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## Will Russia Comply with the Western Norms and Values? Russia's Understanding on Credible Deterrence, Normative Power and Sanctions

The study relies on the assumption that, to some extent, the current misinterpretations and unrealistic expectations between Russia and the West are caused by linguistic and conceptual differences between the opponents. Thus, the aim of the study is to discuss the ways how Russia linguistically and conceptually understands and construes the terms *normative power*, *deterrence*, and *sanctions*. As the authors see it, deterrence, normative power, and sanctions constitute the three main elements in the toolbox used by the Western world in international relations to achieve its goals. However, none of these three terms has a clear and easily understandable meaning in the Russian language, furthermore, Russia's psychological pattern does not overlap with the one of the Western countries, which makes it difficult to believe that these three elements have a chance to succeed in practice. The indication that the EU and NATO seek to move forward in terms of progress in the relations with Russia entails that challenges and limitations need to be accepted. It seems that normative power is the least likely to be accepted by Russian politicians and members of society out of the three aforementioned elements considering that its translation in the Russian language is linguistically complicated for Russians to understand and it is loaded with negative undertone of domination and disrespect. In this respect, sanctions might have slightly more chances to succeed, as Russia does not question the legitimacy of sanctions, furthermore, Russia might be motivated to find mutual understanding and search for compromises for this matter.

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## Introduction

Credible deterrence, promotion of certain universal norms and values, and the threat to impose sanctions if these norms and values are not respected constitute the three main elements in the toolbox used by the Western countries in international arena today to achieve their goals. The West expects that all these components – first: deterrence, second: normative power, and third: sanctions – would work in the case of Russia as well. For example, after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has significantly contributed to strengthening its deterrence and defence posture to deter Russia by, among other things, deploying multinational battlegroups to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.<sup>1</sup> The Ukrainian conflict prompted the representatives of various institutions of the European Union (EU) to emphasise that the Ukrainian conflict jeopardized European norms and values and to condemn the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation. Furthermore, they also shared the view that Russia would also benefit from more stability and prosperity brought by the EU eastern partnership to the partner countries.<sup>2</sup> Sanctions were imposed by the EU to target either Russia and its supporters or ex-Ukrainian government officials as a counter reaction to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the deliberate destabilisation of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Western countries actively use deterrence, normative power, and sanctions to clearly show Russia that the country should change its behaviour.

In the meanwhile, Russia has confronted Western countries with its own approach to international relations, global powers, and rule of law. Russia prioritizes country's sovereignty, national interests, and the principle of *raison d'état* instead of promoting gains associated with partnership and cooperation. Next to that, Russia constantly advocates for and promotes the development of multipolar world order with a clear aim for Russia to be a dominant power in the Eurasian region.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the country's political elite opposes the accusations of Western countries that Russia conducts a neo-imperial or ag-

<sup>1</sup> NATO (2020), „Deterrence and defence“, accessed 02.08.2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/top-ics\\_133127.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/top-ics_133127.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Veebel, V., Markus, R. (2018), “European Normative Power During Ukrainian-Russian Conflict”, *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, Vol 11, Issue 1, p. 1–20, [https://content.sciendo.com/configurable/content-page/journals\\$002fbjlp\\$002f11\\$002f1\\$002farticle-p1.xml](https://content.sciendo.com/configurable/content-page/journals$002fbjlp$002f11$002f1$002farticle-p1.xml).

<sup>3</sup> European Council (2020), „EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine“, accessed 02.08.2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/>

<sup>4</sup> Karaganov, S., Suslov, D.V. (2018), “A new world order: A view from Russia”. *Russia in global affairs*, Publisher's column, published on October 4, 2018. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-new-world-order-a-view-from-russia/>

gressive foreign policy. On the contrary, Russia's political leaders, like Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov, argue that Russia has behaved in a way that is normal for a Great Power and it was something that other power centres would do as well.<sup>5,6</sup> Western political and economic sanctions have neither forced Russia to stop annexation of Crimea nor caused significant harm to Russia's economy in the mid-term. Last but not least, the success of the NATO Alliance in deterring Russia in military terms is somewhat questionable as well, because the recent military exercises in Poland ("Anaconda 2016") and in the Baltic States ("Defender 2020") have not increased regional stability, but in real terms raised the tensions between the Alliance and Russia to highest levels since 2004<sup>7</sup>. Thus, Russia seems to have survived the pressure of Western countries in terms of deterrence, normative power, and sanctions. The country is simply not reacting to Western measures in a way the EU or NATO would expect.

This indicates that Russia is not interested in complying with the Western values and accepting the supremacy of the Western world over the political system of Russia, both in terms of deterrence and normative power. One explanation for this is that both Russia's political elite and Russians in general do not understand the messages the messages being sent by the EU and NATO to Russia, which causes misinterpretation in mutual relations as well as unrealistic expectations among Western countries. The current study relies on the assumption that, to some extent, misinterpretation and unrealistic expectations are caused by linguistic and conceptual differences between Russia and the Western world. For example, maybe the key foundations of today's Western societies translate very poorly into Russian language and have either little meaning, different meaning, or almost no practical meaning at all for Russians, or that the normative power of the EU or sanctions are either too dominant or too humiliating for Russians and for their political culture? Thus, the aim of the study is to discuss the ways how Russia linguistically and conceptually understands and interprets the core principles of the Western world such as *normative power*, *deterrence*, and *sanctions*. The study has a clear practical value, because any step closer to a better understanding of why Russia is not acting in line with the expectations of the Western societies is also a step closer to security and stability both in Europe and worldwide.

<sup>5</sup> Putin, V. (2014), "Poslanie Federalnomu Sobraniyu", published 04.12.2014; <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/47173>.

<sup>6</sup> Lavrov, S. (2018), "Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions at a news conference on Russian diplomacy in 2017", Moscow, published 15.01. 2018, [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3018203](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3018203).

<sup>7</sup> Ploom, I., Sliwa, Z., and Veebel, V. (2020). The NATO "Defender 2020" exercise in the Baltic States: Will measured escalation lead to credible deterrence or provoke an escalation? *Comparative Strategy*, 39(4), 368–384.

The article is structured as follows. Section 1 briefly discusses the theoretical logic of how *normative power*, *deterrence*, and *sanctions* are expected to work in the eyes of the Western countries. Section 2 provides a linguistic interpretation of these words in the Russian language and Section 3 discusses contextual and conceptual meaning of the words *normative power*, *deterrence*, and *sanctions* for Russians. Section 4 discusses the results of the study followed by conclusions.

