Subjectivity matters.
Reconsidering Russia's Relations with the West.

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Introduction

Russia continues to be an important partner for the West[1]: the country is an essential pillar of the European political and security architecture, a key international player and is also of growing importance as an economic partner. Thus, a constructive relationship with Russia is bound to remain a key objective for Western policy-makers – and vice versa. The relationship between Russia and the West is a very complex one and characterized by a multitude of different forms as well as different areas of interaction. It stands to reason that a broad variety of interests and motivations on each sides and a complex set of issues shape the quality and dynamics of Russian-Western interaction. And each of the parties involved carries the potential and power to act for its benefit or to its detriment.

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[1] The notion "the West" refers to the countries and political organizations that are traditionally attributed to the Western hemisphere – Northern America and Europe.

For the West, it is therefore crucial to understand Russia's interests and motivations as an actor in this relationship as well as Russian behaviour as a respondent to demands, interests and actions from the West. Such an understanding is, however, often lacking. Western policy-makers have been confronted with a sometimes puzzling Russian foreign policy behaviour throughout the whole post-Soviet period the characteristic pattern of which has been the (re)emergence of situational inconsistencies – disproportionate changes and shifts of positions (Welch Larson/Shevchenko 2010: 70) – or "swings" (Clunan 2009) that substantially contradicted current (often positive and constructive) trends and dynamics of engagement – "sometimes even at the cost of a serious confrontation" (Lukin 2008: 52).

Such behaviour became manifest both in the form of verbal protest against moves from the West, and in the form of "blocking tactics" in settling common issues and problems, e.g. in the NATO-context (Pouliot 2010) or in the management of the conflicts in the Balkans (Mendeloff 2008), or throughout 2007/8 when Russia rejected to agree to Kosovo's independence. The recognition of Georgia's breakaway-regions Abchasia and South-Ossetia 2008 and the clear confrontational stance Russia had taken towards the West, equally puzzled the international community (Sakwa 2008). Russia's reaction during the conflict over Georgia in August 2008 came as a surprise to most "Western" actors. The harsh rhetoric as well as the decision of the Russian leadership to intervene in the regional conflict in South-Ossetia militarily, to extend military action to Georgian core territory and, finally, to recognize South-Ossetia's and Abchasia's independence, was met with incomprehension and even shock. From a Western point of view, Russia's attitude appeared largely inconsistent and illogical: Hadn't Russia's newly elected President Dmitri Medvedew just been getting ready to become more oriented towards international cooperation and good relationship with the West and Western institutions? Was Russia's resurrection as a great power and the desire to restore old spheres of influence in the post-Soviet space so much more worthy and desirable for the leaders in Moscow than positive, constructive and mutually beneficial relations with the West and cooperative security in Europe? And why, if so, did Russia shortly after go back to 'business as usual' as if nothing had happened?

Many observers see the same puzzling logic in Russia's position on the U.S. plans to NATO enlargement or to establish a missile defence system on the European continent. It seems as if Russia's 'No' cannot be altered with 'rational' argumentation ('NATO enlargement resp. missile defence system is no threat to Russian security') at all. Instead, Moscow's positions seem to be tied to other interpretations. Apparently, they result from the feeling that Russia is being unfairly treated by Western representatives. But in addition to such 'blockades' and

opposition, however, one can also observe a dynamic manifesting itself in a sometimes disproportionate turn towards Russia's Western partners. For instance, Russia over-optimistically 'embraced' and made offers to the West, which did not necessarily end up in political or economic 'gains'. Such moves, e.g. Russia's offer to form a global coalition against international terrorism after 9/11, came to nothing and again ended in frustration and "disillusionment" (Aksenyonok 2008: 69) in Moscow about the prospects and nature of the relations with the West. All this leads one to assume that the symbolic value of these issues is much more important than strategic instrumental power calculations.

