SHAPEDEM-EU

Autocracy Goes Global:
Inside the Kremlin's Foreign Policy Toolkit

PUBLICATION #18

Funded by the European Union

SHAPEDEM-EU Publications

Published by Justus Liebig University Giessen. July 2025.

This publication is part of WP6, led by Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB).

Authors/Edited by: Murad Nasibov

To cite:

Nasibov, Murad. Autocracy Goes Global: Inside the Kremlin's Foreign Policy Toolkit. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025.

Design: EURICE GmbH

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

Abstract

This case study explores the multifaceted ways in which Russia exerts autocratic effects abroad, with a particular focus on the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods of the European Union. While Russia does not explicitly promote autocracy as a normative project, its firmly established authoritarian regime influences neighbouring and strategically important regions through a diverse set of mechanisms. The study outlines four dimensions of this influence: (1) autocracy support, where Russia safeguards embattled autocratic regimes (e.g., Belarus, Kazakhstan, Syria); (2) democracy resistance, leveraging economic, security, and subversive tools—including disinformation, secessionist conflicts, and military intervention—to undermine democratic transitions (e.g., Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova); (3) autocracy promotion by example, wherein Russia's governance model, legal restrictions on civil society, and promotion of traditionalist values are emulated by other regimes; and (4) autocracy promotion through regionalism, via Russia-led organisations such as the CSTO, EAEU, and CIS, which reinforce authoritarian stability through legitimisation, legal harmonisation, and discursive coordination.

Drawing primarily on developments from 2010–2021, with contextual references to earlier and later events, the study highlights the behavioural and discursive instruments Russia employs to undermine democratisation and maintain authoritarian influence. It argues that Russia's actions have not only contributed to democratic backsliding within its immediate vicinity but also pose a structural challenge to EU democracy support strategies. The paper concludes that addressing these autocratic effects requires the EU to recalibrate its democracy support by integrating counter-autocracy measures across policy domains, enhancing resilience to authoritarian regionalism, and promoting alternative democratic regional networks.

1 Russia's Autocratic Effects Abroad: A diverse inventory[1]

Although Russia does not explicitly endorse autocracy on the global scale in the same manner as democracy is advocated by the West (Babayan, 2015), its firmly established autocracy exerts *regime-related effects (*Tolstrup, 2009) that stretch well beyond its national boundaries (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010: 2). The immediate vicinity, inherently entwined with Russia due to historical ties from the Soviet and pre-Soviet periods, directly experiences these pervasive effects (Brownlee, 2017). Nevertheless, Russia's autocratic exertions are by no means confined to its close neighbourhood. The European Union Southern Neighbourhood encounters their portion of this influence, though perhaps relatively to a lesser extent. This case study is set to highlight different *democracy resistance* and/or *autocracy support* mechanisms deployed by Russia towards the highlighted regions. In doing so, it looks at two dimensions of *democracy resistance*:

- Autocracy support: Safeguarding autocratic regimes which face immediate threats.
- Democracy resistance: Leveraging economic and military instruments in cooperation, subversion and invasion, particularly when the incumbent regime is not autocratic.

Similarly, two dimensions of *autocracy promotion* are considered:

- Autocracy promotion: leading by example.
- Autocracy promotion through regionalism.

[1] *Note: The content of this article was last updated on 20 November 2023*

Far from being a systematic assessment and short of providing the full record of Russian autocratic effects abroad, this case study provides only the most prominent examples along the mentioned dimensions to illustrate the nature of Russia's democracy resistance and autocracy promotion in the EU neighbourhoods. The provided examples aim to highlight both discursive and behavioural aspects of Russian practices in the relevant dimensions. The main timeframe of analysis for the case studies is 2010-2021. However, examples are drawn also from the preceding and succeeding years to show more nuanced aspects and highlight the relatively more prominent events. In conclusion, the study analytically explores the implications of Russia's autocratic effects abroad for the EU strategies in the field of democracy support.

2 Mapping out Russia's Autocratic Effects in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods of the EU

2.1 Autocracy Support: Safeguarding Autocratic Regimes

The most recent example of Russia's standing up in support of an autocratic regime was during the unrest in Kazakhstan in January 2022. Following Kazakhstan's request on January 5, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) – Russia-led military alliance, of which Kazakhstan is part –intervened to clamp down on the protesters spread across the country upon a sudden spike in car fuel (Eurasianet staff, 2022; Kucera, 2022). This has indicated how threats to authoritarian rule are seen as a common concern within the alliance (Klein & Schmitz, 2022). The CSTO intervention only further beefed up the amalgam of authoritarianism in the region and dependence on Russia (Botting, 2022; Essen & Hedenskog, 2022). The fear of the spread of "colour revolutions" in the most stable authoritarian regime of the region, raising the stakes more than in the cases of Kyrgyzstan's and Armenia's requests in 2010 and 2020 respectively, has been a major driver for the involvement of the CSTO in Kazakhstan (Choi et al., 2022). The fact that the incumbent regime played on the Kremlin's preference for the status quo (Clarke, 2022) amid what quickly turned into an intra-elite confrontation is a clear indication of Russia's role in safeguarding authoritarian regimes in the region. Russia's support has not been only in behavioural terms. The Russian president also supported the version of the January events in Kazakhstan articulated by the Kazakhstani president Tokayev (Gavin, 2022; Khamitov et al., 2023; Pannier, 2022).

In contrast to the situation in Kazakhstan, where Russia's intervention in support of an authoritarian regime was conducted under a formally legitimate guise, as it was requested by the president of the country and the CSTO provided an umbrella for this, the case of Belarus has exposed the deployment of Russian forces in aid of an authoritarian regime facing opposition from the masses. Lukashenko's regime in Belarus, which for a long period managed to buy the loyalty of people at least partly thanks to Russia's financial backing (Bedford, 2021; Buzgalin & Kolganov, 2021: 444), entered a difficult period after Western countries-imposed sanctions on Russia following the latter's annexation of Crimea (Hall, 2023: 4). The situation, which was further severed by the government's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic leading eventually to unprecedented mass demonstrations (IISS, 2021), was catalysed by the falsified presidential elections in 2020 (Buzgalin & Kolganov, 2021; Mudrov, 2021). At the initial stage, Russia kept silent, increasing the cost of support for Lukashenko, but eventually came to the aid of the Lukashenko regime, playing the most crucial role in re-instating the falling regime. This support included sharing the version of the story as a West-instigated discontent told by the Lukashenko regime to provide special forces to the defence of the regime (Onuch & Sasse, 2022b: 4;

Preiherman & Graham, 2020). Having burned all bridges with the West after the 2020-2021 protests, the Belarusian government had no option but to back Russia's war in Ukraine. It has subjugated itself to Russia, tying its fate fully to the regime in Kremlin. Ukraine's victory and/or the cut of Russian financial backing could eventually mean the collapse of the Lukashenko regime in Belarus (Hall, 2023: 22), particularly given the growth of pro-EU attitudes in Belarus in the last two decades (Onuch & Sasse, 2022a).