## 1. Normative power, deterrence, and sanctions: how should they have an impact on Russia in principle?

For more than 70 years, both the NATO Alliance and the EU have served as cornerstones of peace, security, and stability in Europe. While NATO focuses on collective defence with credible deterrence as a key element of the Alliance's overall strategy to prevent conflicts and wars and to protect its members<sup>8</sup>, the European Union mostly relies on its normative power in the international arena and promotes export of certain universal norms and values like democracy, rule of law, and commitment to human rights to the other countries<sup>9</sup>. Thus, it is expected that the principle of collective defence would deter other countries from attacking any member of the NATO Alliance and that other countries are eager to impose common values of the Euro-Atlantic community to maintain good relations with Western countries in the form of positive conditionality. However, in the event that any countries fail to adhere to these values or behave in an unacceptable way, there are political and economic sanctions (such as a materialization of negative conditionality) designed to force the target country to change its behaviour or to end an unacceptable behaviour<sup>10</sup>. In this way, deterrence, normative power, and sanctions constitute three main elements in the toolbox used by the Western world in international relations to achieve its goals.

The concept of *normative power* has become the subject of more detailed research in academic literature since the late 1990s in association with the successful transition of the former Soviet Bloc countries to the Western-style societies. The academic community associates normative power with neo-im-

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<sup>8</sup> NATO (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Veebel, V., Markus, R. (2018), p. 9, 13, 15, 16.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion on this topic, see, e.g. Veebel, V., Markus, R. (2016). "Will sanctions against Russia be successful: Will Russia fall before Ukraine?", *Journal of Security & Sustainability Issues*, Vol 5, Issue 4 (June 2016), pp. 465–480.

perial mentality and self-identification.<sup>11,12</sup> In theory, norm diffusion is expected to take place via six channels, such as contagion (unintentional diffusion), informational factor (strategic and declaratory communications), procedural factor (institutionalization of the relationship, e.g., in international organisations), transference (exchange of benefits by imposer to other parties), overt (physical presence in other countries or international organisations), and cultural filter (cultural diffusion and political learning in other countries or international organizations).<sup>13</sup> In a wider sense, normative power is also linked to the belief that Western values are universal by their nature. In addition to this, diffusion of Western norms and values is closely related to the theory of external governance, in which internal rules are extended beyond the formal membership as a result of interdependence.<sup>14</sup>

On that basis, both the EU and NATO are expected to have the power to change or protect certain norms and values in international relations. A vision that Russia is interested in the adoption of the Western normative values is directly linked to the self-identification of NATO and the EU Member States as the implementers of the normative power. Similarly to other countries in this model, Russia is seen as being no more special than the rest of (the former Soviet) countries, i.e., Russia is only a target country to be forced or persuaded to import certain norms, rules, and practices such as democracy, social justice, commitment to human rights, and fundamental freedoms.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, some recent studies argue that the theory of external governance applies to all countries taking part in the EU neighbourhood policy (ENP).<sup>16</sup> Although Russia is not a member of the ENP as such, the country participates in various cross-border cooperation activities under the aegis of the ENP.<sup>17</sup>

To sum up, Western countries expect to successfully promote the European norms and values in other countries, including Russia, through various channels, mutual contacts, and joint projects. However, as several authors have

<sup>11</sup> Cooper, R. (2003), *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, Atlantic Books, London.

<sup>12</sup> Zielonka, J. (2008). "Europe as a Global Actor: Empire by Example?", *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)*, Vol. 84, No. 3, Power and Rules in the Changing Economic Order (May 2008), pp. 471–484.

<sup>13</sup> Manners, I. (2008), "The Normative Ethics of the European Union", *International Affairs*, Vol 84, Issue 1, pp. 45–60.

<sup>14</sup> Veebel, V., Kulu, L., Tartes, A. (2014). "Conceptual factors behind the poor performance of the European Neighbourhood policy", *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, Vol 31, pp. 85–102.

<sup>15</sup> Manners, I. (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Lavenex, S. (2004), "EU external governance in 'wider Europe'", *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol 11 (August 2004), pp. 680–700.

<sup>17</sup> European Commission (2019), „European neighbourhood policy“, last updated 31.01.2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/european-neighbourhood-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/european-neighbourhood-policy_en).

pointed out, it is an asymmetric and one-way domination framework, which is based not on compromises or mutual benefits, but on the demands of the EU to accept European values in exchange of receiving economic benefits.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of *deterrence* in the framework of NATO's collective defence strategy is explained in many strategy documents of the Alliance. For example, the Alliance's strategy states that "no one should doubt NATO's resolve if the security of any of its members were to be threatened"<sup>19</sup>. The organisation also stipulates that the combination of the Alliance's nuclear and conventional capabilities is expected to persuade the opponent that an act of aggression would cause costs exceeding any potential gains.<sup>20,21</sup> In this way, deterrence is built-up on the attempt to convince an adversary not to use force, either by threatening the opponent with retaliation or by harming the adversary's operational plans.<sup>22</sup>

In case of Russia, Western countries by large rely on the argument that "Russia should be deterred, because we would be deterred if we were in their place". However, as a prerequisite, it means that the psychological and cultural behavioural patterns of Western countries and Russia should overlap at least in fundamental aspects. Thus, Russia is again expected to accept the widely prevalent postmodern security narrative of the Western world giving priority to political and social stability, economic welfare, peaceful solutions to conflicts, and a rules-based global order, as well as to apply those Western normative values in Russia.

Last but not least, *sanctions* are relatively common measures applied in international relations by many countries. Theoretically, sanctions are aimed either at changing the behaviour of the target country (i.e., a tool for coercion), at limiting its behaviour (i.e., the constraining effect), or at sending the target a message (referred to as a signalling effect).<sup>23</sup>

In principle, the linkage between normative power, deterrence, and sanctions is obvious in case of Russia. Western countries have been imposing

<sup>18</sup> Manners, I., Tocci, N. (2008). Comparing normativity in foreign policy: China, India, the EU, the US and Russia. In N. Tocci (Ed.), *Who is a Normative Foreign Policy Actor?: The European Union and Its Global Partners* (pp. 300-329). Centre for European Policy Studies. <http://www.ceps.be/book/who-normative-foreign-policy-actor-european-union-and-its-global-partners>

<sup>19</sup> NATO (2012), „Active engagement, modern defence“, accessed 04.06.2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official\\_texts\\_68580.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm)

<sup>20</sup> NATO (2015), „NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces“, accessed 04.06.2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50068.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm)

<sup>21</sup> NATO (2017), „Strategic concepts“, accessed 04.06.2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/top-ics\\_56626.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/top-ics_56626.htm)

<sup>22</sup> von Hlatky, S. (2015), Introduction: American Alliances and extended deterrence. In: S. Von Hlatky and A. Wenger, eds. *The future of extended deterrence: The United States, NATO, and beyond*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 4–5.

