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THE RUSSIAN  
NORTHWESTERN FEDERAL DISTRICT  
AND THE EU'S NORTHERN DIMENSION:

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW POLITICAL SUBJECT  
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EU-RUSSIAN REGIONAL  
COOPERATION

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## **Abstract**

The Northwestern Federal District of the Russian Federation has been particularly active in asserting itself as a macro-regional political subject, transcending the administrative borders of the subjects of the Russian Federation. This affirmation of the Northwest as a macro-region is also characterised by the explicit location of the Federal District within the international regional context and the linkage of the newly elaborated strategic development plans with EU policies in the region, particularly the Northern Dimension. This strategic policy discourse is grounded in the problematisation of the existing format of EU-Russian cooperation on the regional level as marked by the passivity of Russian regions vis-à-vis EU policies. The district-level strategies proceed, on the contrary, from the need to assume a more active and assertive position towards the EU that would allow to integrate the policies of the Northern Dimension with the domestic reform vision in Russia. The paper seeks to analyse the international dimensions of the strategic discourse of the Northwestern 'macro-region', elucidate the conflict episodes and conflict issues that are articulated in this discourse and address the wider implications of the emergence of the Northwestern Federal District for the EU-Russian regional cooperation in the border regions.



# Introduction: Putin's Federal Reforms and the Emergence of the Macro-regional Dimension in Russian Politics

The objective of this paper is to begin to address the reshaping of Russian regionalism and its international dimension in the aftermath of the federal reforms of the first term of the Putin presidency.<sup>1</sup> The regional dimension of EU-Russian relations has arguably been transformed after the federal reforms of the Putin presidency in 2000, particularly the formation of seven federal districts as intermediate layers of authority between the federal centre and the regions. The goal of the reform has been to improve the coordination of the operation of federal institutions (e.g. departments of the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Federal Security Service) in the regions and to supervise the constitutionality of regional legislation and statutory acts. The grand objective of the reform is to ensure the existence of the common legal, political and economic space in the Russian Federation, whose absence was problematised in the Russian political discourse throughout the 1990s and was an integral part of President Putin's policy agenda in the beginning of his first term.<sup>2</sup> At first glance, these reforms may be said to have clearly limited the autonomy of the regions in domestic policies and foreign relations, the only remaining issues for debate being the legitimacy, effectiveness and the ultimate consequences of such 're-centralising' policies. However, these conclusions appear both facile and hurried particularly with regard to internal politics within the regions. The studies of regional politics in Russia during the Putin presidency demonstrate the very modest success of the federal centre in reining in politically autonomous regional leaders.<sup>3</sup> The frequent failure of the centre to influence the outcome of regional elections, the defeat of the initial plans to legally limit the number of terms the incumbent regional leaders may serve and the ultimate reliance on the 'administrative resource' of the regional leaders in the election campaign of United Russia in December 2003 all testify to the fact that the so-called '*monocentric*' political regime, allegedly installed in the Putin

<sup>1</sup> This working paper is part of the research undertaken for the Euborderconf project, funded by the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme with co-sponsoring from the British Academy. The first draft of the paper was presented at the 2004 ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Uppsala, Sweden. The author would like to thank all workshop participants for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> For the general discussion of Putin's federal reforms see Hyde 2001, Nicholson 2001, Smirnyagin 2001. See Putin 2000, 2001 for the examples of the prioritization of the task of recreating a single socioeconomic space in Russia in the President's official discourse.

<sup>3</sup> See Smirnyagin 2001, Makarychev 2004.

presidency<sup>4</sup>, remains either a case of wishful thinking or a 'straw figure' for facile criticism, and that the complexity of the interactions between the centre and the regions, characteristic of the situation of the 'vertical displacement of statehood'<sup>5</sup> in the 1990s, tends to persist.

Yet, it appears that besides the observation of the maintenance of considerable political autonomy of the regional authorities and the irreducibility of regional politics to federal policy designs, it is possible to argue that the federal reforms of 2000 carry a number of more positive or productive effects for Russian federalism. For the purposes of this paper, let us briefly present the logic of this argument.<sup>6</sup>

Firstly, the criticism of Putin's anti-regionalist and re-centralising policies tends to proceed from an idealised (or ill-informed) valorisation of regional politics as *a priori* more prone to pluralism, diversity and heterogeneity than the politics on the federal level. While the critique of the theoretical anti-statist bias is beyond the scope of this paper<sup>7</sup>, let us merely observe that in the Russian conditions this argument is thoroughly ungrounded empirically. On the contrary, throughout the 1990s we have witnessed the consolidation of the authority of regional elites (frequently retaining key positions from the late-Soviet period onwards) under the aegis of the discourse of 'managerialism'. Self-portrayed as technocratic 'managers' (*hozyaistvenniki*) as opposed to 'Moscow' politicians, detached from down-to-earth local concerns, regional leaders accumulated disproportionate political power, all the while depoliticising their own activities as neutral, business-like and common-sense, and hence not

<sup>4</sup> See Bunin et al 2001a, 2001b, Zudin 2002, 2003. While the politics of the Yeltsin era was characterised by the irreducible pluralism of formal and informal centres of power, with the presidency functioning as a merely nominal centre (pace the criticism of Yeltsin's alleged 'super-presidentialism'), the Putin presidency is deemed to be marked by the appearance of a single centre of power, personified by the president himself and the reduction of the political autonomy of regional and non-state elites. This notion of mono-centrism indicates the end of the situation of 'subjectless-ness' (*bessubjektost'*) of the political process, which was noted by a number of analysts in the 1990s. (See e.g. Gaman-Golutvina 2000, Fadin 1995, Kapustin 1995, Sakwa 1999b) See also Shevtsova 2002 for a conceptually similar yet more ideologically biased notion of 'bureaucratic authoritarianism'.

<sup>5</sup> See Prozorov 2004b, chapter 4 for the discussion of this notion. See Makarychev 2004 for the case study of the multiple pathways of successfully 'adapting to the vertical of power', practiced by political actors in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.

<sup>6</sup> The more detailed elaboration of the logic of regionalisation in Russia during the 1990s is attempted in Prozorov 2004c.

<sup>7</sup> See Bartelson 2001 for the incisive criticism of the 'critique of the state' as complicit in the discursive construction of the very object of its criticism. See also Paasi 2001 for the criticism of the facile valorisation of 'regionalism' in contemporary critical approaches in political geography.



subject to political contestation. As a result of this depoliticisation the regional political spaces, have, with few exceptions, been substantially narrower than that of federal politics. The frequently mentioned notion of ‘regional despotism’, while not entirely unfounded in a number of cases, is rather too melodramatic a designator of what is in fact a highly sterile, intellectually mediocre hegemony of the regional status quo. Somewhat paradoxically, the Russian politics of the 1990s was marked by radical pluralism and heterogeneity on the federal level, combined with the increasing closure of the regional political space.

Secondly, while this experience of the displacement of statehood was marked by undeniable pluralism, it was hardly conducive to the success of liberal reforms, proclaimed by the state. The incapacitation of state authority has been problematised as the disappearance of the very agent of liberal reforms, and thus the main reason for their stagnation in the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, with regard to ‘centre-regions’ relations, liberal reforms have been disabled by the lack of a common economic space, punctured by unconstitutional regional legislation installing various barriers to the free movement of goods and capital. The problematisation of this ironically ‘neomedieval situation’ by Russian liberals is nonetheless not only pragmatic but also follows logically from the liberal denial of heteronomous pluralism that cages the individual in the network of segmented communities and ascribed identities<sup>9</sup>: the autonomisation of essentialised regional identities (particularly those defined in ethnic or religious terms) is in principle incompatible with the liberal valorisation of heterogeneity of individual practices (rather than the pluralism of homogeneous communities) and the emphasis on self-definition.<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, from this perspective the criticism of Putin’s ‘statism’ confuses the *quantitative* expansion of state powers (which, as the governmental programme of socioeconomic deregulation<sup>11</sup> illustrates well, is entirely contrary to the president’s policy) with the *qualitative* delineation of a distinct domain of statehood *as such*: what is at stake in the ‘reconstitution of the state’ is not the *specific* question of strengthening state authority in particular domains but

<sup>8</sup> See Ulykaev 1999, Mau 1999, Mau and Starodubrovskaya 2001, Gaidar 2001, Tompson 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The most vocal opposition of Russian liberals to regional autonomisation is found in the 1999 programmatic article by Alexei Ulykaev, one of the leaders of the Union of Right Forces and presently the Deputy Finance Minister. See Ulykaev 1999.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Hall 1995, Keane 1998.

<sup>11</sup> See Main Directions of Socioeconomic Policy of the Government of the Russian Federation for the Long-Term Perspective, Programme of Socioeconomic Development of the Russian Federation for the Midterm Perspective: 2003-2005.

the *general* question of the state's *effective presence as a self-identical positivity*. The much-maligned metaphor of the 'single vertical of power' and the notion of monocentrism developed in Russian political science as a designator of 'Putin's regime' in contrast to the 'poly-centric' Yeltsin presidency, must therefore be qualified. The 'Putin project' of reforming Russian federalism may rather be defined as the elimination of the *para-constitutional excesses* of the politics of the 1990s, which serves to depoliticise and consolidate as a foundation the constitutional order established in 1993.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the term 'single vertical of power', applied with regard to the 'vertical reconstitution' of the state, is unfortunate since it connotes the hierarchical subordination of the lower levels of government to upper ones, which in contemporary Russia is made impossible by the federative constitutional structure and the direct elections of local and regional authorities. Instead, what is at stake in Putin's reforms in centre-region relations is the elimination of violations of the Constitution and federal laws, practiced by regional authorities, which does not modify the federative power-sharing arrangement, inscribed in the Constitution.

Putin's federal reforms of spring-summer 2000 proceed from precisely this imperative to consolidate state autonomy within the constitutional domain, to install the very distinction between the federal and the regional, obscured in the vertical displacement of statehood, and thus create the common socioeconomic space for liberal reforms.<sup>13</sup> The formation of seven federal districts, headed by presidential plenipotentiary envoys, serves to restore the control over the activities of federal governmental institutions in the regions, which in the 1990s

<sup>12</sup> See Sakwa 2000. Cf. Kahn 2002, who is sharply critical of Putin's federal reforms as contradicting the very logic of federalism. Within the Russian discourse the most critical account of Putin's federal reforms has been given by Nikolai Petrov (2002).

