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The Social Psychological Barriers of Social Norm Contestation: The EU, Russia and Crimea

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the social psychological barriers underpinning the EU and Russia's social norm contestation in the context of Ukraine. Through a frame analysis, I analyse how the two actors perceive the Crimean annexation, their own foreign policy behaviour in this context, the foreign policy behaviour of the other, and the general state of the international normative system. My findings indicate that the social psychological barrier which underpins the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia is related to the cognitive processes the actors apply in their construction of the international normative system and the type of norms which constitute it. Whereas the EU points to a stable international normative system based on injunctive norms and their clear-cut application, Russia emphasises that the normative system also consists of descriptive norms and that the presence of this type of social norm makes social norm application a matter of contextual interpretation. What the actors do agree on is the purpose of social norms and the motivation states have for complying with them. The analysis hence finds that the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia is not based on differing perceptions and interpretations on why norms are relevant or why states should comply with them. Rather, it is based on differing perceptions and interpretations of the common knowledge that is to guide state behaviour. What the analysis also suggests is that Russia's foreign policy behaviour in Ukraine was not necessarily influenced by a lack of moral compass or a wish to disrupt the international normative system. Instead, it may have been based on a subjective interpretation of what has been done before in perceived similar contexts.

Keywords: Social norms; social psychology; conflict analysis; state behaviour; interpretations and perceptions

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INTRODUCTION

In International Relations there is much debate about what guides states' foreign policy behaviour in the absence of a central authority and what causes states to comply with international norms. An event that – amongst others – has incited such a discussion is Russia's foreign policy behaviour in the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, where a referendum led to the peninsula's inclusion into Russian territory (Treisman, 2016, 47). Following the events in Crimea, actors such as the EU imposed sanctions on Russia to force a change in Russia's foreign policy behaviour and redirect it to compliance with international norms. Russia has however argued that it did not violate international norms, but rather that its actions were in agreement with democratic values and international law. Hence, rather than conforming with the pressure imposed on it via sanctions, Russia has imposed its own sanctions on EU member states and stated that a revocation of Crimea's inclusion under Russia is not up for debate. The EU and Russia hence currently find themselves in a social norm contestation over Crimea.

The source of this social norm contestation has mainly been explained by pointing at Russia's wish to disrupt the international normative system and the EU's desire to restore or secure this system. In this literature, focus is primarily on Russia and the structural factors and national interests which may have led to its annexation of Crimea. Here scholars point to, e.g., NATO's expansion, Russia's great power ambitions, Russia's wish to gain and maintain energy and military power status (Biersack, 2014), and Russia's domestic political factors, including nationalism (Laruelle, 2015). Little focus has been placed on the extent to which the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia over Crimea is driven by different perceptions and interpretations of the international normative system and the social norms which constitute it. If, however, we draw our attention towards how Russia and the EU understand and explain the international normative system and social norm compliance, then we may gain an insight into the interaction between the two actors' cognitive and motivational processing. Such an analysis would hence provide a better understanding of what considerations may have assisted in influencing Russia's actions in Crimea. It may furthermore give us a better understanding of the social psychological barriers that may underpin the social norm contestation

between the EU and Russia. To explore this, the paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do the EU and Russia justify their actions in the context of the annexation of Crimea?
- 2) What do these justifications tell us about the EU's and Russia's perception and interpretation of their own foreign policy behaviour, the foreign policy behaviour of the other, and the current state of the international normative system, and how do these perceptions and interpretations differ?
- 3) Based on the actors' justifications, what may be the social psychological barriers that underpin the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia over Crimea?

The following is based on the social constructivist approach and is an interdisciplinary study of International Relations (IR) and Social Psychology (SP). The paper seeks to explore the social psychological dynamics which may influence social norm contestation by drawing on IR and SP literature on social norms and social conflict. Social constructivism will thereby function both as the outlook of the paper but also as an overpass between the two fields, as its epistemology is compatible with norm and conflict research conducted in both areas of study (Schunk, 2012, 229). The theories used in this paper are hence rooted in the assumption that reality is socially constructed, and that behaviour and conflicts form through subjective perceptions (understanding) and interpretations (explanations based on an understanding), which actors bring to interactions (Schunk, 2012, 231). The aim of the paper is to explore the social psychological barriers of social norm contestation. These social-psychological barriers refer to "cognitive and motivational processes that impede mutually beneficial exchanges of concession" (Halperin and Bar-Tal, 2011, 638). Social psychological barriers are hence differing perceptions and interpretations actors may have of an issue, situation, and another actor, which may influence contestation (Halperin and Bar-Tal, 2011, 638). More specifically, the objective of the paper is hence to unravel what kind of cognitive and motivational processes the EU and Russia rely on in the context of Crimea and how these may differ and influence the social norm contestation between them.

The paper will proceed as follows: It will first lay out the theoretical framework and concepts which will be analysed as potential cognitive and motivational barriers in social norm contestation. Second, it will move on to describe the method of framing and the data to be analysed. It will then move on to analyse the two actors' interpretations and perceptions, with the findings eventually discussed and concluded in the final section of the paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL NORMS AND THE INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE SYSTEM

Social norms are, as stated by Fehr and Urs (2004), "standards of behaviour that are based on widely shared beliefs how individual group members ought to behave in a given situation" (185). Norms hence refer to shared beliefs about what is effective/ineffective behaviour (Cialdini et.al., 1991, 203-204) and what is socially acceptable/unacceptable behaviour in given contexts (Fehr and Urs, 2004, 185). Beliefs are defined as knowledge structures which actors have about themselves, others, and the environment, and they are the result of cognitive and emotional processing (Bar-tal, 2000, xii). In social psychology, there is a differentiation between individual and shared beliefs (Bar-tal, 2000, xiii). Individual beliefs refer to the belief of an individual, whereas shared beliefs are common understandings communicated between individuals and groups through verbal and non-verbal communication (Bar-tal, 2000, xiii). Shared beliefs hence construct reality or a "shared communicative environment" in which social planning, such as cooperation and goal formation, can occur between actors (Bar-tal, 2000, xiii). From this perspective, social norms hence define reality and how actors are to behave within this reality, and they only claim an existence if they are shared with others (Cialdini and Trost, 1998, 153).

