Russia’s Quest for International Society and the Prospects for Regional-Level International Societies

Pami Aalto, University of Helsinki, Finland

Abstract

This article enters the recent debate on the decline in the features of international society within the current system by looking at the case of Russia; a case that has, to date, received little attention. Russia is considered one of the great powers. It is also characterised by a long-standing quest for membership in international society. In addition, Russia merits closer attention as a result of its strategic partnership with the EU. The EU offers Russia access to regional-level international societies with a thicker set of institutions than are available in its relations with the United States and Asia. The fact that Russia identifies itself with Europe has driven it to experiment with some of the solidarist institutions typifying EU-centred societies, most notably the market. As a result there are tangible prospects for maintaining and even expanding the features of international society at the level of greater Europe regardless of the systemic constraints.

Keywords: Asia, Europe, European Union, identity, international society, international system, northern Europe, Russia, United States

Introduction

In 2001, Adam Watson asked whether the international system was moving towards a collective hegemony of the most developed Western states, or towards an empire-like formation where failed, incompetent or otherwise ‘troublesome’ states were dealt with by a core group of states centred around the United States.¹ In the aftermath of the events of 11 September and the resulting US-led ‘war on terror’, responses to Watson’s question started pouring in. Many of them supported his suggestion of a US-centred unipolar world empire in the making.²

In one of the most thought-provoking of such analyses, Timothy Dunne argued that the evolving system is in danger of losing a large number of the features of international society. Some very basic features continue to be present, such as recognition of sovereignty by the majority of states and some basic diplomatic rules. ‘Failed’ and ‘troublesome’ states have, however, clearly been excluded from this thinly defined society. At the same time, the ‘thicker’, albeit still pluralist set of features characteristic of international society is becoming rapidly eroded. These features, such as jointly exercised control of warfare, great power management, or great powers’ mutual consultation in ordering international politics used to characterise post-Cold War international politics. In Dunne’s analysis, the main reasons for the erosion of the ‘thickness’ of international society include toothless opposition to the United

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States’ declared need for pre-emptive self-defence anywhere in the world, its unilateralism, its preventive military interventions and its disregard for international law. In short, the global society of states, which evolved and extended from European international society, is on the verge of turning into a hierarchical international system centred around the unipolar empire of the United States.3

It is a matter of debate whether this hierarchical shift is at an advanced or early stage, or whether we should speak of an emerging empire, or simply of unipolarity.4 In this article, however, I concentrate on the other part of Dunne’s argument by examining in more detail the recent decline in the features of international society within the international system. This issue has been studied, for example, by examining such topics as the altered strategic posture of the United States, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and their consequences on the system and its patterns of alliances, deepening tensions between the United States and Europe over security questions, and the prospects for the survival of global institutions.5 Barry Buzan’s structural revision of the English school also takes these events into account, but simultaneously argues that at the regional level one can find instances where rules, norms and institutions characteristic of international society are still strongly present and indeed developing. Most notably this concerns the European Union (EU), as Thomas Diez and Richard Whitman also confirm in their application of the English school approach to the EU.6

In this article I aim to carry forward this debate by examining a case which has been widely neglected in the otherwise vibrant literature on international society. This is the case of Russia, which Buzan’s succinct work bypasses by simply noting that Russia is ‘busy trying to adapt to global institutions’. In a rare English school study on Russia, Neil MacFarlane portrays Russia as contributing to the maintenance of pluralist institutions at the global level, even though, for him, Russia remains hesitant regarding any expansion or thickening of global society. Diez and Whitman, for their part, leave Russia almost completely outside their analysis of EU-centred regional societies and are content to hint at Russia’s ability and potential willingness to resist their expansion.7 To strike a balance between Buzan’s structural revision of the English school and the school’s originally more normative tradition, I suggest a different argument: focusing on Russia will help us further evaluate not only the prospects of maintaining, but also expanding what is left of international society, especially in the context of EU–Russian relations within the greater European area.

Making this claim will first require a short description of Russia’s international position. Thereafter Russia’s stance regarding the present direction of international society will be outlined. I will claim that Russia has consistently strived to be part of international society, and that in pursuit of this end Europe, with its rich variety of ties characteristic of international society, has been of central importance. Russia’s position vis-à-vis Europe-based international societies is then outlined in more detail. Finally, the implications for global society and for maintaining and expanding the features of international society at the level of greater Europe are spelled out.

In so doing, this article contributes to the examination, which to date has been rather limited, by the English school of regional-level developments. I will argue
that the analysis of the international system will also benefit from looking at ideas of international society elsewhere than at a purely global level or at the core of the system: the United States and the shifting coalitions it builds around itself. The Russian case, I will suggest, is insightful if we accept the normative proposition that even a degree of thickness in international society, if broadly enough accepted within a given regional context, may be significant for the functioning of the overall system. Although by no means a perfect example, the prospect of well-institutionalised society arrangements between the EU and Russia are worth looking at in more detail.

Russia in the contemporary international system

Given that during the Cold War era Russia was the rival superpower to the United States, and that today it is still a nuclear power feared by many of its smaller neighbours, the focus on Russia may at first appear perplexing and at best indicative of a very thin notion of international society. Furthermore, some analyses have dropped Russia from the list of great powers, while others expect the Russian stance to be of little significance to the system. In this article, however, the continued importance of studying Russia is proposed. What do I mean by this?