When it comes to EU's Southern Neighbourhood, Russia's direct engagement in Syria and Libya went beyond the limits it had in the above-discussed cases. In both the Syrian and Libyan crises, which started with the "Arab Spring" (2010-2011), Russia has persistently provided support for autocratic rule. Although Russia abstained from the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 in 2011, which authorized the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya and the use of "all means necessary" to protect civilians, and thus allows it to pass, later it expressed regret over that decision arguing that the Western powers had exceeded the UN mandate to pursue regime change in Libya (Ishetiar, 2019). Whether this was a strategic choice to allow military intervention in Libya so that Russia could benefit from the chaos to emerge in the afterwards or a miscalculation on the Russian side, the following events showed once again that Russia's genuine interests lied elsewhere other than helping bring stability and democracy to the country.

Russia backed General Khalifa Haftar, who stood against the Libyan elected government and fought to build a military-autocratic rule in the country. Starting with Serbia in 1999 and growing with Iraq in 2003, Russia's opposition against regime changes through foreign interventions has found a well-established ground in Libya, which played, consequently, an important role in shaping Russia's position in Syria (Stepanova, 2018: 40–41). Likewise, in Syria, Russia supplied significant military aid and diplomatic backing to Bashar al-Assad (Hughes, 2014), as traditionally it did (Trofino & Nemets, 2009), and consequently, achieved keeping him in power. Along with geopolitical considerations related to Russia's military bases near Latakia and in Tartus in Syria – a foothold in the Mediterranean Sea and the MENA region (Thornton, 2018) and long-standing alliance between Syria and Russia, Russia's support for autocratic regimes also originated from its fear of the normalisation of regime change through international interventions in international politics (Antonyan, 2017: 342–343; Charap, 2013). Russia has also discursively supported the Al-Assad regime by denying the use of chemical weapons by the regime against the insurgents in Syria (Brown, 2015). Russia's engagement in Syria eventually culminated in direct military involvement starting in 2015 justified by the official Kremlin as a counter-terrorism operation against Islamist jihadist groups such as Islamic State (Stepanova, 2018: 39–40). In both Syrian and Libyan cases, Russian media provided argumentative support to the sides backed by Russia (Strovsky & Schleifer, 2020), describing the events as part of the Western efforts to topple pro-Russian and/or anti-Western governments in the world, and in both cases, Russia is also known to have involved mercenaries, like Wagner Group, in service of the autocrats it supports (Marten, 2019).

As the paragraphs above demonstrated, Russia, depending on the needs on the ground, has chosen to support both discursively and behaviorally the autocrats it backs by any means. Wherever possible, like in Kazakhstan, it did so through relatively legitimate means, while in Syria and Libya, it reached the point to involve its own military directly and its mercenary groups.

2.2 Democracy Resistance: Leveraging Economic & Security Instruments, Subversion and Invasion

Russia has traditionally exploited economic, political and security interdependences with its neighbouring states. This has been particularly visible in Central Asia where the states have been substantially and principally dependent on Russia. Russia's direct financial support to Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Saliyevich Bakiev prior to the 2009 elections is, perhaps, the most illustrative example of it in Central Asia (Bader et al., 2010). However, Russia's leveraging of economic and security instruments has by no means been limited to Central Asia. As already stated above, part of the reason for the Lukashenko regime's success in generating loyalty for most of the 2000s was Russia's financial support, as the latter wrote off the former's debts several times during this period (Hall, 2023). Russia has similarly leveraged its cooperation instruments with Armenia, which is extensively dependent on Russia for security and economy, before, to hold its local allies in power and now, to bring them back to power. This has been particularly visible in Armenia's U-turn from the Association Agreement negotiations with the EU and heading to the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2013 (Vieira & Vasilyan, 2018).

Russia's use of economic means to counteract democratic movements was vividly evident in Ukraine in the period leading to the annexation of Crimea. Unlike Armenia, Ukraine had to suspend the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) for a year under the fear of Russian retaliatory measures, when it chose to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014 (Börzel, 2015: 523–524). Prior to this, Russia used the economic crisis and high energy prices to pressure on Yanukovych's government (Balcaen et al., 2022), which resulted in the later drawing back from signing the Association Agreement during the Vilnius Summit in 2013 (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015: 468–469). In a similar vein, Russia imposed trade embargos on Georgia following the Rose Revolution (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015: 468). After Georgia signed the DCFTA, Russia continued pressuring Georgia with similar tools. It cancelled the free trade agreement established within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States with Georgia and imposed a new series of embargos on Georgia (Nilsson, 2021: 62–63). Russia has been using similar leverages against Moldova for a long time, too (Delcour, 2018).

Since the early 1990s, Russia has also consistently exploited security interdependences, in particular, secessionist conflicts in its neighbourhood – Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan – towards its own strategic interests, including resisting democratization in the region (Ademmer et al., 2016; M. Nilsson & Silander, 2016), thus intervening in the EU's democracy support in Eastern Partnership countries and eventually leading to a geopolitical competition (Antonopoulos et al., 2017; Cadier, 2019; Nitoiu & Sus, 2019) with diverging economic, political, security and normative framings (Mikalay & Neuman, 2022).

In these conflicts, Russia has used a subversive approach, building its own leverage over the sides of the conflict through the provision of financial, military and political backing to one or the other side at different periods, to manipulate the conflict sides. In Transnistria, Russia backed the secessionist entities by primarily providing them with security guarantees through the Russian military base dislocated in this region of Moldova and closely involved itself in the negotiation processes (Albulescu, 2023). The Transnistria conflict emerged as a major tool in the hands of Russia, along with those in energy and other sectors of the trade, to sway influence over the Moldovan governments (Hagemann, 2013; "Moldova's New Pro-EU Government," 2021).

In Georgia, Russia has been similarly supporting secessionist entities through different means. The fact that Georgia's secessionist entities share a border with Russia, unlike the other cases, has made them particularly conducive to Russian subversion. Russian emissaries have been infiltrating both entities, particularly since the early 2000s (Berglund & Bolkvadze, 2022). The border factor with Russia has also facilitated these entities trading with Russia (Blakkisrud et al., 2021) and Russian investments in them in general (Kolstø, 2020). Russia's "passport colonisation" policy[2] moved smoothly with them, too (Nagashima, 2019). Moreover, as elsewhere, Russia could successfully install or recruit actors within the Georgian public sphere, political parties, civil society organisations, media as well as factions within the Georgian Orthodox Church to promote a political narrative favouring Russia (Nilsson, 2021). Eventually, Russia used these leverages not only towards its objectives related to these secessionist entities but also towards Tbilisi (Souleimanov et al., 2018). Fighting a five-day-long war with Georgia in August 2008, Russia recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia, solidifying both the dependence of these entities on itself and its influence over Georgia, blocking the resolution of conflicts until today (Unkerley, 2008; Mikhelidze, 2009; Tuathail, 2008; Vendil Pallin & Westerlund, 2009).