This SP approach to social norms and shared beliefs is compatible with the social constructivist approach to norms in IR. In IR, social norms are neither an ephemeral nor an isolated phenomenon. Rather, they fall under a constructed system, which consists of a range of norms that are meant to guide state behaviour. What may be referred to as an international normative system is hence a structure that states have constructed over time via their own behaviour and agreements, and it is meant to ensure a streamlined and moral approach to foreign policy behaviour. The international normative system as a concept may hence be compared to what Wendt

(1999) called "common knowledge" (159). According to Wendt (1999), this knowledge "concerns actors' beliefs about each other's rationality, strategies, preferences, and beliefs, as well as about states of the external world. These beliefs need not be true, just believed to be true" (159). Common knowledge in the realm of IR, it may be argued, is hence a unifying force between states in as much as it is understood to be a shared outlook on how the world of international politics functions. Through this common knowledge, a culture is established, which, however, does not imply that all actors possess the same perceptions about the world, but that they have benchmarks which guide their actions in the international space (Wendt, 1999, 159). These benchmarks are social norms. The international normative system is hence a perceived constellation of what and how norms apply to state behaviour and how norms should be enforced. This perception is "subjective in the sense that the beliefs that make it up are in actors' heads, and figure in intentional explanations" (Wendt, 1999, 160). This implies that the common knowledge which is meant to act as the cognitive foundation for social norm compliance is essentially structured by subjective perceptions and interpretations and thus presents a potential cognitive barrier in social norm contestation. In the following, I will hence focus on how the EU and Russia perceive the international normative system and whether there is a difference in this perception.

According to Cialdini et al., there are two types of social norms which actors may refer and resort to in structuring their behaviour, namely injunctive and descriptive norms (Cialdini et.al., 1991, 203-204). Descriptive norms refer to perceptions of what is common behaviour in given situations, whereas injunctive norms refer to perceptions of what is right and wrong behaviour (Cialdini et.al., 1991, 203-204). Descriptive norms motivate behaviour by offering decision-making shortcuts by providing "evidence as to what will likely be effective and adaptive action" (Cialdini et.al., 1991, 203). These norms hence serve as information as to what behaviour is most operative in certain contexts (Cialdini et.al., 1991, 203-204). Injunctive norms refer to morality and motivate behaviour by "promising social rewards and punishments" (Cialdini et.al., 1991, 203-204). They can also take the form of legal norms (Cialdini and Trost, 1998, 153-154). Injunctive norms are therefore perceptions about what ought to be done or ought to be avoided and they serve as "the moral rules of the group" (Cialdini and Trost, 1998, 157). Given that social psychology

operates with two types of social norms which may have an influence on behaviour, I will in the following focus on how and whether the EU and Russia refer to these two types of norms and the extent to which the actors perceive these types of norms as constitutive of the international normative system. This distinction between social norm types may hence serve as another potential cognitive barrier in the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia.

SOCIAL NORM COMPLIANCE

Apart from exploring whether the EU and Russia have differing perceptions of social norm types and the international normative system, there is also a need to address whether the actors have differing perceptions of the purpose of norms and the motivations for social norm compliance, as these may equally be barriers which influence the actors' social norm contestation.

According to Bandura (1999), social norm compliance is dependent on actors' interpretation of a norm in the situation where it is invoked (207). As stated by Bandura (1991): "Situations with moral implications contain many decisional ingredients that may be given lesser or greater weight depending upon the standards by which they are cognitively processed and the particular constellations of events in given moral predicaments" (45). How actors interpret a given situation may hence influence the type of norm they resort to. The interpretation of the situation may however also be accompanied by a general interpretation of the purpose of social norms and the motivation for complying with them. According to Hurd (1999), there are two perceptions which may influence an actor's interpretation of the purpose of social norms. These are the societal-valued and functionalist perspectives (379). The societal-valued perspective refers to social norm compliance based on an interpretation that the norm is socially valued (Hurd, 1999, 379). This implies that an actor may comply with a norm because it is of value to the actor and/or the community. The functionalist perspective refers to social norm compliance based on an interpretation that a norm serves a certain function (Hurd, 1999, 379). This suggests that an actor may comply with a norm because the actor perceives it as useful in terms of reaching goals. Eventually, an actor may decide to comply with a norm due to an interpretation that it is socially valued and at the same time functional for reaching one or more goal(s) (Hurd, 1999, 379).

Apart from these two perceptions, social psychology operates with three interpretations which may have an influence on an actor's motivation for social norm compliance. These are the wish of ensuring accuracy, preserving social relationships, and maintaining a favourable self-concept (Cialdini et.al., 2004, 591). An actor may, e.g., wish to comply with a norm to ensure accuracy, meaning ensuring that it responds appropriately to a given situation and complies with the accurate or socially accepted form of behaviour (Cialdini et.al., 2004, 592). An actor may also wish to comply with a social norm to preserve relationships and ensure social approval and inclusion (Cialdini et.al., 2004, 598). Eventually, an actor may be motivated to comply with a social norm to maintain a stable self-perception and ensure a consistent behavioural pattern in line with the actor's beliefs, commitments, statements, etc. (Cialdini et.al., 2004, 602). Social norm compliance may hence be based on both an interpretation of the social norm's validity and function as well as the implications compliance or non-compliance may have for the actor itself. Hence, I will also explore whether the actors have differing interpretations of the situation in Ukraine, the general function and value of norms, and the motivations for social norm compliance.

To locate the social psychological barriers which may underpin the EU's and Russia's social norm contestation in Ukraine, the analysis will seek to unravel their cognitive and motivational processes and explore whether they differ and clash. More specifically, it will focus on the actors' perception and interpretation of the situation in Ukraine and the international normative system, the type of norms they perceive and interpret to constitute the normative system, the perceived value and function they attach to these norms, and the motivations they perceive to underlie social norm compliance. By focusing on this, the analysis intends to unravel whether the social psychological barriers underlying the EU's and Russia's social norm contestation in Crimea is related to motivational or cognitive processing, or both.