My starting point is to maintain that Russia remains one of the great powers. While maintaining this, it must be granted that the great power category has experienced a loss of status as a result of overwhelming US power. Consequently, the present international structure is here taken as consisting of one leading power, the United States, plus the great powers of China, Japan and the EU. Admittedly, compared to the Soviet era, Russia’s ability to influence international order is greatly reduced, regardless of its recent good economic growth. Some remnants of Russia’s status as a ‘virtual great power’ persist in the economic sense. But more pointedly they are evident in Russia’s demographic crisis and the shrinking of its territory. Russia’s status as a great power in the present system is a result of its former superpower position; possession of almost one-third of the world’s natural gas resources, and substantial amounts of oil and uranium; possession of a large nuclear weapons arsenal; a seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council; its remaining regional power vis-à-vis Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe; plus its own vigorous claim to be recognised as a great power and its relative acceptance by the other great powers. I argue, however, that even more important is what Russian ideas of international society can tell us about the evolution of the contemporary international system. Two reasons are suggested for this.

First, Russia was one of the powers that contributed to the development of the originally European society of states during its later stages. Watson once noted that ever since Peter the Great’s reforms in the late seventeenth century, Russia has been striving to become an equal member of European society. At the Vienna conference of 1815, Russia was, alongside Britain, the most influential player, and simultaneously helped to spread European ideas into Central Asia and Siberia. Although these developments were soon to be interrupted by the emergence of bolshevist
Russia, the Soviet Russian state within a fairly short time began again to practise active diplomacy and claim an influential role within the society of states, which had by then become global in nature.\footnote{13}

Second, in the next two sections I will argue that it is contemporary Russia’s mission to maintain international society. In this, Russia is not alone among the other great powers. In the context of Russia’s ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU, however, Russia’s promotion of international society interestingly moves towards a thicker conception, although it does not match the very high ambitions the EU has for international society.

\textbf{Russia’s quest for international society}

By an international society we mean a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common \textit{rules} and \textit{institutions} for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their \textit{common interest} in maintaining these arrangements.\footnote{14}

The classical definition of international society by Hedley Bull and Watson emphasises rules, institutions and related common interests. Here I will focus mostly on \textit{institutions} as the glue of international society. I will, however, also postulate that a degree of what, in the English school, is often termed \textit{world society} is necessary for the stability and demarcation of thick versions of international society. However, due to the traditionally vague definition of world society in the English school’s conceptual triad comprising world society, the international system and international society,\footnote{15} I will limit my enquiry to how it pertains to \textit{identitive} and \textit{interhuman} ties, which provide a logic that complements the more frequently discussed interstate society.

It is apt to take institutions as the conceptual focus for examining Russia’s position vis-à-vis contemporary international society, because Russia has strived to build and maintain international institutions, and indeed the examination of institutions brings into focus Russia’s long-term systemic orientation. To get at this, a distinction is made between \textit{primary} and \textit{secondary} institutions, as proposed by Buzan, in order to sharpen the English school’s original take on institutions. Primary institutions are understood as Searlean institutional facts, being more ‘evolved’ like the balance of power and diplomacy than ‘designed’ or purpose-built. They include master institutions and their close derivatives. Secondary institutions are, in this analysis, derivatives of primary institutions, and mostly include specific, concrete international organisations and regimes like the UN, the Council of Europe (CE) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).\footnote{16}

As for primary institutions of contemporary international society, Russia’s political tradition is characterised by obsession with the master institution of \textit{sovereignty}. 
This is the cornerstone of Westphalian, or pluralist international society. The important derivative of sovereignty – *international law* – helps to maintain the society of states and receives a pivotal place in Russia’s foreign policy concept, as does the other derivative of sovereignty, *non-intervention* without UN approval. The attempt to promote the institution of *great power management* and its consequent derivative institution, *balance of power*, is also a familiar trait of Tsarist Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet Russian policies. Historically, Russians have often found themselves trying to catch up with more advanced or stronger powers. In order to balance and/or coordinate policies vis-à-vis these actors, Russian foreign policy makers generally support all efforts towards creating a multipolar system of the great powers. *Diplomacy*, both in its bilateral and multilateral forms, also represents a familiar Russian pattern, apart from the noted brief departure during the early Soviet era. *Territoriality* and the maintenance of *boundaries* has more sharply emerged during the post-Soviet era with the shrinking of Russia’s territory to a smaller entity than at any time since the seventeenth century, and the consequent aim of safeguarding what is left. The *market*, in the form of *trade liberalisation* and *market access*, emerged as a theme during the late Soviet era, and gained momentum in the post-Soviet era with Russia seeking trade ties with the EU and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

As for secondary institutions, the OSCE had traditionally been one of the most favoured organisations for Russian foreign policy makers as it so clearly represented the institution of sovereignty and equality of its members, and diplomacy. By the early part of this century, however, frustration with the OSCE’s concerns over human rights and democratic elections within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) had altered this perception considerably. Sovereignty and diplomacy are also upheld through the UN, where Russia’s Security Council seat is associated with the institution of great power management. The G8, the creation of which Russia pushed so hard for, is a forum for the management of the great powers and for the balance of power between states. Increased EU and WTO ties signify the rise of the market as an important institution for Russia. The preconditions for WTO admission were brokered with the EU in 2004 in lengthy negotiations where Russia agreed to gradually abolish double pricing for foreign energy buyers and domestic industrial energy users and enter the Kyoto protocol, which regulates CO₂ emissions. The latter, however, was more a political bargain than evidence of Russia’s consistent commitment to the primary institution of *environmental stewardship*.

