

Beyond Geopolitics: Exploring the Impact of the EU and Russia in the "contested neighbourhood"

Wolczuk, Kataryna; Delcour, Laure ; Ademmer , Esther

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Beyond Geopolitics: An impact of the EU and Russia in the “contested neighborhood”

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Esther Ademmer
Kiel Institute for the World
Economy & Christian-Albrechts-
Universität Kiel
Kiellinie 66
D-24105 Kiel
+49 431 8814 499
esther.ademmer@ifw-kiel.de

Laure Delcour
Fondation Maison des
Sciences de l’Homme
190 Avenue de France
F-75013 Paris
+33 684 9783 23
ldelcour@msh-paris.fr

Kataryna Wolczuk
University of
Birmingham
Muirhead Tower
UK- B15 2TT
+44 121 414 6356
k.wolczuk@bham.ac.uk

Abstract

While the geopolitical rivalry between the European Union (EU) and Russia over their common neighborhood has increasingly attracted academic and public attention, relatively little is known of their actual influence on domestic institutions and policies. This special issue aims to address this deficit by investigating the joint impact of the EU and Russia on the domestic dynamics of sectoral reform in neighboring countries (NCs) – a key declared goal of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) – in the areas of trade, natural resources, and migration and mobility. It examines the nature of the instruments deployed by the EU and Russia to change domestic reform processes and their impact on domestic actors in the post-Soviet space. This introductory article outlines the key research questions to which answers have been sought by experts in their respective fields and summarizes their key empirical findings in the context of broader conceptual debates. Overall, the contributions to this special issue find a strong disconnect between participation in the EU’s or Russia’s macro-frameworks for regional integration and domestic sectoral reforms. We show that despite the increasing external competition over the post-Soviet space, domestic actors remain the key agents to account for the pattern of change in the contested neighborhood.

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Introduction

With the launch of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 and in particular the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009, the European Union (EU) has endeavored to spread its rules into its eastern neighborhood, the post-Soviet countries located in Europe. This export of rules is unprecedented in terms of scale and intensity outside the context of enlargement. However, in the post-Soviet space – unlike in Central and Eastern Europe - the EU is not the only “game in town”. Russia has put forward its own integration regime, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and has actively sought to attract new members, or at least to dissuade potential members from pursuing closer economic integration with the EU. As a result, the countries located between the enlarged EU and Russia have increasingly become an object of contention and rivalry between Brussels and Moscow (Haukkala 2015, 27). The “contested neighborhood” comprises Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, all of which are included in the ENP and the EaP.

Moscow’s objections to EU’s policies date back to the early 2000s. The Color Revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and especially in Ukraine in 2004 triggered concern in Russia over its loss of influence in what it views as its “near abroad” (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015b). The EU’s increased presence in the post-Soviet space starting with the ENP has only exacerbated Russia’s concerns over EU’s encroachment. The Eastern Partnership launched in 2009, in particular, signaled a shift towards hard-law integration with the EU that was interpreted in Russia as a constraint to its own policies in the region (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2013; Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2015a). The competition for influence over their ‘contested neighborhood’ reached its climax with the imminent signing of an Association Agreements between the EU and Ukraine, culminating in a chain events that started with mass protests and led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia and, with the support of Russia, to the war in Eastern Ukraine. All of this has come to be known as the ‘Ukrainian crisis’; a crisis that demonstrated the implications of this rivalry most vividly.¹

And yet, the EU’s and Russia’s foreign policies camouflage the complex and multiple cross-cutting influences exerted on the neighborhood countries. This is especially so with regard to sector-specific developments. This is because the “contested neighborhood” consists of states with limited capacity to steer and regulate domestically and a fusion of political and economic actors, which substantially shape their receptivity to EU and Russian influences.

The overarching aim of the special issue is to shed some more light on these complex developments by analyzing the domestic dynamics behind sectoral reforms in NCs in the area of economics, trade, natural resources, and migration and mobility. We explore the way in which Russia's and the EU's policies have actually influenced the political economy of reforms in post-Soviet countries. We ask which concrete instruments are employed to change domestic reform processes, with what effect and which actors are exactly targeted by EU and Russian policy transfers in the neighborhood countries. We explore the diverse outcomes that Russian and EU actors exert on sectoral change in target countries. This enables us to determine whether there are patterned differences between sectoral policy changes and broader geopolitical decisions in favor of or against regional integration with either Russia or the EU. In addition, we explore the role that different domestic actors play in this process and show them to be active shapers of domestic reforms, rather than passive translators of external influences. We thereby advance existing research by studying how multiple external actors shape the domestic political economy of reforms in a variety of policy field and countries in the region.

