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‘Move the gateposts during the Game’: When Russia and the EU de-order both their relationship and the liberal world order

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The article looks at EU-Russian relations and their current crisis through the prism of the liberal world order (LWO) and its contestation. Since the late 1990s Russia has gradually moved from neorevisionist to revisionist challenge of the LWO, undermining in its relations with the EU such components of this order as political values and security. The EU previously positioned itself as a staunch defender of the LWO; Brussels tried both to enforce elements of the LWO and to accommodate Russia’s concerns so that EU-Russian relations were embedded in the LWO. However, 24 February 2022 became a watershed moment. Moscow’s challenge to the security and values’ components of the LWO became too big for the EU to manage. The EU’s 2022 sanctions heralded a move from the efforts to integrate Russia by all means to the LWO to the efforts to isolate Russia by all means and to deny Russia access to any components of the LWO. In particular, the EU challenges cooperation through international institutions, political values, economic interdependence and transnational links. This EU change undermines the very LWO that the EU tries to defend and that guarantees the EU a privileged position. Moreover, prospects of long-term settlement in the European continent and of engagement with Russia are severely compromised.

Keywords: EU-Russia relations, liberal world order, Ukraine, sanctions, normative power Europe.

Introduction

The ‘de-’ prefix became central for Russia’s relations with Ukraine and the West (including the EU) as of 24 February 2022 when official Moscow ordered its troops to cross the Ukrainian border to conduct ‘a special military operation’ to ‘demilitarize and dena-

zify Ukraine' [1]. This Kremlin vocabulary was rejected in Ukraine and the West (led by the US and the EU); they firmly supported President Zelensky in his classification of the situation on the ground [2]. The US, the EU, and other actors rushed to 'de-swift' Russia, to denounce most cooperation with Russian partners and citizens, and to deprive Moscow of any revenues, with a particular focus on coal, oil and gas contracts.

As the initial shock from the Kremlin's 24 February decision dissuades and euphoria about the EU's most severe sanctions ever settles down, it emerges that we also witness a de-ordering of the liberal world order (LWO). This de-ordering is the result of both Russia's policy and the EU's present response to it. Russia's role in this de-ordering has been well explained in both official speeches [3; 4] and experts' analysis (see the next section for details). In turn, the EU's role in this process has received far less attention so far; the article attempts to close this lacuna.

The goal of this article is to trace the EU's evolution from the efforts to incorporate Russia into the LWO and build EU-Russian relations on that basis to the frantic policy of denying Russia any access to the LWO and its components in the framework of EU-Russian relations and beyond. It is there that the article identifies a form of the EU's contestation of the LWO, which has not been sufficiently examined. The article uses process-tracing method [5; 6] as its key methodological approach; in line with this approach, the analysis exposes how the EU has gradually evolved in how it constructs its relations with Russia with reference to the LWO. In addition, the article recurs to critical discourse analysis [7; 8] within the process-tracing method to expose how the EU has responded to changes in Russian foreign policy, how it has shaped and justified its policy shift.

The article develops in the following way. Firstly, studies of the LWO and its contestation are reviewed. Secondly, the development of EU-Russian relations until 24 February 2022 are revisited to demonstrate how Russia's challenge to the LWO evolved, and how the EU responded to it while being determined to anchor the relations in the LWO framework. Thirdly, the EU's response to Russia's assault against Ukraine and their short-term effect are examined. Finally, longer-term implications of the EU's evolution are addressed and the results of both Russia's and the EU's challenges to the LWO are contrasted.

Liberal world order and its contestation

An order can be defined as 'patterned or structured relationships among units' [9, p. 228]; or as 'a pattern that leads to a particular result, an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals and values' [10, p. 3–4]. The LWO is described as 'open and loosely rule-based' [11, p. 18]. Researchers identify six key elements of the LWO [12; 9; 13]. The first element is the US constitutive hegemony. Some scholars even prefer talking about American-led world order rather than LWO. The nature of this leadership has evolved [14; 15] yet it has remained central for the order. Original (Western) members of the LWO see the US leadership as essential for the 'provision… of public goods such as international security, free trade, financial stability' [16, p. 7]. The second element of the LWO comprises international institutions, 'regulated by common rules of international law' [13, p. 4]. They create venues and procedures for multilateral cooperation and constrain illegitimate behaviour. Security provisions constitute the third element; non-application of force and respect for others' sovereignty is essential although the West itself has challenged it on a number of occasions and under different pretexts [13]. Some scholars view the NATO

