

A Systemic Analysis of the Interaction between Russia and the European Union in the Post-Soviet Space

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This article analyzes post-Soviet relations between Russia and the European Union using the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism. It finds that the post-Soviet level of competition between Russia and the EU is higher than required by the international system. The reason is rooted in the influence of a number of internal factors (or intervening variables). Consequently, elites in both Russia and the EU are not able to adequately understand the signals sent by the international system.

There is a wide variety of intervening variables; for example, there are factors caused by the political elites' perceptions of each other's intentions and of the international situation, factors related to inadequate information, factors related to the complex institutional structure of the EU and factors related to domestic political issues. In addition, the current international environment, characterized by a high degree of uncertainty, increases the effects of these intervening variables.

These effects result in inaccurate and incorrect processing of the signals of the international system by Russian and European elites. As a result, a subsystem of international relations has arisen in the post-Soviet space, featuring a highly competitive environment. However, there are only two major actors in the region: Russia and the EU. Small countries are too weak, so must choose to align themselves with one or the other. This causes a rivalry between Russia and the EU for influence on small and medium-sized countries in the post-Soviet space.

Key words: neoclassical realism, international system, subsystem, Russia, European Union, post-Soviet space

Introduction

The post-Soviet space is a vast region that, according to the traditional definition, includes the territories of former Soviet republics. However, in this article the post-Soviet space is understood not as the territories of all former Soviet republics, but of only twelve of them. It excludes the Baltic countries that are now members of the European Union.

The post-Soviet space invariably attracts the attention of politicians, scholars and journalists. It is evident that the interests of many countries of the world are interwoven in this region. But in most cases analysts emphasize only two actors: Russia and the European Union, which is an alliance that integrates the majority of European states.

Unfortunately, until now the relationship between the EU and Russia has been analyzed only from the perspectives of realism (neo-realism) and liberalism (neo-liberalism). Yet these approaches do not reveal the full specificity of Russia — EU relations in the post-Soviet space.

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The analysis in this article thus uses the new theory of neoclassical realism, which should allow the research to produce as fully as possible objective results to help understand the key features of those relations in the post-Soviet space.

The hypothesis of this study is that the level of competition between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space is higher than required by the international system, and that this phenomenon is caused by the fact that, for a number of reasons, the political elites of Russia and the EU do not properly process the signals sent by the international system. As a result, a subsystem of international relations emerges in the post-Soviet space, characterized by a highly competitive environment.

This article first analyzes the key points and propositions of neoclassical realism and, second, attempts to prove this hypothesis. In addition, it outlines a systemic model of Russia – EU interaction in the post-Soviet space. It concludes by discussing the key characteristics of this model and major causalities that contribute to the current development of Russia – EU relations in this region.

Neoclassical realism: the further development of realism

Neoclassical realism is a relatively new theory first formulated by Gideon Rose [1998] in his review of books by Randall Schweller, Thomas Christensen, Fareed Zakaria, William Walford and Michael Brawley. The authors in these books used a similar approach for analyzing subjects of their studies. Rose called this approach neoclassical realism.

Neoclassical realism takes into consideration not only the general principles of neo-realism (in particular, the influence of the international system on the actions of states), but also internal factors that influence foreign policy through the decision-making process inside a state or an alliance of states.

However, in accordance with most adherents to this theory, the influence of the international system is decisive. For example, Tatiana Romanova [2012] writes that in neoclassical realism the pressure of the external environment and systemic factors remain crucial elements influencing a state's activities. This is especially true in the context of globalization, which is increasing rapidly, and of the disastrously reduced predictability of global changes. For these reasons, neoclassical realism resembles neo-realism.