<sup>23</sup> Giumelli, F., Ivan, P. (2013), "The effectiveness of EU sanctions," EPC Issue Paper No. 76.

political and economic sanctions on Russia since 2014 to motivate the country to accept the Western normative power and credible deterrence. Thus, in rational terms, the grounds for sanctions against Russia rely on an understanding that there is not enough motivation for Russia to accept deterrence and normative power without sufficiently painful sanctions<sup>24</sup>. However, when political and economic sanctions were called into force against Russia as a response to Russia's behaviour, there was no unity among Western countries as regards to the aims and nature of the sanctions.<sup>25</sup> Western sanctions were described either as a tool of conditionality aimed to force Russia to change, a punishment for crimes already committed, an instrument of strategic communication in intra-state communication, or a tool for stigmatizations and deterrence.

## 2. Do Russians linguistically understand the meaning of the words *normative power*, *sanctions*, and *deterrence* as the Western world expects this?

As it was said in the introduction, the West needs to make sure that both Russia's political leaders and people living in Russia correctly understand what Western countries want to say in order to get the expected results in terms of normative power, deterrence, and conditionality, including sanctions. First and foremost, in this respect, it is important to make that nothing is literally not "lost in translation" in mutual communication. Therefore, the linguistic interpretation of the words *normative power*, *deterrence*, and *sanctions* in the Russian language is discussed in this section. From Russia's perspective, the terms *deterrence* and *sanctions* seem to be somewhat confusing.

The fact that Russian terminological apparatus has been relatively inconsistent in using the term *deterrence* could make it difficult for Russians to understand what credible deterrence means. Russian experts among themselves (as well as their Western colleagues) often mean different things when using the same term or use different terms to refer to the same thing.<sup>26</sup>

The Russian language has at least three equivalent words corresponding to the term *deterrence* in Russian. These are *sderzhivaniye* (Rus: *сдерживание*),

<sup>24</sup> Veebel, V., and Markus, R. (2016). Will sanctions against Russia be successful: will Russia fall before Ukraine? *Journal of Security & Sustainability Issues*, 5(4).

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g. Diez, T., Manners, I. (2014). "Reflecting on Normative Power Europe": In T. Diez (ed.) *A Different Kind of Power? The EU's Role in International Politics*. New York: Idebate Press.

<sup>26</sup> Adamsky, D. (2018). "From Moscow with coercion: Russian deterrence theory and strategic culture", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(1-2), pp. 33–60.

*prinuzhdeniye* (Rus: *принуждение*) and *ustrasheniye* (Rus: *устрашение*). However, in Russian these terms are not synonyms and have different meanings. Thus, along these lines the “lost in translation”-effect potentially appears in both ways. First, *deterrence* does not translate into Russian as a universally understandable word or concept, thus at least three different words are used that differ in many aspects. Second, these three words simultaneously carry additional meanings in terms of their content or status that might not be related to the core idea of deterrence as the Western countries understand it.

*Sderzhivaniye* is the most widely used term for *deterrence* in the Russian language. It literally means *containment*, *restraining*, or *holding back*. *Sderzhivaniye* is mainly used in the strategic (incl. nuclear) and political context. Nuclear deterrence officially translates as *yadernoe sderzhivaniye* (Rus: *ядерное сдерживание*), strategic deterrence translates as *strategicheskoye sderzhivaniye* (Rus: *стратегическое сдерживание*). Both terms also appear in the military dictionary of the Russian Ministry of Defence. However, the same noun in the Russian language could also be translated as *containment*. For example, the term *voenno-politicheskoye sderzhivaniye* (Rus: *военно-политическое сдерживание*) is translated in the military dictionary of the Russian Ministry of Defence as *policy of military and political containment*. Furthermore, *policy of containment* translates into Russian as *politika sderzhivaniya* (Rus: *политика сдерживания*). Though the noun *sderzhivaniye* is mostly related to the military domain, the verb *sderzhivat* (Rus: *сдерживать*) is common in Russian language and may also have an impact on the interpretation of the related noun. To bring an example of the context illustrating the use of the term *sderzhivaniye* in practice, recently the new foundations of Russia’s nuclear deterrence posture were signed by Vladimir Putin in June 2020. The document reveals the goals and the character of Russia’s nuclear deterrence, the country’s nuclear deterrence is protective in its character, with the goal to maintain Russia’s nuclear arsenal at the level sufficient to guarantee effective nuclear deterrence as well as to make sure that sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country is guaranteed.<sup>27</sup>

In a similar context, some researchers argue that the term *sderzhivaniye* is used to reflect the efforts to preserve status quo, which refers to a more re-

<sup>27</sup> Authors’ translation of the quote „Госполитика в области ядерного сдерживания носит оборонительный характер, направлена на поддержание потенциала ядерных сил на уровне, достаточном для обеспечения ядерного сдерживания, гарантирует суверенитет и территориальную целостность государства» (§ 4; Указ Президента Российской Федерации (2020), № 355 «Об Основах государственной политики Российской Федерации в области ядерного сдерживания», от 02.06.2020, Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации; <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006020040?index=1&rangeSize=1>),



active *modus operandi*.<sup>28</sup> In principle, this is similar to the way how Western countries use the term deterrence. However, recent statements, e.g., by Russian pro-government academics, clearly reveal that the meaning of status quo (or stability in a similar context) is potentially interpreted differently in Russia and in Western countries. The Western world usually interprets status quo (or stability) as either something neutral or positive, something what is worth to preserve. Russians, however, might interpret it differently. For example, in the article “Сдерживание в новую эпоху” (“Deterrence in the new era”) the authors Sergey Karaganov and Dmitry Suslov argue that *strategic stability*, referring to the term used in mutual relations between Russia and the US, is in crisis due to both military-technological and geopolitical changes, and that countries need to revise the concept of strategic stability and to turn to a new philosophy called *multifaceted strategic stability* (Rus: *многосторонняя стратегическая стабильность*). They conclude that under new circumstances, the key foundation of new multi-faceted strategic stability could be multifaceted mutual strategic deterrence, and that the main goal should be to strengthen and to implement it by all means possible. Furthermore, they also argue that nuclear deterrence should be strengthened and new rules need to be agreed between nuclear powers.<sup>29</sup> Thus, on the one hand, contrary to the views of the Western countries, stability does not necessary mean something that Russia would like to preserve. On the other hand, those Russian pro-government researchers basically say that mutual deterrence (i.e., mutual pressure) should be increased to guarantee “new” stability. Intriguingly, this new vision of multifaceted strategic stability is similar to a principal logic in a criminal world where regions and districts are divided up between different criminal groups, everybody knows what the others are capable of, rules are fixed between groups, and punishment follows if the rules are not obeyed.