This introduction is structured as follows: The next section discusses the empirical dynamics and conceptual debates behind competing external influences in the post-Soviet space. We then present some of the key research questions asked and discuss related answers given in the individual contributions. Finally, the last section gives a brief overview of the policy areas and the six articles covered in this special issue.

The contested neighborhood: empirical dynamics and conceptual debates behind competing external influences

In recent years, the policies of the EU and Russia in their “contested neighborhood” have predominantly been analyzed from a geopolitical prism. Triggered by successive crises – starting with gas crises in Ukraine and the conflict in Georgia, and culminating with the recent crisis in Ukraine - academic debates have concentrated on EU-Russia rivalry. Some have challenged the predominant view of the EU as a normative power (Casier 2013), thus nuancing the assumption that Russia and the EU offer drastically different approaches to their neighborhood (Averre 2009). Others have argued that competition in the post-Soviet space is between a “neo-imperial” EU and a “post-imperial Russia” (Torbakov 2013, 173).

However different their conclusions may be, scholarly publications have focused on both the drivers and instruments behind EU's and Russia's policies in the region. With the launch of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) and the Russia-driven Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as two deep economic integration projects, attention has increasingly shifted toward the effects of EU's and Russia's policies on post-Soviet countries (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2012; Delcour and Wolczuk, 2013). This is because the EU's and Russia's integration offers are mutually exclusive. The EU's offer of the DCFTA is certainly compatible with other FTAs, thus enabling partner countries to maintain the free-trade agreements signed with Russia or within the CIS framework. However, with the EEU Russia's ambitions go beyond the CIS framework; the membership of the EEU involves a loss of sovereignty over foreign trade policy and is therefore not compatible with a DCFTA. By pushing for membership of the EEU, Russia is *de facto* compelling countries in the contested neighborhood to choose between the two projects (Delcour and Kostanyan 2014; Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2014). In the neighborhood, Belarus and Armenia have joined the EEU, whereas Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have concluded the DCFTAs with the EU. And yet, the choice of, and compatibility between, these macro-frameworks for regional integration only capture a few facets of policy change in post-Soviet countries.

Less attention has so far been paid to the choices of and implications for the "in-between countries" (Torbakov 2013, 173) that are frequently simply perceived as a playground of large neighboring actors. As a result, domestic developments have for a long time been overlooked in scholarly work and have only recently gained some prominence.

Yet, recent developments in and analyses of the region show that post-Soviet countries are not merely passive recipients of EU's and Russia's policies, but actively respond to and shape external influences in a complex way (see e.g. Ademmer forthcoming; Langbein 2015). The Maidan protests in Ukraine, for instance, were driven by domestic (rather than external) actors'. They did not develop in response to EU policies or to what Russia sees as a Western plot, but instead signaled domestic demand for democracy and reforms, leading to the ousting of the incumbent regime (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015b). In a similar vein, the Armenian protests in spring and summer 2015 were a bottom-up process, driven by a civic initiative without any clear political affiliation. They expressed frustration over corrupted Armenian commodity-based cartels that are closely tied to the government and increasingly to Russia's big business. The 'Electric Yerevan' protests thus only partially relate to the country's geopolitical engagement in the Eurasian integration process and primarily target the lack of

accountability of the authorities and the restrictions brought to market competition by monopolies tied to the ruling elite. These examples indicate that domestic constellations of actors, perceptions and preferences are central even in a context of geopolitical rivalry between two large external actors.

By highlighting domestic sectoral changes in the post-Soviet countries in response to external influences, this special issue intends to add another dimension to supplement our understanding of integration dynamics in the region. Conversely, by concentrating on domestic concerns and preferences and the domestic political economy of reform, we hope to further enrich understanding of how external actors support or constrain domestic sectoral change for a broad set of cases and countries.