Nevertheless, there are significant differences between these two approaches. For example, neo-realism, unlike neoclassical realism, emphasizes neither processes occurring within a state nor factors causing foreign policy or other decisions. As Rose [1998, p. 145] writes, neo-realism “is a theory of international politics; it includes some general assumptions about the motivation of individual states but does not purport to explain their behavior in great detail or in all cases.” Neoclassical realists try to explain the foreign policy of a state or particular foreign policy decisions – why a state acted exactly in that way, but not differently, not in direct accordance with signals sent by the international system.

In *Theory of international politics*, Kenneth Waltz [1979, p. 71] says that neo-realism could explain the impact of the international system on one or another international actor, and the opportunities this system provides to actors, but it cannot explain in what way and to what extent actors react to these limitations and opportunities. Neoclassical realists try to overcome this limitation of neo-realism.

Although neoclassical realists partly return to the key tenets of classical realism, neoclassical realism differs noticeably, even from a classical realist approach. Neoclassical realists emphasize the influence of the international system; moreover, they explain that the foreign policy decisions are driven not only by human nature but also by a host of internal factors, domestic

processes and the institutional structure of actors. In this sense, neoclassical realism closely approaches neo-liberalism.

Thus neoclassical realism is a qualitatively new theoretical approach to foreign policy analysis. It incorporates the features of many previous approaches, yet is distinguished from them. Romanova [2012] capacious defines neoclassical realism as the search for an answer to the question of why the pressure of global and regional factors is transformed into one and not another foreign policy; in other words, it is a research into the “transmission belt” of foreign policy.

Neoclassical realism is also characterized by a strong emphasis on studying the mechanisms of the development of a state’s foreign policy, but not on studying interstate relations. However, this article attempts to use the key positions of this approach to explain the subsystem of international relations that has formed in the post-Soviet space.

Political scientists distinguish three main components of neoclassical realism: independent variables (the international system and its structure), intervening variables (internal factors) and dependent variables (external policy). Most neoclassicist realists study the influence of an intervening variable on an independent one or the process of determining a dependent variable.

Intervening variables can be divided into two categories. The first category includes factors related to the specificity of perception (by elites) of signals sent by the international system and an international environment, as well as factors related to a lack of information and the inability to make absolutely rational decisions. According to Romanova [2012], no one possesses all the information, and therefore everyone relies on available data and guesses the rest. Moreover, notions about the right and the real, about connections between the well known and the secret – as well as about the world in general – are conditioned by the personal experience of politicians and bureaucrats, and by knowledge and paradigms, where they have formed and exist.

The second category of intervening variables includes factors related to the institutional structure of a state (or a union of states – for example, the EU) or civil society, as well as factors related to the relations between elites and masses. Romanova [2012] asserts that the more complex interactions within a state, the more sophisticated and unpredictable the functioning of that transmission belt.

Neoclassical realists focus on studying how such intervening variables contribute to interpreting the signals of the international system; in other words, they study how intervening variables influence a state’s foreign policy. As Rose [1998, p. 152] notes, to understand the way states interpret and respond to their external environment “one must analyze how systemic pressures are translated through unit-level intervening variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and domestic state structure.”

At the same time, political elites are limited by domestic policy factors as well as by the external environment. In other words, an external environment can turn out to be a factor that strengthens the influence of one or another intervening variable. For example, Rose [1998, p. 152] writes that “neoclassical realists assume that states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment.”

Schweller has an interesting theory, which he has confirmed by examining many case studies (he has also developed a theory of threats in which the basic principles of neoclassical realism are outlined). According to Ariel Ilan Roth [2006, p. 486], Schweller identifies four intervening variables: “(1) elite consensus about the nature and extent of the threat; (2) elite cohesion, that is, the degree of persistent internal divisions within the central government’s leadership; (3) social cohesion in the balancing society; and (4) regime or government vulnerability to political opposition.” Schweller attaches the great importance to consensus between representatives of various social groups of masses, as well as elites.

Schweller's approach is interesting also because it concedes a decisive role of intervening variables in the process of forming foreign policy. For example, state-level variables define if a (relatively weak) state will or not will attempt to restore the balance of power [Roth, 2006, p. 486]. In fact, it means that intervening variables can nullify the significance of signals sent by the international system.

