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The Geopolitics of European Union 25 Years on: Transformations and Continuity

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ITÄ-SUOMEN YLIOPISTO

To begin: Arguments, assumptions,

- Yes, the EU is geopolitical and engages in geopolitics
 - Internally in the creation of political community
 - Externally in the promotion of regional cooperation and development of a sense of its international actorness (e.g. European Neighbourhood Policy)

Questions that emerge

- What kind of political community and geopolitical actor is the EU?
- How is the EU characterised in terms of the historical development of states and borders? Post-Westphalian, Neo-Westphalian, a mix of these or something else?
- How has the EU in fact acted geopolitically?
- Is EU soft power a viable alternative to the Hobbesian Realpolitik understanding of geopolitics?

Potential scenarios have been developed and challenged in the last 25 years

- A fortress Europe vis a vis migration, cultural identity, etc.
- A transnational society and demos
- A new (hybrid) type of culture and identity
- A uniquely European system of (multilevel) governance and policy that is exportable
- EU as a vital element of globalisation and global governance
- A force for good and political innovation in the world

Since 1989: Different Interpretations of the EU as a "Superstate"

- Positive (Leonard, Rifkin, Zielonka): EU represents a new, de-militarised and multilateralist centre of power in the world system
- Negative (Anderson, Bialasiewicz, Smith): EU as a 'superstate' that reproduces inequalities, neoliberal forms of exploitation and power asymmetries both within and outside its borders
- Neutral: the EU is simply a further development of state organisation towards supranationalism and global governance (Bauböck, Stone Sweet)

Possible European identities have been debated that link understandings of states and borders

- Foundationalist (EU as a project of national Europe which is pre-defined and basically complete in terms of culture and identity) - exclusive and final borders
- Transnationalist (EU as something inherently new – a project of self-creation that transcends national definitions of Europeanness) – shifting, permeable borders
- Realist (EU as a project of pragmatic response to globalisation and geopolitical challenges – membership defined by EU interests) – “objective”, selective borders
- Transsouverantist (e.g. Hungary) citizenship rights and political community for ethnic groups beyond borders of “kin states”



EU Geopolitical Identities also subject to debate: Realism, Idealism, or a Hybrid Other?

- Realism= Darwinist struggle against anarchy, power balances maintain order
- Liberalism= international institutions and co-operation create global stability
- Idealism= foreign policy of states guided by legal and ethical standards
- Alternatively= Interests and identities of states historically contingent; power of ideas (e.g. co-development) is central