The question of how the perceived competition between the EU and Russia shapes domestic sectoral reform also speaks to more conceptual debates in the literature. There has been a wide array of research under the heading of “neighborhood” Europeanisation and external governance, which has predominantly studied the bilateral impact of the EU on domestic developments in neighboring countries (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009; Langbein and Börzel 2013). Despite increased attention to domestic-level and agency-centered explanations, the Europeanization literature in general has been criticized as being EU-centered, top-down, and still too inattentive to domestic forces of change (Börzel and Risse 2012). It is conceivable that, because of the success of enlargement, the EU’s role in promoting domestic change has been over-emphasized. The effectiveness of EU’s strategy relying on exporting complex and sophisticated set of sector-specific rules to countries without a functional legal system and/or capacity to implement them has rarely been questioned in European Studies (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2011).

Russia’s policy in the “near abroad” has also been subject to a scholarly debate that has concentrated especially on its political influence, namely the promotion of authoritarian forms of governance (Jackson 2010) and Russia’s management of (in-)stability in the neighborhood (Tolstrup 2009). In addition, the motives behind and instruments in Russian foreign policy have attracted academic interest (Ambrosio 2009; Tolstrup 2015; Bader, Grävingholt, and Kästner 2010) and scholars analyzed different forms of Russian soft and hard power (Hill 2006; Leonard and Popescu 2007; Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012; Sherr 2013). Apart from authoritarianism, studies of Russian influence and its effectiveness in the post-Soviet space have so far mostly dealt with security issues and the energy sector (Tudoroiu 2011;

Nygren 2008; Balmaceda 2013). Attempts to undertake a more systematic analysis, encompassing the EU's and Russia's policies and domestic agents by looking at specific actors of sectoral-specific changes are still rare and limited to few countries and/or policy areas (see e.g. Ademmer forthcoming; Langbein 2015).

Therefore, this special issue hence seeks to drive the research agenda in two ways. First, as has been mentioned, we will place a greater emphasis on the role of both partner countries and especially domestic actors. In response to the criticism of being EU-centered and rather oblivious to domestic developments, scholars have embraced literature on policy transfer and diffusion which also respects more indirect and bottom-up mechanisms of domestic change (Börzel and Risse 2012). As the concept of policy transfer also explicitly places the emphasis on the role of agents (Dolowitz 2000, 3), we favor this approach and consider sectoral changes in NCs as agency-driven instances of policy transfer, defined as “a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting” (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, 5). Secondly, we contribute to the emerging literature on the joint impact of Russia and the EU on domestic policy changes by assembling articles that put analyze the interactions of Russian and European state and non-state actors with domestic agents in a variety of issue areas. In what follows, we elaborate more on the research questions that this special issue set out to investigate and summarize the answers given in the individual contributions.

Levels of change: the disconnect between sectoral reform and macro-frameworks for regional integration

This special issue defines sectoral change of policies, institutions and policy-making processes in the NCs as its broad dependent variable. We explore how the instances of sectoral change can be traced back to domestic preferences and to the EU's and Russia's policies. We endeavor to distinguish between formal (legislative) and *de facto* changes (Börzel and Risse 2012) or - put differently - between rule selection and adoption and actual implementation at the sectoral level (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009).

In doing so, we first want to establish what is the link between NC's countries seeking alliance with either with Russia or the EU, including participation in the formal integration

regimes (i.e. the AA/ DCFTA and the EEU, respectively) and sectoral changes. The literature on policy transfer suggests that there may be a disconnect between these broader geopolitical choices, the selection of integration templates and *de facto* domestic change. This is due to the fact that policy transfer involves multiple interactions on different levels of governance. For instance, transgovernmental networks (consisting, for example, of regulatory agencies, courts, executives working across borders) have been found to impact on the adoption of internationally promoted policies (see, for example, Slaughter's work on networks as summarized by Wetzel (2015)). The connection between different levels of governance provides ample opportunities for domestic actors to pick and choose from different policy models and norms, but also to use and adjust the "imported" templates to the needs of the local context (Acharya 2004; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Delpeuch 2008).