Meanwhile in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, played the formal role of peace broker along with the US and French co-chairing. In this role, it balanced dynamically between Armenia and Azerbaijan, manipulating them towards its own desired ends – that is, control over the region (Ismayil & Yilmaz, 2022). Russia's capacities as a mediator between the sides, a formal ally of Armenia and a weapon supplier to both sides, allowed it to have a grip over both Armenian and Azerbaijani governments, and the South Caucasus region, in general (German, 2012; Waal, 2010). Following the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia achieved to dislocate a peacekeeping mission in parts of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast and still today continues running its own negotiation track independent of the EU and US-run ones. However, the geopolitical picture of the South Caucasus has been no less complex after the war (Abushov, 2022; Davtyan, 2023; Miarka, 2021). With the rising influence of Turkey in the region in the aftermath of the war (Cheterian, 2022; Ibrahimov & Oztarsu, 2022), Armenia's growing disappointment with Russia and the EU's involvement as a mediator in the Armenian-Azerbaijani normalisation process might have relatively limited Russia's leverages over the sides in the conflict (Çakmak & Özşahin, 2023; Doukaev, 2023), though not necessarily opening the space for the greater democratisation of the region.

A much more prominent example of Russia's subversive approach has been observed in Ukraine. Before, but particularly following the 2013-2014 Maidan revolution, Russia built its leverages at the community level in the eastern (Donbas) and southern (Crimea) regions of Ukraine, cultivated secessionist tendencies among the Russian-speaking population of the regions and eventually invaded Crimea in 2014 and the parts of the Donbas region in 2022. From the above-discussed "gas war"[3] to attempts at interfering with elections, supporting pro-Russian politicians, "passport colonisation" and promotion of its influence through the orthodox church, Russia carried out a massive subversion campaign (Hovorun, 2016; Hurak & D'Anieri, 2022; Kozelsky,

[2] The issuance of Russian passports to non-Russian residents in conflict areas that have geopolitical importance for Russia. It serves to bolster Russia's influence and claims over these regions, often creating pretexts for potential military or political intervention under the guise of protecting Russian citizens.

[3] The series of disputes between Ukraine and Russia over natural gas supplies, prices, and transit, which, in 2006, 2009, and 2014, led to periodic cut-offs of Russian gas to Ukraine and, by extension, to European countries that received the Russian gas via pipelines through Ukraine.

2014) triggering polarisation within the Ukrainian society (Matveeva, 2016). As already mentioned in several points above, Russia's instrumentalization of "soft power" – the Russian media, Church and "compatriots" is a pattern beyond Ukraine. It is an active element of Russian foreign policy, particularly since the early 2000s (Rotaru, 2018). The instrumentalization of such elements serves Russia's goals to subvert the target states which are not only democratising ones but also well-established autocracies in the region. In the case of the latter, such a subversion policy serves as a "preparatory" work, should a regime change be seen in prospect.

Although historical and identity factors, economic problems and alienation from the new government in Kyiv could have provided some grounds for the separatist movements, they would hardly be possible without Russia's sponsorship or subversive actions described above (Osipov, 2023; Sasse & Lackner, 2018; Strasheim, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Russia has also been running, in parallel, a disinformation campaign which depicted the West as imperialist and willing to intervene in Ukraine and itself as a friendly actor and respectful towards Ukraine (Smith, 2015). The invasion of Crimea has, similarly, been accompanied by a disinformation campaign presenting distorted historical narratives (Biersack & O'Lear, 2014). However, despite all its efforts, Russia's plan to establish control over Ukraine failed, and Russia saw it as a reason to recognise the separatist entities it backed as independent republics and immediately launch a full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022. The ongoing war of Russia in Ukraine presents so far, the most severe example of Russia's resistance against democratisation in the region, which is a prerequisite for the integration of the states in the region with the Western-Transatlantic structures, above all, the EU and NATO (Allin, 2022; Götz & Staun, 2022).

As the discussions above illustrate, Russia not only came to the help of falling autocratic regimes which are of its allies but also consistently used economic and security leverage to influence its neighbouring states. In this, the presence of secessionist entities in the region provided additional opportunities for Russia to build in its influence mechanisms. In Ukraine, Russia has engaged in a multi-pronged approach involving economic pressure, "passport colonization," and even military invasion to undermine the country's democratic progress and integration with the EU and NATO.

2.3 Autocracy Promotion: Leading by Example

Following the "colour revolutions" in the post-Soviet space, Russia has developed policies insulating itself from what looked initially like a new wave of democratisation, which made it a role model for the other autocratic regimes in the region (Ambrosio, 2009). In doing so, Russia has not emerged as a normative rival to the EU but rather as a norm-contester, by challenging the EU-promoted liberal-democratic norms without offering alternative ones (Casier, 2022). The Putin-Medvedev-Putin model of power management is one but salient example of Russia's emerging as an autocratic role model in the region (Ambrosio, 2010: 384). Although it was not precisely replicated elsewhere in the region, it provided generally an example of power management to avoid democratisation pressures. Similarly, other authoritarian regimes in the region (Armenia and Kazakhstan) sought to realise their own models of power management, though resulting in varying outcomes. Regardless of their varying results (revolution in Armenia in 2018 and intra-elite conflict in Kazakhstan in 2022), they were led by the Russian example.

Indeed, a time-series study on the NGO regulations in Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union countries shows that the colour revolutions in the region lead to the growth of restrictions on NGO entry and operation in the region (unlike the Middle East and Africa) (Gilbert & Mohseni,

2018b). From an overall perspective, Gilbert and Mohseni (2018a) demonstrate that autocratic linkage in the form of trade or defence pacts with Russia (and China) can determine the expansion of repressive NGO regulations such as curtailing foreign funding, subjecting NGOs to stricter financial and legal reporting on programmes implemented, severing NGO registration process, globally. Although it cannot be claimed that no authoritarian regime other than Russian drew lessons from the colour revolutions themselves, with its early move and legal arrangements, Russia has been a leading authoritarian regime showing the rest of the authoritarians in the region how to deal with the growing Western-funded non-governmental organisation and civil society in general (Horvath, 2013; Jackson, 2010; Ziegler, 2016). Among the Eastern Partnership countries, traditionally Azerbaijan (Gogia, 2016; Mudde, 2017; Pearce et al., 2015) and Belarus (Astapova et al., 2022; Mazepus et al., 2021) but now the Georgian Dream government in Georgia (Katamadze, 2023; Lomsadze, 2023) have been the closer followers of Russia, along with Central Asian countries, in this aspect.

Online censorship and digital surveillance are the other two major areas which are known to be negatively associated with democratisation on a global scale (Stoycheff et al., 2020). Russia has for a long time been an example of the authoritarian control of the online and digital sphere (Gurinskaya, 2020) and for its efforts to achieve "digital sovereignty" (Musiani, 2022) - that is, being not dependent on international technological supply but local resources. The Russian government structures engage in a subtle form of manipulation towards internet users, employing complex legal structures and a flurry of actors and tactics, resulting in the prosecution of selected individuals for their social media activities and thus, fostering a culture of self-censorship (Gabdulhakov, 2020; Wijermars, 2022), which also often encourages digital vigilantism in favour of the traditional values (Favarel-Garrigues, 2020). These practices developed and deployed by Russia as well as the control of the traditional media through so-called "media reforms" have resonated well in many of the former Soviet Union states (Sherstoboeva, 2014), including the Eastern Partnership countries (Kryzhanouski, 2022; Kuznetsova, 2023; Wijermars & Lokot, 2022).

