REGIONS IN TRANSITION
IN THE FORMER SOVIET AREA

Ideas and Institutions in the Making

ALESSANDRA RUSSO

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FOREWORD

Regionalism in the former Soviet space is a thriving and dynamic field, but it displays a number of gaps. It tends towards the historical-descriptive end of academic endeavour; efforts to engage relevant bodies of theory are rare. It tends to be russo-centric, focusing on the region's leading power and not giving full place and voice to Russia's neighbours. To the extent that the international policy perspectives of small neighbours receive academic attention, the questions are largely how these states manage their relations with Russia or how they interact with external institutions (NATO, the EU) or major states (the USA). Like much analysis in area studies, academic work on the former Soviet area tends to be idiosyncratic, focusing on the region as it is and how it is developing, rather than situating it in a comparative frame. Finally, there is a tendency in work on former Soviet regionalism to focus on interstate institutions and on policy, rather than on how these states and their citizens understand the space in which they exist.

Dr. Russo seeks to rebalance our understanding of the region(s) in several ways. Her interest in discourse and understandings of regionalism pulls us away from institutions and policy. Her work is self-consciously comparative and provides a fruitful blend of deep understanding of relevant bodies of theory and profound knowledge of the region's history, politics, and society. She also takes the focus away from Russia as regional leader and towards small states who seek to survive and to prosper in this difficult environment.

In this way she provides an original and distinctive account of the dynamics of regionalism in the former Soviet area that enriches our understanding of this complex space. Her discussion of the interdependence of processes of state- and region-formation is particularly compelling. The focus on how states and societies conceive and act in regional space is a welcome supplement to a literature which is dominated by discussion of relations between these states and their powerful regional and global interlocutors.

In short, Dr. Russo seeks to move beyond 'subaltern' analysis of the region's small states and to give them their own voice. For all these reasons, this book is a commendable addition to a thriving literature.

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Introduction

1   WALKING ON THE EDGE

The establishment and development of regional coordination, cooperation and integration initiatives in several parts of the world represents a key theme that has accompanied the International Relations theory in the past 20 years.

While the phenomena of regionalism and regionalisation certainly predate the end of the Cold War, research revolving around the "regionals"[1] received so much new impetus during the last two decades to give rise to a new scholarly field of "Comparative Regionalism". After having proceeded through different waves, studies on international regions and their formation have indeed begun to turn away from the European case to look at other regions as well.

Against this background, students of regionalism continue to be challenged by the ontological and epistemological liminality of the subject, characterised as it is by a precarious balance between Area Studies and International Relations. Academic debates over the meaning of "region" have not disbanded the "palpable unease amongst scholars" (Hameiri 2013, p. 317) when it comes to endeavours of conceptualisation. This is even more evident in the archipelago of Eurasian/Russian/East European/Slavic studies, which are in need new scientific foundations to reconsider the way knowledge about the "post-Soviet" is produced and organised. Whereas "region" can be thus conceived of as a post-Cold War aporia, the definition of the former Soviet space is no less contested and aporetic.

Over the last 20 years, whilst the objects of enquiry have been structurally reshaped, studies on post-Soviet regionalism have revived the "perennial contest between partisans of 'nomothetic' approaches [...] and 'idiographic' approaches" (Kennedy 1997). In other words, the study of former Soviet space has been complicated not only by the crisis of Sovietology, but also by disciplinary cleavages. According to the terminology developed by Amitav Acharya (2006), "regionally-oriented disciplinarists" (primarily disciplinary scholars looking at regional phenomena, often comparatively) and "discipline-oriented regionalists" (primarily area specialists who have accepted and adopted theoretical frameworks from a particular discipline) rarely develop joint intellectual enterprises and often tend to reproduce a traditional division of intellectual labour that hinders a dialogue between data collection and their theoretically-informed analysis, between the mastering of primary sources and "alternative hermeneutics" (Kennedy 1997) on the one hand and the "quest for 'law-like regularities' transcending spatio-temporal confines" (Teti 2007) on the other.

While the evolving scholarship on regionalism in the former Soviet space is breathing new life into the discredited field of Sovietology, it is also reproducing an Area Studies approach that fails to highlight the potentiality of this case study as an instance of far-reaching phenomena. Considering the post-Soviet region through the lens of International Relations, instead, paves the way for the study of a formative process, i.e., how a region is structured through "creative fragmentation",[2] changing territorialities and the political production of new overlapping and interweaving polities—intended as functionally and territorially defined political communities, characterised by their own spatial, institutional and ideational articulations.[3]

Through this twist, and hanging my research agenda in a delicate balance between the case study and what it is an instance of, the book aims at displaying that the post-Soviet region has been and is being shaped by a particular process of mutual constitution of structures (i.e. regional institutions and identities) and agents (actors operating in the region, i.e. states). On the one hand, the assemblage of states previously part of the Soviet Union, having experienced alternate processes of de-integration and re-integration, are defined and redefined by political and cultural elites that recurrently refer to regional institutional schemes and normative orders; on the other hand, regional organisations (hereinafter also abbreviated as ROs) in the former Soviet space produce and reproduce certain policies and practices at the state level.

2   Regionals Unfolding in the Former Soviet Space

The plain observation of how the post-Soviet countries are interconnected results in identifying four typologies of regional interactions: (1) Intergovernmental linkages (state-led top-down regionalism); (2) Informal regionalisation (process of regional assemblages); (3) Shadow regionalism (transnational and trans-state linkages); (4) Regionalist projects driven by international actors.

Several regional organisations loosely bind together many-sided and patchy groups of post-Soviet countries (Table 1).

When the Soviet Union initiated its path towards dismemberment, the Commonwealth of Independent States had already been designed as a mechanism for managing the negative fallout of fragmentation. On 8 December 1991, the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine signed the Belovezh/Minsk Accords, through which they declared the termination of the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the USSR and the foundation of the CIS. Although it was initially established as a "Slavic club", the CIS became after few weeks a "Eurasian club": the Protocol to the Agreement Establishing the CIS, which was proclaimed to be a constitutive integral part of the Minsk Agreement, extended membership to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan[4] as peer co-founders (Kembayev 2009, p. 29).

Since its constitution, membership in the CIS has been considered a contentious political choice by several former Soviet states, although this did not prevent them from joining many other regional organisations, coalitions and alignments. The CIS has been criticised, protested and delegitimised at different moments—almost in rotation—by its members; and its death knell has been repeatedly tolled by national leaders, regional officials, policymakers and the media. In March 1997 the Institute of CIS Countries published a report titled "The CIS: the beginning of the end of the history", where it was argued that disintegrative processes were becoming prevalent in the CIS and that integration had been endangered by geopolitical pluralism and multicentrism in the post-Soviet space. Shortly after the release of that report, the CIS Council of the Heads of State held in Chisinau in October 1997 was described as a "rehearsal for the CIS's funeral" in which the "fraternal Presidents danced in unison" (Zatulin and Migranyan 1997). On 18 March 1998, Georgy Bovt declared in a headline in the newspaper Sevodnya that the "Commonwealth's demise is just a matter of time";

Table 1   Regional organizations in the post-Soviet space (author's elaboration)

	Pan-Regional/ Trans-Regional	*Regional*	*Sub-Regional*
Enlargement	Council of Europe Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Economic Cooperation Organisation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation		
Creation	Conference on Interactions and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (1992)	Commonwealth of Independent States (1991) Collective Security Treaty (1992)/ Collective Security Treaty Organization (2002) Eurasian Economic Community (2001) Eurasian Economic Union (2015)	Central Asian Commonwealth (1991)/Central Asian Economic Union (1994)/ Central Asian Economic Cooperation (1998)/ Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (2002) Caspian Cooperation Organisation (1991—not implemented) Black Sea Economic Cooperation (1992)— Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (1999) Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (2001) Shanghai Treaty (1996)/ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (2001) GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (2001) Community of Democratic Choice (2005) Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (2009) TAKM—Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status (2013)

furthermore, although for a time the "Chisinau crisis" seemed to have been trascended, the narrative of an imminent decease of the CIS persisted, to such an extent that the Commonwealth can undoubtedly be considered a zombie-organisation (Glumskov et al. 2003; Ratiani 2004; Melikova 2005; Dubnov 2005a,[5] 2005b; Gamlova and Mamedov 2011).

Against this funereal background, the architecture of the CIS has not been dismantled; on the contrary, it has become a comprehensive framework which, in turn, comprises a military pillar and an economic pillar. On the one hand, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation stemmed from the institutionalisation of the Tashkent Agreement, originally signed by Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in 1992, and Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia in 1993. In 1999 Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan decided not to renew the treaty, thus only six countries formally agreed to create the CSTO. Uzbekistan re-joined the CSTO in 2005 but withdrew again in 2012.

On the other hand, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) originated from the CIS Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia; when it was established in 2000, it also included Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.[6] In 2005 Uzbekistan joined as well but suspended its participation in the EurAsEC's governing bodies since 2008.[7]

Alongside this set of "spaghetti-bowl" arrangements, it is important to also consider the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. A loose multibilateral cooperation involving Russia, China and three Central Asian countries had already been initiated during the 1990s to resolve a series of Sino-Soviet territorial disputes: negotiations had been launched for the definition and the demilitarisation of the borders between China and, respectively, Russia, Kazakhstan (1994), Kyrgyzstan (1998–1999) and Tajikistan (2000). The definition of borders served as an impulse for generating a broader dialogue amongst the parties: on the occasion of the Shanghai Summit (26 April 1996), China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan formalised their grouping through the inauguration of the "Shanghai Five". In its early phase of activity, the Shanghai Five was aimed at developing cross-border cooperation; a first turning point occurred in 2000: on the occasion of the Dushanbe Summit, Uzbekistan took part as an observer state whilst the other member states declared their will to change the Shanghai Five into a regional structure for multilateral cooperation (the Shanghai Forum), aimed at the organisation of joint operations to counter common threats. On the basis of that consensus, the

cooperative arrangement has been further institutionalised in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, with the admission of Uzbekistan as a full member and the adoption of the Shanghai Cooperation Charter in 2002.

The last (so far) regionalist project to have been launched in the former Soviet space is the Eurasian Economic Union. The idea had been first presented by Kazakh president Nazarbayev in 1994, on the occasion of his address to the academic audience of the Lomosov Moscow State University[8]; and in 2011 the scheme was introduced again by Russian President Putin and catapulted onto the foreign policy agenda of a restricted number of post-Soviet countries: Kazakhstan and Belarus since its foundations, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan as targets of an enlargement policy. As the history of the Eurasian Union is being written simultaneously with the unfolding of this research project, the book does not cover this newcomer in the spaghetti-bowl landscape. Accordingly, the temporal focus is restricted to the period of 1991–2011.

The flourishing studies on the functioning and the role of regional organisations such as the CIS and SCO has not been balanced by quantitatively similar works on bottom-up integration in the post-Soviet space, driven by the transnationalisation of non-governmental actors, migrations, trade flows etc. Regionalisation is the post-Soviet space has been interpreted as a sign of residual interdependence and inertia of ties and networks which characterised the previously unitary polity. Whereas social and cultural integration are quite natural, and facilitated by usage of the Russian language as a lingua franca in the whole region (both in public and private contexts), in the economic realm one can also observe a tendency of "regionalisation from above", i.e. the governmental sponsorship on the establishment of a number of transnational financial—industrial groups (Libman 2007); conversely, economic regionalisation also derives from mixed state capacity to control cross-border transactions.

In addition to the problems pointed out above in relation to the conventional "institutionalist" (= RO-oriented) approach to the post-Soviet region, from a more conceptual perspective it is telling to underline that the mainstream research on the post-Soviet region tends to uncritically reproduce the "divide" between regionalism and regionalisation. The debate on "new regionalism" has certainly questioned the prerogative of the state in going regional; however, the coexistence of alternative regionalising actors[9] (i.e. non-state region-builders) has not problematised the nature of post-Soviet statehood in relation to the features of the

post-Soviet region, and the agency of the state as a member of regional institutions has been conceived in a black box.

One of the few examples exploring the interplay between regionalism and regionalisation in the former Soviet space comes from a reflection on the role of interaction of bureaucrats and technocrats in the processes of regional institution-building. Starting from the assumption that in the majority of post-Soviet countries political decisions proceed from the private preferences of the rulers, Alexander Libman and Evgeny Vinokurov (2012) have elaborated an innovative reflection on the low-level politics of regionalism. Their line of reasoning seems to bridge the interpretation of post-Soviet regionalism as a tool to guard the vested interests of patrimonial-authoritarian leaders and rentier classes (Collins 2009) to the literature on "shadow regionalism" (Söderbaum 2004, in particular Chap. 5, pp. 68–114) and "trans-state regionalism" (Bach 2003, pp. 21–30), which similarly draws on the centrality of rent-seeking goals and personal self-interest of regime actors. Shadow regionalism and transstate regionalism have been conceptualised with an empirical reference to African case studies, in order to capture the existence of parallel structures of power pursuing and managing different patterns and processes of regional interactions. In the case of African regionalism(s), those concepts have been able to explain the resistance to formal regionalism by patronage networks and networks of plunder; in the post-Soviet region, similar notions can be used to account for the fact that non-state actors can coagulate in regional networks and partnerships, possibly detouring the central organs of government and providing an alternative to the state structures, authorities and institutions of governance as well as sources of regionhood.

Non-recognised statelets, namely Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh,[10] have tellingly engaged in mimicking the activities of national governments through the pursuit of regionness. The governments of these de facto states are involved in "para-diplomatic activities", dispatching representatives abroad and trying to develop their status in the international context by means of collective legitimation. Abkhazia and South Ossetia applied for membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO),[11] considering those affiliations as a sign of recognition of statehood; even more interestingly, the four statelets grouped together in the so-called Commonwealth of Unrecognised States (CUS).[12] The agreement to create the grouping was reached in 2001 in Stepanakert, then the CUS

(also knows a "Community for Democracy and Rights of Nations" and "CIS-2") was established in 2006 in Sukhumi. In 2007 the CUS signed in Tiraspol a Joint Declaration on principles of peaceful and fair settlement of the conflicts in which they are involved with the respective states; whilst in 2009 three of its members agreed on the abolition of visa regimes for their citizens. More recently, in 2012, the CUS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly appealed the Interstate Council of the Eurasian Economic Community, in order to express their willingness to participate in the process on regional integration.

Lastly, the four-fold typology of regional interactions consists of a number of regionalist projects driven by international actors. There are a number of programmes, indeed, which support region-building processes driven by economic and/or political cooperation[13]; it is plausible to conceive them as a stand-alone category for at least two reasons. The first one is that, conceptually, they seem to be ascribed to informal intergovernmental organisations (IIOs), which have been pigeon-holed as an intermediate category between non-institutionalised interactions and formal intergovernmental institutions (Vabulas and Snidal 2013): IIOs' agenda does not draw on a formalised agreement, and they do not have an institutionalised structure (i.e. secretariat, headquarters and/or permanent staff). Second, they all drive region-shaping processes through outside-in vectors and more or less implicitly, more or less intentionally, contribute to the constitution of regionalising/regionalised orders at the global level. On the other hand, these externally-driven regionalist projects have different approaches through which they frame and interpret what "post-Soviet region" means.[14]

3   Research Questions and Research Plan

Against this background, this investigation began by looking for answers to a complex set of research questions: (i) why do regional organisations in the former Soviet space proliferate? (ii) how do they function, given that they appear to be lethargic institutions driven by inertia? (iii) why do they resist their ineffectiveness and how do they reproduce?

As described in the previous sections, the post-Soviet region resembles a kaleidoscopic political space, wherein a variety of regional interactions take place in the absence of coherent processes of regional institution-building, and in spite of: (1) dysfunctional/ineffective regional organisations and the repeated failure of regionalist projects; (2) ongoing processes of post-unitary fragmentation.

Most importantly, the manifestation of the regionals is not strongly correlated with power asymmetries amongst post-Soviet countries, their foreign policy alignments, and the quality of their regimes. Accordingly, one can suppose that kaleidoscopic regional configurations reflect all encompassing path-dependencies, and transition in particular. This latter tendency acquires a specific meaning in the case of the former Soviet countries, involved as they are in a complex process of diversification and succession.[15]

The existence of multiple post-Soviet spaces and regionalisms, exactly in their plural form, can be hypothetically explained by the distinctive history of the region. The latter originates from the dismemberment of the Soviet state,[16] a process that has brought into being a number of states and statelets at the same time as it has generated regional and sub-regional visions and institutions; these basic considerations have provided a broad empirical point of departure to frame the research project in terms of "dialectics" between inside-out and outside-in dynamics, in order to find correlations between the "inner consolidation" (of the units) and the "outer consolidation" (of the regional groupings).

The simultaneity of two crucial moments (de-integration and re-integration) has been resonating at different times and through diverse manifestations in the post-Soviet countries; whilst the majority of them also experienced stateness for the very first time. This distinctiveness seems to produce a short-circuit in the idea of "regionalist consequentiality" (interdependence—integration—regional order) which has been assumed by a number of scholars dealing with this phenomenon. In fact, regionalist consequentiality takes as a point of departure a condition of inter-state or trans-state interdependence (Table 2).

In spite of its peculiarities, post-Soviet regionalism might serve the purpose of understanding the relation between the state and the region as two models of polity-making and territoriality.

This book aims to explain why references to the regionals prove to be so resilient in the discourses and narratives characterising post-Soviet politics. This aspect is considered to be closely related to the institutional inertia of post-Soviet regional organisations, the resistance of regional interactions to de-integrative pressures and the proliferation of regional institutions and projects.

While looking for replies to "why-questions", my research has retained a post-positivist epistemology of "understanding" before "explaining", aimed at an all-round appreciation of what the post-Soviet region is. The two approaches ("understanding" and "explaining") are considered far from being dichotomous and positioned one vis-à-vis the other in a

Table 2 Regionalist consequentiality in different theories

Inter-governmental sequence (Moravcsik)	Neo-functionalist sequence (Haas)	Neo-transactionalist sequence (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet)	Neo-idealist sequence (Schmitter)	Inter-presidential sequence (Malamud)
–	–	–	Democracy	Presidential democracy
			↓	↓
Interdependence	Interdependence	Interdependence (transnational)	Interdependence	Integration
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Integration	Integration	Integration	Integration	Interdependence
↓	↓	↓	↓	
Regional institutions	Regional institutions (supranational)	Regional institutions	Regional institutions	–

Source Malamud (2003, p. 65)

zero-sum game. The point of departure and the ultimate objective are in fact why-questions. The latter move the researcher, like in an argumentative cascade, towards the pursuit of causation through the detection of the constitution ("how are things in the world put together so that they have the properties that they do?", Wendt 1998, p. 103).

In other words, "[c]onstitutive theories […] account for the properties of things by reference to the structures in virtues of which they exist […]. Their goal is how to show how the properties of a system are constituted. […] constitutive questions usually take the form of 'how-possible?' or 'what?'" (Wendt 1998, p. 105). Replies to "what-questions" lead to inferences that make sense of phenomena (Wendt 1998, p. 110), to "explanations by concepts" which are attempts to "classify and unify a diverse and complex set of phenomena under a single concept" (Wendt 1998, p. 111).

In addition, the analysis of the interplay between agents and structures in the region has proceeded through abductive inferencing, which "looks for meaning-creating rules, for a possibly valid or fitting explanation that removes what is surprising about the facts" (Reichertz 2004, p. 163). Abduction leaves aside causal inference and opts for an exploratory strategy of research instead of verifying/falsifying pre-determined theory-derived hypothesis: "it therefore abandons the solid ground of prediction and testing in order to introduce a new idea or to understand a new phenomenon" (Bude 2004, p. 322).[17]

This book and the underlying research activities have been moulded by some methodological criticalities that I have addressed through ethnographic endeavours along a research trajectory that sometimes brought my point of view closer to Area Studies than International Relations theory. Research projects dealing with Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Eastern Europe are often conditioned by a difficult scholarly access to fieldwork settings and limited opportunities for applying common fieldwork techniques. Through the study of the post-Soviet region, thus, the aspiration has also been to contribute to the scientific disclosure of that area through multiple instruments of enquiry.

Such research path has been organised in the book as follows. Chapter 2 offers an overview on post-Soviet regionalism, with reference to the literature whose starting point lays in the specificity of the area; such perspective is complemented by a reflection upon the historical legacies of embeddedness: drawing on trans-historical comparisons amongst post-unitary systems, Chap. 2 also attempts to go beyond the peculiarity of the case study of post-Soviet regionalism. Chapter 3, instead, constitutes a digression about the role of Russia vis-à-vis the region and its positioning therein, focusing in particular on the paradoxical essence of a weak-state hegemony. Eurasian regionalism might have played as a compensatory arrangement for Russia's internal criticalities; even though Russia has acted as the main region-builder, it has set out from a condition of non-state-hood or early statehood, exactly as the other post-Soviet countries.

Chapter 4 presents my own tentative analytical model of state-region co-constitution wherein the formation of two different types of polities proceeds in parallel and in relation one to the other. This model represents the mutual constitution of structures (i.e. regional institutions) and agents (actors operating in the region, i.e. states) as a specific process shaping the post-Soviet region and explaining its fundamental features. This chapter argues that states' characteristics and actions (and the way they are engaged in their own internal definition and structuration) define regional institutions, norms and practices, and are in turn defined by them.

Chapter 5 presents and analyses the data related to the three case studies selected to display the inside-out facet of co-constitution. Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova have been selected as specific case studies: the link between their "ideas of the state" and "ideas of the region" has been investigated by using a discursive approach to explore their foreign policy narratives. Unsettled state identities in the three countries under investigation have affected the way the post-Soviet

region has been imaginatively re-constructed, i.e., as a space in which multiple, divergent ideas of the region coexist and overlap.

Chapter 6 delves into the outside-in facet of co-constitution. A sociological approach to two instances of post-Soviet regionalism (Commonwealth of Independent States, CIS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, SCO) uncovers a set of unconventional functions delivered by these organisations. The analysis of both declaratory commitments and practices of regional coordination and cooperation in the fields of border management, counter-crime and counter-terrorism serves to shed light on "bureaucracy-boosting" and "sovereignty-shaping" regionalism. Both the regional organisations under scrutiny turn out to play a role in constructing and ordering the fundamentals of statehood in the post-Soviet region.

In Chap. 7 (Conclusions), I recapitulate how the proposed state-region co-constitution model aids in understanding post-Soviet regional governance and its morphogenesis. This chapter summarises the replies provided for the original research questions, i.e., why regional organisations in the former Soviet space proliferate and why references to the regionals appears to be a recurrent, enduring feature in both post-Soviet politics and elites' discourses and narratives, in spite of dysfunctional/ineffective regional organisations and the repeated failure of regionalist projects. The structuration of the former Soviet space and its states around regional imaginaries as well as institutions, practices as well as organisations, seems to confirm that embracing regionalism may considered a marker of subscribing to the international script of modern statehood (Jolliff and Jupille 2010).

NOTES

1. In this book I often use "regionals" as an umbrella term to indicate diverse articulations of political units in a regional context, or through a regional project/process.
2. "Region privileges a territorial mode of differentiation […] defined by geographical clustering" (Buzan 2012, p. 22).
3. The term "polity" employed in this book will be derived from the definition proposed by Stefano Bartolini (see Chap. 2). Following his conceptualisation, a polity can be generally defined as a political formation involved in the production and provision of public goods: in other words, the political production of a polity depends on the "process

of confinement i.e. implicit in boundary building and exit control" (Bartolini 2005, p. 27), its political structuring proceeds through "voice structuring" (i.e. the political articulation of the community) and "institutional differentiation" (i.e. the role and function differentiation of the governing authorities, ibid., p. 39). On the notion of region as a process of polity-building, also in contrast with regional regulation-building, Karoline Postel-Vinay's work stands out. See in particular: Postel-Vinay (2007, 2011).

4. Georgia joined in March 1994 and formally withdrew in 2008. Ukraine in the mid-1990s insisted on changing the notion of "CIS member-state" to the less demanding "CIS participating state"; it withdrew in 2014. Turkmenistan, which did not take part in the initial CIS summit in Almaty in December 1991, later joined the club acting as a "CIS participating state" as well. However, in 2005 Turkmenistan opted for the status of "CIS observer".

5. In that article it has been reported exactly that after the Council of the CIS Foreign Ministers in Moscow, one of the attendants told to the Vremya Novostei correspondant "I felt completely as if I were attending a funeral".

6. Moldova and Ukraine are observers since 2002, Armenia since 2003.

7. In 2014 EurAsEC members has decided to terminate the agreement in order to replace it with the Eurasian Economic Union.

8. "I appealed directly to the intellectual elite of the entire Commonwealth, fully determined to revive the process of multilateral integration and get it out of the deadlock it had become mired in only two years after the creation of the CIS" (Nazarbayev 2011, p. 5).

9. Soft, de facto, informal regionalisms acknowledge the pursuit of regionalised patterns of activities by non-state actors operating beyond and behind state-led institutional frameworks and establishing connections on a regional scale from below. Nevertheless, the involvement of non-state actors has been associated with regional interactions induced by economic and societal agents. The shift of focus from interstate cooperation to transnational cooperation has been actually intended according to few specific meanings: (1) the emergence of cross-border/transboundary/transfrontier regions; (2) processes of regional cartelisation of national elites; (3) the establishment of projects which are regional in scope and are realised though paradiplomatic activities of sub-national administrative units (Solingen 1998; De Lombaerde et al. 2010).

10. In addition to these four de facto states, Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic were proclaimed in 2014.

11. This declaration was released in September 2008 during a joint press conference in Moscow, by Sergei Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoity.

12. Similarly, during the 1990s Abkhazia established relations with two other unrecognised states: Serbian Krajina in Croatia and the Respublika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

13. Some of them have involved the European Union or have been launched in the framework of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership. The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was initiated to promote sub-regional cooperation in Central Asia; quite differently, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program aims at promoting regional development through a partnership amongst Central Asian states and a group of multilateral institution partners (Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Monetary Fund, Islamic Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme, and World Bank). A number of initiatives have seen different regional leaders at the forefront (i.e. Turkey in the case of "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform" and "Heart of Asia—Istanbul Process").

14. Anna Matveeva (2007, p. 8) has identified seven strategies developed by international actors to influence region-building: (1) integrationalist: treating the region as an integrated whole; catalyst: giving impetus and providing leadership, using the EU as an example; cross-cutting: working on the same issue in parallel in each country; connecting: giving priority to regional infrastructure projects […]; regulatory: developing regional regulatory framework mechanisms to resolve common problems […]; cross-border: working on solutions to cross-border problems; resource Concentration: the establishment of training and education facilities on a regional basis rather than in each country individually.

15. Looking at them, at least two definitions of "transition" could be recognised, thus: the first one is determined by the trajectory of a country towards a certain political organisation—that interpretation of transition applies to the nature of the political regime, the shape of the government, its institutions and the distribution of power within a polity already characterised by stateness/statehood; the second one could be identified with processes of state-building and state-formation. Accordingly, the mainstream interpretation of the transition could be named a "transition *in* the state"; whilst the less conventional one could be termed "transition *to* the state" or rather a "transition of the polity".

16. On the other hand, Samir Amin (1999, p. 59) has defined Sovietism as a form of regionalism in the post-World War II period, institutionalised through the Warsaw Pact.

17. See also Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009).

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Region-Building in the Former Soviet Space

This chapter opens with a review of the main literature dealing with post-Soviet regionalism. Furthermore, it offers a bird's eye view of different imperial histories through a brief trans-historical analysis aimed at underlining the relevance of path dependencies in the configuration of the post-Soviet region (Beissinger 1995).[1]

In addition to its "post-imperial" dimension, the disintegration of the Soviet Union has been considered an example of a comprehensive process of dissolution and dismemberment of complex polities, and therefore viewed through the lenses of international fragmentation and changes in territoriality (Ruggie 1993).

Setting aside the normative implications and political connotations of the concept of "empire" and the problematic aspects of "imperial comparativism" (Gerasimov et al. 2005)—a field which has emerged in particular after the implosion of the Soviet Union—this chapter shifts to instead consider the conceptualisation of post-unitary systems: how agencies and structures organise and relations between centres and peripheries transform. In particular, post-unitary systems display a duality between the persistence of path dependencies (Pierson 2000) and attempts to break out of them. Re-integrative endeavours involve both these tendencies, as they reproduce historical legacies of embeddedness whilst at the same challenging the former strategies of "peripheral segmentation" (Nexon and Wright 2005; see also Motyl 2001) through which the unitary system was governed. I propose paying attention to "the shadow of the past", understood as the sedimentation of past historical legacies, as a

preliminary step to appreciating two simultaneous lines of development: the re-organisation of political space and the political re-organisation of space.

Finally, this chapter advances new avenues for thinking about the post-Soviet region, establishing four overall conceptual objectives: to deconstruct, spin, comprise and compare.

1   The Former Soviet Space as a Region

One of the first attempts to conceptualise the former Soviet space as a region was presented in the pivotal volume on regional orders edited by David Lake and Patrick Morgan. In this volume, indeed, Roeder (1997) argues that "the space previously within the Soviet Union now constitutes a distinct international region" (p. 220); furthermore, he identifies the features shaping the structure of the post-Soviet regional complex, such as the priority granted to survival objectives amongst the successor governments and the considerable impact of Russian hegemony. These two crucial conditions had a number of direct consequences, for example the tendency of many post-Soviet leaders to delegate a portion of their "sovereign prerogatives" to Moscow, the prevalence of a hub-and-spoke configuration based on bilateral interactions between Russia and the individual post-Soviet countries, and the relative autonomy of the post-Soviet regional complex vis-à-vis extra-regional actors in the early stage of post-Soviet de-integration. However, in spite of the relevance of Russian hegemony and power asymmetries in shaping the structure of the post-Soviet regional complex, in the early 1990s regional actors interacted with Moscow in ways that did not straightforwardly reflect disparities vis-à-vis Russia (Roeder 1997, p. 231). Furthermore, whilst the former Soviet space was identified as a regional complex, it was also characterised by a segmented conformation: the region was clearly composed of four distinct "theatres" (the Western sector including Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova; the Baltics; South Caucasus; and Central Asia) and each country developed a different orientation towards the regional complex as a whole.

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003) have further elaborated the conceptualisation of the former Soviet space in regional terms. Their framework draws on the fact that the regionalist awakening/revival has developed parallel to the advancement of a "broadened and deepened" understanding of security (Krause and Williams 1996) that deserves

to be studied through a relational approach (Buzan et al. 1998): "in security terms, 'region' means that a distinct and significant subsystem of security relations exists among a set of states whose fate is that they have been locked into geographical proximity to each other" (Buzan 1991, p. 188). Buzan and Wæver's model introduces the idea of clusters of security interdependence; accordingly, they view the former Soviet space as a "Russia-centred" regional security complex which is included in a broader "European supercomplex" and in turn contains, "mini-complexes" playing the role of buffers and/or insulators. As a regional security complex, they depict the former Soviet space as "self-contained" ("mutually exclusive") and study it in terms of its structure, the way it is defined by the interactions occurring at the different levels comprised of each individual "security constellations", and processes of securitisation and de-securitisation.

The approaches developed by Lake and Morgan and Buzan and Wæver have both paved the way to addressing the concept of region in a way that moves away from measuring off the institutional output of regional interactions; they have instead assessed the performance of regional organisations in terms of their effectiveness and legitimacy. Nevertheless, their frameworks have not problematised or deconstructed the meaning of "former Soviet space" and its designation as a region. Secondly, they have implied (at least in their original formulations) a state-centric vision that reflects neither the reality of post-Soviet statehood nor the coincidence of different polity-building processes. Thirdly, since these approaches have not effectively unpacked the notion of "post-Soviet region", they have in turn failed to fully investigate the varieties of regional interactions and configurations.

In his survey of the existing literature about regional integration in the former Soviet space, Alexander Libman (2012) has attempted to sketch the features of the "average post-Soviet integration paper" by looking at the work produced by both Russian and non-Russian scholarly communities. Drawing on Libman's review, it appears that the mainstream literature about the post-Soviet region suffers from four major limitations: first, it displays an imbalance in which normative and/or descriptive approaches outnumber analytic perspectives and explanatory attempts; second, it shows a highly evident Euro-centric bias resulting in loose comparative practices: the EU is often presented as a reference model that regional actors can learn from or distance themselves from. Third, processes of region-building in the post-Soviet

space are frequently introduced as an aspect of Russia's foreign policy, thereby depriving the other post-Soviet countries of any agency: their ownership is assumed to be exogenously given. Finally, all instances of post-Soviet regionalism are considered in terms of dysfunctionality and non-effectiveness.

The literature does indeed agree that post-Soviet regional organisations have failed to produce integration or other forms of regional governance, arguing that their viability is thwarted by power asymmetries, the involvement of external actors and the fact that they comprise heterogeneous members with divergent interests and strategies. Nevertheless, this emphasis on the failures of post-Soviet regionalism (e.g. Kubicek 2009) does not explain the proliferation of regional organisations and the continued participation of post-Soviet countries. At present, the only convincing explanation for the fact that post-Soviet countries have repeatedly engaged in "new rounds of 'integration rituals'" (Libman 2012, p. 51) is connected to the interpretation of regional organisations in the former Soviet space as examples of "summitry" regionalism. The absence of any real political commitment or enforcement mechanism is balanced by the tendency for post-Soviet leadership to "demonstrate support and loyalty towards one another in order to raise the status, image, and formal sovereignty of their often authoritarian regimes" (Söderbaum 2012, p. 61). In fact, post-Soviet regionalism (and the apparent hyper-activism displayed by a number of post-Soviet countries when it comes to their multiple memberships in these ROs) has been explained as the manifestation of political solidarity and normative consonance amongst regimes, which is to be distinguished from mere interstate cooperation.

This perspective has been expressed by different authors and through different concepts that have in common several concerns, namely the rhetorical purpose of regional institutions ("virtual regionalism", Allison 2008; "symbolic regionalism", Söderbaum 2010), their instrumentality (to meet the personal needs and ambitions of presidents, oligarchs and bureaucrats) and the fulfilment of a normative agenda. From this perspective, ROs have been seen as fora for legitimising the policy preferences of various regimes before both national and international audiences.[2] In other words, regional organisations in the former Soviet space have been explained as a way of coordinating to resist democratisation (Ambrosio 2009, pp. 159–184) and in terms of "protective integration", the main rationale of which is to guard members' regime security

and defend incumbent elites from the challenges of external agendas championing good governance or democracy (Allison 2010).

These explanations do capture the design and resilience of regional institutions. On the other hand, however, "regime-boosting" regionalism posits that the main function of post-Soviet regional organisations is to support the members' rulers and keep them in power (Söderbaum 2004, in particular Chap. 5, pp. 68–114). Accordingly, this explanatory line seems to assume that the countries whose regimes are allegedly being boosted display homogeneous or convergent political trajectories and that regional organisations' members enjoy steady development in domestic politics. In reality, whilst the majority of post-Soviet countries obviously display traits typical of transitioning states, the internal distribution of power and the quality of hybrid regimes varies quite widely across the region. Moreover, a number of post-Soviet countries have gone through reforms and backlashes, leadership turnovers and alternating phases of improvement and deterioration in their democratic performance: these trajectories have not necessarily corresponded to parallel changes in the ROs' membership (i.e. before and after the Colour Revolutions). Instead of "regime-boosting" regionalism, what all the post-Soviet countries share is the objective of boosting their sovereignty: whereas "regime-boosting regionalism" and "sovereignty-boosting regionalism" have not been conceptualised separately, they hint at different political processes and outcomes. "Sovereignty-boosting" regionalism actually implies that regionalism might serve the purpose of reproducing, consolidating and legitimising the state itself, and that regional diplomacy and institution-building—even when virtual—substantiate formal representations of the state.

Whether regional organisations in the former Soviet space have boosted members' regimes or sovereignty will be investigated in the final part of this book (where I juxtapose the concepts of "regime-boosting regionalism" and "sovereignty-boosting regionalism" to "bureaucracy-boosting regionalism" and "sovereignty-shaping regionalism"). For the sake of a literature review, suffice it to mention that neither "regime-boosting" nor "sovereignty-boosting" regionalism per se explains the multiplicity of post-Soviet regionalism and the simultaneous participation of post-Soviet countries in different regional frameworks.

In fact, the most evident feature of the post-Soviet 'multiplex' is the presence of nested regional institutions and, even more convolutedly, overlapping regionalism[3] (Aggarwal 1998). The proliferation of regional

organisations in the former Soviet space has contributed to the development of a region which is "multiply traversed" by a wide range of cooperative structures, conflictual cleavages, coalitions and alignments.

On the one hand, a number of countries in the region are members of institutions which are imbricated one within the other almost as if forming concentric circles, like Matryoshka dolls (Brosig 2011, p. 151). Although the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and diverse experiments of Central Asian sub-regionalisms[4] were conceived of as formally independent projects or institutions (not nested in terms of their mandate), the configurations of membership all represented different CIS-subsets (nested in terms of their membership). Over the last two decades, this "nested equilibrium" has been unsettled by different factors. First, since the early 1990s, different instances of regionalism have integrated the fragments of the post-Soviet space with extra-regional actors: all CIS members joined OSCE in January 1992 (except for Russia, which was declared the USSR's continuator state), whilst—at different times— the majority of post-Soviet countries established varying relations with other "Western" institutions such as the Council of Europe (COE),[5] the European Union and NATO.[6] Second, the Organisation for Democratic and Economic Development (GUAM) and later the Community of Democratic Choice exposed the former Soviet space to alternative sets of norms[7]: GUAM in particular implicitly introduced the first seeds of sub-regional pluralism within the CIS and sanctioned the creation of two alternative but overlapping alignments within the same regional space. Third, the institutionalisation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation brought a "hegemonic outsider" into the post-Soviet region—China.[8]

In spite of this fact, CIS members' decision-makers and representatives often depicted the organisation as the focal institution of a "hierarchically ordered" structure and the only hub for effective inter-institutional coordination. In an interview released in December 2007, CIS Executive Secretary Sergei Lebedev even denied that CIS, GUAM and SCO were actually "parallel" regional organisations, provided that the majority of the members of SCO and all the members of GUAM were also included in the CIS and there were several instances of interaction both between CIS and SCO and between CIS and GUAM. Accordingly, the intersection of different institutions only confirmed the increasing role regional organisations played in the globalised world. Similar interviews released in 2008 and 2009 restated this position

(although GUAM was gradually "removed" from this kind of narrative): according to statements, proliferation did not indicate the weakening or the exhaustion of the CIS and problems of duplication would have been smoothly and successfully contained. According to Lebedev, the different tools of regional cooperation could complement each other just as the craftsman works with a hammer when dealing with nails and a screwdriver when dealing with screws ("Вечерний Бишкек", 19 May 2011).

Overlapping regionalism instead encouraged the states with multiple memberships to adopt a "pick and choose" approach and take advantage of "issue fragmentation" in different multilateral contexts. This might constitute an explanation for why there have been repeated attempts at regional institution-building despite their low functioning and performance: overlapping regionalism, indeed, can be pursued as a strategic choice by the actors involved, actors that deliberately aim at playing across different multilateral fora (forum shopping), selecting the negotiation venue in which they can most efficiently advance their preferences.[9] For instance, multiple institutions might be created to downplay the role of an existing one (strategic inconsistency, Raustiala and Victor 2004), or member states might pursue different policies and try to push the organisations in different directions, thus acting as chessboard players (strategic ambiguity, Alter and Meunier 2009, p. 17[10]). Forum shopping, strategic inconsistency and strategic ambiguity have different kinds of impact on the level of inter-institutional consistency and coordination, but they all display members' emerging capacity to juggle the elements of overlapping regionalism (Russo and Gawrich 2017).

In addition to the literature on overlapping regionalism, there is another—as yet under-explored—thread we can follow to explain the emergence of multiple instances of regionalism in spite of the fact that the post-Soviet countries have recently wrested their way free of a long-term experience of comprehensive integration. This second thread examines post-Soviet regionalism as an instance of imitative institution-building (Schlumberger 2004) and in terms of (regional) institutional façades: employing this approach, it might be plausible to develop the concept of a "Potemkin politics of regionalism"[11] characterised by a decoupling between the semblances of regional organisations and their functions. Considering post-Soviet regionalism as part of a broader phenomenon of Potemkin politics entails studying regional institutions, their bodies and policy-making chains in terms of pseudo-morphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983): the institutional design of post-Soviet

regional organisations resembles other patterns of regionalism which can be similarly observed at the global level. In spite of a supposed homogeneity amongst organisational forms and practices, however, they cannot be interpreted as functionally equivalent to other regional organisations. The added value of exploring the post-Soviet regionalism in terms of Potemkin politics lies not only in acknowledging the existence of institutional façades, but also in recognising that they are a constitutive aspect of post-Soviet politics: indeed, they have actually been described as "complex stage productions conjured by the creative imaginations of political technologists" (Allina-Pisano 2008, p. 41).

As a matter of fact, Allison's "virtual regionalism" mentioned above draws on a similar line of reasoning, transposing the ideas of virtual politics and virtual state (Wilson 2006; Heathershaw 2014) to the realm of international relations. Nevertheless, virtuality is often treated as a reason to dismiss regionalism as a purely instrumental and narrative epiphenomenon. Defining post-Soviet regionalism as a result of Potemkin politics, instead, necessarily entails acknowledging that a theatrical performance of this kind (*dramaturgia*) "belies the reasons for their existence, which are tangible, concrete, and durable" (Allina-Pisano 2008, p. 42) in spite of its chimerical and deceptive nature. In particular, the production of institutional façades carries the remnants of the socialist past (weak state capacity and a lack of normative commitment to institutional change) but also the "colonial impulses" of international actors: this is the case, for example, when institutional façades serve to legitimise certain political actors in the eyes of internal constituencies as well as external audiences.

The study of nesting/overlapping regionalism is useful for understanding the coexistence of and interplay between different regional organisations in terms of the norms, practices and policies they deliver to the post-Soviet countries. Likewise, exploring the idea of a Potemkin politics of regionalism allows us to reconsider the relevance of actors and policy outcomes that exist primarily in the realm of official records. Nevertheless, both of these approaches restrict the field of investigation to formal institutions and the result thus remains a partial overview.

In order to understand the main features of the post-Soviet fragments, the process of ongoing re-assemblage in which they are involved and their positioning in the regional and international system, it might be useful to consider not only their recent trajectories but also the long-term experiences of boundlessness and territorial integration that have been a persistent, resilient and recurrent condition of the region. These points will be developed in the second section of this chapter.

2   Fragmentation and Reintegration

The representation of "Eurasia" has indeed been defined by the alternation of different empire-builders who followed one another throughout the centuries (Von Hagen 2004) to such an extent that the whole history of the continent has been interpreted according to "regional empire periods" (Beckwith 2011) and its geopolitical perimeter has been drawn according to the phases of imperial expansion and contraction. According to many authors, the current configuration of the Eurasian space reflects in particular the rule of the last two integrated polities that succeeded one another in the same geopolitical expanse—the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union. Following this approach, it is argued that the area should be studied by comparatively investigating the consequences of the collapse of empires, in particular the spatially contiguous ones.[12] As a matter of fact, in the case of scattered/overseas empires the dissolution of the imperial structure leads both the metropolis and the colonies to develop a new order; however, processes of disengagement and dismantling can be gradual and the consequences of these processes can be limited to specific segments of the society and sets of actors. On the contrary, in the case of territorially integrated/contiguous empires the post-imperial order is likely to reproduce some imperial institutions of administration and control and to be affected by a certain continuity amongst elites and cadres as well as "viscosity" in other legacies, both physical (i.e. infrastructures, cross-borders facilities, etc.) and immaterial (political culture and identity). The most effective terms of comparison, therefore, seem to be the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empire.[13]

Although these empires do appear to be comparable in many respects, we must also consider two important factors of Soviet "exceptionalism", starting with the "centre-periphery compact" (Tuminez 2003) Soviet rule drew on for its source of legitimation.

This first aspect has been highlighted in particular by two strands of literature—the one on "subaltern empire" (Morozov 2015) and the one on "affirmative action empire" (Martin 2001a; Martin 2001b)—that emphasise the specificity of the Soviet empire and even question whether the Soviet Union was actually imperial in nature. This ambiguity has recently been investigated through post-colonial lenses as well:

> Those who would characterize the Soviet experiment as noncolonial can point, inter alia, to the Soviet Union's wish to liberate its toiling masses; its dismantling of many ethnic-Russian privileges in its east and south; its

support of many Union languages; its development of factories, hospitals, and schools; its liberation of women from the harem and the veil; its support of Third World anticolonial struggles, seen as intimately connected with the Soviet experiment, from 1923 to 1991; and the fact that some minority of the Soviet sphere's non-Russians wished the Bolshevik regime. Those who would argue that the Soviets were simply differently configured colonists could point, again inter alia, to the mass and arbitrary relocation of entire non-Russian peoples; the ironic Soviet national fixing of countless formerly less defined identities and the related tortured intertwining of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz-Tajik border to guarantee an ethnic strife; the genocidal settling of the Kazakh nomad millions from 1929 to 1934; the forced monoculture across Central Asia and the consequent ecological disaster of the Aral Sea; the Soviet reconquest of the once independent Baltic states in 1941; the invariable Russian ethnicity of the number-two man in each republic; the inevitable direction of Russia's Third World policy from its Moscow center; and tanks in 1956 and 1968 in Budapest and Prague. Complicating either argument is that the Soviet Union and its predecessor Russian empire were often as lethal to their Russians as to non-Russians, and that the USSR radically de-valued specifically Russian identity for several decades. (Moore 2001, pp. 123–124)

Studies of the so-called affirmative action empire focus on the Soviet Union's ideological objective of reconciling nationalism and international socialism. On the one hand, the Soviet Union was organised along national-territorial lines, thereby "promoting the national consciousness of its ethnic minorities and establishing for them many of the characteristics institutional forms of the nation-state" (Martin 2001a, p. 67). On the other hand, the creation of national territories scattered across the entire expanse of the Soviet Union aimed at reinforcing the unitary state; likewise, the endorsement of non-Russian nation-building represented a form of controlled decolonisation aimed at maintaining Soviet integrity. Nationalisms were therefore *governed* by granting them the *forms* of nationhood (Martin 2001b).

The second reason why the Soviet Union stands out amongst comparative imperial cases has to do with the difference between how empires had normally ended and how the Soviet Union in particular ended. Moreover, historical circumstances in the aftermath of the Soviet breakdown were relatively different from the post-imperial trajectories of the previous centuries, as the post-Soviet period was characterised by the emergence of a multiplicity of contested sovereignties and new "foreign policy-making units" (Skak 1996, p. 7).