Evidence shows that participating in European integration has been a key driver of domestic change and reform in Central and Eastern Europe (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005). Likewise, aspirations by neighboring countries to join the EU have been perceived to speed up domestic reform processes, even though the EU's continuous enlargement fatigue dampens this effect (Kochenov 2011; Manoli 2013). The same logic is likely to apply to regional integration in the framework of the EEU. In general, the long-term benefit of participating in regional integration may hence be a large enough reward to outdo short-term costs of adopting new rules and regulations. Given that the countries either concluded the Association Agreements with the DCFTA or acceded to the EEU and hence participate in different macro-frameworks for integration, this can be assumed to drive sectoral convergence to EU or EEU rules and policies.

This seems to be confirmed in the post-Soviet space at first sight. For example, Armenia, in negotiating the DCFTA with the EU instigated considerable and unexpected domestic reform. Preliminary evidence from Armenia seems to indicate that since joining the EEU (and the seeming end of EU-related ambitions) these domestic reform processes have come to a halt (Ananicz 2015). The contributions to this special issue, however, paint a more complex picture. The impact of the EU and Russia on domestic change is limited, selective and often shallow. In general, rule selection – defined as the rules that an NC formally subscribes to in international negotiations or agreements with external actors – (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009) tends to be driven by integration aspirations (Langbein and Wolczuk 2012). Nevertheless, participation in these macro-frameworks shapes domestic changes only to a limited and selective extent. Rule adoption and, especially, implementation, are determined by

a plethora of factors, resulting in frequent divergence from the proclaimed geo-political orientation. Anne Wetzel shows that Ukrainian asylum policies stalled under the Yuschchenko presidency but converged to EU demands under Yanukovych despite deteriorating relations with the EU and a suspension of signing of the Association Agreement. And it was Yanukovych who committed Ukraine to aligning with EU rules in the energy sector, as analyzed by Kataryna Wolczuk. Armenia - the loyal geopolitical partner of Russia and a member of the EEU – has displayed a substantial degree of compliance with EU-demands in the area of migration and mobility, as argued by Esther Ademmer and Laure Delcour. And in an analysis of food security reforms, Laure Delcour provides evidence that pro-EU countries still have significant problems with complying with EU-demands, while Armenia had met all major EU requirements in the sector.

Secondly, this special issue also adds some more flesh to the debate whether the simultaneous presence of the EU and Russia in their contested neighborhood reinforces, neutralizes, or undermines efforts to change sectoral institutions, processes or policies. Early on in the literature, Russia has been perceived as undermining EU influence and potential integration aspirations of NCs in those sectors where they are closely interdependent with Russia (German 2015; Dimitrova and Dragneva 2009). Recent accounts of neighborhood Europeanization have also shown, however, that this does not necessarily have to be the case: Russia's policies may inadvertently, support policy changes as advocated by the EU, even under conditions of high interdependence (Ademmer 2015; Delcour and Wolczuk 2015a; Langbein 2015). Our findings strongly indicate that Russia and the EU jointly shape various sectoral outcomes in NCs. However, they rarely do so by deliberate cooperation, but rather as an unintended consequence of their bilateral interactions with NCs. Several contributions suggest that rather than EU policies alone, the triangular relationship between Russia, the EU and NCs actually fosters EU-demanded change. Ukraine's adoption of EU rules has been facilitated and prompted by Russia's punitive, economic and military, actions in Ukraine. While Aron Buzogány shows that Moscow- and EU-based experts jointly advised Ukraine in regulatory reform initiatives in the forestry sector, he argues that as an unintended consequence of the conflict, Ukraine has speeded up the adoption of EU-conform chemical regulations. Also, notwithstanding the formal commitments vis-à-vis the EU, actual reforms of the gas sector only started as a result of securitization of energy interdependence with Russia, as argued by Wolczuk. Free labor migration between Armenia and Russia indirectly supported compliance with EU demands for migration management (Ademmer and Delcour).

On the contrary, both European and Russian trade policies had a devastating impact on the Ukrainian automotive industry (Langbein). We also detect many instances, where the formal policies of the EU and Russia cannot account for subsequent sectoral development at all (Delcour; Wetzel).

Agents of reform: the dominance of domestic politics

While the triangular relationship between Russia, the EU and NCs results in a variety of outcomes, all articles point to the central role of domestic actors, their interests and beliefs in translating and adjusting EU's and Russia's policies to the local context, and thus shaping the outcomes at the sectoral level. The contributions to this special issue scrutinize diverse domestic and external actors and their roles in initiating sectoral reforms. Amongst others, they thereby shed further light on the relative importance of external and domestic actors for inducing domestic changes in a variety of policy areas.