Taken together, the form of international society implied by the list of primary and secondary institutions pivotal to Russian foreign policy is towards the pluralist end of the spectrum. However, in particular the rise of the market as a significant institution in Russian foreign policy since the 1990s creates some solidarist contradictions to this. On the one hand, integration into the global market represents President Putin’s pluralist policy of re-building Russia’s great power status following its long-term economic decline and subsequent collapse in 1998. On the other hand, when applied to political practice, the market challenges many core pluralist values, most distinctively sovereignty, territoriality and the balance of power. At the same time the global market and the resultant regulation pose the classical solidarist test
of enforcement of rules in Russia. This understanding naturally presupposes that solidarism is released from the narrow human rights definition used in traditional English school literature.22

Next I will discuss in more detail how the precise application of Russia’s foreign policy agenda, which I have broadly outlined above, varies across regions. Yet it will be important to note that Russia promotes the thus defined international society agenda consistently only in relation to great powers or superpowers. This reproduces the pattern by which European society evolved into a great power concert during the nineteenth century, pushing smaller powers to the margins.23

Russia’s perspective on the great powers and the question of identity

Taking into account Russia’s preference for the institution of great power management, it is entirely natural that the United States has been a permanent focus of interest for Russia since World War II. Without going into detail, Russia’s attempt to develop international society in partnership with the United States reached its apex with its Atlanticist or Westernist foreign policy of 1991–3. After severe disappointment at the level of engagement being offered, this policy again rose to prominence with the support President Putin offered to the United States immediately after the events of 11 September. Debate rages over the extent to which Russia can realise its goals by aligning itself with the United States.24 With international society features having become thinner due to the trend in US foreign policy, it is clear that this direction holds little prospect of furthering the development of international society. Alignment with the United States signifies negotiations on weapons of mass destruction, intelligence-sharing, other cooperation in the ‘war on terrorism’, and some energy sales. We are discussing, therefore, very limited, issue-based and often mere temporary coordination, which falls short of genuine great power management due to the parties’ asymmetries. These limitations are well demonstrated by the way Russia found itself in the French and German camp opposing the US leadership’s abandonment of the practice of great power management when it started the war in Iraq. In short, the Russian foreign policy agenda represents a considerably thicker idea of international society than that cultivated in the Bush administration and the surrounding strategic communities.

For Soviet foreign policy makers since the 1960s China has been, if not an outright threat, then at least a competitor. In the post-Cold War era, Russia’s decline and the growing peripherality of its sparsely populated Siberian territories mean that Russia is not strong enough to act as a great power in Asia.25 Russia and China together initially opposed the US project of building a National Missile Defence (NMD), NATO expansion, and the intervention in Kosovo in 1999. They set up a ‘strategic partnership’ in 1996, and in 2001 launched the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) together with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to deal with terrorism, military cooperation, economic issues, and mutual confidence-building measures. Russia and China also signed a Treaty on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation in 2001. This treaty is unprecedented in Chinese foreign
policy as it has provisions for not engaging in agreements that could be harmful to the other partner, and calls for mutual consultation if either one faces a threat of external aggression. However, no security guarantees or military commitments were agreed upon, and in practice even consultation has remained limited. The treaty’s most important economic component is Russian arms sales to China. The actual level of cooperation has, however, remained low due to the parties’ economic asymmetry, diverging interests in the Far East and Central Asia, their inherent differences in managing domestic pressures for social, political and economic change, and their historical legacy of distrust. 

The most fundamental limitation to the development of Russia’s relationship with China is their lack of any deep-seated mutual identification despite there being some elements for a pluralist international society in place in their mutual relations. That identity issues are often posited as a pivotal variable for making progress in the study of Russian foreign policy only strengthens the point. The interconnections between international society and identity deserve closer attention in order to fully understand why the Russo-Chinese case and the Asian direction in general fall short of satisfying Russia’s quest for international society.

When addressing questions of identity, one should first acknowledge that the classic works of the English school appeared at a time when, unlike today, identity was not an issue for IR theory. The terms used to refer to similar issues were usually culture and community, both of which, in the broad sense, concern the same ‘we-feeling’ often implied today by the term identity. Moreover, the bulk of the English school tradition tends to place identity issues outside international society, into embryonic world society, alongside transnational actors and other challengers to state-based society. A slightly different solution is offered in the work of R. J. Vincent, which is focused on human rights. In his solidarist alternative to pluralist interstate society, the participating states become internally more alike. However, in Vincent’s scheme, identity issues seem to be linked both to a states-based solidarist society, and a world society comprising individuals and other actors concerned with human rights.

In his revision of the English school, Buzan continues the school’s tradition by not dealing systematically with identity issues. At the same time, however, he makes several useful observations on how identity helps to uphold international society.

Building on the ideas of Alexander Wendt, Buzan first suggests that interstate society is partly constituted by shared identifications among states. Even pluralist society, which otherwise rests on institutions, operates with a small degree of mutual identification among the states that are the main actors. Second, Buzan presents shared beliefs among states as in many cases offering a stronger glue for international society than mere coercion or rational calculation of expected gains. Third, interstate societies are likely to be more cohesive when supported by mutual identification at the interhuman level. How are these identity mechanisms apparent in the Russo-Chinese case?