as 'the most important co-binding security institution' of the order [12, p. 179]. Security provisions also constitute the essence of the rule-based concept [16]. Fourthly, the LWO is based on free and open market economy with private property as the basic concept. The order has led to ever growing economic interdependence that challenges state boundaries and, in some cases, undermines public authorities. Democratic institutions and liberal political values constitute the fifth element of the LWO both domestically and internationally. This element became essential for the LWO towards the end of the 20th century and has been a bone of contention as it potentially challenges sovereignty [13]. Lastly, the LWO leads to intensive transnational relations that involve different strata of the society and leads to 'the relative de-emphasis of states' [17, p. 406]. Transnational relations provide for communication, mutual socialization, and interests' representation [12].

Some scholars believe that the LWO develops normally as long as sovereignty, open global economy and rule-bound multilateralism are intact [18]. Others insist that the LWO has long been contested. Sorensen discusses the clash of universality and plurality of values; the inability of the LWO to cater for all economic interests; the ambiguity of the responsibility to protect; the power of the West, which 'favors a non-pluralist approach to international institutions' [13, p. 142]. Lake, Martin and Risse differentiate between internal and external challenges [9]. The former comprise unevenness in terms of who benefits from the LWO, in-built opportunities for the subversion of liberalism, liberal bias that disadvantages alternative ideologies, and liberal challenges to national identity. External challenges include objective processes (like technological change or inability of the LWO to respond to environmental problems) and contestations from new (China) or old (Russia) centres of power. Internal and external challenges sometimes are interlinked with external contesters exploiting internal divisions [19].

Much of the discussion about Russia's contestation of the LWO has focused on whether the challenge it poses is revisionist or neorevisionist. Proponents of the first view argue that Russia challenges the very foundations of the order, in particular, political values, and would like to see a return to the Westphalian order [20–22]. In this discussion Russia becomes 'a symbol of an anti-liberal trend' [23, p. 5], a power that poses 'a revisionist threat to its neighbours' [24, p. 13]. Some believe that Russia accepts the 'Charter liberalism' while rejecting political liberalism with its potential interference in domestic affairs, and neoliberal economic interdependence, which undermines Russia's sovereignty [25]. Compared to China, Russia has also been seen as more difficult to integrate in the LWO because economically it profits less from it [9; 26]. Russian officials and conservative analysts believe that new power centers and processes unravel the LWO and make the 'Western-patterned world' irrelevant [27–29; 23].

Alternatively, Russia and China are seen as status quo parties because they do 'not want to contest the basic rules and principles of the liberal international order; they wish to gain more authority and leadership within it' [14, p. 57] (see also: [15; 30]). Russia has also been seen as challenging liberalism of imposition [13], universality of values and norms, and the hegemony of the US [31], 'ensuring the equal application of existing principles' [32, p. 197], defending 'traditional ideals of state sovereignty and of internationalism' [33, p. 356] (see also: [25]), and pleading for 'legal exceptionalism' in its neighbourhood [34]. Russia's alternative values' promotion has been defined as 'equivocal' with Russia 'placing itself within the dominant normative community, but contesting' Western application of 'certain liberal political norms… [thus] placing itself outside the dominant

normative community, but claiming to defend "genuine" European values' [35, p. 433]. Many explained it by Russia's search for the status in the international arena [36; 37].

The development of EU-Russian relationship can be seen through this prism of Russia's changing contestation of the LWO. Since the late 1990s Russia's key concern about the LWO has been the US hegemony, which made its challenge neorevisionist [31]. The EU, for its part, has been mostly concerned about challenges to the political values as they undermine the very EU's identity [38] but also the essence of its normative power. Yet Russia has increasingly treated the way the EU advanced political values as a type of hegemony [39]. Over the time, the nature of Russia's challenge to the LWO has evolved to undermine security in Europe and the intensity of the challenge to political values has grown. Thus, Russia's challenge to the LWO gradually became revisionist; it is this evolution that — in view of the author — made the EU change its approach to EU-Russian relationship and their embeddedness in the LWO. The next section traces EU-Russian relations through this prism.

