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Unresolved conflicts in the common neighbourhood: comparative analysis of the EU's and Russia's policies

Abstract

This essay is an attempt to contribute to the heated debate on the subject of international conflict management. The paper focuses on the European Union's (EU) and Russia's policies (analysed separately) towards the frozen conflicts as well as their attempts of joint diplomacy in the EU-Russia shared neighbourhood during the last decade. Russia's and the EU's performance as actors in conflict management are considered on the samples of conflicts over South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria.

Until August 2008 the study of Russia and the European Union as conflict management actors in the post-Soviet region had not been of great relevance. However, the five-day Russia-Georgia war had a profound impact on the region, the EU-Russia relations, and generally, the European security. The Caucasus crisis brought not only a new wave of publications, but also a change of discourse. Thus, based on recent studies, one can speak about four important trends: a critical reassessment of the EU's previous involvement in conflict resolution efforts; recognition of the EU's competition with Russia in the post-Soviet space (both analytical and policy discourses are "realist" driven), consideration of the unresolved conflicts in the CIS in connection with the broader security context in Europe, and finally, the necessity of renewed security cooperation with Russia by including the latter in key security institutions of Europe. Against this background, it is necessary to come up with a joint analysis of the EU's and Russia's role in conflict management in the overlapping neighbourhood. A well balanced and detailed analysis is particularly relevant at a time when other conflicts in the region have potential for escalation: Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria.

The aim of this paper is to identify and develop policy options for the EU-Russia joint diplomacy with regard to the unresolved conflicts in the common neighbourhood.

The first part of this paper analyses Russian involvement in conflicts since the 1990s, and argues that Russian experience has been uneven. In the 1990s Russia deployed its peacekeeping forces to stop violence, but failed to elaborate a long-term policy of conflict resolution. Hence, Russia's settlement plans were not utilised, and its contribution to the negotiations was not noticeable. The second part of the paper examines the EU's engagement in conflict management. The EU's hesitant policy in the region and limited use of tools at its disposal are explained by a set of internal and external constraints. The final part of the paper addresses the formal interaction of the EU and Russia within the scope of the unresolved conflicts in the overlapping neighbourhood. It argues that the partners failed to find a common ground for joint diplomacy with regard to the unresolved conflicts. The paper concludes with a comparative analysis of the EU's and Russia's policies being often characterised as two poles of Europe with obvious differences on a number of issues, their role in conflict management on the post-Soviet territory have certain similarities. One of the immediate lessons from the Caucasus crisis relates to the need of EU-Russia joint approach to conflict management in the adjacent region. Thus, the paper offers policy recommendations which concern both the form and substance of the EU-Russia dialogue on the unresolved conflicts in the common neighbourhood.

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