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DISCURSIVE RECONSTRUCTIONS
OF BOUNDARIES IN THE SOUTH
CAUCASUS COUNTRIES VIS-À-VIS
THE EU AND RUSSIA AND
THE CRUX OF SECURITIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of social images and perceptions of security in the countries of the South Caucasus to scrutinize contested patterns of belonging amid continued talk of a “new Cold War”. These case studies – embedded within the broader EU-Russia context – shed light onto particular securitization practices and their constitutive motivations. To decode these ontological security rationales and divisions – around yet eerily familiar lines – is important in order to make sense of how and why the countries of the South Caucasus conceive of their surroundings as they do and what spaces for political manoeuvres emerge.

Keywords: ontological security; collective identity construction; othering; EU-Russia relations; South Caucasus

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INTRODUCTION

Since the coming-into-existence of the EU's Eastern Partnership – as more differentiated ENP approach – denominations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as countries which could be considered “in between” (Danii & Mascauteanu, 2011) the EU and Russia, within the “spheres of influence” or the “near abroad”, respectively, have featured quite significantly throughout all types of discourses. As the ENP/EaP was initially designed to avoid “new dividing lines” in Europe and aiming at the creation of a zone of stability, prosperity and security on the European continent, these re-emerging categorizations fit yet again in the emerging debate on a “New Cold War in Europe” within which these signifiers of belonging (Jerez-Mir et al., 2009) to a certain socially constructed and cognitively evaluated group regain immense importance (Weisel & Böhm, 2015). It is exactly within this foreign policy discourse that preferences, attitudes and alignments are constituted on the basis of collective identity constructions (Jussim et al., 2001). In other words: constituted on mechanisms of belonging and otherness. These discursive strategies of highlighting belonging to (imagined) communities (Anderson, 1996), yet security communities (Deutsch, 1957; Adler & Barnett, 1998), could have been observed to be the cornerstones of securitization strategies of the EU and Russia¹ vis-à-vis the common neighbourhood and of the countries of the common neighbourhood vis-à-vis the EU and Russia vice versa. The multitude of (discursive) positioning, making sense of the world and others, are part of an amalgamation of identity politics: of self-constituted and ascribed identities – the latter being supported by processes of socialization and conditionality, labelled as ‘Europeanization’ or ‘Russification’, respectively.

In contrast to, but in relation with, the ideas of the debate on a potential new Cold War in Europe, this argument is substantiated by recalling a basic premise of securitization literature (Buzan, 1991; McSweeney, 1996; Buzan et al., 1998; Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Buzan & Hansen, 2007; Balzacq, 2015) which has described the situation after the Cold War in Europe as to be defined by the presence of two Regional Security Complexes [RSC]: a European RSC and a post-Soviet one centred around Russia (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 397), which together built the European Supercomplex (2003: 437). Arguing that what Buzan and Wæver called

1 See table 1 for an overview of prevalent security communities, amongst others not only the EaP, but the EEU, CIS and CSTO.

“separateness and involvement” as modes of interaction of the two latter RSCs could better be modelled as different conceptualizations of otherness with concrete images of amity/enmity informing and co-constituting the situation on the ground, the model presented here assumes that the bridge between the two regional foreign policies of the EU and Russia could be identified in them being different anchors of belonging, yet otherness. Within this complex, the dynamics of collective identity formation play an important role as they inform images and narratives of amity and enmity (Subotić, 2015) vis-à-vis the others. This function of othering is then one of conceptual and categorial boundary-drawing inherently linked to the struggle for/of (definitional/normative) power by and of all actors involved.

Hence, this paper tries to map this variety of others and their varying definitions by looking at two arenas of collective identity formation (Mitzen, 2006) of and within the South Caucasus countries: first, the perspective of main foreign and security policies and, second, the societal perspective². The time frame for this image analysis is 2011 to 2014. By shifting the attention from the EU and Russia as ‘framing actors’ towards the perceptions of the countries in-between, the attention is yet again drawn back to their agency.