The dissolution of both the Ottoman and the Hapsburg empires overlapped with the First World War, which is to be assumed as a constitutive major conflict moulding the emergence of a new international order. The Ottoman Empire collapsed almost through implosion ("imperial decline by means of attrition", Motyl 1998, p. 20),[14] whilst the Habsburg Empire was dismembered in the immediate aftermath of the WWI, even though several "national questions" had already emerged before the Austro-Hungarian dissolution. In the case of the Soviet Union, the structural change took place without the occurrence of a major war: the end of the Union was ratified though an attempt at "coordinated transition" that took the form of a seven-point plan—a sort of "incubator" which was set up for the successor polities.[15]

According to Susanne Michele Birgerson (2002), there is also a third basis of differentiation amongst the above-mentioned empires to be taken into account: the empires that collapsed before the twentieth century either led the peripheries into anarchy, in which order was established on a local basis by small political groupings (clans, tribes, city-states…), or opened the door to territorial conquest by a neighbouring empire. In contrast, the empires that collapsed during or after the twentieth century resulted in processes of state formation; accordingly, the comparison between the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Soviet Empires seems to show much more nuanced realities and points of differentiation amongst specific "sectors" of the post-imperial peripheries. In fact, in the first two cases the processes of decline and/or dissolution often led to a handover between imperial powers—i.e. one empire's rule was succeeded by another. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, has not been followed by a similar handover of power and the post-Soviet entities, lacking competent institutions, were incapable of exercising effective authority over their territories and were thus characterised by contested boundaries.

The ex-communist elites and local, unequipped proto-institutions were suddenly expected to carry out projects of nation-state-building and push their way through a series of overlapping and alternative sources of authority and identity; whilst most of them officially committed to a formal policy of "de-Sovietisation", their political activities were affected by the historical fact that "the Soviet state was the first one to impose a system of territorial governance" (Akçali 2003, p. 417) and "nationalities whose experience of statehood and political independence was scant or non-existent (including Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan,

Georgia, Ukraine, and the Central Asian republics) gained the trappings of pseudo-statehood within the Soviet Union" (Tuminez 2003, p. 95).[16]

The very organisation of the Soviet Union, and in particular its ethnofederalist structure and the presence of an indigenised cadres system, has impacted the way post-Soviet republics claimed or approached sovereignty (Beissinger 1997, p. 166; see also Beissinger and Young 2002); furthermore, the classification of Soviet citizens according to nationalities and the territorialisation of group identities based on ethnicity have had long-term repercussions in the political organisation of the post-Soviet order.

In addition to the effects of the "centre-periphery compact" (Tuminez 2003) on relations between territories and power as well as institutional reorganisation, there is another important aspect that shows the extent to which the post-Soviet space is shaped by path dependencies: namely the ideational aspect. As I show in more depth in Chap. 5, the reference to Soviet mentality and "mental maps" is a recurrent feature that influences elites' narrative templates. The shared Soviet experience constitutes a collective framework of memory that has not only shaped the imagination of the past but also mediated collective imaginaries of the future (Assmann and Shortt 2011).

Past and present patterns of de-integration and re-integration, repeated over time in the long term, have exactly shaped the post-Soviet region, whose units and actors have also formed and morphed according to this dynamics. Such processes can be tentatively captured by reversing the paradigm for the study of political unification elaborated by Amitai Etzioni (1962a, b, 1963), whose paradigm allows us to highlight the fundamental aspects that must be considered if we are to trace how de-integrative and re-integrative courses over the long-term resonate in the current configuration of the post-Soviet region (Table 1).

According to the 1924 Constitution, the Soviet Union was established as a federal structure based on an administrative hierarchy made up of Union Republics and the so-called Autonomies—nationalities and ethnolinguistic groups acknowledged as either Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics, Autonomous Oblast or Autonomous Districts (*Okrug*). The assortment of "autonomies" constituted at the same time the foundation of the Soviet state and an important drive towards de-integration, leading to ethnic issues throughout the whole history of the Soviet Union.[17] However, their inclinations towards the Soviet Union was not monolithic and has obviously changed across time and space.

Table 1 Adaptation of Amitai Etzioni's scheme of political unification (as developed by the author)

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1. Unit properties
   a. Individual properties (i.e. dispositions to be embedded within the integrated system; attitude towards de-integration)
   b. Analytical properties (i.e. heterogeneity or proximity)
2. Environmental properties
   a. Non-social (Ecological) Properties (i.e. territorial disconnection—borders; enclaves/exclaves; cross-border relations and infrastructures)
   b. Social properties (i.e. inter-republic relations)
3. System properties (i.e. de-integrative instances before fragmentation; "prodromes of regionness"; historical regions)

They did not experience similar "anti-union momenta" in terms of either timing or intensity: this point is clearly demonstrated by the sequential timing of the sovereignty and independence declarations (Walker 2003). By a similar token, the Union Republics reacted in diverse ways to the launch of the so-called Novo-Ogarevo process: when Gorbachev announced his plan in June 1990 to establish a "New Union Treaty" amongst Sovereign Socialist Republics, only nine of them agreed to participate in the negotiations, whereas Azerbaijan decided to send its representatives as "observers". In March 1991, a "Union Referendum" was held posing the question: "Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights and freedoms of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?". While Moldova, Armenia and Georgia refused to hold the referendum on their territory, 80% of the Soviet electorate turned out for the vote and 76.4% voted yes.[18]

In the early post-Soviet phases, the restructuration of the whole regional system has reverberated the above-mentioned structural features ascribed in the *long durée*, as well as other sources of path dependencies that have exacerbated and/or inhibited de-integrative and re-integrative courses.

First, the concessions granted to the republics through constitutional amendments and federal laws which (especially since the late 1980s) seemed to be designed to contain emerging centrifugal pressures within the Union[19]; second, the "peripheral segmentation" (Nexon and Wright 2005) carried out by central Soviet authorities in order to

reduce the connectivity between different sectors of the periphery (e.g. the dissolution of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic); third, the weak precedents of regionality enacted by the Union Republics before the establishment of the Soviet Union.[20] These moves, which might be termed "prodromes of regionness," represent precursory attempts at establishing (sub-) or (mini-)regional groupings in pre-Soviet times.

In the Caucasus, the artificial, top-down disconnect between North and South and the supposedly isolating role of the Caucasian mountains have often coexisted with other instances of region-building and forms of regional connectivity driven by various actors. While geographic determinism would seem to cast mountains as zones of both weak interplay or even conflict, around the Caucasus one can identify quite diverse imaginative geographies and historical projects that contradict a deterministic approach and instead confirm the label "*montagne des peuples*". At the same time, however, the traditional idea of "Caucasian confederative unity" has never bridged the entire sub-region.

In the North Caucasus, the Union of Mountain Peoples, and subsequently the Mountain Peoples' Republic, only existed between 1917 and 1918.[21] Similarly, in the period in-between the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union, the three Transcaucasian nations experimented with the first Transcaucasian Federation. In November of 1917, party representatives from the Georgian Social-Democratic Party, the Azeri Musavat Party (Mensheviks) and the Armenian Dashnaktsutiun party met in Tiflis to create an Independent Government of Transcaucasus with the purpose of rejecting the power of the Council of People's Commissars headed by Lenin and refusing the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The latter, in fact, was signed by the Bolshevik regime without consulting the Caucasian countries even though it involved ceding the South Caucasian provinces to the Ottoman Empire. In April of 1918, the Sejm convened in Tbilisi and released a historical "Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of the Transcaucasus" announcing their intent to separate from Russia and form a Transcaucasian Federation. The latter lasted only one month, as each nation went into the project with different perspectives, motivations and intentions. Azerbaijan was oriented towards Turkey and Armenia remained loyal to Russia, whilst Georgia secretly negotiated with Germany for an alliance that would have guaranteed its survival and

then declared its independence in May of 1918; consequently, Azerbaijan and Armenia declared their independence as well.[22]

In Central Asia, the reference to supra-national identities (both pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic) impacted the emergence of autochthonous elites and debates. Islam had balanced the coexistence of different political entities and their subjection to colonial rule; accordingly, shared belonging to the *Umma* (community of Muslims) drove the development of political groupings along religious lines in the first decade of the twentieth century. In May of 1917, the Congress of Muslims met in Moscow, recovering a Turkic vision which had been already promoted in the previous early years (All Muslim Congresses in 1905 and 1906). In the end, however, the project of a Muslim Union failed and the Islamic front broke when two political fault lines emerged. First, there was a divide between the "Precursors" (Qadids) and the "Innovators" (Jadids). The Jadids formed the Islamic Council, whilst the Qadids formed a separated Council of Ulema, and the Kazakh-Kyrgyz delegates came together in the Alash Orda.

Secondly, whilst the "centralists" believed that the Islamic community should have been represented as one body with cultural autonomy within a non-federated Russia, the "territorial autonomists" pursued the territorial autonomy of each ethnic group within a federated Russia (Glenn 1999, pp. 65–66).

On the occasion of the Second and Third All Muslim Conferences, nevertheless, the participants expressed their claims of the autonomy of Turkistan, and during the Fourth Extraordinary Regional Muslim Congress a declaration of autonomy was finally formalised. However, two different authorities were established: the Provisional People's Council of Alash Orda, in the Kazakh-Kyrgyz region, and the Kokand Autonomous Government, later joined by the Turkmenistan Oblast in the TransCaspian Autonomous Government.[23]

Other former Soviet Republics had experienced more or less institutionalised embeddedness in sub-regional, regional and/or transregional spaces before being annexed to/occupied by the Russian Empire, first, and the Soviet Union, later. The belonging to historical regions and past involvements in regional projects might have shaped Soviet Republics' behaviours, connections and practices within the Union, their development throughout the fragmentation process, and have been shaping their post-independence regionally-scaled posture, especially vis-à-vis de-integrative and re-integrative pressures, and the reference to symbolic

geographies and meta-geographies as cognitive and political structures for actors in transition to organise narratives and foreign policy agendas in the wake of the Soviet dismemberment. Bessarabian Moldova's patterns of exclusion from and inclusion in the pan-Romanian project (1812–1918 and 1918–1940, respectively), alternated with Russian and Soviet annexations, certainly resonated in Moldova's post-1991 course of ambivalence and in-betweeness.

Likewise, the former shared history within the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose territory extended in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries over current Poland, Ukraine, Moldova (Transnistria), Belarus, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, inspired tentative groupings and geopolitical concepts in Central and Eastern Europe decades, if not centuries later (e.g. the confederative idea of "New Rzeczpospolita"; the idea of "Baltic-Black Sea Federation" developed by a number of Ukrainian intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth—beginning of the twentieth century, revived at different times also by the reference to the project "Interimarium").

By factoring in the "Unit Properties", "Environmental Properties" and "System Properties" of the partitioning polity, it is possible to gain a perspective on the fragmentation process and the trajectories of individual fragments as well as to see how the current configuration of the post-Soviet region is informed by a partial succession. In particular, the Soviet system has affected the nature of the post-Soviet fragments, especially in terms of the way they redefine sovereignty and territoriality (Cummings and Hinnebusch 2014).

As regards the redefinition of sovereignty, relations between (i) the centre and the Union Republics, (ii) the centre and the Autonomous Republics, and (iii) the Union Republics and the Autonomous Republics were organised according to a complex architecture of "differentiated" and "competing" sovereignties which were "possessed both by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a whole and the Union republics which comprise it. The sovereignty of the Union as a whole and the sovereignty of the Union republics do not negate each other but, rather, are harmoniously combined within constitutionally established limits" (Deyermond 2008, p. 32). This idea of sovereignty later resulted in a series of "sovereignty declarations" which were not univocally identified with acts of secession from the Soviet Union; by the same token, this process of sovereignisation has not prevented immediate or subsequent efforts at re-integration.

Similarly, the unconventional provision of scripts of sovereignty and the coexistence of multiform graduated sovereigntyscapes (Sidaway 2003) paved the way for not only political ambiguities but also legal opacities regarding the way Soviet disintegration was carried out in practical terms: indeed, this disintegration occurred through a process which has been variously identified as partition (which would have entailed a consensual secession), or dismemberment and dissolution (which would have implied the disappearance of the pre-existing state). The Minsk Agreements concluded that "the USSR has ceased to exist as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality" and recognised the sovereignty and equality of each of the former Soviet republics; however, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine "could only withdraw from the USSR […] but they were not entitled to dissolve the Union" and they were even less eligible to empower the sovereignty status of the other constituents of a federative state. Nonetheless, the Minsk Agreements stated that "from the moment of signature […] application of the laws of […] the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics shall not be permitted in the territories of the signatory States"; therefore, it "created in effect two political entities in the same area since other republics still considered themselves members of the union" (Kembayev 2009, p. 28).

As regards the redefinition of territoriality, it is worth noting that in the wake of the post-Soviet collapse both state-formation and region-formation have entailed a re-articulation of political space according to an internal/external divide (Ruggie 1993; Agnew 2005). This type of divide "comes into being when an internal hierarchical order manages to control the external territorial and functional boundaries so closely that it insulates domestic structuring processes from external influences. In this case, the internal hierarchy presents itself as the single organizing principle of the internal domestic structuring and, at the same time, as the single autonomous centre for external relations" (Bartolini 2005, p. xvi).

Since the post-Soviet region emerged out of a process of creative fragmentation, multiple processes of differentiation occurred at the same time, with the result that multiple overlapping scales of spatial orders coexist (Caporaso 2000, p. 7; Buzan and Albert 2010). State-formation and region-formation might be thus conceived of as being embedded in a co-evolutionary path in which inner and outer consolidations are intimately related. Working on the basis of similar assumptions—that there is a relationship between external political consolidation and internal political structures in any type of political formation—Stefano

Bartolini ([2005]) has explained the above-mentioned co-evolution as laying the foundations for a general theory of confinement. The latter deals with the constitution of a polity and the definition of its constituent properties according to a threefold course: centre formation, system building and political structuring. The formation of the centre is not necessarily nor solely identified with state formation; rather, it is described as "sub-systemic differentiation" and takes place by setting boundaries and establishing entry/exit options. System building relates to the production of structures and procedures for system maintenance, in other words the way the components of a system are compelled or induced to stay within it through coercive mechanisms, ideational resources and institutions. Finally, political structuring is related to the emergence of political oppositions and alliances amongst collectivities, organisations and territories. These three processes of "polity formation" can likewise be applied to state-formation and region-formation.

3   NEW AVENUES FOR THINKING ABOUT THE POST-SOVIET REGION (AND WHY WE NEED THEM)

In addition to considering post-Soviet regionalism as an instance of far-reaching phenomena of international integration and de-integration to be observed at various times in different parts of the world, it is worth exploring the ontology of international regions more broadly in order to position this macro-case study within a more IR-theory-driven set of reflections.

This kind of exploration appears to be necessary given that the post-Soviet region may be juxtaposed to and/or contrasted with other processes of region formation and structuration unfolding in the international system.

Only rarely has our object of study been compared to other regions, and even when it is compared the process of drawing parallels has frequently been affected by a Euro-centric bias[24] or has reiterated an RO-centred approach. Against this background, the positioning of the present research is driven by four objectives: (1) to deconstruct; (2) to spin; (3) to comprise; (4) to compare.

3.1   To Deconstruct

In spite of several studies investigating regional interactions in the former Soviet area, the meaning of "post-Soviet region" per se has barely been

unpacked. On the one hand, by qualifying the region as "post-Soviet", one points towards the reverberations of the hub-and-spoke system in current regional configurations; at the same time, however, this designation tends to downplay the emergence of trans-regional and sub-regional patterns, or trans-boundary non-state regional complexes. Similarly, by qualifying the former Soviet space as a region, the dimension of multiplicity ends up overshadowed: by contrast, acknowledging the existence of post-Soviet spaces and regionalisms in their plurality expresses the fact that a more or less defined group of states is subjected to multi-directional pressures (disintegration vs. re-integration, fragmentation vs. recomposition, interdependence vs. emancipation).

Deconstructing the post-Soviet region therefore entails looking at its contested and constructed nature, identifying who defines it as a region, why it constitutes a region (its "regionhood"[25]) and how it constitutes a region (its "regionality"). Concepts such as "regionhood" (what distinguishes a region from a non-region) and "regionality" (what distinguishes one region from another, Van Langenhove 2003) serve to deconstruct: the post-Soviet region actually appears to represent a clear case in which several different types of regionhood coexist and whose regionality has been diversely constructed by different region-makers over the last two decades.

While the notion of regionhood implies the emergence and development of a region through a dialogical process of formation, it also denotes a process marked by rationality and intentionality. Such features cannot be taken for granted in the case of the post-Soviet region; or at least they are not always present and tangible in each and every manifestation of regional interaction.

3.2   To Spin

It is possible that the multiplicity encompassed by the post-Soviet region reveals an ongoing and mutual constitution of structures (i.e. regional institutions) and agents (actors operating in the region, i.e. states). This introduces a further element of complexity that prevents the researcher from assuming a neat separation between the region and its region-makers.[26] While most studies on the post-Soviet region focus on the *outputs* of region-building, the mutual constitution of structures and agents in the region might instead be investigated by focusing on the *process* of region-building itself. This proposal that we emphasise process

in the study of regions is not innovative per se; nevertheless, processes of region-making have mostly been approached as regional projects moving along a continuum of regional development. The concept of regionness, for example, has been put forward to analyse the process through which a regional system is transformed into a regional polity and to identify which conditions hinder or facilitate the advancement of a group of countries through different levels of "being a region" (regional space, regional complex, regional society, regional community, region-state).[27] Regionness has been defined as "the process whereby a geographical area is transformed from a passive object to an active subject capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region. Regionness thus implies that a region can be a region 'more or less'. The level of regionness can both increase and decrease" (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000, p. 461). Accordingly, regionness does not seem to be framed as part of a stage theory, nor does it seemingly lay out "a single path or detailed 'series of stages' that are exactly the same for all regions and that must be passed in order for higher levels of regionness to occur" (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000, p. 470). Nevertheless, the five levels of regionness denote a progressive identification of peoples with the region they live in, and a parallel progressive regional cohesion: in other words, regional identification and regional cohesion are expected to evolve in whichever direction and to be constitutively related to one another.

The "teleological progression" implied by the concept of regionness cannot be observed in the post-Soviet region, as this particular region's long-term re-structuration has been characterised by non-linear trajectories, tipping points and feedback loops. Therefore, what I propose here is to interpret region-building and state-building as two parallel, ongoing processes, and to look at the way interactions between the region and the state constitute both of these elements.

3.3   To Comprise

In order to paint a holistic picture of post-Soviet region, it is highly important that we comprehensively identify the different elements of regionality. The conceptual toolkit provided by the notion of regional governance allows us to consider the interplay amongst state and non-state actors, formal and informal engagements, regulatory mechanisms and systems of rules and the way all these elements impact on the regional order (Webber et al. 2004; Kirchner 2006; Kirchner and

Sperling 2007). In particular, the post-Soviet region seems to be jointly moulded by formal institutions and actors on one side and informal practices on the other.[28] Indeed, it is possible to detect *regional patterns of practices* that are not necessarily enshrined in formal institutions or included in regular policy-making chains (Russo 2016).

Informal practices can be defined as patterns of actions which are not "regulated, monitored or controlled directly or indirectly by the state" (Routh, quoted in Morris and Polese 2013, p. 3); they can be conceived of as actions whose regulation is not codified and *whose agency is not immediately/publicly traceable.* Moreover, it is important to note that informal practices are neither necessarily put into existence by informal actors/institutions nor limited to *illegal* practices.

Vincent Pouliot first advanced the idea that regions are "constituted by sets of specific ways of doing things—practices—that create more or less ordered spaces and narratives of regional interactions" (Pouliot 2012, p. 210). At the same time, a "practical" interpretation of the post-Soviet region sets out to consider different facets of this region: on the one hand, there are *formal security practices* that have been developed in the framework of the above-mentioned ROs (i.e. joint trainings and exercises) and which are often considered "parades".[29] On the other hand, there are *informal interactions* that have been recognised as a key element in the socialisation of post-Soviet elites in multilateral settings (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012, p. 22).

The study of informal *economic* practices has focused on informal trade, employment and entrepreneurship based on trust-sensitive and network-sensitive activities (i.e. itinerant trade and suitcase trade or open-air markets but also bribery, smuggling and what has been termed "the economy of favours", Ledeneva 1998). It would likely be misleading to describe informal economic practices as a phenomenon that suddenly emerged after the collapse of the formal structures of the socialist order. Rather, "many informal economic practices, witnessed today, developed in the late socialist period and have in fact persisted and played significant roles in shaping the emerging logic(s) of the post-socialist order(s)" (Polese and Rodgers 2011, p. 613). In the same way as informal economic practices, informal *security* practices constitute a crucial dimension of the regional system of governance in the former Soviet space,[30] having emerged as a by-product of corrupted policy makers, transnational and transregional criminal networks, the resilience of traditional/customary institutions, and middle-rank officials acting in

the interstices of dysfunctional state institutions.[31] There are also multiple examples of another practice which frequently manifests across the region: the move to convene loosely-institutionalised regional meetings, workshops and conferences that gather together experts, bureaucrats and representatives of specialised state agencies to deal with diverse issues of regional security (such as the Issyk-Kul Initiative on Border Security in Central Asia, for example). These informal *diplomatic* practices might indeed be reminiscent of "seminar diplomacy", defined by Emanuel Adler as a form of talk-shop characterised by "face-to-face interactions on a large variety of technical, practical and normative subjects" (Adler 1998, p. 121).

Even though the emergence of informal practices has not marked a divide between Sovietness and post-Sovietness, their presence and persistence has a significant component of path dependency. Moreover, whereas informal practices already existed during the last years of socialism and had an impact on the history of the Soviet Union, it is important to recall that pre-Soviet social structures often relied on informality as well, and these structures have been retrieved in order to construct new political identities and power infrastructures in the last two decades. For these reasons, informal practices can be seen as a "Karstic river" that has criss-crossed the whole of the post-Soviet region at different times and still displays constitutive effects with a significant impact on the regional governance system.

Even though regional organisations have played only a partial role in shaping a system of governance in the former Soviet space, an approach dismissing post-Soviet regionalism just because it is failing or ineffective shows its limitations. Post-Soviet regionalism can be broadly explained as the reverberation of certain elements of Sovietness that are still present in the post-Soviet countries' political culture. As has been already underlined, an investigation of the rationale and performance of ROs can provide an account of a Potemkin politics of regionalism in which façades and rituals are constitutive features of political interactions. Similarly, the study of regional patterns of practice might help to reveal another feature of post-Soviet politics, namely their informality.[32]

3.4   To Compare

One of the most avant-garde comparative approaches has been advanced by Kathleen Hancock (2009) in order to make the case for her theory

of plutocratic delegation[33] and thus explain why states decide to pursue economic integration. Hancock based her analysis of regional plutocratic governance structures on the diachronic juxtaposition of three instances of economic integration, each of which involved a very different spatial and temporal context: the Zollverein (German Custom Union, over the first half of the nineteenth century), the Southern African Custom Union (first half of the twentieth century) and the Eurasian Custom Union (mid-1990s). By Hancock's own admission, "plutocratic delegation theory explains plutocracy in a subset of integration cases, custom unions" (Hancock 2009, p. 6). Moreover, her theory seems to assume a teleological evolution according to which a custom union develops into a deeper integrative project and, ultimately, spills over into a political union. According to her perspective, intergovernmental governance structures might finally result in monetary unions and supranational governance structures can lead to federal political systems; quite differently, however, "a plutocratic governance structure taken to its maximum level of integration ends in empires" (Hancock 2009, p. 8).

While the puzzle driving my own research aims to answer a different research question, Hancock's framework must be treated as an important reference point for undertaking a comparison focused on understanding how the presence/absence of a regional "kaleidoscope" has been explained in other cases (Africa; Latin America; Asia).

African and Latin American regionalisms have often been put forward as paradigmatic examples of overlapping regional institutions and processes of regionalisation.

The first attempts at establishing regional projects and frameworks for coordination on the African continent date back to its colonial past: this is one of the reasons why the Organisation of African Unity has been interpreted as more an instrument of national independence than one of regional integration (Acharya 1999). African elites discursively narrated these regional endeavours as a way of distancing the course of national independence from histories of colonialism, apartheid and slavery; nevertheless, the persistence of the colonial past has reverberated in contemporary African regionalism. First, colonial models of governance have been treated as the foundational experience of African regional architecture (Hartmann 2016). Second, the colonial legacy of Westphalian quasi-statehood has been interpreted as a structural constraint for the establishment of effective regional organisations and has influenced the capacity of decolonising states to establish their own systems of regional

interaction (Chappuis et al. 2014). Third, the cohabitation of different colonial powers and modes of colonial administration can be considered to lie at the origins of competing regionalist visions and divergent blocs of states. In the early stages of decolonisation, there were two projects aimed at achieving the Pan-Africanist ideal: whilst one group of leaders envisioned the constitution of the United Nations of Africa, others favoured the establishment of the United States of Africa. Regional fragmentation was fuelled by the difficulty of bridging the Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophone, Arabic blocs of states, especially in the absence of a core regional hegemon and the presence of contending regional leaders (namely, South Africa and Nigeria) (Mattheis 2014).

Finally, consequences of the colonial history of African regionalism can be seen in the proliferation of sovereignty-boosting regional organisations, summitry regionalism and a critical assortment of façade institutions. This proliferation can be interpreted as a result of the fact that African countries are relatively permeable to all sorts of external engineering; alternately, it can be seen as a strategy enacted by African policymakers to accumulate multiple diplomatic positions, thus strengthening their status and degree of international recognition as well as the reputation of incumbent governments.

Similarly to the African case, Latin American regionalism was originally based on a call for political unity in support of processes of state- and nation-building, processes which therefore ran parallel to the making of the region. The first wave of regionalism was driven by a hegemonic actor—the USA—which had not been a former colonial power; at a later stage, different projects of hemispheric integration, variable geometries of "modular" sub-regionalism and, more recently, open regionalism clashed with one another in the Americas (Bianculli 2016). On the one hand, pan-Americanism has been led by the USA, embodied by the Organisation of the American States, and contested as the latest manifestation of imperialism to which the states of Central and South America have been subjected. On the other hand, Latin America's emancipation has been pursued through a "Bolivarian", post-liberal regional vision which is nevertheless multi-headed: in Latin America as in Africa, it is difficult to identify one specific actor leading the area's multiple regionalising processes. Indeed, each of the regional projects can be considered an effort by a different regional power (through practices of presidential diplomacy) to consolidate its regional leadership or reposition itself globally.

Current regional configurations in the Asian continent also originate from past histories of imperial dominance and alternate waves of colonisation and "re-asianisation" (Jetschke and Katada 2016). To date, the competition between regional leaders and prospective hegemons (China and Japan) as well as between opposing postures vis-à-vis the United States' role in the continent have prevented any Pan-Asianist project from achieving success; furthermore, the very meaning of "Asia" has been often defined from the outside. Against the background of a postcolonial context, and the region's exposure to the influence of external actors, several authors (e.g. Acharya 2001) have argued that there is a specific "Asian way" to regionalism: whereas a number of sub-regional structures[34] have emerged over the last decades, the main specificity of Asian regionalism(s) is its model of soft integration in which ideational linkages and collective identities replace regional institutions.[35] This "regionalization-without-regionalism" approach has not prevented the development of some regional projects and initiatives whose hidden agenda might have been the consolidation of hegemonic aspirations or the legitimation of leadership schemes; at the same time, North Asia and Asia-Pacific seem to be at the margins of these regionalising processes.

On the basis of comparison amongst instances of African, Latin American and Asian regionalism, it is possible to draw some parallels vis-à-vis the post-Soviet region and sketch out the features of a postcolonial model of regionalism. Specifically, the latter is primarily characterised by the alternation of colonial powers and the presence of multiple extra-regional actors that ruled over arbitrarily-drawn territorial patchworks.

Regional fragmentation, the impossibility of univocally identifying a region-builder with hegemonic capabilities and ambitions, and unfulfilled projects of statehood are the main legacies of colonial empires in Africa, the Americas and Asia. Though it began from similar conditions, the Asian continent does not appear to be a kaleidoscopic political space in the way African, Latin American and the post-Soviet regions appear to be. In the case of Africa and Latin America, then, instances of postcolonial regionalism have been interpreted by local leaders as emancipatory instruments and a strategy they can employ to be integrated and recognised as peers in the international system.

Turning to the post-Soviet region, one finds some similar traits as well as crucial differences. The most evident analogy concerns its

Table 2 Central Eurasia's balance of power

	Population		GDP		Defence expenditure		Military expenditure	
	1995	*2000*	*1995*	*2000*	*1995*	*2000*	*1995*	*2000*
Russia	50.54	50.38	91.30	88.52	96.24	93.04	63.03	58.24
Armenia	1.17	1.19	*	*	*	*	2.85	2.51
Azerbaijan	2.63	2.66	*	*	*	*	3.51	4.30
Belarus	3.52	3.50	*	*	*	*	4.24	4.94
Georgia	1.85	1.68	*	*	*	*	n.a.	1.00
Kazakhstan	5.76	5.53	1.49	1.34	*	*	1.99	3.81
Kyrgyzstan	1.54	1.62	*	*	*	*	*	*
Moldova	1.48	1.51	*	*	*	*	*	*
Tajikistan	2.09	2.15	*	*	*	*	*	*
Turkmenistan	1.43	1.53	*	*	*	*	*	1.04
Ukraine	17.40	17.30	3.06	2.36	1.29	1.71	19.90	19.11
Uzbekistan	7.98	8.44	*	1.4	*	*	1.49	3.3

Expressed as percentage of total; *indicates less than 1%
Source Wohlforth 2004, p. 226

colonial past; however, whilst the other cases involved colonial empires, the Soviet Union has been interpreted as a type of state whose periphery management had some empire-like characteristics. The second dimension to be considered in order to draw parallelisms amongst different regions is the presence/absence of a region-builder, since this constitutes a sign of hegemony or regional leadership. Whereas in the other regions it is not possible to univocally identify such an actor, the former Soviet space is characterised by a clear preponderance of power: Russia's capabilities are actually greater than the sum of the capabilities of all other countries in the "near abroad" (Table 2), and even the strongest regional balancers remain critically dependent on Russia (Table 3).

Post-Soviet regionalisms thus reflect power distribution in the region and the policies of the regionally dominant states, but they have also been effectively defined as "hubless spokes" (Molchanov 2011). Indeed, different centres of gravity developed leading to the multiplication of regional "spokes", but this occurred in the absence of an undisputed regional hub acting as the sole organisational core.

Table 3 Author's elaboration based on Wohlforth (2004, p. 230)

	High trade dependence on Russia (>30%)	*High energy dependence on Russia (>50% and/ or infrastructure)*	*Russian military base or troops stationed in territory*
Belarus	X	X	X
Armenia		X	X
Moldova	X (decreased since 2005)	X	X
Kazakhstan	X		X
Ukraine	X (decreased 2005–2010)	X	X
Kyrgyzstan			X
Tajikistan			X
Georgia		X (decreased since 2006)	X
Turkmenistan			
Azerbaijan		X	X
Uzbekistan			X

4   THE WAY FORWARD

This chapter has provided a review of the main analytical frameworks and conceptual models which have been developed in relation to the post-Soviet region: in other words, I have outlined how the latter has been interpreted and read in different scholarship, either as a case study for broader and more general theories of regionalism or through a closer attachment to an Area Studies perspective.

Second, the chapter has focused on the role played by the "shadow of the past" in shaping how post-Soviet region has been emerging and currently appears. I have explored this process through two main analytical tools: on the one hand, an overall trans-historical analysis, partially drawn from the quite controversial approach proposed by what has been dubbed "imperial comparativism"; on the other hand, I tried to relocate post-Soviet regionalism in an International Relations perspective and consider it as an instance of more fundamental historical phenomena of integration and fragmentation occurring in the international system. The reflection presented in this chapter justifies the frequent move throughout the book to return to the idea of path dependencies.

Third, the chapter has delineated the fundamental research objectives driving this project, including a commitment to a comparative approach which translates into engagement with the diverse strands of literature that have been developed to frame and explain other instances of regionalism.

The following chapter is devoted to the study of one of the peculiarities of post-Soviet regionalism, a specific trait that was uncovered precisely thanks to the above-mentioned comparative endeavour: i.e., the controversial role of Russia, caught between its hegemonic capabilities and ambitions, and its post-colonial condition of a state in the making.

Notes

1. In another work, Beissinger (1997) has argued that "empires never really die; at most they fade away. The consequences of empires usually live on for generations beyond their institutional lives" (p. 157). Several authors have reflected on "post-imperial syndromes" ("There is a medical phenomenon in which a person who has had a limb amputated perceives that limb to still be causing pain. The same phenomenon applies to the post-imperial consciousness", Gaidar 2010, p. XIV); other political scientists have tried to describe the fallout of imperial collapse by looking at post-imperial peripheries and contested sovereignties (Cooley 2000/2001). The phenomenon of imperial wreckage has been effectively addressed by Snyder (1998): "When empires come crashing down, they leave hunks of institutional wreckage scattered across the landscape: pieced of bureaucracies, military units, economic networks, administrative districts, as well as demographic and cultural patterns that bear the marks of imperial past. This detritus of empire constitutes the building blocks of the new political arrangements that are constructed out of the rubble. From these are formed not only new states and nations, but also a whole new system of international and transnational relations amongst the remnants [...] When a child's edifice assembled from rods and connectors crashes down, the overall structure is destroyed, but tightly interconnected segments of it may retain their shape, though scattered across the floor. When an empire collapse, the still-connected sections may be of several types" (pp. 1–5).
2. It is worth noting that the expression of a normative consonance amongst political actors at the international level is not a specific prerogative of these countries. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon to observe the formation of international elite cartels, involving elites from different countries who support the positions and policies of other elites: "elite

positioning in these cartels is as important as positioning in the various national power games. Leaders of the cartels' national components consult frequently with each other, borrow freely from each other's policy repertoires, and shore each other up in crises and electoral campaigns" (Higley and Pakulski 2007, p. 18).

3. According to a broad definition, "nesting" occurs when issue-specific institutions are themselves part of wider regional (or multilateral) frameworks that involve multiple states or issues. Overlapping regionalism, instead, entails the coexistence of multiple ordering principles, "systems of rules", "ways of conceiving power" or "sets of practices" to which "actors' dispositions and expectations may respond simultaneously" (Adler and Greve 2009, p. 62).

4. From the Central Asian Commonwealth formed in 1991 to the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (2002), passing through intermediate steps and chameleonic transformations (such as the Central Asian Union and the Central Asian Economic Community). The Central Asian states attempted to create their own framework of cooperation without including Russia.

5. Moldova and Ukraine were the first to join the Council of Europe in 1995, followed by Russia (1995), Georgia (1999), Armenia and Azerbaijan (2001). Despite not being COE members, Belarus and some of the Central Asian states began participating in some of the COE's initiatives, namely the European Commission for Democracy through Law and the Conference of the Constitutional Control Organs of the Countries of New Democracy.

6. In addition, in 1992 the Economic Cooperation Organisation proceeded with its enlargement to the five Central Asian states and Azerbaijan by establishing a framework for South-Central Asian cooperation; a similar development occurred within the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation between 1992 and 1995. Finally, in 1992 the idea of convening a Conference on Interactions and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (which has been dubbed the "Asian OSCE") was put forward by Kazakhstan. The CICA currently gathers together all post-Soviet states except for Moldova.

7. Launched as a cooperative initiative in 1997 by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, GUAM was institutionalised in June 2001 (Yalta Summit) as a consultative forum. Established in 2005, the Community of Democratic Choice has amongst its founding members Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Azerbaijan holds an observer status.

8. Besides SCO, it is worth mentioning the One Belt, One Road Initiative that is based on the idea of connectivity, investments and infrastructure networks rather than regional institution-building endeavors.

Additionally, several other cooperative frameworks and projects emerged from different regionalist visions, envisaged by a number of regional powers and relevant actors. For example, Iran first proposed—as early as 1991—the establishment of the Caspian Cooperation Organization including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan as well. Any full-fledged integration project amongst the Caspian littoral states has been hindered by the unresolved international legal status of the Caspian Sea; however, several summits have been held and agreements finalized. Another set of integration schemes have been envisioned and partially realized amongst the Black Sea littoral states. The most relevant attempt at regional institutionalisation in the Black Sea region is considered to be the Organization of Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC). In addition to BSEC, the Black Sea littoral states started to cooperate in the field of maritime security through the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (Blackseafor) and the naval operation Black Sea Harmony: both of these initiatives were respectively launched and initiated by Turkey. Similar to projects of region-building in the Caspian Sea, Black Sea regionalist endeavours have also been blocked by two mains sources of tensions: on the one side, between Turkey and Armenia, and on the other side between Georgia and Russia. Nevertheless, regional initiatives and projects continue to be launched (the Black Sea Littoral States Border/Coast Guard Cooperation Forum; Black Sea Border Coordination and Information Centre; Confidence and Security Building Measures in the Naval Field in the Black Sea; Border Defence Initiative/Black Sea Border Security Initiative; and the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialogue).

9. The concept of forum shopping has been introduced by International Law scholars to study the behaviour of actors in jurisdictionally compound settings. In International Relations, in addition to forum shopping, similar notions have been developed (i.e. 'regime shifting', 'institutional choice') (see Helfer 2004; Jupille and Snidal 2005; Busch 2007).

10. Conversely, overlap can result from an unintended path of regional/international institution-building that evolved over time. Some regional organisations end up overlapping with others because of an institutions' resilience and/or inertia.

11. The reference here is to the fake settlements the Russian nobleman Grigory Potemkin erected along the banks of the Dnieper River in order to please Empress Catherine II during her visit to Crimea.

12. These latter must be distinguished from the colonial empires whose breakup has direct repercussions and serious political effects on the basic state structure and web of internal relations amongst the constituent parts (Barkey and Von Hagen 1997).

13. The Russian Empire does not seem to be a proper term of comparison given the continuity between the tsarist period and the Soviet one, at least in terms of influence and rule over the peripheries and their being subjected to a similar centripetal pull.

14. The first symptoms of weakness had been showed by the war with Russia (1768–1774); then Britain and France absorbed the sultan's main North African territories; and in 1912, the Balkan wars resulted in the Ottoman throwing out of Europe.

15. An interesting perspective about the disintegration of the Soviet Empire has been elaborated by Yegor Gaidar (2010): according to this author, the presence of a scattered nuclear archipelago contained the diffusion of violence in the periphery.

16. Astrid Tuminez's point should be clarified in terms of its specifics, as pre-Soviet instances of statehood have been experienced in the form of kingdoms (i.e. Georgia between the early twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries, referred to as the "Golden Age"), khanates (i.e. Azerbaijan), and principalities (i.e. Moldova). By a similar token, more or less stable types of political order emerged in Central Asia in the form of hybrid polities based on tribal confederations, clannish structures and exchange practices of interdependence between nomadic and sedentary peoples. Pre-Soviet instances of statehood developed in a "global" context of highly variable institutional polymorphism; quite differently, post-Soviet statehood has been inaugurated in a system of states mainly characterized by institutional isomorphism (see Thompson 1991; Ayoob 1995, pp. 73–76; Bremmer and Taras 1996; Stedman and Holloway 2002, pp. 168–171; Kotkin 2007; Neumann and Wigen 2013).

17. For example, mass disorders were registered in Georgia, first in 1956 and later in 1981; in Azerbaijan (1963); in Armenia (1965); in Lithuania (1966); in Tajikistan (1985); in Kazakhstan (1986). In the late 1980s, the ethnic tensions transformed in actual conflicts, especially in Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Kyrgyz province of Osh and Transnistria.

18. It is worth mentioning that Abkhazia and South Ossetia did hold the Union Treaty referendum in spite of Georgia's boycott.

19. Between 1989 and 1990, both economic and linguistic autonomy were approved in favour of the Republics, but these instrumental concessions were rather conceived as an attempt to save the Union through limited reforms in the direction of a confederal option. As a matter of fact, the negotiations for the draft of a New Union Treaty also contemplated (March 1991) the acknowledgment of rights of secession and self-determination, the recognition of the declarations of sovereignty proclaimed by the republics and, late on (June 1991) the identification of the Union's constituents unit as "states".

20. In the pre-Soviet period, local leaders tried to form some alignments or groupings; during Soviet times, instead, the Union's strategies for territorialising Soviet rule were implemented through processes of border-making and "National-Territorial Delimitation" (1925–1936) (Hirsch 2005, pp. 163–164).

21. Subsequently, in the late Soviet period, the idea of a North Caucasian republic was revived through the efforts of the Abkhaz National Forum and the first Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus was convened in August 1989 in Sukhumi. The Congress established the Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, which then evolved into the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus two years later. Representatives of Georgian social and political movements attended the third congress of the Confederation (Sukhumi, October 1991); on that occasion, a Georgian parliamentary deputy also called for the entire Caucasus to merge to form a "single fist". Nevertheless, the Confederation did not embody the same project of "Caucasiannes" for all components. According to then-president of the Confederation Musa Shanibov, the Confederation was to integrate the peoples of the Caucasus rather than the official governments of the autonomous republics; furthermore, the unification was meant to serve the purpose of resisting attempts to suppress the Caucasus' national-democratic movements. Quite differently, the then-president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Dzhokhar Dudayev saw the integrative project of uniting the Caucasian people in a confederation as an instrument for achieving independence from Russia. He envisioned the creation of a "Caucasian home" and a Confederation of Caucasian states. Shanibov and Dudayev also diverged on whether to include the Transcaucasian states in the Caucasian union. All in all, the descending trajectory experienced by the Confederation testified to the effectiveness of Soviet rule in devising nationalities on territorial and linguistic principles and dividing them along artificially created ethnic lines. Even though attempts at Caucasian integration had always had an anti-Russian nature, the nationalistic consciousness that prevailed in the post-Soviet period let the Caucasian nations to pursue unification with their co-ethnics rather than Caucasian unity (see Lakoba 1998; Oguz 2004).

22. The second Transcaucasian Federation, instead, was established in 1922 as one of the constituent parts of the newly-established Soviet Union; the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic existed until 1936, at which point it was abolished due to the adoption of the new Soviet Constitution (Bagirova 2007).

23. The pan-Turkic scenario also revived in 1919 after the Bolshevik revolution, when the representatives of the Central Bureau of Muslim Organizations demanded first the establishment of a Soviet Republic of

United Turkistan and then an Autonomous Republic. However, later schemes to form a Central Asian grouping within the Soviet structure were driven by the central administrators. In March of 1921, a resolution by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party laid out its foundation and two years later, on the occasion of the 1st Economic Conference of Middle Asia, the Middle Asian Economic Union or Middle Asian Federation (sredazEKOSO) was established to facilitate the economic integration of the Turkestan, Bukharan and Khorezmian Republics. Whereas the Middle Asian Economic Union was abolished in October 1934, another short-term integrative effort was made through the establishment of a Central Asian Economic Region, set up in February of 1963 and dismantled in December of 1964.

24. See for example Makarychev (2012).
25. "Regionhood" corresponds to the agential capabilities of a region. According to Van Langenhove, there are four conditions needed for a region to act as a polity: (i) the region derives from a system of intentional acts; (ii) the region is a 'rational' system with statehood properties; (iii) the region is a reciprocal achievement; and (iv) the region generates and communicates meaning and identity. These four conditions of regionhood imply the existence of a more or less developed institutional framework.
26. According to a constructivist approach to regionalism, as has been argued by Neumann, regions are what region-makers make of them. However, through post-structuralist lenses region-makers can themselves be considered to be constituted by the region-making process. Therefore, not only are regions what region-makers make of them, but also, at the same time, region-makers are what regions make of them (Ferabolli 2014, pp. 22–23).
27. The regional space is midentified as a primarily geographical unit in which people develop translocal-type relationships; the regional complex emerges through increased social contacts and transactions between groups that develop patterns of economic interdependencies; the regional society is characterized by an increasing level of formalization and/or institutionalization; the regional community displays traits of actorness, as it acquires distinct capabilities, legitimacy and a decision-making structure and can be supported by a regional civil society and regional collective identity; and the region-state is a regionally institutionalised polity born out a group of formerly sovereign national state-based communities that voluntarily decide to transform into a new form of political entity by pooling their sovereignty (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000).
28. Practices have been defined as "socially meaningful actions"; more specifically, they consist of routinized patterns of behaviour organized according to background, implicit or tacit knowledge (Adler and Pouliot 2011; Bueger 2014).

29. Author's interview with Kyrgyz expert (Bishkek, 14 March 2014). The interviewee participated in the group which prepared and chaired the meeting of the Security Council Secretaries for SCO member states as well as the meeting of the Committee of Security Council Secretaries for the CSTO member states, both held in Bishkek in 2007.

30. The presence of informal networks and processes of decision-making appears to be a recurrent characteristic in all countries of the post-Soviet region. However, the coexistence of formal and informal institutions, the presence of mixed organisational systems and practices and the interpenetration of different security, policing and justice providers are not a context-specific, unique trait. Hybrid orders are often found in post-colonial states, where the "rule of the intermediaries […] substitute[s] and compensate[s] for the lack of authority of the central, legally constituted state and its ability to deliver essential public goods and services" (Scheye 2009, p. 49). Accordingly, hybrid political orders are characterized, for instance, by the persistence of customary non-state institutions of governance and traditional societal structures and authorities (Boege et al. 2009). Similarly, "complex interactions amongst a variety of actors following different animating logics and drawing on varying sources of authority" are to be found in hybrid security orders (Luckham and Kirk 2012, p. 12).

31. Especially in countries where inter-institutional and inter-agency coordination is not always fully established, the "vertical of power" displays unexpected loopholes, and relations between the centre and the peripheries often rest on personal exchanges, patronage networks and clientelistic mechanisms.

32. See for example Le Huérou (2002), Collins (2004), Désert (2007).

33. Members of a multilateral accord delegate policymaking to the wealthiest state amongst them.

34. SEATO; Non-Aligned Movement; Association of South-East Asian Nations; SAARC; East-Asia Summit.

35. The Association of South-East Asian Nations in particular displays an institutional design based on pooling instead of delegation.

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The Paradox of Russian Hegemony

As has been already mentioned, this project aims to analyse the configuration of the post-Soviet governance system and seeks explorative explanations of the multi-layered character of Eurasian regionalism. It has been proposed that the region's contradictory traits are related to the fact that the actors involved in the process of region-building are polities in transition: hybrid political orders characterised by weak state institutions and domestic governance—a situation that is relevant not only in the "spokes" but also in the "hubs". Building on these assumptions, the interpretation of the former Soviet area as a political space shaped by a process of co-constitution of state(s) and region(s) is advanced in the course of the book. Before proceeding in that direction, however, it seems unavoidable to address the role of Russia as "region-builder" and its regional leadership by default. One of the most visible (and widely researched) characteristics of the post-Soviet region is actually its Russia-centeredness.

Accordingly, it is necessary to devote our attention to how state weakness and political hybridity affect the nature of Russian hegemony and regional leverage, and how they in turn impact on Eurasian regionalism.

1   Russia: Region-Builder and Region-Shaper?

The Russia-centeredness of the post-Soviet region cannot be ignored: it has been expressed through a diverse set of regional governance instruments and techniques.

The most evident indication of Russia's role at the regional level is the way it leads multiple trajectories of regional institution-building, and its endeavour to affect the course of post-Soviet regionalisms by either supporting or threatening the existence of regionalist projects, mainly as a strategy to control the architecture of regional governance by limiting the options available in the "near abroad" (Slobodchikoff 2014).