Mutual identification at the interstate level is present, manifested by the 2001 treaty. However, Russo-Chinese ties appear to be based more on strategic calculations than on shared beliefs on how to organise international life. This is implied by the
need for confidence-building measures in their mutual relations. Yet, most dam-
agingly, there is a lack of mutual identification at the interhuman level. It seems that
the re-surfacing of Eurasian identity in Russian foreign policy in the late 1990s will
not be a powerful enough force to viably link the identities of two peoples. Although
the idea of a balance between Asia and the West remains part of Putin’s policy, it
is clear that his idea of balance is in this context not as strongly identity-based as
the thinking of cultural Eurasianists. The limited agenda for a Eurasian cultural
bridge between the Russians and Chinese is revealed by their mutual indifference
to each other’s culture and the Chinese perception that Russia is moving away from
Eurasianist ideas.

Identity-based limitations are even more evident in the Russo-Japanese case. This
handicap is accompanied by the unresolved Kurile Islands border dispute, which,
taking into account Russia’s attachment to the institution of territoriality, is alone
enough to disturb relations. However, this dispute may end if the plan to supply
Japan and the Far East with oil by extending an oil pipeline from Angarsk in Siberia
to Nahodka on the Russian Pacific coast is realised.

All this leaves the EU as the sole candidate for Russian foreign policy makers for
developing a thicker and more strongly identity-based international society among
the great powers.

From partnership of the great powers to regional-level societies

Europe has been the most long-lasting focus of Russian foreign policy. The con-
temporary EU as the institutional embodiment of Europe, is also the most logical
direction to look for Russia to realise its international society aims and other foreign
policy goals. The EU is where the features of international society are best rooted
when compared to other constellations involving anything close to great powers. The
EU’s recently strengthened, yet still imperfect, international agency for its own
part helps to uphold current international society, subject to room for manoeuvre
and the Union’s own weight within each particular policy issue and geographical
region. At the same time the Union seeks to expand and deepen international society
by its multifaceted and famously multilevel foreign policies.

The Union supports not only the conventional pluralist characteristics cherished
by Russia, but also solidarist institutions such as environmental stewardship, and
the institution of equality of people, from which the institution of human rights
is derived. With the development of the European Security and Defence Policy
(ESDP), including the EU’s crisis management capacity and rapid reaction troops,
humanitarian intervention may increasingly become an issue for the EU. From
Russia’s point of view these represent tricky cases. The EU obviously also pro-
motes the market, but not always in the sense of completely open markets. A degree
of protectionism is especially evident in the agricultural sector and in import quotas
for primary goods exporters like Russia. The EU’s support for the aforementioned
solidarist institutions, coupled with its preference for further solidarist institutions
such as nationalism, from which are derived national self-determination, popular sovereignty and democracy, in many instances seems to go against Russia’s pluralist preferences.\textsuperscript{34} This becomes especially clear in the context of the EU’s most peculiar foreign policy tool, enlargement. The 2004 enlargement process gradually made Russian foreign policy makers prefer partnership ties with the Union rather than actual accession.

The EU may struggle with legitimacy, accountability and ratifying its constitutional treaty, but it is difficult to deny that ‘Europeanisation’ and ‘Europeanness’ have forcibly emerged as pivotal identity labels in national debates within the greater European area, and that Europe-based regional societies are increasingly becoming EU-centred.\textsuperscript{35} The tensions ensuing from the EU’s solidarist challenge and the coterminously attractive parts of the package on offer for Russia, call for a separate discussion within each EU-centred international society with strong EU–Russian involvement (Figure 1).\textsuperscript{36}

**European international society**

The EU is the chief power that upholds and spreads what today can be called European international society. This can be analytically separated from global society within which it is embedded, although both have their origins in the expansion of European society. European international society is relatively well institutionalised and extends to most of the greater European area stretching from western Europe to Russia.
and the westernmost parts of the CIS. It supports the institutions of sovereignty, diplomacy and the market. It also supports equality of people and human rights, nationalism in the form of self-determination, popular sovereignty and democracy. The latter two primary institutions with their derivatives are not, however, always compatible with each other or easily put into political practice. Vague mutual identifications are also present within European international society. They pertain to claims of identifying with Europe and its values in the widest possible sense.37

Russia’s membership in this society is by no means unproblematic as EU—Russian disagreements in the CE and OSCE testify, but it evidently represents one of the components that constitute its role as a great power with a stake in managing the European continent’s affairs. Indeed, it can be argued that membership of ‘greater Europe’ is a necessary ingredient in Russia’s quest for international society, and that it continues to provide an important reference point for Russia’s political identity, despite the fact that Russia’s view of many institutions of European society is often seen as purely instrumental.