IDENTITY (CHANGE), POWER AND FOREIGN/SECURITY POLICY

The foreign policy-identity and the identity-security nexus are two academic compounds which are vividly debated and tackled from a variety of positions. In this, the terminology referring to identity is multiple: “identification”, “attachment”, “categorization”, “self-understanding”, “role conceptualization”, “social location or position”, or “groupness” are just a few examples (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2015: 3). The arising question of continuity and change within this is closely related to the agency vs. structure debate on which much ink has been spilled, not least in IR theory. This paper follows the poststructuralist approach on identity and foreign policy which postulates a dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship between them both. In other words, foreign policies are reliant upon representations of

2 These identity constructions are a result of intrasocietal discourses: Renan called them „**daily plebiscites**“ (Harnisch, 2011:24). As such, surveys serve as representations of those plebiscites – and are considered to display notions of societal sense-making.

identity, but identities are constituted and reconstructed also through the formulation of foreign policy. In this understanding, material forces and ideas are so inter-linked in the discursive practice of foreign policy that the two cannot be separated from each another, they are indeed ontologically inseparable. However, the understanding of this (re-)construction of identity is often under-conceptualized and needs further elaboration.

In accordance with early role theory sociologists, identity is here treated as layered and simultaneously constituted on mutually interacting levels of inter-subjective meaning making (Harnisch, 2011). These two levels refer to a “domestic (internal) domain” and an “international (relational) domain” of identity construction. A ‘domestic domain’ is, thus, impossible other than in relation to an ‘international’ one. In this context, the fragile and ever-so-to-be-negotiated balancing act between the domestic and the international locus of one’s identity construction is to be found in the mechanism of ontological security-seeking. This deconstruction offers new perspectives on ‘internal’ motivations vis-à-vis ‘external’ ones, scattered by expectations and behaviour of oneself and the other – which are delineating identity and behaviour by enabling and constraining possibilities and expectations. These notions of spatial, temporal and social power highlight the practice of categorization and its inherent linkage to collective identity constructions via subjective security perceptions by the virtue of defining the other – and the self. This ‘categorical power’ of defining in-category status cuts across the debate on ‘normative power(s)’ as this very act of defining in-category status could be theorized as an act of labelling something as ‘normal’. However, ‘categorical power’ is rather the outcome of a much more complex process of identity demarcations and takes into account not only representations of imaginary sets of belonging/otherness but ideological projections of power – of boundaries and borders connected with security discourses through their very implementations as discursive power (could) manifest(s) itself. This socially diffused production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification is, in terms of Barnett and Duvall (2005), productive power.

IDENTITY POLITICS AND SECURITIZATION

Switching away from the essentialist meaning of friends and foes in the Schmittian sense and their provokingly simple/under-complex and dehumanizing categorizations of others (Kteily et al., 2016), arguing in line with Mouffe (2005) opens up the discursive space in which images and narratives of enmity/amity are constantly invoked as instruments and methods to mobilize groups and foster in-group cohesion (Alexander et al., 1999). These images and narratives which provide probabilistic heuristics about the other's behaviour are understood as cognitive shortcuts towards reality and are a powerful tool of political discourse (Williams, 2013; Chernobrov, 2016). Looking at how friends and foes are constructed in political discourse provides a powerful analytical tool for recent developments. Acknowledging this antagonistic constitutive dimension should be understood as admonition of Schmittian reflexes, to "think with Schmitt against Schmitt" (Mouffe, 2005). Thus, images of amity and enmity are heuristic categories of (discourse) analysis rather than foundational principles. In this sense, these discourses represent discourses of danger (Stern, 2005) which discern the self from the other (Brewer, 1996; Campbell, 1998) and "tell [...] *what to fear*" (Stern, 2005: 4). These evaluations construct subjective positions on the boundary of we and them (Connolly, 1985) and are reproduced through performance (Stryker, 2007). This reflex of "to fix where/who we are" is central to the production of in/security where the inside is rendered secure and the outside dangerous (Stern, 2005). This assignment of 'foreign threat' represents a notion of securitizing the identity of the respective group – inherently linked to OST.

ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY (SEEKING) AS SOCIAL MECHANISM BETWEEN THE "WE" AND THE "US"

Ontological Security Theory (OST) (Steele, 2005; Mitzen, 2006; Lupovici, 2012) as a framework to understand behaviour in realms of security and perceptions of security (on a mostly state-centric level) has featured widely in the recent IR debate and turn on narratives (Huysmans, 1998; Alexander et al., 1999; Delehanty & Steele, 2009). OST holds that the motivations for behaviour could be found in needs of holding and reconstructing a positive self-identity. This biographical continuity (of the state/society) in form of narratives and images of the self and the other is

sought to be institutionalized by routinized relationships with those significant others. Reducing uncertainty about the behaviour of those others and creating predictability are functions of this institutionalization of re-imagined relationships. In line with an argument put forward by Chernobrov (2015), this paper suggests that narratives and images are instrumentalised within these co-constitutive relationships: as OST assumes security to rest in an ever-so-positive representation of the self, narratives of othering and belonging are used as balancing mechanism of those relationships. Shedding further light onto the mechanisms of OSS, this is particularly understood as balancing mechanism between the internal and the relational identity domain.

The inherent drive for consistency (Festinger, 1962; Lupovici, 2012) within this system opens up space for two quite different strategies of dissonance reduction within the aforementioned discourses according to two types of dissonances: cognitive and ontological. First, consistent with the overall assumption that the aforementioned images of amity and enmity work as cognitive proxies for power configurations, OST puts forward that there's a hierarchy of needs to be achieved by the state: first securing a positive self-conceptualization, then physical security. This rationale for a positive self-identity thus may lead to foreign policy choices inconsistent with physical security needs. In that scenario, images are strategically used as cognitive bridges between the (physical) security policy and ontological security needs in light of the strategic environment and perceived national security threats (Subotić, 2015). Second, otherness and belonging as distinct representations of those instrumentalised balancing methods of states'/societies' drive for ontological security shape intergroup relations (relational domain): they stimulate the construction of security communities and provide incentives to repel outsiders (Subotić, 2015). Therefore, the 'systemic structure' is a function of otherness, and thus a function of belonging to an in-group vs. an out-group (cf. the English School).

Here, image theory draws the connection between those actors' images of others and theoretical considerations on approaches to security – and their potential resulting behaviour - as it holds that these images contain information about actors' capabilities, intentions, previous experiences/memories as well as

perceptions of threat (Alexander et al., 2005; Gaufman, 2017) ³. In this context, captures of enmity/amity are conceptualized as representations of those social relations – which are then relatively durable, more stable evaluating indicators and patterns of social information on amity/enmity and, thus, defining mediators of intergroup behaviour in this net of relational others (Finlay et al., 1967).

“THE SIGNIFICANT OTHERS” AND THE RELATIONAL IDENTITY LAYER: OTHERING IN EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS AS COMMON DENOMINATOR?

Patterns of international institutional belonging (up to 2015)											
	CIS	EurAsEC	CU	CSTO	GUAM	BSEC	NATO	ENP	BSS	TRACECA	INOGATE
Russia	x	X	X	X		X	NRC	#	x		#
Armenia	x	#	X	X		X	IPAP	X	x	X	X
Azerbaijan	x			#	X	X	IPAP	X	x	X	X
Georgia	#			#	X	X	NGC	X	x	X	X

Table 1. Patterns of international institutional belonging (up to 2015)

CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States, EurAsEC: Eurasian Economic Community, CU: Customs Union, CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organization, GUAM (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova): Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, BSEC: Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ENP: European Neighbourhood Policy, BSS: Black Sea Synergy, TRACECA: (EU) Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia, INOGATE: (EU) Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe.

Rushing from one initiative to the other without having a significant outcome, EU-Russia relations have suffered from being under-defined, meaning that significant, long-term policy development was cast aside in favour of symbolic but rather superficial policy engagement (Kanet & Freire, 2012; Allison, 2013). The PCA with Russia signed in 1994 was framed by long and difficult negotiations with Russia pressing for a better deal and the EU as shaper of norms insisting on conditionality and norms convergence. Ever since then, it was possible to observe that the EU was identified by Russia as a power politics actor in ‘Russia’s neighbourhood’ (Made & Sekarev, 2011).

3 The taxonomy of these images reads as follows: Ally (1: compatible, 2 and 3 equal), Enemy (1: incompatible, 2 and 3 equal), Dependent (1: incompatible, 2 and 3 lower), Barbarian (1: incompatible, 2 lower, 3 higher), Imperialist (1: incompatible, 2 and 3 higher) (Alexander et al., 2005: p.30).