These inconsistencies make Russian foreign policy at times highly unpredictable and have repeatedly led to irritation on the part of Russia's Western partners. While in many instances, Russia's positions and moves can be explained by rational strategic considerations, others are hardly compatible with well-calculated, strategic foreign policy interests, particularly because – on closer examination – they appear to imply high costs in terms of maintaining good and stable (political, security and economic) relations with Western partners. Therefore, in this paper, I will try to unfold some ideas on how we can theoretically and analytically better grasp Russia's inconsistent and costly behaviour in its relations with the West. I argue that the inconsistencies follow a specific behavioural pattern that clearly lies beyond the conventional 'rationally' paradigm. With regard to theory, this leads us to look at approaches and disciplines which put the notion of *subjectivity* in the centre of attention. Subjectivity, in my understanding, refers to non-objectifiable motivational forces and their effect on judgement and behaviour of a political actor in social interaction. New insights from neuroscience, individual and social psychology seem particularly promising for unravelling such psychological, subjective logics in international relations and in the Russian-Western relationship in particular.

I proceed in my paper in the following way: In a *first chapter*, I will discuss the limits of traditional actor-centered, 'rational' IR theories when explaining inconsistent (foreign) policy behaviour. In the *second chapter*, I will present an alternative view that goes beyond the limits of the rationality paradigm and joins in to those academic works that have been published over the recent years and try to theorize, conceptualize and analyse the *subjective* dimension of international relations. Directly or indirectly, these works relate to psychological factors as they are built around the notion of subjectivity and emotionality. As a significant proportion of this research also deals with Russian foreign policy behaviour, I will, in a *third chapter*, present some of these works and show why Russia – particularly in its relations with the West – appears to be an obvious case for studying subjectivity in international relations. In my

conclusions, I will sum up my arguments and argue that once we make the subjective behavioral patterns in Russian foreign policy visible, we can better understand as well as positively influence the interaction dynamics in the overall Western-Russian relationship.

1 Russian foreign policy inconsistencies and the limits of conventional actor-centered IR theories

Conventional IR-guided, actor-centered theories on foreign policy behavior tend to assume either *instrumental (zweckrational)* or *value-based (wertrational)* motivations as drivers for an actors' behavior in international relations. From a realist, liberalist and institutionalist point of view, choices and behavior are subject to a "logic of consequence" (utility-maximizing, instrumental motivation), while liberal constructivism assumes a "logic of appropriateness" (normative, value-based motivation) behind foreign policy conduct. The assumptions on the origins of interests and motivations under these various interpretations differ significantly – for realists as well as institutionalists, the driving motivation is power accumulation and security, for liberalists, foreign policy behavior is the result of political and economic interests and preferences of inner-state groups, for liberal constructivists, social norms guide foreign policy behavior.

However, these theoretical strands all have in common that they assume that the actors' policy preferences do not change easily. Under a realist, liberalist and institutionalist perspective, preferences are fixed. Only liberal constructivists presume that preferences can change, but only slowly, and are, thus, also relatively stable. However, the empirical evidence with regard to Russia suggests, that the actors' foreign policy preferences vis-à-vis the West can change very quickly and, different from what traditional IR actor-centered theories suggest, are rather unstable than fixed or stable in nature. Thus, from the conventional actor-centered interpretations, it would be hardly possible to explain the permanent Russian foreign policy inconsistencies. Instead, these theories would suggest that Russian "swings" are the result of completely changing (objective/substantiated) utility calculations (e.g. after shifts in a state's environment or following a regime change) or a consequence of the emergence of new social norms and identity formation. However under these assumptions, foreign policy shifts and changes would rarely occur and emerge only gradually. Inconsistencies in the form of oscillations, ruptures, shifts and incompatible positions, as well as the reproduction of inconsistent features and behavioural patterns over time would be highly unlikely.

What accounts for these limits in IR theories? From my view basically the fact that all actor-centered theories in IR refer to the paradigm of 'rationality', i.e. to the idea that political choices and action are subject to rational processing that leads to a rational judgment (Mercer 2005: 80). This applies both to realist and liberal theories as well as to such approaches which are inspired by constructivism: behaviour follows 'consequently' from social norms – and has thus an objectifiable value. This means that policy preferences, according to traditional theories, are guided by objective preferences, i.e. preferences directed at an issue with an inherent (material or ideal) objectifiable value, independent from a specific, situational interest of an actor. However, from the 'rationality' paradigm, it would be particularly difficult to explain why Russian foreign policy behavior and attitudes towards the West can change so quickly and why Russian foreign policy makers would repeatedly show negative attitudes towards the West (or Western partners) while simultaneously or shortly after speaking out for good cooperation and constructive relations with (other or even the same) Western counterparts. Neither can conventional actor-centered IR theories explain unstable decision-making outcomes as such, nor can the paradigm of rationality explain the (seemingly) self-harming effect that contradicts "the notion of self-interest or the internalised understanding of what is socially obligatory for these actors" (McDermott 2004b: 15).