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Nicholson 2000, Hyde 2000, Smirnyagin 2001 for the discussion of Putin's federal reforms. The notion of the common economic space pertains to the problematisation of the situation that existed until 2000-2001, when regional legislation and statutory acts stipulated, in violation of the federal constitution, the establishment of regional economic 'barriers', obstructing e.g. the free movement of goods. Putin's 2000 Address discusses this problem at length and in no uncertain terms: "The federal establishment is responsible for ensuring a common nationwide economic environment. But the thing is that territorial administrations often ban grain deliveries to other parts of the country, also restricting alcohol trade, hindering the establishment of "alien" banks' subsidiaries and impeding the free movement of capital, goods and services. This is a real shame and disgrace. All these apparently profitable actions are leading us toward disaster. [...] Any actions on the part of regional authorities that aim to restrict economic freedom must be thwarted as something unconstitutional; and the concerned officials guilty of doing this must be punished." (Putin 2000, p. 7. Emphasis added.) The establishment of seven Federal Districts, headed by plenipotentiary presidential envoys, has had, among its other functions, the prevention of such constitutional violations by the regions.

gradually became subordinated to regional governments, whose very activities they were supposed to monitor and supervise. The reform of the Council of the Federation, which replaced the system of the composition of the upper chamber of the leaders of the regional executive and legislature with the appointment of permanent regional representatives, seeks to break down the nexus of legislative and executive power that the former system created and thus restores the constitutional principle of the separation of powers. Finally, the introduction of the legal procedure of federal intervention that gives the president a (highly restricted and so far never used) right to dismiss regional governors accused of constitutional violations similarly does little more than provide for the enforcement of the principle of the superiority of the Russian constitution over regional legislation. For all their political radicalism (i.e. the reversal of the hierarchy of influence that existed in the 1990s), Putin's reforms have unfolded strictly within the constitutional space and hence exemplify by no means an abandonment of federalism but rather its ordering and structuration. Exemplary in this regard is the president's refusal to extend the power-sharing treaties between the federation and the regions, a practice prevalent in 1996-1999 during the utmost weakness of the federal centre. The treaties, whose content was contingent on the political weight of the regional leader in question, manifestly contradicted the constitutional equality of the subjects of the federation and made the distribution of power between the centre and the regions permanently (re)negotiable, resulting in the structurally built-in political instability.

Putin's federal reforms are thus simultaneously modest and radical, unfolding strictly within the constitutional space but effecting a new sociopolitical reality by restoring state autonomy and introducing new patterns of identification (e.g. federal districts as 'macro-regions'). According even to the observers oppositional to Putin's reforms<sup>14</sup>, these decisions, whatever their alleged 'authoritarian' intent, have actually strengthened Russian federalism, eliminating its most notorious quasi-feudalist excesses without, as it were, throwing the baby away with the bathwater. The inability (demonstrated in the 2001 round of regional elections) of the federal centre to dominate regional politics by 'converting' Putin's high approval rating into the support for the challengers to incumbents in regional elections demonstrates the

<sup>14</sup> See Smirnyagin 2001

continued existence of regional diversity<sup>15</sup> and the irreducibility of regional politics to the nationwide political arena.

Yet, even though, as we have argued, the Putin presidency is not in itself antagonistic to federalism and regionalism, there arises a question whether Putin's reforms have also introduced *new* sites of regionalisation that supplement the 'region' in the conventional sense as potential partners in EU-Russian cooperation. Let us begin by noting that the discussion of Russian regionalisation has largely tended to obscure the fact that Russian regions (i.e. 'subjects of the federation', be they *oblast's*, republics, *okrugs* or *krais*) have not merely appropriated excessive authority at the expense of the federal centre, but also dominated the space of *local government*.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, it ought not to be forgotten that the value of regionalism in the European discourse is located precisely in the local, bottom-up, grassroots or community-based character of regional politics.<sup>17</sup> These features are of course difficult to conceive of in Russian 'regions' such as Krasnoyarsk krai, exceeding the size of the territory of the entire Western Europe. On the other hand, such objectives of regionalisation as the innovative response to the 'challenge of globalisation' are severely disabled by the existence of autonomous development strategies of 89 Russian regions, whose relations with each other may frequently be substantively weaker than with their outside partners. The automatic focus in the discourse of regionalisation on the subject of the federation as the 'middle' level of authority in Russia obscures what appears to be evident: the subject of the federation as the product of the Soviet 'administrative-territorial division' (ATD), presently lacking any cultural determinants or economic rationale, is *an increasingly unfit unit for regionalisation*, an obstacle to the development of more innovative forms of regional cooperation. Rather than hinder international regional cooperation, the Putin presidency that contains and constrains the power of regional governments, actually opens *new* possibilities for regionalism that are relevant to the development of EU-Russian relations.

<sup>15</sup> In a more pessimistic assessment, this inability also demonstrates the entrenchment of regional elites, whose frequently unchallenged standing in their domains (e.g. Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Sverdlovsk Oblast) is immune even to the challenge from the candidates supported by the Presidency.

<sup>16</sup> One of the few exceptions, pertinent to the zone of EU-Russian regional cooperation, is the Republic of Karelia, which introduced the Law on Local Self-Government in 1994, prior to the adoption of the corresponding federal legislation and where the system of elected local government existed since the mid-1990s. See Aleksandrov 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Paasi 2001.

These possibilities are in fact already inscribed within the 1999 Russian Midterm Strategy on EU. We need only recall the emphasis given in that text, on the one hand, to the development of local self-government through cross-border cooperation with the EU and, on the other hand, to the 'integrated development of the Northwest' as a condition of cooperation within the framework of the Northern Dimension.<sup>18</sup> This indicates that regional cooperation might in fact bypass not only the federal but also the regional governments and instead unfold at two levels: local or municipal government (*micro-regionalism*) and the newly formed Federal Districts (*macro-regionalism*). Local government is of course an obvious site for cross-border cooperation with regard to the development of infrastructure, cultural and education exchanges, stimulation of SME activity, insofar as this cooperation involves concrete border localities and not necessarily the region *in toto*.<sup>19</sup> The stimulation of these forms of regional cooperation does not require additional regional autonomy, but rather the effective presence and active participation of local governments, which may in fact be achieved by the *limitation* of the authority of regional governments.<sup>20</sup> More interestingly, questions of a more strategic nature relating to the overall development of the region may find a more proper resolution at the macroregional level, exemplified by federal districts. This paper focuses on the Northwestern Federal District (NWFD) as being most pertinent to EU-Russian relations in the framework of the Northern Dimension. In fact, while the EU Northern Dimension initiative has already attracted considerable scholarly attention<sup>21</sup>, Russian macro-regionalism remains a rare research object. Most of the studies of the regional aspect of EU-Russian relations have tended to focus on Russia's *reception* of European initiatives such as the NDI<sup>22</sup>, thereby perpetuating the perception of Russia's passivity in relation to the EU, the passivity that is presently strongly problematised in the Russian political discourse. In contrast, the Russian discourse of macro-regionalism, as articulated e.g. in the strategic development programmes of the Northwestern

<sup>18</sup> See Russia's Midterm Strategy towards the EU. (WWW-document.)

<sup>19</sup> See Prozorov 2004a for the discussion of EU-Russian cross-border cooperation in the case of the Republic of Karelia.

<sup>20</sup> The currently designed nationwide reform of local government is of course highly significant in this regard. Although occasionally criticised for subordinating the municipal level to the regional one, the reform plan nonetheless provides the legal basis for local government activities across the regions, amending the current situation in which the activities (or even the effective existence) of autonomous local government varies from region to region depending on regional legislation.

<sup>21</sup> See Joenniemi and Sergunin 2003, Joenniemi 2003a.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Fairlie and Sergounin 2001, Joenniemi and Sergounin 2003, Haukkala 2003, Tkachenko 2000, Pursiainen 2001.

Federal District (NWFD), has hardly been the object of serious research.<sup>23</sup> In a rare study of this problematic Andrey Makarychev has argued for the constitutive role of such ‘cognitive actors’ as think-tanks and research institutions in the activities of ‘region-making’ and addressed the activities of various policy think tanks in this area.<sup>24</sup> The remainder of this paper attempts to continue this line of reasoning by focusing in detail on the strategic discourse in the NWFD, represented by the Strategic Designs Centre North-West, assessing the effects of this discourse on the political field in Northwest Russia and offering tentative conclusions on the possibility of the interface of the EU and Russian strategic projects in the North of Europe. The paper concludes with an outline of the implications of focusing on the strategic discourse of macro-regionalism for the studies of EU-Russian relations.

<sup>23</sup> For exceptions see e.g. Makarychev 2002, Shlyamin 2002.

<sup>24</sup> See Makarychev 2002, 2003.

# **The Construction of the Political Subjectivity of the Northwestern Federal District: The Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia as a Discursive Innovation**

Along with the Volga Federal District, NWFD has been particularly active in asserting itself as a macro-regional political subject, transcending the administrative borders of the subjects of the Russian Federation. This activity is concretely exemplified by the formation in 2000 of the Northwestern department of the Strategic Designs Centre (SDC), a major expert institution, in which the federal government's programme of socioeconomic reforms (the 'Gref Programme') was originally designed. In 2001-2002 the Strategic Design Centre 'North-West' (SDC-NW), whose research team was at the time led by the well-known Moscow cultural philosopher Petr Shedrovitsky, prepared the Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia that seeks to supplement if not override the development strategies of individual regions. The point of departure of the doctrine is the problematisation of the 'deficit of strategic thinking' on the macro-regional level that results in Russia's failure to successfully adapt to the new international environment and use the geopolitical and geoeconomic changes in the region to its advantage.

Having failed to work out its own strategies of economic development, the country has desperately sought for harmonious integration into the industrially developed world. Having adjusted itself to the global market division, Russia once again stressed its export-oriented commodity bias. Therefore, the country's economic situation is exposed to a real and tangible risk: Russia has shifted towards international projects and technological industrial links, but has not developed new methods and networks to skilfully guide its development. [...] The acute deficiency in strategic thinking eventually resulted in complete loss of international positions and sharp exacerbation of problems in the sphere of global cooperation. Those scenarios of Russia's participation in the processes of globalisation, which had been elaborated abroad, were at odds with Russia's own strategic interests.<sup>25</sup>

These externally designed scenarios are deemed by the Doctrine to consist in the "extensive exploitation of natural resources of the Northwest Russia and further underpinning of its

<sup>25</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the North-West of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis original.

export-oriented basis”.<sup>26</sup> Thus, on the one hand, it appears that the discourse of the doctrine is sharply antagonistic to Russia’s place in the new international ‘division of labour’ and more generally the process of ‘globalisation’. However, the Doctrine simultaneously serves to naturalise ‘globalisation’ as an objective process that can not be ignored or resisted by any single state: “it is *impossible* to stave off challenges, posed by globalisation. To refuse to take into account the processes of globalisation means to cast away decision-making concerning Russia’s future (and, apparently, the Northwest region) beyond the country’s borders.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, somewhat paradoxically, it is precisely the semi-autarchic, isolationist socioeconomic course demanded by e.g. communist or ‘left-patriotic’ forces in Russia that, in the argument of the doctrine, will weaken the country to the extent that it will be deprived of active political subjectivity as such. The solution proposed in the Doctrine is the *active* and *creative* response to the ‘challenge of globalisation’ on the macro-regional level that, as it were, rehabilitates the very notion of *strategic planning* without any goal of returning to the planning schemes, prevalent during the Soviet period.

The second key point of departure in the SDC’s discourse is the sharp problematisation of the existing administrative-territorial division of Russia, which results in the relative autonomy of strategic development plans of the subjects of the federation and the consequent *fragmentation of the macro-regional space of strategic planning*.