However, strategic interaction – both on a policy level and in what could be observed as frames of the other to relevant in-group audiences - has been fairly limited or framed negatively under the impression of the first Chechen war and the Russian debt crisis. Despite this, the EU's Common Strategy on Russia in June 1999 reaffirmed the importance of Russia and post-sovereign principles (Haukkala, 2010). Russia's Mid-Term-EU strategy 2000-10 can be regarded as a direct answer to that, already opposing the mentioned principles emphasizing sovereignty and interest-based cooperation (Kanet & Freire, 2012). Trying to establish EU-Russia relations in the first place, various aspects of common duty in the neighborhood were neglected in the policy documents, leaving behind fundamentally different interpretations of security and the way of implementing them - economic aspects always played a major role in this relationship. Putin's presidencies initially included a "European Choice" and Russia's cooperative role in the post-9/11 developments in combination with first signs of domestic liberalization boosted cooperation and emphasised equality in interstate relations (Hopf, 2008) but eventually just contributed to a more fuzzy constellation of EU-Russia relations with only virtual progress: the Four Common Spaces (2005) in the light of the Big-Bang enlargement and Russia's rejection of the ENP, the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council because of Russia's insistence of a special strategic partnership, not ranking it amongst the other eastern countries, and the Modernization Partnerships (2009/10) in light of the Caucasus crisis and thus the necessity to re-establish relations.

According to Kanet and Freire (2012) "[c]ooperation on security issues between Brussels and Moscow has been rather limited". Despite all efforts, the implementation has been slow and inconsistent: the external security pillar was under constant contestation without being able to find consensus on a denomination for the "common neighborhood", thus revealing again fundamental differences and abstention from cooperation in security issues (Whitman & Wolff, 2010). At the same time, Russian leaders consider that NATO enlargement has reinforced 'old dividing lines', despite cooperation under the NATO-Russia Council (Allison, 2013). Moreover, the 2008 war in Georgia was a turning point for EU-Russian security relations (Kanet & Freire, 2012): on one hand, both Russia and Georgia blamed each other for having been the aggressor with the EU trying to mediate, on the other hand NATO enlargement was off the table for Georgia with the EUMM as a freezing exercise (Haukkala, 2010). In this context, the failed proposal

of a New Security Treaty for Europe by Medvedev highlighted yet again a strong othering position towards a common European security architecture and underlined differing views and interests of the EU and Russia (Kanet & Freire, 2012).

Thus, EU-Russia relations persist of fundamentally different interpretations of (security) actorhood and different modes of cooperation deduced from them. Russian and European policies imposed on the neighborhood have become competitive regarding all these aspects in the last years, fostering the fear of alienation of CIS countries from Russia (Made & Sekarev, 2011). This was exemplified by Lavrov's assessment of the EaP as an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence which opposes Russian interests (Kanet & Freire, 2012), and the fact that both actors haven't been able to find a common denomination for these countries. Approaches to design complementary policies – as seen above – have been rather limited in scope, coherence and support. The deepening constitution of the ENP in form of the EaP and Association Agreements (AA), thus, exactly constitutes what has manifested to have been a pivotal point for EU- Russia relations: a strong input of EU identity projection, of a redefinition of in-group belonging and, thus, a rather strong othering of the Russian position and vice versa.

“THE SELFS” AND THE OSS MECHANISM BETWEEN INTERNAL AND RELATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS COUNTRIES

Frames of Belonging/Otherness in the Foreign and Security Policy Doctrines/White Papers

When looking at images of amity and enmity in Georgian policy discourse, Russia is framed as an imperialist power whose actions range from active war promotion, violating territorial integrity and creating de-facto occupied territories to limiting policy options and questioning state sovereignty. Georgia's self-conceptualization is coherently linked to 'following a European way', so that Russia's actions are in particular seen as provocations and violations of the very self-concept. As those actions go to the core of ontological security, having experienced conflicts with Russia in the recent past, its arms build-up, and recently perceived 'forced convergence activities' in the neighbourhood contribute very negatively to its imperialist image. However, far from being coherent a region, all countries

of the South Caucasus feature very distinctive interpretations of the social context and otherness and belonging as shown by the analysis of images found in the policy documents:

Country	Images/Narratives of amity and enmity
Armenia	Russia: most important ally CSTO/CIS: institutional ally US/NATO: strategic/very selective ally EU: strategic, very selective ally Azerbaijan: Imperialist / Babarian Turkey: Imperialist
Azerbaijan	Armenia: Barbarian Russia: strategic ally Iran: important ally Turkey and Georgia: strategic allies EU/NATO: strategic, selective ally
Georgia	Russia: Imperialist EU: strong, "natural" Ally NATO: strong Ally Turkey: Ally Ukraine: Ally

Table 2: Images/Narratives of amity and enmity, own inductive policy text analysis

Complex, mutually exclusive self-conceptualizations are reflected within frames of the major foreign policy and security documents – with profound implications for the co-constitutions of the in-group/out-group and adherent evaluations of the latter. At the basis of this lies the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which features as the most important issue in both Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s self-identifications, as both interpret Nagorno-Karabakh and its population as being integral part of its sovereignty, territorial integrity and national identity. It is not surprising that a conflict which is integrated into the very self-definition constitutes very negative perceptions of the involved other. Thus, both Armenia and Azerbaijan hold images of each other varying from barbarian to imperialist. It is within this context, that a net of other significant others is constructed through those lenses, in particular with a focus on national identity ties. Georgia is the only neighbour who is accepted as (selective) ally by both states – from that, perceptions of amity and enmity draw clear distinctions of (un)friendly others given their perceived

material and ideational positioning on self-conceptualization issues. Whereas Armenia sees Russia as most important ally and together with that the CSTO and CIS as institutional allies, Azerbaijan and Turkey are depicted as arch enemies. Coming from that, the EU and NATO are only seen as strategic and very selective allies. Vice versa, perceptions of security follow the same logic in Azerbaijan: Armenia is perceived as the barbarian other with Turkey, Georgia, and in particular Iran being strategic allies. It is noteworthy that also Russia is seen a strategic ally with the EU and NATO only featuring in situational identifications.

It is only within those images of the others that material (here military) situational inputs are cognitively evaluated and reshaped – thus, Russia’s build-up is perceived as providing security guarantees to a certain extent by Azerbaijan and Armenia, whereas Georgia perceive this as fundamental challenge to its self-conceptualizations. Finding a balance between inputs of the EU and Russia as (non-)regional others and all other significant others in the region whilst navigating between upholding and re-constituting codified behaviour and conceptualizations is an immense task for all countries under scrutiny. For example, momentums of that can be identified in Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s sketchy evaluations of Russia and the EU whilst holding contradicting images of each other. There, it is to see whether potentially converging Russian-led integration projects would reconcile or foster those contradictions. Moreover, with Georgia identifying itself as fundamentally European, it is to see how this further fragmentation and recalibration of the South Caucasus will shape perceptions of otherness and how and if so these conceptualizations of otherness will contribute to friendly or unfriendly images vis-à-vis even further material inputs, perceptions of insecurity and, thus, a potential resort to old patterns.

IMAGES OF BELONGING/OTHERNESS IN THE SOCIETAL ARENA

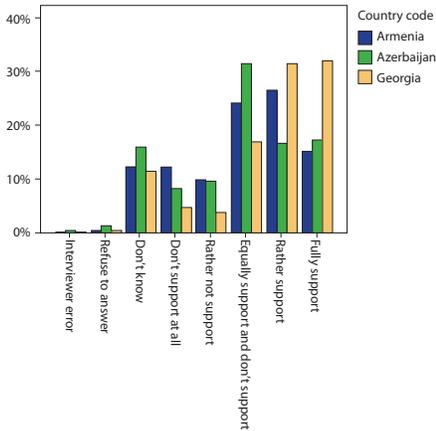


Figure 1. Support of country's membership in the EU (CRRС 2013)