Table 1: Actor-centered approaches in IR to the explanation of foreign policy behavior

IR strands / *Explanation*	**Realism, liberalism, institutionalism**	**Liberal constructivism**
Nature of preferences	Fixed	Relatively stable
Drivers	Self-interests (power, welfare, security)	Socially constructed norms, identity
Causes for differences in behavior	Differences in fixed preferences	(Slowly) Changing assessments of the normative context
Path of human decision-making	Reflective process	
Logic of choice and action	"Logic of consequence"	"Logic of appropriateness"
Theoretical void	No explanatory force for different causal dynamics of human preference-building/quick changes and 'swings' beyond macro-level	

All this leads one to assume that the inconsistencies in Russia's foreign policy behaviour find their explanation beyond the conventional rationality paradigm. They seem neither a result nor a function of purely rational processing.

2 Subjectivity matters – understanding foreign policy patterns beyond the 'rationality' paradigm

In such cases, when people do not behave the ways predicted by conventional, 'rational' theories, we need to appreciate the 'non-rational' dimension of foreign policy behaviour and the unsubstantiated (i.e. rather symbolic) value attached to a specific political goal. It is then not primarily the outer, substantiated reality we are interested in, but rather the, subjective, "inner reality" of an actor or group of actors. Researchers increasingly realize the theoretical voids laid out above and try to find complementary approaches or develop more tailored frameworks for the explanation of more complex foreign policy pictures such as we find with regard to Russia. There is a growing tendency to look beyond the 'rationality' paradigm and to learn from other disciplines, which deal with human decision-making and behavior below the macro-level.

With regard to theory, they lead us to a set of approaches and disciplines, which all put the notion of *subjectivity* in the centre of attention. Subjectivity refers to a person's or group's perspective, belief or desire which is based on personal impressions, feelings, opinions and emotions rather than on external facts. More specifically: Subjectivity refers to non-objectifiable motivational forces – such as (historical) experiences, intentions, perceptions, emotions, desires and wishes – and their effect on judgement and behaviour in a specific social context.[2] Taking this subjective dimension into account, from this follows that international relations are not only subject to strategic (materially and politically motivated) interaction or the prescriptive function of social norms, but are also influenced by subjective interpretation about the role, importance and weighing of a given policy issue and subject matter.

It is particularly psychology that promises the biggest potential for overcoming the voids and for better explaining the subjective dimension of foreign policy patterns and international relations (e.g. Jervis 2008). Psychological approaches to the explanation of IR and foreign policy have *per se* a focus on actors' subjective perceptions and interpretations of the world.

[2] This means: the "truth" of subjective judgments is relative to the person or group making the judgment. See also: Birckenbach 1990: 8.

Psychology also *per se* deals with restrictive structures to human decision-making, but makes an emphasis on emotions, whishes, affects and other cognition-related processes as influencing factors. From a psychological point of view, the assessment of incentives in a given situation are subject to perception biases, biases in judgements and different cost-benefit calculations resulting thereof. From a psychological perspective, we therefore might speak of *'subjective interests'* that account for inconsistencies and seemingly costly behavior. In that sense, such costly action can in fact have a 'strategic' function and relevance – namely to contribute to a subjective needs or expectations satisfaction.

Having said this, the contrast to constructivism becomes evident: Constructivism postulates that actors' perceptions about reality are, as is with psychology, also constructed endogenously and that social (inter-)action is based on, sometimes differing, inter-subjective constructions of reality. Non-material factors, such as ideas, socially accepted norms, collective identity and historic memories are the structures, which shape an actor's preferences. Under a constructivist logic an actor's behaviour would always be guided by the internalised inter-subjective norms and the interest to live up to the demands of that norm (Wendt 1999). A subjective needs satisfaction, however, does not necessarily follow that constructivist, inter-subjective logic as the respective action is not primarily directed at the object, and the actors do not primarily proceed "on the basis of the meaning that the objects have for them" (Wendt 1992: 398).