For example, in the case of Chechnya, it is clear that Russia’s conduct violates the political commitments that result from its CE and OSCE membership. Russia hesitated in admitting these organisations into the troubled republic, but at the same time was happy to continue accusing Estonia and Latvia of violating human rights in the treatment of their Russian-speaking minorities although they have fulfilled all the requirements of the CE and OSCE. Ultimately Russia had to agree on CE and OSCE presence in Chechnya, but in 2002, refused to extend the OSCE mandate there.38 However, aside from the problems of conforming with the primary institutions, self-identification, as conceptualised by Diez and Whitman, is the decisive factor for ascribing membership of international society.39 Most Russian foreign policy makers would be outraged if Russia’s membership of the European international society was questioned. An identity-based political attachment can thus easily be discerned. To aggravate the unclear place of identity within the English school, however, the links between identity, and instrumentality and interest, are not made as explicit in the English school literature as would be appropriate. It is crucial to see the link between identity and interest in the maintenance and expansion of international society: in short, what we want influences what we are, and vice versa.40 In this sense, Russia simply cannot afford to lose recognition of its political identity and self-image as a member of European international society, however troubled the actual relationship may be.

Recognising the centrality of the institution of great power management for Russia, Russia’s membership of this society is necessary, but not sufficient. In Russian eyes, it is not enough to be equal with smaller European countries, especially if they are former members of the Soviet Union, the westernmost of which, in most cases, not only claim membership of this same society, but have, in the past, been conquered by Russia. Recognition of Russia’s preference for the institution of great power management is also included in the European neighbourhood policy, a policy tool which helps the Union take a stronger grip of European international society. The EU Commission asserts that in the westernmost part of the former Soviet Union the
EU should cooperate with Russia ‘whenever possible’. In the Caucasus, the EU calls for a more coherent policy, pursued ‘whenever possible, in cooperation with Russia’. This is music to the ears of Russian foreign policy makers. However, because Russia refused to be lumped together with the Union’s smaller neighbours, and resisted the neighbourhood policy’s conditionality, it declined to be included. The words of Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov at the OSCE’s Istanbul conference in 1999, indicate very well where the primary locus of Russia’s quest for international society lies: ‘[P]artnership with the EU is Russia’s strategic choice ... Today the EU to us is the largest trade and economic and investment partner.’

**EU international society and the EU–Russian strategic partnership**

EU international society is about integration within the EU and around its borders, due to the ‘pull’ or ‘magnetism’ of integration. On the basis of the self-identification principle, membership is not limited to EU members. This society includes those wishing to be bound by the same rules and institutions, and whom the core members are in principle prepared to accept. Membership is ultimately based on differential self-identification. Thus several EU member states have ‘opted out’ of the inner circles of integration such as the single currency and the Schengen treaty. Likewise, many new member states remain outside some sectors of common policy and the primary institutions they reflect. Russia is a very interesting case in this respect. On the one hand, it is perfectly clear that neither Russian nor EU foreign policy makers seriously contemplate the country’s EU membership. On the other hand, relatively far-reaching attempts at integrating Russia into the practices of EU international society are envisaged within the EU–Russian strategic partnership, which the parties unveiled at the turn of the millennium, and which thereafter has come to embody the project of building four ‘common spaces’ in the economic, internal security, external security and educational and cultural sectors. An integral and integrative link is slowly, albeit painfully, forming between EU international society and Russia.

Cooperation within the Common Economic Space (CES) is the best way of making progress on mutual interests. The CES signifies the institution of the market and is based on a strong energy interdependence between the EU and Russia. The EU buys around one-fifth of its gas and oil from Russia, and Russia exports almost two-thirds of its production to the EU and is dependent on European investment in its decaying energy infrastructure. Seventy per cent of Russia’s foreign direct investment comes from EU member countries. The CES talks have slowly moved from expectations that Russia would unilaterally converge with all EU single market standards towards a more selective convergence within different economic sectors, standards and regulatory models. The redefined Russian stance allows for starting negotiations on the long-standing goal of creating a free trade area for goods and services after Russia’s WTO membership. The freedom of movement of people is a long-term goal for Russia, and an area where progress has been made, as discussed below, while freedom of movement of capital has been advanced by Russia’s unilateral moves towards full convertibility of the rouble. Russia’s business community would,
reportedly, be ready for even more radical steps.\textsuperscript{47} However, full convergence with the EU’s market \textit{acquis} would entail adopting regulations that were less favourable for Russia’s economic growth than the regulations resulting from its current legislation, for example in budgetary matters, taxation, and social and environmental issues. A further stumbling block is the EU’s anti-dumping measures, which are aimed at protecting its markets.\textsuperscript{48}

As for energy markets are concerned, Russia’s wish to continue controlling its gas pipelines and to act as an intermediary for gas trade between Central Asia and the EU area effectively prevents Russia from adopting the EU-driven Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). Despite rejecting the ECT’s proposal for free access to export and transit pipelines, Russia is in the process of making its gas supply agreements within the CIS more market-based. In oil markets, Russia continues to boast a mixture of state ownership and private capital reminiscent of many EU countries. Overall, economic policy in Putin’s Russia departs significantly from liberal ideals, and it appears that it is being implemented in a heavy-handed manner in the ongoing separation between state-led ‘strategic’ and ‘open’ economic sectors. Putin himself expects this separation will lead to the creation of a properly monetarised internal energy market in Russia. The aforementioned 2004 EU–Russian agreement on Russia’s WTO membership and gradual abolition of the double pricing of energy will support this. Other official aims include liberalising private enterprise, this time on the basis of the rule of law unlike in the chaotic 1990s; securing international market access for Russian goods; and encouraging private and foreign investment as a ‘strategic choice’.\textsuperscript{49}