METHODOLOGY

To locate the cognitive and motivational processes of the EU and Russia, the analysis will focus on how the actors justify their own foreign policy behaviour and the foreign policy behaviour of the other. By concentrating on how the actors frame justifications for behaviour, the analysis will seek to unravel the perceptions and interpretations

that constitute the actors' understanding of social norm compliance in the context of Ukraine and the current state of the international normative system. These findings will then be compared to explore the social psychological barriers which may influence the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia.

The method used to unravel the cognitive and motivational processes will be a frame analysis centred around the social psychological tendencies related to justification of behaviour. The approach will hence be to focus on how the actors construct issues and the social psychological tools they apply in doing so. According to Bandura (1994), when actors justify behaviour, they tend to apply certain social psychological tendencies in the construction of their narratives (194). They will, e.g., "cognitively reconstruct" their behaviour and issues, meaning that actors will frame the behaviour in a specific manner to highlight its morality (Bandura, 1994, 194). The behaviour is, e.g., constructed as personally and socially acceptable and as an act that serves either social or personal purposes (Bandura, 1994, 194). This construction is an essential element of moral justifications, as it provides psychological well-being for the actors and implies that actors can operate on a "moral imperative and preserve their view of themselves as moral agents" (Bandura, 1994, 194). Apart from this, cognitive reconstruction is meant to change the perception of others (Bandura, 1994, 195). Another element of the cognitive reconstruction is the use of euphemistic language. This is particularly applied by actors who have violated a norm, and who are seeking to disguise immoral behaviour as something moral or respectable (Bandura, 1994, 195). This "verbal sanitizing" cleans the repugnancy or unpleasantness of immoral behaviour (Bandura, 1994, 195). Another element is to present the behaviour as agentless and the act as something caused by "nameless forces" (Bandura, 1994, 195). If the actor is acknowledged as the agent, it will often be described as passively or mechanically led to conduct the act by other - often social - forces (Bandura, 1994, 195). Eventually, actors may compare their acts with the acts of others (Bandura, 1994, 195). In this sense, the violation of an injunctive norm may be compared with descriptive norms or the everyone-does-it comparison. There is also the tendency to justify behaviour by comparing it to successful and/or major events in the past (Bandura, 1994, 196). Essentially cognitively redefining acts, the application of euphemistic language, making the act agentless, and the tendency to compare acts are psychological features which serve to redeem or re-confirm one's morality and

one's compliance with "the moral rules of the group" - or the injunctive norms that are meant to guide behaviour (Bandura, 1994, 196).

Since the paper looks at cognitive and motivational processing, it will focus on actors (such as heads of states and ministers) who represent the Russian state and the EU institutions. The aim is hence to analyse the narratives that the representatives resort to when seeking to express a collective justification on behalf of Russia or the EU. This is done in full awareness of the fact that individuals within the EU institutions and the Russian state may not necessarily share such perceptions and interpretations in private, but rather that they are the cooperative narratives meant to guide the collective behaviour of the actors. The data used are news releases, policy documents, fact sheets, and statements retrieved from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (Mid.ru/en), the homepage of the President of Russia (en.kremlin.ru), the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations (russiaun.ru/en), the European Union External Action Service (eeas.europa.eu), the European Parliament (europarl.europa.eu/portal/en), the Council of the European Union (consilium.europa.eu/), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (osce.org). The time frame for data collection ranges from 2013-2017.

RUSSIA AND ITS JUSTIFICATIONS

In its justification, Russia constructs the situation in Ukraine as socially and politically unstable due to the occurrence of a coup d'état in 2014. As stated by Putin (March 4, 2014) when asked by journalists about his assessment of what happened in Ukraine:

"There can only be one assessment: this was an anti-constitutional takeover, an armed seizure of power... I would like to draw your attention to the fact that President Yanukovich... signed an agreement with the opposition on February 21... He went to Kharkov to attend an event, and as soon as he left, instead of releasing the occupied administrative buildings, they immediately occupied the President's residence and the Government building – all that instead of acting on the agreement.... What was the purpose of all those illegal, unconstitutional actions, why did they have to create this chaos in the country?"

According to the Russian perspective, the event which took place during the winter of 2014 was an illegal attempt to oust a sitting president. The change of power in Ukraine was hence an act which went against the injunctive norm of sovereignty and the peaceful transfer of power. Russia also frames the events following the ousting of Yanukovych as a breakdown of government and an explosion in uncontrolled crime, which eventually would engulf the eastern part of Ukraine and pose a threat to the inhabitants of the area. Putin further elaborated (March 4, 2014):

“Therefore, if we see such uncontrolled crime spreading to the eastern regions of the country, and if the people ask us for help, while we already have the official request from the legitimate President, we retain the right to use all available means to protect those people. We believe this would be absolutely legitimate”.

By constructing the context surrounding the annexation of Crimea as unstable, and by defining the change in power as a coup d'état, Russia is justifying its behaviour in two ways. First, Russia is pointing to the needs and wishes of the people of eastern Ukraine as a population who feared for their safety and asked Russia for assistance in securing this. Russia is hence constructing its behaviour as based on a moral incentive to aid a population in need. Second, Russia is referring to its behaviour as based on the request from a sitting president. Russia's intervention in Ukraine is hence constructed as compliant with the international descriptive and injunctive norms of aiding a population in need and supporting a democratically elected, and still sitting, president. Noticeable in this is that, by pointing out that social forces and demands rather than individual Russian agency forced Russia into reacting the way it did (March 4, 2014), Russia frames its behaviour as a response to these requests. Its behaviour is hence constructed as socially acceptable and as something that served social purposes.