Thus, psychology can help us to see and understand a given situation through the eyes of the actor(s) in question. Unfortunately, mainstream political science has often treated psychological aspects, such as emotions and affects, as marginal factors as "there [were] long and deeply held stereotypes that claim that [they] are either irrational or unpredictable in nature" (McDermott 2004b: 18).[3] Only in the Cold War-context, psychological explanations gained some academic attention, as the antagonistic arms race was seen as a "irrational" dynamic in international politics. This lead to attempts to develop a Political Psychology of International Relations (Kelman 1965) and War and Peace (Frank 1971). After the end of the East-West antagonism, the idea was borrowed for explaining the dynamics of conflicts in

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[3] See e.g. Jervis 1976; Mandel 1987.

general and finding ways to end them peacefully (Birckenbach 1990). With the constructivist turn in IR in the 1990s, the study of the impact of perception, subjective definitions and decision-making became more legitimate again. However, even under the influence of constructivism the ‘rationality’ paradigm continued to dominate the discipline. Emotions, wishes, affects and other psychological factors still counted as determinants for “irrational” behavioural deviance (see: Mercer 2005).

Due to recent advances in the neurosciences, studying psychological aspects have again become attractive in IR (Goldgeier/Tetlock 2001; McDermott 2004b; Mercer 2005; Mercer 2006, Mercer 2010; Giersch 2009).[4] Neuroscience offers new insights about “how the brain works”, thereby stipulating a “close interaction between cognition and emotion” (McDermott 2004a: 691). It also highlights that psychological factors such as emotions or social evaluations of one’s own role and significance strongly impact rational processing and, thus, interaction between individuals and groups (Strack/Deutsch 2004). Emotions are central to experience in all areas of human being and forms of social interaction, and, hence, also to international relations (Mercer 2006). They must be understood as pre-conscious, thus unreflected (Strack/Deutsch 2004) and implicit judgments and appraisals of a given situation (Weber 2008: 33). Emotions in international relations, according to Mercer, strengthen beliefs such as trust, nationalism, justice and credibility (Mercer 2010: 1). Emotions, thus, have a functional role in (individual or group) situational decision-making. Here lies the crucial difference to older psychological approaches: Deviance from purely rational behavior is not seen as ‘un-normal’ or ‘irrational’ any more. Assessments of incentives and risks in a given situation are always subject to cognitive and affective constraints leading to biased perceptions and altered cost-benefit calculations[5] (e.g. Schwarz 2000; McDermott 2004b; Giersch 2009).

All these insights makes psychological approaches more attractive and legitimate again to be integrated in other research (Goldgeier/Tetlock 2001; McDermott/Kugler 2001; Gould 2003;

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4 Neuropsychology stresses that “most of the time, emotions serve as a productive function, providing the foundation for swift and accurate decision making” (McDermott 2004a: 691).

5 This perspective has a close proximity to the economic concept of ‚bounded rationality‘. Bounded rationality assumes a limited rationality of actors, who, unable to reach an optimal decision, try to *optimize* or *satisfice* their interests (Simon 1957).

Gross Stein 2007; Giersch 2009). Subjective interpretations of a situation in question, influenced by emotions, intuition and other affects can, it is assumed, also make a significant difference on the outcome of behavior in the international realm. As Mercer states in this respect:

> "Attending to how specific actors feel about the United States will tell analysts more about U.S. credibility with those actors than will a focus on capability of U.S. military, the U.S. interest in oil, or Americans' belief in their own resolution." (Mercer 2010: 26).