Put together, this represents selective adoption of the \textit{acquis}, but should allow for the integration of EU and Russian markets in many crucial spheres. This represents a much thicker application of the institution of the market than has been seen to date among the CIS states within wider European society. Indeed, not only mere economic interests are involved. There is a strong Russian self-identification with the institution of the market as promoted by the EU: for Putin, the EU’s recognition of Russia’s market economy status in May 2002 connoted, in his words, ‘principled’ and ‘moral-political’ significance.\textsuperscript{50}

The common space of freedom, security and justice, or, put otherwise, of internal security, offers the long-term prospect of an EU–Russia visa-free regime. Whilst border issues are in IR theory traditionally consigned to the realm of internal matters within the ‘black box’, and are similarly classified within the system-centric and often Westphalian-biased classical international society tradition, this prospect may have some implications for how the EU and Russia view the institution of sovereignty in their mutual relations. Naturally prospects for the strengthening of mutual identifications would also be enhanced by the projected free movement of people. Progress since the enlargement of the EU in 2004 has been quicker than expected.\textsuperscript{51} A readmission agreement was signed in 2005, and visa procedures were speeded up and facilitated for students, close relatives and the disabled, with diplomats becoming exempt from such procedures altogether.

The common space of cooperation in the field of external security is about the institutions of great power management and balance of power, and as such explicitly
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holds out the promise of answering Russia's quest for international society that is strongly biased towards great powers. Russia is the only non-EU member country that has gained good access, by means of monthly consultations, to the Union’s Political and Security Committee, the main decision-making body of the ESDP. The EU–Russian summit in Moscow 2002 announced that the two parties would aim for a common crisis management approach and the start of bilateral military contacts. The parties have also underlined their commitment to the central role of the UN in global questions, and have similar positions on Iraq, Middle East settlement, Cyprus, Afghanistan and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and value international law highly. Such relative convergence over security questions has prompted Putin to praise the comprehensive character of EU–Russian relations, which encompass a wide range of civilian and military issues.

However, critical observers suggest several factors that are hindering closer integration in external security. First, the EU has concerns over the Putin regime’s re-centralisation policy in Russia, which is leading to a stark difference in the way the two entities are governed. Second, associated with this, the EU has doubts about Russia’s commitment to the institutions of democracy, and equality of people and human rights: doubts made stronger by the handling of the war in Chechnya. Third, different interpretations of the so-called ‘colour revolutions’ within the western CIS hamper cooperation in a region that might, alongside the former Yugoslavia, represent the best location for joint action. Also, both the EU and Russia tend to look towards the leading power, the United States, rather than towards each other, when developing their security policies.

Finally, the common space of research, education and culture deals with issues that are, in the long run, capable of leading to strengthened mutual socialisation and identification, and thus to bolstered interhuman ties. The EU and Russia have an education and research exchange, and cooperate in research and development programmes. In addition, several Russian universities have entered the Bologna process, which aims to harmonise higher education degrees across Europe.

Overall, some practices within the EU–Russian strategic partnership indicate that Russia is moving towards a thicker conception of international society by experimenting with solidarist ideas. This is especially true in the case of increasing cooperation in the management of mutual economic interests. There is also some potential for integration in the sphere of great power management and external security. The improvement of people-to-people ties, research and educational links support Russia’s European choice. However, obviously in questions of equality of people, human rights, nationalism, national self-determination and democracy, Russia’s overriding pluralism keeps its idea of international society notably thinner than the one promoted by the EU. Even with this important reservation, it is, however, worth noting that Russia’s self-identification with Europe is very strong. At the general level, it is impossible to understand Russian debates on identity without invoking the term Europe. According to president Putin, ‘real integration with Europe ... of course is a complicated and long-term process. But this is our historical choice. It has been made.’ As for the contentious issue of the EU enlargement in
2004 – with its allegedly adverse effects on Russia’s bilateral relations with the Central and East European member countries, and the connected issue of Russia’s former influence over them – Putin suggests that enlargement in fact has brought the EU and Russia ‘not just ... closer geographically, but also economically and spiritually’. In the long term this means ‘new possibilities for the future of Greater Europe’.58

As for Russians’ identification patterns at the individual level, which is after all the root of interhuman ties, in a nationwide survey in April 2002 Russians were roughly divided between those who identified their country with Europe and those who considered it equally European and Asian. Purely Asian alternatives remained unpopular. At the level of individual countries, key European states such as France and Germany were preferred over other EU members and the United States.59 According to interview data in another study, elite groups such as Russian parliamentarians and civil servants were characterised by a tendency to look in particular towards north European models, for example Sweden and Germany.60 A survey conducted in December 2003 and January 2004 found, however, that only a third of Russians viewed themselves as ‘European’. Russians were also found to ‘consistently’ hold different values from those that reputedly prevail in the EU area.61 A similar finding was obtained in a poll in July 2005, with two-thirds of Russians viewing their culture and values as significantly different from their European counterparts; interestingly, however, around half wanted Russia to seek membership of the EU.62 True, the Russian public has a poor knowledge of the EU and often fails to distinguish it from other European organisations.63 The fact that a very clear majority of them wanted to strengthen links with leading European countries, including economic ties, suggests that attachment to Europe persists irrespective of perceptions of a culture gap.64 Hence, some of the available material indicates Russians’ readiness to increase European ties, especially in comparison to other options, whilst some other studies hint at a rising eurosceptism. On balance, while the overall picture is mixed, this does not preclude that there is ongoing, selective but firm EU–Russian integration, which is most pronounced in respect to the market.

