

Europe's Eastern Dimension Russia's Reaction to Poland's Initiative

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Introduction

The process of European Union enlargement dictates two important and interrelated changes in EU–Russia relations. The first is geographic, as the EU's borders have pushed eastward to Russia. Second, there is greater room for regional integration patterns where the EU and Russia meet.

The EU's Eastern Dimension (ED) originates from the idea of margins. These margins are described by scholars Chris Browning and Pertti Joenniemi as self-conscious (and often contested) spaces between two or more centers of influence and power. Therefore, in devising the ED as a key component of its foreign policy strategy, Poland has the chance to avoid becoming a frontier state that separates the EU from Eastern Europe, and instead to become the bridge linking the East to the West. Poland's stand on the ED, however, is torn between moving forward along the post-sovereignty integration track (based on the concept of decreasing importance of borders) and (re)constructing typically sovereign accessories of power as understood in Westphalian terms.

This memo aims to analyze the ED in theoretical and political terms. I start with comparing the ED with its predecessor, the Finnish-initiated Northern Dimension (ND); then turn to the contradictions embedded in the Polish ED discourse; and, lastly, discuss possible Russian reactions to Poland's ED initiative.

Nordic Lessons

A post-territorial, "dimensionalist" way of conceptualizing political space treats margins as contact spaces, intermediaries between the core powers, and thus raises the question of whether the ED can adapt other dimensionalist practices, particularly those associated with the ND. Can Poland, as the ED initiator, borrow some useful trans-border integration experience previously developed in the Nordic/Baltic region for the sake of implementing the concept of "Wider Europe," which includes not only the EU core countries but also states located in what could be considered Europe's margins.

Many actors in the ED-covered countries (especially in Ukraine and Russia, and to a much lesser extent in Belarus and Moldova) are willing to replicate from the ND the

model of networking regionalism, a type of regional governance that leads to the construction of policy space that includes a variety of actors (international and domestic, state and non-state). This concept could be applied to some extent to Europe's eastern margins that may greatly benefit from "policy transfer networks" based on the exchange of intellectual capital and social technologies that create incentives for policy changes. Within the dimensionalist framework, the transnational diffusion of information, ideas, interpretations, social practices and norms, experiences, and worldviews is an important part of a region's way of dealing with the outside world through such channels as travel, media, person-to-person diplomacy, joint project collaboration, and so forth. As a result, the regions may form a "world of transnational spaces" and turn into "networked polities without definite borders" because dimensionalism assumes that the territories have the right to choose whether they participate in or stay aloof from integration projects.

Poland is committed to the networking concept of regional cooperation, yet it wants to maintain a sort of dividing line between Europe and "non-Europe," with clear geopolitical and hard security connotations. Some of the profound differences between the two "dimensions" are shown below:

<i>Eastern Dimension</i>	<i>Northern Dimension</i>
Encompasses the territory that has often been contested by great powers, especially during the Cold War	Continues the Nordic tradition of peaceful co-existence between opposing powers
Hard security concerns top the policy agenda	Soft security approaches prevail
Projection of EU norms eastward based on integration of the Visegrad countries into the EU is the main political rationale.	Region building based on specific identity and shared norms is the main motive.

The ED Seen Through Polish Lenses

Some elements in the Polish proposal move the ED in an ND-like "dimensionalist" direction, including the following:

- Support for local activities seems to be a cornerstone of the whole initiative;
- Ethnic minorities are free to develop their own relations beyond the administrative borders;
- Russian business is welcome to invest in Central Europe;
- The ED ought to play a role in the strategy and framework of the EU common policy, but the individual needs and demands of the ED countries also have to be taken into account, leaving at least four areas in which Russia-specific formulae are feasible: energy, security, Kaliningrad, and Chechnya.