Neoclassical realism has already begun to produce several trends. For example, Tudor Onea [2009, p. 854] notes that *Neoclassical realism, the state and foreign policy*, edited by Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman and Jeffrey Taliaferro, suggests that neoclassical realism has evolved into "a family of neoclassical realist theories." These trends are distinguished by their approaches to assessing the impact of intervening variables on an independent variable, specifically the influence on the international system.

In the context of this article, the most appropriate approach sees international and domestic variables as "almost equally influential in shaping foreign policy so that the two cannot be considered separately," as argued by Steven Lobell, Mark Brawley, Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Benjamin Fordham [Onea, 2009, p. 855].

This approach holds that neoclassical realism can be used for a systemic explanation of some foreign policies, unlike Schweller's approach, which focuses only on explaining why a foreign policy did not correspond to the requirements of the international system. Schweller attaches decisive significance to the international system, but recognizes that states often do not choose the best strategies of behaviour. He studies individual cases (a breakdown of the policies of England and France in the 1930s, for instance) and concentrates on explaining the errors of particular states, but does not do a global analysis of their relations. For this reason his approach is not used in this article.

According to Lobell [2009], Brawley (2009) and Sterling-Folker [2009], intervening variables can exert influence not only on the choice of the tool of foreign policy, but on the nature of processing of system impulses as well. Benjamin Fordham [2009] goes further and states that intervening variables have an impact on forming national interests and conducting policy to realize those interests. This assertion is already incompatible with realism and Fordham's approach is on the verge of realism and liberalism. That diminishes its explanatory power, but Fordham notes that his theory is useful for explaining various actions of a state. However, it is not intended for analyzing the interaction among actors in the international arena.

This article attempts not to explain the process of forming the foreign policy of Russia or the EU but rather to conduct a system analysis of relations between these actors. It is thus based on a realistic paradigm and rests on the approach of Lobell, Brawley and Sterling-Folker. (While Lobell's approach is flexible and similar in some aspects to Schweller's, in general Lobell's approach is more universal.)

According to Lobell, Brawley, Sterling-Folker and others, the international system provides sufficient and clear information about existing threats and opportunities – including information about changes in the balance of power – but it does not give clear information on how the states should act to respond appropriately to these threats and how they should take those opportunities provided by the system [Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, 2009, p. 298]. In fact, this approach develops realism and neo-realism further. Like these two theories, it presupposes that the national interests of states are defined by the international system, and does not deny the great significance of the role of the international system. At the same time, it tries to overcome the weaknesses of neo-realism and explain the paradoxes that arise when, having received clear systemic signals, states conduct highly controversial foreign policy from a neo-realist point of view.

Proponents of this approach place emphasis on different intervening variables. For example, Brawley [2009] attaches special importance to the lack of information, as well as to do-

mestic policy factors. Sterling-Folker [2009] emphasizes the importance of forming a national identity within the state (in the context of this chapter, the aspect of forming a single European identity and the impact of this process on the EU's foreign policy, including the policy that the EU implements in the post-Soviet space, is particularly interesting). Lobell [2009] highlights the significance of social and domestic political and institutional factors.

The approach of Lobell, Brawley and Sterling-Folker appears the most appropriate to the current analysis because it allows a clear explanation of the relations between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space. Emphasizing the role of intervening variables (where the cultural, domestic political and even social factors are considered institutional) in forming foreign policy can be decisive, this approach does not deny the great significance of role of the international system, sometimes linking a successful foreign policy to the correct processing of signals sent by the international system.

Based on the intermediate results, neoclassical realism can hardly be called the direct continuation of classical realism or neo-realism. As Onea [2009, p. 855] writes, "neoclassical realism has gone too far in shedding the assumptions of neorealism." In the United States and Western Europe, neoclassical realism is considered an independent theoretical trend in international relations, although, without a doubt, it remains still well within the realist paradigm. In addition, some individual trends in neoclassical realism are in some ways similar to neo-realism.

