowledge Crimean annexation, stressing Russia's behaviour in Ukraine as a geostrategic security threat that is challenging post-Cold War European architecture (ibid.).[48]

Feldbrugge (2014) points at a general problem in international law, regarding the lack of regulations for the implementation in concrete cases:

> "The usual situation—when important state interests are at stake—is that there is *no* broad or universal consensus about what international law dictates *in casu.* In

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[47] For the potential of narratives as a strategic mean of power in international diplomacy see Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2014).
[48] In the same document, the EU claims Georgia and Russia as „ineligible" for NATO membership. (ibid.).

other words, the contents of international law cannot be *authoritatively* and *effectively* established in many important cases." (ibid., 97)

In cases of international law, Feldbrugge emphasizes two general preconditions: firstly, a "very broad and preferably universal consensus about its actual content in a specific case" (ibid., 96p.). Secondly, the "'cost'-calculation" for compliance with international law must be acceptable for the state (ibid.).

In case of Crimea, both preconditions are not met (ibid.): there is no consensus, since all parties claim to comply with international law. Secondly, for both parties there is a lot at stake (ibid.). Feldbrugge claims that, if Russia was to withdraw from Crimea, Ukraine would continue to integrate into EU and perhaps into NATO, probably reactivating a Cold War-scenario (ibid.). Feldbrugge criticises Western accusations towards Russia's strives for influence in the FSU, aiming at the restoration of the Soviet Union. Instead, he suggests a stronger awareness of the Russian perspective: the EU and NATO expansions towards the FSU appear as attempts to gain influence in the region.

4.4 MODERNISATION

The concept of *modernisation* corresponds with the economic Copenhagen criteria, which aims at a "functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union" (European Commission 2015).

Initially, modernisation was a guiding concept for economic transition of the former Soviet countries towards a market economy, and for several of them towards European integration. Modernisation is an essential aspect in EU-Russia relations and *nodal point* in EU-Russia discourse. However, the conceptual understanding of modernisation differed since the beginning of EU-Russia relations.

Russia rejected the EU's presupposition of Russia's "Europeanisation" by adopting Western values: as outlined in 3.1, the EU's support was welcome in the economic but not in the political or societal sphere as a "helpful partner in the task of modernisation" (Mikhaleva 2005:116p., Timmermann 2005:208). In contrast, the EU identified modernisation with the task of democratisation (Mikhaleva 2005:116p.): transition in terms of integrating Russia into Europe was indivisibly connected with the political. However, Russia refused a close interpretation of the political and requested an adoption to Russian specific preconditions (Mangott 2005:113pp.). As a result, the

Four Common Spaces in 2003 and the respective action plan in 2004 focused on the establishment of a joint economic space.

The Russian understanding did not change over time, though Medvedev (2009) proclaimed progress in Russian modernisation closely tied to the political:

> „In the twenty-first century, our country once again needs to undergo comprehensive modernisation. This will be our first ever experience of modernisation based on democratic values and institutions. (Medvedev 2009)

However, modernisation under Medvedev practically continued the focus on technological innovation, to increase Russia's global competitiveness. This is mirrored in the Joint Statement on the Partnership for Modernisation in 2010. As outlined in chapter 3, the EU shifted towards a pragmatic approach, making concessions towards Russia's economic emphasis by neglecting the EU's political demands:

> „The European Union and Russia, as long-standing strategic partners in a changing multipolar world, are committed to working together to address common challenges with a balanced and result-oriented approach, based on democracy and the rule of law, both at the national and international level." (European Council 2010)

Hence, the initial meaning of modernisation as a guiding concept in the course of transition towards democracy and European integration shifted towards an *empty signifier*. This tendency was boosted with Putin's return to presidency. Modernisation became a mean for Russia's strengthening as a "contemporary power" in the international system, highly prioritized in the external agenda (Freire and Simão 2013:127, Russian Foreign Ministry 2013). Internal administrative, judicial, military and social reforms were postulated in close relation to foreign policy targets. However, concrete modernisation progress in the domestic sphere was practically neglected (Freire and Simão 2013:127).