Russia's bumpy road from neorevisionism to revisionism and the EU's reaction to it

EU-Russian relationship was established when Russia 'appeared to be in the process of normative alignment with the LWO' [17, p. 407]. The 1993 Declaration underlined that the EU would help 'Russia to join European nations sharing common democratic, cultural and social values' and that the parties would 'create a qualitatively new basis for their mutual economic relations, founded on the principles of the market economy' [40]. These positions were then detailed in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), aimed at supporting 'Russian efforts to consolidate its democracy and to develop its economy' [41]. Article 107 even allowed for the suspension of the PCA if one party (presumably, Russia) were to disrespect key values.

Russia's first foreign policy concept also defined relations with European countries as being 'of huge consequence for Russia's incorporation into the community of democratic states' [42]. However, this attitude soon started to change. Two events were crucial for Russia's disillusionment. One was the EU's critique of Russia's military campaign in Chechnya [43, p. 129–135; 44, p. 28–56]. The second one was the NATO 1999 military operation in Yugoslavia [45; 46], which Moscow saw as West's unilateral undermining of the security arrangements. The 1999 strategies became vivid illustrations of both the EU's wish to preserve the emphasis on values as an integral part of the LWO and Russia's growing desire for more pragmatic — hence equal — relations [47–49]. This insistence on equality (rather than the challenge to the essence of the LWO) is what makes Russia's initial choice neorevisionist [31; 32]. This cycle of Russia's contestation resulted in Brussels and Moscow agreeing to launch the Political and Security Dialogue [50] and the Energy Dialogue [51].

The EU's enlargement and the nascent European Neighbourhood Policy caused a new discomfort in Moscow. Russia's initial reaction to the enlargement was positive [52] but it soon became more cautionary, underlining negative consequences for Russia [53]. The EU's enlargement remained a secondary concern to Russia compared to its preoccupation with the NATO enlargement that was seen as challenging Russia's security. The EU thus looked for new formats to accommodate Moscow [43, p. 26] (see also: [44; 54]).

That search resulted in four common spaces [55], granting Russia a very particular status within EU external relations, thus enhancing equality between Moscow and Brussels. However, the roadmaps for these spaces mostly 'operationalized' the EU's acquis for their introduction in Russia [43, p. 84] with the European Commission carefully monitoring Russia's progress. Thus they reinforced both the pattern of building EU-Russian relations in the framework of the LWO, and the EU's normative leadership.

Moscow's discontent with the normative agenda and the resulting EU hegemony, however, continued to grow; it was nurtured by Russia's internal economic revival, by Brussels' mounting critique of human rights in Russia and by the EU's policies in Eastern Europe, increasingly seen in Moscow as confrontational [44; 45; 56]. Russia's perception of the EU had by then evolved from 'an unprecedentedly unique voluntary union of nations that [were] united by common values' to 'an expansionist empire of a new type that is slowly yet steadily driving Russia out of its traditional sphere of influence, seeking to … impose its own views, norms and rules on the Russians' [57]. At the same time Russia was increasingly unhappy about its role in the European security order (the US being the key Moscow's opponent here); President Putin vividly expressed it in his 2007 Munich speech [58]. Thus, Russia's contestation of the LWO was not only about the hegemony of the US and the EU but also about the security arrangements, which opened a way for a move from neorevisionism to revisionism in respect to the LWO. The 2008 Russia's foreign policy concept registered this Russia's discontent, stipulating Moscow's wish to build 'a truly unified Europe without divisive lines through equal interaction between Russia, the European Union and the United States' [59]. Russian ideologists also developed the concept of sovereign democracy signaling the wish to limit Western influence on Russia's political system [60] while then President Medvedev proposed a new European security treaty [61].