Some researchers see in neoclassical realism an attempt to surpass the explanatory power of other theoretical approaches to the study of international relations. For example, Onea [2009, p. 854] notes that neoclassical realism "claims to offer the best of both worlds": on the one hand, it is more practical than neo-realism, because domestic political factors are taken into consideration; on the other hand, it takes into account the influence of systemic factors, and this fact makes it superior to liberalism. But the versatility of this approach is also one of its weaknesses: the explanatory power of neoclassical realism is put in doubt by both neo-realists and neo-liberalists.

Russia and EU relations in the post-Soviet space: from agenda setting to cooperation to open competition

According to several indicators (analyzed below), the current policy conducted by Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space can be characterized as competitive. It is not an open confrontation, but there is rivalry, as well as various disputes and an absence of constructive interaction, often disguised by fine and laconic wording – at least in the political sphere.

In the 1990s, relations between Russia and the European Union were relatively productive. There were hopes for future constructive and mutually beneficial cooperation in a wide range of areas. But although the 1990s were an "era of optimism" in Russia – EU relations, the beginning of the 2000s was already characterized by a reduction of real cooperation and the rise in the number of hidden latent conflicts that, by the end of 2003, had begun to turn more explicit [Bordachev, 2008b, p. 373].

A kind of competition in the form of a diplomatic game (preventing the development of constructive interaction) has developed between Russia and the European Union. As Sergei Karaganov wrote in 2010, the competition was quite tough, sometimes even fierce. Brussels wanted to prove that Russia's foreign policy agency had weakened. Russia made retaliatory and preventive diplomatic "strikes." Karaganov believes that competition between Russia and the EU is increasing in an artificial way, and that it is conditioned by systemic impulses and thus often does not have real grounds.

In the 2000s, as Russia grew more developed and stronger, Russia – EU relations in the political sphere became ever less productive. For example, Bordachev [2008b, p. 373] notes that relations between 1991 and 2007 underwent a transformation from optimism at a forthcoming rapprochement under a single ideology and political and economic space to statements about the presence of insurmountable differences in values and attempts to move to “pragmatic cooperation” mainly in the economic sphere.

However, there are a number of issues over which Russia and the European Union still disagree significantly – especially regarding economics and energy. Currently, as Dmitri Suslov [2008, p. 150] notes, the European Union pursues a policy of diplomatic and economic deterrence, openly countering the rise of Russia and China; it impedes the adjustment of rules in the global energy industry in favour of Russia and other producers.

In particular, the EU’s plans to develop new energy technologies, including energy generation and the use of biofuel instead of traditional energy sources, as well as the search for alternative energy sources, show that the EU intends to diversify its sources of energy, perhaps to show Russia that it can decrease its dependence on Russian energy.

Russia’s policy toward the European Union is notable for firmness, hardness, pragmatism and the desire to neutralize any possible expansion of the EU in the post-Soviet space, including by exerting a negative influence on the level of confidence in relations with the EU members themselves. For instance, Thomas Graham [2010, p. 72] argues that Russia prefers not to deal with the EU as a whole, but with European countries on a bilateral basis, to set them against each other in order to advance Russian interests.

Thus at present Russia – EU relations – on the whole, as well as in the post-Soviet space – are characterized by a high level of competition, which, in the last decade, has been gradually increasing.

Russia – EU relations in the post-Soviet space through the prism of neoclassical realism

In order to analyze Russia – EU relations in terms of neoclassical realism, first the main signals of the international system must be defined, then briefly (because the goal of this article is to make a framework analysis of intervening variables rather than detailed one) the internal factors that do not allow Russia and the EU to react to those signals appropriately must be defined, and then, last, the key features of Russia – EU relations in the post-Soviet space can be determined.