A number of academic works have recently been put out in IR, all of which take up or indirectly relate to this 'non-rational', subjective dimension of foreign policy. Many of these works borrow particularly from social psychology as the discipline can help us to understand how the subjective dimension of policy-making plays a role in social interaction – and in international relations –, how subjective needs are expressed in the international realm and how psychological factors can shape international dynamics (e.g. Gould 2003; Rosen 2005). Some works deal with the role of emotions and affects in social interaction and in international relations in particular (Bleiker/Hutchison 2008; Lebow 2005; Mercer 2005; Mercer 2006, Mercer 2010, Tiedens 2001; Welch 2005), the latter's interplay with rational processing and discursive justification (Schwarz 2000), with trust (Welch Larson 1997), empathy and respect (Wolf 2008; Wolf 2009) as well as with prestige, recognition and status issues (Crawford 2000; Rosen 2005) as social-evaluative factors influencing international relations. Kemper underlines that emotions indicate a judgment of the respective social interaction along the lines of power and status (Kemper 2006: 96). The role of (self)images, (self)perceptions and how perception biases influence behavior is also prominent in these works (Giersch 2009; Jervis 2008; Lindemann 2000), as the amount to which social recognition matters in an interaction stems from these images and perceptions, which are in turn influenced by cultural and historical factors (Voss/Dorsey 1992).

Supposedly most challenging to the study of subjectivity in IR is the often uttered objection that "states do not equal persons" (Wolf 2009: 5) and that transferring insights from individual or social psychology (the latter dealing with small group dynamics and behavior) on whole states is either inappropriate or still needs further substantiation. As a replique to these critics it is commonly argued that when we speak of 'states', we usually refer to a (smaller) group of political decision-making elites, so that assumptions derived from social psychology can be applied without any problem. Moreover, we need to think of these groups or actor groups as institutionalized 'fields', that display a certain social configuration and

share a number of social premises, so that a unified disposition (Bourdieu 1994: 9) – a specific "habitus" of these actors becomes visible and – as they act as "authorized speakers" – impacts a 'state's' appearance in international relations (Pouliot 2010: 87).

3 Explaining 'non-rational' patterns in Russian diplomacy: How Russia 'feels' about the West and why it is important to know

From the above discussed limits of conventional actor-centered IR theories and the chances of 'non-rational' approaches, I suggest looking at Russian foreign policy inconsistencies by applying psychologically-enriched methods. I hypothesize that if the inconsistencies are neither a result nor a function of rational processing, they must have a 'non-rational' foundation.

I share this view with a growing number of Russia experts. Unhappy with the conventional interpretation that Russian foreign policy is mainly driven by '*realpolitik*' (Balzer 2008; Bordachev 2008; Clunan 2009; Pouliot 2010; Muzykantsky 2005), these scholars see a "need to reconsider Russian foreign policy and its main drivers" (Monaghan 2008: 717) and to find alternative explanations beyond conventional 'rational' or constructivist approaches. A significant proportion of the above mentioned research on psychology in IR deals with Russian diplomacy, particularly in the relations with the West. In essence, these studies try to systematically explore, how Russian policy-makers "feel" about the West and what behavior follows from that "feeling". We can use this already generated knowledge in order to shed more light on the underlying psychological determinants of Russian positions and demands in the relations with Western partners.

However, a coherent or single theoretical or analytical framework does not yet exist. Instead, these works find various analytical and methodological ways to deal with the problem. The authors find alternative explanations in such factors/concepts as honor, recognition and status (Tarver-Wahlquist/Tsygankov 2008; Neumann 2009; Clunan 2009; Welch Larson/Shevchenko 2010) as well as anger and emotions (Forsberg 2008). Others put an emphasis on perceptions, images and historic experiences (Feklyunina 2008; Hopf 1999; Legvold 2007; Mendeloff 2008; Neumann 2008; Stewart 2008) or on habit and practices (Pouliot 2010, Hopf 2010) influencing Russian policy today. Also psychoanalytical perspectives on the problem can be found (Arias-King et al. 2008).