North European international society

North European international society deserves a brief mention because it represents some further instances where Russia has flirted with solidarist ideas. This society seemed to be forming as a result of the region-building practices initiated by the Nordic states and Germany in the early 1990s within the framework of the Baltic Sea region.65 Aims included finding a new locus for Cold War-era Nordic cooperation, and getting Russia and the Baltic states around the same table.

The primary institutions of this nascent international society were mostly the same as in European and EU international societies. This strong embeddedness, coupled with the fact that most of the region’s states, with the exception of Russia, were seeking membership of the EU, finally contributed to the north European project becoming overlaid by European integration after the turn of the millennium. The EU became gradually more involved in the secondary institutions launched by
the region-builders, like the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). In fact, the EU eventually launched its own regional cooperation framework, the Northern Dimension (ND) to coordinate and bring some order to the web of activities that had arisen. The ND introduced EU practices and a new EU-defined context into the respective institutions as well as to north European politics on the whole.66

With regard to engagement with Russia, northern Europe is often mentioned as a sort of testing ground, where the Russians have been willing to test new institutions. For example, the CBSS had its own Commissioner for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which included the rights of national minorities. This was the channel used by Russia to try to influence Estonia and Latvia’s policies towards their large Russian-speaking minorities. This Russian stance is, however, more easily explained by its project of maintaining its great power status and influence over the post-Soviet space, rather than by its universalist preference for joint management of human rights issues.

Environmental stewardship of a sort was already in evidence in the proposals of the last Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev for enhanced environmental cooperation in northern Europe, which was part of a policy of gradually overcoming Cold War-era tensions through cooperation in questions relating to ‘low politics’. Thereafter the environment has been the focus within the BEAC in particular, and also within the CBSS and ND. The latter has an environmental partnership fund set to reach over two billion euros for activities mostly on Russian soil. However, simultaneously other northern European states have raised environmental concerns over the Russian–German project to build a gas pipeline from Primorsk to Greifswald through the Baltic Sea. The project also ignored the interests of traditional energy transit states Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states.67

The gas pipeline project puts the potential of northern European integration into context by showing how multilateralism, environmental stewardship and relations with smaller powers are sacrificed when vital economic and traditional great power interests are at stake. In its opinion Russia’s problems with transit states further underline the need for a direct pipeline to Germany. The pipeline also shows how important it is for Russia to maintain its European markets, in which Germany is a key transport hub, and its ties with the largest EU members. This example demonstrates that, at best, northern Europe can function as a testing ground of sorts for Russia, whilst it always remains subordinate to pan-European ties, especially those with larger EU member states. This returns us to the aforementioned larger-scale EU-centred societies.

Russia and the prospects for regional-level international societies

In this article I have suggested looking at Russia when considering the normative prospects for maintaining and even expanding what remains of international society within the current system – a system in which the United States displays global-imperialist tendencies and where the possibility of a shift towards a US-centred
hierarchy cannot be ruled out. This focus was intended to direct attention to a case that has, to date, been relatively neglected in the literature of the English school. The literature has otherwise proved its capacity to shed light, in an original way, on the evolving global order and its regional dimensions.

In line with MacFarlane’s analysis, Russia’s view of international society was found to be mostly pluralist and strongly biased towards the institution of great power management. However, in contrast to MacFarlane’s analysis, there was evidence of clear albeit not uniformly expressed solidarist intervention in the form of the institution of the market. The inherent limitations of the partnership with the United States for realising Russia’s agenda arise from their mutual asymmetry, limited mutual relations, and from the fact that pluralist international society matters much less than before in Washington. In Asia, elements of a thin pluralist international society are in place, but there is a lack of the kind of mutual identification that would strengthen interstate society especially at the interhuman plane, which represents the most important handicap.

Europe, with its rich mixture of regionally defined international societies ranging from European international society to EU international society, which is more narrowly defined, and the short-lived north European society of the 1990s, hence emerges as the self-stated choice of Russia. Whilst Russia claims membership of European international society, which roughly pertains to the CE map, its strategic partnership with the EU also edges it closer to the geographically more narrowly defined, yet better institutionalised EU international society through selective convergence with the EU’s institution of the market. The institution of great power management through EU–Russian security cooperation also represents some potential for future integration. Increasing people-to-people, as well as research and educational contacts, may in the long run help to erode the major stumbling block, which is, on the Russian side, the strongly Westphalian institution of sovereignty. An increase in such contacts would add to Russia’s historically persistent self-identification with Europe and its leading states, a fact that has been reconfirmed at the political level during Putin’s term in office. Although our picture of the identification patterns of Russians at an individual level remains more mixed, nevertheless there is a strong preference among the Russian people for European ties, which extend to the economy. This supports the ongoing, selective EU–Russian convergence being driven by the market. Ultimately these features in the EU–Russian partnership provide tangible prospects for maintaining and even expanding the features of international society at the level of greater Europe, regardless of the systemic constraints.

It might seem that in this article I have tried to make a strongly normative claim that a partnership of the great powers of Russia and the EU would be a particularly desirable arrangement in the post 9/11 world. However, this is only true if we speak of prospects for maintaining international society at some meaningful and regionally limited level and of modest prospects of making it thicker in the medium to long term. This is to say nothing of whether an EU–Russian great power partnership might be capable of sucking in other states from the western parts of the former Soviet Union that are in the process of developing closer EU ties, such as Ukraine. The Caucasus
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is again another matter entirely. Some of these countries might ultimately embrace
the institutions of EU international society far more strongly than Russia is likely to
do, but if so, that will happen by the mechanisms of socialisation and assimilation.
In contrast the current EU–Russian dialogue is between formal equals. But it
was not my intention to portray the degree of EU–Russia convergence as some sort
of a normative ideal to be held in high esteem.