The modern international system quite likely does not send Russia and the EU signals to increase competition. Moreover, a range of systemic factors indicates that competition between them in the post-Soviet space should diminish. The following factors should be mentioned: the high ambitions of the United States and China, the international political crisis, growing instability in almost all spheres of international relations, and the inability of states to use international organizations and institutions effectively to maintain order in the world and implement their own interests.

The United States is still the largest and strongest state in the world (at least in terms of arms – in quantitative as well as qualitative terms). It has interests in all regions of the world that represent at least some geopolitical importance. One goal for the U.S. is to restrain the growth of influence of both Russia and the EU. For example, Suslov [2008, p. 341] argues that one of the provisions of U.S. policy in Europe is the soft counteraction to European integration (especially in the spheres of foreign policy and security), to counteract the EU from becoming an independent pole of force.

China is the second largest economy in the world. It seeks to increase its influence in many regions of the world – smoothly, but steadily. According to Fareed Zakaria [2009, p. 108], China becomes more “energetic” and forceful, and already exerts great influence in the region as well as globally. The post-Soviet space attracts China, and this fact makes this power a real competitor to the EU and Russia. Its huge population and steadily increasing economic power make the possibility of China seizing the opportunity a real threat.

In the foreseeable future, China will achieve a high level of global influence and occupy a top place in the international hierarchy – not only in economic terms (which, in fact, it has already achieved) but also in political terms. Zakaria [2009, p. 112] posits that although China will hardly take the lead over the U.S. in the next 10 years according to economic, military and political indicators, step by step it is becoming number two in the global hierarchy. This process adds an entirely new element to the international system.

The intentions of both the U.S. as well as China are quite serious. Moreover, these states have a broad spectrum of opportunities for implementing these intentions. As Bordachev [2008a] writes, the behaviour of the U.S. and China is relatively predictable and consists in strengthening their power regardless of the consequences for other actors. Karaganov [2010] argues that if Russia does not pool its efforts with Europe, it will inevitably drift into the role of an appendage to China.

U.S. and Chinese expansionism, as well as China’s rising position in the international hierarchy, are those systemic factors that should reduce competition between Russia and the European Union in the post-Soviet space. China likely represents a noticeably greater threat for Russia than the EU, which is weaker militarily and politically, possesses much smaller population and has noticeably less expansionary potential. The United States, which is also showing interest in the post-Soviet space, is potentially not as dangerous, but it remains a real competitor that could interfere with the ability of both Russia and the EU to implement their interests.

Despite the need (for Russia and the EU) to withstand the U.S. and China in the post-Soviet space, the international system will not likely require a political or military alliance between Russia and the EU. It is more likely that more constructive interaction in the region would be required, to assess systemic trends and signals objectively and accurately, but not to initiate full-blown and large-scale cooperation in all spheres.

Another factor that indicates a signal to reduce competition between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space is the international political crisis, primarily in the diminished ability of the leading centres of power to exert influence on smaller states located in geopolitically important regions. Large countries cannot control processes effectively in neighbouring (and weaker) states and, correspondingly, lose the ability to exert efficient influence on the foreign policy of these states. In several cases, actors should work together to solve problems where their interests are similar. There is no need to create full-scale unions; such a situation requires only the ability to make reasonable concessions in order to implement at least some of a state’s interests.

There has been a significant increase in instability in the world. At the end of the bipolar period, the international system entered a so-called transition phase, and is likely still in this phase. This period of transition is characterized by an increase in anarchy and uncertainty, the absence of a clear hierarchy of states, and a trend toward a significant redistribution of power among large actors.

The instability complicates the structure of the international system and reduces any predictability about its development. Accordingly, the process of solving foreign-policy tasks becomes more complex as well. As Henry Kissinger [1997, p. 734] notes, the components of the international order, their interaction with each other and the tasks they need to solve have never before changed so quickly and been as deep and global as they are today. This situation once

again calls for more constructive interaction between Russia and the EU, to work together to resolve issues that are important to both.