Russia does not participate in all the (trans-)/(sub-)regional organisations that coexist in the former Soviet space; in that respect, the kaleidoscopic configuration characterising the post-Soviet region includes, on the one hand, countries that have never approached certain sets of arrangements and, on the other hands, countries that have, at different times, opted out of, decided to loosen their engagements with, suspended their membership in and/or even withdrawn from these arrangements (Table 1).

The participation of post-Soviet countries in these regional organisations has been conventionally interpreted as the result of asymmetries and Russia's dominion over the region. In reality, however, post-Soviet regionalism can be read in terms of strategies of bandwagoning, free-riding and buck-passing deployed by minor players (Wohlforth 2004). According to this reading, whilst trying to take advantage of a Russia-led regional order, one of the reasons smaller or weaker post-Soviet states have joined Russia-centred regional organisations is in an attempt to regulate the presence of a regional hegemon, curbing its power through multilateral restraints ("regionalist entrapment", "institutional taming", Keohane 1969; Schweller 1997, p. 9; Hurrell 1995, pp. 342–343) and maintaining the opportunity for an interstitial voice within cooperative arrangements (Grieco 1993, p. 331).

Not only has the membership of these regional organisations been affected by both Russian preferences and attempts to counterbalance or at least discipline its regional hegemony, the organisations' institutional design has been similarly shaped. For example, legalisation, à la carte structure and treaty nesting have been identified as distinctive institutional design features displayed by the Commonwealth of Independent States (Willerton et al. 2015) (features that might be extended to other post-Soviet regional organisations as well): the CIS is indeed characterised by a multitude of documents and bodies, flexibility in its policy implementation measures and a stretchy combination of multilateral and bilateral devices. Russia's presence and role has given a crucial imprinting to the structuration of the post-Soviet region in the sense that CIS'

Table 1 Post-Soviet countries' participation in regional organisations. Brackets indicate either special status within the institutions or discontinued membership

	AM	AZ	BY	GE	KZ	KG	MD	RU	TJ	TM	UA	UZ
CoE	X	X	(X)	X	(X)		X	X			X	
OSCE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ECO		X			X	X			X	X		X
OIC		X	(X)		X	X		(X)	X	X		X
CICA		X			X	X		X	X		(X)	X
CIS	X	X	X	(X)	X	X	X	X	X	(X)	(X)	X
CSTO	X	(X)	X	(X)	X	X		X	X			(X)
EurAsEC	(X)		X		X	X	(X)	X	X		(X)	
EAU	X		X		X	X		X				
CA*					X	X			(X)	(X)		(X)
CCO		X			(X)	X			X	X		X
BSEC	X	X		X			X	X			X	
BLACKSEAFOR			X					X		X		
SCO					X	X		X	X			X
GUAM		X		X			X				X	(X)
CdC		(X)		X			X				X	
CCTS		X			X	X				X		(X)
TAKM		X			(X)	X						

Note CoE = Council of Europe; OSCE = Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe; ECO = Economic Cooperation Organisation; OIC = Organisation of Islamic Cooperation; CICA = Conference on Interactions and Confidence-building Measures in Asia; CIS = Commonwealth of Independent States; CSTO = Collective Security Treaty/Collective Security Treaty Organization; EurAsEC = Eurasian Economic Community; EAU = Eurasian Union; CA* = from Central Asian Commonwealth to Organization of Central Asian Cooperation; CCO = Caspian Cooperation Organisation; BSEC = Black Sea Economic Cooperation; BlackSeaFor = Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group; SCO = Shanghai Treaty/Shanghai Cooperation Organisation; GUAM = GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development; CdC = Community of Democratic Choice; CCTS = Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States; TAKM = TAKM—Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status

institutional design "balances the juxtaposed power and policy interests of diverse smaller powers with a traditional regional hegemon" (Willerton et al. 2015, p. 48).

Russia-centeredness is further confirmed by other clues when we look at the shaping of post-Soviet regional orders through the lenses of regional organisations. There have been multiple attempts to establish sub-regional "mini-orders" that purposefully excluded Russia, resulting from either emancipatory or contestatory moves on the part of other post-Soviet states. Four of the five Central Asian states have tried to create different "local" arrangements since the early 1990s; in 1996 the

Central Asian Union was established, then renamed the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) in 2002. This latter has represented the last attempt at regional self-organisation in Central Asia: in fact, the treaty establishing the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation provided for future enlargements, envisioning the inclusion of Turkmenistan. In 2004, Russia joined instead, and subsequently decided to merge CACO with the Eurasian Economic Community in 2005 (Tolipov 2006). This incident demonstrates the extent to which Russia's non-participation has acted to de facto silence several instances of sub-regional pluralism in the former Soviet space: a similar example is the case of the Organisation for Democratic and Economic Development—GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova), which has recently been defined as an organisation in a comatose state, according to an ongoing study of the "vitality" of international institutions (Gray 2014, p. 10).

Second, Russia has proven capable of driving coalition-building strategies amongst post-Soviet states within broader regional organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe, especially when overlapping regionalism has resulted in inter-institutional divergence (Russo 2015).

Russia's agency within regional and international organisations is not the only sign of its centrality within the post-Soviet region: as a matter of fact, Moscow has deployed several other instruments through which it sought and still seeks to control what has been dubbed since the early 1990s "the near abroad"—the assemblage of non-Russian former Soviet republics whose sovereignty Moscow has repeatedly problematised. Employing the four-fold sovereignty categorisation scheme suggested by Stephen Krasner,[1] it is possible to identify homologue ways in which Russia has impacted on post-Soviet countries' sovereignty. The formal recognition of post-Soviet countries as states in the international system has not prevented them from having other dimensions of their sovereignty endangered by the Russian presence and predominance. The deployment of military observers and peacekeeping troops in Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan did not result in Russia's neutral involvement as a mediator in those conflicts. Rather, these conflict settlement mechanisms brought Moscow's interests onto the negotiation tables: these interests revolved around the establishment of power-sharing mechanisms (in Tajikistan) and the reconstitution of territorial integrity (in Georgia and Moldova), therefore touching on crucial elements of those states' sovereignty (Popescu 2006).

Russia articulated pro-active policies in relation to the separatist entities that emerged within the newly-established states in the wake of Soviet dismemberment. It has granted Georgia's breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia full-fledged recognition of independence since 2008: besides shaping post-Soviet states' sovereignty, therefore, Moscow is providing unrecognised states with state-building instruments and models of state-making, as well as offering political and diplomatic support to their leaders.[2] Russia has supported the creation of the Commonwealth of Unrecognised States by Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, and has inaugurated a policy of "passportization" that involves granting Russian citizenship to the residents of these statelets. Furthermore, Russians or officials who are for all intents and purposes appointed by Russia have often headed the de facto states' local institutions (Popescu 2006). Russia's provisions to state institution-building in the secessionist entities have proven particularly challenging for Georgia, which has even been subjected to the construction of internal frontiers: a process of "borderisation" has been occurring at the administrative border line between Georgia and South Ossetia, and currently entails the deployment of Russian border-guards and the installation of fences and barbed wire along this boundary.

Given these premises, it would seem that Russia's capabilities and role at the regional level are enough to explain the dynamics of structuration of the post-Soviet region: different manifestations of the regionals and the way actors behave in the regional space are merely the result of Moscow's hegemonic moves and its hold on the "near abroad". However, this straightforward explanation overlooks a number of aspects and factors that have equally contributed to the configuration of the post-Soviet region as a multi-layered structure and the multi-faceted agencies operating within it.

The next section therefore aims to elucidate precisely these dimensions: the baseline is an attempt to demonstrate that, in spite of Russia, there is room to argue that the post-Soviet region and post-Soviet states have resulted from co-constitutive dynamics that are under-researched in the scholarship produced to date. In other words, Russian hegemony is not in contradiction with the state-region co-constitutive framework, as Russia itself has been captured by a double process of re-establishing its statehood whilst re-positioning itself in the international environment.

2   Hegemony by Default, Hegemony by Improvisation

Theories seeking to explain the configuration of the post-Soviet region as a result of Russia's hegemony might fail to problematise the independent variable. There are at least three aspects to be deconstructed regarding Russia's regional power and leadership in order to place this *explanans* into the proper perspective. It is worth recalling that the fundamental *explanandum* of this research project hinges on the resilience of the regionals in post-Soviet politics. Thus, the research trigger lies in the persistence and relative stability of a set of narratives and actions: in contrast, Russia's hegemony has unfolded variably over time, and its capabilities and power have varied during the last quarter of century.

Russia's state capacity has been simplistically judged low under Boris Yeltsin (1991–1999), and strong under Vladimir Putin (1999–2008, 2013–) and Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2012). No matter how trenchant this assessment might be, throughout the 1990s Russia was systemically affected by political instability and underperforming institutions. The 1993 constitutional crisis arose from competition between the president and the parliament and nearly resulted in a civil war; the antagonism between the bureaucratic apparatus and "oligarchs", new economic actors deriving their power from the badly-regulated course of privatisation, also constituted another source of subversion of state structures. Putin came to power with a vision to restore the state and establish a "power vertical"; as early as December 1999, in his speech "Russia at the turn of the millennium", he stated:

> Our state and its institutes and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and its people. For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly which should be got rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a source and guarantor of order and the initiator and main driving force of any change.

Accordingly, Moscow has differently interpreted its political location as a hub and its driving role in the region; however, this has not reflected the consolidation of the Russian state in a linear manner.

It is quite evident that Russia's foreign policy has undergone distinct stages over the last twenty-five years. Mikhail Molchanov (2012), for example, has classified Russia's foreign policy according to five phases: the Atlanticist/Westerniser phase (1992–1993), embodied by Boris Yeltsin

Boris Yeltsin and Andrei Kozyrev: Atlanticist/Westerniser Phase

Yevgeny Primakov: Eurasianist Interlude

Vladimir Putin (+ Dmitry Medvedev): National Pragmatism

- Multivettorialism
- Asian Turn
- Eurasianism
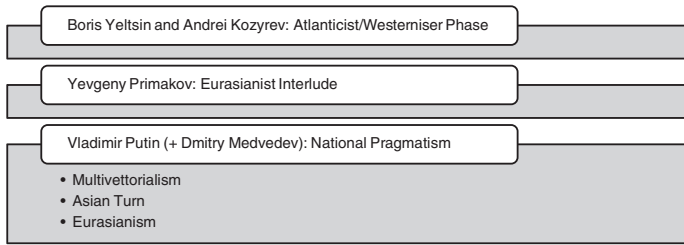
Fig. 1 The five stages of Russia's foreign policy (according to Mikhail Molchanov's classification)

and Andrei Kozyrev; the "Eurasianist interlude", coordinated by Yevgeny Primakov; and the "national-pragmatist" turn inaugurated and sustained by Vladimir Putin—who has maintained his hold on the Kremlin for more than a decade and a half, and has obviously developed variations on the theme. Putin's first term (2000–2004) can be defined in terms of multivettorialism, aimed at balancing the emergence of different poles at the global level and restoring Russia's international stature. Putin's second term (2004–2008) has oriented Russia towards Asia, downsizing Moscow's "Europeanism" and accentuating its anti-Western tone. Finally, Molchanov defined the country's current course (Medvedev's "intermezzo" and Putin's return) as "regionalist proper", characterised by an open disclosure of Russia's objectives of regional governance, specifically the realisation of Eurasian integration and the international acknowledgement of non-liberal alternatives. Against this background, Putin still considers Russia a European nation and, at the same time, a "normal great power" with special relations outside Europe and no imperial ambitions (Fig. 1).

According to Andrei Zigankov, Russia's foreign policy has developed in response to a fundamental civilisational dilemma: in other words, there have been different attempts to locate Russia within a civilisation and therefore drive the country towards its post-Soviet identity haven (Tsygankov 2007). Russian political and cultural elites were and still are engaged in defining Russia's place in the world (Western, Eurasian, European, Euro-Eastern, pan-Slavic…): the multiplicity of civilisational ideas corresponds precisely to Russia's borderland location and the fragmentation of the Soviet civilisation (Tsygankov 2008; Light 2003).

Besides the civilisational debates, Russia has gone through a process of constructing and reconstructing its own state identity through

contradictory messages about its regional leadership, which has always been related in one way or another to the formation of its statehood and the safeguarding of a newly-established national interest. The first Foreign Policy Concept (issued in 1993) presented a parallelism between the integrity of the Russian Federation and the integrative processes of the CIS, representing them as two fundamental aspects of Russian security. Since then, two main themes have alternated and overlapped in strategic documents such as annual presidential addresses and foreign policy concepts: these two keywords have been "responsibility" (towards the former Soviet countries, the neighbourhood…) and "pragmatism". From time to time the attempt to rationalise Russia's stance towards the post-Soviet region has been undercut by appeals to the "naturality" of post-Soviet integration and the historical roots of regional commonalities: in the 1995 State of the Nation, Yeltsin made reference to "forces abroad" that "are not forgoing the temptation to push our country away from its historical boundaries and minimize its international role", and to CIS integration as a result of a "natural desire" (as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 1995, Vol. 47, No. 8, p. 13). By a similar token, in his 1996 State of the Nation the president admitted with a certain relief that integration in the CIS had finally prevailed over the tendency to scatter (as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 1996, Vol. 48, No. 8, p. 5).

This kind of ambivalence has repeated over time: even though the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept acknowledged that domestic policy took precedence over foreign-policy objectives, the first priority stated in the document was "the creation of a New World Order". Subsequently, after a series of self-contained and realist assertions about Russia's foreign policy, in his 2005 State of Nation Putin significantly declared:

> It should be recognized that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical catastrophe of the century. For the Russian people, it was a genuine drama […] without question, the Russian nation must also continue its civilizing mission on the Eurasian continent. (as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 2005, Vol. 57, No. 17, p. 16)

These declarations can be considered a prologue to the 2011 disclosure of Putin's plans for Eurasian integration.

However, the presumption of Russia' special role in the territory of the former USSR and, vice versa, the focus on the internal problems of

the country to the detriment of granting priority to regional projects cannot be mechanically associated with an increase or decrease in Russia' stateness. For example, in early 1993, during a critical moment for Russia's statehood, Yeltsin spoke out about his assertive foreign policy stance during the Civic Union Forum: "the time has come for the appropriate international organisations to grant Russia special powers as the guarantor of peace and stability on the territory of the former Union" (Nadein 1993, p. 17). Shortly afterward, he inaugurated a practice that has been continued by his successors, i.e., securing the chairmanship of key CIS bodies for Russian officials regardless of the rules about rotations (Sinyakevich 1993, pp. 13–14). However, "Yeltsin's doctrine" about the CIS (a Matryoshka-style integration sensitive to members' sovereignty) was far from consistent and strategically organised.[3]

Indeed, Russia's foreign policy during Yeltsin's rule embodied two main contradictions. The first was between the preservation of "some kind of unity in the post-Union space", through the CIS (Portnikov 1993, pp. 14–15), and granting proactive support to the different subgroupings that came into existence within the CIS framework, such as the "Union of Two" (Russia–Belarus) and the "Union of Four" (Russia–Belarus–Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan). The second was between the "futile obsession with proving Russia is still a 'great power'" (Borko 1995) and awareness of a "desperate lack of coordination of foreign policy and of governmental discipline" (Karaganov 1996).[4]

By contrast, Putin's course started off with selective engagement and a realist approach to CIS. Putin was actually the first high-level Russian representative to dare criticise the CIS for the first time since its institution. In November 1999, as a Prime Minister, Putin declared that the Commonwealth was incapable of becoming a community; then in December, in his opening speech at the meeting of Russian Security Council, he also affirmed that CIS countries were not zones of Russian strategic interests, but rather strategic partners (Dubnov 2000).

Against this background, the CIS once again acquired importance in Putin's political agenda during the years of his presidency; this accordion-like tendency, quite similar to the one characterising Yeltsin's approach to the CIS, was explained in July 2002 by an expert panel set up by the newspaper Vremya MN to discuss whether there existed a "Putin Doctrine" in foreign policy: "the Putin doctrine has yet to be plainly formulated, and that's one of its weaknesses. […] Putin doesn't even have a long-term doctrine - it's more like a set of certain values and

reference points […]" (as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 2002, Vol. 54, No. 31). Therefore, in spite of his alleged success in consolidating Russia' state structures, Putin failed in establishing a coherent vision regarding the region. For example, whilst stressing the centrality of the CIS within the system of regional governance, Putin also recovered and strengthened a dense network of bilateral interactions. In 2004, he tasked Russia's Security Council with developing a strategy to strengthen the CIS, to lock in Russia's position as the "locomotive for integrative processes"; at the same time, however, he also made clear that "it would be a profound mistake to think that it has some sort of monopoly on activity in this space" (Ratiani 2004). Subsequently, he seemed to tolerate withdrawals and disengagements from the CIS[5] whilst however reacting aggressively against the formation/consolidation of alternative alignments such as the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM and the Community of Democratic Choice, or the legitimation of extra-regional actors in the governance of the post-Soviet region.[6]

3   HEGEMONY AND ITS OBJECTORS: AN UNSTABLE EQUILIBRIUM

Treating post-Soviet regional governance as the result of Russia's manoeuvres in its neighbourhood, as has been shown in the previous section, is overly static; on the contrary, the post-Soviet region is considered an out-of-equilibrium system whose structures and agents are both undergoing a dynamic process of co-constitution. Different polities emerged from the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and their actorness is being shaped by contrasting trends of interdependence (entrapment) and transition (liberation). Interpreting the post-Soviet region as simply the "garden of the empire" not only neglects the multitude of agencies and structures that represent its crucial feature; it also takes a one-sided perspective focused on the long-term history of autocolonisation that has characterised Russian rule throughout centuries.[7]

Both during and after the end of the Soviet Union, however, autocolonisation has coexisted with moves to resist and contest the dominant centre of power. At various times, all post-Soviet states (including the ones conventionally considered Russia's most reliable and aligned allies) displayed their dissent vis-à-vis Russia's CIS policy and attempts to exercise its hegemony through region-building. Therefore, the contestation

of Russia's hegemony has shaped the post-Soviet region at least as much as Russia's hegemony itself.

The kaleidoscopic configuration of the post-Soviet region is also an effect of multiple attempts to create coalitions and interactions, which have been presented as alternatives to the Russia-centred ones. For example, this is the case with the grouping formed by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (the above-mentioned GUAM), renamed GUUAM during the years of Uzbek membership, and then Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM (ODED-GUAM), or the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC). The latter, however, framed its institutional identity by avoiding any explicit "anti-Russian" narrative: as a matter of fact, Russia was invited to act an observer, together with the US and the EU, at the founding summit held in Borjomi in August 2005 (Ratiani 2005).

Several years before the establishment of GUAM and CDC, beginning in the early 1990s, Central Asian states started envisioning their own "Russia-free" regional projects.[8] Already during one of their first meetings in Bishkek, Central Asian leaders (the presidents of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, together with the First Deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan) voiced their complaints about the CIS ("read: primarily against Russia", Latsis 1992) expressing their "well-founded doubts about the Commonwealth's viability" (Latsis 1992) and their preference for developing cooperation with their non-post-Soviet Asian neighbours rather than the European members of the CIS. Uzbekistan soon emerged as a leader of the Central Asian initiatives: Karimov in particular publicly channelled the collective discontents regarding the CIS, emphasising that the Central Asian states joined it "as equals" (Novoprudsky 1993, p. 3), and acting as a counterbalance to Russia's presence in the region[9]; furthermore, he openly criticised Russia's promotion of internal associations within the CIS (namely, the Union of Two and the Union of Four, and at a later stage the CSTO and EurAsEC) and the concept of variable-geometry integration on the grounds that it inhibited the functioning of the Commonwealth (see e.g. Feliksova 1997; Budakov 1997).

Nazarbayev has likewise always been at the forefront in debates about Eurasian integration, advocating for a clear break from the Soviet past[10] and objecting to the "Either-Or" principles ("let's operate according to the principle of 'both the one and the other'", Kozlov 1993, pp. 15–16). Kazakhstan's take on post-Soviet regionalism has been moulded by some

episodes of overt contestation of Russia on the one hand[11] and a continuous attempt to lead the process of reforming the CIS on the other hand. These two aspects can be seen as two sides of the same coin, as Nazarbayev proposed his reform plan and, almost in parallel with this, voiced a negative assessment of how the Commonwealth was structured and administered.

> I am absolutely convinced that of officials of the CIS need to be replaced. It would also be desirable to replace the people who are currently handling the Commonwealth affairs in Russia. After all, you can't create a proper commonwealth and develop cooperation using postcommunist slogans. (Novaya Gazeta No. 21, 26 May-1 June 1 1997 as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, Vol. 49, No. 21)

> Nazarbayev […] harshly criticized those who 'conceived' the Commonwealth - Burbulis, Shakhrai and Kozyrev, members of Yeltsin's first team […] he reproached them for having been 'mistaken in their very understanding of a 'commonwealth'. (Arkady Dubnov, "Lesser group of Eight", *Vremya Novostei*, 24 July as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, Vol. 58, No. 30)

It is worth underlining that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were not at all the only contesters of Russia's alleged hegemony and unilateralist moves in the post-Soviet region (far more resounding cases can be identified involving Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Turkmenistan); furthermore, the Commonwealth was not the only arena where Russia encountered limitations in implementing its plans: for example, Moscow did not succeed either in steering the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in a clear-cut political-military direction, or—at a later stage—in gaining region-wide support for its policy of recognition towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Repeated failures in building coalitions around specific issues (from the joint defence of the CIS' external borders to the functioning of the CSTO's Collective Rapid Reaction Force) led Konstantin Kosachov, chairman of the State Duma's international affairs committee, to declare in an op-ed on the newspaper Izvestia in (2005):

> Unfortunately, the most powerful channels of potential Russian influence have gone to waste…as reliance has been placed mainly on the flawed premise that the other CIS countries have nowhere to go. (Kosachov 2005)

4 Paradoxical Russia: Problematic Exceptionalism

Russia's "Karstic" reliance on a "civilizational self" and "civilizational other" throughout the different stages of its post-Soviet development provides various and complementary information about Russia's state identity and role in the region.

On the one hand, in 1991 Russia found itself in the unprecedented situation of simultaneously facing the collapse of its empire and the collapse of its state (Lynch 1995). Not only did Russia have to embark on a transitioning geopolitical path and reformulate its conceptions and practices of authority and territoriality, it had also to experience normal state-to-state relations with "sovereign neighbours" for the very first time (Shevtsova and Olcott 1999). At the same time that it was forming and being embedded in a new system of interstate relations, Russia was engaged in a constant and complex dialogue with the other newly independent states over their relative sovereignty whilst itself enacting a process of renegotiating its own sovereignty.

Besides these idiosyncrasies, Russia's condition could be compared to that of a post-colonial state,[12] especially in terms of its traits of intimate inside-outside interconnection—what has been dubbed "intermesticity" (with reference to African polities in Araoye 2012). Studies investigating the regionalising agency in the regional governance of the former Soviet space are often centred on Russia: however, these perspectives tend to underestimate the instability of the political and institutional foundations of the Russian state (Tsygankov 2012). While the dimension of state-formation has seldom been integrated into transitology (Bunce 1998; Grzymala-Busse and Jones Luong 2002), the paradox of Russian politics lies precisely in this state of affairs: "a strong power based on a weak state" (Mendras 2012, p. 7).[13] The heaviness of path dependencies and the weakness of domestic governance partially narrow the gap between Russia and other post-Soviet polities, as they have been all subjected to similar transformative pressures in the wake of Soviet dismemberment.

Furthermore, post-Soviet Russia maintains transitional traits that continue to bind the region as a whole. The Russian sociologist Anton Oleynik (2004) described his country as a "small society", i.e., an organisation resulting from "incomplete modernization" and characterised by a feeble functional differentiation of sub-systems based on spheres of activity; the personalisation of relations; an imperfect control over violence; the duality of norms on the basis of individuals' affiliations with

specific communities; and the domination of imposed authority, without compensation being granted to individuals in exchange for (voluntarily) transferring the right to control their actions.

Similarly to other post-Soviet states, the Russian polity has been emerging from or in spite of the coexistence of competing claims to power and, most importantly, sovereignty claims. Quite unsurprisingly, in 1992 Marie Mendras posed the question as to whether a Russian state was coming into existence, pointing out that Russia had been subject to a process of double fragmentation: in addition to the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, it had to manage an "inside decolonization" ("republicanisation") characterised by claims of autonomy and/or independence by the non-Russian nations of the Federation (Mendras 1992). While the Russian Federation declared Russia to be sovereign in June 1990, by October 11 of the 16 autonomous republics within the borders of the Russian Federation had passed their own sovereignty declarations (Solnick 1998), forcing Russia to renegotiate its centre-periphery relations not only at the regional level but also at the federal level.

This hybrid political order (made up of a state-in-the-making, proto-states and various transnational actors, Clements et al. 2007) succeeded another hybrid entity—the Soviet Union, wherein Soviet Russia "has been shaped by 'internal colonization'—a reflexive process that made Russian culture […] both the subject and the object of orientalism" (Morozov 2015, pp. 29–30, quoting Etkind; see also Martínez 2013). Moscow's repositioning thus partially reflected the organisation of the Soviet Union: whilst the latter could not be reduced to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic,[14] post-Soviet Russia has been certainly affected by the structure of the Soviet state, which was based on a hierarchical multi-ethnic ethno-federation in which the definition of sovereign subjects was blurred.

These dualities not only make Russia more similar to post-colonial states, they also deconstruct its exceptionalism vis-à-vis all other post-Soviet states, thus problematising the centrality of its alleged hegemony as the factor that supposedly explains the configuration of the post-Soviet region.

5   The Way Forward

This chapter has attempted to shed light on the nature of Russian regional hegemony and reconsider the scope of Moscow's starring role in the establishment of regional organisations and other means of

regional governance in the former Soviet space. Russia's capabilities do not contradict the framework of state-region co-constitution: regional institutions and projects act as compensatory arrangements for the hegemon's internal problem areas. They act as a conveyor belt between the Russian state-in-the-making and the post-Soviet region-in-the-making, transferring conditions of hybridity through inside-out reverberations. The process of state reconstruction in the wake of the Soviet breakdown has involved all the former Soviet republics, including Russia, and weakened the Russia-centeredness of the post-Soviet region. In light of this, it is hard to claim that the post-Soviet region is nothing more than what Russia has made of it.

After this digression devoted to Russia, the next chapter brings the thread of the argument back to the main focus of the book, turning to the task of framing the model of state-region co-constitution.

Notes

1. According to Krasner (1999), there are four types of sovereignty: Westphalian sovereignty, domestic sovereignty, interdependence sovereignty and international legal sovereignty. The first type refers to the state's monopoly over authoritative decision-making within its own boundaries. The second refers to the actual state capacity, the power of control and regulation of the state structure and its authority configuration, in terms of both effectiveness and legitimacy. The third refers to state control of trans-border movements and flows. The fourth refers to international recognition as a peer actor within the inter-state system.

2. In 2000, the representatives of the four statelets met in Tiraspol and launched their own Foreign Ministers Forum; the agreement to create that grouping was reached subsequently, in 2001, in Stepanakert. These events were allegedly supported by Russia and can be interpreted as a reaction to the creation of GUAM by the parent-states of the de facto states (Shelest 2013) See also Kosienkowski (2012), p. 50.

3. In May 1998, the newspaper Izvestia titled one of its articles "Ivan Rybkin's fate has gotten lost in labyrinths of government—and not just his, but also that of many other officials who have been handling CIS affairs". While the Ministry for Cooperation with CIS countries had been eliminated, new presidential appointments and government restructuring created an overlap amongst Rybkin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Primakov and the newly-elected executive secretary of the CIS Berezovsky (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 1998, p. 3).

4. Karaganov was back then the Chairman of the Commission of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy.

5. "[…] the CIS has accomplished its mission and those who wish to leave it are free to do so" (Melikova 2005).

6. For example, on the occasion of an international forum titled "Eurasian Integration: Current Trends and the Challenges of Globalisation" held in Astana, Putin commented on one of its sessions: "I have the impression that enemies of President Nazarbayev infiltrated the group of organizers […] Here's a session of security in the Eurasian space where the main topic is defined as 'The Geopolitical Interests of Outside Forces: the US, China, the EU, Japan and Russia' […] All you have to do is open a map to see that Russia is situated in the very heart of Eurasia […] and on the subject of security in the Eurasian space, I think the vast majority of people would agree that not only in the Eurasian space but worldwide these problems can hardly be addressed without taking into account the role that Russia plays in the modern world". He also added "If I were permitted to take part in the forum session titled 'Conceptual Problems Pertaining to the Activities of Integration Associations', I could briefly summarize those problems […:] great-power chauvinism, nationalism, the personal ambitions of decision-makers and just plain stupidity, primitive stupidity" (Lashkina 2004).

7. Autocolonisation has been defined as "voluntary subordination within a political hierarchy", i.e., a "process whereby elites or populations in a target country seek and accept a diminution in their state's sovereignty in hopes of receiving enhanced security, material benefits, or other benefits from an external power, thereby lowering the costs to that power of becoming an imperial state" (Dawisha 1997, p. 339).

8. "Meetings: for the good of their people—Meeting of Heads of Central Asian Republic and Kazakhstan ends in Bishkek", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 24 April 1992, as reported in the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, Vol. 44 No. 17, pp. 19–20.

9. Uzbekistan provided its support to the armed detachments of the Tajikistan People's Front and helped Kyrgyzstan deal with the earthquakes in Jalal-Abad province and the breakout of interethnic clashes in Osh. Karimov was even depicted as the "founding father of the future political bloc" (Kadyr 1993; Alimov 1998).

10. In June 1993 Nazarbayev stated that "the most important thing during those years (the period of disunity when centrifugal forces dominated) was the desire to secure oneself against a return to the empire, and this outweighed all rational arguments from integration. Any coordinating body was associated to the previous central departments that dictated and distributed. The shadow of a terrible monster was still looming nearby and was seemingly ready to materialized once again … The situation has now changed qualitatively … the republics have finally begun to feel like really independent states" (Konovalov 1993, p. 18).

11. In 1997 Nazarbayev reportedly said that "imperial ambitions stick out like a sore thumb in the statements and actions of certain Russian politicians, frightening other states away from Russia […] what the hell are Russian troops doing in Tajikistan, the Dnestr region and Armenia?" (Bovt and Tarasov 1997).

12. The parallelism between "post-colonial" and "post-Soviet" is the object of ongoing debate, together with the intellectual construction of an "Eastern postcoloniality" and the pioneering definition of Soviet rule as colonization-without-orientalization (see e.g. Adams 2008). In a personal communication with the author, Prof. Neil MacFarlane has shed light on the fact that situating the former Soviet Union in the context of decolonization also means making an important distinction between colonial states, which did not collapse, and the Russian state, which underwent a process of overall institutional re-organisation and territorial re-structuration.

13. Whereas Yeltsin was not able to consolidate Russia's state structures, public authorities and institutions of governance, according to Marie Mendras Putin has purposefully elaborated a systematic strategy of hollowing them: "Russia is generally praised or criticized for its intense statism and centralism, for the government institutions' grip on society and the Kremlin's ability to unite lands and peoples. However, analysis of the modern-day Russian state arrives at opposite conclusions. The state as an institutional construction and embodiment of public life is weak and dysfunctional" (Mendras 2012, p. 11).

14. "La République soviétique de Russie (R.S.F.S.R.) n'avait qu'une timide existence administrative dans le système soviétique. En aucune manière, la Russie de Boris Eltsine ne peut être considérée comme la renaissance d'une 'petite' Russie enserrée malgré elle dans le Tout soviétique" (Mendras 1996, p. 103).

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Post-Soviet States and Post-Soviet Regions

I have conceived of processes of region-formation and state-formation in terms of co-evolution; before proceeding further, however, it is important to set a few conceptual boundaries around the two polities which supposedly emerge from these processes of mutual constitution. First, this chapter focuses specifically on the notion of co-constitution itself and attempts to make it researchable through reference to constructivism and neoclassical realism. Second, the chapter presents preliminary remarks about the methodology I employed, the case for discursive approaches, my techniques of data collection and the rationale behind case selection. In this sense, it lays the groundwork for Chaps. 5, 6.

1   Parallel "Creative" Paths: The Region and the State

Here I retain the three-fold definition of the state proposed by Buzan (1991) and tentatively apply it to the region. Buzan has defined the state through reference to three dimensions: the physical base of the state, the institutional expression of the state, and the idea of the state; likewise, a region can be studied in terms of its territorial connotations, as a geopolitical expanse in which one or more regional organisations are based, and as a source of political imaginaries (Paasi 2002, p. 140). Through this perspective, the correlations between region-formation and state-formation are captured in their complexity, as each of the component parts of the region can be affected by developments occurring in each of the component parts of the state (Fig. 1).
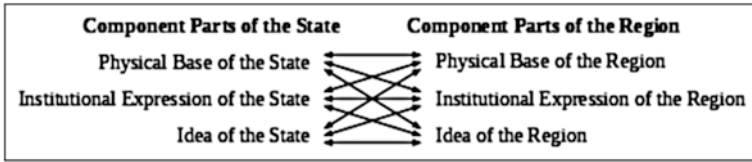
Fig. 1 Component parts of the state and components parts of the region: geographical, institutional and ideational dimensions
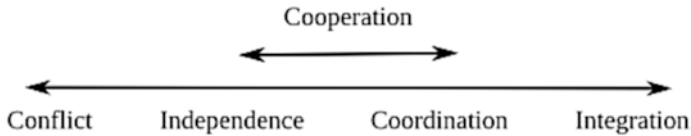
Fig. 2 Dobson's conflict-interdependence-integration spectrum, in De Lombaerde (2006, p. 14)

Second, the concept of "region" is herein defined as comprising the whole spectrum of regional interactions (Fig. 2.) and encompassing non-linear processes of region-building.

These assumptions introduce at least two elements of distinction vis-à-vis the theoretical endeavours undertaken by other authors to explain the complex and dynamic relationship through which states and regions are intertwined. First, this investigation does not revolve around "steady units" and, second, the region is not identified with the existence and institutionalisation of a regional organisation.

According to a classical definition of region, states are the building blocks of regions and the most prominent region-builders. Even though the state-centric approach has been reconsidered by numerous works of scholarship (i.e. the "New Regionalism Approach"), regions are largely conceived of in their relationship to the state: they originate from state actions and are thus created to serve the state. Even in the case of a region shaping and constraining a state's behaviour, it is the state that first agreed to delegate its prerogatives in some way: "regions can be therefore considered as governance tools of states […] this means that regions are used by states to re-scale their governance up and down" (Van Langenhove 2013). This "instrumental" interpretation of regionalism has also resulted in the understanding that regional organisations represent an alternative

source of governance (Börzel and van Hüllen 2015); moreover, the inclusion of regional governance structures in the provision of collective goods, the production, implementation and enforcement of political decisions, and the regulation of social and political issues has been considered in the "regionalization of the world polity" (Jupille et al. 2013) framework and the consequent alteration of our understanding of the very nature of statehood: according to this perspective, regionalism has gradually become part of the script of modern statehood. In other words, being part of regional institutions, organisations, groupings…means acting according to well-accepted standards of international sociability.

These theoretical insights depend on the identification of either the state, the region or both with a respective "institutional product" or degree of actorness. It is possible to adopt a quite different approach, however, and look at the relationship between the state and the region in a way that considers both of them socio-political formations that express territorial constructs.

Furthermore, if we seek to explore whether and how the process of state-formation is mirrored by the process of region-formation and how the latter impacts on the former, it might be necessary to abandon the conventional "comfort zone" of testing causality chains (i.e. (1) Regionalism weakens the state; (2) Regionalism strengthens the state; (3) Weak states hinder regionalism; (4) Weak states trigger regionalism).[1]

In order to account for the simultaneous coexistence of different processes of polity-formation (at the state and regional level) and their interactive relationships, it would be useful to adopt a "circular" approach. The merits of Shahar Hameiri's perspective lies precisely in his attempt to deal with state-making and regionalisation simultaneously, as both of these processes holistically represent contested projects aimed at shaping the spatial, institutional and/or functional organisation of political rule (Hameiri 2013). Both state-formation and region-formation embody the production and reproduction of territorial space according to a particular "location"/"scale" of governance: "the construction and development of scaled forms of governance […] is in other words part of a political project to establish particular forms of political rule" (Hameiri 2013, p. 13).

Second, in order to acquire a sense of the state and region as parallel patterns of polity-shaping that reverberate on each other, this research architecture builds on the notion of co-constitution, a notion imbued with a constructivist interpretation of the agent-structure and their interactive relationships (Giddens 1986; Kubálková et al. 1998; Wendt 1999).

The ontological core of this kind of interpretation paves the way for considering the region and state in their dual constitutive and regulative essence. On the one hand, the regional system creates the conditions of inter-stateness which constitute the states themselves whilst at the same time establishing structural constraints on state actions and behaviours. On the other hand, the state remains "regionalism's 'gatekeeper' and as such the most vital and enduring reference point in the practice and regulation of regionalism" (Fawcett 2013, pp. 5–6). The state therefore constitutes the region in so far as the region constitutes the state. As the co-constitutive framework aims to reason about the state and region along a dual track, a relational approach instead provides for a shift of the objects of analysis from the units to the configuration of the processes and interactions from which they are formed. Processual relationism (Jackson and Nexon 1999) aims precisely to look at the configurations of interactions that not only exist amongst the actors in question, but also create and transform them.[2]

While one of the pillars of this research architecture is the constructivist idea of co-constitution, the theoretical framework I seek to construct is also indebted to neoclassical realism's reappraisal of systemic approaches.[3] As a matter of fact, neoclassical realists have advocated for a new balance between systemic incentives and constraints, on the one hand, and intervening variables at the unit level, on the other hand. Accordingly, the structural configuration of the post-Soviet region and the way post-Soviet states move and behave therein are not straightforwardly determined by systemic pressures; rather, they are also shaped by the encounter between systemic conditions and intervening variables such as political leaders' and elites' perceptions and representations of the world as well as certain characteristics of domestic politics such as the functioning of the state apparatus and state-society nexus.

2   Inside-Out and Outside-In Facets of Co-constitution

Whereas state-formation and region-formation can be theoretically conceived of as two parallel, co-constitutive processes, the two constitutive vectors are not researchable simultaneously: since actors and institutions are not conceptually regarded as discrete entities, on a practical level they cannot be detected at the same time. Indeed, structural and agentic

Component Parts of the State ⟷ Component Parts of the Region
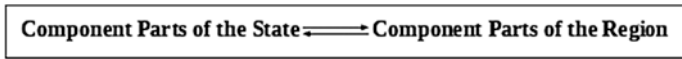
Fig. 3 The two constitutive vectors of state-formation and region-formation, that can be theoretically conceived of as two parallel co-constitutive processes

Component Parts of the State	**Component Parts of the Region**
Idea of the State ⟶	Idea of the Region
Institutional Expression of the State ⟵	Institutional Expression of the Region
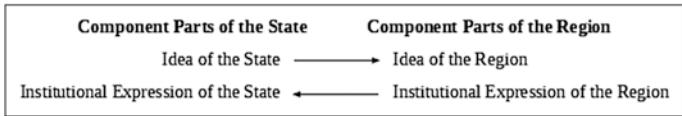
Fig. 4 Co-constitution and bracketing strategy

approaches have been described as "simplifications that make complex phenomena tractable for social inquiry" (Finnemore 1996, p. 24). In order to research "the construction of social structures by agents as well as the way in which those structures, in turn, influence and reconstruct agents", Martha Finnemore has developed a bracketing strategy that entails focusing on either structure or agency, exploring the respective role of one or the other whilst holding the other one constant or at least "non-problematized". Agency and structure are thus each bracketed in turn (Finnemore 1996, pp. 24–25); accordingly, the next two chapters disjointedly examine each of the two directions, indicated by the arrows, connecting the component parts of the state and the region (Figs. 3, 4).

In addition to this "artifice", I have streamlined the complexity resulting from both co-constitutive processes and three-fold definitions of the state and region (physical base, institutional expression, and idea) and only explore relations between two pairs of components. In keeping with the abductive approach adopted here, this selection has been mainly guided by empirical considerations, i.e. the accessibility of primary sources and the data collected through the fieldwork. Therefore, of the manifold and equally interesting possible combinations, this book is focused on (1) how ideas of the state affect ideas of the region (Chap. 5); (2) how institutions of the region affect institutions of the state (Chap. 6).

While the framework of state-region co-constitution binds together a diverse repertoire of research material, the different stages of the research were carried out using different methodologies and techniques of data

collection and analysis; in addition, the choice of a recursive (rather than additive) approach makes it possible to move back and forth across levels of analysis instead of exploring one level at a time.

This investigation of regional organisations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation encountered numerous issues related to the scarce availability of (reliable and original) primary sources, sources which could only be obtained by muddling through interstitial entry points. With the minor exception of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly,[4] none of the regional institutions' bodies, offices or agencies were reachable, as the officers' and representatives' contact information are not publicly available, and the public affairs services are not operational—although the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation does have its own new agency (InfoSCO) and magazine. Given these conditions, it seemed that no form of direct observation or other "ethnographic" tools of investigation would be feasible; on the other hand, archival research was not a viable option since the history of post-Soviet regional organisations is not protracted enough to have declassified documents, transcripts and minutes. The positive aspect of dealing with relatively "young" institutions, however, is that most of the documents can be tracked down on the web, although there has been some delay in the open disclosure and systematization of electronic files. For example, the Concept for creating a Single Register gathering together the documents of the CIS was approved by a decision of the Council of Heads of Government in September 2004; however, the Register did not come online until March 2008 and whole texts have only been included since 2011. On the other hand, especially during the 1990s it was very common in the post-Soviet press to report the whole, unedited text of any official document produced by national and regional authorities and representatives (addresses, speeches, communiqués…); therefore, a qualitative screening of newspapers and journals proved to be particularly productive.

In contrast, my research into state identity, ideas of the state and ideas of the region drew on fieldwork methods, including interviews, (a limited quantity of) direct observation and online focus groups, as will be explained in the next sections. And yet state identity may be difficult to operationalise: according to a quite broad definition, it "connotes a conception of what the country is and what it represents. […It] is not just a descriptive character of a state, but it is also a social and relational conception referring to the state in a way to reflect the existence, or identity,

of Others" (Ashizawa 2008, p. 575). In other words, state identity expresses the "political self-image that a state adopts in the international arena" (Del Sarto 2006, p. 42), embodying the link between national identity and international politics (Del Sarto 2006, p. 45): accordingly, it can be traced through the study of how a state frames its relations with other states, i.e., via foreign policy discourse and narratives.

Using foreign policy as an interface to link domestic and international behavioural patterns is not a completely novel research strategy for the study of post-Soviet states and the Central Eurasian region (e.g. in Fawn 2003): on the contrary, it is exactly the research agenda recently pioneered by Murad Ismayilov (2015) in his attempt to theorise "the domestic" and "the international" as part of a single whole, and suggest that "what has been largely treated […] as a set of discretely evolving domains (i.e., 'levels of analysis'), which could, and should, easily be separated, are rather intricately linked and interlinked with each other […]—one level informing and simultaneously being informed by others […]" (p. 6). In keeping with this innovative research agenda, the comparative study of foreign policy I undertake in the next chapter is narrowed down to the analysis of the linkages between the "domestic" and the "regional", based on the premise that post-colonial/transitional states are more conducive to having unsettled state identities given the coexistence of multiple political designs and narratives of inter-stateness and international positioning, thus paving the way for compound ideas of the region.[5]

Finally, the study of ideas of the state and ideas of the region was carried out mainly through discourse analysis: as the focus of the entire book is to uncover the dynamics of the post-Soviet morphogenesis, it is crucial to look at how these polities are defined and redefined.[6] The use of discourse analysis[7] enables us to understand the region as a "speech act"[8] and the product of discursive processes that "allow regions to come into existence as institutionalized facts" (Van Langenhove 2011, p. 65)—a process referred to as "regionification". As in the case of securitization, the study of regionification is informed by discourse analysis; paraphrasing Ole Waever (1995, p. 58), the most relevant research questions are when, why and how elites label issues referring to the regional level; when, why and how they succeed and fail in such endeavours (i.e. when, why and how a reference to the regional level by a certain group of elites is acknowledged and legitimated by domestic constituencies and/or the international community); what attempts other groups make

to put regionification on the agenda; in which cases and to what extent certain issues have been prevented from undergoing a "regionization" process or de-regionised.

From this perspective, Hansen's (2006) discourse analysis method has fundamentally guided this research in three specific ways:

1. by suggesting the adoption of an intertextual model based on texts and speeches by political leaders, diplomats and advisors ("Model 1", Hansen 2006, pp. 60–61): whilst focusing on the official foreign policy discourse, this model aims to detect the stabilization of such discourse and is thus suited for a genealogical approach;

2. by proposing three criteria for the selection of material (articulation, circulation, formalization), criteria which I have tentatively chosen to follow (Hansen 2006, p. 85);

3. by directing attention to the issue of my not being a native speaker of the languages spoken in the countries under investigation.[9]

3   Why Study Foreign Policy (Comparatively)

Foreign policy can be seen as a "transmission belt" which delivers the internal features of the states into the regional system, resulting in a multilayered and segmented regional order. Different strands of literature have explored the internal/external nexus and the impact of domestic features (political stability and state capacity) on international behaviour, focusing on weak state alliances, amongst other topics. James Rosenau (1969) introduced the concept of "linkages" to describe the dialogic interface between the characteristics of domestic politics and the structure of the international system.[10]

The dialectics between the external and the internal dimensions of foreign policy projects has proved to be particularly evident in the case of small states, on the one hand, and post-colonial states, on the other hand. The first group of case studies led to a reconsideration of systemic approaches and more nuanced strategies pursued by actors that are not labelled "great powers" (i.e. balancing, bandwagoning, hiding and hedging, Paul et al. 2004). The second set focused instead on the specific international agencies of "Third World" countries and "borderline states". This research aim has led Joel S. Migdal to study correspondences between the degree of political institutionalization of "Third World" states and the stability of their role in the international system; as

a matter of fact, the internal characteristics of "Third World" states result in different "mixes" of goals pursued through foreign policy-making:

> First are goals concerned with internal change within the state itself. Here foreign policy is used as a means to achieve such aims as internal cohesion, stability, delegitimization of opposition, and so forth. This type of goal is particularly salient in states with unstable state structures. Second are goals oriented towards sub-systemic changes. These are local initiatives designed to change the state's position in respect to other states in the area. […] And third, states have aims in their relations with the powers and super-powers. […] Unlike the powers and superpowers, then, third world states' foreign policies are usually not aimed at significant changes in the international system itself - although their actions might have such an unintended effect. (Migdal 1972, p. 523)

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, neoclassical realists have treated the internal features of the state and the characteristic of domestic politics as intervening variables that shape foreign policy outputs. However, the relationship between a state's internal weakness and its propensity to go regional and position itself within a certain regional system have not been sufficiently studied.[11] In order to fill this gap, there are two lines of inquiry that should be pursued:

1. Drawing on a modified version of the neoclassical realist model of foreign policy in order to shift the focus from the encounter between the international system and foreign policy output to relations amongst the intervening variables at the unit-level and the structural configuration of the region (Figs. 5, 6);
2. Narrowing down the investigation around foreign policy by limiting it to its regional dimensions: foreign policy has been interpreted as a process that organises the international environment, including the regional space in which a certain country is located, and as a process of making the self through *othering* (Neumann 1996), namely through trajectories of "regional association" and "regional disassociation".