The second translation, i.e., *prinuzhdeniye*, literally means *coercion*, *compellence*, or *compulsion* in the English language. In Russia, this word is mostly used as a juridical term to refer to an act of persuading someone to do something by using force and threats, referring to the English version of *coercion*. However, more recently researchers in Russia have used the term *prinuzhdeniye* in a military context in several academic articles, however without any clear meaning.

<sup>28</sup> Adamsky, D. (2018).

<sup>29</sup> Authors' translation of the quote: “В новых условиях фундаментом многосторонней стратегической стабильности может стать многостороннее взаимное стратегическое сдерживание, и задачей является его всемерное укрепление и совершенствование.” (see, Karaganov, S., Suslov, D.V. (2019). “Сдерживание в новую эпоху”, Россия в глобальной политике, No 4 (2019; July-August), <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/sderzhivanie-v-novuyu-epohu/>

In Russian, the term *prinuzhdeniye* is also used in the form of an expression *silovoye prinuzhdeniye* (Rus: *силовое принуждение*) referring to compulsion by force as a tool of aggressive deterrence. In addition to this, it is also used in the context of sanctions, which Russians refer to as *methods of compulsion* (Rus: *методы принуждения*). In this respect, as argued also by some researchers, the term *prinuzhdeniye* has a more proactive connotation in Russia.<sup>30</sup> The political elite of Russia tend to believe that *prinuzhdeniye* (referring to the English word *coercion*) or in a similar context *silovoye davleniye* is not efficient against them.

The meaning of the third word, i.e., *ustrasheniye*, in the English language is close to *intimidation* or *frightening* and it is used to describe the (*implicitly illegitimate*) deterrent policy of others. For Russians, this term contains some negative associations. For example, the expression *sderzhivaniye putem ustrasheniya* (Eng: *deterrence through intimidation*) is a quite common phrase in Russian used to describe the US policies during the Cold War era.<sup>31</sup>

To sum up, all three Russian terms used as equivalents to the term *deterrence* carry their own additional meaning, depending on a particular context. It could refer to deterrence by not letting someone do something (*sderzhivaniye*), deterrence by making someone do something (*prinuzhdeniye*), or deterrence by making someone fear of someone or something (*ustrasheniye*). From Russia's viewpoint, the West has chosen non-military deterrence, referring to *sderzhivaniye*, to block Russia's growth and progress in political and economic terms. At the same time, deterrence in the context of the NATO framework sounds like the old concept of the Cold War to Russians as it carries some intimidating meaning in terms of *ustrasheniye*. Description of Russia's own policies by local experts primarily includes the term *sderzhivaniye*, which has a less aggressive connotation than the term *prinuzhdeniye*. In the political and military discourse of Russia, Russia's strategic deterrence (*стратегическое сдерживание*) is seen as an answer to the West's compulsion by force (*силовое принуждение*).

The word *sanction* also causes some confusion among the Russians. They hardly use the term *sanction* as a conditional measure, but a legal right to control, deter, and punish somebody, or a punishment itself, having both dominant and destructive nature. In both cases cooperation and compliance is not expected or needed from the subject under sanctions.

In linguistic terms, most academic debates in Russia interpret sanctions as a tool for *coercion* (*prinuzhdeniye*), or for creating pressure (*davlenie*) and

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<sup>30</sup> Adamsky, D. (2018).

<sup>31</sup> Ven Bruusgaard, K. (2016), Russian Strategic Deterrence, *Survival*, Vol 58:4, pp. 7–26.

disadvantages for Russia in the global geopolitical competition.<sup>32</sup> Based on this interpretation, sanctions are seen as a part of hybrid warfare legitimized by international law and by the United Nations to force a target state to accept the demands of normative power and external governance of Western countries. As Russians see it, since sanctions are interpreted as a tool of active hybrid aggression against national sovereignty, all necessary protective measures are considered acceptable in Russia. For example, Russian researchers Tatiana Romanova and Elena Pavlova describe economic sanctions as hybrid aggression against the Russian society and economy aiming to mobilize certain groups to riot against the existing political elite in Russia and to harm the sustainability of the Russian economy. Furthermore, they argue that if sanctions actually repress wider social groups and cause a humanitarian catastrophe, then this should be seen as a crime.<sup>33</sup>

Last but not least, the expression *normative power* is translated into Russian in two ways: first, the original wording *normativnaya sila* (Rus: *нормативная сила*), and second, *normativnaya moshch* (Rus: *нормативная мощь*). Most likely this is associated with the difficulty to find an absolute equivalent to the English word *power* in Russian in the context of international relations. According to Elena Mukhina, *moshch* refers to the European Union as a Great Power and it is also used to describe the power of the EU to impose its concepts and norms on others or a specific instrument to achieve the EU's specific goals.<sup>34</sup>

*Normative power* is also sometimes translated into Russian as *normative expansion* (Rus: *normativnaya ekspansiya*, *нормативная экспансия*) referring to the efforts to force sovereign states and nations to accept and follow non-native values by constructing external legal norms and social reality.<sup>35</sup> The same applies to the word *normativity* (Rus: *normativnost*, *нормативность*). For example, some Russian researchers stress that the normativity, and particularly the EU Eastern partnership, which is based on *normative dogmatism* (Rus: *нормативный догматизм*), is at its concep-

<sup>32</sup> Fituni, L.L. (2019), "Targeted Sanctions: A Tool of Foreign Policy, Unfair Competition or Global Social Engineering?", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, Vol 3/66, pp. 17–41.

<sup>33</sup> Romanova, T., Pavlova, E. (2014), "What Modernisation? The Case of Russian Partnerships for Modernisation with the European Union and its Member States", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol 22(4), pp. 499–517.

<sup>34</sup> Mukhina, E. E. (2008), "Normativnaya sila Evropeyskogo sojuza" (Normative Power of the European Union), *Vestnik Nizhegorodskogo universiteta*, № 4, pp. 164–170.

<sup>35</sup> Шаповалова, А. (2015). «Восточное партнёрство»: нормативная экспансия ЕС продолжится», Аналитическое агентство «Внешняя политика», 18.06. 2015, <http://www.foreignpolicy.ru/analyses/vostochnoe-partnyorstvo-normativnaya-ekspansiya-es-prodolzhitsya/>

tual dead end<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, they stress that the European model is no longer attractive to the neighbouring countries in the crisis situation and that the EU remains only the donor of financial implications. They conclude that under these circumstances it would be an optimal solution for the EU to replace the concept of the normative power with the concept of the ability to withstand stress in terms of *resilience*.<sup>37</sup> In this light, it is highly likely that the connotation of the expression *normative power* is not sensed as positively in Russia as in Western countries.