In the emphasis on traditional values, the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian government converge, paving the way for the sponsored promotion of traditional values, in particular in relation to gender and minorities in the Russian public sphere (Agadjanian, 2017; Stepanova, 2019), precisely, the refutation of LGBTQ+ rights through homophobic propaganda laws (Wilkinson, 2014). The Russian government's conservative approach to the gender question and its homophobic stance finds its resonance beyond its borders but more so in its immediate neighbourhood.

Generally, the new authoritarianism in the post-Soviet space is found to demonstrate similar patterns of discourse and behaviour in relation not only to civil society, media and gender but also to other aspects of life in the former Soviet Union countries (Nisnevich & Ryabov, 2020). With its relatively stronger governmental capacity in the region and given its Soviet legacy, Russia has emerged as the driver of authoritarian legal harmonisation in the region (Lemon & Antonov, 2020).

Overall, not only within the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods of the EU but also globally, Russia, along with China and others, contribute to the insidious normalisation of authoritarianism as a viable model (Buzogány, 2017), at least so until the war in Ukraine started. Russia's role, among others, is empirically evidenced to be a significant contributor to the democratic retreat or autocratic backlash on a global scale (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010).

2.4 Autocracy Promotion through Regionalism

Beyond the individually exercised tools, Russia also exploits the opportunities arising from regional cooperation for the preservation of authoritarianism in the near abroad. The Russia-led organisations such as the CIS, CSTO and EAEU as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) co-led by Russia and China, further foster autocratic regimes in the region (Allison, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2018; Cameron & Orenstein, 2012; Libman & Obydenkova, 2018; Russo & Stoddard, 2018; Tolstrup, 2009). These organisations serve as a regional-level instrument to support the individual ways in which Russia's autocratic effects abroad are realised. As each would require substantial discussion beyond the limits of this case study, below we limit ourselves to the mere differentiation of the ways in which these regional organisations support Russia's democracy resistance and autocracy promotion, supplemented with a few examples.

Proving autocracies with a regional umbrella. At a more general level, the regional organisations led by Russia and the SCO emerge as an additional layer of support for the regime security concerns of the autocrats in the region (Allison, 2004: 469). However, for the same reasons, these organisations have a cap on their integration ambitions, determined by the concerns of sovereignty should they pursue closer integration with Russia (Allison, 2004: 482–483; Libman & Vinokurov, 2018). The threat of democratisation emerges, thus, as a uniting ideology for the authoritarian regimes in the region (Obydenkova & Libman, 201: 349).

Instilling Autocratic interdependence. Another way that regional organisations feed into Russia's autocracy promotion is that they deepen economic and security interdependences between Russia on the one hand and the others in the region, creating more potential for the former to leverage its influence against the other should any democratisation processes be triggered within their societies (Cameron & Orenstein, 2012: 40). However, Russia's extent of willingness to leverage regional organisations for democracy resistance is also suggested to be determined by the geopolitical importance of the country in question for Russia and its relations with the EU (Libman & Obydenkova, 2018), explaining Russia's persistence on Ukraine.

Establishing Regional Autocratic Legitimisation. Regional organisations also create different tools to legitimize the autocratic regimes in the member-states (for other cases see, for instance, (Debre, 2021). In addition to contributing to the output legitimacy of the autocratic regimes in the region by boosting their economic and political performance in front of the eyes of their societies, they provide - as in the example of the CIS Election Monitoring Observation (EMO) established for the Belarus elections in 2001 - a tool to support the input legitimacy of the autocratic incumbents or elites. CIS EMO was established on a permanent basis following the 2002 elections in Armenia and supplied with the Convention on Standards of Democratic Elections and Voter Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the CIS in 2002. It is for the obvious reason that Moldova and Ukraine kicked the CIS Election Monitoring & Observation mission out long before (Kupchinsky, 2005). Yet, the autocratic regimes in the rest of the CIS countries still rely on this mission. For instance, in contrast to Moldova and Ukraine, when the Sargsyan regime in Armenia held the referendum to shift from the presidential to a parliamentary regime in 2015, which was aimed to serve to keep him in power under the guise of democratic reforms, the Russia-led CIS observers approved the results of the constitutional referendum, while the EU delegation in Armenia called for investigations amid the claims of frauds (Vieira, 2017) . Similarly, the parliamentary branches of these regional organisations through discursive practices support the legitimisation of the autocratic regimes in the region. For instance, the International Institute for Monitoring the Development of Democracy, Parliamentarism, and the

Protection of Citizens' Electoral Rights of the Member States of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly carries out a similar function.

Constructing A Region Eco Chamber for Autocratic Discourse. The Russia-led regional organisations also provide a framework within which the discursive arguments of autocratic regimes can find an echo chamber and cooperate on the closure of their national spheres. It is within this context that Russia promotes "a single informational sphere" – an ideal state of integration of the national public spheres and their fencing against the external world, specifically the influences of the liberal democratic world. This objective has been publicly acknowledged in 2005 by Nikola Patrushev, head of Russia's Federal Security Service, who stated:

> *'We are interested in unifying the respective laws of the CIS into clear legislation on the activities of NGOs. The NGOs must be told what problems they should tackle and for what purpose... The Constitution and laws must be changed before the wave of orange revolutions spreads to the leaders of the CIS'* (Jackson, 2010: 105).

Authoritarian Cultural Subversion. It is within this context that Russia finds also an opportunity to carry out its subversion activities through joint events and efforts under the guise of cultural "gumanitarniy" cooperation[4] (Jose & Stefes, 2022; Morozova, 2018; Šćepanović, 2022). The CIS with its large structure and broader mandate plays often a crucial role for facilitating such cooperation across different fields. From pushes for joint history books to preserve the "common history" to creating "a single informational zone" to counter allegedly radical, extremist and Western influence, efforts at localising the normative control through the instruments such as the Convention on the principles of democratic elections and the rights and freedom of the Electorate adopted in 2002. To carry its ideological work in the near neighbourhood, in the last two decades, the Russian government has established several governmental bodies such 'Russian World' ("Russkiy Mir") Foundation, and the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Izotov & Obydenkova, 2021: 161). "Russkiy Mir" – the project to export Russian cultural influence abroad coupled with the tropes of Eurasianism as a civilisational project provide further background to Russia's cultural subversion in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Makarychev, 2018; Pieper, 2020).