Below, I will present two dimensions of Russian subjectivity and discuss them in more detail, particularly with regard to the question of they account for changes in the dynamics and quality of the Russian-Western relations: Russia's desire to be respected by Western partners in its own self-image and status, and the role of anger as an expression of an emotion-led judgment which is rooted in the quest for social respect.

a) Why subjectivity matters: Russia's need of being respected by the West

Be it in the Kosovo context or with regard to NATO-enlargement and the unilateralist steps on European security pursued by the U.S. administration under George W. Bush: in all these cases the main argument from Russian politicians was that the West *ignored* Russian interests in the partnership. What were these interests? In the 1990s, it referred mainly to Russia's aim to become a part of the Western in-group – but the West denied Russia integration into elite Western clubs. In return, "Russia […] engaged in obstructionist behavior [and] acted as a spoiler" (Welch Larson/Shevchenko 2010: 70). In the mediation on the Balkans, for example, Russia made use of all of its influence in Western institutions (UN Security Council) and forums (the Balkan Contact Group) in order to bring in and show its weight and importance for that in-group. Equally, Russia's reaction after the NATO-intervention in Kosovo (without a UN mandate and, thus, without Russian consent), the occupation of Priština airport was largely received as a symbolic statement and demand from the Elcin administration to be *ex-post* integrated into the international post-conflict regulation in Kosovo – although Russian military was hardly able to provide the capacities to fulfil this task (Heller 1999).

After the turn of the millennium and with Putin as the new president, Russia, with its economic situation improving, developed a new foreign policy orientation, the goal of which was to aspire and to restore great power status (Oldberg 2005; Tsygankov 2005). For the relations with the West, this now meant: respecting Russia's spheres of influence and accepting Russia as an equal but emancipated actor in international relations (Neumann 2009). However, this self-image was again ignored, particularly by the new U.S. administration under Bush. The U.S. further stuck to its plans to enlarge NATO towards the post-Soviet space and to install a missile defense shield in Poland and the Chech Republic. Again, Russia started to spoil the partnership. The most disproportionate reaction to this perceived "illegitimate crossing of a red line" (Aksenyonok 2008: 75; also Averre 2009) was to be witnessed in the rapid escalation of disagreement with the West during and after the Russian-Georgian war, which can be seen as a tit-for tat-reaction to Western ignorance since

the early 1990s and therefore as a “proxy” war, where the relationship between Russia and the West is at the core.

Experts tend to explain these interaction patterns as a consequence of the wish of Russian political elites to be adequately respected or recognized (socially) in the relationship with the West and the frustration of that wish (e.g. Clunan 2009; Welch Larson/Shevchenko 2010). Social respect, according to Wolf, “is an attitude we expect others to show by the way they treat us. […] Respect has to manifest itself in behavior towards us” (Wolf undated: 10). The above examples amply show that, although Russian (political elites’) interests vis-à-vis the West changed over time (integration, emancipation), Russian (political elites’) expectations always remained the same: to be *respected* by Western counterparts in its own (foreign policy) identity perceptions and definitions. It is striking, that Russian officials during the last years explicitly underlined that the West should “show more respect” towards Russia.[6] After the Russian-Georgian war 2008 Russia’s ambassador to NATO, Dmitri Rogozin, underlined that the biggest diplomatic success for Russia in the relations with the West was that Western Europe (“Brussels”) “started to look at Russia differently – namely with respect”.[7]

In that sense, Western ill-treatment over the last 20 years basically consisted in the fact that Russian expectations were – subjectively felt – constantly ignored and frustrated and that the West lacked the respective respect towards Russian identity and status needs in the partnership. From this short elaboration, the working hypothesis can be drawn that the affirmation of Russia’s self-perceived identity and showing respect for Russia’s (international) status by the West (the US and the countries of the EU in particular) facilitates pragmatic interaction and stabilizes Russian-Western cooperation; feelings of disrespect on the part of Russian policy-makers, on the contrary, breed tensions and conflict in the relationship (see also: Wolf undated: 3).

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[6] E.g.: Kosovo-Konflikt: Russen drohen mit "roher militärischer Gewalt", die Welt, 22.02.2008

[7] “Сегодня я представляю сильную Россию и очень хорошо чувствую — даже на себе лично — совершенно иное отношение к нам, российским представителям, здесь, в Брюсселе. На нас смотрят совсем по-другому — смотрят с уважением — и я считаю это важнейшим дипломатическим завоеванием России.” Дмитрий Рогозин: Я представляю сильную Россию!, 22.07.2008: http://natomission.ru/society/article/society/artpublication/25/

There are a several indicators why Russia is a "most likely case" (Wolf 2008: 16) for studying the influence of social recognition/respect in its relations with the West: *first,* Russian elite and society seems to very much tie back their "self-esteem" in the relations with the West to the degree to which the West affirms or supports Russia's historical and international role and subjective social value. The pertainance of a positive self-image has so far been highly dependent on affirmation from outside. *Second*, the US and the EU as two poles within the "West" represent two internationally important counterparts, whose affirmation of "respect" and level of regard appear also important for how third parties in the world view Russia, and, subsequently, for its own self-perception (see for instance: Feklyunina 2008; Mendeloff 2008; (Stewart 2008).