At the same time, while containing some border-crossing potential, the ED is clearly biased toward the idea of Europe as composed of "concentric circles" (with hierarchy and clear subordination to a single political center), not "Olympic" ones (with plurality of different poles of influence and power). In other words, Poland perceives the ED landscape in a state-centric manner, as an area victimized by its "edgy" location between

Germany and Russia, and thus doomed to be the battlefield of not only different ambitions but different values as well.

Poland is likely to mold the ED as a continuation of centuries-long geopolitical conflict with Russia. In particular, Poland's intention is to have greater influence within the ED for avoiding a "Russia first" approach in the future. For example, some Polish experts deem it appropriate to remove the Common European Security Space program from the EU–Russia dialogue. Also, Belarus may be included in the EU-Russia agenda to avoid being incorporated by Russia. Another example can be found in statements from Poland's Stefan Batory Foundation saying that Russia's exclusive right to peacemaking activities in Georgia does not correspond with the long-term interests of the EU.

Therefore, with Poland as the chief designer of the ED, the EU's Eastern policy is likely to become less sensitive to Russian demands and concerns. According to a study from the Warsaw-based Center for Eastern Studies, Russia (along with Ukraine) is supposed to remain on the EU visa list, which indicates that Poland gives priority to the "safe border" concept over a "friendly border."

Related is Poland's eagerness to introduce the principle of complete conditionality in relations with the Eastern European countries. For example, in return for non-standard visa solutions to the Kaliningrad issue, Russia is expected to give more freedom to local authorities and facilitate travel between this exclave and the EU. Even more important is that the basic conditions for cooperation are said to be unilateral reforms in specific sectors and harmonization of the country's legislation according to EU norms. If Moscow prefers to decline to participate in such an "adaptation program," it will fail to qualify for any economic preferences.

The problem with the Polish vision of the ED is that, firstly, the principle of conditionality has a poor record of success in EU-Russia relations. Secondly, the question of how sensitive the ED has to be to Russia's and Ukraine's aspirations is still open. Russia has repeatedly expressed its intention to be treated differently by the EU and, in particular, to conclude a special agreement with the EU on Kaliningrad. Ukraine also feels uncomfortable in the ED framework, arguing that it deserves special treatment as a strategic partner of the EU. Poland seems to support the Ukrainian demands. This approach may lead to ED fragmentation and complicate implementation of the ED as a single institutional initiative.

Russia's Stand

Because the ED is not yet a well-established program, and is still in search of its political identity and relevance, the major question is who can make better use of the new regionalized milieu. Russia seems to have kept aloof from the ED debates, yet it is expected that Russia (as well as Ukraine) has its own vision of the ED.

Much will depend on how the ED is interpreted in Russia. Generally, there is a conflation of two European agendas in the Russian discourse: one is of a post-modernist background, leaning toward dimensionalism, the second is formulated in terms of state-centrism, with a clear geopolitical and hard security bias.

One of the most important elements of Russia's integration with Europe is transborder cooperation that creates "juncture points" linking Russia to Europe. To the west of its borders, Russia sees a very innovative yet still uncertain intellectual and political environment. The very fact that Russia is situated at the crossroads of different regions contains significant de-bordering potential because Russia is able to accumulate different regional experiences. Hence, the challenge is to find the ways of shaping ED space to meet Russia's most pressing international needs.

Russia may well be one of the countries to determine the character of the ED. More specifically, it is in Russia's interests to strengthen the dimensionalist aspects of the ED and take the following steps.