Authoritarian Legal Harmonization. Finally, the Russia-led regional organisations serve, in various sectors and to varying degrees, the authoritarian legal harmonisation among the member-states. These include not only the areas where there is a need for technical harmonisation or the harmonisation of standards key to regional integration but also in areas such as countering extremism and terrorism as well as the regulatory framework for civil society organisation and media, which are often used against the opposition figures or government challengers. The process itself is led primarily by Russia and the Russian legislation emerges as the major reference point (Lemon & Antonov, 2020). The major work for authoritarian legal harmonization has been carried out primarily through the Union State of Russia and Belarus, the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, and the EAEU. Nevertheless, subordinating the harmonisation processes going under different umbrellas to the EAEU has been actively pursued by Russia in recent years (Nasibov & Gawrich, 2024).

[4] In the Russian language practice, it is referred to cooperation in the fields beyond military, economy and politics, mostly in the fields of culture and sport.

3 Conclusion

This case study provided a brief portrayal of Russia's autocracy support, democracy resistance and autocracy promotion in the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. For the geographical proximity and historical ties, the emphasis was on the former region where a more nuanced picture of Russia's autocratic effects abroad could be captured. The overall picture suggested that Russia has never shied back from using all means, including its own army and intelligence to back the falling autocratic regimes abroad. To "tame", the democratising countries, Russia has developed a large inventory ranging from soft leveraging of economic and security interdependences to subversion and attempt at full-scale invasion (e.g., Ukraine). The subversion is shown to include a comprehensive extent of elements in which the recruitment and instalment of different societal actors and policy of "passport colonisation" in the target states were accompanied by disinformation campaigns and the promotion of distorted historical narratives.

Nevertheless, Russia's *autocratic effects* abroad are demonstrated to go beyond these *democracy resistance* strategies and activities. It has emerged as a role model for autocratic regimes in its immediate neighbourhoods. As an autocratic regime, Russia supplies, above all, narratives for the legitimisation of non-democratic practices which are eventually picked up by others in the region and beyond. With its practices of restricting the civil sphere, increasing surveillance and censorship in society as well as promoting traditional values against women's rights and the rights of LGBTQ, Russia supplies others in the region and elsewhere in the world with an example of a viable autocratic rule. Finally, Russia is shown to have also embedded all these activities within a regional institutional architecture that supports its both democracy resistance and autocracy promotion ambitions.

Russia's autocratic effects abroad, as discussed above, provides several implications for the EU democracy support in the neighbourhood. Above all, the discussions shows that Russia's direct support to falling autocracies in the region is a fact the EU needs to address by developing its sanctioning strategies. However, more nuanced approach of the EU is needed regarding the diverse inventory of Russia's democracy resistance which includes the leveraging of economic and security instruments, subversion and invasion. The diversity of this inventory invites the EU to better mainstream democracy support along all fields of its relations with the region. Moreover, the regional autocracy layer equally begs an attention in EU's democracy support. Supporting and cultivating democratic practice and discourse in alternative regional institutional frameworks is key to countering autocracy sustained by regional authoritarian structures.

Bibliography

Abushov, Kavus. "Alliance-Building between Great Power Commitment and Misperceptions: Failed Balancing despite Alignment Efforts in the Post-Soviet Space." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 6 June 2013, pp. 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2022.2134988

Ademmer, Esther, et al. "Beyond Geopolitics: Exploring the Impact of the EU and Russia in the "Contested Neighborhood."" *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2 Jan. 2016, pp. 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1183221

Agadjanian, Alexander. "Tradition, Morality and Community: Elaborating Orthodox Identity in Putin's Russia." *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2 Jan. 2017, pp. 39–60,

https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2016.1272893

Allin, Dana H. “Ukraine: The Shock of Recognition.” Vol. 64, no. 2, 4 Mar. 2022, pp. 201–208, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2055837

Allison, Roy. “Virtual Regionalism, Regional Structures and Regime Security in Central Asia.” *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 27, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 185–202, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930802355121

Albulescu, Ana Maria. The Search for a Comprehensive Political Settlement in Transnistria: Explaining the Failure to Reach Agreement. *Peacebuilding, 2* July 2023, pp. 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2023.2231244

Allison, R. Virtual regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia. *Central Asian Survey*, no. 27, 2, 2008, 185–202, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930802355121

Allison, R. "Virtual Regionalism and Protective Integration in Central Asia." Eurasian Perspectives: in Search of Alternatives, edited by A. Sengupta and S. Chatterjee, *Shipra Publications*, 2010, pp. 29–48.

Allison, R. "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and CSTO." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2018, pp. 297–338. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poy008

Ambrosio, T. "Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union." *Post-Soviet Politics*, Ashgate, 2009.

Ambrosio, T. "Constructing a Framework of Authoritarian Diffusion Concepts, Dynamics, and Future Research." *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2010, pp. 375–392.

Antonopoulos, P., Velez, R., & Cottle, D. "NATO’s Push into the Caucasus: Geopolitical Flashpoints and Limits for Expansion." *Defense & Security Analysis,* vol. 33, no. 4, 2017, pp. 366–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1379119

Antonyan, T. M. "Russia and Iran in the Syrian Crisis: Similar Aspirations, Different Approaches." *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2017, pp. 337–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2017.1442407

Astapova, A., Navumau, V., Nizhnikau, R., & Polishchuk, L. "Authoritarian Cooptation of Civil Society: The Case of Belarus." *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.2009773

Babayan, N. "The Return of the Empire? Russia's Counteraction to Transatlantic Democracy Promotion in Its Near Abroad." *Democratization*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2015, pp. 438–458. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.993973

Bader, J., Grävingholt, J., & Kästner, A. "Would Autocracies Promote Autocracy? A Political Economy Perspective on Regime-Type Export in Regional Neighborhoods." *Contemporary Politics,* vol. 16, no. 1, 2010, pp. 81–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569771003593904

Balcaen, P., Du Bois, C., & Buts, C. "The Design of Russia's Economic Warfare Against Ukraine." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2022, pp. 11–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2022.2045796

Bedford, S. "The 2020 Presidential Election in Belarus: Erosion of Authoritarian Stability and Re-politicization of Society." *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 49, no. 5, 2021, pp. 808–819. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.33

Berglund, C., & Bolkvadze, K. "Sons of the Soil or Servants of the Empire? Profiling the Guardians of Separatism in Abkhazia and South O*ssetia." Problems of Post-Communism, 2022, pp. 1–12*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2022.2102039

Biersack, J., & O'Lear, S. "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2014, pp. 247–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2014.985241

Blakkisrud, H., Kemoklidze, N., Gelashvili, T., & Kolstø, P. "Navigating De Facto Statehood: Trade, Trust, and Agency in Abkhazia's External Economic Relations." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2021, pp. 347–371. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15387216.2020.1861957

Börzel, T. A. "The Noble West and the Dirty Rest? Western Democracy Promoters and Illiberal Regional Powers." *Democratization,* vol. 22, no. 3, 2015, pp. 519–535. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.1000312

Botting, L. "China and Russia Both Benefit from the CSTO Intervention in Kazakhstan: Far from Causing Friction, Russia's Intervention in Kazakhstan Shows the Durability of the Sino-Russian Relationship." *The Diplomat,* 11 Jan. 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/china-and-russia-both-benefit-from-the-csto-intervention-in-kazakhstan/.