Given the present-day situation of tense struggle over the country’s future, the management system of the previous epoch proves to be outdated, inefficient, and incapable of adequately responding to challenges, which face Russia today. The dilapidated administrative system was stricken by a serious crisis, which was mirrored in a range of problems. The current projects of development are mainly restricted to administrative borders (municipalities, subjects of the Russian Federation). [...] Given the global challenges and changes, the territorial-administrative division – a certain limiting structure – stops being a major determinant of the country’s management. Being outlined as a federal region, the North West of Russia is split into eleven subjects of the Russian Federation and can be classified into four types of

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. See Dean 2002a, 2002b for the discussion of the naturalisation of globalisation as a key feature of neoliberal governmental rationality. See Prozorov 2004b, chapter 4 for the analysis of this naturalisation in the policy discourses of the Putin presidency.



geographical territories. Each of these territories requires special managerial skills and individual approach.<sup>28</sup>

The Doctrine thus echoes our argument above about the constraining character of the existing regional division in Russia, disabling the emergence of a strategic subjectivity on the macro-regional level. At the same time, the call for a single macro-regional development plan is not equivalent to the denial of the specificity of particular regions and localities; on the contrary, the argument of the Doctrine is that precisely these specificities tend to be obscured and ignored in the historically arbitrary administrative-territorial division. The strategic development programmes, prepared by individual regions (e.g. Karelia, where the presentation of such a strategy is inscribed as a *constitutional obligation* of every newly-elected Head of the Republic) are thus discounted as precluding regional complementarity and hindering the emergence of a transregional development strategy that would have a synergetic effect on the whole area. “The authorities of the subjects of the federation *failed to become the centres of designing regional development*. Manifold programmes of socioeconomic development are not implemented in practice. The old priorities of industrial development are outdated, while *new images of the future, from which new priorities could be derived, have not appeared yet*.”<sup>29</sup>

The maintenance of the present situation is, in the argument of the doctrine, likely to result in the two following scenarios:

The natural course of the present-day events will lead to realization of one of the two following scenarios. The first scenario assumes gradual and selective upgrading of the industrial system of the North West with a primary focus on exploration, processing, and export of raw materials. This scenario is mainly aimed at international corporations, which are interested in redistribution of global currents of raw materials. According to the second scenario, this redistribution will be carried out by Russian industrial enterprises themselves, especially by those, which are eager to join European economic communities and take hold of their cosy (and profitable) places under the sun at global markets. The most striking feature of this scenario lies in a severe scarcity of investment abilities of Russian companies. As a result, all these factors put a drag on industrial up-grade and, therefore, result in expenditure cuts and exhaustive exploitation of already dilapidated ecological, social, and commodity resources. Neither the first nor the second scenarios assign to Russia and the Northwest region any

<sup>28</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the North-West of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis original.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

active role in strategic development: they find themselves in the dependent (and frequently inferior) position in regard to global economic currents.<sup>30</sup>

The solution envisioned by the Doctrine consists in the ‘new assembly’ of the Northwest in a macro-regional project based on the structure of the newly-established Federal District.<sup>31</sup> The Doctrine explicitly problematises the formation of a new kind of political subjectivity on the macro-regional level, stressing the insufficiency of any routine responses to the challenge of the ‘new assembly’ project. According to Petr Shedrovitsky, “it is absurd to hope that we can gather three experts, specialists in the Northwest or old specialists from Gosplan and draw up the new mechanism. The political, economic and cultural environment has changed. There is a *wide range of new subjects that have appeared and influence the economic development* [large corporations, regional elites, municipal entities, professional associations, etc.] Let me venture that there is no normal, full-scale dialogue between them. *To create sites for such dialogue is one of the key tasks of today.*”<sup>32</sup> The Centre thus presents itself as a new site of coordination of the activities of various subjects of development in the macro-region, “offering a common language”<sup>33</sup> for addressing the problematic of reform on a new level, and beginning the painstaking process of creating new institutions of regional development within the framework of the Federal District.

It should be noted that the regional borders of the North West as a single whole, fully conscious of its strategic actions, are only being shaped. On the whole, the formation of the Northwest federal region was a turning point in the concept of federal unity itself: this formation was grounded not solely on military and defence peculiarities on the region; it touched upon geographical and economic factors as well. The implementation of federal units proved to be an innovation in the system of administrative management, which enables to take decisions at a new – larger - scale. In fact, it concerns the concept of the so-called “New Development” of the North West. This vast region badly needs novel technologies, transport, and engineering infrastructure, and new social organization of people’s lifestyle. Consequently,

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> The English translation of the Doctrine (available at <http://www.rusrev.org>) translates the idiosyncratic Russian term ‘sborka’ (‘assembly’ or ‘construction’) by the more conventional term ‘development’, which does not carry the arguably relevant connotations of the active constitutive role played by the subject of the doctrine. The same concerns the declared objective of ‘new development’ of the northwest, in which the Russian ‘osvoenie’ is better translated by ‘mastery’ or (in the neutral sense) ‘colonisation’.

<sup>32</sup> Shedrovitsky et al 2001. Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

it means, that the North West of Russia must foster new managerial institutions, which will guide regional development.<sup>34</sup>

The Northwest Federal District is thus viewed as a new institutional structure that could carry a ‘megaproject’ of the assembly of the Northwest, “a common entity, authorised to strategically manage regional development”<sup>35</sup>. Yet, this move must not be interpreted in terms of the facile understanding of the slogan of the ‘unitary vertical of power’ associated with Putin’s reform project. Besides the inclusion of the Federal District into the vertical hierarchy (taken for granted in the Doctrine), what is problematised in the SDC discourse is rather the introduction of new *horizontal technologies of governance*, “the system of strategic interaction” between the regional authorities as well as between regions and other actors in the area, including national business elites.<sup>36</sup>

An important function of the federal district may therefore be the development of macro-regional integration *within* Russia, which of course need not be viewed as exclusive of international macro-regional cooperation, most notably with the EU. In fact, one of the three success criteria elaborated in the Doctrine for the Federal District consists precisely in *connecting* the macro-regional development programme to the ‘European scale’: “In case the formation of the Northwest macroregion is a success, it will fulfil the threefold task: it will set the *new benchmark of the country’s development* in general; it will *make Russia’s strategic projects consistent with the European scale*; and, finally, it will trigger the *development of the new management system*, which is so crucial for further strategic growth of Russia.”<sup>37</sup>

Thus, contrary to what the critical rhetoric towards Russia’s present state of integration into the new international environment may suggest, the Doctrine is by no means a conservative manifesto of whatever may be meant by ‘anti-Westernism’. On the contrary, within the Russian political discourse, the text of the Doctrine is squarely opposed to the restorationist policy course, emphasising, in the case of the Northwest, the ‘re-establishment’ of Soviet-era industrial links. “It is obvious, that there is little sense to view this structural adjustment as a *revival* of outdated economic and social bodies. There is neither time, nor resources to carry out this reconstruction project. In the present-day reality and new conditions, the *system of the*

<sup>34</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Shedrovitsky et al 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis added.

*previous epoch would be politically and economically unsound.* Therefore, it is important to take decisive actions and, considering new principles of the country's and regional development, it is vital to *mould the fundamentally new managerial and industrial network.*"<sup>38</sup>

Of the seven principles that the Doctrine defines for the project of assembling the Northwest we are particularly interested in the "principle of the projects' transnational essence", "according to which a project's goals should not be restricted to administrative borders of a single region. Figuratively speaking, *regional limits are in the eye of the beholder, so to speak.* Consequently, the Northwest's borders may be stretched to where we perceive them to be or, *in case we remain passive on this issue, the Northwest borders may be outlined by the European communities instead.*"<sup>39</sup> This statement demonstrates most starkly the 'constructivist' episteme deployed by the authors of the doctrine: the very boundaries of the macro-region are deemed to be contingent upon strategic policy planning and not predetermined by anterior administrative distinctions or quasi-natural determinants. The emergent Northwest macro-region is thus cast as a space of *infinite political possibility*, a 'clean slate' on which the new positivity of order may be inscribed.<sup>40</sup> From this perspective it appears possible to fully appreciate the persistent recourse of the Doctrine to the demand for active political construction: foregoing this possibility merely entails the subjection to the externally designed project of moulding the Russian Northwestern space in accordance with specific interests. Secondly, this epistemic point of departure also explains the SDC's insistent attempts to introduce a whole new vocabulary, centred on contemporary geoeconomics and the discourses of 'knowledge society' and 'innovational economy', and the stubborn resistance to the requests to adapting the doctrine's terminology to the more conventional policy discourses of the regional elites. With an almost Foucauldian nominalism, Shedrovitsky notes that "*power consists in naming things and bringing certain processes into existence through the act of naming, through pointing to problems*".<sup>41</sup> Thus, the very introduction of such discursive objects as 'strategic planning',

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added. The other key principles include: consistent innovative approach, synergy, realistic assessment of projects, mutual adjustment of projects, mobility and the adequate response of the projects to global challenges.

<sup>40</sup> See Prozorov 2004, chapter 4 for the discussion of the deployment of the figure of the 'clean slate' and the constructivist episteme in the discourse of the Putin presidency.

<sup>41</sup> Shedrovitsky et al 2001. Emphasis added.

‘macro-regionalism’, ‘new assembly’, etc. within the field of political discourse in the Northwest is conceived of as a constitutive political act.<sup>42</sup>

Let us now address the positive ‘mega-projects’ envisioned in the ‘assembly of the Northwest’, particularly in their relation to EU activities in the area. It is noteworthy that ‘megaproject Kaliningrad’ is placed first on the SDC’s list of seven macro-regional projects, which both points to the relevance of the Kaliningrad question at the time of the preparation of the Doctrine<sup>43</sup> (2001-2002) and locates this question in a wider macro-regional framework, beyond the boundaries of the specific subject of the Russian Federation.

The megaproject Kaliningrad is of paramount importance for Russia to establish its independent stance within the framework of the international integration. Kaliningrad region proves to be the fulcrum point for relationship building between Russia and Europe. The principle of complementary efficiency is a key one in this project’s development; this principle assumes that actions, taken by the regions, the federal centre, public and private companies, should conform to common logics. This conformity is a critical condition to make Russia’s strategic project equal to those, offered by the European Union.<sup>44</sup>

This statement provides us with two insights for the understanding of the position of the Doctrine on the Kaliningrad question. Firstly, the text prioritises Russia’s *independent* stance *within* international integration and casts Kaliningrad as a platform for developing new modalities of relations with the enlarged EU. This claim should not be equated with the more defensive stance that conceives of Kaliningrad as the ‘bastion’ of Russian statehood in an unfriendly environment and seeks merely to retain the close link between the oblast and mainland Russia to prevent the emergence of separatist tendencies in the area. What is at stake is rather maintaining Russian political subjectivity as such in the situation when the region risks becoming the passive object of EU policies.

<sup>42</sup> See Makarychev 2003 for the ‘cognitive-constructivist’ analysis of the effects of Russian think tank activity. See also Kosolapov 2003, Zagorsky 2003.