### 3. Complications in understanding the Western messages: conceptual and contextual meaning of *normative power*, *deterrence*, and *sanctions*

#### 3.1. Russia's vision on multilateral normative power

The reason for the current behaviour of Russia is relatively primitive. On the one hand, Russia is fully based on the concept of *raison d'état*, where vital national interests do not need any additional justification. Furthermore, a strategy of an unforeseen and sudden escalation belongs to the traditional success models of the Russian society, furthermore, the readiness to escalate is regarded as a component of strength and agility.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Russia sees the global power competition as a dynamic process in a zero-sum environment, where for every winner there has to be a loser. States are the main actors in this game, while multilateral groupings and coalitions mostly represent a temporary or distractive form of national interests. Countries and states are not equal, and

<sup>36</sup> Authors' translation of the quote: "Кризис нормативности в рамках восточной политики соседства Европейского союза является сегодня одной из наиболее острых и широко дискутируемых тем как в отечественной, так и в зарубежной политической аналитике. ... / Таким образом, мы приходим к выводу, что программа Восточного партнерства, базирующаяся на «нормативном догматизме» ЕС [4], переживает концептуальный тупик." (see, Кукарцева, М., Дониц. Т. (2018), «Стратегия Европейского союза в отношении стран Восточного партнерства: от концепции нормативной силы к категории стрессоустойчивости». Конференция «Ломоносов 2018», [https://lomonosov-msu.ru/archive/Lomonosov\\_2018/data/13657/67349\\_uid113202\\_report.pdf](https://lomonosov-msu.ru/archive/Lomonosov_2018/data/13657/67349_uid113202_report.pdf)).

<sup>37</sup> Authors' translation of the quote: "Более того, в условиях глубоких кризисных явлений модель ЕС утрачивает собственную привлекательность для соседних государств и становится, по сути, лишь донором для финансовых вливаний. В этом контексте наиболее оптимальным решением внутри- и внешнеполитических вызовов ЕС представляет переход от концепции нормативной силы, где он играл роль «нормотворца» на европейском континенте и притягательного центра, окружаемого государствами-сателлитами, к категории «стрессоустойчивости» ('resilience')." (see, Кукарцева, М., Дониц. Т. (2018)).

<sup>38</sup> Tertrais, B. (2018), "Russia's Nuclear Policy: Worrying for the Wrong Reasons", *Survival*, Vol. 60(2), pp. 33–44.

this includes not only measurable aspects like the size of the economy, etc., but also options of having a special privileged status.<sup>39</sup> As we have already mentioned, actors in the international arena are seen as involved in an endless competition with each other and they do not aim for stability and peaceful co-existence. Accordingly, for Russia clashes and conflicts are a part of characteristic continuous normal processes, while stability is only a temporary state of balance or a resting point between fights. Furthermore, Russia tends to expect that other main global actors would understand global politics in the same paradigm of geopolitical realism<sup>40</sup> and would do their best to slow down the progress and growth of Russia. Military and economic powers need to be presented so that countries could gain more respect and a better reputation in the international arena, which might lead to more growth over the controlled territories in the long run.<sup>41</sup>

With this in mind, states not only want to realize their ambitions by means of power or fear in the international arena, but they also want to be followed and respected, especially in case of Russia aiming for respect as a civilized European (or Eurasian) power centre.<sup>42</sup> The country interprets “the game” as follows. “Rising” powers (like Russia) want as much direct fight as possible, while “old”, declining powers search for alternative and asymmetric tools and indirect force. Thus, old powers manipulate and intervene as much as possible to avoid direct fight, up to the internal manipulation of political competition. The Russian academic community describes this approach as a neo-imperial approach, while also being increasingly authoritarian and aggressive.

Although Russia tries to establish its own asymmetric multilateral network, it simultaneously opposes the overall idea of international cooperation and integration in multilateral organizations. In practice, Russian analysts see many of these as a form of anti-Russian coalition with different labels.<sup>43</sup> As such, they would prefer to engage in intra-governmental and bilateral diplomacy. Membership in international organizations could be a sign of respect, more or less like a marker, if the organization is powerful, selective, and stable.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ponomareva E.G., Frolov A.V. (2019), “NATO Aggression Against Yugoslavia: International-Legal, Military Strategic and Geopolitical Consequences”, *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, Vol. 2(65), pp. 32–56. (In Russ.) <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2019-2-65-32-56>

<sup>40</sup> Svarin, D. (2016), “The construction of ‘geopolitical spaces’ in Russian foreign policy discourse before and after the Ukraine crisis”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 7(2), pp. 129–140.

<sup>41</sup> Istomin I.A., Bolgova I.V., Sokolov A.P., Avatkov V.A. (2019), “A ‘Badge of Honour or a Stamp of Infamy?’ NATO As A Marker of Status in International Politics”, *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, Vol. 2(65), pp. 57–85.

<sup>42</sup> Karaganov, S., Suslov, D. V. (2018).

<sup>43</sup> For example, in Russia the West is often described and analyzed as a “united anti-Russia coalition” that is guided and manipulated by the United States, both at the legal and institutional levels.

<sup>44</sup> Istomin, I.A et al. (2019).

From Russia's perspective<sup>45</sup>, both the concept of normative power of the EU and the concept of external governance are considered to be the tools of Western asymmetric and hybrid activities against Russia, or even an illegal interference into Russia's sovereignty and national interests. Andrey Makarychev and Andrey Devyatkov stress the willingness of politicians in Russia to geopolitimize the concept of normative power.<sup>46</sup> The initiatives of the EU in Ukraine and Moldova, the relations between the EU and Kazakhstan as well as Azerbaijan, even the economic relations between Germany and Central and Eastern European countries offer some supportive arguments for this construction. Tatyana Romanova and Elena Pavlova even argue that the way how things evolved in Kiev and Ukraine are the outcome of aggressive normative power of the EU overcoming some reasonable limits and leading to a conflict of interests and values.<sup>47</sup>

There are two main sources of the attitude of non-compliance with normative power in Russia. First of all, recently the EU has made ambitious attempts to interfere into Russia's socio-economic values and processes. Secondly, the Russians seem to be unable to understand both the content and intention of normative power. Even Vladimir Putin has claimed that he was unable to understand what the protection of the so-called European or Western values meant.<sup>48</sup> In more detail, the only thing within the concept of Europe's normative power that has been known to Russia before is protection of human rights and repressed groups. This argument has been used by Russia itself a lot in international affairs. The efforts of the Western countries to promote other universal values in Russia have led to an increasingly negative reputation of the EU in the eyes of the Kremlin. This negative reputation is also transferred to people living in Russia via state-controlled mass media. Western economic and political sanctions directed at forcing Russia to accept normative power have contributed to an even more negative image of both the concept of normative power in general and of the EU in particular. Although officially NATO has been somewhat more restricted in promoting political values related to governance and democracy, Russian media sources still often label NATO "as evil as the EU".<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Referring to the statements of Russian policy makers, civil servants, as well as some researchers (e.g. Romanova and Pavlova 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Makarychev, A., Devyatkov, A. (2014), "The EU in Eastern Europe: Has Normative Power Become Geopolitical?". *The Vilnius Moment, 1st edition, PONARS Eurasia, George Washington University, Washington, DC*, pp. 1–5, [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-perspectives-pdf/The%20Vilnius%20Moment\\_PONARS%20Eurasia\\_March%202014.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-perspectives-pdf/The%20Vilnius%20Moment_PONARS%20Eurasia_March%202014.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Romanova, T., Pavlova, E. (2014).