Russia never mentions the annexation as such, but the event is rather referred to as a referendum for self-determination that was legal and conforming to international agreements. In an address to Russian State Duma deputies and Federation Council members (March 18, 2014), Putin remarked:

“As it declared independence and decided to hold a referendum, the Supreme Council of Crimea referred to the United Nations Charter, which speaks of the right of nations to self-determination. Incidentally, I would like to remind you that when

Ukraine seceded from the USSR it did exactly the same thing, almost word for word. Ukraine used this right, yet the residents of Crimea are denied it. Why is that? Moreover, the Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent – a precedent our western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country's central authorities”

Apart from referring to the event as a referendum for self-determination, which sanitizes the act of annexation, Russia compares its own behaviour and the event with previous incidents, such as Ukraine's separation from the USSR and the West's acknowledgement of Kosovo. Russia hence argues that Crimea's self-determination is not a unique occurrence but rather based on a historical precedent, on the injunctive norms established through the UN Charter, and the descriptive norm established by the Kosovo case. By doing so, Russia seeks to justify its behaviour by pointing to what it regards as similarities with previous contexts and state behaviour. Russia, however, also questions why similar acts in perceivable similar contexts were justified in the past when they are now perceived as illegitimate. Russia hence questions the behavioural pattern of the West and the standards the West applies when distinguishing between the applicability of injunctive and descriptive norms.

Russia often questions the West's behavioural pattern and its differentiation between descriptive and injunctive norms. What is interesting here is that Russia tends to compare its own actions with particularly that of the US. This is an interesting choice of justification, as in such incidents, Russia tends to point to the often illegal and descriptive-based behaviour of the US. As Putin said about the West's statements regarding Russia's behaviour (March 4, 2014):

“We are often told our actions are illegitimate, but when I ask, “Do you think everything you do is legitimate?” they say “yes”. Then, I have to recall the actions of the United States in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, where they either acted without any UN sanctions or completely distorted the content of such resolutions, as was the case with Libya.”

What is noticeable is that Russia refers to how states, and particularly the US, have a history of resorting to descriptive norms and the violation of injunctive norms for

their own gain. Using such a ground for justification is a peculiar choice, as it resembles an attempt to apply a “everybody-does-it” comparison, hereby justifying an act by arguing that others have done it before. Another frequently used element in Russia’s justification is to point out perceived contradictions in the international normative system where some states may resort to descriptive norms and violate injunctive norms whilst others may not. Russia hence points out that the West applies a double standard when assessing Russia’s and thus US’s social norm compliance (Putin, March 18, 2014).

Eventually, the annexation is justified through history by framing the territory of Crimea as Russian on account of both its Russian heritage and its Russian or pro-Russian inhabitants (Putin, March 18, 2014). The referendum is situated within a construction of Crimea as Russian in heart and spirit and justified by referring to a shared belief within the Peninsula that the territory is Russian. As stated by Putin during an address to the Russian State Duma and Federation Council members (March 18, 2014):

“In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia.”.

Crimea and Russia are hence framed as sharing a belief about the connectedness between the two territories. It is upon this shared belief that the decision to transfer the territory to Ukraine in the 1950s is framed as a decision of Khrushchev largely motivated by personal political gain. This act is hence reconstructed as one which went against shared beliefs and norms and one which did not serve social purposes (Putin, March 18, 2014):

“... this decision was made in clear violation of the constitutional norms that were in place even then. The decision was made behind the scenes”.

The act was hence illegal and eventually made Russia realise that it was “*not simply robbed, it was plundered*” (March 18, 2014). From this, the annexation of Crimea is equally constructed as a way to ensure justice and the righting of a norm violation which occurred in the 50s. This construction is further emphasised and sought to be validated by comparing the choice of the people in Crimea with the unification of Germany (Putin, March 18, 2014):

“Let me remind you that in the course of political consultations on the unification of East and West Germany, at the expert, though very high level, some nations that were then and are now Germany’s allies did not support the idea of unification. Our nation, however, unequivocally supported the sincere, unstoppable desire of the Germans for national unity. I am confident that you have not forgotten this, and I expect that the citizens of Germany will also support the aspiration of the Russians, of historical Russia, to restore unity”.

By comparing the unification of Russia and Crimea with the unification of East and West Germany, Russia is justifying its behaviour by comparing it with a past event celebrated in the West as a liberation of a population from a system it did not identify with. With this, Russia therefore seeks to change how the context in Ukraine and Russia’s behaviour should be perceived. It is equally attempting to justify its behaviour by opening a debate about what norms - descriptive or injunctive - should apply in this context based on an observation of how similar contexts were addressed by the West in the past.

RUSSIA: SANCTIONS AND THE BEHAVIOUR OF OTHERS

The sanctions imposed on Russia are framed as an unfair and largely economic tactic applied by primarily the US as a way of suppressing states (Lavrov, October 31, 2017):

“Let me recall that sanctions as a means of competition have been used for a very long time, primarily by the United States. According to my information, private European companies were fined for over \$200 billion from 2008 to 2016... Total was punished for “commercial bribery” and BNP Paribas for relations with Cuba, Sudan and Iran.... There have been many cases. As you understand, all this had and has nothing to do with what Russia is doing. This has nothing to do with Crimea, which regained its status as part of Russia after the anti-constitutional coup d’état in Kiev, a criminal action that the residents of Crimea did not accept. All this has nothing to do with Donbass, either. Both Donbass and Crimea are simply a convenient excuse for our American colleagues to engage in unfair competition and undermine the positions of rivals.”.

The sanctions are hence not presented as corrective measures for violating injunctive norms, but rather reconstructed as tactical instruments of suppression applied

irrespectively of whether actors have done something immoral or not. Russia hence presents a perception of the current international community as being in a state of unnatural competition with the US as creator and frontrunner of this environment. The cause for this is presented as a remnant of the past with Russia linking it to the norms and perceptions of the Cold War. Putin, e.g., points out that the competitive nature of the Cold War continues to exist, and although the norms of the past have *“formally been eliminated...in reality, many limitations are still in effect”* (Putin, March 18, 2014). The sanctions hence consolidate the unfair competition currently in place in the international community, and they are meant to force Russia to comply with this system. This implies forcing Russia to abandon and alter its self-concept, which includes adopting the Western perspective of the situation in Ukraine. As stated by Sergey Lavrov during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly (September 27, 2014):

“Russia is ready to continue to actively promote this political settlement under the framework of the tried and tested Minsk process... However, it should be clear that we are doing this for the sake of the peace and wellbeing of the Ukrainian people rather than to cater to someone else’s ambitions. The attempts to put pressure on Russia and to compel it to abandon its values, truth and justice have no prospects whatsoever”.