<sup>43</sup> At a press conference associated with the publication of the Doctrine, Shedrovitsky argued that the SDC was one of the first policy think tanks to seriously address the issue of Kaliningrad two years prior to its emergence as a divisive issue in EU-Russian relations. See Shedrovitsky et al 2001. See also Shedrovitsky 2001.

<sup>44</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis added.

Secondly and relatedly, the text problematises the present efforts at strategic policy planning in the Oblast' that is not complementary with the federal reform designs and is limited in scope, focusing on the local level. The object of criticism is not the independent initiative of the local administration, if only because the plan in question has "been more or less definitely outlined by the Government of the Russian Federation"<sup>45</sup>. Instead, as remarked previously, what is problematised is the lack of the *macro-regional contextualisation* of Kaliningrad, which isolates it as a special case and makes meaningless the concept of developing Kaliningrad as a pilot project of EU-Russian relations (by definition, a pilot project is generalisable and replicable in other settings, while the focus on Kaliningrad's exceptional status points to the non-applicability of the solutions, devised for this region, for other territories).

The non-productive clash of geographical, administrative, and corporate interests results in failures of several projects of regional development. Meanwhile, the strategy of relationship building with Kaliningrad region, which is now underway in the European Union Committee, is a consolidated plan, which takes into account interests and multi-level connections of both the EU members and the Russian Federation. Russia, in its turn, can only offer a locally bounded project (either competing with the one by the EU or supplementary), restricted to interests of Kaliningrad region. Therefore, short-, medium-, and long-term goals of both Russia and Kaliningrad region seriously lack internal conformity, especially against the backdrop of the new international environment.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the principle of complementary efficiency as conceived by the Doctrine requires the achievement of synergetic effects between local, regional and federal-level policy planning as well as the horizontal interaction between the regions. Interestingly, the situation is problematised through the contrast with the EU strategies, which are held as exemplary in integrating multiple levels and connections in its relations with the Oblast'. The approach of the Doctrine is thus marked not by a zero-sum game antagonistic relation to the EU policies concerning Kaliningrad but with the demand for what I have previously referred to as

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis added.

‘strategic intersubjectivity’<sup>47</sup>, the ‘subject-subject’ relationship of equality between Russia and the EU as agents of strategic policy-making rather than a ‘subject-object’ relationship implicitly at work in EU’s programmes in relation to Russia, particularly those of technical assistance. Similarly, the target of critique in the Doctrine’s discourse regarding Kaliningrad appears to be not the EU (which is given a curiously positive assessment of its own strategic planning endeavours), but the regional, and to some extent, federal authorities, lacking the relevant skills in strategic management.

This problematic connects with the other key ‘megaprojects’, proposed in the doctrine.<sup>48</sup> The task of “exploration and development of the Russian North” is deemed challenging precisely due to the current absence of a “conscious stance with serious consideration of global economy and policy” necessary to move beyond the current patterns of infra-structural and economic activities. The overall macro-regional strategy proposed in the doctrine that consists in developing the Northwest as an *innovational economy* is similarly made dependent on the development of a new system of ‘managerial education’:

To establish and foster institutional infrastructure of innovative economy is the fourth priority of the Northwest development. The importance of this infrastructure is conditioned by the fact that it is commissioned to ensure the principle of consistent innovative approach toward the existing social and industrial system. [...] The priority trend is to contribute to increasing market share of commodities and services, produced in innovative and hi-tech sectors; to high capitalization of Russian advanced researches; to Russia’s participation in global hi-tech projects; as originator of new ideas and technologies. These goals cannot possibly be attained unless the system of managerial education is fundamentally revised and venture and innovative

<sup>47</sup> Prozorov 2004a. Arguably, it is the very demand for intersubjectivity that accounts for the increased scepticism about the possibility and desirability of Russia’s accession to the EU and the contrasting interest in the possibility of an ambitious association agreement which would retain Russia’s sovereign autonomy in relation to the EU legal and normative principles. See e.g. Gutnik 2003, Afontsev 2003, Romanova 2003 for the recent discussion of such possibilities. The need for a new Association Agreement is the key point of departure of the 2003 Report by “Russia in the United Europe” committee, which comprises esteemed politicians and analysts of liberal persuasion. See “Russia and the European Union: Options for Deepening Strategic Partnership”.

<sup>48</sup> The full list of ‘mega-projects’ is as follows: Kaliningrad, Exploration and Development of the Russian north, Energy Use and Energy Savings, Innovative Economy, Forestry Development, Multicultural Communication, Human Resources. In our discussion we shall focus on those projects, which have a manifest international dimension and connect with EU programmes in Russia. Questions of economic cooperation or cooperation in the energy sphere are beyond the scope of this paper.

industries are developed. New institutions particularly aimed at development of innovative economy are summoned to ensure “the paradigm shift” in almost all political, economic, social, and cultural activities.<sup>49</sup>

It is notable that it was the SDC team and particularly Shedrovitsky himself that first launched and marketed the very idea of an ‘innovational development’ which along with such discourses as ‘learning society’ and ‘knowledge-based economy’, remains a novelty in Russia on the level of policy design. As we shall discuss in detail below, the responses to the Doctrine draft from regional politicians and academics also demonstrate the almost impenetrable character of the Doctrine’s conceptual apparatus to the more ‘pragmatically’ or rather ‘down-to-earth’ oriented regional policy designers. In a way, therefore, the centre casts itself as a subject capable of bringing about the desired ‘paradigm shift’, which of course is preconditioned by the initiation into the very language of the innovational paradigm, resisted by current local and regional elites.<sup>50</sup> The December 2003 interview with Shedrovitsky elaborates on this problematic of discursive transformation as the condition of possibility of technological innovations. According to Shedrovitsky, “innovations always come in a package that includes both technical and cultural transformations. [...] In the Northwest we still remain in the situation, when a lion’s share of actual changes lies in sociocultural and governmental dimensions. And only insofar as the latter take place, the demand is formed for technical decisions.”<sup>51</sup>

The focus on sociocultural change also concerns two of the seven mega-projects that the Doctrine stipulates. The first is ‘human resource development’, focusing on “enhancement of people’s mobility and the adjustment to contemporary technologies and socio-cultural programs”<sup>52</sup> The international dimension is posited as crucial to this process, as the Doctrine emphasises the need for establishing a *network structure of lifelong education* that transcends state borders and offers conditions for the achievement of synergies between the efforts of different parties:

<sup>49</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> See Shedrovitsky 2003b.

<sup>51</sup> Shedrovitsky 2003b.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. See Shedrovitsky 2003a for the more elaborate argument about the centrality of mobility as the key individual skill in the conditions of globalisation.



The North West of Russia has a well-established reputation of the intellectual platform, which potentials can surely fit both Russian and European processes – on conditions that the effect of synergy is consistently preserved. This effect expresses itself in joint actions, aimed at expanding educational, cultural, and information links, existing among people, who live in the North West. The strategic perspective of this project is to create large network universities with the focus on management and scientific research, networks of schools, colleges, educational consultancies, research centres, and humanitarian programs. There is no doubt, that these initiatives will be able to spur buoyant professional activities among diverse social, cultural, and ethnic communities.<sup>53</sup>

The related mega-project concerns ‘promoting multicultural communication’. The text is explicit the noting the lack of coincidence between the administrative-territorial division in the area and the existing cultural-historical entities and offers transnational cooperation as more than a strategy of economic development, but rather as a humanitarian or cultural governmental technology.<sup>54</sup>

Being a significant part of the northern European territory, the Northwest region of Russia either includes or is bordered by the following large cultural entities – Ugro-Finnish, Slavonic, and Baltic. It is worth noting that the administrative and political division of the North West does not always coincide with cultural and historic areas and their impact on up-to-day social and political processes. In this case the principle of transnational cooperation acquires not only economic, but distinct humanitarian meaning, especially given goals of Russia’s cultural policy and the problem of regional self-identity. In this vein of thoughts, the tourism industry appears the most consistent problem-solving technology, which takes into account economic, humanitarian, and lifestyle components and is, therefore, able to ensure cultural cooperation.<sup>55</sup>

The connection of these ‘mega-projects’ with EU policy initiatives in the area (both Tacis and, more generally, the NDI) is evident, particularly in the emphasis on human resources, training and education, the focus on administrative and managerial reforms, the stimulation of cross-

<sup>53</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis added.

<sup>54</sup> The term ‘humanitarian technologies’, which resonates with the Foucauldian governmentality approach, is a staple of Shedrovitsky’s approach and central to his work in cultural studies and philosophy of education. For the examples of Shedrovitsky’s more academic publications see <http://www.shkp.ru/pg>.

<sup>55</sup> Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia. (WWW-document.) Emphasis added.

border cooperation as a cultural policy strategy, etc.<sup>56</sup> The overall approach of the Doctrine, which for all its valorisation of active governmental intervention is an instance of an adaptive strategy in relation to the ‘challenge of globalisation’, is similarly in line with the EU vision of Russia. Yet, what is conspicuous by its absence in the text is any reference to the ‘promotion of democracy’ that the EU has increasingly prioritised in relation to Russia<sup>57</sup> and any indication of Russia’s deficiency in this regard, which could even conceivably require EU interventions in the matter. Integration into Europe is similarly not advanced as Russia’s *unilateral* adoption of EU practices in the political, socioeconomic or cultural spheres. Instead, there is an emphasis on joint *inter-subjective* efforts of Russia and the EU in the Northwestern space that takes into account the changing character of borders:

We need to design in cooperation with the Europeans common standards of activities in the development of territories, ecological and humanitarian spheres that would allow to integrate our infrastructure with the European one. For instance, the conflict that emerged in Kaliningrad in relation to transit and the movement of people is a challenge to the issue of borders. It is evident that the border becomes more of a membrane rather than a barrier and this requires the change in formats and functions of the state authorities and legal regimes.<sup>58</sup>

Evidently, the emphasis on joint policy design in macro-regional development is conditioned by the absence of problematisation of Russia’s internal socio-political configuration as liable to EU policy interventions in the direction of ‘democratisation’. The SDC discourse indeed lacks any notion of a ‘threshold of political subjectivity’ that Russia is required to cross in order to

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Tacis Indicative Programme. Russian Federation. 2000-2003. (WWW-document.), the Second Northern Dimension Action Plan. (WWW-document.)

<sup>57</sup> See Tacis Indicative Programme. Russian Federation. 2000-2003. (WWW-document.), Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006. Indicative Action Programme 2002-2003. Russian Federation (WWW-document.), National Indicative Programme 2004-2006. Russian Federation. (WWW-document.) The working paper on the reform of EU Tacis not the new Neighbourhood policy instrument also emphasises the aspect of democracy promotion and the development of civil society in contrast to the Central Asian countries, in relation to which poverty relief remains a top priority. See Towards a New Concept and Regulation for the Tacis programme. (WWW-document.)