In the particular case of "fragmentation systems", the relationship between the "Self" and the "Other" appears to be interesting in that it might contribute to the constitution of the institutional, ideal and territorial
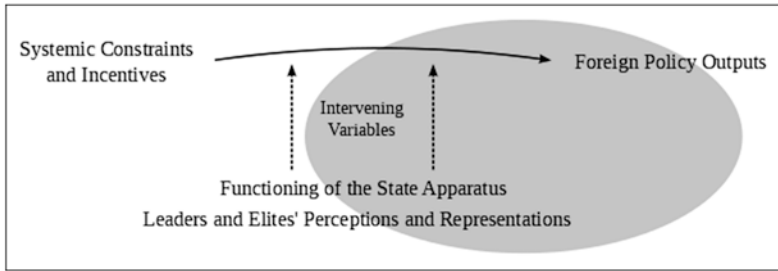
Fig. 5   Neoclassical realist approach to foreign policy making
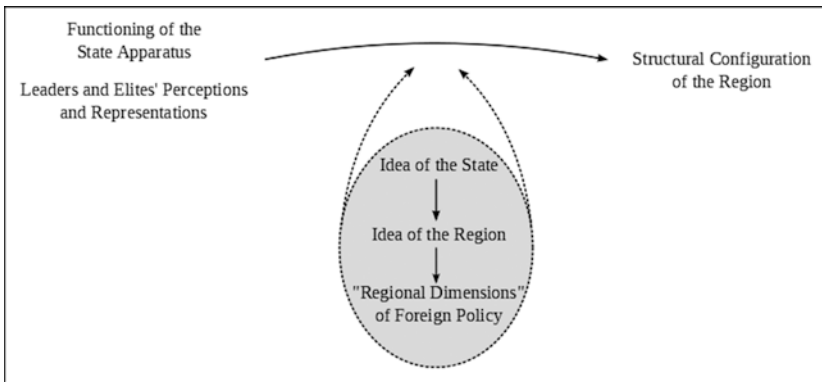
Fig. 6   Double shift of focus vis-à-vis neoclassical realism

expressions of post-unitary fragments; as a result, othering can also be understood as their response to the need to achieve post-Soviet succession through differentiation and emancipation: "states […] need a national identity and an overarching story or narrative for their self-understanding and inner coherence in their representations towards other states" (Reinke de Buitrago 2012, p. xxvii). Furthermore, whilst othering involves representations of difference and entails *positioning*, its content can vary: it may be filled with either negative or positive elements—and, more often, a complex combination of the two.[12] Moreover, discourses, images and practices associated with processes of othering can be changed, modified and adjusted over time, thus legitimizing different and variable foreign policy options.

Interpreting foreign policy as a "transmission belt"—as stated in the opening of this section—introduces a specific assumption into the analysis, specifically that foreign policy-making plays a crucial role in the definition of a country' *state identity*, its perception of what role it should play and what status it should enjoy amongst other states. When we are dealing with a transition country, the fact that the state identity (Buzan's "idea of the state") is evolving and contested constitutes a sources of hybridity (and often, weakness). As state identity is "as a set of broadly accepted (often symbolic or metaphorical) representations of state, in particular in its relation to other states" (Alexandrov 2003, p. 39), the development of this identity draws on specific visions about the international and regional system in which the country is located. Accordingly, the study of foreign policy enables us to see the linkages between the "idea of the state" and the "idea of the region".

By using foreign policy behaviour as an observable proxy for relational processes of othering, positioning, and the constitutive functions of interactions, we *also* subtend an interpretation of "region" as the result of domestic actors and constituencies referencing the regional level; i.e., we assume regions to be created through actors' recourse to a number of political resources that make regionality meaningful even in the absence of effective and coherent regional institutions. Accordingly, a region is considered to exist when "social actors include it in their discourse as such, attempt to clarify it, categorise it, regulate and administer it. In other words, when politicians, elites, people, international organisations and any other relevant actor consider a region as such and devise policies to administer it, organize it, integrate it etc" (Pace 2005, p. 43).

4   How to Study Foreign Policy (Comparatively)

In order to study what political resources have been employed to create a region in the former Soviet space, I have selected three different cases of "regionalist behaviour", looking at the respective countries' "making of the self" "through patterns of "regional association" and "regional disassociation". The regional dimension of foreign policy is analysed through a comparison between Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova.

Case selection has by and large followed a methodological rationale, though it also reflects "logistical" constraints of fieldwork feasibility and the accessibility of data and primary sources.

Concerning the first—and most important—aspect, it is clear that Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova represent diverse cases within the continuum of preferences towards post-Soviet regionalism, which is a useful variation on the dimension of theoretical interest (Seawright and Gerring 2008, p. 296) (i.e., involvement in the kaleidoscopic political space confined within the former Soviet area). In other words, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova exemplify varying values of compliance with the theoretical expectations vis-à-vis small-sized, resource-poor and residually-interdependent states inclined to be members of post-Soviet regional organisations: accordingly, the case selection would appear to be aimed at achieving the maximum degree of variation for a reckonable feature of the phenomenon under study.[13] In particular, if we look at (overlapping) memberships in those regional organisations which include only post-Soviet states (Commonwealth of Independent States, Collective Security Treaty/Collective Security Treaty Organization, Eurasian Economic Community; Eurasian Union; Central Asian projects from the Central Asian Commonwealth to the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation), it is clear that Georgia's behaviour in relation to these organisations has followed a modal trend from 1993 to 2008, with the country being a "negative" outlier (holding fewer memberships) at the very beginning of its post-Soviet history and after 2008; Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, has progressively increased its involvement in post-Soviet regional organisations, representing a "positive" outlier since 1993. Moldova finds itself mid-way, having increased its involvement in post-Soviet regional organisations over time, however to a lesser extent than Kyrgyzstan, and delaying its entrance as a member during its very early post-Soviet phases (Tables 1, 2).

If the only objective were to include case studies that differ in terms of their attachment to post-Soviet regional organisations, the most linear choice would have been Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan; however, for the purposes of this study is was necessary to soften the methodological considerations in order to gain in terms of researchability and to triangulate amongst differently collected data. Moreover, researching the multiplicity of the regionals in the former Soviet area by focusing on a case (Turkmenistan) of extremely loose involvement in the "kaleidoscopic political space" would have presented limitations of equal and opposite sign. On the other hand, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova have displayed different attitudes towards the region over time and have formulated varying foreign policy orientations, especially vis-à-vis their

Table 1 Number of memberships in regional organisations, per country, per year. The regional organisations considered are: Commonwealth of Independent States, Collective Security Treaty/Collective Security Treaty Organization, Eurasian Economic Community; Eurasian Union; Central Asian projects from the Central Asian Commonwealth to the Organization of Central Asian Cooperation. Numbers in brackets indicate special status within the institutions. Numbers in bold indicate the modal value

	'91	'92	'93	'94	95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11
AM	0	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
AZ	0	0	1	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
GE	0	0	1	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
MD	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BY	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
UA	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
KZ	2	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
KG	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
UZ	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
TJ	1	1	2	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
TM	2	2	2	2	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2 The number of countries that have 0—1—2—3—4—5 memberships, per year. Numbers in bold indicate the modal value

	0 membership	1 membership	2 memberships	3 memberships	4 memberships	5 memberships
'91	4	**5**	2			
'92	3	**4**	4			
'93	1	**5**	5			
'94	0	2	**5**	4		
'95	0	3	**5**	3		
'96	0	**3**	**3**	**3**	2	
'97	0	1	3	**5**	2	
'98	0	1	**4**	3	3	
'99	0	1	**6**	1	3	
'00	0	1	**6**	1	3	
'01	0	1	**5**	2	3	
'02	0	1	**5**	2	3	
'03	0	1	**5**	2	3	
'04	0	1	**5**	2	3	
'05	1	0	**5**	1	4	
'06	1	0	**5**	1	4	
'07	1	0	**5**	1	4	
'08	1	1	**4**	2	3	
'09	1	1	**4**	2	3	
'10	1	1	**4**	2	3	
'11	1	1	**4**	1	3	1

post-Soviet neighbours. In the long-term and from a "macro" perspective, dissimilar patterns of regionalist behaviours can be seen across the three cases, tellingly representing the extent to which the countries have accepted their embeddedness in the post-Soviet system of regional governance or, rather, sought to make emancipatory moves. While Moldova has often swung between the Russia-centric East and EU-led West, controversially keeping a foot in both camps, Georgia has repeatedly shown its reluctance to engage with post-Soviet regional organisations, institutions and projects, and Kyrgyzstan has bought all the regionalist options which have been presented at different times on different negotiating tables. If we examine how these patterns have unfolded, the reality appears more nuanced and the three countries can be seen to be similarly exposed to externally-attributed ideas of the state and region, ideas which can in turn be traced to a habitus of other-directedness and path dependency explanations (these points will be illustrated more extensively in the next chapter).

We might thus argue that Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova have displayed different levels of involvement in the kaleidoscopic political space confined within the former Soviet area whilst being quite comparable. Apart from sharing a common Soviet legacy, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova represent small-sized countries whose political and economic development relies on foreign aid in the form of investment and assistance (Kaynak et al. 2006). Third, the configuration of power within the three countries and state-society relations display the hybridity of political orders, being affected not only by the presence of international and transnational actors but also by local dynamics and modes of interaction (i.e. kinship and other informal networks, oligarchies and patronage dynamics, see for example Dershem and Gzirishvili 1998; Gullette 2010). Furthermore, central state authorities in the three countries have been or still are challenged by the presence of violent non-state actors and alternative security providers; in Kyrgyzstan we have seen these on the occasion of interethnic conflicts and border disputes (Southern provinces, Fergana Valley), whilst in Georgia and Moldova in the breakaway provinces. Fourth, these states are poor in hydrocarbons, with minimal oil and gas reserves the exploration and extraction of which are controlled by foreign companies[14]; on the other hand, in terms of geopolitical and geo-economic relevance, they have highly significant transit potentials. Finally, in the last decade the most visible similarity between Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, and probably the rationale driving the majority of comparative studies involving these two countries, is that they both hosted Colour Revolutions in a similar period (Rose Revolution in Georgia, in 2003; Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, in 2005), although these revolutions did result in quite different outcomes in the two countries. In the case of Moldova, waves of civil unrest succeeded at different times, resulting in "nothing close to a Moldovan 'colour revolution'" (Kennedy 2010, p. 63): however, 2005 has been considered by a number of scholars as a turning point for Moldova's public opinion, civil society as well as the country's international orientation.

Against the background of my specific case selection, it is important to underline that all post-Soviet countries find themselves similarly embedded in multiple and manifold systems of regional governance, and their elites refer in various ways to the regionals whilst constructing and framing their mainstream political discourse. This phenomenon can be observed against the background of different levels of dependence on Russia; different sizes in terms of demographic, economic and military capabilities; and different political trajectories (Figs. 7, 8). However, a
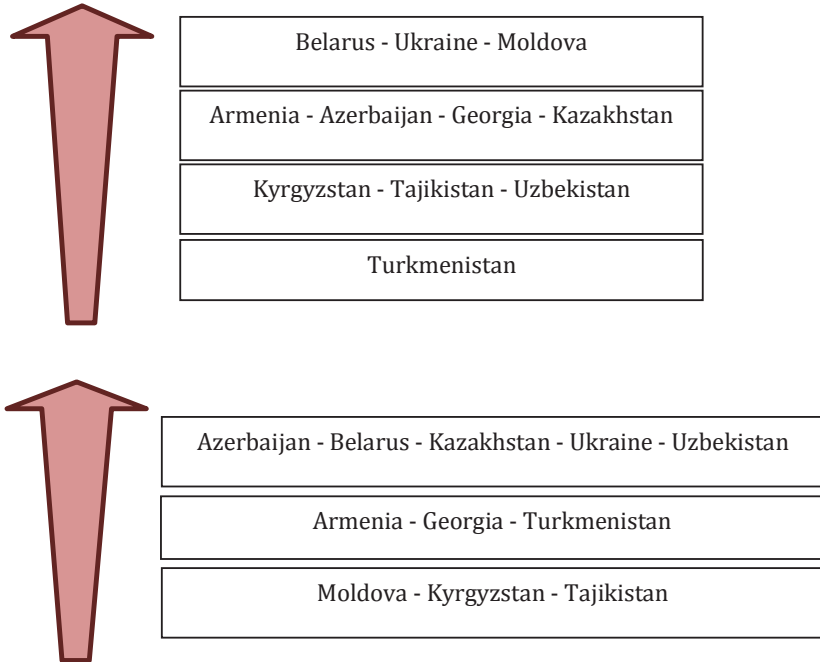
Fig. 7 Post-Soviet countries' levels of dependence on Russia and size in terms of demographic, economic and military capabilities (approximation based on Tables 2, 3 in Chap. 2)

relevant cross-case similarity lies in the fact that they are all polities in the making, involved in a double process of transition (at the levels of both unit and environment).

All in all, the selection of the Georgian, Kyrgyz and Moldovan cases entails both limitations and advantages. In terms of limitations, the cases display quite weak representativeness vis-à-vis all other post-Soviet states; this might be filled, however, by future developments in this research project involving the inclusion of other cases. Indeed, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova should be considered explorative cases in which the tensions between "other-directed" and autochthonous ideas of the state and region are particularly detectable, thus enabling the formulation of a hypothesis to be tested in a broader selection of cases. On the other hand, it should be highlighted that the three countries respectively belong to different historical regions whose features are stratified
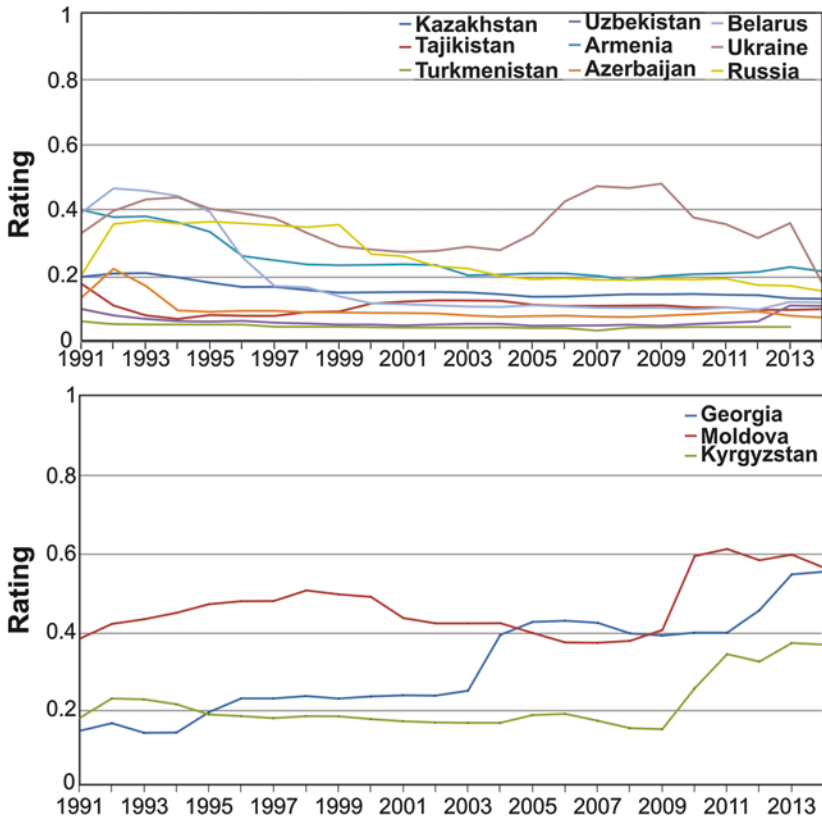
Fig. 8 Decreasing and increasing trends of democracy in the CIS member states. Data about Russia are not included in the database "V-Dem", which nonetheless covers all the years since 1991. V-Dem Institute, *Varieties of Democracy* (Liberal Democracy Index), www.v-dem.ne (last accessed: 15/01/2017)

throughout pre-Soviet times, and recognizable sub-regions within both the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet space.

The above-mentioned comparative investigation has been undertaken using three sets of qualitative tools. First, the fieldwork in Tbilisi, Bishkek and Chisinau served to carry out in-depth elite interviews.

The interviews were planned as "guided conversations": in fact, even though this form of interview resulted in answers that were relatively difficult to analyse, non-standardised focused interviews turned out to be more

appropriate when dealing with political/cultural elites, not only because they were treated as "key-informants" (meaning that individual perspectives were particularly valuable) but also in view of the fact that these interviewees are socialised to dominate dialogue, adjusting and modulating their responses vis-à-vis the sensitiveness of the topic being addressed.

The interviews, characterised by a significant degree of probing and asking follow-up questions, were aimed at analysing the foreign policies of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova, their "regional dimension" and the extent to which they convey regional attraction and/or repulsion through an exploration of the interviewees' representations of the role(s) their countries play at the regional level; their opinions about and perceptions of the scope and objectives of regional interactions; their vision of regional identity/identities; and their attitude towards regional institutionalization(s).

The second instrument was the content analysis of strategic texts, namely the relevant documents Georgian, Kyrgyz and Moldovan institutions have produced in the realm of foreign policy-making.

This triangulation of different tools of investigation stems from the need to compensate for the main limitations of interviews as a source of self-reported data. In fact, interviewees' responses might be weakened by cognitive biases (attribution, exaggeration), memory biases (i.e. selective memory, telescoping, memory conformity and social influences on memories) and social desirability bias (i.e. the tendency of respondents to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favourably by others, the "interviewer-expectancy effect").

The above-mentioned methodological pitfalls are obviously not the substantial reason why I have opted to incorporate content analysis in this research; rather, looking at how region(s) are discursively and imaginatively constructed can prove the assumption that a region can exist independently from its institutional materialization: in other words, that "region" and "regional organisation" are decoupled.

Moreover, a study of the relevant documents Georgian, Kyrgyz and Moldovan institutions have produced in the realm of foreign policy-making complemented interviews by adding a "temporal depth": whilst looking at how "region-related" ideas have been included in the narrative of a transitioning country, it was possible to observe the emergence of different "ideas of the state" over time and explore the existence of a "transmission belt" between internal and regional hybridities.

Finally, three sets of online focus groups were arranged using the virtual platform "Ning", a service that permits users to create customised social networks and closed-community websites (Fig. 9).

Participants in the focus groups were initially approached individually through emails and invited to take part in the research. They were offered the option of anonymity, and a maximum level of privacy protection was guaranteed through the construction of a virtual platform simulating a focus group by setting up discussion threads. The platform resembled a forum but was accessible by invitation only; a new question was shared with the registered participants every 3–4 days for about 2 weeks. As the focus group was asynchronous, the participants could provide answers to each question and comment on other participants' responses at their convenience.

In spite of this format aimed at facilitating participants' inclusion and interaction, they displayed an extremely high drop-out rate which occurred at two different points in the process: after the first email
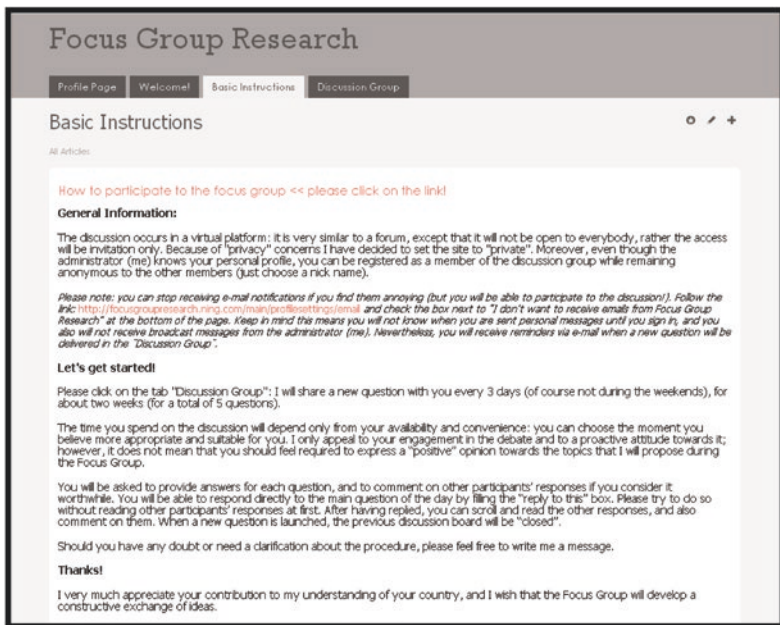

Fig. 9 Screenshot (on-line focus groups)

exchanges and after registering on the platform. While not quantitatively relevant, the focus groups provided interesting results in terms of confirming the main findings from the interviews.

Gathering data through elite interviews, the study of strategic documents produced by foreign policymakers and targeted focus groups entailed leaving aside the role of public opinion in the formation of state identity and post-Soviet countries' international postures. A totally different approach has been adopted by the Eurasian Development Bank, whose Centre for Integration Studies (in collaboration with the International Research Agency « Eurasian Monitor ») has carried out a comprehensive study of public attitudes towards integration in the post-Soviet region since 2012. The Integration Barometer aims to assess people's integration preferences through the three-fold concept of attraction[15] involving three dimensions (economic attraction, socio-cultural attraction, political—and military—attraction) and two axes (mutual attraction between each dyad of countries, and attraction to a "geopolitical cluster"). At present, the Integration Barometer surveyed people's attitudes during "three waves": in 2012 it consisted of nationwide polls in 10 CIS countries as well as Georgia, questioning over 13,000 people (between 950 and 2000 in each country); in 2013 Turkmenistan was added and over 14,000 people were polled (between 950 and 2000 in each country); finally, in 2014, Turkmenistan was again excluded from the sample.

According to the reports presenting the main findings of the Integration Barometer, "the citizens of post-Soviet countries are increasingly inclined to choose from amongst the other countries of the region rather than from any other parts of the world in their everyday decisions": this "indicates that the humanitarian integration of the former Soviet countries has a positive dynamic and positive prospects" (Zadorin and Moysov 2013). The general picture is one of a region in which most countries prioritise their integration in the post-Soviet space at the aggregate level. However, details about specific countries are definitely telling: whilst both Russia and Ukraine are the most attractive countries for all the others in the former Soviet space, neither Kiev nor Moscow value their integration in the region; rather, they display an orientation towards other areas of the world (primarily the European Union, in both cases). Furthermore, whereas in Central Asia, Armenia and Belarus there is a prevalent inclination towards the post-Soviet space (and Russia), in Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan people look elsewhere and in multiple directions. Finally, it is relevant to note that Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan display strong isolationist

sentiments ("no inclination towards any country") and, in general, gaining people support for integration in the post-Soviet space is not to be taken for granted: on the contrary, even in countries where it is possible to document a prevalent inclination, most of the time that attitude is not shared by the overwhelming majority of the population.

The Integration Barometer provides an immediate screenshot of people's attitudes towards the post-Soviet region in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova (Tables 3, 4 and 5); however, as acknowledged in the reports

Table 3 People's attitudes and preferences towards the post-Soviet countries, with respect to various aspects of Eurasian integration and cooperation in the CIS region: data about Georgia

Georgia				
Index of Attraction towards the former USSR countries cluster (2012; 2013) *Note: In theory the index could range between 0 and 1; the actual range of the values was [0.3; 0.7].*	Economy: 0.18; 0.22 Politics: 0.33; 0.37 Culture: 0.11; 0.15 Overall: 0.20; 0.24			
Countries sharing similar geopolitical vectors (overall)	2012: Azerbaijan 2013: Moldova, Russia, Ukraine 2014: Ukraine			
"Do you think the countries of the former USSR will become closer or distance themselves from each other in the next five years?"		2012	2013	2014
	Converge	26%	32%	29%
	No changes	26%	25%	24%
	Diverge	15%	14%	19%
	Don't know	33%	29%	28%
Perceptions of friendliness of post-Soviet countries	2012: 72% 2013: 76% 2014: 76%			
The friendliest countries	Ukraine (52% in 2012; 54% in 2013; 59% in 2014) Azerbaijan (41% in 2012; 46% in 2013; 42% in 2014)			
Isolationist sentiments	2012: 28% 2013: 23% 2014: 22%			
Interest in joining the Custom Union and the Single Economic Space (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)		2012	2013	2014
	Yes	30%	59%	53%
	Indifference	39%	9%	16%
	No	6%	9%	23%
	Don't Know	25%	23%	8%
The country should join (integrate with) Russia (2014)	19%			

Table 4 People's attitudes and preferences towards the post-Soviet countries, with respect to various aspects of Eurasian integration and cooperation in the CIS region: data about Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan				
Index of Attraction towards the former USSR countries cluster (2012; 2013) *Note: In theory the index could range between 0 and 1; the actual range of the values was [0.3; 0.7].*	Economy: 0.42; 0.41 Politics: 0.54; 0.63 Culture: 0.36; 0.35 Overall: 0.43; 0.44			
Countries sharing similar geopolitical vectors (overall)	2012: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan 2013: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan 2014: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan			
"Do you think the countries of the former USSR will become closer or distance themselves from each other in the next 5 years?"		2012	2013	2014
	Converge	46%	50%	46%
	No changes	33%	28%	32%
	Diverge	9%	12%	9%
	Don't know	12%	10%	13%
Perceptions of friendliness of post-Soviet countries	2012: 90% 2013: 97% 2014: 86%			
The friendliest countries	Russia (82% in 2012; 93% in 2013; 81% in 2014) Kazakhstan (54% in 2013 and 2014)			
Isolationist sentiments	2012: 22% 2013: 14% 2014: 23%			
Interest in joining the Custom Union and the Single Economic Space (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)		2012	2013	2014
	Yes	67%	72%	50%
	Indifference	15%	12%	10%
	No	8%	14%	30%
	Don't Know	10%	2%	10%
The country should join (integrate with) Russia (2014)	67%			

Sources EDB Integration Barometer 2012–2013–2014 (http://eabr.org/e/research/centreCIS/projectsandreportsCIS/integration_barometer)

Table 5 People's attitudes and preferences towards the post-Soviet countries, with respect to various aspects of Eurasian integration and cooperation in the CIS region: data about Moldova

Moldova				
Index of Attraction towards the former USSR countries cluster (2012; 2013) *Note: In theory the index could range between 0 and 1; the actual range of the values was [0.3; 0.7].*	Economy: 0.35; 0.32 Politics: 0.49; 0.38 Culture: 0.32; 0.31 Overall: 0.37; 0.33			
Countries sharing similar geopolitical vectors (overall)	2012: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan 2013: Georgia, Russia, Ukraine 2014: Russia			
"Do you think the countries of the former USSR will become closer or distance themselves from each other in the next five years?"		2012	2013	2014
	Converge	38%	30%	32%
	No changes	30%	30%	25%
	Diverge	18%	21%	22%
	Don't know	14%	19%	21%
Perceptions of friendliness of post-Soviet countries	2012: 76% 2013: 78% 2014: 65%			
The friendliest countries	Russia (68% in 2012, 72% in 2013; 56% in 2014)			
Isolationist sentiments	2012: 24% 2013: 29% 2014: 32%			
Interest in joining the Custom Union and the Single Economic Space (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)		2012	2013	2014
	Yes	65%	54%	49%
	Indifference	20%	11%	11%
	No	7%	24%	31%
	Don't Know	8%	11%	7%
The country should join (integrate with) Russia (2014)	43%			

Sources EDB Integration Barometer 2012–2013–2014 (http://eabr.org/e/research/centreCIS/projectsandreportsCIS/integration_barometer)

themselves, "in spheres where the population's opinions cannot be based on any personal experience or first-hand knowledge, respondents tend to express the perceptions that prevail in official government releases and the mass media" (Zadorin and Moysov 2013). In spite of the novelty of a monitoring endeavour of this kind, the findings of the Integration

Barometer must be interpreted keeping in mind that the respective data suffers from a series of information asymmetries and cognitive biases. Furthermore, in this research interviews were preferred over surveys in view of the weak accountability and responsiveness of post-Soviet regimes and the lack of close correspondence between public opinion on the one hand and political elites and policy makers on the other hand.

Finally, the unstructured nature of the interviews involved two fundamental advantages: first, it was possible not to provide interviewees with the interviewer's preliminary definition of the key concepts (such as "region"), and instead let the interviewees' definitions emerge. Second, the interviews paved the way for a "bottom up" process in which "unintended" thematic units "materialized" without asking a specifically/ explicitly related question.

Notes

1. Andrew Hurrell (1995), for example, has attributed the absence of regional cooperation to state weakness. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever have defined a regional security complex as "unstructured" if "local states are so weak that their power does not project much, if at all, beyond their own boundaries, and so generate insufficient security interdependence to form the essential structures of a regional security complex" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, p. 492). In other words, weak states are less "equipped" to engage in regional projects because they are characterized by relational instability and low interaction capacity: "Because of their lack of socio-political cohesion, and commonly accepted political ideology, weak states do not have a strongly defined orientation with regard to the international system and this presents a number of problems. The most obvious from the viewpoint of a unit within the international system is that the foreign policy of weak states, and the foreign policy towards weak states, is difficult to determine and difficult to interpret. In weak states it is difficult to differentiate threats to the government from threats to the national security of the state. Difficulties that arise from the definition of national security complicate the states' external orientation with regard to the international system. The lack of a definitive foreign policy or posture can actually invite more threats to the domestic security of a weak state" (Roehrs 2005, pp. 25–26).
2. Jackson and Nexon in particular focus on four key concepts: processes, configurations, projects and yoking. Processes are causally or functionally linked sets of occurrences which produce change; configurations are aggregations of processes; projects are configurations with agent

properties; and, finally, yoking is understood as the production of entities out of processes and the structuration of a site of transaction beginning from the transaction itself.

3. See for example Rose (1998), Schweller (2003), Kitchen (2010, pp. 117–143).

4. I could establish an exchange of written communications with the Secretary of the IPA CIS Permanent Committee on Defense and Security Issues, Mr. Alexandr Borisov, who shared with me some unpublished documents about the Committee's activities.

5. In a similar vein, Raffaella Del Sarto (2006) established a correlation between the level of effectiveness and legitimacy of region-building and the contested nature of state identities in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

6. The Region-Building Approach initially put forward by Iver Neumann similarly displays a genealogical orientation and aims to understand the construction of regions through the discourses and practices of actors: it seeks to respond to the question "whose region it is" by examining how regions are defined, imagined and represented, and by whom. As a matter of fact, according to Neumann "a region is constantly being defined and redefined by its members in a permanent discourse with each member attempting to identify itself at the core of the region. The core is defined in both territorial and functional terms and this definition necessarily involves a manipulation of knowledge and power" (Neumann 1994, p. 53). Neumann focuses in particular on the strategies employed by region-builders to substantiate a certain region, including the creation of a regional history, symbolism and mythology. Therefore, regions are created by region-builders' discourses on the region, and region-building processes should be traced by examining the discourse of significant political entrepreneurs. Several years after this early formulation by Neumann, Raffaella Del Sarto premised her research on the assumption that "region-building necessitates a reconsideration of how a state defines itself and its place in the regional and international arena, and how it relates to other states" (Del Sarto 2006, p. 24).

7. Content analysis is "a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying characteristics of specified messages" (Holsti 1969, p. 14); it paves the way for the measurement of the saliency of specific "interpretive frameworks" through a quantitative assessment of "the degree of attention or concern devoted to cultural units such as themes, categories, issues" (Weber 1990, p. 7).

8. "Regions are defined in term of speech acts" (Neumann 1994, p. 59).

9. In this regard, Hansen suggests that we devote some attention to the analysis of texts aimed at international audience: this does not necessarily mean texts delivered directly to an English-speaking public (i.e. on the

occasion of international summits, or in the framework of international institutions). As a matter of fact, particularly relevant texts such as the State of Nation Addresses or Ministerial Strategic Concepts are usually issued accompanied by a translation, as national authorities are aware of the international importance of such documents.

10. Hanrieder (1967). Additionally, other authors have posited parallelisms between international and domestic politics: for example, beginning from the similarity between the basic political structure of government in a new state and the structure in the contemporary international system, Fred Riggs (1964) articulated a "prismatic model" aimed at describing polities at different scales. Likewise, Roger Masters (1964) has noted the resemblance between some primitive political systems and the modern international system, thus adding to the idea of isomorphic connections between international and domestic politics.

11. On the contrary, the study of regionalism has been affected by a tendency to identify regions with "parallel or mini-systems in which to try out traditional systemic theories" without considering that region-building entails specific constraints and opportunities for foreign-policymakers in their attempt to establish the external sovereignty of a country. State-building has been considered a form of 'penetration' by external actors impacting on the dynamics of a regional security complex. From a different perspective, a group of weak states would theoretically be less effective in their attempts to trigger regional institution-building. However, the extent to which the process of state formation affects the configuration of a regional order has received far less scholarly attention.

12. Wendt (1994) defines the identification with the Other as "a continuum from negative to positive—from conceiving the other as anathema to the self to conceiving it as an extension of the self" (p. 386).

13. This is particularly appropriate in exploratory investigations and hypothesis- seeking research designs, as diverse case studies stand for particular relationships between variables (Seawright and Gerring 2008).

14. However, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan generate relevant quantity of hydroelectricity and host important mining activities (especially gold and copper).

15. Attraction includes interest, sympathy, the presence of ties and a willingness to cooperate, and is supposed to reflect public support for cooperation and integration.

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The Inside-Out Facet: State Identity and Regional Imaginaries

In spite of the alleged failure or dysfunction of post-Soviet regionalism, the foreign policies of post-Soviet countries convey a regional dimension and make regionality meaningful even in the absence of effective and coherent regional institutions. These peculiarities are related to the fact that "polities in transition" are involved in the process of region-building, polities characterised by weak state institutions and domestic governance. This chapter thus examines how conditions of hybridity are transferred to the regional level through an inside-out reverberation.

Hence, this chapter is devoted to investigating the foreign policies of post-Soviet countries (namely their "regional dimension" and the extent to which foreign policy conveys regional attraction and/or repulsion) in order to understand what political resources are employed to create a region in the Eurasian space.

Foreign policy-making implies a specific positioning of a given country in the regional system and conveys information about state identity; therefore, the study of foreign policy is considered a proxy for scrutinising relationships between state weakness and state linkages to the region.

Three different cases of regionalist behaviour have been selected (Georgia[1], Kyrgyzstan and Moldova) and are examined by looking at their "making of the self" through patterns of "regional association" and "regional disassociation".

1   MAIN FEATURES OF GEORGIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The development of Georgian post-Soviet foreign policy might be periodised according to the alternation of elites in power (presidential terms, and governmental terms since the "cohabitation" established by the 2012 parliamentary elections) even whilst recognising that different phases occurred in the post-revolutionary period.[2] Despite attempts at orderly reconstructions, the Georgian account of its role in the world has often been characterised by multiple contradictions and "cultural paradigms" (Jones 2003, p. 86): (i) the religious identity of Christianity; (ii) the Western identity of Europeanness; (iii) the regional identity of pan-Caucasianism; and (iv) an idiosyncratic aversion to Russia.[3] In Jones' analysis, cultural paradigms explain the role of national identity, Georgian traditional values and political culture in foreign policy-making. Whilst cultural paradigms can be considered one element of continuity in the course of Georgian foreign policy, in the last two decades the very process of foreign policy-making has been characterised by a relative lack of institutionalisation and a personalised structure of leadership that has drifted in populist directions and far exceeded constitutional provisions.[4] In fact, foreign policy-making has been affected by the fact that there is little power to counterbalance presidential control and presidents' personal relations with ministers: "the parliament and its Committee on Foreign Relations could monitor foreign policy, and even make recommendations, but its primary function, it turned out, was to analyse and ratify international treaties. The committee had minimal input in foreign policy formation. The government […] had the opportunity to contribute policy advice, but in reality they functioned as advisory bodies, lobbies, and executors"(Jones and Kakhishvili 2013, p. 33).

In an attempt to identify a few recurrent features of Georgia's outward orientation, Stephen Jones has observed four main factors which have impacted on Georgian foreign policy since independence:

> First, Georgia is a small and weak state surrounded by great powers […] Second, the weakness of the Georgian state […] has made domestic politics a powerful variable in foreign policy decisions. Third, Georgia is a post-colonial state. The ideas and political behaviour of the new elites were profoundly affected by the Soviet experience, which, paradoxically, created an idealized image of the West, one that misled Georgian elites when they first came to power. It also promoted norms of strong centralized leadership and ethnocentric ideas. The latter were, in part, based on decades of enforced

isolation from the rest of the world as well as on a sense of historical victimization. Finally, the Soviet system submerged civic values and removed political negotiation from the public forum. (Jones 2003, p. 87)

When the dissolution of the Soviet Union was officially announced in December 1991, Georgia's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was ousted following a military revolt and the last remnants of political order were smoothly destroyed: "the Georgian state found itself at the mercy of different militias, which were reluctant to merge into a single regular unit and were opposed by armed groups of Gamsakhurdia supporters, Ossetian and Abkhazian separatists, and ordinary criminals" (Nodia 1996). For a short period, Georgia was ruled by a Military Council which in March 1992 decided to invite Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, back to Georgia.

In spite of his short rule (1990–1992), Zviad Gamsakhurdia distinguished his leadership with a radical anti-Russian narrative and a rather naïve reliance on the West. His affinity with the Georgian Church represented both a sign of nationalism and independence from the Russian Church, and an interpretation of Orthodoxy as the frontline of Western civilisation. A further element characterising Gamsakhurdia's presidency was his support for "pan-Caucasianism". On the one hand, the pan-Caucasian vision emerged as a reaction to Western "indifference" or "passivity" vis-à-vis Georgia's quest to normalise and "return" to European family. Accordingly, in 1991, Gamsakhurdia promoted the concept of a common "Caucasian Home" which was meant to collect up non-Turkic-speaking Chechens,[5] Abkhazians and Cherkess, and which included a common economic zone, a Caucasian Forum (a sort of regional UN) and an alliance against foreign interference. On the other hand, Georgian Orthodoxy could not be associated with the Muslim North Caucasians. All previous attempts at Caucasian cooperation, such as the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia and the Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic ended up failing. Furthermore, the complicity of the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples with Georgian secessionists introduced an irreconcilable dichotomy between Georgian territorial integrity and pan-Caucasian ideas.

Eduard Shevardnadze inherited a collapsing state that was challenged by secessionist movements in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia, centrifugal unrests in the provinces of Adjara and Javakhetia, the insurgence of Zviadists (Gamsakhurdia's supporters) and the emergence of local rulers

in overt competition with the central authorities. Therefore, against the background of Western unresponsiveness, Shevardnadze made some concessions to Russia: Georgia became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States and accepted the ongoing presence of Russian military,[6] border guards (on the Georgian-Turkish borders) and peacekeepers (in Abkhazia). Shevardnadze's foreign policy can be termed "Russophilia by default": it was primarily dictated by the imperative to preserve and restore Georgian territorial integrity and bolster Georgian statehood. Two main circumstances determined these policy outcomes: Georgia's regional context, namely its dependence on volatile neighbouring Russia, and the internal weakness and disunity which limited its ability to make independent and confident foreign policy choices (Rondeli 2001).

At the same time, however, westernising aspirations were not neglected; in pursuit of these, Georgia made approaches to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (specifically through the Partnership for Peace), Council of Europe[7] and especially the European Union,[8] at first through Georgia's integration in the Trans-Eurasian Transport Infrastructure.[9]

Georgian activism in the realisation of Trans-European Networks marked the main trajectories Georgian foreign policy went on to follow in the long-term: besides the goal of embedding the country in European structures, Georgia further developed a "Black Sea dimension" and a functional identity as a transit country.[10]

The facet of Caucasian regional cooperation did not disappear, as the establishment of a Caucasian parliament and a permanent Coordinating Council of Caucasian governments was envisioned throughout 1996–1997 (Jones 2003). Pragmatism vis-à-vis Moscow and the ineluctable consideration of Russia as the "relevant other"[11] resulted in the inclusion of Moscow in some "would-be Pan-Caucasian initiatives": for example, in February 1996, Shevardnadze elaborated the main principles[12] that were to govern interstate relations amongst Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia ("Peaceful Caucasus Initiative"); similarly, the Declaration in Support of Inter-Ethnic Harmony, Peace, and Economic and Cultural Cooperation in the Caucasus, adopted in June 1996 in Kislovodsk and explicitly casting the Caucasus as "a single, integral organism and a geopolitical reality", was signed by Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Russia.[13]

However, the quest for emancipation from Russia and alternatives to the Commonwealth of Independent States had already emerged.

Georgia's membership in the Organisation for Democratic and Economic Development—GUAM is noteworthy in this respect. Launched as a cooperative initiative in 1997[14] by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova,[15] GUAM was institutionalised in June 2001 (Yalta Summit) as a consultative forum. In spite of the non-incompatibility of membership in both GUAM and CIS, the former sanctioned the creation of two alternative but overlapping alignments within the same regional space (Kuzio 2000a, b).[16]

Georgia made another "emancipatory" move in 1999 when it declined to renew the Collective Security Treaty. Tbilisi's explanation, *ça va sans dire*, was linked to Russian military and financial support to separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as the increasing Georgian commitment to NATO (in 1999, Georgia deployed a contingent to Kosovo as an emblematic contribution to the NATO-led international peacekeeping force).

A further element of Georgian foreign policy-making during Shevardnadze's presidency was its "formalisation" through the establishment of the National Security Council in 1996 and the adoption of three "strategic documents": the "Basic Principles of the Sustainability of Social Life, the Strengthening of State Sovereignty and Security, and the Restoration of the Territorial Integrity of Georgia" and the "Georgian Military Doctrine", approved by the parliament in April and October 1997, respectively, after a series of intense debates; and a draft document "Georgian National Security Concept" issued by the military political department of the ministry of foreign affairs.[17]

The 2003 Rose Revolution represented a main divide in Georgia post-independence trajectory at the level of both domestic politics and international positioning: in fact, a westward orientation became the overriding feature of Saakashvili's stance[18] and led the country to loosen its ties with the Russia-centred regional structures. For instance, Georgia's withdrawal from the Commonwealth of Independent States was announced in August 2008 and completed 1 year later. It is noteworthy that, although it was clearly necessary to Georgia to pull out after the Russian recognition of South Ossetian independence, Saakashvili had already announced his decision to opt out of the Council of Defence Ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States back in February 2006.

Georgia's path of seeking proximity with Brussels has taken shape within the European Neighbourhood Policy (the respective Action

Plan was signed in 2006, although the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement entered into force in 1999) and been punctuated by the deployment of the European Union Monitoring Mission. The launch of the Eastern Partnership, which was established to regulate relations between the EU and some of the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus, led to the negotiation of an Association Agreement, completed in July 2013 and initiated in November 2013. The bilateral cooperation between Brussels and Tbilisi has been formally arranged through "country-tailored" initiatives and programmes, but the "Caucasian" component stands out in the development of European policy towards Georgia: in July 2003, a European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus (EUSR) was appointed, whilst the Southern Caucasus Integrated Border Management programme (SCIBM) was agreed on October 2007 and implemented as of March 2010 by a consortium led by the United Nations Development Programme.

In terms of its approach to NATO, the course of Georgia's post-revolution path was presaged by two large-scale multinational military training initiatives held, respectively, in Poti (2001) and Tbilisi (2002) as well as a declaration, issued on the occasion of the 2002 Summit in Prague, expressing its aspirations to NATO membership. These ambitions were partially satisfied through the launch of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), established in 2004 to assist Georgia in achieving NATO standards, and the Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues, initiated in 2006; nevertheless, Georgia's aspirations were subsequently disregarded when it was not offered a Membership Action Plan on the occasion of the NATO Summit held in Bucharest in 2008.

The 2008 Russia-Georgia War constitutes the focal turning point of Saakashvili's 10-year rule: prior to this, there were some suggestions of possible cooperation between the two countries, such as the joint patrols of Georgia's northern border, agreed on in February 2004, to contain possible Chechen incursions and, Russia's non-intervention in the Adjaran crisis in spite of its military presence via the Batumi base.[19] In early 2005, several major Russian-Georgian business deals were finalised,[20] and in May, the main cause of friction (Russian military presence on Georgian territory) was tentatively resolved: Russian and Georgian Foreign Ministers reached an agreement on Russian troop withdrawal by the end of 2008.[21] Negotiations regarding Russia's military withdrawal from bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki were connected to a military

transit agreement which allowed Russia to deliver cargo and transfer military personnel to its base in Gyumri through Georgian territory and airspace.

These instances of "appeasement" were counterbalanced by just as many gestures of Georgian enfranchisement and separation from its Soviet past, however: Georgian and Russian moves and countermoves in the breakaway regions between 2004 and 2006 suggested little real improvement in bilateral relations.[22]

The Russia-Georgia War brought with it several collateral problem areas in Georgian foreign policy-making: first, a new diplomatic role for the Orthodox Church, namely the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II opening channels of communication with Moscow (Grdzelidze 2010). Second, the conflict complicated relations between Georgia and Turkey.

In the first half of the 1990s, a Treaty on friendship, cooperation and good neighbourly relations was signed between the two countries, with Ankara supporting Georgia's admission to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in 1992 and acting in limited ways as a counterbalance to Russian overlay in the South Caucasus. In 1997, the two countries signed a military cooperation agreement, and in 1999 Turkey agreed to grant financial and technical aid to the Georgian armed forces over a 5-year period and assistance for the modernisation of Georgia's military training facilities.[23]

Georgia's interest in developing cooperation within the framework of BSEC can be considered another example of its tendency to draw closer to Europe. As a matter of fact, after having emerged as a "Turkish construction" in the 1990s, the Black Sea region became Europe's Southern and South-Eastern borderlands beginning in the second half of the 2000s.[24] From Georgia's perspective, however, the "Europeanising" function of Black Sea regionalism[25] concurred with the fact that these institutions and initiatives are shaped by two main cleavages: between Turkey and Armenia, and between Georgia and Russia. In addition to the BSEC, Georgia agreed to establish the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BlackSeaFOR) and had started participating in multilateral naval exercises with its vessels until the outbreak of the 2008 war. As a matter of fact, in August 2008, Russian warships sailed to Georgia at the same moment that BlackSeaFOR exercises were being carried out in Sevastopol. Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine chose to continue their maritime security cooperation, but Georgia suspended it except for the unexpected deployment of the Coast Guard vessel

P-24 Sukhumi in April 2011, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of BlackSeaFOR, when a naval parade was held in Turkey along the Bosporus.