However, since Russia shares neither the EU’s and the US’s perception of the context in Ukraine nor the presented immorality of Russia’s behaviour, it does not recognize any valid grounds for the sanctions. Eventually, Russia constructs the use of sanctions as the erosion of the shared communicative environment of international relations and as an act which creates a system in which the individual beliefs and interests of a state have started to set the collective agenda. Indeed, according to Sergey Lavrov (September 21, 2017), imposing unilateral sanctions is:

“... illegitimate and undermines the collective nature of international efforts”.

The use of sanctions is therefore largely a descriptive norm applied by the US in many different contexts, and it is a norm which violates the injunctive norms set by the international community. The sanctions hence contribute to the erosion of the international normative system.

In terms of the EU, Russia regards the EU's behaviour as inconsistent and based on a double standard. As stated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during a meeting with members of the Association of European Businesses (October 31, 2017):

"[A]pproximately at the same time Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi fled from Yemen, and the progressive Western community has been demanding for the past three years that he return to Yemen from Saudi Arabia, where he is living now. Why does your attitude to the situation in Yemen differ from your position on Ukraine? Both countries had elected and universally recognised presidents who presided over UN member states. But your European colleagues believe that since Viktor Yanukovych left Kiev for Kharkov, it was perfectly all right to stage a coup. As for Yemen, three years after its president fled the country they demand that his legitimate powers be restored. In other words, we want international relations to be based on full respect for international law without double standards".

Again, Russia bases its justification on a comparison between two contexts which it regards as similar, but to which the EU responded differently. Russia also refers to the motivational factor of the EU as being in contradiction with its self-concept and accuracy. From this "double standard" or unbalanced self-concept and behavioural pattern, Russia argues that the injunctive norms underpinning international relations are enforced irregularly and that the EU rather feeds into the disruptive and self-centered behaviour of the US (Lavrov, October 31, 2017). Eventually, the US and the EU are framed as actors who are supporting an illegitimate regime in Ukraine with a view to creating gains for themselves. As stated by Vladimir Putin when asked about the West's reaction to Crimea and the use of sanctions (March 4, 2014):

"And what motivates our partners? They supported an unconstitutional armed take-over, declared these people legitimate and are trying to support them...After all, look at how it all began, what triggered these events. The formal reason was that he did not sign the European Union Association Agreement... did it really need to be taken to this level of anarchy, to an unconstitutional overthrow and armed seizure of power, subsequently plunging the nation into the chaos where it finds itself today? I think this is unacceptable. And it is not the first time our Western partners are doing this in Ukraine".

Apart from violating injunctive norms, this egoistic behaviour of the EU and the US is also presented as a force which disrupts international peace and security because it, according to Russia, creates a descriptive norm of violating the law for a state's own benefit. As stated by Vladimir Putin about the situation in Ukraine following Maidan (March 4, 2014):

"There was no compliance with the Constitution at all. You see, we are now teaching people that if one person can violate any law, anyone else can do the same, and that's what causes chaos".

In constructing the conflict in Ukraine in this way, Russia hence draws links to what it regards as a historical precedent of social norm violation particularly by the US, which has now manifested itself in Ukraine. As Putin later noted in an address to the Russian State Duma and Federation Council members (March 18, 2014):

"Like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades...Key international institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary, in many cases, they are sadly degrading. Our Western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun".

Russia is hence constructing the use of sanctions as a tactic for creating an unbalanced or hierarchical international environment in which the US and its allies in the EU may force their interests on other states. According to Russia, these actors often resort to double standards and descriptive norms, which blurs the injunctive roots of the international normative system and creates chaos such as that witnessed in Ukraine. In the interpretation of Russia, it is therefore the historical and continued self-centred behaviour of the West which is the cause for an eroded international normative system and chaos around the world.

RUSSIA: THE INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE SYSTEM

Russia's framing of the situation in Ukraine, its own actions in this context, and the actions of the EU and the US are inextricably linked to how Russia makes sense of the international normative system and the enforcement of social norms. In this, Russia emphasises what it perceives as an unequal normative system in which descriptive

norms have taken a toll on injunctive norms (Lavrov, September 21, 2017). These descriptive norms include, e.g., removing heads of state and feeding into conflicts as exemplified in Libya and Ukraine. It also includes the use of double standards when enforcing social norms, as seen in the context of the Kosovo, which Russia – contrary to the West, regards as similar to that of Crimea. The distinction between injunctive and descriptive norms is hence blurred and unequal, as the West allows itself to follow descriptive norms established in the area of self-determination, whereas Russia may not. It is eventually this imposing of descriptive norms and double standards which disregards the injunctive roots of the international normative system. From this construction, Russia frames itself as a counter-actor to descriptive-based behaviour and as an actor that seeks to retreat to the traditional injunctive-based normative system. As Sergey Lavrov stated at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly (September 21, 2017):

"Two millennia ago, the Roman philosopher Seneca ... wrote: "We are born to live together". The UN founding fathers came closest to the realization of this fact. They were convinced (as they enshrined in the UN Charter) that God-given coexistence on one planet must compel all of us to unite in order to prevent the scourge of new wars. To be able to do it today we need to revive the culture of dialogue, search for the balance of interests against the instincts of instant solutions and the desire to "punish the disobedient".... Russia has always been and remains open to joint work with all those who show reciprocal readiness to cooperate on the basis of equality".

Russia hence refers to a need to return to an international normative system in which the agreed upon injunctive norms serve as the guiding force of state behaviour. This includes restoring a shared belief about when descriptive and injunctive norms apply. What is interesting in this framing is that Russia refers to the current prevalence of different perceptions between states regarding the understanding of contexts and the common knowledge which is meant to guide state behaviour.