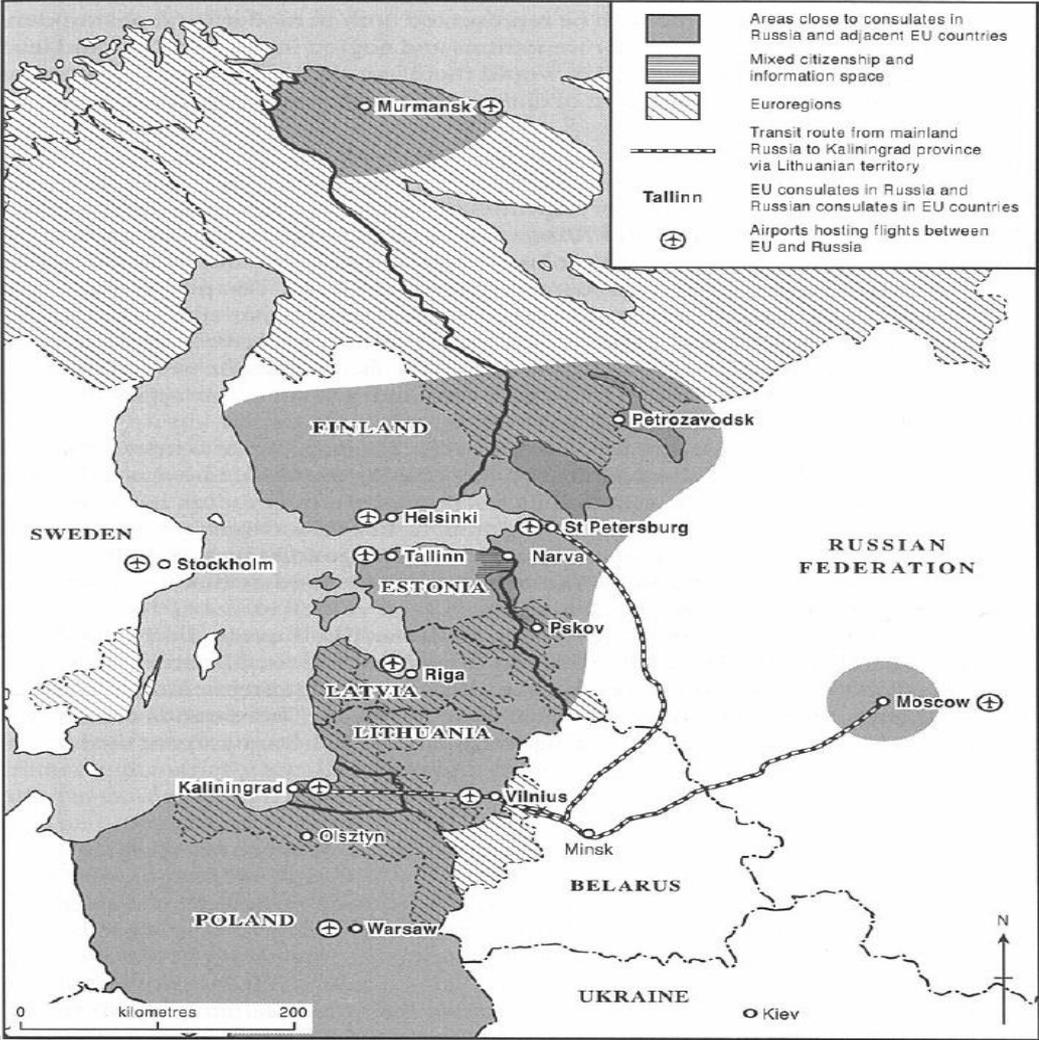


Ian Klinke (2012) asks: Is the EU a postmodern rather than modern power?

- First, what is it? End of the big narratives of historical progress and fixity? End of national teleology?
- PM in this case indicates "postnational": the dissolution of state sovereignty, fixed national identities and emergence of new ideas of multinational citizenship
- Postmodernism heralds the end of geopolitics (no state interests)
- "Modern" states stuck in time, are somehow backward
- Klinke disputes this binary and questions the EU's "newness"



Golunov (2012): Postmodern Russian borderlands



The EU-Russia divide as a geopolitical debate

- Following the work of Haukala (2012), Prozorov (2007). Golunov (2012), others: there appears to be a EU-Russia competition regarding geopolitical identities.
- EU portrayed as a post-national political actor that is no longer concerned with national interest politics in the traditional sense
- Russia on the contrary is narrated as being obsessed with territorial control, nation-building and the aggressive display of sovereignty
- In reality, EU and Russia define each other in ways that reference the modern-postmodern debate but that are more about power relationships

However, EU struggles in a Realist-defined competition for relevance

- Ukraine, Crimea, refugee crisis all challenge the EU's soft power geopolitical identity, Eastern Partnership and the ENP in general
- Realist thinking, new-Cold War scenarios emerge
- Balance of power – equilibrium needs to be established
- Spheres of influence and containment back on the agenda
- Realist narratives are enjoying a robust comeback on both sides of the Atlantic because they provide an assumed “geopolitical familiarity” upon which action can be taken
- Soft power ? ENP has relied too much on conditionality rather than partnership

Foreign Affairs: realist knowledge-making



Part of The Best of Print in 2014

Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault

The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin

By John J. Mearsheimer

FROM OUR SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2014



A man takes a picture as he stands on a Soviet-style star re-touched with blue paint so that it resembles the Ukrainian flag, Moscow, August 20, 2014. (Maxim Shemetov Courtesy Reuters)

▶ Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault • ADD TO PLAYLIST
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According to the prevailing wisdom in the West, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression. Russian President Vladimir Putin, the argument goes, annexed Crimea out of a long-standing desire to resuscitate the Soviet empire, and he may eventually go after the rest of Ukraine, as well as other countries in eastern Europe. In this view, the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 merely provided a pretext for Putin's decision to order Russian forces to seize part of Ukraine.

- Realist challenge to idealism - Was the West, and the EU especially- naive about Russia?
- UK Foreign Secretary: Europe's reading of Russia "catastrophically wrong"

FINANCIAL TIMES

March 29, 2015 3:43 pm

EU's southern flank is exposed, Italy's foreign minister warns

James Politi and Alex Barker in Rome



Italian foreign minister Paolo Gentiloni

Europe risks perilously overlooking threats from its southern flank as the Ukraine crisis dominates attention and reawakens old habits from the cold war, Italy's foreign minister has warned.

“We are a bit too concerned by what happens on our northeastern borders because of the perfectly understandable and strong narrative of the 20th century,” said Paolo Gentiloni in an hour-long

interview with the Financial Times.

“But in fact if we think of migration, terrorism, religious conflicts, poverty — and the risks to our societies — I wouldn't say what happens on our southern borders is more important but it's surely not less,” he adds. “The area from Mali to Pakistan is really challenging for Europe and it has to be at the same level of priority.”



Kaplan's reading of Europe (and idealism)

FINANCIAL TIMES

April 7, 2015 1:14 pm

America will lose patience with European appeasement

Robert D Kaplan

Why should Washington defend a continent that will not defend itself, writes Robert Kaplan



Appeasement is an age-old tactic of diplomacy. It can be a defensible one, but not as a frame of mind for an entire continent. Yet no word captures the general mood of Europe better than appeasement.

Europeans, it has been said, cherish freedom but do not want to sacrifice anything for it. Only about half a dozen of Nato's 28 members spend 2 per cent of output on defence, the alliance's guideline level. When Vladimir Putin's Russia undermined the strategic state of Ukraine, they stood and watched.