The policy implications from these insights are obvious: Showing respect facilitates cooperation; the feelings of disrespect on the other hand, breed tensions and conflict (Wolf undated: 3). Welch/Shevchenko also argue that "states' concerns about their relative status have been largely overlooked by the dominant theoretical approaches of neorealism and liberalism." (Welch Larson/Shevchenko 2010: 66) and that in international relations, there should be a greater emphasis on "status-enhancing actions" (Welch Larson/Shevchenko 2010: 95). Seen this way, social recognition or respect becomes an important factor to the study of IR. Seeking respect can represent an end of state behavior in itself, independent of any power considerations or material gains and, thus, carries a significant potential to shape the quality and dynamic of international relations and interaction (Wolf 2008), particularly in such contexts where an actor ties back one's own social value and self-esteem to the identity affirmations of the interaction partner (Clunan 2009: 219).

b) How subjectivity matters: the grammar of an 'angry' Russia

This hypothesis can be strengthened when looking at the linkage between the need of being respected and the emotional, mainly angry reactions that follow from the feeling of disrespect in Russia's relations with the West. In the cases described above, Russian politicians have openly expressed resentment and harsh critique about Western positions and behavior and showed a very angry attitude towards Western partners. While such open expressions of disagreement were rather sound in the 1990s, particularly under the Putin presidency, we witnessed a very 'angry' Russia respectively angry Russian diplomats and high-ranking politicians. Many observers noted that Russia felt "treated badly" (Muzykantsky 2005; Aksenyonok 2008) or even cheated by the West. We remember Vladimir Putin's angry

outrage during his speech at the 2007 Munich Conference on Security Policy, where he accused the U.S. of pursuing to seek world dominance and superiority and blamed the West for "provoking" Russia,[8] so that observers already then saw a revival of the 'cold war' rising at the horizon.[9]

The psychologically-enriched literature sees these emotionalized, 'angry' verbal protests as a result and an "indirect evidence of concern for status" and the feeling of being disrespected and humiliated by the West. Anger is an expression of a feeling that directly results from an emotional judgment. In social interaction, anger can be interpreted as a reactive attitude, a reaction, to perceived deliberate harm or unfair treatment by others, aroused on behalf of or in defence of the self (see eg. Rosen 2005): "Displays of anger are often intended to restore status or dignity" and "states may try to demonstrate their importance by engaging in obstructionist behavior, acting as spoilers." (Welch Larson/Shevchenko 2010: 70). Thus, the verbally expressed anger can be interpreted as a pre-conscious judgment about how Russia is being treated by its Western counterparts.

Although anger can lead to aggressive behaviour, it is highlighted in social psychology that "anger is meant to be constructive and not destructive, the behavior is more often only threatening than involves actual use of power" (Forsberg 2008: 11). This might explain why from the critique expressed by Russian officials never followed any serious cut in the relations, although when reading from the diplomatic activity, rhetoric, threats and warnings, one could have drawn the conclusion that a serious conflict was to erupt (Forsberg 2008: 19) or that the relationship was about to break apart. But if we treat these angry reactions as symbolic action, namely as a constructive mechanism to manage disagreement, understanding the inconsistencies in Russian behaviour towards the West become much easier. Forsberg argues:

> "In particular, anger that results from subjectively felt injustice may explain why Russians have invested so much diplomatic energy and used hard rhetoric in some apparently symbolic

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[8] Valdimir Putin: Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007: http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179.

[9] Sebastian Fischer: Cold War Revival and Holocaust Denial. Munich Conference Less Than Reassuring, in: Spiegel online, 12 February 2007: http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,465934,00.html.