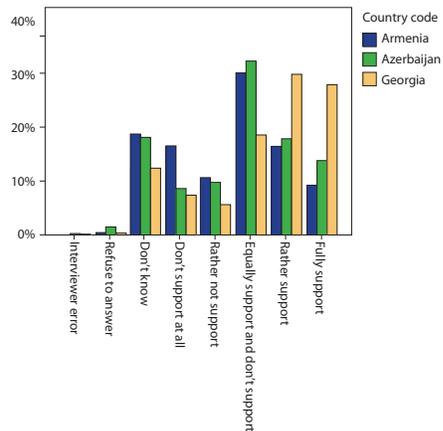


Figure 2. Support of country's membership in the NATO (CRRС 2013)

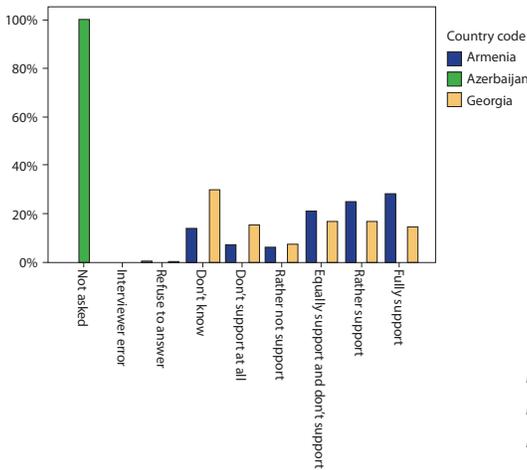


Figure 3. Support of country's membership in the Eurasian Economic Community (CRRС 2013)

As one main anchor of belonging and therefore source for constituting otherness vis-à-vis the others, the EU holds a particular role in the South Caucasus. A sense of belonging to the EU is perceived very strongly in Georgia (65%) with rates of “equal support/don’t support” only at 17% – there’s merely a share of population rejecting the idea of belonging to the EU (only 8%). Nevertheless, from 2012 to 2013, mentions of belonging fell from 72% and undecided accounts as well as othering positions rose from 13% and 3%, respectively. This tendency, even more prominent, is also observable in Azerbaijan: the share of population undecided

whether they support belonging to the EU or not nearly equalled the share of supporters (34%) with 32%. This is partly a result of rising support of the forth (up from 23% in 2012) and partly a significant fall of feeling of belonging to the EU (this number fell from 49%). Simultaneously, othering in terms of not wanting to belong to the EU rose from 12% to 18%. These findings are consistent with observations for Armenia: there, the share of people rejecting the idea of belonging to the EU rose 10% to 23% within one year and now constitutes the highest figure of rejection in the South Caucasus. In line with this, perceptions of belonging decreased sharply from 54% to 41%. 25% are between the stools of those two positions. Not that surprising, membership aspirations for NATO are still the highest within the Georgian population: "fully support" and "rather support" account there for 58% of all replies. However, the share of (rather) non-supporters accounts for 12% – up from 6% the year before. In addition, rather indifferent views („equally support and don't support“) gain more and more shares: in 2013, they represented 19% (in contrast to 14% in 2012). These rather indifferent attachments also now constitute the majority of replies by Azeri respondents: the number rose from 23% in 2012 to 32% in 2013. This change is in line with falling support rates – these went down in the same time frame from 45% to 31% and are now less than the indifferent ones – and rising non-attachment moves: these numbers went up from 14% to 18%. The same tendency is observable in Armenia: indifferent, yet undecided accounts represent the majority with 30% in 2013 (up from 26%). However, the share not supporting in any form NATO membership now is higher than the share rather feeling attached to it: 28% (2012:23%) compared to 26% (2012:33%). The common denominator for perceptions of NATO attachment, thus, is rather a drifting away of the countries of the South Caucasus represented by falling numbers of support and rising numbers of undecidedness and rejection.

It is necessary to put the before-mentioned figures of belonging/otherness into the complete neighbourhood context – to contrast them with perceptions of belonging/otherness to the Eurasian Economic Community. Unfortunately, the available CRRC 2013 dataset didn't include this question for Azerbaijan so that only Georgian and Armenian perspectives can be displayed and compared consistently. Nevertheless, this depicts an interesting contrast between an EEU member (Armenia) and an EU-membership aspiring country (Georgia). Although with 30,9% being the half of the share of feeling attached to the EU, a sense of

positive alignment with the EEU is definitively acknowledged in Georgia. On the same time, othering of this perspective is the highest (22,4%) in comparison with other positions within Georgian society. 16,5% are yet undecided and a significant share of 29,8% doesn't know whether to differentiate or to belong to the EEU. The fragmentation of the South Caucasus in terms of belonging/otherness is rendered visible in particular by a comparison of those Georgian figures with those of Armenia: Whereas only 12,6% reject an idea of attachment with the EEU, over the half of the population (52,4) perceives this as desirable. This figure, thus, is approximately 13% higher than for the EU and even double when compared to orientations towards NATO. Only 13,8% don't know what to answer when being confronted with this question.