THE EU AND ITS JUSTIFICATIONS

The situation prior to the annexation of Crimea is framed by the EU as a political crisis which erupted due to the Ukrainian decision of not signing the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. As stated in the EEAS fact sheet on EU-Ukraine relations (January 9, 2015):

“The EU has been following the political situation in Ukraine closely and has been deeply engaged in seeking a solution to the crisis that developed after months of peaceful protest on the central 'Maidan' in Kyiv following the announcement on 21 November 2013, of the Cabinet of Ministers' decision to suspend preparations to sign the Association Agreement at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius.”

In this context, Russia is framed as an aggressive actor which acted upon its own interest and took advantage of a fragile situation (European Parliament, September 20, 2017). It is this particular motivation which the EU frames as the reason for imposing sanctions upon Russia (European Parliament, September 20, 2017):

“In 2014, the political conflict between Russia and Western countries, which erupted due to the conflict in East Ukraine and Russia's destabilisation of Ukraine and annexation of the Crimea and Sevastopol, gave way to economic sanctions by the EU, USA and other Western countries against Russia.”

The EU hence frames Russia's actions as illegal and as a conduct which goes against the agreed upon injunctive norms of state behaviour as well as the legal documents which have consolidated such norms (EEAS, November 6, 2017). As stated in an EEAS fact sheet on EU's non-recognition policy towards Crimea and Sevastopol (March 2016):

“This position is based on the UN Charter, which clearly states that the territory of a State cannot be acquired by another State resulting from the threat or use of force, as well as on the Helsinki Final Act in which the signatories declared their intention to respect the inviolability of frontiers and territorial integrity.”

The events unfolding in Ukraine are hence largely framed as caused by the agency of Russia that took advantage of social forces which initially were peaceful and in agreement with social norms. Likewise, the referendum held in Crimea is presented as an event socially fabricated by Russia, and the EU hereby contradicts Russia's interpretation that the referendum was based on shared beliefs and goals of the inhabitants of Crimea (EEAS, April 24, 2015):

“This so-called referendum was organised in a matter of weeks by a self-proclaimed Crimean leadership installed by armed Russian military personnel following the seizure of public buildings”.

Contrary to the argument of Russia, the EU, however, validates the presidential elections held on May 25 and the parliamentary elections held on October 26, hereby acknowledging the current Ukrainian authorities (EEAS, April 24, 2015):

The Presidential elections held in Ukraine on 25 May were characterised by a high turnout and the clear resolve of the Ukrainian authorities to hold a genuine democratic exercise in line with international commitments and respecting fundamental freedoms, despite a hostile security environment in two eastern regions”.

The elections are hence perceived as in line with international injunctive norms and democratic values. The elections held in Donetsk and Luhansk on November 2 are however perceived as illegitimate as these were equally socially fabricated and enforced, and violated the newinjunctive norms established under the Minsk agreements (April 24, 2015, 7).

Eventually, the EU also dismisses the Russian argument that a coup d'état took place within Ukraine. As stated in the fact sheet (April 24, 2015):

“There was no "coup" in Kyiv but a democratic vote in parliament in a crisis situation: the government was approved by constitutional majority in the Ukrainian Parliament (the Verkhovna Rada) demonstrating its inclusive character, whereas a simple majority would have been sufficient. Following his flight from Kyiv and Ukraine, then President Yanukovych was dismissed by a constitutional majority and the void left by his departure filled to restore normal functioning of the state”.

The political process in Ukraine is framed by the EU as inclusive and in line with democratic values and the social and legal norms linked to this (April 24, 2015, 13). The EU hence seeks to discredit the Russian argument that Yanukovych served as president at the time of Russia's intervention. Eventually, the EU also disproves the reports of alleged danger towards ethnic Russian's in Eastern Ukraine and rather argues that the current Ukrainian government had shown signs of inclusiveness (EEAS, April 24, 2015, 8). The situation in Ukraine is hence interpreted as a democratic process which was destabilized by an external state actor, and the EU frames its own actions as in agreement with the morality of the international community and the wishes of the Ukraine people. Russia, on the other hand, is framed as a state actor

which violated the injunctive norms of international relations, and the imposed sanctions are presented as the natural result of this norm violation.

EU: THE JUSTIFICATION FOR SANCTIONS

The EU frames the imposition of sanctions as a response towards Russia's illegal behaviour and the violation of injunctive norms. The EU seeks to present this response as a combination of repercussion and persuasion because, as stated in an EEAS fact sheet about the EU's approach towards Russia and the conflict in eastern Ukraine (November 6, 2017, 8):

"The EU's approach has been to combine pressure through restrictive measures with diplomatic efforts and continuing dialogue".

The restrictive measures include economic sanctions that target cooperation and exchanges with Russia, in particular ((November 6, 2017, 10) *"persons and entities responsible for action against Ukraine's territorial integrity, persons providing support to or benefitting Russian decisionmakers"*.

The EU has equally restricted economic exchanges with the territory of Crimea and Sevastopol as well as economic cooperation between EU nationals and companies with their counterparts in Crimea and Russia (November 6, 2017, 10-11). In its framing, the EU cognitively constructs the sanctions as mechanisms which are meant to target the decision-making process of Russia and the individuals and entities that are perceived as influencing this process (November 6, 2017, 10-11). The sanctions are equally framed as mechanisms used to change the Russia's motivation by targeting its interests and relations with, e.g., the EU. The expressed reason for imposing these sanctions is hence framed as two-fold by the EU: First, as a mechanism for changing Russia's policy towards Ukraine which threatens the security and interests of Ukraine (EEAS, June 16, 2016). As stated in an EEAS fact sheet on Ukraine, the EU's Eastern Partnership and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (April 24, 2015, 2):

The EU's imposition of sanctions on those responsible for actions threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence or its stability and security...are intended to dissuade from further actions against Ukraine's interests

and to help bring about a sustainable political solution that respects its territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence, as well as international law”.

Second, apart from correcting immoral behaviour, the EU also links the annexation to a concern that such behaviour may disrupt the international normative system. As stated by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini on the 3-year anniversary of the Crimean annexation (March 17, 2017):

“The European Union reiterates its condemnation of this violation of international law, which remains a direct challenge to international security, with grave implications for the international legal order that protects the unity and sovereignty of all States”.