Brown, J. D. "'A Nightmare Painted by Goya': Russian Media Coverage of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Attacks in Comparative Perspective." *Problems of post-communism,* vol. 62, no. 4, 2015, pp. 236–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1026212

Brownlee, J. "The Limited Reach of Authoritarian Powers." *Democratization*, vol. 24, no. 7, 2017, pp. 1326–1344. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1287175

Burnell, P., & Schlumberger, O. "Promoting Democracy – Promoting Autocracy? *International Politics and National Political Regimes*." Contemporary Politics, vol. 16, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569771003593805

Buzgalin, A. V., & Kolganov, A. I. "The Protests in Belarus: Context, Causes and Lessons." *Critical Sociology*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2021, pp. 441–453. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520982368

Buzogány, A. "Illiberal Democracy in Hungary: Authoritarian Diffusion or Domestic Causation?" *Democratization*, vol. 24, no. 7, 2017, pp. 1307–1325. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1328676

Cadier, D. "The Geopoliticisation of the EU's Eastern Partnership." *Geopolitics*, vol. 24 no.1, pp.71-99, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1477754

Çakmak, C., & Özşahin, C. C. M. "Explaining Russia's Inertia in the Azerbaijan–Armenia Dispute: Reward and Punishment in an Asymmetric Alliance." *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2023, pp. 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2023.2191903

Cameron, D. R., & Orenstein, M. A. "Post-Soviet Authoritarianism: The Influence of Russia in Its 'Near Abroad'." *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–44. https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.28.1.1

Casier, T. "Russia and the Diffusion of Political Norms: The Perfect Rival?" *Democratization*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2022, pp. 433–450, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1928078

Charap, S. "Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention." *Survival*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2013, pp. 35–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2013.767403

Cheterian, V. "Technological Determinism or Strategic Advantage? Comparing the Two Karabakh Wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan." *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2022, pp. 1–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2127093

Choi, S. N., Buranelli, F. C., & Fumagalli, M. "What the CSTO's Intervention in Kazakhstan Really Means." *The National Interest*, 13 Feb. 2022. https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-csto%E2%80%99s-intervention-kazakhstan-really-means-200487

Clarke, M. "Kazakhstan and CSTO Intervention: Geopolitics or Intra-Elite Struggle?" *The National Interest*, 28 Jan. 2022 https://nationalinterest.org/feature/kazakhstan-and-csto-intervention-geopolitics-or-intra-elite-struggle-199869

Davtyan, E. "Lessons that Lead to War: Foreign Policy Learning and Military Escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict." *Problems of post-communism*, 2023, pp. 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2023.2183410

Debre, M. J. "The Dark Side of Regionalism: How Regional Organizations Help Authoritarian Regimes to Boost Survival." *Democratization*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2021, pp. 394–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1823970

Delcour, L. "'You Can Lead a Horse to Water, but You Can't Make It Drink': The EU's and Russia's Intersecting Conditionalities and Domestic Responses in Georgia and Moldova."

European Politics and Society, vol. 19, no. 4, 2018, pp. 490–505. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1441699

Delcour, L., & Wolczuk, K. "Spoiler or Facilitator of Democratization? Russia's Role in Georgia and Ukraine." *Democratization*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2015, pp. 459–478. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.996135.

Doukaev, A. "Azerbaijan Is Drifting Away from Russia, and Moscow Has Only Itself to Blame." *Jamestown Foundation*, 20(86), May 2023. https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-is-drifting-away-from-russia-and-moscow-has-only-itself-to-blame/.

Dunkerley, C. "Russia, Georgia and the United States: Dealing with New Realities." *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2008, pp. 61–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2008.11446331.

Eurasianet Staff. "Kazakhstan Gripped by Protests as Popular Frustration Spills Over." *Eurasiane*t, 1 Apr. 2022. https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-gripped-by-protests-as-popular-frustration-spills-over.

Essen, H. von, & Hedenskog, J. "Russia's CSTO Intervention in Kazakhstan: Motives, Risks and Consequences (Commentary)." *Stockholm Center for Eastern European Studies*, 14 Jan. 2022. https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/sceeus/russias-csto-intervention-in-kazakhstan.pdf.

Favarel-Garrigues, G. "Digital Vigilantism and Anti-Paedophile Activism in Russia: Between Civic Involvement in Law Enforcement, Moral Policing and Business Venture." *Global Crime*, vol. 21, no. 3-4, 2020, pp. 306–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2019.1676738.

Gabdulhakov, R. "(Con)trolling the Web: Social Media User Arrests, State-Supported Vigilantism and Citizen Counterforces in Russia." *Global Crime*, vol. 21, no. 3-4, 2020, pp. 283–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2020.1719836.

Gavin, G. "After Kazakhstan, the CSTO Isn't Finished with Central Asia." *The Diplomat*, 25 Jan. 2022. https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/after-kazakhstan-the-csto-isnt-finished-with-central-asia/.

German, T. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia: Security Issues in the Caucasus." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2012, pp. 216–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2012.694666.

Gilbert, L., & Mohseni, P. "Disabling Dissent: The Colour Revolutions, Autocratic Linkages, and Civil Society Regulations in Hybrid Regimes." *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2018, pp. 454–480. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2018.1471645.

Gilbert, L., & Mohseni, P. "NGO Laws after the Colour Revolutions and the Arab Spring: Nondemocratic Regime Strategies in Eastern Europe and the Middle East." *Mediterranean Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2018.1537103

Gogia, Giorgi. "Harassed, Imprisoned, Exiled: Azerbaijan's Continuing Crackdown on Government Critics, Lawyers, and Civil Society." *Human Rights Watch*, 2016, New York.

Götz, Eva, and Jørgen Staun. "Why Russia Attacked Ukraine: Strategic Culture and Radicalized Narratives." *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2022, pp. 482–497. https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2082633.

Gurinskaya, Anastasia. "Predicting Citizens' Support for Surveillance Cameras: Does Police Legitimacy Matter?" *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice,* vol. 44, no. 1-2, 2020, pp. 63–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2020.1744027.

Hagemann, Carsten. "External Governance on the Terms of the Partner? The EU, Russia and the Republic of Moldova in the European Neighbourhood Policy." *Journal of European Integration,* vol. 35, no. 7, 2013, pp. 767–783. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2012.732073.

Hall, S. "The End of Adaptive Authoritarianism in Belarus?" *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2023, pp. 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2093332.

Horvath, R. "Putin's 'Preventive Counter-Revolution': Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution." *BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies,* vol. 82, Routledge, 2013.

Hovorun, Cyril. "Humanitarianism and the Churches in Ukraine." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2016, pp. 43–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2016.1145471.

Hughes, G. A. "Syria and the Perils of Proxy Warfare." *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2014, pp. 522–538. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.913542.

Hurak, Ivan, and Paul D'Anieri. "The Evolution of Russian Political Tactics in Ukraine." *Problems of post-communism,* vol. 69, no. 2, 2022, pp. 121–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1819162.