This is of a piece with the EU's inability to deal with its own economic difficulties. Whatever they may claim, each member follows its own national interest without asking what is best for Europe. Decades into the project, there is still no chill-up-your-spine loyalty to Europe. There is simply no larger purpose and nothing to fight for, other than providing for the good life under welfare state conditions.

Finlandisation returns as a sign of geopolitical weakness

GLOBAL INSIGHT

September 24, 2014 1:31 pm

‘Finlandisation’ makes a polarising comeback in Finland

By Richard Milne, Nordic Correspondent

Use of the cold war term is met with swift condemnation



In Finland, a single word has become the battleground for the Nordic country’s postwar history.

“Finlandisation” may have been invented by Germans in the 1960s and most recently invoked in connection with Ukraine. But its recent utterance in Finland itself is reviving bitter memories and inciting harsh words.

“Finlandisation” refers to how a smaller country adapts its policies – sometimes unselfconsciously – to suit a larger, more powerful neighbour. In the case of Finland, it was the Soviet Union, with which it shared a 1,300-kilometre border throughout the cold war.

Ville Niinistö, environment minister and leader of the Green party, reignited the debate last week by saying his own government’s decision to approve a Russian-built nuclear reactor invoked “a sense of Finlandisation”.

The condemnation was swift. Using “Finlandisation” was “a national insult”, according to a prominent historian. “Unfair”, “below the belt”, and “less than patriotic” were some of the verdicts of rival politicians.

The debate even cut across families. The Green leader’s uncle, Sauli Niinistö – who happens to be Finland’s president – said: “We have a clear policy, which in no way constitutes Finlandisation.”

EU Anti-politics

Defying Soviets, Then Pulling Hungary to Putin

Viktor Orban Steers Hungary Toward Russia 25 Years After Fall of the Berlin Wall

By RICK LYMAN and ALISON SMALE NOV. 7, 2014

BUDAPEST — A quarter-century ago, as Hungary helped ignite the events that would lead to the collapse of communism, the ferment produced a new political star.

Viktor Orban was 26 then and a longhaired law graduate. In June 1989, five months before the Berlin Wall came down, he lit up a commemoration of the failed 1956 revolt against Moscow with a bold call for free elections and a demand that 80,000 Soviet troops go home.

Now, as the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall is commemorated Sunday, Hungary is a member of NATO and the European Union and Mr. Orban is in his third term as prime minister. But what was once a journey that might have embodied the triumph of democratic capitalism has evolved into a much more complex tale of a country and a leader who in the time since have come to question Western values, foment nationalism and look more openly at Russia as a model.



Neighbourhood Policy - Ukrainian Perceptions of Europe as an indicator of the situation

- EU as a political body is seen as aloof and distant; its way of life and liberal model find different interpretations - portrayed in very negative terms by nationalist groups.
- However, the EU also resonates for many as a model of a more open and tolerant society and has in fact promoted new social agendas and new ways of thinking about Ukrainian social and political transformation.
- Geopolitics in everyday life: EU as maker of Borderlands and buffer zones. Insists on fulfilment of conditions, gives little in return
- The EU might, ironically, be reproducing what it explicitly seeks to avoid: the creation of new divisions in welfare, social opportunity and political dialogue.



Conclusions - continuity and change

- Academic-theoretical debates continue to reflect very different interpretations - among these are two major strands:
 - Perspective of convergence to a liberal, multidimensional ideal
 - Perspective of supranationalism as evolutionary
 - Perspective of core-periphery relations of dependence and inequality
- EU geopolitics, internally and externally defined also reflect the contested project of defining the EU's identity
 - Community (foundationalist, cosmopolitan, pragmatic)
 - Worldview (realist, idealist, pragmatic)
- These projects are complicated by inner tensions (e.g. Euroscepticism) and realist challenges
- EU geopolitics remain highly idealistic in terms of projects, programmes, objectives but often opportunistic in the short-term

Conclusions - geopolitics and contested EU identity

- The EU embodies dilemmas of modern liberal democracy: defined by transcendental principals, but often guided by pragmatism or opportunism and painfully aware of its own contradictions
- EU is conditioned by a constant tension between attempts to spiritualise borders and overcome national particularisms while maintaining a sense of national/local control over political affairs
- At the same time, the promise of Europe has also suggested a notion of community that is not limited by geographical or cultural categories but that is rather based on common attachments and historical experiences



And finally: The East-West Divide, does it exist

- According to Elemér Hankiss (2003) .. the real answer is, I think, that it does exist but is only one among the many dividing lines that criss-cross Europe and it may not be the most important one— or at least its importance is rapidly decreasing. I emphasize this point because the reality or myth of the East-West divide has become part of the political game in Europe. It has become an argument against integration on both sides of the continent. Conservatives in the West repeat: "they are so different," while conservatives in the East echo: "we are so different"
- - See more at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/281-the-east-west-divide-europe-does-it-exist#sthash.rCpcPsw9.dpuf>



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