Moscow's search for a revised LWO led to a three-fold response in its relations with the EU. Firstly, the EU and Russia launched negotiations on a new agreement [62]. The negotiations stopped due to the 2008 war in Georgia that challenged 'the assumption that Russia and the West could settle all their differences by peaceful means' [63, p. 23], and thus the security element of the LWO. Yet they were quickly resumed. The process was tedious, with Russian foreign minister Lavrov claiming that 'it would be premature to say that today… Russia and the EU share the same, clearly visualized goal' [64, p. 7]. Secondly, responding to Russia's wish to modernise, drawing on the EU's / Western expertise [65], the EU agreed to launch a Partnership for Modernisation. A corresponding joint statement stressed both that the EU and Russia are 'long-standing strategic partners in a changing multipolar world', and that their cooperation would be 'based on democracy and the rule of law', which firmly anchored the Partnership in the EU's vision of the LWO [66]. The Partnership mostly focused on practical aspects like trade facilitation or energy efficiency but debates on whether modernisation could be achieved through technical solutions along continued [67, p. 66–67; 68]. In broader terms that led to the question of whether one actor can use some elements of the LWO while ignoring the others. Finally, the EU and Russia intensified their discussions on visa-free travel. For Russia it was a symbol that Russians would be 'acknowledged as equal to Europe and EU citizens' [69, p. 177]. Although the EU and Russia adopted an approach meant to assess their practical policy readiness to the visa abolishment, the EU used those provisions to voice its serious concerns about Russia's respect for values [70], thus underlining Russia's disrespect of some (key for the EU) elements of the LWO.

A new round of Russia's attempts to review its relations with the EU and its corresponding involvement in the LWO came in 2012, at the start of the third presidential term of Vladimir Putin. The 2013 foreign policy listed all areas of practical EU-Russian cooperation without referring to political values [71]. In parallel, Russia intensified its assault against Western values as decadent, it thus positioned Russia as the only genuine proponent of European values [35; 72; 73]. Gradually Russia also increased its contestation of the security element of the LWO, linking it to the values one. Minister Lavrov infamously argued, '[t]he West announced it was the "end of history" meaning that Western liberal ideology would dominate our planet from then on. NATO's eastward expansion was one of the tools that the West used to consolidate this goal in practice' [4]. In sum, Russia's challenge to the LWO was increasingly revisionist, undermining the fundamentals of the order. Moreover, challenge to political values and that to security order were increasingly linked with each other.

In late 2013, political turbulence in Ukraine intensified tension between the EU and Russia. The change of power in Kyiv in favour of pro-Western forces led to Russia's 'repatriation' of Crimea and to massive support of separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Russia saw these activities as a remedy to its security and as a historical justice (for discussion see: [34; 43, p. 33–41; 44; 74]). Yet for the EU it was an upfront violation of the very key element of the LWO, which the EU defended. Thus, the EU stressed that 'there is no place for the use of force and coercion to change borders in Europe in the 21st century' and underlined the EU's 'special responsibility for peace and stability in Europe' [75]. The conflict in Eastern Ukraine was frozen but not resolved. These developments led the EU to suspend most contacts with Russia: summits did not take place, discussions on the future stopped, transgovernmental relations were put on hold [76]. These developments signified that Russia's challenge to the LWO became revisionist. Thus, it could not be any longer accommodated by the EU and Russia changing some elements of their relations only.

Yet the EU and Russia maintained most economic relations and the EU supported people-to-people (transnational) contacts. Some regular work on EU-Russian relations continued in multilateral bodies like the WTO. Thus, in spite of Russia's challenge to both normative and security elements of the LWO, the EU continued to rely on the LWO in its relations with Russia while limiting dialogue with it. In parallel, conflict over political values continued. The EU advanced the concept of rule-based order, which Russia criticized as 'a counterweight to the universal principles of international law' with the attempts of the West 'to shift the conversation on key issues to the platforms… where no dissident voices can be heard' [77]. In addition, Russia sought to limit transnational civil society links, with President Putin underlining that the civil society should be 'nationally oriented and sovereign' rather than 'a product of abstract transnational intelligence behind which alien interests are concealed' [78].

Russia was also strengthening its challenge to arrangements in Europe as undermining its security; in particular it voiced its concerns about the NATO past enlargements and possible continuation of this process to Ukraine (and other post-Soviet states). In late 2021, Moscow asked NATO / EU members for the written clarification of some security principles and proposed new security initiatives in Europe [79]. The crisis was thus 'not just about Ukraine but the European security order' with the EU classifying it as a search for 'spheres of influence' that 'is not a concept that belongs to this century' [80] and thus going against the essence of the LWO. Not satisfied with the answers that it received from

the EU and NATO, Russia started a 'special military operation' against Ukraine proper on 24 February with the conflict ongoing at the time of writing. Russia's assault thus brought its revisionist challenge to the LWO to the extreme.