<sup>58</sup> Shedrovitsky 2003b. Emphasis added.

qualify as the EU's equal partner in macro-regional cooperation.<sup>59</sup> In other words, in this discourse cooperation with the EU in the Northwestern macro-region does not require the accompanying EU efforts at 'promotion of democracy and the development of civil society' in Russia, which in fact constitutes the primary objective of EU policies such as Tacis and broader initiatives such as Wider Europe.<sup>60</sup> Yet, as marked above, the wariness of Russia's political subjection to EU principles does not, in the specific context of strategic planning in the Russian Northwest, entail the *incompatibility* of actual development projects. Clearly, the priority of human resource development in accordance with the idea of 'innovational economy' accords with the increased emphasis of EU Tacis on the reform of public administration and managerial practices, as well as the overall 'pedagogical' orientation of the programme. Similarly, the focus on the development of multicultural networks connects with the very essence of such programmes as Tacis CBC and the Neighbourhood instrument.

Thus, we cannot observe the existence of *substantive conflict issues* in the discursive interface of the two macro-regional doctrines. The only grievances in this regard, not frequently highlighted in the SDC discourse, concern the low efficiency and thematic one-sidedness of the existing programmes of cooperation, which, according to Yuri Perelygin, may well be considered efficient by EU donors but have not produced coherent policy effects in the regions of the District and have tended to involve Russian experts on less than beneficial terms of apprenticeship.<sup>61</sup> Crucially, the response envisioned by Perelygin consists not in the abandonment of these programmes or the conception of the SDC as a 'zero-sum' alternative to them, but rather in raising the strategic planning capacity in the district to the level of the EU expertise in the field to enable proper partnership in policy design and implementation: "We need to understand what kind of work we need to undertake - *not them* [EU], *but us* – to become compatible with them in terms of expert centres, the studies of the problems, etc. Maybe then it will turn out that we can think of something jointly. *In the meantime, we hand over*

<sup>59</sup> This theme is a key feature of the discourse of the analysts close to the Putin presidency, particularly Gleb Pavlovsky (2000, 2001), who interprets the Putin project as the actualisation of Russia's formerly nominal sovereignty that constitutes as it were the end of the 'transitional period' in Russian postcommunism, after which the non-identity of post-communist Russia, defined negatively in terms of the order it left behind, is supplanted by the positivity of Russia proper. See Prozorov 2004, pp. 389-413 for the more detailed discussion of this theme.

<sup>60</sup> See particularly Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours. (WWW-document.)

<sup>61</sup> Perelygin et al 2002.

*the 'thinking part' to them and get built-in in their projects.*"<sup>62</sup> A similar argument has been advanced in the nationwide context by Marina Strezhneva, who claims that the enhanced role of expertise and policy advice in the EU 'network governance' requires a corresponding adaptation of Russian practices of policy-design to enable complementarity of strategic projects in the aspect of the structure and process of the articulation of policy discourse.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the very assertion of SDC as a subject of discursive articulation of the macro-regional strategy is in part a means of *adaptation* to the EU policy process.

At the same time, the demand for strategic intersubjectivity and the problematisation of the objectification of the Northwestern region as a domain of EU policies does exemplify a *conflictual disposition*, which unfolds on the level of *identity* rather than policy. What is at stake is the question of recognition of Russia as a 'sovereign equal' to the EU in the macro-regional context, the 'transition' from a situation of apprenticeship of Russia as dependent on technical assistance in political and socioeconomic reform to the emergence sovereign subject of strategic development in the Russian Northwest that is capable of acting as the counterpart of the EU in the transboundary macro-regional projects such as the Northern Dimension. The conflictual disposition that problematises *asymmetry* in intersubjective interactions is thus in the last instance an *ethical* issue of recognition rather than a matter of policy divergence<sup>64</sup>, which in the particular case at hand is hardly noticeable, the SDC-NW discourse being quintessentially liberal-reformist (in line with the general affiliation of the federal Strategic Designs Centre).

One of the interpretations of this new ethical problematic may be found in the present political and socioeconomic stabilisation and consolidation in Russia, which was particularly enhanced in the 2003-2004 electoral cycle. As the socioeconomic situation in the country is stabilising and the political regime consolidating, one may anticipate a more assertive orientation in Russian foreign policy. While there is a general consensus about the benefits of cooperation with the EU, the specific *model* of EU-Russian relations is a more contentious matter, which is reflected in the official declarations and the practical consensus among analysts on the need to review the existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.<sup>65</sup> "The most significant among these fundamental [EU-Russian] disagreements, which entail

<sup>62</sup> Perelygin et al 2002. Emphasis added.

<sup>63</sup> See Strezhneva 2003.

<sup>64</sup> See Bordachev 2003a for the discussion of Russia's reception of the EU as a 'civilian power' in relation to the Russian reaffirmation of sovereignty.

<sup>65</sup> See Bordachev 2003b.

frustration in many practical aspects of cooperation, is the difference between Russia's self-evaluation and the image of Russia widespread among the EU officials. *The European Union regards Russia primarily as an object of policy, not as a subject.*"<sup>66</sup> As a state that is not even potentially viewed in terms of prospective EU membership, Russia is only to be expected to 'take exception' from externally designed rules and principles and demand the recognition of its autonomous voice and legitimate interests in the region. "The fact that Russia tries to have its norms coincide with EU norms does not mean that it will automatically abide by the *norms that have been designed without its participation.*"<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, the wariness of subjection to external norms is by no means restricted to conservative or 'nationalist' discourses. On the contrary, it is precisely the liberal political forces, for which Russia's 'European identity' is axiomatic, that are aggravated and weakened domestically by the lack of the EU's recognition of this identity, while for the more conservative orientations it merely serves to confirm Russia's 'otherness' in relation to Europe and strengthen the case for alternative avenues of foreign policy. A number of analysts of liberal persuasion, as well as the politicians on the centre-right, have recently voiced strong scepticism about the ultimate goals of Russia's cooperation with the EU and urged to put the question of potential EU membership aside once and for all.<sup>68</sup> Instead of *being integrated* into the EU, leading liberal reformers, such as Anatoly Chubais, have posed the task of actively *integrating* the post-Soviet space into what became controversially termed a 'liberal empire' that could act as an *equal partner* of the EU rather than an object of EU policies.<sup>69</sup> In all these discourses it is precisely the dimension of active political subjectivity and autonomous strategic vision that we have accentuated as the key feature of the Doctrine of the Development of the Northwest of Russia that is prioritised.

If subjected to practical implementation, the SDC-NW's Doctrine may radically reorient EU-Russian regional cooperation away from largely tactical, problem-solving, peripheral projects

<sup>66</sup> Kaveshnikov and Potemkina 2003, p. 336. A similar argument is advanced in Cronberg 2003a, pp. 286-287.

<sup>67</sup> Khudolei 2003, p. 31. Emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Baunov 2003, Remizov 2003. In contrast to the more conventional opposition to Russia's EU membership from geopolitical and other 'multipolarity-oriented' discourses, the liberal opposition to the EU membership proceeds from the unwillingness to abide by the detailed prescriptions of the *acquis communautaire*, particularly insofar as the second round of liberal reforms in the Putin presidency has increased the liberal forces' sense of self-certitude and thus makes integration into European structures less important politically and symbolically than in the beginning of the 1990s.

<sup>69</sup> See Chubais 2003. See also Shedrovitsky 2003c, Kaveshnikov and Potemkina 2003.

undertaken on EU terms and on the basis of the EU's interest in minimising the 'soft security' threats to the inclusion of the international dimension into the overall macro-regional development project so that 'international regionalisation' complements, rather than substitutes for, the inter-regional integration *within* Russia.<sup>70</sup> One may say that in this manner EU-Russian regional cooperation will be *strategically integrated* into the Russian postcommunist reform programme, elaborated at the federal level but concretised and diversified on the macro-regional (and, in the process of implementation, the local) level.<sup>71</sup>

There remains a question of whether the EU is willing and capable of a similarly innovative response to this initiative (and hence the reconstruction of the regional aspect of the present frameworks of cooperation with Russia). The assertive tone of the Doctrine and its opposition to the passive role of the Northwest as the object of external development strategies and the recipient of European technological and policy innovations should not obscure the fact that this text exemplifies one of the first consistent and internally coherent programmes of Russian integration into the European space. According to Andrey Makarychev, the SDC-NW exemplifies one of the rare "voices of postmodernism" in the Russian think tank discourse, which is all the more remarkable considering its original connections with the first presidential representative to the region, Victor Cherkesov, frequently demonised in the media due to his background in security services.<sup>72</sup> Whatever postmodernism may mean in this context, it is undeniable that the discursive structure of the Doctrine that we have elucidated above corresponds most to the contemporary European discourses on globalisation and regionalisation, which means the existence of a ready-made *discursive space* for the EU-Russian interface and the *connective impact* of the EU<sup>73</sup> on the transformation in Russian border regions. In the case of the interface of this Doctrine with EU policies in the Northern Dimension, the Northwestern Federal District may become the proper 'pilot project' (i.e. an experiment with potentially generalisable results) for EU-Russian relations, instead of Kaliningrad, which as an

<sup>70</sup> The example of the SDC Doctrine supports the thesis in Joenniemi 2003b that, contrary to the conventional view, it is Russia rather than the EU that has been at the forefront of policy innovations (at least on the level of a 'grand vision'), while the EU's relations with Russia have been characterised by the wariness of experimentation and the affirmation of the immutability of EU principles and practices. The nature of EU common foreign and security policy as based on the lowest common denominator of the variable interests of the member states (See Haukkala 2000, 2003) may account for the risk-averse and moderate orientation of EU policies with regard to Russia.

<sup>71</sup> See Anders 2003, Cronberg 2003a, Kaveshnikov and Potemkina 2003 for a similar argument.

<sup>72</sup> See Makarychev 2002, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> See Stetter, Diez and Albert 2003.

exceptional case is not fit for the pilot status by definition.<sup>74</sup> Such a project, grounded in the interface of strategic visions, could endow with concrete content the principles of “complementarity, subsidiarity and synergy”, proclaimed in the Second Northern Dimension Action Plan,<sup>75</sup> and substantialise the long-term project of cooperation, stipulated in the EU initiative of the ‘Wider Europe’.<sup>76</sup>

As the prospect of Russia’s EU membership is increasingly perceived even by the liberal political forces as both unlikely and ultimately unattractive, and Russia’s foreign policy becomes more assertive due to the political stabilisation and consolidation in the Putin presidency, it appears unrealistic to anticipate Russia to embark (even in a selective and lukewarm manner) on the passive course of approximating its legislation and practices to the EU *acquis communautaire*. On the other hand, the very overcoming of the protracted political and socioeconomic crisis of the 1990s enhances the potential for EU-Russian cooperation to be more than ‘crisis management’ or a ‘firefighting’ *response* to ‘new security threats’. The innovative potential of EU-Russian relations, particularly in the regional aspect, appears to depend on the EU’s willingness to recognise Russia as a legitimately active *subject* rather than a passive object of the implementation of a Common Strategy. One of the sites in which such recognition may be offered without compromising any of the EU interests is precisely the Northwestern Federal District as a new institutional entity and a political subject. One of the concrete ways of such an intersubjective interface is the turn to the process of designing joint projects in the area through the *coordination of the existing strategic plans* of Russia and the EU, the *identification of areas of common interest* and compatible approaches and the combination of the two parties’ projects into a *transboundary macroregional programme*.<sup>77</sup> For all its modesty as based on the principle of the ‘lowest common denominator’, this strategy in fact exemplifies a feasible modality of cooperation in the situation, when no institutional integration between EU and Russia is envisioned, yet the existing modalities of cooperation are widely perceived as belonging to the transitional stage in Russian postcommunism and thus outdated both in

<sup>74</sup> This is also the argument of Artobolevsky 2003, pp. 23-26. Somewhat paradoxically, within the Russian discourse we have witnessed the unlikely coexistence of the assertion of the exceptionality and uniqueness of the case of Kaliningrad and the proposal to endow Kaliningrad with the status of the pilot region, which must logically presuppose a degree of generalisability of the piloted solutions for other subjects of the Federation.