In contrast to Black Sea summitry regionalism, Georgian foreign policy also displayed elements of pragmatism vis-à-vis Russia. For example, in a memorandum issued in September 2008, the Conservative Party and People's Party openly condemned Russian occupation and prioritised NATO membership. However, in March 2010, a similar policy document ("Pro-Georgian Foreign Policy and National Security") was released by the Conservative Party that revised this stance of anti-Russian intransigence, in part in consideration of the fact that the West would not have sacrificed the stability of its relations with Moscow in the name of the Georgian cause.[26] The document stated that Georgia should have adjourned the process of integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures and accepted the resumption of relations with Russia, holding consultations with neighbours before making any significant decisions about NATO membership. Other politicians and political parties had also displayed other signs of opening towards Russia at that time, some of which were even more substantial: for instance, in February 2010, the Movement for a Fair Georgia signed an agreement of cooperation with Russian ruling party Edinaia Rossia, whilst in March 2010, the then-opposition leader Nino Burjanadze held a much-discussed meeting with Vladimir Putin. In spite of these alternative and alternate considerations of Russia and some instances of reappraising the reliability of Western support, integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures can be considered the polestar of Georgian foreign policy-making, albeit with moments of disillusionment and disappointment; even relations with Turkey[27] and the Baltics[28] can be interpreted as functional links in the pathway to access the "gates" of Europe.

2   Main Features of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy

Since its dependence, the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan has been affected by its small size, landlockedness and geographical position: its borders are important trans-shipment points on the way from Europe to Asia, whilst its territory is surrounded by countries that are not only larger but also contestant regional leaders. These structural constraints have consistently led the country to rely significantly on outside assistance—not only foreign investments and donors but also external political and security resources: that may explain why, immediately after gaining

independence, Kyrgyzstan established a policy of alignment with the USA and the West, China, Japan, Turkey, yet maintaining at the same time an intense "special relationship" with Russia and its Central Asian neighbours. In a sense, the state and national identity of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan has been intrusively shaped by the international environment, to a much greater extent than other newly independent states (Huskey 2003).

Besides these "structural constraints", the second important factor impacting the course of Kyrgyz foreign policy-making has been its political instability and the fragility of its state institutions. In fact, the country's foreign policy-making is still in the process of being defined and institutionalised, and this process is conditioned by "complex organizational routines" (Sari 2012, p. 136) involving bureaucracies and traditional customary actors; on the other hand, the weak institutional design is counterbalanced by the "heavy" role played by the presidents and their entourages.

The relevance of external and internal factors has varied over time: "when the Central Asian region assumed more significance in global terms, the foreign policy behaviour of Kyrgyzstan has been linked primarily to external politics. […] When the region assumed a lesser significance in the international arena, the foreign policy behaviour of Kyrgyzstan has been linked primarily to domestic politics" (Sari 2012, p. 137). Accordingly, the course of Kyrgyz foreign policy since independence can be periodised according to "presidential cycles" but also using the dawn of the 2000s as a threshold, given that this marks the period in which Kyrgyzstan was first identified with a transit route from the North to South in the context of the Afghan war and reconstruction.

Throughout the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan was held up as a successful case of post-Soviet transition and presented both by its national establishment and numerous foreign observers as an island of democracy surrounded by authoritarian regimes: the former President Askar Akayev's rhetoric was actually based on casting his country as the "Switzerland of Central Asia". Generally speaking, Akayev has been identified with the pursuit of a "multivector" foreign policy: the development of diplomatic relations with Western countries and creation of linkages with Western institutions were counterbalanced by the maintenance of intense ties with Russia and the establishment of positive connections with China. Since the second half of the 1990s in particular Kyrgyz foreign policy has displayed a developing "Asian vector" along with a preference for multilateral

frameworks, which led to the formation of four concentric circles: the inner one included the other Central Asian countries, the second one the Commonwealth of Independent States, the third one the Eurasian countries understood in a broad sense, including China, Turkey and Iran, and the outer one the European countries and USA.

This multidirectional foreign policy placed Kyrgyzstan in the Eurasian context through the 1999 Silk Road Doctrine whilst paving the way for the positioning of Western military facilities and diplomatic outposts on its territory.

However, as the economic situation deteriorated, institutional reforms stalled and Akayev allegedly moved in a more authoritarian direction; the "Kyrgyz democratic dream" failed and the fragilities of the Kyrgyz state were dramatically revealed. Corruption and nepotism plagued the regime and exacerbated people's distrust of the state; at the same time, informal elites based on clannish and tribal loyalties were able to mobilise their constituencies and offer alternative sources of authority, including criminal ones. The violent infiltration of armed militants (supposedly religious extremists) into Kyrgyz territory, and the state's inability to deal with these major security challenges functioned in some way to facilitate the country's inclusion in a broad anti-terror coalition led by the USA. Nevertheless, Kyrgyz bandwagoning strategy and attempts to stand on the fence vis-à-vis both Moscow and Washington turned out to have its own criticalities, epitomised by the difficult "cohabitation" of two military bases on Kyrgyz territory, Kant (Russian) and Manas (USA). As a matter of fact, in spite of the supposed advantages of these multiple alignments, the country has been often considered "a victim of foreign involvement and of the 'new great base race' in Central Asia" (Smith 2004): this external envelopment has allegedly produced a situation in which Kyrgyz authorities have progressively lost control over foreign policy and even internal politics.

The "Tulip Revolution", intensified by the 2005 parliamentary elections, raised the expectation that Kyrgyz foreign policy would reorient towards the West: shortly before he was overthrown, Akayev degraded Kyrgyz relations with the USA, whilst the revolution legitimated a number of prominent anti-governmental figures including Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Roza Otunbayeva and Azimbek Beknazarov. Accordingly, when Bakiyev assumed power, it was predicted that the country would undertake a new course of foreign policy. As it turns out, however, the post-Tulip-Revolution trajectory has actually involved "an intensified version of policies pursued by Bakiyev's predecessor" (International Crisis Group

2008). Besides a lack of substantial changes in domestic politics,[29] the acting foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva affirmed that: "not only will there be no fundamental change in foreign policy, there will be no change at all in foreign policy" (Sari 2012, p. 142). In spite of a narrative based on Kyrgyz multivectoriality, this course-maintenance meant that Russian vector remained the priority, together with Kyrgyz membership in all the regional organisations "dominated" by its neighbours.

Bakiyev's attitude towards recovering relations with the USA only shifted after the 2009 presidential election. In reaction to this shift, Russia launched an anti-Bakiyev campaign in which it not only invited the opposition leaders to Moscow but also terminated a bilateral regime for preferential trade relations between the two countries.

As had happened before the Tulip Revolution, the economic crisis triggered a new wave of demonstrations, leading to the election of a provisional government in April 2010 chaired by Roza Otunbayeva and including former revolutionaries who had supported Bakiyev 5 years earlier. Similar to developments in 2005, however, the tentative Kyrgyz strategy of balancing between different vectors of foreign policy remained unchanged. On the occasion of a roundtable discussion in Washington, Otunbayeva again affirmed: "I want to assure you we will make the right balance in the sake of my country's national interests. We will certainly underline and stress our geographic position, common regional interests: language, culture, and traditions."[30]

Almazbek Atambayev, who succeeded Roza Otunbayeva after the 2011 presidential elections, tried to maintain the same balancing strategy. It soon began to draw criticism from Russia, however, on the grounds that it was too erratic and unpredictable (Marat 2012). In addition, Atanbayev introduced a turcophile direction to its foreign policy that was mainly dependent on his personal business and acquaintances in Ankara. These two aspects confirm the main recurrent features of Kyrgyz foreign policy: the continuity of its course independent of power shifts in the domestic realm and the plausibility of using a leader-centric approach when analysing this trajectory.

3 MAIN FEATURES OF MOLDOVAN FOREIGN POLICY

For the most part Moldova's foreign policy has been the product of two features profoundly marking the political course of the country at both international and domestic levels. First, neither Moldovan society nor the country's elites have resolved the cleavages in their collective

identity, shared history and national destiny, and ongoing debates about "Moldovanness" shape the public space. This first aspect is intimately linked with the peculiar location of Moldova "on a key 'marchland' border", which at various times has transported the country's policymakers to a crossroads between "lying within an expanded EU or within the Russian orbit of the CIS" (Williams 2004). This liminal position is not only impacting contemporary Moldova's contested statehood, it also shaped its pre-Soviet history: like the Baltics, Moldova was integrated into the USSR in 1939 (1940), yet it did not experience any inter-war independence. Rather, it passed from being part of the Russian Empire (1812–1918) to being governed by Romania (1918–1939). This passage translated into today's state of affairs in which the country hosts both pro-Romanian/anti-Russian constituencies and pro-Russian/anti-Romanian ones. The former are represented in particular by Moldova's intellectuals and the cultural intelligentsia, whilst the latter have a stronghold in the ethnic minorities and separatist provinces (March and Herd 2006).

Charles King (2003) has attempted to systematise the debate about the fundamentals of Moldovannes into three main interpretative strands.

First, Moldova's heritage has been interpreted and narrated as Romanian. According to this frame, today Moldovans and Romanians are part of separate states only because of Soviet domination and the remnants of Soviet structures in the current governance of the country. The authentic vocation of Moldova is pan-Romanian, but political and economic dependence on Russia prevents it from being realised. King also dubs this orientation "the 'conspirational theory' of Moldovan identity", as it is represented by the early members of the Popular Front and Christian Democratic Party.

Second, according to supporters of the so-called "denationalisation theory", Moldovans were of Romanian descent, but Soviet acculturation impacted the country's national consciousness and loosened these original ties with Romania. Contemporary scholars and politicians engage in expunging the legacies of the Soviet period in the same way as their predecessors who paved the way for the union of Russian Bessarabia with Romania in 1918.

Third, Moldovans are considered as a nation apart. Moldovan historians (hence, "the 'historical theory' of Moldovanness") who made their career during the Soviet period currently propagate an account of Moldovan history which is very similar to the official Soviet version. The distinctiveness of Moldova derives precisely from the sedimentation of

different historical periods, from the Middle Ages and Ottoman period to the Russian Bessarabia to the Soviet Union and up to the achievement of independence, all contributing to the creation of a unique nation.

It is not easy to classify these three narratives according to the official manifestos and discourses delivered by one political grouping or another or by any one political figure within them. On the contrary, the narratives have been interwoven with alternate domestic pathways and different political actors' developments in terms of both changing constituencies and the country's international positioning. What can be reliably mapped, however, is the intimate connection between where a certain political actor stands on the question of Moldovan identity and/ or her foreign policy orientation.

From 1992 to 2001, the Popular Front of Moldova overtly advocated for a political union with Romania, proceeding from their core belief that Moldovans and Romanians form a single pan-Romanian nation. This radical pan-Romanist commitment alienated both some of the Front's own members (especially supporters of the President Snegur and moderates supporting preferential ties with Romania but not necessarily a political union) and the Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Gagauz[31] minorities. Adding nuance to this position did not help the pan-Romanist field to achieve concrete political leverage in foreign policy-making: neither the radical nor the moderate exponents have held governmental positions. However, pan-Romanist narratives have often circulated through and impacted Moldovan society by means of educational exchanges and connections amongst intellectuals and scholars, which also conditions the perspectives bureaucrats, officials and professionals within and/or around the Ministry of Foreign Affairs take on. For instance, it is worth mentioning the training function played by the Romanian National School of Political Studies and Public Administration in hosting and instructing several Moldovan students every year (King 2003, p. 66).

Whereas pan-Romanist orientations find a fertile ground in young generations of Chisinau-based policymakers and policy analysts, Transnistria can be considered a stronghold of Moldovan Eurasianism. Since 1990, Transnistrian leadership (embodied by Igor Smirnov) has conveyed a firm pledge for autonomy or even independence from Moldova and a pro-Russian alignment, modelled after the Russia-Belarus Union. Beyond the Tiraspol-controlled territories, Eurasianism has emerged as an alternative to pan-Romanism especially amongst the Russians and Ukrainians living in the Bessarabian portion of the country, a position that supports

Moldova's accession into the Commonwealth of Independent States. This cause was taken up by the International Movement for Unity (Unitatea-Yedinstvo), part of a network of organisations opposed to the assertiveness of non-Russians within the Soviet Union, and later merged into the Interfront Movement. Furthermore, the post-1994 renaissance of the Party of Communists was anchored to Eurasianist aspirations until 2005.

However, similarly to pan-Romanism, Eurasianism has also occupied the fringes of Moldova's political landscapes. As a matter of fact, since the early 1990s, several parties and political figures have adopted the mainstream foreign policy track of Basarabism, an orientation that "seeks to define Moldova's place as a distinct cultural and political space, a region—like the former Bessarabia province ("Basarabia", in Romanian)—whose traditions and interests derive both from its position as a small region surrounded by large neighbours and from the overlapping identities of its multi-ethnic population" (King 2003, p. 68). Basarabist followers generally advocate for striking a balance between territorial integrity and the protection of minorities; special but not exclusive relations with Romania, to be paralleled with the maintenance of important ties with Russia and Ukraine; and partnerships with Russia and within Russia-centred structures, nonetheless resisting asymmetries and hegemonic endeavors. These tenets were embedded in the official foreign policy documents and translated into Moldova's enthusiasm and receptivity vis-à-vis several variable-geometry initiatives which emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s such as the trilateral framework with Ukraine and Romania (Izmail Statement), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the GU(U)AM. Most importantly, Basarabism has translated into juggling relations with both Moscow and Bucharest.

Moldova's relations with Russia have been significantly shaped by the former's trade and energy dependence on the latter. On the other hand, it is important to note that Moldova has contested the way the Commonwealth of Independent States has been ruled according to Russian preferences, and refused to sign the Collective Security Treaty or allow Russian basing rights in the context of military cooperation. Moldova's subversive attitudes have been inhibited by Russia's military presence on its territory as well as political and economic influence, especially in Transnistria. Whereas Moldova's membership in the OSCE and Council of Europe has certainly alleviated its weakness vis-à-Moscow, Russia has always been involved in negotiations between Chisinau and Tiraspol.[32]

As per its relations with Romania, routine cross-border interactions facilitated the development of cooperation in other sectors. Between 1994 and 1998 bilateral relations cooled, in part because of concerns generated by the Popular Front's rhetoric of radical pan-Romanism and in part because the Moldovan question did not end up being politicised in Romania. The role played by Romania in shaping Moldova's foreign policy frames and discourses has changed since the EU entered into the equation that conditions the country's international and regional positioning.

In 2000, 20 out of Moldova's 28 registered political parties signed a declaration in support of the country's integration into the EU, which was defined in that document as "a fundamental national strategic objective"; furthermore, the signatories expressed their commitment to obtaining full membership in the Southeast European Stability Pact.[33] Previously, a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Moldova was signed in 1994 (and entered into force in 1998); in December 1996, President Lucinschi declared Moldova's aspirations to achieve the status of EU associate member and, since then, different political figures in Chisinau have actively been involved in attracting European interests (and investments) in the country. In its early stages, Voronin's presidency slowed Moldova's path to the EU: in the wake of 2001 parliamentary elections, the Party of Communists came to power with a political programme centred on refusing assistance from Western financial institutions and their associated obligatory reforms, as well as approximation to Russia. In an interview with the Kyiv daily "Fakty" on 10 October 2001, whilst dismissing the hypothesis of joining the Russia-Belarus Union, stated that Moldova has "historically always looked East".[34] However, the episode of the "Kozak Memorandum" brought a further twist to Moldova's foreign policy orientation. After several rounds of negotiations under the aegis of OSCE, in November 2003, Moscow unexpectedly put forward a plan (named after President Putin's aide, Dmitrii Kozak) that envisioned the transformation of Moldova into an asymmetrical federation, with Moldova, Transnistria and Gagauzia becoming equal subjects. In particular, Transnistria and Gagauzia would have retained the right of secession in case Moldova joined the EU or reunified with Romania (Tomiuc and Krushelnycky 2003). The mobilisation of opposition parties and the non-governmental sector hindered the signing of the Kozak Memorandum; its rejection should be considered a turning point, as in the following years relations

between Moscow and Chisinau worsened in several fields (estrangement from the CIS summits and detention of Russian election observers representing the monitoring missions of the CIS[35]) to such an extent that in 2005 Voronin declared that Moldova wanted to "join a European and Euro-Atlantic security space, never to be part of a post-Soviet security space" (Socor 2005).

In the meantime, Moldova was included in the European Neighborhood Policy and further consolidated its relations with the EU,[36] an agenda that the Party of Communists officially championed during their 2005 parliamentary elections campaign. In the framework of the Communists' political programme, Voronin liaised with the presidents of Ukraine and Georgia. In particular, two joint Ukrainian-Moldovan initiatives led to the activation of an EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) for monitoring Transnistrian borders and coordinating anti-smuggling operations, and the insertion of the USA and EU in the ongoing negotiations on Transnistria respectively.

Moldova's emerging consensus around Europeanisation in general and the Communists' shift towards this position in particular are not to be considered unequivocal, however: for example, the 2004 Nationality Concept was centred on the value of interethnic harmony and compliance with international standards of minority protection for the development of a "modern, European, democratic states"; on the other hand, the designation "ethnic minorities" and the definition of Moldovans as the "stateforming" nationality were "an uncomfortable reminder of Soviet concept of a 'titular nationality'" (March 2007). The subtle resilience of these controversies and contradictions is symptomatic of the continuing fluidity of Moldovanness, and resonates with the history of Moldovanism as a whole, which has never encouraged Moldovan self-expression per se but rather has been used as an instrument of domination by external actors (March 2007).

4   Georgia and the Region(s)

Although it is commonly interpreted in mainstream discourses as a "divided" or even "broken" region (De Waal 2012), the "South Caucasus" was repeatedly mentioned as the *first* regional idea by the majority of the respondents interviewed in Tbilisi between April and June 2013. Such a remark is not unexpected: in fact, there is an extensive

literature that diversely considers the South Caucasus (i) a regional security complex; (ii) the result of regional concepts and definitions provided by both by external actors and political groups and parties in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan; (iii) a civilisational area (Coppieters 1996). Nonetheless, the region is conventionally described as a territorial entity whose social and political incoherence is reflected in the absence of a shared identity and common framework of cooperation (German 2012). Whereas the diverse participation of South Caucasian states in different regional organisations might be seen to testify to their dissimilar strategic orientations (institutional dimension), it would be naïve to dismiss Caucasianness as "non-existent" *tout-court*. On the one hand, the idea of Caucasianness and the Caucasian House has never been implemented beyond the declaratory level or imaginative projects advanced by experts and influential members of Georgian civil society[37]; on the other hand, on several occasions, the interviewees presented Georgia through a self-identification with the South Caucasus. The real question is not whether the South Caucasus is discursively and imaginatively constructed as a region, but how so.

Instinctive references to the South Caucasus might give the impression of its being a "*natural* space"; however, its association with regional conflicts might lead us to categorise the South Caucasus as a "*failed* space". These two attributes consistently converge in an understanding of the South Caucasus as a geographical fact (and, furthermore, *Asian*, according to a few respondents) in opposition to politically-grounded groupings (such as Moldova-Ukraine-Georgia, Georgia-Bosnia-Montenegro-Macedonia, Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia, as listed by the interviewees). Nevertheless, whereas the intuitive association of Georgia with the South Caucasus can be interpreted as a sign of the "naturalness" of the region, markers of its artificiality emerged in quite a few of interviewees: for example, respondents did not explain the distinction between the South Caucasus and "Transcaucasia" in relation to the changes occurred in the regional context; rather, they presented it as a matter of "looking from the West" versus "looking from Russia". This kind of reasoning paves the way for reading "regional association" and "regional disassociation" as "other-directed" processes. This specific controversial aspect is epitomised by an interviewee's statement: "[if you ask Georgians] 'Are you South Caucasus?' [you will be answered] Yes, we are South Caucasus" as a sign of internalised acquiescence to patronising definitions.[38] In other words, "politicians understood that it is useful to

use the notion of the South Caucasus".[39] Outside the political realm as well, Georgians often put the South Caucasus label on a wide range of projects and initiatives to attract grants and facilitate international endorsements.[40]

Whereas Caucasianness has been defined as a "perception based on outside-in socialization"[41] and the South Caucasus interestingly narrated as an "international invention",[42] some of the respondents explicitly questioned Georgia's Caucasian component. At times, the contestation took an "emotional" shape ("I do not want Georgia to be compared with Armenia and Azerbaijan"[43]). Such reactions can be explained by the fact that Georgia considers the "South Caucasus" an attempt to peripherialise the country, since the South Caucasus is identified as "the neighbourhood of the European Union but not the European neighbourhood".[44] Along the same lines, it is also interesting to note how the interviewees depicted Armenia and Azerbaijan. Besides diverse characterisations of the respective bilateral relations, both Armenia and Azerbaijan were described as merely "different" (differently European, differently democratic, differently tied to Russia).

In addition to characterisations of the South Caucasus as a "natural space" and "failed space", a further feature that emerged from the interviews was its "inclusivity": whilst few respondents underlined the difference between the South Caucasus and Caucasus, the former was frequently related to Eastern Europe and North Caucasus. Likewise, whilst only one respondent defined it as part of a macro-region that also includes Central Asia and Turkey, the majority of the interviewees defined the South Caucasus as a "*European* space". The latter aspect is quite tellingly if one considers that, besides being considered a South Caucasian country, Georgia was unanimously defined by all interviewees as European.

Georgian interpretations of the country's Europeanness are no less contested than interpretations of its Caucasianness. Even though Europe was the most frequently cited regional idea, it was also described in quite ambiguous terms: the main source of ambivalence lies not so much in a move to decouple being European and being a member of the EU, but rather in the fact that "the European understanding of Europe and the Georgian understanding of Europe do not match".[45] Quite tellingly, the Georgian conception of Europe (as emerged during my fieldwork) and the Georgian notion of the South Caucasus do mirror each other to some extent: first of all, just as the former has a spontaneous dimension, the latter is defined in an emotional rather than rational

terms. Second, Europe is framed as a *plural* and *nested* space (Europe includes Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, a number of sub-regions such as the Baltics…), even "divided" and characterised by differences: this can be read as an attempt to legitimise the divisive, heterogeneous and fragmented nature of the Southern Caucasian region as well, casting it as a trait which does not exclude the South Caucasus from Europe per se.

Whilst Europe is undoubtedly an inspiring vision for Georgia, the recurrent narrative of the EU is affected by a certain disappointment regarding the blurred concept of neighbourhood: indeed, this concept is considered a further reason for marginalisation, as deceptive as the international invention of the South Caucasus, because it relegates Georgia not only next to Armenia and Azerbaijan, but even to Belarus, the Balkans and North Africa. According to some of the interviewees, by substituting "Europeanisation" with "neighbourisation", the EU failed to acknowledge that Georgia enjoys a different degree of Europeanness if compared to other countries ("We are not neighbours of Europe but European neighbours of EU…this is different"[46]).

The third recurrent "regional idea" to have emerged from the interviews is the Black Sea, mostly associated with aspirations of *enlargement* (Black Sea as a *European* space since the EU has shifted to South-Eastern Europe) and the chance to play the role of a *corridor*—a significant component of the Georgian idea of its state, as we will see below. Other characterisations of the Black Sea were also developed by the respondents, establishing pairs of contrasting narratives about this particular regional concept.

First, on the one hand, the Black Sea is considered yet another other-directed project ("Wider Black Sea as defined by the EU"[47]), whilst on the other hand, Georgia has contributed to shaping it through its attempts to construct a "Black Sea-Baltic" region "as a region of *European peripheries* aspiring to be part of the mainstream".[48]

Second, on the one hand, the Black Sea was understood as a political initiative which has been part of the Georgian post-2003 rebranding, whilst on the other hand, the notion of "Black Sea identity" was introduced in relation to the mythology of the Silk Road connecting Greece, Armenia, Georgia and Turkey, and to the qualification of Georgia as a part of the Eastern Mediterranean civilisational space.

Third, interviewees frequently underlined the *instrumental* dimension of being part of the Black Sea; at the same time, however, this instrumental dimension assumed two opposite meanings. On the one hand,

"instrumental" was seen in its negative connotations as "artificial" and "imposed", thereby questioning the existence of real solidarity amongst Black Sea people and highlighting the fact that Georgia has been pushed towards the Black Sea by Americans and Europeans. On the other hand, "instrumental" was understood in its positive implications as "functional" ("it makes us more open to the West, it makes us part of the West, it makes Georgia part of Europe"[49]): in other words, the Black Sea was described as a European Sea, including Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey, whose European identity is not in doubt. The linkage to the Black Sea, furthermore, serves the purpose of reaffirming the decoupling between Europe and the EU.

This latter aspect can be considered preliminary proof that different notions of regions and their institutionalisation in regional organisations often remains disconnected. In fact, Georgia's belonging to the South Caucasus, Europe or the Black Sea was narrated as a separate story from Georgian membership or participation in formal regional groupings; likewise, the country's withdrawal from the Commonwealth of Independent States was not narrated as a significant moment of "regional disassociation". Rather, according to a significant number of respondents, Georgia can still be considered "post-Soviet", especially with regard to the persistence of a Soviet "mentality".

The interviews not only shed light on Georgian narratives of "regional association" and "regional disassociation", they also offered a view of how these narratives inform Georgian making of the self through othering: "positive" othering vis-à-vis Europe and "negative" othering vis-à-vis Sovietness[50] and Eurasianness.[51] In the same way that the South Caucasus and the Black Sea have been represented as a part of a broader European space, the Georgian self seems to be shaped by the inclusion of the country in one region or another; furthermore, as the South Caucasus is perceived as defined by "others" and existing in relation to "others", Georgia itself seems to have defined its idea of the state by drawing on *where* the country is located and who it *belongs* to. Accordingly, the Georgian self has been defined for the most part in terms which seem to deprive the country of any real agency ("attractive", "functional", "useful" to the West).

However, Georgia's international actorness is somewhat restored by its alleged/imagined role in the regional context. As a matter of fact, Georgia is presented as (i) a "facilitator"/"mediator" between

Azerbaijan and Armenia; (ii) a source of inspiration for other ex-soviet states ("frontline", "vanguard", "testing ground"), leading the process of integrating the South Caucasus into Euro-Atlantic structures; and (iii) as a "regional hub" (for the re-exportation of goods, services and reforms). These cases display a further mirror element between the Georgian construction of the self and its course of regional othering: Georgia has been seen as a potential trigger for a democratising/westernising domino involving Armenia and Azerbaijan; furthermore, a Georgia-led South Caucasus is ascribed the potential to initiate a transformative pattern in other sectors of the former Soviet space ("Georgia contributes to shaping Central Asian imaginations"[52]).

An analysis of the main documents produced in the realm of foreign policy has enabled me to trace the development of the main ideas collected through the interviews over time: first, processes of regional association and regional disassociation have produced markedly one-dimensional and flattened narratives of the regions, but they have nonetheless affected Georgian construction of the self; second, the South Caucasus has emerged as the most controversial source of regional identification in terms of how it contributes to the Georgian construction of the self.

The South Caucasus is a "geographic cage" that perpetuates the definition of the region and its units by external actors. At the same time, the South Caucasus can be interpreted as an emancipatory tool to achieve political results and access different types of resources (both material and symbolic). Accordingly, as long as the framing of the Caucasus as a "European South" makes Georgia the Caucasian "core" in terms of Europeanness, the country is defining itself on the basis of kaleidoscopic regional configurations.[53]

The following documents were selected and analysed:

- 1997 Basic Principles of the Sustainability of Social Life, the Strengthening of State Sovereignty and Security, and the Restoration of the Territorial Integrity of Georgia;
- 2000 Georgia and the World: A Vision and Strategy for the Future;
- 2005 National Security Concept;
- 2006–2009 Foreign Policy Strategy;
- 2012 National Security Concept;
- 2013 Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy.

These strategic documents, deliberately drafted to communicate the official posture of Georgia's foreign policy, were also supplemented with the following:

- Statement by Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, BSEC Moscow Summit, 25 October 1996
- Statement by Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, BSEC Yalta Summit, 5 June 1998;
- Remarks by Georgian Ambassador Tedo Japaridze at the GUUAM Workshop, Stanford University, 17–18 November 2000[54];
- Eduard Shevardnadze, Transcript of speech at the Kennedy School: "Searching for Security in a Changing World", Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass, 3 October 2001;
- Mikheil Saakashvili, Inauguration Speech, 25 January 2004;
- Remarks by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 21 September 2004;
- Address by Mikheil Saakashvili at the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 22 September 2006;
- Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili at the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 27 September 2007;
- Mikheil Saakashvli, Televised Address to Nation, 8 November 2007;
- Mikheil Saakashvili, Inauguration Speech, 21 January 2008;
- Remarks by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 24 September 2009;
- Remarks by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2010;
- Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 23 November 2010;
- Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 22 September 2011;
- Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 25 September 25 2013;

- Address by Bidzina Ivanishvili, Prime Minister of Georgia, at the Spring Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 23 April 2013.

The 1997 document has neither been published nor officially translated; it was therefore been examined with the support of a local interpreter. All the other documents were screened using the software AntConc in order to assess the frequency of predefined semantic groups I considered relevant for understanding the regional dimension of Georgia's international stance and the extent to which the country has self-represented in relation to different regional imaginaries.

In general, the key narratives seem to confirm the main findings gleaned from the interviews, except for fewer references to the Black Sea. The South Caucasus is more frequently represented as part of Europe; for the latter, it is more common in these documents to be mentioned in it its sub-regional and plural dimensions (South-Eastern Europe) and related to terms such as "return", "values", "traditions", "norms", "family", "community" and "identity". Regional interactions amongst Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia are sustained by the EU and other European/Euro-Atlantic structures, possibly confirming the other-directed feature of Caucasianness; nonetheless, Georgia is able to display its leading role in the South Caucasus and play an active role in Europe as well.

In spite of the lack of references to the South Caucasus, the 2005 National Security Concept does contain a significant frequency of words related to the verb "to contribute"; and the same text also argues that Georgian Europeanisation makes the whole Black Sea European, thereby revealing the potential for Georgia's international agency. Furthermore, it is quite telling that in the same period (2006–2009 Foreign Policy Strategy), an original criterion of alignment was proposed in addition to the reference to different regions: namely, Georgia's inclusion in an international coalition of democracies. However, this element had a regionality of its own when it is linked to the Community of Democratic Choice and the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development, both aimed at bridging the Baltics, Black Sea and Caspian Sea in a trans-regional space to be connected to Europe.

Scanning the documents overtly addressing an international audience, the "semantic complex" connected to one or more ideas of the region clearly predominates.

Unsurprisingly, the most recurrent terms are those that reference Europe, often associated with romanticised concepts such as "family" ("family of European democracies"[55]; "there is one Caucasus, that belongs to Europe and will one day join the European family of free nations"[56]), "home" ("return to our European home"[57]), "(re) unification", "dream" and "peace". On the one hand, Europe forms a natural part of Georgia's history: accordingly, Georgia is historically a part of Europe ("Georgia is a European nation and this is not a recent revelation. We would in fact deny our history if we felt—or acted—otherwise"[58]; "our European vocation which is so deeply enshrined in our national identity and history"[59]; "Georgia was the first European social-democratic republic ever proclaimed in 1918"[60]; "European destiny"); on the other hand, Europe is a utopian objective to be achieved and an instrument of *temporal othering* vis-à-vis the Soviet past. This latter aspect in particular reveals a special role for Georgia, which places itself at the forefront of transformative transitions envisioned in the former Soviet area ("It is the goal of my government that we become a model European neighbour"[61]; "Europe that is whole, free, and at peace remains a goal still to be achieved"[62]; "I want to tell the Russian people that they will always be welcome in Georgia … They are welcome to come too if they want, in order to understand how a post-soviet society can turn into a European one"[63]; "Only a 'mental revolution' could lead to a European transformation of our societies. This is the message that we, Georgians, brought to this region"[64]). Finally, in line with the majority of the texts analysed above, institutional embodiments of Europe (i.e. the EU) are often overlooked in favour of societal and normative interpretations of Europe (i.e. "European civilisation", "European identity", "European values and aspirations"; "European common space", "European societies"). Moreover, terms variously referring to the importance of unity frequently appear throughout the documents, thereby creating a kind of reverberation amongst ideas of Georgia's national unity (endangered by separatist provinces and centrifugal pressures from minorities), regionalist projects in the Caucasus and European integration (i.e. "drawing any 'red lines' across the continent is utterly unacceptable today"[65]).

In contrast with the other sets of documents I analysed, in these instances of discourse the idea of "West" is less conflated, meaning that references to the EU and NATO, respectively, are more decoupled,

and integration into "Euro-Atlantic" structures is not seen as generating an undifferentiated, homogeneous whole. Second, the contours of Georgian state identity are sketched using fewer terms that evoke the connective role of the country (i.e. bridge, crossroad); terms such as "transit" and "corridor" are still present, but Georgia seems to instead present itself as a small, mountainous country. Imaginaries linked to the idea of "connection" are related to regional institutions/groupings rather than Georgia as a country (i.e. referring to Black Sea regionalism: "As the ancient saying goes, the road is the life. A new life, in our case"[66]; "GUUAM is an ideally placed bridge for different European institutions into the heart of Eurasia. And it's a two-way bridge"[67]). In addition, Georgian state identity seems to be less based on imitating successful examples of transition (i.e. the Baltic model) and regional cooperation (i.e. "we have obtained ample information about the Visegrad Group, Southeast European Cooperation Initiative, South Balkan Development Initiative, Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Northern Europe Initiative"[68]).

Lastly, the regional imaginary of the Caucasus is ever-present throughout the texts: some of its features are constant, i.e. the reference to Caucasian unity and "non-discrimination" between North Caucasus and South Caucasus ("We might belong to different States and live on different side of the mountains, but in terms of human and cultural space. There is no North and South Caucasus, there is one Caucasus"[69]); the vision of a region of people rather than institutions; and the representation of a region that is simultaneously historical and open to transformation:

I came here to speak about this change and to promote a specific vision—a vision for a free, stable and united Caucasus. From Pushkin, Lermontov or Tolstoy's times till now, the Caucasian mountains were a symbol of wilderness and paradoxes, a region where individuals and souls were fundamentally free, but where citizens were politically oppressed. Where people and cultures were deeply tolerant but where governments and authorities created artificial divisions, where shepherds would cross 5000 meters high mountains, but where rulers erected walls nobody could cross. I came here today to tell you that these times are vanishing, that the dream of unity and peace is possible.[70]

For centuries, the Caucasian mountains have been a geopolitical mystery, a beguiling paradox—a region where individuals and souls were

free, but where citizens were oppressed; where cultures were tolerant, but where governments created artificial divisions; where people never ceased to feel deeply Europeans, but where walls erected by Empires turned Europe into a faraway mirage, where men and women were striving for peace, but where wars seemed unavoidable. I came here to tell you that we must put an end to these times, that cooperation must replace rivalry, that negotiation must prevail over the rhetoric of war".[71]

To summarise the conclusions drawn from the interviews and document analysis, it could be argued that Georgian foreign policy is deeply informed by references to different regions regardless of their specific institutional shape. This enduring narrative linking Georgia to various (sub)regional groupings was further confirmed by a limited (and extemporaneous) period of participant observation carried out during fieldwork in Tbilisi. On the occasion of an informal meeting hosted by the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in May 2013, experts from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia envisioned joint projects bridging the South Caucasus and the Visegrad group. Whilst the Chatham House Rule applied to that meeting, one of the participants mentioned the idea of recovering and restoring GUAM as a new Visegrad-like format. Later on, during a follow-up, one-on-one interview with another participant, the idea was presented that it would make little sense to draw a parallelism between South Caucasus and the Visegrad group considering that the latter was motivated by the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Central and Eastern European countries. Moreover, during the same conversation, the interviewee underlined that envisaging a resurrection of GUAM in the wake of Visegrad's achievements was impracticable due to the diversity of attitudes vis-à-vis the EU and NATO in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Azerbaijan and their differentiated willingness and capacity to emancipate themselves from Russian-centric structures and frameworks.

Although references to sub-regional groupings sometimes turn out to be of limited pertinence, regional imaginaries continue to flourish. During the 2013 Wroclaw Global Forum,[72] Tengiz Pkhaladze, chairman of the International Centre for Geopolitical Studies, introduced a further group, i.e. the group of the four NATO aspirant countries, and depicted Georgia as a part of it. According to Pkhaladze, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro should act similarly to the Visegrad countries to establish a format of cooperation for pursuing the pathway of Euro-Atlantic integration. In

the wake of Pkhaladze's contribution to the debate, Alex Petriashvili, the then-Minister of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, reaffirmed his approval of the formalisation of such group. By contrast, other regional imaginaries—which might be judged less functional or pragmatic—more incisively contribute to the shaping of Georgia's state identity: references to the South Caucasus can thus be interpreted as a pleasing façade, as part of the same wide-ranging and multicoloured Potemkin politics of regionalism I referenced previously.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that narratives change slightly depending on the "audience": by comparing inaugural state-of-the-nation speeches and addresses to the United Nations General Assembly, it becomes clear that references to the South Caucasus and Black Sea are downplayed when elites address domestic constituencies (instead of the international community). This contributes to the interpretation of these regional imaginaries as both attempts to win free of post-Sovietness and other-directed constructions which reproduce a practice of delimiting, naming and symbolising spaces and groups of people from the outside.

5   KYRGYZSTAN AND THE REGION(S)

Investigating references to regional imaginaries in the interviews carried out in Bishkek (March–April 2014), the overall impression was that such references are similar in frequency and content to the data collected during fieldwork in Georgia. Central Asia is an idea no less contested than the South Caucasus. By contrast, however, Central Asian countries (conventionally yet arguably understood as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) have undergone an official process of constructing an imaginary of the region and have been embedded in a number of common regional institutional frameworks.

In December 1991, Nazarbayev, Akayev, Nabiyev, Niyazov and Karimov (the heads of the Central Asian states) met in Ashgabat[73] to work towards developing a coordinated voice opportunity in negotiations over the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which were launched without them.[74] When Nazarbayev put forward a proposal for some form of Turkic or Central Asian Union (Anderson 1997), Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan revealed their reluctance to be formally tied through any collective arrangement; however, the Ashgabat meeting was followed by other analogous summits, such as the ones held in Bishkek in April 1992 and in Tashkent in January 1993.

During this latter meeting, the five leaders decided to specify the term "Central Asia", implicitly differentiating it from the previous denomination "Middle Asia and Kazakhstan", whilst Nazarbayev even proposed a platanus tree with a single root and five branches as a symbol to represent Central Asia.[75]

In spite of these developments and the fact that Kyrgyzstan has repeatedly joined all the regional institution-building initiatives in Central Asia, the region did not emerge as a straightforward idea to be associated with the country. Rather, Kyrgyzstan appeared to be at the centre of nested and overlapping imagined spaces (Eurasia, Turkic community/civilisation) whose relationships with Central Asia were described in vague terms. Moreover, none of the interviewees identified Kyrgyz' belonging to Central Asia as a *constitutive* feature of Kyrgyz self; rather, references to Central Asia often appeared in the second half on the interview and then only as a "reaction" to the interviewer's questions mentioning the term "region".[76] Once the conversation explicitly turned to regionalism, all the respondents mentioned Central Asia; however, this region was defined in a variety of ways, employing assorted criteria of regionality.

The redefinition of Central Asia in the early 1990s was often minimised by the interviewees. This could be interpreted as a sign of ambivalence surrounding the country's relationship with its Soviet past—in other words, Kyrgyzstan does not appear to have fully carried out its process of *temporal othering*. At the time the interviews were carried out, Kyrgyzstan was struggling with negotiations regarding its membership in the Eurasian Custom Union: the overall adverse attitude of the majority of the respondents vis-à-vis this particular initiative did not prevent them from expressing positive opinions about the Soviet Union, in spite of the fact that Eurasianist projects and the Custom Union itself have been associated with the 70-year-long history of integration.

Not even the interviewees' representations of Russia as a threat and the resentment they expressed towards Moscow[77] ("there is common understanding that, if it were not for the Russian people, the Kyrgyz population would still have lived in yurts"[78]) inhibited their portrayals of the Soviet Union as a context of solidarity and equality amongst nations, a significant stage of development for Kyrgyzstan and the catalyst for statehood in Central Asia. The image of the Soviet past in negative terms was noticeably present but not consensual and, above all,

Kyrgyz' independent trajectory was not narrated as being disconnected from Soviet legacies.

As a result of the fact that a *temporal othering* was never really completed vis-à-vis the Soviet past, there is no clear-cut definition of Central Asia in relation to the Soviet Union or, more generally, of what makes Central Asia a region. In other words, it might be argued that the process of *spatial othering* is still at an early stage of delineation as well, as the research did not turn up any widely agreed-upon understanding of the region. In a few cases, Central Asia was identified with the Fergana Valley to represent a "geographically inseparable and intermingled group of countries, contiguous with each other"[79]; whilst at other times, the region was defined in connection to South Asia. Similarly, in some cases, it was represented as including Turkmenistan whilst in other cases the definition given implied the exclusion of this country.

The majority of respondents referred to common traditions and cultural practices derived from a shared past without clarifying which historical period they were using as a reference; Central Asia was thus confusingly described (i) as an *artificial* production of the Soviet Union and (ii) as a region which was *naturally* interconnected during the pre-Soviet period and subjected to fragmentation by the Soviet ethno-federal system.[80] The first characterisation frames post-Soviet Central Asia as a captive structure to be defined in relation to Russia ("playground for Russia", "southern frontier of Russia", "buffer zone", "corridor") whilst the second definition identifies the foundations of "Central Asianness" as lying in the interdependence between nomadic and sedentary peoples, whose complementarity allowed them to contain the expansion of the Chinese empire towards the Steppes. By the same token, it paves the way for an emancipatory understanding of Central Asia: according to this depiction, the latter should be reconstructed to let the countries of the region to "survive as nations" and collectively resist being roped into acting as the "Russian backyard" and being subject to ongoing Russification. Whereas in the case of Georgia the country seems to frame its post-Soviet agency in the context of the region (in terms of "normative" leader in the South Caucasus), the round of interviews carried out in Bishkek provided a contrasting picture in which Central Asia as a whole might be endowed with potential agency.

By contrast, Kyrgyzstan per se was seldom attributed any specific features of international/regional actorness; rather, it was described as being dependent on the outside, as a recipient of investments, as relying

on "international guarantees" and foreign support or as a transit territory whose mountains create "a sense of disconnection and marginality amongst Kyrgyz people".[81]

At various times Kyrgyzstan has tried to position itself as an international actor: after having joined the World Trade Organization (as the first in the former Soviet space), it attempted to contribute positively to the accession of other post-Soviet countries (such as Ukraine). In September 2011, Kyrgyzstan also submitted its candidacy to be nominated as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Moreover, it has tentatively displayed its role as a mediator at the regional level as well, both on the occasion of the Tajik civil war (when Akayev decided to host talks in Bishkek) and by launching the "Bishkek Process" (a series of high-level meetings about the stabilisation of Afghanistan within the framework of the EU Troika and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of Central Asia).[82] However, all of these initiatives have been narrated as lost opportunities, emphasising instead that Kyrgyzstan is a small, remote country ("the end of the world"[83]) with few resources and underpowered capabilities. Instead of being a *contributor*, "Kyrgyzstan is a 'joiner' […]. Somebody has counted how many countries joined how many regional organisations, and Kyrgyzstan was the number one: it has joined every possible regional configuration appeared after the Soviet collapse […] Kyrgyzstan needs to be part of all these because they are venues and possibilities for the country to maintain connections and relations […] The leadership of the country has always been concerned about being left out. Also, the choice of not joining can be interpreted as a protest by Kyrgyzstan".[84]

Against this background, Kyrgyzstan has also been represented as *different* than the other Central Asian "stans" in terms of democratic achievements and political pluralism. These features seem to shape the Kyrgyz self and should be understood not only as a gradual liberal disclosure of the country,[85] but also as a multiplicity of actors engaged in the definition of a Kyrgyz idea of the state. Whereas the president is broadly identified as the main source of foreign policy-making, traditional institutions (linked to either clannish or religious affiliations) play a fundamental part in the informal governance of the country; in addition, some respondents reported at least two initiatives aimed at contributing to the political socialisation of the Kyrgyz

people and modelling the international actorness of the country. The first is the International Congress of Kyrgyzstan Citizens and Forum of Compatriots "Mekendeshter", organised annually by Roza Otunbayeva's Foundation along the lines of the "popular diplomacy" plan launched by Chingiz Aitmatov (Issyk-Kul Forums). The second is a non-governmental project (Өркүндөө кыймылы) aimed at training a new generation of elites: one of its objectives is precisely to establish the meaning of "being Kyrgyz" through a bottom-up process.

The blurred trajectories of "regional association" and "regional disassociation" might be interpreted as connected to the fact that Kyrgyzstan is still in the process of developing its idea of the state and defining its external role; in the same vein, the series of documents aimed at delineating specific Kyrgyz strategies of security and foreign policy-making do not seem to have articulated a coherent Kyrgyz vision of the world. This inconsistency in the ways the Kyrgyz self is defined through processes of regional othering was revealed throughout the following documents selected for textual analysis as part of this research:

- Diplomacy of the Silk Road (1998);
- National Security Concept (2001);
- Foreign Policy Concept (2007);
- National Security Concept (2009);
- National Sustainable Development Strategy (2013).[86]

These strategic documents, deliberately developed to deliver the official posture of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy, were supplemented with the following instances of discourse:

- Address by Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, United Nations General Assembly, New York, 20 September 2002;
- Address by Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, United Nations General Assembly, New York, 2 October 2003;
- Address by Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, United Nations General Assembly, New York, New York, 28 September 2004;

- Address by Mr. Kurmanbek Bakiyev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, United Nations General Assembly, New York, 17 September 2005;
- Address by Mr. Igor V. Chudinov, Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic, United Nations General Assembly, New York, 26 September 2009;
- Statement by Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, at the General Debate of the 66th Session of the General Assembly, New York, 22 September 2011.

Throughout these texts, there is a persistent idea that Kyrgyzstan is in transition: despite the fact that "Kyrgyzstan [lies] at the very centre of the Eurasian continent, at the junction of several civilisations, having taken in and absorbed a multiplicity of cultures and ways of looking at the world" (Diplomacy of the Silk Road), and in spite of its transit potential and multivector aspirations, it is mainly represented as a "country of the South" (Diplomacy of the Silk Road) whose conditions of remoteness and isolation (2007 Foreign Policy Concept) have resulted in a "nation without priorities" which has spent two decades in "survival mode" (2013 National Sustainable Development Strategy). The second key feature lies in a variable conceptualisation of Central Asia and, in general, intermittent trajectories of "regional association" and "regional disassociation".