My analysis has left unexamined the many options open for the evolution of
larger-scale international society, in which EU–Russia relations are embedded.68
It does, however, suggest that the proposed shift towards a more hierarchical system
is at best in its early stages.69 For the moment it is clear that American rule leaves
spaces where great powers can try to compensate for the decline of global inter-
national society. This may well be a long-lasting feature of the system. At best, these
spaces remain essentially regional in nature, and even their richer set of institutions
cannot entirely compensate for the empire-like behaviour that is eroding global
international society.

Notes
341–402; for commentaries resisting the term empire, see Christopher Hill, ‘11 September 2001:
Perspectives from International Relations’, International Relations, 16(2), 2002, p. 258.
3 Timothy Dunne, ‘Society and Hierarchy in International Relations’, International Relations,
Historical Analysis (London: Routledge, 1992); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), The Expansion
4 For a stronger version of Dunne’s argument, see Vilho Harle, ‘Towards a Hierarchical International
System? Waltz’s Structural Theory Revisited’, in Vilho Harle (ed.), Towards a Hierarchical Inter-
5 See e.g. James Anderson, ‘American Hegemony after 11 September: Allies, Rivals and Con-
tradictions’, Geopolitics, 8(3), Autumn 2004, pp. 35–60; Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez,
“International Community” after Iraq’, International Affairs, 81(1), January 2005, pp. 31–52;
Michael Cox, ‘Commentary: Martians and Venusians in the New World Order’, International Affairs,
79(3), May 2003, pp. 523–32.
6 Barry Buzan, From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure
of Globalisation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 8; Thomas Diez and Richard
Whitman, ‘Analysing European Integration: Reflecting on the English School – Scenarios for an
7 Buzan, From International to World Society?, p. 238; Neil S. MacFarlane, ‘Russian Perspectives on
Order and Justice’, in Rosemary Foot, John Gaddis and Andrew Hurrell (eds), Order and Justice in
8 See, respectively, e.g. John Ikenberry, ‘American Power and the Empire of Capitalist Democracy’,
Review of International Studies, 27(special issue), December 2001, p. 192; Jack Snyder,
‘Russia: Responses to Relative Decline’, in T. V. Paul and J. A. Hall (eds), International Order and
9 China has evident potential to challenge the US in the long run. In the 1990s Japan was seen as
a potential challenger, and remains economically powerful. The EU has economic capabilities,
but has only relatively recently launched its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and


15 Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, ch. 4.


20 MacFarlane, ‘The “R” in BRICs’, p. 49; see also note 38 below.

21 For more, see the northern European section below; for the principle of environmental stewardship, see Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, ch. 6, p. 186.


24 Galia Golan, ‘Russia and the Iraq War: Was Putin’s Policy a Failure?’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 37(4), December 2004, pp. 429–59; MacFarlane, ‘The “R” in BRICs’. Note that although Russia reserves a right for pre-emptive military strikes, it has not exercised this option, unlike the US.


28 For a good overview, see Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, pp. 30–45.

29 Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, ch. 4, esp. p. 131; MacFarlane, ‘The “R” in BRICs’.


33 Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, pp. 142, 148, 211; Diez and Whitman, ‘Analysing European Integration’.

34 For the institutions, see Buzan, *From International to World Society?*

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36 The first two international societies to be discussed derive heavily from Diez and Whitman, ‘Analysing European Integration’, pp. 51–9.


51 For a good analysis slightly caught by the pace of events, see Oksana Antonenko, ‘Russia and EU Enlargement: From Insecure Neighbour to a Common Space of Security, Justice and Home Affairs’, in Antonenko and Pinnick, Russia and the European Union, pp. 72–5, 96–7.

52 See e.g. ‘Joint Statement, EU–Russia Summit, 13990/03 (Presse 3 13) 2’; ‘Russia–European Union Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) Meeting in Luxembourg, 921-28-04-2004, 28 April 2004’. The EU and Russia also share the concern of terrorism, although the war in Chechnya continues to attract some criticism from the EU side.


54 Forsberg and Herd, Divided West, pp. 112–18; Antonenko, ‘Russia and EU Enlargement’, pp. 68–70, 97–7.

56 Viatcheslav Morozov, ‘Ideja Evropy v rossiiskom vneshnepolititseshkom diskurse’ (unpublished manuscript); also Neumann, ‘Russia as a Great Power’.


61 Although no direct comparison, including population samples, from the EU area was made, Russians were found to support democracy as an abstract principle. They were divided into those favouring a state-based economy or full private ownership by a ratio of two to one, although other market indicators pointed to more positive attitudes towards already realised market principles. However, values relating to democracy, the market and belonging to Europe were found independent of each other, as opposed to them supposedly forming a coherent set in the EU area; see Stephen White, Margot Light and Ian McAllister, ‘Russia and the West: Is There a Values Gap?’, International Politics, 42(3), September 2005, pp. 314–33.


63 White et al., ‘Russia and the West’, p. 322–3.