- Adhere more explicitly to a soft-security and "Olympic rings" approach to Europe-building advocated earlier by supporters of the ND, with a variety of regions co-existing with each other and horizontally coordinating their strategies. This is important for counter-balancing a "Fortress Europe" model that, as Finnish scholar Pami Aalto argues, may evolve into a "soft imperial center" that displays geopolitical expansionism in its own "near abroad" zones.
- Seek closer cooperation with the ED in comprehensively solving the many border-related issues (Polish law-enforcement agencies have particularly relevant experience in dealing with such micro-security matters).
- Acknowledge the benefits of positive interaction with major security institutions in Europe. Russia has to stop perceiving NATO as a purely military machine and start thinking about using its potential to ensure that NATO's new members and applicants become more compliant with international soft security norms concerning the treatment of minorities, border conflict management, and so on. In the meantime, Russia has to avoid ambiguity regarding the OCSE; this organization was praised in Moscow for its security commitments and simultaneously criticized for its proposal to reinforce the peacekeeping contingent in Moldova's Transdnister.
- Foster the gradual adaptation of EU norms regulating important sectors of Russian economic and social life.
- Continue to create preconditions for visa-free travel with the EU. The Russian-Lithuanian readmission treaty is an important step in this direction.
- Avoid further isolation of the Kaliningrad oblast. Kaliningrad, as viewed by many Polish experts, does not pose a threat to European security. Presumably, the precondition of deepening Poland's involvement in bringing Kaliningrad closer to Europe is giving more powers to the oblast authorities, who are treated in Warsaw as more reliable partners than the central government. Meanwhile, Russia is interested in convincing the EU that not only Kaliningrad is a problem; because Brest, Lvov, and Swinoujscie are known as major centers of gambling, criminality, and the sex industry, there is a need to tackle the border issues on the basis of comprehensive commitments of all parties involved.

- Use Russian influence to gradually democratize the Lukashenko regime and incorporate Belarus into the ED-covered area.

Russia is also interested in multilateralizing the ED initiative by welcoming U.S. participation in shaping the ED. The Northern European Initiative has moved U.S. thinking away from the traditional state-centric models of security building toward removing existing West-East trade barriers. The emergence of the U.S.-led anti-terrorist agenda may also be beneficial for creating an inclusive, dimensionalist security milieu.

Meanwhile, there are some grounds for expecting the increasing appeal of national security and sovereignty arguments in Russia's ED discourse, probably at the expense of "de-bordering through cooperation" ideas. On the official level, Russia still gives priority to security and geopolitics, two classical tenants of *realpolitik*, over regionality and transnationalism. Russia tends to treat the Central European countries as small states with a limited capacity for foreign policy action on their own. In this worldview, Russia's Europeanization means that the EU has to accept Russia as it is, in the capacity of an equal power, without paying much attention to its domestic transformation.

Ukraine's reaction to the ED seems to strengthen the power politics arguments that see borders as dividing institutions, watersheds, and sources of vulnerability. Many Russian experts think that Ukraine's ED strategy is to maintain closer communication with those countries that oppose Russia, which further complicates Moscow-Kyiv relations and allows Ukraine to remain an instrument in the strategic weakening and distancing of Russia. Thus, dimensionalism may turn into a policy that excludes Russia. Ukraine, in particular, is criticized in the Kremlin for paying too much attention to fortifying its borders with Russia and Belarus. The other challenge for Russia is Ukraine's plans to abrogate its non-aligned status and include in the zones of its national interests countries such as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, all treated by Russia as its "near abroad."

Conclusion

The future of the ED will depend on two major factors. The first is whether the Polish initiative will come into force and be recognized as a new doctrine to substitute the EU Common Strategy toward Russia, which was heavily criticized by both sides. At issue is also the extent to which the EU wishes to shift security responsibilities to Poland.

The second factor to determine the ED's path is Russia's reaction, which has yet to be formulated. On the one hand, many in Russia deem that national interests are better defended in the framework of a bipolar (Moscow-Brussels) European order. In this case, Russia will try to deal directly with the EU and skip such initiatives of Polish diplomacy. On the other hand, it is in Russia's interests that both the ND and the ED are developed. The more channels of communication that are available, the greater freedom Russian diplomacy has to maneuver. At any rate, Russia cannot afford to ignore the proliferation of the "new geometries" of regionalism in its western neighborhood because Russia's inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe is at stake. Russia still has a chance to participate in the region-building efforts, which will provide opportunities for the country to skip over traditional East-West lines and make these lines less divisive.

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