The literature on policy transfer reflects the complexity of actor constellations that shape the outcome of sectoral policy changes, especially if externally influenced. For instance, Dolowitz and Marsh identify nine categories of actors potentially involved in the transfer process, ranging from elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants to think-tanks, pressure groups, non-governmental organizations and consultants (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, 10). Others shed light on different roles actors play in the policy transfer process (e.g. receivers, producers, senders, facilitators), with some actors fulfilling many of them (Wolman and Page 2002). To complicate things further, the transfer of norms and templates results from actors' strategies and interactions in both the 'transferring' and 'borrowing' contexts (Stone 2004, 561; Dezalay and Garth 2002).

In the "transferring" contexts, neither the EU nor Russia are unitary actors. While this only seems natural for the EU as a *sui generis* and multi-level system of governance, this also applies to some degree to Russia (Lo 2002; Langbein and Börzel 2013): Russia's foreign policy is not without tensions between different concepts and narratives (Laruelle 2015). In the "borrowing context", together with domestic governments that play a crucial role (Ademmer and Börzel 2013), mid-level bureaucrats (Wolczuk 2009; Freyburg 2015), further veto players (Buzogány 2013; Langbein and Wolczuk 2012), transnational civil society (Buzogány 2013; Beichelt et al. 2014; Rommens 2014) and business actors (Gawrich, Melnykovska, and

Schweickert 2010; Langbein 2014; Turkina and Postnikov 2012) have been identified as actors facilitating or hindering sectoral change in response to EU policy transfer. Parts of the political elites, business actors, political parties, civil society organizations and Churches have also been identified as actors upon which Russia can rely to maintain its influence in post-Soviet countries (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012; Wilson 2014).

The few recent works on the impact on the trilateral relationship of the EU, Russia and neighboring countries on domestic change have underlined the dominating role of domestic actors: They find that domestic incumbents cherry-pick and use multiple offers by external state or state-connected actors to further their domestic agendas, e.g. in sovereignty-sensitive areas in Georgia and Armenia (Ademmer forthcoming), and in Moldova (Hagemann 2013). Others also find that strategies pursued by both EU and Russia are crucial in empowering domestic state and non-state actors for enacting sectoral change in Ukraine in ‘low politics’ areas (Langbein 2015).

The results of this special issue corroborate these findings for a variety of additional issue areas, and shed further light on the importance and the diversity of domestic actors that are not only passive recipients, but active creators of domestic change, notwithstanding any geopolitical rivalry between the external actors. Vested business actors and their political affiliations matter especially in the areas of trade and natural resources: Julia Langbein shows the importance of Ukrainian car dealers in the early 1990s – at the time one of several domestic groups - that engaged in a peculiar coalition with the EU to sign a bilateral Interim Trade Agreement. These specific actors later became part of the rent-seeking and politically well-connected oligarchic elite which constrained the development of a competitive automotive industry in the early 2000s and eventually lobbied against the signature of the DCFTA in 2013. Laure Delcour shows the importance of rent-seeking elites in Ukraine and ideologically opposed governmental actors in Georgia that crucially constrain EU policy transfer in the area of food safety. Kataryna Wolczuk argues that vested interests of business actors with close ties to political decision-makers have also been the main impediment for reforming the Ukrainian energy sector, a source that Russia could well rely on to further its geopolitical objectives in Ukraine. In addition, Aron Buzogány scrutinizes the interaction between multiple external and domestic private actors for adoption regulatory environmental standards. He shows that Ukrainian businesses engage in private governance initiatives to develop closer ties to the EU market and thereby indirectly help to converge to its standards. In doing so, they can rely on strategic support by the EU and EU-based companies, but also

from Russian-based actors. He argues, however, that this process crucially hinges on the overall political support for domestic reforms.