In addition, in recent years states have been unable to use international organizations and institutions effectively to implement their interests. Karaganov [2012] notes that most institutions of global management in the last two decades have become weaker. The “unipolar” dreams of American reactionary idealists in the 1990s, on the offensive after the apparent victory in the Cold War, faded almost instantly by the beginning of the next decade.

It has become evident that a state must develop its own self-reliant policy with only partial reliance on organizations such as the United Nations. As a “self-help system,” according to Waltz [1979, p. 106], the international state dictates a need for bilateral interaction, which is more effective because it is easier for two actors to negotiate an agreement than, say, for ten actors to do so. Consequently, there is a systemic impulse to develop constructive and efficient interaction between the EU and Russia, *inter alia*, in the post-Soviet space, including in the political sphere.

Thus at present the international system does not contribute to the rise of competition between Russia and the European Union in general, nor does it aggravate the contradictions between these actors in particular. At the same time, in practice, the opposite situation exists: competition does not weaken, but rather increases. Some influencing factors exist — as was noted in the first section of this article — which neoclassical realists call intervening variables, and these factors exert significant influence on processing of the international system’s signals by the political elites of Russia and the European Union.

Intervening variables

As discussed, intervening variables fall into two groups. The first group includes factors associated (to some extent) with the peculiarities of the human psyche and, accordingly, even with human nature. It is interesting that classical realists believe it is human nature that causes competitiveness and anarchy in international relations. Hans Morgenthau [1998, p. 5], a founder of the theory of realism, which forms the basis for the theory of neoclassical realism as well, asserted that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature: “human nature ... has not changed since the classicist philosophies of China, India and Greece endeavoured to discover these laws.”

The first group of factors deserves slightly more detailed consideration. According to many neoclassical realists, this category includes, first and foremost, the possible irrational activities of politicians (because they, like anyone, can make erroneous decisions, or make decisions under peer pressure, sometimes even under the influence of emotions, stereotypes, principles, etc.). Another important factor, which also belongs to the first category, is a lack of information. Very seldom, all the information necessary to make the right decision can be collected. In addition, often the human mind subconsciously discards some information and facts that it does not “want” to acknowledge; these facts may seem absolutely unnecessary, while in reality they can be extremely important.

Intervening variables in the first category are extremely diverse, so their analysis can be very long and deep. They include cultural, civilizational, historical (in particular, historical memory) and psychological (the peculiarities of perception, for instance) factors among, probably, many others. However, this category is not useful for the purposes of this article, which is reviewing the overall picture of relations between Russia and the EU.

The second group of intervening variables includes such factors as the institutional structure of states, relations between elites and masses, relations between the ruling elite and any

opposition, and civil society. Some neoclassical realists – for example, Schweller – give the second group of intervening variables decisive importance, paying noticeably smaller attention to the first group.

For this article, only the influence of the second category of intervening variables is considered, because the goal does not require a detailed discussion of the effects of intervening variables. This category plays an important role in the ability of the elites of the European Union to process the signals sent by the international system.

The EU is characterized by a complex institutional structure, and it is composed of independent states, each of which possesses its own institutional structure, developed civil society and complex domestic political relations. There are many contradictions within the EU, and these contradictions prevent forming a coherent and rational foreign policy in the post-Soviet space, a policy that would fully reflect the requirements of the international system. Therefore, there is nothing surprising in the fact that the signals sent by the international system undergo tremendous changes and “materialize” sometimes into an unexpected foreign policy (from the viewpoint of neo-realists).

Russia is a much more monolithic actor compared to the European Union. The strong “vertical power” established by Vladimir Putin is notable for its forethought and solidity; however, it does not exclude the probability of a significant distortion by systemic signals in the way of forming foreign policy.