As regional power, Turkey holds a significant position within the self-positioning of the Armenian and Azeri people – given the inverted identity function mentioned beforehand. Resources of identity construction in Armenia draw heavily on the Armenian Genocide and its non-recognition by Turkey (seen by them as perpetrator, as barbarian other): as a consequence, 28% of Armenians identify Turkey as main enemy. Whereas people in Azerbaijan don't mention Turkey at all when thinking of enemies, only 3% do so in Georgia, too. As another part of this equalization, Turkey is seen as a main friend (91%) by Azerbaijan. On the other hand, these stratifications have led to mutual perceptions of enmity between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Strikingly high figures of mutual mistrust, devaluation and thus, enmity, can be observed here: 90% of the people in Azerbaijan see Armenians in a very unfavourable light which resonates with 66% of Armenians seeing Azerbaijan as main enemy. It is also remarkable that this question has a very polarizing effect in itself when being asked – 32% of Georgian's don't have an answer to that question or refuse to answer, with the latter option accounting for over three quarters of that figure.

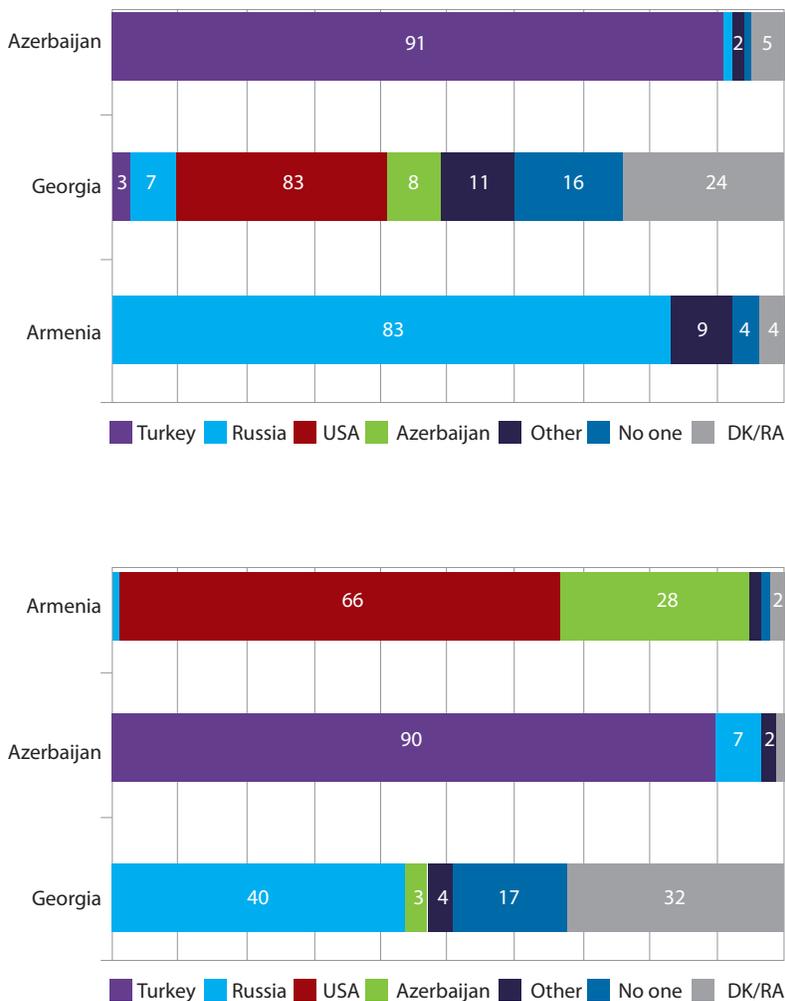


Figure 4. Friends (first graph) and enemies (second graph) of the South Caucasus countries (CRRC 2013)