Similar to the screening carried out with regard to Georgia's texts, the second set of Kyrgyz documents analysed here include those released in international contexts such as the United National General Assembly (in the Kyrgyz case, the sample of documents only covers the 2000s, as 2002 was the first year a Kyrgyz president addressed the UN rostrum). The Kyrgyz state identity that emerges from these documents is only weakly related to regional imaginaries: with the exception of the 2009 statement, the "semantic complex" connected to one or more ideas of the region (i.e. "Central Asia", "Eurasia") appears less frequently here than in Georgian documents (0 times in 2002). The term "region" itself appears less than five times in each document, with two peaks in 2005 and 2009 (17 and 11 times respectively). Kyrgyz state identity is instead connected to its political and economic characterisation: on the one hand, Kyrgyzstan is presented as a country engaged in a process of democratisation (terms related

to this semantic complex appear 17 times in a 1.5-page-long document); on the other hand, the most significant semantic complex is the one including terms such as "development"/"developing"—"poverty"/"poor"—"donor"/"assistance"/"aid". Finally, whereas regional imaginaries do not seem to sustain Kyrgyzstan's "catch-all" behaviour vis-à-vis regional organisations, there is one interesting component of Kyrgyz state identity which has triggered national discourses about international coalitions and groupings: Kyrgyzstan as a mountainous country.

6   Moldova and the Region(s)

The magmatic and topical nature of the debate about Moldovanness significantly shapes the narratives produced and conveyed by political and cultural elites in response to questions about their country's international actorness and positioning. Three main themes were consistently employed in every single case to contour Moldova's foreign policy, external identity and role on both regional and international stages. The first of these was the characterisation of Moldova as a "borderland" and tendency to identify its political trajectory—not only post-independence but across the country's long-term history—with is location "at the crossroads". In some cases, this imagined spatiality was defined in ambiguous terms—"we are somewhere in-between", "we are in a sort of limbo", "no man's land", "frontier between Europe and Asia"—that suggest a rather weak local agency, capabilities and resources that are insufficient to juggle multivector ambitions and the impossibility of impacting not only the regional dynamics but also the country's own course. In other cases, this location was defined in binary terms, i.e. "either East or West", yet envisaging the worst-case scenario of ending up "neither East nor West". In the framework of contemporary politics, this mental map translates into seeing Moldova at the junction of two alternative options, each with its own pragmatic and material implications: on the one hand, there is the EU, implying a certain pathway of reforms and the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area enshrined in the EU-Moldova Association Agreement; on the other, there is the Eurasian Economic Union. These two options are frequently perceived as mutually exclusive, and this divisive representation resonates at both the societal level and the level of policymakers and political institutions. Hence, the second recurring theme to have emerged from the round of

interviews held in Chisinau is the fact that foreign policy narratives and attitudes are embedded in the routinised discourses elaborated in the framework of political parties. In other words, in the case of Moldova (more so than in the other two countries studied in this chapter), interviewees tended to describe their country's foreign policy by quite consistently mapping the political fields that correspond to the different positions, sources and actual agents involved in foreign policy-making. This latter is generally the playground of political parties[87] whose platforms and manifestos are largely defined along the European/Eurasian axis[88]—although the choice of field can be either tactical or strategic, and is certainly nuanced and contested amongst different party members; nevertheless, the interviews displayed a quite straightforward outline of the Moldovan political landscape. On the other hand, political parties have been portrayed as business-driven groups rather than ideology-based formations, thus implying the significant role oligarchs play as "grey eminences" whose economic interests impact the country's domestic developments to such an extent that one of the interviewees used the term "captured state" to describe how deeply oligarchs' transnational networks intrude into Moldova's politics (the same interviewee also underlined that one of the channels for exerting external influence on oligarchs' behaviors is leaking information and compromising materials about them, information that is frequently stockpiled by Russian services and commonly known as "Kompromat").

The main cleavage characterising Moldova's party politics (and its underlying dynamics) reflects an extremely fragmented society and further exacerbates the lack of social cohesion around who Moldovans are and where they stand in the international and regional system. This divisive narrative can be found throughout Moldovan institutions and communities, including the Church ("The Church is considered to be one of the most trusted institutions but I do not agree with that: our Church is as divided, fragmented as our society. The pro-Europeans trust the Mitropolia Basarabiei, the pro-Russians trust the Moldovan Orthodox Church…"[89]) and the diasporas, which tend to be absorbed by either the Russian or Romanian communities living and working abroad ("We are a voiceless group in almost every country where we are"[90]). Against this background, the two fundamental regional imaginaries mentioned by all the interviewees during our conversations regardless of prompts from me as interviewer were, unsurprisingly, Europe and Eurasia.

As for the former, one remarkable element of consistency found throughout the interviews is the interchangeability of Europe and the EU: in other words, ideas of Europe which do not imply the institutional and policy facets were very limited and interstitial. References to the EU tended to be pragmatic and practical, associated with the formal steps of Moldova's integration process; in particular, interviewees mentioned elements that are official, codified, enshrined in documents and "in the agenda", such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, ENP Action Plan, Association Agreement and Visa Liberalisation Action Plan—the latter being presented as a crucial milestone. Moldova's approximation to the EU was frequently presented in terms of policy-making in Brussels and quite unidirectional relations between sources and recipients of Europeanisation; however, the EU was also frequently presented in the framework of domestic (Chisinau-based) chains of policy-making: a course mediated, for example, by President Voronin's initiative to establish a committee to coordinate Moldova's activities surrounding its EU-vector (September 2002), the Presidential Decree on setting up the National Commission for European Integration (November 2002) and the redenomination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as "Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration" (since 2005). At the same time, Moldova's Europeanisation was described as a process which overlaps with or is apprehended by the ruling coalitions which have succeeded each other in Moldova since 2009 (Alliance for European Integration, July 2009–February 2013; Pro-European Coalition, May 2013–February 2015; Political Alliance for a European Moldova February 2015–July 2015): the failing course of these coalitions has inevitably discredited the European project as such, alienating it from the civil society. The other source of Moldovans' disaffection vis-à-vis the EU lies in the technical and specialised nature of the process ("project implementation", "homework" to complete, budget reporting, monitoring and evaluation), which was interpreted by one interviewee, a high-ranking official from the Ministry's General Directorate for European Integration, as an effective way of responding to citizens' demands for improved living standards. However, the thinness of the visionary dimension has made the EU "accessible" and appealing only to limited sectors of society (i.e. "public intellectuals, commentators, political analysts"), especially after the credibility crisis affecting the country's pro-EU parties. A part of the interviewees did certainly frame

Europe in "normative" terms ("development", "democracy", "transformation", "modernisation"; "ethnically, socially and geographically they [Moldovans] have always been European, in terms of values and aspirations, to freedom of movement, of speech, human rights…"; "Europe is a space where you can express yourself freely, including in your mother language…we have the right to decent living…Europe is about the rule of law, protecting citizens' right and the right to a good judiciary system…Europe for us is the only way to build a democratic society but also the only way to put an end to the transition period, to finish the decolonisation process. We are small, and you can see the European idea that small states in this globalising world cannot be on their own, it is a club of small nations…"[91]), but this cannot consider the most prevalent discourse. There are instead two other aspects, evident in the interviews, which are worth mentioning. First of all, there is a permeability to opinions and decisions about Moldova's Europeanness originated outside the country and resulting in its peripherialisation: a number of interviewees actually echoed at various times an understated awareness that Moldovans are considered "low-quality Europeans" but also "the ENP success story". Second, there is a complex process of othering: interviews conveyed alternate sentiments about having been grouped together with other countries which are considered different. Whilst Moldova and Ukraine are intimately interdependent, they share a similar function of "securing European borders" and they are "historically closer to Europe"; Georgia for example, has a different Euro-Atlantic agenda which includes a NATO dimension, and the Caucasus, in general, belong to a different civilisation—"they are less European". In one case, the same interviewee affirmed that "it was so visible how different we are—we six [Eastern Partnership] countries—In terms of wishes, in terms of what we would like to achieve together, commitments and also the way of seeing things… the differentiation is important, and the possibility to work at different speeds…these countries are different, problems are different, visions are different, ambitions are different…".[92] At the same time, however, she admitted: "I perfectly understand the EU, it is difficult to deal with every country in a particular way, and however much we can argue and cannot argue, we like it or don't like it, it is something that is happening in this way… we tried to influence the process…we understand how difficult it is for countries like Moldova to really be heard…but then we are looking at this instrument of policy whatever it offers as an intermediary stage for our goals… we are trying to take what is there, what we can to do, what to improve, to enhance,

to strengthen our cooperation and this helps us to move forward…this is a stage, a phase, a stone in our path for our objectives…we will be part of the decision-making process, we will talk the same language…we do not want to be hostage of this, and this is the message we are sending, yes we are from this region, yes we cannot change geography…".[93]

The Eurasian vector is no less complex and subject to contestation, as it can be broken down into at least three different—yet interrelated— components: Russia-Moldova relations, Moldova's embeddedness in the Eurasian regional system and the "cognitive" dimension of path dependency.

The majority of interviewees consistently identified a number of ways Russia has intervened to hinder Moldova's pathway of Europeanisation: the conflict in Transnistria, Moldova's access to the Russian market in terms of both goods (especially agricultural products) and the labor force (seasonal workers and long-term migrants who conspicuously contribute to the country's GDP through remittances), and energy security (in particular natural gas prices). Furthermore, Russia's propaganda is channelled through mass media and broadcasts, considering that "35% of population is Russian native-speakers, [including] Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians"[94] and more generally workers who entered the job market during the Soviet era and used Russian to communicate with their supervisors.

The continued diffusion and use of Russian amongst certain sectors of Moldovan society not only facilitates the diffusion of messages packaged in Moscow, it also reflects the continued existence of the mentality of "Homo Sovieticus"—an aspect that was highlighted by several interviewees. Post-Sovietness is enshrined in memories (generating sentiments of nostalgia for the past) as well as specific practices and features of Moldova's political culture (the ones mentioned by the interviewees include the cult of strong men, the sense of belonging to a borderless, transnational space and a statist and paternalistic understanding of public institutions, but also paranoia, a fear of authorities and inhibition to contest them, lack of care for public space and the tendency to view the state as an instrument of repression and an entity to be distrusted).

Whereas respondents often portrayed the EU as a cure that can help overcome the above-mentioned conditions of post-Sovietness and "protracted transition",[95] they also addressed Moldova's membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the recent institutionalisation of the Eurasian Economic Union, although mentions of these organisations were scattered throughout the conversations.

Although the conversations were highly varied, they did all follow a twofold scheme of comparing and contrasting Russia's and the EU's presence and influence in the country. Against the background of this binary pattern, the majority of interviewees serially talked about Moldova's systematic integration into regional and sub-regional cooperation and coordination arrangements mushrooming in South-East Europe[96]: the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the Central European Initiative, the South-East European Cooperation Initiative, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the South-East European Cooperation Process and the South-East European Law Enforcement Center ("we are quite active in all the regional cooperation platforms and frameworks, all the possible ones, especially from the Western Balkans, CEI, Black Sea, GUAM, Danube Strategy…"[97]).

Following the same scheme as the other two cases, the main texts produced by Moldova's foreign policy-making were both analysed, and compared and contrasted with the interviewees' responses. More specifically, the documents listed below were processed using qualitative techniques of discourse and content analysis. The first set of documents includes a series of official papers produced by the institutions in change of and/or involved in the formulation of foreign policy instructions and directions for the country:

- 1995 Foreign Policy Concept;
- 2005 Parliament Declaration on the Political Partnership on Achieving the Objectives of the European Integration;
- 2008 National Security Concept;
- 2009 Activity Program of the Government of the Republic of Moldova "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare";
- 2011 National Security Strategy;
- 2011 Activity Program of the Government of the Republic of Moldova "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare".

The second set of documents gather a series of statements, speeches, addresses, pronounced and or delivered by representatives of Moldova explicitly addressing an international audience:

- Statement by President Mircea Snegur at the United Nations General Assembly, 46th Session, 82nd Meeting, New York, 2 March 1992;

- Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Tiu at the United Nations General Assembly, 47th Session, 21st Meeting, New York, 1 October 1992;
- Statement by President Mircea Snegur at the United Nations General Assembly, 49th Session, 10th Meeting, New York, 29 September 1994;
- Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihai Popova, at the United Nations General Assembly, 51st Session, 7th Meeting, New York, 24 September 1996;
- Statement by President Petru Lucinschi at the United Nations General Assembly, 53rd Session, 14th Meeting, New York, 24 September 1998;
- Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicolae Tabacaru at the United Nations General Assembly, 54th Session, 22nd Meeting, New York, 2 October 1999;
- Statement by President Petru Lucinschi at the United Nations General Assembly, 55th Session, 5th Meeting, New York, 7 September 2000;
- Statement by President Vladimir Voronin at the United Nations General Assembly, 58th Session, 8th Meeting, New York, 23 September 2003;
- Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Stratan at the United Nations General Assembly, 59th Session, 14th Meeting, New York, 28 September 2004;
- Statement by President Vladimir Voronin at the United Nations General Assembly, 60th Session, 7th Meeting, New York, 16 September 2005;
- Address by Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova Iurie Leanca at the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central European Initiative, Bucharest, 13 November 2009;
- Statement by Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Iurie Leanca, at the 17th OSCE Ministerial Council, Athens, 2 December 2009;
- Address by Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Iurie Leanca, at the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the South East European Cooperation Process, Istanbul, 22 June 2010;

- Statement by Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Iurie Leanca, at the 121st Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Istanbul, 10 May 2011;
- Statement by Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Iurie Leanca, at the 18th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Vilnius, 7 December 2011.

The 1995 Foreign Policy Concept was developed earlier than the "homologous" strategic documents delivered by the other post-Soviet countries; however, two features of Moldova's state identity were explicitly set out in the first lines of the text: on the one hand, the fact that Moldova is a South-Eastern country from the former Soviet Union and, on the other hand, that Moldova is a country in transition. Further, Moldova was defined as a potential "regional hub" through the possibility of using the Danube as a transit artery to link the country to Central Europe, the Black Sea and the Middle East.[98] The reference to these conditions that clearly establish the boundaries of Moldova's international actorness then gradually disappeared in the later documents listed above. On the contrary, there is a fourth characteristic defining Moldova's state identity and international behavior which was often reiterated and confirmed throughout the documents, i.e. neutrality.

Moldova's positioning in the international context has been defined along multilateral as well as bilateral axes. However, the respective "order of appearance" of each actor, institution, partner or another, its centrality in the text and semantic characterisation have slightly changed over time. For example, the 1995 Foreign Policy Concept mentioned different organisations with which Moldova aimed to liaise or in which it sought membership (OSCE, NATO BSEC, Danube Commission, CEI, Visegrad Group, Nordic Council, Baltic Council…) as well as different countries with which it hoped to develop relations; however, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States appeared in first place amongst Moldova's foreign policy priorities, followed by vaguely defined "Europe and North America". Although relations with Romania stood out as specially important, references to Europe were expressed in the text via a constellation of different terms ("integration into European structures", "integration into the European community", "integration into the European Union", "relations with the countries of Europe", support to

the "European security system"…), whilst different Europes seemed to contour different sets of collective interlocutors for Moldova ("countries of Central and Western Europe", "countries of Eastern Europe", "Baltic countries", "Scandinavian countries").

This fragmented and multifaceted representation of Europe gradually changes in the later documents, which reference the EU and process of European integration more distinctively. On the one hand, references to Europe become largely predominant if compared to references to Russia and the Eastward vector in general; on the other hand, the EU has been associated with terms such as "membership" and "join". The texts refer to specific policies and schemes developed by the EU in relation to Moldova, in the framework of the ENP and the Eastern Partnership, by expressly mentioning specific initiatives or instruments such as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, the Mobility Partnership, the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan and the EUBAM mission: this confirms the conventional interpretation of Moldova's approach towards its own pathway to Europe, generally seen to be pragmatic and resistant to romanticism. However, the 2008 National Security Concept, in particular, specifies what it means to Moldova to be a European state: democratic, economically advanced and secure. Furthermore, it is worth noting the references to European values evoked in the 2008 National Security Concept as well as the 2009 and 2011 Activity Programs respectively. Nonetheless, according to the 2008 National Security Concept itself, the South-East European Cooperation Process, Southeast European Cooperative Initiative and other multiple regional and sub-regional cooperation arrangements in which Moldova participates are designed "to facilitate the integration to the EU", reiterating the rational and practical drivers of the country's foreign policy.[99]

Whilst the European vector has gradually been incorporated into Moldova's strategic documents in a more visible way, the elements of "post-Sovietness" have weakened over time, at least at the declaratory level and in official papers. It is telling that in the 2011 Activity Program, the element of cooperation with the other post-Soviet countries is not conveyed, for example, through the Commonwealth of Independent States or other platforms centred around Russia: GUAM and BSEC have become the channels for cooperating with Georgia and Azerbaijan; Central Asia is granted the same (limited) significance as Arab countries and Israel; the CIS is mentioned right at the end of the document, perhaps in an attempt to pin it down as a structure as well as a grouping.

Although the Soviet past is less and less detectable in Moldova's foreign policy documents throughout the 2000s, documents overtly addressing an international audience (for example, presidents' addresses at the UN rostrum) do include some terms that continue to define Moldova as an incomplete state with serious structural limitations. Throughout these texts, Moldova is primarily depicted as an Eastern European country, and before the international audience its Europeanness is indeed stated earlier and in a slightly more idealised way than when addressing the domestic one:

> The Republic of Moldova has joined the United Nations as a young European country. Our European aspirations are determined by our geo-political and cultural affiliations to the European democratic space, and we are linked to it by our Latin heritage also. For us, to be isolated from the European space and its values means to facilitate the re-emergence of some influences from which we suffered painfully in the recent past. That is why our vital and fundamental goal is the integration of our country into Europe. In this context, we firmly look forward to increasing cooperation and linkage with the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Western European Union (WEU), and the CSCE, including expanding our relations with the European Union, which represents the main guarantee of democratic practices and values.[100]

More than as an Eastern European country or European *tout court*, however, Moldova tends to internationally represent itself as a young, small country "in transition". This latter label is used very frequently and at different times: Moldova is a transitional state seeking and receiving support, assistance, encouragement (three other recurrent terms used when addressing an international public), a country whose transformations and reforms are molded by and adapted to meet the expectations of external observers' ("these favorable changes have been welcomed with satisfaction by many delegations, both governmental and non-governmental, which recently visited our country"[101]).

In the same way as Georgia with respect to the South Caucasus, there may be one niche in which Moldova exerts local agency and ownership over its own international breadth, namely the context of South-Eastern Europe. At least at the discursive level, there is a discernible difference in the way Moldovan representatives and politicians depict their own

country when speaking from a global stage (i.e. the UN rostrum) as opposed to a more confined setting frequented by other countries sharing similar constraints and experiencing similar challenging. Whereas in the first case, Moldova is depicted as a country in transition, a recipient of international aid striving to emulate, imitate and adopt international standards and practices in order to be part of the international community, in the second case, Moldova is able to perform a more active role involving contributing, initiating and providing:

> During the last years, Moldova positioned itself as a responsible regional partner carrying out several regional Presidencies, and bringing its own contribution to the security and prosperity of the region. Furthermore, my country will continue to be firmly engaged in contributing to the strengthening of the role of SEECP as an indispensable mechanism aimed to support the SEE countries in the implementation of the EU policies and requirements, acting as 'the voice of the region'.[102]

7   COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

As expected, a comparative take on Georgian, Kyrgyz and Moldovan foreign policies has enabled us to view these three countries as different cases of post-Soviet actors in terms of their respective embeddedness in regional frameworks. In other words, they display a significant degree of dissimilarity in the process of making of the self through "regional association" and "regional disassociation".

Whilst Georgia seems to have regularly relied on a set of regional imaginaries and sought to actively contribute to their discursive construction, Kyrgyzstan's "regional landscape" gives rise to a hazy image characterised by non-consensual and scattered interpretations. Conversely, Kyrgyzstan has repeatedly engaged in different initiatives of regional institution-building and been tied by its membership to various instances of post-Soviet regionalism inspired by either Central Asian integrative objectives, Eurasian projects or originating from the Russia-centred hub-and-spoke system. On the contrary, Georgia's regional imaginaries have not been sustained by institutionalised arrangements or been embodied in loosely formalised regional institutions. As already mentioned, Moldova constitutes an intermediate case in many respects: its state identity is tied to a binary interpretation of its regional positioning which has led the country to ambivalently hold its seat in the Commonwealth of

Independent States, at the same time joining a multitude of sub-regional arrangements (often conflicting with post-Soviet regional structures) and subscribing to the closest form of partnership with the EU (i.e. the 2014 signature of the Association Agreement).

Whilst Moldova's regional imaginaries seems to be mostly substantiated by institutional anchorages, in the other two cases, the interviews revealed that regional imaginaries through which political and cultural elites frame their country' state identity are sustained by cognitive, affective and/or functional dimensions which are not necessarily reflected in a regional institution-building output.[103] Regional imaginaries connected to the ideas of South Caucasus and Central Asia stem instead from a romanticised re-elaboration of pre-Soviet experiences of regionality that contributed to their being identified as "historical regions" (Todorova 1997, 2005) (Table 1).

Table 1 Georgia's, Kyrgyzstan's and Moldova's ideas of the region (author's elaboration)

GEORGIA	South Caucasus	Europe	Black Sea	Post-Soviet
Cognitive Dimension	High	Low	Low	High
Affective Dimension	Low	High	Low	High
Functional Dimension	High	High	High	Low
KYRGYZSTAN	Central Asia	Eurasia	Silk Road	Post-Soviet
Cognitive Dimension	Low	Low	Low	High
Affective Dimension	Low	Low	Low	High
Functional Dimension	Low	High	High	Low
MOLDOVA	South-Eastern Europe*	Europe	Eurasia	Post-Soviet
Cognitive Dimension	Low	Low	Low	High
Affective Dimension	Low	Low	Low	High
Functional Dimension	High	High	High	Low

*This also includes other sub-regional ideas which were occasionally mentioned.

In spite of this "inverted parallelism", it is interesting to note that the element of "post-Sovietness" is present in both cases (with different degrees of resistance and contestation), apparently confirmed by the fact that the majority of interviewees made repeated references to a resilient "Soviet mentality" ("mental maps", "collective memories", "generations that remember the same past", the same routines in private and public life, the same education schemes) regardless of the research setting (Tbilisi, Bishkek or Chisinau).

In some of the interviews, a few respondents mentioned a *generational divide* in post-Soviet countries specifically in reference to the prospect of the Soviet mentality vanishing through generational turnover; as stated by Martha Brill Olcott (2013) in a recent op-ed about Central Asia:

> Over half of the population in each of these countries is under the age of thirty, and most citizens have therefore received all of their secondary education in their national school system and had no direct exposure to shared "Soviet" values" […] All of these changes will have a compounding effect on the next generation of Central Asians. Soviet identities have clearly faded away, especially for anyone over the age of forty, and contact with the Soviet past is becoming more difficult.

By the same token, the above-mentioned Integration Barometer has found that in the majority of polled countries, integration preferences depend significantly on age: especially in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, the older generations have displayed a marked attraction to the post-Soviet region, which is instead less attractive for the younger generations (similar trends, with smaller value excursions, are observable in other countries as well, i.e. Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia) (Zadorin 2012).

In order to take into consideration the generational dimension, the online focus groups involved young people (under-35) interested in international affairs but not necessarily involved in foreign policy-making. Besides their primary goal of testing the resilience of "Soviet mental maps" amongst new generations, the focus groups offered a tool for balancing the gender gap (especially in Georgia, 90% of the interviewees were men) and bias generated by the fact that all the interviews were carried out in the respective capitals.

The focus group carried out with young Georgian experts revealed a tension between the country's formal foreign policy stance (currently

very much oriented towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures[104])
and its complex positioning at the regional and international levels.
Such tension is linked to both external and internal factors: on the one
hand, the Georgian foreign policy-making chain is not fully institutional-
ised ("foreign policy is 'what states make of it'"[105])—it lacks back-office
research, inter-agency coordination and long-term vision, and is rather
characterised by an emotional take on the issues. On the other hand,
Georgia "is part of several regions/areas at the same time": in the mid-
dle of the Eurasian corridor, "[located] between the West and the East",
"along the […] Silk Road".[106] In this regard, young Georgian experts
expressed more cautious opinions about Georgia's own character as
potential leader or avant-gardist in the region:

> Georgia can have a very positive role across the region, just it does not
> work towards this goal. At the regional level Georgia's foreign policy is
> vague and not very succinct. It lacks momentum, […] flexibility and adapt-
> ability to changing realities.[107]

> It has a potential to play an important role. However, as one of the post-
> Soviet countries, it really faces a number of challenges at the regional as
> well as at the international level.[108]

> I doubt that Georgia is able to play any role on the international arena, it
> lacks all the potential for it. […] it can potentially play an important role
> in the region […]. However, considering the enmity level between the
> neighbouring states and other security issues, I find it difficult to define
> what role it could be […] it seems to me that political decision-makers pay
> less attention to the regional issues and even try to escape this notion of
> "Caucasian" in exchange of "European".[109]

> Georgia could become key player in terms of Turkey-Armenia, Armenia-
> Azerbaijan relations. For this, country needs strong diplomatic engage-
> ment and cooperation with all parties, and work to portray itself as an
> open platform for dialogue of its neighbours and its good will for build-
> ing the regional peace and cooperation. I think, here Georgia has the
> diplomatic potential it has never used. […Georgia] should set a success-
> ful example for other small countries, on how to survive post-Soviet leg-
> acy, conflicts and chaos and transform to democratic country with market
> economy and rule of law.[110]

Moreover, the responses about Georgia delivered through the focus
group made fewer references to the country's post-Sovietness than did

the interview findings: this might suggest that the generational dimension plays a role in the representation of Georgia's regional belonging. The influence of the "Soviet mentality" and the ongoing impact of the "Soviet heritage, with some kind of mixture of Caucasian or Asian cultural elements" are still present, but they are problematised in some ways ("Georgia is a state painfully struggling with Bolshevik legacy"[111]) and perceived as a feature that is currently conferred from the outside, as well:

> In the academic literature FSU and post-communist state is often the label for Georgia. This expresses potential similarities with the rest of the states in terms of former institutions and political/economic management of the state. But along with changes and reforms these states vary nowadays as they went through different paths since 1991 and are still in the process of changing. Moreover, as Georgia was integrated in this grouping (Soviet Union) against its will, belonging to the FSU in terms of self-identification would not make sense. However, technically Georgia will always remain a former Soviet country (you can't escape from history) and will have neighbours from the FSU […].[112]

> Intuitively, "Former Soviet Space" or "post-communist country" represent more or less neutral categories of description. However, in societies in transition, they are frequently avoided or criticized by political elites as they were pejorative labels of failed democratic transitions. […] Hence, "post-Soviet" is sometimes juxtaposed to "democratic" or "European". In this regard, Eastern European countries (in political sense, hence, including South Caucasus countries) often underline their belonging to "Europe" or "European space".[113]

There are nonetheless several aspects that crop up again and again in the narratives of Georgian specialists and policymakers regardless of their exposure to the Soviet experience, i.e. regardless of the abovementioned generational dimension. First, Georgian state identity is characterised by multiple regional belonging, namely the South Caucasus, Europe and the Black Sea, even though at least one of the young experts clarified that "regional belonging has frequently been selected consciously by the political leaders"[114]:

> This selection was related to political goals. For instance, Zviad Gamsakhurdia emphasized the Caucasus region and its unity in the context of absent aid from the West. However, along with increasing expectations for more potential benefits (economic as well as security) from the West, Georgia started identifying itself with the Black Sea Region which brings

it closer to European states. […] other than that, belonging to the West was also a way of modernization for Georgia […] But when this goal boils down to values, it is disputable whether it is possible to identify Georgia as part of Europe.[115]

Second, "there are different Europes" and "Europe itself is a contested notion".[116] This ambivalent reference to Europe (which constitutes an evident similarity to the findings from the interviews and document analysis) allegedly results from the confluence of European and Persian elements in the South Caucasus; moreover, Georgia's Europeanness is mainly related to Christianity. Whilst "European values were coming via St. Petersburg and Russian Orthodox Church",[117] the incorporation of the South Caucasus in the Russian Empire produced a sort of "filter" that has been interposed between Georgia and its Europeanness.

Third, the South Caucasus is mostly depicted in emotional rather than geopolitical terms, primarily as a space of nations/peoples rather than a group of states, just "as it is represented in the pictures of Dmitri Ivanovich Yearmakov".[118] In fact, whilst Georgia could be grouped together with Moldova and Ukraine or even with "Armenia, Eastern EU countries like the Balkans, and Southern EU like Spain, Italy",[119] references to the South Caucasus seem to be unavoidable:

> For me the South Caucasus is associated with Karvasla - the old guild-hall of merchants in the old district of Tbilisi. […] It is something manifested in the Knight in the Panther's Skin - "to us men He has given the world, infinite in variety we possess it" - this very word "variety", which in Georgian has a much powerful meaning "utvalavi ferita" (multiplicity of colours). It is a space that shaped ideas of Rustaveli, Vazha-Pshavela. […] We had trilingual poet Sayat-Nova who was Tbilisi born Armenian, but wrote poems in three languages (Georgian, Armenian, Persian).[120]

The South Caucasus was imaginatively described by young Georgian experts as a "multicultural and multilingual space"[121] that has inherited a medieval history of intense communication and commercial exchange ("as Churchill said once about Balkans could be used about the South Caucasus: these people have more history than they can digest"[122]); at the same time, however, the contemporary vision of Caucasianness has been subjected to manipulation, as "modern politicians have misinterpreted the idea of the South Caucasus, made it too political or, if you like, geopolitical".[123]

In one exceptional case, a focus group participant emphasised the "international" origins of "South-Caucasianness" and its mistakenly romanticised characteristics. According to this respondent, Georgia finds itself "confined within a narrow South Caucasus regional framework that seems to be still at work amongst Georgia's Western partners and allies"[124]; similar statements feature other replies provided by the same person:

> "South Caucasus" is a typical category used by Western political structures, which is also a case of "Black Sea region"[125].

> Even if it is a part of a nomenclature and a discourse espoused by Georgia's Western partners, I don't think Georgia should pursue and construct its "national brand" and a foreign policy identity based on a vague concept of "South Caucasus". For me, South Caucasus merely means a sum of independent states located South to Russian Federation. The particular space included in the umbrella of "South Caucasus" undoubtedly needs further cooperation amongst players and a long period of peace-building processes; however, any attempt to conceptualize regional integration - even if we are talking about a hypothetical set of progressive and mutually beneficial projects of partnership - should avoid past mistakes of portraying South Caucasus or Caucasus in non-rational, mystified terms that always fall short of validity and broader perspective[126].

The focus group with Kyrgyz and Moldovan young experts, respectively, enjoyed far less participation; in spite of this fact (and considering that even a non-response might be understood as an indication of differing attitudes towards the topic addressed by the focus group), it is possible to trace specific reactions vis-à-vis the questions circulated through the platform.

On the one hand, the international/regional positioning of Kyrgyzstan is the result of passive and reactive foreign-policy-making which has been officially defined as a part of a "multivector strategy" but is actually "only responding to the relations between big actors, such as Russia, China and the USA. These countries have been changing their foreign policies towards Kyrgyzstan (or Central Asia), and Kyrgyzstan has been reshaping its policy accordingly".[127] Central Asia does not seem to hold a special place amongst the regional imaginaries that shape Kyrgyz state identity, whereas the country was equally described as a "former Soviet" and "post-communist" state and part of other groupings of countries with no

regional anchorage ("economically, I would place Kyrgyzstan amongst developing and low-income countries […] culturally, it has been moving towards the group of Turkic states […]. Also, it is a transitioning democracy state"[128]).

On the other hand, (the very few) Moldovan focus group participants confirmed that their country is mostly conditioned by external perceptions and opinions, as well as (dis)interests, and that its international/regional positioning is not actively and locally designed—it rather results from multiple, sedimented and stratified sources of path dependency:

> I have recently realized that nobody really cares about Moldova. Most won't even know where it is on a map. […] Still, we are caught in the crossfire between the Western world and Russia.

> […] we are so confused about our country […]. We don't have a specific role, we are just a group of survivors […] we are on the cross of European and Russian Cold war, like a territory to be taken. We are trying to identify ourselves as a nation, but some of us really don't understand to whom we belong (as a nation).

> I always imagine a Venn diagram. East and West, Russia and Romania, Europe and Eurasian Customs Union…and we're kind of in the middle. […] We're living in the Milky Way, we're humans from Earth, East-Europeans, our nationality is Romanian, we're Moldovans, we're Bessarabians, we lived in the Soviet Union and we're close to the Back Sea.

In spite of some evidence pointing towards differences between young and old generations and several indications that Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova are embedded in different political frameworks, there is one thick *fil rouge* weaving together the diverse storylines, characterised by references to regional imaginaries frequently generated by/deriving from other-directed processes and moves.[129] The "shadow of the past" has an organising capacity vis-à-vis evolving ideas of the state: whilst this aspect has been studied elsewhere in relation to domestic politics (Lahusen and Solomon 2008; Getmanchuk et al. 2012), here it is connected to the formation of the external political identity of the state and parallel co-constitutive processes of state-formation and region-formation. Unsettled state identities in both the countries under investigation have affected the way the post-Soviet region has been imaginatively

re-constructed; conversely, political elites draw on different regional imaginaries to shape their country's state identity.

Similarly to "foreign policy imaginaries", "security imaginaries" and "geopolitical imaginations" (Guzzini 2012), regional imaginaries thus emerge as socially shared narratives and discourses out of which representations about the world and the position of a country in the international system are created. In other words, drawing on a common "reservoir of raw meanings embedded in their collective memory of the expert field, including historical scripts and analogies", different actors grant meaning to and make sense of their country's role and place in the world, relying on an organised set of interpretations and "system of references that frames and authorises certain opinions as parts of the debate" (Guzzini 2012, p. 52).

In the case of Georgia, it has been observed that multiple regional imaginaries have affected the definition of the country's role in the international system and its international actorness; notions of in-betweenness, marginality and otherness are closely connected to "post-socialist, postcolonial and postimperial overtones [which] constantly intersect and communicate in the complex imaginary of the ex-Soviet space" (Tlostanova 2012, p. 141). Although Georgia is gradually claiming space to contribute to and mould the regional imaginaries shaping its own state identity, it has been shown that these imaginaries generally draw on other-directed constructions and have been legitimated by their functional character. Therefore, the need to juggle sub-regional or alter-regional options has in some ways transferred Georgian internal features into a regional system in fragmentation. Since the early 1990s, Georgia has pursued a politics of temporal and spatial othering, trying to establish itself in *disassociation* from the Soviet past and the collective arrangements proliferating in the post-Soviet space. Likewise, even though this process of othering seems to be completed on a formal level, the habitus of representing itself in *association* with a regional group has not been dispelled.

On the other hand, both Kyrgyzstan and Moldova have feebly linked their political identities to specifically contoured regionalising ideas, and yet they seem to undergo the (re-)construction and (re-)structuration of their environment according to regional projects, visions and institutions.

Kyrgyz pursuit of multivector partnering has resulted in its "purchasing" all the available membership options in post-Soviet regional

organisations. In other words, Kyrgyz state identity in the making has favoured other-directed policy outcomes and the legitimation of a multitude of regional projects even when they have turned out to be dysfunctional or ineffective.

Moldova's attempts to swing between Europe and Eurasia, controversially keeping a foot in both camps, have been reproducing a dichotomous way of thinking and narrating its own condition that not only echoes the Cold War style worldview, but also reverberate all the past histories of being subjected to one empire or another.

Although presenting distinct traits and specificities, the three countries which have been examined in this chapter share some commonalities: the political and cultural elites have used and abused of regional ideas, imaginaries, symbolic geographies: on the one hand, these latter have often performed as classificatory devices in a constellation of polities in the making[130]; on the other hand, they have not stemmed from local exercises of defining and redefining their idea of the state and how it relates to its regional and international environment.

NOTES

1. Within the current chapter, some parts revolving around Georgia have been partially published in Russo 2016.
2. This criterion of periodisation was shared by a significant majority of the interviewees the author encountered in Tbilisi between April and June 2013.
3. According to Stephen Jones, it is a "rejection of Russia", whilst Alexander Rondeli (2001) found it more appropriate to term it a "fear of Russia". Jones has also considered how Georgia's Europeanness has been specifically facilitated/mediated by Russia, seeing as it was connected to the country's incorporation into the Russian Empire in the first decades of the nineteenth century.
4. See the Constitution of Georgia as adopted in 1995 and amended in 2006, namely the articles 48, 78.1 and 69.3 (www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf). Although the constitution granted the Parliament a specific role in foreign policy-making, Saakashvili fostered a centralised and personalised style of leadership. Finally, any form of parliamentary resistance to presidential prerogatives faded with the death of Zurab Zhvania in 2005 (Jones and Kakhishvili 2013, p. 32).
5. Gamsakhurdia established very positive relations with Dzhokhar Dudaev, the first president of independentist Chechnya (Skakov 2000).

6. Russian military (the main bases were in Akhalkalaki, Batumi, Gaudauta and Vaziani) were allowed to remain on Georgian territory for 25 years.

7. Georgia joined the Council of Europe in 1999: that year was marked by many important political developments and critical foreign policy decisions. In fact in 1999 Georgia also joined the World Trade Organization and withdrew from the 1992 Treaty on Collective Security; Russia agreed to start its withdrawal from its military bases in Georgia in 2000 and to complete the transfer of power from Russian border guards to Georgian forces.

8. As detailed later, Georgian Europeanness was narrated by the political elites as an imaginative construction going beyond the institutional frameworks of cooperation with the EU structures. In his 1997 state of the union address, Shevardnadze declared that joining Europe "was for centuries the dream of our ancestors", whilst 2 years later, in his speech of accession to the Council of Europe, the Chairman of the Georgian Parliament, Zurab Zhvania, suggestively declared "I am Georgian, therefore I am European" (Rondeli 2001).

9. The Project TRACECA (TRAnsport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) was conceived of as a multimodal transport route extending from the Yellow Sea to the Black Sea (namely the Georgian ports of Poti and Batumi) and various arterial pipelines, therefore reviving the ancient trade route of the Silk Road. It is quite telling that as early as September 1990 Eduard Shevardnadze, in his capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, had already raised the idea of restoring the Silk Road, on the occasion of an international conference held in Vladivostok.

10. In November 1999, on the occasion of the OSCE summit in Istanbul, an agreement on the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline route for the export of oil from the Caspian region was signed by Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Shortly afterwards, at the Helsinki European Council in December 1999, the European agenda included preliminary talks about the possible inclusion of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey in the EU and, implicitly, bringing the Black Sea region into the EU. These developments contributed to instilling a measure of confident enthusiasm towards the "West": in October 2001, in his address to the Institute of Central Asia and Caucasus of Johns Hopkins University, Shevardnadze stated that "Georgia is not the southern flank of Russia's strategic space, but rather the northern flank of a horizontal band of Turkish and NATO strategic interests, running from Turkey and Israel to Central Asia. Geography, history and culture locate Georgia comfortably within this band".

11. In 1997, 24% of Georgian considered Russia important to Georgia's future, whilst in 1998, 43% of Georgians believed that Georgia should ally itself with either Russia and the CIS, or Russia and Western countries jointly, despite the fact that only 29% had a favourable view of Russia (Jones 2003).

12. (a) the renunciation of territorial claims and recognition of existing borders; (b) a commitment to the protection of human rights; (c) the protection of transport and communication assets; (d) joint efforts to preserve the natural environment and deal with natural disasters; (e) the promotion of ethnic and religious tolerance and the renunciation of extreme forms of nationalism; and (f) support for and comprehensive protection of international projects and investments in the Caucasus region.

13. Whilst some of these "Caucasian endeavors" remained inconsistent, contradictory and still "autochthonous" (i.e. in June 1997, Zurab Zhvania proposed an "Interparliamentary Assembly of the Caucasus"), others were promoted or initiated by non-Caucasian actors: early in 1999, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov proposed that a "Forum on the Caucasus" be convened, whilst in June 1999 a Caucasian Summit was held in Luxembourg under the aegis of the EU.

14. On the occasion of a meeting in the framework of the Council of Europe held in Strasbourg.

15. Those countries' initials form the acronym that gives their coalition its name. As a matter of fact, with Uzbekistan joining GUAM in 1999, the initiative became GUUAM; nevertheless, the Uzbek period only lasted a few years, as Uzbekistan first decided to suspend its membership 3 years later and then withdrew in May 2005, following the controversial events in Andijan. GUAM might be considered an "antecedent" of the Community of Democratic Choice, established December 2005 by nine states of Northern, Central and Eastern Europe in Kiev and representing a cooperative endeavour between the Baltic, Black Sea and Caspian Sea. The Community also renewed the axis existing at that time between Georgia and Ukraine, as its creation was envisioned in the Borjomi Declaration of August 2005, a joint statement signed by Mikheil Saakashvili and Viktor Yushchenko.

16. One of the main focuses of cooperation addressed by GUAM is the establishment of a transport corridor aimed at mitigating Russian pressures on energy provisions; in drafting plans to develop pipeline routes that avoided Russian territory, GUAM member states certainly enjoyed the encouragement and support of the USA. This point must be framed within the broader context of GUAM's attempts to escape to the West through an unconcealed aspiration towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. See, for example, the Chisinau Declaration of the GUUAM

Heads of States "In the name of democracy, stability and development". It is interesting to note how this point slightly changed on the occasion of the Batumi Summit (July 2008), with the declaration of the GUAM member states' intention of developing "a space of integration and security in the GUAM region as an integral part of *all-European* and *Euro-Asian* areas" (emphasis added by the author). Besides the aspects related to energy security and the aims of capitalising on their transit potential and drawing nearer to the EU, one of the priority objectives of the cooperation of GUAM member states has always been the resolution of "protracted conflicts" and counteraction of separatist threats, in particular in the Transnistrian region of Moldova, South Ossetian and Abkhazian regions and Adjaria in Georgia, the region of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan and the Crimea in Ukraine.

17. These documents are not publicly accessible. The author retrieved them thanks to the help of Prof. Neil MacFarlane and Irakli Mchedlishvili.

18. This shift was also reflected in the establishment of a Minister of Integration in Europe.

19. There was even a proposal that this latter be transformed into a Joint Russia-NATO training camp for the South Caucasus or Black Sea region (International Crisis Group 2004).

20. As early as February 2004, Saakashvili publicly stated that Russia had given up its "imperial hegemonism" and declared that 'Russia will not create additional problems but it will actually assist Tbilisi in resolving the conflicts on its soil' (Itar-Tass Weekly News 11 February 2004).

21. Russia committed to closing its military facilities in Georgia and Moldova as a precondition for the ratification of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty by OSCE member states. Georgia collaborated closely on this agreement with regional partner countries Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.

22. As early as December 2000 Russia's "selective" visa policy was already creating a number of frictions in bilateral relations. Russian decision was explained by the need to make Russia's borders more secure against alleged infiltration by Chechen terrorists. However, the new visa requirements did not apply to the inhabitants of secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which border Russia. Later, in 2002, tensions rose over the Pankisi Gorge, which Moscow alleged was used by Chechen terrorists with links to al-Qaeda. The Russian military demanded that Georgia allow Russian troops entry into the gorge to remove the terrorists, in the name of its right to self-defense. Shevardnadze threatened to withdraw from the CIS. On August 23, an unidentified aircraft bombed the gorge, whilst in September Putin warned that Russia might resort to unilateral action in the gorge, and the Defense Minister

Ivanov called for a 20–45 kilometer security zone along the border. In October, Georgia agreed to joint anti-terrorist patrols and the exchange of information with the Russians. At a later stage, however, tensions increased once again. In South Ossetia, whilst Georgia pursued a combination of humanitarian measures, economic pressure (closing the Ergneti market) and military action to reintegrate it, Russia provided military assistance to separatists. In Abkhazia, Russia actively interfered in presidential elections and obtained the vice-presidency for the pro-Moscow candidate Raul Khadzinba. In 2006 worsening tensions between Russia and Georgia manifested in blocks interrupting the transport of Russian energy supplies to Georgia, provoked by two explosions in North Ossetia and one explosion in Karachaevo-Cherkessia which damaged some infrastructure (a pipeline and an electrical cable), the Russian suspension of entry visas to Georgian nationals and a Russian ban on the import of some Georgian products. The escalation intensified when Georgian law enforcement arrested four Russian military personnel, charging them with espionage; soon after, Russia organised maritime maneuvers in the Black Sea and mobilised its forces in North Ossetia. Furthermore, Russian authorities coordinated a discriminatory campaign against Russian inhabitants of Georgian origin and Georgians working in Russia, who were subject to deportation and persecution and whose daily lives were damaged by a blockade on money transfers and postal, airline, automobile, sea and railway transport between Russia and Georgia. The Russia-Georgia crisis took a bad turn in 2007, as evidenced by a host of signs of rising tension and two episodes in particular: in March, several helicopters entered Georgia's air space in the Upper Kodori Valley from Russia's Karachaevo-Cherkessia region and launched projectiles against local government buildings; later, in August, an unidentified aircraft dropped an air-to-surface missile near a newly upgraded Georgian military radar station located near to the South Ossetian conflict zone.

23. In spite of positive bilateral relations between Ankara and Tbilisi during the 1990s, the ambivalence of Turkish-Georgian relations was endangered by the rapprochement between Moscow and Ankara: for example, Turkey did not provide the support Tbilisi expected for Georgian accession to NATO. Turkey has also hosted facilities belonging to Abkhazian civil organisations and was accused of maintaining trade relations with Abkhazia in spite of the Georgian sea blockade imposed on the breakaway region since 2004. Georgia seized several Turkish commercial ships on the charge of trespassing in Georgian waters: the vessels were en route from İstanbul, Samsun and Trabzon to Abkhazia through the Black Sea.

24. In particular, with the 2007 EU enlargement to include Bulgaria and Romania, "'Europe' reached the Black Sea shores for the first time ever. As the EU moved eastward, the Black Sea moved westward, and became regarded as an integral part of the European project" (Manoli 2010, p. 8).

25. The Black Sea-EU Platform of Cooperation has been exactly launched in Tbilisi in 1999.

26. See the decision not to offer Georgia a Membership Action Plan during the NATO Summit in Bucharest, in April 2008.

27. Georgia, Turkey and Azerbaijan have been involved in a series of talks to develop trilateral formats of cooperation over the last few years. In June 2012, the three foreign ministers met to sign the Trabzon Declaration and commit to a Trilateral Sectorial Cooperation Action Plan for 2013–2015. Moreover, the armed forces of the three countries have begun to carry out special exercises ("Caucasus Eagle").

28. Baltic–Georgian bilateral relations are very positive, especially Tallinn's relations with Tbilisi. In February 2005, the Baltic States came together with Bulgaria, Poland and Romania to form "Georgia's New Group of Friends." The purpose of this alliance was to concentrate on the changing nature of politics in Georgia following the Rose Revolution. The group's focus has been to promote Georgian–EU relations, Georgian–NATO dialogue and cooperation in the Baltic and the Black Sea regions.