Modernisation on the basis of equal relations was an early critical point in EU-Russia relations: criticising the asymmetry of relations, Lavrov (2013:7) questions the EU's insistence on the normative agenda as mutual foundation. He claims mutual respect of interests:

> "We can only achieve a fundamentally new, higher level of partnership if we regard each other as equal partners, respect each other and take into account each other's interests." (ibid.)

Lavrov suggests "strategic trust" as a foundation for joint relations, in order to turn the

"partnership of necessity" towards a "partnership of choice" (ibid.). For instance, Lavrov argues against the Third Energy Package, questioning the coherence in mutual cooperation:

> "[...] it seems that recently our European partners have even somewhat abandoned our common understanding regarding the consistent development of Russia–EU co-operation." (ibid., 7)

Russia is interested in maintaining monopoly in the European Energy market. Since energy trade is the most important sector in Russian economy, Russia opposes the EU's interests in liberalisation of the market (Pominova 2014). Hence, Russia withdrew from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) in 2009. The Third Energy Package (TEP) raised Russia's critique: Lavrov claims that violations of PCA and further agreements with EU-member states by TEP would negatively affect Russian prior investments and Russia's reputation on the markets. Moreover, it would erode trust and damage the foundations for EU-Russian partnership.[49] Conversely, he directly questions EU-power by hinting at the EU-internal discussion about power distribution (Lavrov 2013:7).

Similarly, Lavrov argues regarding negotiations on visa facilitation (Lavrov 2013:8): Lavrov criticises the EU for bringing the question to EU-level of decision, albeit Russia reached consent with certain EU-members at state-level. As a result, the negotiation process stagnated. Lavrov claims the EU to comply with its own principles: according to EU-principles, the EU-apparatus only gets involved in cases when member states cannot achieve their objectives on national level (ibid.).

Both argumentations prove to be shortsighted: as a signatory of ECT, which is in force in parallel with TEP, Russia yet participates in the Charta process. Hence, Moscow might apply to its investment protection mechanism to solve the problem (Pominova 2014:22). Concerning visa-negotiations, Makarychev and Sergunin (2013:324) illuminate the necessity for the EU to regulate movement on its borders, for instance, regarding illegal migration and transborder-organized crime. Accordingly, for the EU the issue is much more than a technical process. Though prolonging the process, the EU demands technical but also political requirements, for instance to cease issuing passports to South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to conform to the process with parallel EU-visa negotiations with EaP members (ibid., 325).

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[49] Pominova clarifies the distinct origin and character of both documents: ECT, which Russia had signed, came into force in the 1990s with a much lower degree of liberalisation. TEP was developed in 2005 with the target to expand EU-energy legislation according to the "acquis communautaire", to reach a distinctly higher degree of liberalisation of the market (ibid., 15).

In conclusion, modernisation in the diverging understanding of EU and Russia turns out as an *empty signifier* in a power struggle in EU-Russia discourse: Russia appears reluctant to the emphasis of political dialogue and democratisation in the course of modernisation since early stages of transition. Russia apparently found an own solution by rhetorically referring to modernisation, picking the meanings of the concept according to interests (Freire and Simão 2015:133).