In sum, in its relations with the EU Russia started the contestation of the LWO by undermining the political values element, which Moscow saw as an instrument of interference to its domestic affairs but also as a form of the EU's / West hegemony, which undermines equality and sovereignty of Russia. Initial Russia's challenge can be classified as neorevisionist because it was not so much about the essence of the LWO but rather about how rules were applied, who was the hegemon, and how justified that hegemony was. Yet Moscow gradually intensified its challenge to the security element of the LWO and linked the challenge to values with that to the security. These steps eventually led to Russia's 2022 large-scale confrontation with the EU / West over Ukraine. The start of Russia's 'special military operation' also signified Moscow's overt and revisionist contestation of the security element of the LWO, that is the wish to review the fundamental rules of the order.

The EU's initial response to Russia's 'Special Military Operation'

The EU responded to Russia's special military operation against Ukraine in a very swift and cohesive way, which surprised most EU players. Already on 24 February 2022 an extraordinary European Council underlined that 'Russia is grossly violating international law… and undermining European and global security and stability' [81]. Russia was clearly qualified as 'revisionist' [82] and as 'the most direct threat to the world order' [83] (see also: [84]).

Furthermore, the EU has (so far) adopted seven packages of sanctions [85; 86] in close coordination with the US and other Western players. The very first EU package (21 and 23 February) blacklisted Russian officials who supported the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk regions as independent of Ukraine entities. It further limited Russia's access to the EU's capital and financial markets. The second package (25 February) widened the EU's blacklist. In addition, the EU tightened a ban on the export of dual-use and military goods to Russia as well as on goods and services for its oil refining, aviation and space industries. The third package (28 February) included a ban on transactions with the Central Bank of Russia and an unprecedented freeze of all its assets. That package also closed the EU's airspace and airports for all Russian carriers, and stopped airplane leasing agreements with Russian companies. In addition, on 2 March the EU de-swifted seven Russian banks and suspended broadcasting of two Russian media that we directly controlled by the state. On 9 March a new group of Russians was blacklisted.

The fourth package of sanctions was approved on 15 March. It blacklisted some state-owned enterprises, prohibited the provision of credit rating services to any Russian person or entity as well as new investments in Russia's energy sector. The EU's black list was expanded, and trade restrictions were introduced for iron and steel as well as for luxury goods. The fifth package (8 April) prohibited the import of Russia's coal and other solid fuels, and banned Russian vessels and road haulers from entering the EU thus severing any logistics. In addition, it put an embargo on the export of jet spare parts and materials to Russia and a ban on the import of wood, cement, seafood and liquor from Russia. A ban on financial operations was also extended to crypto-wallets, owned by Russian

nationals in the EU and further four banks (including Sber, the biggest Russian retail bank). The sixth package, which included a ban on the sea import of oil, de-swifting of Sber, further blacklisting and a ban of three more Russian media, was agreed on 3 June. The seventh package, approved on 21 July, tightened existing economic sanctions, prohibited to buy, import or transfer Russian-origin gold, and further extended the list of sanctioned individuals and entities. As a result, Russia became the world's most sanctioned country (by number of placed restrictions). At the time of writing a discussion on a new package started.

In the course of spring and summer of 2022 a number of EU member states stopped issuing tourist visas to Russian citizens [87]. In early August Estonia stopped admitting at its external border Russian citizens — holders of Estonian short-term Schengen visas [88]. On 19 September, this approach was extended to holders of most other short-term tourist Schengen visas at the external borders of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland [89]. On 6 September, the Council of the European Union suspended the 2006 visa facilitation agreement with Russia [90]; although visas can still be issued, the process will be more expensive, longer and cumbersome with EU member states allowed to request additional documents from all applicants [91]. As a result, most people-to-people contacts between the EU and Russia are suspended.