29. Bakiyev immediately started to shape his government team relying on both opposition leaders and former office holders, merging old Communist Party nomenklatura, the Akayev nomenklatura and those involved in Akayev's overthrow; in a parallel process, heads of local governments ("akins") and directors of state enterprises were appointed, mostly outside constitutional bounds and in keeping with the rules of informality and kinship. Likewise, in the Parliament, the majority of the newly elected deputies were people involved in grey activities or even criminal business, as well as local power brokers. Several former members of the opposition coalition who had occupied a power position during the very early stages of Bakiyev's presidency were removed and dismissed (Azimbek Beknazarov and Roza Otunbayeva, amongst others) (International Crisis Group 2005, 2008).

30. Roundtable Discussion with Roza Otunbayeva and Martha Brill Olcott, April 16, 2010 Washington, D.C.

31. Orthodox Christian Turks.

32. Russia's interests in Moldova are not confined to Transnistria and embrace all ethnic Russians in Moldova (and other former Soviet countries) (King 2003, p. 76).

33. "Moldovan Parties Back EU Integration Process", *RFE/RL Newsline*, 11 May 2000.
34. "Moldovan President Sees No Point in Joining Russia-Belarus Union Now", *RFE/RL Newsline*, 11 October 2001.
35. "Moldova deported Russian elections observer", *Sputnik*, 20 July 2005, https://sputniknews.com/world/20050720/40938270.html. At the same time, Russia's reprisals included the introduction of economic sanctions and visas for Moldovan citizens.
36. For example through its membership in the South East Europe Cooperation Process (2006) and the opening of a Common Visa Application Center in Chisinau (2007).
37. Giorgi Khutsishvili has supported the idea of unification of the three states (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and the three conflicting territories (Abkhazia, Tskhinvali and Karabakh) granting the latter a special status. Following Khutsishvili's vision, the Teqali Peace Center has been created in the province of Kvemo-Kartli, at the intersection of the borders amongst Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Quite differently from Khutsishvili, Abkhazian historian and politician, Viacheslav Chirikba has suggested that the North Caucasian Republics of the Russian Federation, the federated Republic of Abkhazia-Apsny, South Ossetia and the Adjarian Republic, forming a common state with Georgia, should have been brought together in the framework of the pan-Caucasian union.
38. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
39. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
40. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
41. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
42. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
43. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
44. Interview, Tbilisi, June 2013.
45. Interview, Tbilisi, June 2013. That has been particularly recalled in the interviews carried out after the clashes occurred in Tbilisi in May 2013, when an anti-homophobia rally became an occasion of violent confrontation between the conservative Orthodox sector of the society and some groups of activists.
46. Interview, Tbilisi, June 2013.
47. Interview, Tbilisi, April 2013.
48. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
49. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
50. The opposition to Georgia's Soviet past introduces a distinction between "temporal othering" and "spatial othering".

51. Idiosyncrasy in relation to the reference to Eurasia was a common denominator throughout all the interviews. Nevertheless, one must take into consideration the fact that Eurasianism has its fans in Georgia as well—for example, the circle of the Eurasian Institute led by Gulbaat Rtskhiladze.
52. Interview, Tbilisi, May 2013.
53. Georgian «self-orientalisation» and «internal   orientalism» vis-à-vis Armenia and Azerbaijan.
54. As reported in *Azerbaijan International*, Vol. 8, No. 4.
55. Address by Mikheil Saakashvili at the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 22 September 2006.
56. Remarks by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2010.
57. Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili at the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 27 September 2007.
58. Address by Mikheil Saakashvili at the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 22 September 2006.
59. Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili at the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 27 September 2007.
60. Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 23 November 2010.
61. Address by Mikheil Saakashvili at the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 22 September 2006.
62. Remarks by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 24 September 2009.
63. Remarks by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2010.
64. Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 23 November 2010.
65. Eduard Shevardnadze, Transcript of speech at Kennedy School: "Searching for Security in a Changing World", Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 3 October 2001.
66. Statement by Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, BSEC Yalta Summit, 5 June 1998.
67. Remarks by Georgian Ambassador Tedo Japaridze at the GUUAM Workshop, Stanford University, 17–18 November 2000.
68. Remarks by Georgian Ambassador Tedo Japaridze at the GUUAM Workshop, Stanford University, 17–18 November 2000.
69. Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 23 November 2010.
70. Remarks by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2010.

71. Speech by Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 23 November 2010.
72. The 2013 Wroclaw Global Forum (http://wgf2013.com) was organised by the Atlantic Council and the Polish Institute of International Affairs, co-funded by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supported by the Mission of the United States to Poland.
73. This consultation was preceded by two other similar meetings held previously, in 1990, in Alma-Ata and Tashkent.
74. "The Ashkhabad Declaration", as reported in Brzezinski and Sullivan (1997), pp. 46–47.
75. "Karimov, Nazarbaev Comment", *Interfax*, 4 January 1993, as reported in Brzezinski and Sullivan (1997), p. 356.
76. The interviewees did not introduce the idea of Central Asia when asked about the role of their country in the international context (which has always been the opening question).
77. One has to consider that the crisis in Ukraine was escalating in the period when the author was carrying out this fieldwork, raising concerns that Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan would be Russia's next target for destabilisation.
78. Interview, Bishkek, March 2014.
79. Interview, Bishkek, March 2014.
80. This contradiction can be exemplified by two contrasting definitions of the Kyrgyz self in relation to its external environment: on the one hand, the country is a part of "Central Asia with a Soviet flavor", on the other hand, it is a part of "post-Soviet space with an Asian *mentality*". Interviews, Bishkek, March 2014.
81. Interview, Bishkek, March 2014.
82. Interview, Bishkek, March 2014.
83. Interview, Bishkek, March 2014.
84. Interview, Bishkek, March 2014.
85. According to the Kyrgyz policymakers, experts and academics, this open stance is proven by the fact that this country, unlike other Central Asian capitals, hosts "Western" researchers.
86. As is clear from an examination of this case, the practice of institutionalising a specific vision of the world through the release of strategic documents is not yet completely formalised. The 1998 Doctrine was originally an address delivered by Akayev at the University of Bonn during an event sponsored by the Center for European Integration; it was subsequently transmitted by the Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the UN and even distributed as a booklet by the state secretary during a lecture in Washington, at Johns Hopkins University. Whilst the next concept about Kyrgyz foreign policy dates to 2007, in

December 2004, Akayev presented (quite tellingly, in Moscow, during a gala hosted by the Diplomacy Academy of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) his "Ideas on Foreign Policy and the World" in a book titled "Thinking of the Future with Optimism". At the time of my fieldwork in Bishkek, one of the respondents herself was recently included in a pool of experts tasked by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with drafting a new concept of foreign policy: as far as she was aware, the work of the task force did not result in a document.

87. Especially following Moldova's constitutional shift in 2000 from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary regime.

88. As one of the interviewees put it, "Moldova's politics is quite original if compared to Central European countries or the Baltics, as it is organized not along the Left-Right divide, but rather along the East-West divide".

89. Interview, Chisinau, June 2015.

90. Interview, Chisinau, June 2015.

91. Interviews, Chisinau, June 2015.

92. Interview, Chisinau, June 2015.

93. Interview, Chisinau, June 2015.

94. Interview, Chisinau, June 2015.

95. It is interesting to mention that one of the interviewees has associated the persistence of the transitional status with the resilience of a "mentality of *provizorat*", that is a collective attitude, diffused across the Moldovan society, of considering themselves in a temporary, provisional condition, passing from one stage to another—not only at a geographical but also temporal junction.

96. A few interviewees has also defined, always *en passant* and without much specification, Moldova as a Balkan country.

97. Interview, Chisinau, June 2015.

98. The representation of Moldova as a connector has been used by several politicians, on different occasions, inserting the country in a multiscalar context. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nicolae Tiu, speaking at the UN General Assembly in October 1992, defined Moldova as "a meeting-point between Eastern and Western Europe"; some years later, in 1997, during his Inauguration Speech, President Patru Lucinschi stated that Moldovans consider themselves "as a bridge between the West and the East" tout court, thus widening the possible political landscape of action.

99. The functional dimension of regional and sub-regional cooperation was expressed even more explicitly, precisely at a meeting convened in the framework of one of these respective organisations: "[…] the Republic of Moldova became a full-fledged CEI member. This step was of special

significance for us, having in mind that the Central European Initiative was one of the first European structures of regional cooperation that we have joined, being viewed as an entrance room to the European Union. I would like to mention that this perception was well motivated, because during the following years most of the CEI members had become members of the European Union. Today, nine members of the CEI are part of the EU, six countries are candidates for joining the EU, and other three, amongst them the Republic of Moldova, cooperate with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. Dear colleagues, On behalf of my country, I want to express my sincere hope that the Central European Initiative will continue to act as an efficient tool in the political and economic relations amongst the member states, as well as will serve as a bridge that links the EU and the countries that aspire to be part of the great European family. We pledge for the continuous support of the CEI countries that are not members of the European Union in achieving their European aspirations". Address by Iurie Leanca at the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central European Initiative, Bucharest, 13 November 2009.

100. Statement by President Mircea Snegur at the United Nations General Assembly, 49th Session, 10th Meeting, New York, 29 September 1994.

101. Statement by President Mircea Snegur at the United Nations General Assembly, 46th Session, 82nd Meeting, New York, 2 March 1992.

102. Address by Iurie Leanca, at the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the South East European Cooperation Process, Istanbul, 22 June 2010.

103. According to Michael Keating (1998), the cognitive dimension refers to people's awareness of the region in quite basic terms, i.e. its boundaries and how to distinguish it from other regions; the affective dimension identifies the extent to which the region provides an identity framework, even in competition with other sources of identities, i.e. local, class, national identities; and the instrumental dimension identifies the extent to which the region represents a base for collective action in pursuit of social, economic and political objectives. This classification also builds on different strands of literature, i.e. Hveem (1968), Turner et al. (1987), Gabriel (1989), Higgott (2007).

104. "Internationally Georgia has [a] very one-dimensional approach […] The government does not consider other options. There is an enemy which is Russia, but the rest of the world is ignored. […] The approach reminds me a Cold War style approach when there were either friend or foes, in other words black and white view of the world" (Focus group participant).

105. Focus group participant.

106. Focus group participants.
107. Focus group participant.
108. Focus group participant.
109. Focus group participant.
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111. Focus group participants.
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126. Focus group participant.
127. Focus group participant.
128. Focus group participant.
129. These two dimensions are closely interrelated: in fact, the institutional and/or psychological affiliation to a collective political space was induced by the Soviet rule, and it was tellingly reproduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union by a diverse constellation of actors. The way the post-Soviet countries have been uninterruptedly categorised, for example in international organisations, have affected how they themselves self-represented, given their transitional phase and the emerging nature of their state identity.
130. On the invention, imagination and construction of regions as an orientalising practice, largely occurred in post-colonial spaces, see for example the works of Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (on Africa), Maria Todorova (on the Balkans), Larry Wolff (on Eastern Europe).

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The Outside-In Facet: Regional Models
of Governance Transfer?

The collapse of the Soviet Union has entailed first and foremost the breakdown of its "ethno-territorial structures of 'institutionalised multi-nationality'" (Hughes and Sasse 2001, p. 239). The successor states have thus prioritised efforts to delineate their newly established sovereignty by differentiating from the previously unitary system and re-articulating state authority and state territoriality. *À mont* of any normative or institutional orientation to be imprinted on post-Soviet statehood, the fundamental political ordering of these new states was affected by the dual process of Soviet disassembly and regional reassembly, whilst the resilience of a "post-Soviet" regional structure has convoyed the new states into the international system. The Commonwealth of Independent States was conceived immediately after the fragmentation of the Soviet Union as a mechanism for managing the dismemberment process itself; since then, regional organisations in the former Soviet space have proliferated to such an extent that there is disagreement about which governance institutions in the region are to be considered accepted, acknowledged and legitimated.

As mentioned in Chap. 2, regional organisations in the former Soviet space have often been studied in terms of their "non-transformative impact" and depicted as "conservationist alignments" exalting the principles of political stability, regime security, national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Nonetheless, and despite the fact that one of the objectives of this research is to downplay an "RO-centred" approach to regionalism, the establishment of the first

post-Soviet regional organisation, the Commonwealth of Independent States, in such a crucial constitutive phase implicitly grants it a significant role in moulding interstate relations and defining how its members deal with their statehood in the making.

In order to explore in more depth the co-constitution of the region and the state, this chapter turns to the study of outside-in dynamics. Whereas in Chap. 5 a comparative analysis of foreign policy narratives and how it conveys regional imaginaries provided an account of the inside-out vectors, I propose to investigate the outside-in element through an analysis of the role regional organizations play in the process of state formation. This chapter is thus devoted to the investigation of whether regional organisations function as compensatory arrangements for the problematic issues internal to their member states and how so.

The first section counterintuitively reveals that the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation do prescribe and promote standards for the establishment of governance institutions in their member states. The rest of the chapter draws on similar background literature to explore three realms wherein regional organisations have impacted on the construction of the state in post-Soviet countries: borders, organised crime and terrorism.

1   The Transfer of Standards to Post-Soviet Regimes: Towards a Model of "Regional Clusterisation"[1]

As already mentioned, the existing literature suggests that the regional organisations of the former Soviet space trigger processes of "regional clusterisation" and establish a line of quarantine to filter out norms and standards that originate from extra-regional actors. This interpretation is consistent with a view that understands regional organisations such as the CIS and SCO as instruments for members to lock in their political systems and protect incumbent regimes.

As a matter of fact, at first glance the constituent documents of the CIS (1991 Minsk Agreement establishing the CIS and the Protocol extending the membership to non-Slavic former Soviet republics) assert the centrality of the principles of mutual sovereign equality, non-interference in other members' internal affairs and the right of the Commonwealth's people to determine their fate without external intervention (Art. 3 of the Charter). On the other hand, the same documents

also enshrined members' respect for human rights, the people's right to self-determination, universally recognised principles and norms of international law and the provisions set by the UN and OSCE; in the same line, they affirmed the intent to "build democratic states ruled by law" (Alma-Ata Declaration).

Between 1993 and 1995, the CIS took a tentative step towards establishing a human rights regime with the adoption of the Declaration on the International Obligations in the Field of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Regulations for the functioning of the Commission on Human Rights and the CIS Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.[2] In addition, the Interparliamentary assembly (IPA CIS) was created in 1992 as a sign of members' commitment to using consensus-based approaches to develop social policy, promoting respect for human rights and freedoms and engaging in humanitarian cooperation. However, the activities of CIS IPA have been limited by the "soft" nature of the acts it is authorised to issue: indeed, its "model acts" have no direct legal power and so the member states are free to incorporate them into their respective domestic systems at their discretion.

The creation of a CIS human rights regime and the institutionalisation of a tool for the dissemination of legislative best practices represented a response to the peculiarity of the post-Soviet situation. The CIS was a newly funded institution seeking to appropriately fit with the international community and acquire the "chrism" of a "proper" regional organisation. It is thus reasonable to posit that the CIS developed a strategy of international legitimation through (1) the importation of universally accepted norms (such as the protection of human rights); and (2) reference to a "golden model" of regional institution-building, namely the European one.[3] Furthermore, CIS members were successor states entering the international system as "newcomers", pursuing strategies of transition, normalisation and international recognition as sovereign actors: not only was CIS as a whole seeking international legitimation and involvement in processes of international socialisation, the same was also true of its members. Their foreign policies were therefore oriented towards a number of international and regional organisations.

As a result, the CIS' (re-)integrative endeavour ended up being "challenged" by the emergence of instances of overlapping regionalism: whilst all CIS members joined the OSCE in January 1992 (except for Russia, which was declared the USSR's continuator state), only some of them

joined the Council of Europe (Table 1). Moreover, the establishment of the Organisation for Democratic and Economic Development—GUAM signalled the emergence of alternative and overlapping alignments within the same regional space.

Given this, the fact that the Commonwealth of Independent States institutionalised mechanisms promoting democracy and human rights standards can be interpreted as either a way of leading a process of normative coordination at the regional level or a move to shield CIS' member states from external influences.[4] This latter function gradually turned out to be a priority at the dawn of the 2000s, when the tensions between the CIS and extra-regional sources of norms and standards became evident.[5]

To explain the urgency behind designing a distinct CIS model of providing governance standards, we must also look at the regional setting more broadly: indeed, the negotiations for the CIS Convention on Standards of Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms were launched in December 2000, 2 months after Slobodan Milošević was overthrown during the Bulldozer Revolution. Furthermore, whilst the first team of observers was deployed to Kazakhstan in 1994, CIS electoral observation missions began to be regularly dispatched in the same period. These moves would appear to serve a double purpose: first, to develop a tentative antidote to the "virus" of Colour Revolutions in the name of regime security and, second, to convey an "anti-OSCE" message, thereby conveying the dissatisfactions some of the post-Soviet countries harboured vis-à-vis the implementation of the OSCE's mandate "East of Vienna".[6]

As a matter of fact, a Russia-led coalition including other CIS members emerged inside the OSCE precisely to contest the OSCE electoral observation missions. In particular, the coalition contested these missions on the grounds that they violated principles of non-intervention in internal affairs and respect for sovereignty of nations and also revolved around the alleged existence of "double standards" as well as the quest for a balanced, transparent and objective approach by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) during its missions.[7]

This wave of contestation occurred in tandem with the institutionalisation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which had already emerged as a loosely structured format of cooperation in the late 1990s. With the adoption of the Shanghai Cooperation Charter in 2002, SCO member states formalised the centrality of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs (Art. 2 of the Charter)

Table 1 Involvement of the CIS member states in the OSCE, COE, Venice Commission and Conference of the Constitutional Control Organs of the Countries of New Democracy (author's elaboration)

Country	OSCE	COE	Venice commission[1]	Conference of the Constitutional Control Organs of the Countries of New democracy[2]
Armenia	1992	2001	X	X
Azerbaijan	1992	2001	X	X
Belarus	1992	[3]	(X)	X
Georgia	1992	1999	X	X
Kazakhstan	1992		X	X
Kyrgyzstan	1992		X	
Moldova	1992	1995	X	
Russia	(1973)	1996	X	X
Tajikistan	1992			X
Turkmenistan	1992			
Ukraine	1992	1995	X	X
Uzbekistan	1992			X

[1] European Commission for Democracy through Law

[2] Established in 1997. A Co-operation Agreement between the Conference of the Constitutional Control Organs of the Countries of Young Democracy and the European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe (Venice Commission) was signed in 2003

[3] In 1993, the Belarusian parliament was granted Special Guest status in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), but the country was later stripped of this status in 1996 following a referendum that approved the use of the death penalty in the country

and explicitly affirmed that international standards and rules were to be enacted in consideration and respect of internal legislation and domestic political contexts.[8] Indeed, as signatories declared, "the SCO member states support the movement of the states of the region towards democratic development with due regard for their national realities as well as cultural historical features"[9]:

> [SCO] discards "double standards" [and] respects the right of all countries to safeguard national unity and their national interests, pursue particular models of development and formulate domestic and foreign policies independently and participate in international affairs on an equal basis. Diversity of civilisation and model of development must be respected and upheld. Differences in cultural traditions, political and social systems, values and models (sic) of development formed in the course of history should not be taken as pretexts to interfere in other countries' internal

affairs. Models (sic) of social development should not be "exported". Differences in civilisations should be respected, and exchanges among civilisations should be conducted on an equal basis to draw on each other's strengths and enhance harmonious development.[10]

In spite of its "come as you are" approach, the SCO redoubled the CIS' efforts in the field of election observation,[11] aimed primarily at reaffirming the legitimacy of elections per se (specifically not calling their validity into question) and showing how their missions were carried out in keeping with the principle of political neutrality.

The institutional design of the CIS and SCO in the domain of democracy and human rights has been aimed, especially since the second half of the 1990s, at locking in the political systems and domestic institutions of their member states; in other words, these two regional organisations seem to have developed a barrier against outside-in dynamics, effectively preventing any transmission belt leading from the region to the state. In doing so, however, both the CIS and SCO have provided their members with practices of pseudo-morphism and camouflage, which the leaders of post-Soviet countries have used as a foundation on which to build various state institutions and a scheme for behaving in multilateral contexts.

2   Sovereignty-Shaping Bureaucracy-Boosting Regionalism

The measures undertaken in the field of democracy and human rights within the framework of the CIS and SCO have thus shaped a local model for post-Soviet countries to engage with extra-regional actors, balancing their insertion in the international system with instances of resistance to and contestation of "foreign" models of political development. Although developing standards in the field of democracy and human rights does not represent the core mission of these two regional organisations, the interplay between newly established post-Soviet states (within newly established regional institutions) and more "settled" international actors has contributed to defining regionally-specific norms and practices, thereby stimulating the ongoing structuration of the post-Soviet region. This process has often unfolded without framing full-fledged policies, formalising schemes of implementation or institutionalising regional bodies: in other words, without envisioning a transformative function for the CIS and the SCO. Nonetheless,

these emerging norms and practices have offered post-Soviet countries a common set of "ways to do things" and, even more frequently "ways to narrate things", and national leaders and policymakers have been able to draw on these shared practices to govern their countries and address domestic political developments according to alternative criteria of legitimisation. It is plausible to imagine that a similar outside-in dynamics have taken place through analogous mechanisms—mainly characterised by soft legalisation (Dragneva 2004)—in other fields of cooperation as well, specifically the fields that can be considered part of the core mission of the two regional organisations under consideration.

Since the adoption of its constituent document, the CIS has displayed a major interest in political and military cooperation (as stated in Sect. 3 of the CIS Charter). Whereas during the 1990s, the CIS had prioritised the prevention, localisation and resolution of conflicts arising in the security perimeter of the organisation (Sect. 4 of the Charter, 1996 Concept of Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts in the Territory of Member States of the CIS), in recent years, the organisation has gradually moved towards developing joint responses to non-traditional, transnational security challenges. This progressive shift has increasingly put the CIS on the same page as the SCO, whose main agenda is embodied in the so-called Three Evils Doctrine (2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism). Indeed, the SCO's priority is "to jointly counteract terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations, to fight against illicit narcotics and arms trafficking and other types of criminal activity of a transnational character, and also illegal migration" (SCO Charter: Art. 1).

In keeping with the arguments previously put forward regarding the CIS' and SCO's activities in the field of democracy and human rights, it can be asserted that these instances of regional coordination and cooperation located in the security realm have unintended and "indirect" outcomes and effects and, counterintuitively, actually provide something substantial within the CIS and SCO member states. In other words, the function of the region-wide Potemkin might be not only oratory and instrumental, but on the contrary, it may somehow play a role in constructing and ordering the fundamentals of statehood in the post-Soviet region.

As the following sections show, both the CIS and the SCO have developed instruments of coordination and cooperation centred on "light" programmes of capacity-building (mainly limited to technical

assistance) and, especially, the organisation of meetings and other opportunities for dialogue and exchange. In addition to summits, these mechanisms mainly consist of joint training and educational programmes targeting national policymakers, bureaucrats and officials, as well as conferences, workshops and seminars that bring together experts and advisors. Although the CIS and SCO convey regional norms and standards through elite networking and professional socialisation, it would be misleading to consider these instruments simple examples of virtual regionalism; in reality, this reliance on transnational communities of practitioners might be the most effective means of conveying region-building, given the member states' former shared reference to the same diplomatic, administrative and bureaucratic culture.

With this in mind, the next sections of this chapter aim to demonstrate that the CIS and SCO carry out two specific functions vis-à-vis the making of post-Soviet states: sovereignty-shaping and bureaucracy-boosting.

The conceptualisation of sovereignty-shaping bureaucracy-boosting regionalism is premised on a number of assumptions. First, it sheds light on the problematic aspects of an apparently similar concept, that of sovereignty-boosting regionalism (Söderbaum 2004; Taylor 2005). This latter concept has been associated with forms of regional organisations based on core principles of political stability, regime security, national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states: according to this perspective, the intersection between the notion of sovereignty-boosting regionalism and the notion of regime-boosting regionalism is not problematic. However, the element that remains under-explored is *how* sovereignty-boosting regional organisations actually boost member states' sovereignty. Therefore, in order to examine region-state dialectics and outside-in dynamics, it is necessary to refocus on the process (how member states' sovereignty is moulded through their interactions and affiliations with a regional organisation) rather than positing that a regional strategic narrative based on political stability and regime security results in sovereignty-boosting effects.

Second, in order to discover how conveyor-belt transmitting models of political organisation from the regional to the state level actually function, it is necessary to set aside interpretations of regional organisations that are based on policy effectiveness and which therefore dismiss post-Soviet regionalism as dysfunctional and/or virtual. Sociological interpretations, in contrast, treat regional organisations as "social facts" that

are created "not for what they do but for what they are—for what they represent symbolically" (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, p. 703); furthermore, these analyses take into consideration the fact that regional organisations in turn give rise to social facts.

In launching intergovernmental sites of regional cooperation, both the CIS and the SCO have contributed to the formation of regional and state bureaucracies (ministers, diplomats, officials, advisors, etc.). The latter in particular play a crucial role in the production of practices, routines, rituals, functions, categories, institutions and other performative forms of stateness, regardless of the actual effects of the governing techniques used by the bureaucracies themselves, and irrespective of the politically motivated considerations surrounding policy design and implementation. In other words, bureaucracy-boosting regionalism plays a role in constructing a symbolic language of stateness (Hansen and Stepputat 2001) and the procedural appearances of the state (Weber 1998), both of which make the "state spectacle" possible. The relevance—and problematic nature—of the "bureaucracy-boosting" dimension of regional organisations in the former Soviet space became quite evident when Nazarbayev formulated his proposal for a CIS reform plan in 2004 (he has actually attempted to reform the CIS at various times since it was established). The Kazakh president's main critique was precisely that the Commonwealth "has become an unwieldy bureaucratic association preoccupied with generating documents that have no bearing on real-life needs" (Glikin 2004). In contrast, Nazarbayev's proposal was rejected by Russia in relation to this specific point: against the background of broader disagreements over CIS reforms (with both Russia and Kazakhstan laying claim to the role of lead reformer), Lavrov in particular argued that "the reform of the CIS must not be reduced to a mechanical downsizing of the staff of the Commonwealth bodies" (Filchenko and Yozh 2006).

Regional projects of political order-making in the former Soviet space, however, are not only accompanied by the formation of bureaucracies, they also involve efforts to fashion artefacts of sovereignty. Boundaries, for example, have been understood as typical manifestations of sovereign statehood and, more broadly, the definition of "inside and outside" as well as "right and wrong" can be seen to lie at the foundations of a sovereign political agency and at the origin of the process of polity construction. In spite of their alleged "non-transformative impact", both the CIS and the SCO therefore represent examples of sovereignty-shaping

regionalism, especially in the way they operate to frame specific policy archipelagos located in crucial fields of state-making: delimiting borders, countering organised crime and combatting terrorism. These multifaceted sets of policies are indeed at the core of rescaling and renegotiating state prerogatives, as they ultimately establish spatially and legally bounded communities. The delimitation, control and surveillance of borders constitutes a foundational act for any polity insofar as establishing a boundary results in the institution of a specific territoriality and criteria of mobility. Similarly, the capacity to detect, deter and detain law evaders can contribute to the establishment of a specific normative order at the regional level.

At the same time, however, various authors have demonstrated the existence of a virtuous circle connecting state building and organised crime: they have problematised the assumption that organised crime inhibits the definition of an accomplished sovereignty, arguing instead that the latter might stir a state-in-formation to action, thereby triggering processes of state power consolidation and centralisation.[12] First, organised crime pushes the state to better define its borders and securitise them. Second, labelling individuals as "criminals" or "delinquents" is not only a discursive strategy, it is also a part of the process of defining the categories of "inlaw" and "outlaw" and, therefore, of establishing standards of legality and legitimacy: this process is to be considered a typical prerogative of the state. Third, the state's perceived degree of legitimacy in the eyes of both domestic and foreign audiences is strengthened when the elites of a state adopt an internationally derived norm to fight organised crime. Criminalising, indicting, convicting and punishing are all forms of governing: through counter-crime policies; the state not only defines the legitimate authority, it also establishes the values and principles of a certain normative community and the criteria for its membership. When conceptualising sovereignty-shaping regionalism, it thus makes sense to highlight the specific functions of regional organisations aimed at reinforcing state prerogatives, establishing policies to secure borders and deploying a law-and-order discourse (Cheliotis and Xenakis 2011).

Similarly, regionally-framed measures to counter terrorism can be interpreted as a field in which sovereign-shaping regionalism is particularly evident. By labelling violence as either legitimate or illegitimate, states acquire the power to grant legitimacy and illegitimacy to acts of violence, thus manifesting a typically statist endeavour—"an act of statecraft".[13] Regional counterterrorism strategies and schemes facilitate this course.

In the absence of explicit and formalised mechanisms of policy transfer, therefore, sovereignty-shaping regionalism establishes its own tools of governance and aims to produce a sovereignty-centred regional order based on regional definitions of peripheries and dangers, a regional understanding of justice and a regional classification of socially dysfunctional subjects and groups. In Sects. 3 and 4, these aspects are investigated through the analysis of documents issued by the CIS and SCO that have to do with borders, organised crime and terrorism. This analysis of the process of formalising border, counter-crime and counterterrorism regimes makes use of the same periodisation identified whilst studying the transfer of democracy and human rights standards. In the early mid-1990s, the post-Soviet countries were driven by a normative demand for international legitimacy and the need to show the international community that they were engaged in ongoing normalisation: regional institution-building within the CIS can be interpreted accordingly. Later, the region has become increasingly criss-crossed by overlapping and proliferating arrangements whilst the set of post-Soviet regional organisations has been consolidated by the institutionalisation of the SCO.

3   Regional Arenas and the Fundamentals of the State

Borders are the institutional representation of an interstate system, as they regulate and structure contact and interaction between states; therefore, border delimitation and management have been often interpreted as a constitutive aspect of statehood. Following the international legal norm of *uti possidetis*, the international borders of the newly established post-Soviet states were drawn upon the basis of the previously existing internal administrative borders of the Soviet Union—and, with the exception of Western Ukraine, almost all the nations of the former Soviet space were part of a single polity since before. The establishment of borders has thus represented a completely novel way of claiming sovereign authority and signalling ownership within a bounded territorial space.

It is important to note, in this regard, that the Soviet republics had already started to set up border control systems on their own before the formal dismemberment of the Union, as they subtly began to assert their sovereignty (Chandler 1998, p. 90); when the Soviet Union finally broke up, the inheritance of former Soviet border control structures was one of

the key issues to be resolved (Chandler 1998, p. 103). In 1991, only a small fraction of the borders between former Soviet republics had been demarcated, and none of the newly independent states were able to exert effective control over their own borders.

Acknowledging the seriousness of border issues, the mandate of the Commonwealth of Independent States included the creation of a coordinated border policy in an attempt to reconcile the recognition and respect of each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of existing frontiers on the one hand, and the openness and transparency of borders on the other hand. This contradiction reflected another tension that existed in the wake of the Soviet collapse: i.e. the discrepancy between the "symbolic connection between statehood and border controls"[14] and the actual weakness of state institutions.

However, in spite of the inconsistency of the CIS border policy archipelago and non-Russian republics' "attachment to the idea of border controls as a visible image of their sovereignty" (Chandler 1998, p. 113), the Commonwealth (in addition to other post-Soviet regional organisations) did have an impact on the definition of border institutions.

CIS member states actually signed a number of agreements in 1992 that tentatively provided for a coordinated border policy: first, these agreements established a complementary role for CIS border troops and state border troops (Art. 1: CIS Agreement on the Status of the Border Troops, Kiev, 20 March 1992); second, the Council of Commanders of Border Troops was institutionalised and tasked with coordinating various functions (Resolution on the establishment of the Council of Commanders of Border Troops (Council of Heads of State, Moscow, 6 July 1992); and third, a doctrine of common "external borders of the Commonwealth" was formalised (Agreement on cooperation among the States members of CIS in ensuring a stable situation on the external borders, Bishkek, 12 October 1992; Memorandum of cooperation on the protection of external borders, 24 December 1993). This latter agreement envisioned multifaceted coordination amongst the national security services, the representatives of the ministries of internal affairs and customs, and consular and visa services. Furthermore, the doctrine of common external borders paved the way for fact-finding missions to be consensually decided in consultation with the state under inspection, and for the implementation of non-military sanctions against members who failed to effectively protect the Commonwealth's outer perimeter.

The Treaty on Border Protection between CIS and non-CIS states (officially the Treaty on Cooperation in the Protection of the Borders of the Participants in the Commonwealth of Independent States with States That Are Not Members of the Commonwealth, Minsk, 26 May 1995) defined in particular the fundamental objective of border cooperation, namely that of combatting international and domestic terrorism, separatism and nationalism, illegal immigration and the illicit traffic of drugs and weapons (Art. 2). The parties planned some implementation measures, such as the harmonisation of domestic legislative instruments, the creation of regional joint commands, operational groups and coordination councils and the promotion of training assistance programmes. Furthermore, in concomitance with the Treaty on Border Protection between CIS and non-CIS states, a Concept of Border Security was approved. Although it envisaged the creation of national border infrastructures and border troops as a primary step (and thus encouraged the consolidation and takeover of state authorities, in one of the core manifestations of statehood), Azerbaijan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine refused to affix their signatures to it. This instance of discord had been foreshadowed by the Commonwealth's failure to agree on the creation of a common external border.[15]

In spite of the above-mentioned *defaillance*, throughout the 1990s several other agreements were signed under the aegis of the CIS to establish shared principles for border management and control, including cooperative schemes for information exchange and personnel training.[16] The fragmentary nature of consensus within the CIS, however, fuelled a multidyadic approach to border management that unfolded through a series of bilateral agreements between Russia and each post-Soviet country. These accords revolved around the deployment of Russian border guards beyond and outside of Russian territory and, more generally, Russian assistance to post-Soviet countries in guarding their borders.[17] Proposals of border cooperation within the CIS and the presence of Russian border-guards throughout the territory of the Commonwealth were not always clearly plainly accepted or enthusiastically received by the other CIS members; however, the contestation of such cooperative schemes played an equal role in shaping their understanding of sovereignty.

Uzbekistan, which had sought to achieve military independence from Russia from the outset, immediately placed all its border troops under Uzbek jurisdiction and created a special border cadet group at the

Tashkent Higher Combined Arms Command School (Smith 1998, p. 37). The final Uzbek plan for state-building through autarchy resulted in a unilateral and highly regulated border policy, centralised border policing monitored by the National Security Services and executive branch, and the move to deploy custom officials before even military personnel (Gavrilis 2006). Turkmenistan agreed to organise border control together with Iran and Afghanistan as a dual responsibility, with a joint command structure headed by a Turkmen commander and Russian chief of staff[18]; moreover, Turkmen border guards received training assistance from Russian officials and advisers.[19]

In Kyrgyzstan, initial control over the Kyrgyz–Chinese border was explicitly delegated to Russian border troops. Especially in view of massive desertions by Kyrgyz border guards, the Russian troops were granted direct responsibility for guarding Kyrgyz borders. The joint command for this operation was actually placed under Russian authority, and the "Groups of Russian Border Guards in Kyrgyzstan" were made subject to the Russian Border Guard Service and financed by Moscow. Russia withdrew its border guards from Kyrgyzstan in 1999; in 2007, however, Kyrgyz authorities publicly admitted that they were unable to sustain the costs of protecting the southern borders of the CIS and raised the issue of bringing Russian border guards back to Kyrgyzstan. In 2010, Russia agreed to once again station its border guards in both Osh (to assist Kyrgyz authorities in preventing illegal migration and trafficking along part of its border with Uzbekistan) and the northern region of Chui.

Ultimately, Russian border troops played their most significant role within the Central Asian context in Tajikistan, given that they uninterruptedly guarded the Tajik borders with Afghanistan until 2004. Russian command coordinated Tajik conscripts and Russian contingents, although troops from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also contributed to the stabilisation of Tajik frontiers.

In Southern Caucasus, Russian border troops were involved in guarding Armenian–Iranian, Armenian–Turkish and Azerbaijani–Iranian borders. Armenia, in particular, sought out cooperation between its own and Russian border guards both in the early 1990s (in line with a general trend which was shared by other CIS countries) and again in the 2000s. In contrast, the decision to station Russian border troops on the Georgian territory involved hard-hitting negotiations and heated political tensions that currently reverberate in the ongoing process of

borderisation along the administrative border lines dividing the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgian-controlled territory. Indeed, Georgia and Russia signed an agreement in 1994 providing for the stationing of Russian border guards in Georgia; under that agreement, Georgia allowed Russia to establish four military garrisons within its territory under the official status of "foreign military bases" in exchange for technical, financial and training assistance in the creation of Georgia's border guard service. However, in November 1997, the Georgian government raised objections with Russia about alleged Russian encroachment into Georgian territory. In the wake of these tensions, the head of Georgia's border guards, Valeriy Chkheidze, announced that his country would soon assume sole responsibility for guarding its borders.[20] According to a parliamentary resolution passed in February 1998, Russian border guards were to be removed and replaced by Georgian ones by 2001. Consequently, the Russian coast-guard withdrew from Poti and Sukhumi in September 1998 and Russian border troops withdrew from Georgian–Turkish borders in November 1998.[21]

CIS border cooperation and the presence of Russian border troops has not prevented border disputes between neighbouring countries in the region: there have been episodes involving de facto statelets (Transnistria, Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and several other contested territories.[22] Moreover, moves to build walls and add landmines along border zones have signalled serious problems of border security (Tables 2, 3).

In spite of the bilateralisation of border security and ongoing conflict dynamics, the tentative process of developing a border policy within the Commonwealth of Independent States since the early 1990s has had a sovereignty-shaping function in relation to post-Soviet countries. In fact, the member states had to choose a strategy for defining, securing and controlling their borders, moulding this strategy via convergence and absorption (or via divergence and rejection) vis-à-vis a Russia-centred model of border management. Even when CIS members agreed to the deployment of Russian border troops inside their territories, they began to equip themselves with training facilities, opening their doors to international assistance, and created basic institutions such as commissions for the delimitation and demarcation of state borders that went on to initiate negotiation practices with their counterparts, including diplomats and cartographers.

Table 2 Incidents = Individual Militarised Actions that range in intensity from threats to the use of force to actual combat short of war

Countries involved	Year(s) the incident(s) took place
Armenia, Azerbaijan	1992–1995; 1995–1996; 1996–1997; 1998–1999; 2000; 2001; 2002–2010
Iran, Russia, Turkey	1993
Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Tajikistan	1993–1994
Georgia, Azerbaijan	1996
Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Tajikistan	1997
Afghanistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	1998
Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan	1999; 2005; 2006; 2010
Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	1999; 2004; 2005; 2006
Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Russia	1999–2001
Georgia, Russia	1999–2001; 2001–2005; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2007–2010
Russia, Azerbaijan	1999; 2002
Armenia, Russia, Turkey	2000
Iran, Azerbaijan	2001; 2002; 2003
Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	2005

Source Correlates of War (Militarised Interstate Disputes); IBRU: Centre for Borders Research (Durham University (Boundary News)

Table 3 Walls, Lines and Frontier Fortifications

Uzbekistan	Afghanistan	1990s	Present
Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	1999	Present
Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	2001	Present
Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	2006	Present
Abkhazia	Georgia Border Fence	2008	
Georgia	Abkhazia Border Fence	2008	
Georgia	Ossetia Border Fence	2008	
Ossetia	Georgia Border Fence	2008	
Kyrgyzstan	Sokh District Border Fence	2013	Present

Source Global Security: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/walls.htm

In November 1993, a commission of representatives from Russia, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya and Georgia met in Sochi to begin work on demarcating the Russian–Georgian border. A preliminary demarcation protocol was signed in February 1996, which was followed

by further cooperative developments as well as stalemates. A further protocol on border delimitation and future border agreements was signed on March 2000, but this protocol left the issue of the Ossetian border unresolved. By the same token, the delimitation of borders between Azerbaijan and Russia was hindered by the demarcation of the Dagestani sector. The demarcation of the borders between Georgia and Azerbaijan, instead, began in 1996 and stretched out until the 2007 agreement on the joint use of the David Gareja monastery complex.

The delimitation and demarcation process in Central Asia dragged on even longer: for example, the border treaty between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was not signed until 2009, whilst an agreement on the demarcation of the long-disputed boundary between China and Tajikistan in the Pamir region was finally reached in January 2011. There are several other examples involving Central Asian countries: an emblematical case has been the delimitation of the common boundary between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which only began in 2004. It has been argued that this delay is due to the relative cost/benefit of settling border issues vis-à-vis accepting a decrease in the profits coming from smuggling, illegal trafficking and contraband, which constitute an important source of revenue for the Tajik economy, as well as challenging a state-building project that was based upon warlordism and criminal networks:

> Following delimitation, borders become the focus of commissions, reports, and on-site inspections […]. A delimitation and demarcation agreement with Kyrgyzstan will mean the permanent stationing of newly trained border guards and customs officials along the border. Such a stationing could disrupt the smuggling networks in which existing Tajik border guards seem to be involved. The Tajik state's aversion to creating a formal boundary regime along the Kyrgyz boundary is such that officials have turned a blind eye to Tajik locals near the border area who periodically attack and destroy customs and border posts that the Kyrgyz state eventually set up on a temporary basis. While Tajik authorities regularly condemn illicit trade and drug trafficking, in reality their interests lie in preventing the delimitation and consequent deployment of officials and border guards to the boundary. (Gavrilis 2006, p. 29)

The process has also been hindered by the fact that the newly independent "stan-countries" inherited a number of Sino-Soviet territorial disputes. The first session of a working group to draft border agreements between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was convened

in April 1993; further border talks involving these countries resulted in a series of negotiations to define and demilitarise the borders between China and, respectively, Russia, Kazakhstan (1994), Kyrgyzstan (1998–1999) and Tajikistan (2000). The task of defining borders served to stimulate broader dialogue amongst the parties: on the occasion of the Shanghai Summit (26 April 1996), China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan formalised their grouping by launching the "Shanghai Five", an initiative to establish confidence-building measures, sanctioned by the signing of the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions and, one year later, the Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions. It was precisely these loosely institutionalized meetings and talks regarding border issues that gave rise to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

In addition to triggering interstate negotiation dynamics, the CIS' attempts to establish a common border policy lent impetus to the institutionalisation and activities of joint bodies openly and directly committed to establishing common security standards in relation to the member states. The CIS Council of Commanders of Border Troops and the CIS Interparliamentary assembly have been particularly (albeit diversely) involved in this process: although they were first established back in the early 1990s, their activity in terms of border policy coordination and cooperation increased over the second half of the 2000s, a fact that is also evidenced by the second wave of CIS border cooperation.[23] This second surge has been characterised by four important aspects in particular.

First, whereas the creation of a unified system of military education had already been suggested as early as 1997 (in the Agreement on cooperation in the training and upgrading of military personnel for the border troops of the Commonwealth of Independent States), member states have manifested renewed interest in this goal by identifying a base organisation at which all the member states can train their own national border troops. A Resolution of the CIS Council of Heads of Governments (adopted in Minsk, 19 May 2011) granted the status of base organisation for the training of border management staff to the Border Academy of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. This apparently centralising move has been counterbalanced by the practice of rotating (i) the countries hosting the meetings of the CIS Council of Commanders of Border Troops, and (ii) the countries in charge of preparing and conducting joint special border operations.

For example, Kazakhstan was responsible for the overall management of operation "Dostyk" ("Druzhba", in Russian: transl. "Friendship") in 2004 (Vasko 2005), whilst Uzbekistan led operation "Chegara" (transl. "Borders") in 2007.

Second, the activities carried out by the CIS Council of Commanders of Border Troops have facilitated the involvement of other regional and international organisations and the establishment of inter-regional cooperation in the field of border management. Both the 2009 Resolution and the 2010 Action Plan encouraged cooperation not only with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Eurasian Economic Community and Collective Security Treaty Organisation, but also with Frontex (the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union), CARICC (the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors, established by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) and the EU-UNDP BOMCA (Border Management Programme in Central Asia).

In October 2006, the CIS Council issued a decision "On Drafting the Guideline Document on the Interaction in Border-Related Matters between Frontex and the SKPV Coordination Service". In July 2009, the join border operation "Good Will" was carried out along Russian western borders: it was jointly planned, coordinated and evaluated by Frontex and the Russian Border Guard Service, and hosted by Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Finland and Russia.[24] Subsequently, in October 2009, a meeting of the CIS Council of Commanders of Border Troops was held in Chisinau, and was attended for the first time by Frontex representatives. Later in the same month, a follow-up meeting regarding "Good Will" was organised in Moscow and attended by the participants of the operation as well as representatives of the CIS Council of Commanders: these interactions ultimately resulted in a memorandum on the establishment of Operational Cooperation in border-related matters between Frontex and the CIS Council of Commanders in December 2010.[25]

The third branch of activities facilitated by the CIS Council concern the practice, common amongst the post-Soviet countries, of convening loosely institutionalised regional meetings, workshops and conferences that gather together experts, bureaucrats and representatives of specialised state agencies and which closely resemble "seminar diplomacy".[26]

The 2010 Action Plan included the proposal to "hold international scientific conferences, meetings, round tables and seminars" on the coordination of border policy, the training of border officials and other topics related to border security. There was also a plan to hold a series of conference between 2011 and 2015 in Belarus, Russia and Tajikistan.

Finally, both the 2006 and 2010 Action Plans mentioned the participation of the CIS Council of Commanders in the development, drafting and revision of the Model Laws issued by the CIS Interparliamentary assembly[27]: in fact, the Model Laws "On the State Border" and "On Border Security" were adopted in October 2010,[28] whilst in May 2012, a Model Law "On Border Agencies" was approved together with further "recommendations for perfecting legislation of CIS countries on regulation of responsibility for violations in the area of border security".[29]

4   Regionalisation of Internal Security Objectives

The break-up of the Soviet Union certainly changed the interplay between criminal enterprises and state officials/party elites. Post-Soviet organised crime per se definitely should not be considered a brand new form of criminality: rather, it stems from the Soviet system and has been shaped by the Soviet past (Shelley 1994). The criminals who operated in the interstices of the Soviet structure continued to seek endorsement and support from the leaders of the newly independent states, and sought resources and influence whilst avoiding direct confrontation with the new authorities: "most criminal organizations choose co-option rather than confrontation, collusion rather than coercion, and the development of symbiotic rather than adversarial relations with state authorities" (Kupatadze 2012, p. 47). Post-Soviet transitions nevertheless affected the dynamics and encounters of *upperworld-underworld* networks (Kupatadze 2012). Furthermore, post-Soviet organised crime has been defined as a continuation of politics by other means (Handelman 1994): the weakness of post-Soviet political systems, dysfunctionally embedded in states-in-the-making, alongside the lack of an effective monopoly on violence, created new opportunities for organised crime. The establishment of state law enforcement and policing structures as well as judicial and regulatory institutions served to exacerbate tensions with criminal groups.

In a variegated context such as this, characterised by both competition and collaboration between criminal groups and state structures

as well as recurrent power shifts (along a continuum from states being taken over by organized crime to state control of criminal groups[30]), the Commonwealth of Independent States engaged in the assembly of a policy archipelago focused on the fight against transnational organised crime.