<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Putin argued that he sees at least two problems with the concept of normative power. To quote: "Firstly, /.../ there is no criteria for them. These are only general discussions about democracy, about this or that. /.../ Secondly, what is behind this promotion? Definitely these are geopolitical interests of one country or a group of countries" (see, Putin 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Isotomin, I.A et al. (2019).

In this light, the Russian political elite have also actively rejected all attempts of the Western soft power to “teach” Russia the values of normative power. In his 2007 Munich speech Vladimir Putin stressed that “Russia, we are constantly being taught about democracy./.../ Russia has been the target of biased and aggressive criticism which, at times, exceeds all limits. When we are subjected, again and again, to blanket criticisms in a persistent effort to influence our citizens, their attitudes, and our domestic affairs, it becomes clear that these attacks are not rooted in moral and democratic values”.<sup>50</sup> According to Andrey Makarychev, “It is Russia’s denial of politicised practice that underpins its claims to being a normal country, which does not need to be normalised by others”.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, Vladimir Putin stressed the failure of unipolar world order and pointed to double standards of the Western democracies while dictating Russia to move towards democratic transition during 2007 Munich Security Conference already. At the same time, the Russian political elite have been constantly sending signals to the international community that the country had not violated the fundamental principles of international law since the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, normative power has also been seen by Russia as a tool to discredit the country as an independent multipolar power centre and to degrade it to the Western dependency in terms of values and economy. As an alternative initiative, the Russian administration stressed that normative power, as such, was not relevant in international relations today (or for the dialogue with Russia). This approach was also meant to illustrate that the EU itself did not consistently follow its own logic and the EU did not live up to the standards promoted by it.<sup>53</sup>

As an alternative to the European normative power, Russia emphasizes its experience in constructing a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society, as well as its willingness to share it with others in order to help the EU to deal with problems of ethnic minorities, racism, and xenophobia. For example, to quote Vladimir Chizhov, Russia was ready to share its “unique tradition of good neighbourhood coexistence of representatives of various cultures and religions, based on tolerance at socio-political and interpersonal levels”.<sup>54</sup> In other words, Russia would like to become the source of expertise and an example to some

<sup>50</sup> Romanova, T. (2016), “Russian Challenge to the EU’s Normative Power: Change and Continuity”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 68:3, pp. 371–390.

<sup>51</sup> Makarychev, A. (2014), *Russia and the EU in a multipolar world: Discourses, identities, norms* (Vol. 127).

<sup>52</sup> Lavrov, S. (2018).

<sup>53</sup> Putin, V. (2012) Russia and the Changing World, *Russia Today*, 27.02.2012, <https://www.rt.com/politics/official-word/putin-russia-changing-world-263/>

<sup>54</sup> Chizhov, V. (2012), “Strategicheskoe partnerstvo Rossiya-ES: evrokrisis—ne povod dlya peredyshki”, *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn*, 6.

countries how to solve their problems. A metatext comes along with this message, saying that Russia is showing its values to be similar to the Western ones (i.e., Christianity, traditional family, tolerance, etc.), yet, it also has its own legitimate civilization encompassing a specific value system.

In conclusion, according to the Russian view, Western countries have systematically developed a multilateral international order under the concept of normative power, which is consciously expected to project its own values to other countries by using the “stick and carrot” type of conditionality. The EU believes that it is irrational for neighbouring powers not to accept this model, even if Russia is not the only one openly rejecting the concepts of normative power and external governance. However, Russia does not comply with the concepts of normative power and external governance, since there is hardly any carrot in it for Russia, or any reputation to gain in doing so. In addition to the opposition of the Western normative power, Russia considers itself to be a regional power centre and an alternative source of external governance based on traditional conservative values. For example, Putin’s 2013 speech depicted him as one of the leaders of the global conservative movement, talking about conservatism as a system of values helping to build bridges across various cultures.<sup>55</sup>

### **3.2. Is Russia able to feel deterred? Conceptual meaning of deterrence in Russia**

A broader understanding of how deterrence is expected to work in Russia has a lot to do with what the Russians understand by deterrence in general. Hereby, at first one should discuss the ontological and epistemological aspects of the term *deterrence* in the Russian language. Researchers have differentiated between three stages in the evolution of the post-Cold War thinking on deterrence in Russia. The first stage refers to the late 1990s, when the theory of de-escalation emerged in the international arena with a focus on how to make use of nuclear capabilities in the most efficient way possible against a conventionally superior adversary. During the second stage in the 2000s, the focus of the deterrence concept shifted towards the strategic deterrence by referring to the question focussing on ways how nuclear and conventional capabilities could be combined to deter both conventional and nuclear threats. During the third

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<sup>55</sup> President of Russia (2013), “Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii”, The Kremlin, 17.02.2013; Abzalov, D. (2013), “Novyi lider mirovogo konservatizma”, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 11.12.2013, [http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2013-12-11/5\\_putin.html](http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2013-12-11/5_putin.html)



stage since 2010, the idea behind the strategic deterrence has been expanded further to include the non-nuclear and non-military components as well.<sup>56</sup> In this light, the term *deterrence* was initially associated with the nuclear assets in Russia. However, some doubts about the country's nuclear capabilities in the 1990s and early 2000s have contributed to the development of a more comprehensive approach to deterrence in Russia in the following decades with the aim of offering Russia other tools in addition to the nuclear capabilities to prevent and shape conflicts<sup>57</sup>. For example, the Russian Military Doctrine placed more emphasis on conventional forces, communication, and command and control systems already in 2010. Further doctrinal documents from 2015 onward have only confirmed this approach, describing a large variety of non-military, non-nuclear, and nuclear capabilities in Russia to deter adversaries.<sup>58</sup> However, despite this the strategic deterrence of Russia is still a strategy, which, to a large extent, is based on convincing an opponent of the credible threat of using military force. To quote the Russian National Security Strategy:

Interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, informational and other measures are being developed and implemented in order to ensure strategic deterrence and prevention of armed conflicts. Strategic deterrence and prevention of armed conflicts are achieved by maintaining the capacity for nuclear deterrence at a sufficient level as well as the Russian Federation Armed Forces, other troops, and military formations and bodies at the requisite level of combat readiness.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, from a functional aspect, Russia should understand the essence of deterrence in a similar way as the Western countries do because the deterrence models of both adversaries include military and non-military, nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities as a response to potential threats.