No less important was an exodus of Western companies from the Russian market, driven by the spirit of the Western official sanctions and by public pressure in the EU [92]. Many enterprises did that voluntarily, others had to surrender to public pressure and hackers' attacks; some left for goods, others suspended/minimised their operations [93]. That included, for example, cloths brands (mostly European) and financial services companies, transportation and logistics, scientific databases (like Taylor and Francis) and Google. Pharmaceutical companies continued to supply life-essential products but logistical problems led to some shortages; moreover, they stopped most experiments in Russia. The halt of MasterCard and Visa operations created significant problems for the internationalised Russians (traveling and buying international services).

Furthermore, the EU decided to speed up phasing out its dependency on Russian fossil fuels. The decision got a political approval at the European Council in Versailles [94]. The European Commission then suggested RePowerEU plan [95], which consisted of reliance on renewable sources of energy and hydrogen as well as diversification of oil and gas supply. These measures are to eliminate the EU's dependence on Russia by 2027 but also the economic interdependence that for years has provided a safety net for EU-Russian relations.

In addition, the EU intensified discussions on military (particularly industrial) cooperation, it pledged to cooperate more closely with the NATO and to increase its military spendings [96; 82], which are meant to reinforce the security element of the LWO. Finally, while not becoming a part of the military conflict with Russia (and deliberately stressing this), the EU has consistently financed Ukraine, to date mobilizing 5,4 bln euro for civilian needs and about 2,5 bln euro for military assistance to Kyiv [96]. It also provided temporary protection to millions of Ukrainian refugees.

Several reasons explain this EU's resolute response. First, the attack against Ukraine was conceptualised as Russia's attack on the LWO. It thus went to the core of the EU's identity and its position in the international arena, requiring an urgent and strong response. Moreover, the conflict took place at the EU's doorstep, partly because of Ukraine's aspiration to become an EU member. Furthermore, EU institutions and member countries were

politically prepared to the Russian attack (although not entirely believing it) in the months before 24 February 2022. Moreover, the mechanism of sanctions was already familiar to the EU's relations with Russia (as of 2014). Finally, the pressure of the EU's civil society for more severe sanctions was strong. Demonstrations in support of Ukraine took place across the EU. Various organisations campaigned for more restrictions and pressured business to halt operations in Russia. This public reaction was reinforced by scenes of atrocities from Ukraine and by the influx of Ukrainian refugees. Significantly, the reaction of the EU (as part of the West) was heralded as a 'rebirth' of the LWO [97; 98]. Yet, in the longer term it creates profound challenges to the LWO, which are reviewed in the next section.

EU's contestation of the LWO?

The EU's reaction to Russian foreign and military policy potentially challenges at least three elements of the LWO. Firstly, the EU-Russian economic interdependence is undermined. The idea behind sanction packages is to limit resource available to the Kremlin to continue its 'special military operation'. Energy sector is the most prominent field where the EU tries to eliminate its excessive dependence. Yet many economic relations between Russian and EU counterparts were rendered impossible by the EU's restrictions on the banking sector and transportation. Small and medium business, which are believed to be the very foundation of the liberal values and are (in their majority) not linked to the campaign in Ukraine, were affected the most. Measures have also been detrimental for sectors like telecommunication, which is essential for societal communication and balanced information, and space cooperation, vital for the humanity. Limits placed on the financial infrastructure led to Russia's default on 27 June 2022 when resources were sufficient for regular payments but Western institutions did not move money to creditors.

A deeper challenge to the LWO comes from the discussions on confiscation of Russia's frozen assets (both public and private). In the first place, the connection between sanctioned individuals and Russia's political regime / 'special military operation' is not always clear. Furthermore, a legitimate question to ask is why the origin of the money did not raise any concern when individuals in question purchased property in the EU or deposited money (thus creating a source of revenues for many in the EU), and why the legal basis had to be invented retroactively [99] thus undermining the rule of law and the notion of private property. Moreover, it remains an open question whether assets of the Central Bank of Russia, which is independent from the Russian Government and President, which is independent from the Russian Government and President, can be used to compensate for the damage made by the regime. The complexity of this debate is evidenced in today's public discussions [100–104]. In addition, overcompliance of EU banks and financial institutions with sanctions makes it impossible for Russian non-sanctioned individuals and entities to make most transactions or access their — legally earned — money in the West (for example dividends from the ownership of Western companies). Thus, EU / Western measures undermine the very economic and legal fundamentals of the LWO, they demonstrate that the latter are open to political manipulations.