The EU hence points to the social consequences of violating a norm, and how particularly injunctive norm violation may pose a threat to the entire system on which states are legally and socially based.

It is, however, interesting that despite the narrative of needing to respond to social norm violation with sanctions, the EU seeks to revoke the punitive element of this act (European Council, April 29, 2014):

“EU sanctions are not punitive, but designed to bring about a change in policy or activity by the target country, entities or individuals. Measures are therefore always targeted at such policies or activities, the means to conduct them and those responsible for them”.

Sanctions should hence not be regarded as punishments imposed on one actor by another, but rather as part of a collective corrective measure which is to ensure that all states comply with the agreed-upon norms of international relations. The reason for this is that ensuring such norms eventually will guarantee peace and stability (EEAS, September 3, 2016):

“Sanctions are one of the EU's tools to promote the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP): peace, democracy and the respect for the rule of law, human rights and international law”.

In its framing, the EU hence seeks to cognitively reconstruct the use of sanctions as not a form of punishment but rather as a measure for ensuring peace and security.

Linked to this is also the use of euphemistic language, as sanctions are often referred to collectively as “*restrictive measures*” (European Parliament, September 20, 2017, 4). The choice of such wording verbally sanitizes the unpleasantness of the repercussive nature of sanctions and diminishes the correcting act- or authoritative nature - which the use of sanctions entails. Eventually, the EU frames sanctions as temporary precautions which will be withdrawn once Russia reverts its behaviour. As stated in the EU’s statement at the OSCE on Russia’s behaviour in Ukraine (October 19, 2017):

“The duration of the European Union’s economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.”

The sanctions will hence be revoked once the EU considers Russia to sufficiently comply with the injunctive norms of the Minsk agreements. The EU thus constructs social norm violation as something which is liable to punishment, but also as something which will be revoked once the violating actor complies with a list of newly established injunctive norms and thereby re-establishes itself as a moral and trustworthy actor.

EU: THE INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE SYSTEM

In terms of international relations and social norms, the EU frames the international political community as an arena in which states have obligations to uphold, in the form of injunctive norms. If such obligations are neglected, a form of punishment should occur.

Following a Foreign Affairs Council meeting on the situation in Ukraine, Catherine Ashton remarked (March 3, 2014) that “[w]ithout question this is in breach of Russia’s international obligations and its commitments” and that “[i]n the absence of de-escalating steps by Russia, the EU shall decide about consequences for bilateral relations between the EU and Russia”. Combining this with the sanctions, the EU points out that social norms have to be enforced by the collective, but also that the violation of norms harms the collective by disrupting the system and the current political environment. In the same statement, Ashton continues:

“The EU and its states that are participating in the G8 have decided to suspend for the time being their participation in activities associated with the preparations for

the G8 Summit in Sochi in June until the environment comes back where the G8 is able to have meaningful discussion".

In the EU's framing, social norms hence construct a certain environment which is favourable for all states and whose disruption due to norm violation have an implication for everyone. Injunctive norm violation, rather than the use of descriptive norms as argued by Russia, is hence the cause of the disruption of the normative system and the creation of chaos. As stated by the EEAS on the annexation of Crimea (February 22, 2017):

"The illegal annexation of Crimea remains a direct challenge to international security, and the reports about the constant military build-up on the peninsula further increase the tension in the region".

The EU, however, also refers to the collective responsibility states share in ensuring peace and security. As stated in an EEAS fact sheet on Ukraine, the EU's Eastern Partnership and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (April 24, 2015, 1):

"The EU and Russia, like all other OSCE participant States, share responsibility for peace and security on the European continent".

In the EU's interpretation of the Ukraine context, the primary focus rests on the violation of state sovereignty, specifically the infringement on the welfare and interest of the Ukrainian state, which simultaneously presents a threat for the international normative system and the welfare and interests of other states. The EU hence argues that its decision to impose sanctions on Russia is a way to prevent similar acts in the future as well to reign in a state which is understood as having retreated from the international normative system in the egoistic pursuit of national interests. In its understanding of the event, the EU hence seeks to morally justify its sanctions by pointing to the need for changing such behaviour to ensure the future safety of the international normative system. What is interesting, however, is also that, contrary to that of Russia, the EU refers to the prevalence of a shared perception about the common knowledge of states and how this is to be applied in contexts.

DISCUSSION: DIFFERING COGNITION AND SIMILAR MOTIVATIONS

On the one hand, Russia justifies its approach by framing the situation in Ukraine as an illegal coup d'état by which an illegitimate government was installed that sought

to harm the population in Eastern Ukraine. In this, the inhabitants of Crimea are presented as sharing similar beliefs with Russia, namely that the territory is Russian in nature and that the referendum resulted in a reunification with Russia (which righted a norm violation caused by the agency of Khrushchev in the 1950s). Russia hence presents itself as an actor which responded to the social forces and demands that erupted in Eastern Ukraine following Maidan. Linked to its perception of the situation in Ukraine is also Russia's interpretation of the current state of the international normative system. According to Russia the international normative system is currently eroded primarily due to the US's use of descriptive norms over the years, which has violated the injunctive norms agreed to by the international community, and the US's and the EU's double-standard in responding to other actors who act in a similar fashion as Russia in what Russia perceives as comparable contexts. Combined, this has led to an unstable and unfair normative system in which one state may impose its own will on others through, e.g., the use of force or sanctions. In its interpretation, Russia hence points to the destabilizing force of descriptive norms and the need to return to an equal and injunctive-based international normative system.

The EU, on the other hand, frames the situation in Ukraine as a political crisis which was destabilized by Russian agency. In this, Russia is perceived as an actor which violated Ukraine's territorial integrity for its own national benefit. The referendum in Crimea is hence not regarded as valid but rather as an annexation, which is a perception shared by other states including the US. Russia is furthermore presented as the manufacturer of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and as an actor which is bent on disrupting the international normative system. The EU presents itself as a fair and norm-abiding actor that seeks to pressure Russia into changing its foreign policy behaviour in Ukraine with the purpose of re-establishing the validity of injunctive norms. According to the interpretation of the EU, the international normative system is only injunctive-based, and it was stable, equal, and clear-cut prior to Russia's annexation of Crimea. Russia's immoral behaviour is hence the reason why the international normative system is currently vulnerable. There is, therefore, a need to correct Russia's foreign policy behaviour and motivation (via sanctions) to ensure a return to a stable international normative system.