In addition, there is another factor that relates to neither the first nor second group of intervening variables. This factor consists of the specific features of external environment, namely the international system. For example, Romanova [2012, p. 10] asserts that the pressure of the system and the globalizing world can increase the influence of certain domestic policy factors. The current high degree of anarchy and uncertainty and the instability of the international system contribute to the high competitiveness between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space. Their political elites do not possess sufficient information about what can happen even in the near future, and consequently prefer not to take any risk but to take measures solely to strengthen their own positions rather than engaged in constructive interaction.

Uncertainty causes elites to fear interaction with anyone – in order to avoid defeat. For example, Bordachev [2008a] believes that in conditions “where the world is dangerous in a different way every new day ... foreign partners are viewed either as potential predators or potential prey.” There is no understanding that the partner faces the same challenges and has to decide the same problems.

Thus the elites of Russia and the European Union cannot adequately process the signals sent by the international system because of the large number of intervening variables related to the psychological peculiarities of humans, as well as to the complex institutional structures of both actors (especially the EU) and the lack of information. The influence of these intervening variables is strengthened even more because of uncertainty and instability in the international environment.

The subsystem of international relations in the post-Soviet space

The significant distortion in processing the systemic signals by Russian and EU elites has produced a subsystem of international relations in the post-Soviet space. The signals are processed and transformed and fed into various activities and measures taken by those elites, in their interactions with each other as well as with other countries in the post-Soviet space. A new local reality has developed, which can be considered a subsystem of international relations in the post-Soviet space.

This subsystem is a kind of a miniature coordinating system with its own laws. The international system affects the post-Soviet space and its subsystem indirectly – by signals, which it sends to the Russian and EU elites. The impact of those signals is not always decisive, because it passes through filters – namely, intervening variables.

The subsystem, which is (to a significant extent) shaped by the foreign policy decisions of the Russian and EU elites, likely has both direct and indirect impacts on these elites. Somehow the results of the interaction between Russia and the EU in this subsystem are deposited in the minds of ruling elites, as well as in the minds of the opposition and civil society, and then deliberately or subconsciously taken into consideration when those elites decide on subsequent foreign policy. It is a manifestation of the indirect impact of the subsystem.

The direct impact of this subsystem is expressed in the impulses themselves. These are formed as a consequence of those or other foreign policy activities in the post-Soviet space. Such foreign policy actions can affect the international system as a whole. Receiving new signals from elites (or, to be more precise, in the process of interactions among elites), the international system adjusts and complements the impulses, which it sends back to the elites.

The subsystem of Russia and EU relations in the post-Soviet space can be characterized by certain patterns that can be conventionally called rules or even laws. These patterns require more study, but it is already evident that a competitive environment is the key feature. In addition, the basic “laws” of the international system (anarchy, struggle for survival, etc.) function within this subsystem.

The countries in the post-Soviet space (of course, except Russia) play the role of objects rather than subjects of international politics; more precisely, they can be considered the objects of the competition between Russia and the EU. These countries are too weak to offer and promote their own projects, and can only choose on whose side to stand.

This situation seems to be typical. All the countries in the post-Soviet space are small or medium-sized states. Only Russia is a very large power, maybe even a superpower, according to some experts. As Alexei Bogaturov [2006, p. 12] writes, bringing together the efforts of “small and middle powers” countries is still not enough to impose their will on stronger players. In other words, even if the former Soviet republics set aside their own ambitions and want to create some form of organized integration or union, without Russia or any of the European powers, such a union will not be viable or will have little influence in the post-Soviet space.

In this situation the former Soviet republics have no alternative than to seek close cooperation with Russia or the European Union. Accordingly, some lean toward joining Russia (such as Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) and the others toward the EU (such as Ukraine and Moldova). There are also “undecided” states, and Russia and the EU struggle for influence over them. Moreover, the various political elites within these states also struggle. Ukraine is one such example.