Russia holds a quite particular role as constitutive other in the South Caucasus: whereas in Georgia – still evoking the 2008 war with Russia whilst constructing collective identity – 44% see Russia as main enemy, only 7% do so in Azerbaijan and a non-significant part identifies Russia as such in Armenia. However, as Georgia (only) and Azerbaijan (rather) hold negative opinions on Russia, Armenians by far see Russia with 83% as main friend. Whereas the axis of stratified relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan constitutes strict adherence to evaluated

different others in the logic of identity spill-overs and sameness/difference in attachment, Georgian people are the only ones mentioning the USA as main friend (31%). It is quite remarkable that the USA doesn't feature in the list of significant others given the friend/enemy questions at all in the three South Caucasus countries, except in Georgia. This role decline is also observable for Iran (not accounting for any significant percentage above 5% in any of those polls).

CONCLUSION

One basic premise of Buzan and Wæver's work was that there were two RSCs to be found after the Cold War in Europe: a European RSC and a post-Soviet one centred around Russia, which together built the European supercomplex (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). This paper has argued that what Buzan and Wæver called "seperateness and involvement" within the European Supercomplex could better be modelled as different conceptualizations of otherness with concrete images and narratives of amity and enmity informing and co-constituting the situation on the ground. According to this model the bridge between the two regional foreign policies of the EU and Russia could be identified in them being different anchors of belonging, yet otherness – cutting across the dimensions of values and interests - serving as polarizing anchors of belonging and otherness: diffusing potentially mutually exclusive sets of ideational and material factors. These de facto contradicting images of allies vs. imperialist/barbarian others have an impact on those others, too: they, vice versa, mutually constitute images and narratives of otherness and belonging, which, in turn, amplifies the images of enmity/amity of those countries in-between, given ever so more distinctive patterns of alignment/alienation of those providing incentives.

Within this complex, applying a twofold concept of identity – relational and internal – supplements the analysis strongly – as they inform images and narratives of amity/enmity vis-à-vis OSS mechanisms. Ontological security approaches provide understandings of (broader) situations based on behaviour which fundamentally is constituted by an actor's need of 'securing' a certain self-conceptualization. However, these social identities are rather exogenous to the system itself – which, in turn, leaves the question open why these specific self-conceptualizations are evoked. Thus, conceptualising and embedding OSS as balancing mechanism between those two identity arenas seems to significantly strengthen

the meaning of this otherwise rather generic mechanism. In this way, it was possible to see a limited trickle-down effect of security dialogues from elites to people as elites – as creators of the main policy documents – have much more ontologically fest positions. A drifting apart of positions of othering/belonging between elites and societies could be observed: leaving room for manoeuvre for other anchors to leverage those in terms of applied identity politics.

Summarizing all those factors, the security outcome for the Countries of the South Caucasus is discouraging. They have witnessed a strong commitment to self-conceptualizations which are mutually exclusive. From that, securing these ontological standpoints has led to portraying the (not only) surrounding others as imperialist or even barbarian, as major security threats to the very own existence. Within this existential reasoning, even little changes in comparative (military) advantages constitute heightened perceptions of insecurity as those enmity lenses bundle negative out-group perceptions. It is within this 'existenzialized' context that intergroup boundaries are very clearly defined so that it is very difficult to overcome inherited patterns of contradicting self-conceptualizations and, thus, of negative intergroup evaluations. Seeing those factors as endogenous to a co-constitutive environment, changes to this setting could only be realized due to the diffusion of material and ideational factors as well as to expectations of significant others. In this context, it is to see whether the diverse inputs of the EU and Russia are evaluated as being reasonably intense and (bene)fitting for the respective country as to implement these momentums into its self-conceptualization and whether this would constitute a significant change in who is perceived as amicable or inimical other.

In light of yet again rising populism and nationalism combined with abstract, undercomplex and openly aggressive reasoning, it is of utmost importance to decode these ontological security rationales and existenzialised categorizations – around yet eerily familiar lines – to make sense of how and why these countries conceive of their surroundings as they do and what spaces for political manoeuvres emerge.

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