In the economic domain, vested interests of business actors crucially shape domestic developments, whereas in other sectors, governmental and administrative unity and steering capacity seem to matter more. This is evident in the area of migration and mobility. Anne Wetzel argues that a main constraining factor for initiating reforms in the Ukrainian asylum system until 2010 were internal power struggles and a strong bureaucratic reluctance within the Ukrainian administration. These constraints were only overcome when Viktor Yanukovich, seemingly less EU-oriented, came back to power and re-established a 'power vertical' that – against the background of strong policy conditionality by the EU – helped to quickly push through reforms. Esther Ademmer and Laure Delcour argue that the variation in compliance with demands associated to Schengen visa liberalization strongly depends on domestic preferences and ideologies of incumbent governments with regard to mobility and related security issues.

Jointly, all of these contributions suggest that either outright political survival or at least political and material gains of incumbent political and economic elites are crucial for explaining domestic sectoral change in the countries under scrutiny here. They also suggest that these preferences are predominantly derived from domestic politics and less so from external means of influence-seeking.

Multiple external instruments of change: pressured into reforms?

The special issue examines various instruments of external influence-seeking and their effects on sectoral changes. In light of recent developments, we especially set out to draw some preliminary conclusions on the effects that Russia's increasingly assertive foreign policy has on sectoral policy changes. Our conclusions offer some suggestions as to the dynamics that may prevail in an increasingly contested neighborhood in the years to come.

Bilateral foreign policy instruments applied by either the EU or Russia have received substantial academic attention, but only recently has their joint impact on domestic change gained some more prominence. In the case of the EU, the ENP has been characterized by a combination of bilateral and multilateral political dialogue, policy conditionality and assistance or capacity-building (Kelley 2006; van Hüllen 2009; Börzel and Risse 2009).

Political dialogue takes place in various committees and sub-committees and high level meetings, such as the Eastern Partnership summits. Policy conditionality can be defined as any instance in which the EU ties the offer of further integration, such as increased market access or visa liberalization in the case of the Eastern Partnership, to the condition of adopting policy-specific reforms in NCs. EU capacity-building is usually provided through financial and technical assistance that is contracted on a bilateral basis, seeking to equip neighboring countries with the necessary skills and infrastructure to implement reforms in the first place.

Russia does not have a similarly formalized neighborhood policy, but adopts a more *ad hoc* and more targeted approach to neighboring countries (Wilson and Popescu 2009). It has exploited existing interdependence - defined as mutual, though not necessarily symmetrical dependence in terms of costs and benefits associated with unilateral changes to flows of goods and people (cf. Keohane and Nye 1977) – to keep neighboring countries in its “sphere of influence”. Two forms of interdependence have been differentiated in this regard (see Ademmer 2015 in reference to Keohane and Nye 1977): sensitivity captures the costs that a unilateral policy change by Russia (such as an increase of gas prices) can cause to a NC if it does not change its domestic policies (for example, diversify its energy sources), while vulnerability can be defined as the measure of the costs that such a change to the status quo would entail for the NC.

Russia thus does not necessarily promote rules or policy templates that are different from those promoted by the EU. Rather it uses the interdependence with post-Soviet countries to influence the domestic political economy of reforms by altering the cost-benefits calculations of domestic actors engaged in the process of rule transfer from the EU (Ademmer forthcoming; Delcour 2011; Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015b). In contrast, to the EU, Russia deploys a full spectrum of positive and negative incentives. For example, trade embargoes, the expulsion of migrants or stirring instability in secessionist territories are among some of the disincentives that Russia can use in its neighborhood. Yet, Russia has also provided NCs with positive incentives, such as the delivery of energy below market prices, financial loans, political support; all of which may entail further benefits or costs for domestic actors.

These incentives are at times tied to concrete demands for domestic change and thus represent a functional equivalent to the EU’s policy conditionality. Recent research has shown that EU policy conditionality and its Russian functional equivalent can - jointly with the policy preferences of incumbent elites - explain a decent amount of formal and *de facto* policy

changes in some policy areas and selected NCs (Ademmer forthcoming). In addition, Russia-based companies can also provide further capacity and incentives to domestic actors in NCs in support of convergence with EU standards (Langbein 2015). It has also been argued that some forms of Russian pressure increase the need for domestic changes and hence incentivize the adoption of EU templates (Ademmer 2015; Hagemann 2013; Langbein 2013).