However, in case of Russia, the military aspect clearly cannot be separated from a broader strategic and political meaning of this term, as the Western countries understand it. As long as the latter is perceived by Russia as an aggressive strategy directed at deprivation of Russia from both its rights and control over its nearby foreign countries, the military aspect of the deterrence posture of the Western countries can be interpreted by Russia as a ratchet-effect that locks in the Western intrusion and a takeover of what has been and should "legitimately" stay within the Russian sphere of influence.

Furthermore, essentially Russia sees deterrence as a reactive concept, which historically has been associated with Russia's fight against Napoleon or

<sup>56</sup> Ven Bruusgaard, K. (2016).

<sup>57</sup> Veebel, V. (2018b). (Un) justified expectations on nuclear deterrence of non-nuclear NATO members: the case of Estonia and Latvia?. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 34(3), 291-309.

<sup>58</sup> Russian Federation (2015),

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Hitler, because in the past the word *sderzhivaniye* was used to refer to the idea that the opponent is forced to step out of the conflict upon suffering heavy losses. Additionally, there is an important political meaning associated with this term. To be precise, in real terms, deterrence has very little meaning and motivation for decision-makers in Russia. Once you show any signs of being deterred, you are considered a loser in Russia and will be crossed off a list of national leaders and heroes in the global arena. In this light, any sign or proof of weakness in this direction means political suicide in Russia.

In conclusion, current attempts of the Western countries to succeed in building-up credible deterrence are simply acts of dominance and aggressiveness in the eyes of many groups in the Russian society. Accordingly, Russia feels an internal need to react to it by escalation, moreover, the country feels that it is justified to react by escalation<sup>60</sup>. Hence, the deterrence efforts of the Western countries could be simply counter-productive: if Russia starts threatening, the West feels more insecure and believes that more deterring activities are needed, which, in turn, would once again trigger Russia to escalate the situation further.<sup>61</sup> The essence of the phenomenon of multifaceted strategic deterrence discussed in Section 2 speaks also in favour of this. In principle, in the end there are only two possible outcomes in this situation: either a conflict breaks out, or one opponent runs out of motivation or resources.

### **3.3. Why does Russia ignore sanctions?**

#### **The conceptual view**

Until now, the Western political and economic sanctions have neither forced Russia to stop annexation of Crimea nor caused any significant harm on Russia's economy. Furthermore, Vladimir Putin is still in power in Russia and after the recent constitutional referendum in Russia in 2020 his position as a long-term political leader of Russia is stronger than ever before. This makes one wonder what makes Russia ignore the Western sanctions that much?

One possibility would be that it was too complicated for political leaders of Russia to understand what was essentially expected from them. The lack of unity among the Western countries in regards to the goals of the sanctions made

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<sup>60</sup> Veebel, V. (2019). Why it would be strategically rational for Russia to escalate in Kaliningrad and the Suwalki corridor, *Comparative Strategy*, 38:3, 182-197.

<sup>61</sup> Halas, M. (2019), "Proving a negative: why deterrence does not work in the Baltics", *European Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 431-448.

it highly likely.<sup>62</sup> Russia could come to three main conclusions when attempting to interpret what the West could mean by the sanctions. First, sanctions are tools of conditionality and would only be lifted after the occupied territories are returned to Ukraine. Second, sanctions are tools of punishment that simply has “to be served” (like prison time). Returning the occupied territories might shorten the duration of the sanctions, however, the sanctions would be lifted anyway when the time of punishment is served. Third, sanctions are a part of the Western initiative of anti-Russian deterrence and harassment to push Russia back as an uncomfortable growing power, and annexation of Crimea was only used as an excuse for their activation.<sup>63</sup> In the latter case, sanctions would not be lifted completely even if Russia showed reasonable readiness for cooperation and compromise.

Russia’s choice out of these three options as a response to the Western sanctions highly depends on realistic options available for the political elite of Russia. Currently, the acceptance or compliance with the Western sanctions is completely excluded as a possible option for Russia, since Russia perceives the goal of the sanctions as a clear attempt to dominate over the sovereign power of the Russian Federation by using manipulation, destabilization, and pressure in socio-economic terms. Furthermore, as the political elite see it, the country is illegally being forced to change the current political regime in Russia. Following this logic, political actors in Russia promoting acceptance of the sanctions should be seen as manipulated collaborators of the Western powers.

According to Russian researchers, the only respectful way to get the sanctions lifted is not the compliance, but the ability to show that these sanctions do not have any meaningful effect on Russia, but harm the economies of those countries having imposed them even more. In practice, Russia has invested a lot to convince the Members of the European Parliament and the European Commission that certain EU Member States suffer greatly because of the sanctions, while the Russian economy is growing (and developing even faster than in Germany). In recent years several research institutions and groups in Russia have focused on finding proof that the Western expectations in terms of economic effects of sanctions were misleading and full of propaganda, if not fully wrong.

The hope that Russia expresses its good will to improve relations with the West due to the country’s desire to avoid political isolation or economic recession is also rather unrealistic. In principle, this comes back to the assump-

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<sup>62</sup> Kuvalin, D. B. (2016), “Russian enterprises at the end of 2015: Anti-crisis activities and assessment of the impact of mutual Economic sanctions of the west and Russia”, *Studies on Russian Economic Development*, Vol. 27(3), pp. 341–358.

<sup>63</sup> Fituni, L. L. (2019).

tion that Russia would be ready to sacrifice its sovereignty for more diplomatic influence and inclusion in the international arena. In practice, this is unrealistic simply because of the failure to consider the fact that the Western countries are the only potential partner out of many options in the political and diplomatic landscape of Russia. The country has numerous “clients” located both in Russia’s neighbourhood (like Belarus and Armenia) and in other regions (such as Venezuela in Latin America). Furthermore, Russia has influential and technologically advanced economic partners at their borders (like China) or a bit further away (like India).

Last but not least, researchers in Russia also draw the attention on a paradox that effective sanctions are not possible when relations between an imposer and a target country are limited (which, for example, is precisely the case of the sanctions imposed by the USA and the EU on Iran, North-Korea, and Venezuela), but their effect is the strongest when the target country has a strong industrial economy with intensive trade relations with the future imposer of the sanctions. This leads Russians to a conclusion that, in terms of Russia’s security, it is more rational not to intensify relations with the Western countries aiming for potential “abuse” of mutual trade relations to “blackmail and manipulate with sanctions”.