Ibrahimov, Rufat, and Mehmet Fatih Oztarsu. "Causes of the Second Karabakh War: Analysis of the Positions and the Strength and Weakness of Armenia and Azerbaijan." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies,* vol. 24, no. 4, 2022, pp. 595–613. https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2037862.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). "The Protest Movement in Belarus: Resistance and Repression." March 2021. https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2021/protest-movement-in-belarus.

Ishetiar, Said. "Echoes of Abstention: Russian Policy in Libya and Implications for Regional Stability." Princeton University. *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, 2019, May 21.

Ismayil, Emin, and Sabri Yilmaz. "Strategic Alignments and Balancing of Threats: Military and Political Alliances in the South Caucasus (1991–2021)." *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2022, pp. 533–552. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.2000940.

Izotov, V. S., & Obydenkova, A. V. "Geopolitical Games in Eurasian Regionalism: Ideational Interactions and Regional International Organisations." Post-Communist Economies, vol. 33, no. 2-3, 2021, pp. 150–174. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2020.1793584.

Jackson, N. J. "The Role of External Factors in Advancing Non-Liberal Democratic Forms of Political Rule: A Case Study of Russia's Influence on Central Asian Regimes." *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2010, pp. 101–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569771003593920.

Jose, Bobby, and Christoph H. Stefes. "Russia as a Norm Entrepreneur: Crimea and Humanitarian Intervention." Problems of post-communism, 2022, pp. 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2022.2132405.

Katamadze, Mariam. "Georgia's 'Foreign Agent' Bill Undermines EU Hopes." *Deutsche Welle*, 3 July 2023. https://www.dw.com/en/georgias-foreign-agent-bill-undermines-eu-hopes/a-64908879.

Khamitov, Z., Knox, C., & Junusbekova, G. "Corruption, Public Procurement and Political Instability in Kazakhstan." *Central Asian Survey,* vol. 42, no. 1, 2023, pp. 89–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2022.2072811.

Klein, M., & A. Schmitz. "Precedent Kazakhstan." Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP). *Point of View,* 19 Jan. 2022. https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/precedent-kazakhstan.

Kolstø, P. "Biting the Hand that Feeds Them? Abkhazia–Russia Client–Patron Relations." *Post-Soviet Affairs,* vol. 36, no. 2, 2020, pp. 140–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2020.1712987.

Kozelsky, M. "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine." *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2014, pp. 219–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2014.957635.

Kryzhanouski, Y. "Managing Dissent in Post-Soviet Authoritarianism: New Censorship of Protest Music in Belarus and Russia, 2000–2018." *Europe-Asia Studies,* vol. 74, no. 5, 2022, pp. 760–788. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2032605

Kucera, Joshua. "CSTO Agrees to Intervene in Kazakhstan Unrest." *Eurasianet*, 1 May 2022. https://eurasianet.org/csto-agrees-to-intervene-in-kazakhstan-unrest.

Kupchinsky, Roman. "CIS: Monitoring The Election Monitors." *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 4 Feb. 2005. https://www.rferl.org/a/1058234.html.

Kuznetsova, Daria. "Broadcasting Messages via Telegram: Pro-Government Social Media Control During the 2020 Protests in Belarus and 2022 Anti-War Protests in Russia." *Political Communication*, 2023, pp. 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2233444.

Lemon, Edward, and Oleg Antonov. "Authoritarian Legal Harmonization in the Post-Soviet Space." *Democratization*, vol. 27, no. 7, 2020, pp. 1221–1239. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1778671.

Libman, Alexander, and Anastassia V. Obydenkova. "Regional International Organizations as a Strategy of Autocracy: The Eurasian Economic Union and Russian Foreign Policy." *International Affairs,* vol. 94, no. 5, 2018, pp. 1037–1058. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy147.

Libman, Alexander, and Evgeny Vinokurov. "Autocracies and Regional Integration: The Eurasian Case." *Post-Communist Economies*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2018, pp. 334–364. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2018.1442057.

Lomsadze, Giorgi. "Far from FARA? Georgia's Foreign Agent Law Controversy." *Eurasianet*, 3 June 2023. https://eurasianet.org/far-from-fara-georgias-foreign-agent-law-controversy.

Makarychev, Andrey. "Normative and Civilisational Regionalisms: The EU, Russia and Their Common Neighbourhoods." *The International Spectator*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2018, pp. 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1483630.

Marten, Kimberly. "Russia's Use of Semi-state Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group." *Post-Soviet Affairs,* vol. 35, no. 3, 2019, pp. 181–204. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142.

Matveeva, Anna. "No Moscow Stooges: Identity Polarization and Guerrilla Movements in Donbass." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2016, pp. 25–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2016.1148415.

Mazepus, Halyna, et al. "Civil Society and External Actors: How Linkages with the EU and Russia Interact with Socio-political Orders in Belarus and Ukraine." *East European Politics,* vol. 37, no. 1, 2021, pp. 43–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2021.1873780.

Miarka, Andrzej. "The 2020 Autumn War in Nagorno-Karabakh: Course and Implications for the Strategic Balance of Power in the South Caucasus Region." *Asian Affairs*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2021, pp. 826–851. https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2021.1993050.

Mikalay, Mikalay, and Mark Neuman. "Framing the Eastern Partnership in the European Union's and Russia's Institutional Discourse." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2022, pp. 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2022.2043256.

Mikhelidze, Nona. "After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus." *The International Spectator*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2009, pp. 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932720903148807.

“Moldova’s New Pro-EU Government." *Strategic Comments,* vol. 27, no. 8, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2021.1991633.

Morozova, Natalia. "Resisting the West, Forging Regional Consensus: Russia’s Discourse on Humanitarian Cooperation in the Commonwealth of Independent States." *Geopolitics*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2018, pp. 354–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1462160.

Mudde, Cas. "The Threats of Russian-style NGO Legislation to Civil Society in Azerbaijan." *MA Thesis, Leiden University,* 2017.
https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2608100/view

Mudrov, Sergey A. "Doomed to Fail? Why Success Was Almost Not an Option in the 2020 Protests in Belarus." *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe,* vol. 29, no. 1, 2021, pp. 109–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2021.1928880.

Musiani, Francesca. "Infrastructuring Digital Sovereignty: A Research Agenda for an Infrastructure-based Sociology of Digital Self-determination Practices." *Information, Communication & Society,* vol. 25, no. 6, 2022, pp. 785–800.
https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2049850.

Nagashima, Taku. "Russia’s Passportization Policy toward Unrecognized Republics." *Problems of post-communism,* vol. 66, no. 3, 2019, pp. 186–199.
https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1388182.

Nasibov, Murad, and Alexander Gawrich. "EAEU and Other Post-Soviet Integration Organizations." In A. Libman & E. Vinokurov (Eds.), Elgar Companions to International Organizations series. Elgar Companion to the Eurasian Economic Union. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024.

Nilsson, Martin, and David Silander. "Democracy and Security in the EU’s Eastern Neighborhood? Assessing the ENP in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine." *Democracy and Security*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2016, pp. 44–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2015.1135744.