The contributions to this special issue provide important insights into the effect of these diverse instruments in the “contested neighborhood”. Laure Delcour argues that Russia’s impact on the selection of integration regimes depends on the NCs vulnerability to Russia, as evidenced, for example, by Armenia’s decision to join the Eurasian Custom’s Union after Russia linked this issue to its support for Armenia in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia’s impact on sectoral change, however, is far less evident in the case of food safety. Julia Langbein’s analysis indicates that Russia’s cutting of existing ties through a more protectionist policy in the automotive sector and the EU’s push for an increased liberalization both contributed to the declining competitiveness of Ukraine’s automotive sector. EU policy conditionality helped to catalyze asylum policy adoption and further reforms required to benefit from visa liberalization in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova, as argued by Esther Ademmer and Laure Delcour, as well as Anne Wetzel. In the former piece, the authors also argue that negative, unconditional incentives by Russia further amplified this process, as they either increased the attractiveness of the reward of visa liberalization (Georgia) or made a national reform of migration management all the more urgent for the incumbent government (Armenia).

The contributions, however, also provide evidence of the effect of the “new” forms of coercion in the neighborhood. Russia’s stabilization of secessionist regimes, or the stirring of instability in the post-Soviet space has been well researched (Tolstrup 2009). Growing pressures on NCs – for example, Armenia in 2013, the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the ongoing war in Ukraine – to deter them from further integration with the EU is a new phenomenon for the EU, which it is struggling to react to. Previously it was integration with NATO that triggered a military backlash from Russia, whereas now the EU’s role has also been securitized in the Russian view (Allison 2014). The contribution by Kataryna Wolczuk argues that Russia’s military and economic coercion has opened unprecedented windows of opportunities for harsh reforms in Ukraine’s energy sector. This development is driven by a greater preparedness of the Ukrainian elites and public to accept painful changes in policies which are framed as necessary to safeguard national security and to lower interdependence

with Russia. Aron Buzogány provides additional evidence that the war in Ukraine forced Ukrainian chemical and timber exporting companies to quickly orient themselves towards the EU and further converge with EU regulations. Russia's backlash against European integration of the post-Soviet countries – through economic and military means – has pushed those countries towards convergence with EU rules even in the areas where previously strong domestic opposition had been encountered. In other words, Russia provided a strong 'push' in areas, in which the EU's relatively weak 'pull' was insufficient to induce sector-level change. The confrontation hence also paves roads towards reforms in these countries even though the outright military conflict – such as in the case of Ukraine – impoverishes the country.

The contribution by Esther Ademmer and Laure Delcour suggests that the new competition in integration regimes trigger some peculiar opportunities for domestic change in Armenia due to the different means of influence-seeking by the EU and Russia. Russia has so far rarely promoted its own rules, but has frequently increased the costs for domestic changes by offering various (dis)incentives especially either prior to or in retaliation to the conclusion of Association Agreements with the EU by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Having opted for a clear Russia-oriented security and economic choice, Armenia is likely to avoid Russia's punitive measures in the future in contrast to Moldova or Ukraine. This leaves Armenia with a relatively free hand in some areas, as it continues to show interest in close cooperation with the EU. EU policy transfer on the sectoral level is likely to be unconstrained in areas, that is in those in which there is no formal incompatibility with the Eurasian integration regime and/or which are outside economic integration

Overview of the special issue

The contributions to this special issue provide for a broad coverage of countries and policy sectors. The comparative case studies analyze domestic changes in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, these countries have experienced different political and economic trajectories. The EU and Russia are major actors in all four countries, albeit to different degrees and in different areas. Russia is a major energy provider and an important trade partner to all four of them. It is also a source of policy transfer (via the Eurasian Economic Union) in Armenia. Last but not least, in these countries Russia acts either as a security (Armenia) and insecurity provider (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova) in the various hot and frozen conflicts. In comparison to Belarus and Azerbaijan,

the four selected countries have generally participated in the European Neighborhood Policy to a comparable degree. All four completed negotiations for an Association Agreement together with a DCFTA (even if not signed in the case of Armenia). This focus enables us to better compare sectoral processes and outcomes across these countries.