<sup>75</sup> The Second Northern Dimension Action Plan, p. 2. (WWW-document.)

<sup>76</sup> See Wider Europe: Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours. (WWW-document.)

<sup>77</sup> See Anders 2003 for a similar argument that problematises the absence of a joint EU-Russian strategy of regional cooperation that prevents the emergence of transboundary sites of ‘regional governance’.

terms of substance and in terms of Russia's autonomy in policy design. Similar proposals have in fact been repeatedly advanced on the regional level. For instance, in the 2000 Interview the Minister of Foreign Relations of the Republic of Karelia, Valery Shlyamin, noted that "we have insistently raised the question of *harmonising EU programmes with Russian interests*, our own plans, since we [the Republic] have ourselves designed a long-term programme of the socioeconomic development of the region until 2010, in which we clearly state our objectives in the spheres of the economy, environment, education, health care, international tourism and culture."<sup>78</sup> The demand for strategic intersubjectivity, in which EU strategies would be integrated with domestic reform visions, is thus articulated on both regional and macro-regional levels. One of the signs of the change of the EU's stance vis-à-vis federal-level Russian reforms is the articulation of the priorities of EU Tacis with the reform programme of the Putin presidency in 2001-2002, when the main coordinating function of the operation of the programme was bestowed on the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, which is also responsible for strategic reform design, Minister Gref simultaneously occupying the Chair of the Board of the federal SDC. The latest Tacis Indicative Programmes also explicitly link the change in priorities with the need to articulate the operation of the programme with the reforms undertaken by the Russian government and thus exemplify the 'intersubjective connection' of reform designs, proposed by SDC-NW.<sup>79</sup> Insofar as the federal policy course remains unchanged in the second term of the Putin presidency, it appears fully possible to extend this principle of cooperation, based on the recognition of the sovereign autonomy of both parties, into the domain of (macro-)regional cooperation. In the more general sense, one is tempted to argue that the overly enthusiastic dispensation with the principle of sovereign statehood in the 'twin' discourses of globalisation and regionalisation obscures the fact that EU-Russian relations remain, for better or worse, *international*, which does not in any way exclude the development of cooperative arrangements on various levels, as long as the space of these relations remains, as it ironically has been in the classical realist political ontology, a 'pluriverse' of intersubjectivity.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Shlyamin 2000. Emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> See National Indicative Programme 2004-2006 (WWW-document.) and Tacis Indicative Programme. Russian Federation. 2000-2003. (WWW-document.)

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Schmitt 1976, pp. 44-45, 67-79. See also Rasch 2000.



## **The Northwestern Macro-Region in the Contemporary Political Context: The Effects of the SDC Discourse and the Prospects of Macro-Regionalism**

The final question arises in relation to the possibilities of the implementation of the Doctrine and more generally to the potential of the Federal Districts to fulfil their functions as centres of intra-federal regional integration. Particularly in the light of the evidence of the continued domination of regional political elites, which we discussed in the beginning of this paper, one may choose to remain sceptical about the capacity of the Federal District to assume its role of the institutional structure that ‘gathers together’ or ‘re-assembles’ the fragmented Northwestern space.

Indeed, the initial response of both regional policy-makers and researchers previously involved in policy design to the innovative terminology of the Doctrine has been at best ambivalent. On the one hand, the work of the Centre has been widely reported in federal media (e.g. such quality newspapers as *Izvestia*, *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*, *Sobesednik*, etc.) and attracted strong local interest. On the other hand, the response of local analysts to the activities of the SDC and the content of the Doctrine has been far from uniformly positive. For instance, the leading political analyst in the Republic of Karelia Anatoly Tsygankov shares the point of departure of the SDC in the need for macro-regional integration but disagrees sharply with the content of the Doctrine and the manner of its design.

We have no perception of being a single country with common geopolitical interests and consequently common threats. [...] Therefore, the goal of the politicians who organised the work of the CSR is so useful. We need to rise above everyday concerns and look into the future. Either we are inscribed into the plans of Western Europe and behave in accordance with the interests of these countries or we demand the recognition of our interests in the European division of labour. We can no longer be a mute state entity that no one takes into account. Hence the necessity of the coordination of life in the broadest sense in the whole of Northwest Russia.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Tsygankov 2001. Emphasis added.

At the same time, Tsygankov notes that Karelia as a border region does not necessarily gain many benefits from the interregional integration; on the contrary, “if Karelia accepts this philosophy [of macro-regionalism], we may definitely anticipate serious turmoil at least in the system of management.”<sup>82</sup> Tsygankov’s particular concern is the fate of Euregio Karelia as a form of transboundary regional integration with Finland in the EU framework, which in his opinion might clash with the overall interests of the Northwestern macro-region and create the impression of Karelia’s ‘drifting apart’ from other regions in the district in an exclusive programme of cross-border cooperation with Finland.<sup>83</sup>

However, Tsygankov’s criticism is not restricted to these concerns and also targets the SDC activities as such. Referring to the SDC team as ‘intellectual colonisers’, Tsygankov claims that the attention of local decision-makers to its activities (illustrated e.g. by opening speech of Head of the Republic of Karelia Sergei Katanandov at the SDC seminar on the preparation of the Doctrine) owes far less to the “epic outburst of illusions” that the Doctrine allegedly consists in, but rather to the implicit political connections of the Doctrine’s designers on the federal level.<sup>84</sup> The more substantive criticism concerns the Doctrine’s emphasis on the creation of a single economic space in the macro-region, which, according to Tsygankov, would contradict the Republic’s traditional policy of preferential treatment of local business and a ‘closed doors’ stance towards major Russian corporations. The influx of these companies (many of which have sponsored the research activities of the SDC) into Karelia is, according to Tsygankov, likely to result in the drastic increase of their influence in Karelian politics, with unpredictable consequences.<sup>85</sup> Similar criticism is advanced by another Karelian analyst, Alexei Ukkone, who otherwise takes a more positive stance towards the SDC and the compatibility of its designs with the Karelian interests. Ukkone notes that Karelia became the first region of the Federal District to launch a wide social discussion of the Doctrine, which revealed its similarities with the Karelian government’s recent Conception of the Development of the Republic.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, he claims that the ‘threats’ to the Republic do not consist as much in its inclusion into Northern European designs on less than beneficial

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> One might note that these fears have neither materialised nor appear to be founded insofar as we take into consideration the Doctrine’s emphasis on cross-border multicultural networks, which the Euregio exemplifies. Tsygankov’s concern may be a reflection of the excessively high expectations of the Euregio from the Karelian side. See also Ukkone 2001b. For the discussion of Euregio Karelia see Prozorov 2004a.

<sup>84</sup> Tsygankov 2001.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> See the full text of the Conception at <http://www.gov.karelia.ru/gov/Leader/Document/concep.html>.

terms, as in the ‘colonisation’ of Karelia by nationwide business groups whose commitment to local interests and reform priorities need not necessarily be any greater than that of Karelia’s European partners.<sup>87</sup> To counter that threat, Ukkone presents as the necessary condition for macro-regional integration the active involvement of civil society actors in designing and implementing reforms. Ukkone also criticises the overall economy-centric tone of the doctrine, which ignores the social consequences of the transformation it advocates. For instance, the Doctrine’s discussion of the human development ‘mega-project’ is restricted to the characteristically neoliberal call for ‘lifelong learning’ for the purposes of the enhancement of individual mobility and flexibility as central skills for adapting to the ‘challenge of globalisation’.

Despite the indisputability of the thesis that a person is most mobile in the process of education, educational projects, however wide in scope, are insufficient. [...] the destruction of traditional forms of economic activity leads to the crisis of lifestyle and the familiar ethno-cultural environment. How is the population of the Northwest to adapt to the new realities? And what must the state do in this regard? These questions are answered neither by the creators of the Doctrine nor by the Karelian experts entrusted with the inscription of the republic into the district strategy.<sup>88</sup>

The similarly ambivalent reception of the SDC doctrine characterises local and regional authorities. For instance, the former Minister of Economic Development of the Republic of Karelia Valery Shlyamin considers macro-regional integration to be central to the successful response to future challenges in the north of Europe and singles out SDC-NW as a key actor in the process:

The Northwest requires a thoughtful complex approach to itself as a common economic space. Unfortunately for a long time such an approach was lacking, as every subregion of the Northwest of the Russian Federation designed the strategy of its development autonomously, which did not give the Northwest proper investment attractiveness. In 2000, after the

<sup>87</sup> One may venture that this type of ‘protectionist’ argument against macro-regional integration, which is manifestly at odds with the very idea of a common economic space within the Russian Federation, serves as the ultimate vindication of the ‘Putinian’ problematisation of the vertical displacement of statehood and the formation of federal districts as the solution to that problem. In this sense, the local criticism of SDC appears perfectly correct, since the breakdown of regional administrative barriers to economic activity is precisely what the federal districts are meant to achieve.

<sup>88</sup> Ukkone 2001a.

establishment of federal districts, the situation changed for the better. Finally, the state has posed the task of designing a strategy of the development of federal districts, [...] thus reviving the very concept of strategic planning.<sup>89</sup>

The federal district must undoubtedly become a common economic space, literally penetrated throughout by inter-regional infrastructural projects. Thus, the efforts of the Strategic Designs Centre 'North-West' in developing a strategy of the development of our macro-region are extremely valuable. [...] Only in this manner is it possible to achieve organic development of the whole space of the Northwest, make it attractive for investment and create preconditions for an adequate response to the Northern Dimension of the European Union.<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, while the SDC team has noted in its press releases that the very attention of the regional media to the Centre's activities served to thoroughly transform the public attitude to the concept of 'strategic planning' (allegedly discredited since the late 1980s' disavowal of 'planned economy') during the last two years, it also noted the difficulty of moving beyond mere 'agenda-setting' to actually involving regional administrations in the establishment of new institutions of regional development. Thus, while the concept of 'strategic planning' became popularised with the help of the SDC, the actual regional activities in this direction tended to unfold in traditional administrative settings, i.e. within the boundaries of particular subjects of the federation. Petr Shedrovitsky illustrated this problem with the example of the 2001 Strategy of the Development of Murmansk Oblast', prepared in the format similar to the SDC Doctrine and substantively close to it in the focus on innovations, and yet lacking almost any macro-regional dimension or even the discussion of the relation of the Strategy to the policies of neighbouring regions.<sup>91</sup> Another reported weakness of the SDC is the allegedly greater sympathy of regional political and administrative elites to the strategic policy documents prepared by the Expert Council for Economic Development and Investment (ECEDI), the expert institution more closely linked with the

<sup>89</sup> Shlyamin 2001b. Emphasis added. See also Ukkone 2001c.