The EU and Russia hence disagree on how to perceive and interpret the situation in Ukraine and on the type of norms which apply in this context. They also disagree on the current state of the international normative system and the type of foreign policy behaviour that has led to the vulnerability of this system. What unites the EU and Russia is, however, that they both share similar perceptions and interpretations of the purpose and motivations for social norm compliance – albeit from different cognitive constructions.

Both actors agree that social norms have a purpose and an influence on state behaviour because norms are socially valued and functional. Russia, e.g., perceives social norms as functional because they ensure international peace and security, and thus an environment in which all states can reach their interests on an equal footing. The EU also argues that the purpose of norms is to ensure peace and security and that this function is based on norms being adhered to by all states. Apart from this, both actors agree that the motivation for states to comply with norms is based on a wish for ensuring accuracy, stable relations, and a consistent self-concept. What they disagree on, however, is how the current situation in Ukraine affects the motivations of the other. Russia, e.g., points out that it seeks to act accurately and according to international law, but also in accordance with the descriptive norms created by, e.g., the Kosovo precedent. The EU in contrast underlines its adherence to the injunctive norms agreed to by the international community and states that it seeks to correct Russia's foreign policy behaviour so that it once more follows accepted behaviour. It equally argues that Russia's current behaviour is damaging its relations with the West, but that the latter may be re-established if Russia abides by the Minsk agreements, which would restore Russia as a moral agent. While Russia states that it is ready to re-establish relations with the West, but that this will not be based on an acceptance of the Western perception of the situation in Ukraine and the applicability of norms in this context. It eventually also points out that it seeks to control and sustain its self-concept by not giving in to the sanctions imposed upon it. Russia further argues, e.g., that the EU has an unstable behavioural pattern, as it does not respond in a similar fashion in comparable contexts. The EU, in turn, argues that Russia is presenting an unstable self-concept, as it is not conforming to its previous statements and agreements.

The EU and Russia hence disagree on how to perceive and interpret the Ukraine situation and the current contours of the international normative system, but they agree that states are motivated to comply with social norms because social norms are valued, functional, and because social norm compliance ensures accurate behaviour, stable relations, and a consistent self-concept. The main findings which emerge from the analysis are hence the following:

International Normative System	EU: The system is constituted of only injunctive norms which have a clear-cut application in all contexts. Russia: The system is constituted of descriptive and injunctive norms which are selectively applied in contexts.
Types of norms which apply in Ukraine	EU: Only injunctive norms apply. Russia: Injunctive norms? as well as descriptive norms first established by the US and EU.
The value and function of norms	Both agree that norms have a value and a function for the individual state and the collective.
State's motivations for social norm compliance	Both agree that states are motivated to comply based on a wish to ensure accurate behaviour, good relations, and a stable self-concept.

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Since both actors agree on the purpose of norms and the motivations for social norm compliance, this implies that the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia is not based on differing perceptions and interpretations of why norms are relevant or why states should comply with norms. Rather, the EU and Russia share a similar motivational processing for social norm compliance. The social psychological

barrier underpinning the social norm contestation between Russia and the EU is instead their cognitive processing of the type of norms that may be drawn on in a context such as Ukraine, and the type of norms which constitute the international normative system. Their contestation is hence rooted in the cognitive processing over whether the international normative system is based on injunctive norms (right/wrong behaviour) or a combination of injunctive and descriptive norms (common behaviour). This implies that the main social psychological barrier is differing perceptions and interpretations of the common knowledge, that is the “shared outlook on how the world of international politics functions” (page 3), which should guide state behaviour. Since this common knowledge is inevitably based on subjective perceptions (because of the difference in how actors construct social reality), establishing an international normative system that provides a unified approach to every situation that occurs in international politics is unlikely. The behaviour of both actors in the context of Ukraine, with the EU’s sanctions against Russia and Russia’s counter-sanctions against EU member states, hence seems futile if the goal is to force such a system upon each other. But since the actors do agree on the purpose of social norms and the motivation for social norm compliance, there is an opportunity to find a common ground on which type of norms should constitute the international normative system. The situation in Ukraine should hence not only open a debate about whether Russia violated injunctive norms or not, but also about the role descriptive norms play in the international normative system.

What also springs from the analysis is that Russia’s foreign policy behaviour in Crimea may have equally been based on a subjective interpretation of a historical correlation between the situation in Ukraine and other similar situations, and the descriptive and injunctive norms that may be invoked in such contexts. This may indicate that Russia’s behaviour in Ukraine was also a matter of interpreting its own behaviour in accordance with what has been done before in perceived similar situations. This may imply that Russia’s norm violation is not necessarily caused by a lack of a moral compass or because Russia wishes to disrupt the international normative system; rather, it may be because Russia perceives the international normative system as consisting of both injunctive and descriptive norms, hereby making social norm compliance a matter of contextual interpretation rather than merely an act of conforming.

CONCLUSION

The social psychological barriers which underpin the social norm contestation between the EU and Russia in the context of Ukraine can be traced to the cognitive processes the actors apply when perceiving and interpreting the current state of the international normative system and the type of norms that constitute it. Whereas the EU exclusively focuses on the role of injunctive norms in shaping state behaviour, Russia focuses on states' application of descriptive norms in their behavioural patterns. What the actors do agree on, however, is the purpose of social norms and the motivations for complying with them. This agreement between them hence provides an opportunity for the actors to find common ground in their current social norm contestation, which may be found through, e.g., a discussion of the role descriptive norms should play in the international normative system. However, since both actors seem to take an intractable view on the social norm contestation between them, such a debate currently seems unlikely. What the analysis however also found is that the role of descriptive norms should nevertheless feature more in the consciousness of political actors and analysts, as Russia's justifications of its foreign policy behaviour suggest that its actions in Ukraine were not only based on an interpretation of what states ought to do, but also on a perception and interpretation of what states tend to do.

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