In academic discourse, modernisation is debated as a key for further relations between Russia and EU in the light of Ukraine crisis: Freire and Simão (2015:130) argue that the EU's shift from the former equation of modernisation with democratisation towards pragmatic targets probably proves its limitedness, since it lacks of a clear strategy for implementation. Regarding recent EU-sanctions towards Russia concerning Ukraine crisis, the authors consider Russia's turn away from the EU as a prioritized partner towards China, for instance, on one hand. On the other hand, they emphasise the potential of interdependence for maintaining relations (ibid., 128pp.). Similarly, David and Romanova (2015:5) emphasize modernisation as a mean for "re-stabilisation" of EU-Russia relations – under the premise of a Russian pragmatic reading. Flenley (2015:23) suggests a middle way, arguing that Ukraine crisis "has set back the possibilities of Russia's modernisation reforms and of cooperation between the EU and Russia on that basis" (ibid.). Hinting at the Russian understanding of modernisation, Flenley stresses Russia's association of the state with freedom. In contrast, the Western liberal idea of freedom focuses on limiting the power of the state (ibid., 17.). Considering modernisation as a *nodal point* in discourse from Russian perspective consequently entails different political implications than the political implications of the concept of modernisation in EU-discourse.

In future prospects, Flenley advises the EU to acknowledge Russia as an equal partner: Since Russia has no intention for EU-accession, the EU cannot oblige Russia to accept the EU's normative agenda as a prerequisite for partnership (ibid.). The EU would need to open up for the joint elaboration of a new concept based on a mutual understanding of modernisation, even if this concept would deviate from EU-norms and values (ibid., 24). Likewise, the Russian modernisation concept, which has focused on foreign policy strategies to reframe Russia as a 'Great Power' and to retain legitimacy, would need a sustainable revision (ibid., 23).

5. Conclusion and future prospects

Minsk II turned out as a watershed in EU-Russia relations, with yet unforeseeable future prospects.

In retrospect, Ukraine crisis was not a surprise. The examination of relations over time showed, that the EU not only failed in expecting Russia's integration into a liberal-democratic post-Cold War Europe. All the more, the EU failed to predict Russia's course properly and to react consistently over a long period, though there were early signs of miscommunication and misperceptions. Striving to overcome Russia's weaknesses of the 1990s, Russia became openly reluctant to fulfil the EU's political demands. Putin's central aim to restore Russia in the Russian reading of the strong sovereign state, (re)constructing a particular Russian national identity, proved to be a challenge of the European normative agenda since the beginning of the millennium.

The EU did not prove a serious actor facing Russia's turn to a hardliner, as it repeatedly reacted weak and inconsistent due to internal incoherence, security issues and interdependence from Russian energy. Eventually, the EU imposed economic and political restrictions against Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Donbas. However, the EU seeks for a peaceful solution in NATO's shadow, since it lacks military forces and fears the outbreak of military conflict in Europe.

From the Russian point of view, the enlargement of the EU, the NATO and the European integration project of ENP and EaP challenged Russia's security and influence in the FSU. Eventually, the EU's negotiation with Ukraine for a joint Association Agreement was the final of triggers for the Ukraine crisis. In parallel, Russia achieved the establishment of the EEU as a counter integration project in the region in January 2015.

Foucault's theoretical framework of 'truth of *power/knowledge*' and *discourse* helped to illuminate the power struggle in EU-Russian discourse, by which the EU's normative agenda as initial common ground of EU-Russia relations is challenged. The Analysis of key concepts in EU-Russia relations, applying to the conception of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers* by Laclau and Mouffe demonstrated that Russia and the EU employ the key concepts differently since the beginning of joint relations. Though the EU already made concessions towards Russia, the underlying core differences in comprehension and in perceptions gradually caused mutual alienation, culminating in the Ukraine crisis.

The crisis revealed, that EU-Russia relations need to re-conceptionalise their common ground: the shared key concepts of the EU's normative agenda turned out as *empty signifiers*, as Russia complies to them different than the EU.

Similar to the conclusions of the academic world, analysis affirms that a re-conceptualisation of modernisation and a focus towards good governance and less explicitly on democratisation would open a path for future prospects in EU-Russia relations. Bargaining of concepts such as democracy and the rule of law is hardly to imagine, since they are the cores of the historical Western European heritage – evermore with actors of authoritarian governance. However, the EU is frequently challenged to open up to comprehend the Russian discourse and to develop a more flexible but consistent approach regarding modernisation towards Russia.

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