<sup>90</sup> Shlyamin 2001a. Emphasis added.

<sup>91</sup> See Shedrovitsky et al 2001.

administration of the presidential representative in the district.<sup>92</sup> While it would be incorrect to suggest that the documents in question are incompatible (both share a focus on interregional integration and innovational strategies), the ECEDI Strategy<sup>93</sup> represents a more conventional programme of governmental activities for the midterm perspective and lacks the discursive innovations and the constructivist tone that characterise the text of the SDC Doctrine. “After the scientific and abstruse formulations of the strategists of the SDC, calling us forth into the mist of ‘innovational development’ and frightening us with the erosion of administrative borders in the context of globalisation, the governors heard from the SDC’s ‘competitor’ what they longed to hear: the old, electorally tested lexicon of the socially-oriented economy.”<sup>94</sup> Another reason for the governors’ more enthusiastic response to the ECEDI document is its avoidance of ambitious goals to recast the Federal District as anything more than an extension of the federal centre in the ‘vertical of power’.<sup>95</sup>

Although Shedrovitsky has attempted to dismiss the shift of regional governments to the more conventional discursive site by claiming that their “loss of interest is compensated by the increase of the interest of the federal centre in our activities”<sup>96</sup>, it is evident that the SDC has so far failed to become the coordinating centre of authoritative policy design. One may venture that the frequent personnel changes in the Federal District, which had a succession of three presidential representatives during Putin’s first presidential term, contributed to the decline in the political clout of the district administration. From 2002 onwards, one notes the shift in the SDC rhetoric away from flaunting its close connections with the authorities towards asserting itself as the first properly independent think tank in Northwest Russia. In a late 2002 press conference, the current scientific team leader of SDC-NW Yuri Perelygin has claimed that “The SDC ‘North-West’ is in my view no longer associated with the authorities

<sup>92</sup> In contrast to the SDC-NW, ECEDI is formally a part of the administrative apparatus of the office of the presidential representative in the Federal District and is entrusted with policy advice with regard to economic development and the attraction of investment. During 2002 the Council prepared its own strategy of socioeconomic development of the District, which echoes some of the key principles of the SDC Doctrine but is more oriented towards addressing short- and medium-term economic problems rather than the formation of a macro-regional political subject. See *Main Principles of the Strategy of Socioeconomic Development of the Northwestern Federal District for the Period Until 2015*. (WWW-document.)

<sup>93</sup> See *Main Principles of the Strategy of Socioeconomic Development of the Northwestern Federal District for the Period Until 2015*. (WWW-document.)

<sup>94</sup> Ukkone 2001c.

<sup>95</sup> See Makarychev 2002, pp. 16-17.

<sup>96</sup> Shedrovitsky quoted in Ukkone 2001c.

or any single level of power. There are a lot of myths surrounding the centre. We are presented as almost a presidential team, a pro-governor team, a pro-Cherkesov [presidential representative in the District until 2003] team. This means that we are actually independent. We will try to maintain the independence of our designs and our financing.”<sup>97</sup> At the same time, Perelygin makes a point of stressing that the SDC retains its *policy orientation* and thus remains distinct from independent *research institutions*: “SDC Northwest is a centre of *designs* rather than *research*, more a ‘project institute’ rather than an institution that comments and evaluates the events that already took place.”<sup>98</sup> The challenge for SDC is to combine its independent stance with an active contribution to actual policy-making in the district and more specifically to the *institutionalisation* of its doctrinal principles in concrete governmental technologies.<sup>99</sup> As of 2003, the SDC team admits that its efforts at designing the development strategy for the district were not translated into concrete and coordinated policies on the regional level, i.e. the move from *strategic design* to *policy implementation* has not yet been made:

Doctrinal and strategic work in itself does not allow us to seat the governors at the negotiation table and stimulate cooperation. It is not enough. The process itself was launched, the agreements of the Centre with the regions were prepared and entered into force. We have identified joint interests and projects that in our view were sufficient to let the provinces agree among themselves even in the absence of our participation. [...] But further steps were unsuccessful. I am reading the strategy of Murmansk oblast and do not see a single point where it would say that this question is to be coordinated with Karelia, Arhangelsk oblast, etc. [...] Thus, the Centre now proceeds from the assumption that we will at this stage work within the professional community and concretely with the stakeholders. There are regional subjects, interested in strategic line of thinking and strategic development. We will work with them on the establishment of the institutions of development.<sup>100</sup>

After the publication of the Doctrine, the activities of the Centre switched towards the objective of establishing new sites of discussion of regional development, independent of the

<sup>97</sup> Perelygin et al 2002.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added. With regard to this claim, let us suggest that the common English translation of the very name of the Centre as a ‘Centre for Strategic Research’ is incorrect as it ignores the distinction between ‘issledovania’ (research, connoting more academic or journalistic enterprises) and ‘razrabotki’ (designs, constructs, etc). The SDCs in Moscow and the federal districts stand out as rare examples of centres of designs amid the ever-greater number of centres of research.

<sup>99</sup> Perelygin et al 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added. See also Shedrovitsky 2003b.

existing administrative divisions. A wide programme of seminars and round-tables on ‘innovational development’, ‘Russia’s image in the world’ and other themes, a research project on the ‘statistics of spatial planning’, a series of distance-learning arrangements in the framework of the ‘Higher School of Management’, and the launching in 2003 of a monthly publication *Russian Expert Review* are some of the examples of the Centre’s efforts to act as a site of discursive innovation on the macro-regional level, attracting regional scholars, consultants and policy-makers within the orbit of a new discourse on regional development. In the analogy of Petr Shedrovitsky, the Centre aims to become a new kind of ‘operating system’, within the framework of which multiple new ‘software programmes’ may be developed, a new environment of communication, the absence of which is the main reason of the failure of most strategic projects in the District.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, the SDC considers its three years of operation to have been a success, not in terms of the implementation of the Doctrine, but in terms of transforming the very character of discourse of regional development and stimulating the formation of groups of discourse practitioners through the establishment of working groups of local professionals in the regions, connected with the SDC and actively participating in its activities. An interesting development in this regard, reported by Yury Perelygin, is the emergence of the independent “infrastructure of strategic planning” in the subjects of the federation, whose governors have been sceptical or outright hostile to the Centre’s activities (Leningrad, Vologda and Novgorod oblast’s).<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Perelygin remarks that there turned out to be a great demand among district professionals, academics and journalists for such materials as the Doctrine and other policy texts produced by the Centre, which points to the initially unforeseen expansion of the SDC as a site of policy discourse.<sup>103</sup>

Thus, in the assessment of the role of SDC-NW it is important to differentiate between different functions of the Centre. As the initial expectations about the federal districts as a new level of government, entrusted with the practical implementation of federal or macro-

<sup>101</sup> Shedrovitsky et al 2001.

<sup>102</sup> Perelygin et al 2002.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

regional reform policies have so far proven unfounded<sup>104</sup>, it is hardly meaningful to evaluate the Doctrine and other SDC documents in terms of official discursive practice and proclaim their irrelevance in terms of the absence of concrete policy decisions or legislation with regard to the implementation of the Doctrine. Yet, the significance of the Centre's activities is irreducible to the more narrowly circumscribed political domain. In the concluding chapter we shall argue that the discourse of SDC Northwest that we have reconstructed above raises a number of important problematics relevant to the study of both Russian regionalisation and EU-Russian relations.

<sup>104</sup> See Markedonov 2004 for the argument that the second half of Putin's presidential term should be conceived as a 'post-vertical' period, as the initial thrust of the reforms aimed at re-establishing the unitary vertical of executive power with the help of federal districts gave way to the resurgence of the informal negotiations and consultations with the regional leaders, characteristic of the Yeltsin presidency. The appointment of the former governor of St. Petersburg Vladimir Yakovlev, rumoured to have a hostile relationship with Putin, as the presidential representative in the Southern Federal District in March 2004 also suggests a certain downgrading of the position of the federal district in comparison with the original reform design of 2000. At the same time, the simultaneous appointment of Andrei Fursenko, the Head of the Scientific Board of the SDC-NW as the Minister of Education and Science points to the continued influence of the key figures in the Northwestern Federal District in Russian politics. Moreover, it is important that this promotion concerned not the administrative official in the federal district but one of the key figures in the relatively independent expert institution.



## Conclusions: The Significance of the Federal District as a Level of Analysis in the Studies of Russian Regionalism and EU-Russian Relations

The study of the strategic discourse of the Northwestern Federal District isolates a *new level* in Russian politics, complementing and complicating the rather facile distinction between the federal and the regional that gives rise to the dubious interpretations of the Putin presidency in terms of the ‘assault on regional autonomy’.<sup>105</sup> As opposed to the more mechanical ‘centralising’ policy moves such as the abolition of direct elections of regional governors, the institution of the federal districts is a political decision of an innovative kind that reshapes the regional political space in various, possibly unforeseeable ways. The notion of macro-regionalism can hardly be fitted into the ‘authoritarian’ understanding of the Putinian ‘vertical’ and rather brings forth such questions as regional integration within Russia, the formation of a common socioeconomic space, the enhancement of horizontal mobility of individuals and social groups, the relation between federal and regional reform designs, etc. The very ‘failure’ of SDC to become an extension of the administrative structure of the office of the presidential representative and its transformation into the broad venue of discursive innovation demonstrates the fruitfulness of the focus on the federal district as a locus of the *formation* of political subjectivity in its own right rather than as a form of *representation* of the federal centre in the regions.

Secondly, our discussion has served to underscore a *new domain* of political discourse in Russia, i.e. the discourse of *policy expertise*, articulated by the newly emergent think tanks and other policy institutions. The activities of political research institutions in Russia have in general been rarely submitted to serious analysis.<sup>106</sup> The few existing studies describe the disintegration of the Soviet system of policy expertise and its fragmentation into a multiplicity of small and frequently dubious research centres and institutes, serving as mere vehicles of advertising their leading personalities.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, the importance of mass media in the Russian politics of the

<sup>105</sup> See e.g. Shlapentokh 2000, Shevtsova 2002 for such arguments.

<sup>106</sup> One of the indicators of the increased interest in this theme is the publication of the special issue of the Russian Pro et Contra journal, entitled “Politicians and Experts” and dealing with the changing relationship between politics and the expert community in postcommunist Russia. See particularly Zagorsky 2003 for the discussion of the relation between the expert community and the foreign policy establishment and Kosolapov 2003 for the comparative analysis of such relations in the Soviet period and in contemporary Russia.