Nilsson, Niklas. "Between Russia’s ‘Hybrid’ strategy and Western Ambiguity: Assessing Georgia’s Vulnerabilities." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2021, pp. 50–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2021.1923992.

Nisnevich, Yasha, and Alexander Ryabov. "Post-Soviet Authoritarianism." *Russian Social Science Review,* vol. 61, no. 6, 2020, pp. 538–554.
https://doi.org/10.1080/10611428.2020.1852042

Nitoiu, Cristian, and Mihai Sus. "Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU’s Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood." *Geopolitics*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–19.
https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2019.1544396

Obydenkova, Anastassia, and Alexander Libman. "Understanding the foreign policy of autocratic actors: ideology or pragmatism? Russia and the Tymoshenko trial as a case study." *Contemporary Politics,* vol. 20, no. 3, 2014, pp. 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2014.911500.

Onuch, Olga, and Gwendolyn Sasse. "Anti-regime action and geopolitical polarization: understanding protester dispositions in Belarus." *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 1-2, 2022, pp. 62–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2034134.

Onuch, Olga, and Gwendolyn Sasse. "The Belarus crisis: people, protest, and political dispositions." *Post-Soviet Affairs,* vol. 38, no. 1-2, 2022b, pp. 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2042138

Osipov, Alexander. "Crimea in Ukraine: Smoothing the Edges as Diversity Institutionalization." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics,* vol. 29, no. 2, 2023, pp. 204–223. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2023.2207367.

Pannier, Bruce. "How the Intervention in Kazakhstan Revitalized the Russian-led CSTO." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 7 Mar. 2022. https://issuu.com/foreignpolicyresearchinstitute/docs/final_issuu_version

Pearce, Katy E., Robert Vincent, and Arzu Geybullayeva. "Crackdown on Civil Society in Azerbaijan." *The Caucasus Analytic Digest,* no. 70, Feb. 2015, p. 19. https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-a-010389532.

Pieper, Moritz. "Russkiy Mir: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad." *Geopolitics*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2020, pp. 756–779. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1465047.

Preiherman, Yauheni, and Thomas Graham. "Don't Put Belarus in the Middle: The West Needs to Balance the Interests of Moscow and Minsk." *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, 10 Feb. 2020. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2020-10-02/dont-put-belarus-middle?check_logged_in=1.

Rotaru, Vlad. "Forced Attraction?" *Problems of post-communism,* vol. 65, no. 1, 2018, pp. 37–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2016.1276400

Russo, Alessandra, and Erica Stoddard. "Why do Authoritarian Leaders do Regionalism? Ontological Security and Eurasian Regional Cooperation." *The International Spectator*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2018, pp. 20–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1488404

Sasse, Gwendolyn, and Aimee Lackner. "War and identity: the case of the Donbas in Ukraine." *Post-Soviet Affairs,* vol. 34, no. 2-3, 2018, pp. 139–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1452209.

Šćepanović, Jelena. "Commonwealth of Independent States at 30: why does Russia still support this organization?" *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2022, pp. 187–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2022.2057637.

Sherstoboeva, Elena. "Media Law Reform in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan." *Problems of post-communism,* vol. 61, no. 5, 2014, pp. 32–45. https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216610503.

Smith, Nathaniel R. "The EU and Russia's conflicting regime preferences in Ukraine: assessing regime promotion strategies in the scope of the Ukraine crisis." *European Security*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2015, pp. 525–540. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2015.1027768.

Souleimanov, Emil A., Emil Abrahamyan, and Huseyn Aliyev. "Unrecognized states as a means of coercive diplomacy? Assessing the role of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Russia's foreign policy in the South Caucasus." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies,* vol. 18, no. 1, 2018, pp. 73–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2017.1390830.

Stepanova, Ekaterina. "Russia and Conflicts in the Middle East: Regionalisation and Implications for the West." *The International Spectator*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2018, pp. 35–57.

Stepanova, Elena. "Competing Moral Discourses in Russia: Soviet Legacy and Post-Soviet Controversies." *Politics, Religion & Ideology,* vol. 20, no. 3, 2019, pp. 340–360. https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2019.1656070.

Stoycheff, Elizabeth, Gabriel S. Burgess, and Matthew C. Martucci. "Online censorship and digital surveillance: the relationship between suppression technologies and democratization across countries." *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2020, pp. 474–490. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1518472.

Strasheim, Julia. "Power-sharing, commitment problems, and armed conflict in Ukraine." *Civil Wars,* vol. 18, no. 1, 2016, pp. 25–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2016.1144494.

Strovsky, Dmitry, and Robert Schleifer. "The Russian Media as a Promoter of Manipulative Approaches: The Case of the Syrian Civil War." *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2019.1692609.

Thornton, Rod. "The Russian Military Commitment in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean." *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 163, no. 4, 2018, pp. 30–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2018.1529892.

Tolstrup, Jakob. "Studying a negative external actor: Russia's management of stability and instability in the 'Near Abroad'." *Democratization*, vol. 16, no. 5, 2009, pp. 922–944. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340903162101.

Trofino, Salvatore, and Andrew Nemets. "Russia: Tipping the Balance in the Middle East." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2009, pp. 367–382. https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040902917990.

Ó Tuathail, Gearóid. "Russia's Kosovo: A Critical Geopolitics of the August 2008 War over South Ossetia." *Eurasian Geography and Economics,* vol. 49, no. 6, 2008, pp. 670–705. https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.49.6.670

Vendil Pallin, Christina, and Fredrik Westerlund. "Russia's war in Georgia: lessons and consequences." *Small Wars & Insurgencies,* vol. 20, no. 2, 2009, pp. 400–424. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310902975539.

Vieira, André. "A Tale of Two Unions: Russia–Belarus Integration Experience and its Lessons for the Eurasian Economic Union." *Journal of Borderlands Studies,* vol. 32, no. 1, 2017, pp. 41–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2016.1211959.

Vieira, André, and Suren Vasilyan. "Armenia and Belarus: caught between the EU's and Russia's conditionalities?" *European Politics and Society*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2018, pp. 471–489. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1455337.

de Waal, Thomas. "Remaking the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process." *Survival*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2010, pp. 159–176. https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2010.506830

Wijermars, Martijn. "Selling internet control: the framing of the Russian ban of messaging app Telegram." *Information, Communication & Society,* vol. 25, no. 15, 2022, pp. 2190–2206. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1933562

Wijermars, Martijn, and Tetyana Lokot. "Is Telegram a “harbinger of freedom”? The performance, practices, and perception of platforms as political actors in authoritarian states." *Post-Soviet Affairs,* vol. 38, no. 1-2, 2022, pp. 125–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2030645

Wilkinson, Claire. "Putting “Traditional Values” Into Practice: The Rise and Contestation of Anti-Hom propaganda Laws in Russia." *Journal of Human Rights,* vol. 13, no. 3, 2014, pp. 363–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2014

Wilson, A. "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but not Civil War." *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2016, pp. 631–652. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09668136.2016.1176994

Ziegler, C. E. "Great powers, civil society and authoritarian diffusion in Central Asia." *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2016, pp. 549–569. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2016.1228608