Secondly, one of the constitutive elements of the LWO is cooperation through international institutions. Yet Russia was expelled from the Council of Europe [105] with the EU in a rather Jesuit way referring the Russians to their state for their present inability to defend their rights from the very public authorities of Russia [84]. Another example is the

Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), from which Russia withdrew stressing that '[t]he NATO and EU members of the CBSS have turned their backs on equitable dialogue' and excluded Russia from the CBSS work and projects [106]. Similarly, the work of the Arctic Council under the Russian presidency has stalled [107]. Even more worrying are talks about the expulsion of Russia from the WTO and some of its bodies as well as suspending its most-favoured-nation status [108; 109]. Ousting Russia from the IMF, World Bank and EBRD is also considered [110]. All these steps challenge international institutions as venues of multilateral cooperation, another fundamental element of the LWO.

Thirdly, some EU sanctions undermine the values' element of the LWO. In the first place, the EU's insistence on expelling Russia from the Council of Europe meant that Russian citizens lost their right to challenge Russian authorities in the European Court of Human Rights. Furthermore, EU steps limit the marge of maneuver for the Russians who disagree with the regime and the official narrative. The EU's closure of its sky to Russian planes severely restricted the freedom of travel not only to the EU (which EU member states certainly have the right to restrict) but also to the rest of the world. The coordinated exit of MasterCard and Visa further limited the freedom of movement of the Russians (and made any relocation from Russia more expensive and logistically difficult). Similarly, it is not quite clear how the EU intends to provide protection to the Russian's, fleeing the country for fear of being persecuted due to their political views, professional or civic activities. All these measures, in fact, enhance the already stringent control imposed on the civil society in Russia, and lead to the disappointment of the Russian liberals in the EU and in its ability to promote civic and political values, irrespective of nationality and passport one holds. These developments might seem negligible compared to the sufferings of the Ukrainians but it will have important longer-term consequences.

Finally, transnational links were severed as a result of the EU's sanctions. Logistics, visa and financial restrictions became hurdles for most contacts. Expulsion of diplomatic personnel by both sides meant that many embassies and consulates had to limit not only issuance of visas but also most cultural activities. Limits on visas and travel mean that exposure of the Russians to an alternative set of values and thinking as well as mutual socialization of the peoples of Russia and the EU will be severely decreased. In addition, scientific and education cooperation with Russia was suspended by the EU and its member states, as detailed in the fifth package of EU sanctions. Academic relations were further negatively affected by the limits that various EU member states self-imposed on cooperation with Russian educational and scientific establishments [93]. The refusal of some publishing houses to accept manuscripts of scholars working in Russian institutions as well as a ban on the access of Russian scholars to databases of scientific literature produced additional barriers for the academic dialogue that could drive a change but also for the development of the civil society and its critical thinking in Russia.

The attitude to the Russian society has also been ambiguous. Initially EU representatives tried to differentiate between the Putin regime and the Russian people, High Representative J. Borrell in particular argued that '[t]he present conflict is… the decision of one man, President Putin' and the support of the Russian population 'rests on false information' [3]. France and Germany reportedly defended the "need to strategically fight for the 'hearts and minds' of the Russian population" while the Baltic and the Nordic states talk about the need to restrict Russian travelers to the EU [111]. Yet the EU seemingly converged in talking about Russia as a collective entity, about the people bearing a collective

responsibility for Russia's foreign policy steps. This position is certainly legitimised by various Russian polls, reflecting massive support of the 'special military operation' among the Russian population [112]. Yet it constitutes a break with the EU's previous tradition of talking to both the state and civil society, thus undermining the value of transnational relations as such.

The EU's sanctions as a result also seized even pretending being smart that is targeting only those who are directly linked to the cause of the sanctions, in terms of shaping, taking decisions. Rather, the EU's decisions impose a collective responsibility on the Russian society as a whole (which, in fact, is against the political values component of the LWO). Moreover, most measures hardly hit utmost supporters of Russia's 'special military operation', who — in their majority — do not have European business partners, rarely travel outside Russia, do not shop for brands that left Russia, and do not use international services. Rather paradoxically restrictive measures hit the people who are internationalized, europeanised and are critical of the conflict and Russia's foreign policy. In addition, and rather awkwardly, these policy steps reinforce the message that Russian authorities promote, that of the Russophobic West, rejecting all Russians, thus contributing to a rally around the flag in Russia.