<sup>107</sup> See e.g. Puhov and Makienko 2003, Kosolapov 2003.

1990s entailed the erasure of the distinction between ‘social-scientific’ expertise and media commentary, lowering the quality of the expertise and making its content contingent on the specific interests of the owners of the media in question. Interestingly, Puhov and Makienko note that the obverse side of the domination of doctrinaire ‘liberal-democratic’ orientations in the Russian mass media during the 1990s was the appearance of deeper and more sophisticated sociopolitical reflection on the ‘right-wing-conservative’ side of the political spectrum, which lacked media representation and was therefore independent of specific politico-financial interests.<sup>108</sup> More generally, it is possible to argue that policy think tanks and research institutions have so far not constituted an expert community, either in the social or the ‘epistemic’ sense.

Indeed, it is perhaps not a coincidence that it was SDC-NW that in 2003 launched the electronic periodical Russian Expert Review (RER), which seeks to report on the activities of a wide range of policy think tanks and research centres in the whole of Russia, promising to become one of the network structures of interaction between the emergent regional and nationwide research centres and policy design institutions. The first issue of RER also features one of the first detailed studies on the positions on EU-Russian relations in the increasingly diverse Russian field of policy expertise.<sup>109</sup> Locating the Russian think tanks along three axes (liberal vs. statist economic strategies, autonomy vs. integration in foreign policy, ‘modern’ vs. ‘postmodern’ stances on security) the RER editorial reveals a complex constellation of policy discourses irreducible to the existing political spectrum in contemporary Russia. Yet, our analysis of the SDC-NW’s own discourse permits us to venture yet another complication of this picture. Indeed, the SDC discourse can hardly be fitted into a framework of these axes. The clear focus of the Doctrine on liberal reforms, conditioned by the rationality of globalisation, is combined with a strong emphasis on constitutive governmental practices reshaping the macro-regional space.<sup>110</sup> The clearly integrationist design of the Doctrine’s international dimension is supplemented by the demand for strategic intersubjectivity in relations with the EU, which is conditioned by the reaffirmation of state sovereignty. At the same time, sovereignty itself is cast by Petr Shedrovitsky as an instrument in economic competition, a ‘resource’ that enhances the country’s competitiveness in the global economic

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>109</sup> See Issue 1 at <http://www.rusrev.org>.

<sup>110</sup> The confluence of liberalism and statism in the reform project of the Putin presidency is analysed in detail in Prozorov 2004, chapter 4.

exchange.<sup>111</sup> Finally, the modern/postmodern opposition, which in itself is a highly problematic distinction<sup>112</sup>, is clearly dismantled in the discourse, which exemplifies an eclectic combination of trademark ‘postmodern’ valorisations of the ‘learning society’, ‘humanitarian technologies’ and ‘discursive innovations’ and the characteristically statist problematisation of fragmentation, disintegration and the decentring of sovereign political subjectivity. Thus, on the level of strategic policy design, the conventional dualisms, used in the second-order structuration of Russian political discourse, simply fail to function, which raises the question of the utility of such constitutive distinctions as modern/postmodern or statist/liberal for the study of the emergent discursive field of policy expertise in Russia. A methodological consequence of this observation consists in the need to move from taxonomic and theory-centred interpretations towards discourse-analytical approaches that focus on the emergent field of practices in their specificity without subsuming them under grand theoretical narratives. From this perspective, the terminological apparatus for the study of political change in Russian postcommunism is in large measure still to be created, largely as an outcome of the analysis of concrete discursive practices of the kind we have focused on in this paper.

Thirdly, and relatedly, our analysis above isolates a *new focus* in the study of Russian political discourse. The strict self-delimitation of the SDC as a *design* rather than a *research* centre, preoccupied with construction of new phenomena rather than the commentary on current events points to the distinct domain of governmental rationality (governmentality) in the Foucauldian sense. The Foucauldian approach focuses on the historical constellation of governmental practices, irreducible to, though intertwined with, various trends within political thought.<sup>113</sup> The problematic of governmentality thus operates in a narrow domain between political philosophy and empirical sociology of government, focusing on neither ‘thought’ nor ‘practice’ but on the nexus of the two that forms a governmental rationality, a domain of “thought as it seeks to *make itself technical*”<sup>114</sup>. This formulation succinctly encapsulates the drive

<sup>111</sup> See particularly Shedrovitsky 2003c, a text tellingly entitled “Sovereignty as a Competitive Advantage”.

<sup>112</sup> See Haukkala 2001 for another example of a questionable application of a modern/postmodern dualism with regard to foreign policy, which constructs a simplistic opposition of Russian ‘modernist’ (allegedly realist or geopolitical) policy orientation and the EU’s ‘postmodern’ and ‘post-sovereign’ political orientation. In addition to being empirically problematic, the very distinction of ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ policy projects between which a state might choose, appears to rest on an ultimately ‘modern’ instrumental or calculative governmental rationality and, on a more abstract level, does not mark a break with the ‘modern’ logic of government.

<sup>113</sup> See Foucault 1991, 1988, 1990. See also Dean 1999, pp. 48-53.

<sup>114</sup> Rose 1996, p. 23. Emphasis original.

of the SDC discourse, particularly Shedrovitsky's own statements on the institutionalisation of doctrinal principles in concrete practices. Returning to our thesis above on the irreducibility of the SDC discourse to any of the familiar discursive axes deployed in the interpretations of Russian politics, we may venture that the reason for this is precisely the distinct character of this discourse, oscillating freely between grand 'ideological' narratives in the search for a technically feasible modality (in the strict Kuhnian sense, a *paradigm*) of constructing the Northwest as a new macro-regional political subject.<sup>115</sup> The question of the actual 'phenomeno-technical capacity'<sup>116</sup> of this discourse is beyond the scope of our discussion. One may indeed receive the SDC's 'innovational discourse' sceptically as yet another in the series of dubious modes of knowledge in the postcommunist discourse that derived their influence from their almost self-consciously esoteric character and the implicit connection of their proponents to the highest levels of state administration. The brief fashion of geopolitics in the mid-1990s and the present flourishing of the so-called 'political-technological' discourse associated with the name of Gleb Pavlovsky may belong to the same series. Yet, this politico-epistemic nexus that, only half-jokingly, may be referred to as 'applied Machiavellianism', nonetheless appears significant in the case at hand, insofar as, unlike e.g. the highly abstract and mythologised discourses of e.g. Russian geopolitics or Eurasianism, the SDC discourse is both concrete and technologically oriented and accords with the contemporary European governmental rationalities in its constructivist stance.<sup>117</sup> The very emergence of such a technologically or project-oriented discourse of regional governmentality as a privileged alternative to normative and ideological discourses of both liberalism and variously defined 'patriotism' is in itself a significant development in contemporary Russian politics. We may thus analyse the politico-epistemic relays of this discourse within the wider field of Russian politics as, in itself, an 'innovation' of a discursive kind, the emergence of a new, rather idiosyncratic language in terms of which problems are constituted and solutions devised. Besides, since regions are now commonly understood as being constructed in political and administrative discourses<sup>118</sup>, it is particularly interesting to focus on the region-building discourse, which is explicit about its constructivist orientation and does not disavow its own

<sup>115</sup> See Shedrovitsky and Neklessa 2003 for the argument that the proposed innovational approach requires a wholly new kind of political actor, transcending the present left-right political spectrum in Russia that fails to reflect the new sociopolitical realities.

<sup>116</sup> See Osborne and Rose 1997, 1999 for the discussion of this notion that is borrowed from Gaston Bachelard's epistemology of science and refers to the capacity of a discourse to bring into existence new objects of knowledge and action.

<sup>117</sup> On governmental constructivism in contemporary Western neoliberalism see Prozorov 2004, chapter 4.

<sup>118</sup> See e.g. Paasi 2001 for the emphasis on specifically administrative discursive practices of region-building.

constitutive force. Ultimately, such discursive innovations on the level of strategic policy design appear as a crucial object of analysis within the wider problematic of political change in postcommunist Russia.

Finally, we ought to sum up the significance of the study of the NWFD and the SDC discourse for the analysis of EU-Russian relations. Firstly, our analysis points to the existence of a new, macro-regional site of potential EU-Russian cooperation, particularly within the framework of the Northern Dimension initiative. While other formats of regional cooperation between Russia and the EU (Tacis CBC, Interreg) logically unfold at the most local levels of border territories and are coordinated by regional administrations, the ambition of the Northern Dimension in transnational region-building<sup>119</sup> does not appear to be satisfied by such modest formats and requires a more wide-ranging and consolidated strategic vision on behalf of Russia. Insofar as the activities of SDC-NW have been shown to be leaning towards the formation of a relatively independent social platform for discursive innovation, involving a multiplicity of regional and local actors, the interface of EU programmes in Northwest Russia with the Centre's design would permit the *connective impact*<sup>120</sup> of the EU on the course of sociopolitical transformation in the macro-region. In a more ambitious manner, depending on the success of the NWFD in becoming the institutional carrier of the Doctrine, this structural change would have an *enabling impact* with regard to joint EU-Russian efforts in 'transnational macro-regionalism' in the North of Europe.

At the same time, the emergence of the NWFD as a macro-regional political subject also introduces new potential for conflictual scenarios in EU-Russian relations that could not be actualised in the manifestly asymmetric relations that EU programmes have so far employed with individual local and regional administrations in Russia. It is precisely the emergence of a macro-regional *subjectivity* that constitutes the problematic of strategic *inter-subjectivity* in EU-Russian cooperation. Our analysis of the discourse of SDC-NW has revealed that this conflictual disposition relates less to the positivity of strategic designs of the two parties than to the ethical questions of autonomy and recognition that arise in the context of Russia's 'object' status in the EU's regional initiatives. We may venture that the recognition of this problematic is crucial for the successful achievement of connective and enabling effects. Conversely, the perpetuation of the conflictual disposition constituted by this problematic produces negative effects on EU-Russian cooperation, respectively *dis-connective* in the sense of

<sup>119</sup> See Joenniemi 2003a, Joenniemi and Sergounin 2003, chapter 10 for the discussion of such possibilities.

<sup>120</sup> See Stetter, Diez and Albert 2003.

antagonising a wide array of social agents in the Northwestern macro-region and *dis-abling* in the sense of foregoing the region-building possibilities offered by the restructuration of (macro-)regional political space in Russia.

In short, the developments on the level of the NWFD appear to significantly modify the constellation of the EU-Russian interface in the North of Europe, creating new opportunities and making possible new conflictual dispositions. As our tentative conclusions in this paper demonstrate, the Federal District has emerged as a valuable level of analysis, irreducible to the dimension of federal-level politics in Russia and relatively independent from the unstable configurations of political forces in the relations of the federal centre and the regions.

Whatever the ordering and 'centralising' motive behind the presidential federal reforms may have been, the ironic effect of these decisions has been the appearance of a new site in Russian politics, in which the contingency and indeterminacy of the postcommunist transformation persist as much as they do on other levels of authority.

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