We focus on sectoral change as this is the level on which external actors, especially the EU, try to shape domestic developments. In addition, sectoral dynamics and demands by external actors are sufficiently concrete, as opposed to broader notions of democratization or authoritarian rule. This allows us to more clearly ascribe domestic developments to either predominantly external or domestic influences. The special issue covers policies related to trade, natural resources, and mobility issues that are prominently promoted by the EU beyond its borders and that are highly relevant to the tripartite interaction of the EU, Russia and domestic actors in the “contested neighborhood”. The contributions span a variety of trade-related sectors including automotive, chemical and timber industries. They also study legislation on food safety and energy, as well as policies related to visa liberalization with the EU that include migration management and asylum standards. In the following, we briefly outline the relevance of these sectors and the respective contributions in the triangular relationship of the EU, Russia and the NCs, and summarize their key findings.

Trade

As a result of their common Soviet past, the four countries selected for analysis were closely economically integrated with Russia. However, over the past two decades all four countries have experienced a diversification of trade flows (to different degrees) toward the EU and other countries, such as those located in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or Turkey. In addition, trade is at the core of both integration projects promoted by the EU (EaP) and Russia (EEU) in their “contested neighborhood”. Yet, as is pointed out by Julia Langbein’s and Laure Delcour’s articles, external actors only influence trade developments to a limited extent. As Julia Langbein argues, Russia and the EU have prioritized their own economic interests over domestic change in trade-related areas in post-Soviet countries. Laure Delcour shows that the adoption and implementation of trade-related templates are shaped by domestic preferences and constellation of actors rather than the EU’s and Russia’s policies.

Migration and Mobility

In the post-Soviet space, patterns of migration and mobility are still shaped by close economic, societal and cultural ties inherited from the common Soviet past (Brunarska, Nestorowicz, and Markowski 2014). With the European Neighborhood Policy the EU has started diffusing its rules into the largely unregulated area of migration and mobility of post-Soviet countries. It offers visa liberalization with the EU as a highly attractive reward in return. However, mobility within the CIS and hence with Russia is still largely unrestricted for most NCs under scrutiny here. As the articles by Anne Wetzels and Esther Ademmer/Laure Delcour both demonstrate, the EU's and Russia's foreign policies (e.g. the EU's use of conditionality, Russia's use of punitive measures) therefore do carry some explanatory weight for understanding reform dynamics in the area of migration and mobility. Yet, change in this sector is primarily shaped by the preferences of domestic governments.

Natural Resources

In recent years, the EU has predominantly sought to export its energy rules and standards to the post-Soviet area, using the Energy Community; an international organization established in 2005 that aims at extending the EU internal energy market beyond its borders. However, energy interdependence with Russia is a crucial legacy of the Soviet past. Russia is a major gas provider for most NCs and, as shown by the case of Ukraine, has increasingly sought to exploit asymmetrical interdependence with the view to expanding its leverage over post-Soviet countries. Yet, as Katarzyna Wolczuk points out, regional interdependence and external actors' policies are embedded in, and actively managed, by domestic business interests and elites' strategies. For the first two decades, the Ukrainian elites sought to maximize benefits while avoid integration commitments vis-à-vis Russia. This policy run its course in 2014 and Ukraine has drastically reduced its energy interdependence with Russia and began to reform the energy sector in line with EU regulatory templates. Aron Buzogány investigates how Russia and the EU impact on domestic politics with regard to another natural resource: wood. Based on the case studies of forestry (and chemical policy), he highlights the role of policy actors from Russia, who by supporting private regulation have acted as norm-amplifiers. Yet, he also points to the role of domestic interests as key factors explaining differentiated outcomes in his two selected sectors (with forestry policy showing a much more extensive adoption of EU standards). Finally, as Aron Buzogány points out the 2014 conflict has left Ukraine without choice between the different regulatory regimes.

This special issue hence highlights complex dynamics of domestic change in the contested neighborhood, whereby different factors and levels are entangled. Our six articles show that

none of the explanations considered can be entirely dismissed, yet they carry different explanatory weights. The special issue as a whole confirms the central role of domestic politics in shaping the outcomes of sectoral change. It also shows the large disconnect between macro-level integration frameworks and domestic change. This finding cautions against mistaking geopolitical alignment to the EU with a reform path that smoothly follows the EU model: it is domestic politics that have and will continue to shape this process.

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¹ Russian import bans on Moldovan products in 2014, threats to take away security guarantees for Armenia and Russian agreements with breakaway regions in Georgia are just some recent examples that demonstrate Russia's actions to dissuade the post-Soviet states from integrating with the EU.