Ancillon, the tutor of Frederick William IV and Prussia’s state secretary for foreign affairs, argued that each state has only one purpose when implementing its foreign policy: to cooperate with natural allies against natural enemies (quoted in [Haas 1953, p. 470]). Natural allies are states whose power is necessary to balance the power of the natural enemies. This is the only maxim that should be considered in international relations. Ancillon’s principle seems to work in the post-Soviet space as well.

Thus it makes no sense to consider the «small and middle powers» countries in the post-Soviet space separately: their activities must be analyzed solely in the context of the interaction between two key actors – Russia and the European Union – within the subsystem of international relations in the post-Soviet space.

Conclusion

Interaction between Russia and the European Union in the post-Soviet space takes place within a subsystem of international relations with its own specific characteristics. This subsystem must be considered in the context of the overall interaction between Russia and the EU, which, in turn, can be most effectively analyzed on the basis of neoclassical realism. Several connections characterize that interaction in the post-Soviet space.

First, the international system sends signals to the elites of Russia and the EU. These signals do not call for active competition between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space; on the contrary, they most likely encourage less competition.

Second, intervening variables (for instance, those related to lack of information, the complex institutional structure of the actors, the peculiarities of the human psyche) influence the foreign policy decision-making process by the Russian and EU elites. These factors constitute a mechanism for processing the international system's signals and – at present – stimulate the political elites to conduct competitive policy in the post-Soviet space. Furthermore, the significance of these factors is likely strengthened by a high level of uncertainty, which is one of the key features of today's international environment.

Third, after processing the signals sent by the international system, the Russian and EU elites (influenced by the above-mentioned factors) make decisions concerning interactions with each other as well as with other countries in the post-Soviet space. The interactions of these countries – «small and middle powers» states – with Russia and the EU are also influenced by a wide range of factors, some of which are discussed above as well. As a result, this subsystem of international relations in the post-Soviet space sends signals back to the elites of Russia and the EU and participates in the transformation of those factors (intervening variables).

Fourth, the activities of the elites (expressed in the Russia – EU interaction in the post-Soviet space) influence the international system. At present this influence is rather nominal and has little impact on the either structure of the international system as a whole or the essence of the signals that system sends to Russia and the EU.

In sum, the interaction between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space is characterized by a high degree of competitiveness, which is contrary to the signals sent by the international system and which is caused by the influence of various intervening variables (domestic policy, psychological and other factors) on formation of foreign policy by Russia and the EU.

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Системный анализ взаимодействия России и Европейского союза на постсоветском пространстве¹

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В статье анализируются отношения России и Европейского союза на территории постсоветского пространства. В качестве теоретической базы используется сравнительно новый и комплексный подход – неоклассический реализм. Согласно результатам исследования, уровень конкуренции России и ЕС на постсоветском пространстве выше, чем того требует международная система. Это происходит потому, что элиты Российской Федерации и ЕС из-за влияния ряда внутренних факторов, называемых неоклассическими реалистами вмешивающимися переменными, не в состоянии корректно обработать импульсы, посыпаемые международной системой.

Число вмешивающихся переменных весьма велико, среди них необходимо отметить факторы, связанные с восприятием политическими элитами намерений друг друга и международной обстановки; факторы, связанные с недостатком информации, а также со сложной институциональной структурой акторов и различными внутриполитическими проблемами. Кроме того, текущее состояние международной среды, характеризуемое высокой степенью неопределенности, способствует усилению влияния этих вмешивающихся переменных на обработку импульсов международной системы.

В результате не совсем корректной обработки этих импульсов на постсоветском пространстве возникает подсистема международных отношений, ключевой характеристикой которой является высококонкурентная среда. При этом главными акторами на постсоветском пространстве остаются Россия и Европейский союз, а остальные страны, будучи слишком слабыми, вынуждены выбирать, к какому из акторов примкнуть, и это вызывает соперничество между Россией и ЕС за влияние над данными странами.

Ключевые слова: неоклассический реализм, подсистема, Россия, Европейский союз (ЕС), постсоветское пространство

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