## Discussion and conclusions: adjusting expectations or changing the methods?

Currently the EU and NATO rely on three main pillars in their relations with Russia: normative power, deterrence, and sanctions. However, none of these terms has a clear and easily understandable meaning in the Russian language, furthermore, the country’s psychological pattern does not overlap with the one of the Western countries, which makes it difficult to believe that these three elements have a chance to succeed in practice. Thus, it is not surprising that Russia does not comply with the Western “demands”, does not understand what behaviour is expected, and does not react in the way expected by the West from Russia. Taking into account the fundamental differences in terms of international stability and the role of multilateral institutions, the positive output is even more unrealistic.

As a result, the policy-making discourses of both Moscow and the capitals of the Western countries are full of mutual misperceptions, distorted mirror images, and attributions to other non-existent intentions and capabilities.

Although, for example, the concepts of deterrence partially overlap in the West and in Russia, there is also a huge area where they operate in “parallel universes”. Furthermore, a lot of the strategic culture in association with deterrence is produced not for operational or functional purposes, but to please local political or military elite<sup>64</sup>.

The current study indicated that numerous challenges and limitations needed to be accepted and understood, if the EU and NATO sought to move forward in terms of progress in relations with Russia. The linguistic part of the study concluded that the terms with a clear and understandable meaning in the English language might not translate into the Russian language in the exact same way. The mirror effect is possible as well: words in Russian might not translate back to English as expected by the Russians. Additionally, it should be taken into account that the language carries not only the meaning of words, but also the status of the communicative parts. Again, changes could appear within the course of communication and translation. For example, although Western analysts or policy-makers might not plan on patronizing Russia at all, upon translation into the Russian language the nature of the message could transform into a form that is completely unacceptable for the Russians, for the local political elite, society and culture.

In principle, there could be two solutions to the current situation. The West could either adjust the message to make it acceptable and understandable for Russia or the Western countries could hope to change Russia’s society and political leaders to make them think and feel as the West needs and wants this, theoretically either in a peaceful or forceful way. However, any attempts to change the target country’s obsolete way of thinking and its political regime have proven to be very difficult. Russia is simply not surrendering to the current deterrence and normative model of the West. Thus, what should the West do?

There is very little hope for credible deterrence, as a long-term sustainable concept in relations with Russia, for three reasons. First, from the linguistic point of view, it does not translate into Russian as any kind of active or positive behaviour. Second, from the cultural point of view, it has a strong patronizing and dominating effect on the target country. Third, the Russian society, from the political elite to the academic elite, is united in regards to the aspect that the rulers of Russia should not and cannot be deterred. These three aspects create a cumulative effect that is difficult to break. Historically, there are many examples in Russia where local rulers were removed from power after “selling

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<sup>64</sup> Veebel, V. (2018a). NATO options and dilemmas for deterring Russia in the Baltic States, *Defence Studies*, 18 (2)

the fatherland for dimes”, but only some examples (like the times of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin) when Russia both publicly admitted the Western supremacy and accepted the need to comply with the Western values, and still remained in power. Thus, should the political leaders of Russia show publicly any signs that they were afraid and deterred, it could trigger the process where the political elite of Russia could not be trusted by the Russians anymore, as noted by Andrei Kolesnikov as well<sup>65</sup>. Russia can be deterred only in the language that they understand and Russia needs to understand the existence of a credible threat. However, in this case the only reasonable reaction to be expected from the Russian side is mobilization of resources and confrontation with all means available.

Out of the three elements, normative power (together with the concept of external governance) seems to have the lowest likelihood to be accepted by Russian politicians and members of the society. The translation of the concept of normative power into the Russian language is linguistically complicated for Russians to understand and it is loaded with negative undertone of domination and disrespect. Some Russian researchers even point out that rejection of the normative power of the EU (or NATO) is a clear and understandable marker for Russia to prove that its sovereignty and power is intact. Paradoxically, it has been argued that it often remained unclear which values and whose interests were being promoted even for those groups, who were generally pro-European in Russia.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast, sanctions might have slight chances to succeed. On one hand, Russia has used similar measures against its neighbouring countries, so the country cannot question the legitimacy or the actual economic and political effects of sanctions. On the other hand, since sanctions have at least some minor impact on the Russian economy and the country’s competitiveness, regardless of whether they are publicly understood or not, it is also Russia’s concern to find mutual understanding and search for compromises in this matter. The situation is more complicated in linguistic terms, because for some members of the Russian society sanctions mean to be punished and dominated without the need to change or comply, but for others it means simply negative conditionality to be reversed when compromise is found.

To sum up, the prospects for the future still remain unclear. Assuming that the Western countries would like to succeed in their actions and cause political

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<sup>65</sup> Kolesnikov, A. (2016), Do Russians want war? Carnegie Moscow Center, June 2016. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Article\\_Kolesnikov\\_2016\\_Eng-2.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Article_Kolesnikov_2016_Eng-2.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> Romanova, T. (2016).

and social changes in Russia, they need to understand that the idea of national glory and being respected as a great power centre is one of the few national virtues shared by the majority of people in Russia. Another important aspect seems to be the point that mutual signals need to be received and understood correctly. Signalling goes mostly wrong for linguistic and psychological reasons. This is obviously a two-way road, which also applies to Russia's conduct. For example, Moscow repeatedly expresses genuine frustration that the West attributes the country, as Russia stipulates, to non-existent strategic intentions in the Baltic States, in Ukraine, and in Syria<sup>67</sup>. The responses of the Western countries following Russia's acts of coercion run against Moscow's expectations and desired final result. Russia's approach appears to presume signalling, including intensified pressure across all domains, to communicate both Russia's ability and capability to resolve. However, according to Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, the question remains "whether the adversary will understand the message of deterrence the way the Russian concept prescribes it".<sup>68</sup> In this sense, amateur translators and interpreters can be found on both sides of the conflict. Thus, when making plans for a long-term strategy, the Western experts should take into account that basically the Russians have two options for choosing between compliance and strategic competition struggle: to follow the Western paradigm, which would mean playing by the rules of the West, or to find an alternative model, which might not be that sophisticated, but it might be something they could use with confidence and initiative.<sup>69</sup>

Last but not least, one should not forget that the "lost-in-translation"-effect could appear not only because of the translation from one language or value system to another one, but also because of the concentration from personal understandings to common understandings, or even, in the final stage, from the common level back to the personal level. It cannot be excluded that the accent plays an important role as well. For example, while the EU and NATO might be more focused on the content of the message, for the Russians the way how the message is presented might be even more important.

*February 2020*

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<sup>67</sup> Veebel, V. and Ploom, I. (2019). Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic?, *Defense & Security Analysis*, 35:4, 406-422

<sup>68</sup> Ven Bruusgaard, K. (2016).

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g. the publications by Dmitry Adamsky.