In sum, the EU's reaction to Russia's 'special military operation' against Ukraine challenges four key elements of the LWO: these are economic interdependence, political values, the role of international institutions, and transnational relations. In itself, the EU's reaction constitutes a break with the previous pattern of building interdependence to socialise and firmly bind Russia in the LWO. The vector of today's policy is to isolate Russia and to deprive it (and its citizens, companies and other entities) of any LWO benefits or element.

The change in the pattern of the EU's relations with Russia leads to several consequences. Firstly, it challenges the very LWO. On the one hand, the globality of the LWO is undermined by this effort to exclude Russia and deprive it from access to any of its elements. On the other hand, the EU's denial of elements of the LWO to Russia could confirm the worst worries of non-Western participants. These measures demonstrate how the EU / US / West not so much enforce the LWO but rather manipulate its rules to serve the specific goal of today, that is punishing Russia and its population. The complexity of this contestation has been explored in postcolonial studies that investigate how the West (including the EU) preserve the exclusive right to set the normative framework for any discussion thus reaffirming its authority [113; 114], stigmatise any dissent [115], and deny the benefits of the LWO to the non-West [116]. In a popular way Russian leadership referred to it as the West moving 'the gatepost during the game' [4]. This can (and will) backfire in the EU's / West relations with non-Western world and affect the EU's own authority, challenging its normative power in its very core. It remains to be seen whether this EU's challenge will remain neoneorevisionist (that is posed to reassert the supremacy of the West in setting the rules while restricting access of the others to it) or whether it will evolve into a revisionist one (that is reviewing the rules of the LWO themselves).

Secondly, the EU-sponsored developments are also detrimental for the long-term EU-Russian relationship. Josep Borrell underlined that the EU 'will need to find ways to reorganise the relationship between the EU and Russia and agree on security guarantees and mechanisms to allow for peaceful coexistence to take hold again' [3]. Similar statements can be heard from national leaders of the EU [117; 118]. Yet the EU's limits on the

LWO as applied to Russia do not favour this outcome. For now, the economic interdependence is being eliminated; Russia is denied a place in international institutions; transnational relations are destroyed; and even political values — as applied to the Russians — are challenged. Thus, the EU's strategy eliminates any stakeholders (business, academia, common people) in Russia who would be interested in the revival of the LWO as it was previously known. Moreover, the EU creates a situation when official Russia, faced with the isolation of the West, has nothing to lose from being a spoiler of any remaining LWO elements, a spoiler under the shield of nuclear weapon. In the longer term it will mean that the EU-Russian relationship will depend on the reconceptualization and reformulation of the order, so that it would create a firm and acceptable foundation for both Moscow and Brussels / EU national capitals.

Conclusion

The LWO has provided for peace, development and prosperity. Yet the challenges to it are numerous with the present Russian 'special military operation' dominating the agenda in Europe. The article sought to demonstrate the nature of both Russia's and the EU's contestation to the LWO as well as the evolution of the EU's pattern of constructing relations with Russia from engaging and grounding Russia in the LWO to denying it any elements of this order. Russia has always been concerned with the US hegemony, in-built in this order but also with its political values and security, which Moscow saw as a form of hegemony and violation of its sovereignty. These concerns have constantly grown, transforming Russia's contestation from neorevisionist to revisionist. The EU has initially reacted to Russia's challenge by trying to incorporate its concerns and make relations more equal while remaining anchored in the LWO. Yet, the challenge that Russia posed as of 2014, and particularly since 24 February 2022 has been too big for the EU to accommodate. The EU, therefore, moved to isolate Russia and deny it any access to the LWO elements. As a result, however, the EU now challenges the very LWO, in particular such elements of the LWO as economic relations, international institutions, political values and transnational links as applied to Russia. In the longer-run this EU strategy undermines the very LWO and the long-term rebuilding of EU-Russian relations. It remains for the scholars to trace whether the EU's challenge will be neoneorevisionist, that is oriented at preserving its key role in the LWO, or whether it will become revisionist, that it reshaping the very order.

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