> issues and why they have continued to be critical of such issues, although the decision about the issue had already been made. Because anger aims at mending a relationship by correcting a wrong and not at destroying it, the explanation based on emotions explains why Russia has issued threats and warnings but did not carry them out. An explanation that draws from emotions and the special character of anger is both simpler and more accurate than the view that repeated warning and threats and strong moral language and accusations simply represented assertiveness or were just 'rhetorical flailing' that did not materialize in action because of fear of Western counter-reactions." (Forsberg 2008: 3)

It is striking that such open verbal protests have occurred much more often and much harsher in the last five years than during the 1990 and immediately after the turn of the millennium. The literature about emotions, conflicts and social ranks would argue that such open conflicts are more likely to occur in symmetrical relationships than in hierarchical ones (Rosen 2005). This more courageous form of expression of disagreement might be a result of the fact that Russia has consolidated its great power identity in the last five years and has become more self-confident with regard to its own strength as a great power -- although Russia until today is still not in the position to base this claim on political, economic or let alone military substance.

4 Conclusions

Aren't we, a realist would probably argue, at this point back at 'pure power politics'? Not at all! In accordance with Pouliot, I would argue that we witness a form of 'symbolic power politics' (Pouliot 2010: 52ff.) in Russia's relations with the West. What in a realist interpretation can be defined as a typical form of power politics, from a psychological point of view must be understood as the quest for self-affirmation. This does not mean that 'symbolic power politics' are less relevant for the Western-Russian relations. Rather, it becomes evident that power politics and symbolic, subjectively driven politics are two sides of one coin. If we flip the 'realist' coin, look at its subjective side and take it serious, we are able to better understand the inconsistencies in Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis the West. We will be able to understand why and how the symbolic value of an issue in question has the potential to challenge the Western-Russian relationship even more than conflicts over material interests. Moreover, we see how the subjective gain that a country – in this case Russia – gets from symbolic action and reaction can in some instances outweigh the objective one.

What we basically learn is that the objective world cannot be taken-for-granted. We have to also take into account the subjective understanding of the world as our interaction partner sees it: "[O]ur experience on the failures of intelligent communities in analyzing foreign policy behaviour of foreign countries tends to underestimate rather than exaggerate the need to understand the other from his or her own perspective" (Forsberg 2008: 4) and successfully apply it to scientific explanation. This insight clearly applies to Russia in its relations with the West. With regard to theory, it is therefore important to overcome traditional/conventional analytical perspectives and consider approaches that lie beyond the rationality paradigm.

Russia appears to be an obvious case for studying subjectivity in international relations. With Russia, still searching its role in the international world after the end of the Cold War, the country seems to represent a "most likely" case for proving the influence of subjective factors on the dynamic and quality of the relations with the West. The analysis of Russia's subjectively felt aim to be "respected" by the West and the respective attitude which is expressed in obstructionist and angry behaviour in the relationship might serve as a first proof that the subjective dimension of foreign policy in fact is an important factor we must not ignore. The analysis over time even stipulates that the West's "ill-treatment", i.e. denial of "respect" in the 1990s might have directly contributed to a shift in Russia's political self-image towards a Great Power identity and its subsequent foreign policy orientations after the turn of the millennium. However, to proof this stipulated causal link, one needs to conduct further research. It also has to be underlined that also on the part of Russia's Western counterparts (EU and its Member States, U.S., NATO, etc.) such subjective logics influence decision-making and behaviour.

This paper aimed at contributing to a better understanding of the building-blocks of Russian-Western relations by suggesting a new theoretical and analytical perspective on this important relationship, namely one that is inspired by psychology and subjectivity. Such a new perspective can help to *empirically* clarify the emergence of inconsistent and seemingly costly foreign policy behavior on the part of Russian politicians and the role subjective needs play in this regard. Psychology-inspired approaches can help to disguise seemingly power-driven politics as symbolic politics. In *practical terms*, we can make assessments about when, how and under which circumstances responding to subjective needs and paying respect can avoid unnecessary conflict and irritation and is a productive function for an enhancement and stabilization of the overall relationship between Russia and the West.

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