This endeavour was aimed at launching a regional counter-crime narrative and officially strengthening states' judicial, penal and law enforcement capacities; quite tellingly, it was concomitant to an international counter-crime drive that has grown increasingly significant precisely since the 1990s. However, in spite of the pledge to forge a "unified legal space" (Ginsburgs 1999, p. 317), the post-Soviet region instead came to resemble a "unified criminal space", as arrangements regarding extradition and rendition procedures were barely practicable in a context in which many post-Soviet states had not yet adopted citizenship statutes or the eligibility criteria for transfers abroad. Moreover, cooperation in the legal realm was hindered by the ongoing process of defining which acts were to be categorised as crimes. Accordingly, cooperation schemes initially proceeded through interdepartmental rather than interstate agreements. In February 1992, the Procurators General convened a meeting in Moscow "to discuss the problems posed by the rash of 'traveling' crimes" and created a CIS Council of Procurators General[31]; at the same time, an agreement on interparliamentary cooperation in the legal sphere (27 February 1992) was formed with the objective of exchanging plans for drafting legislative acts, convening consultative meetings to harmonise states' legislative activity and organising joint working sessions, conferences and seminars. Additionally, the heads of the Supreme Courts of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine convened a meeting in Moscow (30 June–1 July 1992, in Moscow).

The first moves to engage in a coordinated fight against transnational organised crime were tentatively undertaken at a higher level as well. First, on the occasion of their first meeting in Almaty in April 1992, the CIS ministries of internal affairs signed an agreement concerning cooperation in the fight against crime: one of the most incisive aspects of this agreement was the fact that it juxtaposed transnational organised crime and gangsterism with other phenomena the parties committed to combat, namely banditry and terrorism. The cooperative schemes were informed by the primacy of sovereignty, the inviolability of states' national interest and the principle of preserving the confidentiality of

information; in addition to these rationales, the agreement specified that the execution of requests for collaboration in investigative and prosecutorial activities could also be denied in the name of respecting human rights. The treaty outlined the creation of a coordinating body: the Conference of Internal Affairs Ministers, which later took the initiative of establishing the Office for the Coordination of the Fight Against Organized Crime and Other Dangerous Crimes on the Territory of CIS Participant-States. On the basis of a resolution by the Council of CIS Heads of Government dated March 1993, the Office was instituted in September 1993. Second, the Convention on Legal Assistance and Legal Relations in Civil, Family and Criminal Matters was signed in Minsk in January 1993. However, this attempt to regulate matters of extradition, criminal prosecution and legal assistance in criminal cases clashed with the politics surrounding the assignment of citizenship status: indeed, national justice institutions were tasked with handling criminal cases involving foreigners even though the practice of shopping for second passports was quite common amongst CIS citizens.

In addition to the two above-mentioned agreements, the Interparliamentary assembly of the CIS was involved in early counter-crime efforts as well. The fight against organised crime was part of the IPA CIS agenda since its first plenary session; in 1994, it adopted two model laws, "On the formation of an interstate system of legal information within the CIS" and "On drafting recommendatory legislative acts on combating organized crime on CIS territory", whilst in 1996, it adopted the Model Criminal Code.[32]

It is not surprising that Russia sought to play a lead role in the counter-crime drive within the CIS through the kind of centralising instruments Moscow had conventionally employed to steer post-Soviet regional organisations. In 1995, the first CIS conference involving the top officials of the members' special services was held in Moscow to set a common agenda on the fight against illegal sales of narcotics and weapons, nuclear terrorism, the extradition of criminals and suspects, agreements on legal assistance and cooperation amongst law enforcement agencies. When the participants decided to convert the conference into a body with regularly scheduled meetings, the idea was that its secretariat would have been chaired by the director of Russia's Federal Counterintelligence Service; moreover, participants decided to create a common database in Moscow based on the FCS computer system (Andreyev 1995).

In spite of Russia's centrality, the early phases of CIS coordination in the fight against transnational organised crime contributed to defining national offices and roles in the realms of national judiciary, law enforcement and policing: this constitutive moment occurred through collective steps (meetings, summits…[33]) and was forged through an interactive process that repeatedly placed national officials from different post-Soviet countries next to each other.

The subsequent stage delivered an even more defined picture of the CIS counter-crime model. Three illustrative documents were signed in the second half of the 1990s, each of which contributed an important piece to the overall mosaic: an agreement signed in 1995 by the heads of the secret services; the 1998 Agreement on Cooperation in the Fight Against Organized Crime; and the 1999 Concept of Cooperation. Quite tellingly, the 1995 agreement included a series of protocols on nuclear smuggling, terrorism, drug trafficking and "illegal armed formations", whereas the 1998 Agreement listed the types of offences that formed the case for counter-crime cooperation, including terrorism and illegal migration amongst others. These statements shaped a discourse of danger centred on the "crime-terror nexus" and narratives of "narco-jihad" that have proved to be quite distant from reality (Lewis 2014). The "crime-terror nexus" in the post-Soviet region may have served two different purposes, however: on the one hand, it might have diverted attention away from another, more realistic nexus, namely the one between organised crime groups and networks and the institutions of the state. On the other hand, it sought to legitimise disputable counter-insurgency policies disguised as counter-narcotics strategies. Additionally, as transnational organised crime was depicted as a threat to societal, economic and political security, the fight against such crime was increasingly presented as a multifaceted struggle with the primary objective of re-establishing the trust and confidence of citizens vis-à-vis state agencies (1999 Concept of Cooperation).

The progressive delineation of a CIS-specific notion of transnational organised crime and the measures required to combat it might have been moulded by the interface with the international environment and other regional organisations into which the post-Soviet countries gradually integrated. One significant example is the enlargement of the Council of Europe to include CIS members (Moldova and Ukraine: 1995; Russia: 1996; Georgia: 1999; Armenia and Azerbaijan: 2001), which then began participating in the COE's "actions against crime".

Such cooperation in criminal matters entails compliance with the COE's standards on policing and managing penitentiary and law enforcement institutions as well as extradition, mutual legal assistance and the transfer of sentenced individuals. The European Convention on Extradition, in particular, excludes infractions from the list of extraditable offences that the requested party regards as political crimes; at the same time, extradition and the other mechanisms of mutual legal assistance implemented in the CIS have been seen as political instruments used precisely to hinder the opponents of incumbent regimes. This substantial divergence of intent might explain why the CIS' members that signed the above-mentioned convention[34] included a significant number of reservations in their instruments of ratification; it also explains the vague references to human rights provisions in CIS agreements and documents (i.e. principles of refugee protection, including the principle of non-*refoulement*, prohibitions on returning individuals to places where they might be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment…) (Table 4).

Moves to develop a scheme for coordinating counter-crime measures within the Commonwealth of Independent States and to insert its members into the international drive against organised crime have involved setting up a range of instruments, each of which were launched and consolidated at different times.

First, joint exercises and operations have been conducted to foster *practical* cooperation and assemble common counter-crime practices. Second, cooperation in the area of personnel training has often worked through "decentralisation" and the empowerment of national agencies, institutions and educational facilities. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Russian Law Academy of the Ministry of Justice was trusted with training legal cadres for the CIS members; a report on the work of the CIS Office for the Coordination of the Fight Against Organized Crime released in 2004 testifies to the existence of complex networks of exchange: representatives of security services and members of the intelligence community from Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan have been trained in Russia (at the FSB Academy), whilst the schools of Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs trained law enforcement officers from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It would be misleading to consider Russia the only educational hub, however: Tajiks have been also assisted by Belarus and Kazakhstan in that respect whilst police

Table 4 CIS' members and the European Convention of Extradition (author's adaptation, *Source* http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=024&CM=8&DF=&CL=ENG)

Country	Signature	Ratification	Entry into force	Reservation	Declarations	Objections
Moldova	2/5/1996	2/10/1997	31/12/1997	X	X	
Ukraine	29/5/1997	11/3/1998	9/6/1998	X	X	
Russia	7/11/1996	10/12/1999	9/3/2000	X	X	X
Georgia	22/3/2000	15/6/2001	13/9/2001	X	X	
Armenia	11/5/2001	25/1/2002	25/4/2002	X	X	
Azerbaijan	7/11/2001	28/6/2002	26/9/2002	X	X	

groups from Russia have been sent to the Police Academy of Belarus and employees of border control departments from different CIS countries have been trained in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and the Ukraine. An association of the educational institutions of the Ministries of Internal Affairs of the CIS countries has been then created, whilst specific resolutions by the CIS Council of Heads of State have granted some of these institutions the status of "base CIS institutions" in specific counter-crime activities. For example, the International Training Center for Migration and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in Minsk has been officially recognised as a CIS-approved institution for training and improving the professional qualifications of the CIS states' personnel in the sphere of managing migration and combating human trafficking; similarly, the Agency on Economic and Corruption Crimes (Financial Police) of Kazakhstan is entrusted with CIS joint training in the field of financial investigations.

Additionally, alongside the emergence of a CIS model to tackle transnational organised crime, the CIS embarked on the formalisation of its own counterterrorism strategy, starting with the Treaty on Cooperation among the States Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Combating Terrorism that was signed in Minsk in June 1999. Similar to the process described in the case of combatting organised crime (and specifically its dual nature, both regulatory and constitutive), the move to define terrorist acts and actors and develop strategies to counter them are part of a process through which states consolidates their authority vis-à-vis other non-state armed actors and establish a monopoly over violence. Furthermore, as has been observed in the case of CIS-tailored counter-crime schemes, CIS strategies to combat

terrorism can be read as an effort to create regional ways of interfacing and interacting with international anti-terror enterprises developed in the framework of other organisations in which the post-Soviet countries participate (i.e. the OSCE).

A telling example of this tendency is the series of decisions made within the CIS following the OSCE Istanbul summit of 1999 (which highlighted the importance of regional and global cooperation in coping with the threat of international terrorism) and the 2001 Bucharest Plan of Action for combating terrorism. In keeping with these, in fact, the CIS Heads of States adopted a series of documents concerning the implementation of joint measures for combating terrorism. In 2000, CIS members committed to hammering out an interstate programme of joint measures for combatting extremism, terrorism and organised crime (following the initiatives by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan); subsequently, a Council of Ministers of Internal Affairs met in Cholpon-Ata to sign an inter-agency agreement.

In addition, Russia sponsored the creation of an Anti-Terrorist Centre[35] which was then set up in June 2000.[36] After having stipulated the creation of the Anti-Terrorist Centre, the CIS assigned it multiple functions: it currently serves as hub for coordinating the various bodies involved in internal security and law enforcement cooperation; furthermore, it takes part in shaping IPA CIS Model Laws[37] and developing the multiannual Cooperation Programs, as well as organising joint exercises and command and staff trainings (Table 5).[38]

The centre has also supported information exchange and the creation of a Specialised Data Bank intended to provide the backing for practical activities; it prepares periodical "Reviews of Terrorism Facts and Other Forms of Extremism, their Reasons and Funding Sources" and sponsors conferences—in line, as I have shown, with a seminar diplomacy approach that seems to be a recurrent feature in the post-Soviet region.

In October 2002, the Council of the CIS Heads of States convened in Chisinau and decided to inaugurate an ATC CIS Department for Central Asia in Bishkek, in addition to the Moscow headquarters. On this same occasion, a Protocol designed to regulate anti-terrorism measures within CIS territory was signed and a new Convention on Legal Assistance and Legal Relations in Civil, Family and Criminal Matters was added to the Minsk Convention.[39] It should be noted that, in the early 2000s, broader transformations in regional and global contexts triggered a renewed international anti-terrorist drive. That development certainly

Table 5 Exercises and trainings organised and/or coordinated by the CIS ATC (X = participants; (X) = observers)

	AM	AZ	BY	GE	KZ	KG	MD	RU	TJ	TM	UA	UZ
South Antiterror-2001		X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
South Antiterror-2002					X	X		X	X			
Azov-Antiterror-2003					X			X			X	
Caspian-Antiterror-2005					X			X			X	
Baykonur-Antiterror-2007			X		X			X				
Berkut-Yug-2011	(X)	(X)			X	X		X	X	(X)	(X)	(X)

intertwined with the CIS and the way its counter-crime and counterter-rorism measures impacted its members' processes of state-making and institution building.

At the same time, SCO emerged as an international actor at the fore-front of counterterrorist endeavours. Tackling the "three evils" gradually predisposed SCO members' leaderships to adjust their domestic political behaviour in the name of a common approach to security governance[40]: indeed, SCO members are authorised to undertake various measures to counter the three evils, including the exchange of information, the "execution of requests concerning operational search actions' within one state's territory, the extradition of people involved in actions that have terrorist/separatist/extremist nature, [and] 'various forms of training, retraining or upgrading of their experts" (Shanghai Convention, Art. 6); at the same time, however, the execution of these measures can be "postponed or denied" if a member considers that they might preju-dice its sovereignty, security, public order or other substantial interests or that the measures contradict its domestic legislation or international obligations.[41]

Since the signing of the Shanghai Convention, a "SCO model" for governing the crime-terror nexus developed[42] along quite similar lines to the one which had been set up in the framework of the CIS.[43] Similarly to the CIS, the SCO decided to equip itself with a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) that began participating in drafting international legal documents on matters concerning the struggle against terrorism, separatism and extremism, and currently plays a crucial coor-dinating role in organising the SCO's exercises and training initiatives (Table 6).

Table 6 SCO's counter-terrorism exercises and trainings

	RU	PRC	KZ	KG	TJ	UZ	Notes
Vostok-Anti-terror 2006 (Tashkent, Uzbekistan)	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cooperation of the Institute of Nuclear Physics at the Uzbek Academy of Sciences
Issyk-Kul Antiterror 2007	X	X	X	X	X	X	Observers from the CSTO, CIS ATC, India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan
Peace Mission 2007 (Chelyabinsk, Russia - Urumqi, China)	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Norak Anti-terror 2009 (Fakhrobod training grounds, Tajikistan)	X	X	X	X	X		
SCO law enforcement exercise (Saratov, Russia, 2010)	X		X	X			
Peace Mission 2010 (Matybulak Range, Kazakhstan)	X	X	X	X	X		
Peace Mission 2012 (Chorukh-Dayron Range, Tajikistan)	X	X	X	X	X		
Joint border operation 2013 (Torugart Pass)		X		X			Observers from Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Pakistan

The insertion and institutionalisation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a significant player in the counterterrorism arena occurred alongside the ongoing definition of CIS initiatives in the same field. At the same time, however, the CIS continued to increase its interactions with other international actors; interestingly, this development coincided with increasing activism on the part of other (subregional and overlapping) groupings in the realm of counter-crime and counterterrorism.

In relation to the first point, the CIS framed its counter-crime and counterterrorism programmes congruently with other international standards: not only the principles provided by the UN but also the norms established within the OSCE and COE. In practice, several CIS

coordination meetings (held by the Office for the Coordination of the Fight against Organized Crime and Other Dangerous Forms of Crime in the Territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center, amongst others) were attended by representatives of these institutions as well as International Labour Organisation, Interpol and UN agencies such as the UNDP and UNODC and the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC).

At the same time, other multilateral frameworks were established that partially overlapped with those developed within the CIS: they include the Borzhomi Four (the Conference of Internal Affairs Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Russia), the Bishkek Group (the Conference of Leaders of Law Enforcement Agencies and Intelligence Services of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan), the Conference of Internal Affairs Ministers of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, and the TAKM—the Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status, an intergovernmental military law enforcement organisation bringing together Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Mongolia. Even a grouping as loose as the GUUAM (including at that time Uzbekistan) inaugurated its own law enforcement strategy: an Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Combat Against Terrorism, Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking and Other Dangerous Types of Crimes was signed in July 2002, whilst one year later the same five countries decided to establish the GUUAM Virtual Centre on Combat Against Terrorism, Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking and Other Dangerous Types of Crime and the GUUAM Interstate Information Management System.

Just as with the CIS, the SCO has also established connections with other international organisations: besides occasional interchanges with the OSCE and a measured dialogue with the UN, it has built a consistent channel of communication with the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and signed memorandums of understanding with both ASEAN and ECO (= non-Western multilateralism). As evidence of SCO's alleged multivector policy, representatives of the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center, CSTO, UN, OSCE, Embassies of USA, France, Italy, Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and India participated as observers in the joint counterterrorist training manoeuvres organised by the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, "Kazygurt—Antiterror", conducted in June 2006.

The international legitimation of this local model for combatting terrorism has been endangered by several negative assessments on the part of transnational advocacy networks and non-governmental actors such as "Human Rights in China" claiming that it constitutes a threat to human rights.[44] Even whilst becoming objects of contestation, CIS and SCO's counterterrorism strategies and schemes, in turn, conveyed a counter-narrative, seeking to celebrate their distinctiveness vis-à-vis "Western" models. Russia, in particular, reiterated its discontent about the existence of "double standards" in the war on terror, just as it had done in reference to the fields of democracy and human rights (Fawn 2013, pp. 132–166; see also Simons 2006).

All in all, the above-mentioned local counterterrorism model has emerged through increasing inter-institutional coordination between the CIS and the SCO (and specifically between the ATC and the RATS),[45] which contributes to normative and policy convergence and the development of regional practices; in turn, such practices are ever more widely disseminated at the domestic level. Indeed, practices of training and expert gathering represent a recurrent instrument throughout various policy fields, including that of counterterrorism; moreover, the introduction of the practice of listing (i.e. the creation of a common wanted list and list of terrorist organisations to target) is crucial for establishing common standards and criteria to define the perimeters of political violence perpetrated by anti-state actors and legitimate measures of repression and punishment. This latter aspect is actually a clear example of a statist endeavour, thus constituting and reproducing certain forms of stateness.

Notes

1. This section draws on my chapter in Börzel and van Hüllen (2015).
2. Although the Commission was created as a control mechanism, its monitoring function is limited to issuing non-binding recommendations. Second, it is composed of appointed representatives of the contracting parties. Third, the Commission can only consider appeals related to the violation of human rights in any of the state parties that are not under consideration by a different international mechanism (i.e. the European Court of Human Rights) and, even then, only after all internal means of legal protection within the member states have been exhausted. Svensson-McCarthy (1998, pp. 197–198); Libman (2011).

3. In some cases, the reference to the European model has been explicitly made clear, for example in the way the "model acts" of the CIS Interparliamentary assembly are defined, as "international legal standards, foremost European, adapted to the Commonwealth realities" and tools to contribute to the "alignment of national laws with the best European standards" (www.iacis.ru). At a later stage, when the Russian government committed to a CIS reform, the then-Executive Secretary Boris Berezovskii publicly declared that the EU was the "most acceptable development model for the CIS" (RFE/RL Newsline 3 March 1999).

4. See also the launch of the NATO Partnership for Peace (1994–1995) and the signing of several Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with the EU (1998–1999). On the contrary, according to a report published in 2003 by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the CIS Convention on the Standards for Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms was adopted in the wake of an extensive trend of states committing to democratic elections, a trend that developed in different multilateral contexts and was encouraged by the ODIHR itself. The report mentions that "during the 2000 Bucharest Ministerial Meeting, the Russian Federation urged the ODIHR to prepare a comprehensive review of the election legislation of participating States with a view to developing common standards under which democratic elections could be enhanced" (p. 8). Moreover, the report underlines the similarities amongst, for example, the CIS Convention, the ACEEEO (Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials) draft Convention on Election Standards, Electoral Rights and Freedoms, which was submitted to the Council of Europe for consideration in 2002, and the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters adopted by the Venice Commission in 2002. OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2003).

5. The warning signs of such strains arose between 1998 and 2001 when, in the midst of drafting of the CIS Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, objections were raised about its compatibility with the European Convention of Human Rights, and the COE members who were also CIS members were advised not to sign or ratify it. In 1998, the Venice Commission concluded that the CIS Convention offered less protection than the ECHR, and these arguments were reiterated in 2001 when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolutions 1249 and 1519. It is interesting to note that Russian Senator Alexander Torshin proposed in October 2011 that a CIS Human Rights Court be set up, potentially to counterbalance the European Court of Human Rights.

6. On the occasion of the Belarusian parliamentary election and Kyrgyz presidential election in 2000, the OSCE issued assessments at odds with those developed by the deputies from the Russian Duma, Ukrainian Supreme Council and CIS observers respectively (Andreyev 2000; Tesemnikova 2000). At the time the Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission, Sulaiman Imanbayev reacted by stating that OSCE, "in assessing the presidential election in Kyrgyzstan in a negative light, is operating under special orders from certain political forces in the world…" (Tesemnikova 2000). In both 2004 and 2006, the CIS observers deployed in Belarus overtly criticised the external pressures being brought to bear on the country as well as the negative assessments of the country coming from Europe and the USA (CIS 2004; CIS 2006). In 2005, in the wake of the mission reports by COE and OSCE, Azerbaijan's President Aliyev delivered a speech before the deputies of the newly elected parliament, noting that "in a number of cases, various political events are being exploited by certain political circles for other purposes" and describing this approach as a "kind of political pressure" on Azerbaijan's leadership (Mamedov 2005). In other words, whereas OSCE observers criticised the incumbent regime's illegitimate interference with the electoral process, CIS observers appeared to critique Western institutions' illegitimate interference in their members' political lives.

7. Declaration by the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States regarding the state of affairs within the OSCE, Moscow, 3 July 2004; Appeal by the CIS Member States to the OSCE Partners, Astana, 15 September 2004, available on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, section "Statement and Speeches", www.mid.ru. See Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (2007); Socor (2004), 2007a, b.

8. Similar principles have been restated in several documents, for example: 2006 Declaration on the Fifth Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; 2007 Bishkek Declaration of the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation; 2007 Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation Between the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; and 2010 Declaration of the Tenth Meeting of the Council of the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

9. 2011 Astana Declaration of the 10th Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This vision has recently assumed particular significance in connection with the events of the "Arab Spring": see the Statement by SCO Secretary-General in connection with Middle East events, 4 March 2011.

10. 2006 Declaration on the Fifth Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
11. SCO observers, in contrast, are dispatched in accordance with the Regulations on Observer Missions issued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in relation to presidential and/or parliamentary elections and referendums, approved by the Foreign Ministers Council of the SCO member states on 15 May 2006.
12. See Heyman and Smart (1999); Xenakis (2004); Goodhand (2009).
13. "Violence emanating from the State—be it policing, capital punishment, extrajudicial assassination, or all-out war at the level of the nation-state— is deemed legitimate, legal, just and ethical. Conversely, violence originating from outside the State, or that which has the State as its target, is universally seen as illegitimate, illegal, unjust, unethical and often ascribed to the mental state of the attackers. The use of non-sanctioned violence—violence produced by a non-State entity or violence that is counter-State—elicits a reaction from the State precisely because such actions challenge the production and legitimization of State violence. […] The usage of violence by social movements and other non-State actors destabilizes this central assertion disrupting the State's veneer of control. […] The framing of radical socio-political movements as "terrorists" is motivated by an acknowledgment of this contestation wherein a non-State actor utilizes a revolutionary praxis that is rejectionist in nature, thus presenting a challenge to the State's desire to act as not only the protector of capital, but also as the sole producer of force." (Loadenthal 2013).
14. "Border controls have become a prominent motif in the discourse and imagery of sovereignty". Chandler (1988, p. 110).
15. In July 1994, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan signed an accord in Tashkent regarding the joint defence of the CIS southern border; however, on the occasion of the CIS Council of Heads of States meeting a few months later in Alma-Ata, Russia's proposal for the joint defence of external borders was rejected (February 1995).
16. Agreement on the exchange of information on matters related to the protection of the external borders of CIS member States, 12 April 1996; Agreement on procedures for the entry into and departure from States which are not members of the Commonwealth of nationals of CIS member States, of 17 January 1997; Agreement on cooperation in the training and upgrading of military personnel for the border troops of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Bishkek, of 9 October 1997; Agreement on cooperation amongst the States members of CIS in combating illegal migration, of 6 March 1998; Agreement on cooperation amongst border troops in implementing border controls at crossing

points on the borders between CIS member States and States which are not members of the Commonwealth, of 25 November 1998.

17. It is worth noting, however, that the CIS agreements themselves provided a legal foundation and political rationale for the presence of Russian border guards throughout the CIS common space.

18. Officials on Military Treaty with Russia, Interfax, 11 June 1992, in FBIS-SOV-92-114, 12 June (1992, pp. 82–83); Decision Made on Dual Control of Border Forces, Ostankino Television First Program Network, 28 July (1992), translated in FBIS-SOV-92-029, p. 41; Niyazov, Border Commanders Discuss Cooperation, ITAR-TASS, 16 December 1993, printed in FBIS-SOV-93-241, 17 December (1993, p. 82).

19. Russia, Turkmenistan Sign Accords on Russian Border Guards, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 23 January 1996, translated in FBIS-SOV-96_016, 24 January 1996, p. 70.

20. Russians Encroach into Georgia (Boundary: Georgia-Russia; Date: 21 November 1997). Reported in Boundary News. IBRU: Centre for Borders Research (Durham University).

21. The rest of the border guards withdrew in 1999, including the ones stationed in the autonomous republic of Ajaria and the province of Javakheti. In Ajaria, the presence of Russian border troops prevented the Georgian central government from reinstating its authority. The fact that the withdrawal has not occurred without further tensions is quite telling. For example, in October 1999, the Georgian government rejected a proposal from Moscow for Russian border guards to be deployed to the Georgian village of Shatili, close to the Chechen–Georgian border whilst at the same time suggesting that Russia provide further assistance in the form of additional equipment for Georgian border guards. Russian Border Deployment Refused (Boundary: Georgia-Russia; Date: 7 October 1999). Reported in Boundary News. IBRU: Centre for Borders Research (Durham University).

22. The Correlates of War's dataset Militarised Interstate Disputes (collected at the participant level, i.e. one record per militarised dispute participant) offers a detailed overview of disputes involving or resulting in a border fortification, border violation or territorial revision.

23. That is, regulations on a unified system of accounting for foreign nationals and stateless persons entering the territory of CIS member States, 2 June 2005; Concept for Border Policy Coordination amongst the States of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Kazan, 26 August 2005; Action Plan to Implement the Concept for Border Policy Coordination 2007–2010, Minsk, 28 November 2006; Resolution on measures to strengthen border security in the framework of Concept for Border Policy Coordination, Chisinau, 9 October 2009; Action

Plan to Implement the Concept for Border Policy Coordination, 2011–2015.

24. http://frontex.europa.eu/operations/archive-of-operations.
25. http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Partners/Third_countries/WA_with_CIS.pdf.
26. See Chap. 2 for a definition.
27. According to IPA CIS sources, 86% of the Model Laws passed found their way into the national legislations of CIS member states. IPA CIS Secretariat Press Center, Agreement on the establishment of the IPA CIS was signed in Alma-Ata 21 years ago this day, 27 March 2013, https://92.53.127.58/eng/pressroom/news/sekretariat_mpa_sng/ipa_cis_day/.
28. CSTO, CIS and EurAsEC parliamentary events will take place in S Petersburg, 26 October 2010, http://www.kabar.kg/eng/world-news/full/1496.
29. CIS interparliamentary assembly passes 14 model laws, 18 May 2012, http://www.eabr.org/e/press_center/news-region/.
30. According to Kupatadze (2012), the different stages unfold as follows: (1) Organised crime Groups co-opting state institutions; (2) Elites creating and promoting organised crime; (3) Elites seeking services from organised crime; (4) Elites monopolising control over organised crime activities; (5) Organised crime groups developing corrupting and collusive relations with elites; (6) Crime groups/gangs under state control.
31. Izvestia, 20 February 1992.
32. Over time, the CIS Interparliamentary assembly has also adopted a model law for combatting the financing of terrorism, a model law on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors and other recommendations aimed at harmonising and standardising the national legislation of CIS member States. Author's personal written communication with Alexandr Borisov, Secretary of the IPA CIS Permanent Commission on Defense and Security Issues.
33. For example, in 1997, the Coordinating Council of Prosecutors General convened—in Moscow—the first meeting, gathering together the Council of Internal Affairs, the Council of Directors of Security Agencies and Special Services, the Council of Commanders of Border Troops, the Council of Directors of Custom Services and the Council of Tax Police Directors. The participants discussed issuing a Concept for Cooperation among CIS Law Enforcement Agencies in Combating Crime (Shvaryov 1997).
34. Russia reserves "the right not to extradite the persons whose extradition can affect its sovereignty, security, public order or other essential interests. Offences that may not lead to extradition shall be stated by the

federal law"; by a similar token, Azerbaijan refuses extradition if there "are sufficient grounds for supposing that the extradition would affect [its] sovereignty or national security"; and Georgia reserves the right to deny the extradition of its nationals "on the grounds of public morality, public policy and State security". Interestingly, Moldova's and Armenia's reservations specifically deal with Article 3 of the Convention ("Political offences"): Moldova reserves the right "to determine whether the taking or attempted taking of the life of a Head of State or a member of his or her family shall or shall not constitute a political offence"; Armenia, when facing a request for extradition on the grounds of political crime, "will grant extradition if the offence mentioned in the request is considered as such under its ordinary criminal law or under the International Treaties in force in the Republic of Armenia" (see Reservations and Declarations for Treaty No.024 - European Convention on Extradition, http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/search-on-treaties/-/conventions/treaty/024/declarations).

35. Shortly before that, on the occasion of an extraordinary meeting of the CIS Council of Ministers of Internal Affairs, Putin called for the formation of a united front to combat terrorism and extremism. He declared that "No one should have any illusion that international terrorism is a Russian problem only […] no one should be a mere observer in this effort". He also proposed the creation of a databank to cover the activities of all terrorist organisations in the CIS, to be established on the basis of special units of the Russian Federal Security Service (Pavlov 2000).

36. Boris Mylnikov was nominated director of the ATC after having served as first deputy director of the Russian Federal Security Service's constitutional order and anti-terrorism department. Moscow suggested the centre be established, envisioning its operation on the basis of the special units of the Russian Federal Security Service. The Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Sergei Ivanov, even proposed to CIS members states the adoption of national legislation authorising Russian special units to operate throughout the whole of CIS territory. Moscow Offers Assistance to CIS in Fighting Terrorism, Monitor (Jamestown Foundation), Vol. 6, No. 51, 13 March (2000).

37. The Interparliamentary assembly has developed various model laws on this issue, including "On countering terrorism" (2004), "On countering terrorism financing" (2008), and "On countering extremism" (2009). Author's personal written communication with Alexandr Borisov, Secretary of the IPA CIS Permanent Commission on Defense and Security Issues.

38. In contrast to the trainings conducted under the aegis of other bodies or in other fields, the trainings of anti-terrorism divisions of the CIS members are organised and delivered by instructors from specific departments within Russia's Federal Security Service (i.e. the Special Purpose Center and the Institute of Crime Detection), with the assistance of the Center.

39. Interestingly, the Chisinau Convention contained some measures to protect asylum seekers and refugees by referring to circumstances under which a state party reserves the right to decline a request for extradition (namely, if an extradition request is likely to be related to persecution for reasons of race, gender, religion, nationality or political beliefs). However, the Chisinau Convention does not establish an absolute ban on returning individuals to torture or other ill-treatment (Amnesty International 2013, p. 17).

40. Nevertheless, the protection of incumbent regimes in the region through the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs is indeed of utmost importance: "member states are entitled to pursue whatever domestic security policy they deem appropriate, and the organisation and its members will offer support for whatever form this may take" (Aris 2011, p. 115).

41. 2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism. Even though the SCO's resolutions cannot be transposed within the internal political systems of its parties, the 2005 Concept of Cooperation Between SCO Member States in Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism and 2009 Convention on Counter-Terrorism (Articles 7–10) paved the way for incorporating the "Three Evils doctrine" into national frameworks through the harmonisation of domestic legislative structures. The 2005 Concept in particular introduces the principle of mutual recognition, i.e. the requirement that member states reciprocally acknowledge an act of terrorism, separatism or extremism "regardless of whether the legislation of SCO member states includes a corresponding act in the same category of crimes or whether the act is described using the very same terms" (Article 3), in other words, regardless of whether the legislation of the SCO Member States includes the act in the same category of crimes.

42. The 2009 SCO Convention on Counter-Terrorism complements the 2001 Shanghai Convention in that it defines terrorism as an "ideology of violence" and a "practice of exerting influence on the decision-making of governments or international organizations by threatening or committing violent and (or) other criminal acts, connected with intimidating the population and aimed at causing injury to private individuals, society or the state."

43. While the RATS has been operational since 2004, the original decision had been made 2 years before, tellingly enough on the occasion of the same SCO summit at which the organisation's charter was signed.

44. For example, the CIS Agreement on Cooperation in the Fight against Terrorism (i) foresees extradition procedures which can be at variance with international human rights standards; (ii) assures the confidentiality of information and documents received from another state potentially leading to political motivations for the criminal prosecution of individuals whose extradition is being requested; (iii) guarantees diplomatic immunity for members of law enforcement agencies and security services, and permits these personnel to detain and even assassinate political opponents outside their home countries if these targets have been officially declared terrorists; (iv) refers to "individuals who represent a threat to the security of the State", implicitly including members of the opposition or representatives of civil society. By the same token, SCO agreements concerning cooperation amongst the members' police and security services provide a normative basis for the extradition of political and religious refugees to the countries of which they are citizens, especially Uzbekistan and China and increasingly frequently Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as well; in particular, SCO member states committed: (i) to not provide asylum to individuals accused or suspected of terrorist, separatist or extremist activities, and to hand over such individuals when asked to do so by another SCO member state; (ii) to assist in conducting international manhunts for individuals accused of having committed the acts cited in the Shanghai Convention on the Fight against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism for the purpose of instituting criminal proceedings against them; (iii) to reciprocally recognise acts of terrorism, separatism and extremism, irrespective of whether or not the legislation of SCO member states includes the acts in questions in that category of crime or uses the same terms to describe it; (iv) to create and maintain a register of individuals for whom an international manhunt has been declared on their grounds of their having committed, or being suspected of having committed, crimes of a terrorist nature. Furthermore, representatives and officials of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) created by the countries of the "Shanghai Six" enjoy diplomatic privileges and immunity under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (International Federation for Human Rights 2009).

45. SCO Observer States to Be Involved in Terrorists Retrieval - Head of CIS Anti-terrorism Center, AKIpress, 24/01/2014, http://www.akipress.com/news:534171/ (SCO Observer States to Be Involved in Terrorists Retrieval—Head of CIS Anti-terrorism Center 2014).

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Conclusions

This research has engaged in making sense of the magmatic political space that emerged in the post-Soviet region. After a preliminary overview of the reality on the ground, the focus has shifted from the straightforward study of regional organisations to an exploration of how the regionals manifested in the former Soviet space, and why the reference to the regionals appears to be a recurrent feature in the post-Soviet politics and remains resilient in elites' discourses and narratives.

Although providing an explanation was my ultimate objective, the pathway to it has proceeded through *understanding the "texture" of the post-Soviet region*, the multiplicity of which can be captured through the notion of regional governance.

The regional structure of the former Soviet space is still in a phase of "creative fragmentation": its key features are best characterised by the coexistence of several processes of polity-formation that are partially overlapping and occur at different levels and scales. Emerging regional institutions, indeed, seek to acquire characteristics of actorness and international recognition whilst the fundamental regionalising agencies (i.e. the states) are involved in a double course of constituting themselves and their proximate environment. In other words, post-Soviet states have been evolving in an embryonic system of states in their close neighbourhood, whose boundaries and rules of interactions are still in the making. Against this already compound background, regional organisations are not the only expression of regionness, nor are the states the only providers of regionhood: a multilayered and many-sided cobweb of

region-, sub-region-, trans-region- scaled interactions contribute to re-shaping of the post-Soviet region. These interactions are initiated and/or maintained by different actors, and embodied by initiatives, projects and various kinds of materialities that are not necessarily formalised or conventionally institutionalised.

It thus makes sense to ask, what is discernibly "post-Soviet" in the models, narratives, practices that constitute the post-Soviet regional governance throughout different regional organisations and expressions of regionness? What are specifically post-Soviet traits of regional governance?[1]

Six essential traits characterising the post-Soviet regional governance emerge from this research: three of them mainly revolve around the creation of regional organisations and their institutional design; the other three appear to be more in line with the overall theoretical aim of this investigation—i.e., approaching a region without limiting the analysis to an overview of regional organisations that are accommodated in a certain geopolitical expanse.

Probably the most evident characteristic of the post-Soviet region is the presence of nested regional organisations and overlapping regionalism. Post-Soviet states have opted, over time, for the membership and affiliation to different multilateral formats, in which they participated increasingly learning how to juggle a multitude of alignments, coalitions and agendas; overlapping regionalism have paved the way to reconciling two different objectives: on the one hand, the integration in the international system, and on the other hand the hybridisation of global "rules of the game" through strategies of localisation and subsidiarity.

The second characteristic is what I have proposed to call the "Potemkin politics of regionalism"[2]: whilst proliferating, regional organisations in the former Soviet space have been designed drawing on strategies of pseudo-morphism and camouflage. In other words, regional organisations such as the CIS and the SCO are equipped with institutions displaying a gap between their resemblances and their functions, between their appearances and their actual purpose and performance. In spite of a supposed "homogeneity of organisational forms and practices" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p. 148), regional instruments and policies are not "functionally equivalent" to apparently similar arrangements developed by other regional organisations.

Third, in spite of frequent claims about the dysfunctionality and ineffectiveness of post-Soviet regionalism (and its variations), the last chapter of this book has engaged in a tentative endeavour of revealing the

unintended effects of regional institution-building on the making of post-Soviet states. Looking at regional organisations would seemingly contradict the non-institutionalist approach pursued by the whole research projects; however, whilst studying the functions fulfilled by the CIS and SCO, the focus has been shifted towards unintentional outcomes of regional arrangements and coordination instruments. Sovereignty-shaping and bureaucracy-boosting dimensions of post-Soviet regionalism have taken place in the tangles of regional institutions, without regional policies specifically and explicitly addressing the problems of post-Soviet state-building.

The fourth feature of post-Soviet regional governance is the combination of formal and informal modalities of actions, practices and behaviours of political elites, policymakers, and all other relevant actors embedded in the system of governance. To begin with, informal interactions have been recognised as the key element for the socialisation of post-Soviet elites in multilateral settings; furthermore, post-Soviet states have often associated themselves with informal intergovernmental organisations that do not draw on a formalised agreement, and/or do not have an institutionalised structure (i.e. secretariat, headquarters and/or permanent staff). Yet, their activities can be traced through declarations, documented reports, and communiqués. And finally, in the former Soviet space there are numerous examples of patterned ways of doing things that are outside the reach of state institutions and authorities, but nonetheless generate significant effects in terms of both region-building and non-state-led regionalist plans.

The final two traits characterising the texture of the post-Soviet regions are closely related: the reverberation of the Soviet past in current political configurations and the ongoing construction of the state experienced by all post-Soviet countries, included the ones frequently associated with "hard states" or supposedly occupying hegemonic positions within the region. These two aspects are intimately interconnected since, for most of the post-Soviet states, being embedded in the Soviet Union has also meant experiencing statehood for the first time in 1991.

Path-dependencies are not to be considered as synonyms of historical determinism; however they account for continuity, recurrence, viscosity vis-à-vis the accomplishment of processes of fragmentation and de-integration, resistance to centrifugal and emancipatory pressures. The inheritance of the infrastructures of a unitary system, the long-lasting

existence of a common social, economic and cultural space and the non-occurrence of a radical shock accompanying the Soviet collapse (as in other cases of imperial demise and dismemberment) contributed to the reproduction of Soviet institutions and modalities of interactions (for example the construction of facades!). Among the institutions bearing elements of path-dependency, a problematic and negotiable understanding of sovereignty stands out; in addition, the habitus of other-directedness can be observed as a general tendency of national elites to outsource fundamental decisions about the destiny of their countries to external actors.

Moving from these six qualities of post-Soviet regional governance, and premising on the assumption that both the structures and the agencies of the post-Soviet system are in a developmental, foundational phase, I have tried to build a model of state-region co-constitution, in which the formation of two different types of polities proceed in parallel and reflect into each other.

The model of state-region co-constitution has been framed in two conceptual steps. First, both the state and the region have been broken down into three different components (physical base, institutional expression, idea), to clarify that the co-constitutive process does not necessarily occur between pairs of homologues and does not affect all the different dimensions at the same time. Second, a theoretical and historical analysis of the meaning of fragmentation was aimed at showing that in the post-Soviet landscape it does not seem possible to give to neither the state nor the region an ontological priority: these two types of polity in the making cannot be conceptualised in isolation. Rather, they must be viewed as simultaneously and dialectically constituting each other. An approach based on co-constitution was aimed at adding something new to the observation of interaction effects between the states (as agents) and regional structures they are embedded in; states' characteristics and actions (and the way they are engaged in their own internal definition and structuration) define regional institutions, norms and practices, and are in turn defined by them.

In spite of this circularity, state-region co-constitution has been studied by looking separately at inside-out and outside-in dynamics.

Concerning the inside-out dynamics, it has been showed that unsettled state identities, and their reliance on different "regional imaginations" delivers multiplicity and inconsistency to the regional structure. Political and cultural elites in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova frame

their respective state identity in terms of where their country is located and how its regional positioning can be narrated, rather than what their country is. Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova have been selected as they are countries representing easily identifiable sub-regions within the former Soviet space; despite sharing a number of similarities (size, resources, tentative political trajectory), looking at their formal foreign policymaking choices one would claim that they have radically diverged in their attitude towards regionalist projects and regional institutions. Quite differently, the reality uncovered through interviews, focus groups, along with the discursive analysis of the main strategic documents (presidential speeches, foreign policy statements, national security concepts…) delivers a more nuanced picture and a discrepancy between the ideas of the region and the institutional expressions of the region, as the former belonging to the Soviet Union and the habitus of other-directedness continues to affect the elaboration of regional imaginations in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. Furthermore, the study of regional imaginations seems to confirm that regions also result from whether and how domestic actors and constituencies refer to them, making regionality meaningful even in the absence of effective and coherent regional institutions.

Concerning outside-in dynamics, it has been shown how the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation affected the process of state formation in their members. These two regional organisations have been conventionally interpreted as non-transformative actors: on the contrary, in certain fields their mission seems to be the creation of a "filter" to shield their members from attempts of governance transfer undertaken by other international institutions or actors. Even though neither the CIS' nor the SCO's institutional agendas deal with state-building traditionally intended, the establishment of (even soft, summitry, ceremonial, declaratory) forms of coordination and cooperation at the regional level has contributed to the organisation of some basic infrastructures of statehood. Evidence of regional coordination and cooperation in the field of border management, counter-crime and counterterrorism has served the purpose of rereading the concept of "sovereignty-boosting regionalism" and instead focusing on two under-researched functions delivered by the CIS and SCO: "bureaucracy-boosting" and "sovereignty-shaping". In line with the features which have been identified in relation to the post-Soviet regional governance (in particular, overlapping regionalism, informality, Potemkin politics), bureaucracy-boosting and sovereignty-shaping functions emerge as

non-institutionalised outcomes of region-building, by means of socialisation not only of leaders and elites but also policymakers, middle- and low-rank officials, and officers in advisory rather than executive positions.

The conceptualisation of such a state-region co-constitution model—at first—aids in understanding post-Soviet regional governance and its formative process. However, answering a "what-question" might pave the way to explaining; therefore, it is possible to offer some tentative answers to the "why-questions" outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

First, regional organisations in the former Soviet space proliferate and resist their own ineffectiveness, because they are not ineffective—they have often been evaluated according to inappropriate criteria of effectiveness. Sovereignty-shaping and bureaucracy-boosting functions proved to be quite relevant for states in the making in need of establishing the fundamentals of their statehood, coherently with residual interdependence and poor domestic governance. The absence of implementation and enforcement measures to complement and execute the "talked talks" does not equate to superficial or virtual regionalism: on the contrary, the reliance on socialisation mechanisms is particularly meaningful as they support the resilience of Soviet networks and reproduce seamless transnational communities.

Second, the reference to the regionals seems to be a recurrent feature in post-Soviet politics because a number of states that were previously part of the Soviet Union (not only the "peripheries" but also Russia) are still in the process of re-framing their state identities, and they often do so by attaching themselves to other-directed and not-so-emancipatory regional imaginaries.

Finally, one could wonder whether a study about post-Soviet regionalism(s) offers any room for generalisation; in other words, whether this research is ultimately exemplary, representative, or marginal. Future research can be developed following the model of state-region co-constitution, through exploring other case studies and extending it to other regions that have experienced contrasting trends of integration and fragmentation, such as Saharan Africa. Some of the dynamics characterising the former Soviet area and understood in terms of state-region co-constitution lend themselves to experimental comparative endeavours: for example, the problematisation of "saharanness" in an effort to shed light on state identities in that region.

Similarly to post-Soviet states, "Saharan" states are today part of several regional organisations, thus composing a kaleidoscopic assemblage made up of institution-building endeavours, façade projects, overlapping

and nested schemes of cooperation. As a matter of fact, the Saharan compound regional space includes both active and dormant initiatives, that rely on both fully-fledged arrangements and soft instruments of coordination, ranging from the African Union to the Arab-Maghreb Union (AMU), from the Organisation International de la Francophonie (OIF) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to the Communauté des Etats Sahélo-Sahariens (CEN-SAD), the "G5 du Sahel" and the recently-launched "Nouakchott Process" on the enhancement of Security Cooperation and the Operationalisation of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan Region. None of these groupings, whose geometry deeply varies, encompasses all the states located in the Saharan space; moreover, few of them emphasise the dimension of "saharanness" as their least common denominator. Future research projects comparing the former Soviet area and the Sahel-Saharan region might focus on the coalescence of hybrid political orders around regionalist projects and institutions, and the reverberations between dual processes of polity-building. On the one hand, the process of region-building reveals features of post-coloniality: parallel integrative and de-integrative pressures result in a multilayered and compound outcome. On the other hand, the coexistence of several "*Afriques politiques*" (Coulon and Martin 1991) also reflects the ongoing re-definition of constitutive elements of the units forming and "inhabiting" the region(s):

> La crise de l'intégration en Afrique ne fait en réalité que traduire l'incapacité plus générale du principe de territorialité à s'imposer comme un réalité social universelle constitutive de la dynamique étatique […]. La crise du principe de territorialité se traduit par un échec à faire accepter le monopole de domination étatique sur le territoire avec son corollaire, l'impuissance à contrôler les limites territoriales, c'est à dire à séparer le *dedans* du *dehors*. (Bach 1998, p. 70)

This kind of comparative study could be aimed at further refining the conceptualisation of correspondences between processes of state-making and region-making, interpreted as modes of political and territorial ordering at different scale, in a context of hybridity where diverse and competing claims to power and logics of order coexist, overlap and intertwine.

All in all, by pursuing this line of inquiry, the crucial objective of reconciling Area Studies and International Relations through projects located in the field of Comparative Regionalism, will be further advanced.

Notes

1. Similar questions have been asked by Chappuis et al. (2014).
2. This concept has been previously elaborated in my book chapter for Börzel and van Hüllen (2015).

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